

Unit-VI AMERICAN LITERATURE

Poetry (Detailed study)

Walt Whitman: “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”

Walt Whitman (1819 – 1892)

- ❖ **American poet.**
- ❖ He linked the **Transcendentalist poets** with the more **realistic style** of the Twentieth Century.
- ❖ Walt Whitman was born in West Hills, Long Island, US on May 31, 1819.
- ❖ He was the second child in a family of eleven.
- ❖ At the age of twelve, Whitman began learning to work as a **printer**.
- ❖ It was around this time that he discovered a great passion for literature.
- ❖ He was **self-taught**, he **read voraciously**, including works by the great classic writers – **Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and the Bible**.
- ❖ After a devastating fire in the printing district of New York, Whitman was left without a job, but, in 1836, at the age of 17, he began his career as a teacher in the one-room school houses of Long Island.
- ❖ He continued to teach until **1841** when he turned to **journalism** as a full-time career.
- ❖ He founded a weekly newspaper, Long-Islander, and later edited a number of Brooklyn and New York papers.
- ❖ In **1848**, Whitman left the Brooklyn Daily Eagle to **become editor of the New Orleans Crescent**.
- ❖ In New Orleans, he became witness to the practice of slavery in the city and was repulsed by what he saw. Whitman opposed the extension of slavery, though did not always support the abolitionists, over concerns about their commitment to democracy.
- ❖ He closely followed politics throughout his life.
- ❖ He returned to Brooklyn in the fall of **1848**, where **he founded a “free soil” newspaper**, the **Brooklyn Freeman**.
- ❖ As well as journalism, Whitman became absorbed in poetry, writing a unique and distinctive style.
- ❖ In **1855**, he finished his seminal work ‘**Leaves of Grass**’, which **consisted of twelve sections**.

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume,
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

– **Leaves of Grass, Walt Whitman**

- ❖ Walt Whitman was heavily **influenced by Deism** – a belief in God without needing an organised religion.

- ❖ In his writings **he suggested that all religions were valid**, but he himself did not adhere to one particular creed.
- ❖ This underlying oneness of the Universe is a recurrent theme of Whitman's poetry.
- ❖ In the early 1870s, Whitman settled in Camden, where he had come to visit his dying mother at his brother's house.
- ❖ However, after suffering a stroke, Whitman found it impossible to return to Washington.
- ❖ He prepared his final volume of poems and prose, **Good-Bye, My Fancy (1891)**.
- ❖ After his **death on March 26, 1892**, Whitman was buried in a tomb he designed and had built on a lot in Harleigh Cemetery.

Walt Whitman: "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking"

Out of the cradle endlessly rocking,
Out of the mocking-bird's throat, the musical shuttle,
 Out of the **Ninth-month midnight**,
 Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where **the child leaving his bed wander'd alone**,
bareheaded, barefoot,
 Down from the shower'd halo,
 Up from the mystic play of shadows twining and twisting as if they were alive,
 Out from the patches of briars and blackberries,
From the memories of the bird that chanted to me,
 From your **memories sad brother**, from the fitful risings and fallings **I heard**,
 From **under that yellow half-moon late-risen** and swollen as if with tears,
 From those beginning notes of yearning and love there in the mist,
 From the thousand responses of my heart never to cease,
 From the myriad thence-arous'd words,
 From the word stronger and more delicious than any,
 From such as now they start the scene revisiting,
As a flock, twittering, rising, or overhead passing, (simile)
 Borne hither, ere all eludes me, hurriedly,
A man, yet by these tears a little boy again,
 Throwing myself on the sand, confronting the waves,
I, chanter of pains and joys, uniter of here and hereafter,
 Taking all hints to use them, but swiftly leaping beyond them,
A reminiscence sing.

Once **Paumanok**,
 When the **lilac-scent was in the air** and **Fifth-month grass was growing**,
Up this seashore in some briars,
Two feather'd guests from Alabama, two together, **(2 Birds)**
 And their **nest, and four light-green eggs spotted with brown**,

And every day the he-bird to and fro near at hand,
And every day the she-bird crouch'd on her nest, silent, with bright eyes,
 And every day **I, a curious boy, never too close, never disturbing them,**
Cautiously peering, absorbing, translating.

Shine! shine! shine!
 Pour down your warmth, great sun!
 While we bask, we two together.

Two together!

Winds blow south, or winds blow north,
 Day come white, or night come black,
 Home, or rivers and mountains from home,
 Singing all time, minding no time,
 While we two keep together.

Till of a sudden,

May-be kill'd, unknown to her mate, (Mate killed)

One forenoon the she-bird crouch'd not on the nest,
 Nor return'd that afternoon, nor the next,
 Nor ever appear'd again.

And thenceforward **all summer in the sound of the sea,**
 And at night under the full of the moon in calmer weather,
 Over the hoarse surging of the sea,
 Or flitting from brier to brier by day,
I saw, I heard at intervals the remaining one, the he-bird,
The solitary guest from Alabama.

Blow! blow! blow!

Blow up sea-winds along **Paumanok's shore;**
 I wait and I wait till you blow my mate to me.

Yes, when the **stars glisten'd,**
 All night long on the prong of a moss-scallop'd stake,
Down almost amid the slapping waves,
Sat the lone singer wonderful causing tears. (Mate Bird in tears)

He call'd on his mate,
He pour'd forth the meanings which I of all men know.

Yes my brother I know,
The rest might not, but I have treasur'd every note,
For more than once dimly down to the beach gliding,
Silent, avoiding the moonbeams, blending myself with the shadows,
Recalling now the obscure shapes, the echoes, the sounds and sights after their sorts,
The white arms out in the breakers tirelessly tossing,
I, with bare feet, a child, the wind wafting my hair,
Listen'd long and long.

Listen'd to keep, to sing, now translating the notes,
Following you my brother.

Soothe! soothe! soothe!

Close on its wave soothes the wave behind,
And again another behind embracing and lapping, every one close,
But my love soothes not me, not me.

Low hangs the moon, it rose late,

It is lagging—O I think it is heavy with love, with love.

O madly the sea pushes upon the land,
With love, with love.

O night! do I not see my love fluttering out among the breakers?

What is that little black thing I see there in the white?

Loud! loud! loud!

Loud I call to you, my love!

High and clear I shoot my voice over the waves,
Surely you must know who is here, is here,
You must know who I am, my love.

Low-hanging moon!

What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?

O it is the shape, the shape of my mate!

O moon do not keep her from me any longer.

Land! land! O land!

Whichever way I turn, O I think you could give me my mate back again if you only would,
For I am almost sure I see her dimly whichever way I look.

O rising stars!

Perhaps the one I want so much will rise, will rise with some of you.

O throat! O trembling throat!

Sound clearer through the atmosphere!

Pierce the woods, the earth,

Somewhere listening to catch you must be the one I want.

Shake out carols!**Solitary here, the night's carols!**

Carols of lonesome love! death's carols!

Carols under that lagging, yellow, waning moon!

O under that moon where she droops almost down into the sea!

O reckless despairing carols.

But soft! sink low!

Soft! let me just murmur,

And do you wait a moment you husky-nois'd sea,

For somewhere I believe I heard my mate responding to me,

So faint, I must be still, be still to listen,

But not altogether still, for then she might not come immediately to me.

Hither my love!**Here I am! here!**

With this just-sustain'd note I announce myself to you,

This gentle call is for you my love, for you.

Do not be decoy'd elsewhere,

That is the whistle of the wind, it is not my voice,

That is the fluttering, the fluttering of the spray,

Those are the shadows of leaves.

O darkness! O in vain!**O I am very sick and sorrowful.**

O brown halo in the sky near the moon, drooping upon the sea!

O troubled reflection in the sea!

O throat! O throbbing heart!

And I singing uselessly, uselessly all the night.

O past! O happy life! O songs of joy!
 In the air, in the woods, over fields,
 Loved! loved! loved! loved! loved!
 But my mate no more, no more with me!
 We two together no more.

The aria sinking,
 All else continuing, the stars shining,
The winds blowing, the notes of the bird continuous echoing,
With angry moans the fierce old mother incessantly moaning,
 On the sands of Paumanok's shore gray and rustling,
 The yellow half-moon enlarged, sagging down, drooping, the face of the sea almost touching,
 The boy ecstatic, with his bare feet the waves, with his hair the atmosphere dallying,
 The love in the heart long pent, now loose, now at last tumultuously bursting,
 The aria's meaning, the ears, the soul, swiftly depositing,
 The strange tears down the cheeks coursing,
 The colloquy there, the trio, each uttering,
 The undertone, the savage old mother incessantly crying,
 To the boy's soul's questions sullenly timing, some drown'd secret hissing,
 To the outsetting bard.

Demon or bird! (said the boy's soul,)

Is it indeed toward your mate you sing? or is it really to me?
 For I, that was a child, my tongue's use sleeping, now I have heard you,
 Now in a moment I know what I am for, I awake,
 And already a thousand singers, a thousand songs, clearer, louder and more sorrowful than yours,
 A thousand warbling echoes have started to life within me, never to die.

O you singer solitary, singing by yourself, projecting me,

O solitary me listening, never more shall I cease perpetuating you,
 Never more shall I escape, never more the reverberations,
 Never more the cries of unsatisfied love be absent from me,
 Never again leave me to be the peaceful child I was before what there in the night,
 By the sea under the yellow and sagging moon,
 The messenger there arous'd, the fire, the sweet hell within,
 The unknown want, the destiny of me.

O give me the clew! (it lurks in the night here somewhere,)
 O if I am to have so much, let me have more!

A word then, (for I will conquer it,)

The word final, superior to all,
 Subtle, sent up—what is it?—I listen;
 Are you whispering it, and have been all the time, you sea-waves?
 Is that it from your liquid rims and wet sands?

Whereto answering, the sea,
 Delaying not, hurrying not,
 Whisper'd me through the night, and very plainly before day-break,

Lisp'd to me the low and delicious word death,
 And again death, death, death, death,
 Hissing melodious, neither like the bird nor like my arous'd child's heart,
 But edging near as privately for me rustling at my feet,
 Creeping thence steadily up to my ears and laving me softly all over,
 Death, death, death, death, death.

Which I do not forget,
 But fuse the song of my dusky demon and brother,
 That he sang to me in the moonlight on Paumanok's gray beach,
 With the thousand responsive songs at random,
 My own songs awaked from that hour,
 And with them the key, the word up from the waves,
 The word of the sweetest song and all songs,
 That strong and delicious word which, creeping to my feet,
 (Or like some old crone rocking the cradle, swathed in sweet garments, bending aside,)
 The sea whisper'd me.

Analysis & Summary

- ❖ **First published as "A Word Out of the Sea"** in the **1860** edition of his collection *Leaves of Grass* and **later published in the 1871 version** using the final title.
- ❖ It was written in **lyrical free verse**.
- ❖ The poem was **first published under the title "A Child's Reminiscence"** in the **New York Saturday Press** for 24 December 1859, with the opening verse paragraph bearing the heading "Pre-Verse."
- ❖ When the Cincinnati Daily Commercial published an attack upon the poem a few days later, the Saturday Press of 7 January 1860 reprinted the attack along with an anonymous response by Whitman entitled "**All About a Mocking-Bird.**" There, in one of his first defenses against hostile criticism, Whitman justifies the poem and his craft and prophesies a new edition of *Leaves of Grass*, what would become the 1860 edition.
- ❖ The final form of the poem appeared in **1881**.

- ❖ This poem is **addressed to an unknown listener or audience**, or the speaker might be talking to Self.
- ❖ **Autobiographical elements are in this poem.**
- ❖ The poetic persona **remembers about a past incident inspired by the unceasingly rocking of the sea waves.**
- ❖ He remembers that as a child, he left the **mother's womb**, which is a **cradle of human life**, he also left the bed and roamed alone in search of the secret of life and death.
- ❖ **Life itself is the cradle that is continually rocked by death.**
- ❖ He remembers the **sea shore** with strong waves and the **pair of birds loving each other and singing to one another.**
- ❖ One day, the **she-bird did not return to the nest** and the **he-bird was worried**. He waited for her and desperately looked for her here and there.
- ❖ **The poetic person**, then a **boy**, heard everything and also understood the pain and agony of the separation of the he-bird.
- ❖ **The lamentation of the bird touched him deeply.**
- ❖ The boy and the male bird did not have any clue about the whereabouts of the female bird.
- ❖ Then the sea gave hints to the boy (now the poet) 'the word final, superior to all', 'delicious word death...../Death, death.' These clues and the painful song of the he-bird marked the beginning of his poetic career. He was enlightened by the truth that death is the final destiny of any creatures.
- ❖ **Death rocked the cradle of life endlessly.**
- ❖ The lonely bird singing to relieve his pain is a metaphor here for arousing the poetic spirit in the poet.
- ❖ **This poem is an elegy by the male bird in the death of his sweetheart.**
- ❖ As an elegy, this poem has following features; death of some dear one, here the death of the female bird, as the main subject of the poem.
- ❖ The nature too mourns on the death, in this poem, the sea is restless and the moon is lagging behind on the separation of the loving birds.
- ❖ The mourner laments and **recalls the past happiness**; the speaker tells us the past happy situations of the birds.
- ❖ As almost all the elegy has the consolation through the realization that death is final and superior, this poem too has the ending with the poet and the lone bird realizing the final truth of the death.
- ❖ Through this elegy, Walt Whitman presents his attitude towards death through the medium of he-bird.
- ❖ For Whitman **death is not the end of life**, but the **beginning of another form of life.**
- ❖ It is true that death is the beginning of another form of life. It is true that death is superior and final, yet it can make us enter another phase of life.
- ❖ The body dies, but the soul continues in another form. With this belief he has presented the elegy of he-bird whose mate is gone, and yet he has hope that her life has continued elsewhere.

- ❖ **Seeing the dusky spot in the moon, he guesses that his beloved is there.** So he requests moon not to keep her away from him. He even hopes that his beloved will rise at the shining stars. Moreover, the sea or land will give him back his mate. All these requests made to the moon, land, sea and stars presuppose the continuation of life somewhere in another form.
- ❖ **The title of the poem itself is symbolic to the birth.**
- ❖ Cradle is **metaphorically a mother's womb** and at the same time, it can be a life which is rocked by the death. So, the title has dual meaning: one refers to the birth from mother's womb, and if the cradle is taken as the life, it refers to the death.
- ❖ The implied **theme of the poem** is the **connection between grief and art.**
- ❖ The poem vividly depicts the growing **process of the boy from immaturity to maturity through his live experience** of the love of the birds and the death of one bird. Any piece of art is created through frustrations and death only releases us from such frustrations.
- ❖ The poem is full of musicality in the first twenty two lines with rhyming pattern and wavelike quality.
- ❖ This poem flows like a wave with poetic syntax.

Emily Dickinson: “Because I could not Stop for Death”

Emily Dickinson

- ❖ Emily Dickinson was born on **December 10, 1830**, in Amherst, Massachusetts.
- ❖ Throughout her life, **she seldom left her home and visitors were few.**
- ❖ The people with whom she did come in contact, however, had an enormous impact on her poetry.
- ❖ She was particularly stirred by the **Reverend Charles Wadsworth**, whom she first met on a trip to Philadelphia.
- ❖ **He left for the West Coast** shortly after a visit to her home in 1860, and some critics believe his departure gave rise to the heartsick flow of verse from Dickinson in the years that followed.
- ❖ While it is certain that he was an important figure in her life, it is not clear that their relationship was romantic—**she called him “my closest earthly friend.”**
- ❖ Other possibilities for the unrequited love that was the subject of many of Dickinson’s poems include **Otis P. Lord, a Massachusetts Supreme Court judge**, and **Samuel Bowles, editor of the Springfield Republican.**
- ❖ **By the 1860s, Dickinson lived in almost complete isolation from the outside world**, but actively maintained many correspondences and read widely. She spent a great deal of this time with her family.
- ❖ Her father, Edward Dickinson, was actively involved in state and national politics, serving in Congress for one term.
- ❖ Her brother, Austin, who attended law school and became an attorney, lived next door with his wife, Susan Gilbert.
- ❖ Dickinson’s younger sister, Lavinia, also lived at home for her entire life in similar isolation.
- ❖ Lavinia and Austin were not only family, but intellectual companions for Dickinson during her lifetime.
- ❖ **Dickinson’s poetry was heavily influenced by the Metaphysical poets of seventeenth-century England**, as well as her reading of the **Book of Revelation** and her upbringing in a Puritan New England town, which encouraged a Calvinist, orthodox, and conservative approach to Christianity.
- ❖ She admired the poetry of **Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning**, as well as John Keats.
- ❖ Though she was dissuaded from reading the verse of her contemporary Walt Whitman by rumors of its disgracefulness, the two poets are now connected by the distinguished place they hold as the founders of a uniquely American poetic voice.
- ❖ While Dickinson was extremely prolific as a poet and regularly enclosed poems in letters to friends, she was not publicly recognized during her lifetime.
- ❖ **The first volume of her work was published posthumously in 1890 and the last in 1955.**
- ❖ **She died in Amherst in 1886.**

- ❖ Upon her death, Dickinson's family discovered **forty hand-bound volumes of nearly 1,800 poems, or "fascicles" as they are sometimes called.**
- ❖ The handwritten poems show a variety of dash-like marks of various sizes and directions (some are even vertical).
- ❖ The poems were initially unbound and published according to the aesthetics of her many early editors, who removed her unusual and varied dashes, replacing them with traditional punctuation.
- ❖ The Manuscript Books of Emily Dickinson (Belknap Press, 1981) is the only volume that keeps the order intact.

Emily Dickinson: "Because I could not Stop for Death"

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
 The **Carriage held but just Ourselves –**
 And **Immortality.**

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
 And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
 At **Recess –** in the Ring –
 We passed the **Fields of Gazing Grain –**
 We **passed the Setting Sun –**

Or rather – **He passed Us –**
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
 For only Gossamer, (transparent) my Gown –
 My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
 The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – **'tis Centuries –** and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –

Analysis & Summary

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Because I could not stop for Death – Summary of the poem

- ❖ **"Because I could not stop for Death"** is a lyrical poem by Emily Dickinson first published posthumously in Poems: Series 1 in 1890.
- ❖ The poem was published under the title "The Chariot".
- ❖ It is composed in six quatrains with the meter alternating between iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter.
- ❖ Stanzas 1, 2, 4, and 6 employ end rhyme in their second and fourth lines, but some of these are only close rhyme or eye rhyme.
- ❖ In the third stanza, there is no end rhyme, but "ring" in line 2 rhymes with "gazing" and "setting" in lines 3 and 4 respectively. Internal rhyme is scattered throughout.
- ❖ The speaker in the poem is too busy to approach death; therefore, death comes in the form of a gentleman to pick her up on a chariot.
- ❖ The carriage included no other and the speaker travelled with death alone.
- ❖ The civility of death is praised as he drives the chariot with a relaxed and steady pace which provides ease to the poet.
- ❖ The chariot crosses a town where children are seen playing and there are fields with full of grain.
- ❖ They witness the serenity of the setting sun. But, as the sun sets the speaker feels the chill of the night and believes that she is not properly dressed for the occasion (date with death).
- ❖ They halt before a house that appears to be a small mound emerging from the ground (the grave of the speaker).
- ❖ She could not clearly see the roof of the house and the cornice was nothing but the mound of earth.
- ❖ The speaker realizes that it's been centuries since he death and it feels to her like yesterday that she was eternally taken by death.

Because I could not stop for Death – Analysis of the poem

Stanza-1:

- ❖ The speaker represents the human race when she declares that she is too busy to think about death.
- ❖ It has become our primordial instinct to survive through all the difficulties posed by the community. But death never forgets and comes after those whose time in this realm is over.
- ❖ To the speaker Death is kind and it offers a chariot to take her away.
- ❖ There is a lot of perplexity about the inclusion of "Immortality" in the last line of the stanza (as the speaker says that the chariot has Death, her and Immortality).
- ❖ The reason for the inclusion of the word can be only understood from the meaning of the last stanza.

Stanza-2:

- ❖ The speaker considers Death as wooer who shows civility in his manners.
- ❖ She expresses pleasantness about the steady handling of the chariot by Death.
- ❖ In response, she forgets all her labour and leisure to enjoy the ride.
- ❖ This description of the chariot ride can be interpreted as a smooth passing of the soul after death and the person has left the world without having to struggle too much nor with pain.

Stanza-3:

- ❖ The third stanza in the poem – Because I could not stop for Death – through three various descriptions gives a complete cycle of life.
- ❖ The chariot passes children playing joyfully indicating the innocent childhood, the grazing grain attaining fruitfulness indicating manhood and the setting sun dawning light indicating the old age where one waits for the darkness to take over.

Stanza-4:

- ❖ The speaker shows uncertainty about the passing of the sun as she feels that they didn't pass over, but it was the Sun who crossed them.
- ❖ This glimpses that the speaker is resting somewhere and it is her soul travelling in the chariot. The realization slowly creeps into the speaker as she feels the chill and understands the way she dresses, which is inappropriate for a pleasant chariot ride and feels as if it is an abrupt gesture (from Death).

Stanza-5:

- ❖ The chariot pauses at her grave, which she calls as her “house” and it is nothing but a swelling on the ground.
- ❖ It is indeed no house but the speaker's grave where she rests and watches the world eternally. The journey of the speaker after witnessing different marvels of the world pauses at the grave and goes on, indicating that there is an after-life for her (human race) and she must continue her journey. The grave is only the resting place.

Stanza-6:

- ❖ The first line of the last stanza in “Because I could not stop for Death” reveals that it has been centuries since the death of the speaker.
- ❖ Although, it was so many years ago she feels the memory as fresh and it feels as if it happened on that very day.
- ❖ She believes that it is the day she died when the horses' of the chariot were pointing her towards eternity.
- ❖ It is the reason for the inclusion of “Immortality” in the first stanza, as death though appears to be a gentleman apprehends the soul for eternity and one has to journey through without any respite.