1

IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS - I

Unit Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, the purpose of this chapter is to comprehend certain aspects and terms in the 19th Century American Literature. In the beginning, we will take a look at the Introduction to 19th Century American Literature. You will gain a better understanding of romanticism as a whole and Romanticism in American literature, the origin and development of Transcendentalism, and the American Civil War and its impact on literature. You will also be acquainted with the practitioners of Romanticism, Transcendentalism and Civil War. By revising your understanding of these terms, you will be better prepared to understand and interpret 19th-century American literature.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE 19TH CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

Following the American Revolution, and particularly following the War of 1812, American authors were encouraged to compose truly indigenous literature. Four well-known authors appeared, almost as though in retaliation. A tremendous half-century of literary development was launched by William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe.

Bryant, a New England native, rose to prominence when the first edition of his poem "Thanatopsis" was published when he was only 23 years old. Some 18th-century English poets impacted this poem, as well as a few others that followed. Later, under the influence of Wordsworth and other

Romantics, he wrote nature poetry that clearly mirrored the New England location. He went on to have a long career as a combative liberal editor at The Evening Post. In terms of renown, he was overshadowed by Washington Irving, a native New Yorker.

1.2 ROMANTICISM

In romance, strange countries and wonderful adventures are depicted. It allows the writer more leeway in combining the fantastic and the commonplace. The typical hero on the white horse with the white hat; the bad villain with the long black moustache; the gorgeous young woman in need of rescue; and the hairbreadth rescue itself may all be part of the romance.

Romanticism, a late-eighteenth-century movement centred on the appreciation of nature, the supernatural, and the struggling individual versus society—spread to England. It was brought to America in the early to mid-nineteenth century by writers like Hawthorne, Poe, and Cooper.

American Romanticism

The Romantic Movement, which was altering European society, began to have an impact on America in the 1830s. In a broad sense, American Romanticism was a new attitude toward nature, mankind, and society that championed individualism and independence, similar to the European movement from which it was an offshoot. American Romanticism was defined by several trends. Among the most important are the following:

- An impulse toward reform
- A celebration of individualism in Emerson, Thoreau
- A reverence for nature (Cooper, Emerson, Thoreau)
- A concern with the impact of new technology—the locomotive, for example—
- An idealization of women in Poe's Anabel Lee
- A fascination with death and the supernatural in Hawthorne, Poe
- Now let us take a look at some of the important writers associated with Romanticism in American Literature.
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson** is famously known for his work, *Self-Reliance,* and it left an impact on many authors, not just in America but in the whole world.
- **Henry David Thoreau** is again known as one of the best authors of Nature. *Walden* and *Civil Disobedience* are some of his famous works.

- **Washington Irving** is known for his works like *The Devil and Tom Walker, Rip Van Winkle Tales* etc.

- **Edgar Allan Poe's** The Pit and the Pendulum, The Masque of the Red Death, The Raven and many more are famous for using romantic and gothic elements.

- **Nathaniel Hawthorne's** *The Scarlet Letter* became one of the most famous works of American romanticism. His other major works are *The House of the Seven Gables*, *Doctor Heidegger's Experiment, Young Goodman Brown,* and *Rappaccini's Daughter.*

The Romantic Period

Romanticism is a school of thought that prioritises the individual over the group, the subjective over the objective, and emotion over reason. It also prioritises natural chaos over man-made order. Western Europe embraced Romanticism as a worldview in the late 18th century, while American writers embraced it in the early 19th century. During the 1830s and up until his unexplained death in 1849, Edgar Allan Poe best embodied and represented the Romantic individual—a genius who was frequently tortured and constantly rebelling against convention. Poe invented modern detective fiction with "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." One of his poems is "The Raven," a sorrowful tale of lost love. The metre and rhyme scheme adds to the eerie atmosphere. The horror novels "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1846) and "The Cask of Amontillado" (1846) are both scary. Multiple groups of authors and thinkers emerged in New England after 1830, each exploring the experiences of individuals in various aspects of American society. James Russell Lowell was one of the poets who employed humour and accent to represent everyday life in the Northeast in rhyme and prose.

The most notable of the upper-class Brahmins, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and Oliver Wendell Holmes, filtered their depictions of America through European patterns and sensibilities. The Transcendentalists established a complex philosophy that saw all of creation as a single entity. Henry David Thoreau wrote Walden, an account of his time alone at Walden Pond, while Ralph Waldo Emerson produced significant writings. Margaret Fuller edited The Dial, a major Transcendentalist publication. Three men—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and Walt Whitman—began producing novels, short stories, and poetry during the Romantic period, which would go on to become some of America's most iconic works of literature. As a young man, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote short stories, the most renowned of which is the allegorical "Young Goodman Brown." He met the Transcendentalists in the 1840s before beginning to write his two most important novels, *The Scarlet Letter* and *The House of the Seven Gables*.

One of Hawthorne's friends and neighbours was Herman Melville. Melville's Moby Dick, which was the pinnacle of Melville's early life of travelling and writing, was heavily influenced by Hawthorne. Walt Whitman wrote poems in his hometown of New York City. In his collection

of poems entitled *Leaves of Grass*, he rejected traditional rhyme and metre in favour of free verse, and his candour in subject matter and tone irritated some critics. However, the book became a classic in American poetry, and it typified the Romantic attitude. It was reprinted numerous times after that. An increasing number of publications by and about slaves and free African Americans were created as the United States headed into civil war in the 1850s.

Clotel, the first black American novel, was published in 1853 by William Wells Brown. Also, he wrote *The Escape*, the first African-American play to be published. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and Harriet E. Wilson were the first black women in the United States to write fiction in 1859. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, written by Harriet Beecher Stowe and initially serialised in 1851–52, is credited with boosting anti-slavery sentiment in the North.

Emily Dickinson lived a life unlike that of other Romantic writers. She spent most of her time alone. Only a few of her poems were published before she died in 1886, and she was a woman writing at a time when men controlled the literary world. Her poems, like Walt Whitman's or Edgar Allan Poe's, portray a Romantic vision. They're razor-sharp and emotionally charged.

1.3 TRANSCENDENTALISM

In the early nineteenth century, a cultural movement called transcendentalism arose. The notion of transcendentalism revolves around the belief that humans have knowledge from nature that goes beyond what the senses can comprehend. Two important elements prompted authors, artists, and activists to unite behind this movement during this time.

At the turn of the century, Romanticism was the dominating artistic trend in the United States and Europe. Romanticism emphasizes freedom, spontaneity, and the value of love in literature and art, highlighting the beauty of nature as well as the simplicity of existence. Many artworks from this period portrayed farmers as idealised figures who could manage their own time and were always in touch with nature. Despite the heat and hard work involved in crop harvesting, agricultural families are regarded as peaceful and desired by many who have moved to cities. Industrialization fueled this migration to cities in the United States. During the 1800s, millions of people abandoned their farms to work in factories for a living. This was in stark contrast to how people had lived in the country, and it exposed them to hazardous working conditions and harmful gases.

The period of Transcendentalism overlaps with this desire for a simpler life and the rising urbanisation of Americans. The Second Great Awakening, which saw millions of Americans become devout Christians for the first time in their lives, was one of the first answers to this shift in American society. Many Americans sought meaning after moving to cities and idealising the agrarian lifestyle they left behind, and the Christian revival provided an answer. Transcendentalism was an attempt to find a more secular solution to the unhappiness that people were experiencing.

The Transcendental movement would be the first instance of a unique American cultural identity developing. The Transcendentalist movement's primary ideas concern human relationships with nature. The Transcendentalists thought that everyone had a universal spirit that they shared with nature. The Eternal One is the name given to this eternal soul, which leads to many of the movement's core ideas. People should follow their instincts since humans and nature share a universal essence. Transcendentalists objected to many forms of racism and sexism at the time since everyone shares a similar connection to nature. Humans should learn to be self-sufficient by relying on nature to meet their physical and spiritual requirements. Rather than being destroyed, the natural world should be treasured. These tenets of transcendentalism were spread most by authors who articulated this uniquely American movement in essays, books, and poems.

Transcendentalism in American Literature: Transcendentalist literature was the primary means by which Americans were introduced to this cultural movement. "The Dial", which became the flagship publication of The Transcendentalist, was founded by several of the movement's leading personalities. Countless writings by Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and others were published in this periodical. Margaret Fuller was named editor of this publication, and she contributed to the movement's message expansion. German thinkers such as Immanuel Kant impacted their perspectives, proposing that everything in life appears a specific way because of how humans perceive it, not because that is how it appears. His writings were translated from German, allowing Americans to elaborate on this through literature. Some of the earliest works of this movement were:

- *Self-Reliance* by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- *Nature* by Ralph Waldo Emerson
- *Man versus Men*. *Woman versus Women* by Margaret Fuller
- *Civil Disobedience* by Henry David Thoreau

Because residents were disillusioned with their lifestyles in cities and working in factories, these essays were popular with a huge number of Americans. These writings, many of which were written by Ralph Waldo Emerson, appeared to offer an answer to Americans by highlighting nature's healing and restorative powers. The tradesman, the lawyer, emerges from the din and craft of the street, sees the sky and the trees, and returns to his former self. He finds himself lost in their endless serenity.

The most well-known Transcendentalist authors are Emerson and Thoreau. They also had a big influence on each other's opinions. Thoreau, who was younger than Emerson, eventually moved into his house and the two worked closely together. By moving to a hut on Emerson's estate and living on the shores of Walden Pond for two years, Henry David Thoreau was able to fully adopt transcendentalism in his own life. Thoreau came from the woods after two years and authored the book *Walden*, in which he detailed what he had learned and experienced living alone in nature for so long. Thoreau

believes that the best way to connect with nature and live deeply is to live as simply as possible. This long period of isolation transformed him into an adept naturalist with a thorough awareness of plants and animals. Despite the fact that the majority of Americans did not abandon their lives to live in the woods, the movement had an impact on many aspects of American culture.

1.4 AMERICAN CIVIL WAR AND ITS IMPACT ON LITERATURE

The Civil Wars have provided rich material as well as a significant body of writing. Most of the country's writers used them as a motif. Furthermore, the Civil War had a significant impact on American society. The literary approach of the texts continues to shape current views of war and its aspects. For example, over the previous decade, World War I spawned a plethora of writing and attracted a great deal of examination. Many people were affected by the Civil War. The first great Civil War writers experimented with new literary genres and challenged many of the orthodox preconceptions about the repercussions of the conflict.

The majority of writers wrote about the war's events and background from both a literary and historical perspective. Literature has had a long-lasting impact on how people view wars. Although the term "war" may appear to be overly narrow, war and peace experiences frequently intersect and overlap in reality. Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* is an example of Civil War writing. Most war writers have viewed their work as a portrayal of unique, exceptional events that truly merit the designation of war. Plays, novels, poems, diaries, memoirs, and personal accounts are among the various types of Civil War literature. The Civil War was a great event that led to the transformation of American culture. Many people are still haunted by recollections of the Civil War. Others, on the other hand, were motivated by the occurrences. Most American political elites were terrified of the fantasy because they recognised how it empowered many people. Many people's passions, whims, and inclinations were catered for in fiction about the Civil War. During the American Civil War, American leaders argued that fiction could cause chaos and destruction through literature. For example, in 1818, Jefferson described literature as a poison that influences people's minds. Furthermore, he thought that books would increase people's imaginations, resulting in skewed judgements and hatred for the real business of life.

The Civil War literature recounts the events that occurred during that time period. It broadens readers' understanding of the war's qualities. Furthermore, the literature explains how people lived during the time period and how the conflict that ended it marked the era. The significance of the escalating sectional struggles that split America between the industrialised North and South was acknowledged and appreciated by Americans. The American Civil War was a tragic event that changed the course of history. It attracted a large number of writers, who used it as a backdrop for literary works about the American character. There were numerous peculiarities in

American writing, such as the fact that it absorbed a large amount of material. The material needed to fuel poems, novels, and plays was viewed as a serious crisis in America's existence. The failure was more obvious because whites and southerners shared a compulsive remembrance of the Civil War. In many ways, the Civil War inspired American literature. The majority of literary artists involved in the writings were also intimately involved in the battle. The events of the war inspired the writers, who helped readers better understand the conflict. They also got the opportunity to identify the problems. The writers, who included novelists and poets, were inspired by the brutality and glory of the Civil War scenes and based their personal non-fiction writings on their experiences and what they saw in the battle scenes. Some poets and novelists were even present throughout the agony of their loved ones. In addition, some authors chose to write about the romantic aspects of the conflict, while others preferred to write about the bloody battle scenes.

Elizabeth Akers Allen, whose piece *In the Defense* was composed while she attended to a wounded soldier during the Civil War, was one of the Civil War literature writers. She worked as a federal clerk in Washington. Another prominent Civil War author is Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who published the book Fredericksburg and worked as a combat journalist for The New York Tribune magazine and later as an editor for the Atlantic monthly. The inaugural address of Abraham Lincoln is the source of some Civil War literature. The main topic of the speech was to restore peace and order, which had become a distraction from the country's dire situation. The Emancipation Proclamation was also written by Lincoln. The book was given an official order ordering that all slaves were to be executed psychologically and morally. The author also stated in the book that the fight was being fought to free the slaves from slavery and to bring the citizens of the nation back together. Slavery was a key issue in this literary masterpiece. The author had strong sympathies for slaves and was against slavery.

James Dickey, who wrote his book while serving as a fighter pilot during the Civil War, was another noteworthy Civil War author. He also worked in the advertising industry. According to Hedinand Cronkite, another notable Civil War literature writer was Sidney Lanier, who served in the Confederate Army and witnessed several major Civil War battles. Stonewall Jackson's Dying Words were written by him. The war was translated with a romantic tone in Sidney's poems, with a group of gallant knights seeking to defend their country as well as their honour.

The potential of literature can elicit additional emotions, create bewilderment, sweep horrible images with a panoramic lens, and end agony or courage has been demonstrated. The Civil War literature led to mourning, eventual reconciliation, and healing. Furthermore, Civil War literature elicited a range of emotions that influenced America's history. Transcendentalist ideology was prevalent throughout the Civil War. Spiritualism was emphasised above empirical reality in transcendentalism. The articles also showed a commitment to abolitionism's ideals and achieving the goals through whatever means were available. Conflicts, for

example, were strikingly congruent with transcendentalism's worldview. Furthermore, many outstanding people around the world were changed by the horrific realities of the scenes observed during the civil war.

Finally, the Civil Wars had ramifications for writers; for example, few writers had time to devote to their creative work. It was expected that some of the writers would assist the war effort. As a result, the tone of much of the fiction and poetry about the war was martial and argumentative. At its best, Civil War writing stimulated the study of regional identity, which culminated in the twentieth century with the arrival of the Southern Literary Renaissance. The literature of the Civil War drastically altered many Americans' romanticised viewpoints, which were quickly shattered by the extraordinary murder or volume of carnage represented by the Civil Wars, as well as the associated atrocities.

Most authors have been rudely awakened by situations that have ripped at their own creativity. The most dramatic impact of Civil War literature on American history began with a struggle between the actuality of the fight and the authors' fundamental doubts regarding wars as a legitimate means of achieving good policy goals. Dramatic developments followed the Civil War in literature. Following the Civil War, poets waxed lyrical about the country's achievements. Instead of abandoning religious motifs, they tried to secularise religious language. In addition, stories about women of African descent yielded some of the most insightful insights. Furthermore, some of the most insightful insights were made in stories about women of African descent. Furthermore, the writers were concerned with the problem of race, which was seen as a major worry and could be found in almost every story with African American protagonists. According to several writers, the current world has a literary cohort that has grown increasingly uneasy with certainty.

1.5 REALISM

In literature, realism refers to a school of fiction authors who, in contrast to romanticism or classicism, describe life with uttermost adherence to reality and detail. This inclination toward realism can be found in modern writing from various times, but it established a distinct school in the late nineteenth century as a result of French influence. Although Balzac and Stendahl emphasised thorough study and characterization, it was Flaubert who outperformed them in *Madame Bovary,* his masterwork. Goncourts, J.K. Huysmans, de Maupassant, Zola, and others were inspired by Flaubert's achievement. The tendency of realistic writing to overemphasise what is corrupt and sordid sparked a heated debate, but their influence in the novel has become apparent, and their detailed descriptions have lessened.

In American literature, the term "realism" refers to the time period between the Civil War and the turn of the century, when authors such as William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to the accurate representation and exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, rising rates of democracy and literacy, rapid

industrialization and urbanisation, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence created a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid cultural shifts.

In William Dean Howells' words, “Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of the material.” Ambrose Bierce, in his *The Devil's Dictionary,* said that "Realism, the art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads. The charm suffusing a landscape painted by a mole, or a story was written by a measuring worm. " Now let us take a look at some of the major authors in realism and their contributions.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, best known as Mark Twain, is our next American realist writer. Clemens was born on November 30, 1835, in Florida, Missouri. He began his career as a composer. He became a Mississippi steamboat pilot in 1851. His pen name "Mark Twain," a leadman's yell meaning "two fathoms," came from this life. He began his writing career. He attempted mining and journalism in San Francisco and visited the Sandwich Islands after working as a reporter in Virginia City, Nevada. He was termed "the father of American literature" by William Faulkner. Among his works are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), the latter of which is frequently referred to as the "Great American Novel."

Henry James was a New York-born Anglo-American novelist. William James was his older brother. He studied law at Harvard, but shifted his focus to literature early on, publishing short tales and essays in magazines. He is regarded as a pivotal figure in the transition from literary realism to literary modernism, and many consider him to be one of the greatest novelists of the English language. He is best known for his novels about the social and marital interplay of émigré Americans, English, and continental Europeans. Novels like *The Portrait of a Lady, The Ambassadors,* and *The Wings of the Dove* are examples of this type. His later works have become more experimental. James frequently used a style in which ambiguous or contradictory motives and impressions were overlaid or juxtaposed in the discussion of a character's psyche when describing the internal states of mind and social dynamics of his characters. His late works have been compared to impressionist painting because of their unique ambiguity, as well as other aspects of their composition.

Stephen Crane is an American writer, who was born in Newark, New Jersey, in 1871. He travelled to New York City in 1890 to work as a freelance reporter for the Herald and Tribune. His debut work, Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, depicting life in the slums, was regarded as the United States' first naturalistic fiction. Crane's famous realistic depiction of ordinary men among the tempest and commotion of war, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was published in 1895.

Frank Norris is an American novelist Frank Norris was born in Chicago and educated in Paris, Harvard, and the University of California. In 1896, he was a war correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle in South Africa.

In 1807, he was the editor of the San Francisco Wave. His notable works include *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*, *The Octopus: A Story of California* and *The Pit*. *The Epic of the Wheat*, his unfinished trilogy, is widely regarded as his best work.

After an extended analysis of the works by the above-mentioned authors known to be American realists, it is not easy to come up with an original definition of American realism. In American literature, realism refers to a style of fiction influenced by the French in which life is depicted with strict adherence to fact and detail. Naturalism, on the other hand, is a subgenre of American fiction which involves the main character's singular struggle against the forces of war, nature, and the like. Although there are a lot of similarities between American realism and European realism, from which it originated, the former puts stress on that which is optimistic and aesthetic, reflecting the American way of viewing life.

1.6 LET'S SUM UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. We discussed the introduction to 19th Century American Literature and comprehended certain aspects and terms of the same era. Thereafter, we have arrived at a basic understanding of terms like Romanticism in American literature, the origin and development of Transcendentalism, the American Civil War and its impact on literature, etc. Lastly, the chapter also discussed the practitioners of Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and the Civil War in American literature.

1.7 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Consider working on the following concepts with the help of notes and the references given at the end of the chapter.

- The Beginning of the 19th Century American Literature.
- Romanticism in 19th Century American Literature
- Comment on the origin and development of transcendentalism in American literature.
- Write an essay on the American Civil War and its impact on literature.
- What is realism? Its practitioners in the 19th Century American Literature.
- Compare and contrast the features of Romanticism, Transcendentalism, and Realism in 19th century American literature.

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2

IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS - II

Unit Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, the purpose of this chapter is to comprehend certain aspects of 19th century American literature. You will gain a better understanding of Naturalism, the Local Color Movement, and 19th-century American women writers like Kate Chopin, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, Louisa May Alcott, Edith Wharton, etc. You will also be acquainted with the meaning and characteristic features of Naturalism, the Local Color Movement and the writings of women of 19th-century America. It is believed that a revisionary study of these terms will prepare you to understand 19th Century American Literature.

2.1 NATURALISM

Naturalism was a late 19th- and early 20th-century literary and artistic movement inspired by the adoption of natural science concepts and methods, particularly the Darwinian view of nature, to literature and art. It was a literary extension of the realism tradition, striving for a more genuine, unselective picture of reality, a veritable "slice of life" presented without moral judgement. Naturalistic authors emphasised man's incidental and physiological nature rather than his moral or rational traits, which set them apart from realism. Individual characters were viewed as hapless products

of heredity and the environment, driven by powerful innate desires from within and harried by external social and economic pressures. As a consequence, they had very little say or influence over their fate, and their "cases" had a poor prognosis from the outset.

Naturalism began in France, with its direct theoretical foundation in Hippolyte Taine's critical approach, "There is a cause for ambition, courage, and truth, just as there is for digestion, muscular action, and animal heat," he said in his preface to Histoire de la littérature anglaise. Despite the fact that the Goncourt brothers' Germinie Lacerteux (1864), a case study of a servant girl, was the very first "scientific" book, Émile Zola's piece "Le Roman expérimental" (1880) became the school's literary manifesto. According to Zola, the novelist was to become a detached scientist who puts his characters and their passions into a series of experiments and works with emotional and social facts in the same way that a chemist works with the matter. Following Zola's lead, the naturalistic style spread widely, influencing most of the period's great writers to vary degrees. The popular story "The Necklace" by Guy de Maupassant introduces a figure who will be handled like a specimen under a microscope. Early works by Joris-Karlysmans, as well as those of German dramatist Gerhart Hauptmann and Portuguese author José Maria Eça de Queirós, were based on naturalistic principles.

Naturalistic writers believed that by studying people objectively, the laws underlying the forces that govern their lives could be studied and understood. Naturalistic writers wrote their novels using a model of the scientific approach; they studied human beings governed by instincts and passions as well as the ways in which the characters' lives were governed by forces of heredity and environment. Although they used the techniques of accumulating detail pioneered by the realists, the naturalists chose the part of real life that they desired to convey with a particular object in mind.

Naturalism was proposed and developed by Emile Zola, a French novelist, and was brought to America by American novelist Frank Norris. It's a new, tougher realism. It's a literary view of life that emphasizes direct observation rather than idealism or rejection of the unpleasant. Naturalists in American literature questioned the validity of comforting moral truths. They attempted to achieve extreme objectivity and frankness by portraying characters from lower social and economic classes who were influenced by their environment and heredity. The melancholy and determinism concepts of naturalism pervade the writings of authors such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Henry Adams, Theodore Dreiser, Ernest Hemingway, and others.

Both André Antoine and Otto Brahm formed the Théâtre Libre in Paris in 1887 and the Freie Bühne in Berlin in 1889, respectively, to produce real works in a naturalistic style with a naturalistic setting. In the visual arts, a parallel progression happened. Following the example of realist painter Gustave Courbet, painters chose themes from daily life. Many of them left the studio for the streets, where they discovered subjects among the peasants and traders and photographed them as they happened, unplanned and

unposed. Their finished canvases possessed the freshness and immediacy of drawings as a result of this approach. The first to champion Édouard Manet and the Impressionists was Zola, the advocate for literary realism.

Despite their claims to impartiality, the literary naturalists were hampered by biases in their deterministic ideas. They correctly portrayed nature, but it was always "red in tooth and claw." Their beliefs about inheritance led them to choose basic characters with powerful, elemental passions. Because of their beliefs in the overpowering influences of the environment, they chose the most miserable locations for their subjects—the slums or the underworld—and photographed them in gloomy and disgusting detail. Finally, they couldn't keep a romantic element of revolt against the societal conditions they detailed from coming through.

Naturalism was a short-lived historical trend, but it contributed to the refinement of realism in art, new fields of subject matter, and largeness and formlessness that was closer to life than art. Its plethora of impressions gave the image of a world in perpetual motion, necessarily jungle-like due to the abundance of interdependent lives. In American literature, it flourished late in the writing of Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, and Jack London, and culminated in the work of Theodore Dreiser. The "Studs Lonigan" trilogy by James T. Farrell is one of the most recent instances of pure realism.

Other American writers pushed toward naturalism, a more sophisticated kind of realism, toward the end of the nineteenth century. Hamlin Garland's writings exhibited part of this evolution when he used short tales and novels as vehicles for philosophical and social preaching, and he was franker than Howells in emphasising the harsher elements of the farmer's hardships and in dealing with the subject of sex. Garland's talents were showcased in films like *Main-Traveled Roads* and *Rose of Dutcher's Coolly*. These, together with *Crumbling Idols*, a critical manifesto for new fiction, were crucial contributions to a growing movement.

Other American authors of the same era or slightly later were ardent supporters of Émile Zola's French naturalists. For example, Theodore Dreiser dealt with subjects that previous realists deemed too hazardous and, like other naturalists, used his characters and narratives to express his own ideas. He portrayed characters who couldn't control their actions, claiming that men's actions were "chemical compulsions." He also showed characters being destroyed by stronger and more vicious opponents, believing that the race was to the swift and the battle to the strong. *Sister Carrie*, *Jennie Gerhardt*, *The Financier, The Titan*, and much later *An American Tragedy* were among his greatest works.

Dreiser was unconcerned about or uninterested in the finer points of style or intricate symbolism found in French naturalistic works, but Stephen Crane and Frank Norris were. In his short novels Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and The Red Badge of Courage, as well as several of his short stories like In McTeague, The Octopus, and The Pit, Crane was an artistic genius who created his details and brought them out to represent a picture of a man

heavily burdened by environment and situation. Frank Norris, who loved Crane's aptitude for making phrase sparks that cast a momentary gleam upon whole phases of life, strove to create phrases, scenes, and entire narratives that cast similar gleams. Both Crane and Norris died young, their full powers unfulfilled, but their experiments foreshadowed great successes in the book in the twentieth century.

In Henry James' writings, fiction took a new course. He believed, like other realists and naturalists of his period, that literature should reflect reality. However, he saw reality as being translated twice: first, through the author's unique experience of it, and then, through his distinctive description of it. As a result, deep knowledge and extensive expertise were less necessary than the artist's difficult and delicate duty. His articles on authors, “The Art of Fiction”, and magnificent prefaces to his collected works showed him grappling deeply and consciously with the issues of his craft. They produced an important body of work on fictional craftsmanship when read together.

Despite being a great short story writer, James is best known for his novels in which his beliefs are put into action. *The American*, *The Portrait of a Lady*, *The Spoils of Poynton*, *What Maisie Knew*, *The Wings of the Dove*, *The Ambassadors*, and *The Golden Bowl* were among the most notable works. The first of them were international books, in which tensions originated from interactions between Americans and Europeans, each with its own set of traits and ideals. With time, he became more concerned with his characters' psychological processes, as well as a subtle representation of their restricted insights, perceptions, and feelings.

Realism and Naturalism

The Civil War in the United States cost more than 2.3 million soldiers their lives, with an estimated 851,000 individuals dying between 1861 and 1865. Walt Whitman foretold it, and the years that followed saw the emergence of literature that presented a clear and unembellished vision of the world as it truly was. This was the core of reality. Naturalism was a form of realism that was taken to its logical conclusion. They were the writers' principal means of expression after the dismal reality of a disastrous conflict.

Before becoming Mark Twain in 1863, at the age of 27, Samuel Clemens worked as a typesetter, journalist, riverboat captain, and itinerant labourer. He first went by that moniker when covering politics in the Nevada Territory. The short story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," published in 1865, propelled him to national prominence. Although Twain's story was a hilarious tall tale, the characters were accurate representations of real Americans.

Naturalism is a branch of realism that has many characteristics in common with realism but differs in some ways. Naturalism emerged in 1859 and, like realism, presented real people in genuine settings, but it was thought that factors greater than the person, such as nature, fate, and genetics, affected people's fates. This branch represents a transition from idealism to reality.

The Civil War provides the historical backdrop for this time period. Agriculture, which was considered the south at the time, was competing with industry, which was deemed the north. A session from South Carolina was held in the Union in 1861. The Civil War resulted from the partition of nations. The conflict sprang from disagreements over state's rights and slavery. This definitely had a negative impact on the United States, as well as the literature of the historical period. Reconstruction began once the conflict was over. The homestead acts launched the United States' westward expansion, and Indian reserves were now being seized in order for the country to expand its borders. This development aided the country's growth and eventually led to the Second Industrial Revolution, which saw the introduction of electricity, telephones, and vehicles. The rise of cities as a result of the second industrial revolution led to immigration.

Spirituals and slave narratives centred on slavery were prevalent in realism and naturalism literature. These essays provide compelling proof that slavery ruins people's personalities. Frederick Douglass, for example, authored "My Bondage and My Freedom," a book about his life as a slave that exposes the negative aspects of slavery. War memoirs and frontier stories are among the other written works. Because the Civil War had no concern for anyone and people were killed or injured on a daily basis, we may detect a theme of a loss of innocence in these written works.

Naturalism, like realism, was a literary style inspired by 19th-century French authors who aspired to capture the reality they saw around them via fiction, particularly among the middle and working classes in cities. Paul Laurence Dunbar was an African American poet who wrote popular poems in the black vernacular for a white audience, such as "Possum" and "When de Co'n Pone's Hot," and gave them a glimpse into what black Americans were like. Dunbar also wrote non-dialect poetry, such as "We Wear the Mask" and "Sympathy," which depicted racism in America during and after Reconstruction.

While Henry James shared the realists' and naturalists' belief that literature should convey reality, his writing style and use of literary form aimed to produce an aesthetic experience as well as document the truth. He was enthralled by the clash of American and European values. Both 19th-century realism and naturalism, as well as 20th-century modernism, may be found in his writing. The American, The Portrait of a Lady, What Maisie Knew, The Wings of the Dove, and The Golden Bowl are just a few of his renowned novels.

2.2 LOCAL COLOR MOVEMENT

The local colour writing style is generated from the presentation of a certain location's and its residents' traits and characteristics. “Local color" can be applied to any type of writing, it is almost solely used to define the type of American literature that first occurred in the late 1860s, sometime after the War Had ended. For nearly three decades, The Local Color was probably the most popular form of American literature, satisfying the newly awakened interests of the public in distant parts of the U S and, for some,

presenting a nostalgic memory of the past times. It was concerned primarily with showing the character of a specific region, focusing on the peculiarities of dialect, manners, folklore, and landscape that distinguished the area.

The first popular group of fiction writers, the local colorists, took over some of the work of portraying sectional groups that had been neglected by the new humorists. Bret Harte, one of these writers to achieve widespread popularity, confessed to being inspired by prewar sectional comedy writers, as did some others, and they all had commonalities with the prior generation. Harte's Luck of Roaring Camp, and Other Sketches, funny and emotional tales of California mining camp life; Harriet Beecher Stowe's Oldtown Folks and Sam Lawson's Oldtown Fireside Stories, beautiful vignettes of New England; and Edward Eggleston's Hoosier Schoolmaster, a novel of the early days of the settlement of Indiana, all appeared within a short period of time. Short tales in the patterns established by these three continued to appear well into the twentieth century.

Local-color fiction has ultimately been portrayed in practically every section of the country. Among the other works by George W. Cable are depictions of Louisiana Creoles, Virginia Blacks by Thomas Nelson Page, Georgia Blacks by Joel Chandler Harris, Tennessee mountaineers by Mary Noailles Murfree (Charles Egbert Craddock), New England tight-lipped folk by Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Henry Cuyler Bunner and William Sydney Porter's works include Wilkins Freeman and New York City citizens. A few of these authors declared that their purpose was to portray the lives of people from various walks of life in an honest manner in order to promote compassion in a united nation. However, because the authors tended to nostalgically relive the past rather than portraying their own period, winnowing away less attractive aspects of life or developing their stories with pathos or humour, the novels were only partially realistic. Even if they were tinged with romanticism, because they delicately described common people, were concerned with dialect, and avoided obsolete emotional or romantic clichés, these fictional works were a step toward realism.

James Fenimore Cooper's frontier novels have been recognised as forerunners of the local color narrative, as have Washington Irving's New York Dutch tales. The California Gold Rush provided a vivid and exciting backdrop for Bret Harte's stories, including *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, which uses miners' dialect, colorful characters, and a California setting.

Harte wasn't the only regional colorist who began his career as a stand-up comic. In the end, his unsuccessful attempts to find excellent writing for the Overland Monthly led him to just lampoon the slavering authors of the American West with overblown verse. A number of men, including George Horatio Derby and Robert Henry Newell, the master of dialect spelling, followed his humorous lead. Other "Old Southwest" writers joined in the satirical, broadly humorous style. Samuel Clemens, afterwards known as Mark Twain, apprenticed with Harte at this time. Twain's tall tales (most notably "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," 1865) and

books about life on the Mississippi River show the clearest influence of the local color story—and the humorist subgenre.

2.3 19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

Modern thoughtful evaluation of nineteenth-century women's literary works attempts to understand the deeper causes of why women authors, particularly in America, Britain, and France, were able to attain such widespread exposure and significance in a period known for its male dominance and often lackadaisical attitude toward women's intellectual capabilities. Furthermore, scholars have investigated the broad thematic concerns that characterise much of the literary output of nineteenth-century women writers, with many arguing that it was in the nineteenth century that gender-consciousness and feminist attitudes first came to the forefront of the literary imagination, forever changing how female authors' works would be written and regarded.

In the nineteenth century, there were more published women authors than in any previous century. During the century, women's access to higher education improved dramatically, equipping them with the ability to further their work. Women in Europe and the United States were required to adapt to new cultural constraints such as market economies, cities, and life expectancies grew, and many women became more aware of their imposed social, legal, and political inequality. Finally, nineteenth-century women's social reform movements, such as religious revivalism, abolitionism, temperance, and suffrage, provided a background, an audience, and a place for women authors to express their opinions. While most scholars agree that many women writers accepted the separate sphere of domesticity that the age expected of them, they also argue that as the century progressed, an increasing number of women began to express their dissatisfaction with gender relations and the plight of women in general through their writing. The "woman question" about a woman's true role in art and society, was a passionately discussed topic during the Victorian era, fueled in part by the rapid development of women's literature.

Women writers in the nineteenth century broadened their subject matter beyond spotlighting the lives and hardships of women imprisoned in domestic jails at the end of the century. Instead, they were more individualistic and expected more equal partnership with males in marriage, public life, law, and politics.

2.3.1 Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin is known primarily for her short stories and essays about life in the South of the United States. The Awakening is her most well-known piece (1899). Many critics considered Chopin, a native of Louisiana, one of the first feminist writers to represent the South. Her stories were published in prestigious journals such as Vogue and Atlantic Monthly, and they varied from toddlers to adults. She established herself as a key writer and figure in early feminist movements, not just as a female novelist but also as a feminist from the South.

2.3.2 Harriet Beecher Stowe

Stowe's work as a novelist and abolitionist aided the abolitionist movement's advancement throughout the nineteenth century. Uncle Tom's Cabin, her most renowned novel, highlighted the harsh conditions of enslaved Black people across the United States. The work attracted great notice and resistance in the United States after it was published in America and even Great Britain. During the Civil Conflict, she saw former President Abraham Lincoln, who greeted her by crediting her writing as a spark for the war. "So you're the woman who wrote the book that started this great war," he allegedly told her. while speaking of female empowerment.

2.3.3 Fanny Fern

Sara Payson Willis, better known as Fanny Fern, was a writer and humorist who contributed to novels, children's literature, and journalism. Her writing style appealed to middle-class women and became synonymous with it. Fern was the highest-paid newspaper writer by the time she was 44, earning $100 per week for the New York Ledger. Ruth Hall, a fictional autobiography based on her life that feminist experts hail as a seminal feminist literary work, is her most recognised work today.

2.3.4 Louisa May Alcott:

Alcott was known as one of the best known American novelists, short story writers, and poets best known for her work Little Women and its sequels, Little Men, Abigail May and Amos Bronson Alcott were both transcendentalists who grew up in New England among many famous thinkers of the day, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Alcott's family was poor, so she started working at an early age to help support them while also looking for a creative outlet in writing. In the 1860s, she began to receive critical acclaim for her work. Early in her career, Alcott used various pen identities, including A. M. Barnard. She wrote brutal short stories and adult sensation novels about desire and revenge under this pen name. Little Women, published in 1868, is largely based on Alcott's childhood experiences with her three sisters, Abigail May Alcott Nieriker, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott, and Anna Alcott Pratt, and is set in the Alcott family home, Orchard House, in Concord, Massachusetts. The novel was well-received at the time, and it continues to be popular among children and adults today. It has been adapted for the stage, cinema, and television numerous times. Throughout her life, Alcott was an abolitionist and a feminist who was active in reform organisations such as temperance and women's suffrage. Alcott did not marry. She died of a stroke two days after her father in Boston on March 6, 1888.

2.3.5 Edith Wharton

Edith Newbold Jones was an American author, short story writer, and designer who lived from January 24, 1862, until August 11, 1937. Wharton drew on her intimate understanding of upper-class New York aristocracy to

realistically portray the lives and morals of the Gilded Age. She was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize in Literature in 1921 for her novel The Age of Innocence. She was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame in 1996. The House of Mirth and the novella Ethan Frome are two of her other well-known works.

2.4 SUMMING UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. We have understood certain aspects of 19th century American Literature. We have arrived at a basic understanding of Naturalism, the Local Color Movement, and 19th-century American women writers like Kate Chopin, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Fanny Fern, Louisa May Alcott, and Edith Wharton etc. The chapter also discussed the meaning and characteristic features of Naturalism, the Local Color Movement, and the writings of women of 19th-century America. Lastly, we studied the contributions of American women authors to the history of 19th-century American literature.

2.5 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

The questions in this unit will be asked in the short-notes format, so the learner needs to comprehend each literary term in detail. The following are some of the sample questions.

- The Origin of Naturalism in America
- The Local Color Movement and its impact on literature.
- The Contribution of the Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers
- The Similarities and differences between Naturalism and Realism
- The writings of 19th-century women authors

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF-XEhyNFLs&t=5s

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3

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF WALT WHITMAN'S "I HEAR AMERICA SINGING", "THOUGHTS", "I SIT AND LOOK OUT", "A GLIMPSE" AND "ALL IS TRUTH"

Unit Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, the learner is provided with a brief introduction of the author Walt Whitman and shares some snippets of his life. The learner will be introduced concisely to the poems prescribed in the syllabus. Each poem is summarized and analyzed critically. By the end of the chapter, the learner will be advanced to understand the famous American poet Walt Whitman and his famous poems. Thereafter, all the learnings will be summed up in short for the learner, followed by a self-check exercise.

3.1 WALT WHITMAN

American poet, journalist, and essayist Walt Whitman was born on May 31, 1819, New York, and passed away on March 26, 1892, New Jersey. Whitman was raised in Brooklyn and dropped out of school at the age of 12. He later held a wide range of positions, such as writing and editing for magazines. His revolutionary poetry celebrated the shared experience of an idealised democratic American society while addressing incredibly avoided realities. Whitman is acclaimed as the first "Poet of Democracy" in addition to being recognized as a great American poet. He is also regarded as the father of free verse poetry. His first edition of *Leaves of Grass* (1855), was

revised and greatly expanded in later editions that included his subsequent poems, would be too brutally honest and unconventional to find universal support in its day, but it was praised by his contemporaries. He had a significant impact on both American and foreign literature. Poems like "I Sing the Body Electric" and "Song of Myself," which were written without rhyme or conventional meter, claimed the beauty and the significance of the human body. Later editions also included few more his well-known works like "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry," and elegies on Abraham Lincoln, including "O Captain! My Captain!" Throughout the Civil War, Whitman served in the hospitals in Washington. He borrowed heavily from his wartime experiences and post-war musings for the prose works Democratic Vistas (1871) and Specimen Days & Collect (1882-83).

Walt Whitman is renowned for his masterwork, *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of poetry that he revised and expanded on over the course of his lifetime. The original edition, which is regarded as a turning point in the history of American literature, was a compact volume containing just twelve poems, whereas the final version contained more than 400. He worked on his final years' edition of *Leaves of Grass* on his deathbed (1891-1892). Harold Bloom in one of his interviews with Harper Magazine in the year 2011 described Walt Whitman as “a heroic individualist; he was marked by enormous kindness towards his fellow man. From 1863 to 1867, he tended to between 35,000 and 40,000 men in hospitals – Yankees and Confederates alike. He did this as a volunteer, as a lover of humanity. He brought them bags of peppermint, sips of brandy.” Harold Bloom presented Whitman as an important man and citizen, who is not only a poet but someone who acquired successfully the American soul. He worked in a hospital during Civil War as a volunteer nurse and crossed the ordinary boundaries of duty, charity and love to serve his country men and to those whom he considered as fellow human beings. Through his poetry, he creates a link between the reader and himself. Some of the major themes in the poems of Walt Whitman are the self the body and the soul, nature, time, cosmic consciousness, mysticism, death, transcendentalism and democracy.

3.2 I HEAR AMERICA SINGING

Walt Whitman's masterpiece, I Hear America Singing, has been studied from a number of angles, but the working class of a thriving American society has received the most emphasis. Overall, his poetry prose is lively and simply respectful and appreciative of America's proletariat. Walt Whitman included this poem in his poetry collection *Leaves of Grass* in 1860.

Walt Whitman's optimistic viewpoint reveals a prospering American nation. As each proletariat-class member sings his own song, the poetry is straightforward and clear. The boatman, mason, mechanic, wood-cutter, shoemaker, and carpenter are all contributing to the overall picture of America. Even the female population is appropriately taken into account, recognising their work and praising them.

When the patriotic poem starts, Whitman begins to praise the proletariats in American society and emphasises unique qualities with genuine emotion. The poem has a happy tone as a result, and it encourages encouraging words of support for the people it is addressed to. The expression "I hear American singing" is important in preserving respect for the American working class, which is acknowledged as having contributed equally to the advancement of American society.

The poet now commits himself to documenting many people involved in contributing to American culture in their own unique ways. Each individual character or professional is portrayed happily travelling down his or her predetermined path, being admired for playing a role in contributing to the society. Each character articulates their own distinctiveness as he sings about their line of work. Overall, all of these singing characters are portrayed as being Americans. It is obvious that the poet imagines his own image of America, one built on the labour of the proletarian class, by dividing society along socioeconomic lines. Lincoln's "for the people, by the people", political philosophy is used here as a core principle. It symbolizes his own ideal vision of a future America, one that welcomes the bourgeoisie class into regular public service jobs.

Whitman has specifically devoted two lines—which feature a sewing girl, a wife, and a mother—to the female population of prosperous America. He sees each of these contributions as crucial turning points for progress and transformation in a developing American nation. It serves as an allegory for a time when women were denied the right to vote at the federal level. They thus had no input towards the functioning of the government or elected politicians.

After highlighting people's contributions and all the various professionals connected in an industrial system, he closes his cheerful song. He also appeals to the right to rejoice and celebrate after a hard day's labour as the poem comes to a close.

In the poem, we see, Walt Whitman values individualism and appears to be focused in that regard. It is admirable and respectable that people sing songs that are uniquely their own. Through their singing, the diverse occupations and professions are connected. There are eleven lines in this poem's single stanza. The poem, which was written in free verse, is a drop-down list of professionals from the working class who are striving to make ends meet. He depicts them as genuine supporters of the present and future of America, and does so in a positive light. The poem avoids using traditional poetic forms. He creates a patriotic anthem for future Americans through music, elevating and admiring them. Whitman has filled the poem with American pride and inspires the reader with free rhyme and emotive language.

Overall, the poem has a positive, lively, and cheerful vibe. He plays down any idea of despair and the struggles proletariat society faces by using a set of inspirational words. In the end, it is comparable to the American nation's national anthem. As is generally known, Walt intended for his poems to be read aloud, giving other listeners a sense of optimism, inspiration, and strength.

3.3 THOUGHTS

Whitman's "Thoughts" is a compilation of his ideas on various topics, organised into numbered sections. This poem is written in free verse and does not adhere to any particular meter or rhyme system, as is typical of Whitman's approach. The poem is divided into seven various lengths of stanzas, or divisions. Every section of the poem is a list that addresses a distinct problem that Whitman was strongly considering. The majority of the beginning lines start with "of," as the speaker discusses the topic that occupies his thoughts the most at that precise moment.

Whitman considers individuals in the opening paragraph. Instead of simply scanning their "visages," he considers going farther and learning more about them. He considers ugliness because he acknowledges that it is as significant to beauty. He expresses concern about "detected persons" and criminals and declares his conviction that everyone, including the President, has the ability to commit a crime.

Nature is discussed in the second section. The speaker considers the advancements that humans have brought to the world, as well as the water, trees, hills, and other lovely views. In the third segment, he considers those whom society celebrates and makes the case that accolades have no bearing on a person's physical or spiritual makeup. He notes that these "persons of high positions" frequently live under illusions, which he calls "sad." They are also constantly "walking in the dusk," according to him. Here, in this section, Whitman criticises those in positions of power. He holds the view that pursuing material prosperity destroys the "center of existence" and that those who do so are living in a false reality and are disconnected from their humanity. Whitman emphasises his conviction that pleasure does not depend on wealth or social standing but rather on truth and introspection.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker considers justice and freedom, and he questions why society thinks it is appropriate for certain people to have greater rights than others. While the section 5 takes a different tone again and with the exception of him thinking on these subjects and not mere any observation. It's probable that Whitman's questions about humanity and the soul in this section were inspired by the feast goers. The speaker mentions being at a feast when all of a sudden, he starts to think of a shipwreck in the water and all the people who are drowning. He ponders if the soul can endure beyond physical death or if it perishes together with the body. He questions, in the sixth stanza, if recorded history is as "full" and "enduring" as his own poems because "shreds" of events that were recorded may ultimately come to represent the history of an entire country. Whitman, however, in the sixth stanza, goes so far as to assert that his poems are more significant than the contents of written history. He backs up his assertion by describing history as "shreds, the chronicles of countries," in contrast to his universal poems, which are applicable to anybody from any nation without omission. In the last stanza, he questions why people are so prone to follow leaders who don't give a damn about their subordinates' individual well-being.

Together, these ideas don't really make sense. Whitman was not the only poet to suggest that his poems would address universal issues and the human condition. Whitman gives his readers scattered, brief flashes into his thoughts instead. He poses open-ended questions that urge the reader to consider the same problems that trouble him. This poem contains many concepts that go against widely held social norms. For instance, Whitman claims in the opening verse that everyone, including the President, has the potential to turn into a criminal.

3.4 I SIT AND LOOK OUT

In his poem "I Sit and Look Out," Walt Whitman evokes the echoes of all the miseries and cruelties of life that emerged in the wake of capitalism. The 19th century saw a turning point in people's lives as the vicious circle for materialistic wealth became more influential and principles were abandoned, emotions and feelings were sidelined from within human beings.

I Sit and Look Out, is a poem in free verse which is used to connote the never ending and never changing situation. The poem is more of a study and a bitter commentary of this dystopian world where violence and complete disgrace run the society. The capitalization of the verb "sit" in the title denotes the action of an onlooker. Here, as an onlooker, Whitman witnesses suffering, exploitation, humiliation, misery, lack of regard by the children, mistreatment of women, sickness, irrationality, and other forms of suffering.

In the poem's last line, "All these - All the meanness and agony without end, I sitting, look out upon, See, hear, and am silent," the poet blames others of mistreating people rather than attempting to understand the reasons behind their suffering or to provide any solutions to reduce it.

In the poem, we also witness the loneliness and unhappiness of a woman who has been mistreated by her own children. The children being neglected of her lonesome scream. Heartless suitors pick up young women and betray them without showing any remorse or shame. The poet also observes a rise in the number of unrequited loves and jealousies that are kept secret from the public. The World War was a moment of disgrace and persecution for the young. The poet's unease, discomfort, and the worry and tension that run through his thoughts as he sits back are a wake-up call to the audience to act to improve circumstances.

Walt Whitman penned, "I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots as to who shall be killed to save the lives of the rest, I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant people upon labourers, the poor, upon negroes, and the like; All these-all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon, See, hear, and am silent." Because the poet appears to be at an extremely higher elevation and far from the pictures

of sorrow, the theme of "I Sit and Look Out" conveys a sense of solitude. However, his suffering and cruelty are brilliantly captured.

The pen picturization is horrifying according to the poet as he has to endure such excruciating pain at the expense of his sight that it is worse to watch than to be the victim. In other words, the poet challenges everyone to act morally and stand up to free themselves from the bonds of suffering.

3.5 A GLIMPSE

A free verse poem by Whitman is titled “A Glimpse”. Instead of following the structure of metrical speech, free verse poetry typically follows the patterns of speech and pictures. A Glimpse is about making observations while remaining unnoticed, moving from the outside to the inside, from raucousness outside to silence within. It is a poem full of inconsistencies. The poet is inspecting the inhabitants of the poem's, he contrasts his particular views and beliefs with the surroundings, "crowd of labourers and drivers," in a pub.

The poem opens by giving the reader a sense of the one sight the poet chose to think on. "A glimpse through an interstice" may also refer to a singular viewpoint held by the poet. The words "a glimpse" and "interstice" in the first phrase both imply hidden or invisibility. Additionally, it can entail focusing on a single set that, as we later learn, the barroom's frenzied environment contrasts with the man's peaceful demeanor. The second sentence, "Crowd of labourers and drivers in a bar-room," implies that they are simply relaxing and socializing with one another after work. The second line's word "unremark'd" distinguishes the narrator from the rest of the "crowd." This stresses how we view and interpret the scenario through his perspective. The contrast between the pleasant atmosphere of the barroom and the quietness inside him afterwards emphasises the idea of the exterior and the inner being in opposition to one another.

The poem's second and third lines explain "the outside" in terms of poet, but if we start reading it without them, lines 4 and 5 provide a quite different introduction to the scenario. These lines reveal the poet's inner thoughts. The narrator is completely at ease in the barroom's ambiance, yet he inhabits it differently than the "drivers" and "workmen" do. Lines four and five imply this, as his lover is "seating himself near” to anything that accentuates homosexuality. The word "silently" in line four contrasts the quietness of the poet's mind and his relationship with his beloved with the atmosphere of "the outside." "He might hold my hand" implies warmth in their relationship, which in a way connects them to "the outside," while also highlighting how different their relationship is from the environment of "the outside." This lends credence to the poem's dual subjectivity of "the outside" and "the interior," or the environment and the person.

The phrase "a long while" in line six supports the idea that the character and his lover were sitting quietly and holding hands the entire time, contradicting the silence and warmth of their relationship. The split

subjectivity is supported by "Noises of Coming and Going," as what lies beneath the poem's words and the narrator's thoughts are invisible to the passerby and even to the patrons of the bar. The atmosphere of people talking in the barroom is infused with the idea of charged male sexuality through drinking, swearing, and crude humour. It also implies that the narrator and his lover occupy this sexually charged environment differently from "the outside," setting them apart from and in opposition to "the outside," even in this case, to society.

The final line emphasises the intersubjectivity that the narrator and his lover share by contrasting "quietness" against "warmth," which are both present in their connection.

As a result, the poem's significance extends much beyond simple observation because it pits the individual against society and minorities—such as homosexuals—against communities where they are unwelcome. Here, "the outside" and "the inside" are opposed to one another, dividing them and underlining their inability to converse with one another.

3.6 ALL IS TRUTH

Walt Whitman believes that "all is truth" in his poem, as suggested by the poem's title. Even things we perceive to be "false" aren't always false. In reality, "there is no falsehood or type of lie." This demonstrates that everything—even what we perceive to be wrong and a lie in our minds—is actually true; a true perspective, vision, or goal, as well as any other mistake of a falsehood, are only projections of ideas or ideals offered by a forebear.

Instead of focusing on religion and the way that religion wants you to think, this poetry truly focuses on people and the way that they think. It's as though when it comes to its worthiness and coherence in relation to its source, truth is often what we define it to be. However, it is always a true representation of what it appears to be. The poet offers a different approach that incorporates wisdom and insight to develop a notion based on lie/truth. Truth is what each individual perceives, hears, tastes, feels, and smells. These truths always return flawlessly and their quality is gradually disclosed.

Where has fail'd a perfect return indifferent of lies or the truth?

... is compact just as much as space is compact, And that there is no flaw or vacuum in the amount of the truth—but that all is truth without exception

In the physical sciences, where "everything exactly embodies itself and what has preceded it," these statements express an unshakable belief. "All Is Truth" asserts that reality's nature is independent of our disagreements in a time when the centuries-old conflict between men of faith and men of

science was intensified with each new unbiblical idea. It is just how it is; the world is "indifferent" to what we categorise as "lies or the truth."

He seems to be trying to make the point that we should all acknowledge that we have all misled about who we are in order to fit in with society. We may see evidence of this today, and it is quite real. People don't mean to be this way; they just believe that it's an intrinsic desire that drives us to want to be a part of something greater than ourselves, and we accomplish this by altering our personalities to fit those of others.

In spite of the fact that it is a falsehood, it is being said that people will believe anything they want to believe when they hear it. Despite the fact that what you say is untrue, I believe that the way you respond to people genuinely reveals the real you.

Whitman writes, "And henceforth I will go rejoice whatever thing I see or am, and sing and laugh and deny nothing" as he puts the poem to rest. It essentially says to enjoy and appreciate who you are and your surroundings. So, let's follow his wise advice and take in everything, deny nothing, and decide what lessons experience has to teach.

Self-Check Exercise 1

1. Discuss the underlying message in all the above poems.
2. Find out the writing style of the poet.
3. Major themes in Walt Whitman’s poetry.
4. Surf the web and read more about Walt Whitman and his other works.

3.7 SUMMING UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. In brief, we learned about Whitman’s life. We also studied and did a critical analysis of each prescribed poem in the syllabus. We analyzed the poems with a similar set of themes, like life beyond what we perceive at the surface level. We conclude the chapter by understanding what Whitman perceives life as and how he wants to put it across to the readers.

Some questions in the self-check exercise are provided further for the learners to ponder on the subject.

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3.9 SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

- Self-Check Exercise 1 Refer to the end of Section 2.6

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4

Critical Study of Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not Stop for Death", "I Heard a Fly Buzz – When I Died", "Hope is the Thing with Feathers", "A Bird Came Down the Walk" and "A Light Exists in Spring"

Unit Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, the learner is provided with a brief introduction of the author Emily Dickinson and shares some snippets of her life. The learner will be introduced concisely to the poems prescribed in the syllabus. Each poem is summarized and analyzed critically. By the end of the chapter, the learner will be advanced to understand the famous American Poet Emily Dickinson and her famous works. Thereafter, all the learnings will be summed up in short for the learner, followed by a self-check exercise.

4.1 EMILY DICKINSON

American lyric poet Emily Dickinson, also known as Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, was born in Amherst, Massachusetts, the U.S. on December 10, 1830, and passed away on May 15, 1886. Dickinson received her education at Amherst Academy and later on joined college lectures at Amherst College. She was the granddaughter of Amherst College's co-founders. Her writings reflected the education she gained in this college. She was born to Edward Dickinson, a member of the United States Congress and Emily Narcross Dickinson. She lived a private life and two of her siblings, brother Austin and sister Lavinia were her windows to the outside world. She herself confessed that "I don't go from home, unless emergency leads me

by hand, and then I do it obstinately, and drew back if I can" (Bradley and Beatty 148)

She started writing in the 1850s; by 1860, she was freely breaking grammar and versification traditions. Almost 1,800 poems Emily Dickinson wrote throughout her lifetime and had only seven confirmed published. She sent hundreds of poems to her friends and acquaintances, but she seems to have kept many of them to herself. Sometimes her countless letters are as artistic as her poems. She frequently wrote in poetic styles characteristics of hymns and ballads. She also displayed great boldness and authenticity in her literature's intellectual content. One of the scholar/writers of that age Thomas Wentworth Higginson accepted that the poetry of Dickinson was witty.

Her poetry stands out for its intriguing beauty, succinct compression, and evocative real voice, yet they seem unpolished. Love, mortality, and nature are among the topics of her seemingly straightforward poems, whose profundity and intensity contrast with the seeming serenity of her existence. Casey Russel Hayes in his dissertation "The Spiritual Seesaw: Emily Dickinson and the Paradox of Belief" pointed out that the central themes in Dickinson's poetry is the acceptance of God, nature and death. Her poetry reflects both doubts and beliefs where she mixed personal thought with motivation from higher power and conclusion is left up to the readers.

Following posthumous writings, her popularity expanded, and is highly respected. After her death in 1886, Lavinia her sister found a number of Dickinson's writing and manuscripts in her room and asked some scholars for help in editing these writings. Since the publication of her complete works in 1955, she has earned a reputation as one of America's best poets. Dickinson is frequently cited as one of the two most important American poets of the 19th century, along with Walt Whitman.

4.2 'BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH'

The 1863 poem "Because I could not stop for Death," which is assumed to have been written between 1855 and 1863, is a plain lyric about Emily Dickinson's confrontation in the face of death. Dickinson experienced the deaths of numerous loved ones during her younger years. This poem was probably inspired by something similar.

The poem, which is considered to be Dickinson's best-known work, shows a speaker's journey beyond life. She personifies "Death" and "Immortality" in her poetry to make them into characters.

When she adds, "He kindly stopped for me," in the first stanza, she makes it clear that she considers death by presenting it as a personal friend or a gentleman. The poem's calm tone further hints that the author is at ease with death. The author's death is portrayed by the carriage trip. Dickinson expresses her willingness to accept death in the next stanza when she writes that she "put away...labor and... leisure too, for his civility." This demonstrates the author's acceptance of her own mortality even further. She

eagerly boarded the carriage with Death and Immortality after abandoning everything she had planned to do with her life. Death is portrayed as taking care of her while driving slowly so that she can reflect. When he said that he "knew no haste", he patiently and slowly takes her through the many phases of her existence. The author is kindly allowed some time to reflect on her childhood as they drive "passed the School where the Children strove." The author then has the opportunity to go back on her early years as they pass the "Gazing Grain." The sun is setting as they pass it. Here, the setting sun represents the author's departure. The transition from this life to eternal is depicted as being as peaceful and beautiful as the sunset. The author has a warm relationship with Death and Immortality in the first through third stanzas. She doesn't feel self-conscious about being underdressed as she describes Death as a gentleman suitor who is nice and civil. However, as sun sets and the chill dampness takes in, the author begins to shiver and realizes she has not fully prepared for the weather. The poem's unexpected tone changes in the fourth stanza and thereafter allows readers to recognize the poem for what it truly is—cruel and terrible.

Perhaps because she believed she would merely be transitioning from this life to one that was greater. She feels tricked because her small, damp, permanent abode isn't a mansion in the sky but rather a swelling of the ground, and disappointment sets in as she realises this in the fifth stanza. The author comes to the realisation that death is not everything she had anticipated.

Dickinson seems to have considered the idea of an afterlife in paradise, but ultimately remarked that she wanted to believe in an afterlife in paradise but couldn't. In the end, she believed the grave was where she would rest.

The poem "Because I Could Not Stop For Death" has six stanzas and is composed of quatrains, which are groups of four lines. There is no rhyme pattern used in the poem. The mood of the poem is the emotional feeling that the poet wants to produce in the reader. This poem's tone and mood are connected in this particular context.

Dickinson employs a number of literary techniques throughout the poem. These include personification and alliteration, among others. The first of these, alliteration, happens when words that start with the same sound are placed near together. For instance, the second stanza has the words "labor" and "leisure".

One of the most evident literary devices used in this poem is personification. The first stanza very explicitly personifies death. It plays the role of the speaker's suitor, inviting her to board the carriage and travel with him.

4.3 I HEARD A FLY BUZZ-WHEN I DIED

Dickinson's "I heard a Fly buzz-when I died", is composed of four quatrains, which are groups of four lines. The poem provides an unforgettable portrayal of the final moments of life. The speaker draws attention to both the room's silence and one fly's buzz.

Dickinson is renowned for her concise poems that are absolutely packed with dark thoughts and graphic imagery. The speaker of "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" contrasts what readers would anticipate reading about death with what she actually writes about it by using disturbing dark images. The story "I heard a Fly buzz-when I died" is portrayed from the viewpoint of a narrator who is on the verge of passing away.

Instead of lamenting this circumstance, the speaker turns her attention to a buzzing fly that buzzes around her as she draws to an end.

Dickinson wants her readers to be shocked by the stunning beginning of "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died." With a dash before announcing, the speaker tells the audience that she heard the fly buzz at the precise time of her death. Suddenly, the readers learn that the rest of this poem will be told by the speaker from the opposite side.

The speaker stresses the feeling of emptiness in the final line of this stanza. It was extremely silent, similar to how quiet it is when there is a resting period in between storms.

The speaker of "I heard a Fly Buzz - when I died" changes her thoughts from the fly to the room's silence in the second stanza and starts to describe the people she sees seated close. Not because no one cried for her passing, but rather because everyone had cried all of their tears, the speaker calls their eyes "wrung" as the eyes went dry. When the speaker claims that she could hear the breath of those nearby who were waiting for the moment of death, she is addressing the stillness of the room. In the last two lines of the second stanza, she is referring to God or the Angel of Death by "The King" in this verse is unclear, but whichever she is referring to, she anticipates that he will enter the room as soon as she passes away.

The speaker of "I heard a Fly buzz - when I died" indicates in the third verse that everything was ideal and she was prepared to pass away before the intrusive fly intervened. She states that she assigned a specific person for each of her "keepsakes." Her will was in accord. The atmosphere in the room was calm and still. But when she was about to pass away peacefully, the fly began to buzz.

Everything changes abruptly in the final verse, and the readers can sense the speaker's uneasiness as she portrays the fly in his perplexity. He buzzes around, uncertain of where to settle. The speaker is disturbed by this eerie buzzing as she nears death. The speaker infers that there is such a light in this passage, but a fly buzzes between her and it. There was a disturbance in her serene moment of death, which was intended to be when she followed the bright light from this life to the next. She loses her ability to see the windows abruptly, followed by her total loss of vision. The speaker leaves the readers with this mental picture of the final moments: darkness and an unsettling fly. It appears that the speaker thinks that a bright, warm light needed to be there at the moment of death. In the calm of her room, she must have been surrounded by those close to her. Unfortunately, the fly disrupted it all, and the speaker leaves her readers with the knowledge that, just before she passed away, she heard a fly buzzing, saw darkness, and felt

uncertain. Everyone in the room appeared to be in a serene yet sorrowful spirit. The buzzing of the unsure fly that came and disturbed her calm shows that the dying woman alone felt a sense of uneasiness.

Alliteration is one of the various literary devices that Dickinson uses frequently in her poem. One kind of repetition that emphasises the usage of consonant sounds at the beginning of words is known as alliteration. For instance, lines three and four of the opening stanza's "Stillness" and "Storm" respectively.

Another often used is enjambment, it is primarily focused on line transitions. When a sentence or phrase is abruptly ended by the poet before it naturally concludes. For instance, in the opening stanza, between numbers 2 and 3.

4.4 HOPE IS THE THING WITH FEATHERS

Emily Dickinson wrote a poem titled "Hope is the Thing with Feathers" that is centered on the concept of hope. The poetry is described by the symbolic bird. The poem is regarded as having been published in about 1891. It was included in her sister's second book of poetry, Poems by Emily Dickinson, after she passed away.

"Hope is the Thing with Feathers," is an allegorical poem. Dickinson, a master of metaphor, utilizes the bird to depict religious texts and psalms throughout her poem. Dickinson emphasizes her point that, without ever expecting anything in return, hope survives even the wildest storms, the coldest winds, and, for that matter, the unexplored oceans. Hope keeps us alive by continuing to exist inside of us.

According to Emily Dickinson, hope is the only uncertain thing that offers a strong barrier to being true even in the most trying situations and environments that people encounter before finding stability.

In "Hope is the Thing with Feathers," the poem's narrator portrays Hope as a bird that lives inside people. It doesn't stop singing continually. In the first quatrain, the narrator surmises that hope might be likened to a bird singing merrily to itself. Even though it doesn't have a particular language, it is undeniably present in our spirits. According to Emily Dickinson, hope is an endless source and a vital element of humanity that enables us to venture into unexplored territory.

The poetess highlights the extent of hope's influence over us in the second stanza. The storm becomes merrier and sweeter as it grows stronger and more violent. In the poetess' opinion, no storm could shake hope's stubborn spirit. The poetess claimed that a tremendous cosmic storm would be required, in order to bring down the bird of hope that had kept most of the men's ships afloat.

In order to convey why the bird sings loudly during a hurricane and why a strong storm is expected to go silent, she offers a parable. Emily Dickinson emphasises that hope endures through the most difficult circumstances and

never asks for anything in exchange for its selfless efforts, in the poem's last quatrain. Hope effectively guides the ship from one storm to the next since it is inherently powerful and doesn't require polishing. Even in the coldest places and the wildest waters, the speaker claims that this bird never leaves her side and sings cheerfully without ever demanding food.

A bird is utilized in the poem as an example of a natural object that is frequently employed as a metaphor when talking about abstract ideas like love, death, and hope. Sometimes it's possible to read the poems simply as they are; yet, careful inspection uncovers layers upon layers that lie just beneath the surface. Although there are numerous ways to interpret some verses, their main point is always obvious.

The author uses a variety of literary techniques in this poem. Among them are:

Repetition: Throughout "Hope is the Thing with Feathers," the poet repeatedly uses the phrases "that" and "and."

Also here, anaphora is being used with the same words or phrases used at the beginning of multiple lines for poetic effect. For example, the words "And" and "That" begin in different lines.

As we see previously in this section, we perceive that metaphor is a literary device used to compare hope and a bird in order to convey the content of a poem with a theme focused on hope.

4.5 A BIRD, CAME DOWN THE WALK

"A Bird, Came Down the Walk," a wonderful poem by Emily Dickinson about nature. The primary focus is on a bird going about its regular activities.

Five quatrains, or groupings of four lines, serve as the poem's structural unit. Her unique use of capital letters and dashes at the ends of each line serves to extend the pause before the reader moves on to the following line.

A bird makes simple yet beautiful gestures in Dickinson's poem "A Bird, Came Down the Walk" as it looks for food before taking flight.

The suspicious bird is presumably heading "down the Walk." This is most likely a sidewalk or a walkway that runs close to the speaker's home or wherever she is. At the beginning of the poem, the speaker describes a bird she sees. She is close by and can see the bird, but bird does not immediately notice it. It does seem that birds are wary of humans. They won't behave the same way if they are aware that they are being observed. The speaker, however, is only reporting what she sees and emphasising the importance of the bird's basic behaviors. From where she is standing, she sees the bird pick up an "Angle Worm" and bite it in half. The speaker then notices a bird consuming "Dew" off the grass. Its existence has thus far been portrayed as a straightforward progression from the need to the need.

The following two sentences introduce a brand-new, little life, the "Beetle." Even while the two species may appear very simple to the naked eye, the bird makes a conscious effort to "hop" to the other side and "let" the beetle move past.

In stanza three, the speaker carefully analyses the bird's reactions to its surroundings. It is clear that she is paying great attention to this animal and carefully noting its actions in her mind. She notices the tension it exudes. Bird always examines the area "with quick eyes" regardless of what it's doing. Dickinson uses the word "velvet" to imply the bird's richness. It is clear that she believes the bird to be attractive.

The fourth verse describes the speaker's one and only interaction with the bird. She offers the bird a food crumb- "him a crumb". The bird reacts negatively to this incident in its personal space and takes off in the direction of its natural impulses. It makes purposeful, swift movements that resemble swimming. The fifth stanza will show how perceptive the bird is to its surroundings.

The final verse is written more figuratively than the prior ones. The motion of the bird's wings in the air fascinates the speaker. In her explanation, she likens this procedure to "oars splitting the ocean." The bird's evident beauty is compared to a butterfly that flies off the "Banks of Noon" under the scorching midday sun. It takes a bound and "flies splashless." It moves through the air similarly to how an oar moves through the water.

4.6 A LIGHT EXISTS IN SPRING

The springtime light that enlightens its surroundings is the subject of the poem "A light exists in spring." Even though this poetry is about the natural world, it has a profoundly religious undertone that science cannot explain. There are five quatrains in this poem. In this poem, the speaker tries to capture a particular light that "exists [only] in Spring" or is extremely close to spring. According to the speaker, "A Light exists in Spring," and this specific light can only be felt during this season as this light does come "when March is hardly here." However, this acclamation raises the possibility that the light may potentially occur shortly before spring truly arrives. Spring doesn't officially start until the third week of March, as the speaker had originally claimed.

The speaker now states in the second stanza that "A Color stands abroad / On Solitary Fields." It appears that science has not yet recognised this remarkable "color" in nature. The speaker claims that despite there being no name or scientific definition for this color, humans are nonetheless capable of perceiving it. Therefore, the speaker makes a suggestion that this particular light's color may not appear in nature at all and may only be seen to the human soul, not the mind or even the heart, much as certain lights, like rainbows that are visible to the sight.

In the third quatrain, as light sits "on the Lawn," this unearthly, possibly even supernatural, light and color can be perceived. However, the light may also be seen in trees that are located far away and can also be gathered from locations that are fairly far away from the speaker. This unusual, mystical light, the speaker now claims, "almost speaks to you." The language would undoubtedly be one that only the soul could understand.

However, in the fourth stanza, we see that time, nevertheless, cannot wait for very long, thus "it goes." Certainly, the speaker stays in the same place as the light changes.

Thus, the peculiar light appears to resemble the midday sun after it has passed overhead. There is no music when it departs, but the speaker seems to have been hoping for it or other cues to let her understand the unique sensation she felt with this light.

In the last verse, with the return to reality the speaker claims that she is experiencing a profound loss. It appears as though something absolutely wrong has happened. She perceives the same loss that appeared just as out of place as "Trade" and "Upon a Sacrament's" encroachment.

Mere encounter with the light has got the speaker spiritual awareness that describes the light as some mystery that has influenced her feelings. The speaker seems to be highly moved by her almost supernatural experience of this unique light. She is unable to describe the light's physical characteristics, but she can provide an idea of how it has affected her mentally and spiritually.

Self-Check Exercise 1

1. Discuss the literary devices in all the poems.
2. Find out the examples of the literary devices mentioned above in the poems.
3. Comment on the major themes of Emily Dickinson's Poems.
4. Surf the web and read more about Emily Dickinson and her other works.

4.7 SUMMING UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. In brief, we learned about Dickinson's life. We also studied and did a critical analysis of each prescribed poem in the syllabus. We analyzed the poems with a similar set of themes such as "hope" and "death" with the key themes we also conclude how spiritual the author was pertaining to life.

Some questions in the self-check exercise are provided further for the learners to ponder on the subject.

4.8 SUGGESTED READING

Richard Sewall, *The Life of Emily Dickinson*.

Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Emily Dickinson's Letters," *The Atlantic*, October 1891.

Holland Cotter, "Critic's Notebook: Sights Trained Yet Again on Amherst's Elusive Belle," *New York Times*, 14 October 1999.

4.9 SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

- Self-Check Exercise 1 Refer to the end of Section 4.6

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5

CRITICAL STUDY OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN - I

Unit Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES:

1. To introduce students about a renowned early women writer of America, Louisa May Alcott
2. To study her most famous novel *Little Women*.
3. To understand the plot, characters and historical context of the novel.

5.1 ABOUT LOUISA MAY ALCOTT:

Louisa May Alcott was an American novelist. She was born on 29th November, 1832 and died on 6th March, 1888. She was born in Germantown, now part of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Alcott is best known for the novel Little Women, which she wrote in 1868.

Alcott was the daughter of noted Transcendentalist Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail May III. Her father is often referred to as the father of modern education in the United States. The family moved to Boston in 1844, where her father established an experimental school and joined the Transcendentalist Club with Emerson, Thoreau, and other authors.

Alcott's family suffered from financial difficulties. Louisa started to work from early age to support the family. While working, she also sought interest in writing. She began to receive critical success for her writing in the 1860s. Early in her career, she sometimes used pen names such as A. M. Barnard, under which she wrote lurid short stories and sensation novels for adults that focused on passion and revenge.

Published in 1868, *Little Women* is set in the Alcott family home, Orchard House, in Concord, Massachusetts, and is loosely based on Alcott's childhood experiences with her three sisters, Abigail May Alcott

Nieriker, Elizabeth Sewall Alcott, and Anna Alcott Pratt. The novel was well received at the time and is still popular today among both children and adults. It has been adapted multiple times to stage, film, and television.

An abolitionist and a feminist, Alcott was active in reform movements such as temperance and women's suffrage throughout her life. Alcott never married. She died from a stroke two days after her father in Boston on March 6, 1888.

5.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE NOVEL:

Little Women opens in the latter days of the American Civil War. In the novel, Robert March's involvement in the war would have been a common element for many readers at the time. During the Civil War, there were very few families that didn't have male family members who were involved in the conflict in some or other way. It is also worth noting that *Little Women* takes place in the middle of the Gilded Age, a time in American history that saw booms in scientific innovation, industrialization, and social justice. The American feminist movement gained strength during this time, and hence seeds of feminist thought can also be found in *Little Women*'s pages.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL:

Alcott prefaces *Little Women* with an excerpt from John Bunyan's seventeenth-century work *The Pilgrim's Progress,* an allegorical novel about leading a Christian life. The story opens in Concord, Massachusetts, just a few days before Christmas in the year 1860. The four March girls – Meg (age 16), Jo (age 15), Beth (age 13), and Amy (age 12) – live alone with their mother, Mrs. March. Their father, Mr. March, has volunteered to serve in the Union army in the civil war as a chaplain, leaving his wife and daughters to fend for themselves in his absence. Though impoverished, the March family is rich in spirit; they are strengthened by their familial love and lived by strong Christian morals. On Christmas morning, the girls wake to discover that they have each received a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegorical novel about Christian morals. Together, they resolve to read a little from their books each day, and to put the morals they learn into practice. While attending a dance thrown by a local rich family, Meg and Jo meet Laurie, the grandson of the March family's rich neighbor, Mr. Laurence. Later, Laurie becomes like a member in the March household, and old Mr. Laurence befriends the girls and becomes a grandfather like figure to them. Laurie's tutor, Mr. Brooke, also becomes a fixture in the March household, and he takes a special liking to Meg.

Over the course of the following year, the girls encounter a number of trials that put their readings of *Pilgrim's Progress* to the test. Vain Meg, for instance, burns off a lock of her hair, conceited Amy is beaten in front of her classmates at school when she's discovered hoarding pickled limes in her desk, and Jo (blinded by anger) carelessly allows Amy to fall into an icy river. Toward the end of the year, they learn their father has fallen ill, and

Mrs. March travels to Washington, D.C. (accompanied by Mr. Brooke) in order to tend to him. While Mrs. March is away, Beth contracts scarlet fever, and she grows so sick that the March girls and their servant Hannah fear that she won't survive. Beth's sickness finally abates the morning Mrs. March returns from Washington, much to everyone's relief. On Christmas, Laurie surprises Mrs. March and her daughters with the news that Mr. March has come home early. Mr. March surveys his daughters and is pleased with their moral growth in his absence. Soon after, Mr. Brooke confronts Meg and asks for her hand in marriage. She accepts, with the stipulation that they should wait three years before marrying, and the March family (with the exception of Jo, who wishes for her sister to remain at home) is awash in celebration.

Part II opens with Meg's wedding to Mr. Brooke. The ceremony is a simple affair held at the March family's home. She and Mr. Brooke then begin their new life at their modest home, the Dovecote. Meg gives birth to twins, Daisy and Demi, not long afterward. Jo, meanwhile, is pursuing her writing in earnest; she soon sells several of her stories and poems to a local newspaper; she uses the proceeds from her publications to send Beth and Mrs. March on holiday. Amy, given her elegant manners, has become rich Aunt March's confidante. Amy also impresses a distant yet wealthy relative, Aunt Carrol, who decides to take Amy with her on a trip to Europe. Soon after, Jo decides to move to New York for the winter in order to evade Laurie, who is infatuated with Jo. While working as a governess in a boarding house, Jo meets a kindhearted German professor named Friedrich Bhaer.

When Jo returns home after her stint in New York, Laurie confronts her and asks for her hand in marriage. Jo turns him down, and Laurie is devastated. Mr. Laurence then takes him on a trip to Europe, where Laurie soon runs into Amy. Meanwhile, back at home, Beth's health is waning. Jo takes her on one last holiday to the seashore, and Beth dies not long after. Word of Beth's death reaches Amy, who finds solace in her friendship with Laurie. Laurie realizes Amy was his true love all along; the two fall in love and elope. They return home the night before Jo's 25th birthday. That same night, Professor Bhaer makes a surprise visit. He proposes to Jo toward the end of his visit, and Jo accepts.

Five years pass. Jo and Bhaer are married, they have two boys, and they inherit Aunt March's house when she dies. Jo and Bhaer turn it into a school called Plumfield. The book ends with the celebration of Mrs. March's 60th birthday. The entire March family gathers in the apple orchard and reflects on how blessed they are to have each other. Mrs. March reflects that there is no greater happiness than to experience the love she has for her family.

5.4. CHARACTERS:

Josephine "Jo" March: The protagonist of the novel, and the second-oldest March sister. Jo, who wants to be a writer, is based on Louisa May Alcott herself, which makes the story semi-autobiographical. Jo has a temper and a quick tongue, although she works hard to control both. She is

a tomboy, and reacts with impatience to the many limitations placed on women and girls. She hates romance in her real life, and wants nothing more than to hold her family together.

Margaret "Meg" March: The oldest March sister, Meg battles her girlish weakness for luxury and money, and ends up marrying a poor man she loves. Meg represents the conventional and good; she is similar to her mother, for whom she was named. Meg sometimes tries to alter who she is in order to please other people, a trait that comes forth when she allows other girls to dress her up like a rich girl at her friend Annie Moffat's house. She becomes an agreeable housewife, pretending to like politics because her husband does, and forgoing luxury because her husband is poor.

Elizabeth "Beth" March: The third March sister, Beth is very shy and quiet. Like Meg, she always tries to please other people, and like Jo, she is concerned with keeping the family together. Beth struggles with minor faults, such as her resentment for the housework she must do.

Beth resembles an old-fashioned heroine like those in the novels of the nineteenth-century English author Charles Dickens. Beth is a good person, but she is also a shade too angelic to survive in Alcott's more realistic fictional world. With Beth's death, Alcott lets an old type of heroine die off. The three surviving March sisters are strong enough to live in the changing real world.

Beth is close to Jo; outgoing Jo and quiet Beth both have antisocial tendencies. Neither of them wants to live in the world the way it is, with women forced to conform to social conventions of female behavior. Similarly, it is not surprising that Meg and Amy are particularly close to each other, since generous Meg and selfish Amy both find their places within a gendered world.

Amy Curtis March: The youngest March sister, Amy is an artistic beauty who is good at manipulating other people. Unlike Jo, Amy acts as a perfect lady because it pleases her and those around her. She gets what she wants in the end: popularity, the trip to Europe, and Laurie. Amy serves as a foil—a character whose attitudes or emotions contrast with, and thereby accentuate, those of another character—for Jo, who refuses to submit to the conventions of ladyhood. Both artists struggle to balance society's expectations with their own natural inclinations. The more genuine of the two and the more generous, Jo compares favorably to Amy. Both characters, however, are more lovable and real for their flaws.

Margaret "Marmee" March: Mother of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, and wife of Mr. March. Mrs. March runs the household in the first half of the book, when Mr. March is away at war. She is calm and collected, deeply moral, and teaches her girls to see the proper way to behave and the value of their poverty.

Robert March: Father of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, and husband of Mrs. March. Mr. March is a minister. In Part I, Mr. March has volunteered to serve in the Civil War as a chaplain, leaving his wife and daughters to fend

for themselves, and plunging them into a degree of poverty. After he returns he partners with Mrs. March to provide support and a moral example to his daughters.

Theodore "Laurie" Laurence: The Marches' charming, fun, and intelligent next-door neighbor, Laurie becomes particularly close to Jo but ends up marrying Amy. In between the publication of Part One and Part Two, Alcott received many letters asking her to marry Jo to Laurie. Perhaps to simultaneously please her readers and teach them a lesson, Alcott had Jo get married, but not to Laurie.

Laurie struggles with his grandfather's expectations of him, in a similar manner to the way Jo struggles with becoming a lady. Laurie is not manly enough for his grandfather because he does not want to enter the business world. Likewise, Jo is not feminine enough for her sisters because she swears, soils her gloves, and speaks her mind at all times.

Mr. Brooke: Laurie's tutor. Mr. Brooke is poor but virtuous.

Frederick Bhaer: A respected professor in Germany who becomes an impoverished language instructor in America. Mr. Bhaer lives in New York, where he meets Jo. He is kind and fatherly.

Mr. Laurence: Laurie's grandfather and the Marches' next-door neighbor. Mr. Laurence seems gruff, but he is loving and kind.

Hannah: The Marches' loyal servant.

Aunt March: A rich widow and one of the March girls' aunts. Although crotchety and difficult, Aunt March loves her nieces and wants the best for them.

Daisy: Meg and Mr. Brooke's daughter. Daisy is the twin of Demi. Her real name is Margaret.

Demi: Meg and Mr. Brooke's son and Daisy's twin. Demi's real name is John Laurence.

Mrs. Kirke: The woman who runs the New York boarding house where Jo lives.

Kate Vaughn: One of Laurie's British friends. At first, Kate turns up her nose at the bluntness and poverty of the Marches. She later decides that she likes them, however, showing that she is able to overcome her initial prejudice.

Sallie Gardiner: Meg's rich friend. Sallie represents the good life to Meg, and Meg often covets Sallie's possessions.

Aunt Carrol: One of the March girls' aunts. Aunt Carrol is ladylike, and she takes Amy with her to Europe.

Florence: Aunt Carrol's daughter. Florence accompanies her aunt and Amy to Europe.

Fred Vaughn: One of the Vaughn siblings. Fred is Laurie's friend, but he soon develops a romantic interest in Amy.

Esther: Aunt March's servant. Esther is a French Catholic.

Annie Moffat: Another wealthy friend of Meg's. Annie is fashionable and social, and she wears stylish clothing that Meg envies.

Ned Moffat: The older brother of Meg's friend Annie Moffat.

Frank Vaughn: One of the Vaughn siblings. Frank is sickly.

Grace Vaughn: The youngest sister of the Vaughn family. Grace and Amy become friends on a picnic.

Dr. Bangs: A doctor who tends to Beth when she is ailing.

The Hummels: A family that lives near the Marches. The Hummels are poor and in bad health.

5.5 QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the term "little women." What does the term say about the status of American women in the 1860s?
2. Discuss the role of the Civil War in Little Women. Who goes to the war, and who wants to? Why does Alcott deliberately put such a big war so far in the background of her story?
3. How does Jo represent the plight of the female artist in the 1860s? Does Amy represent the plight any differently? If so, how?
4. Discuss the similarities and differences between Jo and Amy. How do these differences lead to Laurie's love for Jo but eventual marriage to Amy?
5. Discuss the character of Beth, the most conforming sister. Is her death at all symbolic?

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6

CRITICAL STUDY OF LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S LITTLE WOMEN - II

Unit Structure

6.0 OBJECTIVES:

1. To study the genre of the most famous novel of Louisa May Alcott's novel Little Women.
2. To study the setting of the novel.
3. To understand various themes of the novel *Little Women*.

6.1 GENRE OF LITTLE WOMEN:

Coming-of-Age, Romance, Children's Literature:

More than anything else, *Little Women* is a coming-of-age story – specifically for Jo March, but more generally for all of the March sisters and even their friend Laurie. How can we tell? Well, it's simple: we begin with children and teenagers who have dreams for the future, and then we watch them mature into adults who have to adapt their plans to their circumstances. In that sense, *Little Women* reminds us of other great nineteenth-century novels in which children grow into adults, like *Jane Eyre* and *Great Expectations*. In *Little Women*, however, things seem to be just a little bit softer, easier, and cozier; we're never as worried about what will happen to Jo as we are about what could happen to Jane or Pip, who are more alone and more exposed to the trials of the world around them. Jo's coming-of-age is difficult, but it's made easier by the supportive nature of her close-knit family. We're actually a bit jealous of that; the March family is almost a little too perfect!

You can also think of *Little Women* as a romance; after all, it's the love triangle between Jo, Laurie, and Professor Bhaer that seems to capture everyone's attention. Just Google the words "Jo Laurie fan fiction" and you'll see what we mean. People write stories in which Jo falls for Laurie,

and they make "Jo + Laurie" YouTube montages with their favorite love songs playing over them. The romance in the novel is a lot of fun, and you can get caught up in it. But *Little Women* is more than just romantic drama. It unites the romance plot with Jo's attempt to find herself and find a way to express her talents in the world around her.

Little Women is often considered children's literature, although it's a pretty high reading level. Louisa May Alcott wrote it with the intention of creating a girls' book, and she succeeded spectacularly – the book has had a long afterlife as a children's classic. It has also inspired later writers, and we think we see a debt to *Little Women* in books like *Anne of Green Gables* and *Little House on the Prairie*. That's not to say that L. M. Montgomery and Laura Ingalls Wilder didn't have unique visions of their own; they certainly did. But Louisa May Alcott paved the way for audiences to receive the kind of stories that Montgomery, Wilder, and others had to tell.

6.2 SETTING OF THE NOVEL:

New England during and after the American Civil War

The town where the March and Laurence families live is never given a name in the novel, but it's clearly somewhere in New England and loosely based on Concord, Massachusetts, where Louisa May Alcott's family lived all her life. Although the March sisters will at times travel the globe – Jo goes to New York, while her sister Amy embarks on a European tour – they always come back to the family home in the northeastern United States. We realize just how proud the March girls really are of their American heritage when Laurie hosts a picnic for some visiting British friends – their pride in the democratic ideals of independence and advancement through hard work is obvious. Being in New England in the mid-nineteenth century also means they're close to the philosophical community of the Transcendentalists – you know, people like Emerson and Thoreau. Mr. March, like the real-life Bronson Alcott on whom he is based, is one of these enlightened forward-thinking men.

There are a lot of clues to the time frame in which the book takes place. The first chapter begins at Christmastime in the middle of the Civil War; it's not clear exactly what year, but sometime in the early 1860s. The first volume of the novel – the original *Little Women*, which ends with Chapter 23 – spans one year, from Christmas to the next Christmas, and ends with the war still going. Over the course of this first part, Jo goes from being fifteen to being sixteen.

The second volume of the novel, beginning with Chapter 24 and originally titled *Good Wives*, starts three years later. Jo seems to be nineteen, and this part of the novel spans the events of about six years – Jo is almost 25 when she becomes engaged to Mr. Bhaer, and they marry a year later, when she's presumably almost 26. The novel ends with a birthday party for Marmee five years after Jo's wedding – so Jo is just about 30, going on 31. Take-away fact: from the beginning of the first chapter to the end of the last

chapter, the novel covers around fifteen years, but the last five years are summarized really fast at the very end, and another three years get skipped in the middle.

Why does this timing matter? Well, it's long – a broad swath of years which gives us a picture of the March girls from childhood through to maturity. This wide-angle view is typical of the nineteenth-century novel, which often gives a complete picture of an individual, a family, or an entire society. By contrast, the Modernist novel in the early twentieth century has a narrower focus – think of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, which takes place in a single day! If the fifteen years covered by *Little Women* aren't enough for you, then you can read the sequels *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*, which take Jo into her fifties!

6.3 IMPORTANT THEMES OF THE NOVEL:

Women's Struggle Between Familial Duty and Personal Growth

While on the surface a simple story about the four March girls' journeys from childhood to adulthood, *Little Women* centers on the conflict between two emphases in a young woman's life—that which she places on herself, and that which she places on her family. In the novel, an emphasis on domestic duties and family detracts from various women's abilities to attend to their own personal growth. For Jo and, in some cases, Amy, the problem of being both a professional artist and a dutiful woman creates conflict and pushes the boundaries set by nineteenth-century American society.

At the time when Alcott composed the novel, women's status in society was slowly increasing. As with any change in social norms, however, progress toward gender equality was made slowly. Through the four different sisters, Alcott explores four possible ways to deal with being a woman bound by the constraints of nineteenth-century social expectations: marry young and create a new family, as Meg does; be subservient and dutiful to one's parents and immediate family, as Beth is; focus on one's art, pleasure, and person, as Amy does at first; or struggle to live both a dutiful family life and a meaningful professional life, as Jo does. While Meg and Beth conform to society's expectations of the role that women should play, Amy and Jo initially attempt to break free from these constraints and nurture their individuality. Eventually, however, both Amy and Jo marry and settle into a more customary life. While Alcott does not suggest that one model of womanhood is more desirable than the other, she does recognize that one is more realistic than the other.

Family and Marriage

The dominant theme of Little Women, as for girls in the nineteenth century, is family. The characters are defined by their familial relations and behaviors toward each other, and all are deeply invested in cultivating and supporting one another.

Throughout the novel, Alcott emphasizes the importance of family as not only a practical or economic unit but also a deeply meaningful one. When Aunt March offers to adopt a child, Father and Mother reject, insisting that they stay together. Without money or an urge to be very active

in society, much of the March family's experiences and emotions take place within the family unit, inventing plays and clubs. The main dramas play out within the family as well, such as Jo and Amy's fight over the burnt manuscript. The girls miss their Father or Mother not because it makes their work harder, but because they are the moral head and heart of the family.

The theme of family encompasses the girls marrying and starting families of their own. Marmee teachers her daughters that having a loving husband and family is the greatest joy a woman can have, as emphasized by the concluding line of the book. Marmee's discussions with the girls about their duties to each other and their parents evolve into discussions about their duties to their husbands and children. Alcott and her characters devote great attention to finding good husbands. Each of the grooms spends significant time meeting and being accepted by the family before the marriage. Laurie in particular evolves from being a neighbor and friend to being a son and brother. While Jo initially a threat to her family unit, the March family actually expands to include these new families. Thus, marriage does not replace but rather enhances the familial bond.

The Danger of Gender Stereotyping

Little Women questions the validity of gender stereotypes, both male and female. Jo, at times, does not want to be a conventional female. In her desires and her actions, she frustrates typical gender expectations. She wants to earn a living, for example—a duty conventionally reserved for men. Also, she wears a dress with a burn mark to a party, evidence that she does not possess tremendous social grace, a quality that nineteenth-century American society cultivated in women. Similarly, there are times when Laurie does not want to be a conventional man. He wants to pursue music, at that time a culturally feminine pursuit, instead of business, a culturally masculine pursuit. Even his nickname, Laurie, which he uses in favor of his much more masculine given name, Theodore, suggests his feminine side. Alcott bestows the highest esteem upon Jo and Laurie, who, in their refusal to embody gender stereotypes, willingly expose themselves to particular obstacles.

Christianity, Morality, and Goodness

In the opening pages of *Little Women*, Mrs. March urges her daughters to take their cue from Christian, the main character in the allegorical tale *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. "Our burdens are here," she says, "our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City." And in many ways, the story arc of *Little Women* can be seen as a shadow of *The Pilgrim's Progress* – through their mishaps and misdeeds, and through their constant struggle to do what is good and right, the March sisters' progression from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood can be seen as a story of moral growth. How does one become a virtuous person? What constitutes virtuous behavior?

Work and Social Class

Louisa May Alcott, the author of *Little Women*, was preoccupied with what constituted women's work, and how the Industrial Revolution spurred changes in a woman's power to earn a living – so much so that, following the success of *Little Women*, she would go on to publish a semi-autobiographical novel called *Work: A Story of Experience*.

Work is central to the lives of the members of the March family, and it's part of the social experiment at the heart of *Little Women*. Are women happiest when they work where they've always traditionally worked, in the home? Are women who are forced (or who select) to find work outside of the home less happy than women whose husbands serve as the breadwinners? These questions and more are addressed through the various work experiences of the March sisters (Meg is a governess, Jo tends to crotchety Aunt March, etc.). The book pushes forward the idea that a woman's usefulness extends beyond the realm of hearth and home – and this is most evident when Jo goes on to create a name for herself as an author.

Social class is also at stake in *Little Women*. Prior to Mr. March's departure, the March family is plunged into poverty due to shadowy circumstances. Throughout *Little Women*, the notion that poverty is valuable (and that material wealth, on the other hand, often leads to moral decay) is returned to again and again. "Wealth is certainly a most desirable thing," Alcott writes, "but poverty has its sunny side, and one of the sweet uses of adversity is the genuine satisfaction which comes from the hearty work of head or hand…" The notion (right or wrong) that the lower classes possess a kind of nobility and virtue that the upper classes lack is levied again and again in *Little Women*.

Genuineness, Simplicity, and Natural Beauty

"I don't like fuss and feathers," Laurie remarks when he sees Meg dolled up in borrowed finery at a dance thrown by one of her wealthy friends. Simplicity and genuineness are touted as values of the highest order in *Little Women*, and they're often seen as an antidote to the difficulties of poverty. Similar to a number of other late 19th century thinkers (the doctor and cereal tycoon John Harvey Kellogg, for instance), Alcott is a proponent of natural beauty. The March girls discover that corsets and dainty slippers often cause fainting and sprained ankles, and they receive far more praise, pleasure, and moral good from wearing their simple hand-me-down dresses and adorning themselves with a few hot house flowers from Mr. Laurence's conservatory.

Love

In *Little Women*, the March girls learn about the importance of love, both familial and romantic. The book can be seen as a record of the March girls' progression from an innocent, idealized vision of love to a more complex, worldly understanding of it by the end of the novel. The girls' idealized notions of romantic love are embodied in Jo's picaresque plays, in which swooning damsels find true love in spite of their hardships. (These plays

can be seen as a reflection of the way romantic love was viewed in the 19th century – they represent an ideal that even Jo aspires to, even if she chafes against conventional femininity.) Laurie, the rich boy next door, offers Jo her first lessons in love, and helps her come to better understand what she's looking for in a successful marriage. By the end of Part 2, all of the March girls (with the exception of Beth) have found their way to true love. Working in tandem with this notion of romantic love is the notion of familial love – motherly love in particular. Mrs**.** March's love for her daughters is consistently upheld as an ideal that the March girls long to achieve both in their romantic lives and in themselves when they go on to become mothers.

The Necessity of Work

Over the course of *Little Women,* the March sisters try to find happiness through daily activities, their dreams, and each other; but when they do not engage in any productive work, they end up guilty and remorseful. When they indulge in selfishness by dressing up in finery, hoarding limes, neglecting chores, or getting revenge, the girls end up unhappy. The only way they find meaningful happiness is when they are working, either for a living or for the benefit of their families. The novel demonstrates the importance of the Puritan work ethic, which dictates that it is holy to do work. This work ethic, in line with the transcendentalist teachings with which Alcott grew up, thrived in New England, where many Puritans lived and where the novel takes place. Alcott ultimately recommends work not as a means to a material end, but rather as a means to the expression of inner goodness and creativity through productivity.

The Importance of Being Genuine

Little Women takes great pains to teach a lesson about the importance of being genuine. To make this point, Alcott contrasts the Marches with more well-to-do young women like Amy Moffat and Sally Gardiner. Transcendentalists emphasized the importance of paying more attention to the inner spiritual self than to temporary, earthly conditions like wealth and impressive appearances, and Alcott incorporates this philosophy into *Little Women.* For instance, Meg and Amy constantly struggle with vanity, and eventually overcome it. Amy turns down Fred Vaughn's offer of marriage, even though he is rich, because she does not love him. The March sisters all learn to be happy with their respective lots in life and not to yearn for meaningless riches. The Marches' snug New England home is presented as more desirable than mansions in Paris. This theme is particularly American, especially distinctive of New England. Unlike their counterparts in Europe, many middle-class Americans at the time did not mind having come from humble origins and did not crave titles or other superficial trappings of wealth. These Americans wanted only what they deserved and believed that what they deserved depended on how hard they worked.

Literature and Language

Alcott imbues her characters with a love of language and text. Alcott exposes the reader to many forms of language, including German, French,

Hannah's dialect, the individual voices of the characters in their letters, Jo's slang, and Alcott's own creative poetry and prose.

The characters' constant references and allusions to books indicate that they are well read and assume others to be so. The most explicit example of this is Alcott's structuring of Part I to mirror *Pilgrim's Progress*. Amy's misuse of words is playfully mocked, and when she is abroad, she regrets not having been more studious. A shared love of books brings Jo closer with the Laurences and with Mr. Bhaer. German literature in particular plays a role in both Meg's and Jo's courtship

6.4. QUESTIONS:

1. *Discuss the characters of Meg's twins, Daisy and Demi. How are the twins different from Jo and Laurie?*
2. Little Women describes the experience of Christian girls growing up in 19th century New England. Yet it continues to be read by people of all ages around the world. What aspects of the book account for its universality?
3. Many critics celebrate Little Women's promotion of women's rights, yet the characters adopt very clear gender roles, particularly as husbands and wives. Do the March women demonstrate equality with their husbands?
4. Which of the four sisters is the most intriguing to you, and why?

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7

A CRITICAL STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S THE CONFIDENCE MAN: HIS MASQUERADE - I

Unit Structure

7.0 OBJECTIVES:

This unit aims at making the student familiar with:

- The author and the milieu to comprehend and appreciate the text commendably.
- The Literary Background needed for understand the text with context.
- The characters and summary to remember study the text with comfort.

7.1. HERMAN MELVILLE: A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Herman Melville was an American novelist, short story writer, and poet of the American Renaissance period. Herman Melville was born in New York City on August 1, 1819, to Allan Melvill (1782–1832) and Maria (Gansevoort) Melvill (1791–1872). Herman was the third of eight children in a family of Scottish and Dutch descent. Among his best-known works are *Moby-Dick* (1851); Typee (1846), a romanticized account of his experiences in Polynesia; and *Billy Budd, Sailor*, a posthumously published novella. Although his reputation was not high at the time of his death, the 1919 centennial of his birth was the starting point of a Melville revival, and *Moby-Dick* grew to be considered one of the great American novels.

7.2. BACKGROUND STUDY:

The Romantic Period:

Romantic style prevailed in American literature from about 1830–70. This flair in literature was marked by prioritizing the subjective over the

objective and emotion over reason. The natural world was more highly valued than the man-made world. Romanticism was a style that was practiced earlier in Western Europe than in America. In Europe Romanticism flourished in the late 18th century.

Numerous writers in America wrote in the Romantic style preceding Herman Melville. In the early 19th-century, Edgar Allan Poe (1809–49) was a proponent of Romanticism. He wrote highly charged emotional mysteries, love stories, and horror stories. Around the same time period a group of New England Romantic writers also wrote about the subjective, emotional experiences of the individual. James Russell Lowell (1819–91) was a local colour writer who used specific regional dialect to portray the experiences of individuals in the Northeast. Writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and Henry David Thoreau (1817–62) praised the individual as part of the unity of the living world. Emerson and Thoreau were part of a philosophical movement in 19th-century New England that had some commonality with the Romantic style of the time. This philosophy was Transcendentalism which stressed not only the unity of all creation but also the intrinsic goodness of human beings and the predominance of awareness over logic.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) and Herman Melville (1819–91) adopted the Romantic style in the mid-19th century. Hawthorne was an advocate of Transcendental philosophy which expressed the Romantic concept of the unity of all creation. Hawthorne wrote *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) about the opposing concepts of order and chaos, culture and wilderness, and childhood and maturity. Hawthorne was a friend and neighbour and a strong influence on Melville. Hawthorne's influence led Melville to make his novels more complex. This influence was evident in Melville's novel *Moby Dick*. It took until the mid-20th century for modern critics to recognize *Moby Dick* as one of the most important works in the history of American literature.

Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man* reflects the literary Romantic style of the period in its focus on the subjective and the emotional. The con man Melville presents in his novel has no interest in objectivity or reason. He lures people not with talk of reality or facts. Instead he appeals to the emotions of his targets and elicits subjective responses from them. *The Confidence-Man* is a Romantic novel in this respect and it is also a satirical allegory commenting on the commercial atmosphere of America in the mid-19th century. Satire is a literary device used to expose vices or deficits in human nature. In many allegories the action of the story represents a larger issue that is not directly stated in the novel. The game of the confidence man in Melville's novel is an allegory for a society focused on greed and profit at any cost.

Transcendentalism:

Transcendentalism was a popular philosophy in New England intellectual circles from about 1830–55. Many of Herman Melville's contemporaries such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82), Henry David Thoreau (1817–

62), and Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64) subscribed to this philosophy. Its main tenets stressed the unity of all creation, the intrinsic goodness of human beings, and the predominance of insight over logic. Although Melville was friends with Hawthorne and held him in high esteem, Melville did not believe in the philosophy of the Transcendentalists. Melville took the opposite view. He called the philosophy "oracular gibberish."

The reasons Melville held this attitude could have been the result of his personal experiences. He had an insecure youth and suffered from bad health. He faced much rejection with his writing and with employment that he pursued to support himself and his family. Literary historians believe his life was neither happy nor materially successful. One of Melville's sons committed suicide and the other died after a long illness. Melville did not have an optimistic view of human beings or of life.

Melville expressed this attitude in *The Confidence-Man.* Melville's view of human nature in the novel is opposite to the view of the Transcendentalists. Melville did not create characters who had innate goodness. He presented con men who were self-interested, greedy, exploitive characters. They relied on deceit for their livelihood. His characters were ruthlessly ambitious for their own gain. They took advantage of anyone in whom they could inspire trust whether the person was young or old, rich or poor.

Allegorically Melville's novel is an expression of his negative perception of the commercialism and lust for profit that Americans were experiencing at this time. An allegory is a literary device in which abstract ideas are described in terms of characters, figures, and events. Melville's characters encompass the ambitious attitude of 19th century America but with no redeeming qualities. The con men on the steamboat *Fidèle* are acting solely in their own interests.

Steamboat Travel in Mid-19th Century America:

The steamboat was pivotal to commerce and travel in 19th-century America. It was powered by a steam-propelled paddle wheel. Some steamboats had a paddle wheel on each side of the boat which provided them with greater speed. In 1811 a steamboat was built specifically to travel the lower Mississippi River. Two men began to operate a steamboat service in 1812 between New Orleans, Louisiana, and Natchez, Mississippi. A boom in steamboat travel soon followed. There were only about 20 steamboat arrivals in New Orleans in 1814. This increased to about 1200 annual steamboat arrivals in New Orleans by the middle of the 19th century. The steamboat was essential to the economy of the middle territory of America until about 1870. It provided the main means of transport for humans, cotton, sugar, and other cargo.

The design of the steamboat greatly improved beginning in 1816 when it was built to better fit the shallow waters of the Mississippi. It also used a higher pressure steam engine so it could travel upstream as well as downstream. The larger steamboats during this era were luxurious. Many had at least two decks. They had lounges like those of expensive hotels with

oil paintings and chandeliers. They often had famous chefs, orchestras, and servants to attend to the first-class travellers.

The advantage of steamboats for the characters in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* was the plethora of wealthy travellers. The confidence men could choose someone likely to respond to offers of herbal potions or stock in various companies. They could also ask travellers for donations to various charities or just for themselves. The size and multiple decks of the steamboats offered many escape routes and hiding places for the confidence men. The various cities where the steamboats stopped for travellers to come and go also provided handy places for the confidence men to escape from the steamboat if the need arose.

American Society and Culture in the First Half of the 19th Century:

American society in the mid-1800s was a source of fascination to Europeans. American society was in constant flux and turbulence. It was the New World unlike the static and well-ordered civilization of the Old World in Europe. Americans may have been less educated than Europeans but they were ambitious, optimistic, and independent. They were self-assured and did not defer to others based solely on title or status.

The population of America during this period expanded rapidly. In the first three decades of the 19th century about 250,000 Europeans immigrants arrived in America. Between 1830 and 1850, ten times that number arrived from Europe. The immigrants were primarily from Ireland and Germany and were attracted by the opportunities in America including abundant work, land, and freedom. Norwegians and Swedes also immigrated to America because of the agricultural depression in their countries in the mid-19th century. These immigrants could find much land to farm in the Great Plains of America.

Most African Americans who lived in the south in the first half of the 19th century were enslaved by white masters. African Americans who lived in the northern part of America typically possessed freedom on paper but still suffered harsh conditions. They worked in menial jobs and had to compete for those jobs with the many Irish who were coming to the American cities of the northeast. The free northern African Americans faced discrimination in politics, employment, education, and housing. They did have the right as free men and women to criticize and petition against these discriminations, but these efforts were for the most part ineffectual in changing their situation.

The picture of a diversely populated America in constant change is reflected in Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence-Man.* The colourful characters in his story represent the qualities of independence and self-assurance that were a hallmark of the new America that had achieved independence from Britain less than a century before. Independence, optimism, and ambition are necessary qualities for the confidence man whose goal is to convince another person to have confidence in him. The confidence man exploits the confidence he gains for profit. Melville's characters thus corrupt the ideals

of independence and ambition because they use these qualities only to advance their own personal gain.

The Origin of the Confidence Man:

A writer by the name of Alexander James Houston introduced the term "confidence man" to American culture in an article he wrote for the *New York Herald* newspaper in July 1849. Houston was writing about a swindler by the name of Samuel Thompson. Newspapers all around the country reprinted these articles. Literary critics believe that Herman Melville's book *The Confidence-Man* was inspired by Houston's articles. Specifically in one article Houston relates how Thompson tried to convince strangers that they knew him in the past. He would then ask the stranger to have confidence in him and lend him money. This is a strategy Melville used in his novel when he described the interaction between the man with a weed John Ringman and the country merchant Mr. Roberts.

A confidence game or scam is a scheme in which the con man tries to gain the trust of his mark or target. The con man would try to make the mark feel that it was wrong not to trust him. The confidence man did not feel that he was wronging his mark because he was not stealing from him. He was deceiving him but the mark would eventually voluntarily give the con man something the con man wanted. Sometimes the confidence man was more proud of accomplishing the scam than he was of what he acquired as a result of it. If he bragged about this to others it was easier for law enforcement to identify him. The confidence man also had to vary his scamming strategies to avoid the notice of law enforcement. Sometimes the marks were so embarrassed by falling for the con that they did not want to report it.

Confidence men were successful in 19th-century America because it was a time of social and technological change. People who wanted to take advantage of booming business opportunities often found themselves in unfamiliar environments. Rural people moved to cities and were good targets for swindlers who could take advantage of their naïveté. In Melville's novel the country merchant Mr. Roberts is an example of a trusting soul who wants to believe in the goodness of others. Even as country people moved to cities, confidence men would go to communities that were not familiar with confidence games. There they could find targets who prided themselves on trusting in the good will of others.

7.3. CHARACTERS:

1. **The Mute** – A man in cream colors, a tossed look, a linty fair cheek, downy chin, flaxen hair. Looks like a stranger. He writes on a slate an allusion to 1 Corinthians 13.

2. **The Barber** – Puts up a sign "No Trust". The Cosmopolitan convinces him to remove the sign, and trust that for one week, he will pay for all unpaid services.

3. **Guinea, an African-American crippled beggar** – Catches coins with his mouth. Says he sleeps on the streets. After his honesty is

questioned, he gives a list of people who can vouch for him: The man with the weed in his hat, the man in a grey suit, the transfer agent, the herb-doctor, the Cosmopolitan, The Agent of the Philosophical Intelligence Office and Thomas Fry, all of these are main characters potentially attempting to deceive each other.

4. **A purple faced drover** – Gets the initial information about Guinea.

5. **The man with the wooden leg** – Casts doubt on whether Guinea is a cripple.

6. **A country Merchant, Mr. Henry Roberts** – A man of generous acts. He is the first to be pushed into believing he used to know Mr. John Ringman, but a memory lapse made him forget. He gives him money, then follows the advice to buy stock at the Black Rapids Coal Company. He later discusses pity with its president, drinks too much, then confesses 'charity and hope' are mere dreams.

7. **A Young Episcopal Clergyman** – Discusses the genuineness of Guinea, "frozen in cold charity" then "thawed into fluidity" and kind words.

8. **A Methodist minister** – Very martial looking, accuses the man with the wooden leg of being a 'reprobate and a Canada Thistle'.

9. **A gruff boatman** – Asks Guinea to go find anybody to vouch for (Guinea).

10. **John Ringman, the Man with the Weed** – He tries to convince the country merchant, Mr. Roberts, they are acquainted, but Robert's memory faltered. He asks for money, then recommends buying stock at the Black Rapids Coal Company. He is said to be looking for money to be able to go join his daughter after a disastrous divorce left him penniless. He tries to convince the sophomore to throw Tacitus away because it is too depressive. He is reading Mark Akenside's "The Pleasures of the Imagination".

11. **The sophomore** – A young student reading Tacitus to read the gossip. Later, he wants to buy stock from the Black Rapids Coal Company. It turns out he likes "prosperous fellows" and despises "gloomy men".

12. **A Well-to-do Gentleman** – dressed in ruby coloured velvet, has a ruby coloured cheek. After he is accosted by the man in the gray suit, expresses annoyance at all the beggars allowed on the ferry.

13. **The Man in a Gray Suit** – This man accosts people for donations to a Widow and Orphan Asylum (Seminoles).

14. **The Hard-Hearted Old Gentleman** – A bulky man accuses the man in a gray suit of hypocrisy.

15. **The Good Man** – An elegantly-dressed man with white kid gloves and white hands. Melville explains he is "a good man" but not a righteous man. His hands are kept clean by having a black servant do the dirty work for him. He has a disagreement with the man in a gray suit about poverty.

16. **A Charitable Lady** – asked to give $20 to the man in the gray suit.

17. **John Truman, The President and Transfer Agent for the Black Rapids Coal Company** – lives on Jones street in Saint Louis.

18. **A somewhat elderly person in Quaker dress** – spreads his poetry about confidence in one another.

19. **A little dried-up man** – Refuses to do anything outside his habits: no wine, no games, etc.

20. **The Shrunken Old Miser** – sickly, he is afraid of losing his last savings, yet gambles in the Merchant's scheme of tripling returns, and ends up buying boxes from the Herb-doctor, paying in Mexican pistols and not dollars.

21. **Goneril** – The wife of John Ringman, the man with the weed. She is said to be cold-hearted, to touch other men in a sly way, to take revenge for jealousy on her daughter. During the divorce procedures, she dragged her husband to court then was awarded his money. Shortly after, she dies.

22. **The sick man** – The man is sick and tired of doctors offering ineffective remedies. The herb-doctor tries to convince him, with confidence, his herbs will work. After a philosophical debate about whether nature can be trusted, he agrees to try.

23. **The herb-doctor** – Tries to sell "Omni-Balsamic-Reinvigorator" and "Samaritan Pain Dissuader". He tries to set the bones of Tom Fry. He gives part of his earnings to 'charity'. He helps the Old Miser to stand during a conversation with the Missourian.

24. **The Dusk Giant** – A kind of invalid Titan in homespun. He violently attacks the Herb-Doctor, proclaiming 'there are pains only death can ease'.

25. **His child** – The daughter of the Dusk Giant is bi-racial.

26. **Auburn-haired gentleman** – Thinks the Herb-Doctor needs unmasking.

27. **An unhappy-looking woman** – sobs after the Herb-Doctor asks if anybody needs charity.

28. **A man with a hooked nose** – Thinks the Herb-Doctor is a fool for giving away some of his earnings to charity.

29. **A third person with a gossiping expression** – Thinks the Herb-Doctor is a 'prowling Jesuit emissary'.

30. **Thomas Fry, aka, Happy Tom, the "soldier"** – A beggar dressed in grimy old regimental coat. He passes off as a veteran of the Mexican wars, but claims his true story is he was crippled in prison while waiting to testify against a rich murderer. The said murderer got off easily because he had friends, whereas Thomas Fry had no friends and was crippled. After he discovers his brother in Indiana died, he took to begging. Confident his story wouldn't arouse any pity, he fakes a different story.

31. **Pitch, The Missourian Bachelor** – An eccentric, ursine in aspect. He questions the efficiency of the Herb-Doctor's remedies, proclaiming nature brings about many ills, and is not to be trusted: eye problems, destroyed $10,000 of property, threw hail, and shattered windows, He is skeptical of the goodness of humanity and doesn't have confidence in man: "All rascals", most are "knaves or fools". He makes fun of the Old Miser after he is tricked by the Herb-Doctor, argues with the Herb-Doctor about whether nature is good and trustable, then talks about the dishonesty of teenagers with the Agent of the Philosophical Intelligence Office. The latter, however, convinces the Missourian to try hiring a boy at their agency. After the transaction, The Cosmopolitan accosts him, and as he tries to get rid of him, defends his right to be a solitary misanthrope. Throughout the conversation, he shows broad knowledge of "philosophy and books" equal to his obsession with "woodcraft and rifles".

32. **The Agent of the Philosophical Intelligence Office** – A labor-contractor for teenagers. He tries to convince the Missourian Bachelor he should try the services of the Philosophical Intelligence Office. After the latter objects he had enough of teenagers, the agent makes an analogy between a child not having a beard but a beard will grow later, and a child who hasn't "evinced any noble quality" will yet "sprout" these qualities, "for, have confidence, it, like the beard, is in him". He also likens baby teeth to "corrupt qualities" in "the man-child", and "the sound, even, beautiful permanent" adult teeth to "sound, even, beautiful and permanent virtues". The baby teeth, like the corrupt qualities are "thrust from their place by the independent undergrowth of the succeeding set" of teeth or virtues. He also likens a teenager to a caterpillar, and an adult to "the natural advance of all creatures" - the butterfly. a teenager is like good wine in maturation. Saint Augustine and Ignatius of Loyola are given as examples of virtuous men, rascals in their youth. He succeeds in convincing the Missourian Bachelor to try a fifteen-year-old boy.

33. **The Cosmopolitan, Francis "Frank" Goodman** – A philanthropist, the Cosmopolitan tries to test the ideas of love evoked in the beginning of the book by the Mute, (the references to 1 Corinthians 13), first by arguing with the Missourian one should be warm and confiding with all members of humanity, then by testing the strength

of Charlie Nobel's commitment to friendship by asking to borrow money, then by doing the same to the disciple of Mark Winsome, Egbert. The latter test leads to a long debate about whether helping friends leads to an end of their friendship, and if so, how. Finally, the Cosmopolitan convinces the barber momentarily to trust him to pay all the financial losses the barber will accrue for removing the sign "no trust", then does not pay for the shave. In the final chapters, he has a discussion with the Old Man about a warning in the Bible about "an enemy" who "speaketh sweetly in with his lips" but his intention is to tempt, use, and profit from you.

34. **Charles "Charlie" Arnold Noble** – Charlie tells the Cosmopolitan Frank he thinks the Missourian is worse than Colonel John Moredock. Then he tells the story of John Moredock. Then he invites Cosmopolitan Frank to drink together as they discuss the story. Charlie clearly tries to get Frank to drink too much. He agrees to be "best friends" with Frank, but turns cold after Frank reveals he would like to borrow money from him. Frank brings him back to his normal self by performing a ritual.

35. **Colonel John Moredock** – The Indian Hater. He wasted his life taking revenge on Indians for the murder of his family. He is a kind man and a good citizen outside of his revenge sprees.

36. **Charlemont** – The protagonist of the integrated fable told by the Cosmopolitan Frank. He is a young merchant of French descent with many friends. One day, he became morose and unfriendly to everyone, vanishes, and isn't heard from for many years. It appears he was bankrupt, but his strange behavior started several months ago. One day, he comes back, friendly and dressed in expensive clothes. Everybody wondered about events, then one friend asks about them several years later. Charlemont knew his ruin was coming, and didn't want to embarrass his friends into helping him, so he shunned them, and moved to Marseilles (France) so he made his fortune again, then returned, confident he wouldn't embarrass his friends. (The Cosmopolitan Frank stresses there is no moral to this story, it is merely an amusement.)

37. **Mark Winsome, The mystic Master** – a cold restrained. He accosts the Cosmopolitan Frank to warn him Charlie Noble is "an operator". He encourages Frank to think about what it must be like to be a rattlesnake. Then he scares an artist-beggar away with a cold stare. His disciple, Egbert, is the example of following his philosophy.

38. **Crazy Italian beggar** – A haggard seller of a rhapsodical tract. The Cosmopolitan Frank buys his tract and promises to read it. Mark Winsome, the Mystic Master regards him as a scoundrel.

39. **Egbert** – Mark Winsome's disciple. He agrees to do a theoretical exercise with the Cosmopolitan Frank: he pretends to be Frank's "best friend" Charlie Noble, and plays the scene of Frank asking for money. Egbert, following his master's philosophy, gives several reasons for

not lending or giving money, and tells the story of China Aster as an illustration.

40. **China Aster** – The protagonist of an integrated fable. He accepts a loan from his friend Orchis with the aim of investing in his business to create more profit. But he doesn't have any business skills, so the money serves to bring about his ruin through unpaid interest on the loan. The devastation is so great, his wife loses her inheritance, his son misses school, and he dies of despair. (The moral of the story -- never accept a loan from a friend.)

41. **Orchis** – China Aster's friend. He wins the lottery, then pushes some of it in the form of a loan on his friend.

42. **The Old Man** – He sits in the middle of the Gentlemen's cabin, awake while others try to sleep, reading the Bible. He discusses the trustworthiness of the Apocrypha with Cosmopolitan Frank. He buys objects from the peddler-boy. He gets a "Counterfeit Detector" as a bonus for buying so much, and tries to use it to see if his banknotes are fake. The Detector is complicated.

43. **The man talking in his sleep** – A man sleeping in a berth in the Gentlemen's cabin while the Old Man and Cosmopolitan Frank have a discussion. His interjections in his sleep coincide with the subject of the discussion, attributing the quote from The Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach to a description of the confidence man.

44. **The peddler-boy** – A boy dressed in rags sells items for protecting one's money from thieves on a steamer: a traveler's lock, a money belt. His sales technique involves showing the uselessness of the object just purchased to sell the next object. All his customers receive a bonus of a "Counterfeit Detector"

7.4 SHORT SUMMARY:

The story of *The Confidence-Man* takes place during a single day on a steamboat called the *Fidèle* traversing the Mississippi River from St. Louis to New Orleans in the mid-19th century. The day of the voyage is April Fool's Day and the confidence men on the steamboat find many fools to target. Herman Melville portrays the crowd of travellers on the steamboat as different types of hunters. They are hunting for real things as well as transient feelings. The most intriguing hunters on the steamboat are "hunters after all these hunters."

The title informs the reader that there will be at least one confidence man on the boat. A deaf-mute stranger appears first at the waterside in the city of St. Louis. He boards the boat and attempts to convey a feeling that he wants the travellers to adopt. He writes on his slate "Charity endureth all things" and "Charity believeth all things." Guinea comes on board soliciting coins from the crowd. Many onlookers in the crowd think Guinea is an imposter. They believe he is a white man posing as a disabled black man in order to get money. Many different types of confidence men appear after

the introduction to the story who are all dressed in different costumes and who all follow different strategies in their approach to conning the people in the crowd.

The confidence men assume many guises and target different types of victims. The man with a weed in his hat looks for sympathetic listeners. The man in a cap with ruddy cheeks targets potential investors. The man in a gray coat searches for charitable donors. The herb doctor in a snuff-colored overcoat offers cures to the weak and infirm. The round-backed man seeks people in need of trustworthy servants. The cosmopolitan in grotesque and elaborate clothes claims to be in need of a friend. While all these characters have unique looks and act differently, they are all expert con men and could well be the same man in disguise.

7.5.QUESTIONS:

1. Throw light on the life and work of Herman Melville.
2. Discuss the background of writer's time period which influenced this work.
3. Write short notes on:
   a) Origin of The Confidence Man
   b) Early19th century American society
   c) Transcendentalism
   d) Romantic Period

7.6 REFERENCES:

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8

A CRITICAL STUDY OF HERMAN MELVILLE'S THE CONFIDENCE MAN: HIS MASQUERADE - II

Unit Structure

8.0. OBJECTIVES:

This unit aims at making the student familiar with:

- The Literary style and themes of Herman Melville in *The Confidence Man*.
- The Critical Analysis of *The Confidence Man.*
- The type of questions asked on the novel.

8.1. LITERARY STYLE AND THEMES:

The Confidence Man is satirical novel with allegories. His major sources are Bible Shakespeare and Milton from where he draws references and allegories. The Confidence Man is based on Melville's own experience, and focused on ordinary life experiences of men. The novel is episodic by narrating chains of scams plotted to extract money from people. According to Nathalia Wright Melville practises the theme of communicative expression and the pursuit of the absolute among illusions throughout his writing career. This eternal quest for the absolute is an enterprise dominant to his literary standard.

Confidence

Confidence is a predominant theme of *The Confidence-Man.* The clever characters of Herman Melville's novel are skilful at exuding personal confidence and soliciting the confidence of others. They do this for their own gain and profit. They are skilful in choosing likely victims for their schemes. They are indiscriminate and prey on the young, the old, the vulnerable, or the sick. They have much experience gauging the correct scheme to use on a particular victim. The confidence men are so caught up in their game that they are ruthless in choosing their victims. It is more

profitable for them to focus on someone who appears rich, but they have no qualms about taking the life savings of a suffering old man. Everyone who shows confidence in the false claims of the confidence men ends up a victim.

The confidence men are willing to pose as any type of character to gain their ends of creating confidence in their victims. Guinea invites the crowd to throw coins into his mouth and is one of the likely confidence men in the novel. Guinea asks the crowd to have confidence in him when some in the crowd believe he is an imposter. Guinea names some men who can vouch for his authenticity and tells the crowd to find the men.

Confidence is one of the key elements the confidence man uses with his victims. The victim must believe the con man and be willing to do what the con man wants. The confidence man is very clever at figuring out how to create confidence in each particular victim either by appealing to the victim's generosity or the victim's belief that he might gain something for himself.

The wealthy man is an easy target for a confidence man because he has money to spare. The wealthy man may not be generous but with the right strategy the con man will talk him out of some of his money. The wealthy man might give the confidence man money out of sympathy or because he thinks he might be buying something valuable. A man with gold buttons in Melville's novel is wealthy and donates to the charity for which the confidence man is collecting when the con men respectfully salutes him. The scheme of the confidence man is not only to exude an air of personal confidence, but also to inspire the confidence of the victim. An essential part of this interplay is that the victim must feel confident in himself. He must feel that he is making the right decision to engage in whatever the confidence man is doing. There must be confidence on both sides of the interaction.

Deceit

Deceit is a game the confidence man plays and a major theme of *The Confidence-Man.* The confidence that the confidence man displays and inspires in others is a mask for the underlying deceit that motivates him. He is deceiving his victims into thinking that to do what the confidence man wants will either somehow profit the victims or allow them to feel good about themselves. The confidence man chooses the strategy that he thinks will work best for each victim.

The confidence man's strategy with the wealthy man is to flatter him deceitfully. A man with gold buttons on his sleeve has enough money that he can afford to donate to the man in a gray coat's fraudulent charity. The man in a gray coat provides a reason for a wealthy gentleman to feel good about himself by contributing to his charity. The confidence man continues to deceitfully flatter the wealthy man for his idea of a World's Charity. He gives the gentleman another reason to feel proud. The con man asks the wealthy gentleman to describe his idea for the World's Charity. The man

replies "The World's Charity is to be a society whose members shall comprise deputies from every charity and mission." The con man takes this idea and quickly invents the next part of his strategy for the wealthy gentleman. The con man says he has had the same idea. He deceitfully presents himself to the wealthy gentleman as a philanthropist and a financier. He wants to put himself at the same philanthropic level as the wealthy gentleman but not at the same financial level. The con man is a superlative actor as he masks the deceitful motive of all his actions. Sometimes this strategy works with his victims and sometimes it does not. The con man enjoys his deceitful game as much as the profits he gains from it as long as his deception is undetected.

Trust

Trust is a theme in *The Confidence-Man* because it is an essential element in the con games that are perpetrated throughout the novel. The victim the con man chooses must not only have confidence in him but also a level of trust that allows the victim to give the con man what he wants. The con man chooses whether to inspire confidence or trust in his victim. The con man is skilled in determining the subtle difference between the two approaches. If the con man observes that his victim does not have much confidence in himself, the con man might surmise that it could be difficult for the victim to muster confidence in him. It might be easier for the con man to elicit trust from this man rather than confidence.

Though the two concepts have similarities, there is a difference between trust and confidence. The skill of the confidence man is that he understands the subtle difference. The definition of confidence includes the idea that confidence is based on knowledge of past experience. Someone who has performed a task successfully in the past can inspire confidence. The confidence man can inspire this confidence when he deceitfully relates a story of his past successes with an investment or with a business idea.

On the other hand, trust is the belief that one has in another person. It can occur without evidence or knowledge of the past experience of the person being trusted. If the confidence man does not construct a story about his past successes to inspire confidence, he will rely on a person instinctively trusting him. In *The Confidence-Man* the cosmopolitan Frank Goodman spends much time talking, drinking, and smoking with a Western stranger that boards the boat. The stranger from West goes by the name of Charles Arnold Noble or Charlie. Frank does not talk about his past successes in business or investment with Charlie. He is simply going to rely on Charlie trusting him when Frank asks Charlie to loan him fifty dollars. Frank has not told Charlie anything about his financial status to inspire confidence. Frank believes that after much entertaining and philosophical talk, Charlie will trust him. Frank is wrong. When Frank asks Charlie to loan him fifty dollars, Charlie is offended and angry. He has no reason to trust Frank. Charlie says to Frank, "Beggar, impostor!—never so deceived in a man in my life." Frank's strategy of eliciting trust from Charlie fails.

8.2 STRATEGIES OF THE CHARACTERS:

The confidence men have different scams but they all possess keen insights into human nature. They can quickly evaluate whether the person they want to con will respond best to a speech on charity, confidence, or trust. The very first man on board who only appears at the beginning of the story reminds the crowd of passengers on the boat to remember charity. He writes several messages on his slate about charity and holds them up to the crowd, "Charity suffereth long, and is kind," "Charity thinketh no evil," and "Charity never faileth." The strategy of this man may be to prime the pump and set the tone for the passengers to be generous.

The confidence men sometimes choose to talk about confidence. The man with a weed in his hat John Ringman takes the approach of directly asking for confidence. A young college student is one of his first marks. The weed on John Ringman's hat is black fabric attached to his hatband as a sign of mourning not an actual weed. The fabric is an outward sign of grief and Ringman's need for sympathy. John Ringman asks the young college student, "could you now, my dear young sir, under such circumstances, by way of experiment, simply have confidence in me?" If he can gain the young college student's confidence, Ringman knows he can ask the college student for anything he wants and set him up for the future scams. Ringman primes the young college student to buy stock in the Black Rapids Coal Company.

The confidence men also use a strategy of eliciting trust. The cosmopolitan who goes by the name of Francis Goodman or Frank enters the barber shop on the steamboat and chastises the barber for having a sign that reads, "No Trust." The sign means that the barber will not give shaves and haircuts on credit. Frank says to the barber, "No trust means distrust." Frank tells the barber that it is scandalous not to trust people. Frank has a plan for the barber. As a way of introducing the plan Frank says, "barber, now have a little patience with me; do; trust me, I wish not to offend." Frank's plan is that the barber should remove his "No Trust" sign and Frank will reimburse the barber for any money he might lose as a result of removing his sign. Frank writes up the agreement for the barber. Sadly for Frank he has not inspired trust in the barber. The barber wants to take the agreement to the captain of the ship to read. Frank saunters off without paying for the shave and thus accomplishes his true goal of getting something for nothing.

The confidence men are skilled in the strategy of using flattery. The man in a gray coat is a master of this technique. A man with gold buttons is a passenger whom the man in the grey coat believes is wealthy and susceptible to flattery. A servant accompanies the gentleman adding to the man in the grey coat's belief. The man in a gray coat concludes that admiration is the best way to approach his potential victim. The narrator describes the effect of the man in the gray coat's complimentary greeting on the gentleman by pointing out that "It was pleasant to mark the good man's reception of the salute of the righteous man, that is, the man in gray; his inferior, apparently."

The confidence men employ sympathy as one of their strategies. This is especially true of Guinea whom most people in the crowd believe is a white imposter. Guinea wants to entertain the crowd with his tambourine. He is amiable with a good-natured and honest face despite his "deformity, indigence, and houselessness." He collects coins from some individuals in the crowd because he elicits their sympathy.

Deceit is another strategy the confidence men use. A disabled veteran Thomas Fry wanders among the steamboat passengers begging for alms. He tells different stories to the numerous people he encounters. He meets the herb doctor who is one of the confidence men on the steamboat. The herb doctor defends Thomas Fry's tall tales when he claims, "The vice of this unfortunate is pardonable. Consider, he lies not out of wantonness." This is also how the herb doctor defends his own deceit. The disabled con man Thomas Fry tells lies not because he enjoys deceiving people but for his livelihood. It is a necessary strategy for his existence.

The Con Continues

The confidence men in Melville's story are relentless and ruthless. Their occupation is to gain the confidence of other men. The con men want to test men's confidence for their personal gain. As they practice their craft on the crowd aboard the steamboat, they become better and better. They intuit what strategies to use on different sorts of people. They have no authentic sympathy for others because they are too invested in their own deceptions. At the end of the novel the cosmopolitan Frank Goodman discovers his final mark. The old man reading the Bible in a well-lit cabin catches Frank's interest. He is kind and friendly to the old man. Frank asks his advice and he reads the old man's Bible. When the old man purchases a money belt from the young peddler, Frank generously offers to take him to his room. The narrator relates, "Something further may follow of this Masquerade." Frank might well find a way to steal the money from the old man's newly purchased money belt.

8.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

Symbols in The Confidence Man:

Stocks

Stocks symbolize the burgeoning economy of America in the 1850s. In the early 1800s transportation and technology substantially advanced in America. The steamboat was an example of this advancement. Traffic of products and people grew rapidly along the Mississippi River. There were only about 20 steamboat arrivals in New Orleans in 1814. By the middle of the 19th century there were about 1200 annual arrivals in New Orleans.

The period from the 1820s to the 1850s was considered an era of market revolution in America. At this time, private individuals and the government invested substantial money in the transportation sector. Commerce and population were expanding so rapidly that investment in transportation looked like a sure thing that would reap profit for the investor. Fuel was

another investment that was bound to pay off because it was needed to power the transportation and manufacturing industry of America. A con man in Herman Melville's novel includes the coal industry in one of his con-games. He presents it as a fail-safe investment that will greatly profit the investor.

In *The Confidence-Man,* various con men on the steamboat *Fidèle* offer to sell stock in the Black Rapids Coal Company to the passengers on board. The man with a weed in his hat named John Ringman is one of the con men who spends much time talking about how lucrative an investment in the Black Rapids Coal Company would be. Ringman is not presenting himself as the president of the Black Rapids Coal Company but he tells the country merchant Mr. Roberts that the president is on board the steamboat. Ringman tells Mr. Roberts about the good success of the coal company. He tells Mr. Roberts that the president of the coal company is now willing to sell some valuable shares in the company. Ringman advises Mr. Roberts that he would greatly benefit from an investment in the company. The reader is unaware but it is possible that Ringman himself changes his persona and becomes the president of the Black Rapids Coal Company who appears later in the novel.

Steamboat

The steamboat in *The Confidence-Man* symbolizes the great diversity of the American population in the mid-19th century as well as the rapid expansion of trade, commerce, and travel in America during that time. There is so much diversity on board the *Fidèle* and such a large crowd of travelers that the con men easily blend in with the crowd. The con men may be a few men or one and the same man. The eccentric dress of one of the con men is described as "a vesture barred with various hues, that of the cochineal predominating, in style participating of a Highland plaid, Emir's robe, and French blouse." If indeed the various con men are the same man, a different costume for each character would be a necessary requirement. Another con man is described as "a man in mourning clean and respectable, but none of the glossiest, a long weed on his hat."

Melville portrays the herb doctor as "a stranger in a snuff-colored surtout, the collar thrown back; his hand waving in persuasive gesture." The herb doctor is stylish in his surtout which is a close-fitting long overcoat. There is much diversity on the steamboat including Eastern philosophers, Santa Fe traders in striped blankets, and "Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold." This diversity helps the many costumes of the con men easily blend in with the crowds of other costumed men and women. The steamboat is a microcosm of the diverse and ambitious American society of the mid-19th century.

The steamboat *Fidèle* symbolizes speed and the rapid expansion of trade, commerce, and travel in America in the mid-19th century. The steamboat was specifically invented in 1811 to traverse the lower Mississippi River. It

could travel eight miles per hour downstream and three miles per hour upstream. In 1816 one steamboat made the trip from New Orleans to Louisville, Kentucky, in 25 days. By 1853 the 25-day run between New Orleans and Louisville was shortened to four and a half days. The steamboat reflected the speed with which industry was developing in America in the mid-19th century. In turn the ambitious development of industry in America at this time is reflected in the characters of the con men on the steamboat. These men do not want to be left out of the profit and ambition that they witness around them. They will take advantage of it and profit it from it through their scams and cons. All that they require of their marks is that they have faith in the con men. The steamboat is aptly named *Fidèle* which means faith in French.

The Money Belt

The money belt in *The Confidence-Man* is a symbol of distrust. The term "money belt" arose in American usage between 1840–50. The money belt was probably not invented before this time. The money belt was simply a belt with hidden pockets for money or any other valuables. The pockets were not visible when the belt was worn. The social and technological changes in America in the mid-19th century brought about not only the phenomenon of the con game but also the usefulness of the money belt. Rural people were moving to cities and would find the money belt an effective way to hide their valuables.

In *The Confidence-Man* the young peddler approaches the old man reading the Bible and tries to sell him a money belt. The young peddler is quite an enterprising businessman because money belts were a relatively new invention. Not only does the young peddler market them but also, he chooses the steamboat as a likely place with promising customers to buy them. The old man reading the Bible agrees to buy a money belt from the young peddler. However, the cosmopolitan is present when the young peddler sells it to the old man. The young peddler has conducted a legitimate piece of business with the old man but the cosmopolitan is a confidence man and will doubtless use this transaction to his advantage.

According to Zack Friedman," The confidence-man occupies the point of slippage between trust and distrust. If you distrust me, he says, you must distrust all men, and what a wretched way to live that would be. If you trust all men, he says, and I am a man, you must trust me. As he argues, he relies on an image of humanity in the abstract that is to be trusted, and from that he derives his own trustworthiness. This is the same move we have to make to have trust under capitalism. In a pre-modern community, trust is always specific, given to particular individuals based on a complex network of social ties. Under capitalism, trust is generalized, given to people and things on the basis of their being instances of abstract conditions. A dollar bill, a brand of product, an anonymous stranger is all trustworthy because of their resemblance to other things, not their specific qualities."

8.4 QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the importance of this novel.

2. Evaluate the novel as a satire.

3. Explain the themes of this novel.

4. Anayse the symbols used in The Confidence Man

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9

CRITICAL STUDY OF STEPHEN CRANE'S "A LITTLE PILGRIM" AND "THE ANGEL CHILD"

Unit Structure

9.0 OBJECTIVES:

- To study the short stories of Stephen Crane
- To critically analyze the prescribed short stories

The Angel Child

9.1 INTRODUCTION:

The ninth surviving child of Methodist parents Crane began writing at the age of four and had several articles published by the age of 16.Having little interest in university studies though he was active in a fraternity, he left Syracuse University in 1891 to work s a reporter and writer.

WORK WRITTEN….The open boat, the red badge of courage

Maggie, Agirl of the streets

An experience in misery

Spouse…..CoraCrane

Born…..Nov 1, 1871, Newark

College...Claverack College

Died….June 5, 1900

Cause of death….Tuberculosis

Stephen Crane's whilom Ville stories consists of thirteen, self-contained short stories consists primarily about the children of a sleepy, fictional town

called Whilom Ville. Whilom, "which means "once upon a time," may have become familiar to crane in his childhood through a family connection to the 'whilom drum crops'. Each of the thirteen stories was serialized in Harper's New Monthly Magazine from August 1899/1900.

9.2 SUMMARY OF THE STORY:

The story is about an **angel child** (cora) a spoiled and tyrannical young girl who is the daughter of a timid painter and his imperious wife. In the story the angel child comes to whilomville from New York for a visit because the Trescott's of relations. It is her birthday and so she asks her father for money he hand over 5 dollars to here. This 5 dollars enables much havoc, including the humors scene where Cora decides that they should all spend her birthday money on haircuts at William neeltje's barber shop. The parents especially order of Margaret twins with the curls, and horrified, and these over blown reactions are chronicled in the story.

9.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS:

The WhilomVille stories were part of a new subgenre of short stories, generally featured in quality magazines like Harpers or the Atlantic monthly which were linked by a common set of characters and setting .These stories weren't entirely different from serialized novels ,critical accounts have stressed the ways in which this new genre affected the novel and vice versa Michael Lund points out, interestingly that the use of 'to be continued 'began in this period, in order to signal to audiences that the work was a serialized novel and not serial short story.

In 1897, Harper's suggested that Americans had perfected the short story more than anyone else concentrating on American trades of (national hurry and impaction's**)** to suggested that the gnre was somehow naturally suited to Americanness. A scenes of novelty, imagination, and freshness was also associated with the American short story.

Crane's WhilomVille stories surtenly embodies much of what Lund describes. The stories are upbeat, light and quick reads and they also encaged readily in a tradition of Distinctly American Idioms, Situation, images, and history. The Examples are too numerous to list, but here are a couple of memorable once: when jimmy bangles his speech of Tennyson's "charge of the light Brigade", The cruelty of his peers was no better than a Roman populace in Nurous time. When coras father ineffectually punishes her, she raised to heaven a loud, clear soprano howl that expressed the last word in even mediaeval Anguish. This ventriloquism doubly suggest taking up are even embraced of the imaginative world of childish reception while also making fun of it.

The Narrator to describes the confrontation between Johnnie and the boys from WhilomVille in terms of historical myth, it was like savages absorbing the first white man, or white men observing the first savges.The story on making an orator the children simply don't get the history nor the emotion behind the speeches which they gave it suggest perhaps, that such great works have known cultural bearing on American children, and so they ought not to be forced down their throats

Though the stories are upbeat and light, they are not with the edge of critique, particularly of raced relations, indulgent parenting, pointless education systems and more broadly, that dark side of human nature as apparent from the social play that children encaged in.

9.4 CONCLUSION:

The couple accepted Maggie and never left her to the poorhouse. The story ended with Mrs. Thompson asking a couple of more days spend with Maggie and this couple of days never ended. The story basically is about a poor, miserable and wretched child who turns out to be an angel for Thompson family .A poor woman who is hated throughout her life by almost all the people of the village is now surrounded by the same people .When she dies in a drunken state on the threshold of her own house. The tragedy in the life of the children in An Angel in Disguise is beyond imagination.

A Little Piligrim

9.5 INTRODUCTION:

Stephen Crane (November 1, 1871-June 5, 1900) was an American poet, novelist, and short story writer. Prolific throughout his short life, he wrote notable works in the Realist tradition as well as early examples of American Naturalism and Impressionism. He is recognized by modern critics as one of the most innovative writers of his generation.

A Little Pilgrim is the story of little boy who is in the childish minds in certain parts of WhilomVille that the Sunday school of the Presbyterian church would not have for the children the usual tree on Christmas eve. The funds free for that ancient festival would be used for the relief of suffering among the victims of the Charleston earthquake.

9.6 SUMMARY OF THE STORY:

The generous head of the superintendent of the Sunday school, and during one session he had made a strong plea that the children should forgo the vain pleasures of a tree. Glorious application of the golden rule, refuse a local use of the fund. At the end of a tearfully eloquent speech the question was put fairly to a vote and the children in a burst of virtuous abandon carried the question for Charleston. But this was a long time before Christmas .boys held important speech together. Sullenly the victims answered, No .

We are going to have the all fired biggest tree that ever you saw in the world. The little Presbyterians were greatly downcast .It happened that Jimmie Trescott's had regularly attended the Presbyterian Sunday school. The Trescott's were on Sundays consistently undenominational, but they had sent their lad on Sundays to one of the places where they thought he would receive benefits. Jimmie appeared before his father and made a strong spiritual appeal to be forthwith attached to the Sunday school of the big progressive Sunday school is better for you than the Presbyterian Sunday school .Jimmie, looking at his father with an anxious eye. Trescott's mused

the question considerably once more. In the end he said, well you may change if you wish,this one time, but you must not be changing to and fro. You decide now and then you must abide by your decision .All right ,'said the father .,but remember what I've told you. The boys, instead of being envious,looked with admiration upon Clarence, while he adopted an air of being habituated to perform such feats everyday of his life. He had the virtue of being habituated to perform such feats everyday of his life .He was not much of a boy. He was not much of a boy .He had the virtue of being able to walk on very high stilts, but when the season of stilts had passed he possessed no rank save this Sunday school rank, this clever little Clarence business of knowing the bible and the lesson better than the other boys. The other boys, sometimes looking at him meditatively,did not actually decide to thrash him as soon as he cleared the portals of the church, but they certainly decided to molest him in such ways as would re-establish their self respect. Back of the superintendent's chair hung a lithograph of the martyrdom of St.Stephen.

A bell pealed; the superintendent had trapped a bell slowly. The rustling and murmuring dwindled to silence. The benevolent man faced the school. I have to announce, he began, waving his body from side to side in the conventional bows of his kind , 'that ---bang went the bell.'Give me.your attention , please ,children .I have to announce that the board has decided that this year there will be no Christmas tree,but the-----Instantly the room buzzed with the subdued clamor of the children .Jimmie was speechless. He stood morosely during the singing of the closing hymn.He passed out into the street with the others, pushing no more than was required. Speedily the whole idea left him.If he remembered Sunday school at all,it was to remembered Sunday school at all,it was to remember that he did not like it.

9.7 CONCLUSION:

The narrator says that he has told his dream and invites the reader to interpret it.Though he warns of thevdangers of interpreting his dreams.he has also cautions against playing around with the obvious surface content of the tale, being entertained by it rather than instructed.

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10

CRITICAL STUDY OF EDGAR ALAN POE'S "THE GOLD BUG" AND "THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH"

Unit Structure

10.0 OBJECTIVE:

To introduce students to the originator of both detective and horror fiction, Edgar Allan Poe. The students would be able to understand the importance of Poe in American literature and also be familiar with some of his works.

10.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE AUTHOR-EDGAR ALLAN POE

Edgar Allan Poe was born in Boston on January 19, 1809.Poe's parents who were professional actors, died before he was three years old. He was raised as the foster child of John and Frances Allan in Richmond, Virginia. Poe studied in the best boarding schools and later studied at University of Virginia. He was forced to leave the university when Allan refused to pay for his gambling debts.

Poe moved to Boston in 1827 and enlisted in United States Army. His initial volumes of poems were not a critical success and neither did they receive much public attention. He had published *Tamerlane and Other Poems* in 1827 and *AlAAraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems* in 1829. Poe was admitted to the US Military Academy but had to leave due to lack of financial support. Poe had started selling short stories to magazines at this time and he became the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond in 1835. He had moved there with his aunt Maria Clemm and her daughter, Virginia whom he married in 1836.During the following years he edited a number of literary journals and during these years he established himself as a short story writer, poet and editor. His famous short stories and poems "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Tell-Tale Heart", "The

Murders in the Rue Morgue" and "The Raven" were published during this time. Poe's struggle with depression and alcoholism worsened after the death of his wife. He set out for an editing job in Philadelphia but stopped at Baltimore. On October 3, 1849 he was found in a state of semi-consciousness and died four days later. The cause of death remained unknown and was assumed to be due to disease, alcoholism, substance abuse and suicide.

Poe is remembered as one of the first American writers to become a major figure in world literature. His work as an editor, poet and critic had huge impact on American and international literature. He is considered to be the originator of both detective and horror fiction. His best works belonged to Gothic horror. Death and its aspects were a prominent theme in his writings. Poe also wrote satires and humour tales apart from horror stories. He is considered to be the architect of modern short story and was someone who focused on the effect of style and structure in literary work. He also had a keen interest in cryptography which is reflected in his short story "The Gold Bug". Poe was a forerunner of the "art for art's sake" movement in nineteenth century European literature. French symbolists were greatly influenced by the writings of Poe. He is also regarded as the central figure of Romanticism (Dark Romanticism) in United States.

10.2 THE GOLD BUG- SUMMARY

The Gold Bug is a short story by Edgar Allan Poe published in 1843. The story can be categorised under the genre mystery. The story is narrated by an unnamed narrator who is the friend of the protagonist of the story, Mr. William Legrand. The story is about Mr. Legrand's attempt to regain his fortune.

The story opens with an unnamed narrator introducing the readers to the past of Mr. William Legrand and telling the readers how he came to be acquainted with him. Mr. Legrand once belonged to a wealthy family, Huguenot family from New Orleans. A series of unfortunate events led him to lose his money and to avoid the shame of his present circumstances, he shifts to Sullivan Island, near Charleston, South Caroline. The Island is a singular one and is largely wilderness. It is here that he builds a hut for himself and the narrator and Legrand become friends. Legrand was accompanied by his emancipated slave, Jupiter, who refuses to abandon his master. Legrand was educated, with unusual power of mind, a misanthrope who loved gunning, fishing or going along the beach in quest of shells or entomological specimens.

One October 18th the narrator goes to the hut of Legrand and not finding anyone there, he lets himself in and waits for his hosts. Once inside, he finds the fire burning which he finds welcoming and sits near it. Legrand and Jupiter arrive home soon after nightfall. Upon finding the narrator waiting for him, he enthusiastically tells him of the new species of scarabaeus that he had discovered. Legrand wanted to show the bug to the narrator but he couldn't do so as on the way home he bumped into Lieutenant G—and had lent him the bug. He describes the bug to be of a brilliant gold colour, about

the size of a hickory nut with two black spots near one extremity of the back and another somewhat longer at the other. Jupiter believes that the bug is made of gold.

Since Legrand could not produce the bug in front of the narrator at that moment, he decides to draw it for him. He is unable to find any paper initially but finally he pulls out a dirty paper from his waistcoat and begins to draw. The narrator waits near the fire and the paper is handed over to him. Just at that moment, a large Newfoundland leaps upon the narrators shoulder and licks him.The narrator turns his attention towards the sketch and appears puzzled as the sketch did not appear as anything described by Legrand. To him, it appeared as a skull or a death's head. The narrator gives the paper back to Legrand and takes a jibe at his drawing skills by saying that he hasn't drawn the antennae that he had described. Legrand insists that he had drawn it and becomes irritated. In his anger he takes the paper and was about to crumple it and throw into the fire. But a glance at the sketch makes him to study the piece of paper furiously in candlelight. The narrator does not understand what was going on. After sometime Legrand puts the paper away but remains distracted so the narrator decides to leave.

One month later Jupiter visits the narrator and tells him that it seems like his master has lost his mind. Upon enquiry, Jupiter tells the narrator that Legrand keeps a cypher with strange figures that he obsesses over and once he disappeared for a day. Jupiter believes that his master is in this situation due to the bite of the bug. He even mentions that Legrand speaks about gold in his sleep. Jupiter then hands over a letter to the narrator by Legrand. In the letter it is written that he is not keeping well and Jupiter annoys him. Legrand asks the narrator to visit him that night as he has something important to tell him. The narrator agrees to go to meet Legrand. Upon reaching the boat which might take them to the Island, Narrator sees a scythe and three spades in there. When he enquires about it, Jupiter confesses that even he is unaware regarding why his master had instructed him to buy those.

Upon arrival at the island, the narrator finds Legrand waiting eagerly for both of them. Legrand looks pale and his eyes had an unnatural lustre. Legrand has retrieved the gold bug from Lieutenant and claims that the bug is of real gold and it would help him make a fortune. The narrator is confused by the declarations made by Legrand and suggests him to take rest although he wasn't exhibiting any sign of fever or physical illness. Legrand refuses to take his advice and asks both of them to join him in his night expedition in connection with the gold bug. The narrator doubt the mental stability of Legrand but with much reluctance agrees to join him in the expedition on the condition that he would follow narrator's advice upon their return.

All three of them along with Legrand's dog go on this mysterious expedition. Jupiter carries the tool while cursing the bug and Legrand walks swinging the beetle from a length of whipcord. Legrand leads them across the island. He does not disclose to them where he is taking them but keeps consulting landmarks on the go. Ultimately they arrive at a hill covered in

brambles and Jupiter makes way for them with the help of the scythe. They ascend the tree and reach the foot of an enormous tulip tree.

Jupiter is asked by Legrand to climb the eighth branch of the tree and also take the bug along with him while doing so. At first Jupiter is reluctant to do so but when Legrand threatens him of beating, he complies. Once Jupiter reaches there, he tells his master that the branch is rotten and he fears that the branch would break. Legrand asks Jupiter to continue out onto the branch as far as it is safe by bribing him with a silver dollar. Jupiter discovers a human skull fastened to the tree. He orders Jupiter to suspend the gold bug tied to the string through the left eye of the skull. Jupiter at first is confused regarding the left and right eye of the skull but later he does as instructed. Legrand marks the spot where the bug would have fallen if Jupiter had let go of the string. He takes a series of measurements and in the end draws a circle. He then asks his companions to start digging. The narrator complies only to prove Legrand wrong and put an end to his eccentric actions.

Legrand is disappointed since even after two hours of digging they do not find anything. They head towards home and on the way Legrand seizes Jupiter and asks him to point to his left eye. Jupiter touches his right eye which confirms the suspicion of Legrand that the failure of his mission was the result of the mistake committed by Jupiter. They head back to the same place and Legrand makes fresh measurements and asks other to dig. Seeing the new developments, the narrator is excited and he starts digging. Legrand's dog jumps into the hole that was being dug and starts clawing the earth. Two skeletons are found and they decide to keep digging.

The narrator stumbles over an iron ring and they unearth a large wooden chest filled with treasures of incalculable value. The box was full of coins, gold and jewels. They start to remove the treasure as the chest was too heavy to lift. The trio make two trips to the hut as the contents of the chest were too much to carry in one trip. They sleep for many hours after the task is done. Once they wake up they calculate the treasure's worth which amounts to almost a million and a half dollars.

In the end Legrand explains to the narrator regarding the chain of events and how he came to know about the hidden treasure. On the day Legrand and Jupiter had found the gold-bug, Jupiter had picked up a piece of parchment to wrap the gold bug in it. The parchment remained in the waistcoat pocket of Legrand even after he had given the bug to the Lieutenant. He had used the same paper to draw the bug to show to the narrator. Due to the interruption by Legrand's dog when he was having a look at the sketch, the narrator ended up holding the parchment close to the hearth. As a result of this coincidence, the heat revealed the drawing of a skull (symbol of pirates) drawn using an invisible ink. It was due to this that the narrator was not able to see the drawing of Legrand. While Legrand was about to throw away the parchment, he discovers this picture and starts examining the parchment using a candle. After narrator left and Jupiter fell asleep that night, Legrand remembered that near to where he found the parchment he had also seen remnants of the hull of a ship's long boat. On

further inspection he finds a signature at one end of the parchment and deduces it to be of Captain Kidd (a famous pirate). On connecting the dots he deduces that the parchment would lead him to a treasure. Again the parchment was further held against fire and a cryptogram was now visible. A detailed explanation regarding how Legrand solved the cryptogram is given. Legrand makes a trip one day to find the exact location of the treasure as given in the cryptogram. The last part of the solution to the puzzle required dropping a weight through the left eye of the skull. But their initial attempt at the discovery of treasure had failed as Jupiter had put the bug through the right eye of the skull. Legrand confesses that the doubts of the narrator regarding the sanity of Legrand had irritated him and he decides to punish him which is why he makes use of the bug to be dropped down the eye of the skull rather than a bullet or any other heavy material which could be used for the same purpose.

In the end Legrand assumes that the skeletons that they found during the digging would have been of the members of Kidd's crew who had helped him in burying the treasure. After they helped him in doing so, he must have murdered them in order to keep the location of the treasure a secret.

10.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Gold Bug by Edgar Allan Poe is a mystery story published in 1843 in the *Philadelphia Dollar Magazine.* He had entered this story in a story writing competition in this magazine. The story received the first prize in the competition and it was published in three instalments. Later this story was published in *Tales* in 1845. This story by Poe helped in popularising cryptography. His interest in cryptography is revealed through this story. The story centres on the use of logic in solving a secret code made up of numbers, symbols and punctuation. It is one of the longest stories ever written by him. Treasure Island by R.L.Stevenson was influenced by this story.

One of the important themes discussed in this story is the power of reason. It's through his deduction and reasoning that Legrand finds the location of the treasure. His smartness leads him and his friends to the fortune which would change their lives. Another important aspect in the story is of luck. It was because of sheer luck and coincidence that Legrand gets the initial and most important part of the puzzle. It was just luck that Jupiter took the parchment containing the location of the treasure to wrap the bug. Later, the discovery of the sketch of skull and other details written in invisible ink was also an accident. The whole incidents in the story is a combination of luck and intellect.

From the modern perspective the depiction of the African slave can be considered to be racist as he is depicted as someone to be superstitious. He is also represented as someone who is foolish as he cannot tell his left eye from the right. Poe has written his speech phonetically to represent what was considered to be a Black man's pronunciation.

10.4 THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH- SUMMARY

"The Mask of Red Death: A Fantasy" is a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe published in 1842. It was first published in *Graham's Magazine*. The short story is considered to be gothic in nature.

The country was devastated by "Red Death". Anyone infected by it would have sharp pains, sudden dizziness and profuse bleeding from pores. It also made scarlet stains upon the face and body of the victims which prevented people helping those affected. The whole seizure and termination of the disease happened within half an hour.

Even when half of the population of Prince Prospero's dominions dies due to "Red Death" and the disease was spreading rampantly, he remained indifferent, happy, fearless and sagacious. He called his friends to accompany him and retires into his castellated abbeys. The abbey was shut off from the outside world and had ample provisions. The prince provided his friends with all appliances of pleasure. The place had buffoons, ballet-dancers, musicians, cards, beauty and wine to entertain them.

Towards the end of fifth or sixth month of their seclusion, when the outside world is ravaged by the pestilence, Prospero decides to entertain his friends at a masked ball of the most unusual magnificence. It was held in rooms which were decorated for this purpose. There were seven imperial suite containing windows of stained glass. To the extreme east was the room in blue colour having blue windows. The second chamber was purple in colour with the same colour ornaments and tapestries. The third room and its casements were green in colour. The fourth room was orange in colour. The fifth and sixth room were white and violet in colour. The seventh room was covered in black velvet tapestries and carpet. The panes of the windows were scarlet in colour. None of the rooms had any candle or source of light but in the corridors there was a heavy tripod which bore a brazier of fire. The rays of this fire passed through the tinted windows and illuminated the rooms. The effect of this on the seventh room (black chamber) was so ghastly that rarely anyone dared to enter that room.

This black room also contained a gigantic clock of ebony against its western wall. The clock made loud and deep sound at each hour due to which the musicians would stop their music and the performers would stop performing. The sound also made everyone in the place uncomfortable and pale. When the echoes of the clock stopped, everyone went back to the merriment. Prospero had made sure that the costumes of the people who attended the masked ball were grotesque. The whole set up of the ball was dream like. The only interruption in this dream was the unpleasant loud chiming of the clock. All the chambers were full of people who revelled except the last one. At last the clock sounded the twelfth hour upon the clock and as usual all celebrations paused till the clock stopped sounding. At that moment, the guests started noticing a new masked figure. Soon the guests started expressing terror, horror and disgust at the presence of this figure. The figure was tall and gaunt, and shrouded from head to foot in the habiliments of the grave. The mask which concealed the visage was made

so nearly to resemble the countenance of a stiffened corpse. Its dress was dabbled in blood and his broad brow was besprinkled with scarlet horror.

Prospero notices the masked figure walking around and at first he is horrified but later becomes angry on seeing it. He orders to strip the masked figure of its reddened vestures. Prospero gave these orders from the blue chamber but although the music stopped, no one tried to seize him. The figure passed from blue chamber to all successive chambers and enraged by all this, Prospero follows him with a dagger. The masked figure reaches the black room when Prospero reached near hi. The figure turns and Prospero let out a loud cry, drops the dagger and dies. The guests enter the Black room and try to attack the cloaked man but find that there was no one beneath that costume. In the end everyone dies and the story ends with the note that "Darkness and Decay and Red Death" had at last triumphed.

10.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "THE MASK OF THE RED DEATH"

This story belongs to the genre of Gothic fiction and fantasy. The story is full of dark and creepy images making the story terrifying. It also contains certain supernatural elements. The story appears to have been inspired from Italian writer Boccaccio's *Decameron* where a group of nobleman and noblewoman retreat to an abbey to escape Black Death. The story was written at a time when his wife was diagnosed with tuberculosis which was considered to be incurable. In this story also Poe has discussed the theme of death. Prospero and his friends retire in the castle thinking that they would remain untouched by the "Red Death" and they would be able to enjoy their life behind the closed doors. The end of the story displays the power that death has over all living beings. It clearly shows the inevitability of death and how no riches on earth can save one from death.

The story could be taken as an allegory. The only named character in the story is Prospero. His name suggests prosperity representing that the character was wealthy and had the means to insulate himself and his friends from the plague that was ravaging the city. The seven rooms are arranged from east to west symbolising sunrise(birth of a person) and sunset(death of a person)The seven rooms might represent "seven ages of men", or the "seven deadly sins". The colours of different rooms might suggest the extravagance that Prospero could afford. The last Black room represents death itself as the colour black is used to represent death and the red window panes represent the bloody death (Red Death).Him isolating and his friends during this plague reflects his indifference towards the sufferings of his people and an illusion of safety that he creates. This illusion is broken temporarily whenever the clock chimes as it makes them pause their merriment. The clock is a constant reminder of the final judgement of death. The imagery of blood and time in the story would represent corporeality. Through this story Poe has also represented the hierarchical relationship between peasantry and Prospero and how unfair the feudal system is where the aristocracy enjoys and the poor suffer.

The tone of the story is grave, dark and ominous. During certain moments the tone appears to be delirious also. At times the narrator appears to be caught up in the delirium and dizzying whirl of the masquerade.

10.6 CONCLUSION

The prescribed short stories of Poe depict the genres in which he wrote. "The God Bug" can be categorised as a mystery story and "The mask of the Red Death" as a gothic/horror story. Poe is considered as a literary inventor as the elements of mystery in his stories is now considered as a classic element of detective fiction. The short story "The Gold Bug" is a clear representation of the passion that Poe had for cryptography. In the second story Poe maintains both the elements of mystery and horror and touches upon an important theme which is the inevitability of death. His writing genius has clearly earned him the title of being the father of modern horror literature.

10.7 QUESTIONS

1. Describe of "The mask of the Red Death" as a story of mystery.
2. Comment on the relationship that Jupiter and narrator share with Legrand.
3. Explain the incidents that lead Legrand to the treasure.
4. What is the central theme of "The mask of the Red Death"?
5. Describe "The mask of the Red Death" as belonging to the Gothic fiction.

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11

CRITICAL STUDY OF KATE CHOPIN'S "THE STORM" AND "THE LOCKET"

Unit Structure

11.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the students to the author Kate Chopin and her contribution to literature
- To make the students understand the summary of the two short stories: The Storm and The Locket

11.1 INTRODUCTION TO KATE CHOPIN

Kate Chopin (1850 - 1904), born Katherine O'Flaherty in St. Louis, Missouri on February 8, 1850, is considered one of the first feminist authors of the 20th century. She is often credited for introducing the modern feminist literary movement. Chopin was following a rather conventional path as a housewife until an unfortunate tragedy-- the untimely death of her husband-- altered the course of her life. She became a talented and prolific short story writer, influenced primarily by the French short story author, Guy de Maupassant. She is best known for her novel The Awakening (1899), a hauntingly prescient tale of a woman unfulfilled by the mundane yet highly celebrated "feminine role," and her painful realization that the constraints of her gender blocked her ability to seek a more fulfilling life. Many of her works are featured in our Feminist Literature - Study Guide

Commenting on the influence of Maupassant on her writing, Chopin wrote:

"...I read his stories and marveled at them. Here was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old fashioned mechanism and stage trapping that in a vague, unthinkable way I had fancied were essential to the art of story making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw.." [source: Jane Le Marquand, Deep South (1996)]

Kate Chopin's short stories were well received in her own time and were published by some of America's most prestigious magazines—Vogue, the Atlantic Monthly, Harper's Young People, Youth's Companion, and the Century. A few stories were syndicated by the American Press Association. Her stories appeared also in her two published collections, Bayou Folk (1894) and A Night in Acadie (1897), both of which received good reviews from critics across the country. Twenty-six of her stories are children's stories—those published in or submitted to children's magazines or those similar in subject or theme to those that were. By the late 1890s Kate Chopin was well known among American readers of magazine fiction.

Her early novel At Fault (1890) had not been much noticed by the public, but The Awakening (1899) was widely condemned. Critics called it morbid, vulgar, and disagreeable. Willa Cather, who would become a well known twentieth-century American author, labeled it trite and sordid.

Some modern scholars have written that the novel was banned at Chopin's hometown library in St. Louis, but this claim has not been able to be verified, although in 1902, the Evanston, Illinois, Public Library removed The Awakening from its open shelves—and the book has been challenged twice in recent years. Chopin's third collection of stories, to have been called A Vocation and a Voice, was for unknown reasons cancelled by the publisher and did not appear as a separate volume until 1991.

Chopin's novels were mostly forgotten after her death in 1904, but several of her short stories appeared in an anthology within five years after her death, others were reprinted over the years, and slowly people again came to read her. In the 1930s a Chopin biography appeared which spoke well of her short fiction but dismissed The Awakening as unfortunate. However, by the 1950s scholars and others recognized that the novel is an insightful and moving work of fiction. Such readers set in motion a Kate Chopin revival, one of the more remarkable literary revivals in the United States.

After 1969, when Per Seyersted's biography, one sympathetic to The Awakening, was published, along with Seyersted's edition of her complete works, Kate Chopin became known throughout the world. She has attracted great attention from scholars and students, and her work has been translated into other languages, including Albanian, Arabic, Catalan, Chinese, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, Galician, German, Hungarian, Icelandic, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malayalam, Persian (Farsi), Polish, Portuguese, Serbian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish, and Vietnamese. (If you know of a translation into another language, would you write to us?) She is today understood as a classic writer who speaks eloquently to contemporary concerns. The Awakening, "The Storm," "The Story of an Hour," "Désirée's Baby," "A Pair of Silk Stockings," "A Respectable Woman," "Athénaïse," and other stories appear in countless editions and are embraced by people for their sensitive, graceful, poetic depictions of women's lives.

11.2 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE STORM

The Storm Summary

As thundercracks overhead, Bobinôt and his young son, Bibi, take a seat inside a general store. Bobinôt tells his son that they should wait until the storm ends to return home. Young Bibi asks if his mother, Calixta, will be afraid of the thunderstorm. Bobinôt says that while the rain will frighten his wife, she will be fine because she has the company of the family's maid, Sylvie. Bibi politely corrects his father, explaining that Sylvie is not on duty today. With the news that his wife is all alone in the storm, Bobinôt purchases a can of her favorite shrimp as a gift before returning to sit with a remarkably peaceful Bibi.

However, although her family assumed she would be frightened, Calixta doesn't even notice the incoming storm as she's too busy sweating over her sewing. Calixta only notices the clouds when the room she's sewing in turns dark. At the sight of the thick black clouds, Calixta rushes outside together the family's laundry hanging up to dry. As she struggles to seize laundry swept up in strong winds, Calixta notices a man approaching on horseback. To her surprise, it's Alcée Laballiere, whom she knew as a young woman but had not encountered much since. With drops of rain plopping from the sky, Alcée asks if he can wait out the storm on Calixta's porch. The very sound of Alcée's voice sparks a bit of arousal from Calixta. When it's clear that the porch won't provide Alcée adequate protection from the storm, Calixta invites him to follow her into the house. Once inside, the pair work together to quickly fortify the house's windows and cracks from pooling water. As they work side-by-side, Alcée notices Calixta's good looks held up over the years.

Alcée joins Calixta by the window to watch the storm. As the rain gathers outside, she grows increasingly nervous for her son and husband's well-being. Alcée attempts to soothe Calixta with kind words about her family and a hug. With each crash of thunder or bolt of lightning, Calixta jumps with fear and settles more snuggly into Alcée's arms. The closeness of their bodies reminds Alcée of their time together in a town called Assumption. With Calixta in his arms and Assumption on his mind, Alcée grows increasingly aroused. When he takes a moment to look into Calixta's eyes, Alcée notices Calixta is also aroused. When Alcée asks Calixta if she remembers Assumption, breaking the conversation Calixta's family in the storm, Calixta leans in for a kiss. The kissing then leads to sex. As the two enjoy a tender embrace, Alcée admires Calixta's beautiful white skin, and then leaves as the storm rolls away.

Meanwhile, Bobinôt and Bibi start the journey home. As they trudge through mud, both worry how Calixta will react to their filthy clothes. However, to their surprise, Calixta greets them with open arms when they return. With Calixta happy to see her family and the gift of shrimp, all three enjoy each other's company over dinner.

Elsewhere, Alcée writes a sweet letter to his wife, Clarisse, encouraging her to stay longer on her vacation if she so desires, noting that her well-being is his top priority. The tender correspondence pleases Clarisse. Even though Clarisse loves her husband, she's she pleased to have a break from her wifely duties, particularly as they pertain to sex. The story concludes: "the storm passed, and every one was happy."

The Storm Character List

Calixta

An Arcadian domestic who is Bibi's mother and Bobinôt's wife. She is home alone waiting for her husband and son to return when the storm comes, giving her the chance for a brief tryst with her old flame Alcée.

Alcée Laballière

Alcée is a wealthy Creole who is riding by Calixta's house when the storm approaches. While seeking shelter from the storm, he initiates an affair with his old flame, Calixta. We learn after that Alcée's wife is away in Biloxi and he encourages her to stay there for longer, implying that he might be interested in pursuing more with Calixta.

Bobinôt

Calixta's husband, also an Arcadian. He clearly loves Calixta—specially buying her a can of shrimp at Friedheimer's store because he knows it's her favorite—but he also fears her a bit. When he and Bibi return home after the storm, he frantically scrapes mud off himself and the boy, and brews up a series of excuses to give Calixta for being gone during the storm. He is relieved when she welcomes him with open arms.

Bibi

Calixta's and Bobinôt's son, Bibi is portrayed as being much more intelligent than a four-year-old should be. His father treats him like an adult, and he certainly converses like one throughout the story.

Clarisse

Alcée's wife and also a Creole, Clarisse is in Biloxi with their children during the events of the story. She decides to stay there a little longer, enjoying an autonomy she hasn't known since before was married.

The Storm Themes

Forbidden Love

The story hinges around a forbidden reprisal of an old love affair between Calixta and Alcée. Having met Boinôt and Bibi early on in the story, we know that, according to the moral codes by which the characters are bound, Calixta should not give in to her urge to have sex with Alcée, and even as the story winds down, we feel the risk and titillation when Calixta and Alcée have to interact with the partners they're committed to.

Familial Obligation

The flip side to the theme of forbidden love is that of familial obligation, as the storm represents a rupture in both Calixta's and Alcée commitments to their families. With Calixta's chores around the house—taking the drying laundry inside and sewing a cotton sheet—and Alcée writing to his wife at the end of the story, we know that this forbidden passion came as an interruption to the regularly scheduled program of adult family life.

Female Sexuality

While we certainly get a sense of Alcée desires during the sexual encounter, the only experience of the sexual encounter really explored is Calixta's. Chopin shrouds this experience in purple prose and sensual imagery, providing a trailblazing portrayal of the female sexual experience. The story's focus on Calixta's experience and pleasure—and total disinterest in any kind of moral aspect of the affair—help to explain Chopin's place as a predecessor to feminist authors in the English literary canon.

The Small Town

This story takes place in a small town, one where we could imagine that it's hard for anyone to enjoy an affair and get away with it. We get a sense of this when, at the end of the story, Calixta and her family laugh so much at the kitchen table that "anyone might have heard them as far away as Laballière's." Laballière's, of course, is Alcée house. So therefore, the storm acts as a strange wedge in the typical small-town existence, providing the space and timing for an encounter that would have otherwise been impossible if Bobinôt and Bibi could have taken a much quicker, unimpeded trip to the store.

Clothing

Clothing plays a major role in the story, both in terms of plot and character development. Of course, there's the bodice that Calixta unties from around her neck during the early moments of the seduction which we know means that she and Alcée will indulge in their wants. But there is also the frequent mention of her son Bibi's clothing: Calixta brings in some of his clothes that are drying before the storm, and the clothes Bibi is wearing getting covered with mud after the storm. Bobinôt, at the end of the story, pulls a can of shrimp out of his "ample side pocket," representing his role as the provider for the family.

11.3 SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE LOCKET

One autumn night, four Confederate soldiers in worn, gray uniforms are encamped on a hill as they wait for their orders. One man heats food in a tin cup, and two other men are resting away from the fire, while Edmond sits with his shirt unbuttoned as he tries to read a letter. One of the resting men asks about the object around Edmond's neck, but Edmond does not answer.

The men speculate that the object is a picture of Edmond, while Nick, the man with a tin cup, speculates that it is a magical Catholic to protect Edmond, who is French and who has not been injured after a year and a half of war. Edmond jokingly agrees. Homesick, he lies on his back and thinks of the spring day when Octavia said goodbye to him. She had given him her locket, which has images of her parents and the date of their marriage.

Edmond falls asleep and dreams that Octavie brings him a letter while he is embarrassed at his poor condition. He also dreams of a snake that tries to strangle him until it eludes him as he tries to grab it. He wakes up to a commotion and the beginning of dawn, as well as Nick's yelling.

A wise but confused blackbird wonders what is occurring, thinking that the men must be children playing a game, and he decides to watch the battle, which lasts until nightfall. Finally understanding what has occurred, the bird comes to the now quiet plain. On the plain, a black man accompanies a clergyman who is administering rites to the dead and dying, while the wounded have been taken away. One of the dead soldiers is a boy with a locket around his neck, and the tearful priest takes the locket as he prays for the dead.

Later, on a spring day in Louisiana, Octavie and her neighbor Judge Pillier take a morning ride in a coach. Octavie is plainly dressed and hides her locket under her clothes. She holds it in this way because she now values the locket for its association with an important event in her life. She has read many times the priest's letter that accompanied the return of the locket, and she again reads his description of Edmond's death as she mentally compares the beautiful spring with the horrible death of her beloved.

After her moment of despair, resignation returns to Octavie's mind, and she decides to be like Aunt Tavie, who has grown "old and quiet and sad." She feels a sense of loss, but part of her wants to enjoy her youth. When she draws her veil closer to her face, Judge Pillier, who is also Edmond's father, requests that she remove the veil, for it contrasts too much with the day's glory. Pillier asks that she never again put it on. Octavie feels hurt, considering that he has somehow kept her from sharing in their mutual grief, but she obeys.

The coach leaves the road and enters a meadow toward Judge Pillier's house. With agitation, he tells her that miracles seem ready to happen on such a magnificent day, yet she looks at him with need and fear. When they approach the house, she sees a familiar face. Suddenly Edmond is holding her! She again feels alive.

Later, she asks him about the locket. He explains that he had thought he lost the locket in the tumult of the fight but that someone must have stolen it. She thinks of the priest's description of the dead soldier's expression of supplication. Edmond thinks of the other man at the campfire who had lain away from the fire and had said nothing during the conversation about the locket.

Analysis

As with many short stories, the power of "The Locket" derives from the plot twist that occurs at the end of the narrative, for the reversal destroys both our assumptions and those of the characters within the tale. Throughout "The Locket," Chopin seeks to deceive as she hints that Edmond rather than the fourth man at the encampment is the one who died in the Civil War. She succeeds so fully that upon reading the final revelation, many readers might choose to return to the beginning of the story to review who the dead man might have been, to reaffirm that a fourth man was at the campfire that night. That man first appears "lying in the obscurity," suggesting his hidden nature, and he next appears as a dream serpent before he is eventually revealed as a "mere boy" without mystery or evil intent.

In writing "The Locket," Chopin refers to dual motifs of love and war that serve to connect the two vignettes that comprise the structure of the story. Part I's atmosphere of horror and destruction in the war contrasts easily with the springtime background of Part II, but they are intimately connected because of the tie between Edmond and Octavie. Edmond feels the connection in Part I from his side, and Octavie feels it in Part II from hers. Edmond, who lives in a drab encampment and who fights in the chaos of an unexpected battle, nevertheless retains a memory of Octavie's love, and although Octavie lives in a beautiful world of renewal and growth far away from the war, she is dressed in black mourning clothes, held back by the locket and its reminder of Edmond's presumed death.

Chopin portrays the days of the Civil War as particularly horrible because the war leads to premature aging among those who should be young and hopeful. The locket thief, Edmond, and Octavie are all young and in the prime of life. Yet, the unnamed locket thief dies while Edmond seems dead and Octavie herself wears mourning clothes during the most beautiful time of the year and is on the verge of resolving to live out her life in mourning. War causes the young to confront border between life and death, while older men, such as the priest and Judge Pillier, paradoxically preserve life, whether by praying for people's souls or by trying to revive life in the young, as does the judge for Octavie. The older generation, at least, can claim a broader perspective on suffering and death and the existential need to move forward despite experiences of profound loss. However, the older generation ultimately has little positive effect or even a negative effect on Octavie, and only Edmond's miraculous return restores Octavie's happiness.

The setting of "The Locket" is particularly important because it foreshadows Edmond's unanticipated and figurative resurrection. Chopin refuses to maintain an elegiac tone in the story and repeatedly interrupts Octavie's melancholy thoughts with a description of the liveliness of the spring day. Having supposedly died in the previous autumn, Edmond becomes a figure of rebirth that parallels the renewal of nature after a fading autumn and a cold winter. In Chopin's other story "Ma'ame Pélagie," the years after the Civil War serve to age her protagonist, but in this tale, the end of the Civil War ultimately marks rejuvenation and hope. Nevertheless, while these people can rejoice in their reunion, the family of the dead solider

has no such luck. As for the wise bird, Chopin appears to be asking us to reexamine human war from an outsider's perspective; if it did not have such horrific results, it would seem like a game. The bird's life will be about the same regardless of which side wins.

Near the end of Part II, the happiness of the spring setting seems to suddenly and finally infuse both Judge Pillier and Octavie with a sense of dream-like anticipation, as though Judge Pillier's request that Octavie remove her veil allow both characters to understand the message given to them by nature. Pillier invokes a religious sentiment when he says, "Does it not seem to you, Octavie, that heaven might for once relent and give us back our dead?," and although the previous representation of religion in the form of the priest proves to be mistaken about Edmond's fate, Edmond's arrival is in a sense entirely miraculous. Octavie thinks of him as "her dead Edmond; her living Edmond," and this phrase accurately conveys the feeling of instantaneous revival that accompanies his return to life. Her abiding desire is love, the joyful bonds of a restored relationship, quite the opposite of the married women desiring freedom whom we sometimes find in Chopin's stories.

11.4 SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. In Kate Chopin's story "The Storm," explain the last line: "So the storm passed, and everyone was happy."
2. What are literary techniques used in "The Storm" by Kate Chopin? Explain
3. In "The Storm" by Kate Chopin, in what sense does the storm act as a character in the story? Discuss
4. What details in Kate Chopin's story "The Storm" emphasize the fact that Bobinôt loves his wife? Explain
5. What is Alcee's role in "The Storm" by Kate Chopin? Elaborate
6. How does Chopin explore female sexuality in “The Locket”
7. Identify the characteristics that Chopin appears to value in her protagonists
8. How does Chopin characterize romantic love in “The Locket”
9. Attempt a summary of “The Locket”

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