

## PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Post Graduate degree programme, the opportunity to pursue Post Graduate course in Subjects introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Post Graduate level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analyses.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Co-operation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of a proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in invisible teaching. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great part of these efforts is still experimental—in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

**Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar**  
Vice-Chancellor

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## Paper -VI

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## **PAPER - VI**

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## Unit 1 □ The Puritan Period in the History of American Literature (1607 - 1700)

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### 1.0 □ Introduction

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THE COLONIZATION of the eastern seaboard of America in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century was as much the end of a long process as the beginning of a new chapter in history. The voyages of Columbus followed soon afterward by those of Amerigo Vespucci and lesser-known explorers from Spain, France, Holland and Portugal defined the trajectories of rival imperialisms. The Spaniards had established the settlement of St Augustine in 1565; a small group of Englishmen, at the behest of Walter Raleigh, had tried to found a colony on Roanoke Island off the coast of North Carolina in 1594; an outpost had briefly been set up on the Maine coast in 1607; Captain John Smith in 1614 had surveyed and mapped the entire New England coastline.

The waves of English immigration which brought the Pilgrim Fathers, among others, to the shores of America in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century have become the defining displacement of the era, creating as they did a dedicated diaspora on alien shores and generating, in the process, a dialogue of discovery typically expressed in the journals, accounts and diaries of the first colonials. The concepts of flight and dream were as effective for these pioneers as they

were for the later generations of immigrants, impelling them beyond latitudinal limits to a near-mythical map whose boundaries they expected to shape. The awareness of the sheer space that was newly available and the wonder at the beauty and rich diversity of the landscape that captured the imagination of the primary planters remain in their literature to this day.

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### 1.1.0. □ Establishment of the Colonies

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Between 1607 with the establishment of Virginia (named after the virgin Queen, Elizabeth I of England) the first English colony on American soil, and 1682, which saw the addition of Pennsylvania, the last, there were no less than ten colonies of English blood and speech. They are in the order of their establishment, Plymouth, New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, and South Carolina. The first writers were therefore immigrants who negotiated the new land and the life it offered with a primarily English sensibility and cultural apprehension. This first tract of the pre-national literature may be said to be both of English and American origin in which English agency and American environment came together to give rise to a body of writings that was largely of a historical, religious and descriptive nature.

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#### 1.1.1 □ The Establishment of the First English Colony at Virginia

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In 1607 a company of enterprising Englishmen, empowered with a royal patent left for the eastern shores of America and established in Virginia the first successful colony on American soil. Captain John Smith, the leader of the group, was the writer of the first book in American literature. He wrote three books of which the first, **A True Relation of Virginia** was, as Tyler maintains “not a literary effort” but “a budget of information for the people at home, and especially the stockholders of the Virginia Stock Exchange”. (A History of American Literature by Moses Coit Tyler, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p 52)

Most notable among the other early writers of Virginia were George Percy of Northumberland whose **Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony of Virginia by the English** provides a history of the colony from its

departure out of England down to the year 1607. William Strachey's **A true Reportory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, KT** was published in July 1610. Gates had set sail for Virginia from England with a fleet of nine ships and five hundred emigrants. In a terrible tempest that subsequently broke out Gates' ship was driven ashore on one of the Bermudas and the few passengers who survived the wreck managed to voyage to Jamestown. Strachey gives an account of this in his little book on the calamity, and the emigrants' experience of it.

**Good News from Virginia** published by Alexander Whitaker in 1613 cast in the mould of a hortatory sermon, was composed for the enlightenment of people in England and consequently describes the country, the climate, the Indians, and the pioneers' struggle with the daunting conditions of immigrant life. The other notable examples of literature produced during this period in Virginia are John Pory's sketches of pioneer life along the James River and George Sandys' translation of Ovid's 'Metamorphosis'.

These writings, perceptively described by Tyler as having "some noteworthy value as literature, and some real significance in the literary unfolding of the American mind..." are historically important in terms of their positioning at the very beginning of the American literary articulation and their consequent value as record and document rather than as works with an intrinsic literary potential.

The Restoration in England did not bide well for Virginia as the navigation acts passed by Charles II's Parliament went against the commercial and agricultural interest of Virginia. The parliamentary and legal injustices that were meted out to Virginia between 1660 and 1676 under Charles II caused widespread resentment in the colony. Moreover the vast tracts of land that were granted by the English sovereign to his favourites aggravated the situation.

An Indian massacre in the spring of 1676 caused panic among the populace and the people prevailed on the royal governor Sir William Berkeley to restore order in the colony. An alternative centre of authority complicated matters when a number of the inhabitants turned to Nathaniel Bacon to provide leadership during this crisis. Berkeley and Bacon became opponents and the split leadership exacerbated an already difficult situation, the instability at the top in the face of the Indian threat adding to the general disorder. The anonymous manuscripts of the period relating to the massacre and the rebellion constitute documents of historical and sociological

importance affording as they do, a glimpse of some of the most disturbing local events of the time.

The intellectual condition of Virginia was further compromised by the religious intolerance practiced by a section of its inhabitants. Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians and all those who dissented from the Episcopal Church were discriminated against and were fined for detected trespasses. The feudalistic tilt in social relations along with the narrow sectarian emphasis in matters of religion militated against the growth of a socio-cultural atmosphere in which literature could take root. Hence the first colonial period in Virginia saw the sparse offshoots of a limited literary consciousness struggling to emerge and survive in an inhospitable and largely uncongenial atmosphere.

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### **1.1.2 □ The Establishment of the Puritan Colonies at New England**

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Barely thirteen years after the establishment of the colony in Virginia, four hundred miles to the north of the continent, in that climatically bleaker region of what came to be patriotically christened as New England American civilization planted its second outpost.

The first Puritan colony was founded in Plymouth, Massachusetts by the “pilgrims” who arrived at Cape Cod in 1620 on the *Mayflower*. The next one was set up at Salem in 1628. The more stable and enduring Massachusetts Bay Colony was established in and around Boston in 1630 by the company that came over on the *Arbella* under the leadership of John Winthrop. In the course of time New England expanded from Massachusetts into Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine. These communities grew from the hundred or so persons who came aboard the *Mayflower*, and the 600-odd on the *Arbella* under the leadership of John Winthrop a decade or so later in the course of time New England expanded from Massachusetts into Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Maine. By 1640 some twenty thousand Puritans spread across the landscape.

Additional colonies sprang up in the wake of Virginia and Massachusetts. In 1634, Maryland, founded as a refuge for Catholics, was carved out of northern Virginia. Thirty years later, New Netherland was wrested from the Dutch by the English and renamed New York: in the same year New Jersey

came into existence through a grant from the Duke of York. Pennsylvania was born in 1681 when Charles II ceded a large tract of land to the elder Penn for a debt that he owed the latter.

The social structure of New England was one of concentration while that of Virginia was that of dispersion. In New England families settled down in close proximity to each other thus forming neighbourhoods while in Virginia, each settler in imitation of the English lord, occupied vast tracts of land thereby giving rise to geographical and social isolation. The domestic isolation of the latter, in sharp contrast to personal community enjoyed by the New England settlers, hindered the growth of public and civic institutions, which depend on and in turn foster, a sense of kinship and belonging between the social groups.

The popular notion of the Puritans as pioneers may be ascribed to the fact that they dominate the written records of the time. In the first colonial period generally regarded as the years between 1607 and 1676, a considerable body of writing emanated from New England, recording the colonials' negotiation of the new land. There were the historical writers, namely William Bradford, John Winthrop, Nathaniel Morton and Edward Johnson; the theological ones, prominent among who were Thomas Hooker, John Cotton and Cotton Mather; the descriptive writers and poets such as Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor. 'The one grand distinction between the English colonists in New England and nearly all other colonists in America' maintains Tyler "was this, that while the latter came here chiefly for some material benefit, the former came chiefly for an ideal benefit. In its inception New England was not an agricultural community, nor a manufacturing community, nor a trading community: it was a thinking community". (A History of American Literature by Moses Coit Tyler, Collier Books, New York, 1962, p109)

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### 1.1.3.

"The New England Puritan's difference from the Anglican or Catholic in worship and polity dictated differences in literary theory. His literal attitude toward the Bible left little excuse for any religious art not somehow justified by its text; and the ardor of his Protestantism led him to reject anything traditionally associated with the Church of Rome. Organ music, stained-glass windows, incense, rich vestments, ornate altars, religious images —these were all adjuncts to Catholic, and to some extent to Anglican, worship. Their

“Papist” associations were enough to make them anathema to the Puritan. Catholics commonly held that things which appealed to the senses could be fittingly used in the service of religion. The Puritan could not agree. He distrusted sensuous appeals in worship because they usually involved objects and practices not specifically endorsed by Holy Writ, because they smacked of Rome, and because he believed that “fallen man” was likely to become the prey of his senses, subject to the tyranny of passion rather than the dictates of right reason and faith.

This meant that the Puritan writer could not use, as his Catholic and Anglican contemporaries did, a body of material and a set of devices calculated to charm sensuously and to “adorn” his work—such charming and adornment seemed to him dangerous. He wanted to reach men’s reason and to convince them of truth, not to lull them to acceptance by drugging their minds with potions all too likely to stir the carnal passions so powerful in the descendants of fallen Adam. The Puritan usually rejected imagery which served merely to delight, accepting only that which seemed to him to make the truth more easily understood, and preferring that which he could find in the Bible. He would rather talk of plain glass, letting in all the light, than of stained-glass windows, which seemed to him empty adornment symbolizing man’s aptness to dim the light of truth. Anything which appealed to the senses so strongly as to endanger concentration on what must be grasped by reason, was dangerous. Good writing was to teach; its method must make directly and clearly comprehensible what man most needed to know.

Naturally, early New England writers of prose concentrated on sound and logical structure, and on clarity. The logic and rhetoric of Peter Ramus, the great French anti-Aristotelian logician of the sixteenth century, were adopted by Puritan pundits partly because they seemed to offer useful rules for good expository prose. But more immediately important than such rules was the Puritan’s consciousness of the nature of his audience. It comprised men who were neither trained critics nor expert writers, but were, usually, earnest Christians, eager to learn. They were humanly fallible, and if a page, however clear, seemed dull, their thoughts strayed. Therefore the Puritan preacher and writer, although he advocated the “plain style” and objected to adornment for adornment’s sake, seasoned his prose with imagery and used whatever literary devices seemed to him legitimate and necessary to make his instruction palatable. Anything in words which might rouse evil passions was forbidden, but picturesque phrasing and evocative images were allowable

if their associations were innocent or if they had Biblical' precedent.

The last point is important. The Bible had for the Puritan supreme literary value. It was the work of an omnipotent God, who used language perfectly because all that he did was perfect. Allegory, figures of speech— even frankly sexual imagery—crop up often in Puritan writing, sometimes in ways that are startling if we forget that its authors knew that men's "affections" must be charmed if their attention was to be held, and were sure that any literary method used in the Bible had divine sanction. New England authors avoided the rapturous expression of Catholic or Anglican mystics as too sensuous and too redolent of "enthusiasm"; they closed their eyes to much in the great religious literature of seventeenth century England because they did not want to tempt their readers' passions or to cloud their understanding of the truth by too elaborate rhetoric. Moreover, symbols and images, linked with the Mass and with ritualistic forms of worship, were suspect to the Puritan, and, in general, he looked coldly upon the ingenuities ' of style, the extended similes, the complicated metaphors (often sensuous or even sensual in suggestion), the elaborate prose music, and the rhetorical decoration, which characterized much of the best English writing in the late Renaissance. The Puritan was thus cut off from many sources of literary effect; but mercifully the Bible gave him others. He had no qualms about using its imagery, its rhythms, and its stylistic devices for his own pious purposes.

Part of his success with his audience depended on what he learned from Biblical style; he profited also by his understanding of other means by which he could hold his audience's attention without concessions to its baser appetites. He spoke and wrote principally for fishermen, farmers, woodsmen, shopkeepers, and artisans. However little they knew about classical literature or about rhetorical niceties in English prose and verse, they knew a great deal about the sea, gardens, village life, and the concrete concerns of pioneers busily establishing prosperous colonies in a wilderness. They enjoyed seeing an author drive home his point with a simile or a metaphor that touched their familiar experience; and their experience was rich with homely material. When Thomas Shepard wrote in his *Sincere Convert* (1655 edition), "Jesus Christ is not got with a wet finger," he meant, "Salvation cannot be had by mere study of books"; but his metaphor made a commonplace statement expressive and vivid for his readers by calling up the picture of an earnest student wetting his finger whenever he had to turn a page. Such metaphors and similes abound in Puritan writing. Their purpose is obvious; their effect

is to give to pages which might otherwise be abstract and dull the taste of life.

Some New England writers broke away from the usual Puritan conventions of style. They were all to some extent influenced by non-Puritan ways of writing; many of them were English university men, well trained in literary traditions; and those whose work has merit enough to deserve mention today were individuals never completely subjugated by rigid convention. But the variations from orthodox Puritan practice are usually minor, and, so far as the work of any group can be summed up in a formula, the Puritans' can , be. The formula called for clarity, order, and logic as supreme stylistic virtues. It admitted some concessions to the reader's liking for sensuous appeal, but limited that appeal to what was unlikely to stimulate man's baser nature and distract his mind from truth." (Literacy History of the United States, p. 56-58)

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## 1.2.0. □ The Historical Writers of New England

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The earliest Puritan records were historical and descriptive accounts of the settlers' response to the new land. The envisaged ideal, the actual America and the linguistic apprehension of the same may be seen as being curiously interconnected "Puritan narratives defined a shape for the writing of America, but they also questioned how and whether language could reveal the extraordinary experience. As a result, from the very beginnings America became a testing for language and narrative, a place of search for providential meanings and hidden revelations, part of a lasting endeavour to discover the intended nature and purpose of the New World" (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, Ruland & Broadbery, Penguin Bks, USA, 1991, p-4)

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### 1.2.1 □ William Bradford (1590-1657)

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The writings of William Bradford and John Winthrop may be regarded as the prototype of this early immigrant canon. The tradition that they initiated accommodates various disciplines and interests and essentially reflects the Calvinist origins of American Protestantism. Bradford of the *Mayflower* and Plymouth Rock, regarded as the father of American history, provides in his **History of Plymouth** Plantation the earliest documentation of this colonial period. Bradford's **History** had been left in manuscript and had been used

by his nephew Nathaniel Morton for his book **New England's Memorial**, after which many writers used it as source-material. It disappeared during the British occupation of Boston and was given up for lost till it surfaced in 1855 in the Fulham Library in London.

Bradford's **History** in its minute and painstaking observation of fact and detail remains a faithful chronicle of day-to-day life as it was lived in the colony at Plymouth. During the period of the voyage the history was recorded almost as soon as it was made but upon the completion of the same and with the first sowings of the plantation at Plymouth the entries became less frequent and regular and the observations were largely limited to the more significant of the happenings in the life of the infant colony. This is to be expected in the light of Bradford's growing involvement in the administration of the colony, an exercise that claimed his time and attention to a very large extent.

The exodus of the English Puritans to America has traditionally been likened to the flight of the Israelites to the Promised Land. Like the patriarchs of the Old Testament, William Bradford describes the "choosing" of His people, their exile and wanderings. Inscribed in this primordial parallel are the echoes of previous passages and peregrinations, namely those undertaken by the apostles and missionaries of the early Christian church, men who braved the rigors of strange, often inhospitable, climates and customs to spread their faith across countries. The immigrants from England who, in many cases, had left behind substantial estates, and embarked on a similar project, that of carrying European civilization and Christianity to the New World (as they believed) may, in all justice, be compared to those first missionaries and their rites of passage to the ancient apostolic destinations.

That the patriarchs themselves had a notion of this historic affiliation becomes evident from Bradford's spontaneous identification of the hardships suffered by him and his people with those endured by St Paul. In recalling the plight of the travellers on at last reaching Cape Cod, he observes: "It is recorded in the Scripture as a mercy to the Apostle and his shipwrecked company that the barbarians showed them no small kindness in refreshing them, but these savage barbarians, when they met with them, were readier to fill their sides full of arrows than otherwise." (The American Tradition in Literature, Vol I, ed S. Bradley, R.C. Beatty & E. Hudson, Long, W. W. Norton, New York, 1956)

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### 1.2.2 □ John Winthrop (1588-1649)

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John Winthrop led the fleet that carried the 600-odd pilgrims across the Atlantic in 1630. One of the founders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, Winthrop, with characteristic scrupulousness, went on to record the minutiae of that migration in his **Journal**. His narrative provides, not only a record of the day-to-day life as it was lived in the colony, but also the workings of the Puritan mind in its negotiation of a changed geographical, historical, social and civil reality on an alien continent. John Winthrop's **Journal**, which developed into **The History of New England** was begun in 1630 and was added to for the next twenty years till a few weeks before the author's death in 1649. Winthrop seeks to register in plain and unadorned prose, through a balanced and dispassionate manner, the events, both momentous and mundane that unfolded in the life of the colony at Massachusetts Bay

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### 1.2.3 □ Edward Johnson (1598-1672)

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Edward Johnson, though of humbler stock, yet managed to attain prominence in the governments of Massachusetts Bay. In 1640 he founded the community at Waburn, Massachusetts. He provides his epic account of the trials and tribulations of the Puritan experiment in holy living in the western world in his work **A History of New England** (1653), better known as **The Wonder-Working Providence ofSion's Savior in New England**.

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### 1.2.4. □ Nathaniel Morton (1613-1685)

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Born in England in 1613 Nathaniel came with his father's family to Plymouth in 1623. In 1645 he was elected secretary of Plymouth Colony and occupied that office till he died in 1685. He published in 1669 **New England's Memorial** based largely on Bradford's **History** and Winslow's **Journal**. It enjoyed fame and a readership till the discovery and publication of Bradford's **History**.

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### 1.2.5 □ Common Features in the Puritan Mediation of History in New England

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These writers, not literary in the usual sense and mainly occupied with subduing a wilderness, building homes and creating the instruments of

government and law, were yet the progenitors of a vigorous prose tradition, foreshadowing interesting developments in later writings, and constituting in embryonic form some of the legal and political manifestos of the American system. *The Mayflower Compact* is important as an early American covenant instituting civil government by common consent with reference to the common good. The *Compact with the Indians*, which like 'The Mayflower Compact' a part of Bradford's **History** was the first American treaty with the Wamponaug people and was faithfully kept for 54 years until 1675 when Metacomet began those savage attacks known as King Philip's War and included the Deerfield Massacre. The Narragansett challenge, described in the same book incidentally was an episode that Longfellow had used dramatically in **The Courtship of Miles Standish**.

Though a significant amount of this pre-national literature was produced, it has been argued that it was not in any sense of the term 'American' literature for it did not arise out of an imaginative engagement with America itself- as a society or culture -for America so understood, had not yet been constituted. Which brings one to the paradox that literature existed in America before America (as we understand it) existed a paradox captured by Robert Frost in all its perplexities in his poem *The Gift Outright*.

The land was ours before we were the land's.  
She was our land more than a hundred years  
Before we were her people.

In another interesting twist to the conceptualization of America it is felt that even before the continent was discovered by Columbus America existed as a figment of the European imagination, which had long believed in the existence of a fabulous landmass in the west awaiting discovery and exploration.

With the New England Puritans however, this myth took on a Biblical dimension. Even before they arrived in the New World, they had tended to see the nature and purpose of human life in the light of God's plan and promises. The religious and nationalistic imperatives of the colonists' endeavor are clear from their avowal that they had begun the voyage across the Atlantic "for the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian faith" and for the honor of their "king and country". (A History of American Literature, Tyler, Collier Books, N. Yk, 1962, p 130)

The genesis of such thinking may be traced to the two great European theologians of the previous century — Martin Luther and John Calvin. The

Puritans derived the Lutheran idea that men are essentially wicked and God all-powerful with the corollary that no human action is capable of attaining spiritual redemption. It was Calvin however who was more crucial to the development of Puritan thought and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, first published in 1536, was the major text from which the founding fathers drew doctrinal speculation.

Early New England writers operate within the Calvinist theoretical framework, having derived their vision and moral bearings from the attitudes contained therein. Bradford, in his **Of Plymouth Plantation**, presents the Puritan immigration experiment as part of a “great design”, and Winthrop, in his sermon aboard the *Arbella*, emphasized the need to nurture the potential colony as “a model of Christian charity” on the Calvinist assumption that any deviation from it would spell doom. In chapter 32 of his narrative, where Bradford describes the breaking out of wickedness amongst the people, he does so with a typically Calvinistic understanding of human nature. He says: “I say it justly may be marveled at and cause us to fear and tremble at the consideration of our corrupt natures, which are so hardly bridled, subdued and mortified; nay, cannot by any other means but the powerful grace of God’s spirit.” (American History, p 23)

Bradford and Winthrop were governors of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies respectively for repeated terms and were admirably suited for, and indeed did combine most effectively the roles of spiritual and secular leader, guiding their flock to the hallowed pastures, exhorting them to exemplary action, setting the moral pace as it were and, at the same time, administering justice and laying the foundations of a civil society. In their combination of the two roles both men demonstrate an affinity with the biblical archetype Moses who was spiritual leader, lawgiver and chronicler of Israelite history.

There is a constant striving in both men to discharge their sacred and secular offices with the utmost sincerity. Winthrop, in his *Model of Christian Charity*, describes his dual concern thus: “For the work we have in hand, it is by mutual consent, through a special overruling providence and a more than an ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seek out a place of cohabitation and consorts, under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical.” (American History, p 26) In like manner, Bradford, while recounting the first marriage solemnized by him in Plymouth recognizes the civil as well as the sacramental nature of the contract describing the same as

being: “ a civil thing upon which many questions about inheritances do depend with other things most proper to their cognizance and most consonant to the Scriptures...” (Colonial and Federal, p 25)

However, the civil was more often than not subsumed within the sacred in a way that is perhaps possible only in a theocratic society. The Puritans with Calvinist leanings who formed the core of the New England clergy subscribed to the view that the church is the state, and should enjoy primacy in all areas of human life. Not unexpectedly then the New England scheme of punishments was a product of theology rather than of jurisprudence. The social intercourse enjoyed by these people along with the sartorial habits sported by them was likewise tempered by a Puritan narrowness of belief and outlook.

A belief in prayer and providence runs through the entire corpus of writings heightening its affinities with biblical prose. In a scenario where every act of survival was construed as a miracle, and every tribulation overcome, a sign of divine sanction and blessing, providence appears as an agency of affirmation. The literalness and logic with which the New Englanders approached everything were applied particularly to prayer and providence, clear from their belief that God was always near at hand, and more than willing to interpose in their smallest affairs. In the words of Ruland and Bradbury, Bradford and Winthrop’s writings “is the stuff of millenial epic, but it is epic without known outcome”, (Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 11)

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### 1.2.6 □ Literary Style of the New England Historians

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Bradford renders his account in “the plaine style”, with singular regard unto the simple truth in all things”. Not only are the boundaries between personal testimony and objective history considerably blurred in Bradford’s *History* the constant need to adjust to the changing parameters of pioneer life imbues the narrative with shifts in tone and tempo. Eventually his history takes the shape of a jeremiad, a fundamental Puritan articulation that assesses the gap between professed intention and final accomplishment and calls for a return to the original vision, chronicling in the process, the hardships encountered along the way.

Though for the most part these writers used plain language and a simple

style to “justify the ways of God to man”, they did take recourse to the occasional metaphor for greater impact. The vivid biblical imagery finds its most frequent and forceful expression in the metaphor of “the city on the hill”. This “city on the hill”, of course, is the visible body of Christ or the New Jerusalem; a model community of Christians expected to act as a beacon to the rest. Winthrop’s reminder to his flock, “for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us”, (American History, p 27) finds corroboration in chapter 32 of Bradford’s narrative where he refers to his people as those who had been “brought into the light, and set in the plain field, or rather on a hill, made conspicuous to the view of all”. (Ibid, p 23)

Unlike the elegant, often ornamental prose styles of Catholic or Anglican writers the ‘plaine style’ of the Puritan historians was language that was ‘resacralized by its own congregation, shaped by specific theological, social and political assumptions’. (From Puritanism, p 15) The prose of this period therefore is both a history and story of the epic struggle of people consecrated to a vision, a rhetoric of range yet restraint that rates even as it narrates the experience of early colonial life.

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### **1.3.0. □ Descriptive Writing of the Puritan Period.**

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The first settlers were struck by wonder and excitement at the expanse of land and scenery that confronted them in the new land. Many of them expressed their response to the uncharted continent providing details of the topography, climate, vegetation, fauna and the native inhabitants of the place. The histories written during this period and already referred to are rich sources of such descriptions. The descriptions of land and ocean furnished by the first settlers gain a particular focus from their imperialist assessment and understanding of the same, even as the Puritan, providential view of settlement engendered myths and shaped attitudes regarding the immigrants’ relationship to the new land which survive in the American consciousness even today.

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### 1.3.1. □ Francis Higginson

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Francis Higginson, a minister of the Church of England who reached Salem in June 1629 as a religious teacher had maintained a journal of his voyage across the Atlantic and of his observations on his new environment. The contents of this work were compressed into a slim volume called *'New England's Plantation'*. In this book both the voyage and the new country are described through the fresh perceptions of the emigrant who is eager to taste the adventures and novelties of scene and custom that necessarily await him. The first glimpse of the New England coast is thus conveyed: "Now, what with fine woods and green trees by land, and these yellow flowers painting the sea, made us all desirous to see our new paradise of New England, whence we saw such fore-running signals of fertility afar off" (A History of American Literature, M.C. Tylor, p 164).

The idealizing thrust of Higginson's survey is clear from his praise for the land and its natural bounty, the physical proportions of the Indians, and most of all for the opportunities for "preaching and diligent catechizing" that it afforded.

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### 1.3.2. □ William Wood

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*'New England's Prospect'* by William Wood published in 1634 is yet another specimen of the descriptive literature of the period. Divided into two parts the book sets out to describe the landscape and topography, the seasons, the flora and fauna of New England and the suitability of the English physiognomy to the climate and soil of the place. In the second part Wood dwells extensively on the Indian tribes of New England documenting their habitat and habits, their customs, livelihoods, moral attributes and predilections.

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#### **1.4.0. □ The Theological Writers of the Colonial Period**

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As history, theology and political governance have been inseparable in the Puritan ethics and outlook the historical writers of the fledgling colonies invariably used the themes and forms of Protestant, specifically Calvinist discourse to express their views. They drew their images and allusions from the same source to illustrate their point, Despite their religious orientation the Pilgrim Fathers were primarily colonists and administrators, and they directed their energies to that end. The theological writers of New England who have gone down in history as the progenitors of a tradition of religious prose are Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepard and John Cotton during the first colonial period and Cotton Mather in the second colonial era.

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##### **1.4.1. □ Thomas Hooker (1586-1647)**

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Thomas Hooker was a brilliant preacher in London. Later he became religious lecturer and assistant minister in Chelmsford. His non-conformist views earned him the wrath of Archbishop Laud who effectively put an end to all the avenues open to him for preaching in England, as a result of which Hooker had to flee to Holland where he spent two or three years preaching in Delft and Rotterdam. From Holland Hooker made his way in 1633 to the Puritan colony at Massachusetts Bay in New England where he spent the last fourteen years of his life. He preached in the church at Cambridge for three years after which he led his flock of a hundred families or so to Connecticut where he, along with his devoted followers, helped to build the town of Hartford and found the community there.

During this last phase of his life Hooker poured forth his genius in a succession of religious treatises, which at once established his reputation as a major voice in Puritan literature. The twenty-three titles to his credit were without exception on religious subjects. In common with the prevailing Puritan temper and literary tendencies Hooker filled his works with Scriptural quotations and allusions, and subjected his prose to minute divisions, subdivisions and classifications. The conviction of tone and the force and vigour of his argument may be seen in the following extract: "There must be subjection or else confusion. Will you outbrave the Almighty to his face, and will you dare damnation...As proud as you have been. crushed and humbled. Where

are all those Nimrods and Pharaohs and all those haughty monarchs of the world? The Lord hath thrown them flat upon their backs, and they are in hell this day". (Tyler, p 189)

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### 1.4.2. □ Thomas Shepard (1605-49)

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Thomas Shepard arrived in New England in 1635 and took charge of the church in Cambridge. Possessed of a powerful intellect and devotion to his vocation, Shepard achieved fame as a writer and pulpit orator. Shepard's works honoured by a modern edition (Boston, 1853) draw for its core message on the Calvinist belief in the fallen and depraved condition of man, the wrath of God and the promise of redemption through man's repentant humility and divine forgiveness.

A couple of brief extracts from some of his writings may serve to exemplify both his theological theme and literary style. "We are all in Adam as a whole country in a parliament man; the whole country doth what he doth". (Works of Thomas Shepard 1.24); "Every natural man and woman is born full of sin, as full as a toad is of poison, as full as ever his skin can hold; mind, will, eyes, mouth, every limb of his body, and every piece of his soul, is full of sin; their hearts are bundles of sin", (Ibid.28)

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### 1.4.3. □ John Cotton (1584-1652)

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Archbishop Laud hounded John Cotton from England for his non-conformist views. Cotton arrived in Boston in 1633. He gradually became one of the most powerful leaders of the theocratic society of New England. Cotton's contribution to the Psalter that came to be popularly called the *Bay Psalm Book* is invaluable.

The individualistic streak in the American psyche is seen in the wish of the Puritan leaders to have a Book of Psalms that was at once more literal and Calvinist in its orientation than the several English translations that were available at the time. Accordingly, a project was initiated by the learned divines of the time to bring forth a translation of the scriptural Psalms that would be suited to the particular needs of the colonies, and more in keeping with the beliefs of the colonial citizens.

Eminent theologians such as Richard Mather, John Wilson, Nathaniel Ward,

Thomas Shepard and John Cotton among several others set about the task of diligently translating the Psalms. A collective venture, undertaken in the best spirit of community service this endeavour left little scope for individual claims to authorship except for the instance of John Cotton who was credited with the translation of Psalm 23, and with the composition of the Preface to the **Bay Psalm Book**.

A Puritan manifesto in miniature, on style and intent, the last paragraph of the Preface virtually approximates the status of a classic in its condensed articulation of its avowed objective, namely the achievement of literal accuracy rather than pleasing sweetness of style.

“If therefore the verses are not always so smooth and elegant as some may desire or expect: let them consider that God’s altar needs not our polishings...for we have respected rather a plain translation, than to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and so have attended conscience rather than elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in translating the Hebrew words into English meter...” (Colonial and Federal, p 223)

There are numerous titles to Cotton’s credit but in the words of Tyler his place in early American literary history bears no proportion to his place in the early religious and political history of the country.

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#### 1.4.4. □ Increase Mather (1639-1723)

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Richard Mather, sire of the Mather dynasty contributed sermons, a catechism, letters on church administration and some of the translations in **The Bay Psalm Book** along with various other documents to the contemporary corpus of writings, Increase Mather, the son of Richard Mather had almost a hundred titles to his credit. The one book however that stands out is known by a name not given to it by its author. Called ‘*Remarkable Providences*’ it is a work that was begun in England and Ireland in 1658 and took shape as a compilation of testimonies of Puritan priests about providential interventions in their lives. Discontinued for some time, the work found its way into New York and fortuitously fell in the hands of Increase Mather who developed the project in the new settlement and saw it to its completion, Sound in conception and scientific in implementation, “**Remarkable Providences**’ lacked the critical scrutiny that needs to be applied to personal recollections.

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#### 1.4.5. □ Roger Williams (1603-1683)

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Roger Williams was born in England where he acquired a liberal education, receiving his B.A. from Cambridge before going on to study divinity. He was a chaplain in Essex for a brief while. He arrived at the Massachusetts Bay colony in 1631 but was refused appointment to a church in Salem for his opposition to the dominant Congregational polity. Williams then spent two years in the Plymouth region living and working in close proximity with the Indians. He demanded, as a matter of principle, the separation of church from state and questioned the right of the colonial administrators to take away land from the Indians in order to build and expand their colonies. For this bold and radical step Williams was banned from Massachusetts Bay colony in 1635. In 1636 Williams fled to Narragansett Bay where he founded the settlement of Providence.

Two of Williams' work that merits mention are **A Key in to the Language of America** (1643) and **The Bloody Tenent of Persecution** (1644).

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#### 1.4.6. □ Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

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Increase Mather's son Cotton Mather, born in 1663 in Boston followed in the professional footsteps of his father and grandfather. Prodigiously talented, Cotton Mather developed into a scholar and preacher of extraordinary repute. Of the 444 items that Cotton Mather published during his lifetime several are important from a historical point of view. The more important ones among his writings are: ***The Wonders of the Invisible World; Magnalia Christi Americana: Manu ducterio***

***Ministerium; and The Negro Christianized.***

Cotton Mather's one book which established him as a major writer on theological themes, and which to some extent ensured his name for posterity is *Magnalia Christi Americana* or The Ecclesiastical History of New England from its First Planting (1702). The first book of this mammoth literary enterprise is a history of the settlement of New England; the second deals with the lives of the governors and magistrates; the third dwells on the lives of sixty renowned priests of the Puritan churches of New England; the fifth is devoted to an evocation of "the faith and order of the churches"; the sixth

presents remarkable cases of divine intervention in human lives while the seventh provides an account of the “afflictive disturbances” which the churches of New England have suffered at the hands of their various adversaries ranging from the Devil to sectarian enemies to the Indians.

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## 1.5.0. □ Poetry of The Puritan Period

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The millenarian thrust of the Puritan discourse gave to early colonial literature some of its typical literary forms - history, travel-record, sermon, journals, diaries and jeremiads that do not really qualify as imaginative literature. Believing wholeheartedly in their status as the elect who had been specially called to interpret the divine plan to the multitudes, the New England leaders prized utility over art, and the practical over the imaginative. Imaginative literature was encouraged in so far as it led to the improvement of the moral fibre, and the edification of the people. In the circumstances, it was not surprising that the output of imaginative literature was limited. There is virtually no fiction or drama worth the name. In poetry while Michael Wigglesworth attained renown in his age with his poem **The Day of Doom** the voices that were truly complex, expressing the rich interplay of the old and the new, the Metaphysical and the Puritan, looking back and ahead in a simultaneous sweep of the poetic imagination were those of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor.

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### 1.5.1. □ Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

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Michael Wigglesworth's poem '*The Day of Doom*' (1662) as the title suggests was an exercise in righteousness completely in agreement with the religious tenets of contemporary New England. Consisting of 224 eight-line stanzas of doctrinal observations in a rousing ballad meter the poem acquired an astonishing popularity in its day. Dealing with the Calvinist themes of depravity, damnation and deliverance, the poem not only provides a key to the Puritan mentality but also illustrates the 'plaine style' of the historians that was perhaps unconsciously adopted by some of the poets as well.

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### 1.5.2. □ Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

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Born in England, Anne Bradstreet was the daughter of Thomas Dudley the steward of the Earl of Lincoln. Anne who grew up in an elegant and erudite atmosphere acquired a learning that was unusual for a woman of her time. Her first volume of poems was published in England in 1650 under a very long title not of her own choosing - '*The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America...by a Gentlewoman of those Parts*'. The poems were interesting

reflections not only on the moral ideas held by her but also on some of the emerging scientific theories of the day.

Anne Bradstreet's poems were surprisingly well received by contemporary New England society given the orthodox tilt of the patriarchal dispensation at the helm. They were actually given a second edition that was brought out in Boston in 1687 under a considerably abbreviated title. The new poems that were added to the original ones in this second edition have, with their depth of feeling and complexity of tone, contributed to the lasting reputation of this pioneering poet who, in some measure, resembled and anticipated another New England woman poet, namely Emily Dickinson who was to appear on the scene 200 years later.

Anne Bradstreet articulates in her poetry the problems of the woman writer who has to reconcile her several roles, balancing domestic duties and literary interests, negotiate the world of professional writing, traditionally regarded as a male preserve, and redefine her image and status in the context of her identity as both woman and poet.

From *The Prologue* (Stanzas 1 and 5)

To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings  
Of cities founded, commonwealths begun,  
For my mean pen are too superior things;  
Or how they all, or each, their dates have run;  
Let poets and historians set these forth;  
My obscure lines shall not so dim their worth,

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue  
Who says my hand a needle better fits;  
A poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong,  
For such despite they cast on female wits.  
If what I do prove well, it won't advance;  
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance. (Colonial, p 228)

From *Contemplations* (Stanzas 30 and 33)

And yet this sinful creature, frail and vain,  
This lump of wretchedness, of sin and sorrow,

This weather-beaten vessel wracked with pain,  
Joys not in hope of an eternal morrow;  
Nor all his losses, crosses and vexations,  
In weight, in frequency and long duration,  
Can make him deeply groan for that divine translation.



O Time, the fatal wrack of mortal things,  
That draws oblivion's curtains over kings,  
Their sumptuous monuments, men know them not,  
Their names without a record are forgot,  
Their parts, their ports, their pomp's all laid in th' dust,  
Nor wit, nor gold nor buildings 'scape time's rust;  
But he whose name is graved in the white stone  
Shall last and shine when all of these are gone. (Colonial, p 235)

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### 1.5.3. □ Edward Taylor (1645-1729)

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Born in Leicestershire, England, probably in 1645, Edward Taylor was educated there. He arrived in Boston in 1668 with the aim of acquiring a university education, as British universities were not exactly hospitable to Puritan scholars at the time. He studied in Harvard, graduating from it in 1671 and at Massachusetts started on a dual career as pastor and physician devotedly looking after the needs of his flock for the rest of his life.

When Thomas H. Johnson published selections from Taylor's poems more than 200 years after his death the fusion of an intensely Puritan outlook and a subtly wrought Metaphysical sensibility became apparent. Themes of devotional, piety were mediated in Taylor's poetry through complexities of tone, meter and imagery and a rhetorical fervour that made it significantly different from any comparable poetic expression in colonial America at the time.

The crossing of Puritan priorities with aesthetic ambiguities certainly inflected Taylor's voice and tone with multivalencies of mood and meaning. In the perceptive analysis of Gross and Stern, Taylor "combined the intense sincerity of a William Bradford with the aspiring exaltation of a Jonathan Edwards, merging his fire and humility in the intricate style of the English metaphysicals", (Colonial and Federal, p 259).

Taylor's position in the literary tradition of America is important in that it betokens a heralding of the torn, troubled, questioning metaphysics that came to affect a strain of the American imaginative expression. Ruland and Bradbury explain it thus: "Taylor's poems pass beyond literary artifice to become emblems of transcendent relationships, beyond allegory into the moral, psychological intensity that comes to characterize so much of the richest American writing, from Emerson, Hawthorne and Melville through Emily Dickinson and Henry James to William Faulkner". (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 26)

The following excerpts from Taylor's poems may give one an idea of his themes and styles:

***Meditation One*** (Last Stanza)

Oh! That my love might overflow my heart,  
To fire the same with love: for love I would.  
But oh! my straitened breast! My lifeless spark!  
My fireless flame! What chilly love and cold!  
In measure small, in manner chilly, see!  
Lord, blow the coal! Thy love inflame in me!

(Colonial, p 261)

***Meditation Six***

Am I thy gold? Or purse, Lord, for Thy wealth;  
Whether in mine or mint refined for Thee?  
I'm counted so, but count me o'er Thyself,  
Lest gold washed face, and brass in heart I be.  
I fear my touchstone touches when I try  
Me, and my counted gold too overly.

Am I new minted by Thy stamp indeed?  
Mine eyes are dim; I cannot clearly see.  
Be thou my spectacles that I may read  
Thy image and inscription stamped on me.  
If Thy bright image do upon me stand,  
I am a golden angel in Thy hand.

Lord, make my soul Thy plate; Thine image bright  
Within the circle of the same enfoil.  
And on its brims in golden letters write  
Thy superscription in an holy style.  
Then I shall be Thy money, Thou my hoard:  
Let me Thy angel be, be Thou my Lord.

(Colonial, p 264)

(angel: English gold coin)

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### 1.6.0. Conclusion

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The Puritan diaspora by virtue of its sectarian motivations sought to exist within a limited geographical and ideological compass, excluding in the process elements both from within itself and the unexplored mass of the continent that could, in all likelihood, have contributed to its further growth. While Anne Hutchinson earned the wrath of the orthodox ministers of the church for her critical thinking and dissenting views a preacher such as Roger Williams with his progressive sympathies naturally could not be accommodated within the Puritan theological framework. The great wilderness beyond the plantations was viewed, for the most part, with suspicion by the settlers who tended to regard it as a source of both known and unknown dangers and therefore, best left unexplored.

The spiritual orientation of the Puritan mind with its tendency to read prophetic meanings in every manifestation of nature, and the phenomenal world in general, anticipated the transcendentalism of a later epoch of American writing. However, the lack of sensitivity to the beauty of nature, the rigidly moral outlook, the unimaginative temper of mind, and the exclusionary attitude with the consequent propensity for monologic discourse disqualified the Puritan experiment in New England for engaging in heterogeneous and hybrid exercises that could have contributed to a dynamic cultural exchange.

The limitations of the Puritan literary contribution notwithstanding, it has to be conceded that the providential world-view afforded by the same, along with the belief in renewal and redemption associated with the momentous migration that brought this forth in the first place, imbued American literature as a whole with patterns and paradigms that certainly owe much to this

primary perception. "Puritanism may have set certain limits on the American imagination; it was also one of its essential roots". (From Puritanism, p 32).

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### 1.7.0. □ Questions :

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- 1) Examine the moral, political and literary significance of the New England historians.
- 2) "Puritanism may have set certain limits on the American imagination; it was also one of its essential roots", Discuss,
- 3) Comment on the poetic sources as well as contribution of Anne Bradstreet to the poetry of America.
- 4) Trace the intricate mingling of the Puritan and Metaphysical elements in the poetry of Edward Taylor.
- 5) Would you agree with the view that the 'cosmic, transcendental and providential vision' of the New England theological writers "lingers yet in American culture"?

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### 1.8.0. □ Suggested Reading:

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Colonial and Federal, To 1800 (Ed Milton R. Stern and Semour L. Gross, Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1975)

From Puritanism to Postmodernism, A History of American Literature, Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury (Penguin Books, New York, Copyright R Ruland and M Bradbury, 1991)

A History of American Literature, 1607-1765 by Moses Coit Taylor, Collier Books, New York, 1962)

Literary History of the United States, Editors : Robert E Spiller, Willard Thorp, Thomas H. Johnson, Henry Seidel Caulya Richard M Ludwig, The Macmillan Company 1946.

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## Unit 2 □ The Enlightenment Period in the History of American Literature (1700-1800)

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### □ Structure

- 2.0. Introduction
- 2.1.0. The Prose Writers of the Period.
- 2.2.0. The Poetry of the Enlightenment Period.
- 3.0. Conclusion

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### 2.0. □ Introduction to the Enlightenment Period

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The Reformation world of Aristotle and More gave way to the rational, empirical values of a different physics and metaphysics. The foundation of the Royal Society in London in 1662 with its espousal of the ideas of Locke, Newton and Burke introduced notions that would deeply influence the shape of the emerging nation. With the great western hinterland of the newly discovered continent awakening curiosity and awaiting exploration spatial focus shifted from east to west, from the seaboard to forest and frontier. Theological imperatives began to be broadened by secular concerns, and narrowly moral preoccupations by mercantile interests. The idealizing thrust of the Puritan mind began to be gradually informed by a pragmatist ethics imbibed both from the mother-country England and also from within its own struggle to come to terms with a changing order.

The Puritan mind in its negotiation of the world could not but be touched by some of the scientific theories of the day. Cotton Mather's 'The Christian Philosopher' (1721) shows the stirrings of a scientific awareness but an awareness that is subjugated to his theology.

"Taylor died in 1729. By then New England had changed greatly. The old religious fervor had abated; the concept of a universe centered in God had weakened before that of one centered on man; and more and more colonists, especially in the prosperous seaboard towns, were interested in trade and in aping the amenities of English society rather than in conquering new lands for Christ. They paid lip service to the old theology, and church membership was still a mark of social respectability; but the zeal for teaching

and the fierce concentration on the dilemma of sinful man had lessened, and literature reflected the change. More and more the grace and urbanity of the English periodical essayists came to be admired; the robust vocabulary and rhetoric of the original colonists were toned down to the level of easy fluency; concrete realism often gave way to well turned generalizations couched in abstract terms. In verse Taylor's ardor and his love of dramatic contrast were replaced by smooth couplets and neat stanzas obviously reminiscent of Dryden, Watts, and Pope. Between 1700 and 1760 New England produced plenty of good prose and plenty of graceful verse; but much of it seems tame when compared with earlier work because the feeling behind it was less intense. "Good sense" was in vogue; "reasonableness" and "politeness" were more important than they had been to Puritan preachers and tract writers. Compare almost any line of Taylor, or almost any stanza, however clumsy, of *The Day of Doom* with this bit from a "Poetical Meditation" by Roger Wolcott of Connecticut, published in 1725:

Vertue still makes the Vertuous to shine,  
Like those that Liv'd in the first week of time.  
Vertue hath force the vile to cleanse again,  
So hcing like clear shining after Rain.  
A Kind and Constant, Chearful Vertuous Life,  
Becomes each Man, and most Adorns a Wife.

True enough, any Puritans would have agreed but few earlier Puritans would have put it so blandly with so little sense of man's helpless vileness before God or of the miracle of God's grace vouchsafed to his elect. The change in attitude—and in style—from the earlier writers, shown in Wolcott and many eighteenth century New Englanders, illustrates some of the ways in which deism, the new rationalism; and changed English literary fashions affected the original puritan outlook.

There were some literary gains. The newer theory flowered in Benjamin Franklin's best essays, skillfully written by a "sensible" man for "sensible" folk, with their eyes on this world more than on the next, and in the scientific and philosophical works of Jonathan Edwards. The brilliance of the prose in which the Reverend John Wise defended the original New England church polity in *The Churches Quarrel Espoused* (1710) and *Vindication of the Government of New-England Churches* (1717), shows how much he had learned from English stylists of the school of Dryden and Swift.

Furthermore the increasing secularization of society, the relaxing of the old dominant preoccupation with religion, opened the door to pleasant excursions in fields unvisited by the earlier Puritans. Mather Byles, for example, the nephew of Cotton Mather, was a minister, but achieved almost as much fame for his punning as for his preaching. He was also a rhymer, and an admirer of Pope and of the English poets of his day, and dashed off a few verses which his ancestors would have considered too trivial—or too frivolous—for a divine. The early Puritans had humor, of course—to take but two examples, Samuel Sewall in his diary and Nathaniel Ward in his *Cobler*, showed theirs; but usually the seventeenth century colonial preacher would have considered it a waste of paper and ink to display wit (in the modern sense) or humor in published writings. Nor were there, in the early days of Massachusetts, merchants like Joseph Green, ready to entertain themselves and their less pious neighbors with verses on the joys of drinking, or on the death of Mather Byles' cat, or with even more direct ridicule in rhyme of the minister of the Hollis Street Church. New England's notion of the purpose of literature changed fast after 1700. Good writing was seen no longer as simply a way of serving God by communicating divine truth as directly as possible; there was room for work designed merely to entertain. There was also an increasing interest in discussions of purely literary and stylistic matters. John Bulkeley, in 1725, wrote for Wolcott's *Poetical Meditations* a preface which is pious enough but devotes more attention than do most earlier colonial writings to purely literary values. Cotton Mather's famous essay on style, inserted in his *Manuductio ad Ministerium* (1726), a manual for theological students, takes a broader aesthetic view than the preface to the "Bay Psalm Book" or Michael Wigglesworth's unpublished "Prayse of Eloquence."

It is unlikely that more than a few pages of poetry and prose of New England before 1760 will ever achieve popular literary immortality. There are, none the less, memorable passages not only in the chronicles and histories, but in the great mass of sermons, tracts, essays, poems, and pious verse written by the colonists; and there are hundreds of other passages which lack the stamp of greatness but still have interest for, and may give excitement to, the modern reader who can read them with the understanding they deserve. That understanding involves first of all some knowledge of colonial conditions, some realization of the circumstances under which they were written and of the purpose and the audience for which they were designed.

It involves, too, an appreciation of the literary conventions which were accepted by our forefathers and, in spite of serious limitations, had value. Order, logic, clarity, are still virtues in writing, even though the devices by which we try to achieve them are unlike the Puritans'. Homely imagery, earthy phrasing and the use of simple and realistic figures to make abstract ideas or emotions concretely realizable are traits still characteristic of much of the best American writing. Emerson admired "language of nature." He found it in the speech of a "Vermont drover" and said that "in the 17th century, it appeared in every book." For an example he cited Thomas Shepard's "And to put finger in the eye and to renew their repentance, they think this is weakness." Obviously he was thinking of the homeliness so characteristic of Puritan prose; obviously too, much of his own best work shows the same quality. Emerson, and others, found in the Puritan's stylistic theory something adaptable to the needs of the idealist in any age. The early New Englanders' eyes were on God; but they were busy men with a wilderness to subdue and the divine will to carry out on earth.

Jonathan Edwards wrote on science and philosophy more effectively and more attractively, at least for modern readers, than most of his seventeenth century predecessors. Such men were exceptional, but they profited from some of the new methods in English prose popularized in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries—methods by which many other New England writers before 1760 made their work palatable. The Puritans' literary practice grew out of the search for some way to express both the spiritual emotion that controlled them and their vigorous desire to make practical use of it, and to teach others to do so, in daily life. They never succeeded, perhaps, in realizing their aim, either in literature or in life, but only those of us who are too limited in vision to see the gallantry of their quest will refuse them respect for what they did and wrote." (Literary History of the United States P. 68-70)

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### 2.1.0. □ The Prose Writers of the Period

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In keeping with the rational spirit of the age a body of prose writings gradually came into being. Illustrating the secular tendency of the times much of this earlier writing was matter-of-fact record of travel, an enquiry into contemporary lifestyles, or an examination of the practical and commercial

possibilities that had come to the fore. Benjamin Franklin's deistic preoccupation with the pragmatic imperatives of the changing scenario was a measure of the new beliefs and interests. Where the old Puritan spirit lingered it was tempered by an awareness of the scientific motives and methods of the time as in the writings of Jonathan Edwards. However, it was the political orientation of some of the most important writings of the time, most notably those of Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, that inflected the prose with its dominant tone and accent, giving to American literature the fundamental articles of its liberal, secular, democratic polity.

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### 2.1.1. □ William Byrd II (1674-1744)

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The changing times were perhaps most conspicuously reflected in the outlook and writings of William Byrd II, one of the greatest landowners of colonial America. Byrd founded Richmond on his family estate by the James River.

Having studied law of the Middle Temple in London, and later the rudiments of the tobacco business in Holland, Byrd spent a substantial portion of his life in England mingling with the rich and the influential. Byrd became a regular at the courts, coffee-houses and other haunts frequented by dramatists, writers and poets such as Wycherley, Congreve, Swift and Pope. Not surprisingly then did he imbibe and import some of the dominant values of Restoration England into the colonies when he returned to Virginia in 1705.

A member of the Royal Society, the exploratory and empirical thrust of Byrd's investigations is quite evident in the nature of his themes. **The History of the Dividing Line** chronicles the charting of the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina, a work in which he had been directly involved having been on the commission that oversaw the division. **A Progress to the Mines** grew out of Byrd's visit to several iron mines in Virginia while the third; **A Journey to the Land of Eden** was a record of his visit to North Carolina. All three records of Virginia, meant for private circulation were not printed till 1841.

The love of travel, the negotiation of different places and people, the cartographical delineation of state boundaries, the enquiry into the ethnicity of Indians and the general perception of plantation life as a pastoral idyll where the scholarly aristocrat may attend to cultural and intellectual pursuits

are some of the traits of this body of urbane records.

It was however, the discovery and decoding of Byrd's Secret Diary as late as 1941 that revealed a whole new perspective on the eighteenth century life of the American South. 'The **Diary** does for southern colonial life what the journals of Bradford and Sewall do for New England' (Colonial and Federal, p 297). Like Samuel Sewall Byrd is a transitional figure looking back to the conventions of a leisurely past even as he inspires and anticipates the Jeffersonian ideal of the active, liberal, public-spirited aristocrat. In the words of Ruland and Bradbury 'Byrd brings us remarkably close to the eighteenth century American mind that owed quite as much to contemporary Europe as to its seventeenth century past'. (From Puritanism, p 36)

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### 2.1.2. □ St. Jean de Crevecoeur (1735-1813)

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St. Jean de Crevecoeur was born in Normandy, completed his schooling in England and went to Canada at the age of nineteen. In 1765 he became a colonial citizen of New York, got married and settled down to farm life in Orange County. The outbreak of the revolution necessitated an escape to France, as his political views did not make him popular either in England or in the colonies.

The impressions of America that Crevecoeur sought to publish were finally brought out in a considerably edited version in 1782 under the title **Letters from an American Farmer**. This agrarian metaphysics traces through an epistolary mode the interaction between nature, society and the evolution of a new human being. Crevecoeur's vision of the modern farmer in an open landscape is a Rousseauistic rendering of the American, nourished on civil liberties guaranteed by a just government.

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### 2.1.3. □ Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)

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It is in the **Diary** of Samuel Sewall that the documentation of everyday life and the domestic vicissitudes of eighteenth century America received a fresh treatment and succeeded in introducing a new tone and register in the prevailing mode of writing. Sewall's **Diary** presents the mingling of two distinct strains-the spiritual aspiration of the Puritan mind with its providential interpretation of history, and the secular imperatives of a social and commercial life. Ruland and Bradbury note the historical importance of Sewall

in the following observation: “His significance goes further however, for he is a figure on the turn: away from the Puritan past, toward the Yankee commercial, empirical spirit of eighteenth century America” (From Puritanism to Postmodernism, p 35)

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#### 2.1.4. □ Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

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Born in Connecticut into an illustrious line of clergymen Edwards came to represent an original and speculative temper of mind. Graduating from Yale he stayed on to study theology and went on to accept various preaching posts, becoming in the process, very active in the evangelical movement that took hold of American Protestantism at the time.

In Jonathan Edwards one sees the older Puritan metaphysical strain striving to adapt itself to the secular, subjective, pluralistic ethic that began to manifest itself in the expanding cosmos of the New World. It is his open-minded response to ‘contemporary Deism and experimental science’ that widened the scope of the original Puritan discourse and helped ignite the great religious awakening of the late 1730s.

Edwards’ famous sermons with their emotional intensity and contact with the roots of daily living contributed in no small measure to the revivalist and revisionist movement of the time. His **‘Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God’** remains the most famous of Puritan sermons. His defence of Calvinist doctrine is found in **Freedom of the Will**, in which he “combined an older orthodoxy with the new empirical psychology of Locke in order to unify man’s being and knowing”. (Colonial, p 149)

Edwards’ typological interpretation of cosmic, natural, scientific and other phenomena along with his reliance on the subjective as a means of apprehending truth link him to the symbolist, transcendental, Romantic impulse in American writing of a later age.

##### **An extract from Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God:**

“You probably are not sensible of this; you find you are kept out of hell, but don’t see the hand of God in it, but look at other things, as the good state of your bodily constitution, your care of your own life, and the means you use for your own preservation. But indeed these things are nothing; if God should withdraw His hand, they avail no more to keep you from falling than

the thin air to hold up a person that is suspended in it". (Colonial, p 195)

The development of this early Calvinist strain into a more measured and reasonable argument is seen in the following extract from Edwards' tract **Freedom of the Will**.

"There are two things contrary to what is called liberty in common speech. One is constraint, otherwise called force, compulsion, and coercion, which is a person's being necessitated to do a thing contrary to his will. The other is restraint, which is his being hindered and not having power to do according to his will. But that which has no will cannot be the subject of these things. I need say the less on this head, Mr Locke having set the same thing forth, with so great clearness in his **Essay on the Human Understanding**". (Colonial, p 208)

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### 2.1.5. □ Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

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Benjamin Franklin was a didactic writer of rational prose enshrining his social and moral precepts. His materialism was a reflection of the "general deistic belief that free reason and full attention to this world of the present moment would result in a social altruism that would be the best service to the world" (Colonial, 372). The founder of several of the foremost civil and academic institutions in America, Franklin upheld the developing liberal values of the colonies.

With his numerous enquiries and enthusiasms, his amazing range of interests, his experimental, entrepreneurial attitude to life, he approached the modern American who may well have answered to the famous description of the same by J. Hector St Jean de Crevecoeur: "He is an American, who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds...The American is a new man, who acts on new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions". (Colonial, p237-8)

Franklin's ability to successfully transmute his Calvinist roots into an altruistic yet pragmatist philosophy demonstrates the flexible and accommodative nature of the emerging American consciousness which was mature and self-assured enough to question, moderate and revise some of its fundamental tenets to stay in tune with the changing historical circumstances.

Franklin's **The Autobiography**, arguably his best-known book, transcends the genre of personal narrative to acquire the allegorical dimensions of national history as it charts the intellectual and commercial trajectories of the unfolding American psyche.

Influenced by Addison's style in 'Spectator' Franklin sought to cultivate the Augustan virtues of wit, balance and urbanity in his own writings. With the spirit of practical application that characterized his endeavours in everything he did Franklin set to crafting and polishing his literary expressions by diligently enlarging his vocabulary, and modulating the 'plaine' style into a more sophisticated instrument of expression and mediation. Promoting the eighteenth century priorities of sense and science Franklin's prose remains one of the classics of an elegant and edifying specimen of the genre.

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### □ From Franklin's The Autobiography

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"Before I enter upon my public appearance in business, it may be well to let you know the then state of my mind with regard to my principles and morals, that you may see how far those influenced the future events of my life. My parents had early given me religious impressions, and brought me through my childhood piously in the dissenting way. But I was scarce fifteen, when, after doubting by turns of several points, as I found them disputed in the different books I read, I began to doubt of Revelation itself. Some books against deism fell into my hands; they were said to be the substance of sermons preached at Boyle's lectures. It happened that they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the deists were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough deist". (Colonial, p 405)

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### 2.1.6. □ Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

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Described as 'the most luminous and heartbreaking figure of the American Revolution' (Colonial, p 440) Thomas Paine followed several occupations in England before making his way to Pennsylvania. The climate of a simmering revolutionary fervour in America was just the element that was required to stimulate Paine's political genius. He began to express his democratic views in Pennsylvania Magazine.

The publication of **Common Sense**, Paine's strident call for immediate

independence from England in 1776 established him as a voice of the Revolution and a political ideologue whose ideas would contribute to the shaping of the emerging nation. **Common Sense** was followed by the sixteen 'Crisis' papers which, appearing at strategic moments in the revolutionary war, served to boost the flagging spirits of the colonial citizens involved in the war effort.

Paine's impassioned rhetoric and powers of persuasion evident in these writings became identifiable features of his literary style. The first part of Paine's **The Rights of Man** was published in 1791. In support of 'France, Revolution and representative republicanism' it was in reply to Burke's **Reflections on the French Revolution**. When the second part of **The Rights of Man** was published the following year, Paine because of his outspoken espousal of revolution and liberty was banished by England. Apprehending this turn Paine had already found asylum in France and remained there till 1802. While in France Paine served a prison sentence for his opposition to the Reign of Terror.

Paine was brought back to America through the kind intervention of his friend Thomas Jefferson. Paine had completed the first part of **The Age of Reason** while he had been imprisoned in France. With the publication of part two in 1796 **The Age of Reason** became "the fullest and most radical statement of deistic rational regional" (Colonial and Federal, p 441).

Paine spent the remaining years of his life, vilified for his ideals, which for the most part, were not understood by the majority. He died in 1809 in New York.

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## □ From The Age of Reason

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"I believe in one God and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life. And I believe in the equality of man; and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures Happy lest it should be supposed that I believe in many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe and my reasons for not believing them.

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My mind is my own church.

All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.

I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine. But it is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing or disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe". (Colonial, p 451).

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### 2.1.7. □ Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826)

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Born into the landed and slave-holding aristocracy of western Virginia Thomas Jefferson was a member of the professional elite. In a surprising negation of the circumstances of his birth and upbringing and the entrenched interests appertaining thereunto Jefferson came to sport a comprehensively democratic outlook that militated against many of the privileges that he was used to take for granted as the prerogatives of his class.

Jefferson occupied several legislative and executive offices in the state of Virginia before distinguishing himself in service to the nation as a whole. He was Secretary of State (1790-93), the Vice-President of the United States (1797-1801) and President (1801-1809).

Guiding the young nation at a crucial stage of its development Jefferson, like Franklin came to exercise an inestimable influence on the moral outlook of the republic, laying in the process, the foundations of a liberal, democratic civil society. Insisting that a 'national aristocracy of worth must replace an artificial aristocracy of station' (Colonial and Federal, p 463) Jefferson developed the concept of a 'populistic, agrarian, republican democracy'. (Ibid)

Jefferson led both by personal example and by precept, championing indefatigably for religious, political and intellectual freedom, for the extension of the franchise and educational opportunities. He died on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

The following passage from one of Jefferson's famous writings is illustrative of the main features of his prose style.

From **The Unanimous Declaration of the Thirteen United States of America in Congress**, July 4, 1776

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundations on such principles and organizing its powers in such form as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security”. (Colonial and Federal, p 465)

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### **2.1.8. □ The Federalist (1787-1788)**

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‘The Federalist’ consists of 85 letters published in the New York Independent Journal between 1787 and 1788. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison wrote the articles under the joint pseudonym ‘Publius’. While Hamilton later became the first secretary of the Treasury, Jay was appointed the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Madison went on to become the fourth President of America.

Hamilton and Jay represented conservative opinions on governance and social progress. Sharing the Calvinist belief in the essential depravity of humankind Hamilton in ‘The Federalist’ articles argued for a strong government to maintain civil order and protect the interests of the ruling class. Jay took the same protectionist stand on the interests and prerogatives of the administrating elite. It was Madison who embodied the liberal views of the Enlightenment arguing for the accommodation of diverse, even conflicting beliefs and values within a centralized form of governance that would strive, at all events, to respect the rights of the individual.

The colloquium of voices in ‘The Federalist’ represents the multifarious

public debate on the issues of political governance that naturally affected the young republic at this critical juncture of its history. As a source of constitutional law 'The Federalist'<sup>1</sup> remains an invaluable frame of reference for basic information on the subject as well as clarifications on contentious points.

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### 2.1.9. □ Poetry in the Period of Awakening and Enlightenment

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In eighteenth century America the colonial poets were trying to earnestly emulate the best British models. Mather Byles, a leading poet of the age turned to England for inspiration, raising imitation to an art and denouncing dullness in true neo-classical fashion in his poem 'Bombastic and Grubstreet Style: A Satire' (1745). If Byles turned to Alexander Pope for poetic direction the preacher-poet of New Jersey Nathaniel Evans sought inspiration from Milton, Gray, Cowley or Goldsmith. At any event, poetry of this age lacked originality of vision and method, and depended for the most part, on the established conventions of the older British tradition.

An important theme, that of nation-building began to inform the poetic expression of colonial America at this time with the result that this celebration of colonial achievement peaked in the 1770s. The poem entitled 'Poem...On the Rising Glory of America' written jointly by Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Philip Freneau bear testimony to this patriotic tendency.

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### 2.2.0. □ The Connecticut Wits

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Around this time a group of poets experiencing the turmoil of transition, and sensing the imminent birth of the Republic, began to reflect the promise of a new dawn in their poetry. John Trumbull, Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow and David Humphrys of Yale, later christened the 'Connecticut Wits' helped usher in an age that trembled on the brink of possibilities.

John Trumbull (1750-1831) wrote a number of poems of which **The Progress of Dulness** (1773) was the most notable specimen. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) contributed several poems of which **Greenfield Hill** is remembered. Joel Barlow (1754-1812) wrote the long poem 'The Hasty Pudding'<sup>9</sup>.

Mostly derivative in theme and style these poets "occupy a transitional

and peripheral place in American literary history, and are remembered not so much for the virtues of their own works as for their joint value as representatives of the early stirrings of national literary consciousness". (Colonial, 517)

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### 2.2.1. □ Philip Freneau (1752-1832)

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Philip Freneau spent the early years of his life in New Jersey, studied in Princeton, and became a friend and supporter of Madison and the liberal viewpoint. Freneau developed strong anti-British feelings since the Revolution, and his punishment in a British prison ship. He had an interesting and varied career as a journalist and a ship worker. For a while from 1790 he concentrated on journalism taking sides in the ongoing war between Jefferson's and Hamilton's views. He staunchly supported the former. In 1791 Freneau went to Philadelphia to start the National Gazette, an instrument for his liberal, democratic opinions. Freneau went to New Jersey and then to New York to launch successive newspapers but these ventures did not succeed. He went back to life on sea to sustain himself.

Freneau's imaginative pieces such as 'The House of Night': A Vision, (1799); 'The Vanity of Existence, 'The Wild Honey Suckle', (1786); 'On the Religion of Nature', (1815) remain some of his best works.

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### 2.3. □ Conclusion

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The Enlightenment Period in America saw the gradual evolution of the American spirit. The religious motivations of the early settlement era became tempered by a sturdy mercantile outlook, which changed the direction of the socio-economic development of the colonies, and introduced the contradictions that lie at the heart of American life and literature.

The eighteenth century saw the processes that led to the change in the equation between Britain and the American colonies. The staging of the Revolution and the subsequent responsibilities of nationhood called for a new attitude to life, one in keeping with the spirit of science and reason that had overtaken Britain and several other parts of the world.

The study of the physical and natural sciences received a special impetus

from the intellectual contributions of men like John Winthrop of Connecticut regarded as a leading physicist at the time and John Bartram, the Quaker naturalist of Pennsylvania.

This age saw the rise of American journalism. Some early literary magazines were also launched, the first of which, 'The American Magazine' was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1741.

Several prominent American colleges including Harvard and Yale were founded in this era leading to a growth in academic pursuits and scholarly interests in the country.

The eighteenth century in America was an age of change and growth, which saw the development of the secular and scientific spirit and also a practical, mercantile outlook. Like all other ages before and after it, this age too was just a phase in the evolution of the nation, and being subject to the laws of history, was destined to yield to the succeeding era. Stern and Gross are illuminating in their analysis of the changeful nature of American life and literature when they maintain in their General Introduction to **The American Romantics**, "One thing stands out clearly: American literature is a rebellious and iconoclastic body of art. The Puritan rebelled against the Anglican, the deist against the Puritan, the romantic against aspects of deism, the naturalist against aspects of romanticism, the symbolist against aspects of naturalism". (The American Romantics, Light and Life publishers, N. Delhi, 1968)

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## 2.4. □ Questions :

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1. Examine the European influences on American thought and literature in the eighteenth century.
2. Discuss the prose of Paine, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton as primarily political writing that aimed to "declare the causes which impel... separation".
3. Comment on the characteristics that made Benjamin Franklin the most multi-faceted and representative individual of that germinal age-the Enlightenment.
4. Trace the gradual change from Puritan ethics to Enlightenment ethos as seen in the works of the leading writers of eighteenth century America.
5. Comment on the literary contribution of Philip Freneau to the political and poetic consciousness of the developing nation.

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## 2.5. □ Suggested Reading :

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Colonial and Federal, To 1800 (Ed Milton R. Stern and Semour L. Gross  
Light and Life Publishers, New Delhi, 1975)

From Puritanism to Postmodernism, A History of American Literature,  
Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury (Penguin Books, New York,  
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## Unit 1.1 □ Two Essays—"The American Scholar" and "The Poet" : Emerson

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### Structure :

- 1.1.0 Introduction
- 1.1.1 The "American Scholar" : Background to the Essay
- 1.1.2 Central Theme of the Essay
- 1.1.3 The Three Influences
- 1.1.4 The Duties of the Scholar
- 1.1.5 The Concluding Section of the Essay
- 1.1.6 The Poet : Background to the Essay
- 1.1.7 Emerson's Introduction to His Essay "The Poet"
- 1.1.8 Emerson's Ideas about "The Poet" 's Nature and Functions
- 1.1.9 The Materials and the Method of "The Poet"
- 1.1.10 Conclusion to the Essay : the General Condition of "The Poet"

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### 1.1.0 □ Introduction

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Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is acknowledged to be one of the greatest thinkers of nineteenth century America, was born in Boston, Massachusetts (USA) in 1803. His father (who was a preacher) died when Emerson was still a child, but he was brought up and given a good education by his mother and his aunt. A year after his father's death in 1811, Emerson started attending the Boston Latin School, and in 1817 was admitted to Harvard College from where he graduated in 1821.

For the first few years of his professional life, Emerson taught at his brother William Emerson's school before studying for the church and being ordained as a priest in the Second Church, Boston, in 1829. But after the death of his first wife, Ellen he resigned from the Second Church. The year 1833, Emerson spent in visiting Italy, France, and England, before coming back to America and commencing his professional career as a writer, essayist, poet, and public lecturer. He settled down in the New England village of Concord.

Emerson is called "the Father of American Transcendentalism" The term "Transcendentalism" needs explication. Essentially, the Transcendentalist

movement was a movement against the rationalistic thought that had dominated Europe throughout the eighteenth century. The roots of Transcendentalism go back to English and German Romanticism. Romantic trends reached America around 1820. Rather like the belief of the European Romantics in the spiritual essence of nature, the American Transcendentalists also believed in the oneness of the created world and its creator, God. They also believed that the individual soul of each man was identical to the world itself, that the microcosm of the human soul was the macrocosm of the world. In 1836, the American Transcendentalists organized themselves as a group called the " Transcendental Club", and began publishing a quarterly, *The Dial*, which was edited by first Margaret Fuller and then by Emerson himself.

Emerson's first long essay, "Nature", was published in 1836, and in the following year (1837) appeared "The American Scholar" which was an essay that had been originally delivered as the " Phi Beta Kappa Address". Before the students of Harvard. In 1838, Emerson also delivered the " Divinity School Address" at Harvard, and in 1841 and 1843 he published two books of essays, *Essays: First Series* and *Essays: Second Series*. In 1847 appeared the poetry of Emerson in a volume entitled *Poems*, and a further collection of his poems, *May-Day and other Pieces* came out in 1876. *Representative Men* (1850) contains the lectures delivered in Oxford and London. *English Traits*(1856) presents Emerson's opinions about the English character. *The Conduct of life* (1860) and *Society and Solitude* (1870) are two volumes of essays. Throughout his life, Emerson had always maintained a series of journals, and these were published several years after his death. The following discussion will however concentrate on Emerson's two essays,

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### 1.1.1 □ "The American Scholar" : Background to the Essay

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"The American Scholar" was delivered as a formal lecture at Harvard on 31 August 1837. Emerson was given only about two months notice to prepare this address, but he put into it his ideas about what a scholar in a new nation like America should be, ideas that had been developing in his mind for a long time. " I should write for the Cambridge men [Harvard was a college in Cambridge , Massachusetts] a theory of the scholar's office", Emerson wrote in a journal entry in July 1837. "It is not all books which it behoves him [the scholar] to know," wrote Emerson, "least of all to be a bookworshipper". Rather, what was important was for the scholar to be "able to read in all books that which alone gives value to books.....to read the incorruptible text of truth."

The essay is important, first, because it asserts what has been called a new spirit of American intellectual nationalism. Many earlier American authors had felt that their writings were inferior to the best that was being produced in England and Europe. However, Emerson asserted that "We [i.e., Americans] have listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe", and that it was now time for the new American scholar to express his own thoughts and to build up a tradition of American thought. It is because of this spirit of Emerson that the essay became justifiably famous. Emerson's contemporary, the American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes praised the essay and called it an "intellectual Declaration of Independence." Another respected poet and critic of the day wrote in the same strain and declared : "we were still socially and intellectually moored to English thought till Emerson cut the cable and gave us a chance at the dangers and glories of the blue water."

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### 1.1.2 □ Central Theme of the Essay

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In writing "The American Scholar", Emerson had a two-fold intent—to define not only the truly "American" (and not English or European) scholar, but also to set out his ideas about the work and the functions of such a scholar. These ideas are set out in the first seven paragraphs of the essay and this constitutes a kind of introduction to the whole piece. Emerson begins his discussion by talking about an "old fable" (actually Platonic in origin) which told of the gods dividing "Man" into "men" so that "he might be more helpful to himself", the analogy being of the division of the hand into fingers so that work could be done better. This fable implies that just as there is one hand constituted out of many different fingers, so too there is one man behind all the different kinds of men. However , Emerson laments that in America, Man has become divided into separate individuals each of whom does his own work in isolation from all the other individuals. This has the original unity of the One Man become dispersed, and instead of being " priest, and scholar, and statesman, and producer, and soldier" all together, Man has become many "men", each doing his work in isolation from the work done by the others. As Emerson says about the state of his contemporary society, it is "one in which the members have suffered amputation from the trunk, and strut about so many walking monsters—a good finger, a neck, a stomach, an elbow, but never a man."

In this condition of the social state in which the "original unit" (man) has been "minutely subdivided", the Scholar has become the "delegated

intellect." Emerson states that while in the right condition, the Scholar should be "Man thinking", now he has degenerated into being "a mere thinker, or still worse, the Parrot of other men's thinking." But, according to Emerson, this negative trend is reversible, and the American scholar may yet become One Man in his thought if he opens himself up to three key influences—those of Nature, of the Past (Books), and the Future (Action). The next few paragraphs of the essay are devoted to a discussion and elaboration of Emerson's thinking on these important influences.

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### 1.1.3 □ The Three Influences

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About Nature, Emerson says the rising and the setting of the sun, the coming of night and the stars, the blowing of the wind and the growing of the grass all show that Nature is a continuous, never-ending process, a "web" created by God which has neither beginning nor end, and is a "circular power returning into itself." The scholar is the man whom the spectacle of Nature attracts most. The scholar observes Nature and discovers that in it, thousands of most different and even contradictory things are united. And from realizing this, he understands that Nature is not chaotic but has a law of unity within it, which is also a "law of the human mind." Nature then becomes to man "the measure of his attainments", for the less he knows of Nature the less he knows of his own mind. And as Emerson sums up, the "ancient precept 'know thyself' and the modern precept 'Study nature' " thus mean the same thing.

The second crucial influence on the mind of the scholar is that of the Past, whether this is inscribed in or embodied by literature, art, or any other human institution. However, Emerson in his essay singles out books as "the best type of the influence of the past," and he devotes his discussion to books alone. According to Emerson, books were born of man's experience of the world around him and were the result of a process of sublimation by which "short-lived actions," "business", and "dead fact" were transformed into "immortal thoughts," "poetry", and "quick thought." Yet, no book is totally perfect, and this is why new books have to be written for and by each new generation of men. In fact, if one loses sight of the fact that no book is perfect, then one will be inevitably led to an unthinking worship of books written in the past and mistake dogma for truth. Books written on a credulous acceptance of whatever was stated in the past are works not of "Man thinking" but merely of "men of [lesser] talent" who believe it "their duty to accept the view which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that

Cicero, Locke and Bacon were only young men in libraries when they wrote these books." Such men who blindly worship books and hold as truth all that is contained in them, Emerson calls "bookworms".

The right use of books, Emerson argues, is for them to inspire the "active soul" of man. Hence, the really valuable relationship is not between man and book, but man and nature, a relationship which results in the transmutation of "life into truth." Thus Emerson declares unequivocally : " Books are for the scholar's idle times. When he can read God directly, the hour is too precious to be wasted in other men's transcripts of their readings." Of course, Emerson does admit that History and "exact science" must be learnt by "laborious reading", but he indicates that such study is useful only when it contributes to the scholar's ability to think by himself. Therefore, books (like the past too) are useful in so far as they inspire the scholar: "Genius looks forward; the eyes of a man are set in the forehead, not in his hind-head."

Having stated this, Emerson thus moves on to discuss the third important influence on the scholar—that of the Future or of Action. Emerson indicates that a scholar should not be a recluse but rather a man of action, for without the experience of action—"handiwork or public labour"—"thought can never ripen into truth." Action "is the raw material out of which the intellect moulds her splendid products," and so the scholar who engages himself in appropriate action has the benefit of getting "the richest return of wisdom." And finally, the value of action lies in the fact that if "thinking is the function", then "living is the functionary." Put simply, this means that even if the scholar runs out of thought, he can always live a life of action.

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#### **1.1.4 □ The Duties of the Scholar**

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After having spoken about the three influences necessary for the development of the American scholar: "the office of scholar," writes Emerson, "is to cheer, to raise, and guide them by showing them facts amidst appearances". He must perform "the show, unhonoured and unpaid task of observation." The scholar must also willingly accept a life of poverty and solitude. But what he gets in return is the knowledge that he is " the world's eye....the heart." He is the communicator and announcer of "whatever new verdict reason from her inviolable seat pronounces on the passing men and events of to-day." The scholar's statements have an effect on his hearer because they know that by "going down into the secret of his own mind, he has descended into the secrets of all minds." Thus the scholar's audience "drink his words, because he fulfils for them their own nature." But the main point that Emerson makes

is that at the root of all the powers of the scholar lies "self-trust" or self-confidence and conviction which "are the keys to success in every sphere of life."

Apart from this, the other duty of a scholar is to be free from fear. "Fear always arises from ignorance," writes Emerson, and the scholar must have self-confidence enough to be able to influence other men with his ideas, illuminate them, and so free them from fear. Most people, explains Emerson, are of "no account", merely "bugs" and "spawn", "the man" and "the herd". Most people too are in thrall to money and power. But if they are woken up, "they shall quit the false good and leap to the true." And Emerson implies that the scholar is the man who can bring about this awakening. This is therefore the scholar's main function—"the upbuilding of a man".

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### 1.1.5 □ The Concluding Section of the Essay

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The concluding paragraphs of "The American Scholar" have a clearly exhortatory purpose. In writing them, Emerson wished to tell his college audience that they had the ability of discovering themselves, of understanding for themselves "the inexplicable continuity of this web of God," of realizing the process of Nature as a "circular power returning into itself," and finally of living and acting in the light of these perceptions. Emerson in the concluding part of his essay writes as an optimist with unbounded faith in what has been called the American Dream, an idea of progress : that the American Man can accomplish both social reform and material success. The "conversion of the world" is what Emerson visualizes at the end, and the scholar will help to bring about this for he will believe "himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."

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### 1.1.6 □ "The Poet" : Background to the Essay

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Emerson's ideas about the nature, role and function of the Poet were first expressed by him in a lecture entitled "The Poet" which he delivered as one of a series in 1841-42. Around the same time he composed a poem called "The Poet" some lines from which he took as an epigraph for his essay, which was published later in his collection *Essays : Second Series* in 1844. The epigraph outlines Emerson's basic idea that the function of the poet is two-fold : first to notice "Through worlds, and races, and terms, and times/ .....musical order, and pairing rhymes", and second to communicate this realization to other

men as had done the "Olympian bands who sung/Divine ideas below/  
which always finds us young,/And always keeps us so."

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### **1.1.7 □ Emerson's Introduction to His Essay "The Poet"**

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It is in the first paragraph of his essay that Emerson lays out his key ideas. He indicates that both contemporary art criticism as well as literary appreciations show signs of a deep spiritual lack. Four categories of men—those esteemed as "umpires of taste," those believed to be "intellectual men", "the theologians" of the time, and even the ordinary "poet" appear to have "lost the perception of the instant dependence of form upon soul." Those who depend on the "material world" only, says Emerson, fail to understand that behind every "sensuous fact" there are many hidden meanings which are "intrinsically ideal and beautiful". As Emerson declares, all men are "children of the fire, made of it, and only the same divinity transmuted."

The greatest poets and thinkers (and Emerson names Orpheus, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Plato, Plutarch, Dante and the Swedish visionary Swedenborg) and even "the fountains hence all this river of Time and its creatures floweth are intrinsically ideal and beautiful."

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### **1.1.8 □ Emerson's Ideas about "The Poet"'s Nature and Functions**

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After having defined man in the introductory section of his essay in the spirit of a Promethean "child of fire", Emerson broaches the topic of the poet's nature and functions. The poet is truly representative, writes Emerson, for he is the "complete man" among "partial men", and he "appraises us not of his wealth, but of the common wealth." This means that the poet is the only man among ordinary men, an individual who cannot receive and live by truth, but also express the truth for the benefit of ordinary men. Again, since the poet has the unique quality or gift, he stands among the three children of the Universe who may be described (according to Emerson) alternatively as "cause, operation, and effect "or as" Jove, Pluto, Neptune," or as "the Father, the spirit, and the Sun ", or as "the knower, the Doer, and the Sayer." Among these, the poet is the sayer , that is the truth-lover, the namer who represents beauty.

"Poetry was all written before time was," says Emerson and poet are those who " can penetrate into that region where the air is music," and those who write down what they have heard. These poems, the often imperfect transcripts of the "primal warblings" heard by the poets, become " the songs

of the nations." It is on this ground, too, that the real poet can be differentiated from the man of mere poetical talent, industry and skill in writing verse. Contrary to the man of poetical talent, the true poet "announces that which no man foretold....He is a beholder of ideas and an utterer of the necessary and casual." And following upon this, Emerson holds that the true poem can be identified by its possession of an argument—"a thought so passionate and alive that like the spirit of a plant or an animal, it has an architecture of its own."

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### 1.1.9 □ The Materials and the Method of "The Poet"

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In so far as all the materials used by the poet are concerned, Emerson speaks of his use of objects as symbols, and of the poet's use of language. He says that "things admit of being used as symbols because nature is a symbol, in the whole and in every part." Borrowing from the Neoplatonic idea of Plotinus that the soul is an ever-flowing fountain of which both nature and the individual's soul are emanations, Emerson writes that "The Universe is the externalization of the soul." In loving nature, ordinary man too actually worships "the symbol nature." Political parties and even nations set great store by symbols or emblems. Men use emblems everywhere, and so even if "people fancy they hate poetry....they are all poets and mystics," according to Emerson.

True poets however have another motivation in using symbols. The original poets were the Namers or the language-makers in the sense that by coining words they "symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer." Or as Emerson goes on to explain, "the etymologist finds the deadest word to have been once a brilliant picture. Language is fossil poetry." Yet, the poet's powers are not dead but alive and organic, and the poet's expression grows "as a leaf out of a tree". Like the Universal Soul or Spirit which creates the world, the poet creates his poem.

Next, Emerson turns to the means or methods of the poet. One special faculty of the poet by which he is enabled to express his thoughts "Like the metamorphosis of things into higher organic forms," is his imagination or insight which is "a very high sort of seeing." Imaginative insight however does not come by study or the operation of the "conscious intellect," but from "the intellect released from all service and suffered to take its directions from its celestial life. "This is why", says Emerson, "the bands loved stimulants" like "wine, bread, narcotics, coffee, tea, opium" etc. Yet, Emerson goes on to

say that the true poet does not need such auxiliaries : " The sublime vision comes to the pure and simple soul in a clean and chaste body." The common sights and sounds of nature should be enough to inspire the poet, and as "the imagination intoxicates the poet, its effect on the poet's audience is liberating too." And so Emerson describes poets as the "liberating gods", for they "unlock our chains and admit us to a new scene."

Emerson also goes to the extent of stating that the "religions of the world are the ejaculations of a few imaginative men". But Emerson is suspicious of the mystic who fixes symbols as having one and unalterable meaning. Instead, "all symbols are flexional, "according to Emerson , and it is poetry which is truly religious, "because it encourages and makes possible the passage of the soul into higher forms."

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### **1.1.10 □ Conclusion to the Essay : The General Condition of "The Poet"**

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In the last part of his essay, Emerson looks for the ideal poet in America. His point in brief is that just as other nations and civilisations had their poetry, so too must America have her own poet—even though there seems to be none in sight. America itself is a poem, says Emerson, for "its ample geography dazzles the imagination," and therefore "it will not wait long for meters." And it is on the basis of this conviction that Emerson sketches a prophetic scenario of the function of the poet. As a man who pursues beauty, as an artist striving to apprehend and express the ideal and the eternal, the poet is exhorted not to doubt but to persist even in the face of opposition and criticism till at last rage will draw out of him that "dream-power" by the "virtue of which a man is the conductor of the whole river of electricity."

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## Unit 1.2 □ *Walden* : Thoreau

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### Structure :

- 1.2.0 Introduction
- 1.2.1 Theme of *Walden*
- 1.2.2 Influences
- 1.2.3 Thoreau and Transcendentalism
- 1.2.4 Questions
- 1.2.5 Recommended Reading

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### 1.2.0 □ Introduction

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Notable among the American Transcendentalists is Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) who is the author of *Walden, or Life in the Woods*. An autobiographical narrative published in 1854, *Walden* describes nearly two years (March 1845 to September 1847) that Thoreau spent away from the town of Concord in the state of Massachusetts where he lived, in the countryside near Walden Pond. In a way, this was Thoreau's individual Transcendentalist experiment, his way of trying to fulfil a plan of self-reliance, of a programme by which the individual spirit may have the opportunity of developing in isolation and solitude. Much of *Walden* which is a book of eighteen essays was written down by Thoreau in the journal that he kept during his stay beside Walden pond. And as a whole the narrative is a complex blend of almost scientifically observed descriptions of the flora and the fauna in the region, and of allegory and parable, discourses on poetry and philosophy. Three important sections are devoted to Thoreau's interactions with an Irish family, a woodcutter of Canadian origin, and a detailed description of a bean field he had planted.

Henry David Thoreau (to give his full name) was born in the town of Concord of French and Scottish parents. His family was poor, and Thoreau had to work to pay for his college education at Harvard. However, Thoreau schooled himself to reduce his wants, and taught himself to live on a very small budget. An idealist and a man of principles, he tried always to live his life in accordance with his nonconformist ideals. In a way, his life became his subject for he wrote about his experiments in living according to his own strict principles.

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### 1.2.1 □ Theme of *Walden*

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It is acknowledged today that *Walden, or Life in the Woods* is Thoreau's masterpiece. The work is the product of the two years, two months, and two days that he spent in a small cabin he made for himself at the Walden Pond near Concord on some land that belonged to Emerson. However, in *Walden*, the real time of the twenty-six months Thoreau spent in his cabin is reduced to a period of one year. Each of the seasons is evoked in turn, and the work is so constructed that there is a progression of themes or concerns from the most simple and concrete to the highest in philosophical or metaphysical amplitude. Hence, while in a section entitled "Economy", Thoreau speaks about how much money it cost to build a cabin, at the end of the book he has gone on to speculate and hold forth on the stars in the sky.

Thoreau was a great reader of travelogues and himself wrote a number of travel books. Yet, *Walden* has been rightly described as an "anti-travel book" in so far as it is about living in one place for a considerably long period of time. In his entry in his journal dated 30 January 1852, Thoreau wrote about his staying rooted in the place and observed : "I am afraid to travel much or to famous places, best it might completely dissipate the mind." Actually, Thoreau seems to have felt that wandering from place to place was inimical to the opening up of one's innerself, for which isolation and rootedness was a must. It is because of this that *Walden* has been called a work that opened up "the inner frontier of self-discovery as no American book had up to this time." Certainly despite all its deceptive simplicity, *Walden* is no less than Thoreau's practical guide to living an ideal life of peace and contentment. The whole essay which is simultaneously both a prose poem and a deeply philosophical treatise involves the reader and challenges him or her to scrutinize his or her own life and to live life fully and meaningfully. Indeed, Thoreau's description of the building of his cabin is an image, a metaphor for the building of a soul.

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### 1.2.2 □ Influences

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Thoreau, like his contemporaries and fellow-Transcendentalists Emerson and Walt Whitman, was deeply influenced by Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. His collection of books included several Asian classics, and it has been said that he was influenced both in his philosophy of life and in his procedure of withdrawal and meditation by his reading of Indian religious texts. Also, in

so far as Thoreau's use of language and his distinctive style is concerned, it is true that he learnt much from the writing of the Greek and Latin classical authors as well as from the compositions of the seventeenth century English Metaphysical poets. A clear, concise way of expression and the liberal use of puns and metaphors show the extent of Thoreau's inspiration from the writers of the past.

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### 1.2.3 □ Thoreau and Transcendentalism

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The Transcendentalists were men committed to the ideals of anti-rationalism, a general humanitarianism of spirit, and a belief in the essential unity of the world and god. The Transcendentalists held that the individual's soul was one with God, and this conviction led to the formulation of the Transcendentalist doctrine of committed individualism and, above all, self-reliance. These traits can be seen in Thoreau, particularly in his devotion to the principles of simple living and high thought. Also, like the other Transcendentalists who regarded themselves as pioneering explorers going out of society and breaking with convention, Thoreau too was willing to face the dangers of the unknown on a quest of self-discovery. The wilderness always held a fascination for Thoreau, and in America he saw the spirit of the wilderness, a spirit that he felt had become lost in the civilized societies of ancient Greece or Rome, or even medieval and Renaissance England.

Today, Thoreau is widely read and respected for a number of reasons. In the first place, Thoreau's essay *Civil Disobedience* inspired Mahatma Gandhi to develop his policy of passive resistance as a weapon against the British. This essay also inspired the black American Civil Rights leader Martin Luther King to wrest some measure of equality for his people. Thoreau's ecological consciousness has further become the subject of much recent research in the field of eco-criticism. Finally, Thoreau's stance of independence, his sense of morality and idealism, and even his insightful poetic style have given him a permanent place in the history of American literature.

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### 1.2.4 □ Questions

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1. Write a brief essay on Emerson as an essayist.
2. What are Emerson's views concerning the nature and function of the poet and poetry? Answer with reference to the essay "The poet".
3. Critically examine what Emerson in his essay "The American Scholar" has to say about the duties and functions of a scholar.

4. "Emerson is an American essayist in that he shows a special concern for the development of an American literary sensitivity." Discuss, with reference to the two essays you have read.
5. What do you understand by Transcendentalism? What features typical of Transcendentalism can you discern in *either* Emerson or Thoreau? answer with reference to the texts you have read.
6. Bring out with reference to *Walden*, the basic premises of Thoreau's thought.
7. Is *Walden* merely an essay in the pastoral genre or a more philosophic work? Give reasons for your answer.
8. With close reference to the ideas of Thoreau as set out in *Walden*, indicate why the work is still one of abiding interest.

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### 1.2.5 □ Recommended Reading

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1. H.H. Clark (ed.). *Transitions in American Literary History*
2. Robert E. Spiller. *The Cycle of American Literature*
3. F.O. Matthiessen. *American Renaissance*
4. Brian Harding. *American Literature in Context II : 1830-1865*
5. David Morse. *American Romanticism*, Vol. I
6. Robert E. Spiller, *The Literary History of the United States*
7. Milton Konvitz and Stephen E. Whicher (ed.). *Emerson : A Collection of Critical Essays*
8. James McIntosh. *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist : His Shifting Stance toward Nature*
9. Sherman Paul. *The Shores of America : Thoreau's Inward Explorations*
10. Frederick Garber. *Thoreau's Redemptive Imagination*

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## Unit 2.1 □ Moby Dick : Herman Melville

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### Structure :

- 2.1.1 Objective
- 2.1.2 A Brief Sketch of Melville's Life and Works
- 2.1.3 Melville's Whaling Sources in *Moby Dick*
- 2.1.4 Story-line of the Novel
- 2.1.5 Critical Analysis
  - (i) Introduction
  - (ii) Characters in the Novel
  - (iii) *Moby Dick* as a Tragic Novel
  - (iv) Symbolism
- 2.1.6 Language and Style
- 2.1.7 Conclusion
- 2.1.8 Questions
- 2.1.9 References

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### 2.1.1 □ Objective

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The objective of this unit is to introduce an American writer Herman Melville who belongs to the pre-civil war decades. This period may be interpreted as an age of the prophet and an age of the poet. We may refer to Transcendentalism as the significant ideology of the age.

It was an age of idealism with a sincere belief in self-reliance and immense possibilities in man. One of the great writers of the American Renaissance, Melville in *Moby Dick* shows not only an emerging self-reliant individualism and spiritual exploration but also how 'the transcendental identity of Self and Nature' is 'always beyond the grasp of the individual mind' and the pursuit often proves to be a 'dangerously self-reflexive activity' (*Columbia Literary History of the United States*, p. 436)

It was also a new Romantic age with its special emphasis on self. It was further an age of skeptical writers, artists of irony and detachment like Hawthorne and Melville who were closely attached and friends.

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### 2.1.2 □ A Brief Sketch of Melville's Life and Works

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Herman Melville (1819 - 1891), the author of *Moby Dick* was a Romantic writer in American Literature. He was greatly influenced by Lord Byron, Sir Walter Scott, Goethe and Washington Irving and also by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Robert Southey. Melville was much influenced by the American Revolution, so much so that he may be called the child of American Revolution.

Melville was born in New York City. He belonged to the rooted and distinguished family, the Calvinist Melvilles of Boston in America. Melville's father died as bankrupt, financially ruined. Melville is an uprooted person who had to face a hard and harsh world of alienating social forces. In his writings, Melville's male characters normally move from deprivation to hardship and bitter struggle of life. We may refer to the most famous of them, Ishmael in *Moby Dick*, the classic Wanderer.

Melville struggled through life as bank-clerk, salesman, farmer and school-teacher. In *Moby Dick* the writer Melville, himself is identified with Ismael. His father went bankrupt and then died in debt when Melville was still a boy. Melville began his career on a ship bound as a cabin-boy on a voyage from New York to Liverpool. This was the background of his bleak experience (making him feel extremely alone) behind his work *Redburn* (1849). His unique experience of exploration of the American frontier, down the Erie Canal and the Mississippi led to *The Confidence Man* (1857). In 1941, Melville sailed as seaman aboard the whaler, *Acushnet*. It was a long voyage into the Pacific. His experience of the Marquesas Islands is portrayed in *Typee*. It is based on his experience as a peer at *Polynesian Life* (1846). *Typee* was his first book. While joining an Australian ship, Melville faced mutiny on board and was imprisoned in Tahiti. 'Omoo : A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas' (1847) was based on this experience. Melville admitted to his friend and guide, the famous American writer of the time, Hawthorne that he acquired his experience of life and writing at sea and the alternative worlds. A whaling ship and the extensive reading while at sea was for him his Yale and Harvard, the famous institutions of learning.

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### 2.1.3 □ Melville's Whaling Sources in *Moby Dick*

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Melville had read series of whaling stories in the May 1938 issue of a popular New York magazine, the *Knickerbocker*. It published J. N. Reynolds's "Mocha

Dick : or the White Whale of the Pacific : A Leaf from a Manuscript Journal". There is another story published by the Albany Argus in 1839, "Method of Taking the Whale". The source is Thomas Beale's "The Natural History of the Sperm Whale".

Melville may have thought of writing about whaling in his early age. He thought of shipping on a whaler in Sag Harbor, actually signed on the merchant ship for a voyage to Liverpool. He sailed on the whaler, the *Acushnet* at the beginning of 1841. He was deeply influenced when he read Owen Chase's account of the sinking of the *Essex* by a vengeful whale. Melville read books on whaling—Frederick Debell Bennett's "Whaling Voyage round the Globe", J. Ross Browne's 'Etchings of a Whaling Cruise', William Scoresby Jr's "The Voyage to the Northern Whale Fishery". Apart from sources in printed form, Melville shared his personal experiences with those of his shipmates on three whalers and their accumulation of stories from previous voyages. In this process, Melville could plan, at sea, on voyage, a book about the pursuit of a great white whale by the name Mocha Dick. Henry T. Cheever's "The Whale and His Captors" published in 1849, influenced him.

*Moby Dick* is an original composition, based on the assimilation of both nautical and non-nautical books. Two most important books that influenced *Moby Dick*, though they are non-nautical books, are the Bible and Complete works of Shakespeare. Some great classics of English literature and some European classics also influenced the making of *Moby Dick*.

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### 2.1.4 □ Story-Line of the Novel

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The story runs that in the superstition of some whalers, there is a white whale. The whale, Moby Dick possesses supernatural power. People believe that to capture or even to hurt, it is beyond the capacity of man. In the face of this sea-monster, the skill of the whaler is useless : his harpoon does not wound it. The White Whale shows a ferocious strategy when it attacks the boats of its pursuers. Ahab, the mariner and Captain loses his limb while pursuing his chase of the sea-monster. The mono-maniac captain Ahab again pursues the sea-monster as the master of the *Pequod*, his whaling ship. The loss of the leg exasperates Ahab, his reason is shaken. Under these circumstances, he undertakes the voyage, his only thought is to chase his antagonist, the White Whale. The interest of the novel pivots on Captain Ahab. Ahab's enmity to Moby Dick, the white whale, has been aggravated to

monomania. He thus is predestined to defy his enemy, Moby Dick to mortal strife, in spite of his former defeat in the chase, his loss of leg. Ishmael, the narrator of the story narrates this wild huntman's chase through unknown seas. He is the only one who remains to tell about the destruction of the ship and the doomed Captain Ahab by the victorious, indomitable Moby Dick.

The novel consisting of 135 chapters, may be divided into five major parts :

### **I Chapters 1-22 Ishmael Queequeg**

The entire first part is concerned with the narrator Ishmael and his developing friendship with the harpooner Queequeg. The Christian Ishmael participates in Queequeg's religious ceremonies. Their bonds of friendship being sealed, they set out offering their services in a whaler Pequod.

### **II Chapters 23-45 Ahab and Moby Dick.**

Though the spectre-like image of Moby Dick, the whale appears in the first chapter as a 'snow hill in the air' in the second part, still invisible, his huge and menacing bulk looms large. Captain Ahab comes to the forefront, mesmerizes the crew, makes them participate in a diabolical sacrament pledging their vows to kill the whale.

### **III Chapters 46-72 The Business of the Pequod**

As Melville observes Ahab's monomania does not deter him from his main business which is to harpoon whales and collect oil. In an important scene, a sperm whale is converted to oil. As the Pequod comes across several ships, Ahab's passion to seek Moby Dick flares up and Ishmael's insight into the nature of man's fate deepens.

### **IV Chapters 73-105 Whales and Whaling**

Starting with the incident of Stubb's killing of a Right whale, the narrative comes to halt for some chapters as information about whales and whaling is conveyed to the reader, Ahab's gold coin, the 'doubloon' is sailed to the mainmast as prize for the sailor who can first spot Moby Dick.

## V 106 – 135 The Search and the Chase

His part is dominated by Ahab as the source of his obsession and the purpose of the voyage is introduced. The crew reaffirm their pledge to kill Moby Dick. As Ahab's defiance persists his ego swells, neither Starbuck nor Pip can dissuade him ; he identified with Fedallah and the final three-day chase begins. The Pequod is smashed by the enraged whale. Ahab is killed entangled with the harpoon. Ishmael alone is the sole survivor of the catastrophe ; he appears in the final section floating alone on the sea.

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### 2.1.5 □ Critical Analysis

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#### (i) Introduction

*Moby Dick* is a sea novel, a classic American novel for all time. At first, Melville started the novel as a record of facts of the whaling industry in America, but later on along with his vast reading of Shakespeare, the Bible, American and European classics and his association and involvement with Hawthorne, the great contemporary American writer, he wrote a "wicked" book to interrogate the so-called innocence of his age, he offered a critique of the dominating philosophy of his age. *Moby Dick* became a powerful Romantic Faustian tragedy' of humanity confronting both nature and divine power. *Moby Dick* is a distinctive American novel. It offers a critique of the ambiguity and duplicity of transcendental knowledge and pursuit. Melville creates a tragic novel because Melville considers nature as 'deceitful hieroglyph'. He believes that Captain Ahab's story is the story of *Narcissus* who struggles the lure and fascination of the great sea.

As a sea-novel, *Moby Dick* is an intermixture of naval observation, magazine and article writing, satiric representation and reflection. It is also a critique of conventional civilized life.

The novel is a South-Sea, whaling voyage, narrated by Ishmael, one of the crew of the ship 'Pequod' from Nantucket. The novel consists of details of usual sea-matter in the branch of Industrial marine. It gives us pictures of preparations for the sea-voyage, the trial marine, the chase and capture of whale, the story of the economy of cutting up whale. There are also descriptions and detailed digressions on the nature and characteristics of the

Sperm whale, the history of fishery. Life in American sea-ports is thus broadly depicted in *Moby Dick*.

## **(ii) Characters in the Novel**

*Moby Dick* has three central characters—the wandering narrator Ishmael, the monomaniac captain Ahab and the White Whale, Moby Dick.

The dynamic force of the novel is of course Captain Ahab. He is the dark protagonist, the maimed supremo of the quarter-deck. His monomania to chase and kill the white whale persists throughout the novel till it drowns and kills all his men, both in mind and body except Ishmael, the narrator. He is the dominant character and source of the action of the novel. Ahab's bitter revenge on an antagonist who represents massivity of nature, results in a mythic struggle, Ahab, "ungodly, God-like man" appears to be a challenger of the universe. Through Ahab, Melville both invokes and challenges the great transcendentalist belief that the cosmos or universe is good. Ishmael as he narrates, wrestles with the complexities of Ahab's language, origin and identity. Ahab is represented as the unique man of tragic proportions. Ahab is steeped in rage and sorrow and because of his torn body and bleeding soul, he became monomaniac and mad. Ishmael constructs images of excavation. Melville delves into the depths of Ahab's being. Ahab is an image of individual and ancestral identities. Ishmael depicts Ahab's schizophrenia as a fierce dialectic. Ahab's essential self falls prey to his frantic self.

There are two other characters who reflect aspects of Ahab's madness—Fedallah and Pip. Fedallah represents the demonic aspect of Ahab's "characterizing mind" and Pip is the insane, distorted, maimed symbol and justification of Ahab's purpose.

The gods also demonstrate a final projection of Ahab's insanity, monomania of chasing and killing the white whale, Moby Dick. Ahab remakes the gods in his own image and language—his rhetoric. He symbolises a self-imposed myth of Prometheus in his extreme suffering. Ahab is the novel's most dramatically resonant character.

Ahab's antagonistic force is *Moby Dick*, himself. He is the particular white whale, "spouting fish with a horizontal tail". Legends and lores have been created round his story. Moby Dick, the white whale looms a huge phantom, a phantasy figure in the restless dreams of the Pequod's Captain and crew. He is the prime antagonist figure in the novel.

At the same time, the story of *Moby Dick* is not only about Captain Ahab or the White Whale, it is also about Ishmael, the narrator, Ishmael, the wanderer. There are two identities of Ishmael. Ishmael as narrator represents the sensibility of the novel, manifests the imagination and poetry of the story, the romance and adventure of the sea-voyage of the whaler. The other Ishmael is a major character in the story. Narrator Ishmael grows out of Ishmael, the individual, the young man who is experiencing as he grows old. Ishmael is in the cobbled streets of New Bedford, carpet-log in hand, in a cold winter night ; he is in search of lodgings. Ishmael's rich imagination is stirred by all that is hidden, mysterious and unspoken in the great riddles of mankind. Ishmael also has a unique sense of wonder—wonder of the wide Pacific world, at the creatures of the deep, wonder at man, dreamer, doer, doubter, wonder at the incomparable power of the massive whale.

We may say that Ishmael is also writer Melville in another name. Melville's experience, imagination, poetry and scholarship are identified within the voice of the narrator.

Ishmael the observer and story-teller, dominates the story and the course of action as its speculative and varying narrative voice, rather voices. 'Call me Ishmael' the book begins and grows out of the singleword 'I'. He is also the single voice and single mind, from whose spool of thought the whole story is unwound. His contemplativeness and dreaming contribute to the reflective essence of the story. His gift for speculation explains the terror we come to feel at the fabulousness and whiteness of the whale and the wonder at the terrors of the deep sea. His mind ranges, almost with mad exuberance, through piles of images and in the wonderful chapter on the masthead, his reveries transcend space and time. He is the symbol of man, who is the only survivor of the voyage ; probably it is the necessity to keep one person alive as witness to the story that saves Ishmael from the general wreck.

Ishmael seems absolutely alone at the end of the book floating on the Pacific Ocean. He gives us an impression that life can be confronted only in the loneliness of each heart. The focus seems to be on the sceptical experience—scarred mind of Ishmael, his personal vision and the richness and ambiguity of all events. As in so many 20<sup>th</sup> century novels the emphasis is on the subjective individual consciousness. His mind is not a blank slate but passively open to events, constantly seeking meaning in everything it encounters. He is an exile, searching alone in the wilderness, suffering from homelessness, but more from doubt, uncertainty and the agony of disbelief.

He is a modern man, cut off from all belief and certainty, constantly in doubt, in the eternal flux like the Sea.

Ishmael's illusion of innocence is the root cause of his isolation. At the beginning of the novel Ishmael envisions Moby Dick, the 'hooded phantom' as innocent, identifies him with the spotlessness of his own immaculate soul. On the other hand he has an acute antipathy toward all human beings, the vast pretense of the world, its mark of innocence—'civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits'. As he enters the Spouter-Inn in New Bedford, he comes across a simple scene which embodies in miniature, all the evil which the world's mask of innocence hides. A beggar lies shivering in the Streets 'Poor hazarus, chattering his teeth against the curbstone for his pillow, and shaking off his tatters with his shiverings. He is struck by the human indifference to the beggar's misery.

In course of the novel, Ishmael is going to make a series of discoveries that constitutes the 'affirmation' of *Moby Dick*. At first Ishmael gloomily perceives that the world is what is promises to be. Ironically, the first step in his development is the companionship he forms not with a Christian, but a cannibal. He gradually overcomes his initial fight at Queequeg's austerity and his repugnance at his cannibalistic tattooing and comes to perceive redeeming qualities: 'Through all his unearthly tattooings I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart.' Association with this savage expands his knowledge about human beings and their relationships. Queequeg becomes the instrument of the restoration of Ishmael's faith and respect for man as he gradually realises the spiritual possibilities of comradeship. His voyage deepens his awareness of the plight of mankind and the complex human interrelationship and interdependence as well as the value of love. Queequeg restores Ishmael's respect for man. Transfigured by his experience he achieves a balance of intellect and heart, knowledge and love and also wisdom.

### **(iii) *Moby Dick* as a Tragic Novel**

*Moby Dick* has been called a tragedy and Ahab, a tragic hero of impressive stature. It is a world of moral tyranny and violent action in which the principal actor is Ahab. With the entry of Ahab a harsh new rhythm enters the book. He seeks to dominate nature and inflict his will on the outside world. As Ishmael is all rumination, Ahab is all will and determination. Both are thinkers. But while Ishmael is a bystander who believes in man's utter unimportance

and insignificance in nature, Ahab actively seeks the whale bent on revenge, asserting man's supremacy over nature. The reader watches his sway over his crew with awe, fear and fascination. The question remains, how does the reader judge Ahab's rage against the universe and his monomaniac revenge? Is his determined devotion to an evil purpose his tragic flaw? Is his greatness a kind of disease, with an element of morbidity in it? A commanding figure, he calls together the entire ship's company to exact their total allegiance. Starbuck questions Ahab's motive 'To be engaged with a dumb thing, captain Ahab, seems blasphemous'. The angry Ahab cries out a curse on Moby Dick.

He tasks me ; he heaps me ; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate ... I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man ; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me.

Starbuck is silenced by the sheer force of Ahab's will. Noble by nature, Ahab seems created on the epic scale to act out his role on that high level. A hero of the old type, he tries to reassert man's place in nature by terrible force. But soon his desire for revenge grows beyond the bounds of human containment. Ahab becomes mad, but it is a madness that conserves all its cunning and craft to achieve its end. Ahab realises that his madness is the result not of a disintegrated mind but of a supreme intelligence : 'I'm demoniac, I am madness maddened ! That wild madness that's only calm to comprehend itself.' The self-knowledge ultimate, gives way to self-delusion. Outwardly convinced of his own innocence in his effort to rid the world of evil, he realises deep within him the magnitude of his gradual and awful commitment to the devil. What began as personal revenge becomes an obsessive hatred of evil and a consuming cosmic defiance. His defiance of God as symbolized by the sun, soon follows. After the diabolical ceremony of the rededication of the entire crew to the death of Moby Dick Ahab swears his continued rebellion : 'I now know thee, thou clear spirit (of five), and I now know that thy right worship is defiance'. Drunk with the success of his defiance Ahab moves from one act of dangerous rebellion to another. He even envisions himself as Apollo : 'I drive the sea'. The crew observe him : 'In his fiery-eyes of scorn and triumph, you then saw Ahab in all his fatal pride.' Ahab sins against man and God and like his namesake becomes 'wicked'.

Ahab's harpooner, Fedallah seems an embodiment of Ahab's demoniac subconscious, symbolizing Ahab's dedication to evil. Fedallah's oppressive presence is felt more and particularly when outraged Ahab defiantly challenges God's wisdom. Their relationship becomes so close, intertried

and ambiguous that to the crew, they seem two aspects of the same being : 'as if in the Parsee Ahab saw his forethrown shadow. Towards the end of the novel Ahab becomes Fedallah. Ahab in his dark dedication has transformed himself into his own monstrous impulse for evil—Fedallah. Ahab, as he gazes down into the deep sea, knows that the devil Fedallah possesses his soul and that he himself in his 'fatal pride' has come to embody all the evil he had attributed to Moby Dick.

#### **(iv) Symbolism**

*Moby Dick* may be read as a symbolic fable, Moby Dick, the whale standing for primeval dragons and sea monsters which embody the forces of chaos that rule over Creation. As James E Miller Jr observes : 'all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down ; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shall upon it.'

At the opening of the tale we are confronted with the complexity of Moby Dick's whiteness. Ishmael sees him innocent as Ahab later will identify him with evil. When Moby Dick will be finally unmasked and unhooded he will be revealed as neither innocent nor evil but an 'inextricable entanglement', like life itself. After exploring the full and complex meaning of Moby Dick for Ahab, Ishmael confesses : 'What the White Whale was to Ahab, has been hinted ; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid.' Here Ishmael dissociates himself from Ahab's view of the whale, thus giving us important clues as to the real meaning of *Moby Dick*. Chapter 42 ('The Whiteness of the Whale') provides a key to Moby Dick's complex symbolism. Though whiteness is associated with many agreeable things—'the innocence of brides, the benignity of age' 'yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood.' Thus whiteness contains both innocence and terror, both attracts and repels. While exploring the complexity of the meaning of whiteness Ishmael ascribes the colour (or its absence) to the entire universe 'the great principle of light for ever remains white or colourless in itself...would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge—pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us a leper...And of all these things the Albino Whale was the symbol. 'The whiteness of Moby Dick is a reflection

of the inscrutable whiteness of the entire universe.' In him are inextricably bound together both good and evil, innocence and horror.

As a 'poor old whalehunter' Ahab may have posed special problems of elevation and speech. Melville invoked traditional heroic associations of war, royalty, scripture and myth. Ahab is linked to champions like Perseus and St. George, a self-appointed redeemer setting out to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah and 'slay the dragon that is in the sea.' Apart from this universal myth, Melville presents his hero in the resonant idiom of Shakespearean tragedy also, as we have seen. As a contrast to the Ahabian element, we are offered the productive sanity of Ishmael. As Ahab who began as humanity's redeemer grows more furious and becomes a villain Ishmael emerges as a symbol for a new democratic man, redeeming the world from emptiness through his won creative energy.

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## 2.1.6 □ Language and Style

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The structure, method and style of the novel do not an organic whole, but an unceasing, restless series of movements. To quote Ishmael's own words : "There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method."

It was after the publication of *Moby Dick* that Victor Hugo's great romances of the sea and land came out. The fantastic learning, the episodic style, the wonderful picturings of the sea in all its beauty and terror emphasize the kinship between Melville's *Moby Dick* and Victor Hugo's "Les Travailleurs de la Mer." Melville may be compared with Coleridge ; he is fantastically poetical, like Coleridge in the "Ancient Mariner". But *Moby Dick* is far more real than Coleridge's poem. The grief-stricken captain, his eerie monomania, the crew as half-devils, the incessant chase of the ever-elusive, vindictive, ferocious white whale, the storms and calms, the ups and downs of sea-weather, the weird scenery of the pursuit of the white whale in moonlight and daylight are so terrifically real and fantastic. The informations regarding whales, sea-fisheries, within the novel do not interfere with the overall effect of the epic quality of the novel.

We may focus on Melville's use of extraordinary vocabulary. Its wonderful diction may be compared to that of Chapman's translations of Homer.

One of the striking features of the book is its Americanism. Whaling is particularly an American industry, particularly the Nantucketers are the keenest, the most daring and the most successful. In *Moby Dick*, Melville's intimate knowledge of whaling, whale-hunting and his intense interest to recreate the whaler's life in all its details are both comprehensible, interesting and fascinating.

Melville is distinctly American in his style. Ideologically, his treatment is epic-like and expansive ; it has Elizabethan force and freshness. We may locate very distinctively the influence of his extensive reading of the Bible, Shakespeare and other great American and classical literature. Picturesqueness of the New world is represented in the novel. There may be certain mannerisms which may appear tedious like the constant moral tone, use of bombastic language, use of too much allusions. On the whole, Melville may be compared with Walt Whitman in his contribution to American prose. Melville is excellent in creating atmosphere, to present to the people of the land the very salt of the sea-breeze.

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### 2.1.7 □ Conclusion

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*Moby Dick* is a great and significant American novel. Melville offers a critique of the ambiguity and duplicity of transcendental knowledge, the light and the dark, the dangers of "craving after the indefinite" in the book. To Melville, nature is a baffling hieroglyph. *Moby Dick* conveys multiple layers of meaning. It conducts its own narrative and linguistic search for the meaning of the 'the whale'. Like any major novel, *Moby Dick* has lent itself to multifarious readings and *Moby Dick* in that sense is a pioneer of the modern novel.

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### 2.1.8 □ Questions

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1. Analyse *Moby Dick* as a pioneering modern novel.
2. Examine the whaling sources of *Moby Dick*.
3. Write a note on Melville's treatment of two significant characters in *Moby Dick*— Captain Ahab and Ishmael.
4. Comment on Melville's treatment of language and style in *Moby Dick*.
5. Examine the importance of the role of the narrator in *Moby Dick*.

6. Assess *Moby Dick* as a tragedy or Ahab as a tragic hero.
7. Discuss how Melville uses symbolism in *Moby Dick*.

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### 2.1.9. □ References

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## Unit : 2.2 □ *The Old Man and the Sea* : Ernest Hemingway

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### Structure :

- 2.2.1 A Brief Sketch of Hemingway's Life and Works
- 2.2.2 The Making of *The Old Man and the Sea*
- 2.2.3 The Background
- 2.2.4 Story-Line of the Novel
- 2.2.5 Critical Analysis
  - (a) The Code hero
  - (b) Tragic Vision
  - (c) Themes
    - (i) Religious analogies
    - (ii) Universal brotherhood
    - (iii) Contention or fight
    - (iv) Plurality
  - (d) Santiago-Manolin Relationship.
  - (e) Dreams
  - (f) Ending
  - (g) Structure, Technique and Style
- 2.2.6 Questions
- 2.2.7 References

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### 2.2.1 □ A Brief Sketch of Hemingway's Life and Works

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Ernest Hemingway, the famous American writer was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1899. At the age of seventeen, he left his home and joined the *Kansas City Star*, the newspaper as a reporter in 1917. During the First World War, he joined war as an ambulance driver on the Italian front, but he was severely wounded and returned home. He was awarded the honour of a brave soldier—the Croce dignerra. Later on, in the year 1921, he moved to Paris. Hemingway became part of the expatriate circle of Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford. His first book, "Three stories and Ten Poems", was published in Paris in 1923. It was followed by the short story selection "In Our Time". When "The Sun Also Rises" was published in 1926, he became the voice, the spokes-person of the "lost generation" and an eminent writer of his time.

This was followed by a series of publications—“Men Without Women” in 1927, “A Farewell to Arms” (1929). Hemingway settled in key West and later in Cuba in 1930s. He travelled widely to Spain, Italy and Africa. He wrote about his varied experiences of life in “Death in the Afternoon” (1935), on bull-fighting in Spain and big-game hunting in Africa. Spanish Civil War was the background of his famous novel, “For Whom the Bell Tolls” (1939). Hemingway hunted U-boats in the Carribean and covered the European front during the Second World War.

*The Old Man and the Sea* is the most popular novel and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and in 1954 Hemingway won the Nobel Prize in Literature, “for his powerful, style-forming mastery of the art of narration.” Hemingway was one of the significant writers of the American fiction in the twentieth-century. He died a tragic death, committed suicide in Ketchum, Idaho in 1961. His other works include “The Torrents of Spring” (1926), “Winner Take Nothing” (1933), “To Have and Have Not” (1937), “The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories” (1938), “Across the River and Into the Trees” (1950) and posthumously, “A Moveable Feast” (1964), “Islands in the Stream” (1970), “The Dangerous Summer” (1985) and “The Garden of Eden” (1986).

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## 2.2.2 □ The Making of the *Old Man and the Sea*

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In April 1936 issue of Esquire, Hemingway wrote an article entitled “On the Blue Water : A Gulf Stream Letter”, Hemingway began with a debate with one of his friends on the relative adventure and thrills of deep-sea fishing and big-game hunting. He describes the joy and beauty of life on the Gulf-Stream. He further goes on to describe his own fishing experiences and also adds stories told to him by his Cuban friend Carlos. One of the stories was about a giant marlin. Three years later, he wrote about a new book of short fiction he was planning to write : “One about the old commerical fisherman who fought the sword fish all alone in his skiff for four days and four nights and the sharks finally eating it after he had it alongside and the fisherman could not get it to the boat. That’s wonderful story of the Cuban Coast.” It was in January 1951, fifteen years after its first appearance in Esquire that Hemingway returned to the “Santiago Story” as he termed it.

At first Hemingway planned to publish the tale as part of a collection

called 'The Sea Book' which became the novel *Islands in the Stream*. But soon he decided to sever it from the rest of the novel and published it separately as *The Old Man and the Sea*.

*The Old Man and the Sea* was published in *Life Magazine*. Later, the novel appeared in book-form. It was a great success. Santiago's story describes the loss of a gigantic fish, at the same time it enables its author to win the Nobel Prize, the greatest prize of his career.

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### 2.2.3 □ The Background

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Ernest Hemingway was committed to his own times. He belonged to his own generation, stricken by the "unreasonable wound" of war. Hemingway believed that the writer is a performing artist. He is the discoverer of his personal being and crisis through action, through experience. In order to express his unique experience, the writer challenges the truth of language and form. As an expatriate in Paris, Hemingway wrote of his multifarious experiences in different parts of Europe, bullfighting in Spain, war on the Italian front, the Spanish Civil War, big game hunting in Africa. His short stories deal with American materials ; many stories deal with the Michigan woods.

Hemingway emphasized inner strength, the things one can not lose. Hemingway's hero crosses the dangerous estate with an air of ease that cloaks but does not entirely conceal what lies behind—tension, insomnia, pain, wounds, the nightmare of the age.

Hemingway believes in tight linguistic economy, he sets his limits on false experience and rhetorical abstractions. It was first displayed in his short stories like "Three Stories and Ten Poems" (1923) and in "Our Time" (1929). Hemingway portrays the wartime violence—"nature consumes its own creations and the corpses of the dead seem no more important than the slaughtered cattle in Chicago stockyards". Hemingway's honesty as a writer is suffused with personal experience, historical loss and tremendous human suffering. His works derive directly from encounter with experience. It implies acquaintance with a new historical condition.

Sometimes, specifically in his later fictions, Hemingway represents the sense of a direct encounter between struggling man and the seemingly implacable universe. According to Hemingway, writing must express the real thing, the sequence of emotion and facts which made the emotion. War

was Hemingway's natural subject. He had become a soldier writer, a heroic stylist. In the anti radical postwar climate, Hemingway's pre-war sense of political commitment faded ; he was left with his own legend and a sense of life's fundamental struggle. This was expressed in the plain, powerful myth of "The Old Man and the Sea" (1952). To quote from *The Old man and the Sea*, "But man is not made for defeat ..... A man can be destroyed but not defeated". As the legendary hero, Hemingway, himself reached his last years, the message took on a darker look. He, a man of action was battered by action, his body was bruised by plane accident, his brain was damaged. Towards the end of his life, Hemingway worked on five more book-length manuscripts, but it was hard for him to complete them. On July 2, 1961, Hemingway killed himself with a shotgun, the victim of depression, paranoia and increasing physical disability. The writer of physical action came to the end of his great strength. His fictional world is complex, nuances of meaning lie under his plain prose surfaces. For every reader of Hemingway, his prose expresses the hard clarity and underlying existential pain which characterized the modern age.

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## 2.2.4 □ Story-Line of the Novel

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The central action of the story is an old man's trial by the marlin and the sharks. The old man of the title of the book is a Cuban fisherman. He bears the symbolic name of Santiago, his gentle suffering, strength and apparent defeat, transforms him into an image of Christ on the cross. 'Santiago' also is connected literally with Saint James, the apostle, he is the fisherman, and martyr from the Gulf Stream.

Early one morning, after long days of bad fishing luck, the old man rows out into the deep Gulf Stream. It swings in above the long island of Cuba. Towards the noon of the first day, the old man hooks a gigantic marlin. For two days and two nights, the gigantic fish pulls him in his boat far out into the sea. The man hangs for life onto the heavy lines, becomes a human towing bitt, fighting a battle of endurance against the power of the fish. On the third day, he succeeds in bringing the marlin to the surface and killing it with his harpoon. But the fish is too large to put aboard, he lashes it alongside his skiff and sets his small, patched sail for the long voyage home. Then one by one and later in rapacious ripping packs, the sharks move in on his trophy. By the time he has reached his native harbour, there is nothing

left of it except the skeleton, the bony head and the proud, sail-like tail.

In its main outlines, the story is thus apparently simple but actually intricately designed as we shall presently see.

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## 2.2.5 □ Critical Analysis

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**(a) The Code hero :** It is a plot familiar to Hemingway's readers. It is almost an epic pattern. The hero undertakes a hard task. He is scarcely equal to it, because of ill luck, hesitation, wounds, treachery or age. With tremendous effort he seems to succeed. But in the process he loses the prize itself, or the final victory or his life. His gallantry, courage or heroism remains. One thinks of Hemingway's special understanding of the hero, his code and his world.

The *Old man and the Sea* moves round such a 'code hero' and a familiar Hemingway theme—the theme of the undefeated—a story of novel triumph under the cover of an apparent smashing defeat. The old fisherman could be traced back to several Hemingway 'code heroes'. As Philip Young observes :

Particularly he is related to men like..Manuel Garcia, " The Undefeated" bullfighter who lose(s) in one way but win(s) in another. Like Manuel Santiago is a fighter whose best days are behind him and, worse, is wholly down on his luck. But he still dares, and sticks to the rules and will not quit when he is dicked. He is undefeated, he endures, and his loss, therefore, in the manner of it, is itself a victory.

This is the essence of the Hemingway 'code hero'. Santiago is the first of the code heroes to grow old though Hemingway's early short stories did have some aging athletes in them. He reminds us of Jack, the prizefighter and Manuel Garcia, the 'Undefeated' bullfighter. He is a fighter too. One thinks of Francis Macomber in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. But then his best days are behind him. His will not be the energetic death of the fighter or hunter. He is too old to live upto the demands of his profession ; he is wholly down on his luck. But he still dares, sticks to the rules and he will not quit. Undefeated he endures and his loss becomes a sort of victory.

The unalterable facts of physical destruction scar the surface of Hemingway's. world. As Malcolm Cowley says, no other writer of our time has presented 'such a profussion of copses....so many suffering animals. 'His imagination projects a nascent feeling of terror and anxiety. In fact for him, death is a symbol for the hostile implacability of the universe. Happy endings are rare, the humour is black ; but the novels abound in courage and endurance. The heroes fight against the darkness that threatens to devour them. Young

men like Jakes Barnes (*The Sun Also Rises*) or Robert Jordon (*For Whom the Bell Tolls*) and older men like Santiago acknowledge 'nada' or 'nothingness', hate it and struggle tirelessly against the void. They try to subdue afflictions like insomnia, fear of the dark, passivity and dependence. They never entirely are able to master the art of living. Yet Hemingway's novels are parables about the heroic capabilities of man in general. In fact the central heroic action of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago's trial by the marlin and sharks is reflected in miniature actions like man-of-war bird chasing the flying fish, or the hawks threatening the tired warbler on his way to the shore. There are references to Santiago's victory after a difficult twenty-four hour hand-wrestling contest with the Negro from Cienfuegos and to Santiago's admiration for the great Di Maggio, acting as a champion in spite of his pain or to the Christ figure to which I shall come later. This 'technique of superimposing parallel heroic actions', according to Katherine T. Jobes, implies that 'the heroic ideal symbolized by Santiago can be easily generalized.' Thus every reader can discover 'a personally meaningful image' of moral heroism in this timeless parable. In a remark about his purpose in *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway himself confirms such an impression given by the story :

I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks.

But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.

The elemental simplicity of the humble Cuban fisherman and his adventure contribute to a symbolic type of common human experience. Though Santiago the author also seems to explore the stresses of aging and impending death.

**(b) Tragic Vision :** This brings us to the tragic vision of man projected by Hemingway through the novel. Throughout the novel Santiago with his epic individualism, powerful and wise in craft, is given heroic proportions. He hooks the great marlin, fights him with the epic skill and endurance demonstrating 'what a man can do and what a man endures'. Later when the sharks attack the marlin he is determined to 'fight them until I die' because he wants to prove that 'man is not made for defeat....A man can be destroyed but not defeated.' The theme of the undefeated is central to the story.

And all the qualities that Santiago associates with the fish—courage, calmness, endurance, nobility and beauty are qualities that are valued most in life, qualities which redeem life from meaninglessness and futility—qualities that Santiago wishes to imbibe in himself. As for dexterity and agility, again these are characteristics Santiago shares with the marlin, his worthy antagonist.

And Santiago must catch the great fish not just for physical need, but for his pride and his profession. It is pride in his skill and craft as a fisherman : 'I know many tricks'. No fisherman reads sky and sea with greater assurance. Like a fire, proud bullfighter he is alert, methodical, patient and determined. And he is prouder of being a man than of being an expert. 'What a man can do and what a man endures'. Like Juan Belmonte and Manuel Garcia Santiago blends humility with pride.

But is pride his hubris? 'You violated your luck when you went too far outside' the old man thinks. The question of sin and guilt seems to bother him and persists. Santiago tries to deal with it honestly.

'And what beat you? he thought.

'Nothing' he said aloud. 'I went out too far'.

The marlin is a deep water fish. Santiago could not have caught it if he had not gone far inside the sea. And his spate of bad luck, the condition of being a 'salao', looked down upon with pity, would not have come to an end if he had refused to go far out into the sea. Santiago cannot resolve the question of guilt for himself, neither can he, as a fisherman rule out the necessity factor 'you were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish.' 'You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman' (105). The inevitable doom faces all' joined by the necessity of killing and being killed.' After months of failure, does Santiago decide to risk all by reaching beyond man's reach, by going too far out.' In fact, some critics argue that *The old Man and the sea* is much like Greek tragedy. The tale of courage, endurance, pride, humility and death sounds 'classical'. The purity of its design, the fatal flaw of pride and mature acceptance of things as they are, is classical in spirit. Going too far out is typical of the hero Greek Tragedy, so is Nemesis assuming the guise of sharks—the inevitable penalty for hubris. As Philip Young says, 'It is specially like Greek tragedy in that as the hero fails and falls, one gets an unforgettable glimpse of what stature a man may have.' When the sharks begin to devour the fish Santiago thinks that he is violated his luck by going out too far. It is actually humility that leads him to say that. Not that it is an admission of guilt or sin or even regret. Had he not ventured all alone out so bravely, he could not have discovered the grandeur a man may command even in failure. And his past memories, memories of his youth, grace, strength and determination seem to goad him on. To conquer the unconquerable. What stands as an obstacle to his goal is not his propensity to go too far out but rather the sheer bad luck of being too old. He reminds us of doomed artists whose skills come to nothing.

In fact the sense of failure is an essential ingredient of the predicament of a tragic protagonist. Santiago's admirable qualities can hardly make up for the unredeemable loss resulting from going too far out and the bad luck of being old. The Tourists from the portside café are impressed by the bigness of the fish's skeleton. A man's magnificent performance does not compensate for his failure. The boy weeps and natives shrug as the old man returns to his newspaper-lined bed in his shabby shack.

The qualities which make Santiago a superior individual, are, as we have seen, courage nobility, determination, skill tenacity and also abysmal suffering, fighting spirit and endurance. At the same time he is entirely human, his humanness manifesting itself in small realistic touches like the brown blotch on his face, his peculiar idiom, his love of big-league baseball and his dreams of lions on a yellow African beach. He faces the malice and vengeance of the universe and accepts defeat gracefully and with resignation.

**(c) Themes :** Since the novel *The Old man and the Sea* has only two characters of any consequence and the principal character Santiago has been already discussed in the previous section, a separate unit on 'characters' seems redundant. The character of Manolin will be taken up in a subsequent unit.

**(i) Religious analogies, Christian allusions :** The novel abounds in religious analogies. It has been read even as a Christian allegory by some critics. Is there something of the Christian saint in Santiago (St. James in English)? He appears to achieve humility which is possibly the most difficult and saintly of the Christian virtues. There is even a suggestion of St. Francis in response to animal life and especially to birds. As Carlos Baker observes, he is "a man of humility, natural piety and compassion."

Here one must add that an interesting change is noticed in course of the novel. At the beginning the great fish is associated with Christ. The fish itself is an ancient Christian symbol. Santiago exclaims : 'Christ! I did not know he was so big I'll kill him though...In all his greatness and his glory.' The word Christ is suggestive and the echo in the next sentence is unmistakable 'for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever.' Then does it follow that Santiago, who kills his brother, the fish, is here identified with Cain and the crucifiers of Christ ? The old man cannot evade the sense of sin in connection with the killing of the fish. But later, when he leans forward and almost unconsciously tears a piece of the fish and eats it, the fish becomes

a part of his life. The reader experiences, a kind of communion and now onwards the old man's experience is related to the Passion of Christ. There is a transfer of Christian allusions and symbols, so long applied to the giant fish, to the fisherman. The old man in his noble futile struggle to preserve the fish from the sharks, becomes identified with Christ figure.

As Santiago sees the sharks coming to attack the fish, he cries out 'Ay!' The authorial comment runs 'there is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood. As Santiago leaves the skiff, he falls and lies for a moment with the mast across his shoulders and when he reaches the shark he lies down in the attitude of the crucified Christ. His hands are scarred reminding us of the hand of our lord. The mast he carries up the hill resembles the Cross. When in the end, he carries the mast uphill to his cabin, falls exhausted and collapses on his cot, his 'face down...with his arms out straight and palms of his hands up' the allusion is obvious. The figure of Santiago is Christ-like because the novel shows the way the old man is crucified by the forces of a capricious and violent universe leading us on to Christ's lesson of humility and love. Santiago stands out as a fisherman and as a teacher of the younger generation of fishermen like Manolin. The Christian symbols do not transform the novel into a Christian allegory ; the essential humanism stands out. The Christian elements serve to reaffirm the humanist theme of struggle, suffering and triumph. Both Christians and humanists share love and compassion. Apart from the suggestion of Christian martyrdom which comes at the end and humility without self-consciousness and sentimentality, the Franciscan quality of Santiago also comes under the label of Christian analogies.

**(ii) Universal brotherhood, kinship with all creatures :** Starting with a humble awareness that 'man is not much beside the giant birds and beasts' Santiago feels the same kinship with all living things, the elegant green turtle or the playful lions. It all stems from Santiago's great respect for the whole of life, a reverence for life's struggle and for mankind in general. It is a powerful novel; its power is the power of love and veneration for humanity and sense of kinship with and fellow-feeling for all creatures of the world. Santiago comes to feel his deepest love for the fish, the creature he kills, a worthy antagonist whom he comes to pity, respect and admire :

You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more

noble thing than your brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who.

Santiago is very fond of the flying fish as they are his principal friends on the ocean. He is sorry for the birds specially for the small, delicate dark terns, always flying and looking and never finding what they want to find. He feels deep affection for the porpoises. Lonely as he is, he constantly requires the companionship of others. What comes out is his sense of community with all created things. This includes the stray land bird that perches momentarily on his taut lines, everything above and beneath the blue water and the big fish which becomes his alter ego.

**(iii) Contention or fight :** The other interpretation of the novel sees it as a fight between two opposite polarities, as a contention of the victor and the victim, the pursuing and the pursued. The dolphin pursues and catches the flying fish ; the dolphin in its turn is caught by the old man who is nourished by the big fish. Each form preys on the other for food and life and then in turn becomes a prey to another. As the first shark attack Santiago, he cries out 'everything kills everything else in some way.'

In fact, all the noble creatures in the novel—the marlin , the mako shark or the turtle (Santiago show empathy for each of them) put up a good fight and demonstrate their fighting spirit, and transcend defeat by displaying intense life and vitality at the moment of death. One remember's Santiago's words. 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated.' And vitality seems to be transmitted through the ritual of eating of the victims, flesh, providing continuing vitality to the victor. Does Santiago nourish himself by the act of killing and eating the flesh of his brother fish, thus becoming the marlin? imaginatively the old man gathers inspiration and vital nourishment from his mythical brothers—the powerful Negro, De Maggio and Manolin who seem to stand for his former youthful self. This seems to be the obverse of Santiago's 'everything kills everything else'—'everything nourishes everything else in some way.'

**(iv) Plurality :** This is a pointer to the basic assumption in ecology—participation in the same natural rhythms of the universe. This reading is opposed to interpretation of the novel as a 'fight'. In Hemingway's harmonious view of the world, life exists in plurality ; there is no contradiction in that plurality ; there is no contradiction in that plurality and even the sharks have their place. All this contributes to an understanding of the plural nature of the universe.

**(d) Santiago Manolin relationship** : Incidentally, one must remember that the relationship between Santiago and the boy Manolin, the second and the only other character in the novel (if we do not count the fish marlin to be one) is of special kind.

Santiago, the old man has a meaningful and memorable relationship with the boy Manolo, his follower and admirer. Manolin undoubtedly heightens our sympathy for the old fisherman. At the beginning and end of the story, we watch Santiago through the boy's admiring and pitying eyes. From the charitable Martin who is the owner of the Terrace, Manolo brings Santiago a last supper of black beans and rice, fried bananas, stew and two bottles of beer. In the morning on the day of the journey Manolin arranges for the breakfast of coffee fixes the bait, helps Santiago to launch the skiff and sees him off in the dark with a wish for his luck on this eighty-fifth day. The love of Manolo for Santiago is that of a disciple for his master in the arts of fishing. He also loves Santiago like a father. At the end of the novel Manolo again brings coffee and food for Santiago, ointment for his injured hands, planning to work together in future.

But from Santiago's point of view, the relationship runs deeper. It is true that the old man constantly thinks of the boy while fishing. During the ordeal he feels that the boy would be a help in a time of crisis 'I wish the boy was here'. Like many other aging men, Santiago finds something reassuring in the image of the past in the present, in the young manhood of the boy. Through the agency of Manolo, he is able to recapture in his imagination, the same strength, courage and confidence of his own young manhood as a fisherman.

Some critics see in Manolin Hemingway's experiment in symbolic doubling. Manolin is seen to stand for old Santiago's lost youth. In a way the boy provides sentimental education, Santiago enjoys, in his need for love and pity. Thus Manolin takes over some functions hitherto performed by the heroine in Hemingway's other novels.

Instead of reading the novel as an allegory of old age longing for the return of youth, it could be read from the boy's point of view. The old man may do without the boy, it is the boy who feels that he cannot do without the old man, who is a wonderful teacher. Manolin is his great admirer. He was with the old man for the first forty days of present run of bad luck. He is intelligent enough to distinguish Santiago, 'a strange old man' who knows 'many tricks' from the other ordinary fishermen and recognizes his

uniqueness : 'There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.'

**(e) Dreams :** Santiago's dreams—his actual dreams and daydreams—dreams of Di Maggio, the African sea beaches and the lions are quite significant in the novel. If the novel is about action (fishing) what is the significance of these sleep or dream sequences? They introduce another layer into the novel. They indicate Santiago's longing for inner repose, suggestive of peace and harmony. The lions and Di Maggio are perfection symbols. Santiago longs to identify himself with sources of power.

**Biographical reading :** The novel has been interpreted as symbolic representation of Hemingway's vision of himself in 1952. Such biographical reading identifies Santiago meticulous craftsman dedicated his vocation with Hemingway, the writer. Santiago's reputation as a champion corresponds to Hemingway's literary reputation in the 1950s. Santiago's suffering due to attacks by evil forces could be compared to Hemingway's sufferings from critics' attacks. Sharks stand for both internal and external forces working against the craftsman. Thus the old man catching fish is also a great artist in the act of mastering his subject.

**(f) Ending :** The novel ends with the old man sleeping and dreaming of lions. Most readers feel that it ends on a note of hope, new strength and vitality. Others notice hints for the old man's approaching death. In the closing section Manolin is crying, each time, he withdraws from Santiago's bedside. Is it reverse for contributing to his suffering ? He should have accompanied him and now it is too late. Santiago's excellent performance does not compensate for his failure. Does he lie dying at the end ? The very spectacle of the old man challenging Nature totally disregarding safety seems deliberately stoic, almost recklessly suicidal.

**(g) Structure and technique style :** The novel takes up the ritual journey as a motif. The journey also forms the structure of the novel—Santiago's three day sojourn on the sea. As for the prose style, it is not static. Hemingway has created his own unique style and language of expression, rooted in his innumerable experiences of life. He addresses the need of his generation. He has developed a 'spare prose', the special features being concrete nouns, few colouring adjectives, a selected vocabulary and a not very complicated

sentence structure. As Jobs remarks 'terse factuality', 'objectivity' and 'emotional control', carried over from journalism were the salient features. The repeated images and symbols are a part of an emphatic stylistic design of repeated serends, words and rhythms, lending a quality incantation and dignity of virtual to routine actions. Some of the vivid interlocking images are those of the sea, marlin and shark. The sea, for example, is not just the background, the Gulf Stream, the means of livelihood of the entire fishing community in Caribbean. It is the sea of life which man has to negotiate. Side by side we have the other aspect of the sea—the inexorable quality that evokes awe and fear, the dangers it stands for. The caprice of the sea is a reflection of the caprice of Nature and the Universe in general. Both the noble marlin and the destructive sharks belong to the sea. It combines benevolence, malice and violence. To Santiago, the sea is not merely a place or an enemy but Lamar—a woman to be loved however cruel. It stands for the unsurmountable obstacle against which Santiago must assert his manhood.

As for narrative technique Hemingway is not an innovator or pioneer but he consolidated and perfected what had been originated by modernists like Conrad, James, Proust and Joyce. He used both omniscient and subjective modes in his novels, In *The Old Man and the Sea* variations are quite interesting, the way he mixes third person narrative with interior monologue. In the first twenty pages he maintains the third person voice, but once Santiago is by himself on the sea we enter his mind. Hemingway excels in skillfully merging the different narrative modes, smoothly gliding over transitions.

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## 2.2.6 □ Questions

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1. “‘The Old Man and the Sea’ is an allegory, a fable, a Christian parable.’—Elucidate.
2. “‘The Old man and the Sea’ is a story of human strength, endurance and suffering.’—Elucidate.
3. Analyse the strength and greatness of the character of Santiago, ‘The Old man and the Sea.’
4. Analyse the creative relationship between the old man Santiago and the boy Manolo.

5. Consider Hemingway as a great artist with reference to “The Old Man and the Sea.”

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## **Unit : 2.3 □ *The Sound and the Fury* : William Faulkner**

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### **Structure :**

- 2.3.1. Introduction.
- 2.3.2. A Brief Sketch of Faulkner's Life and Works
- 2.3.3. The Background
  - (i) Faulkner and History
  - (ii) Faulkner and Time
  - (iii) Faulkner and Race.
- 2.3.4. Critical Analysis of *The Sound and the Fury*
  - (i) Source and Publications
  - (ii) Analysis of the plot
  - (iii) Theme and Technique
- 2.3.5. Questions
- 2.3.6. References

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### **2.3.1. □ Introduction**

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William Faulkner is one of the most important literary figures in American literature. He is a Nobel Prize Laureate and recognized worldwide as a stylistic innovator. At first, Faulkner can be confusing and bewildering because of his complex prose style and narrative technique. In order to comprehend and enjoy his writing, we have to locate his origin, cultural and historical background.

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### **2.3.2. □ A Brief Sketch of Faulkner's Life and Works**

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William Faulkner (1897-1962) was born William Cuthbert Faulkner in New Albany, Mississippi on September 25, 1897. He was the first child of Murry Cuthbert and Maud Butler Falkner and the great-grandson of the soldier, author, banker and railroad builder William Clark Faulkner, known as the Old Colonel. He is a legendary figure and resembles Colonel John Sartoris of Faulkner's fictional Jefferson, Mississippi and Yoknapatawpha County.

William Faulkner had served in the Royal Air Force in 1918. After the

War, Faulkner went back to Oxford, Mississippi. At home, his war with his self and consciousness began. He was not able to accept the post-war world of America, particularly its South. At that time he was writing poems and violent and effective stories, he was brooding over his own situation and the decline and decadence of the South. His thought was reconstructed into the whole interconnected pattern. This was the substance and form of all Faulkner's works.

The pattern of his writing was structured on his experience and reminiscences of Oxford, scraps of his family tradition, the Falkners as they spelled the name. Thus Faulkner invented a Mississippi County. The Yoknapatawpha County was like a mythical kingdom and in Faulkner's writing it stands as a parable or legend of all the Deep South *i.e.*, Texas, Mississippi, South Carolina and other states in the southern part of USA.

Faulkner was better equipped by talent and background than he was by schooling and formal education. Faulkner was the oldest of the four brothers. At Oxford, Faulkner attended the public school, but he did not complete his graduation. He was admitted to the University of Mississippi as a war veteran, but he did not complete his course. Faulkner was self-taught, because of his personal experience, his childhood memory and his "undirected and uncorelated reading."

Faulkner took two hard falls from horses in Virginia in 1962. William Faulkner died of a heart attack there at 1:30 on the morning of July 6, 1962.

Faulkner has written several novels and stories concerned with his mythical Yoknapatawpha County and its people. *Sartoris* was the first of the books to be published, in the spring of 1929. *The Sound and the Fury* was published six months later. It recounts the going-to pieces of the Compson family. The books that followed in the Yoknapatawpha series are *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom Absalom!* (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Palms* (1939), *The Hamlet* (1940) and *Go Down, Moses* (1942). There are also many Yoknapatawpha stories in *These 13* (1931), *Doctor Martino* (1934) and *Mill Zilphia Gant* (1932).

All the books that Faulkner published after 1945 are concerned with Yoknapatawpha County. The exception is *A Fable* (1954), about a reincarnated Christ in the First World War. The other books, eight in number, are *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), *Knight's Gambit* (1949), *Collected Stories of William Faulkner* (1950), *Requiem far a Nun* (1951), a three-act drama, *Big Woods* (1955), *The Town* (1957), *The Mansion* (1959) and *The Reivers* (1962). In all, sixteen of Faulkner's

books belong to the Yoknapatawpha cycle, as well as half of another book *The Wild Palms* and it is difficult to count how many stories of Faulkner are based on Yoknapatawpha.

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### 2.3.3 □ The Background

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#### (i) Faulkner and History

William Faulkner got hold of the almost moribund tradition of the fiction of the American South and brought to it the energy and resources of experimental Modernism. His finest explorations of form and consciousness may be compared with Joyce, Proust or Virginia Woolf. Faulkner represented the distinctive, defeated nature of Southern history, its great chivalric and rural traditions broken apart by the American Civil War. In this sense, Faulkner always remained essentially a Southern writer. The disorders of Reconstruction and the growing predations of industrialization and mercantilism—these are the main sources of Faulkner's Writings. Faulkner was also under the impact of Romantic, Decadent and Modern literature.

Faulkner was greatly influenced by the writing of his own time, especially by Joyce's *Ulysses*. His work also was bred, in his own words, "by Oratory out of Solitude." He linked the Classic Southern romance with the modern sense of experimental form. It is an interrelation of a deep-seated sense of regional history with an awareness of the fracture of historical time. Past and present thus clash eternally in Faulkner's fiction. As a child, he absorbed a living history in the tales of aging Civil war veterans ; he witnessed the final destruction of the wilderness of the Mississippi Chickasaw Indians.

Faulkner's fictional world extends back to the 1790s, when a few thousand Native Americans and Black slaves peopled his Yoknapatawpha county region. By the 1830s, the New World encroaches. It is the great conflict : the conflict of man in nature and in society which echoes through Faulkner's writings. Settlers arrive from east of the Appalachians with their slaves and their notions of ownership. The conflict of the slave society of the South with the powerful and industrialised North culminated in the declaration of several southern states (called "The Confederacy") that they would break out of the USA and form an separate country. This happened during the Presidency of Abraham Lincoln (1860-65) and led to the Civil War in which the South was defeated. Civil war abolishes slavery and destroys the South, but the sins

live on : the legacy of slavery, the destruction of the Big Woods. The old, proud South found itself reduced to the status of an economic dependent of the North after the war. Those who adapted to modern, northern ways stood the best chance of survival. Landless whites displaced the crumbling planter aristocracy, ruthlessly trampling their antique codes and values in the process. Faulkner linked the destruction of the wilderness to the loss of values that bring on decline and ultimate fall.

Faulkner's fictional history closely parallels his family's history. The Civil War ended 32 years before Faulkner's birth, but it lived on still in turn-of-the-century Oxford, Mississippi. What Faulkner has written is basically about the great American divide, the Civil War. Unlike other Southern writers, Faulkner's issues in the post-civil war South were race and history, not gallantry in battle. His south was not noble. It was morally corrupt.

In Faulkner, there is no nostalgia for the past. The modern world overwhelms a society that deserves to collapse. Faulkner offers a critique of the past and the present, it is a parable. The devastation comes from the land itself, from its rich soil, from history, from an error or sin committed long ago and repeated thousands of times ; the doom of civilisation follows this.

With the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s, the past caught up with the South and with America. Faulkner participated in the struggle. The crisis justified the historical vision of Faulkner's writings.

## **(ii) Faulkner and Time**

Faulkner's use of time in the lives of his characters and in the stylistic devices of his narrative, especially the Interior Monologue, is wonderful and intricate. Time in his writings is not a static dimension. It plays a significant role in the depiction of characters seen within a context larger than that of individual experience ; it includes historical reminiscences of the past. Faulknerian treatment of time is not merely chronological : it is more akin to the Greek notion of *kairos* (time as memorable event) than to *chronos* (time that can be measured).

In one interview, Faulkner stated : "I agree pretty much with the French philosopher Henri Bergson's theory of the fluidity of time. There is only the present moment, in which I include both the past and the future and that is eternity." For Faulkner, apart from the stream of living consciousness, time is merely an abstraction. The French philosopher and writer Jean-Paul Sartre also discusses Faulkner's concept of time.

Faulkner puts historical time to work in his novels. The Yoknapatawpha novels create an informal history of this fictional region of northern Mississippi. Faulkner employs history as a symbolic underpinning to events in the present. To Faulkner, "no man is himself, he is the sum of his past."

### **(iii) Faulkner and Race**

Faulkner's principal theme is the relation between whites and blacks. Faulkner's attitudes on white and black relations in a South with its legacy of slavery were complex and ambiguous. Faulkner would weave miscegenation themes into his fiction : a number of memorable characters in his novels are of mixed parentage. Blacks lived in every section of Oxford in the early 1900s. All familiarity, hysteria about racial matters in Faulkner's novels convulsed the Mississippi of Faulkner's childhood. Lynching became a terrible symptom of white hysteria. More than 200 blacks were killed by the white mobs in Mississippi between 1889 and 1909, more than in any other state.

Faulkner absorbed the atmosphere as a boy. Strict subordination, white over black, governed racial relations in the Oxford of Faulkner's childhood. Faulkner's family, his parents, his brothers, his wife accepted segregation as though it were the natural order of things. In this matter, Faulkner stood apart. He came to be deeply troubled over the South's racial past and present.

Faulkner's attitudes toward individual African Americans were a blend of paternalism, generosity, gratitude and real affection, even love. He regarded the longtime Faulkner servant, Caroline Barr as a second mother. He maintained affectionate relations with the elderly black caretaker Nod Barnett. Faulkner was a patron of the black families who worked at the place under his benign supervision. Faulkner's attitudes toward such black people may reflect what the biographer Frederick Karl diagnoses as his unconscious racism. In the early 1940s, when racial questions had begun to claim Faulkner's attention, he consistently used the epithet 'nigger' in correspondence with his friend and editor Robert Hass. If we analyse Faulkner's writings, Faulkner's views on race in his fiction were hugely sophisticated.

His book *Intruder* is a reflection of Faulkner's confusion about racial questions. We may refer to Faulkner's observation and protest against the lynching in Mississippi of Emmett Till, a 14-year old child for whistling at a white woman and making an obscene remark to her. The killing revolted Faulkner. "Perhaps the purpose of this sorry and tragic error committed in

my native Mississippi by two white adults on an affiliated Negro Child is to prove to us whether or not we deserve to survive. Because if we in America have reached that point in our desperate culture when we must murder children, no matter for what reason or what colour, we don't deserve to survive and probably won't." In the Autherine Lucy case who got admission by court order in the University of Alabama and caused race war in the South when she was not allowed to study there, Faulkner argued for a gradual approach to integration and solution through understanding and conversion. His later utterances had a lecturing, patronizing tone, sometimes offensive and always in sad contrast to the subtlety and empathy of much of his literary output.

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#### **2.3.4. □ Critical Analysis of *The Sound and the Fury***

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##### **(i) Source and Publications**

A story called "Twilight" begun by Faulkner in Paris in 1925 became the basis for the novel, which Faulkner earnestly started writing in early 1928. *The Sound and the Fury* is totally different in its style and concept of form. There are different editions of the novel. Much of the last chapter of the novel, April Eight, 1982 was published under the title "Dilsey" in *The Portable Faulkner* (1946) ; the first appearance of Faulkner's appendix to the novel, "1699-1945 the Compsons." also appeared in this volume. The appendix appeared as a foreword, titled "Compson 1699-1945." The complete novel was also published with the appendix at the end in *The Faulkner Reader* (1954), and in 1984, a corrected text edited by Noel Polk was published by Random House, New York.

##### **(ii) Analysis of the Plot**

*The Sound and the Fury* is Faulkner's fourth novel, first published by Cape & Smith, New York on October 7, 1929. It is widely appreciated as Faulkner's best work of fiction. Treated from different points of view, the novel concentrates on the breakdown of the Compson family over a period of three decades, from around 1898 to 1928. Faulkner explained that he started it with the image of a young girl, Caddy Compson, climbing a tree in order to look through the parlour window at her dead grandmother laid out in the house.

Caddy is the central character in the novel and her relationship with her three brothers—Quentin, Jason and Benjy Compson is the novel's integrative theme. Faulkner tells the story from multiple points of view.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, in a famous soliloquy, speaks of life as a "tale/ told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, /signifying nothing." The first chapter of Faulkner's novel is literally a tale told by an idiot, Benjy Compson. The more Faulkner writes, "the more elastic the title became, until it covered the whole family." In this chapter, the reader receives direct and immediate impressions of the world as expressed in an Interior Monologue of the longings and sensations of Benjy, the youngest son of Jason Compson Sr. and Caroline Compson. The novel opens on April 7, 1928, Benjy's 33rd birthday. He and his 14-year-old black caretaker, Luster are standing by the fence that separates the yard from the golf course that had once been the Compsons' pasture, where Benjy and his siblings spent much of their childhood. In 1909, the pasture had to be sold to supply the money for Caddy's wedding and Quentin's education at Harvard University. Benjy's reflections flutter back and forth between the present and the past and at times are permeated with unsettling flashback, as when he recalls certain incidents relating to Caddy's wedding. The scenes with Luster take place during the present, while the scenes with T. P. Gibson, Dilsey's youngest son, are set sometime between 1906 and 1912 and those with Versh Gibson between 1898 and 1900 when Benjy was a small child.

Benjy's fragmented narrative begins with Luster searching along the fence for a lost quarter. Benjy thinks back on the death of his grandmother Damuddy. Benjy recalls his name-change from "Maury" to "Benjamin", the loss of Caddy's virginity, the sale of the pasture : Caddy's wedding ; his brother Quentin's suicide and the day his body was brought home from Cambridge, his castration after he attacked a neighbour's daughter : and his father's death and funeral.

The second chapter, "June Second, 1910" takes the narrative back eighteen years and is narrated by Quentin, a romantic idealist and Hamlet-like figure, pensive brooding and guilt-ridden for his incestuous feelings for his sister. Quentin has deeply neurotic thoughts and longings. His actions are symbolic of the self destruction to come. In the end, Quentin commits suicide, thinking about his sister Caddy. Among the three narrators, Quentin alone is aware of the doom of the Compsons.

The third Chapter of *The Sound and the Fury* is narrated by Jason

Compson, Jr, the resentful and hard-hearted son, and it takes place on Good Friday, April 6, 1928. Jason is his mother's favourite and just like his mother, he is self-absorbed. Caddy's disgrace and divorce from Herbert meant the end of Jason's hopes. Caddy's daughter Quentin is despised and ostracized and Benjy is an unnecessary burden whom Jason would like to send to an asylum. Jason represents the final degeneration of the Compsons.

The final chapter is told in the third person and takes place on April 8, 1928. It is Easter morning, a day that begins badly for Dilsey, the Compsons' black servant. The house is cold and there is no firewood. Dilsey begins to make breakfast. Jason interrupts the meal to complain about the broken window in his bedroom through which. Quentin, his sister's daughter ran away.

Meanwhile Dilsey attends Easter services. She takes her daughter Frony, Frony's son Luster and Benjy to the church. The preacher starts off slowly, gradually builds to a crescendo that moves Dilsey to tears. Dilsey says "I read de beginin, en now I sees ending." Dilsey acts as a chorus to the action. Her presence also puts in perspective the whole story of the Compsons.

After lunch, Luster takes Benjy to the cellar and tries to perform a trick. Benjy starts moaning when he hears a golfer call for his Caddie. The sound of the word reminds him of his absent sister. Jason strikes Benjy and tells him to shut up. He commands and warns Luster, "If you ever cross that gate with him again, I'll kill you !" The novel ends with the now quiescent Benjy returning to the Compson home, with serene and empty eyes looking upon each passing object "in its ordered place."

### **(iii) Theme and Technique**

Critics have compared Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* with Joyce's *Ulysses* because of its technique of interior monologue and its complex time scheme. The four narratives of the novel are set on four different days, three in 1928, one in 1910 and of course its stream of consciousness technique makes it a Modernist novel. As we analyse the plot, the first fractured story is set in the present of 1928 and belongs to the mind and comprehension of Benjy, an idiot with a mental age of five. We move to the monologue of Quentin Compson on the day of his suicide back in 1910. We next hear the voice of the surviving, opportunistic Jason Compson and finally the enduring voice of the black servant Dilsey.

Faulkner's remarkable Modernist strategies are reinforced by the primary consciousness of a larger history, the history of Yoknapatawpha itself. Faulkner's concept of time has to do with the endless interlocking of personal and public histories and the interrelation of the lost past with the chaotic present. A central theme of *The Sound and the Fury* is Quentin's attempt to arrest both subjective and historical time by defending his sister Caddy's virginity from psychic corruption and time's flow. Benjy himself is locked in a single continuous moment of time. Jason sees matters empirically, Dilsey from a patient sense of human continuity. It is interesting that Dilsey becomes the figure of sustenance at the end of the novel. She is a descendant of the slaves ; through her the black people come into their own while the descendants of the slaveowners disintegrate, dumb, corrupt, guilt-ridden. Themes and images thus multiply and give the novel its symbolic qualities.

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### 2.3.5 □ Questions

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1. Give a brief sketch of Faulkner's life and works.
2. Analyse the significance of Faulkner's mythical county, Yoknapatawpha.
3. Analyse the title of the novel *The Sound and the Fury* and focus on its interrelation with the underlying theme of the novel.
4. Faulkner is very often compared to James Joyce. Point out the similarities in their technique.
5. Comment on Faulkner's use of 'interior monologue' and 'stream-of-consciousness technique' in *The Sound and the Fury*.
6. Analyse Faulkner's historical consciousness with reference to *The Sound and the Fury*.
7. Faulkner's awareness and perspective towards race in America is both ambiguous and complex. —Elucidate with reference to *The Sound and the Fury*.
9. Time is the major theme, and also the philosophy in Faulkner's writing. —Elucidate with reference to *The Sound and the Fury*.

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## Unit 2.4 □ *Sula* : Toni Morrison

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### Structure

- 2.4.0 Text : *Sula*
- 2.4.1 About the Author
- 2.4.2 Morrison's Works and Contemporary Milieu
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### 2.4.0 □ Text : *Sula*

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It was too cool for ice cream. A hill wind was blowing dust and empty Camels wrappers about their ankles. It pushed their dresses into the creases of their behinds, then lifted the hems to peek at their cotton underwear. They were on their way to Edna Finch's Mellow House, an ice-cream parlor catering to nice folks—where even children would feel comfortable, you know, even though it was right next to Reba's Grill and just one block down from the Time and a Half Pool Hall. It sat in the curve of Carpenter's Road, which, in four blocks, made up all the sporting life available in the Bottom. Old men and young ones draped themselves in front of the Elmira Theater, Irene's Palace of Cosmetology, the pool hall, the grill and the other sagging business enterprises that lined the street. On sills, on stoops, on crates and broken chairs they sat tasting their teeth and waiting for something to distract them. Every passerby, every motorcar, every alteration in stance caught their

attention and was commented on. Particularly they watched women. When a woman approached, the older men tipped their hats; the younger ones opened and closed their thighs. But all of them, whatever their age, watched her retreating view with interest.

Nel and Sula walked through this valley of eyes chilled by the wind and heated by the embarrassment of appraising stares. The old men looked at their stalklike legs, dwelled on the cords in the backs of their knees and remembered old dance steps they had not done in twenty years. In their lust, which age had turned to kindness, they moved their lips as though to stir up the taste of young sweat on tight skin.

Pig meat. The words were in all their minds. And one of them, one of the young ones, said it aloud. Softly but definitively and there was no mistaking the compliment. His "name was Ajax, a twenty-one-year-old pool haunt of sinister beauty. Graceful and economical in every movement, he held a place of envy with men of all ages for his magnificently foul mouth. In fact he seldom cursed, and the epithets he chose were dull, even harmless. His reputation was derived from the way he handled the words. When he said "hell" he hit the *h* with his lungs and the impact was greater than the achievement of the most imaginative foul mouth in the town. He could say "shit" with a nastiness impossible to imitate. So, when he said "pig meat" as Nel and Sula passed, they guarded their eyes lest someone see their delight.

It was not really Edna Finch's ice cream that made them brave the stretch of those panther eyes. Years later their own eyes would glaze as they cupped their chins in remembrance of the inchworm smiles, the squatting haunches, the track-rail legs straddling broken chairs. The cream-colored trousers marking with a mere seam the place where the mystery curled. Those smooth vanilla crotches invited them; those lemon-yellow gabardines beckoned to them.

They moved toward the ice-cream parlor like tightrope walkers, as thrilled by the possibility of a slip as by the maintenance of tension and balance. The least sideways glance, the merest toe stub, could pitch them into those creamy haunches spread wide with welcome. Somewhere beneath all of that daintiness, chambered in all that neatness, lay the thing that clotted their dreams.

Which was only fitting, for it was in dreams that the two girls had first met. Long before Edna Finch's Mellow House opened, even before they marched through the chocolate halls of Garfield Primary School out onto the playground and stood facing each other through the ropes of the one vacant swing ("Go on." "No. You go."), they had already made each other's

acquaintance in the delirium of their noon dreams. They were solitary little girls whose loneliness was so profound it intoxicated them and sent them stumbling into Technicolored visions that always included a presence, a someone, who, quite like the dreamer, shared the delight of the dream. When Nel, an only child, sat on the steps of her back porch surrounded by the high silence of her mother's incredibly orderly house, feeling the neatness pointing at her back, she studied the poplars and fell easily into a picture of herself lying on a flowered bed, tangled in her own hair, waiting for some fiery prince. He approached but never quite arrived. But always, watching the dream along with her, were some smiling sympathetic eyes. Someone as interested as she herself in the flow of her imagined hair, the thickness of the mattress of flowers, the voile sleeves that closed below her elbows in gold-threaded cuffs.

Similarly, Sula, also an only child, but wedged into a household of throbbing disorder constantly awry with things, people, voices and the slamming of doors, spent hours in the attic behind a roll of linoleum galloping through her own mind on a gray-and-white horse tasting sugar and smelling roses in full view of a someone who shared both the taste and the speed.

So when they met, first in those chocolate halls and next through the ropes of the swing, they felt the ease and comfort of old friends. Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be. Their meeting was fortunate, for it let them use each other to grow on. Daughters of distant mothers and incomprehensible fathers (Sula's because he was dead; Nel's because he wasn't), they found in each other's eyes the intimacy they were looking for.

Nel Wright and Sula Peace were both twelve in 1922, wishbone thin and easy-assed. Nel was the color of wet sandpaper—just dark enough to escape the blows of the pitch-black truebloods and the contempt of old women who worried about such things as bad blood mixtures and knew that the origins of a mule and a mulatto were one and the same. Had she been any lighter-skinned she would have needed either her mother's protection on the way to school or a streak of mean to defend herself. Sula was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birthmark that spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose. It gave her otherwise plain face a broken excitement and blue-blade threat like the keloid<sup>1</sup> scar of the razored man who sometimes played checkers

1. An excessive growth of scar tissue.

with her grandmother. The birthmark was to grow darker as the years passed, but now it was the same shade as her gold-flecked eyes, which, to the end, were as steady and clean as rain.

Their friendship was as intense as it was sudden. They found relief in each other's personality. Although both were unshaped, formless things, Nel seemed stronger and more consistent than Sula, who could hardly be counted on to sustain any emotion for more than three minutes. Yet there was one time when that was not true, when she held on to a mood for weeks, but even that was in defense of Nel.

Four white boys in their early teens, sons of some newly arrived Irish people, occasionally entertained themselves in the afternoon by harassing black schoolchildren. With shoes that pinched and woolen knickers that made red rings on their calves, they had come to this valley with their parents believing as they did that it was a promised land—green and shimmering with welcome. What they found was a strange accent, a pervasive fear of their religion and firm resistance to their attempts to find work. With one exception the older residents of Medallion scorned them. The one exception was the black community. Although some of the Negroes had been in Medallion before the Civil War (the town didn't even have a name then), if they had any hatred for these newcomers it didn't matter because it didn't show. As a matter of fact, baiting them was the one activity that the white Protestant residents concurred in. In part their place in this world was secured only when they echoed the old residents' attitude toward blacks.

These particular boys caught Nel once, and pushed her from hand to hand until they grew tired of the frightened helpless face. Because of that incident, Nel's route home from school became elaborate. She, and then Sula, managed to duck them for weeks until a chilly day in November when Sula said, "Let's us go on home the shortest way."

Nel blinked, but acquiesced. They walked up the street until they got to the bend of Carpenter's Road where the boys lounged on a disused well. Spotting their prey, the boys sauntered forward as though there were nothing in the world on their minds but the gray sky. Hardly able to control their grins, they stood like a gate blocking the path. When the girls were three feet in front of the boys, Sula reached into her coat pocket and pulled out Eva's paring knife. The boys stopped short, exchanged looks and dropped all pretense of innocence. This was going to be better than they thought. They were going to try and fight back, and with a knife. Maybe they could get an arm around one of their waists, or tear . . .

Sula squatted down in the dirt road and put everything down on the ground : her lunchpail, her reader, her mittens, her slate. Holding the knife in her right hand, she pulled the slate toward her and pressed her left forefinger down hard on its edge. Her aim was determined but inaccurate. She slashed off only the tip of her finger. The four boys stared open-mouthed at the wound and the scrap of flesh, like a button mushroom, curling in the cherry blood that ran into the corners of the slate.

Sula raised her eyes to them. Her voice was quiet. "If I can do that to myself, what you suppose I'll do to you?"

The shifting dirt was the only way Nel knew that they were moving away; she was looking at Sula's face, which seemed miles and miles away.

But toughness was not their quality—adventuresomeness was—and a mean determination to explore everything that interested them, from one-eyed chickens high-stepping in their penned yards to Mr. Buckland Reed's gold teeth, from the sound of sheets flapping in the wind to the labels on Tar Baby's wine bottles. And they had no priorities. They could be distracted from watching a fight with mean razors by the glorious smell of hot tar being poured by roadmen two hundred yards away.

In the safe harbor of each other's company they could afford to abandon the ways of other people and concentrate on their own perceptions of things. When Mrs. Wright reminded Nel to pull her nose, she would do it enthusiastically but without the least hope in the world.

"While you sittin' there, honey, go 'head and pull your nose."

"It hurts, Mamma."

"Don't you want a nice nose when you grow up?"

After she met Sula, Nel slid the clothespin under the blanket as soon as she got in the bed. And although there was still the hateful hot comb to suffer through each Saturday evening, its consequences—smooth hair—no longer interested her.

Joined in mutual admiration they watched each day as though it were a movie arranged for their amusement. The new theme they were now discovering was men. So they met regularly, without even planning it, to walk down the road to Edna Finch's Mellow House, even though it was too cool for ice cream.

Then summer came. A summer limp with the weight of blossomed things. Heavy sunflowers weeping over fences; iris curling and browning at the edges far away from their purple hearts; ears of corn letting their auburn

hair wind down to their stalks. And the boys. The beautiful, beautiful boys who dotted the landscape like jewels, split the air with their shouts in the field, and thickened the river with their shining wet backs. Even their footsteps left a smell of smoke behind.

It was in that summer, the summer of their twelfth year, the summer of the beautiful black boys, that they became skittish, frightened and bold—all at the same time.

In that mercury mood in July, Sula and Nel wandered about the Bottom barefoot looking for mischief. They decided to go down by the river where the boys sometimes swam. Nel waited on the porch of 7 Carpenter's Road while Sula ran into the house to go to the toilet. On the way up the stairs, she passed the kitchen where Hannah sat with two friends, Patsy and Valentine. The two women were fanning themselves and watching Hannah put down some dough, all talking casually about one thing and another, and had gotten around, when Sula passed by, to the problems of child rearing.

"They a pain."

"Yeh. Wish I'd listened to mamma. She told me not to have 'em too soon."

"Any time atall is too soon for me."

"Oh, I don't know. My Rudy minds his daddy. He just wild with me. Be glad when he growed and gone."

Hannah smiled and said, "Shut your mouth. You love the ground he pee on."

"Sure I do. But he still a pain. Can't help loving your own child. No matter what they do."

"Well, Hester grown now and I can't say love is exactly what I feel."

"Sure you do. You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference."

"Guess so. Likin' them is another thing."

"Sure. They different people, you know . . ."

She only heard Hannah's words, and the pronouncement sent her flying up the stairs. In bewilderment, she stood at the window fingering the curtain edge, aware of a sting in her eye. Nel's call floated up and into the window, pulling her away from dark thoughts back into the bright, hot daylight.

They ran most of the way.

Heading toward the wide part of the river where trees grouped themselves in families darkening the earth below. They passed some boys

swimming and clowning in the water, shrouding their words in laughter.

They ran in the sunlight, creating their own breeze, which pressed their dresses into their damp skin. Reaching a kind of square of four leaf-locked trees which promised cooling, they flung themselves into the four-cornered shade to taste their lip sweat and contemplate the wildness that had come upon them so suddenly. They lay in the grass, their foreheads almost touching, their bodies stretched away from each other at a 180-degree angle. Sula's head rested on her arm, an undone braid coiled around her wrist. Nel leaned on her elbows and worried long blades of grass with her fingers. Underneath their dresses flesh tightened and shivered in the high coolness, their small breasts just now beginning to create some pleasant discomfort when they were lying on their stomachs.

Sula lifted her head and joined Nel in the grass play. In concert, without ever meeting each other's eyes, they stroked the blades up and down, up and down. Nel found a thick twig and, with her thumbnail, pulled away its bark until it was stripped to a smooth, creamy innocence. Sula looked about and found one too. When both twigs were undressed Nel moved easily to the next stage and began tearing up rooted grass to make a bare spot of earth. When a generous clearing was made, Sula traced intricate patterns in it with her twig. At first Nel was content to do the same. But soon she grew impatient and poked her twig rhythmically and intensely into the earth, making a small neat hole that grew deeper and wider with the least manipulation of her twig. Sula copied her, and soon each had a hole the size of a cup. Nel began a more strenuous digging and, rising to her knee, was careful to scoop out the dirt as she made her hole deeper. Together they worked until the two holes were one and the same. When the depression was the size of a small dishpan, Nel's twig broke. With a gesture of disgust she threw the pieces into the hole they had made. Sula threw hers in too. Nel saw a bottle cap and tossed it in as well. Each then looked around for more debris to throw into the hole : paper, bits of glass, butts of cigarettes, until all of the small defiling things they could find were collected there. Carefully they replaced the soil and covered the entire grave with uprooted grass.

Neither one had spoken a word.

They stood up, stretched, then gazed out over the swift dull water as an unspeakable restlessness and agitation held them. At the same instant each girl heard footsteps in the grass. A little boy in too big knickers was coming up from the lower bank of the river. He stopped when he saw them and picked his nose.

"Your mamma tole you to stop eatin' snot, Chicken," Nel hollered at him through cupped hands.

"Shut up," he said, still picking.

"Come up here and say that."

"Leave him 'lone, Nel. Come here, Chicken. Lemme show you something."

"Naw."

"You scared we gone take your bugger away?"

"Leave him 'lone, I said. Come on, Chicken. Look. I'll help you climb a tree."

Chicken looked at the tree Sula was pointing to—a big double beech with low branches and lots of bends for sitting.

He moved slowly toward her.

"Come on, Chicken, I'll help you up."

Still picking his nose, his eyes wide, he came to where they were standing. Sula took him by the hand and coaxed him along. When they reached the base of the beech, she lifted him to the first branch, saying, "Go on. Go on. I got you." She followed the boy, steadying him, when he needed it, with her hand and her reassuring voice. When they were as high as they could go, Sula pointed to the far side of the river.

"See? Bet you never saw that far before, did you?"

"Uh uh."

"Now look down there." They both leaned a little and peered through the leaves at Nel standing below, squinting up at them. From their height she looked small and foreshortened.

Chicken Little laughed.

"Y'all better come on down before you break your neck," Nel hollered.

"I ain't never coming down," the boy hollered back.

"Yeah. We better. Come on, Chicken."

"Naw. Lemme go."

"Yeah, Chicken. Come on, now."

Sula pulled his leg gently.

"Lemme go."

"OK, I'm leavin' you." She started on.

"Wait!" he screamed.

Sula stopped and together they slowly worked their way down.

Chicken was still elated. "I was way up there, wasn't I? Wasn't I? I'm a tell my brovver."

Sula and Nel began to mimic him: "I'm a tell my brovver; I'm a tell my brovver."

Sula picked him up by his hands and swung him outward then around and around. His knickers ballooned and his shrieks of frightened joy startled the birds and the fat grasshoppers. When he slipped from her hands and sailed away out over the water they could still hear his bubbly laughter.

The water darkened and closed quickly over the place where Chicken Little sank. The pressure of his hard and tight little fingers was still in Sula's palms as she stood looking at the closed place in the water. They expected him to come back up, laughing. Both girls stared at the water.

Nel spoke first. "Somebody saw." A figure appeared briefly on the opposite shore.

The only house over there was Shadrack's. Sula glanced at Nel. Terror widened her nostrils. Had he seen?

The water was so peaceful now. There was nothing but the baking sun and something newly missing. Sula cupped her face for an instant, then turned and ran up to the little plank bridge that crossed the river to Shadrack's house. There was no path. It was as though neither Shadrack nor anyone else ever came this way.

Her running was swift and determined, but when she was close to the three little steps that led to his porch, fear crawled into her stomach and only the something newly missing back there in the river made it possible for her to walk up the three steps and knock at the door.

No one answered. She started back, but thought again of the peace of the river. Shadrack would be inside, just behind the door ready to pounce on her. Still she could not go back. Ever so gently she pushed the door with the tips of her fingers and heard only the hinges weep. More. And then she was inside. Alone. The neatness, the order startled her, but more surprising was the restfulness. Everything was so tiny, so common, so unthreatening. Perhaps this was not the house of the Shad. The terrible Shad who walked about with his penis out, who peed in front of ladies and girl-children, the only black who could curse white people and get away with it, who drank in the road from the mouth of the bottle, who shouted and shook in the streets. This cottage? This sweet old cottage? With its made-up bed? With its rag rug and wooden table? Sula stood in the middle of the little room and in her wonder forgot what she had come for until a sound at the door made her jump. He was there in the doorway looking at her. She had not heard his coming and now he was looking at her.

More in embarrassment than terror she averted her glance. When she

called up enough courage to look back at him, she saw his hand resting upon the door frame. His fingers, barely touching the wood, were arranged in a graceful arc. Relieved and encouraged (no one with hands like that, no one with fingers that curved around wood so tenderly could kill her), she walked past him out of the door, feeling his gaze turning, turning with her.

At the edge of the porch, gathering the wisps of courage that were fast leaving her, she turned once more to look at him, to ask him . . . had he . . . ?

He was smiling, a great smile, heavy with lust and time to come. He nodded his head as though answering a question, and said, in a pleasant conversational tone, a tone of cooled butter, "Always."

Sula fled down the steps, and shot through the greenness and the baking sun back to Nel and the dark closed place in the water. There she collapsed in tears.

Nel quieted her. "Sh, sh. Don't, don't. You didn't mean it. It ain't your fault. Sh. Sh. Come on, le's go, Sula. Come on, now. Was he there? Did he see? Where's the belt to your dress?"

Sula shook her head while she searched her waist for the belt.

Finally she stood up and allowed Nel to lead her away. "He said, 'Always. Always.'"

"What?"

Sula covered her mouth as they walked down the hill. Always. He had answered a question she had not asked, and its promise licked at her feet.

A bargeman, poling away from the shore, found Chicken late that afternoon stuck in some rocks and weeds, his knickers ballooning about his legs. He would have left him there but noticed that it was a child, not an old black man, as it first appeared, and he prodded the body loose, netted it and hauled it aboard. He shook his head in disgust at the kind of parents who would drown their own children. When, he wondered, will those people ever be anything but animals, fit for nothing but substitutes for mules, only mules didn't kill each other the way niggers did. He dumped Chicken Little into a burlap sack and tossed him next to some egg crates and boxes of wool cloth. Later, sitting down to smoke on an empty lard tin, still bemused by God's curse and the terrible burden his own kind had of elevating Ham's sons,<sup>2</sup> he suddenly became alarmed by the thought that the corpse in this

2. Ham, son of Noah and father of Canaan, was traditionally the ancestor of the black race (cf. Genesis ix: 25-26).

heat would have a terrible odor, which might get into the fabric of his woolen cloth. He dragged the sack away and hooked it over the side, so that the Chicken's body was half in and half out of the water.

Wiping the sweat from his neck, he reported his find to the sheriff at Porter's Landing, who said they didn't have no niggers in their county, but that some lived in those hills 'cross the river, up above Medallion. The bargeman said he couldn't go all the way back there, it was every bit of two miles. The sheriff said whyn't he throw it on back into the water. The bargeman said he never shoulda taken it out in the first place. Finally they got the man who ran the ferry twice a day to agree to take it over in the morning.

That was why Chicken Little was missing for three days and didn't get to the embalmer's until the fourth day, by which time he was unrecognizable to almost everybody who once knew him, and even his mother wasn't deep down sure, except that it just had to be him since nobody could find him. When she saw his clothes lying on the table in the basement of the mortuary, her mouth snapped shut, and when she saw his body her mouth flew wide open again and it was seven hours before she was able to close it and make the first sound.

So the coffin was closed.

The Junior Choir, dressed in white, sang "Nearer My God to Thee" and "Precious Memories," their eyes fastened on the songbooks they did not need, for this was the first time their voices had presided at a real-life event.

Nel and Sula did not touch hands or look at each other during the funeral. There was a space, a separateness, between them. Nel's legs had turned to granite and she expected the sheriff or Reverend Deal's pointing finger at any moment. Although she knew she had "done nothing," she felt convicted and hanged right there in the pew—two rows down from her parents in the children's section.

Sula simply cried. Soundlessly and with no heaving and gasping for breath, she let the tears roll into her mouth and slide down her chin to dot the front of her dress.

As Reverend Deal moved into his sermon, the hands of the women unfolded like pairs of raven's wings and flew high above their hats in the air. They did not hear all of what he said; they heard the one word, or phrase, or inflection that was for them the connection between the event and themselves. For some it was the term "Sweet Jesus." And they saw the Lamb's eye and the truly innocent victim: themselves. They acknowledged the innocent child hiding in the corner of their hearts, holding a sugar-and-butter

sandwich. That one. The one who lodged deep in their fat, thin, old, young skin, and was the one the world had hurt. Or they thought of their son newly killed and remembered his legs in short pants and wondered where the bullet went in. Or they remembered how dirty the room looked when their father left home and wondered if that is the way the slim, young Jew felt, he who for them was both son and lover and in whose downy face they could see the sugar-and-butter sandwiches and feel the oldest and most devastating pain there is: not the pain of childhood, but the remembrance of it.

Then they left their pews. For with some emotions one has to stand. They spoke, for they were full and needed to say. They swayed, for the rivulets of grief or of ecstasy must be rocked. And when they thought of all that life and death locked into that little closed coffin they danced and screamed, not to protest God's will but to acknowledge it and confirm once more their conviction that the only way to avoid the Hand of God is to get in it.

In the colored part of the cemetery, they sank Chicken Little in between his grandfather and an aunt. Butterflies flew in and out of the bunches of field flowers now loosened from the top of the bier and lying in a small heap at the edge of the grave. The head had gone, but there was still no breeze to lift the hair of the willows.

Nel and Sula stood some distance away from the grave, the space that had sat between them in the pews had dissolved. They held hands and knew that only the coffin would lie in the earth; the bubbly laughter and the press of fingers in the palm would stay aboveground forever. At first, as they stood there, their hands were clenched together. They relaxed slowly until during the walk back home their fingers were laced in as gentle a clasp as that of any two young girlfriends trotting up the road on a summer day wondering what happened to butterflies in the winter.

1973

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### **2.4.1. About the Author**

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Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wafford in Lorain, Ohio. After graduating from high school she attended Howard University, earning her B.A. in 1953. Two years later, with an M.A. in English from Cornell University, she began a teaching career and left for the Texas Southern University. She stayed there from 1955 through 1957 and then went back to Howard from

1957 to 1964. During these years in Howard, she met and married Harold Morrison and began to write fiction seriously. Accepting an editorial position with Random House, she totally abandoned teaching as a full time career and was soon a senior editor in New York. In 1984 she was appointed to an endowment chair at the State University of New York at Albany and in 1989 to a similar position in Princeton.

Toni Morrison is a pathbreaker : She states :

The language has to be quite, it has to engage your participation. The reader supplies the emotions. My language has to have holes and spaces to the reader can come into it.

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## 2.4.2 Morrison's Works and Contemporary Milieu

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Toni Morrison's novels – *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Tar Baby* reveal the trauma of the Black experience in America. The discrepancy between 'white' and 'black' perverted social existence at all its levels. The superiority of the 'white' is reinforced by the Christian ideas of fair and foul. We recall the little black boy in Blake's poem who had said "But I am dark as if bereft of light." The pain and the disease of never being accepted spread from the level of unequal social intercourse, into the very core of the beings of the black women Morrison portrays so intensely. June Jordan in her book *Some Changes*, presents an unique vision of black womanhood. She says :

To be black and to be a woman is to be a double outsider, to be twice oppressed, to be more than invisible. That's a triple vision.

Black women in America are triply burdened by racial, sexual and class prejudices, and are forced to occupy a marginalized place in a patriarchal society.

In each of Toni Morrison's novels unfolds a horrific tale, sagas of pain and disillusionment of a class of people ever prone to racial discrimination. The predicament of the Blacks in America is pitiful.

Among her earliest novels *Song of Solomon* (1977) has received the most praise. A complex narrative, rich in myth and symbol, it follows with Faulknerian intensity a northern man's search for the southern sources of his identity, his most significant clue a folk song about a black man who could fly.

*The Bluest Eye* (1970) and *Sula* (1973) are much shorter works, are also mythically and symbolically suggestive, with women as the central characters. Together, these three books explore a world mostly rural and black, centred

in a northern town very like Morrison's hometown—Lorain. Weird situations of life, loneliness and pain are everywhere. Sudden, inexplicable violence explodes in all her novels, but endurance and great love are also present, expressed in remarkable ways.

In *Tar Baby* (1981), Morrison examines a more sophisticated society, bringing blacks and whites together in Paris, on a Caribbean Island and in New York.

In the widely acclaimed *Beloved* (1987), where the locale is set in rural Ohio not long after the Civil War, she tells of a mother an escaped slave. This unfortunate woman is haunted by the teenage ghost of the baby daughter she killed to keep it from the slave-catcher's hands. Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Beloved* is the first novel in an intricately planned trilogy. It is considered to be a catalyst for Morrison's Nobel Prize for Literature; and differs in both theme and attitude from familiar tales of revolt-leading male slaves (versions of which began in 1853 with Frederick Douglass' *The Heroic Slave*. Sethe, the female ex-slave who had killed her child to save it from slavery, remains one of the most vibrant and memorable of characters ever portrayed in American Literature.

*Jazz* (1992) revolves around the love, hate and compulsion of Joe, a cosmetic salesman, his sterile wife, Violet, and young Dorcas, the mistress he adores, idolizes and kills.

In *Paradise* (1998) Morrison's first novel since winning the Nobel Prize and one of her most ambitious, she explores race and gender in a story, set in 1976 in an all-black town in Oklahoma, that begins with the murder of four women, outsiders by nine men. Traditional paradise, Morrison holds, are 'male enclaves'. The book is truly striking, for it "coalesced around the idea of where paradise is, and who belongs in it."

Morrison's critical works are no less striking than her creative ones. Her essays, first presented at Harvard University, are gathered in the book *Playing in the Dark : Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (1992). She edited and wrote the introduction for *Race-ing Justice, En-gendering Power : Essays on Anita-Hill, Clarence Thomas and the Construction of Social Realist* (1992). Along with Claudia Brodsky Lacour, she edited *Birth of a Nationhood : Gaze, Script and Spectacle in the O.J. Simpson Case* (1997). It includes an introduction by Morrison.

Black American Literature is prominent and pervasive today, for it has a full life of its own outside the academy. Toni Morrison is clearly not dependent on an academic audience.

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### 2.4.3 As a Black Woman Writer

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In the works of Black women writers of America are found intense revelations of the condition of black women in their roles as mother wife and daughter. Pre-marital and extra-marital relationships are depicted. It is women in their social roles that has been explored and exposed by the women writers with energy, anger and insight. Chaudia Tate, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor, Maya Angelou Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, Toni Cade Bambara, Margaret Walker, Paule Marshall and Toni Morrison all struggle for expression in an idiom peculiarly their own. They had to surmount the all-pervasive mainstream white social and literary culture as well as the literary influences of male Black writers—Richard Wright, James Balduisn, Alex Holy and LeRoi Jones.

Toni Morrison's fictional art is marked by four distinct phases—anger, self-discovery, haloing of the African culture and a crystallization of the ethnic experience with Julius Lester, a black writer, Morrison agrees that as an Afro-American, she is an amalgam. It is her responsibility to reflect the African side of the hyphens for the other (American) side has been too much reflected. Black writers, associated with the Black Arts Movement asserted that their ethnic origin was a matter of pride, not embarrassment. The Black Arts Movement proposed a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic—proposing a separate symbolism, critique mythology and iconology. This distinctness, in fact, forms the basic format of Morrison's novels. She transcends propaganda, racial pride and prejudice and evolves into a narrative out of great excellence and universal dimensions.

Women's literature is attempting to establish a separate ethos and an unique feminine myth as a counterpoint to the existing myth of the male standards. Together, women writers are moving to attain greater aesthetic perfection and a broader perspective on the world. The tragedy of American racism instilled a terrible insecurity and stilted emotions in the Afro-Americans, something that Morrison is intensely concerned about.

Her aesthetic experience of a black culture springs from her association with black life—its music and rhythm, its mystical and mythical contours. Her novels deal with basic issues of black life within a cultural framework. She says in *Black Women Writers at Work* (edited by Claudia Tate) :

When I view the world perceive it and write about it, its the world of black people. I just know that when I'm trying to develop the various themes I write about, the people who best manifest those themes for me are the black people who I invent.

She deliberately avoids or renounces an imposed narrative form. Her writings stand outside the conventional framework and rise out of a situation that demands a perception of black culture.

As William R. Ferris, Chairman U. S. National Endowment for the Humanities commented—

Multicultural literature is a major source of insight into the rich cultural dynamics of our society, a primary medium for Americans to comprehend our nation's rich cultural heritage, and for international audiences to fathom life and thought in the United States. In the stories they tell from different points of view, U.S. authors of a multitude of backgrounds build bridges of understanding over which all of us can cross into each other's worlds .... Ultimately the power of multicultural literature affects us all, because literature defines the true essence, and soul, of our country.

In the writings of Alice Walker (*The Color Purple*) and Toni Morrison (*The Bluest Eye*) are bondings of certain common features that are horrific and seems to make an empty word of the positive 'multicultural.' Both Celie in *The Color Purple* and Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* were molested by their fathers—sullen men rendered bestial by their addiction to hard drinking. Illiteracy, racialism and poverty seem to crowd in together to create a hellish world where the Black woman, young or old they are perpetually tormented by the twin forces of racism and sexism. The uncertainty of the Black people constantly juxtapose with the aggressiveness, power and influence of the Whites. The social and psychological demeanour laid down by the superior white culture is forcibly thrust on the blacks. As Toni Morrison says :

They were given a cloak of ugliness to wear and they accepted it without question. The master had said, "you are ugly people". "Yes" they had said, "You are right" . And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (*The Bluest Eye*)

Like *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison's creation—*A Genuine Black Book*, most of her novels betray her concern about the cultural devastation and its repercussion on the future of the country. They, like *The Bluest Eye*, often make an effort through the Afro-Americans to exercise what the divided psyche after holds as the evil of blackness.

Throughout her various novels *Beloved*, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* gaps and spaces are intentionally left for the reader's participation.

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## 2.4.4 Analysis : *Sula*

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### (i) Introduction

*Sula* is an account of Eva Peace's matrilinear household. Eva, Hannah Sula—mother, daughter and grand daughter are tied to each other by guilt and a corrupted sense of love, hate and tradition. Morrison exposes this relationship as an idealized and ideological construct. The gulf between mother and daughter is necessitated by patriarchy, so there is 'silence' between them. There is always an 'injury' caused by the mother, that traumatizes the daughter. There is also an echo of the mother's voice, the disciplinarian, as economic helplessness, lack of work and alcohol frustrated a man's capacity of parenthood.

### (ii) Structure

Like *Song of Solomon*, *Sula* concerns itself with issues that are basically African-American within a mythical framework. The structure into which the novel is cast is more cyclical than linear, more repetitive than singular and evidently more oral than written. It is not a 'bildungsroman' that traces the life of the protagonist from birth to death. Here, a dominant culture seeks here to circumscribe black experience through the imposition of very negative values. It is strange that in a 20<sup>th</sup> Century world where the mystic and the imaginative do not belong to living reality, a Black woman writer like Morrison, substitutes a world that thrives on fantasy in reality.

In an interview by Nellie McKay, Morrison had explained : "I think about what black writers do as having a quality of hunger and disturbance that never ends. I want my books to be like that because I want that feeling of something held in reserve and the sense that there is more—that you can't have it all right now."

The search for an identity, a self-assurance establishes a thematic bonding between major black women writers. Paula Marshall's Silla (of *Browngirl, Brownstone*), Alice Walker's Celie (of *Colour Purple*) or Meridian (of *Meridian*) pass on the impulse to define oneself. Their self assurance emanates from within. Morrison, too, never judges her characters. Their horrific parts, bitter experiences and sordid deeds are always put in context to the conditioning that their harsh lives had afforded them.

### **(iii) Character**

The focus of Morrison's study in most of her novels is the repeatedly marginalized girl child. The recurrence of this girl-child points to an organization in Morrison own psyche and examines an archetypally feminine growing up process. In its fulfilled form the process often appears symbolical for the assertion of the child against the effacement of personality demanded by an adult. Stretched further, it becomes a metaphor for the process of maturation of feminine art in a milieu of alien, dominant ideologies.

It is the girl-child, in her moment of psychic and sexual awakening, that Morrison highlights. Sula, like her images in the other intense novels, are even traumatized and abused. She is pubescent, half woman, half child—and she is a little of all these others—Pecola, Claudia, Dorcas Felice, Denver, Nel and Beloved. Rebellious and sensitive, she finds herself burdened with a family, children and responsibilities. As a Black, a female and a child, Sula realises that utter powerlessness is her inheritance. Inbuilt into her is a fear of autonomous action—that for her, things can never go right. Subordination is demanded by her mother, as in other novels of Morrison, and Sula refuses. In her world of matrilinearity, the father is a nebulous presence. This implies a rejection of an apotheosis of marriage, motherhood and domestic servitude. She is rebellious, and demands, like Beloved, nothing less than a resurrection or a willed rebirth. Hers is not a passive resistance to victimization or betrayal, and she, in her own capacity, poses a challenge to mainstream racial and patriarchal values. As Sula transgresses many boundaries, she displays a stubborn acceptance of a lack of relatedness with family or immediate society. Her experience engender endurance, tremendous stamina, courage and an ironical wit in her. Against conventional bounds of normalcy and reality, Sula's hysteria, eccentricity and immorality is a common factor we find in other Morrison heroines—poor, degraded, evil-dogged girls.

Sula and her friend Nel are 'solitary little girls of profound loneliness.' They are excited by a mean determination to explore everything that interested them and 'they had no priorities.' Both are 'unshaped, formless things.' She is insecure in her relationship with her mother for she was a daughter with a distant mother and incomprehensible father. Sula's confidence that her mother loved her was shattered when she overheard her maveric say – "I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference." The shock released Sula from any allegiance towards her mother and makes her a maveric. Like her mother, Sula becomes another vicious adult and apathetic mother, ironically completing a pattern that her grandmother Eva had begun. Sula even watches

interestedly as her mother burns. Sula runs away from home and returns ten years later—an emotionless and amoral adult. She fosters her own terrible estrangement as a condition of her rebirth. “I want to make myself.” An accidental murder she committed the same day she overheard her mother's hurtful comment fosters a corruptive egoism in her. She would survive but “she had no centre, no speak around which to grow.”

Like Pecola or Beloved, Sula manufactures herself from this lack of being. When she talks of the ‘free fall’, the ‘full surrender to the downward flight’ perhaps at the back of her mind she thinks of her victim, chicken little, whom she had carelessly tossed into deep waters to be drowned in a childish, mindless act of annihilation.

#### **(iv) Images**

Images recur with an intensity that drive home certain truths. Two major images recur in *Sula*—*fire* and the *circle*.

Eva, the grandmother had set fire to her own son Plum, as she detested his habit of addiction. Yet when her daughter Hannah is on fire and Sula watches dispassionately, Eva jumps out of a first floor window to save her.

The circle returns with various undertones throughout *Sula*. Sula swings chicken little in circles before letting him fly into the waters to drown, leaving circular ripples in the river—Hannah, before dying, makes circles in her cooking water. Nel laments and her cry is envisaged: “It had no bottom and it had no top, just circles and circles of sorrow.”

It seems that a circular motion draws the outcast black folk into the mainstream of life, making affirmations of their cultural identity. Moral good or evil refuse to be antithetical poles of morality, as the conditions of life draw everything into a vortex, so that the distinct edges are blurred.

#### **(v) Female Bonding**

Morrison's *Sula* resonates with repetitive incidents that acquire symbolic undertones. She had explored male friendship in *Song of Solomon*, and in *Sula* Morrison reveals an intense feminine friendship that does not disintegrate into lesbianism. She values, unlike many of her contemporaries, friendship at the emotional and spiritual plane. Sula is both a foil and countefoil to Nel Wright her childhood companion. As long as Sula stays within the traditions of the black folks, she is tolerated. But when she returns after many years to

lead a life of sexual freedom, people abhor her. She is considered 'evil' and even Nel shuns her. Sula sets up a challenging pattern rather than defensive strategies. She rejects traditional ordering principles as they relate to self and society. Sula is a leitmotif of her grandmother Eva, even towards the end, when she barricades herself in a room upstairs and totally withdraws from society. Eva had found a defense in hate, but Sula challenges reality and is disillusioned, but undefeated. Morrison is critical towards Sula's 'me-ness'. Since her search was perverted, she dies unfulfilled. For Morrison, the wholeness of life lies in sharing and loving, not in isolation or meanness.

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### 2.4.6 □ Questions

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1. Consider Toni Morrison as an iconoclastic black woman novelist.
  2. Comment on the portrayal of women in Morrisons' novel *Sula*.
  3. Does Morrison succeed in depicting women who are deviant from social norms by delving into their complex mental fabric? Give a detailed answers, with examples from the novel *Sula*.
  4. Comment on the bonding of Nel and Sula.
  5. How far does Morrison succeed in giving an intense insight into the world of the child? Is it juxtaposed with the adult world?
  6. Morrison reveals dimensions to a world that few black writers even explored. Do you agree?
  7. Consider Morrison as an innovation blender of occasion and character in her novel *Sula*.
  8. Write a note on the character and tragedy of Chicken Little.
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### 2.4.7 □ Select Bibliography

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## Unit 2.5 □ “Good Country People” : Flannery O’ Connor

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### Structure

2.5.0 Text : "Good Country People"

2.5.1 Introduction

2.5.2 “Good Country People” : An Analysis

2.5.3 Narrative Technique

2.5.4 Women Characters

2.5.5 Conclusion

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### 2.5.0 □ Text : “Good Country People”

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Besides the neutral expression that she wore when she was alone, Mrs. Freeman had two others, forward and reverse, that she used for all her human dealings. Her forward expression was steady and driving like the advance of a heavy truck. Her eyes never swerved to left or right but turned as the story turned as if they followed a yellow line down the center of it. She seldom used the other expression because it was not often necessary for her to retract a statement, but when she did, her face came to a complete stop, there was an almost imperceptible movement of her black eyes, during which they seemed to be receding, and then the observer would see that Mrs. Freeman, though she might stand there as real as several grain sacks thrown on top of each other, was no longer there in spirit. As for getting anything across to her when this was the case, Mrs. Hopewell had given it up. She might talk her head off. Mrs. Freeman could never be brought to admit herself wrong on any point. She would stand there and if she could be brought to say anything, it was something like, " Well, I wouldn't of said it was and I wouldn't of said it wasn't," or letting her range over the top kitchen shelf where there was an assortment of dusty bottles, she might remark, "I see you ain't ate many of them figs you put up last summer."

They carried on their most important business in the kitchen at breakfast. Every morning Mrs. Hopewell got up at seven o'clock and lit her gas heater and loy's. Joy was her daughter, a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg.

Mrs. Hopewell thought of her as a child though she was thirty-two years old and highly educated. Joy would get up while her mother was eating and lumber into the bathroom and slam the door, and before long, Mrs. Freeman would arrive at the back door. Joy would hear her mother call, "Come on in," and then they would talk for a while in low voices that were indistinguishable in the bathroom. By the time Joy came in, they had usually finished the weather report and were on one or the other of Mrs. Freeman's daughters, Glynese or Carramae. Joy called them Glycerin and Caramel. Glynese, a redhead, was eighteen and had many admirers; Carramae, a blonde, was only fifteen but already married and pregnant. She could not keep anything on her stomach. Every morning Mrs. Freeman told Mrs. Hopewell how many times she had vomited since the last report.

Mrs. Hopewell liked to tell people that Glynese and Carramae were two of the finest girls she knew and that Mrs. Freeman was a *lady* and that she was never ashamed to take her anywhere or introduce her to anybody they might meet. Then she would tell how she had happened to hire the Freemans in the first place and how they were a godsend to her and how she had had them four years. The reason for her keeping them so long was that they were not trash. They were good country people. She had telephoned the man whose name they had given as a reference and he had told her that Mr. Freeman was a good farmer but that his wife was the nosiest woman ever to walk the earth. "She's got to be into everything," the man said. "If she don't get there before the dust settles, you can bet she's dead, that's all. She'll want to know all your business. I can stand him real good," he had said, "but me nor my wife neither could have stood that woman one more minute on this place." That had put Mrs. Hopewell off for a few days.

She had hired them in the end because there were no other applicants but she had made up her mind beforehand exactly how she would handle the woman. Since she was the type who had to be into everything, then, Mrs. Hopewell had decided, she would not only let her be into everything, she would see to it that she was into everything—she would give her the responsibility of everything, she would put her in charge. Mrs. Hopewell had no bad qualities of her own but she was able to use other people's in such a constructive way that she never felt the lack. She had hired the Freemans and she had kept them four years.

Nothing is perfect. This was one of Mrs. Hopewell's favorite sayings. Another was : that is life ! And still another, the most important, was : well, other people have their opinions too. She would make these statements,

usually at the table, in a tone of gentle insistence as if no one held them but her, and the large hulking Joy, whose constant outrage had obliterated every expression from her face, would stare just a little to the side of her, her eyes icy blue, with the look of someone who has achieved blindness by an act of will and means to keep it.

When Mrs. Hopewell said to Mrs. Freeman that life was like that, Mrs. Freeman would say, "I always said so myself." Nothing had been arrived at by anyone that had not first been arrived at by her. She was quicker than Mr. Freeman. When Mrs. Hopewell said to her after they had been on the place a while, "You know, you're the wheel behind the wheel," and winked, Mrs. Freeman had said, "I know it, I've always been quick. It's some that are quicker than others."

"Everybody is different," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Yes, most people is," Mrs. Freeman said.

"It takes all kinds to make the world."

"I always said it did myself."

The girl was used to this kind of dialogue for breakfast and more of it for dinner; sometimes they had it for supper too. When they had no guest they ate in the kitchen because that was easier. Mrs. Freeman always managed to arrive at some point during the meal and to watch them finish it. She would stand in the doorway if it were summer but in the winter she would stand with one elbow on top of the refrigerator and look down on them, or she would stand by the gas heater, lifting the back of her skirt slightly. Occasionally she would stand against the wall and roll her head from side to side. At no time was she in any hurry to leave. All this was very trying on Mrs. Hopewell but she was a woman of great patience. She realized that nothing is perfect and that in the Freemans she had good country people and that if, in this day and age, you get good country people, you had better hang onto them.

She had had plenty of experience with trash. Before the Freemans she had averaged one tenant family a year. The wives of these farmers were not the kind you would want to be around you for very long. Mrs. Hopewell, who had divorced her husband long ago, needed someone to walk over the fields with her; and when joy had to be impressed for these services, her remarks were usually so ugly and her face so glum that Mrs. Hopewell would say, "If you can't come pleasantly, I don't want you at all," to which the girl, standing square and rigid-shouldered with her neck thrust slightly forward, would reply, "If you want me, here I am—LIKE I AM."

Mrs. Hopewell excused this attitude because of the leg (which had been shot off in a hunting accident when Joy was ten). It was hard for Mrs. Hopewell to realize that her child was thirty-two now and that for more than twenty years she had had only one leg. She thought of her still as a child because it tore her heart to think instead of the poor stout girl in her thirties who had never danced a step or had any *normal* good times. Her name was really Joy but as soon as she was twenty-one and away from home, she had had it legally changed. Mrs. Hopewell was certain that she had thought and thought until she had hit upon the ugliest name in any language. Then she had gone and had the beautiful name, Joy, changed without telling her mother until after she had done it. Her legal name was Hulga.

When Mrs. Hopewell thought the name, Hulga, she thought of the broad blank hull of a battleship. She would not use it. She continued to call her Joy to which the girl responded but in a purely mechanical way.

Hulga had learned to tolerate Mrs. Freeman who saved her from taking walks with her mother. Even Glynese and Carramae were useful when they occupied attention that might otherwise have been directed at her. At first she had thought she could not stand Mrs. Freeman for she had found that it was not possible to be rude to her. Mrs. Freeman would take on strange resentments and for days together she would be sullen but the source of her displeasure was always obscure; a direct attack, a positive leer, blatant ugliness to her face—these never touched her. And without warning one day, she began calling her Hulga.

She did not call her that in front of Mrs. Hopewell who would have been incensed but when she and the girl happened to be out of the house together, she would say something and add the name Hulga to the end of it, and the big spectacled Joy-Hulga would scowl and redden as if her privacy had been intruded upon. She considered the name her personal affair. She had arrived at it first purely on the basis of its ugly sound and then the full genius of its fitness had struck her. She had a vision of the name working like the ugly sweating Vulcan<sup>1</sup> who stayed in the furnace and to whom, presumably, the goddess had to come when called. She saw it as the name of her highest creative act. One of her major triumphs was that her mother had not been able to turn her dust into Joy, but the greater one was that she had been able to turn it herself into Hulga. However, Mrs. Freeman's relish for using the name only irritated her. It was as if Mrs. Freeman's beady steel-

1. In Roman mythology, the lame blacksmith to the gods and husband of Venus, goddess of love.

pointed eyes had penetrated far enough behind her face to reach some secret fact. Something about her seemed to fascinate Mrs. Freeman and then one day Hulga realized that it was the artificial leg. Mrs. Freeman had a special fondness for the details of secret infections, hidden deformities, assaults upon children. Of diseases, she preferred the lingering or incurable. Hulga had heard Mrs. Hopewell give her the details of the hunting accident, how the leg had been literally blasted off, how she had never lost consciousness. Mrs. Freeman could listen to it any time as if it had happened an hour ago.

When Hulga stumped into the kitchen in the morning (she could walk without making the awful noise but she made it—Mrs. Hopewell was certain—because it was ugly-sounding), she glanced at them and did not speak. Mrs. Hopewell would be in her red kimono with her hair tied around her head in rags. She would be sitting at the table, finishing her breakfast and Mrs. Freeman would be hanging by her elbow outward from the refrigerator, looking down at the table. Hulga always put her eggs on the stove to boil and then stood over them with her arms folded, and Mrs. Hopewell would look at her—a kind of indirect gaze divided between her and Mrs. Freeman—and would think that if she would only keep herself up a little, she wouldn't be so bad looking. There was nothing wrong with her face that a pleasant expression wouldn't help. Mrs. hopewell said people who looked on the bright side of things would be beautiful even if they were not.

Whenever she looked at Joy this way, she could not help but feel that it would have been better if the child had not taken the Ph.D. It had certainly not brought her out any and now that she had it, there was no more excuse for her to go school again. Mrs. Hopewell thought it was nice for girls to go to school to have a good time but Joy had “gone through.” Anyhow, she would not have been strong enough to go again. The doctors had told Mrs. Hopewell that with the best of care, Joy might see forty-five. She had a weak heart. Joy had made it plain that if it had not been for this condition, she would be far from these red hills and good country people. She would be in a university lecturing to people who knew what she was talking about. And Mrs. Hopewell could very well picture her there, looking like a scarecrow and lecturing to more of the same. Here she went about all day in a six-year-old skirt and a yellow sweat shirt with a faded cowboy on a horse embossed on it. She thought this was funny; Mrs. Hopewell thought it was idiotic and showed simply that she was still a child. She was brilliant but she didn't have a grain of sense. It seemed to Mrs. Hopewell that every year she grew less like other people and more like herself—bloated, rude and squint-eyed.

And she said such strange things! To her own mother she had said—without warning, without excuse, standing up in the middle of a meal with her face purple and her mouth half full—“Woman! do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are *not*? God!” she had cried sinking down again and staring at her plate, “Malebranche was right: we are not our own light. We are not our own light!” Mrs. Hopewell had no idea to this day what brought that on. She had only made the remark, hoping Joy would take it in, that a smile never hurt anyone.

The girl had taken the Ph.D. in philosophy and this left Mrs. Hopewell at a complete loss. You could say, “My daughter is a nurse,” or “My daughter is a school teacher,” or even, “My daughter is a chemical engineer.” You could not say, “My daughter is a philosopher.” That was something, that had ended with the Greeks and Romans. All day Joy sat on her neck in a deep chair, reading. Sometimes she went for walks but she didn’t like dogs or cats or birds or flowers or nature or nice young men. She looked at nice young men as if she could smell their stupidity.

One day Mrs. Hopewell had picked up one of the books the girl had just-put down and opening it at random, she read, “Science, on the other hand, has to assert its soberness and seriousness afresh and declare that it is concerned solely with what-is. Nothing—how can it be for science anything but a horror and a phantasm? If science is right, then one thing stands firm: science wishes to know nothing of nothing. Such is after all the strictly scientific approach to Nothing. We know it by wishing to know nothing of Nothing.” These words had been underlined with a blue pencil and they worked on Mrs. Hopewell like some evil incantation in gibberish. She shut the book quickly and went out of the room as if she were having a chill.

This morning when the girl came in, Mrs. Freeman was on Carramae. “She thrown up four times after supper,” she said, “and was up twict in the night after three o’clock. Yesterday she didn’t do nothing but ramble in the bureau drawer. All she did. Stand up there and see what she could run up on.”

“She’s got to eat,” Mrs. Hopewell muttered, sipping her coffee, while she watched Joy’s back at the stove. She was wondering what the child had said to the Bible salesman. She could not imagine what kind of a conversation she could possibly have had with him.

He was a tall gaunt hatless youth who had called yesterday to sell them a Bible. He had appeared at the door, carrying a large black suitcase that weighted him so heavily on one side that he had to brace himself against the

door facing. He seemed on the point of collapse but he said in a cheerful voice, "Good morning, Mrs. Cedars!" and set the suitcase down on the mat. He was not a bad-looking young man though he had on a bright blue suit and yellow socks that were not pulled up far enough. He had prominent face bones and a streak of sticky-looking brown hair falling across his forehead.

"I'm Mrs. Hopewell," she said.

"Oh!" he said, pretending to look puzzled but with his eyes sparkling, "I saw it said 'The Cedars,' on the mailbox so I thought you was Mrs. Cedars!" and he burst out in a pleasant laugh. He picked up the satchel and under cover of a pant, he fell forward into her hall. It was rather as if the suitcase had moved first, jerking him after it. "Mrs. Hopewell!" he said and grabbed her hand. "I hope you are well!" and he laughed again and then all at once his face sobered completely. He paused and gave her a straight earnest look and said, "Lady, I've come to speak of serious things."

"Well, come in," she muttered, none too pleased because her dinner was almost ready. He came into the parlor and sat down on the edge of a straight chair and put the suitcase between his feet and glanced around the room as if he were sizing her up by it. Her silver gleamed on the two sideboards; she decided he had never been in a room as elegant as this.

"Mrs. Hopewell," he began, using her name in a way that sounded almost intimate, "I know you believe in Chrastian service."

"Well yes," she murmured.

"I know," he said and paused, looking very wise with his head cocked on one side, "that you're a good woman. Friends have told me."

Mrs. Hopewell never liked to be taken for a fool. "What are you selling?" she asked.

"Bibles," the young man said and his eye raced around the room before he added, "I see you have no family Bible in your parlor, I see that is the one lack you got!"

Mrs. Hopewell could not say, "My daughter is an atheist and won't let me keep the Bible in the parlor." She said, stiffening slightly, "I keep my Bible by my bedside." This was not the truth. It was in the attic somewhere.

"Lady," he said, "the word of God ought to be in the parlor."

"Well, I think that's a matter of taste," she began. "I think . . ."

"Lady," he said, "for a Chrastian, the word of God ought to be in every room in the house besides in his heart. I know you're a Chrastian because I can see it in every line of your face."

She stood up and said, "Well, young man, I don't want to buy a Bible and I smell my dinner burning."

He didn't get up. He began to twist his hands and looking down at them, he said softly, "Well lady, I'll tell you the truth—not many people want to buy one nowadays and besides, I know I'm real simple. I don't know how to say a thing but to say it. I'm just a country boy." He glanced up into her unfriendly face. "People like you don't like to fool with country people like me!"

"Why!" she cried, "good country people are the salt of the earth! Besides, we all have different ways of doing, it takes all kinds to make the world go 'round. That's life!"

"You said a mouthful," he said.

"Why, I think there aren't enough good country people in the world!" she said, stirred. "I think that's what's wrong with it!"

His face had brightened. "I didn't introduce myself," he said. "I'm Manley pointer from out in the country around Willohobie, not even from a place, just from near a place."

"You wait a minute," she said. "I have to see about my dinner." She went out to the kitchen and found Joy standing near the door where she had been listening.

"Get rid of the salt of the earth," she said, "and let's eat."

Mrs. Hopewell gave her a pained look and turned the heat down under the vegetables. "I can't be rude to anybody," she murmured and went back into the parlor.

He had opened the suitcase and was sitting with a Bible on each knee.

"You might as well put those up," she told him. "I don't want one."

"I appreciate your honesty," he said. "You don't see any more real honest people unless you go way out in the country."

"I know," she said, "real genuine folks!" Through the crack in the door she heard a groan.

"I guess a lot of boys come telling you they're working their way through college," he said, "but I'm not going to tell you that. Somehow," he said, "I don't want to go to college. I want to devote my life to Christian service. See," he said, lowering his voice, "I got this heart condition. I may not live long. When you know it's something wrong with you and you may not live long, well then, lady . . ." He paused, with his mouth open, and stared at her.

He and Joy had the same condition! She knew that her eyes were filling with tears but she collected herself quickly and murmured, "Won't you stay for dinner? We'd love to have you!" and was sorry the instant she heard herself say it.

“Yes mam,” he said in an abashed voice, “I would shere love to do that!”

Joy had given him one look on being introduced to him and then throughout the meal had not glanced at him again. He had addressed several remarks to her, which she had pretended not to hear. Mrs. Hopewell could not understand deliberate rudeness, although she lived with it, and she felt she had always to overflow with hospitality to make up for Joy’s lack of courtesy. She urged him to talk about himself and he did. He said he was the seventh child of twelve and that his father had been crushed under a tree when he himself was eight year old. He had been crushed very badly, in fact, almost cut in two and was practically not recognizable. His mother had got along the best she could by hard working and she had always seen that her children went to Sunday School and that they read the Bible every evening. He was now nineteen year old and he had been selling Bibles for four months. In that time he had sold seventy-seven Bibles and had the promise of two more sales. He wanted to become a missionary because he thought that was the way you could do most for people. “He who loseth his life shall find it,” he said simply and he was so sincere, so genuine and earnest that Mrs. Hopewell would not for the world have smiled. He prevented his peas from sliding onto the table by blocking them with a piece of bread which he later cleaned his plate with. She could see Joy observing sidewise how he handled his knife and fork and she saw too that every few minutes, the boy would dart a keen appraising glance at the girl as if he were trying to attract her attention.

After dinner Joy cleared the dishes off the table and disappeared and Mrs. Hopewell was left to talk with him. He told her again about his childhood and his father’s accident and about various things that had happened to him. Every five minutes or so she would stifle a yawn. He sat for two hours until finally she told him she must go because she had an appointment in town. He packed his Bibles and thanked her and prepared to leave, but in the doorway he stopped and wrung her hand and said that not on any of his trips had he met a lady as nice as her and he asked if he could come again. She had said she would always be happy to see him.

Joy had been standing in the road, apparently looking at something in the distance, when he came down the steps toward her, bent to the side with his heavy valise. He stopped where she was standing and confronted her directly. Mrs. Hopewell could not hear what he said but she trembled to think what Joy would say to him. She could see that after a minute Joy said something and that then the boy began to speak again, making an excited

gesture with his free hand. After a minute Joy said something else at which the boy began to speak once more. Then to her amazement, Mrs. Hopewell saw the two of them walk off together, toward the gate. Joy had walked all the way to the gate with him and Mrs. Hopewell could not imagine what they had said to each other, and she had not yet dared to ask.

Mrs. Freeman was insisting upon her attention. She had moved from the refrigerator to the heater so that Mrs. Hopewell had to turn and face her in order to seem to be listening. "Glynese gone out with Harvey Hill again last night," she said. "She had this sty."

"Hill," Mrs. Hopewell said absently, "is that the one who works in the garage?"

"Nome, he's the one that goes to chiropracter school," Mrs. Freeman said. "She had this sty. Been had it two days. So she says when he brought her in the other night he says, 'Lemme get rid of that sty for you,' and she says, 'How?' and he says, 'You just lay yourself down across the seat of that car and I'll show you.' So she done it and he popped her neck. Kept on a-popping it several times until she made him quit. This morning," Mrs. Freeman said, "she ain't got no sty. She ain't got no traces of a sty."

"I never heard of that before," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"He ask her to marry him before the Ordinary," Mrs. Freeman went on, "and she told him she wasn't going to be married in no *office*."

"Well, Glynese is a fine girl," Mrs. Hopewell said. "Glynese and Carramae are both fine girls."

"Carramae said when her and Lyman was married Lyman said it sure felt sacred to him. She said he said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars for being married by a preacher."

"How much would he take?" the girl asked from the stove.

"He said he wouldn't take five hundred dollars," Mrs. Freeman repeated.

"Well we all have work to do," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"Lyman said it just felt more sacred to him," Mrs. Freeman said. "The doctor wants Carramae to eat prunes. Says instead of medicine. Says them cramps is coming from pressure. You know where I think it is?"

"She'll be better in a few weeks," Mrs. Hopewell said.

"In the tube," Mrs. Freeman said. "Else she wouldn't be as sick as she is."

Hulga had cracked her two eggs into a saucer and was bringing them to the table along with a cup of coffee that she had filled too full. She sat down carefully and began to eat, meaning to keep Mrs. Freeman there by

questions if for any reason she showed an inclination to leave. She could perceive her mother's eye on her. The first round-about question would be about the Bible salesman and she did not wish to bring it on. "How did he pop her neck?" She asked.

Mrs. Freeman went into a description of how he had popped her neck. She said he owned a '55 Mercury but that Glynese said she would rather marry a man with only a '36 Plymouth who would be married by a preacher. The girl asked what if he had a '32 Plymouth and Mrs. Freeman said what Glynese had said was a '36 Plymouth.

Mrs. Hopewell said there were not many girls with Glynese's common sense. She said what she admired in those girls was their common sense. She said that reminded her that they had a nice visitor yesterday, a young man selling Bibles. "Lord," she said, "he bored me to death but he was so sincere and genuine I couldn't be rude to him. He was just good country people, you know," she said, "—just the salt of the earth."

"I seen him walk up," Mrs. Freeman said, "and then later—I seen him walk off," and Hulga could feel the slight shift in her voice, the slight insinuation, that he had not walked off alone, had he? Her face remained expressionless but the color rose into her neck and she seemed to swallow it down with the next spoonful of egg. Mrs. Freeman was looking at her as if they had a secret together.

"Well, it takes all kinds of people to make the world go 'round," Mrs. Hopewell said. "It's very good we aren't all alike."

"Some people are more alike than other," Mrs. Freeman said.

Hulga got up and stumped, with about twice the noise that was necessary, into her room and locked the door. She was to meet the Bible salesman at ten o'clock at the gate. She had thought about it half the night. She had started thinking of it as a great joke and then she had begun to see profound implications in it. She had lain in bed imagining dialogues for them that were insane on the surface but that reached below to depths that no Bible salesman would be aware of. Their conversation yesterday had been of this kind.

He had stopped in front of her and had simply stood there. His face was bony and sweaty and bright, with a little pointed nose in the center of it, and his look was different from what it had been at the dinner table. He was gazing at her with open curiosity, with fascination, like a child watching a new fantastic animal at the zoo, and he was breathing as if he had run a great distance to reach her. His gaze seemed somehow familiar but she

could not think where she had been regarded with it before. For almost a minute he didn't say anything. Then on what seemed an insuck of breath, he whispered, "You ever ate a chicken that was two days old?"

The girl looked at him stonily. He might have just put this question up for consideration at the meeting of a philosophical association. "Yes," she presently replied as if she had considered it from all angles.

"It must have been mighty small!" he said triumphantly and shook all over with little nervous giggles, getting very red in the face, and subsiding finally into his gaze of complete admiration, while the girl's expression remained exactly the same.

"How old are you?" he asked softly.

She waited some time before she answered. Then in a flat voice she said, "Seventeen."

His smiles came in succession like waves breaking on the surface of a little lake. "I see you got a wooden leg," he said. "I think you're real brave. I think you're real sweet."

The girl stood blank and solid and silent.

"Walk to the gate with me," he said. "You're a brave sweet little thing and I liked you the minute I seen you walk in the door."

Hulga began to move forward.

"What's your name?" he asked, smiling down on the top of her head.

"Hulga," she said.

"Hulga," he murmured, "Hulga. Hulga. I never heard of anybody name Hulga before. You're shy, aren't you, Hulga?" he asked.

She nodded, watching his large red hand on the handle of the giant valise.

"I like girls that wear glasses," he said. "I think a lot. I'm not like these people that a serious thought don't ever enter their heads. It's because I may die."

"I may die too," she said suddenly and looked up at him. His eyes were very small and brown, glittering feverishly.

"Listen," he said, "don't you think some people was meant to meet on account of what all they got in common and all? Like they both think serious thoughts and all?" He shifted the valise to his other hand so that the hand nearest her was free. He caught hold of her elbow and shook it a little. "I don't work on Saturday," he said. "I like to walk in the woods and see what Mother Nature is wearing. O'er the hills and far away. Pic-nics and things. Couldn't we go on a picnic tomorrow? Say yes, Hulga," he said and gave her

a dying look as if he felt his insides about to drop out of him. He had even seemed to sway slightly toward her.

During the night she had imagined that she seduced him. She imagined that the two of them walked on the place until they came to the storage barn beyond the two back fields and there, she imagined, that things came to such a pass that she very easily seduced him and that then, of course, she had to reckon with his remorse. True genius can get an idea across even to an inferior mind. She imagined that she took his remorse in hand and changed it into a deeper understanding of life. She took all his shame away and turned it into something useful.

She set off for the gate at exactly ten o'clock, escaping without drawing Mrs. Hopewell's attention. She didn't take anything to eat, forgetting that food is usually taken on a picnic. She wore a pair of slacks and a dirty white shirt, and as an after-thought, she had put some Vapex on the collar of it since she did not own any perfume. When she reached the gate no one was there.

She looked up and down the empty highway and had the furious feeling that she had been tricked, that he had only meant to make her walk to the gate after the idea of him. Then suddenly he stood up, very tall, from behind a bush on the opposite embankment. Smiling, he lifted his hat which was new and wide-brimmed. He had not worn it yesterday and she wondered if he had bought it for the occasion. It was toast-colored with a red and white band around it and was slightly too large for him. He stepped from behind the bush still carrying the black valise. He had on the same suit and the same yellow socks sucked down in his shoes from walking. He crossed the highway and said, "I knew you'd come!"

The girl wondered acidly how he had known this. She pointed to the valise and asked, "Why did you bring your Bibles?"

He took her elbow, smiling down on her as if he could not stop. "You can never tell when you'll need the word of God, Hulga," he said. She had a moment in which she doubted that this was actually happening and then they began to climb the embankment. They went down into the pasture toward the woods. The boy walked lightly by her side, bouncing on his toes. The valise did not seem to be heavy today; he even swung it. They crossed half the pasture without saying anything and then, putting his hand easily on the small of her back, he asked softly, "Where does your wooden leg join on?"

She turned an ugly red and glared at him and for an instant the boy

looked abashed. "I didn't mean you no harm," he said. "I only meant you're so brave and all. I guess God takes care of you."

"No," she said, looking forward and walking fast, "I don't even believe in God."

At this he stopped and whistled. "No!" he exclaimed as if he were too astonished to say anything else.

She walked on and in a second he was bouncing at her side, fanning with his hat. "That's very unusual for a girl," he remarked, watching her out of the corner of his eye. When they reached the edge of the wood, he put his hand on her back again and drew her against him without a word and kissed her heavily.

The kiss, which had more pressure than feeling behind it, produced that extra surge of adrenalin in the girl that enables one to carry a packed trunk out of a burning house, but in her, the power went at once to the brain. Even before he released her, her mind, clear and detached and ironic anyway, was regarding him from a great distance, with amusement but with pity. She had never been kissed before and she was pleased to discover that it was an unexceptional experience and all a matter of the mind's control. Some people might enjoy drain water if they were told it was vodka. When the boy, looking expectant but uncertain, pushed her gently away, she turned and walked on, saying nothing as if such business, for her, were common enough.

He came along panting at her side, trying to help her when he saw a root that she might trip over. He caught and held back the long swaying blades of thorn vine until she had passed beyond them. She led the way and he came breathing heavily behind her. Then they came out on a sunlit hillside, sloping softly into another one a little smaller. Beyond, they could see the rusted top of the old barn where the extra hay was stored.

The hill was sprinkled with small pink weeds. "Then you ain't saved?" he asked suddenly, stopping.

The girl smiled. It was the first time she had smiled at him at all. "In my economy," she said, "I'm saved and you are damned but I told you I didn't believe in God."

Nothing seemed to destroy the boy's look of admiration. He gazed at her now as if the fantastic animal at the zoo had put its paw through the bars and given him a loving poke. She thought he looked as if he wanted to kiss her again and she walked on before he had the chance.

"Ain't there somewheres we can sit down sometime?" he murmured, his voice softening toward the end of the sentence.

"In that barn," she said.

They made for it rapidly as if it might slide away like a train. It was a large two-story barn, cool and dark inside. The boy pointed up the ladder that led into the loft and said, "It's too bad we can't go up there."

"Why can't we?" she asked.

"Yer leg," he said reverently.

The girl gave him a contemptuous look and putting both hands on the ladder, she climbed it while he stood below, apparently awestruck. She pulled herself expertly through the opening and then looked down at him and said, "Well, come on if you're coming," and he began to climb the ladder, awkwardly bringing the suitcase with him.

"We won't need the Bible," she observed.

"You never can tell," he said, panting. After he had got into the loft, he was a few seconds catching his breath. She had sat down in a pile of straw. A wide sheath of sunlight, filled with dust particles, slanted over her. She lay back against a bale, her face turned away, looking out the front opening of the barn where hay was thrown from a wagon into the loft. The two pink-speckled hillsides lay back against a dark ridge of woods. The sky was cloudless and cold blue. The boy dropped down by her side and put one arm under her and the other over her and began methodically kissing her face, making little noises like a fish. He did not remove his hat but it was pushed far enough back not to interfere. When her glasses got in his way, he took them off of her and slipped them into his pocket.

The girl at first did not return any of the kisses but presently she began to and after she had put several on his cheek, she reached his lips and remained there, kissing him again and again as if she were trying to draw all the breath out of him. His breath was clear and sweet like a child's and the kisses were sticky like a child's. He mumbled about loving her and about knowing when he first seen her that he loved her, but the mumbling was like the sleepy fretting of a child being put to sleep by his mother. Her mind, throughout this, never stopped or lost itself for a second to her feelings. "You ain't said you loved me none," he whispered finally, pulling back from her. "You got to say that."

She looked away from him off into the hollow sky and then down at a black ridge and then down farther into what appeared to be two green swelling lakes. She didn't realize he had taken her glasses but this landscape could not seem exceptional to her for she seldom paid any close attention to her surroundings.

"You got to say it," he repeated. "You got to say you love me."

She was always careful how she committed herself. "In a sense," she began, "if you use the word loosely, you might say that. But it's not a word I use. I don't have illusions. I'm one of those people who see *through* to nothing."

The boy was frowning. "You got to say it. I said it and you got to say it," he said.

The girl looked at him almost tenderly. "You poor baby," she murmured. "It's just as well you don't understand," and she pulled him by the neck, facedown, against her. "We are all damned," she said, "but some of us have taken off our blindfolds and see that there's nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation."

The boy's astonished eyes looked blankly through the ends of her hair. "Okay," he almost whined, "but do you love me or don'tcher?"

"Yes," she said and added, "in a sense. But I must tell you something. There mustn't be anything dishonest between us." She lifted his head and looked him in the eye. "I am thirty years old," she said. "I have a number of degrees."

The boy's look was irritated but dogged. "I don't care," he said. "I don't care a thing about what all you done. I just want to know if you love me or don'tcher?" and he caught her to him and wildly planted her face with kisses until she said, "Yes, yes."

"Okay then," he said, letting her go. "Prove it."

She smiled, looking dreamily out on the shifty landscape. She had seduced him without even making up her mind to try. "How?" she asked, feeling that he should be delayed a little.

He leaned over and put his lips to her ear. "Show me where your wooden leg joins on," he whispered.

The girl uttered a sharp little cry and her face instantly drained of color. The obscenity of the suggestion was not what shocked her. As a child she had sometimes been subject to feelings of shame but education had removed the last traces of that as a good surgeon scrapes for cancer; she would no more have felt it over what he was asking than she would have believed in his Bible. But she was as sensitive about the artificial leg as a peacock about his tail. No one ever touched it but her. She took care of it as someone else would his soul, in private and almost with her own eyes turned away. "No," she said.

"I known it," he muttered, sitting up. "You're just playing me for a sucker."

"Oh no no!" she cried. "It joins on at the knee. Only at the knee. Why do you want to see it?"

The boy gave her a long penetrating look. "Because," he said, "it's what makes you different. You ain't like anybody else."

She sat staring at him. There was nothing about her face or her round freezing-blue eyes to indicate that this had moved her; but she felt as if her heart had stopped and left her mind to pump her blood. She decided that for the first time in her life she was face to face with real innocence. This boy, with an instinct that came from beyond wisdom, had touched the truth about her. When after a minute, she said in a hoarse high voice, "All right," it was like surrendering to him completely. It was like losing her own life and finding it again, miraculously, in his.

Very gently he began to roll the slack leg up. The artificial limb, in a white sock and brown flat shoe, was bound in a heavy material like canvas and ended in an ugly jointure where it was attached to the stump. The boy's face and his voice were entirely reverent as he uncovered it and said, "Now show me how to take it off and on."

She took it off for him and put it back on again and then he took it off himself, handling it as tenderly as if it were a real one. "See!" he said with a delighted child's face. "Now I can do it myself!"

"Put it back on," she said. She was thinking that she would run away with him and that every night he would take the leg off and every morning put it back on again. "Put it back on," she said.

"Not yet," he murmured, setting it on its foot out of her reach. "Leave it off for a while. You got me instead."

She gave a little cry of alarm but he pushed her down and began to kiss her again. Without the leg she felt entirely dependent on him. Her brain seemed to have stopped thinking altogether and to be about some other function that it was not very good at. Different expressions raced back and forth over her face. Every now and then the boy, his eyes like two steel spikes, would glance behind him where the leg stood. Finally she pushed him off and said, "Put it back on me now."

"Wait," he said. He leaned the other way and pulled the valise toward him and opened it. It had a pale blue spotted lining and there were only two Bibles in it. He took one of these out and opened the cover of it. It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it. He laid these out in front of her one at a time in an evenly-spaced row, like one presenting offerings at the shrine of a goddess. He put the blue box in her hand. THIS PROPERTY TO BE USED ONLY FOR

THE PREVENTION OF DISEASE, she read, and dropped it. The boy was unscrewing the top of the flask. He stopped and pointed, with a smile, to the deck of cards. It was not an ordinary deck but one with an obscene picture on the back of each card. "Take a swig," he said, offering her the bottle first. He held it in front of her, but like one mesmerized, she did not move.

Her voice when she spoke had an almost pleading sound. "Aren't you," she murmured, "aren't you just good country people?"

The boy cocked his head. He looked as if he were just beginning to understand that she might be trying to insult him. "Yeah," he said, curling his lip slightly, "but it ain't held me back none. I'm as good as you any day in the week."

"Give me my leg," she said.

He pushed it farther away with his foot. "Come on now, let's begin to have us a good time," he said coaxingly. "We ain't got to know one another good yet."

"Give me my leg!" she screamed and tried to lunge for it but he pushed her down easily.

"What's the matter with you all of a sudden?" he asked, frowning as he screwed the top on the flask and put it quickly back inside the Bible. "You just a while ago said you didn't believe in nothing. I thought you was some girl!"

Her face was almost purple. "You're a Christian!" she hissed. "You're a fine Christian! You're just like them all—say one thing and do another. You're a perfect Christian, you're . . ."

The boy's mouth was set angrily. "I hope you don't think," he said in a lofty indignant tone, "that I believe in that crap! I may sell Bibles but I know which end is up and I wasn't born yesterday and I know where I'm going!"

"Give me my leg!" she screeched. He jumped up so quickly that she barely saw him sweep the cards and the blue box back into the Bible and throw the Bible into the valise. She saw him grab the leg and then she saw it for an instant slanted forlornly across the inside of the suitcase with a Bible at either side of its opposite ends. He slammed the lid shut and snatched up the valise and swung it down the hole and then stepped through himself.

When all of him had passed but his head, he turned and regarded her with a look that no longer had any admiration in it. "I've gotten a lot of interesting things," he said. "One time I got a woman's glass eye this way. And you needn't to think you'll catch me because Pointer ain't really my

name. I use a different name at every house I call at and don't stay nowhere long. And I'll tell you another thing, Hulga," he said, using the name as if he didn't think much of it, "you ain't so smart. I been believing in nothing ever since I was born!" and then the toast-colored hat disappeared down the hole and the girl was left, sitting on the straw in the dusty sunlight. When she turned her churning face toward the opening, she saw his blue figure struggling successfully over the green speckled lake.

Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman, who were in the back pasture, digging up onions, saw him emerge a little later from the woods and head across the meadow toward the highway. "Why, that looks like that nice dull young man that tried to sell me a Bible yesterday," Mrs. Hopewell said, squinting. "He must have been selling them to the Negroes back in there. He was so simple," she said, "but I guess the world would be better off if we were all that simple."

Mrs. Freeman's gaze drove forward and just touched him before he disappeared under the hill. Then she returned her attention to the evil-smelling onion shoot she was lifting from the ground. "Some can't be that simple," she said. "I know I never could."

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## 2.5.1 □ Introduction

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Flannery O'Connor is often uncomfortably put into the category of a woman writer, yet such is her perception, gender bias has very little to do with her art. There is a strength and a leaning towards the grotesque that is her hallmark. Like many other women writers of her generation, whose works have great diversity, she refuses to be strait-jacketed. Toni Morrison's concern for the terrible emotional forces driven into the coloured people by the tragedy of American racialism and Alix Shulman's sensitive forays into the dominion of male writers — the novel of ideas the cases in point, show that no water-tight compartments are valid for women writers today. They have their own uniqueness, and a wide-ranging sensibility that opens all doors of possibilities to them. Sulamith Firestone in her amazing book, *The Dialect of sex : The Case for Feninist Revolution*, points out, how earlier, women were banished from the male literary tradition.

Culture is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes.

Flannery O'Connor's very sensitive portrayal of sin and suffering does not

stand against her fondness in the portrayal of mothers and daughters. O'Connor's creative energies were often stifled by the terrible degenerative diseases that crippled her through much of her career. It is significant that many of her characters are physically handicapped, or afflicted in some terrible or another. In the short story being analysed — "Good Country people", The girl Hulga possesses just one leg, and the wooden leg that supports her, forms a key motif in the story. It is the defect that makes her unique often with horrifying consequences.

O'Connor died at the young age of thirty nine, in 1964. It is miraculous how her courage and fortitude grew with her pain and deteriorating condition. Her courage and her refusal to wallow in despair, made her commitment to her art very special. Her two short novels and thirty short stories all delve into certain uncomfortable regions of the mind, dealing with behaviour patterns that often shock and embarrass us. The stories feel away illusion, foolish selfishness and mindless cruelty and leave the characters to face the harshness of a truth that they cannot bear. Had Flannery O'Connor lived longer, and shared the full impact and effect of the Feminist Movement, her consciousness might have been more violently aroused.

Art was a specific force for O'Connor — a force outside conditions of gender. Yet we discern a softness for a blood-bond of the mother and the daughter. Her stories are given a certain piquancy as this relationship figures largely in most of them. The stories throb with the perplexing issues of spiritual existence. Though O'Connor begins with the trauma and painful experiences of women, she keeps in perspective those experiences that she felt had universal value. Her themes touch many painful areas of female experience. A Southern, Catholic writer, she shows extraordinary powers in depicting the contortions of spirit with a steady eye and relentless pity. Her collection of short stories *A Good Man is Hard to Find* (1955) contains some of the best and most unsettling fiction of the period. Her terrible vision of the world was enhanced by her two religious novels *Wise Blood* (1952) and *The Violent Bear It Away* (1960). Though her avowed interest did not lie in the creation of the grotesque as such, but rather in the disorders that create or deflect spirit, the story we have at hand is a fine study of the grotesque in human nature and also in the turn of events.

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## 2.5.2 □ “Good Country People” : An Analysis

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There are two distinctly disturbing occasions in the story “Good Country People” — one, when the salesman of the holy Bibles takes out his personal copy and reveals that it is nothing but a facade for his baser leanings, and the other, when he cruelly takes away the girl’s artificial leg. There are moments both shocking in their intensity, and just as provoking in their play upon the readers’ mind.

The young salesman, the ironic player on the words ‘good country folk, is a rogue and a hypocrite. He, posing to be ‘good’, cheats the country folk, who, even to the end believe that he is a nice, dull young man.

Religion and the sham that it often passes for it is explored here. The young man takes out a Bible “It was hollow and contained a pocket flask of whiskey, a pack of cards, and a small blue box with printing on it ... The boy was unscrewing the top of the flask. He stopped and pointed with a smile to the deck of cards. It was not an ordinary deck but one with an obscene picture on the back of each card.”

Even as she plaintively asks : “Arn't you just good country people?” he reveals the utter villainy in a cheap, mediocre man, whose guile is mixed with malevolence.

I gotten a lot of interesting things. Once I got a womans' glass eye this way. And you needn't think you'll catch me, because Pointer ain't really my name. I use a different name at every house. I call at and don't stay nowhere long.

There is absolute grotesqueness in the way the man collects things—things that are useless to him, but life-supports to their users.

The placidity and simple faith of the two elderly women, Mrs. Hopewell and Mrs. Freeman are cleverly juxtaposed against the pathetic defiance of Hulga, and the foxy cunningness of the young salesman, who has his eyes on all the main chances, and is a very glib talker.

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## 2.5.3 □ Narrative Technique

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Inexplicable occurrences are O’ Connor’s forte. Her story endings are a peculiar blend of the comic (hinging on grotesque) and utter sadness. The grimness of most of her endings pervades the reader’s mind for a very long time. Yet in her writings there is a certain element of hope in the recognition of the bleak reality of life and an acceptance, even if the truth hits with a terrible humiliating force.

O'Connor's plots hinge upon these shock interludes. In "Good Country People" the story begins in a dead-pan manner, and then twists and turns its way through seemingly simple occasions. Some of the dullness surrounding Hulga, the girl to whom so much happens in so little an interval, seems to pervade the fabric of the story. The 'gloom', that she often associates with O'Connor lurks at every turn of the narrative, becoming more intense as the story progresses. The ironic intent of the writer runs between the lines.

Flannery O'Connor's understanding of the problems and results of widowhood is truly profound. She is sensitive, probing and scathing at the same time.

Virginia Woolf had categorised (in *A Room of One's Own*) the distortions we can expect to find in the writings of women. Anxiety, buried confusion and shame, caused by the male-dominated culture makes it extremely difficult for women to feel assured about discussing their own experience. Such attitudes result in portraying women who are too aggressive or too strong, and their ambience too uncomfortable to fit into the assigned place in the fictional world. O'Connor's short story "The Enduring Chill" shows the protagonist, a young man, as a pathetic, confused spiritually isolated creature totally unprepared for either life or death "Good Country People", too, hinges on the problem of wasted existence. It is not the girl, Hulga, but the personable young man, who is a moral cripple.

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## 2.5.4 □ Women Characters

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One of her favourite methods, as in this short story, is to explore the plight of intelligent and defiant girls who reject traditional submissive roles.

Joy-Hulga, 'a large blonde girl who had an artificial leg—dull to the view, but with a mind of her own (her interesting naming of the two other girls is a hint). Later, she even does a Ph.D, and has a cache of prophetic sayings.

To her own mother she had said without warning, without excuse standing up in the middle of a meal with her face purple and her mouth half-full—'Woman, do you ever look inside? Do you ever look inside and see what you are not?' God !

Hulga is an unusual girl, who is an atheist and declares to the shallow young man quite openly.

We are all damned, but some of us have taken off their blindfolds and see that there is nothing to see. It's a kind of salvation.

In an intimate interlude with the young man, Hulga agilely climbs into the high loft, surprising him. "We won't need the Bible" she tells him.

As he desires to see her artificial leg, he persuades her that it makes her unique. She takes off her leg, her symbol of independence and gives it to him. As he finally discards her, helpless, in the loft and moves off, Hulga maintains her quiet, "sitting on the straw in the dust." The only sign of her heartbreak is the reference to her 'churning face'.

Life, love, hope all touch her and Hulga stoically counter all Trauma. We wonder, though, how she would descend from the loft, the boy having stolen her artificial leg. Expectations of an exciting new life had made her ascend, but as gloom descends upon the despairing girl, her being stuck in the left—an intermediate region, begins to take on symbolic significance.

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## 2.5.5 Conclusion

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During the last half-dozen years of life O'Connor enjoyed a growing recognition of her work. Her first collection of short stories, *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, appeared in 1955, and her second novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*, in 1960. At the time few reviewers saw beneath the grotesque surface of her fiction (Granville Hicks called *The Violent Bear It Away* "Southern Gothic with a vengeance") but she was almost unanimously regarded as a writer of originality and power. What was to become a substantial body of criticism of her work began to grow in the wake of her essay "The Fiction Writer and His Country" (1957), in which she discussed the apparent contradiction between her belief in spiritual purpose and the fact that her stories are, "for the most part, about people who are poor, who are afflicted in both mind and body, who have little—or at best distorted— sense of spiritual purpose, and whose actions do not apparently give the reader a great assurance of the joy of life." She also began to be invited to lecture at colleges and writers' conferences, where she spoke on such subjects as "Some Aspects of the Grotesque in Southern Fiction" and "The Catholic Novelist in the Protestant South." (The drafts of these speeches : plus some other essays, were collected and edited by Sally and Robert Fitzgerald under the title *Mystery and Manners*, 1969.)

O'Connor continued to refine the art in which she expressed her vision, but the vision itself did not substantially change from the stories in *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* to those in her final collection, *Everything That Rises Must*

*Converge* (posthumously published 1965). She spoke once, near the end of her life, of attempting something different from what she had been doing so successfully, but in the final months of her life she was still at work on the stories that were to complete her last collection. Following an abdominal operation in the spring of 1964, her lupus flared up again. She survived its onslaught for a few months, but late in July she suffered kidney failure. She died on August 3, 1964, at the age of 39.

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## 2.6 □ "The Cop and the Anthem" : O' Henry

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### Structure :

- 2.6.0 The Cop and the Anthem
- 2.6.1 The Short Story : An Introduction
- 2.6.2 About the Author
- 2.6.3 "The Cop and the Anthem" : Analysis
- 2.6.4 The Story
- 2.6.5 Conclusion

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### 2.6.0 □ Text : "The Cop and the Anthem"

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On his bench in Madison Square Soapy moved uneasily. When wild geese honk high of nights, and when women without sealskin coats grow kind to their husbands, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand.

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card. Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call. At the corners of four streets he hands his pasteboard to the North Wind, footman of the mansion of All Outdoors, so that the inhabitants thereof may make ready.

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to resolve himself into a singular Committee of Ways and Means to provide against the coming rigour. And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench.

The hibernatorial ambitions of Soapy were not of the highest. In them were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, of soporific Southern skies or drifting in the Vesuvian Bay. Three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from Boreas and bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the essence of things desirable.

For years the hospitable Blackwell's had been his winter quarters. Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time was

come. On the previous night three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench near the spurting fountain in the ancient square. So the Island loomed large and timely in Soapy's mind. He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. There was an endless round of institutions, municipal and eleemosynary, on which he might set out and receive lodging and food accordant with the simple life. But to one of Soapy's proud spirit the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit received at the hands of philanthropy. As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which, though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

Soapy, having decided to go to the Island, at once set about accomplishing his desire. There were many easy ways of doing this. The pleasantest was to dine luxuriously at some expensive restaurant; and then, after declaring insolvency, be handed over quietly and without uproar to a policeman. An accommodating Magistrate would do the rest.

Soapy left his bench and strolled out of the square and across the level sea of asphalt, where Broadway and Fifth Avenue flow together. Up Broadway he turned, and halted at a glittering café, where are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm and the protoplasm.

Soapy had confidence in himself from the lowest button of his vest upward. He was shaven, and his coat was decent and his neat black, ready-tied four-in-hand had been presented to him by a lady-missionary on Thanksgiving Day. If he could reach a table in the restaurant unsuspected success would be his. The portion of him that would show above the table would raise no doubt in the waiter's mind. A roasted mallard duck, thought Soapy, would be about the thing—with a bottle of Chablis, and then Camembert, a demi-tasse and a cigar. One dollar for the cigar would be enough. The total would not be so high as to call forth any supreme manifestation of revenge from the café management; and yet the meat would leave him filled and happy for the journey to his winter refuge.

But as Soapy set foot inside the restaurant door the head waiter's eye fell upon his frayed trousers and decadent shoes. Strong and ready hands turned him about and conveyed him in silence and haste to the sidewalk and averted the ignoble fate of the menaced mallard.

Soapy turned off Broadway. It seemed that his route to the coveted Island was not to be an epicurean one. Some other way of entering limbo must be thought of.

At a corner of Sixth Avenue electric lights and cunningly displayed wares behind plate-glass made a shop window conspicuous. Soapy took a cobblestone and dashed it through the glass. People came running round the corner, a policeman in the lead. Soapy stood still, with his hands in his pockets, and smiled at the sight of brass buttons.

'Where's the man that done that?' inquired the officer excitedly.

'Don't you figure out that I might have had something to do with it?' said Soapy, not without sarcasm, but friendly, as one greets good fortune.

The policeman's mind refused to accept Soapy even as a clue. Men who smash windows do not remain to parley with the law's minions. They take to their heels. The policeman saw a man halfway down the block running to catch a car. With drawn club he joined in the pursuit. Soapy, with disgust in his heart, loafed along, twice unsuccessful.

On the opposite side of the street was a restaurant of no great pretensions. It catered to large appetites and modest purses. Its crockery and atmosphere were thick; its soup and napery thin. Into this place Soapy took his accusive shoes and tell-tale trousers without challenge. At a table he sat and consumed beefsteak, flapjacks, doughnuts and pie. And then to the waiter he betrayed the fact that the minutest coin and himself were strangers.

'Now, get busy and call a cop,' said Soapy. 'And don't keep a gentleman waiting.'

'No cop for youse,' said the waiter, with a voice like butter cakes and an eye like the cherry in a Manhattan cocktail. 'Hey, Con!'

Neatly upon his left ear on the callous pavement two waiters pitched Soapy. He arose, joint by joint, as a carpenter's rule opens, and beat the dust from his clothes. Arrest seemed but a rosy dream. The Island seemed very far away. A policeman who stood before a drug store two doors away laughed and walked down the street.

Five blocks Soapy travelled before his courage permitted him to woo capture again. This time the opportunity presented what he fatuously termed to himself a 'cinch.' A young woman of a modest and pleasing guise was standing before a show window gazing with sprightly interest at its display of shaving mugs and inkstands, and two yards from the window a large policeman of severe demeanour leaned against a water-plug.

It was Soapy's design to assume the role of the despicable and execrated 'masher.' The refined and elegant appearance of his victim and the contiguity

of the conscientious cop encouraged him to believe that he would soon feel the pleasant official clutch upon his arm that would ensure his winter quarters on the right little, tight little isle.

Soapy straightened the lady missionary's ready-made tie, dragged his shrinking cuffs into the open, set his hat at a killing cant and sidled toward the young woman. He made eyes at her was taken with sudden coughs and 'hems,' smiled, smirked and went brazenly through the impudent and contemptible litany of the mesher.' With half an eye Soapy saw that the policeman was watching him fixedly. The young woman moved away a few steps, and again bestowed her absorbed attention upon the shaving mugs. Soapy followed, boldly stepping to her side, raised his hat and said :

'Ah there, Bedelia! Don't you want to come and play in my yard?'

The policeman was still looking. The persecuted young woman had but to beckon a ringer and Soapy would be practically *en route* for his insular haven. Already he imagined he could feel the cosy warmth of the station-house. The young woman faced him and, stretching out a hand, caught Soapy's coat-sleeve.

'Sure, Mike,' she said joyfully, 'if you'll blow me to a pail of Suds I'd have spoke to you sooner, but the cop was watching.'

With the young woman playing the clinging ivy to his oak Soapy walked past the policeman, overcome with gloom. He seemed doomed to liberty.

At the next corner he shook off his companion and ran. He halted in the district where by night are found the lightest streets, hearts vows and librettos. Women in furs and men in greatcoats moved gaily in the wintry air. A sudden fear seized Soapy that some dreadful enchantment had rendered him immune to arrest. The thought brought a little of panic upon it, and when he came upon another policeman lounging grandly in front of a transplendent theatre he caught at the immediate straw of 'disorderly conduct.'

On the sidewalk Soapy began to yell drunken gibberish at the top of his harsh voice. He danced, howled, raved and otherwise disturbed the welkin.

The policeman twirled his club, turned his back to Soapy and remarked to a citizen :

' 'tis one of them Yale lads celebratin' the goose egg they give to the Hartford College. Noisy; but no harm. We've instructions to lave them be.'

Disconsolate, Soapy ceased his unavailing racket. Would never a policeman lay hands on him? In his fancy the Island seemed an unattainable Arcadia. He buttoned his thin coat against the chilling wind.

In a cigar store he saw a well-dressed man lighting a cigar at a swinging light. His silk umbrella he had set by the door on entering. Soapy stepped

inside, secured the umbrella and sauntered off with it slowly. The man at the cigar light followed hastily.

'My umbrella,' he said sternly.

'Oh, is it?' sneered Soapy, adding insult to petit larceny. 'Well, why don't you call a policeman? I took it. Your umbrella! Why don't you call a cop? There stands one at the corner.'

The umbrella owner slowed his steps. Soapy did likewise, with a presentiment that luck would again run against him. The policeman looked at the two curiously.

'Of course,' said the umbrella man—'that is—well, you know how these mistakes occur—I—if it's your umbrella I hope you'll excuse me—I picked it up this morning in a restaurant—If you recognize it as yours, why—I hope you'll—'

'Of course it's mine,' said Soapy viciously.

The ex-umbrella man retreated. The policeman hurried to assist a tall blonde in an opera cloak across the street in front of a street car that was approaching two blocks away.

Soapy walked eastward through a street damaged by improvements. He hurled the umbrella wrathfully into an excavation. He muttered against the men who wear helmets and carry clubs. Because he wanted to fall into their clutches, they seemed to regard him as a king who could do no wrong.

At length Soapy reached one of the avenues to the east where the glitter and turmoil was but faint. He set his face down this toward Madison Square, for the homing instinct survives even when the home is a park bench.

But on an unusually quiet corner Soapy came to a standstill. Here was an old church, quaint and rambling and gabled. Through one violet-stained window a soft light glowed, where, no doubt, the organist loitered over the keys, making sure of his mastery of the coming Sabbath anthem. For there drifted out to Soapy's ears sweet music that caught and held him transfixed against the convolutions of the iron fence.

The moon was above, lustrous and serene; vehicles and pedestrians were few; sparrows twittered sleepily in the eaves—for a little while the scene might have been a country churchyard. And the anthem that the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars.

The conjunction of Soapy's receptive state of mind and the influences about the old church wrought a sudden and wonderful change in his soul. He viewed with swift horror the pit into which he had tumbled, the degraded

days, unworthy desires, dead hopes, wrecked faculties and base motives that made up his existence.

And also in a moment his heart responded thrillingly to this novel mood. An instantaneous and strong impulse moved him to battle with his desperate fate. He would pull himself out of the mire, he would make a man of himself again; he would conquer the evil that had taken possession of him. There was time; he was comparatively young yet; he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering. Those solemn but sweet organ notes had set up a revolution in him. To-morrow he would go into the roaring down-town district and find work. A fur importer had once offered him a place as driver. He would find him to-morrow and ask for the position. He would be somebody in the world. He would—

Soapy felt a hand laid on his arm. He looked quickly around into the broad face of a policeman.

‘What are you doin’ here?’ asked the officer.

‘Nothin’,’ said Soapy.

‘Then come along,’ said the policeman.

‘Three months on the Island,’ said the Magistrate in the Police Court the next morning.

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## 2.6.1 □ The Short Story

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Suzanne Ferguson ably discuss this form in *The Rise of the Short Story in the Hierarchy of Genres*. The tendency in the modern high-brow story to focus upon a moment of illumination near the end of the story, a moment in which apparently disparate threads of the characters’ experience are drawn together into an intelligible pattern, rather than a traditionally prepared plot climax, is very much dependent upon, and perhaps readable because of, the prominent popular success of the middlebrow detective story in the preceding decades.

Both of these relatively low-prestige forms contributed importantly to the grooming of the English short story for its assault on the generic high society. Local color did so by foregrounding the detailed local setting, with its emphasis on realistic natural and social scenes (and thus “atmosphere”) and with its relative deemphasis on plot. The detective story left its trace in the assumption of the setting into the impetus of plot and in the omission of certain expected elements in the plot that were simply deduced and tacitly supplied by the reader, never actually told in the story. In both, the importance of setting seems to have influenced the modern short story, where it is

frequently made to convey ideas about characters and feelings as well as merely place, simply through being given extraordinary prominence while other elements are left obscure and undeveloped. This very obscurity, which requires of the audience special reading techniques, became essential to the "glamor" of the short story for its modern writers and readers.

Emerging in the last two decades of the century, the aesthetic story put the finishing touches on the restyling of the English short story for modern tastes. Another variation of the romance, this type utilized the descriptive techniques and gradual heightening of psychological tension of the sensation story and the concealment of meaning associated with the detective story, along with "fine writing," to make an overt bid for high prestige. Its preoccupation with its own preciousness, together with its frequently morbid themes, earned it the epithet "decadent" as well as "aesthetic."<sup>1</sup> Writers and critics began to claim this type of story to be superior to the novel in artistry because the short story was more controlled, intense, and, finally, reflective of life itself.

Writers for glossy, arty magazines such as the *Yellow Book* and *Savoy*, many of the "aesthetes" were drawn to poetry as well as prose. Ernest Dowson, and even Yeats, on occasion, wrote stories utilizing what are usually considered poetic stylistic devices: figures of speech, metaphorical imagery, purple descriptions, deliberately stylized rhythms and aural tropes. Others of this loosely identifiable group, such as Frederick Wedmore, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Ella D'Arcy, and George Egerton, concentrated on developing sketchy, psychologically complex plots in addition to poetic prose.<sup>2</sup> Influenced by Russian writers, especially Turgenev, George Moore wrote identifiably impressionist stories in his local-color collection, *The Untied Field* (1901 in Gaelic, 1903 in English), which in turn inspired, or influenced, *Dubliners*. The self-consciousness of aesthetic artistry in the short story, encouraged by Flaubertian novelist-critics such as Henry James, Conrad, and Ford Madox Ford, influenced the next generation of short story writers, who "invented" for England the modern, prestige short story: Joyce, Mansfield, Lawrence, the later Kipling, and then the generation of Elizabeth Bowen, A. E. Coppard, V. S. Pritchett, and Sean O'Faolain. Significantly, James later wrote of the *Yellow Book*, in his preface to Volume XV of the New York Edition of his works, that it "opened up the millenium to the 'short story.'" Wells, in the

1. See John R. Reed, *Decadent Style* (Athens, Ohio, 1985), for a full discussion of the relationship.
2. An art critic as well as a writer, Wedmore wrote an important essay on the artfulness of the highbrow short story in his *On Books and Arts* (London, 1899), 1-24.

preface to his collection of short stories, *The Country of the Blind* (1911), approvingly characterized a catalog of short story writers from the nineties as “a mixed handful of jewels drawn from a bag.”

More than any other single quality, artistry itself, as a highbrow value, pitched the short story genre above the popular, middlebrow status it had throughout most of the nineteenth century. The mysteriousness of the modern short story, its being written in a code of generic and stylistic conventions that only the initiate of modern art could decipher, was part and parcel of this success. Although the highbrow novel for a time certainly shared not only the emphasis on artistry but the precise techniques of literary impressionism—fragmentation, sketchiness, time shifts, exploitation of unusual points of view, stylistic foregrounding—its length permitted a fuller and ultimately more traditional development. I have contended that it is primarily that difference in length, and what goes into the impressionist novel to create that length, that differentiates it from the impressionist short story, rather than some essential difference in vision, form, or technique.<sup>3</sup> The elaboration of formal and stylistic elements in the smaller space of the short story contributed to a certain element of detachment, “coolness” in the aesthetic medium, that made clear to the story’s audience the intellectual effort necessary to decipher its meaning, in contrast to the “warm” emotional milieu of the longer, more experiential novel.

Moreover, in the early decades of the twentieth century, moral uncertainties about existing class structures allowed rhetorically powerful “post-aesthete” writers and critics such as Ezra Pound and Ford Madox Ford the opportunity to argue for a modernist aristocracy in the arts, which, though not specifically concerned with the short story, benefited it as a modern form. In this view, artists and intellectuals rather than the politically or economically powerful are the possessors of a superior vision, which they exhibit in the secret, refined languages of their art. The codes of this art were so esoteric (and often so deliberately offensive to middlebrow taste) that the general public was sometimes moved to assault exhibits or performances verbally and even physically, in notorious outbursts that now seem merely quaint. A less public art than music, painting, or sculpture, the short story escaped such demonstrations, (Perhaps excepting the destruction of the plates and type for what was to have been the first edition of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, in a printer’s objection to its content, rather than its form.) Rejection by the lowbrow became a touchstone of high modernist art, and to be too popular,

3. Suzanne Ferguson, “Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, XXVIII (1982), 13-24.

as Dickens was, or Kipling in his early years, was to court critical deprecation. Appreciation of the short story, along with that of other modernist art forms, became connoisseurship.

But beyond the formal changes, beyond the changes simply deriving from the short story's imitation of twentieth- rather than nineteenth-century behavior, speech, and details of everyday life, the pre-eminence of the short story as a modernist genre grew out of the modern, highbrow audience's acceptance of fragmentation as an accurate model of the world, with a concomitant focus on "being"—as in Woolf's "moments of being"—rather than the "becoming" that characterizes the plot of the Romantic and the Victorian novel. The brevity that marked "minor" to earlier generations became a badge of the short story's superior representational capacity. For a brief period, in English literature, at least, the short story became not just a prestige genre but the genre that could be said to best represent the essence of the age, as did drama at the end of the sixteenth century.

Thus, by persistently trying to move into the prestige circles of the genres ... poetry, drama and the novel...the short story came into its own 'social' success, producing a highbrow heir to low and middlebrow heir."

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## 2.6.2 □ About the Author

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William Sydney Porter used O'Henry as his *nom de plume*. He wrote humorous, poignant tales with a twist at the end. Some of his tales were out-landish, but always meticulously plotted.

O'Henry specialised in the human of incongruity and surprise, in his endings and in his humorous combinations and distortion of words. He used malapropisms, comic companions and tall tale conceits.

The tall tale was traditionally a fictional narrative told as fiction, but it masqueraded as true narration of a personal narrative. It was the narrator's design to present it as true and the listeners acted as though they believed it to be true. O'Henry in his stories often used the tall tale atmosphere and the tall tale technique. Many of the hundreds of stories he wrote continue to delight readers to this day.

O'Henry died in 1910 at the age of 48. The O'Henry Prize—an award instituted in his honour is considered America's most prestigious award for short fiction.

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### 2.6.3 □ "The Cop and the Anthem" : Analysis

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The boundless charity that O'Henry had for his fellow human beings is revealed in this short story. Almost Biblical in its references to crime and punishment, views of sin and absolution and profound sympathy, the story has universal scope. The racy style and colloquial language, as well as the intimate tone of narration have endeared O'Henry's stories to generations readers.

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### 2.6.4 □ The Story

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Soapy, a petty criminal is the hero of this brilliant short story. Soapy had no faith in charity.

As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its fall of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. Wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law, which though conducted by rules, does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

O'Henry loves the Manhattan and his tongue in cheek humour plays around this urban centre and its busy denizens. The very vulnerable individual is mostly juxtaposed against heartless institutions. O'Henry's faith in mankind is palpable in most of his stories—virtuous and flawed, all men share his warm acceptance, and this endears him to readers round the globe and down the years.

The story begins with a tramp, Soapy, panicking at the premonition of the oncoming winter, and trying to get himself into the jail's security for the winter months.

Soapy looks at the glittering cafe, where, in O'Henry's inimitable language :

... are gathered together nightly the choicest products of the grape, the silkworm and the protoplasm.

In a hilarious manner, the writer presents the plight of Soapy who does one petty crime after another so that he would be arrested and put into prison for most of the harsh winter months. His plan to gatecrash an expensive restaurant fails and even when he smashes a shop window and confesses to the misdeed the police do not arrest him. When, desperate, he finally eats a hearty meal and declines to pay, the waiters manhandle him and throw him out.

"Arrest seemed but a rosy dream, The Island seemed very far away."

His attempt at eve-teasing, with a policeman looking on, was doomed. The elegant lady turned out to be a common street-walker and began seriously propositioning him.

All his attempts failed. He raved, ranted and created a terrible nuisance. But the police mistook him for a celebrating Yale student and ignored him. He pilfered a man's umbrella, and declared his offence. The man, who was not really the owner of the umbrella, sheepishly gave up all claims. Soapy just could not get himself arrested.

As he came upon an old church, Soapy was transfixed by the sweet music coming from within.

The anthem the organist played cemented Soapy to the iron fence, for he had known it well in the days when his life contained such things as mothers and roses and ambitions and friends and immaculate thoughts and collars.

Soapy in a trance, looked back in distaste upon his present degradation, and effect of the music swayed him to the very core. He began promising himself that he would climb out of the self-created rut and that he would vanquish the evil that had possessed him.

There was time : he was comparatively young yet, he would resurrect his old eager ambitions and pursue them without faltering.

As the anthem swelled to a crescendo, Soapy's resolutions became firmer. He would be somebody in the world, he decided. Just as he was about to take forth a step as a changed man, The police arrested him on charges of loitering and of being a vagabond. The Magistrate gave him the much-desired sentence of his—three months on the Island, only Soapy did not want it now. The Church music had metamorphosed him, he had virtuous intentions. But it was too late.

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## 2.6.5 Conclusion

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Irony is O'Henry's forte. Very gently he demonstrates how puny the efforts of human kind are in the face of destiny. Bitter sweet experiences crowd upon a person as he goes through life, and it touches us to the very soul.

Even as the Soviet-American hostilities enhanced, and 'communism' became a dirty word in the U.S., O' Henry remained a perennial favourite with readers. He was popular not only with the masses, but also with many of the Soviet writers, who studied him for his technique so that stories with an O'Henry Twist were being published in Russia at a time when American short-story writers were imitating Chekhov.

The out-of work law clerk, the humble typist, the millionaire's girl, the

bell-boy, the small trader with great ambitions—O'Henry's world was crowded with mundane, very urban characters who have a spark of something unique amidst all their mundane existence. The meticulous details of their speech, dress and habits are products of long years of close observation. O' Henry in a very Chaucerian way is infinitely forgiving, very understanding and tolerant of small human flaws.

The cynical wit of George Ade, expressed in slang (in *Fables in Slang*, 1899), found reflection, though in a gentler manner, in the slang often found in O' Henry's stories. It was a slang that gave America a common speech in those days before the radio. The colloquial voice of New York specially Manhattan, rings clearly in most of his stories, lending them a uniqueness and immediacy that is appreciable. His strong belief that mankind is redeemable, even under hopeless conditions, instill hope among his readers and renews faith in humanity.