
UNIT 1 SEXUAL REVOLUTION IN MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will discuss (i) the dialectic of Sex-motif in American literature (ii) the influence of Freud, Jung, and the Revisionists; (iii) the approaches of William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Scott Fitzgerald, Eugene O'Neill, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Henry Miller towards sexuality.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Sex plays a vital role in life. It is an integral and essential part of life. In literature in general and in American literature in particular, it plays only a small though aggressively righteous part. In every society, primitive as well as modern, the sexual instinct is – for good or evil – always subject to some measure of regulation and restraint. In literature, where the battle between love and sex, spirit and flesh, is fought in terms of symbolic action, the writers support their cause – for or against sexual freedom – with varying degrees of evangelical order and outspokenness. On this issue, there is no unanimity for the simple reason that human nature or culture is not unified in its beliefs concerning the nature of man. The central conflict between instinctual needs and the claims of the ideal, between physical desire and the inner check, between Dionysus and Christ, goes on all the time!

1.2 THE DIALECTIC OF SEX-MOTIF IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

The twentieth century gave rise, especially in the United States, to a number of movements designed to redress the balance and cure man of his sexual neurosis. The strident call for a return to primitivism was accompanied by the glorification of

instinct and later, by the apotheosis of the orgasm. The revolt initiated in the twenties by the members of the *Lost generation* was carried out in a more thorough going militant fashion by the *Beat generation* in the fifties. The quest for the apocalyptic orgasm, the spokesman of the Beat generation contended, was motivated by the highest morality. As Norman Mailer, the prophet of the hipsters declared in an interview: "After all, if my generation of writers represents anything, if there is anything we have fought for, it is sexual revolution."² He cites the fact that what was forbidden fare twenty years ago – books like *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *Tropic of Cancer* – is now published without fuss or hindrance and allowed to circulate freely. The sexual revolution that Norman Mailer says his generation fought for and won had its antecedents in the contribution made by such iconoclastic figures as Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and Eugene O'Neill – all of whom warred against the repression imposed by the Puritanic ideal.

If the practice of sexual freedom for the lost generation of the twenties ended time and again disastrously, it was because the sexual problem was vastly more complex than the libertarians of that gaudy and irrepressible decade realized. Sexual love transcends the physiological basis of instinct; it is a metaphysical as well as physical passion'. Thielicke rightly speaks of the mystical component in the sex urge, alongside the physiologically determined libido: the mystery can be unveiled along with another person.³ The spirit enters into the mystery of the sexual encounter. Sex is a mystery because it is not a function of organs – especially reassured for this purpose; it involves the whole man. Though the biological basis of sex is common to all men, the experience is psychologically and spiritually differentiated for each individual.

1.3 PSYCHOANALYSIS AND SEXUALITY

The literary sex-rebels were supported in their position by the science of psychoanalysis.⁴ Freudism refutes the idea of original sin which is associated primarily with the sexual act. It explodes the fiction that sex exists or should exist, exclusively for the purpose of perpetuating the species. Moreover the science of psychoanalysis taught them a great deal about the subliminal working of sexual desire, the inter dependence of body and mind, the role of the unconscious, the significance of dreams, the vagaries of instinct and how it is shaped or twisted out of shape by society. Like Whitman, they boldly affirmed their belief in the flesh and the appetites.

"I do not press my fingers across my mouth
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart
Copulation is no more rank to me than death is"

1.4 THE INFLUENCE OF FREUD, JUNG AND THE REVISIONISTS

The American writers of the twenties were attracted to Freud for a variety of reasons, one of which was his radical reinterpretation of the nature and functions of sexuality. Waldo Frank, like Dreiser, harped insistently on the traumatic impact of Puritanism, the sinister sex repression from which American culture suffered. Floyd Dell, an aggressive leader during the twenties in the cause of sexual freedom, found in Freudianism another mighty weapon to be used in his fight against bourgeois morality. During this decade, Freudianism was converted into a veritable crusade. By utilizing the Freudian discoveries of dream displacement and the dynamic role of

the unconscious, writers were able to arrive at a better understanding of the self and its relation to reality.

Sexual Revolution

It is not at all surprising that Freud, in the United States as well as Europe, was fiercely attacked for violating the taboo of silence and scenery surrounding the subject of sex. Freud disclosed the secrets hidden behind the multifarious disguises assumed by the sexual instinct. It was this outspokenness on Freud's part which called forth emotional resistance to his theories both in the United States and abroad, and prompted the charge that psychoanalysis was guilty of pansexualism, though Freud had never recommended unrestricted sexual indulgence.

The protest against such excesses in interpreting the significance of sex in life and literature was bound to come. The quarrel over the implications to be drawn from the conception of the libido broke out in the inner circle of Freudian disciples long before psychoanalysis became a popular cult. Freud had accused Jung of suppressing the sexual factor in psychoanalysis as a concession to the prejudices of a prudish-minded public. Jung desexualized the libido whereas for Freud the libido was electrically charged with the elemental force of sex, the instinctual energy that motivates all human striving. Jung, on the contrary contended that sex is but one of the forms this energy can take. Sex, he felt, was not the central, sustaining power in the psyche. No society, primitive or modern, permitted the sexual instinct uninhibited modes of expression. Why, Jung asked, should all cultural manifestations, including art, be interpreted in terms of the sexual drive? Though Jung did not deny the importance of sexuality in psychic life, he wished to put sexuality itself in its proper place. But what is its proper place? It is the question to which not only psychologists but writers of all kinds earnestly addressed themselves. Increasingly Jung came to feel that this disproportionate emphasis on the power of sex was symptomatic of the spiritual malaise of his time; the age had gone mad on the subject, enough to indicate that the sexual life of modern man was profoundly disturbed. Only a change of heart, an allegiance sworn to the kingdom of the spirit, could save man from this biological bondage. "It is not the children of the flesh, but the "children of God" who know freedom." In short, according to Jung, there is much between heaven and earth not included in the Freudian philosophy of sexuality.⁵

If the mystique of sex encountered spirited resistance in some quarters; it found one redoubtable champion who withdrew from the psychoanalytic school on the ground that Freud did not go far enough in his psychology of sex. Wilhelm Reich called for a world wide sexual revolution. In *The Sexual Revolution*, he charged that the capitalist society was engaged in a vast conspiracy to frustrate the sexual needs of the young and rob them of mental independence and creative originality. Rejecting wholesale the Freudian theory of sublimation, he denied that repression was either necessary or desirable. Insisting that the full gratification of the sexual instinct would result not only in the integration of the individual but also in the salvation of society, Reich assails the idea of life long monogamous marriage as a species of enslavement not to be borne. Sex thus emerges as the new religion of life – a religion which the hipsters and the members of the beat generation have enthusiastically taken over. Reich went far beyond Freud in tracing all our troubles – social disorders, political strife, the outbreak of Fascism, the eruption of war – to disturbances in the sexual life of man. All of culture, in fact, is essentially governed by sexual needs.⁶ It is the signal distinction of Erich Fromm, whose work had a marked influence on a whole generation of American writers, that, in opposition to the scientific and statistical approach to sex, he highlighted those elements in the experience of love which are not included in the Freudian or Kinsey outlook. The aim of love is to break down the walls of isolation that hem us in, to achieve a deep feeling of intimacy and union. It is more than that: it is an art that calls for sensitiveness, insight, and a readiness to give generously of oneself. Instead of analyzing sexual love in physiological and instinctual terms, he looks upon it as a quest for union with another person. Physical desire is not to be confused with the

complex feeling of love. He makes the point that every theory of love grows out of a theory of human nature. When love inspires the desire for sexual union, it is always blended with the element of tenderness.

1.5 SOME LITERARY IMPLICATIONS

To what extent each of these men-Freud, Jung, Reich and Fromm – influenced twentieth century American Literature in its portrayal of the sex motif is still an open question. Undoubtedly the major influence was that of Freud. Psychoanalysis made it possible for the writer to explore new, hitherto tabooed areas of experience, unconscious as well as instinctual. He could utilize the stream of consciousness technique and the interior monologue, break up the sequence of time in the ordering of the narrative, exploit the rich resources of dream symbolism, and, finally, uncover traits of human nature that had until then not been allowed to be discussed in literature. He could rely on biology and psychology for many of his controlling insights. **Whatever was “natural” was not only “normal” but “moral” as well and perfectly legitimate material for literary presentation.**

The scientific outlook, moreover, helped to develop an attitude of tolerance toward all forms of sexual behavior. The existence of sexual abnormality could be accepted without branding it with the stigma of moral corruption. The knowledge and improved practice of birth control served to emancipate woman from her oppressive fear of pregnancy outside the covenant of marriage. **All these influences contributed to the revaluation of the traditional Victorian attitude toward sex.**

1.5.1 William Dean Howells

Deeply concerned about the social function and moral effect of the novel, Howells upheld the established canons of decency. According to him, the Anglo-Saxon tradition was in this respect – truer to life than the practice honored in French Fiction. He did not deny that “vicious” types of love were at work beneath the surface of society. The numerous divorce trials told their own sordid story of marital conflict, sexual incompatibility, and flagrant infidelity, but all this Howells insisted, was in no way the characteristic of American society. A moralist at heart, he contended that the effects derived from the literary exploitation of sex were sensational and cheap though the theme of guilty love afforded a sure-fire recipe for success, the serious novelist would not – he really meant should not – thus be willing to soil his artistic conscience. Basically, when the issue came to a showdown, Howells was more interested in preserving the laws of propriety in such matters than in defending the right of the artist to complete freedom of expression. Why should the novelist, in the name of a restrictive morality, be held back from dealing with the theme of “guilty” love? Why should the honest depiction of “the beast-man” – Howells’ own epithet – tend to defile and corrupt?

While serving as editor of ‘The Atlantic Monthly’, Howells carefully respected the moral sensibilities of the audience for which the magazine was intended. He advised Mark Twain to eliminate in his work all sexual references which could possibly offend the taste of the public. When compared with novelists like Samuel Butler, Hardy; or Dreiser, he seems needlessly fearful and genteel in all areas that touch on the sexual love of man and woman.

1.5.2 Theodore Dreiser

The literary rebels of the twentieth century ceased to look upon man as a responsible agent, ruled by reason, endowed with free will, superior to the animal kingdom. Freudianism exposed the erring rationalizations to which civilized man resorts in order to justify his irrational and often perverse behavior. The naturalist writers

focused their interest on the instinctual life of man. Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neil, Hemingway, and Faulkner depicted human nature without attempting to gloss over the biological facts – **and the facts showed plainly that man was at bottom a promiscuous animal, the victim of his sexual compulsions. Hailing sex as the deliverer rather than enslaver, a number of American writers went to great lengths to identify love with sex.**

When the novelist appeals to Nature as the norm, he is in effect trying to lift a heavy burden of guilt ("original sin") from the shoulders of the descendants of Adam shaped by heredity, instinct and the pressure of the social environment. Man, as Theodore Dreiser portrays him, is no longer responsible for his actions and therefore the question of innocence or guilt, good or evil, does not arise. Moreover, the naturalistic writer of fiction aims ambitiously to report the whole truth of life, from the lowest reaches to the highest. He seeks to picture conditions as they actually exist and refrains as far as possible from passing moral judgment on human behavior. Though his object is not to shock, unless the truth itself proves shocking, his outspokenness on matters hitherto considered taboo often produces precisely that effect on the reading public. In his efforts to delineate people as they are, not as they ought to be, he directs attention to those biological passions which in many temperaments are the determinants of fate.

As Somerset Maugham declares in *The Summing Up*, most men follow the call of desire, while keeping a prudent eye open for the policeman around the corner. The conflict between instinct and culture cannot be avoided. Society, concerned solely about the perpetuation of the species, the protection of the family, the safe guarding of the rights of children born into the world, labors, with all the institutional power of enforcement at its disposal, to deflect the mighty energies of the sex instinct into morally sanctioned channels. Somerset Maugham like Dreiser, adheres to a physiological conception of love. "However much people may resent the fact and however angrily deny it, there can surely be no doubt that love depends on certain secretions of the sexual glands.... People are very hypocritical in this matter and will not face the truth⁸".

A naturalist who from the opening of the twentieth century dared write what he believed was the truth, however maligned or unacknowledged, about sex, Dreiser led the revolt against the hypocritical moral conventions that were crippling the intellectual and spiritual development of America. The younger generation accepted him as one of their spokesman. His work, together with that of Sherwood Anderson, Eugene O'Neil, and Ernest Hemingway, was instrumental in effecting a radical change in the love ethic of the lost generation during the roaring twenties. Viewing life through the scientific perspective, Dreiser affirmed that sex was the dominant instinct in man. **Society for its protection attempted to enforce a strictly monogamous code of morality, but human beings in America and elsewhere, Dreiser asserted, long before Kinsey, were incorrigibly polygamous.** Hence a bitter conflict that rages between society, and the individual who obeys the voice of his instinct. The law, the courts, the police, the churches, the weight of public opinion, are all arrayed on the side of the social order, and the weak individual is virtually coerced into submission. Dreiser, like Sherwood Anderson, openly champions the cause of the victims of sexual repression: the frustrated, the maladjusted, the neurotic sufferers. He would allow greater room for the play of instinct and give people the opportunity to find some measure of happiness in life.

1.5.3 Sherwood Anderson

The cause of naturalism finally triumphed. The determined battle on behalf of sexual freedom that Dreiser had fought and won encouraged other writers to explore this hitherto forbidden area of experience. Freudianism prepared the way for the full-bodied emergence of the literary gospel that sex was salvation, and Sherwood Anderson became its anointed prophet. In opposition to the conspiracy of silence that

puritanism had imposed on all matters relating to the sexual life of man, Anderson endeavoured to picture the total personality. He would make no concession to conventional morality or traditional notions of human nature. Whatever lay beneath the surface of consciousness – nameless longings and erotic fantasies and libidinal impulses, however perverse or lawless they turned out to be – would find expressions in his work. In probing the subliminal recesses of the self, he revealed what Freud had already discovered in his theory of the neuroses: how thin is the boundary line that divides the so called normal from the abnormal. In his stories he uncovered the crippling effects of sexual frustration upon emotionally starved and lonely people. In his fiction the urgent need for love inevitably over takes the voice of reason and the restraints of public morality. When that is not the case, when the individual suppresses her deeper instincts, neurotic suffering and misery is the end result. Notable among his stories and novels which reflect Anderson's attitude towards sexuality are: *Winesburg, Ohio*, *Many Marriages*, *Winney's Dry Goods Store*, *"The Strength of God"*, *"The Untold Lie"*.

1.5.4 Fitzgerald and The Jazz Age

About Jazz Age, Charles Glicksberg avers:

"During the twenties, the young came exuberantly into their own, they ushered in a ten-year period of irreverence, iconoclasm, and boundless insurgency. Youth was not only its own excuse for being but also a warrant for reckless uninhibited behavior,.... / The decline of religion, the aftermath of the First World War, the militant rise of feminism, the effects of prohibition, the popularization of psychoanalytic doctrine – these combined influences led them to throw off the restraining traditions of the past and invoke a new moral order. In Greenwich Village, Floyd Dell proclaimed to gospel of 'free' love, which the young intellectuals found eminently to their liking...."⁹

Fitzgerald showed many of these libertarian beliefs, but even as a lapsed catholic he was –still inwardly affected by the dogmas of the Church he had renounced. As Andrew Turnbull sums him up in this respect:

"He was normally out not overly sexual. Perhaps one could say that with him a strong sex drive had been geared to beauty and creation, while the destructive side of his nature found an outlet in drink. For someone who had been instrumental in relaxing censorship his writing was remarkably chaste."¹⁰

1.5.5 Eugene O'Neill

The contributions of psychanalytic theory left their impress on all branches of American literature at the time O'Neill was first launching forth on his career – on biography and literary criticism as well as poetry, drama, and fiction. What was originally a therapeutic method became a literary cult, a salvatory faith, a surrogates for the lost faith. Analysing O'Neill's attitude towards love in general and sexual love in particular, Charles Glicksberg declares: "A lapsed catholic like Fitzgerald, O'Neill is always aware of the transcendental element in love, the dimension of the mystical, the ineffable, the numinous that includes and yet transcends the plane of physical passion – the power of love, in the fleeting fraction of time that measures out a life span, to hold at bay the forces of darkness and the ever-present threat of death."¹¹

Like Dreiser, O'Neill pictures the universe as basically aural. God is an efflux of energy that is infinite but, from the human point of view, meaningless. In such a godless universe, love is stripped of the aura of the sacred. O'Neill's naturalistic nihilism conditions his depiction of the dialectic of love and sex. The heart of his message emerges in *Welded*, when Michael Cape voices his realization: "To love the truth of life – to accept it and be exalted – that's the one faith left to us."¹²

1.5.6 Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway underlines the cruel necessity that compels men and women in war time to reach out desperately for fulfillment in love while they still have the opportunity, ---they be destroyed and left with nothing at the end. Hemingway in his fiction, thus, exalts 'the natural' man. It is the animal in man that is holy. Nature is not a moral teacher but it will not betray the heart that loves her truly. Viewed from this perspective, Hemingway appears as the spokesman of a romantic naturalism that effects a trans-valuation of the conventional notions of good and evil. The characters he presents are intensely concerned about their instinctual urges. The myth of romantic love as passion spiritualized, is debunked. The natural man has come into his own and is not to be cheated of his erotic happiness by moral taboos. Complete fulfillment in sexual love is what counts; the rest is the product of illusion and neurotic evasion.¹³

1.5.7 William Faulkner

Unlike many of the important writers of the lost generation or the sex-obsessed American novelists who have sprung up in the fifties and sixties, William Faulkner promulgates no mystique of sex. He propounds no thesis and points no moral. A naturalist in his attempt to depict the human condition in all its fascinating diversity, he does not pass moral judgement on his characters – however criminal or depraved they may be if Faulkner is interested in examining the anomalies of sexual behavior, it is not because they provide him with a rich mine of sensational material, Faulkner never panders to the public. Though his fiction includes scenes of seduction, adultery, rape, incest, and sodomy, these are never brought in for their own sake but form part of a larger plan. They are designed principally to reveal the potentiality for evil present in each human being. Faulkner is aware of the profoundly irrational character of much human behavior and of the extent to which the biological will rather than abstract reason or ethical principles are in control. Faulkner had some knowledge of Freudianism and, like O'Neill, he took from the science of psychoanalysis what he could put to creative use namely those insights that confirmed his own observations and experience.¹⁴

1.5.8 Henry Miller

Talking about Henry Miller – the prophet of the sexual revolution – Karl Shapiro proclaims: "Miller writes hundreds of pages describing in the minutest and clearest detail his exploits in bed. Every serious reader of erotica has remarked about Miller that he is probably the only author in history who writes about such things with complete ease and naturalness." **Like the mystics, Henry Miller deliberately seeks to focus on the most repulsive aspects of existence in order to recognise them as intrinsically beautiful, an organic part of the cosmic scheme of things.** He glories in anality, and thus, as Kingsley Widmer points out, transmutes the naturalistic facet thus curiously brought into focus, into a metaphysical vision. Like the surrealists with whom he has much in common without swallowing their aesthetic as a whole, he finds everything in the world – the ugly the hideous, the feculent, a source of wonder, a miracle in the making. Long before the beat writers made this transcendental discovery and intoned in rapt worship a hymn of praise for all things holy, Miller had included as an integral part of his philosophy of being. For strange as it may seem, there is in this joyous nihilist, a Transcendental echo.¹⁵ We shall discuss this transcendental aspect of Henry Miller in the subsequent units.

1.5.9 The Beat Generation

Lawrence Lipton, in *The Holy Barbarians* stresses that for the best generation, sex is more than a fountainhead of pleasure, it is a mystique Glickesberg avers: "their private language is rich in the multivalent ambiguities of reference so that they dwell in a sexualized universe of discourse. The singular uncompromising force of their

revolt against the odious cult of restraint is illustrated by their eagerness to dance in a public place. The social dance is but a disguised ritual for the expression of ungratified sexual desire. For this reason, too, their language is more forthright and earthy. The beatniks crave a sexual experience in which their whole being participates. Henry Miller is their literary patron saint whose fictional treatment gave inspired expression to the new religion of sex. In addition, they have been converted to Zen. Buddhism, with the glorification in the world is flowing. They make no attempt in their novels, or their critical proclamations, to reconcile Zen with their determined quest for the beatific bliss of the orgasm.... They are sex-obsessed, but they also resort to religious metaphors."¹⁶

1.5.10 Norman Mailer

As you read in Unit 1, section 1.3, Norman Mailer, the prophet of the hipsters declares in an interview: "After all, if my generation of writers represents anything if there is anything we have fought for, it is sexual revolution." You may note that we have included an article on Norman Mailer in the "Readings".

1.6 SUMMING UP

Sex is an integral and essential part of life. Freud's radical interpretation of the nature and functions of sexuality attracted the attention of the American writers in the twenties. Sex emerged as the new religion of life – a religion which the hipsters and the members of the beat generation enthusiastically took over. The naturalist writers focused their interest on the instinctual life of man. Dreiser, Anderson, O'Neill, Hemingway, and Faulkner depicted human nature without glossing over the biological facts, and the facts showed plainly that man was at bottom a promiscuous animal, the victim of his sexual compulsions. Hailing sex as the delivered rather than enslaver, a number of American writers went to great lengths to identify love with sex. The prophet of sexual revolution, Henry Miller deliberately tries to focus on the most repulsive aspects of existence in order to recognize them as intrinsically beautiful, an organic part of the cosmic scheme of things.

1.7 QUESTIONS

- i. Write a short note on the dialectic of sex-motif in American literature.
- ii. Write an essay (about 400 words) on the impact of Freud and psychoanalysis on the American writers.
- iii. Write a short note on "the Prophet of Sexual Revolution."

1.8 NOTES AND GLOSSARY

Notes

1. Charles I. Glicksberg, *The Sexual Revolution In American Literature*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971.
2. "The Realist", No. 40, December 1962, p. 15.
3. Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex*. Translated by John Doberstein. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row, 1964 p. 74.
4. See Frederick Hoffman, *Freudianism and the Literary Mind*. New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1959, p p 63065.

5. C.G.Jung, *Modern Man In Search of a Soul*. Translated by W.S. Dell and Cary F Baynrs. London: Keagaw Paul Trewch, Trubner & co., 1941 p. 140.
6. Ginsberg, *The Sexual Reutilities*, p. 19.
7. Ibid, p. 31.
8. Somerset Maugham, *The Summing Up*. New York: Penguin Books Inc, 1946. p. 216.
9. Ginsberg, *The Sexual Revolution*, p. 7
10. Andrew Turnbull, *Scott Fitzgerald*. New York: Charles sCribner's Sons. 1962. p. 262.
11. Ginsberg, *The Sexual Revolution*, p. 72
12. Ibid, p.81
13. Ibid, p. 81
14. Ibid, p.97
15. Ibid, p.129
16. Ibid, p.155-156

Glossary

- This material is taken from A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams.

i. Stream of Consciousness:

It was a phrase used by William James to characterize the unbroken flow of thought and awareness in the waking mind; it has now been adopted to describe a narrative method in modern fiction. The stream of consciousness is a mode of narration that undertakes to capture the full spectrum and flow of a character's mental process, in which sense perceptions mingle with conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, feelings, and random associations.

ii. Interior monologue:

Some critics use "Stream of Consciousness" interchangeably with the term "Interior monologue". It is useful to use the former as the inclusive term: denoting all the diverse techniques employed by authors to describe or to represent the overall state and process of consciousness in a character. "Interior monologue" denotes specifically the technique that undertakes to reproduce the course and rhythm of consciousness just as it occurs in a character's mind, with no-or with minimal - intervention by the author as guide or commentator and without tidying the vagaries of the mental process into grammatical sentences or into a logical and narrative order. The interior monologue - in its radical form - is sometimes described as the exact reproduction of consciousness.

iii. Surrealism:

"Surrealism" was launched as a concerted movement in France by Andre' Breton's *Manifesto on Surrealism*, 1924. The expressed aim was a rebellion against all restraints on the free functioning of the human mind. These restraints included the logical reason, standard morality, social and artistic conventions and the control of artistic creation by forethought and intention. To ensure the unhampered operation of the deep mind, which they regarded as the only source of valid knowledge and art, surrealists turned to "automatic writing". The influence, direct or indirect, of surrealist innovations can be found in many modern writers in prose and verse who have broken with conventional modes of artistic organization to experiment with free associations, violated syntax, nonlogical and nonchronological order, dream like and nightmarish sequences, and the juxtaposition of bizarre, shocking, or seemingly unrelated images.

iv. Apotheoses of Sex:

If a particular thing is the apotheosis of something, it is an ideal or perfect example of it. For example: He seemed to be the apotheosis of generosity.

When a person's or a thing's apotheosis happens, they become or declared to be, a god or goddess. It means the writers like Norman Mailer, Jack Kerouac, Alex Ginsberg declared "sex" as a god or goddess.

UNIT 2 THE GREAT TRADITION

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 American Transcendentalism
- 2.3 Ralph Waldo Emerson
- 2.4 Henry David Thoreau
- 2.5 Other Members of Transcendentalist Club
- 2.6 Walt Whitman
- 2.7 Melville, Whittier, & Twain
- 2.8 20th Century Scenario
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Questions
- 2.11 Notes & Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we have discussed (I) American transcendentalism (ii) the contribution made by Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Whittier, Twain to American transcendentalism and (iii) the 20th century scenario.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

"The East has ever been a romantic puzzle to the West, the home of adventures like those of *Arabian Nights*, the abode of magic, the land of heart's desire, one to which even men of waning faith may turn for confirmation in the hope that after all the spiritual counts".

- Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan¹

The Oriental - Occidental intercourse began in Graeco-Roman times. The humanism, the idealism, and the spiritualism of the Oriental philosophies have been attracting the attention of the catholic, the eclectic, and the fertile minds of America for about two centuries.² It would be very interesting to know how far the American mind has been influenced, directly or indirectly, by the Oriental philosophies.³

Shortly after the American Declaration of Independence, American ships started sailing for India. The most important American ports connected with this vigorous trade between America and India were Salem and Boston. The American ships, from the Indian ports like Calcutta and Bombay, brought a great variety of Indian products: Indigo, sugar, gunny sacks, silk and cotton goods, and Indian classics translated into English by Sir Henry Thomas Colebrook, John Stevenson and others of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In course of time the translations of Indian classics rendered by French scholars like Anquetil-Duperron, Alexandre Langlois, Eugene Burnouf, and J.H. Gracin de Tarry; by German scholars like Christian Larsen and Max Mueller; and by Indian scholars like Raja Rammohan Roy also reached the American shores. Moreover Indian wisdom reached America through the writings of British poets like Coleridge and Shelley, and German Philosophers like Herder and Schopenhauer also. Thus the splendrous expression and the sonorous music of the Vedic hymns; the lofty, esoteric thought of the Upanishadic seers; the profound insights and

unfathomable wisdom of the *Manu dharma Sastra*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Mahabharata*; the eclectic philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita* – which appealed to the idealists and the materialists, the men of contemplation and the men of action like-became accessible to the American intellectuals in the first quarter of nineteenth century.⁴

These seeds of oriental thought fell on the receptive soil of America, which was already, by that time, fertilised by religious movements like Puritanism, Quakerism, Calvinism, and Unitarianism⁴. Puritanism imparted a deep sense of religiousness and a pervasive moral outlook to Americans; Quakerism increased their mystical proclivities; Calvinism injected the idea of suprarational revelation into their minds; Unitarianism made them reject the idea of the Trinity and declare their belief that there was one god. Moreover, the American intellectuals of this period had catholic and eclectic minds. They learnt through their special upbringing to be responsive and sensitive to all great thought irrespective of region or religion. They had an idealistic disposition and a speculative bent of mind. They were deeply moral and religious people. They possessed unflagging optimism and staunch individualism. The outcome of the meeting between the great Oriental thought and the receptive American minds under propitious conditions was the birth of American Transcendentalism.

2.2 AMERICAN TRANSCENDENTALISM

American Transcendentalism is so profound and so comprehensive that it is very difficult to define or describe it. Nevertheless, many critics of great reputation and immense discretion have attempted to define and describe it: "The very word 'Transcendental' has a German flavour", said Leyla Goren; and she dilated: "It was originally used by Kant, who replied to the empiricism of Locke that recognised nothing in the intellect not previously existent in the experience of the senses, by showing that at least one class of ideas did not come by experience. Kant said there were institutions of mind itself and called them Transcendental forms. The Kantian distinction between Reason and Understanding suited Emerson well".¹⁶ In his essay, "Transcendentalist," Emerson wrote: "What is popularly called Transcendentalism among us is idealism; idealism as it appears in 1842." Broadly, he compared it with "the very oldest of thoughts.... Buddhism... an expression of it".⁷ When a critic like Frederick I. Carpenter proclaimed that American Transcendentalism was "primarily a reassertion of the mystical basis of all religion" and was therefore "primarily religious rather than philosophical," another critic called it "a distinct philosophical system" that was "essentially poetical." According to H.C. Goddard it was a literary movement, a philosophy and a religion all in one. Further, Kenneth Walter Cameron comprehensively described Transcendentalism as "a warm and intuitional religion, aesthetic, philosophical and ethical movement – the American tributary of European Romanticism, a theoretical and practical way of life and a literary expression within the tradition of 'idealism' – a new humanism based upon ancient classical or Neo-Platonic Super-naturalism and colored by Oriental mysticism".⁸ All the aforementioned definitions can be considered various interpretations of the same truth – "Ekam Sat Viprah Bahudha Vadanti".⁹

The Transcendentalist club or circle flourished in Concord, Massachusetts from 1836 for some years. The important members of the club were: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Frederick H. Hedge, Amos Bronson Alcott, George Ripley, James Freeman Clarke, Theodore Parker, Elizabeth Peabody and Margaret Fuller. They were, as mentioned earlier, receptive and fertile minds concerned with social reform and individualist who questioned authoritarian tradition and thinkers whose goal was the amelioration of mankind.

"Transcendentalism," said Robert E. Spiller, "emerged as a full-fledged movement of New England thought between 1815 and 1836. The first date marks the maturing of the liberalizing ministry of William Ellery Channing; the second, the publication of Emerson's 'Nature,' the original- and probably the best systematic expression of the Transcendentalist philosophy. Thereafter the movement continued to expand, first as a revolt against the continuing cultural dependence of America on Europe, and finally as a profound exploration of the spiritual foundations and moral implications of the new democracy. The source of this vitality lies in the intellectual background of transcendentalism; in its appropriation of certain insights of Puritan, Quaker and other colonial theologies".¹⁰

Renowned researchers, both American and Indian,¹¹ have proved that American Transcendentalism was profoundly influenced by Oriental thought.¹² Thus proclaimed Spiller: "The close affinity between the idealism of contemporary European philosophy and the romanticism of Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Hawthorne, and Whitman must not be pressed to the point of identity or to the exclusion of other influences.... Nor was European philosophy the only such force on the nineteenth century American mind.... Historians have demonstrated the catalytic effect of Plato and Plotinus on Emerson and of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other Oriental tales and poems of Emerson and Thoreau".¹³ "It was Orientalism", declared V.K. Chari "that gave American transcendentalism its distinctive character and tone. Transcendentalism without orientalism is inconceivable".¹⁴

2.3 RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was the high priest of American Transcendentalism. "To Emerson," wrote Frederick I. Carpenter, "the word 'Asia' had an emotional as well as an intellectual meaning. 'Asia' was more than an Eastern continent, and it was more than the literature produced by that continent. It was a symbol for the unknown - for the other half of the world - for mystery, and romance, and poetry, and love, and religion".¹⁵ To young Emerson, Oriental books were recommended by his aunt, Mary Moody Emerson. Though he could not initially fathom the intricacies of Oriental thought for some years, he found in it later much material favourable to his own system of values and ideas. It made his own thought very rich and universal. According to him, Hindu philosophy expressed the core of Oriental thought. As a voracious reader, he read the following on oriental thought: Robert Southey's "the Curse of Kehama"; Sir William Jones's "Hymn to Narayana," *The Ordinances of Manu*, and fragmentary translations of the *Vedas and Upanishads* found in his works; Sir Charles Wilkins's *The Bhagavad Geeta*; Horace Hayman Wilson's *The Vishnu Purana*; Henry Thomas Colebrooke's *Essays on the Vedas*; Eugene Bournouf's *Bhagavat Purana*, and Raja Rammohan Roy's translation of *Several Principal Books*, etc. The Prince of New England Brahmins was deeply interested in Indian philosophical concepts like "Brahman",¹⁶ "Atman", "Paramatman", "Maya", "Karma", and "Punarjanma". His poems and essays like "Brahma",¹⁶ "Hamatreya",¹⁷ "Maya",¹⁸ "Illusions", "Representative men". "The Over-Soul", "the Progress of Culture", "Poetry and Imagination". "Inspiration," "Greatness," and his journal are permeated with the aroma of Indian thought. He declared in his journal: "The Indian teaching, through its clouds of legends, has yet a simple and grand religion, like a queenly countenance seen through a rich veil. It teaches to speak the truth, love others as yourself and to despise trifles. The East is grand and makes Europe a land of trifles."²⁰ Moreover, he thought that Hindu books were the best gymnastics for the mind.²¹ He propagated Oriental ideas and ideals through the periodical, "The Dial".²² "Amidst this ceaseless, sleepless din and clash of Western materialism, this heat of restless energy, the character of Emerson" wrote. Pratap Chunder Mazoomdar, "shines upon India serene as the evening star. He seems to some of us to have been a geographic mistake. He ought to have been born in India. Perhaps Hindus were closer kinsmen to him than his own nation".²³ In the

same vein wrote Mahatma Gandhi, an admirer of Emerson: "The essays to my mind contain the teaching to see our own sometimes thus differently fashioned".²⁴ Thus the impact the Indian thought on Emerson is undeniable.²⁵

2.4 HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Emerson's bosom friend, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) also showed avid interest in Oriental thought. His works, *Walden*, and *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* reflect his exuberant and unreserved admiration for and his erudite knowledge of Indian scriptures.²⁶ Further evidence of his interest in Indian philosophy can be found in the fact that when he edited portions of the "Ethnical Scriptures" for "The Dial", he selected passages from "The Laws of Manu", "The Sayings of Confucius", "The Chinese Four Books", and "the Preaching of Buddha." From Langlois's French version of the *Harivamsa*, he translated a story "The Transmigration of Seven Brahmins" into English. He read the following Indian scriptures: Jones's translation of *Shakuntala*; Wilson's translation of the *Hitopadesa* and of the *Bhagavad Gita*; Stevenson's translation of the *Harivamsa*; and Garaisse de Tassy's *Histoire de la littérature hindoue et Hindoustan* and other books. He was deeply interested in Indian discussions and views on individualism, transmigration of souls, solitude, action without attachment, austerity, chastity, divinity, morality, renunciation, and illusion. Thoreau, with all admiration for Indian sages, declared: "...the contemplations of those Indian sages have influenced, and still influence, the intellectual development of mankind. In comparison with the philosophers of the East, we may say that modern Europe has not yet given birth to none".²⁷ In *Walden*, he proclaimed: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavad Geeta*, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial".²⁸ Further, in his letter (dated 10 August 1849) to his friend, H.G.C. Blake, he wrote: "Depend upon it that rude and careless as I am, I would fain practice the Yoga faithfully... To some extent, and at rare intervals even I am a Yogi".²⁹ Thoreau's main achievement was not the creation of a system, but the creation of himself. Thoreau, like the ancient Hindus, led a simple and ascetic life; and believed that solitude and contemplation would enable one to attain spiritual heights.³⁰ Moreover, Thoreau, like ancient Indians, did not frown upon sensuous pleasures. "See, hear, smell, taste etc., while these senses are fresh and pure", he said.³¹ He was, unlike many, not shocked by Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*.³² He commended the Hindus for their frankness in discussing sexual relations. He wrote: "We are so degraded that we cannot speak simply of the necessary functions of human nature. In earlier ages, in some countries, every function was reverently spoken of and regulated by law. Nothing was too trivial for the Hindu law-giver, however offensive it may be to modern taste. He teaches how to eat, drink, cohabit, void excrement and urine and the like, elevating what is mean, and does not falsely excuse himself by calling these things trifles".³³ Further, "Even in style", said John T. Reid, "there is an affinity between the Indian classics and Thoreau's writing (.....): one finds in them the same love of the pithy, often startling epigram making oracular and arbitrary statements".³⁴ Thus there is an indelible impact of Indian thought on Thoreau.

2.5 OTHER MEMBERS OF TRANSCENDENTALIST CLUB

Other members of Transcendentalist Club Frederick H. Hedge, Orestes A. Brownson, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody derived inspiration from Indian idealism and tried to propagate Indian ideas and ideals through their writings as well as deeds. Among

them, Alcott was the most zealous propagator. A haunter of libraries he was, he read Wilkins's *The Bhagavad Geeta*, Joseph Marie Degerando's *Comparative History of Philosophical Systems*, Heinrich Ritter's *The History of Ancient Philosophy*, Spence Hardy's *Eastern Monotheism* and other books. The passages on food in *The Bhagavad Geeta* impressed the rabid vegetarian in him. His subsequent experiment of 'Fruitlands' became well known among visionaries. He planned an ambitious project, "Mankind Library", which was to be a series of collected sacred books, including Oriental literature. He was primarily responsible for popularising Edwin Arnold's *Light of Asia* in America.³⁵

2.6 WALT WHITMAN

On reading the first edition of the *Leaves of Grass* written by Walt Whitman, Thoreau commented that the book was "wonderfully like the Orientals." Emerson found in it a mixture of the *Bhagavad Geeta* of the Hindus and the New York Herald. Sir Edwin Arnold and Romain Rolland perceived the Indian parallels in Whitman. Swami Vivekananda read and re-read the "Song of Myself" and concluded that Whitman was a great Sanyasin. Swami Ram Tirtha too found in Whitman a great Sadhu. Rabindranath Tagore declared that no American caught the Oriental spirit so well as Whitman. Anand K. Coomaraswamy pointed out many parallels between Buddhist thought and Whitman's in *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, in his *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, wrote: "Whitman turns to the East in his anxiety to escape from the complexities of civilisation and the bewilderment of a baffled intellectualism".³⁶ V.K. Chari, an authority on this aspect of Whitman, averred: "Whether impelled by native or foreign influences or by his own innate disposition, Whitman came to express in his poems a body of mystical beliefs which are also the fundamental assumptions of the Hindu Advaita Vedanta. The *Leaves of Grass* is to be studied and understood rather as a body of mystical verse comparable to the apocalyptic utterances of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* than as a finished work of art. In respect to some of his fundamental beliefs Whitman approximates the Advaita Vedantic philosophy. In fact, the affinities are so deep that Whitman's writings lend themselves to a consistent interpretation in the light of the Vedanta".³⁷ T.R. Rajasekhariah in *The Roots of Whitman's Grass* confirmed that Whitman read Indian scriptures.³⁸ Thus scholars, both American and Indian, averred that the poetry of Whitman contained many parallels to the philosophical and religious concepts of India. Walt Whitman's admiration for the East is reflected in the following passage! "The East-what a subject for a poem; Indeed where else a more pregnant, more splendid one? The East, answering all lands, all ages, peoples, touching all senses, here, immediate, now-The East-long stretching... the Orient, the gardens of Asia, the womb of history and song... Always the East-old, how incalculably old; And yet here the same-ours yet, fresh as a rose... today and always will be".³⁹ His writings like "Democratic Vistas," "Song of Myself",⁴⁰ "A Broadway pageant",⁴¹ "Song of the Broad Axe",⁴² "Passage to India",⁴³ "Salut au Monde",⁴⁴ "Song of the Redwood Tree",⁴⁵ and "Chanting the Square Deific"⁴⁶ contain the essence of the profound Indian philosophy. Like ancient Indians, Whitman recognised the important role played by sex in life. In "A Backward Glance over Travel'd Roads", Whitman reaffirmed the sexual bias of his book: "*Leaves of Grass* is avowedly the song of sex... The espousing principle of those lines... gives breath of life to my whole scheme".⁴⁷ Like Tantriks, he believed that sexual ecstasy would lead to supraconsciousness. Thus we find considerable impact of Indian thought on Whitman.

2.7 MELVILLE, WHITTIER, & TWAIN

Herman Melville (1819-1891) did a great deal of haphazard reading about the hoary Indian past. Besides Jones's and Wilkins's translations, he was acquainted with W.J. ... "Inquiry into the Religious Tenets and Philosophy of the Brahmins";

and Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities*; Melville's knowledge of Indian mythology is reflected in his works like *Moby dick*.⁴⁹

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), a contemporary of Emerson was also influenced by Indian thought. Besides a copy of *The Bhagavad Gita* lent to him by Emerson, Whittier read Alger's *The Poetry of the Orient*; Clarke's *Ten Great Religions*; Bayard Taylor's *Poems of the Orient*; John Muir's *Metrical Translations from... Sanskrit Writers*; Kendersley's *Specimen's of the Hindu Theatre*; Max Mueller's *Sacred Books of the East*; and Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*. In his poems: "Miriam", "the Cypress Tree of Ceylon," "The Dead Feast of the Kol-Folk," "The Khan's Devil," and "The Browing of Soma," Whittier's admiration for Indian mythology and history is strikingly present.⁵⁰

Mark Twain also showed avid interest in India and Indian culture. In his travelogue entitled *Following the Equator*, he recorded his impressions on his trip to Bombay, Banaras, Allahabad, Darjeeling and Calcutta; his account of his meeting with a Sadhu in Banaras is interesting and instructive. He declared: "India is the only foreign land I ever day dream about or deeply long to see again".⁵¹ "Mark Twain", said John T. Reid, "found Hindu customs, rituals, and traditions a fascinating subject, particularly as he saw them in Banaras. He confesses that he believed Hindu theology to be too intricate for his comprehension, but with the warmth of his human understanding he found in the faith of the Hindus something which he instinctively recognised as genuine and remarkable."⁵²

Thus all the foremost American writers of the nineteenth century were deeply touched by the East. Even later several American intellectuals of exceptional sensibility evinced keen interest in Eastern thought.⁵³

2.8 TWENTIETH CENTURY SCENARIO

In the twentieth century, many great American writers like Eugene O'Neill,⁵⁴ Theodore Dreiser,⁵⁵ John Steinbeck,⁵⁶ T.S. Eliot, and Henry Miller were influenced by Eastern thought.

T.S. Eliot, did courses on Sanskrit, Pali, and Patanjali's *Yogabhashya* under famous indologists like Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and James Haughton Woods at Harvard University. Besides the books on Sanskrit and Pali languages, Eliot read *The Vedas*. *The Principal Upanishads*, *The Ramayana and the Mahabharata*, *Yoga aphorisms of Patanjali*. *The Bhagavad Gita*, texts on Hinayana Buddhism, and Sankaracharya's works like *Vivekachudamani*. His poems like *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*, and his plays like *the Family Reunion* and *The Cocktail Party* reflect his knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism.⁵⁷

Henry Miller (1895-1980), the sage of Big Sur, also belonged to this great tradition. Even a cursory reader of his writings: *The Cosmological Eye*, *Stand Still like the Hummingbird*, *Sunday After the War*, *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn* and other books, would not miss Henry Miller's references to and quotations from Oriental classics, Oriental personalities and Oriental concepts. As an inveterate reader, Miller showed interest in oriental philosophy even at an early age. The writings of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman influenced him to become an ardent admirer and serious student of Eastern culture. In his writings, there are some passages and situations wherein the Oriental influence is direct and unmistakable; in some other places one finds some similarities between Oriental thought and Henry Miller's.⁵⁸

The lives and the works of men like T.S. Eliot and Henry Miller illustrate a tendency in modern times not unlike the Transcendentalism of an earlier day in New England.

"These Transcendentalists," said William York Tindall, "are not a group united by locality or friendship like their predecessors in New England, but they have been forced into a pattern by the times and by their romantic aspiration."⁵⁸ Thus the Great Tradition of Transcendentalism-of love of and admiration for Oriental thought-has been continuing for centuries and, perhaps, will continue forever.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

Transcendentalism emerged as a full-fledged movement of New England thought between 1815 and 1836. The first date marks the maturing of the liberalizing ministry of William Ellery Channing; the second, the publication of Emerson's 'nature', the original and probably the best systematic expression of the Transcendentalist philosophy. The movement continued to expand, first as a revolt against the continuing cultural dependence of America on Europe, and finally as a profound exploration of the spiritual foundations and moral implications of the new democracy. It was orientalism that gave American transcendentalism its distinctive character and tone. Transcendentalism without orientalism is inconceivable. Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Whittier, Twain drew a lot of inspiration from Indian thought. In the 20th century, many great American writers like O'Neill, Dreiser, Steinbeck, Eliot, and Henry Miller were influenced by Indian thoughts. The lives and works of men like T.S. Eliot and Henry Miller illustrate a tendency in modern times not unlike the Transcendentalism of an earlier day in New England. These transcendentalists are not a group united by locality or friendship, but they have been forced into a pattern by the times and by their romantic aspirations.

2.10 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the Transcendentalist movement at length
2. Analyse the influence of Indian thought on Emerson
3. Analyse the impact of Eastern philosophy on Thoreau and Whitman.
4. Discuss the 20th century scenario in terms of Eastern influences.

2.11 NOTES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

1. S.Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* 2nd ed.(1940); rpt. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.251.
2. "For a good many years writers of England and America troubled by the civilization around them, have turned to the East. To some it has meant mystery, color, and freedom from habit; but to more it has promised a spiritual enlargement which the West appears to have denied". From William York Tindall, "Transcendentalism In Contemporary Literature", in *The Asian Legacy and American Life* ed Arthur E. Christy (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p.175.
3. "Indeed the civilization of our modern world is a product of the interchange between the eastern and western hemispheres; and there are peculiar reasons why the American manifestations of the reciprocal contacts are particularly worthy of study. The New World from the time of Columbus, has stood midway between Europe and Asia. It is the laboratory in which many values are tested, the field in which everything from oriental flora and fauna to exotic modes of life and thought is being domesticated". From Arthur E. Christy, "The sense of the past", in *Asian Legacy and American Life*, p.1

4. Also "The Spirit of the East, through the genius of its great thinkers, has been made available to the West and has found interpreters and sympathetic readers through the course of America's literary history. At no time has that interacting influence been greater or of more importance than now" *Studies in American Literature*, p.173.
5. "Even before the Indian doctrines were introduced into the country, there already existed in America a predisposition towards Vedantism". V.K. Chari, "Whitman and Indian Thought" (Banaras: A Ph.D Dissertation submitted at Banaras Hindu University, 1950), p.18. Also "In the American tradition there is an element of mysticism bearing a remote affinity with certain Vedantic concepts" J.P.R. Rayapati, *Early American Interest in Vedic Literature and Vedantic Philosophy* (Bombay: Asia Book House, 1973) p.24
6. Leyla Goren, *Elements of Brahmanism in the Transcendentalism of Emerson* (New York: 1959)
7. Donald N. Koster, *Transcendentalism in America* (Boston: Twayne, 1975), p.5
8. Quoted in *Transcendentalism in America* p.8
9. It means: 'There is one Truth; Scholars describe it in different ways'.
10. Robert E. Spiller, et al, ed., *Literary History of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), p.355
11. Arthur E. Christy, Frederick I. Carpenter, Gay Wilson Allen, Leyla Goren, Dale Riepe, Chaman Lal, Swami Paramananda, S. Radhakrishnan, P.C. Mazoomdar, and V.K. Chari
12. There are some prejudiced critics who understated the importance of Eastern influence.
13. Spiller, *Literary History*, pp.355-356
14. V.K. Chari, "Whitman and Indian Thought". P.29
15. Frederick I. Carpenter, *Emerson and Asia* (Cambridge; Harvard University Press, 1930)", Introduction, p.ix.
16. Critics, both American and Indian recognised the resemblance between Emerson's 'Brahma' and the following sloka of the *Bhagavad Gita*:
ya enam vethi hantaram
yati cai nam manyate hatam
ubhau tau na vijanito
na yam hanti na hanyate (2.19)
(He who thinks that this slays and he who thinks that this is slain, both of them fail to perceive the truth; this one neither slays nor is slain)" S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavad Gita*, 2nd ed. (1970; rpt. Bombay: Blackie & Son (India) Ltd., 1975), p/107.
17. 'Hamatreya' was inspired by a passage of the *Vishnu Purana*. This passage is about the vanity and ignorance of kings who take pride in their possessions and conquests, forgetting that death and the earth will reclaim them.
18. "Illusion works impenetrable
Weaving webs innumbeable.....('Maya')
Emerson's knowledge of the Indian concept of 'Maya' is reflected in his poem 'Maya'.
19. "Without any question, Emerson is the first great American literary figure in whose thought and works the prominent mark of India is evident. In fact, he is probably the first major author of the Western World in whose world view the ideas of Hindu philosophy were clearly and demonstrably etched" *Indian Influences*, p.19.
20. Quoted in Krishnanad Joshi, *The West Looks at India* (Bareilly: Parkash Book Dept., 1969), p.14
21. Quoted *Indian Influences*, p.28
22. "He seldom assimilated any foreign idea till he had come upon it several times. When he did find such an idea to his liking, he copied the significant outline of it into his journals, and gradually absorbed it more completely into his mind. Finally, he reinterpreted it in his Essays, and gave it new connection and meaning". *Emerson and Asia*, p.13

23. Quoted in Arthur E. Christy, *The Orient In American Transcendentalism* (New York: octagon Books Inc., 1963), pp. 263-64
24. Quoted in Frederick I. Carpenter, "American Transcendentalism in India", *Emerson Society quarterly*, II Quarter, 1963, p.59.
25. "...to have shown that Emerson was pre-occupied with oriental thought and that he possessed certain temperamental affinities with it, is far from proving that he accepted the organised Vedanta system in toto. There was much in the system of which he remained ignorant. He took only that which he could accept and mix successfully without inhibitions and preconceptions". *The Orient*, p.182 also, "Emerson was the best of Brahmins only in one sense. Like them he had acquired wisdom and spiritualism partly from their own books. He had reinterpreted their ideas in his essays and poems" and "If Emerson did not accept the whole, of Hindu Literature, he did value the essential spirit of it". *Emerson and Asia*, pp.25-26 and 155.
26. "It has been evident, I believe, that Thoreau not only was well-acquainted with some of the key-books of Hindu thought, but also found in them nutritious food for meditation and even some patterns of living which fitted rather closely with those woven by his own inclinations. It is more doubtful, although possible, that he understood or accepted fully the inmost spirit of the Hindu doctrines". *Indian Influences*, p.42.
27. Quoted in Krishnanad Josh, *The West Looks at India*, p.8.
28. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New Delhi: S. Chand & Co., 1975), p.266
29. Quoted in Walter Harding, *A Thoreau Handbook*, (New York: New York University Press, 1959), p.68
30. "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best, is soon weaisome and dissipating....I never found a companion that was so companionable as solitude". *Walden*, p.27.
31. Quoted in *A Thoreau Handbook*, p.133
32. "Most surprising of all, for his times, was his frequent practice of wading along the steams of Concord in the nude. Modern sunbaths have hailed him as 'the pioneer American nudist'" *A Thoreau handbook*, p.121
33. *Walden*, p.199
34. *Indian Influences*, p.37
35. *Indian Influences*, p.46-47
36. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p.249
37. V.K. Chari "Whitman and Indian Thought", *Western Humanities Review*, 13, No.3 (Summer 1950), 291-301.
38. See T.R. Rajesekhariah, *The Roots of Whitman's Grass* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1970)
39. Quoted in *The West Looks at India*, p.43
40. In his book: *Walt Whitman and Yoga*, O.K. Nambiar proved that Whitman's account in Sec.5 "song of Myself", had described the whole Yogic movement and that the incidents and symbols he referred to were similar to those mentioned in the works on "Kundalini".
41. In "A Broadway Pageant" Whitman characterized the Indians as the race of Brahma and paid glowing tributes to their intense spiritual qualities, hailing the Oriental as the originatress.
42. In this poem, India is referred to by Walt Whitman as "the most ancient Hindustanee"
43. In "Passage to India", the poet celebrated the marriage of intellectual life of the West with the spiritual life of the East.
44. In this poem, with great love he referred to the rivers and the hills of India and visualized the immensity of India in her rivers and hills.
45. In this poem the poet talked about the reputation gained by Indian traders and about the ships coming from and going to India.
46. Whitman in this poem, identified himself with the Hindu god Brahma and says "old Brahma I" and added that he was both ancient and modern and so time did not affect him.

47. Quoted in James E. Miller, Jr. et al, ed. *Start with the Sun: Studies in Cosmic Poetry* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1960), p.28
48. See O.K. Nambiar, *Mahayogi Walt Whitman: New Light on Yoga* (Bangalore: Jeevan Publications, 1978)
49. See Mohamed Elias, "the Indian of Melville and Mark Twain" Trivendrum: A Ph.D. Dissertation, 1977)
50. See *Indian Influences*
51. Quoted in Mohamed Elias, p.68
52. See *Indian Influences*, p.74
53. Arthur Lincoln Forthingam (1859-1923); William James (1842-1920); Charles Rockwell Lanman (1850-1941); Josiah Royce (1855-1916); Henry Clarke Warren (1854-1899); James Haughton Woods (1864-1935); George Foot Moore (1851-1931); Irving Babbitt (1865-1933); George Santayana (1863-1952); John Dewey (1859-1952); Anand K. Coomaraswamy (1863-1947); Maurice Bloomfield (1855-1952); Edward Washburn Hopkins (1857-1963); Robert Ernest Home (1877-1948); Walter Eugene Clark (1881-1960); Franklin Edgerton (1885-1963); Clarence H. Hamilton (1886-); Will Durant (1885-1967); Waldo Frank (1889-1967); George William Brown (1870-1932); Stuart C. Northrop (1893-); Charles William Morris (1901-); Charles A. Moore (1901-1967); Joseph Campbell (1904-85); Christopher Isherwood (1904-85); Gerald Heard (1889-); Dale Riepe (1918-); Alex Wayman (1921-); William Henry Harris (1922-1966); Richard Hugh Robinson (1926-); and several others. Also, "though the early nineteenth century American might have conceived of India as a land of snake charmers, idols, elephants, and mysteriously veiled ladies, a land of extreme wealth and extreme poverty; and of discordant and mutually antagonistic groups of peoples-the end of the century found a much more widespread realization of the richness of its arts, the depth of its culture, the value of its philosophy, and the human quality of its people", and "the interest in the Orient proceeded so rapidly with the turn of the century that it might almost be maintained at the present time that the proper place to study Oriental art is in the American museums from Boston to Seattle-and in the departments of oriental studies in the American universities, from Harvard to the University of California". *Studies in American Literature*, pp.215-216 and 223.
54. His *Marco Millions*, *Lasarus Laughed*, and *the Great God Brown* are suffused with the strong flavour of Eastern thought.
55. See R.N. Mukherjee, "Dreiser's use of Hindu Thought in *the Stoic American Literature*, 43, No.2 (May 1971), 273-78
56. See M.R. Satyanarayana, "the Unknown God of John Steinbeck", *Indian Journal of American Studies*, 3 (June 1973), pp 98-102. Steinbeck's novel, *To a God Unknown* contains references to the *Rig Veda* and some myths of ancient India.
57. In this regard, T.S. Eliot said, "Two years spent in the study of Sanskrit under Charles Lanman, and a year in the mazes of Patanjali's metaphysics under the guidance of James Woods, left me in a state of enlightened mystification". T.S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), pp.40-41. Also, see Damayanti Ghosh, *Indian Thought in T.S. Eliot* (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pusthak Bhandar, 1978); and A.N. Dwivedi "Indian Thought and Tradition in T.S. Eliot's Poetry". (Meerut: A Ph.D. Dissertation submitted at Meerut University, 1973)

UNIT 3 THE OUTSIDER

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Omnivorous Reader
- 3.3 Emotional Life
- 3.4 Beginnings of a Writer
- 3.5 Paris Days
- 3.6 Big Sur Days and After
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Questions
- 3.9 Notes & Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we have discussed the intellectual and emotional aspects of Henry Miller's personality. Also, we have discussed Miller's Paris days, his visit to Greece, his Big Sur days and his writings from the beginning to the end of his life. In other words, we have discussed how Henry Miller started his life as a seeker of truth, how he passed through his life through many phases and experiences, how he became a vagabond, a bohemian, and outsider and how he ultimately reached the stage of a sage.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

I am a sinner and you are a sinner, but someday the sinner will be Brahma again, will someday attain Nirvana, will someday become a Buddha, ... *I learned through my body and soul that it was necessary for me to sin, that I needed lust, that I had to strive for property and experience nausea and the depths of despair in order to learn not to resist them, in order to love the world, and no longer compare it with some kind of desired imaginary world, some imaginary vision of perfection, but to leave it as it is, to love it and be glad to belong to it.*

From Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*¹

The life of everybody is a road to himself, to self realization... No man has ever yet attained to self-realization yet he strives after it, one plodding, another with less effort, as best as he can. Each one carries the remains of his birth, slime and eggshells, with him to the end.

From Hermann Hesse's *Demian*²

There's the sensual me, the philosophical me, the religious me, the aesthetic me, I like to regard myself as many-faceted ... I can talk on different levels. I can talk gutter language and I can talk like an angel.

From Henry Miller's *My Life and Times*³

My emphasis in the last twenty years is in moving from doing to being. *I am more interested in being than doing.*

From Henry Miller's *My Life and Times*⁴

To parents of German descent, Henry Miller was born in the Yorkville section of New York on 26 December 1891.⁵ His father's side consisted of jovial and convivial people while his mother's of austere and abstemious people. Miller seemed to have inherited the best qualities of the people of both sides. When Miller was about a year old, his parents moved to Brooklyn area, Miller went to school there and to the last day of his life retained much of his Brooklyn accent. About his life in the streets of Brooklyn, Miller wrote with nostalgia: "To be born in the street means to wander all your life, to be free. It means accident and incident, drama, movement. It means, above all, dream. A harmony of irrelevant facts which gives your wanderings a metaphysical certitude. In the street you learn what human beings really are, otherwise, or afterwards, you invent them. What is not in the open street is false, derived that is to say literature.../In my dreams I come back to the 14th Ward as a Paranoiac returns to his obsessions".⁶

3.2 OMNIVOROUS READER

Miller was very fond of books even at the school level. *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Romances of Rider Haggard*, *Alice In Wonderland* and other books introduced him to the world of imagination and adventure. Flabbergasted by Miller's love of books, his grandfather complained to his parents that the boy read too much. The stories of his relatives who lived in Germany and other parts of Europe and the lectures of visiting lecturers like Dr. Brown excited him and made him think about distant lands in Asia, Africa, and Europe. As he was a prize pupil, Miller's teachers and neighbours were very fond of him. Even as a boy, Miller was convivial and gregarious and made many friends-one of them being Emil Schnellock. Regarding Miller's penchant for friendship and his friends, Alfred Perles wrote: "Henry had always had a talent for making friends. His sympathy, his enthusiasm, and exuberance were infectious... Although he soon became the hero of the local dead-end kids, he never quite became a dead-end kid himself. He was aloof, curious, and detached... Henry treated his friends with great gentleness and affection, but he was not unaware of their deficiencies and idiosyncrasies.../Although superficially obedient as a child, Henry always went his own way. He picked his friends for reasons of his own, and whether his parents approved of them or not was a matter of indifference to him." Along with his friends-at a later stage-he formed associations such as "Deep Thinkers" and "Xerxes Society." Hockey, Ice-skating, Boxing, Wrestling, Music, and Dance were some of their activities.⁷

Though he was busy with all these activities, the bibliophile in Miller was always active and aggressive. He devoured the Greek classics, the Elizabethan plays, the works of the Restoration period, and the writings of Goethe, Schiller, Coleridge, and Shelley. Miller was so fond of books that he frequently dreamt that he was in possession of a big library. The books he read supplied the food necessary for his thought and imagination. Besides books, the lively theatre of New York also helped him to enliven his imagination.

Miller's financial positions did not allow him to attain his goal of becoming a Yale man. Having failed to get a fellowship at Cornell, he joined as a freshman at City College, New York. The dull academic routine bored the lover of freedom and variety in him and drove him out of the college.

Later, for a period of ten years or more, Miller worked at a great variety of jobs- as dish-washer, bill sticker, book salesman, liquor salesman, typist, librarian, charity worker, insurance collector, mechanic, garbage collector, gymnasium instructor and drifted across the country and back.

During this period, Miller continued his education on his own by reading tomes, attending lectures, and discussing with famous or unknown people. He sometimes

bought books and magazines on his own and sometimes he borrowed books from libraries like Brooklyn Public Library. He read Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, Madame Blavatsky's *the Letters from the Mahatmas*, and the Works of Rabindranath Tagore; he inbibed the philosophies of Heraclitus, Marcus Aurelius, and Petronius; Nietzsche, Bergson, and Spencer; he enjoyed the writings of Jack London, Walt Whitman, Joseph Conrad, and Leo Tolstoy.⁸ The friendship of Stanley Borowski, Emil Schnelllock, William Dewar, and Robert Hamilton Challacombe, profited him immensely. Challacombe,⁹ a believer in Theosophy divined that Miller had a vast reservoir of spirituality within him. He attended the lectures of the ex-evangelist, Benjamin Fay Mills. These lectures deepened his interest in theosophy in particular and spirituality in general. He attended Emma Goldman's lectures religiously and listened to them attentively. Her profound theories of anarchism influenced him. These meanderings in the world of thought and imagination enabled him to discover his vocation, writing. His first serious attempt at writing was an essay on Nietzsche's Anti-Christ. Miller tried to express himself because that was the means by which he could get to know himself and his unknown possibilities. He realized that self-expression would lead first to his evolution as a man and then to self-realization. In 1917 Miller met John Cowper Powys, the author of *Visions and Revisions* and tried to understand his views on self, society and the cosmos. At his father's tailor shop also-where he worked as a tailor for sometime-Miller met men of letters like Frank Harris, Walter Pach and Boardman Robinson. These acquaintances boosted his interest in the writer's profession. In these days he maintained a small note book entitled, "The Intellectual Tailor's Son." The growth of Miller as a thinker can be seen from the following extract taken from his note-book. "To tell the truth, I am getting more disgusted and pessimistic everyday over the situation here in America. It may be that I am living in a narrow sphere, being only a tailor, but from using my powers of observation, I am able to form some judgment of the masses that surround me and I can truthfully say that I loathe them thoroughly. Their own sheer stupidity will be the death of them."¹¹

3.3 EMOTIONAL LIFE

Miller's emotional life-during this period-was full of conflicts and tribulations. He had a sordid affair-for seven years, - with a widow, Pauline who was old enough to be his mother. After disentangling himself from the clutches of the widow, Miller married a pianist, Beatrice who was conservative and pusillanimous. In September 1919, Beatrice gave birth to his daughter, Barbara whose birth compelled him to settle down to a steady job.¹²

3.4 BEGINNINGS OF A WRITER

At Western Union, New York, Miller started at the bottom in the typical American tradition, but after a few months' apprenticeship, he reached the top and became its personnel manager. The man who hired Miller must have sized up his quick perception, his ability to manage people, and his essential toughness.¹³ It was a dull, drab, soul killing and heart-breaking job. He had to interview, hire, and fire messengers everyday. He met all kinds of people-mostly-the desperate and derelict. They educated him in cynicism and humanism; they made him altruistic, compassionate, and even hard-boiled; they enabled him to realize how hollow was the so called successful life. The experience opened his eyes and caused a spiritual reawakening in him. In his *Tropic of Capricorn*, Miller gave a graphic picture of Western Union-which he humorously called the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company or the Cosmoccoccic Telegraph Company in the following manner, "It was a slaughter-house, so help me God. The thing was senseless from the bottom up. A waste of men, material and effort. A hideous force against a backdrop of sweat and misery. The whole system was so rotten, so inhuman, so lousy, so hopelessly corrupt

and complicated, that it would have taken a genius to put any sense or order into it, to say nothing of human kindness or consideration. I was up against the whole rotten system of American labor, which is rotten at both ends"¹⁴

One day the Vice-president of Western Union hinted that Miller might write a sort of Horatio Alger book about the messengers. Miller wanted to take the opportunity to vent his fury against the company and the American dream and to wipe Horatio Alger out of the North American consciousness.¹⁵ In 1922, Miller wrote his first book—"Clipped Wings" during a three week vacation. It was the story of twelve Western Union messengers.¹⁶ The characters were out of Dostoevski: gentle souls, insulted and injured, who run amok or suffer violence; the stories are full of bitterness and horror, ending in murder or suicide, usually both. The book was bad, inadequate, and faulty, the author confessed; but it gave him the necessary urge and impetus to go on writing. "I had to learn," Miller said, "as I soon did, that one must give up everything and not do anything else but write, that one must write and write and write, even if everybody in the world advises you against it, even if nobody believes in you"¹⁸

In 1924, when he firmly decided to be a writer and to give himself to it completely, Miller quit Western Union; he resolved never to take up another job and to live by writing. Walt Whitman had proclaimed himself his "one master absolute" His ardent admirer, Miller wanted to follow his master, Emulating Whitman he peddled his prose-sketches from door to door. During this period, Miller wrote two novels, "This gentile World" (or "Moloch") and "Crazy Cock," which were not published.

By this time Miller had divorced Beatrice and married June, the femme fatale of his autobiographical novels. June encouraged her husband to write, deployed her charms in selling his prose sketches, and supported him financially though she made him suffer a lot in the later phase of their married life.

In 1928 she found the necessary money which permitted her and her husband to spend a year in Europe; the trip opened up new vistas for Miller. He went to Paris again in 1930 to live and write there. Thus the life of a vagabond in New York ended and the life of an expatriate in Paris began.¹⁹

As Ezra Pound proclaimed: "Paris is the laboratory of ideas; it is there that poisons can be tested, and new modes of sanity be discovered. It is there that the antiseptic conditions of the laboratory exist. That is the function of Paris." Dissatisfied and disillusioned with the overwhelming material values, the lack of spiritual depth, the mechanisation, the falsity, the hypocrisy, and the repression that were present in American civilization,²⁰ many an American artist left America to be an expatriate in Paris—the citadel of culture and the El Dorado of artists.²¹ When a number of expatriate Americans were asked: 'why do Americans live in Europe?' they replied as follows "because an artist needs a place away from home '(Gertrude Stein); 'because in America there are no facilities for the enjoyment of leisure' (Halaire Hiler); 'because in Europe there is less interference with one's private life' (McAlmon); 'because in America each citizen functions with pride in the American conspiracy against the individual' (Key Boyle).²² Moreover, the factors such as: a favourable rate of exchange, the ideal conditions for a bohemian life, a chance to criticize one's own country from a distance, and the freedom to make one's life according to personal taste are also responsible for the enticing attraction of Europe for American artists.

3.5 PARIS DAYS

Being a frustrated American artist, Miller found Paris very congenial and ideal for the fulfilment of his ambitions. In an interview, he told George Wickes; "...I found a freedom such as I never knew in America. I found contact with people so much

easier—that is, the people that I enjoyed talking to. I met more of my own kind there. Above all I felt that I was tolerated... In America I never felt that".²³ By the time Miller entered Paris, the prosperous Twenties²⁴ were over and the Great Depression of the Thirties²⁵ just began. During his first two years in Paris, Miller lived in penury; but according to him, starving in Paris was better than thriving in New York; this experience gave him a wealth of new material for his books²⁶. With his wits, his conversational skills and his charm, Miller made several friends and lived on their generosity.²⁷ The education of his senses continued here²⁸. Miller found erotic life in Paris harmonious and joyous. He led the life of a bohemian²⁹ and had adventures and encounters in bars and bedrooms, whorehouses, streets and trains.

With his penchant for friendship, Miller got acquainted with Walter Lowenfels, Samuel Putnam, Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, and John Steinbeck. Michael Frankel, Lawrence Durrell, Alfred Perles, and Anais Nin became his close friends. With his acquaintances and friends, Miller had myriads of discussions and widened his intellectual and spiritual horizons. When he was asked to help a youngman, Millard Fillmore Osman who was a friend of June—in writing his thesis for an advanced degree in Psychology, Miller studied and discussed the intricate problems of Psychology. As a result of his association with Anais Nin, Miller started showing interest in the work of Otto Rank,³⁰ the psychoanalyst and the author of *Art and Artist*, and *The Trauma of Birth*. During this period he kept a 'Dream book', where from he got material later for his novels.³¹

In his emotional life some remarkable developments took place. June visited Paris a number of times, made Miller suffer a lot, and finally got divorce from him. Meanwhile, the friendship between Miller and Anais Nin grew.³² Nin became his benefactor, counsellor, and guide. She persuaded him to believe that he had a destiny to work out but not a fate to suffer;³³ Nin boosted his confidence and encouraged him to complete the projects on his hands.

The major projects that Miller was working on during this period were: revision of *Tropic of Cancer*, and the drafts of *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, and a critical work on D.H. Lawrence.³⁴ His assiduity and the moral as well as material support given by his friends like Anais Nin and Alfred Perles enabled Miller to complete these projects—except the book on Lawrence. The Obelisk Press—owing to the persistent efforts of Miller and his friends—published *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934, *Black Spring* in 1936,³⁶ and *Tropic of Capricorn* in 1939. The publishers later discovered to their amazement that they published three classics. Miller received letters containing favourable comments on all the three books from persons like Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Havelock Ellis. In 1939, having loved nine years in Paris, Miller decided to go on a prolonged vacation and he accepted the invitation of his bosom friend, Lawrence Durrell to spend a few months in Greece³⁶.

Greece impressed Miller immensely. It stirred antediluvial memories in him and opened up new vistas for him. He talked to several persons, well-known like Ghikas and Katsimbalis,³⁷ and unknown persons like factory workers and peasants. He liked the landscape there and enjoyed the climate. He proclaimed to himself that Greece was what the American dream aimed at. His stay in Greece³⁸ for a few months gave Miller the much needed peace and spiritual direction. He left Greece at the end of 1939 and reached America as a repatriate.³⁹

In America also Miller led a vigorous life⁴⁰ but it was full of tranquility and serenity. He had discussions with a number of writers, painters, and philosophers John Dos Passos, Sherwood Anderson, Kenneth Patchen, John Steinbeck, Hilaire Hiler, Aldous Huxley, and Swami Prabhavananda of Vedanta Center, California.⁴¹ *The Cosmological Eye*, a collection of his essays written in Paris, was already published in America by New Directions. Working assiduously Miller produced a number of books, booklets and pamphlets: *The World of Sex* (1940); *The Colossus of Maroussi* (1941); *The Wisdom of the Heart* (1941); *Sunday after the War* (1944); "The plight of

the Creative Artist in the United States of America" (1951); *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945); *Remember to Remember* (1947); *The Smile at the Foot of the Ladder* (1948); *Sexus* (Book one of The Rosy Crucifixion) (1949); *The Books in My Life* (1952); *Plexus* (Book two of the Rosy Crucifixion) (1953); *Quiet Days at Clichy* (1956); *The Time of the Assaisins* (1956); *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1957); *Nexus* (Book Three of The Rosy Crucifixion) (1960); and *To paint is to Love Again* (1960); and *and Still Like the Hummingbird* (1962);

3.6 BIG SUR DAYS AND AFTER

His emotional life during this period-though turbulent at times-led him not to the despair of a vagabond (of New York days) nor to the disillusionment of an outsider (of Paris days) but to the serenity and wisdom of a sage. After his father's death, Anais Nin found Miller to be resigned, mystical, and quiet.⁴² As it was his wont, Miller was asking himself: Where did he come from? Where was he going? Who was he?- the questions of a seeker of truth, especially an Eastern seeker. He made Big Sur-a peaceful, quiet, and isolated area-his home. Miller, as mentioned earlier, wanted to visit India and other Eastern countries and settle somewhere in Nepal or Tibet.⁴³ "Big Sur seemed," Miller wrote to a friend, "the nearest to Tibet one can find in this country of bustle and hustle".⁴⁴ Big Sur was Miller's Walden.⁴⁵ "The idyllic setting of Big Sur quite naturally brought to mind, Thoreau, the American frontier, and Utopian communities".⁴⁶ Soon his legend grew; Big Sur was made a centre of pilgrimage; and Miller became the sage of Big Sur.⁴⁷

In December 1944, soon after moving to Bug Sur, Miller married-for the third time-Janina Martha Lepska. In 1952, after about seven years of married life⁴⁸ with him, Lepska walked out of his life leaving for him two small children to look after. Miller married again in December 1953 and his fourth wife Eve McClure shared some of his child-rearing duties. Harried by enormous correspondence, innumerable visitors and household chores, he could hardly find time to write. When his life in Big Sur became extremely complicated, Miller left it in 1960. Lionised by publishers and writers, he toured Europe for a year. Then he returned to America and found a home in Pacific Palisades, Southern California. Here Miller devoted himself to painting water colours - an art he always loved-and led a very peaceful life till his death on 7 June 1980. *Henry Miller started his life as a seeker of truth; he passed through many phases and varied experiences; he became a vagabond, a bohemian, an outsider; and he ultimately reached the stage of a sage.*⁴⁹

3.7 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed the multi-facted life of Hanry Miller: his intellectual life, his vast reading, his exposure to great thinkers; his emotional life, his liason with a number of women; his life as a writer, and finally Miller reaching the stage of a Sage at Big Sur.

3.8 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Miller's life in Brooklyn days.
2. Analyse Miller's Paris days and their contribution to his development as a writer.
3. Discuss Miller's output as a writer
4. Analyse critically Miller as an Omnivorous reader.

5. Comment on his trip to Greece.
6. "Miller started his life as a seeker of truth, passed through many phrases and varied experience, became a Vegabond, a bohemian, our outside, and finally reached the stage of a sage" Discuss.

3.9 NOTES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha* (Calcutta: Rupa & co., 1972). Pp.150-152
2. Quoted in Colin Wilson, *The Outsider* (Great Britain: Pan Books Ltd., 1978), p.63
3. Henry Miller, *My Life and Times* (New York: Germaine Smith Inc., 1971), p.56
4. Ibid., p.10
5. About his birth, Miller wrote: "Slated for Christmas I was born a half hour too late. It always seemed to me that I was meant to be the sort of individual that one is destined to be by virtue of being born on the 25th day of December, Admiral Dewey was born on that day and so was Jesus Christ..Perhaps Krishnamurti too, for all I know. Anyway that's the sort of guy I was intended to be. But due to the fact that my mother had a clutching womb, that she held me in her grip like an octopus. I came out under another configuration..." Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (Great Britain: Panther Books Ltd., 1975), p.56
6. Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (Great Britain: Panther Books, 1974), p.33
7. Miller wrote about his early years lyrically and vividly in two sections of *Black Spring*: 'the Fourteenth Ward' and 'The Tailor Shop'.
8. About the bibliophile in Henry Miller, George Wickes wrote: "Voraciously and indiscriminately he absorbed works on a wide range of subjects. And he read with the autodidact's sense of discovery, oblivious to received opinion. The result, reflected in *The Books in My Life*, proves a rather erratic liberal education, with emphasis on Oriental mysticism and adventure fiction. Here Bellock and Madame Blavatsky rub elbows with Nietzsche and Spengler". George Wickes, "Henry Miller", in *American Writers*, Vol.III.
9. Miller dwelt on his early associations and their impact on him in the section 'The Theatre' of *the Books In My Life*.
10. As a result of these lectures and his omnivorous reading, Miller "was attracted to all kinds of universalizing ideas-world literature, the one religion' concept, the Spiritus Mundi, universal history and he was always trying to make everything bind together as if his life would become harmonious where his ideas cohered. Sitting in a café with Dewar, George Wright, or Stanley, he could endlessly discuss the possible relations existing between Herbert Spencer and Friederich Nietzsche, Edward Bellamy and Lewis Carroll, Paul Eltbacher's Anarchism and Rider Haggard's Romances, *The Secret Doctrine* and the Figure of Saladia..." *Always Merry and Bright*, p.39.
11. Quoted in *Always Merry and Bright*, p.46.
12. About Miller as job hunter, Kenneth Rexroth wrote:"...he had the typical spirit of a young white collar worker, living in a furnished room, migrating from job to job in the jungle of the city, a life only marginally distinguished from that of hustlers, scufflers, and drifters, the lightweight, white collar underworld", Kenneth Rexroth, "Henry Miller" in *Contemporary Novelists*, ed. James Vinson (London: St. James Press, 1976), p.6.
13. George Wickes, "Henry Miller", p.173.
14. *Tropic of Capricorn* pp.18-19.
15. Ibid., p.32.
16. Earlier, for one or two years, Miller wrote critiques on the stories published in the magazine "the Black Cat", which were published in the same magazine; Steadily he became the star critic of "the Black Cat" and won a little money and fame.

17. George Wickes, "Henry Miller", pp.176-177.
18. *Tropic of Capricorn*, p.32.
19. When Miller passed from one stage to another, his evolution-like that of the hero Siddhartha of Hermann Hesse-was fast and steady.
20. Miller's attack upon America-which is a major theme in his work-is a part of a larger crusade against the modern, mechanised civilization.
21. Regarding the atmosphere in Europe which is congenial for an artist, Miller wrote: "They (artist) prefer their own way of life even if it entails poverty, bitterness, defeat. Dollars do not inspire artists, nor do they sustain them. It takes something new, something infinitely better, something which quite obviously we are not able to offer. What that something is you feel every minute of the day in Europe". *Remember to Remember*, pp.315 and 318.
22. Quoted in Frederick J. Hoffman. *The Twenties: American writings in the post-War Decade* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), p.32.
23. George Wickes, "Henry Miller", in *Writer's at Work: The Paris Review Interviews: Sound Series*, ed. Van Wyck Brooks (New York: The Viking Press, 1963), p.178.
24. "The 1920's were marked by a disrespect for tradition and an eager wish to try out any new suggestions regarding the nature of man-his personal beliefs, convictions, or way to salvation", said Frederick J. Hoffman in *The Twenties* (p.14) The other hallmarks of the 20's are: expatriation; bohemianism; revolt against the bourgeoisie and the puritans; the popularity of psychoanalysis and Freudian theories and an insatiable curiosity about sex.
25. Though Miller lived in Paris during the Thirties most of the salient features of the Twenties were conspicuously present in him.
26. Graphic descriptions of Miller's life in Paris are available in his *Tropic of Cancer*.
27. Writing about his life and his friends in Paris, Miller remarked "the three principal questions we put to each other every time we met were: 1) is there food? 2) Was it a good lay? 3) Are you writing? Everything centered around these three exigencies". *Remember to Remember*, p.350.
28. Regarding the education of his senses, Miller was like the hero Siddhartha of Hermann Hesse's novel who said "Everything is necessary, everything needs only my loving, understanding; then all is well with me and nothing can harm me", *Siddhartha*, pp.151-152.
29. About the bohemian life, Hoffman wrote: 1) It was a rebellion against authority: the bohemian preferred to become a literary anarchist rather than endure authority he did not respect; 2) it was an attempt, however poor, to find the ideal life and the free one-that is when the attempt was genuine and not mere taking; 3) it was a natural result of the defeat of respect and prosperity that the war had caused". *The Twenties*, p.21.
30. In *The Diary of Anaïs Nin*, we find the details about Miller's personal relationship with Anis Nin and the profound influence of Rank on Miller and Nin in the early thirties. Also, as Gordon said: "Rank was especially important to Miller because he emphasised the self-construction aspects of personality.../When we add Rank's theory of the birth trauma and its ramifications to the theory of the artist, we have the main outlines of Miller's principal themes". *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*, p.50.
31. During the period, Miller prepared a time table for his work and stuck to it as scrupulously as Benjamin Franklin. He tried to organise his life for attaining his goals. He wanted to become more than a writer-a great man, a saint. He knew quite well that writing was merely an instrument through which he was practising sainthood.
32. The marriage of Miller and Nin did not materialise owing to financial reasons.
33. About the outsider - men like Henry Miller who are different, in many ways, from millions and millions of their fellow human beings-Colin Wilson wrote as follows and his description applied aptly to Miller: "the outsider's way of salvation, then, is plainly implied. His moment of insight he must formulate laws that will enable them to move towards his goal in spite of losing sight of

it. It is unnecessary to add that these laws will apply not only to him, but to all men, their goal being the same as his", and "Let the outsider accept without further hesitation: 'I am different from other men because I have been destined to something greater; let him see himself in the role of predestined prophet, or world-betterer, and a half of the outsider's problems have been solved". *The Outsider*, pp.71-72 and 154.

34. This book was later published posthumously in 1980 with the title: *The World of Lawrence*.
35. A detailed discussion of the criticism on Miller and his work can be found in *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*.
36. About the importance of Paris days in Miller's life, George Wickes wrote: "It is hard to imagine Miller without Paris. French culture suited him as no one would have done; it liberated him and permeated him, satisfying his psychic and artistic needs." George Wickes, "Henry Miller", p.177
37. Miller described his experiences and spiritual development that took place in Greece in his book, *The Colossus of Maroussi*.
38. Jay Martin wrote "What Gorguin had found in Tahiti and D.H. Lawrence in Mexico, Miller had experienced in Greece". *Always Merry and Bright*, p.370.
39. The Second World War was responsible for Miller's repatriation to America.
40. The period covered under this section is forty years from the date of Miller's repatriation to America in 1940 till his death in 1980.
41. Miller wrote in eulogising terms about Swami Prabhavananda-a holy man in *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (p.18) Gerald Heard (now Swami Vidyatmananda of Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, France) in his letter dated 2 October 1989) to the author confirmed that Miller had met the Swamiji before 1950.
42. Quoted in *Always Merry and Bright*, p.385.
43. In his letters to Anais Nin and Lawrence Durrell, he mentioned that he had invitations from institutions like Sri Ramakrishna Mission for settling down in Nepal or Tibet.
44. Quoted in *Always Merry and Bright*, p.405.
45. Miller described his life in Big Sur in his book, *Big Sur and The Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*(1957). Further, as Ihab Hassan wrote: "the theme of Big sur is reconciliation, reconciliation to everything. Stay out and watch the world go round; if there are flaws in your paradise, open the windows, Miller cries." Ihab Hassan, *the Literature of Silence: Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1967), p.43.
46. George Wickes, "Henry Miller", p.139
47. Regarding Miller's life in Bug Sur, Jay Martin wrote "...there was more love, and certainly more companionship and mutual collaboration than sex. Sex was not by any means out of Henry's mind, but he was bent on fashioning a new public image, as a happy clown and a man of wisdom. *He corresponded with Krishnamurti* (on stationery emblazoned with his own photo), he wrote a Yemen amulet which Schatz had given him; he practiced sainthood in public. He rid himself of all desire for success. He rejected offers that he had once solicited...." *Always Merry and Bright*, p.425.
48. In Miller's life, this period of association for seven years recurred in his relationship with Pauline, Beatrice, June, Lepski, and even Eve; this cycle of seven years is quite enigmatic; Miller got separated from Eve in 1960-after about seven years of married life with her. He married again; his fifth wife, Hoki Tokuda was a Jazz pianist.
49. In Indian mythology and history, there are many instances of persons who had started their lives as "sinners" but became saints ultimately, Valmiki the author of the *Ramayana* in Sanskrit, rose from the stage of a dacoit to that of a poet-saint. Bilvamangala transformed his lust for a woman into devotion for the Almighty. Vemana, a famous Telugu poet, rose from the level of a womaniser to that of a yogi.

UNIT 4 THE INDELIBLE IMPACT

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Eastern Influences: Comments by critics
- 4.3 External and internal Evidence
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions
- 4.6 Notes & Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will mainly discuss impact of Eastern thought on Henry Miller. Also we will analyse the external and internal evidence.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

One of the most mysterious of all the intangibles in life is what we call influences.

—Henry Miller in *The Books in My Life*

What were the subjects which made me seek the authors I love, which permitted me to be influenced, which formed my style, my character my approach to life? Broadly these: understanding, mystery... the purpose of existence, the oneness of every thing, self-liberation, the brotherhood of man, the meaning of love, the relation of sex to love, the art,... mysticism more particularly the mystics themselves, the varieties of faith and worship.

—Henry Miller in *The Books in My Life*

It is clear that influence is not so much a thing that bears down on one accidentally, out of a blue sky, as it were, but a thing one seeks, every truly influential influence is sought, willed, conjured up. And it is in the make-up of the individual that we must look for the reason why one kind of influence is desired rather than another.

—Alfred Perles in *My Friend Henry Miller*

An inveterate thinker and incorrigible quester he was, Henry Miller questioned himself: "What is life?" "Who am I?" "What is the meaning of this activity? To what end?" to arrive at appropriate answers, Miller studied many a philosophy of the West as well as the East. From Plato's Dialogues to the existential philosophy of Nietzsche, Sartre and Camus; from the esoteric sutras of Upanishadic seers to the anarchic writings of Emma Goldman; the Buddhist literature, the Tantra of Tibet, the Advaita of Adi Sankara, the Raamakrishna-Vivekananda literature, and the lofty thought of J. Krishnamurti.

4.2 EASTERN INFLUENCES: COMMENTS OF CRITICS

The writing of Henry Miller are permeated with the aroma of Eastern thought, Renowned critics, both American and Indian, have acknowledged the presence of Oriental element in his writings—"My greatest neglect...", declared William A.

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Gordon, "seemed to be of the Oriental thought which had been important for Miller from the earliest times. That aspect of his work remains a field for investigation". Lawrence Durrell stated that one might ascribe Miller's intellectual pedigree partly to Bergson and Spengler, partly to Freud, and partly to Hindu and Chinese religion. While discussing the influences on Henry Miller, Karl Shapiro averred: "Like a true poet, he (Henry Miller) found his way to Rimbaud, Ramakrishna, Blavatsky, Huysmans, Count Keyserling, Prince Kropotkin, Lao-tse, Nostradamus, Petronius, Rabelais, Suzuki, Zen Philosophy" Else where the same critic stated categorically that Miller frequently immersed himself in modern Indian mystics like Krishnamurti and Ramakrishna, without any of the flop-doodle of the cultist. Another critic, Alwyn Lee testified that Miller had peopled his private world with Blake and Madame Blavatsky, Rimbaud and Abe Rattner, Buddha and Anais Nin, Christ and Swami Vivekananda. About Miller the following is written in Contemporary Authors: "Miller has always been attracted to Eastern religious systems. Durrell believes that 'only those holy men (of the East) would be able to read his spiritual adventure without prejudice and would regard his books as a spiritual autobiography.'" Alfred Perles, a close friend of Henry Miller proclaimed that no Chinaman, no Hindu, could be so wildly enthusiastic about the marvels of the Orient as a simple American with the peculiar spiritual make-up of a Henry Miller. D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu too acknowledged the Indian impact on Miller.

4.3 EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Miller himself reiterated categorically that he was influenced by Eastern thought. "Way back when I was 21 years of age, I became acquainted with an Indian theosophist in California, Swami Vivekananda was the most powerful influence on me. He was a flaming sword. Years later I read Ramakrishna's books and gained better understanding of life," Miller told Kunhi Krishnan, an Indian interviewer. In a letter to William A. Gordon, Miller wrote that persons like Milarepa, Swami Vivekananda, Krishnamurti, Jacob Bohme and Madame Blavatsky influenced him profoundly.

Further, in his letter to his friend, Lawrence Durrell, Miller averred: "Influences... My loyalty and adoration have been constant for the same men, all through my life: Whitman, Emerson Thoreau, Rabelais, above all. I still think that no one has ever had a larger, freer, heal their view of man and his universe than Walt Whitman. If my memory serves me right, here is my genealogical line: Boccaccio, Petronious, Whitman, Emerson Thoreau, ... Romain Rolland, Plotinus, Heraclitus, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, (...) ... D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Ellie Faure, Oswald Spengler, ... Balzac... everything I read on Zen Buddhism, *everything I read about china, India, Tibet, Arabia, Africa....*"

Further, while discussing the part played by books in his life, Miller mentioned the following under the title: "*The Hundred Books which inflenced Me Most*" Siddhartha by Hermann Hesse; Tao The Ching by Lao Tse; The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna by Esoteric Buddhism; A.P. Sinneh; Kirshnamurti by Carolo Saures; Zen Buddhism by D.T. Suzuki; Prophets of The New India by Romain Rolland and The Secret Doctrine by Madame Blavatsky. Miller's other favourite books are: the biographies of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda by Roamin Rolland; Kamasutra by Vatsayana; Ananga Ranga by Kalyan Mallah; The Spirit of Zen by Alan Watts; the translations of the Ramayana the Mahabharata, the Bhagvad Gita and the Dhammapada.

Besides these sources, Henry Miller derived Eastern wisdom from the Hindu messenger boys at the Telegraph company, New York where Miller worked as its manager; the Swamijis of Vedanta Centre, California and of other branches of Sri Ramakrishna Mission, friends like David Edgar, Christopher Isherwood, and Aldous

Huxley, the writings of Emerson Thoreau and Whitman, and the writings of contemporary Indophiles like Aldous Huxley, Ellie Faure and Erick Howe.

It is no exaggeration to say that very few Indians have more love for India, more admiration for and more interest in Indian scriptures, and more adoration for Indian thinkers than Henry Miller. "The very mention of such words as Bengal, Gujarat, Malabar coast, Kali-ghat, Nepal, Kashmir, Sikh, Bhagavadgita, Upanishads, raga, stupa, Prakriti, ...guru, Hanuman, Shiva, was enough to put me in a trance for the rest of the evening proclaimed Miller.

Moreover, Miller was so much infatuated with the East that he wanted to migrate to Tibet or Nepal or any other place near the Himalayas. In a letter (dated 25 October 1938) he wrote to Lawrence Durrell: "... if I could get to that Tibetan frontier, either side, if I could live somewhere there in the Himalayas I haven't the slightest doubt but that I would be content for the rest of my life". In another letter (dated 15 September 1943) Miller informed Durrell that he was offered hospitality in a Ramakrishna Vivekananda Centre situated on the border of Nepal.

Among the modern thinkers of the East, Miller admired and adored Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and J. Krishnamurti most—though he had some admiration for Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi. On one hand condemning America for its materialism, Miller extolled Sri Ramakrishna in *The Air Conditioned Nightmare*: "I was full of Ramakrishna on leaving Pittsburg, Ramakrishna, who never criticized, who never preached, who accepted all religions, who saw God everywhere in everything, was the most ecstatic being, I imagine, that ever lived"

Speaking about Swami Vivekananda, Miller went into raptures: "I had just been reading Rolland's book on Vivekananda. I had put it down because I couldn't read anymore, my emotions were so powerful. The passage which roused me to such a state of exaltation was the one in which Rolland describes Vivekananda's triumphant return to India. No monarch ever received such a reception at the hands of his countrymen; it stands unique in the annals of history. And what he had done, Vivekananda, to merit such a welcome? He had made India known to America; he had spread the light. And in doing so he had opened the eyes of his countrymen to their weaknesses. All India greeted him with open arms; millions of people prostrated themselves before him, saluting him as a saint and savior, which he was. It was a triumph of love, of gratitude, of devotion. I am coming back to him later, to his clear, powerful words spoken like a fearless champion not of India but of the human race." Miller's admiration knew no bounds when he wrote about J. Krishnamurti, a contemporary Indian philosopher. In *The Books In My Life*, he devoted an entire chapter to Krishnamurti, "There is a name I have withheld", exhorted Miller, "which stands out in contrast to all that is secret, suspect, confusing, bookish and enslaving. Krishnamurti. Here is one man of our time who may be said to be a master of reality, he stands alone. He has renounced more than any man I can think of, except the Christ, Fundamentally he is so simple to understand that it is easy to comprehend the confusion which his clear, direct words and deeds have entailed.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

All the afore-mentioned information evokes an interesting question: what were the factors responsible for Miller becoming a serious student and ardent admirer of Eastern philosophies and personalities? To answer: 1. Like the other great transcendentalists Miller had a catholic and eclectic mind which made him responsive and sensitive to all great thought irrespective of region or religion. 2. Like any great thinker, Miller had a speculative and philosophical bent of mind. His pursuit of Truth, his longing for the unknown, and his zeal for self-realization forced him to

look into Eastern literatures—for finding answers to his enigmatic philosophical questions.

While the aforementioned factors were innate in Miller's personality, there were some external factors such as the following:

1. The presence and the impact of the Transcendental, the Theosophical, and the Ramakrishna–Vivekananda movements.
2. The enriching Eastern philosophies themselves entice all great thinkers.
3. The disillusionment caused by the materialism of West and the havoc created by the two world wars compelled more of the Western thinkers to turn to East and Eastern thinkers. Whatever may be the reasons, Miller's admiration for Oriental philosophies and personalities is unquestionable and the Eastern impact on Miller is indelible.

4.5 NOTES & SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Henry Miller, *The Books in My Life* (London Peter Owen Limited, 1961). p. 33.
2. Ibid., p. 125.
3. Alfred Perles, *My Friend Henry Miller* (London: Neville Spearman, 1955), p. 216
4. Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (Grea: Britain: Panther Books Ltd. 1974), p. 283.
5. Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (Great Britain: Panther Books Ltd., 1974), p. 283.
6. Henry Miller, *The Air Conditioned Nightmare*. (New York: New Directions, 1970).
7. The Books Miller read and the movements of thought he was influenced by are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.
8. In *The Wisdom of the Heart* (New York: New Directions, 1960), Henry Miller wrote about the psychoanalyst, E. Graham Howe: "Many influences, of astounding variety, have contributed to shape his philosophy of life which, unlike most philosophies, takes its stance in life, and not in a system of thought. His view embraces conflicting world-views; there is room in it to include all of Whitman, Emerson, Thoreau, as well as Taoism, Zen Buddhism, astrology, and so forth. It is a thoroughly religious view of life, in that it recognises 'the supremacy of the unseen.' Emphasis is laid on the dark side of life on all that which is negative passion...mysterious, and unknowable" (p. 35). Henry Miller's analysis of the renowned psychanalyst is aptly applicable to himself.
9. Elsewhere Gordon said: "He (Henry Miller mentioned from time to time various Oriental philosophies especially the ideas of the Tao and of Zen Buddhism... Two books for which Miller expressed admiration will show sufficiently his use of Oriental Philosophy: *The Spirit of Zen*, by Alan Watts and *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse. *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*. p. 73.
10. William A Gordon, *Writer & Critic: A Correspondence with Henry Miller* (Baton Rouge; Louisiana State university, 1968), 'Introduction', p. xii.
11. Lawrence Durrell, "Studies in Genius: 'Henry Miller'" in *Henry Miller and The Critics* ed. George Wickes (Carbondale; Southern Illinois University Press, 1966)p. 89.
12. Karl Shapiro, "The Greatest Living author: In Defense of Ignorance" in *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Edward Mitchell (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 78.
13. Karl Shapiro, "The Greatest Living Patagonian" in *Start with the Sun; Studies in Cosmic Poetry*. p. 203.

14. Alwyn Lee, "The pathology of isolation", in *Henry Miller; Three Decades of Criticism*, p. 68. Also the same critic observed; "Among the photographs on his wall are those of Krishnamurti and Rimbaud (He is remarkably like Yeats in these matters...), p. 73.
15. Clare D. Kinsman and Mary Ann Tennen Mouse, eds., *Contemporary Authors*, Vol. 9-12 (First Revision) (Detroit: Gale Research Company 1974), p. 628.
16. *My Friend Henry Miller*, p. 217.
17. D.V.K.Raghavacharyulu, "Indian influence on American Writers", *Trivent*, 42, No. 3 (October-December 1973), 47-52.
18. T.V.Kunhi Krishnan, "Miller Karma Yogi or Sexualist?" (An Interview with Miller in New York) *Hindustan Times*, 23 June 1980 p. 7.
19. In his correspondence with Willam A. Gordon, the author of *The Mind and Art of Henry Miller*, Miller repeatedly referred to Indian influence.
20. Alfred Perles wrote "....David Edgar... who initiated Miller into the secrets of the Bhagvad Gita, the occult writings of Madame Blavatsky, The spirit of Zen and the doctrines of Rudolf Steiger...." *My Friend Henry Miller*, p. 132.
21. In his letter (dated 19 May 1941) the Anais Nin, Miller wrote: "Well I see Huxley tomorrow and perhaps Isherwood and perhaps Gerald Heard too." Gunther Stuhlmann, ed. *Henry Miller Letters to Anais Nin* (London Peter Owne, 1965), p. 290.
22. The influence of the great transcendentalists: Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman on Miller is conspicuous in his writings. He frequently referred to them and called them his 'Gurus'
23. See Henry Miller *Nexus*, p. 264.
24. Henry Miller, *Black spring* p. 179.
25. Geore Wickes, ed. *Lawrence Durrel and Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence* (Newyork: E. Dutton & Co., 1962). p. 139.
26. George Wickes, ed., *Lawrence Durrel and Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence*, p. 175.
27. Among the ancient Eastern thinkers, Miller adored Gautama and Buddha, Lao-tse, and the Zen masters most.
28. Miller referred to Rabindranath Tagore and his Santiniketan a few times in his writings. At one place, he said "I had hundreds of extraordinary messages from extraordinary people, not the least of them coming from an Indian guru.... That and the one from Tagore via a mutual firebrand Hindu communist friend (...) are outstanding in my memory". *Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller: A Private Correspondence*.
29. Karl Shapiro said that Miller was a Gandhi with a penis.
30. *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare*, p. 14 Also, Miller wrote elsewhere: "The greatest face of all perhaps because it was registered in ecostasy is that of Ramakrishna. Take one good look at this face and you will understand why men of God are joyous men. The eyes are everything. All holy men have dear, spherical, untroused eyes. Often they are like the eyes of a dove." *Remember to Remember* p. 104.
31. Miller wrote about Swami Vivekananda's triumph in America in the following eulogising terms: "About Detroit... it was here that Swami Vivekananda kicked over traces. Some of you who read this may be old enough to remember the stir be created when he spoke before the Parliament of Religions in Chicago back in the early Nineties. The story of the pilgrimage of this man who electrified the American people reads like a legend. At first unrecognised, rejected, reduced to starvation, and forced to beg in the streets, he was finally hailed as the greatest spiritual leader of our time..." *The Air Conditioned nightmare* p. 18.
32. *Ibid.* p 28.
33. In a letter to Lawrence Durrell (dated 17 December 1945), Miller wrote; "Have just been reading Krishnamurti. Ten Talks.... Expect to visit him very soon. He is about 150 miles away." *Lawrence Durrell and Henry Miller A Private correspondence*, p. 214. In the same vien, he wrote in *The Books in My Life* "I have never met Krishnamurti, though there is no man living

whom I would consider it a greater privilege to meet than he. The Books in My Life. p. 152.

34. The Books in My Life. Pp 151.

35. A detailed study of this aspect of the other great transcendentalists is present in unit 2.

36. In this regard Alfred Perles said: "... Miller's leaning towards the mysterious the occult, and the esoteric East, are conditioned, I should say, by the polarity of his nature..." *My Friend Miller* pp. 216-217.

37. In a letter to Alfred Perles, Miller stated: 'my whole life is a kind of sparkling activity. I spark. I don't glow steadily, like a Sun. Hence my adoration for the sages, the masters, the great teachers of life. The truth is that from a very early age this thought formed itself and led me to seek out strange individuals, strange books, even strange adventures.' *Art and Outrage*, p. 57.

UNIT 5 MILLER'S WORKS: BLACK SPRING

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Bibliography of Miller
- 5.3 Critical Analysis of Millers works
- 5.4 *Black Spring*: Plot and Narrative Technique
- 5.5 Style in *Black Spring*
- 5.6 Let us sum up
- 5.7 Questions
- 5.8 Notes and Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this course is to critically analyse some of the major works of Henry Miller in general and *Black Spring* in particular.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Henry Miller was a prolific writer He wrote autobiographical novels (auto-novels), essays, treatises, reminiscences, letters, and travelogues. We will analyse in the following sections some of the major works of Miller.

5.2 BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MILLER

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5.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MILLER'S WORKS

Henry Miller writes in two main genres. His work is almost evenly divided between narrative and expository modes. He is best known for his narrative works such as *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Capricorn*, *Sexus*, *Plexus*, *Nexus*, etc. Critics have usually treated these books as novels, because Miller's method is that of fiction, but Miller has always insisted that he is writing autobiography or

autobiographical novels or auto-novels. Miller appears in them primarily in the familiar role of the artist-hero who dominates modern fiction. They might be described as confessions and the method is picaresque. They are confessions in Rousseau's sense of the word—introspective, autobiographical monologues like those of Rousseau. Miller usually tries to argue a thesis from his personal experience.²

The expository writings are harder to classify. They would usually be defined as essays, but they assume a variety of forms: letters, criticism, travel, portraiture, anecdotes, reminiscences, opinions. The personal essay admits plenty of latitude, which Miller has used, incorporating a good deal of narrative technique. The essays represent Miller in his shorter flights of imagination, and most commonly serve as a vehicle for his ideas, or rather, opinions. Most of them were originally written for periodicals and later collected for publication in book form. Miller himself has no use for literary genres – or literary criticism for that matter. To him all of his work expresses a man.

The richest period of Miller's writing career is also the most varied. This is the period he spent in Paris and its immediate aftermath. In a volcanic creative outburst, he produced stories, articles, books, at the rate of a volume a year. During this decade, he wrote the three picaresque narratives generally regarded as his best and most characteristic works namely, *Tropic of Cancer*, *Black Spring*, and *Tropic of Capricorn*. He also wrote two books in epistolary form: *Aller Retour New York* and *Hamlet* (the latter in collaboration with Michael Frankel); he wrote several stray pamphlets and articles, and stories to fill two miscellanies: *Max* and *The White Phagocytes*, and *The Wisdom of the Heart*. Upon his return to New York in 1940, he wrote a manifesto entitled *The World of Sex*; and the narratives that constitute *Quiet Days in Clitchy* and an account of his visit to Greece in 1930: *The Colossus of Maroussi*. We will give a critical analysis of some of the major works ut infra.

- A) *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) is an account of the adventures and encounters of an American in Paris—Written in the first person and the present tense, it conveys a strong sense of the speaking voices and the continuing moment. The narrator is named Henry Miller and the technique is basically interior monologue, reporting successive states of mind as they occur, with all the fragmentary nature of the true stream consciousness, a hodge podge of incidents, memories, hallucinations, rights, ruminations, conversations, nightmares. There are frequent interruptions and shifts, back and forth in time, or altogether out of time into dream and fantasy. The disorder is intentional. Miller wanted "to get off the gold standard of literature", to write as he spoke, and to revise nothing that he had written. Behind his bewildering technique, there is some organization, however. The structure is roughly chronological, with distinct episodes succeeding each other following the calendar from autumn to summer. The book is also divided into chapters, unnumbered and untitled, but each with a name. Then there is the overriding theme of "cancer and delirium". These organising principles are not readily apparent, the first impression created by this book is one of chaos, with the first chapter being the most chaotic. In fact, the uninitiated reader is likely to win the underlying themes altogether, for what is far more striking at first is Miller's intention to write "all that which is omitted in books." The reaction of many readers is shock; others are unimpressed by Miller's attempt to shock: still others are bored. But those who can accept obscenity calmly can find meaning behind it.³
- B) *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), the third of Miller's personal narratives - you may note here that *Black Spring*, the prescribed novel, is the second of Miller's narratives - is more strictly autobiographical whereas *Tropic of Cancer* portrayed the author-narrator living in the eternal present, *Tropic of*

Capricorn goes back to the years he had discovered himself as a writer. In trying to explain how and why he became a writer, he reviews more than thirty by years of his past experience. He succeeds mainly in conveying his sense of alienation from American life. Capricorn, the sign of the zodiac symbolizes his destiny and complements the rich symbolism of cancer. For, cancer is not only the symbol of disease and corruption, it is also the zodiacal sign of the poet and the versatile: maneuverable crab "opposite cancer in the zodiac extremes (of the Equinox – turning points) is capricorn." Miller wrote in a letter to Anais Nin at the time he was finishing his second Tropic: — "the house in which I am born, which is religious and represents renaissance in death. Cancer also means for me the disease of civilization, the extreme point of realization along the wrong paths— hence the necessity to change one's course and begin all over again."⁴ Also, it is the dominant theme of resurrection which runs all through the work in man: images of suffering, death, and revival as well as more explicit allusions. In *Tropic of Capricorn*, the character he presents is that of the solitary, self-reliant-rogue, at odds with society, improving his life from day to day, accepting wind falls or hard knocks as they come. The narrative alternates between good luck and bad; the windfalls are usually sexual, the misfortunes his sufferings as an alienated individual. Since his luck is often good, it is hard to take his sufferings too seriously.⁵

- C) Five miscellanies present Miller in a new guise as a critic. In *The Cosmological Eye*, he admires the mystic perception akin to madness that produces visionary paintings. Miller makes an excellent critic of the visual arts. He has the years of appreciation, the understanding of the media, the taste, and the ability to express his vision that make a successful critic. The two major literary essays in *Max and the White Phagocytes*, both provocative, nevertheless reveal certain limitation. *The Wisdom of the Heart* (1941) is the best source for his reflection on philosophy and its expression in art-philosophy in a broad sense, embracing psychology and mysticism, the book includes two essays on Balzac, whose illuminism appealed profoundly to Miller. *Sunday after the War* (1944) is noteworthy for its three selections from *Sexus*, then unpublished. *Stand still like the Humming Bird* (1962) sweeps together as a very uneven collection of essays, mostly on literary subjects.⁶
- D) *The Colossus of Maroussi* is one of Miller's finest books. The visit to Greece had been a high moment in his life, deeply affecting him in a number of ways. His account is much like a travel book, though it dramatically conveys the spirit of place through the observer's personal intuitions. To Miller Greece was a holy land that aroused all his religious awe. Miller's experience of the sacred places of Greece is deliberately unhistorical; what he wanted was not archeology or history but a feeling of kinship with the men of the past. Disheartened by his own time, Miller preferred to take a millennial view of the human race. In Miller, Greece not only stirred antediluvian memories, it opened up several new worlds. It was both ancient and modern, with its pastoral landscape and the cities like Athens being a blaze of electric lights. Also, the book is a record of great friendship and casual encounters with ordinary folk, with whom he communicated effectively by pantomime.⁷ He is most intolerant of the American Greeks he meets every where he goes, who appreciate the worst of American materialism and nothing of their own culture. Underlying many of his attitudes is the war – the final proof that the modern world is dehumanized and death-driven.
- E) The same attitudes pervade another travel book, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945). When Miller returned after a stay of ten years in Europe, he decided to tour the United States and record his impressions as he went. He spent a year zigzagging across the country and back. His account of the

journey is as erratic as his route. It would hardly serve as a guide to the United States, but it provides a good index to Miller's opinions. He is mainly appalled by his native land. The country is magnificent but the people are dead – all but the Negroes, Red Indians, and an occasional non conformist. The American way of life has created a spiritual and cultural waste land, with its obsession for objects and money, its modern conveniences, advertising, radio programs, movies, comic stories, battle ships, bombs, and canned foods. For all its anathemas, *The Airconditioned Nightmare* is a thoroughly American book. Miller rages because he is truly American, because he believes in the national ideal with a fundamentalist fervor. The book is very American in flavor. The very notion of a transcontinental odyssey is in the best native tradition, with unexpected adventures and excursions off the beaten track a part of the pattern.⁸

- F) Miller planned originally to write two volumes of *The Air Conditioned Nightmare*, but like many of his projects, the one had a way of changing as it went along. The second volume, *Remember to Remember* (1947) is a sequel only in the sense that it preserves the same man airing similar opinions. Both volumes are miscellaneous collections of sketches. The second is built around persons rather than places, for Miller's travel had ended in 1944, when he settled in Big Sur. Here again, as in the earlier volume, he makes a point of discovering unsung genius and prefers to believe that the genuine artist is always unrecognized.

- G) *Quiet Days in Clichy* (1940), as the title suggests, narrates personal experiences of the early forties when Miller was living in Clichy with his friend, Perles. The material is similar to that of *Tropic of Cancer*. It is good story telling and realistic reporting; but it has none of the vehemence that made the *Tropic of Cancer* "a cry of passionate protest", and none of the ecstasy and none of the heightened subjective vision that informed the earlier writing.

- H) *The World of Sex* (1957) is the *biographia literaria* of Henry Miller – a key statement that defines the role of sex in his writings and in his life written at midpoint in his career as a kind of postscript to *Tropic of Capricorn*, it serves to explain his purpose in that book and to introduce the other autobiographical volumes that are to follow.⁹

- I) *Sexus, Plexus, and Nexus*, taken together (called *The Rosy Crucifixion*) are simply an enormously expanded *Tropic of Capricorn*. The three volumes of the trilogy differ considerably. *Sexus* is the most obscene of all Miller's works, and the *Sexus* episodes which alternate regularly with neutral passages, often seem gratuitous. The other two volumes contain hardly any obscenity. *Sexus* is also the most disorganized with constant digressions, reminiscences, and other excursions, interrupting the main thread. In *Plexus* and *Nexus*, the narrative becomes more factual and straightforward, and as a result offer a clearer explanation of Miller's emergence from the past. "The *Rosy Crucifixion* is, says George Wickes," is four times as long as *Tropic of Capricorn*, with little of the humor, ferocity, or pyrotechnics."¹⁰

- J) *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* (1957) presents Miller's meditations from his own *Walden*. The idyllic setting of Big Sur, quite naturally brought to mind Thoreau, the American frontier, and utopian communities.

About Miller's position as a writer, George Wickes avers: "Gradually a calmer view of his work is emerging not only in the public mind but among literary historians. His final place has yet to be determined, but he is being generally

5.4 *BLACK SPRING: PLOT AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE*

Black Spring, published in 1936 – two years after the publication of *Tropic of Cancer* – deals with many of the same themes, but in a different mood. “I am Chancre, the crab which moves sideways and backwards and forwards at will. I move in strange tropics,” Miller announces, explaining the connection between *Black Spring* and *Tropic of Cancer*. **And the black spring of the title is a metaphor for the world’s blight. It may also be interpreted as “the season of ecstatic despair.”** Instead of taking place only in the immediate present, the narrative moves in time and place, from Paris to memories of Brooklyn and New York and on to other planes to reverie and fantasia. He is less fierce now, less hungry, more euphoric; There is less sex and obscenity, less action and violence. There is more delirium than cancer now, more dream, hallucination, and Schizophrenia, as Miller explores different modes and levels of perception. *Black Spring* was written partly before and partly after the delayed publication of *Cancer*. Miller repeatedly refers to post-cancer period as “euphoric”, “ultra-happy”. Miller presents a series of monologues, meditations, reminiscences, dreams, and visions, shifting back and forth from his Paris surroundings to his early years in Brooklyn and New York. Underlying its chaotic variety in style and technique is a coherence of theme and symbol.

The theme of the book is universal death and dark regeneration, humanity caught in the season of “black spring”. “Schizophrenia!”, Miller cries, pointing to the characteristic malady of our age; the whole world is diseased.¹² And yet: “a brand new world is coming out of the egg and no matter how fast I write the old world doesn’t die fast enough. I hear the new machine guns and the millions of bones splintered at once; I see dogs running mad and pigeons dropping with letters tied to their ankles”. “Smash it, smash it,” he seems to be constantly shouting, adding for ironic effect, “Always merry and bright.” Miller can hardly wait for Doomsday. He is an alien in his homeland – though a citizen of the universe and his favorite fantasy is to know the crowds of our wasteland down: “Men and women promenading on the sidewalks: curious beasts, half-human, half-crazy, their teeth polished, their eyes glazed, the women clothed in beautiful garbs, each one equipped with a cold storage smile, The men smiled too now and then, as if they were walking in their coffins to meet the Heavenly Redeemer.....I had a gat with me and when we got to Forty-Second street I opened fire, Nobody paid any attention.” (189)¹³

The Surrealists – some of you who have studied Surrealism know this – advocated firing at random on a crowd, a gesture of ultimate defiance; unlike them, Miller forecasts the millenium, his fantasy betokens not absurdity but faith. “I am thinking of that age to come when god is born again,” he writes, “when men will fight and kill for god as now and for a long time to come men are going to fight for food. I am thinking of that age when work will be forgotten and books assume their true place in life, when perhaps there will be no more books, just one great book – a Bible.” (23)¹⁴

The personality behind these statements; contradictory, shrill, humble, provides the deeper sense of unity in *Black Spring*. Apocalypse is the gloomy theme of the book, but a cynic may say that apocalypse is also Miller’s personal vindication. Without false modesty, Miller claims that his history will have a scar on the face of the earth, that it will burn up other meaningless histories. Yet Miller is too genuinely incongruous a man to inspire the sneer we reserve for charlatans.

The book contains ten sections. These are:

1. The 14th word
2. Third or Fourth day of Spring

3. A Saturday afternoon
4. The Angel is My Watermark
5. The Tailor Shop
6. Jabberwhorl Cronstadit
7. Into the Nightlife
8. Walking up and down in China
9. Burlesk
10. Megalopolitan Mania

Each of its ten self-contained sections is an exercise in a different medium of art or the imagination, or in several media. "The Angel is My watermark" for instance investigates literary inspiration, the vision of the mad, and water color technique. Further, Miller is both the angel and the horse's ass in the metamprphia picture of "The Angel is my WaterMark;" his happy task is to relate the sublime to its animal origins. He is many selves, squabbling among themselves, warring on the world, lost to memory, "There are huge blocks of my life which are gone forever. Huge blocks gone, scattered, wasted in talk, action, reminiscences, dream. There was never any time when I was living one life....." (23).¹⁵

Moreover, he absolves himself from all conventional unities. His home is the present, grimy and sodden with glory; but his home, too, is in his beloved China—the symbol of a reconciled being. "I am here in the midst of great change, he writes in "Walking up and down in China," "I have forgotten my own language and yet I do not speak the new language, I am in China and I am talking Chinese." (164).¹⁶

Yet, he remembers repeatedly to yell: Primary colors! Primary passions! Even in China, the world must always be covered in snow or perpetually aflame. This is finally an extremist's vision of life, an artist's dream. It is the flawed artist in Miller, even more than the crippled seer, who puts his stamp on each page. The task is sometimes solitary. Like Robinson Crusoe, Miller carries his desert island with him, building his fort in his wilderness. In this view of himself as an artist, Miller may strike as an excessively romantic, yet the same man states: "THE GREAT ARTIST IS HE WHO CONQUERS THE ROMANTIC IN HIMSELF." (194).¹⁷ Like Whitman, Miller loudly proclaims his contradictions, unlike Whitman, he ends by saying to his reader: "...tonight I would like to think of one man, a lone individual, a man without name or country, a man whom I respect because he has nothing in common with you— Myself." (206) It begins with Miller possessed by "the dictation" that goes on in his head, beyond his control. He can only water down what is being dictated to him until finally it causes, leaving him exhausted. He then turns to a fascinating book on art and which prompts him to do a water color.. the rest of the piece explains how a water color happens, through a process as fortutous as his writing: "when you're an instinctive water colorist everything happens according to God's will."¹⁸

Another section "Into the Night life...." is the scenario of a surrealist nightmare or rather, a dozen nightmares lumped together. Vividly pictorial, it is like a surrealist film, full of irrational sequences, screaming terrors, Freudian guilt and logic. Like any good nightmare it is experienced; one is there, being personal, unable to run, locked in, frantically trying to find a way out. The world tilts and the scene shifts in this "Coney island of the mind," "where memories are jumbled together with Gothic visions in a world of crazy symbols that make sense. Miller has written a great deal about the creative process elsewhere, but never so effectively, *Black Spring* demonstrates the creative imagination at work on all levels. "In ordinary waking life", Miller explains in his surrealistic vocabulary: "... The author suffers from normal vision but in the frontispiece he renders himself myopic in order to grasp the immediacy of the dream plasm. By means of the dream technique he peels off the outer layers of his geo-logic mortality and comes to grips with his true mantic self, a non stratified area of semi-liquid character. Only the amorphous side of his nature now possesses validity. By submerging the visible I, he dives below the threshold of

his schizophrenic habit patterns. He swims joyously, ad lib. in the Amniotic fluid, one with his amoebic self.¹⁹ Miller believes that writing should be as spontaneous and unconscious as possible. His own writing is full of free associations and improvisations. There are passages of automatic writing—cadenzas, as Miller sometimes calls them when the dictation possesses him. Miller at the typewriter is like a centaur; he becomes one with the machine, and in furious bursts. The result is a succession of discontinuous virtuoso passages that show where he sat down to write and where he left off.

This work shows the to-be-expected frenzied journeys, horrendous transformations, snakes coming out of female organs, disintegrating bodies, mechanized desert landscapes, and threatening menageries of night life. Perhaps, the material would be of some interest in providing psychogenetic patterns for a biographer of Miller: The "poor, desperate father (holding a rust razor) with whom the son can't communicate, (177)²⁰; the injured girl-child (his sister or his daughter?) whom he can't save, the recurring images of surgery and dismemberment; the agonized stumbling into childhood scenes next to cemeteries and the recurrent nostalgia for the "street of early sorrows," the images of sexuality always turning into grotesque mechanisms (including wives); and the italicization of personal guilt – his customs declaration: "I want to declare that I am a traitor to the human race." (168).²¹

In the section entitled "Third or Fourth Day of Spring"—which can be characterized as an apocalyptic essay—Miller simply states his two gestures of escape: "You have the dream for night time and the horse laugh for day time." (30) But they are not really separate for Miller, and the laugh is emphatically nightmarish and diseased. Each great period, he suggestively notes, is followed by its characterizing malaise: "The crusades – Black Death; Columbus–syphilis; nineteenth century–Schizophrenia. The twentieth century laugh thus tends hysteria, toward cackling at catastrophe."²²

However, Miller also claims a different stance of "gay, hard wisdom" (33). He would like to possess the sardonic delight of Petronius (whose Trimachio's "piss warm and drink cold" provides the epigraph here; of Rabelais and his pan-human hyperbole, and of Whitman's embracing song. But, Miller more often sees "only catastrophes, and his longings are messianic. He claims to be on the way, with his escape from the 'black curse' of America and with his awareness of millennial circumstances. ("I am dazzled by the glorious collapse of the world." (32).²³ More crudely, he accepts himself deified; his wife is of great 'importance' and 'significance'; his words become 'divine stuttering'; his megalomania raises up an image greater than Christ or God Almighty, 'Myself' (Here you ponder—as an Indian student – whether it is megalomania or the Indian concept of Aham Brahmasmi – I am Brahman.)²⁴ He is the "new reality" in the "Universe of Death" Miller shrewdly qualifies Schizophrenic pretensions by comic hyperbole, as in his burlesque horoscope:

"I am Chance, the crab, which moves sideways and backwards and forwards at will. I move in strange tropics and deal in high explosives, embalming fluid, jasper, myrrh, smaragd, fluted snot and porcupine's toes. Because of Uranus which crosses my longitudinal I am inordinately fond of cunt, hot chitterlings and water bottles. Neptune dominates my ascendant. That means I am composed of watery fluid, that I am volatile, quixotic, unreliable, independent, and evanescent. Also quarrelsome. With a hot pad under my ass I can play the braggart or the buffoon as good as any man, to matter what sign he be born under. This is a self-portrait which yields only the missing parts—an anchor, a dinner bell, the remains of a beard, the hind part of a cow. In short, I am an idle fellow who pisses his time away. I have absolutely nothing to show for my labours except my genius. (29).²⁵

Burlesque or not, then, Miller does have a destiny, his role as artist; his gestures are confined to sitting before the typewriter; and the wild images ("missing parts") may cover the longing to be more than the Comedian in him. He ends his apocalyptic

essay by using the strategy of extremes, insisting that the choice is between song and listerine, 'Fourth Eclogue or 13th Arrondissement.' (41)²⁶

The rhapsodical memories of his Brooklyn-Newyork life start with the much worked first piece, entitled "The 14th ward". With a "patriotic" love of its streets, though not of the neighbourhood's Luthran morality. Miller joys over his boy-herds and the lost richness of the time when "foam was on the lager and people stopped to chat." (13)²⁷ No doubt that the pre-world War-I, German-American neighbourhood did have a sense of community no longer to be found; but this is not really Miller's interest since most of his nice concrete details and rhetorical flourishes point to the sense of mystery in the good old days of beer, burlesque, and boys. The single Mexican male ethos, which underlies so much of Miller's work and response, holds him in the "clutching brilliance" of memory. The insistence on returning to the world of memory reveals a longing for the time when his life, hounded by a simple masculine code, seemed "whole"; and therefore the ways of the 14th ward become holistic. One of the curious forces driving all through Miller's work is a sense of Edenic loss which he can never quite pin down. Maturity he sees, accurately for himself, as a "grant fragmentation" (18).²⁸ The awesomeness of youthful vision with its awareness of mystery in common things", and, probably later, of literary discoveries not as ideas but as rituals, had a brightness which now belongs only to dream and longing. He ends with an apostrophe to a lost world which seems to have doomed all other worlds since they cannot awaken the innocent eye of a poignant memory.

The longest piece in *Black Spring* is "The Tailor Shop," with Miller's own pathetic clown epigraph: "I have got a motter: always merry and bright" (71)²⁹. This genre piece about the days when he worked in his father's tailor shop (i.e. in his early twenties, before and during World War I) reveals nostalgia going bitter. The first part consists of a series of character sketches—with broad sentiment but shrewdly sardonic detail — of cursing Irish bartenders, earnest Jewish cutters, irascible well-to-do customers, loquacious and drunken drummers, and several pathetic imposters. As he later notes, "The men who passed through my father's shop reeked with love," (133);³⁰ more exactly, they were endearing failures, and Miller's recognition of that bed-rock type provides a solid American motif of the pathetic role of sensitivity in our society.

In the first part of the narrative, Miller subordinates the elaborate verbal play of his other sketches to an only slightly exaggerated account. Only when he is dallying with sex—the too easy seduction of the too-beautiful widow of one of his father's customers—does really get lost, and we have a presentation suitable to one of the "old cronies", in the shop. But as the peace programmes, cutomers die off, the narrator fights with his wife and outrage graves. While Miller—again claiming the example of Rabelais (115) insists on boisterous gaiety, the misery twists humor. He turns from the tailor shop—never able to maintain dramatically intense narrative—to the reunions of the "freaks who made up the family tree" (116), and he catalogues the heavy food and heavy troubles of his jolly germanic tribe. Tante Melia, who went "completely off her nut" (121)³¹ and had to be taken to the asylum by Miller, focuses the horror; the "too good" — the half-witted angel" type — are, he says always destroyed. He thus laments the lost innocence of Henry Miller. As a narrative, "The Tailor Shop" now disintegrates. Hyper-awareness becomes verbal hyperbole, with fragments of events (apparently drawn from various years) obscurely linked in an enlarging and often surreal rhetoric. His claimed artiotic gropings (dream-writing in his head a vast ancestral book, of which only the title—The Island of Incest—exists) attempt to counter the decline of his actual world. The disordered prose insists on an anguish whose cause remains unspecific and disproportionate to the obvious problems of reaching manhood which the situation suggests. The pyrotechnical fragments world seem to mark, in Miller's consciousness, the simultaneous decline of his father's tailor shop, the pre-war world, and a whole way of life, Decay, death, madness, and suffering—Miller does want to accept them, and so shores fragments of memory against the loss which threatens to become his one reality.³²

Miller writes, as D.H. Lawrence once said of himself, not for art's sake but for his own sake. Midway in one of his burlesque pieces, entitled "BURLESK," Miller sloganizes: "The Greatest Artist is he who conquers the romantic in himself" (209)³³ But his own means of conquests turns out to be violent surrender. TO overcome his past and his obsessions, he makes them his one subject; to cure himself of overstatement, he exaggerates and shouts. A weird and rather forced tone of associations leads from the Paris of the present to New York of his past. The mania for title becomes the heavy repetition of capitalized signs and "Don't spit on the Floor" and "Amen! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah" (197)³⁴. These incongruities come from a store-front gospel tabernacle in New York. Then, by natural antilogic, we move to Cleo, the of a burlesque show. The style sometimes turns from shouts and violent yokings into just bad verse: "The night is cold and men are walking in lockstep. The night is cold but the queen is naked save for a jock-strap (205)³⁵. The nuclear experience UNDERNEATH these vernal gestures – "The grotesque and the void, with the heart breaking love times. (206)³⁶ – intermittently comes through the mannerisms, sometimes with vivid detail. The cathartic process, rather than any narrative sequence or logical coherence, apparently provides the rationale for a group of brief anecdotes. These include a sadistic-obscene one of a friend punishing his frigid and unfaithful wife, which is told with a moral relish (one of the few obscene bits in *Black Spring*). Of the sketchy sordid-fantastic anecdotes from his youth, Miller says: "I am speaking of things that brought me relief in the beginning" (204)³⁷. But better therapy for his longings appears in the super-romantic conceit of writing a "beautiful book" which "will contain the absolute truth" of his life. (204) and will be of religious significance. To obscure the crude naivete of this confession. Miller switches to parody of academic explication, supposedly of the frontispiece of his projected holy writ. The burlesque concludes with an apocalyptic longing for "a new heaven and a new earth" (202), a plea for the assolution of his own disorder and disappointments.³⁸ There are some lively bits here, but the gusto is really hysteria. Miller is struggling to accept himself and his world, which he is of but not in. he can only glue the fragments with the "opiums of dream". (166) and the gestures, but not the full substance, of art.

The brief conclusion to *Black Spring* has the cute title of "Megalopolitan Maniac." The self made epigraph does equally well: "Imagine having nothing in your hands but your destiny. You sit on the doorstep of your mother's womb and you kill time- or time kills you. You sit there chanting the doxology of things beyond your grasp outside. Forever outside." (198)³⁹. Outsiderness is the quality of the city with its glittering desert streets and sardine people, for whom he writes a sardonic parody to the Vulcanized loneliness for God. mixing sharp mechanical tropes with swelling romantic rhetoric, he hyperbolically, insists on the intensity of living the apocalyptic last moments until all is "blotted in final annihilation (201). God and the song of love, of course have become a stinking fraud, but they print by their absence to a new and greater dynamo of love ten thousand years hence. Waiting on a Nietzschean mountain top for the new revelation, he meanwhile wishes to contemplate "a lone individual, a man without name or country, a man whom I repeat because he has absolutely nothing in common with you – Myself." (206).⁴⁰

5.5 STYLE IN *BLACK SPRING*

Stylistically *Black Spring* is a dazzling book, the work of a rampant imagination intoxicated with words. Miller is a poet of reckless abandon, his language exuberant and prodigal often used for sound rather than meaning. Fond of jargon and parody, he readily spins off into nonsense and jabberwocky. 'Jabberwhorl cronstadt is a verbal caricature of a friend, parodies his multisyllabic pontification and turns it into nonsense. During the course of his conversation, Jabberwhorl grows progressively drunk and in language reels: Miller drags in his usual catalogue of exotic names and

miscellaneous titbits of information, and his joking delight in scientific jargons:
 "... the great vertiginous vertebration... the zoospores and the leucocytes
 Wamroths and hollenlindens... everyone's poem, the jellyfish is a poem too—the
 finest kind of poem. You poke him here, you poke him there, he slithers and slathers,
 he's dithy and claborous, he has a colon and intestines, he's vermiform and
 ubiquitous....."⁴¹

As that final pun indicates, Jabberwhorl jellyfish is described from James Joyce as well as Lewis Carroll. It is not only the section entitled "Jabberwhorl Cronsbtadt," but the whole of *Black Spring*, is full of Joycean passages. Like the great parodist, Miller writes not in one style, but in many. Not only is each section of *Black Spring* written in a different style, but individual sections are written in Chameleon style that borrows its constantly changing colors from a dozen sources. Besides Joyce the authors he most frequently resembles are Proust and Whitman. Like the Tropics, *Black Spring* is Proustian in its view of coexistent time and place stimulated by memory and the senses; Miller's writing is evocative and nostalgic. His affinity to Whitman is more fundamental, for Whitman contributes to his stance as well as his style. "For me the book is the man," Miller declares, "and my book is the man I am, the confused man, the negligent man, the reckless man, the lusty, obscene, boisterous, thoughtful, scrupulous, lying, a diabolically truthful man that I am." Miller's rhetoric is like Whitman's, with long rhythmic lines pushing along through present participles. His descriptions of the Seine could be scanned as Whitmanesque verse:

...this still yet rushing on from out of a million billion roots,
 this still mirror bearing the clouds along and stifling the past,
 rushing on and on and on while between the mirror
 and the clouds moving transversally
 I, a complete corporate entity,
 A universe bringing countless centuries to a conclusion.
 I and this that passes beneath me
 And this that floats above me
 And all that surges through me....⁴²

The method of *Black Spring* is clear: burlesque and poetic description, vignette, and reminiscence, caricature, and revelation, all pointing to the same theme, reflecting always the same urgent sensibility. The style even more than the subject matter carries the burden of variety. Looking down from Brooklyn bridge, Miller can suddenly spin a net of images that hauls back large, symbolic meanings. A whimsical description of two spigots in a kitchen sink ends with a fugue of cosmic acceptance. A bland sentence takes a quick turn, leaping over the metaphysical contrasts of space and times. Here is an instance:

"Such a day it may be when first you encounter Dostoevski. Remember the smell of a table cloth on which the book rests; you look at the clock and it is only five minutes from eternity. Now every door of the cage is open and whichever way you walk is a straight line toward infinity; a straight, mad line over which the breakers roar and great rocks of marble, and indigo swoop to lower their fevered eggs. Out of the waves beating phosphorescent step proud and prancing the enameled horses that marched with Alexander, their light proud bellies glowing with calcium, their nostrils dipped in laudanum. Now it is all snow and ice, with the great band of Orion slung around the ocean's crotch." (14).⁴³

The passage, in Miller's own fashion, moves from the prosaic to the poetic, and on to the fantastic, and suggests the kind of vocabulary— anatomical, pharmaceutical, astrological, a vocabulary in fact derived from all the sciences and pseudo-sciences—in which he sometimes revels.

The distinctive quality of *Black Spring*, probably written before and after the publication of *Tropic of Cancer*, is not really created by new techniques. It is created, rather, by a curious aura of vindictiveness and nostalgia, an attitude toward

time even more unresolved than Cancer's. For though one of its motifs is that man must act as if the past were dead and the future unrealizable, its pervasive sense is one of loss. "Whenever I have made my bed, I have thought like a mamiac to drive out the past," he writes, "But at the last moment it is the past which rises up triumphantly, the past in which one drowns. With the last gasp one realizes that the future is a sham...." (194)⁴⁴. In *Black Spring*, Miller is indeed like a drowning man, clutching at his old selves as one might clutch at straws, mouthing imprecations and prophecies in the same breath. Yet if Miller's vision is more turbulent in *Black Spring*, his style is frequently bolder.

Kenneth Rexroth says: "what will preserve Miller and make him a minor classic is his style...He has been compared to the French 18th century naive writer Bestif de la Bretonne and the resemblances are marked. He is almost as garrulous, almost as sex-obsessed, Miller is unassignable and his style is a careful cultivation of all these elements of communication—the speech of interpersonal relations which violates the mechanisms of the dominant society. It is not just that the sexual capers of his characters expose the social lie. His prose disrupts acceptable speech. It does this so easily by simply being the common talk of his declassed caste. The lumpen intelligentsia talked this way in the days of Villon. His writing is spontaneous and uncontrolled on principle, but the control is in the principle, in the intention. If Miller just tells you the time of day he could never be mistaken for Edith Wharton. *The Tropics* established a method of which Saroyan early and Kerouac later were outstanding practitioners, a method which would become dominant in the fiction of the latter half of the century—the roman fleuve in a different sense—the pages go by like a river in flood. The overwhelming flow of Proust or Joyce or Gertrude Stein is highly contrived and recognizably so. In Miller and his descendants, the author begins by overwhelming himself. This is a method where nothing succeeds but success. Miller can sweep you away.... Miller can be hilariously funny, but his humor is the humor of old time burlesque."⁴⁵

In following passages Miller's surrealistic style is reflected. Also in some of the passages you find long catalogues which are Whitmanesque:

I

However, always merry and bright! If it was before the war and the thermometer down to zero or below, if it happened to Thanksgiving Day, or New Year's or a birth-day, or just any old excuse to get together, then off we'd trot, the whole family, to join the other freaks who made up the living family tree. It always seemed astounding to me how jolly they were in our family despite the calamities that were always threatening. Jolly in spite of everything. There was cancer, dropsy, cirrhosis of the liver, insanity, thievery, mendacity, buggery, incest, paralysis, tapeworms, abortions, triplets, idiots, drunkards, ne'er-do-wells, fanatics, sailors, tailors, watch-makers, scarlet fever, whooping cough, meningitis, running ears, chorea, stutters, jail-birds, dreamers, story-tellers, bartenders – and many there was Uncle George and Tante Melia. The morgue and the insane asylum. A merry crew and the table loaded with good things—with red cabbage and green spinach, with roast pork and turkey and sauerkraut, with kartoffel-klosse and sour black gravy, with radishes and celery, with stuffed goose and peas and carrots, with beautiful which cauliflower, with apple sauce and figs from smyrba, with bananas as big as black-jack, with cinnamom cake and Streussel Kuchen, with chocolate layer cake and nuts, all kinds of nuts, walnuts, butternuts, almonds, pecans, hickory nuts, with lager beer and bottled beer, with white wines and red, with champagne, kummel, malaga, port, with schnapps, with fiery cheeses, with dull, innocent store cheese, with flat Holland cheeses, with limburger and schmierkase, with home made wines, elderberry wine, with cider: hard and sweet, with rice pudding and tapioca, with roast chestnuts, mandarines, olives, pickles, with red caviar and black, with smoked sturgeon, with lemon meringue pie, with lady fingers and chocolate eclairs, with macaroons and cream puffs, with black cigars and long thin stogies, with Bull Durham and Long Tom and meerschaums with corn-cobs and tooth-picks, wooden tooth-picks which gave you gum-boils the day after, and napkins a yard wide with your initials stitched in the corner, and a blazing coal fire and the windows steaming, everything in the world before your eyes except a finger bowl. (92)⁴⁶

II

Once in a while they worked in unison, Froid and Chaud, but that was seldom. Saturday nights, when I washed my feet at the sink, I'd get to thinking how perfect was the world over which these twain ruled. NNeveranything more than this iron sink with its two ruled. Never anything more than this iron sink with its two faucets. No beginnings and no ends. Chaud the alpha and Froid the omega. Perpetuity. The Gemini, ruling over life and death. Alpha-Chaud running out through all degrees of Fahrenheit and Reaumur, through magnetic filings and comets' tailed, through the boiling cauldron of Mauna Loa into the dry light of the Tertiary moon; Omega-Froid running out through out through the Gulf Stream into the marsupials and the foraminifera, through the nammal whales and the Polar fissures, running down through island universes, through the follicles and tentacles of worlds unformed, worlds untouched, worlds unseen, worlds unborn and forever lost. Alpha-Chaud dripping, dripping; Omega-Froid working, working. Hand, feet, hair, face, dishes, vegetables, fish washed clean and away: despair, ennui, hatred, love, jealousy, crime....dripping, dripping. I, Jabberwhorl, and my wife Jill, and after us legions upon legions...all standing at the iron sink. Seeds falling through the drain: young cantaloups, squash, caviar, macaroni, bile, spittle, phelgm, lettuce leaves, sardine bones, Worcestershire sauce, stale beer, urine, blood-clots, Kruschen salts, oatmeal, chew tobacco, pollen, dust, grease, wool, cotton threads, match sticks, live worms, shredded wheat, scalded milk, castor oil. Seeds of waste falling away forever and forever coming back in pure draughts of a miraculous chemical substance which refuses to be names, classified, labelled, analysed or drawn and quartered. Coming back as Froid and Chaud perpetually, like a truth that can't be downed. You can take it hot or cold, or you can take it tepid. You can wash your feet or gargle your throat; you can rinse the soap out of your eyes or drive the grit out of the lettuce leaves; you can bathe the new-born babe or swab the rigid limbs of the dead; you can soak bread for fricadellas or dilute your wine. First and last things. Elixir. I, Jabberwhorl, tasting the elixir of life and death. I, Jabberwhorl, of waste and H₂O composed, of hot and cold and all the intermediate realms, of scum and rind, of finest, tiniest substance never lost, of great sutures and compact bone, of ice fissures and test tubes, of semen and ova fused, dissolved, dispersed, of rubber schnausel and brass spigot, of dead cathodes and squirming infusoria, of lettuce leaves and bottled sunlight....I, Jabberwhorl, sitting at the iron sink and perplexed and exalted, never less and never more than a poem, an iron stanza, a bioiling follicle, a lost leucocyte. The iron sink where I spat out my heart, where I bathed my tender feet, where I sang like a diamond-backed terrapin and I am singing now and will sing forever though the drains clog and the faucets rust, though time runs out and I be all there is of the present, past and future. *Sing*, Froid, *sing* transitive! *Sing* Chaud, *sing* intransitive! *Sing* Alpha and Oemga! *Sing* Hallelujah! *Sing* out, O sink! *Sing* while the world sinks... '(127)⁴⁷

III

Over the foot of the bed is the shadow of the cross. There are chains binding me to the bed. The chains are clanking loudly, the anchor is being lowered,. Suddenly I feel a hand on my shoulder. Someone is shaking me vigorously. I took up and it is an old hag in a dirty wrapper. She goes to the dresser and opening a drawer she puts a revolver away.

There are three rooms, one after the other, like a railroad flat. I am lying in the middle room in which there is a walnut bookcase and a dressing-table. The old hag removes her wrapper and stands before the mirror in her chemise. She has a little powder puff in her hand and with this little puff she swabs her armpits, her bosom, her thighs. All the while she weeps like an idiot. Finally she comes over to me with an atomizer and she squirts a fine spray over me. I notice that her hair is full of rats.

I watch the old hag moving about. She seems to be in a trance. Standing at the dresser she opens and closes the drawers, one after the other, mechanically. She seems to have forgotten what she remembered to go there for. Again she picks up the powder puff and with the powder puff she daubs a little powder under her armpits. On the dressing table is a little silver watch attached to a long piece of black tape. Pulling off her chemise she slings the watch around her neck' it reaches just to the pubic triangle. There comes a faint tick and then the silver turns black.(131)⁴⁸

IV

I am here in the midst of a great change, I have forgotten my own language and yet I do not speak the new language. I am in China and I am talking Chinese. I am in the dead centre of a changing reality for which no language has been invented. According to the map I am in Paris; according to the calendar I am living in the third decade of the twentieth century. But I am neither in Paris nor in the twentieth century. I am in China and there are no clocks or

calendars here. I am sailing up the Yangstaze in a dhow and what food I gather is collected from the garbage dumped overboard by the American gunboats. It takes me all day to prepare a humble meal, but it is a delectable meal and I have a cast-iron stomach.(164)⁴⁹

5.9 NOTES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 6 CRITICAL APPROACHES

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Critical Appreciation-1
 - 6.2.1 George Orwell
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6.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will discuss the views of T.S. Eliot, Edmund Wilson, George Orwell, Lawrence Durrell, Norman Mailer, Karl Shapiro, Wallace Fowlie, and William Gordon. Also, we will analyse at length the feminist approach to Henry Miller.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

From the publication of *Tropic of Cancer* in 1934 to about 1950, Henry Miller was a major influence in world literature and enjoyed a vast, underground popularity with an audience that stretched from T.S. Eliot and Edmund Wilson to Parisian chambermaids and taxi drivers. In the years around the Second World War, Miller had an explosive effect upon the young. His books were eagerly passed from hand to hand in every literate country. Many writers—including the Beat generation – were profoundly influenced by him.

As the rigors of censorship died away and his major works have been legally published in cheap editions and have come close to being best sellers, that influence had died away. *Black Spring*, *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* have become social-historical documents. People once suffered severe penalties for sending his books through the mail. Today they seem little more pornographic than many a successful Hindi movie. Anarchism, pacifism, oriental philosophy, occultism, pop-surrealism, sexual freedom, copulation on demand, had all become common place all over the world, a few generations after the first underground publications in Paris of the Tropics.

If ever a writer was a success, Miller was, so much so that he now is in danger of being ignored, like the inventor of the wheel or the safety pin. "“Arthur Rimbaud spoke to only a handful of intellectuals, D.H. Lawrence to a limited audience of highly literate sophisticates. Henry Miller was the first to reach a mass audience with

the gospel of the rejection of the rational, scientific synthesis – what were call modern civilization”.¹

6.2 CRITICAL APPRECIATION-1

Henry Miller has had his share of praise, and such literary maharajahs as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Edmund Wilson made their contribution. Pound contented himself with a cryptic remark: “Here is a dirty book worth reading”; and Eliot, who found Shelley Satanic, nonetheless became a closet devotee of Miller’s, and even sent a letter to Miller. Wilson wrote one of the earliest laudatory reviews to be printed of *Tropic of Cancer*.

6.2.1 George Orwell

It is difficult to summarize so insightful and far ranging an essay as that written by George Orwell on Henry Miller’s work. In his long essay, “Inside the Whale” he declares: “when Henry Miller’s novel, *Tropic of Cancer*, appeared in 1935, it was greeted with rather cautious praise, obviously conditional in some cases by a fear of seeming to enjoy pornography. Among the people who praised it were: T.S.Eliot, Herbert Read, Aldous Huxley, John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound... And in fact the subject matter or the book, and to a certain extent its mental atmosphere, belong to the twenties rather than to the thirties.”² Orwell perceived the crucial distinction between *Tropic of Cancer* and such work as *Ulysses* and *Voyage to the Bottom of Night*. He was also among the earliest to point out Miller efforts to reproduce throughout his narration the syntax and rhythms of our spoken language rather than to use the rhetorical devices of the interior monologue. But the most revelatory sections of Orwell’s essay are found chiefly in his comments on the similarities between Miller and Whitman, Orwell declares: “So far from protesting, he is accepting, and the very word ‘acceptance’ calls up his real affinity to, another American, Walt Whitman,” Miller’s outlook is deeply akin to that of Whitman, and nearly everyone who has read him has remarked on this. *Tropic of Cancer* ends with an especially Whitmanesque passage, in which, after the swindles, the fights, the drinking, and the imbecilities, he simply sits clown and watches the seine flowing past, in a sort of mystical acceptance of thing-as-it-is.”³

6.2.2 Aldous Huxley

Aldous huxley’s essay entitled “Death and the Baroque” is one of the few essays which links Miller’s work with something more than a narrowly literary cult or ism. In other words, it offers a truly comparative base in the arts from which Miller’s work might be viewed. As many critics had noticed there is something gorgontuan, something bording upon caricature in Miller’s art. The value of Haxley’s a essay’s that it offers a wider perspective from which the “art of the inordinate” can be viewed. If Huxley is correct in his contention that those experiences which are inescapably, invoilably private–death, sex, the mystical–are also unavoidably ‘comparable, unsocial, a historical, then we may have a more adequate explanation than ‘pornography,’ for the ambivalence and discomfort which Miller’s work seems so often to arouse.⁴

6.2.3 Wallace Fowlie

Not the least provocative aspect of Wallace Fowlie’s essay–entitled “Shadow of Doom” –is his contention that Miller has “interrupted the traditional American treatment of evil,” which is another way of acknowledging that there is a large and always easily divided stream in American literature one branch of which is best represented by Melville; the other by Whitman. However, the principal subject of “Shadow of Doom” is the role of the artist in the modern world. While Fowlie shares

Miller at his best wrote a prose grander than Faulkner's, and wilder—the good reader is revealed in a farrage of light with words heavy as velvet, brilliant as gems, eruptions of thought over the page. Men with literary styles as full as Hawthorne's—appear by comparison stripped of their rich language, stripped as an A style book; one has to take the English language, back to Marlowe and Shakespeare before encountering a wealth of imagery equal in intensity.”⁹

6.3 CRITICAL APPRECAITION-II¹⁰

Miller has something in common with Lawrence and Joyce; in his detestation of the abstract, depersonalized life of his time he is on the side of Lawrence, and he is like Joyce in that all his work is a confession. But it is undertaken in a very different temper from Joyce's; it completely dispenses with dignity and is all the better for it.... He pours out everything, getting over his shame by a sort of braggadocio, as Rebelais did; not so completely as Rebelais, but more completely than Joyce.

Edwin Muir. *The Present Age from 1914* (Cresset). 1939.p.149

Miller invokes food and sex as heroic sentiments and even generalizes them into principles. For the man who is down and out has eyes only for that which he misses most frequently; his condition makes him a natural anarchist, rendering irrelevant all conventions, moral codes or any attempt to order the process of experience according to some value-pattern. The problem is to keep alive, and to that end all means are permissible.... Miller's claims as a guide to life and letters or a prophet of doom can be easily discounted.... He is remarkable, however, as the biographer of the hobo-intellectual and as the poet of those people at the bottom of society in whom some unforeseen or surreptitious contact with art and literature has aroused a latent antagonism to ordinary living, a resolve to escape the treadmill even at the cost of hunger and degradation.

Philip Rahv. NR. April 21, 1941. pp.557-9

He has always been a martyr in his idolators' minds and it must be said that Henry Miller has done nothing to remove the opinion that he is a genius who can expect nothing but contempt and more martyrdom from his countrymen. It may well be that he is one of the truly great writers of his time, as his admirers believe; it may be that the strain of willingly suffering indignities, plus an ego as large as all outdoors, will prevent the fulfillment of his genius.

Harrison Smith. SR. Aug. 16, 1947. p. 18

Both (Gertrude Stein and Henry Miller) are tremendously good Americans, because they are wholly concerned. America is the background of all their thinking and writing.... And in spite of continual disillusionment (and how Miller can describe the etiolated, emasculated blotting paper Americans call bread! And how he can suggest the anonymity, the forlornness, the tastelessness of Main Street!) Miller yet has a faith Walt Whitman would have envied.... So, at the end, these two great expatriates do not have to come home, because they never went away. With lance and probe for armor, these are valiant Americans, because they have suffered to discover what America is, and why, and to relate America with Europe, with the world, and with the Creator of the world.

Anne Fremantle. *Com.* Dec. 12, 1947. pp.229-30

He spruces up words conventionally regarded as vulgar and taboo and brings them out on parade, thus achieving an effect of daring originality, what Kenneth Burke calls perspective through incongruity. The solemn he treats with ribald mockery and iconoclastic disdain, the sublime with profane levity; the erotic, the sensual, the luridly carnal—prohibited themes—he honors with lyrical fanfares, almost mystical exaltation. Since the time of the Greeks, sex has been proscribed by Western

the view that modern life presents itself to man as particularly dislocated and atomized, he differs from Rahv and Hoffman is that he takes the view that modern life should not tempt us into artistic self dissolution, but modern life should oblige us to organise the chaos of experience into coherent partners. Fowlie locates Miller's literature heritage of in the work of Rimbaud, thereby offering some literary context for such terms as "prophet" and "seer" as these are applied to Miller. The modern artist is captured particularly well by Miller in the projections of the artist-hero who is "the little man who" is terrified and who in reality greater than that which terrifies him."⁵

6.2.4 Philip Rahv

"If Henry Miller's status in our literary community is still so very debatable, it is probably because he is the type of writer who cannot help exposing himself to extreme appraisals with every page he adds to his collected works" proclaim Philip Rahv. His essay is note worthy as several counts. It was one of the first to call attention to the need for drawing a distinction between merely exploiting one's personality and the more general necessity of exploiting any material for artistic purpose. The failure to draw such distinction leads, particularly in the case of a writer like Miller, to critical partonaship. More important is it frustrates a comprehension of the 'biographical' as a narrative strategy. While it would probably no longer be possible to agree that the ego of Miller's persona is 'confused and helpless' in the face of exterior reality, there is no doubt that Miller is of the opinion that man can no longer afford the continual sacrifice of personality required by creative acts of the kind represented by Joyce and Proust.⁶

6.2.4 Frederick Hoffman

Frederick Hoffman was one of the first to explore in any detail the Freudian implications in Miller's work. Hoffman particularly calls attention to the relation between the nonrational, nonlogical aspects of man's experience as Miller and portray them and the functioning of the preconscious and unconscious as Freudian theory deduces it. Hoffman also distinguishes Miller's happy acceptance of "the new opportunity which psychoanalysis affords of viewing a world previously shut off from consciousness" and Miller's rejection of the uses to which psychoanalysis, as a clinical practice, has been put.

6.2.5 Karl Shapiro

Karl Shapiro is one of the critics who ardently defended Henry Miller. Comparing Miller with Walt Whitman and D.H. Lawrence, he avers: "Whitman, Lawrence. Miller, and even Blake all have the reputation of being sex-obsessed whereas Whitman writes "copulation is no more rank to me than death is," Miller writes hundreds of pages describing in the minutest and cleanest details his exploits in bed. Every serious reader of erotica has remarked about Miller that he is probably the only author in history who writes about, such things with complete ease and naturalness."⁷ Comparing Miller with the Orientals, Shapiro proclaims: "...His aim was not to write about the erotic but to write the whole truth about the life he know. This goal demanded the full vocabulary and iconography of sex, and it is possible that he is the first writer outside the orient who has succeeded in writing as naturally about sex on a large scale as novelists ordinarily write about the dinner table or battlefield."⁸

6.2.6 Norman Mailer

His friend and fellow writer, Norman Mailer was almost eulogistic "... Miller provided his considerable qualifications. One had to go back to Melville to find a rhetoric which could prove as noble under full sail. Indeed one has to ask oneself if Miller could not outwrite Melville if it came to describing a tempest at sea,

actor's voice-style is a chief aim of all artists in all media. This Henry Miller has achieved: he is a wonderful stylist.

Spontaneous, his style appears. He writes prose which often seems to run absolutely naturally, like the flow of eager conversation or a rapidly written letter or the current of nonlogical ideas in one's own mind. If in the future he is remembered for anything more than his interest in obscenity, he will be recalled as an agile, often graceful, sometimes powerful manipulator of word and phrase and sentence and paragraph, and sometimes (although less often) of those larger units which are called chapters.

Gillbert Higher. Horizon, Nov., 1961. Pp 104-5

The form he uses is sometimes called "the autobiographical novel," but this is a misnomer; the word "autobiographical" obtains merely because the narrator (that is the created I) sounds so very real. It is now generally recognized that all that is dramatically engaging—whether tragic or comic—must appear to stem from a bedrock of reality. In narrative, this means a straight-faced delivery. This straight face can extend as it does with Miller, beyond the work itself, so that, when questioned about it he can say: "Oh yes, that's all real, that really happened, that's me I'm writing about, etc." which is, of course, nonsense, but, in any case, does not alter the new form which he has brought into being. This form—the narrative using a wholly created, but entirely convincing I—is one of the great forms of the future, even as it is today, in the work, for example, of William Burroughs and John Reechy.

Terry Southern. Nation. Nov. 18, 1961. pp.400-1

What is more, Miller has developed a style that is very well fitted for this continual act of celebration. He writes a hurrying, turbulent prose that gives the impression of complete spontaneity, but only the most naïve reader will imagine that such prose can be produced without a great deal of hard work. the rhythms never get out of hand, the pauses are varied with considerable skill, and the words are chosen with great effectiveness. If this is anti-art, it is at least not anti-craft.

John Wain NR Dec. 1, 1962. P. 22

He is childlike, sensitive, very proud, high-spirited, totally uncritical, alternately to the point of euphoria and despairing to the point of suicide. He curses a civilization that he does not understand, reviles a country he is unable to leave, and dismisses as worthless all the major authors he has never taken the trouble to read. He refuses to make any effort to commercialize himself, to "earn a living," but harasses his acquaintances to support him ("You call yourselves my friends") in petulant open letters—and they do. I do not pretend wholly to understand such a man—even Durrell, who should of all people be able, all too obviously fails. But his letters... cleared of the cant and rhetoric of his books, offer as clear a picture as we are ever likely to get. They prove, at least, if proof were needed, that the Dirty Old Man who still represents the greater part of his public image is really only a fractional, though integral, fragment of the whole—a whole that is huge, unchanging, probably unique, and the closest thing our century is likely to produce to a genuine Noble Savage.

David Littlejohn. Reporter, April 11, 1963, p. 45

Sexus, Plexus, and Nexus, taken together, are simply an enormously expanded Tropic of Capricorn. All these books deal with Miller's life during the twenties when he was trying to discover himself. This is the central story that he has been trying to tell ever since 1932., when he started writing *Tropic of Capricorn*, the story of his "rosy crucifixion," when he died as an ordinary mortal and was resurrected as a writer. Originally he thought he could explain the miracle in one volume. It took him five or six years to finish *Tropic of Capricorn*, only to discover that the mystery had eluded him. The events he narrated were in some mysterious way deeply significant to him, yet he had not succeeded in explaining the significance even to himself...Miller's method [in the trilogy] is rather like psychoanalysis. He seems to be putting down everything he can remember about the period, in hopes that some meaning will ultimately emerge from the mass.

George Wickes. Henry Miller (Minnesota). 1966. Pp. 38-9

civilization; Henry Miller considers it his mission to redress the balance, to restore sex to its position of primacy.

Critical Approaches

Charles I. Glicksberg. *SWR* Summer, 1948. p.289

You don't walk beside Henry, you are conveyed, practically levitated. His relish of the miraculous outburst of nature that is Big Sur seems to hoist you into a sultan's howdah beside him. Like a potentate greeting his subjects, he bows left and right to the Big Sur flora and fauna. Cars pass unnoticed; a roar of planes overhead will not divert his attention from an interesting bug. I constantly had the feeling that he was on leave of absence from ancient Greece or China, pledged to observe in our day only those things that had eternal currency.

Harold Maine. *AQ*. Autumn, 1951. p.201

Henry Miller is a really popular writer, a writer of, for, and by real people. In other countries he is read, not just by highbrows, or by the wider public that reads novels, but by the people who, in the United States, read comic books. In the United States he has been kept away from a popular public and his great novels have been banned. Only highbrows who could import him from France have read him... I should say he has become part of the standard repertory of reading matter everywhere but in England and in the United States. If you have read Balzac, or Baudelaire, or Goethe, you are also expected to have read Miller.

Kenneth Rexroth, *Nation*. Nov. 5, 1955. P. 385

Even in books like the two Tropics where Miller was piling sordidness upon sordidness to get the effect of reality, the thing (on rereading) does not come off as real, especially if you compare him with writers in the same genre like Celine and Beckett. The excitement of the books as good sexual pornography has also considerably worn off, partly perhaps because we have got used to those things from other sources, but chiefly because Miller's own interest in sex (as a writer, of course, not in life) is not fully authentic, but there again seems a little forced. It is not the genuine interest in sex as a thesis, as in Lawrence, or in sex as sensuality, as in Colette; it is not the experience of sex itself that is important to Miller but the symbol of it—symbol of the violent quest for experience that flung Miller out of an ordinary office job and a bourgeois career into the streets of Paris. As a writer Miller has never dealt with experience as such but with himself having the miraculous adventure of having experience. He is an innocent abroad—he is even now the innocent abroad in California.

William Barrett, *SR*. Aug. 3, 1957. P. 10

It is difficult to say how far such an instinctive writer as Miller has realized his own importance. Probably he arrived at it through a process of trial and error: looking for a fixed point in a world of shadows he found only himself, and in the depths of himself nothing but a longing, nihilistic and pre-natal, a violent attraction toward the darkness of the womb. There is however, no doubt that his transition from the objectivity of the third person to the subjectivity of the first, from a narrative to an autobiographic style, from reticence on certain subjects to the most brutal frankness, was deliberate and conscious. With him the American novel, which with many of the imitators of Hemingway. Faulkner and Saroyan had become merely a literary machine, reached a turning point. Like the spring-time rush of a turbid and riotous mountain stream breaking up the winter's ice (or if you prefer it like the filthy gush from a drain busting up through the cracks in the surface of a road), we see in Miller the moment when that precarious balance between American society and its opponents, which had never been completely achieved broke down altogether.

Alberto Moravia, *SwR*. Summer, 1960. Pp. 474-5

Henry Miller can use the language. He writes strong, biting, memorable, vivid prose... Style, style, style: burshwork, the drive of the hand into the clay, the thrust of the lines of structure against each other, the movement of the musical phrase between keys and modes, the balance and rivalry of colors, the rise and fall and timing of an

conventional perspectives of *Sexual Politics*, but in the complex and contradictory field of consciousness that constitutes *Flying*.

6.4.2 Susan Griffin

Another major feminist writer, Susan Griffin has branded Millet's writing pornography and lumped it with works more traditionally considered to be of that genre. Griffin's influential book, *Pornography and Silence* (which was first published in 1981) discusses an enormous range of 'pornographic' texts and images, including works by Miller, Sade and Reage. Griffin does not differentiate between the various approaches taken by these texts to the subject of sexuality much less evaluate their relative literary or external value; Indeed she suggests that all contribute to the material oppression of women in the same way and to the same degree. 'While Griffin's book is important in that it attempts to analyse, in psychoanalytic and cultural terms, the attractions for men of certain pornographic images, it falls far short of its goals. *Pornography and Silence* is undermined by Griffin's refusal to make important distinctions and her tendency to overgeneralize. Her insistence that women are always and everywhere victimized by the very existence of pornography runs counter to the experience of many women who are aroused and sexually empowered by such materials. Likewise, Griffin's reliance on essentialist assumptions about the nature of gender and gender relations, for instance that there is a 'natural' female sexuality that excludes both violence and abuse of power, but includes what Ellen Willis calls the 'goody-goody concept of eroticism, the idea that 'love making should be beautiful, romantic, soft, nice, 'are disturbing in their implications for those women and men who do not experience sexuality, in Griffin's approved way', declares Mary Kellie Munsil.¹²

6.4.3 Erica Jong

Erica Jong, who calls herself one of the disciples of Henry Miller, is eulogistic about her guru. In her book on Miller entitled *The Devil at Large*, she proclaims: "why must we read? Because he invented a new style of writing a style as revolutionary in his own way as Joyce or Hemingway's or Stein's a style that reveals, as he says, "the inner pattern of events."¹³ Also, she calls him a sage: 'Henry is, above all, a wisdom writer like Hesse or Krishnamurti', and the narrative is far less important to him than the philosophical digressions. He uses his life as a parable; this is not the usual novelist's dance. He seeks to instruct for more than to please. Beyond that, he wants to liberate—both himself and the reader." In her "Introduction", she declares: "perhaps enlightenment is the ancient function of the poet prophet seer. "The Divine literature" was Whitman's term for this being. And Henry Miller had deputies to Whitman, as he did to Hesse and Thoreau. He wanted to be more than just a writer; he wanted to be a prophet for his readers, and he became one— — — — —"¹⁴

6.4.4 The analysis of Mary Kellie Munsil

In her insightful essay entitled "The Body in the prison-house of language: Henry Miller, Pornography, and Feminism," Mary Kellie Munsil avers that Henry Miller is misunderstood by the Feminists due to the complex interplay of language and bodily experience. She says: "Only a few critics—few of them feminine—have been willing to acknowledge that Miller's work represents a new form of autobiography and to accept this fact is the light of its potential for positive cultural subversion. Kenneth Rexroth's excellent 1955 review of Miller's work in the *Nation* is one of the few he suggests that Miller offends because he refuses to lie about life. Discussing Miller's disturbing literary approach to sexual relationships. Rexroth writes that "a real wedding of equals may exist but it certainly isn't very common. I don't see why Miller should be blamed if he has never found it. Hardly anybody ever does, and those who do usually do it in some sordid fashion. This of course, is the point... of all his encounters in parks and telephone booths and brothels.. Better this than the lie. And this is why these passages are not pornography, but comic. A feminist reading

Tropic of Cancer could have been written by no one else, a good deal of Tropic of Capricorn and Black Spring by any one else. Capricorn is the book of Miller's adolescence, Cancer of his maturity; and these categories apply in some measure to his treatment as well as his subject. In all his work Miller is affected with the romantic fallacy that anything that happens to a writer is worth our attention. Or perhaps he felt that a scandalous subject was enough. But in Capricorn and Black Spring his scandals are adolescent. Much of what he records in these works in the way of sexual improprieties is familiar enough, yet he sets it all down like a boy out to shock his elders. But whether his subject is scandalous or not is irrelevant: the weakness in the later books, what makes them so tiresome, is that he is not able to give his subject the larger meaning it had in Cancer, a sense of the age. If these later works have a larger value at all, it is that Americans remain incorrigibly innocent no matter what they do. And incorrigibly sentimental! After Cancer who would have predicted Miller's moonstruck nightly walk past the house of the girl he "loved," or his tears at the news of her engagement?

Isadore Traschen. SAQ. Summer, 1966. P. 346

6.4 FEMINIST CRITICISM

Henry Miller's writing has proved deeply troubling to feminist critics, given the seemingly misogynist and sexually violent inclinations of the protagonist/author. We will study the approaches of a few major feminist writers.

6.4.1 Kate Millett

Kate Millett boldly proclaims: "Certain writers are persistently misunderstood, Henry Miller is surely one of the major figures of American literature living today, yet academic pedantry still dismisses him as beneath scholarly attention. He is likely to be one of the most important influences on our contemporary writing but official criticism perseveres in its scandalous and systematic neglect of his work. To exacerbate matters, Miller has come to represent the much acclaimed 'sexual freedom' of the last few decades----- . However attractive our current popular image of Henry Miller the liberated man may appear. It is very far from being the truth. Actually, Miller is a compendium of American sexual neuroses, and his value lies not in freeing us from such afflictions, but in having had the honesty to express and dramatize them. There is a kind of culturally cathartic release in Miller's writing, but it is really a result of the fact that he first gave voice to the unutterable. What Miller did articulate was the disgust, the contempt, the hostility, the violence, and the sense of filth with which our culture, or more specifically its masculine sensibility, surrounds sexuality"¹¹

Yet, Millett argues that Miller's work expresses a 'neurotic hostility' towards women, 'the yearning to effect a complete depersonalisation; in his prose, ' Miller simply converts woman to 'cunt' -thing, commodity matter; "At the heart of Millett's view is," avers Michael Woolf, "an ideological rejection of Millett's representation of women. There is though, a sense of distance between ideology and art in Millett's writings... Millett is torn between a political and ideological alienation from Miller's work, and a repressiveness to his creative method and artistic vision. In this respect, her autobiographical work dramatises the supremacy of art over ideology. In *Sita and Flying* she reveals a profound sympathy for many of Miller's attitudes and narrative strategies. Eventually, *Flying* owes much to *Tropic of Cancer* in both method and ideas. Both books occupy a place in the study of the relationship between sex and introspection in American culture. They belong within a tradition of fiction that uses sexual action to assert an anti puritan position, and that further sees sexuality as a means of liberating an essential self from social restraints and conventions. The ideological and historical distinction between these books observe the underlying correspondences, Millett's understanding of Miller is best expressed in the

might be that these passages are not only comic, but subversively so, as they undermine male sexual supremacy precisely by insisting upon it so hysterically. That is, by accentuating his persona's sexual need. Miller, consciously, or not makes the persona seem laughable, even pitiable. This treatment is similar to the excesses of emotion and gesture typically found in melodrama, and as theorists of melodrama such as Peter Brooks have pointed out, the locations in a text readers or viewers are most likely to find "excessive" are also those that tend to draw attentions to themselves and, often to themselves. Read in this light, the excesses of Miller's on going self creation as virile male border on a self-parody that he may well not have intended."¹⁵ Further says Mary Kellie Munsil. "If feminists have failed to address the subversive potential of sexually explicit writers like Henry Miller, it can be attributed more to the historical content in which the most recent wave of feminism arose than to any inherent blindness. Because the initial period of any civil rights movement is quite naturally marked by the identification of wrongs and demands for redress of those wrongs, it is not surprising that early criticism tends to focus on external forces of oppressions and to vilify those figures who seem to embody these forces such has been Henry Miller's. fate at the hands of some feminists."¹⁶ Talking about the failure of cross-gender communication, the learned critic declares: "Feminists often lay the blame for failures of gender communication on men (or, more obliquely, on male created language), while refusing to ask women to take responsibility for their own participation in the process of linguistic creation and self-creation. As women, we have, until recently, retreated behind the role of external victim of patriarchal culture and language, often refusing to acknowledge our own participation in those structures. Perhaps it is time now to seek out the significant gaps in the fabric of cross-gender communication and to take advantage of such openings to create ways out of the "prison-house of language."¹⁷

6.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the views on Henry Miller of some of the well known critics like George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, Wallace Fowile, Philip Rahv, Frederick Hoffman, Karl Shapiro Norman Mailer and those of some of the less known critics. Also, we have analysed the comments—some caustic, some favourable of some of the famous feminists like Kate Millett, Susan Griffin, Erica Jong, and the comments of the critic, Marie Kellie Munsil on the comments of the feminist critics. So, plenty of information is given here to help your further understanding of Henry Miller.

6.6 QUESTIONS

1. What are the views of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Edmund Wilson Henry Miller?
2. Write a long note (about 400 words) on the comments of
 - i) George Orwell
 - ii) Aldous Huxley
 - iii) Wallace Fowlie
 - iv) Philip Rahv
 - v) Frederick Hoffman
 - vi) Karl Shapiro
 - vii) Norman Mailer
 - viii) Kate Millett
 - ix) Susan Griffin
 - x) Erica Jong
3. Give your assessment of Henry Miller as a writer. (400 words).

6.6 NOTES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Vinson, James ed. *Contemporary Novelists*. London: St. Jame Press, 1976.
2. George Orwell, "Inside The Whale"
3. Ibid
4. Edward Mitchell (Ed.) *Henry Miller : Three Decades of Criticism*.
5. Wallace Fowlie, "Shadow of Doom": An Essay on Henry Miller:, Ronard Mitchell (Ed.) *Three Decades of Criticism*, p.38. New York: New York University Press, 1971, p.4.
6. Philip Rahv: "Skethes In Criticism: Henry Miller"
7. Karl Shapiro, "The Greatest Living Author : In Defense of Ignorance," in *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. Edward Mitchell (New York: New York University Press, 1971), p. 81
8. Ibid, PP 81-82 .
9. Norman Mailer, *Genius And Lust*
10. Dorothy Nyren Curley. *Modern American Literature*, Pp.345-52
11. Kate Millet, *Henry Miller in Sexual Politics* P. 145
12. Mary Kellie Munsil, "The Body in the Prison-house of Language: Henry Miller, Pornography and Feminism", p. 291
13. Erica Jong, *The Devil At Large*
14. Ibid
15. Mary Kellie Munsil, "The Body in the Prison-house of Language"
16. Ibid
17. Ibid