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AMERICAN LITERATURE

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AMERICAN LITERATURE

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UNIT I

INTRODUCTION BACKGROUND

The first Frontier (Settlement of America)

The region of the nation that borders the inhabited area is known as the frontier. The phrase “frontier” denotes outward growth into a territory that was previously uninhabited by a particular state, which sets it apart from a boundary. Boundary disputes have arisen at certain frontiers where two nations have advanced from different directions. A political border is where the state’s boundary meets the settlement boundary, whereas a settlement frontier denotes the extent of settlement within a state. A complicated and multidimensional historical process spanning several centuries, the settling of America, commonly known as the “First Frontier,” encompassed numerous European nations, indigenous peoples, and African slaves. The first people to set foot on the American continent were the Portuguese. It was just by happenstance that they arrived. The Italian-born Christopher Columbus is credited with finding the American continent. Out of all the colonists, the majority of Americans were frontiersmen. Beyond the inhabited villages, the frontier or forest region was mostly a man’s realm, especially for young men.

The Frontiers Become the First True American Life on the Frontier

When humans first ventured into the wild, they left behind numerous remnants of European culture. They carried everything they owned, including a long rifle, a hunting knife, powder, and shot, on their backs or in their hands. Still, they made it through with this scant gear. They ate a lot of berries, nuts, fish, and game. They slept in rudimentary wood shelters or caves under the sky. Some guys from the frontier erected cabins, cleared land, got married, and started children. However, the majority of these guys were hunters and trappers who valued their alone in the woods over their ties to a house. Occasionally, they travelled to a trading post in order to trade a few furs for fresh ammunition, shot and possibly some maize. Many frontiersmen never made it back from their perilous excursions through the woods because it was an unpredictable life where they had to pit their cunning and knowledge of the wilderness against Native Americans and the elements. Occasionally, the frontiersmen would travel great distances and congregate for sports and camaraderie. Their reenactment was a reflection of their difficult, rocky existence. They were skilled hunters and it was both a need and a pleasure for them. Much of their enjoyment also came from games involving pure physical prowess. They had foot races, wrestling battles, jumping competitions, and

tomahawk and heavy wooden fence rail throwing exhibitions. Before a long, crackling fire in the evenings, they joked about newcomers to the bush and traded colourful stories of their adventures in the forest.

Frontier Independence

These men travelled through the area that separated civilization from barbarism. They found the routes through the mountains and the lush valleys. They were strong proponents of independence, self-sufficiency, and initiative; they were individualists. Despite being competitive, their individualism was also cooperative because, in the frontier, having an extra gun and a second set of strong arms could be the difference between life and death. The principle of equality, which is the foundation of democracy, also took root and quickly expanded in the forest. A man's aptitude for carpentry and familiarity with the outdoors were more important to him than his elegant attire or the flowery language of titles that followed his name. Men led essentially the same lives from New France to Spanish Florida along the whole frontier. The frontier males of Massachusetts shared more characteristics with the German, Scotch, Irish, or English people in Virginia than they did with the wealthy planters in their own colony's tidewater areas or the prosperous townspeople in the colonial seaports. The great thing about frontier life was that it brought together a diverse group of people to create a new, independent kind of human.

The Puritans and the Spread of Puritanism in America

A group of English Protestants known as the Puritans worked to rid the Church of England of what they believed to be the last vestiges of Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They followed a tight interpretation of the Bible in their daily lives and practiced a simple style of worship. The history of England and the founding of the New England Colonies in America were greatly influenced by the Puritans.

The Puritans were deeply religious people.

Protestants broke free from the Catholic Church's centralised authority and established a number of sects and organisations. Numerous national churches founded. Radical doctrinal reforms were not instituted by the Church of England or many other churches. Some institutional modifications were started by John Calvin (1509–1564), whose supporters were referred to as Calvinists. He endeavoured, along with his adherents, to eradicate the residual Catholic customs. They were unyielding rebels who would not bow down. The Anglican authorities despised Calvinists and wished to maintain the status quo.

The Puritans were devout Christians who were prepared to leave their home country of England and immigrate to American colonies in order to live out their religious convictions and avoid religious persecution in England. Many Puritans moved to Massachusetts and Connecticut between 1630 and 1640. Plymouth, Maryland, Rhode Island, New Heaven, and Pennsylvania are the other five colonies that the Puritan colonists from England created in addition to these two. The main goal of the Protestant emigrants was to build a manner of life and a church government in the colonies that aligned with their deeply held values.

Writings of the Puritans

The naturalness, lucidity, clarity of thought, and direction of expression in the works of the Puritans are striking. Jonathan Edwards, like with many other theologians and preachers, possessed these qualities in his sermons and writings. American prose was originally created by them.

The Puritan influence

The Puritan influence enfeebled with the end of the colonial period but it did not die out. The Puritan has left on American literature "the impress of his strong moral sense, of his emphasis on the drama of the inner life and of his conviction that spiritual beauties are infinitely the greatest".

Spread of Puritanism in America

In order to build Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts, a party of Puritans sailed on the Mayflower in 1620. Based on their theological convictions, they created a theocratic society and fought for religious freedom. The Puritans under John Winthrop founded Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629. Between 1620 and 1640, the Massachusetts Bay Colony saw the arrival of thousands of Puritans. Their vision was to build a religiously outstanding city atop a hill that would serve as an example for others. America's culture and civilization have been forever influenced by the Puritans.

Romanticism: Optimists and Pessimists

In America during the first part of the 1800s, the Romantic movement was a magnificent phenomenon. In America, romanticism was an outspoken opposition to the rational era and the concepts that Locke, Newton, and Pope had solidified. The great romantic revolution in England came after the neo-classicism of the Augustan Age. The 19th century saw a strong backlash against the age of reason, and something similar occurred in

America as well. Locke and Pope were starting to be seen as less significant as Newton influenced the opinions of notable authors and thinkers. Something new, a new perspective on humanity, the natural world, and the ultimate deity, was palpable everywhere. It was clear that classicism gave way to romanticism throughout all of Europe. The new ideas that were popular were also welcomed in America. The poet William Cullen Bryant, in his essay on American poetry, highlighted the necessity for flexibility and new paths, criticising the practice of imitating the poetical tradition of the eighteenth century. Walt Whitman finished emancipating poetry from its 18th-century constraints, while romantics like Thoreau and Emerson rejected the established pattern.

Treatment of Romanticism in literature

The modifications to the subject matter and how it was treated in literature that Romanticism brought about were far more important. The poet and the reader were no longer captivated by the strictly intellectual; instead, they were strongly drawn to the imagination. This sparked an intense hunt for the unusual, weird, and even horrific. There was an eerie energy at work everywhere that inspired Shelley to draw comparisons between the unusual and completely new image of “ghosts from an enchanter fleeing” and the very familiar picture of fall leaves being scattered by the West wind. This tendency led to the “naturalisation” of the bizarre in literature. Augustan disdain for Gothic brutalities gave way to a nostalgic appreciation and sympathetic grasp of mediaeval objects. The public was captivated by gothic literature, architecture, and mediaeval chivalry. A lot of haunted castles and fantastical plot devices were introduced into literature in England due to the romantic interest in the distant, mysterious, and magical middle ages. It took a different form in American writing, where it was extremely effective in using the grotesque and malevolent in psychological form.

Nature

The Romantic Movement brought with it an increased emphasis on nature in American writing. The newfound fascination with nature was mirrored in the precise, detailed depictions of it seen in poetry and fiction’s idyllic settings. Nature had been used into the poetry of authors like Freneau even before the romantic period. However, the poets of the 19th century were the ones who made nature a significant issue. The American poets Bryant and Emerson fervently believed in the fundamental kinship between man and nature, and Wordsworth’s tremendous love of nature had counterparts across the Atlantic. Emerson

outlines ideas in his work “Nature”. The consideration of nature as a fundamental component of literary method was also made possible by Sir Walter Scott’s influence. Scott skillfully dealt with the beauty of the Scottish environment while using it as a backdrop for his stories in his poems and novels. In response to Scott, Washington Irving introduced the powerful romantic landscape tradition to American literature.

Individualism

The individual gained significance as a result of this new Romantic attitude. The spread of lyricism was a result of a growing understanding of the value of people, the significance of personality, and the range of emotional responses. The American public greatly appreciated Burns and Thomas Moore, and Byron’s widespread appeal led to the rise of the personal lyric as one of the country’s most popular literary genres. One of the leading proponents of the individual cult was Emerson. Romantic literature brilliantly captured the whole spectrum of human feeling, including joy, love, rapture, longing, fear, regret, hope, and faith. Two of the strongest feelings experienced were an endless yearning for beauty and an insatiable curiosity. Romanticism’s characteristics are exemplified by Edgar Allen Poe. He demonstrates his attempts to achieve the beauty above in his poetry and storytelling.

Optimism and Pessimism

Both optimism and pessimism are present in American Romanticism. Poe, Melville, and Hawthorne are all gloomy. Although they all embrace independence, their individualism has been shaped by their experiences. Their concern was with the person’s emotional experience. Emersonian optimism in the romantic study of the human psyche was not shared by all romantic writers. Poe, Hawthorne, and Melville formed a core contradiction between man’s goals and the conditions under which he must exist, and it also focused stress on morbid emotional forces on man’s solitude. None of them was particularly optimistic about the prospects for social improvement. They were primarily focused on the issue of isolation, which can be understood as individualism when it is considered in terms of its risks and liabilities rather than its advantages.

The Flowering of New England

The term “The Flowering of New England” refers to a time in the early American colonies—especially in the New England region during the 17th century—when there was a significant intellectual and cultural advancement. During this time, literature, theology, and education all flourished and a distinct American identity emerged. The period from 1829 to

1860 is known as the period of the American or the "New England" Renaissance. American literature was in its "golden day" at the time. The reason it is referred to as the "New England" Renaissance is, that most of the authors who contributed to the expansion of the American Renaissance in literature were from New England. New England was home to writers such as Hawthorne, Thoreau, Holmes, Lowell, and Longfellow. Outside of New England, only Melville resided. These authors have accomplished more collectively than all of American literature in terms of style and philosophical depth.

Factors responsible for The Flowering of American Renaissance

The following elements played a major role in the Flowering of the American Renaissance:

(1) Engagement with European culture.
(2) Romanticism in Europe.
(3) The traditional Puritan value of intellectual life.
(4) The rise of nationalism in the United States.
(5) The expansion of democracy.
(6) The advancement of science.
(7) Philosophy's growth, particularly that of transcendentalism.
(8) Free thinking and social, political and economic freedom of the Whites in America.
(9) The emergence of famous writers from America, including Melville, Hawthorne, Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau.
(10) Americans' desire to advance their culture and history
(11) The American Industrial Revolution.

Important details about "The Flowering of New England"

Transcendentalism was a highly significant intellectual movement during this time. Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson were two transcendentalists who emphasised the intrinsic goodness of both nature and mankind. They were strong proponents of the value of personal intuition and independence. Thoreau's "Walden" and Emerson's "Self-reliance" are two important examples of transcendentalist writing. The "American Renaissance" was the name given to a remarkable collection of writers who came from New England. Notable writers who wrote alongside Emerson and Thoreau were Nathaniel Hawthorne, whose *The Scarlet Letter* tackled issues of sin and guilt, and Herman Melville, whose epic masterpiece *Moby Dick* is well-known. In American literature, the accomplishments of this age represented a pinnacle. A lot of philosophical research was done during this time, and people like Bronson

Alcott and Henry James Sr. helped shape American philosophy. The early feminist movements were centred in New England. Women's rights and equality were promoted by Susan B. Anthony and Margaret Fuller.

Writers of the South

A wide variety of writers have contributed to the rich literary heritage of the American South. They have significantly influenced American literary works. The main topics of Southern literature include Southern identity, family and community, conflict and change, and landscape and nature.

Writers of the South in America

The most significant writers from the American South are Tennessee Williams (1911–1983), Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964), Harper Lee (1926–2016), Eudora Welty (1909–2001), Zora Neale Hurston (1891–1960), Carson McCullers (1917–1967), and William Faulkner (1897–1962).

Tennessee Williams (1911-1983)

Thomas Lamar Williams, better known as Tennessee Williams, was born in 1911 in Columbia, Mississippi. His grandparents provided him with shelter during his early years of life and a significant portion of his adult life. He had an episcopal clergy grandfather. The Williams family relocated to St. Louis in 1918 so that Comelius Coffin Williams could live with them. It was a fatal decision for Williams. Williams had a disorganised academic career. To supplement his family's meagre money, he was forced to work early. After spending sporadic time at the University of Missouri (1933), Washington University in St. Louis (1936), and the University of Gowoi (1938), he received his college degree. He found solace and camaraderie with "the lonely, the rootless, and the outcast" at Vieuse Corre in New Orleans. Memorable tales and one-act plays were created to convey the new experience. The Group Theatre for American Blues gave him a special prize. Williams received a fellowship to pursue playwriting at the New School of Social Research in addition to a Rock Faller Fellowship. On stage, his piece *Battle of Angels* did not fare well. Williams's theatrical hit, *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), catapulted him into stardom. He won his first Pulitzer Prize in 1943 for *A Street Car named Desire*. Between 1945 and 1980, he wrote an astounding amount of excellent plays. Williams choked to death in 1983 by accident. Williams's Southern upbringing was his first source of inspiration. Williams' imagination was stirred by Hart Crane's life and poetry. Crane's Poem "The Broken Tower" is the source of *A Street*

Car Named Desire's epigraph. Similar to Chekhov, he skillfully evoked a nostalgic feeling in *The Glass Menagerie*. "A mood play" is the term for it. The opening sequences of *A Street Car Named Desire* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* both demonstrate the Chekhovian strategy of establishing atmosphere and progressively disclosing to the viewer the characters' thinking processes. *Cairo! Shanghai! Bombay!* and *The Magic Tower* (1936) marked the beginning of Tennessee Williams' playwriting career in 1935. Williams' first truly outstanding drama is *The Glass Menagerie* (1945). There is a persistent autobiographical element to *The Glass Menagerie*. It's a potent tragedy of the mind. A young woman's misfortune is depicted in *A Street Car named Desire*. It made Williams famous as a dramatist. Williams wrote a number of plays that are worth seeing, including *Kingdom of Earth* (1968), *Erapstik Tragedy* (1966), and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963–1964), *Small Craft Warnings* (1972), *Out Cry* (1973), *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel* (1969), and *Viese Carre* (1977).

Tennessee Williams is known for his dramatic works in the following categories:

(1) Realism and Anti-Realism
(2) Expressionism and Symbolism
(3) Sex and Violence
(4) Tragic Vision
(5) Characterization.

William Faulkner (1897-1962)

1897 saw the birth of William Faulkner in New Albany, Mississippi. In 1902, his father moved the family to Oxford. It was the location of the University of Oxford, where Murray C. Faulkner, his father, oversaw business operations. Faulkner struggled academically. After the tenth grade, he dropped out of high school and joined the Canadian Air Force for a while. From 1919 to 1921, he attended the University of Mississippi as a special student. He took French, Spanish, and English studies. In an attempt to pursue a writing career, Faulkner moved to New Orleans. *Soldier's Pay*, his debut book published in 1926, is about the "lost generation". The satirical novel *Mosquitoes* (1927) is set in New Orleans. *The story of the Sartoris family in Sartoris* (1929) centres on young Bayard, a war veteran. In addition, the "lost generation" is discussed. *The Sound and the Fury*, a tale of lost innocence, is among his best books and was published in 1929. *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Sanctuary* (1931), *Light in August* (1932), *Pylon* (1935), *Absalom Absalom* (1936), *The Unvanquished* (1938), *The Wild Palms (*1939), *The Hamlet* (1940), *Go Down Moses* (1942),

Intruder in the Dust (1948), *Requiem for a Nun* (1951), *A Fable* (1954), *The Town* (1957), and *The Reviewers* (1962) are some of his well-known works. In 1950, Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Numerous more honours were given out after, including as the Pulitzer Prizes for The Town and The Reviewers. On July 6, 1962, Faulkner passed away in Oxford, Mississippi. *The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Sanctuary, Light in August*, and *Absalom Absalom* are among Faulkner's best works. The central works of Faulkner's greatest accomplishment are these six books. They are a masterful start to Faulkner's in-depth examinations of the moral state of humanity, for which he is currently well-known and respected. Themes and character development in William Faulkner's works were influenced by T.S. Eliot, Edgar Allan Poe, and James Joyce. Faulkner was a brilliant storyteller and novelist who made significant contributions to the development of fiction in the 20th century.

His novels are characterised by the following:

(1) Thematic variety and innovation

(2) Regional element

(3) Technique and craftsmanship

(4) Language and style

(5) Characterisation

Eudora Welty (1909-2001)

Southern author Eudora Welty was born in 1909. She has written five novels and four anthologies of short tales. Through her tales of the South, she has marvellously portrayed comedic creativity. Her literature is distinguished by the vast range of human events that are passionately conveyed with flawless artistic neutrality and honesty. Her writings validate the enigma and diversity of existence. Her creative juices never stop. She depicts the humorous circumstances of a half-mad Southern woman battling her family in her story "Why I Live at the P.O." through an entertaining monologue. In her book *The Ponder Heart*, she tells the bizarre story of a crazy saint who lived in his village. She skillfully displays a number of her comedic imagination's elements in *The Robber Bridegroom*. Comic characters that will stick in your memory are Judge Moody, Jack and Curly from Loosing Battles, Uncle Daniel Ponder, Bonnie Dee Peacock, Edna, and other characters in *The Ponder Heart* (1954), the Harpe Brothers, Salome, the evil stepmother, Don McInnis, and Billy Boy from *The Robber Bridegroom*. Welty integrates the sorrowful and the funny in *The Golden Apples*. Her best

piece of work is *Delta Wedding* (1946). For the Optimist Daughter, she won the Pulitzer Prize in 1973. She died in 2001.

Flannery O'Connor (1925-1964)

One of the best Southern writers is Flannery O'Connor. She writes with power and force about the state of "the child, the woman, the sick man". His characters' frailty demonstrates how strong their aspirations are.

Other notable writers of the South

Born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama, Harper Lee lived until 2016. Her book *To Kill a Mocking Bird* made her famous. It looks at morality and racial injustice in the American South. In 1961, Lee's book was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. Born in Alabama in 1891, Zora Neale Hurston lived from 1891 until 1960. Her book *Their Eyes Were Watching God* has won her praise. The experiences of African American women in the South are examined in this piece. 1917 saw the birth of Carson McCullers in Columbus, Georgia, who lived until 1967. A novel such as The Heart is *a Lonely Hunter* has made McCullers famous. It looks at isolation and loneliness in the South.

Themes in Southern literature

The key themes in Southern literature are:

1. Southern identity
2. Family and community
3. Conflict and change
4. Landscape and nature

Themes including race, class, family, religion, tradition, and the shifting dynamics of the South are frequently explored by Southern writers. Their writing frequently highlights the unique landscapes, accents, and cultures of the South. The main themes of Southern literature also include conflict and change, family and community, Southern identity, and landscape and nature.

Indian Thought in Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman

The Vedanta Philosophy had an influence on nineteenth-century American literature. Indian philosophy permeates the writings of Walt Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau. Hindu scriptures, particularly *The Bhagavad Gita*, have an elegant and well-elaborated notion of self that piqued the curiosity of transcendalists such as Thoreau, Emerson, and others who were

interested in the idea of selfhood. According to Hindu Vedantic philosophy, the supreme or cosmic soul is the embodiment of the essence of each individual. All objects, living and inanimate, are infused with Brahman, or the God, and we, as people, is a part of the ultimate. The primary texts that had a significant impact on Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman were *The Bhagavad Gita*, *The Laws of Manu*, *The Vishnu Purana*, *The Katha Upanishad*, and *The Vedas*.

Emerson influenced by Indian philosophy

Indian philosophy had an impact on Emerson when he was a Harvard student. He perused the translations of several Hindu texts in the Harvard University library. Seemingly, he studied De Gerando's Mahabharat translation and was greatly impacted by the transcendental doctrine of the Gita, which is included in a Mahabharat chapter. An entry in his journal makes it clear that he held it in great respect. Many of the ethical and philosophical ideas that the Gita so brilliantly expresses are embodied in R.W. Emerson's writings. These include the idea that God is present everywhere, the beliefs about Karma and soul transmigration, the idea that all living things are spiritually equal and one, the idea that death is inevitable, and the idea that the soul is immortal. His articles on nature, intellect, the über soul, heroism, spiritual rules, compensation, self-reliance, and history as well as some of his poetry in which he appears as Brahma—not god—but only men and rhodora—all exhibit these lofty ideas. Emerson states in his well-known article "The Plato or the Philosopher" that the *Vedas*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Vishnu Purana* are the best places to find the highest expression of the idea of underlying unity and the exhilaration of losing "all being in one being." Both in structure and subject, several of Emerson's poems are reminiscent of the Vedanta philosophy.

Thoreau's understanding of Hindu Philosophy

Thoreau discovered a way of life in Hindu philosophy that he deeply identified with. He discusses the Gita's majestic and luminous worldview in "Walden". While staying at Emerson's home in 1841, Thoreau developed a profound and close grasp of Hindu philosophy. Emerson's personal library contained a fairly extensive collection of Hindu scriptures. Thoreau was drawn to these scriptures and incorporated their basic ideas into his life and works. According to Thoreau, Arthus Christy was a Yogi from New England who was shaped by his upbringing as well as his moral and religious upbringing. Thoreau thought that the essence of the Gita's lessons is impetuous action. He also adhered to the simple

principle. He was fiercely against urbanisation. He believed that cities undermine their own source of energy by excluding nature from within their boundaries and forcing the urban layout upon the surrounding area. He begged that in order to satisfy his spiritual demands, man must develop a close relationship with nature. He ascribes to the values stated in the Gita in all aspects of his life. Thoreau was not very fond of material goods and belongings. He thought that the Bhagavad Gita was a tremendous work that was greater than all the buildings and temples of the East and that most persons were actually possessed by their possessions.

Walt Whitman's poems suffused with the thoughts and teachings of the Gita

Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" contains various poems that are permeated with the Gita's ideas and lessons. Emerson read "Leaves of Grass" with considerable delight, finding "incomparable things incomparably said." It was described as "wonderfully like the Orientals" by Thoreau. It is a potent vehicle for mysticism. The main idea of "Song of Myself" is the exaltation of the self. Whitman's self is similar to the Upanishad and Gita self. It is the Upanishads' dynamic self and the cosmic self of the Gita. Whitman is a very accepting of himself. Whitman's ideas about the nature of man, the ego, the soul, and immortality were heavily affected by Indian, particularly Hindu and Buddhist, thought. Whitman's cohesive conception of a mystic is demonstrated in "Song of Myself". He creates a balance between the spirit and the body, which ultimately results in God's illuminated vision. Whitman's poetry gives fair recognition to the Hindu idea of illusion, or Maya. Like the Hindu mystics, he began to believe that things are not as they seem on the outside. The only thing that matters is Brahman, the fundamental soul.

The Sacred Writings of the East

An intriguing and important part of literary history is the impact of Eastern sacred texts on American literature. The rich and complex subject of the East's sacred books' influence on American literature has had a long-lasting effect on the evolution of American philosophy and culture. These holy books, which come from Eastern religions like Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, have served as a source of inspiration for American writers and intellectuals.

Emerson's 'Self-reliance'

Emerson amplifies a passage from his diary, "Insist on yourself: never imitate," in his essay "Self-reliance." Emerson emphasises that a man should live for himself and not for other people. He highlights the fact that we all have extremely strong opinions about our own

value. We believe that by obtaining things from the outside, we can excel. This forms the foundation of what is known as education, scholarship, and religion. Religion is not about abiding by a set of rules written long ago by a prophet. Conversely, it is a dynamic exchange of messages with God. Following a set of rituals does not make us religious. Our hearts need to be filled with the divine light so that we may face any circumstance head-on and never look back. Instead of acting in accordance with a sacred book, we must be able to say and do in accordance with the true promptings of our hearts. In a similar vein, we can acquire culture just by taking in other people's ideas. Emerson scowls at the traditional prayer of petition. According to him, praying is a way of expressing a desire for happiness that comes from without. He refers to this kind of prayer as thievery and meanness, highlighting the enormous chasm that exists between God and the individual soul. A man is not able to beg when he is one with God. He is limited to acting in accordance with God's instructions. Actually, when we behave as God's instruments rather than working on our own behalf, every small thing we do in daily life can be a genuine act of prayer. Emerson desires that we constantly have optimism. A hero's life is devoid of regrets and bitterness. He acts from a pure heart and accepts all that is from God. The belief that there is only one ultimate truth gives rise to self-reliance. All of the manifestations that we refer to as the "World" are all products of one ultimate cause. Emerson emphasises that intuition is the main source of wisdom. That is, the light that bypasses all middlemen and comes straight from God. When we are united with the infinite, we perceive the infinite in all laws, and as a result, the nature of our existence becomes universal. Fine, self-reliant man depends only on his innermost truth, which is identical to God and encompasses everything.

Thoreau influenced by the Bhagavat Gita

Thoreau, like Emerson, was greatly impacted by Hindu thought. Thoreau studied Sir William Jones' "Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations" as an undergraduate at Harvard, with a few translations of the poems. *The Laws of Manu* were known to Thoreau. He has read the *Bhagavat Gita* before. Thoreau asserts that the *Bhagavat Gita* makes no suggestions about society, nature, or God; rather, it inspires people to live moral lives, breathe the surrounding air, and have complete faith that doing what is right will free them from desire and bring them under the control of God. Thoreau held the Gita in the highest regard. He remarked in the book Walden: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonal philosophy of the *Bhagavat Gita*". Thoreau's individualism and transcendentalism were influenced by the *Bhagavat Gita* and other Hindu texts. Their core

ideas became part of his life and philosophy. The Gita's monistic philosophy affirms that each human is a piece of the world, a piece of the over-soul, and collectively they make up the whole. This monistic Gita philosophy serves as the foundation for Thoreau's spiritual views. Thoreau approved of the Gita's recreationist philosophy. The processes of creation, destruction, and recreation are one and the same. It suggests that although the soul, which is a manifestation of the divine, is eternal, the body, which is a manifestation of the physical or material, dies. A new body is where the soul is born. It's leisure time. The arrival of spring is a metaphor for renewal or rejuvenation. Thoreau, a devoted disciple of the Gita's detached existence, held that man awakens spiritually only when he triumphs over sensual and material temptations. Thoreau was not very fond of material goods and belongings. He thought that the *Bhagavat Gita* was a greater work than all the castles and temples of the East and that most persons were actually controlled by their possessions.

Religions

Texts from Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Hinduism, and other Eastern traditions are included in the canonical literature of the East. Three phases in the development of classical Hindu literature have survived. The Vedas are a representation of the first of these. The Brahmanas, or sacred texts, stand in for the second phase. These are related to rituals used by priests. The Upanishads, or Vedanta, are the gateway to Hinduism's third stage. Siddartha established the religion of Buddhism in India in the sixth century B.C. The denial of the self is a feature of traditional Buddhist teaching. The Chinese religious system known as taoism is founded on Lao-tze's teachings.

The Confucian treatises comprise of

1. The Analects, a collection of dialogues and aphorisms.
2. The Great learning now believed to be the work of a pupil of Confucius.
3. The doctrine of the Mean, which Confucius's grandson's thought to have composed and
4. The work of Mencius, Confucius's great successor.

UNIT II – POEM

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN! – WALT WHITMAN

About the Author

Walt Whitman is regarded as one of the most significant poets in American literary history. This poem exemplifies his unorthodox free verse form, which he also celebrated individualism, democracy, and the beauty of nature. His poetry, which still inspires readers today, captures the shifting social and cultural climate of the United States in the 19th century.

Historical Context

'O Captain! My Captain!' was authored by famous American poet Walt Whitman. It alluded to President Abraham Lincoln's death in 1865. The poem was included in his contentious but well-known "Leaves of Grass" collection of poetry. When "O Captain! My Captain!" was first published; it quickly gained popularity as a classic poem. Regarding Whitman's poetry, he observed that readers at the time valued poetry that followed strict forms of rhyme and metre and were not yet aware with the idea of free verse. The poem is a potent example of a period and evokes strong feelings of regret and melancholy in the reader regarding the end of the Civil War and its tragic aftermath.

Structure

The poem "O Captain! My Captain!" is composed of three stanzas, each with two quatrains. Four lines make up a stanza, or quatrain. In addition, this poetry is an elegy. A mourning poetry is called an elegy. Whitman wrote this poem using the free verse form. As a result, there is absolutely no rhyme between the poem's lines. However, there are some situations in which rhyme is appropriate after then, the author primarily employs iambic metre in this poem. The first line, for example, is written in iambic hexameter. The two lines that follow are written in iambic heptameter. The second quatrain, however, deviates from a particular metrical system.

Summary

Walt Whitman's poignant elegy "O Captain! My Captain!" honours the passing of US President Abraham Lincoln. Oh Captain, my Captain! Our difficult journey is now complete. The treasure for which we have been battling has been won, and the ship has weathered every storm. I hear celebrations and bells ringing from the nearby harbour. Everybody's gaze is

fixed on that unwavering, fearless ship. However, my heart, my heart, my heart! Oh, see the blood drops on the deck where my captain lies lifeless and frigid.

Oh Captain, my Captain! Rise, and pay attention to the bells. Get up; they are playing the bugle and waving the flag for you. They are swarming the shoreline for you; they have brought bouquets and ribbon-wreathed wreaths. Everyone's eager faces are turning to face you as the swaying crowd calls for you. Right here, captain! My dad, how I love you! My arm will be beneath your head. It seems like I'm dreaming that you're dead and lying on the deck.

My Captain isn't answering me. Pale lips that do not move. Since my father is unconscious and lacks a pulse, he cannot feel my arm beneath his head. The ship's voyage is now complete, and it is securely anchored. The triumphant ship has returned, with its prize, after this arduous voyage. Let the bells ring and the masses rejoice! In the meantime, I slowly and melancholy make my way across the deck to where my Captain lies lifeless and cold.

Analysis

The speaker of "O Captain! My Captain!" exclaims to the ship's captain in the opening verse that they will make home safely and sound. The ship returned to the pier after withstanding strong winds and storms. The mission has been an overwhelming success, but they are worn out and faded following the arduous voyage. "Land ahoy," even though the ship hasn't arrived in the harbour safely, since it's nearby and people appear to be delighted to see it.

As the ship approaches the coast, the church bells are ringing and people are acting animatedly. As the boat gets closer to the harbour, the excitement grows. To keep the moving ship steady, the keel has been tossed in. The term "all hands on deck" refers to everyone being prepared, just as the term "keel" also refers to a "ship."

The poem takes a sinister turn as the ship approaches the harbour, portending the revelation of something negative. The words "grim and daring" describe the mood that is twisting. For the waiting crowd, the would-be ghost ship brings some unwelcome news.

After that, he spoke from the heart. The loss of the ship's captain has left hearts broken and ripped. Beside him, in all his splendour but dead, lies the fallen comrade, and the

sailor is experiencing a breakdown of emotions. Abraham Lincoln's blood is streaming down the ship's deck in the form of drops.

The sailor begs the captain, who is now dead, to come back to life. Speaking with the dead is referred to as an apostrophe. The reason is that the people on land are waiting for their beloved skipper to take the helm and leave his legacy. The audience is overjoyed and uses various instruments to celebrate, like holding flowers, hoisting the flag in triumph, and applauding the captain. The excitement among the audience to see their ship's captain is growing feverish. Unfortunately! He's not with them anymore.

Although the ship's captain is not his real father, he is nevertheless held in higher regard and regard than his biological father. The sailor wishes this nightmare was only a dream as he gazes over his slain companion. Unfortunately! The sailor learns that the damage is irreversible when reality settles in.

The sailor bemoans the dead captain's pain in the final verse of "O Captain! My Captain!" He notices that his lips have turned as pale as a corpse. His wails of despair go unanswered by the captain. The captain's expression is no longer as animated. He no longer has a pulse and is not expected to move. The ship has made a safe landing in the harbour and has dropped its anchor. The journey is now over. The sailor remembers the journey as being really difficult, but they went over the line in a compromise.

The poem's final lines explain that the sailor must inform the gathered audience of some unwelcome news. He makes a direct plea to the boisterous applause, bellowing yells, and jeers for the eagerly anticipated captain. Once more, the poet employs synecdoche to allude to the broader American audience in relation to the poem's discussion of Abraham Lincoln's passing. The sailors are uneasy because they have to break the bad news to the public while the celebrations of their win come to a halt.

BIRCHES – ROBERT FROST

About the Author

American poet Robert Lee Frost was born on March 26, 1874, and died on January 29, 1963. Before it was released in the United States, his work was first published in England. Frost, who was well-known for his accurate portrayals of rural life and his command of American vernacular speech, often used the rural settings of early 20th-century New England to explore intricate social and philosophical subjects in his writing.

Frost is the only poet to have won four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry, an honour he received frequently throughout his lifetime. He rose to prominence as one of the few "public literary figures, almost an artistic institution" in America. For his poetry, he was given the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960. Frost was named Vermont's poet laureate on July 22, 1961.

"Birches" was written by Robert Frost between 1913 and 1914, and it was finally published in the August 1915 issue of The Atlantic Monthly. Later on, Frost published the poem in Mountain Interval, his third collection of poems. This 59-line blank verse poem tells the story of a speaker who loves to think that the drooping birch trees covered with ice are because some little child has been climbing them and dangling to the earth while clinging to the flexible treetops. Eventually, it is revealed that this was something the speaker did when he was younger. This contrasts the poem's sentimental celebration of childhood happiness with the more sombre and everyday realities of adulthood.

Summary

The speaker likes to imagine that stooped birch trees, which contrast sharply with the surrounding upright trees, are bent in this way because a small boy has been holding onto their slender upper branches and then swinging to the ground with the flexible trees in his hands. Nevertheless, the speaker is aware that, unlike ice storms, swinging from the trees does not genuinely keep them bent downward.

The speaker makes the claim that most people have seen birch trees covered in ice on clear mornings following a winter's downpour. Similar birches rub against one another in the wind, the ice glistening around the branches as it starts to fracture. The tiny layers of ice eventually break through the hard crust that the snow has formed on the ground as the sun warms the ice-covered limbs. This kind of falling and shattering breaks off so many shards of

ice that it looks as though some sort of sphere in heaven has broken and fallen to Earth. The weight of the ice eventually gets to the birches, causing them to become as sickly and scraggly as ferns. They never shatter under this pressure, but after being bent for so long, they also never rise to their original height. For this reason, years after they have been bent, onlookers will notice these trees bending towards the ground, their leaves hanging down in a manner akin to how young girls' hair might hang when they toss it forward while on their hands and knees, allowing it to hang that way while it dries in the sun.

At this point, having become engrossed in detailing the impact of ice storms, the speaker returns to the poem's primary subject. The original speaker intended to suggest that it's better to believe that a boy, on his way to tending his family's cows, swung from birch trees, bending them. The speaker imagines that this child had to create his own way to keep himself entertained all year round because he lived too far out in the woods to play baseball in town. The child swung from the tops of all the birches on his father's property, gradually bending them until the trees were drooping and flexible. He did this so often, in fact, that all the birches in the vicinity had fallen victim to him.

The boy discovered how to swing from the birch trees safely and that it's crucial to wait to jump until the trunk reaches its most flexible point to avoid the tree snapping and falling to the ground too soon. The child climbed to the upper branches without losing his cool, going with the same deliberate care that goes into carefully filling a cup all the way to the top or even slightly beyond. Then, as he got to the top of the tree, he leaped out and gracefully swung his legs through the air before descending to the earth.

The boy who is speaking used to swing from birch trees in a similar manner. He now dreams of swinging from birches once more. The speaker experiences this fantasy when they become overwhelmed by the minutiae and frustrations of daily life. It is similar to trying to find your way through a stretch of woods without a trail, with trees and spider webs attacking their face and a small stick severing their eye.

The speaker expresses how pleasant it would be to temporarily leave Earth and then return to resume life after a short period. This is not to mean that the speaker wishes for some sort of omniscient being to misunderstand and partially grant this request by removing the speaker off this planet permanently and preventing them from ever returning. According to the speaker, there is no location where life could be better than it is on Earth, and this is the

only place where one may truly experience things like love. The speaker wishes to die by ascending a birch tree, moving towards heaven along its snow-covered trunk and dark limbs, until the speaker reaches a height where the tree is unable to sustain its weight and slowly bends over to return the speaker to the ground. The speaker remarks that it would be good to have the sensation of leaving Earth but also coming back. Being a person who swings from birch trees is hardly the worst thing ever.

Structure

The poem "Birches" is written in unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse. This indicates that each line contains ten syllables, which are grouped into five metrical feet, or iambs in this case. An unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one. Frost frequently used blank verse in his poems because it reflects his homegrown, informal style and is similar to the English language's natural speech rhythms. The unrhymed iambic pentameter rhythm in "Birches" is appropriate for the poem's contemplative, meditative tone.

Analysis

"Birches" by Robert Frost is one of the most well-liked poems. It is a wonderful illustration of the poet's ability to combine imagination with observation. Frost is a member of the pastoral school. The majority of his poetry captures the breathtaking landscapes of New England. They also convey America's sense of patriotism. His poetry addresses the intricacies of existence, making them readable as philosophical works upon thorough examination. This essay analyses the poem "Birches" in order to draw attention to the joy and insight it exudes.

One day, the poet notices some birches bending to the left and right, and they bring back happy memories of his early years. He believes that it was probably done by some boys. But right once, he understands that the boys cannot make them change who they are: "Ice storms do that; swinging doesn't bend them down to stay". Thus, a strong ice storm is the only option. Then Frost notices the slabs of ice wedged between the trees. As the sun rises, these blocks melt and break into pieces, and "such heaps of broken glass sweep away". The wind then blows the shattered fragments away. After an incident like this, the trees find it difficult to straighten out. They spend years in that arched position.

The poet's comparison of the sight of the arched trees to that of some lovely females drying their hair in the sun is the most exquisite description in the entire poem. The "girls on

their hands and knees that throw their hair" are likened to the trees that are "trailing their leaves on the ground". His early days are brought back to memory by the sunlight shining after a rainstorm, the shattered ice fragments, the bending birches, and the gentle breeze. The poet intended to connect this mesmerising scene with his favourite childhood pastimes, but then "Truth broke in," revealing that ice storms were actually bending the trees.

Thus, the poet goes back to what he said before: "I should prefer to have some boy bend them." When he thinks back to the boys in New England, he sees them swinging and bending down birch trees on their way to get the cows. Through "repeatedly riding them," they eliminate the trees' rigidity. The boys make sure that not even a single tree remains unassumed. The nice thing about this game is that it teaches the poet a lot about life. He picks up the skill of rising and falling, rather than just climbing. Once they reach the top of the birches, the boys, like the poet, also learn how to balance themselves. The poet has been so enthralled with the game that he likens the act of ascending to the attention one takes when filling a cup. As Frost puts it, it's like "filling above the brim." The guys launch themselves outward, "kicking his way down through the air to the ground," as they reach the top of the trees. The poet knows the joy of swinging, having previously been a birch swinger himself. His desire to return to those carefree times is partly motivated by the difficulties he has in his current life.

THE RAVEN – EDGAR ALLAN POE

About the Author

Edgar Allan Poe was raised in foster care by the affluent Allan family in Virginia after becoming an orphan at an early age. He was among the first authors of his era to earn a career from publishing his stories and criticism after leaving the service and his university. Published in 1845, "The Raven," arguably his best-known piece, brought him significant recognition and prosperity. But he struggled greatly throughout his life, both financially and mentally, especially after his wife Virginia passed away. Poe's death is a highly discussed tragedy; numerous factors, including alcoholism, suicide, tuberculosis, and other illnesses, have been suggested as causes.

Form and Structure

Edgar Allan Poe's ballad "The Raven" consists of eighteen six-line stanzas. The poet employs trochaic octameter, a very unusual metrical form, throughout. He used the first-

person perspective and the ABCDDB rhyme scheme consistently. Many nouns have the same ending. For instance, “ore” is used in both “Lenore” and “Nevermore.” There is also epistrophe, which is the repetition of a word at the conclusion of several lines.

Summary

One gloomy December night, the anonymous narrator is idly flipping through an old book when he hears someone tapping on his room’s door. Reminding himself that it is only a guest, he waits for tomorrow since he is unable to let go of his grief over Lenore’s passing. He’s scared by the rustling curtains, but he believes it must be a late guest, so he goes to the door and begs for forgiveness, explaining that he’s been asleep. But when he opens the door, the only thing he sees and hears is the word “Lenore,” which sounds just like something he spoke.

He hears tapping again as he gets back to his room, figuring it’s probably the wind outside his window. But a raven appears when he opens the window, and it immediately sits “upon a bust of Pallas” over his door. The narrator finds it funny that it looks so serious and asks it what its names are. In reply, the raven says, “Nevermore.” The narrator proclaims loudly that the raven will depart from him tomorrow, just like the rest of his pals, but the bird remains silent until then. And once more, the bird calls out, “Nevermore.”

The narrator, taken aback, remarks that the raven must have picked up this epithet from a misfortunate owner whose bad luck led him to utter it often. The narrator sits in front of the menacing raven, grinning, contemplating the significance of its name. As the narrator sits in the chair that Lenore will never again occupy, the raven keeps staring at him. Then, believing angels to be near, he fiercely accuses the raven of being a wicked prophet. When he inquires about whether there is relief in Gilead and whether he will see Lenore in Heaven once more, the raven simply replies, “Nevermore.” The narrator, filled with rage, orders the raven to return to the darkness and leave him alone once more. However, the raven responds with “Nevermore,” refusing to leave the bust of Pallas. The narrator believes that the shadow of the raven will “nevermore” hold his spirit.

Analysis

Poe’s most well-known poem, “The Raven,” is renowned for its dramatic and musical elements. The poem has eight stressed-unstressed two-syllable feet per line, making up its predominantly trochaic octameter metre. The trochaic octameter, the repetition of “nothing

more" and "nevermore," the predominant ABCBBB end rhyme scheme, and the frequent usage of internal rhyme give the poem a melodic quality when read aloud. Poe additionally highlights the "O" sound in terms like "nevermore" and "Lenore" to further emphasise the melancholy and lonesome tone of the poem and create the overall mood. Lastly, the poem's recurring theme of "nevermore" lends it a circular sense and supports Poe's idea of the unity of effect, which holds that every word and line contributes to the poem's overall meaning.
With a dwindling fire, a lone flat, and a "bleak December" night, the anonymous narrator finds himself in a stereotypically Gothic environment as he glumly studies his books in an effort to escape his problems. Though the effort of keeping his emotions in check wears him out and makes his speech similarly languid and outwardly placated, he periodically thinks about Lenore. However, the protagonist's mental and physical agitation increases throughout the story; this development is first conveyed by his justifications and then by his increasingly frantic monologue. Towards the end of each verse, though, his outbursts are broken by the serene melancholy of "Quoth the Raven, 'Nevermore,'" which expresses the hopelessness of his spirit.

"The Raven" alludes to the agonised recollections of a deceased woman by the protagonist. Lenore's untimely death is subtly rendered beautiful via poetry, and the narrator is unable to break free from his dependence on her memory. He asks the raven if Lenore really does exist in the afterlife, or if there is "balm in Gilead" and so spiritual salvation, but the raven confirms his greatest fears by turning down his requests. Poe's work is often influenced by his fear of death or oblivion, and "The Raven" is among his darkest works since it offers such a resoundingly negative conclusion. In contrast, Guy de Vere, the protagonist of Poe's poem "Lenore," comes to the conclusion that he does not need to grieve in his grief since he is sure he will see Lenore in heaven when Poe employs the name Lenore in a similar circumstance.

There are several reasons why Poe is justified in designating a raven as the messenger of bad news. Originally, Poe said that previous versions of "The Raven" contained the usage of a parrot, and he just wanted a dumb beast that could make sounds similar to those of a person without knowing the meaning of the words. The raven is significant in this way because it eliminates the need for an obviously supernatural intervention and lets the narrator act as both the messenger and the interpreter of the ominous message. Poe might possibly be referring to Norse mythology, in which the god Odin possessed two ravens named Hugin and

Munin, which respectively denoted “thought” and “memory.” At the same time, the black feather of a raven has historically been supposed to be a mystical harbinger of bad luck. As a student, the narrator pursues Hugin, but Munin always gets in the way of his ideas. In this instance, Munin manifests physically as a bust of Pallas, a reference to the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athena.

The poem casts doubt on the narrator’s credibility because of the late hour of the setting and the narrator’s emotional anguish. Initially, the narrator tries to rationalise his experiences, but by the poem’s conclusion, he has stopped providing the raven with any meaning other than his own. Hence, in the poetry “Ulalume,” the raven represents Psyche the animal and a piece of his soul. Every figure symbolises the subconscious of the corresponding character, which is aware of his innate need for mourning and obsession.

BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH – EMILY DICKINSON

About the Author

The American poet Emily Dickinson wrote a poem titled “Because I could not stop for Death.” This poem was probably written by Emily Dickinson around 1863, at her most productive time, even though it wasn’t published until 1890s. Similar to numerous other poems composed around that time, this one exhibits a fixation on death. Dickinson, however, lightens the subject matter with her well-known depiction of Death as a pleasant gentleman and the lively rhythms and rhymes of ballad metre.

Form and Structure

Emily Dickinson’s poem “Because I could not stop for Death” is composed of six stanzas that are divided into quatrains, or groups of four lines. Although the poem has instances of perfect rhyme, these quatrains do not all adhere to the same rhyme scheme. For example, in the first two stanzas, the words “me,” “immortality,” and “civility”

The metre is far more reliable. It has a metrical pattern-like appearance. Eight syllables total—four sets of two beats—make up the first and third lines. These two beats are unstressed in the first and stressed in the second. We call this iambic tetrameter. Iambs, or unstressed and stressed beats, are also used in the second and fourth lines, however each line only consists of three sets of two beats. We call this iambic trimeter.

Summary

Dickinson's speaker in this poem is speaking from beyond the grave as she describes her journey from this life to the afterlife with Death personified. Because the speaker is too busy for Death in the first verse, Death "kindly" takes the time to do what she is unable to accomplish and stops for her.

She gives up on the things that had kept her so busy because of Death's "civility" in taking time out for her—"And I had put away/My labour and my leisure too"—so they may just enjoy the carriage trip ("We slowly drove – He knew no haste").

With kids playing and grain fields in the background, the third verse serves as a reminder of the world the speaker is leaving behind. Between this stanza and the next, her position in the universe changes. She corrects herself at the beginning of the fourth stanza, saying, "Or rather, He passed Us," indicating that she is no longer an active actor and is just now a part of the surroundings. In the third stanza, she says, "We passed the Setting Sun—."

In this verse, after realising her new role in the world, she also describes how her death suddenly becomes extremely physical, saying that "The Dews drew quivering and chill—" and that her "Tippet," a type of fur-covered cape, is "only Tulle." Her garment is merely gossamer.

Following this glimpse of the icy nature of her demise, the carriage comes to a stop outside her new "House." It is evident from the building description, "A Swelling of the Ground—," that this is a grave rather than a residence. However, although this house is purportedly her home, it is actually merely a place of rest on her journey to eternity, which is why they only "pause" here.

The first two words of the final verse, in which she states that even though it has been millennia since her death, it feels like only a day, provide the clearest indication of her immortality. She contrasts that with a particular day, though—the day of her death, when she saw "the Horses' Heads" beckoning her to this eternal life.

Analysis

Dickinson frequently addresses death in her poetry, although the theme is never precisely the same. Death is personified in "Because I could not stop for Death—." Instead of being a menacing or even threatening reaper, he is a kind and considerate guide who is

guiding her to eternal life. The speaker doesn't feel afraid when Death arrives in his carriage to pick her up; instead, she interprets it as a gesture of compassion because she was too busy to make time for him.

The first line emphasises that the carriage holds just the two of them, made further so by the internal rhyme "held" and "ourselves." It is this generosity, this personalised attention to her that causes the speaker to give up so easily on her life and everything it contained. This is made clear by the fact that Dickinson uses metonymy to refer to another alliterative word—her life—in "For His Civility," where she stores her "labour" and "leisure."

In fact, the next line illustrates how unsatisfactory life may be as compared to this peaceful, leisurely carriage journey. A potentially moving picture of kids playing in a school is actually just a demonstration of how hard life can be; even though the kids are playing "At Playtime," the verb she uses to emphasise the struggles of life is "strove." The anaphoric phrase "We passed" highlights the monotonous, exhausting nature of everyday routine.

A more traditional depiction of death is presented in the following stanza, since the speaker's clothing is insufficient to keep her warm or shield her from the chill. However, it soon becomes evident that even though the chilly aspect of death and the thought of the tomb as home in the following stanza may not be ideal, they are nonetheless worthwhile since they lead to the final verse, which concludes with immortality. The stanza as a whole is also less menacing because of the use of alliteration in this passage, which highlights the material trappings with the words "gossamer" and "gown" and "tippet" and "tulle."

The first verse suggests that immorality is the aim; "Immortality" is the only other person in the carriage. However, it isn't until the last line that we learn the speaker has succeeded in achieving this immorality. Suddenly, hundreds of years seem no more significant than a single day. The speaker, who had "surmised the Horses' Heads/Were towards Eternity -," can still appreciate the epiphany that death was more than just death because time has passed. The poem itself enacts this eternity by concluding with "Eternity -," flowing out into the infinite

UNIT III

I HAVE A DREAM – MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

About the Author

One of the most famous speeches in American history is “I Have a Dream.” Given in Washington, D.C. by Martin Luther King Jr. (1929– 1968). The speech, given in 1963, serves as a potent call to action for racial equality and the creation of a more just and equitable society where African Americans have the same freedoms as White Americans.

Context

The march on Washington, which brought together around 210,000 African American men, women, and children at the Washington Monument in August 1963 and led them to the Lincoln Memorial, served as the impetus for King’s address.

Many of them were unemployed, therefore one of their key motivations for the march was freedom. King and other Civil Rights activists aimed to end the division between black and white Americans and guarantee that they would be treated equally.

The year 1963 marked the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, which was issued in 1863 by US President Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) and emancipated the country’s African slaves. However, King notes that despite the abolition of slavery a century ago, black Americans are still not truly free in many ways.

Summary

King reminds his audience at the outset of his address that it has been a century—or “five score years”—since the Emancipation Proclamation was signed by that “great American,” Abraham Lincoln. This guaranteed the liberation of the African slaves, but King notes that racial discrimination and segregation mean that Black Americans are still not free.

Despite being a prosperous nation, a large number of Black Americans are impoverished. The Black American seems to be living as an exile within his own country. King compares the meeting in Washington to paying a cheque, or demanding an amount that is owed.

King then extols the “magnificent words” of the Declaration of Independence and the US Constitution. Because these papers guarantee what the Declaration of Independence refers

to as “inalienable rights”—namely, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”—to all men, including Black men, King compares them to promissory notes.

According to King, America in the 1960s “defaulted” on this promissory note, meaning it did not make the payment. Although America as a nation is like someone who has written someone else a check that has bounced and the money owing is still outstanding, King refers to it as a “sacred obligation.” However, this isn’t because there isn’t enough money; America, as a land of opportunity, has enough “funds” to guarantee that everyone enjoys adequate prosperity. King exhorts the country to walk the “sunlit path of racial justice” and emerge from the “valley” of segregation. Since all men and women are children of God, he refers to all Americans as members of the “brotherhood.” He also underlines how urgent the situation is several times. This is an essential fresh start for America, not just a fleeting fit of rage. King, however, issues a warning to his listeners not to give in to resentment and anger but to pursue justice in the proper way—that is, with discipline and dignity.

Militancy and physical aggression should be avoided. King acknowledges that all Americans ought to support the Civil Rights movement since many white Americans who are also impoverished and disadvantaged share a common bond with it. Racial discrimination in establishments such as restaurants and motels must end, as must police brutality against African Americans. States with laws prohibiting Black Americans from voting must amend them. Next, Martin Luther King delivers his most well-known speech, in which he used the rhetorical device of anaphora—using the words “I have a dream” to introduce each sentence—to start a series of phrases. King describes the shape his goal, dream, or desire for a better America takes.

He informs his audience that his desire is “deeply rooted” in the American desire, which is the conviction that everyone can achieve prosperity and success in the country, no matter what their origins. Reiterating the Declaration of Independence’s opening line, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” King addresses his audience once more. King sees a united group of former Black slaves and former slave owners’ descendants gathering and eating together in his dream of a brighter future. In his dream, his children live in a nation where people evaluate them on the content of their character rather than the colour of their skin.

People of different races will coexist peacefully even in states like Mississippi and Alabama, which are torn apart by racial injustice and hatred. King then expands on his vision to include “our hope,” which is a goal and objective shared by all. King then sings a line from the patriotic ballad “My Country, Tis of Thee,” in which the country is referred to as a “sweet land of liberty.”

King again employs anaphora, saying “let freedom ring” multiple times in quick succession to allude to how joyful America will be the day such liberties are guaranteed. And when this occurs, people in the United States will be able to come together and draw closer to the moment when they can sing “Free at last,” a traditional African-American hymn. At last, free. Thank the Almighty God, we are now free.

Analysis

While many Black Americans and anyone who identifies with their fight against racial injustice, segregation, and discrimination share Martin Luther King Jr.’s speech as being about a collective dream for a better and more equal America, the speech is actually about a personal vision that King expressed in the repeated four words “I Have a Dream.” But by moving from “I have a dream” to a distinct four-word statement, “this is our hope,” The transition is both inevitable and a masterful use of rhetoric, as King’s personal and heartfelt desire of a better nation is expanded into a global and group struggle for liberation. Furthermore, King implies that what might be written off as an idealistic goal is actually something that is both feasible and attainable by switching from the noun “dream” to the distinct noun “hope.” As soon as the dream gains traction, it transforms into a more tangible “hope.”

King went beyond simply mentioning Abraham Lincoln’s signing of the Emancipation Proclamation a century prior in his “I Have a Dream” address. Lincoln’s opening remarks, “Five score years ago,” make reference to a speech he had given exactly a century earlier: the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln urged his audience to carry on the fight for freedom in that speech, which he gave in November 1863 at the Soldiers’ National Cemetery (now known as Gettysburg National Cemetery) in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Lincoln spoke of the day when all Americans, including Black slaves, would be free. “Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal,” is how his speech is renowned to start.

Eighty-seven years, or “four score and seven years,” takes us back to 1776, the year the Declaration of Independence was signed. Thus, the reference made by Martin Luther King to the words of Abraham Lincoln’s famous speech has two purposes: it recalls Lincoln’s speech and, indirectly, the United States’ creation nearly two centuries earlier. King makes it apparent in “I Have a Dream” that there is still work to be done, even though Lincoln and the American Civil War represented progress in the cause to make all Americans free, regardless of their ethnicity. Ultimately, King’s address is a skillfully worded and profoundly felt plea for the use of nonviolent protest to fight against racial injustice, discrimination, and segregation while simultaneously making sure that every American is lifted out of poverty and deprivation. King highlights the importance of teamwork and collaboration above all else in order to create the world he envisions for his children. These elements are critical to realising the goal.

SELF-RELIANCE – RALPH WALDO EMERSON

About the Author:

American philosopher, lecturer, and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in Boston, Massachusetts on May 25, 1803. Emerson, who attended Harvard at the age of 14, finished his studies at Harvard Divinity School, and is the son of a well-known Unitarian pastor. From 1829 to 1832, Emerson was the pastor of Boston’s Second Church; nevertheless, he left the position a year after the passing of his first wife and at a time when he started to publicly voice his concerns about the church. In 1833, Emerson returned to the United States to start a career as a lecturer after spending several months travelling throughout Europe. In 1835, he was married to his second wife and relocated to Concord, Massachusetts. An important year in Emerson’s life was 1836. In addition to publishing “Nature,” a significant essay that outlined the central ideas of transcendentalism—a philosophy that placed a premium on individuality—he also assisted in setting up the initial gatherings of the Transcendental Club, an academic association dedicated to reviving American literature and culture. He discussed the necessity for a distinctively American literature in his lecture “The American Scholar” in 1837. This idea remained throughout his career. Following this, Emerson made the acquaintance of Henry David Thoreau, another significant transcendentalist who urged Emerson to preserve the notebooks that later served as valuable materials for his writing. Emerson was a significant American scholar who also authored multiple essay collections and assisted in founding the transcendentalist periodical

The Dial. In the late 1860s, Emerson's health started to deteriorate, and in 1879, he gave up lecturing. Emerson passed away in Concord, Massachusetts in 1882 from pneumonia-related complications.

Historical Importance

Emerson's essay, 'Self-Reliance' (1841), became his most famous work and had a significant influence on society. Emerson's reputation as a writer and lecturer was formed by Self-Reliance and Nature. He came to be recognised as the creator of the Transcendental movement, an explicitly American ideology that prioritised mysticism, optimism, and individualism. Because of the new attitude outlined in Self-Reliance, America produced literature and art that was unlike that of any other nation in the globe and for the first time cemented America's place in the literary and artistic worlds. Emerson influenced next generations as well with his work Self-Reliance. He served as an inspiration to authors like Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman. Some of Self-Reliance's quotes are so commonplace today that they are almost clichés. The American way of life has incorporated elements of the individual freedom ideology. Self-reliance had a profound effect on Unitarians and the liberal religious movement, exposing them to science, Eastern faiths, and naturalistic mysticism, in addition to American writers and artists. Apart from its influence on the collective, Self-Reliance also had an effect on the individual American, motivating him to pay attention to and obey the silent, tiny voice of God within. Self-reliance and the transcendental movement that followed had a profound impact, challenging Americans to use their gifts from God for the benefit of the person and, consequently, the community. It turned out to be a good, long-lasting, genuinely American adjustment.

Summary

Three epigraphs that preview the essay's concept of independence are included in Emerson's first paragraph. He then starts the essay by considering how frequently someone has a brilliant idea but then writes it off as a product of their own mind. Emerson argues that we ought to value these bursts of personal insight even more than the works of well-known authors and philosophers because the mature thinker will eventually come to the conclusion that originality in thought—rather than following the herd's blindfold—is the path to grandeur.

Emerson goes on to say that trusting oneself above all others is the most significant realisation one can have. Emerson claimed that since babies, kids, and even animals are

innately aware of this, they should be imitated. Emerson believes that males, with their self-reliant attitudes, disregard for authority, and eagerness to make snap judgements about everything they come across, also possess self-reliance.

After that, Emerson turns his attention to a study of the link between the individual and society, pointing out that while we are by ourselves, we can be like infants or children, but the inner voice that speaks our truths disappears when we venture out into the world. Emerson contends that in order to regain their sense of independence, people must embrace nonconformity, even if doing so means rejecting what the majority of people consider to be goodness. In Emerson's view, morality is superior to the opinions of well-respected individuals or calls for almsgiving to the poor. This goodness originates not from what is apparent to society, but rather from the individual's inner intuition.

Furthermore, living by the standards of the world and one's own standards of goodness is simple while one is alone, but it takes a very bold person to uphold one's own standards of goodness when under social pressure, according to Emerson. Complying with societal expectations may appear simpler, but it is more difficult because it distributes one's power. Emerson cautions that whenever a person ultimately defies social conventions, they should be ready for criticism from all quarters, realising that being a nonconformist is easier said than done. The quiet and harsh condemnation of regular people, the mob, will need an individual to muster all of their inner strength to face down. It will be simple to ignore the courteous disapproval of refined people.

The world's fixation with uniformity is another obstacle that Emerson sees standing in the way of the would-be nonconformist. But really, he contends, why should you feel any kind of obligation to your prior behaviour or self-doubt? Emerson observes that small-mindedness is the outcome of society viewing inconsistency as the devil. He makes the point that all of the great people in history have refused to let the past define them, using both historical and theological examples. He believes that if you want to be great, accept that you will be misinterpreted like them. Emerson contends that as every behaviour always reflects an underlying harmony that is founded in one's own individuality, the individual should have faith that inconsistency is simply an appearance. As long as the person stays loyal to himself, their behaviour will be sincere and moral.

Emerson expects that, after presenting his case in the first section of the essay, everyone is aware of how absurd conformity is and the detrimental effects it is having on American culture. According to him, modern American culture is mediocre and can only be conquered by realising that every person possesses a small portion of the universe, or God, and that God may be discovered wherever a person lives truthfully. Emerson thinks that by being still and allowing the underlying reality that underpins all of creation to speak through us in the form of intuition, humans can access that truth, justice, and wisdom. Only because of our mental habits does everything else—including time, space, and even the past—appear to be distinct from the underlying truth. Emerson advises people to break out from that mindset by expressing themselves against intruders and live in the moment, just like plants do.

Emerson bemoans the loss of understanding in his community about what it means to be an independent person. He characterises his historical time as feeble, devoid of outstanding individuals, where young men from the city pursuing careers give up as soon as they experience their first setback. Emerson thinks that the individuals who will shape American history are the kind of country boys who attempt anything without hesitation and don't care to fit in or fail. Emerson contends that in order to attain true virtue, a person must fight against everything that subjugates their sense of self, even if doing so leads to charges of egregious immorality. They will be justified and perhaps even win over others to their point of view if they take care to fulfill their sense of obligations to themselves or to loved ones. In the end, Emerson thinks that being in a constant state of conflict with society is the real virtue.

Emerson applies the general idea of independence to particulars in his last paragraph. If we let it, he thinks self-reliance may transform every aspect of society. Rather than waiting for someone else to save us, we should take action. Rather than letting faiths and philosophies dictate how we should interpret our experiences, we ought to follow our intuition. Emerson contends that in order to become more culturally aware, people—especially Americans—should give up travelling overseas and instead use the resources available to them to produce original works of art, literature, and culture. Emerson feels that progress is irrelevant and that we should give up on it since it would only weaken us and that society does not advance in a straight line. Emerson contends that instead of finding their identities in possessions, individuals should realise that a man's greatest asset is found within. Emerson suggests that

we should stop ruling ourselves through political parties and instead let each individual to govern himself by intuition as an example of self-reliance in politics. Emerson notes in his conclusion that the real road to peace is independence.

Analysis

Ralph Waldo Emerson challenges a number of conventional notions of the self in his essay "Self-Reliance," even though some of his points of contention may seem obvious to us or to be the product of simple common sense. For instance, Emerson believed that although it is frequently asserted that travel broadens the mind, our trips are meaningless if our minds are not ready to process what we encounter. Emerson contends that it is acceptable and right to change our beliefs from day to day if our hearts and minds so demand, despite the fact that many people would contend that constancy in one's thoughts and opinions are crucial.

Emerson suggests that hearing one's own ideas should be prioritised over hearing the sermon at church at one point in "Self-Reliance." It's not that he didn't think Christian teachings were important; rather, he thought that if we didn't make the effort to get to know our own brains, then such sermons would have less of an effect on us. Before we can react to the outside environment appropriately, we must first find our true selves within.

"Self-Reliance" is still pertinent now in many ways that it was for Emerson's original audience back in the 1840s. In fact, it might be even more true in the social media age, when youth often snap selfies throughout their travels but sometimes have little idea how much those locations and landmarks mean to them personally. In a similar vein, Emerson's critique of uniformity may seem especially relevant in the age of social media, with its echo chambers and promotion of a herd mentality.

In the end, "self-reliance" is really more about having faith in oneself than it is about depending on oneself. According to Emerson, we ought to respect the authority of our own ideas, judgements, and convictions more than that of the crowd. Of course, one might refute such a claim by pointing out that Emerson is not obstinately upholding a person's freedom to be blatantly and noisily incorrect. Even so, we ought to seek out other people's perspectives to validate our own. However, it is crucial that we are able to think for ourselves first. We need to know our own brains and selves before venturing out into the world. "Know Thyself," the two-word adage that was inscribed at the location of the Delphic Oracle in ancient Greece, was correct.

UNIT IV

THE GLASS MENAGERIE – TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

About the Author

Tennessee Williams was born in Columbus, Mississippi, in 1911. The name given to him at birth was Thomas Lanier Williams III. He did not acquire the nickname Tennessee until college, when classmates began calling him that in honor of his Southern accent and his father's home state. The Williams family had produced several illustrious politicians in the state of Tennessee, but Williams's grandfather had squandered the family fortune. Williams's father, C.C. Williams, was a traveling salesman and a heavy drinker. Williams's mother, Edwina, was a Mississippi clergyman's daughter and prone to uncontrolled emotional attacks.

Williams lived with Edwina's parents in Mississippi until he was seven years old, together with his parents, older sister Rose, and younger brother Dakin. The family then relocated to St. Louis. After arriving, the family's circumstances worsened. The family moved sixteen times in ten years, C.C.'s drinking worsened, and the young Williams—always frail and bashful—was teased and shunned at school. He grew very close to Rose throughout these years. Williams was deeply disturbed by Rose's prefrontal lobotomy, an intense brain surgery that she eventually underwent as a result of her mental health issues. Rose served as the model for Laura in *The Glass Menagerie*.

Williams, a typical student and social misfit in high school, found comfort in writing and watching films. After he had a horror story published in Weird Tales, he majored in journalism at the University of Missouri the following year. He composed his first plays there. But before Williams could get his degree, his father made him drop out of school and start working at the same shoe firm where he worked since Williams had failed a mandatory ROTC programme course. Williams' father was furious. Williams spent three years working at the shoe factory, a position that ultimately caused a mild psychological breakdown. He later enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis to resume his college career.

Williams' plays The Fugitive Kind and Candles to the Sun were performed by a St. Louis theatre group while he was a student at Washington University. Williams enrolled to the University of Iowa after leaving Washington University due to personal issues. Rose, his sister, had an obotomy while he was in Iowa, leaving her permanently institutionalised. Even

after going through this tragedy, Williams graduated in 1938. He had a nomadic lifestyle in the ensuing years, travelling from city to city and doing lowly jobs. Still, he worked on drama, attending the New School in New York to pursue playwriting while receiving a Rockefeller fellowship. Williams was a Hollywood playwright in the early years of World War II.

Williams started the project that would eventually become *The Glass Menagerie* around 1941 or so. The short tale "Portrait of a Girl in Glass," which was more entirely centred on Laura than the play is, served as the inspiration for the play. A number of prominent theatre personalities worked together to present *The Glass Menagerie* in Chicago in December of 1944. The play drew a small crowd when it originally premiered, but as Chicago critics praised it, it soon began to play to packed houses. After the play was transferred to Broadway in March 1945, it was honoured with the esteemed New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Williams gained notoriety, money, and critical acclaim for this intensely personal and overtly autobiographical production. It also signalled the start of a lucrative run that would last for an additional ten years. Williams received a second Drama Critics' Circle Award and a Pulitzer Prize for *A Streetcar Named Desire*, which was published two years after *The Glass Menagerie*. In 1955, Williams' Cat on a Hot Tin Roof earned him the same two honours once more.

Success had a huge and, in Williams's opinion, negative influence on his life. In a piece titled "The Catastrophe of Success," he describes the risks that celebrity presents for an artist, balancing lightheartedness with a profound sense of loss. Williams continued to draw on his personal experiences for years after he rose to fame in order to produce compositions that were heavy on emotion. Williams's environment included alcoholism, depression, unfulfilled desire, loneliness in quest of meaning, and insanity. His homosexuality has been well known since the early 1940s, and his experiences growing up in a time and culture that was hostile to homosexuals undoubtedly influenced his art. Williams started doing drugs after 1955 and would later refer to the 1960s as his "stoned age." Following the loss of his lifelong companion in 1961, he went through a period of severe despair and six years later checked himself into a St. Louis psychiatric institution. Despite this, he kept writing, even though most critics concur that his later works were of lower quality. His body of work includes two novels, five screenplays, over seventy one-act plays, hundreds of short stories, two full-length

plays, poetry, and a memoir. Five of his plays have also been adapted for the big screen. In 1983, Williams passed away at the age of 71.

List of Characters

Amanda Wingfield

Laura and the mother of Tom. Amanda is a fiercely nostalgic woman who holds on to the ghosts of a refined and exuberant past. She is funny, endearing, pathetic, and admirable all at once.

Laura Wingfield

Tom's elder sister and Amanda's daughter. Laura is a limper and needs to wear a brace on her injured leg. Painfully timid and twenty-three years old, she has mostly shut herself off from the outside world, spending her time with her collection of glass figurines and vintage recordings.

Tom Wingfield

Laura's brother and Amanda's son. Tom supports his family by working at a shoe warehouse and hopes to become a poet. His job is a mind-numbing habit that irritates him, so he uses booze, reading, and movies to escape.

Jim O'Connor

A longtime friend of Laura's and Tom. Jim, who played a popular sport in high school, works as a shipping clerk in the shoe warehouse where Tom is employed. He has an unshakable commitment to his personal and professional success aspirations.

Mr. Wingfield

Laura Wingfield, Tom's father, and spouse of Amanda Wingfield. Mr. Wingfield was a dashing employee of a telephone company. Years before the play's action takes place, he left his family and never makes an appearance on stage. But his photo is hung up proudly in the Wingfields' living room.

Summary

American playwright Tennessee Williams' drama *The Glass Menagerie* had its world debut in 1944. Tom Wingfield is the narrator and partially re-enactor of this memory play, which centres on the lives of him, his sister Laura, and his mother Amanda. The family struggles with the difficulties of everyday living in 1930s St. Louis, especially Amanda's

frantic efforts to find a spouse for Laura, who is physically challenged and extremely shy. Set in the years following the Great Depression, *The Glass Menagerie* captures the social and economic upheavals of the period. The drama also examines the effects of World War II, focusing on the conflicts and uncertainty that marked the time.

The play by Tennessee Williams is praised for its lyrical and moving examination of subjects like memory, illusion, and the intricacy of family ties. With her delicate glass animal collection, Laura's persona comes to represent the frailty of hopes and dreams. Because of its inventive use of symbolism and iconic depiction of the human condition, The Glass Menagerie is regarded as a classic of American theatre.

Tom Wingfield, the narrator of *The Glass Menagerie*, is the source of the play's action, which is derived from his memories. The drama is about a character named Tom, and it takes place in 1937 in St. Louis. He works long hours in a shoe warehouse as an aspiring poet in order to provide for his sister Laura and mother Amanda. Tom and Laura's father, Mr. Wingfield, ran away years ago and hasn't been heard from since—aside from one postcard.

Originating from a refined Southern background, Amanda often regales her kids with stories of her carefree childhood and the several suitors who once had her on their hands. She is dismayed that painfully timid Laura, with a brace on her leg, is not drawing any masculine callers. In the hopes that Laura will use a business career to make both the family's and her personal fortune, she enrolls her in a business college. However, Amanda finds out weeks later that Laura has discreetly dropped out of the class and is spending her days alone travelling the city due to her debilitating shyness. After coming to the conclusion that marriage is Laura's last chance, Amanda starts reselling magazine subscriptions in order to supplement her income and maybe attract more suitors for Laura. To his mother's dismay, Tom, who despises his warehouse work, escapes into alcohol, films and books. Tom unintentionally shatters several of Laura's most valuable glass animal sculptures during one of their many confrontations as mother and son.

After talking about Laura's possibilities, Amanda asks Tom to watch the warehouse for possible suitors. Tom chooses his casual buddy Jim O'Connor and extends an invitation to supper. When Amanda questions Tom about Jim, she is happy to discover that he is a motivated young man who is focused on advancing his profession. She makes a fancy meal and makes Laura change into a new dress. Laura finds out at the last minute who her caller is,

and it turns out that she had a serious high school crush on Jim. When Jim arrives, Laura answers the door, on Amanda's orders, and then quickly disappears, leaving Tom and Jim alone. Tom tells Jim that he intends to quit his work and his family in pursuit of excitement, having used the money meant for his family's electricity payment to enlist in the merchant marines. Laura pretends to be ill in order to avoid eating dinner with the others. Amanda interacts animatedly with Jim during the meal while sporting elaborate attire from her glitzy childhood.

Just as supper is about to conclude, the unpaid electricity bill causes the lights to go off. Candles are lit by the characters, and Amanda suggests that Jim amuse Laura in the living room while she and Tom tidy up. Jim's presence first paralyses Laura, but she eventually comes out of her shell thanks to his kind and approachable demeanour. She acknowledges that when in high school, she knew and liked him, but she was too hesitant to talk to him. As they converse further, Laura brings up the moniker he had given her: "Blue Roses," which was an unintentional corruption of pleurosis, a condition she suffered from throughout her high school years. He calls her out on her timidity and low self-esteem while highlighting her individuality. Laura then takes the risk of showing him her unicorn, a favourite glass creature. While dancing with her, Jim unintentionally topples the unicorn and snaps off its horn. Laura is understanding, pointing out that the unicorn is now a typical horse. After that, Jim gives her a kiss, but he soon retracts and says he's sorry, saying he was swept away by the excitement and that he actually has a real girlfriend. Laura, giving up, hands him the shattered unicorn as a memento.

Glancing across the living area, Amanda is beaming. Jim quickly clarifies that he has to go since he has to meet his fiancée. Amanda bids him farewell with warmth, but not before she turns on Tom, who was unaware that Jim was engaged. After accusing Tom of being a careless, conceited dreamer, Amanda rushes to Laura's side to offer her comfort. Tom watches the two women from their apartment's fire escape and tells them that he gets fired from his job shortly after Jim visits and leaves Amanda and Laura behind. Even after travelling far, years later, he discovers that he cannot get rid of his bad memories of Laura.

Analysis

The Glass Menagerie chronicles Tom's recollections of the events that preceded his ultimate desertion of his mother and sister. Even so, he reveals himself to be similar to them when he recalls the miserable circumstances he was forced to endure in the past, where he

worked a menial job to support his domineering, deluded mother and his shy, ghostly sister. Every Wingfield family member is ensnared in a personal drama involving delusions and hopelessness, and every one of their delusions causes harm to the other family members. Tom and Laura are under unbearable pressure as a result of Amanda's escape into her past. Laura's unwillingness to put money down for the future strains Tom and Amanda's finances. Tom had to give up Amanda and Laura in order to go on. Tom narrates the play as if to explain why he had to leave as the sole member to escape this toxic dynamic, but in the end, he finds it difficult to let go of Laura.

Tom's anguish is immediately clear as he taunts Amanda at the dinner table. Despite their lack of resources, Amanda makes dinner into a theatrical play by sharing memories of her wonderful time spent in Blue Mountain. There is a tight environment between Amanda and Tom as a result of her forcing the entire evening to fit within the framework of her delusions, and tension between them is evident. The main catalyst for action is revealed in scene two when Amanda learns that Laura left business college early due to nervousness. Amanda becomes enraged at the thought that Laura would probably never be able to support herself.

Tom feels more and more trapped as Amanda becomes more furious. He frequently visits the cinema in an attempt to both mentally and physically escape the illusions of his mother and to picture a life in which he is free to pursue experiences at his own pace. The farther Tom goes, the more terrified Amanda is that he's going to be gone forever, like his father. In the end, Amanda implores Tom to locate Laura a "gentleman caller," a prospective spouse who would relieve some of their mutual stress.

Amanda reacts with nearly maniacal delight when Tom eventually gives in and invites Jim over. Jim is referred to by Tom at the play's opening as "the long delayed but always expected something we live for," which is a dream or the possibility of a future. Jim is seen by the Wingfield family as a potential diversion from their own problems and as a potential suitor for Laura, who would give Amanda and Laura stability. Just before they get to Tom's house, he also tells Jim that instead of using his last paycheck to pay the energy bill, he joined the merchant marines. Tom's plan to go feels less like abandonment because he's taking Jim to dinner and following Amanda's instructions, even though Tom doesn't actually think Jim and Laura will get married. The lights go out shortly after dinner, so this is the first illusion to break.

Her idealistic visions of Jim and Laura are dashed in the scene that follows. Jim's high school crush, Laura, remembers an almost heroic version of him, and she lets him live out his glory days. Jim leads Laura in a dance, unintentionally shattering her beloved glass unicorn, all while being enthralled with the romanticism of the candlelight, his bygone days, and her adoration. Tragic events are ahead, even though Laura's composed explanation of the devastation at first seems to suggest that she may be giving up on her fantasies in favour of reality. In the play's finale, Jim plants a kiss on Laura as he is drawn in by her flattery and the lovely history she has imagined. But his delusion disintegrates right away. He is aware of his location, time, and engagement. Despite her shock, Laura offers him the shattered unicorn as a memento, perhaps inviting him to share her romantic fantasy with him. When Amanda's hopes are not met, she becomes extremely irate with Tom, who then decides to leave once more.

In his monologue, which concludes the play, Tom describes how he has seen the world and experienced the adventure he has always dreamed of, yet he can't help but think of Laura. It was an illusion in and of it for him to believe that he could just walk away from Laura, for whom he did care, without feeling guilty. Tom injured Laura when he should have been angry with Amanda, as he brought Jim over without thinking about what Amanda had planned for the evening and neglected to pay the electricity bill. He pleads with Laura to blow out her candles so that he won't have to see her anymore—she is the innocent victim of his escape scheme.

Themes

The Difficulty of Accepting Reality

The characters' struggles to accept and relate to reality are among *The Glass Menagerie's* most important and conspicuous themes. Because none of the Wingfield family members can get over this obstacle, they all retreat into their own little fantasy worlds, where they find solace and purpose that the outside world does not seem to provide. Laura is the Wingfield with the lowest grasp on reality out of the three. Glass animals occupy her hidden world; these items are as dangerously delicate and wildly imaginative as Laura's inner life. Tom, in contrast to his sister, demonstrates his ability to function in the real world by holding down a job and interacting with people. Ultimately, though, he is no more driven than Laura to pursue career advancement, love partnerships, or even casual friendships; instead, he

would much rather wallow in the delirium brought on by intoxication and the dreams penned by books and films.

The play's most intricate relationship is that between Amanda and reality. She is partial to real-world values and longs for social and financial success, unlike her children. However, she is blind to some realities about her life because of her dedication to these ideals. She is unable to believe that Laura is strange, that Tom is not a successful businessman, that she is or should be anything other than the spoiled belle she was raised to be, and that she may be partially to blame for her children's problems and shortcomings. Since Amanda's retreat into illusion is a regretful distortion of reality rather than a deliberate imaginative fabrication, it is in many ways more pitiful than her children's.

Though the Wingfields are unique and connected by their tenuous bonds with reality, the delusions they give in to are more than just peculiar family traits. The outer world is no more immune to deception than the Wingfields. Another take on Laura's glass animals, the young folks at Paradise Dance Hall waltz beneath the transient illusion given by a glass ball. Jim is informed by Tom that other moviegoers at the theatres he frequents are finding fulfilment in illusion rather than reality and are replacing real-life adventure with on-screen adventure. Even Jim, the representative of the "world of reality," is placing his future in the hands of public speaking, radio, and television—all platforms for fabricating stories and convincing people that they are genuine. The Glass Menagerie recognises one of the most significant and expanding aspects of the human predicament in its day as the conquering of reality by illusion.

The Impossibility of True Escape

Scene four opens with Tom telling Laura about a magic show he was in where the magician got out of a coffin that was nailed shut. Tom clearly feels unfairly imprisoned in a coffin of sorts, one that is crowded, oppressive, and depressing, both at the warehouse and with his family. From the start of the play, Tom is haunted by the possibility of escape, symbolised by his father's disappearance, the Merchant Marine Service, and the fire escape outside his flat. In the end, he does decide to break away from the confines of his life. Regarding the moral ramifications and even the viability of Tom's escape, the drama adopts a neutral stance. As a physically fit young man, he is bound to his life by emotional causes instead of external ones, such as his love and commitment to Laura and Amanda. Tom's definition of escape involves causing severe hurt to his mother and sister in addition to

suppressing and denying these feelings within himself. The human nails that hold Tom to his house will undoubtedly be disturbed by his departure, but the magician manages to come out of his coffin without breaking a single one. It's impossible to predict for sure if Tom will actually escape his house after departing. Even if he does decide to leave his house, something continues to pursue him. Similar to a jail break, Tom's escape brings him to the life of a fugitive rather than freedom.

The Memory's Unwavering Power

Tom claims that *The Glass Menagerie* is a memory drama as memory formed and influenced both its substance and style. Tom makes it quite evident that the play's high drama, overdone and excessively perfect symbolism, lack of realism, and frequent use of music are all products of its memory-based origins. The majority of fictional works are creations of the mind that, through realism, have to persuade their audience that they are something more. However, a play based on memory is a creation of actual experience and does not require the realism rules to be adhered to in order to feel authentic. The author can choose to cover over a factual event with as many layers of melodrama and surreal metaphor as they choose, all while maintaining the story's substance and veracity. Tom makes the most of this advantage, as does Tennessee Williams.

The play's narrative is conveyed due to its unyielding hold on the narrator's memory. The play's very existence, then, is proof of the influence memories can have on people's lives and consciousness. Williams states that "nostalgia... is the first condition of the play" in the Production Notes. There are other characters besides Tom, the narrator, who are plagued by his recollections. Like Laura, Amanda is always searching for her lost youth, and her glass creatures hold just as much significance to her as old records from her early years. These characters are unable to find happiness in the here and now or in the promises of the future because of the crushing power of recollection. However, it also serves as Tom's driving force, inspiring him to create the play that comes to fruition.

Motifs

Abandonment

The Glass Menagerie's story is organised around a sequence of abandonments. Their circumstances are set by Mr. Wingfield's abandonment of his family; Jim's desertion of Laura is the focal point of the dramatic action in the play; Tom's leaving of his family provides him with the necessary distance to mould their story into a narrative. For the people

left behind, each of these acts of abandonment has disastrous consequences. All of these are presented simultaneously as the inevitable result of progress and as its prerequisite. Specifically, each is closely linked to the advancement of technology and the accomplishments of the contemporary world. The telephone company employee Mr. Wingfield departs from his family after he "fell in love with [the] long distances" that the phone brings into people's awareness. Jim, who believes that radio and television will play a major role in the future, could never have committed to Laura's closed-off, static environment. Tom believes that leaving will be necessary to pursue his desire for "adventure," which is piqued by the nightly films he goes to. The only people who, apparently, will never play the part of abandoner and are destined to be abandoned repeatedly are Amanda and Laura, who are wedded to antiquated ideals and sentimental recollections.

The Words and Images on the Screen

One of the most distinctive stylistic elements of the play is the projection of action-related words and visuals onto an onstage screen. The screen is occasionally utilised to highlight a point made by the characters, such in Scene Two when an image of blue roses emerges; other times it's used to allude to a memory or fantasy of a character, like in Scene Six when an image of Amanda as a young girl appears. Sometimes, like when Amanda's voice is heard offstage in Scene One and the words "Ou sont les neiges," which are taken from a fifteenth-century French poem celebrating beautiful women, appear, it seems to serve as a blank canvas for impersonal commentary on the play's events and characters.

The majority of the time, what is shown on screen highlights themes or symbols that the play's action has already clearly established. Thus, the device comes across as, at best, sardonic and, at worst, a little conceited or patronising. The majority of directors who have performed the play have chosen to remove the screen from the performance because they are divided on its usefulness and worth. Nonetheless, Tennessee Williams's expressionist theatrical style, which downplays lifelike depictions in favour of stylized presentations of interior experience, is intriguingly embodied on screen.

Music

In *The Glass Menagerie*, music is frequently used to highlight themes and heighten the action. Occasionally the music is extra-diegetic, meaning that although the audience can hear it, the characters are unable to hear it because it is coming from outside the play. For instance, when Laura's character or her glass collection are at the centre of the action, the

musical number “The Glass Menagerie,” composed especially for the play by Paul Bowles, plays. The first mention of this scene occurs at the conclusion of Scene One, when Laura observes that Amanda worries that her daughter will become an old maid. At other moments, the music is audible to the characters and originates from within the diegetic environment of the play. Two instances of this are the tunes Laura plays on her record player and the music that drifts out of the Paradise Dance Hall. The music, both diegetic and extra-diegetic, frequently offers commentary on the play’s events. For example, as Tom is discussing the imminence of World War II, the Paradise Dance Hall plays a tune called “The World Is Waiting for the Sunrise.”

UNIT V

THE SCARLET LETTER – NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

About the Author

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, is a classic novel set in Puritanical 17th-century Massachusetts. The protagonist of the story is Hester Prynne, a woman whose adultery is condemned by her town and who is made to wear a scarlet letter "A" on her chest as a reminder of her transgression. Hester struggles with the fallout from her deeds and longs for atonement as she makes her way through the critical society that surrounds her.

The book explores topics of sin, guilt, and social expectations and provides an engaging look at morality and human nature. The complicated people and their psychological problems are set against a striking representation of the austere Puritan society. *The Scarlet Letter* offers timeless insights into the human condition while historically reflecting the ideas and values of 19th-century America.

Discussions like morality, judgement, and the stifling power of social standards are still pertinent in the modern era, and *The Scarlet Letter* is no exception. Its continuing appeal stems from its exploration of the human mind and the effects of social stigma. Numerous adaptations of the book have been inspired by it, demonstrating both its continuing relevance and the fascination people have with its topics. Hester Prynne, played by Lillian Gish in a great silent version from 1926, is arguably the best-adapted film.

There is a lengthy introduction in *The Scarlet Letter* explaining how the book came to be written. The anonymous narrator worked as the customhouse surveyor in Salem, Massachusetts. He found several documents in the attic of the customhouse, one of which was a manuscript written by a previous surveyor that described events that happened about two hundred years before the narrator's time. It was wrapped with a red cloth patch embroidered with gold in the shape of a "A." The narrator made the decision to compose a fictitious narrative of the events detailed in the manuscript when he lost his customs post. The finished work is The Scarlet Letter.

The narrative opens in Boston in the seventeenth century, followed by a Puritan settlement. Hester Prynne, a young lady, is escorted out of the town jail holding Pearl, her infant daughter, in her arms and bearing the red letter "A" across her breast. An old bystander

is informed by a man in the throng that Hester is being punished for her adultery. Hester was sent ahead to America by her husband, a scholar much older than she is, but he never made it to Boston. Everyone seems to agree that he is adrift at sea. Hester had given birth to a child, suggesting that she had an affair while she waited for her husband. She refuses to disclose the identity of her lover, though, and the scarlet letter and her public humiliation are her penance for her transgression and her concealment. Hester is carried to the town scaffold and interrogated by the town fathers on this particular day, but she once more declines to reveal the identity of her child's father.

Hester's absent husband, now practicing medicine under the name Roger Chillingworth, is the elderly bystander. With retaliation in mind, he moves to Boston. He has pledged to keep his true identity a secret from everyone but Hester. A few years go by. Hester works as a seamstress to support herself, and Pearl develops into a mischievous, stubborn youngster. They reside in a little cottage on the outskirts of Boston, shunned by the neighbourhood. Authorities from the community try to take Pearl away from Hester, but the mother and daughter are able to remain together thanks to the assistance of Arthur Dimmesdale, a young and gifted clergyman. On the other hand, Dimmesdale seems to be fading away and has an unexplained cardiac condition that is probably brought on by psychological turmoil. In order to give the sick minister round-the-clock care, Chillingworth becomes attached to him and finally moves in with him. Chillingworth also thinks that the minister's suffering and Hester's secret could be related, so he starts quizzing Dimmesdale to find out more. Chillingworth is confirmed in his suspicions when, one afternoon, he finds the minister sleeping with a mark on his breast.

Dimmesdale creates various forms of self-punishment as his psychological suffering intensifies. Hester has been spared the derision of the community in the interim because to her altruistic actions and quiet humility. Pearl, then about seven years old, and her mother come upon Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, attempting to exact revenge on himself, as they are making their way home from a visit to a deathbed one evening. Pearl and Hester join him, and the three of them clasp hands. Pearl asks Dimmesdale to officially acknowledge her the following day, but he declines, and a meteor creates a dull red "A" in the night sky. Hester decides to step in since she sees the minister's health deteriorating. She approaches Chillingworth and requests that he cease escalating Dimmesdale's self-punishment. Chillingworth declines.

Hester knows that Chillingworth has most likely surmised that she intends to divulge his name to Dimmesdale, so she sets up a meeting with him in the forest. In order to live as a family with Pearl, the ex-lovers make the decision to flee to Europe. In four days, they will board a ship departing from Boston. Hester takes off her scarlet letter and lets her hair down as they both experience a sense of liberation. Pearl does not recognise her mother without the letter when she is playing close by. When the village comes together for a celebration the day before the ship leaves, Dimmesdale gives his most moving sermon to date. Hester discovers in the meanwhile that Chillingworth has reserved passage on the same ship and is aware of their scheme. As Dimmesdale exits the church following his speech, he notices Pearl and Hester positioned in front of the town scaffold. In a fit of rage, he climbs the scaffold with his partner and daughter, admits his guilt in front of everyone, and reveals a red letter burned into his chest. As Pearl gives him a kiss, he passes away.

A year later, Chillingworth passes away, frustrated in his quest for vengeance. After Hester and Pearl depart from Boston, nobody is aware of their whereabouts. Many years later, Hester comes back by herself to live in her former cottage and carry on with her philanthropic activities. She is still wearing the scarlet letter. Pearl, who married a European aristocrat and started a family of her own, occasionally writes to her. Hester is buried close to Dimmesdale after her death. The only tombstone that the two have in common has a red "A."

Analysis

The Scarlet Letter explores the themes of shame in both public and private spheres of life, as well as what happens to a close-knit community when one of its members breaks a social taboo. Through the tale of the morally upright but unfaithful Hester Prynne, her weak and troubled lover Dimmesdale, and her vindictive husband Chillingworth, Hawthorne delves into concepts related to the nature of sin and the division between the individual and the community. Two centuries after the novel's events, a first-person introductory chapter reveals that the story will examine attitudes and beliefs that have changed since the novel's setting. The main character, Hester, is first seen in the following chapter when she leaves the prison holding her infant daughter, Pearl, and donning a clothing bearing the scarlet letter "A." Hawthorne establishes the themes of the book as sin, guilt, and remorse rather than forbidden passion by setting the action of the novel after Hester and Dimmesdale's adultery has already occurred.

After presenting Hester as the protagonist of the novel, Hawthorne sets up the main conflict by placing Hester in close proximity to her adversary, Chillingworth, the spouse she deceived by having an affair. Serving as a stand-in for the reader, who is now equally interested in learning who Hester's lover is and why she is so adamant about keeping him safe, Chillingworth swears to find out who Pearl's father is.

Tension rises as the reader begins to strongly assume Dimmesdale is the father and wonders if Chillingworth has come to the same conclusion or if Dimmesdale will retain his secret. Though Hester is the only one who has been formally banished, Dimmesdale, Hester, and Chillingworth all live in isolation within the group because they conceal their ties from one another. The suspense is further increased by this dramatic irony, when the reader is aware of each character's hidden motives while the characters themselves are unaware of each other's genuine emotions.

As Chillingworth and Dimmesdale's friendship and reliance grow stronger over time, the struggle intensifies. When Dimmesdale is sleeping, Chillingworth opens his shirt and notices a mark, which persuades him that Dimmesdale is Pearl's father. Hester, in the meantime, resides in isolation with her daughter and develops a philosophic viewpoint of the nature of her offence and the place of women in society. When Hester and Pearl join Dimmesdale on the scaffold in the middle of the night, the forces of repression and concealment squarely face the human yearning for confession and forgiveness in the book's pivotal scene. Hester understands that, despite Dimmesdale's ability to stay in society, he may have endured more suffering than she has when he acknowledges that he is too weak to come forward as Pearl's father. Dimmesdale has continued to hide his transgression and maintain two identities—one for public and one for private—unlike Hester. Hester realises that Chillingworth has made Dimmesdale's suffering worse and wonders whether it was her responsibility for keeping Chillingworth's identity a secret. Meeting in the woods, Hester tells Dimmesdale that Chillingworth is her husband, and the two decide to flee together.

The couple's ambitions, however, are dashed when Chillingworth finds out about them and hatches a scheme to pursue them, guaranteeing that their guilt would follow them around. Dimmesdale gives a farewell sermon, discloses that he is Pearl's father, and then passes away, maybe knowing that his hope for a fresh start with Hester was never going to work out. Chillingworth is displeased with Dimmesdale's public admission that "Thou hast he escaped me!" even if he has exacted his wrath by torturing Dimmesdale to

death.Chillingworth remarks as Dimmesdale passes away. “May God pardon you!Dimmesdale responds, “Thou, too, hast deeply sinned.” This implies that Hester and Dimmesdale’s adultery are not larger sins than Chillingworth’s callous quest of vengeance and, consequently, the town’s desire to punish Hester. Hester departs from the community following Dimmesdale’s passing, but she later returns for undisclosed reasons. She decides to live out her days in quiet solitude, wearing her scarlet A by choice and serving as a confidante to those women who have defied social rules.

List of Characters

Hester Prynne

The protagonist of the novel, Hester, is also the one who dons the scarlet letter that serves as the book’s title. Hester is a “adulterer,” as indicated by the letter, which is a patch of fabric shaped like a “A.” When she was a young woman, Hester married Chillingworth, an elderly scholar who sent her to live in America but never returned. She had an affair with a Puritan preacher named Dimmesdale while she waited for him, and Pearl was born as a result. Hester is strong and passionate; she bears years of ridicule and embarrassment. She is as intelligent and considerate as her husband and lover combined. Because of her estrangement, she is in a unique position to observe her community critically, especially how it treats women.

Pearl

Pearl, the young illegitimate daughter of Hester, has a melancholy, mischievous temperament and the capacity to see things that most people do not. She rapidly learns the truth about her mother and Dimmesdale, for instance. The villagers claim she doesn’t even look human, and they have heard tales that her father is the Devil. She often plays satirical games involving her mother’s scarlet letter and is clever beyond her years.

Roger Chillingworth

In reality, “Roger Chillingworth” is Hester’s spouse undercover. She was sent to America by her father, who is considerably older than her, while he settled his business in Europe. Arriving in Boston a little later than planned due to his captivity by Native Americans, he discovers Hester and her illegitimate kid on display on the scaffold. Despite his wife’s shame and betrayal, he stays in Boston because he is driven by a desire for vengeance. He is a scholar who poses as a doctor in order to gain access to Hester’s secret lover’s identity and torture her. Chillingworth is a monster on the inside as much as out, self-

absorbed. He is the most evil character in the book because of his unwavering quest for vengeance.

Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale

A young man named Dimmesdale immigrated to America after becoming well-known as a theologian in England. He and Hester fell in love in a fit of weakness. He may not acknowledge it in public, but he is her child's father. He tortures himself physically and mentally to cope with his guilt, which leads to the development of a cardiac disease. Because Dimmesdale is a perceptive and sensitive man, his sermons are masterworks of persuasiveness and eloquence. His sense of sinfulness and desire for confession constantly clash with his responsibilities to his congregation.

Governor Bellingham

An old and affluent man, Governor Bellingham spends most of his time conferring with the other town fathers. He looks a lot like a typical English aristocrat, even though he is the governor of a young American civilization. Bellingham usually follows the laws to the letter, but his eloquence often gets the better of him. He continues to be oblivious to the wrongdoing occurring in his own home since Mistress Hibbins, his sister, is a witch.

Mistress Hibbins

Mistress Hibbins is a widow who resides in an opulent home with her brother, Governor Bellingham. Her public appearances serve as a reminder to the reader of the hypocrisy and latent evil that permeate Puritan culture. She is most renowned for being a witch who goes into the forest at night in order to ride with the "Black Man."

Reverend Mr. John Wilson

Reverend Wilson is an elderly preacher in Boston who is both grandfatherly and erudite. He is a literary equivalent of the rigid, sharply drawn pictures of American patriarchs, a conventional Puritan parent. Wilson, like Governor Bellingham, abides by the community's laws to the letter but is susceptible to Dimmesdale's persuasiveness. Wilson argues for severe punishment of sinners and preaches hellfire and damnation, in contrast to Dimmesdale, his younger colleague.

Narrator

Approximately 200 years after the events of the story, the unidentified narrator holds the position of surveyor at the Salem Custom-House. After finding an old manuscript

detailing Hester Prynne's story in the attic of the building, he decides to write a fictionalised account of the story after losing his job. Because of his Puritan heritage, the narrator is a highly tense man who feels bad about his writing career. He writes because he thinks America needs to learn more about its moral and religious past and because he is interested in American history.

Setting

Before American Independence, in the 1600s, Boston serves as the setting for *The Scarlet Letter*. Boston was then a part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which had been founded in 1620 following the arrival of the first wave of English settlers at Plymouth. Following its founding in 1630, Boston had roughly 25,000 English settlers by 1640s. Many of these people emigrated from England in search of religious freedom for their divergent views after becoming disillusioned with the Anglican Church. The word "Puritans" originated from these settlers' belief that the Anglican Church had not gone far enough in breaking with Catholicism and become "purified."

The Puritans were able to establish a society in the Colonies where they could instill virtues such as obedience, modesty, and piety. When describing the novel's setting, Hawthorne is very particular. The first chapter describes the prison house as it was "some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town." In the frame narrative of the "Custom House" preface, the narrator finds a document that specifies that Hester "flourished during a period between the early days of Massachusetts and the close of the seventeenth century."

The forest where the lovers finally meet is also extensively described by Hawthorne, who portrays it as a more forgiving environment. Some characters who are frequently shunned in other contexts find solace and sympathy in the sunshine, breeze, babbling brook, and woodland critters. The fundamental conflict that prevents Hester and Dimmesdale from leading happy lives together is made clear by the stark contrasts between the natural and human environments.

Themes

Knowledge, Sin, and Human Nature

Hester and Dimmesdale's tale is similar to the story of Adam and Eve in that both involve banishment and suffering as a result of sin. However, it also leads to knowledge—

more precisely, knowledge of what it is to be human. Hester views the scarlet letter as "her passport into regions where other women dared not tread," which enables her to theorise more "boldly" than anyone else in New England about her culture and herself.

As for Dimmesdale, his eloquent and potent sermons stem from this sense of empathy; the "burden" of his sin gives him "sympathies so intimate with the sinful brotherhood of mankind, so that his heart vibrates in unison with theirs." Every day, Hester and Dimmesdale reflect on their own immorality and attempt to make sense of it in light of their actual experiences. The elders of the Puritans, however, are adamant that experience on earth is only a roadblock leading to paradise. As a result, they see sin as a threat to the community that needs to be contained and penalised. They shun Hester as a response to her transgression. However, Hester and Dimmesdale's experience demonstrates how sinfulness can result in human development, empathy, and empathy for others, whereas Puritan culture remains stagnant. It is demonstrated that these attributes are paradoxically incompatible with a condition of purity.

Society and Identity

Hester's refusal to leave Boston may appear strange after she is publicly humiliated and made to wear a badge of shame by the locals. She can take off the scarlet letter and lead a regular life after leaving the Massachusetts Bay Colony because she is not physically imprisoned. When Chillingworth informs Hester that the town fathers are thinking of allowing her to remove the letter, she reacts, unexpectedly, with dismay. Hester's actions stem from her desire to define her identity for herself rather than to let other people define it for her. She would be confessing that the letter is a source of humiliation and that she wants to get away from it if she ran away or destroyed it, which would be an admission of society's control over her. Rather than leaving, Hester stays and transforms the scarlet letter into a representation of her personality and experiences. She cannot pretend that her previous wrongdoing never happened because it is an integral part of who she is. Hester assiduously incorporates her transgression into her life as a result.

Female Independence

Hawthorne delves into the issue of female autonomy by showcasing Hester's audacious decision-making and self-sufficiency. Hester has already defied social norms by following her intuition and opting to have sex with a man she is not married to before the book even starts. Hester is freed from many of the conventional notions that a woman should

be obedient and subservient since she is banished from the community. She must also be independent due to her practical obligations. In addition to being a single parent raising an independent child, she needs to make a living for herself and her daughter. Hester feels at ease defending herself in these out-of-the-ordinary situations, as when she angrily rejects Governor Bellingham's attempt to take Pearl away.

Guilt

One of the main themes of *The Scarlet Letter* is guilt, which mostly manifests in Arthur Dimmesdale's mental state. Dimmesdale suffers from constant guilt for having fathered an illegitimate child, which is a sin, as well as remorse for not accepting responsibility for his acts and for having to keep his secret. A feeling of hypocrisy also contributes to the exaggeration of the minister's guilt because many people view him as extraordinarily holy and righteous. Throughout his life, Dimmesdale bemoans his sins, but only in his last moments does he own up to the fact that he is Hester's father. By then, it is too late to make amends. If anything, Chillingsworth's manipulation of him is possible because of his sense of guilt. Hawthorne makes the argument that guilt is not always noble if it is not followed by an attempt to transform or atone for one's actions through the character of Dimmesdale.

Nature versus Society

Pearl, the offspring of Hester and Dimmesdale's forbidden romance, is a perfect example of the topic of nature versus civilization. Desires that are uncontrollably pulled to one another by the laws, societal norms, and religious regulations bind Hester and Dimmesdale together. Their urges are followed, and this results in conception and procreation. Although society condemns Hester's pregnancy, it is the natural result of a fundamental human impulse. The conflict between innate wants and societal attempts to subdue human nature via the imposition of rules and laws is explored in the interaction between Hester and Dimmesdale.

In a similar vein, Pearl, who was created by natural impulses, has a disposition that puts nature ahead of society. Pearl is a feisty and impetuous youngster, and the narrator blames her temperament on the conditions of her conception. The woods serve as the setting for the novel's pivotal moment, which finds Dimmesdale, Hester, and Pearl at last getting back together. The conflict between society and environment is emphasised by this place. Dimmesdale and Hester are able to communicate freely with one another in an environment

that is still wild and unrestricted by social norms. They even have the courage to dream of a time when they would be able to break free and find happiness together. In Hawthorne's depiction, nature is on the lovers' side. Similarly, Pearl is free to wander the forest without fear since "all recognised a kindred wildness in the human child." Although the unorthodox family can find refuge in nature, they are ultimately bound by societal norms and will have to face the repercussions.

Compassion

Characters either succeed or fail in developing empathy for other people throughout the book. Because they have experienced suffering, Dimmesdale and Hester are better able to empathise with the idea that even decent people can make mistakes. Because of their capacity for empathy, Hester and Dimmesdale are much in demand in the community. By the book's end, Hester has developed into a kind of wise woman, and "people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble." Dimmesdale also gains a great reputation as a minister. Characters like Governor Bellingham, on the other hand, are too preoccupied with criticising and highlighting the shortcomings of others to be empathetic. Hawthorne suggests that even tragic occurrences can have purpose and value by drawing a connection between the experience of suffering and the development of empathy.

Motifs

The Wilderness versus Civilization

The town and the surrounding woodland in *The Scarlet Letter* are symbolic of diametrically opposed behavioural systems. The town is a metaphor for civilization: a law-abiding environment where everything is public and offences are swiftly dealt with. Conversely, the forest is a place where natural authority rules instead of human authority. The norms of society are suspended in the forest, where it is possible to adopt different identities. This provides more honesty and an escape from Boston's oppression, even though it also permits misbehavior—Mistress Hibbins's midnight rides, for instance. Hester and Dimmesdale revert to blissful young lovers for a brief while when they cross paths in the woods. Both orders are embodied in Hester's cottage, which is noteworthy for being situated at the edge of the woodland and on the outskirts of town. It is connected to the authoritarian town since it is her place of exile, but it is also a place where she may establish a somewhat peaceful life for herself because it is not part of the settlement.

Day vs. Night

The novel divides the plot's happenings into two categories—those that must occur discreetly and those that are socially acceptable—by highlighting the fluctuation between daylight and darkness. An individual's actions are revealed by daylight, leaving them open to punishment. Contrarily, night hides and permits actions that would not be permitted or possible during the day, such as Dimmesdale's meeting with Pearl and Hester on the scaffold. Two of the book's main themes—inner vs socially given identity and external versus interior states—are connected to these ideas of visibility versus concealment. It is at night that inner selves can show their true colours. During the day, secrets stay secrets and interiority is once again concealed from the public eye.

Genre

Historical Romance

Although we now refer to *The Scarlet Letter* as a novel, Hawthorne subtitled his book *A Romance*, a reference to the European tradition of stories of knights embarking on fantastic quests and having high adventures in foreign lands. A type of romance known as "historical romance" fictionalised historical occurrences. According to academics, Sir Walter Scott's Waverley is the first contemporary historical romance. Waverley, whose novel was published in 1814, recounted the account of a 1745 Scottish rebellion against the English throne from the viewpoint of an English soldier who, upon joining a group of highlanders and falling in love with their female commander, learns about his Scottish ancestry. Scott mixed fiction and history to give readers a sense of what it must have been like to live during that time in history. Real historical events surround the characters, nearly all of his Scottish characters speak in accents from the era, and some historical persons even make cameo appearances. The protagonist goes through a lot of ups and downs while trying to win his beloved's heart.

The Scarlet Letter reinvents the historical romance as a historically true tale that creates a surreal atmosphere through enhanced perception and paranormal phenomena. In the preface of "The Custom House," Hawthorne defines "romance" in a very different way than what most readers in the 1800s would have understood it to be—a literary genre that combined history and fiction. He makes it very evident that *The Scarlet Letter* is not a novel because, as wonderful as novels are, they convey the tales of people's regular, everyday lives. Contrarily, romances immerse readers in a different setting and era, making it more difficult to discern between fact and fiction. According to Hawthorne, reading a romance is similar to

lounging in your living room with the moon shining on it. The way the moonlight illuminates the items in the room at night "spiritualizes" them, making them seem unexpectedly foreign. The chamber takes on the character of a location "between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet" in this ambiance. Therefore, Hawthorne believed that romances such as *The Scarlet Letter* depict a reality that lies in the middle of the actual and the imagined, or between the attainable and the impossibly impossible.