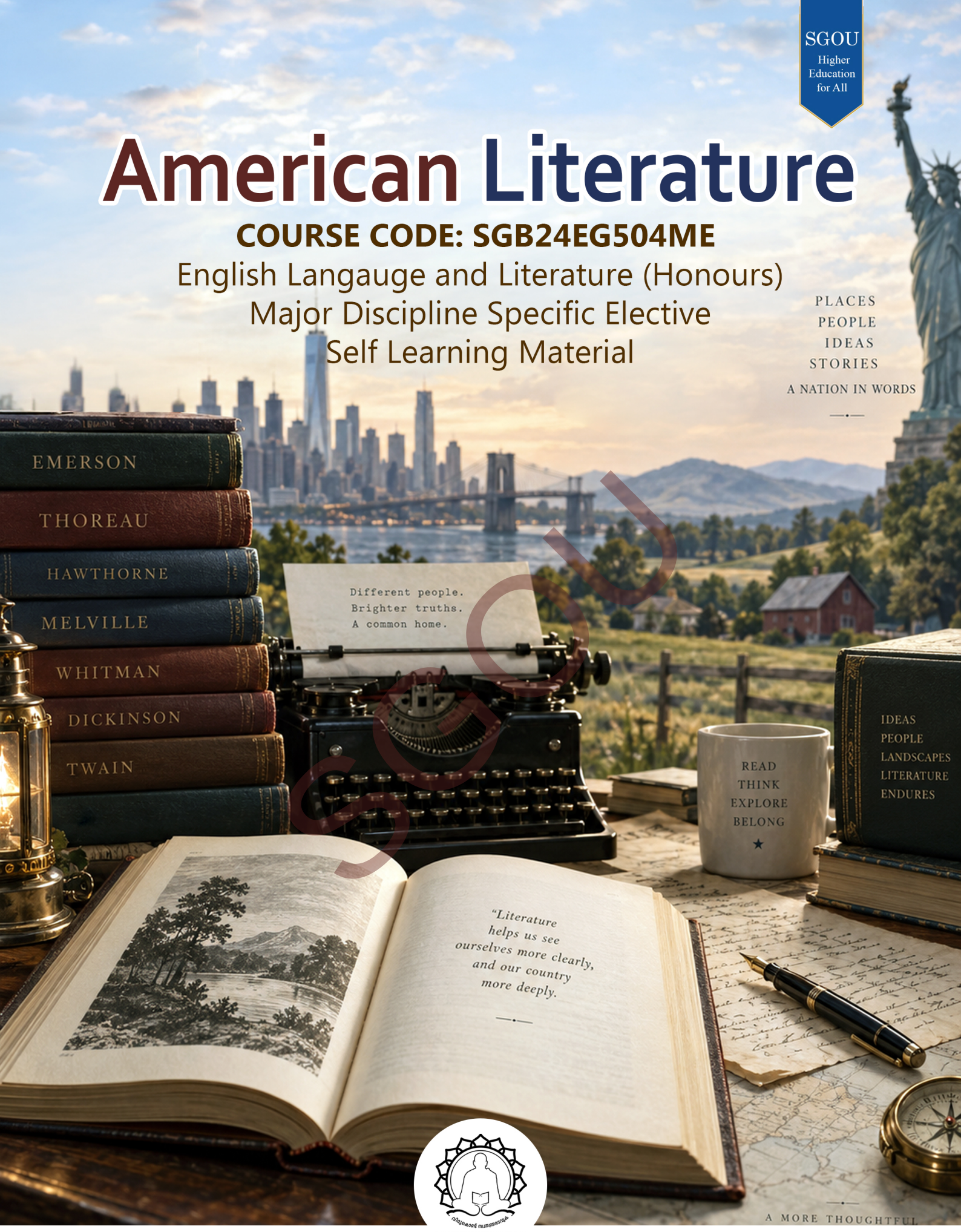
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American Literature

COURSE CODE: SGB24EG504ME

English Langauge and Literature (Honours)
Major Discipline Specific Elective
Self Learning Material



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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

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Mission

To be benchmarked as a model for conservation and dissemination of knowledge and skill on blended and virtual mode in education, training and research for normal, continuing, and adult learners.

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Access and Quality define Equity.

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American Literature

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Semester - V

Four Year Undergraduate Programme
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AMERICAN LITERATURE

Course Code: SGB24EG504ME
Semester- V
Major Discipline Specific Elective
BA English Language and Literature (Honours)

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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear Learner,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature offered by Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Established in September 2020, our university aims to provide high-quality higher education through open and distance learning. Our guiding principle, 'access and quality define equity', shapes our approach to education. We are committed to maintaining the highest standards in our academic offerings.

Our university proudly bears the name of Sreenarayanaguru, a prominent Renaissance thinker of modern India. His philosophy of social reform and educational empowerment serves as a constant reminder of our dedication to excellence in all our academic pursuits.

The Four Year UG Programme in English Language and Literature covers all relevant areas aligned with English language and literary studies. We have incorporated the latest trends in English studies to ensure a comprehensive and up-to-date curriculum. Moreover, the programme encompasses flexible options for learners to choose from a range of Ability Enhancement Courses, Multi-disciplinary Courses, Value Added Courses, and Skill Enhancement Courses, complemented by discipline-oriented Advanced and Additional Advanced Courses.

Our teaching methodology combines three key elements: Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling, and Virtual modes. This blended approach aims to provide a rich and engaging learning experience, overcoming the limitations often associated with distance education. We are confident that this programme will enhance your understanding of English language and literature, preparing you for various career paths and further academic pursuits.

Our learner support services are always available to address any concerns you may have during your time with us. We encourage you to reach out with any questions or feedback regarding the programme.

We wish you success in your academic journey with Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Best regards,



Dr. Jagathy Raj V.P.
Vice Chancellor

01-09-2026

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BLOCK - 01

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Background Study

Unit 1

American Literature: An Introduction

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the diverse genres and dimensions of American literature.
- explore how religion, culture, and European literary traditions influenced the works of American colonial authors.
- understand the historical events that helped shape Colonial Era narratives and the emergence of distinct American literary voices and styles.
- appreciate American literature and enhance knowledge of the nation's intriguing literary past.

Prerequisite

American literature is the imaginative record of a nation in search of itself. Though its written history is relatively brief when compared with the long-established traditions of Europe, its growth has been remarkably dynamic and diverse. Long before the arrival of European settlers, the land resounded with the rich oral narratives of Indigenous peoples: myths, legends, and songs that preserved cultural memory and spiritual vision. With colonisation in the seventeenth century, a new phase began. The early settlers, especially the Puritans of New England and the colonists of Virginia, produced writings shaped by religious conviction, survival anxieties, and historical documentation. Their works were often modelled on English literary forms, yet the challenges of the New World gradually fostered a distinct tone and sensibility. Writers such began to infuse their poetry with personal faith and emotional intensity, marking the beginnings of a uniquely American voice. Over time, American literature would move from imitation to innovation, reflecting the nation's struggles with identity, freedom, diversity, and democracy. This unit introduces learners to the historical foundations and evolving character of American literature, preparing them to trace its journey from colonial roots to a vibrant national tradition.

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Keywords

Colonialism, Puritanism, American Renaissance, Transcendentalism, Realism, Naturalism, Harlem Renaissance, Multiculturalism

1.1.1 Introduction

"America" was only one of the several names for a dream dreamed by Europeans, "for a land so preserved by Nature out of a desire to show mankind existence of a New Eden," remarks Richard Gray, in *A History of American Literature*. The histories of the struggle for independence, the Civil War, the value of the Puritan inheritance, the non-European myths of Manifest Destiny, the frontier, cultural myths and values and the specific historical processes distinguish American literature and make it different from British literature. Racial and ethnic diversity shape the American ethos.

The dream of a new land outside and beyond history: "a Virgin Country," was realised as the Europeans established the United States of America in 1776. Different groups travelled from England to the New World. The Jamestown colony in Virginia was founded as a commercial venture. Those travelling on the Mayflower founded the colony at Plymouth, Massachusetts in in 1620. The inhabitants of the continent in their aboriginal innocence were stripped of culture, as well as clothes and Christianity; they were primitives, a recollection of the natural man in his uncorrupted form.

American literature which has produced so many poet laureates, has a comparatively shorter history. Till the European settlers reached the continent in the sixteenth century the indigenous tribes who possessed a rich oral culture populated the region. Since the natives has no written down literature of their own, the literary writing of America begins with the writings of the European settlers. The plurality of American culture and American writing, the continued invention of communities, and the sustained imagining of nations, constitute the literary history of the United States.

1.1.2 Native Americans and colonialism -1600 -1625

This is the period of first successful colonisation of America. The royalists settled down in Virginia and the Puritans in New England states as Massachusetts, Connecticut and Hampshire. The efforts of the colonists centred in conquering new territories and in establishing social order and a stable government. Writing was imitative of English literature and it consisted chiefly of travel and personal records diaries and sermons, historical and descriptive accounts and a few crude poems.

During the puritan migration that continued up to 1640, the New England population grew enormously. In 1640 it was 25,000. By 1700, it was approximately 1.75 million. Writing was mainly utilitarian, polemical and historical. Crude verse epitaphs and psalms were composed which were imitations of English models. Puritanism was established in 1639 in Massachusetts. Quakers, also called The Society of Friends, as a Protestant denomination in the 1650s.

1.1.3 Colonial literature

Edward Taylor was America's greatest colonial poet. He produced a remarkable manuscript book of poetry. In 1939 Johnson compiled and published selections from the manuscripts. "God's Determinations." In a highly unorthodox fashion, the work celebrates the primacy of divine mercy for man

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caught in the continuing war between Christ and Satan; "Five Poems;" and "Sacramental Meditations," express a fervent yearning and ecstasy in acceptance by Christ. The colonial writings focused on religious, practical, or historical themes. The most influential writers include John Winthrop, Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, and Anne Bradstreet.

1.1.4 Puritanism and New England

Puritans who emigrated to New England were heirs to a rich literary tradition. They expanded their doctrines to make an increase in the quantity and quality of artistic creations. Puritan poetics was more liberal in its employment of biblical typology. The creative impulses of the Puritan ministers and their vision of New England as New Jerusalem led to a liberal use of typology and moral formulations. Puritan poets worked for artfulness and the readers approved of the newly discovered productions and recognized the inherent aesthetic element.

The world around being an expression of the divine imagination, literature was made to shape the human spirit towards a better understanding of the divine metaphysic. 17th century saw chronicles, detailing the individual and the collective experiences of the Puritans in New England. According to the Puritans, the church being the body of Christ, each member an integral part distress to one person meant that the entire body was affected.

During the period between 1660-1798 there was a struggle between puritanism and the liberal elements in New England. Terrible events like the persecution of the quackers and Baptists followed. The first newspaper of America *The Boston Newspaper* was established in 1704.The period from 1700 to 1750 saw the decline of puritanism.

The tenets of Puritan faith were a hindrance to formulating a literary theory. The literary elements were contradictory to the 'ideological' aspects of Puritan philosophy. The Puritans advocated a literary style that was simple, lucid, and controlled, appealing to the intellect, and that always instructed. Puritan authorship was inevitably utilitarian; the writer might chronicle the story of his age, narrate the lives of famous personages, discourse upon human duties, or compose hymns and praises to God.

William Perkins, a key figure in the Puritan movement whose evangelical fervour made him one of the most influential leaders in New England, had written a manual on Sermonising, called An Exposition on the Apostles' Creed. During the 17th century, chronicles describing the individual and collective experiences of the Puritans in New England were written. The Puritans believed that literature should be used to shape the human spirit and promote a better understanding of the divine metaphysics. The Diary of the eminent minister Michael Wigglesworth, and The Autobiography of Increase Mather are central to Puritan literature. The movement towards verbal artistry is exemplified by Richard Baxter (1615-91) in his popular work, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1650). Puritan poetics were characterized by a generous use of biblical typology.

"Jeremiad" is the term to include formula such as letters, covenant renewals and confessions. Samuel Danforth's (1 626- 1674) *A Brief Record of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*, Increase's *A Renewal of Covenant the Great Duty Incumbent on Decaying und Distressed Churches* (1677), *Pray for the Rising Generation* (1678), and *Heaven to the Present and Succeeding Generations* (1679) are other examples to cite for this genre.

Anne 'Bradstreet a woman puritan poet' wrote *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America. Or, several Poems, compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight . . . By*

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a Gentlewoman. Her poems were attempts to versify not only her moral and religious sentiments but also to convey contemporary scientific ideas, and they reflected the psychology, physiology,physics, natural sciences, and "correspondences" of the Renaissance. Published as "Quarternions," the poems included the "The Four Elements," "The Four Ages of Man," "The Four Humours in Man's Constitution," "The Four Seasons of the Year" and "The Four Monarchies."

The evolution of colonial America into a federal structure continued with its engagement with the 'modern' economic and cultural influences. This Transition period which anticipated America's emergence as a nation is referred to as the period of the American Enlightenment. The formation of a federal association of the colonies, the struggle to achieve independence from the domination of the government in England is referred to as the period of the American Enlightenment, which was initiated from the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment in England.

1700's witnessed a new way of thinking about God, nature, and humanity - the Enlightenment. Founded in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century, and with towering English thinkers such as physicist Isaac Newton, Enlightenment thought was consciously scientific and rational. The new thinking for educated Americans became a critique and counter to classic, traditional Protestantism. These two new ways of thinking produced a curious and contradictory blend of theistic belief and sceptical humanism in the American mind. The New Learning was impactful, as Yale received a gift of books on Newtonian physics and Lockean philosophy in 1714.

1.1.5 Literature of the Revolutionary Period

The greatest documents of American history were authored during the Revolutionary Age**,** 1765-1790. In 1776, Thomas Paine authored *Common Sense* and Thomas Jefferson wrote *The Declaration of Independence*. In 1781, *The Articles of Confederation* were endorsed. In 1788 Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay wrote *The Federalist Papers*. In 1787, *The Constitution of the United States* was drafted and approved in 1789.

1.1.6 Post-Independence Era and Nationalism

The period from 1750 to 1798 is referred to as the age of Nationalism. Thinkers and statesman like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin contributed to the evolution of the thought process. Political issues were dominant and the literature of the period was influenced by politics. English poets as Dryden and Pope inspired the poetry of this time. American novel and drama flourished and professional actors staged political plays.

1.1.7 Early National Period

Consolidation of the government of the independent USA, along with territorial expansion, was referred to as "the expanding frontiers". The Early National Period of American Literature saw the beginnings of literature that can be identified as "American". American literature slowly freed itself from English influence to produce literature of its own. The first American comedy written for the stage was *The Contrast*, by Royall Tyler, in 1787, and the first American novel was *The Power of Sympathy*, by William Hill, in 1789. American literature was written in the English style, but the settings, themes, and characters were authentically American. Poets wrote poetry that

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was relatively independent of English precursors. Three of the most popular writers were Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe.

Great American literary figures such as Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, James Russel Lowell, Hawthorne, and H.W. Longfellow enriched the literary tradition. Thoreau belonged to this era of the "New England Renaissance." It was termed so for the increased impetus given to learning, culture, literature, and other developments such as transport, shipping, and manufacturing. In literature, romantic influence was represented through features such as individualism, influence in nature, and supernaturalism. The novel achieved remarkable status with Charles Brockden Brown and his gothic novel Wieland, which made him the first professional novelist in America. The short story, America's contribution to world literature, developed during this period. Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* and other stories were published in 1819. Marked as a milestone in American literature, it was the first collection of short stories in the whole world. Washington Irving may be regarded as the father of short stories.

1.1.8 American Renaissance

The period from 1828-1865 in American Literature is identified differently as the *Romantic Period*, *American Renaissance* or the *Age of Transcendentalism*. It witnessed works of originality and excellence shaped by the ideas, ideals, and literary aims of American writers. American literary criticism was led by Edgar Allan Poe, James Russell Lowell, and William Gilmore Simms. African-American authors published their works such as the "Clotel or The President's daughter" by William Wells Brown in 1853 and "Our Nig, or, Sketches from the life of a free Black" by Harriet E. Wilson in 1859.

Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman also made their presence felt in the literary field of America with their phenomenal works. There was a deliberate effort on the part of these writers to break away from the European tradition. New techniques were introduced in novel, drama and poetry. The period witnessed several literary and intellectual movements like the local colour movement, Transcendentalism, Naturalism, Realism and so on. Periodical literature flourished and drama became a dominant genre with George Henry Boker as the chief dramatist of the age.

1.1.9 Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism as a movement started with the publication of "Nature" in 1836. Ralph Waldo Emerson's work marked the beginning of the intellectual movement known as *Transcendentalism*. Emerson founded the transcendental club along with George Ripley, Bronson Alcottt and a few others. He also gave a series of lectures on philosophy, the one at Harvard in 1837 was titled "The American Scholar" which is rightly called as "the declaration of America's intellectual independence." He had a lasting friendship with Thoreau, Russell and Lowell.

The Transcendental Journal, 'The Dial', was founded and the movement was based on sources such as Platonism, German idealistic philosophy, Oriental Mysticism, and Native American elements. Emerson acquired the Platonic doctrines directly from Plato and also from the Neo-Platonists like Plotinus, Porphyry, and Lamblichus. Emerson was greatly indebted to the Platonists of Cambridge, like Ralph Cudworth. Plato was regarded as the archetype of geniuses and as a philosopher who attempted the reconciliation of matter and spirit. The soul was seen as the microcosm of the universal soul. Emerson present-

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ed the concept of a correspondence between inner and outer nature.

Emerson was very much familiar with the German Idealistic philosophy through Coleridge and Carlyle. Later he mastered German philosophy personally by reading Schiller, Fichte, Goethe, Immanuel Kant and Hegel. Emerson was fascinated by the Transcendental philosophy of Kant and dialectics of Hegel. Emerson had read in translation Oriental literature- Persian and Indian literature. Emerson was well versed in the poetry of the Persian poets, Hafiz Saadi and Ferdouz and regarded Saadi as the ideal poet. The doctrines of *Bhagwat Gita* and 'Vishnupurana' fascinated him and also the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius. He was influenced by the high moral standards set by Puritanism and Quakerism and saw nature as a tangible symbol corresponding to the intangible divine and to the qualities deep within man, who therefore could trust himself to perceive the highest truth.

The doctrines of Transcendentalism were partly harmonious but often contradictory in nature. According to scholars Transcendentalism was an eclectic embracing of the prime values of individual feeling, intuition, conscience and idealistic imagination of a consequent faith in the potentialities of the common man, in democracy, in nature and in a gentle, fraternal, pervasive God and an associated indifference to high society, cold science and systematic institution like schools and churches.

The transcendental beliefs can be summarised as follows:

1. Belief in the supremacy of intuition over induction, imagination over logic, and conscience over traditional authority. Intuition helps the mind to see into the workings of reality, giving visions of reality. Faith in the rightness of one's conscience gives dignity to the individual, for which the study of nature becomes a prerogative and guiding principle.
2. Man is of transcendental value because his soul is part of the bigger soul.
3. Faith in nature is mysterious and poetic, one of beauty and harmony. It is the embodiment of the mind of God.
4. Belief in the universal goodness and fundamental unity in diversity.
5. A transcendentalist would close his sensory organs to external nature and would ecstatically let his soul become enveloped in beauty and truth.
6. Belief in individualism.

Emerson says, "Man determines his own existence. He makes the world by making himself." His thought starts and ends with the centrality of man, and from this centre, he develops his.

1.1.10 1870 – 1900

American literature of this period began to be self-conscious and nationalistic. There was a rapid growth of America in every direction followed by a large-scale migration of people from almost all parts of the world. Progress in science and technology was followed by a conflict between science and religion. The dominant literary tendencies may be noted as the advent of realism, the use of local colour, a love of historical and sentimental romances, and the increasing relevance on American subjects and the popularity of naturalism. The novel gained in reputation and achieved world-class status, and the short story became almost perfect in terms of technique, while commercial drama became popular under able managers. The general tendencies since 1915 in the American novel and drama have been towards realism, social satire, and social protest.

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1.1.11 Civil War

The Civil War (1861-1865) was a turning point in the history of America, initiating a new beginning and new ways of living. Industry became more important, resulting in the increase of factories. This era witnessed the rise of modern America, a development that was reflected in literature. Mark Twain was the first major American writer to capture this change, as demonstrated in his works such as *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He utilised American language in a new manner, presenting characters who spoke like real people with distinct local dialects and regional accents. This marked the beginning of realism and naturalism in literature, with numerous other writers emulating Twain. Following the Civil War, the Realistic Period (1865-1900) emerged in literature. Realistic fiction featured ordinary and commonplace characters, who were introduced for the first time in literature by authors such as Mark Twain, Henry James, Bret Harte, Mary Wilkins Freeman, George W. Cable, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Kate Chopin.

1.1.12 Rise of Literary Realism

American writing of the early twentieth century evidenced a critical attempt to comprehend the tumultuous industrial and technological changes which transformed the economy, society and culture of the country. American modernism characterised by its attempt to overcome the limitations of being a regional literature acquired a global dimension. Though there were other popular genres of writing, drama came to prominence in the early twentieth century.

1.1.13 1900 to 1930

The First World War was the most important factor in the history and thought of the period. It had a unifying force in the beginning but later it generated frustration and disillusionment. Science and technology developed rapidly and the tempo of life became fast and this was reflected in literature. The negro was suddenly discovered as a literary figure. For realistic fiction, drama and poetry. The negro himself joined the white authors in writing about race. Psychology exerted a great influence on drama and fiction. American literature became cosmopolitan towards the end of this period and it was beginning to be imitated by others. There was experimentation in every branch of literature just as in every walk of life.

1.1.14 Modernism

American writing of the early twentieth century evidenced a critical attempt to comprehend the tumultuous industrial and technological changes that transformed the economy, society, and culture of the country. American modernism, characterised by its attempt to overcome the limitations of being a regional literature, acquired a global dimension. Though there were other popular genres of writing, drama came to prominence in the early twentieth century. According to Richard Gray, modernism came to American drama; so did realism, experimentalism, and Americanism. Henry Adams, a professor of History at Harvard, defined modernism as characterised by "multiplicity, diversity, complexity, anarchy, and chaos." These five terms are definitive of American modernism.

American Literature from 1914 to 1939 is marked as "The Beginnings of Modern Literature". The American Modernists experimented with subject matter, form, and style to create remarkable works in all literary genres. American Modernist poets such as Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and E.E. Cummings were prominent during this period. Prose writers of the period included Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lew-

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is, and Willa Cather. There were also various subgenres, with F. Scott Fitzgerald belonging to The Jazz Age, Langston Hughes and W.E.B. DuBois being a part of The Harlem Renaissance, and Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway being writers of 'The Lost Generation.'

The age of complexity followed; the features of the age cannot be clearly defined. Its early years are characterized by the problems of depression and, the horrors of the Second World War. Literature reflected different ideologies, as diverse and varied as capitalism and communism. American literature emerged as trend setter because of its richness and variety. This was the age of realism, naturalism, surrealism and existentialism. Cynicism and scepticism coloured most of the literary works of the period. The conflict between materialism and spiritualism is still in literature with the result that authors became more introspective, self-analytical.

1.1.15 Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance

Harlem Renaissance is popularly known as an intellectual rebirth of African American culture. It was indeed a cultural and literary revival of the African American art forms as music, dance, literature, folk lore, theatre and politics. The events and causes for the renaissance are studied as the American Declaration of Independence, Emancipation Proclamation, End of Civil War, abolition of slavery and The First World War. The time period from 1920 to 1930 is usually considered as its period. Black intellectuals published their journals, periodicals and magazines for the intellectual uplift of the African Americans. *Fire!!*, a literary magazine published by a group of young writers like Langston Hughes, Bruce Nugent, and Zora Neale Hurston had a pivotal role in the flowering of the Harlem renaissance.

The period also witnessed the advent of the Harlem Renaissance a cultural movement honouring and celebrating African American art, literature, and music. Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay contributed to the movement with their works acknowledging and validating black culture, spirituality and identity, addressing issues as racial discrimination and injustice and inequality. The Harlem Renaissance period being a time of immense creativity and innovation, helped shape the course of American literature. Marcus Garvey, the progenitor of Black pride and Black Nationalism contributed to the ideological concept for the Harlem Renaissance and also for the New Negro Movement. With no particular literary style, ideology or doctrine, the movement was more like a quest for identity. The renaissance was a declaration of the blacks to be free. The demand was for freedom from inequality, freedom from subordination, freedom from discrimination, freedom from racism. The black artists, writers, performers believed in themselves and wanted to follow their own artistic intelligence and express their vision and diversity. Black spirituality, dance, music and songs, folktales, customs, dialect became the motive force of cultural awakening. The writers, poets, musicians, and artists sought a true expression of the black identity. "Blues and jazz, folk idioms and urban vernacular would become the building blocks of black modernism." (Walls 5) There is no perfect moment of the beginning of the Renaissance but it gained momentum after the World War I.

Harlem renaissance is still an important cultural force in America because from jazz to carols it is all black culture in essence. The names associated are Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Countee Cullen. Literature during this period extended to include vernaculars, journalism and theatre.

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Black vernacular speech gained popularity as it was accepted in writings.

The New Negro Movement and Harlem Renaissance brought an evolution in jazz music. Black talent and vitality were incorporated to modern music. The staging of *Shuffle Along* in 1921 in Broadway was the starting point. Artists like Josephine Baker, Paul Robeson and singers like Eubie Blake and Noble Sissle became international figures, the whites of New York were introduced to the black music, theatre and entertainment. Jazz music was the creation of the South but got recognition in the North. Various jazz clubs in Harlem like Alhambra Ballroom, Lenox Lounge, Apollo Theatre, and Club Harlem had international stars like Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and Count Basie.

1.1.16 Great Depression and Literature

The Great Depression marked the end of the American Modernist Period, and writers such as William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Eugene O'Neill dealt with the social and political issues of the time. The Great Depression, the most wrenching and divisive domestic crisis in American history is a narrative anchored in the economic and political emergency of the period from 1930 to 1940. An economic structure believed to be the strongest in the world collapsed causing a worldwide economic downturn in 1929 and lasted till 1939. The economic devastation of the Great Depression, the most severe experienced by the industrialised Western world, initiated fundamental changes in macroeconomic policy economic institutions, and economic theory. It started in the United States causing severe unemployment and huge deflation in the world. The period represented the harshest adversity faced by Americans after the Civil War. The Depression was caused by the economic imbalances and war debts imposed by the Treaty of Versailles, the tremors of "the great earthquake" as Edmund Wilson called it shook every American city and village. Individual stock prices fell by as much as ninety per cent; the market losing lost two-thirds of its value. More than five thousand banks failed, and around ten million persons were unemployed. Industry towns, such as Chicago and Detroit, nearly fifty percent were jobless. "Investors had ceased to invest and workers had ceased to work." The devastated economy remained unresponsive to reform programs. The severity and magnitude demanded a definition as it was an essentially new phenomenon. The failure and the aftermath were beyond comprehension; it was systemic, fundamental, and more obstinate than any past global experience. British economist John Maynard Keynes identified the nearest parallel to the hard times as "the Dark Ages and it lasted 400 years."

1.1.17 Post-War Literature

The tremendous aftermath of the World war and its impact on society was so deep and profound in American society and culture which subsequently reflected in the literature. The trauma and devastation of the war left a deep impact on the collective psyche of Americans. Post War American literature witnessed the emergence of the Beat Generation, a group of writers who discarded the mainstream American culture and sought to explore new forms of expression. The most significant literary movements of the post-war era were the Beat Generation, which emerged in the 1950s. The Beat writers rejected mainstream values and celebrated non-conformity, experimentation, and spontaneity and were engaged in exploring themes of alienation, self-discovery, and meaning in life. Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs were the major exponents of this group. The literature was

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characterised by a sense of disillusionment and scepticism towards traditional values and institutions.

The rise of the Civil Rights Movement inspired African American writers to explore themes of identity, oppression, and resistance. Toni Morrison, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison are the influential writers. The confessional poetry movement another literary movement of the post-war era began in the late 1950s and was characterised by personal, autobiographical writings on love, loss and psychological ailments. Sylvia Plath, Robert Lowell, and Anne Sexton are poets who opted to write in this genre. The impact of the war on the American psyche was depicted by writers such as Joseph Heller. *Catch-22* satirises the absurdity of war and military bureaucracy, Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is on the psychological trauma the war caused. American literature of this period was marked by a rejection of traditional values and institutions; its focus on personal experience and self-expression, involved a detailed exploration of the impact of war on individuals and society.

Literary creativity combined with experimentation in literary form, style technique and themes characterized American literature and culture of the era. Innovative, narrative techniques such as stream-of-consciousness techniques along with non-linear storytelling received attention. Modernist writers such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and William Faulkner dealt with themes of disillusionment, fragmentation, and the loss of traditional values.

Foremost literary figures published outstanding works and American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity with the significant works of Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Katherine Anne Porter. Robert Frost, T.S Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Robert Penn Warren was another writer to contribute, with *All the King's Men* winning the 1947 Pulitzer Prize.

Postwar American literature witnessed significant changes in ethnic, regional, and social character, as writers started reflecting on the diversity of American society and exploring the nature of hybrid identity, ethnic and regional culture, and social changes which shaped American literature. The younger writers included Jews, African Americans, and, eventually there were women speaking in a new voice.

African American writing deals with the culture, belief, patterns, practices and attitudes derived from entirely different cultures separated by time and space. African culture related to oral tradition and American culture based on written narratives makes African-American literary tradition bi-cultured in nature, style, genres and narrative forms. It explores the myriad journeys and trajectories of the African diaspora. It also provokes introspection into the multilayered individual identities and delineates the possibility of a final voyage home.

European materialism and native spirituality were the subjects of these writers. Acceptance, reception, assimilation, tradition and history of cultural contacts between the culture of origin and of adoption go a long way to define it. The founders of this tradition in African American literature are women - Lucy Terry, Phillis Wheatley and Harriet E. Wilson. Harriet Jacob in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl Written by Herself* initiated a discourse on the nature of black womanhood in America. She forcefully exerted her free will to shape her destiny positively.

African women have been in America since 1619 and have played a heroic role in the

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struggle for equality and freedom in America. Women were involved in the development of African-American literature from the beginning: Georgia Douglas Johnson, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Nella Larsen, Jessica Fauset, Dorothy West, Helen Johnson and the list continues; still the world of black literature in the United States continued to be dominated by the black patriarchy relegating women to a secondary position often towards an invisibility. Critical writing and history of the Harlem renaissance included *New Negroes* entirely from the male sex.

The vitality and dynamism of the black female experience were fundamentally ignored. Women characters, even in reputed writers as Ralph Ellison and Richard Wright were mere stereotypes. Until the 1970's, there were only reductive and stereotypic analysis of black women's history.

Zora Neale Hurston and Ann Petry with their works in 1940's triggered the transition- breaking of the tragic mulatto pattern to a more complex view of the black woman. There came a group of women writers who represented the black female as a three-dimensional human being. The dynamism of the black female experience in all its complexity was recorded by them-Alice Walker, June Jordan, Gwendolyn Brooks, Gloria Naylor, Sonia Sanchez, Paule Marshall, Margaret Walker, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Ntozoke Shange,Joyce Carol Thomas, Toni Cade Bambara, Rita Dove, Jamaica Kincaid, Andrea Lee, SherleyAnne Williams, Alexis De Veaux, Kristin Hunter, Gayl Jones, Octavia Butler and Thulani.Davis comprises a representative list of blackwomen writers. They denounced the *American dream* in very strong terms. Journey back and spiritual rebirth became their common themes. The black woman was depicted as part of an evolutionary process - from victimisation to consciousness. They often wrote of the need to return to the past, to the roots, to the girlhoodwhen a self-existed that was individual and whole.

1.1.18 Broadway

Broadway, the street in New York city has been associated with American theatrical activity since 1735 when the first theatre opened in the street. The word Broadway refers to the theatrical district in New York associated with the American musical. The trend in musicals towards the integration of songs with plot to make a cohesive whole began in 1920's with *Showboat* by Kern and Hammerstein in 1927. *Oklahom*a in 1943 and the *South Pacific* in 1947 are worth mentioning in this genre. It provided an experimental milieu and welcomed beat poetry, and music integrating songs and plot, with innovative works like the West Side Story in the 1950s. After a decline it was revived in the 1990s with Disney musicals. Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber are influential musical theatre figures of the 20th century. More sophisticated productions such as My Fair Lady in 1956 and *Guys and Dolls* in 1950 were Broadway successes. In the 21st century, Broadway theatres produce more new works than revivals and underwent several changes as to employing the music for social commentary.

1.1.19 Developments in Drama, Poetry, Fiction

The history of resistance against the growth of commercial theatre resulted in the growth of modern American drama in the early years of the twentieth century. Jane Adams and Ellen Gates formed the Hull-House player and the Chicago Hull house theatre in 1901. The theatre groups such as Chicago's Little theatre, Province town players and the Group theatre contributed significantly to the revival of modern drama. According to Richard Gray, modernism came to American drama; so did realism, experimentalism and Americanism

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The first decades of the century were marked by theatrical experiments. *On Trial (1914*) play by Elmer Rice (1892-1967), incorporated the technique of the motion picture to present scenes described by trial witnesses. Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) experimented with an entirely different theatrical tradition by using Chinese theatrical convention of the property man as narrator, to portray life in a small town in New England. O'Neill still remained the only native dramatist of importance adopted by the little theatres. The others like Elmer Rise Lawrence, Stallings, Maxwell Anderson and Howard Sidney came into limelight later.

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was the most outstanding dramatist of the interwar period, who is credited as to have created art in "blood, sweat, and tears." O'Neill was the first American dramatist to win the Nobel Prize and his plays are regarded as being in the tradition of the great Greek tragedies. A prolific dramatist who won the Pulitzer Prize for literature five times and Nobel Prize for literature in 1936, O'Neill is the central figure in the new school of American dramatists. The Nobel Prize was awarded "for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy."

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Theatre played an important role in the revival of American drama. At this point of discussion, it is important to know about the role of *Provincetown Players* and the *Little theatre Movement* in the revival of modern drama. O'Neill was first associated with the province town play house on Macdougal street in New York city. The Provincetown group, as the people responsible for staging plays were known, included no specialists in drama. They were interested in art, literature and politics, but there was no unifying doctrine. They did not look for conventional and commercial entertainment; they felt that a good playwright might be a prophet of social revolution.

The Provincetown Playhouse gave O'Neill an audience, though small. His early one act play *Bound East for Cardiff (*1916) was produced by Provincetown Players and subsequently two more plays of O'Neill, *Beyond the Horizon* (1920) and *The Emperor Jones (*1920) were staged. Bernard Hewitt observed that with these plays, American drama had finally "come of age." They were essentially romantic though they were also termed realistic and a few were melodramatic too. We can notice the predominant influence of certain doctrines or philosophies in his early plays. The nihilistic pessimism of the tortured playwright is discerned in the expressionist plays of O'Neill. *The Hairy Ape* fuses discordant elements into a new whole. Like E*mperor Jones***,** the play is expressionistic.

Americans travelling to Europe came across a vital, flourishing theatre; they returned and initiated the *Little Theatre Movement* all across the United States. Experiments with new dramatic modes and methods of production were tried; the initiative slowly gathered momentum with more college educated, playhouse- trained actors, producers and dramatists joining the movement. There were two rival little theatres near the Provincetown

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Playhouse; Neighbourhood Playhouse and the Washington Square Players. O'Neill was the playwright of the 'Little Theatre.' His plays were soon produced before a larger audience in the 'Greenwich Village Theatre'.

The effect of the intellectual milieu of the period, common to O'Neill and his contemporaries has three factors that determine it:

1. The nature of the nondramatic literary revolution which produced Theodore Dreiser, the greatest American Naturalist in fiction and Sherwood Anderson
2. The belated influence of Ibsen and the post-Ibsen playwrights of Europe
3. The revolutionary 'little theatre movement' with which O'Neill was identified in the beginning.

Expressionism an artistic movement that began in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century under the influence of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849-1012) reached its height in the decade1915-1925. It manifests itself in painting, music as well as literature. The most persistent influence of expressionism has been felt in the theatre. The mingling of the realistic and the fantastic or symbolic has been ascribed to Strindberg. His work ranges from studies of abnormal psychology as *The Father* (1887) to masterpieces of symbolism such as *The Dream Play* (1902).

The central feature of Expressionism is a radical revolt against realism. The author expresses the inner experiences by representing the world as it appears to his state of mind or to that of one of his characters. It should be understood as an attempt to represent events, not as they would appear to a normal detached viewer, but as seen through the distorted vision of a participant. The central characters in an expressionistic play are often in an abnormal state of mind and are emotionally troubled. They are often representatives of anxiety- driven modern man held in the trappings of industrial and technological society drifting towards chaos.

Unlike realism, it is not a faithful portrayal of an object or mood. Expressionism translates appearances intellectually. The expressionist presents actuality as modified by his personality added by an intellectual conception. It may be counted as a distortion; this distortion results from the desire to emphasise an inherent quality obvious to the artist. The artist attempts to discard all conventions in order to express such intellectual, moral or ideal values inherent in the presented objects. Mark Connolly's and George S Kaufman's *Begger on Horseback* was one of the earliest expressionistic plays written in America. It has a dream presented objectively on the screen. The costumes and settings are not realistic but are like those in dreams. Experiments of this kind abound in the works of Eugene O Neill from realism in his early plays he shifted to expressionism in later plays.

The major fiction of Henry James is described as America's rediscovery of Europe; *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) being a noteworthy treatment of an international theme. F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, the foremost modernist, and Ernest Hemingway, America's most notable modernist, are significant themes in American fiction of the time.

Modern American poetry of the period is significant for its remarkable variety; represented by Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) along with Robert Frost (1874-1963). The poetry of Robert Frost serves as a bridge connecting older traditions and the search for newness. Wallace Stevens, the poet of the modern period, firmly believed that poetry is a record and a continuous interaction of the mind and the world.

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Wallace Stevens drew inspiration from the poetry of Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot.

1.1.20 American Multiculturalism and Contemporary Literature

A generation of American scholars and critics, between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, has redrawn the boundaries of the literary field with their expertise in all branches of American writing. These attempts have shaped, and continue to shape, the spectrum of modern literary scholarship. American literary criticism during the past few decades has expanded into a centre of humanist studies. The interest in American literature has grown nationally and globally in dimension, and the scholarly interest invested is tremendous. American texts, in a significant move, have come to provide a major focus for inter- and cross-disciplinary investigation: gender studies, ethnic studies, and cultural studies.

With controversies over factors that are trans-historical and transcultural, multiculturalism has emerged as a vibrant and integral component of contemporary American literary discourse. The concept of multiculturalism in literature, its origins, evolution, and impact on the literary world, is studied across the world. The significance of diverse voices and narratives shaping a more inclusive and empathetic society is understood by the present generation of writers. Multiculturalism enriches the literary landscape of America with its comprehensive understanding of literary works and writers. It promotes an understanding among cultures to appreciate the celebration of differences and also to address the challenges and criticisms, thereby affirming its significance in the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue towards realising the vibrant dream of an interconnected global community.

The Contemporary Period in American Literature begins in 1939 and includes American literary figures from World War II into the New Millennium. Eudora Welty, John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Sylvia Plath, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, African American writers such as Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. During the 1950s, a vigorous anti-establishment and anti-traditional literary movement emerged. The writing of the 1960s and 1970s, also known as *Counterculture Writing*, continues the literary ideals of the 'Beat Movement'.

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Recap

- The unit combines African oral traditions and American written forms.
- Explores identity, cultural clashes, and the search for home.
- Harlem Renaissance highlighted African American arts and literature.
- Black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison explored black womanhood.
- Themes in black women's writing include victimization, self-consciousness, and spiritual rebirth.
- Broadway evolved from song-integrated plots (1920s) to Disney's revival in the 1990s.

- Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber were influential in musical theatre.
- Eugene O'Neill shaped modern American drama with expressionist plays.
- O'Neill's work broke traditional American theatre forms, influenced by European traditions.
- Multiculturalism in literature emerged in the 1960s, promoting inclusivity and cultural understanding.
- American literature was enriched by celebrating diverse voices and experiences.
- Writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost bridged traditional and modern forms.
- Modern American fiction and poetry addressed complex social themes while evolving stylistically.

Objective Questions

1. What concept emerged as a significant part of contemporary American literary discourse between the late 1960s and 1980s?
2. Name the Harlem Renaissance female poets who broke stereotypes of Black women in literature.
3. Who was the central figure of modern American drama in the early 20th century?
4. Which play by Eugene O'Neill is considered one of his expressionist works?
5. What was the primary literary style used by Zora Neale Hurston and Ann Petry for representing black women?
6. What significant shift in American musical theatre happened during the 1920s with "Showboat"?
7. What was the key theme in Toni Morrison's literary works?
8. Which movement promoted the integration of songs and plot in musical theatre?
9. Name the play that marked Thornton Wilder's experiment with Chinese theatrical conventions.
10. Which artist's plays introduced Expressionism to American drama during the early 20th century?

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Answers

1. Multiculturalism
2. Georgia Douglas Johnson, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Nella Larsen
3. Eugene O'Neill
4. The Hairy Ape
5. Transition from the "tragic mulatto" to a more complex view
6. Integration of songs with plot
7. The journey back to roots and spiritual rebirth
8. The integration of songs and plot in musical theatre
9. Our Town
10. August Strindberg (influenced O'Neill's works)

Assignments

1. Discuss the development of African American literature and the pivotal role women writers played in shaping it.
2. Examine the evolution of Broadway theatre and its significant musicals, especially the role of Disney in the 1990s.
3. Analyse the significance of Eugene O'Neill's contribution to American drama, highlighting his association with the Little Theatre Movement.
4. Explore the role of multiculturalism in contemporary American literature and its influence on cross-cultural dialogue.
5. Evaluate how the Harlem Renaissance, particularly in literature, reflected the complex dynamics of African American identity in the early 20th century.

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Suggested Reading

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BLOCK - 02

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Poetry

Unit 1

The Raven

-Edgar Allen Poe

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the significance of Edgar Allan Poe as a poet
- learn the poem "The Raven" as a narrative
- describe the key themes explored in the selected poem
- find out the Gothic elements in the poem

Prerequisite

Edgar Allan Poe occupies a singular place in American literary history as a master of psychological depth and artistic precision. Associated with the Romantic movement, Poe insisted that literature must create a unified emotional effect, a principle that shaped both his poetry and short fiction. He is credited with pioneering detective fiction and refining the genre of horror through tales such as “The Tell-Tale Heart” and “The Fall of the House of Usher.” His works frequently explore themes of death, loss, madness, and the fragile boundaries of the human mind. In poetry, Poe achieved haunting musicality, blending rhythm, sound, and symbolism to evoke states of melancholy and despair. “The Raven”, his most celebrated poem, exemplifies his theory of composition, where every word, image, and refrain contributes to an overwhelming sense of grief and inevitability. This unit prepares students to understand Poe’s aesthetic principles, his contribution to Gothic literature, and his exploration of the darker dimensions of human consciousness, enabling a deeper appreciation of the poem’s structure, symbolism, and emotional intensity.

Keywords

Raven, Lenore, Nevermore, Gothic

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Discussion

2.1.1 Edgar Allan Poe: His Major Works

Poe was an exceptionally prolific and versatile writer. He contributed many reviews of contemporary literature to magazines and periodicals. According to some accounts, he reviewed almost a hundred different books in just one year. While these reviews were insightful and engaging, they often reflected personal biases, leading to unfair assessments. Most of these reviews are now overlooked, primarily because they focused on works that have not endured and are largely forgotten. Poe's lasting contributions can be classified into three main areas: prose fiction, critical essays, and poetry. Only his most notable works in these categories are highlighted here.

Prose Fiction

The only full-length work of prose fiction written by Poe was *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which appeared in 1840 in the collection of his stories entitled *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque.*

The rest of his work in this field consisted of short stories or tales, the most famous of which are:

1. "MS. Found in a Bottle"
2. "The Fall of the House of Usher"
3. "Morella"
4. "Berenice"
5. "Ligeia"
6. "William Wilson"
7. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"
8. "The Mystery of Marie Roget"
9. "The Pit and the Pendulum"
10. "The Tell-Tale Heart"
11. "The Masque of the Red Death"
12. "The Purloined Letter"
13. "The Gold-Bug"
14. "The Cask of Amontillado"
15. "Hop-Frog"
16. " The Black Cat"
17. "The Assignation"
18. "A Descent into the Maelstrom"
19. "The Sphinx"
20. "The Man of the Crowd"
21. "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether"

In all, Poe wrote about seventy short stories.

Critical Essays

1. "Letter to B."
2. "Review of Hawthorne's Twice Told Tales". This review actually belongs to the category of reviews that were published in contemporary magazines and periodicals, and it is an example of Poe's practical criticism. However, it has been included here because it also contains some very important observations by Poe about the art and technique of the short story.
3. "The Philosophy of Composition"
4. " The Poetic Principle"

Poems

Poe wrote about fifty poems, the most famous of which are the following:

1. "Sonnet-To Science"
2. "Romance"
3. "To Helen"
4. "Israfel"
5. "The City in the Sea"
6. "The Sleeper"
7. "Lenore"
8. "Sonnet Silence"

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9. "Dream-Land"
10. " To One in Paradise"
11. "The Raven"
12. "Ulalume"
13. "Annabel Lee"
14. "The Lake: To"
15. "The Valley of Unrest"
16. "The Coliseum"
17. "A Valentine"
18. "For Annie"
19. "To"-(Two words-two foreign soft dissyllables)
20. "The Happiest Day, The Happiest Hour"
21. "Stanzas"(*In Youth have I known one with whom the Earth*)
22. "To My Mother"

Miscellaneous

1. *Eureka*, a scientific-cum-philosophical work in prose containing Poe's meditations and reflections over a long period. Poe called it a prose poem.
2. *Marginalia*, a collection of Poe's random thoughts about a large variety of subjects (The word "marginalia" means the notes which one puts down in the margin of a book while going through it. Thus, "marginalia" may be taken to mean "miscellaneous jottings."

2.1.2 Poe's Theory of Poetry

Poe had clear views on the essence and purpose of poetry. He articulated a coherent, though sometimes inconsistent, aesthetic theory in his works such as "Letter to B," "The Poetic Principle," and "The Philosophy of Composition." He believed that the primary goal of a genuine poem is to evoke pleasure rather than to instruct. According to Poe, poetry should not serve to impart moral lessons but rather to delight the reader. He strongly rejected what he termed the "heresy of the didactic." Additionally, he argued that music is a fundamental component of poetry. For him, poetry arises when music is paired with a pleasurable idea. Another significant assertion by Poe is that beauty is the rightful domain of poetry, which he defined as the rhythmic creation of beauty. This concept of beauty encompasses not only the tangible forms and objects we observe in the world but also the ideal beauty that exists beyond our sight, accessible only through imagination. In essence, Poe's notion of beauty includes both the ideal or Platonic forms and the concrete beauties visible in our universe, as well as those we can envision based on our experiences. Thus, the role of a true poet is to arrange words in a manner that offers the reader a glimpse of Platonic beauty, inspiring pleasure and uplifting the soul through encounters with beautiful things. Furthermore, Poe emphasised that a poet should evoke feelings of beauty in the reader through suggestive techniques. This means that a poet must select words carefully so that their sounds and associations convey meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions.

Now, it is necessary to make it clear here that this theory of poetry is largely applicable to Poe's poetry. It is an inadequate and misleading theory if we wish to accept it in an absolute sense and then judge the poetry of the world by Poe's criteria. Poe's theory of poetry is not all-embracing, and it does not cover the greatest poets of world literature. There is much more in the poetry of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe than Poe's theory conveys or implies. However, Poe's concept of poetry is undoubtedly a most valuable contribution

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to the history of aesthetic theory. And in any case, his poetry fully illustrates his concept.

2.1.3 Summary

One night, when a young student was meditating upon a volume of ancient, forgotten learning, he heard a gentle tapping at his chamber door. The student got the impression that some visitor was knocking. It was a gloomy December night. The coals in the fireplace had already burnt themselves out. The student was in a sorrowful mood because he had lost his beloved, Lenore, who had died a premature death. The death of Lenore, "the rare and radiant maiden", had come as a great blow to the student. He knew that she had left this world forever. But the tapping at the door produced a vague feeling in him that it might be Lenore standing outside. At the same time, the thought came to him that it was not his beloved but somebody else who needed shelter from the storm that was blowing outside.

The student then opened the door and said that he was sorry for having delayed the opening of the door and that the delay was due to the fact that he had been napping. However, the student found nobody at the door. There was only darkness outside and nothing more. The student spoke once more, this time only whispering the name of Lenore. In reply to his whispering this name, he heard an echo of what he had spoken. The echo repeated the name of Lenore.

The student now turned back into his chamber. His heart was in a state of profound grief because of the loss which he had suffered from the death of his beloved Lenore. Soon, he again heard a tapping. It then occurred to him that it was the window from where the sound came. He could not understand who was tapping at the window. Perhaps it was only the wind striking against the window-pane. But, wanting to be more definite about the source of that tapping sound, the student opened the



"The Raven" was influenced by the novel *Barnaby Rudge*, written by Charles Dickens. The book had the line, "What was that– him tapping at the door?"The poem was first published in The American Review under the pseudonym "Quarles."Poe was the first American professional writer who made a living out of his writing".

window- shutter. Thereupon, a majestic-looking raven entered the chamber, fluttering its wings. The raven perched itself upon a bust of Pallas lying close to the chamber door. The raven made no effort to introduce itself to its host, who had allowed it to enter the chamber. The raven had a solemn look on its countenance. The student felt somewhat amused by the raven's informal entry into the chamber and by its grave and stern bearing. Prompted by his fancy, the student asked the raven what its name was. The raven replied: "Nevermore".

The student felt simply amazed to find that the raven could actually speak. He had asked the question playfully, not at all anticipating a reply. But he was surprised by the promptness with which the raven had given its name. It seemed to the student that no human being had ever had the kind of experience which he (the student) was having. It was indeed something unprecedented that a bird should have the name "Nevermore." The raven had spoken just that one word and had said nothing more. It then occurred to the student that the raven would fly away in the morning, and by that time, the storm would surely end. The raven would fly away in the same way as some friends of the student had previously flown away, and just as the student's hopes had also flown away. The student then muttered to himself that some of his friends had already left him, and his hopes, too, had left him. To these words muttered by the student, a reply came from the raven, and the answer was "Nevermore". It now became clear to the student that the raven had learnt just the word "Nevermore" and naturally uttered this word every time somebody spoke to it.

The student now began to meditate upon the word "Nevermore", which the raven had learnt by rote. This word was the raven's only stock and store, and the raven had learnt this word from its owner, who had undoubtedly suffered some misfortune and who had, therefore, taught only this mournful word to his pet bird. There was also a feeling of amusement in the students' meditations. Smiling, he pulled a cushioned seat close to the bust of Pallas on which sat the raven. He gave free reins to his fancy, wondering what this bird of ill omen signified. In its appearance, the raven was grim, ugly, and ghastly. The traditional belief was that the raven was a bird of ill omen, and here was a raven uttering the word "Nevermore" whenever spoken to.

As the student sat speculating upon the raven and the word "Nevermore", it seemed to him that the fiery eyes of the raven were penetrating his bosom and reaching his heart. And then the thought came to him that his beloved used to visit him in this chamber and used to sit by his side in the lamp-light on a cushioned seat. But the student also knew that his beloved would never press the velvet of that cushioned seat anymore. Thus, the word "Nevermore" repeatedly spoken by the raven had relevance to the scholar's situation because his beloved would come to see him nevermore.

Then, it seemed to the student that the air in the room had been perfumed by some unknown agency. Perhaps the air had been scented by the angels who had brought a burning censer with them invisibly into the chamber. Speaking aloud to himself, the student said that God had sent some of the angels into his chamber in order to provide him with some comfort in his grief at the death of his beloved Lenore. Perhaps the perfume brought by the angels was a drug which would make him fall asleep and forget his memories of Lenore. Continuing to speak aloud, the student said to himself: "Forget your beloved Lenore by inhaling this sleep-inducing perfume". To these words spoken by the student, a reply came from the raven, and the answer once again was "Nevermore".

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Addressing the raven, the student asked whether it was a bird or a devil. He called the raven a "thing of evil" because it had made an evil prophecy. He wondered whether the raven was a tempter sent to lure him to evil or whether it was just a bird which had been driven into his chamber by the violence of the storm. He then went on to ask the raven if there was at all any balm in Hades which could soothe his grief. To all this, the raven replied: "Nevermore".

The student then repeated that the raven was a thing of evil because it had made an evil prophecy. And then he asked the raven if his sorrow-laden soul would meet his beloved, the saintly Lenore, in heaven. But the raven again answered: "Nevermore".

The student now became furious. The raven had answered all his questions with the disappointing and depressing word "Nevermore". It seemed to the student that the raven had thrust its beak into his heart. He then called upon the raven to quit his chamber and go back into the storm and the darkness of the night. The student said that the bird had spoken a lie and that he could not tolerate its presence in his chamber any longer. But the raven's reply once more was "Nevermore". The raven continued to sit on the bust of Pallas. The raven's eyes resemble the eyes of a demon who is lost in his dreams. The lamp light was throwing the raven's shadow on the floor of the chamber, and the student felt that his soul, which lay in that shadow on the floor, would be lifted from there nevermore.

2.1.4 Theme or Subject-Matter

The subject of this poem is not a raven but the death of a woman with whom the speaker in the poem was in love and the consequent grief and sense of loss of the speaker. The speaker is a young student deeply interested in scholarly studies. His beloved used to visit him in his chamber, where he now sits in a sad mood because she is no longer in this world. The night is stormy. A raven, which has escaped from the custody of its owner, is seeking shelter from the violence of the storm. The time is midnight. The raven flutters its wings against the window of the student's chamber, and the student opens the door, thinking that some passing traveller has come for shelter. Finding nobody outside, the student turns to the window and sees a raven outside. He now opens the window, and the raven enters the chamber and perches itself on a statue of Pallas lying close to the chamber door. The student playfully asks the raven its name, and the raven utters the word 'Nevermore. ' Actually, 'Nevermore' is the only word the raven has learnt, and therefore, it always utters whenever spoken to. Accordingly, the raven utters the same word, 'Nevermore', every time the scholar speaks to it. The scholar, whose heart is burdened with the grief of his beloved's premature death, seeks some consolation or relief in his misery, and therefore, he asks the raven if he could someday meet his beloved in the other world and clasp her in his arms. The student expects that some encouraging answer might come from the raven, but the raven, which knows only one word, utters the same word, 'Nevermore', every time the scholar speaks to it. The student becomes furious at the same negative reply given by the raven, even to this crucial question he asked. He now orders the raven to leave his chamber, but the raven continues to sit on the bust of Pallas. The student feels that his grief will never end. The raven's reply of 'Nevermore' even to his all-imp and supreme question produces in him the thought that there is no life after death and that this hope of meeting his beloved in another world has, therefore, no validity.

2.1.5 Critical Analysis

"The Raven" begins with a dramatic line, "Once upon a midnight". An unnamed speaker is sitting in his chamber on a December

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night, reading an ancient text. He is tired and is about to fall asleep. The phrase ‘weak and weary’ shows the tiresome day he has undergone. Suddenly, he hears a tapping noise as if someone is gently knocking on the door of his chamber. He is uneasy but reassures himself that it is probably a visitor. It is a gloomy December night, and he remembers the pale shadow of embers on the floor. He hopes for the night to pass and daylight to come. He misses his ladylove, Lenore, who has recently died, and he has found refuge in books to ease his pain over her loss. He can hear the rustling noise of the purple silk curtains, and it fills him with fear. In order to pacify his trembling heart, he tells himself that it could be someone who has come to visit him. Poe slowly builds up the eerie effect of the night with the gothic imagery.

Now, hesitating no more, he apologises to the visitor for his delayed response. He calls out that he did not hear the tapping noise at first since he was napping there. Then he opened the door and peers outside; he could not find anyone there. He stands there for a long time, wondering who it could be, fearing the worst possible. He whispers "Lenore" into the darkness outside, but only his sound echoes back to him. Though he mentioned earlier that he is trying to distract himself by reading, it is obvious that it is difficult for him to forget Lenore. He effectively communicates how important Lenore is to him with the words he used to describe her - "rare and radiant maiden". He harbours a hope that Lenore may return from death. He returns to his chamber with a burning soul within him. Soon, he hears the knocking again, a little louder than the previous time. The speaker assumes that it is the sound of something stuck in his window lattice. He decides to look around and solve the mystery. Though he believes it to be the wind, he feels a little uneasy. His hesitation to check on the visitor and his fear of opening the door point to his hope of seeing Lenore outside the chamber.

He opens the window, and a magnificent raven steps in. The raven is the most important symbol in this poem. The raven symbolises the intense pain, grief, and loss experienced by the narrator. The raven is not hesitant in its movements, nor does it pause anywhere. It goes and perches silently on the statue of Goddess Athena placed above the speaker's chamber door. "Pallas" refers to Goddess Athena, the goddess of wisdom. The bust of Pallas in the speaker's room represents his scholarship and his rationality. The raven sitting on it signifies a threat to his logical ability, rational thinking, and sanity. It has overpowered his rational mind. The raven symbolises the loss the speaker has experienced. The sight of the bird distracts the speaker momentarily, and he smiles at it. The speaker jokingly inquires the name of the raven, and to his surprise, the raven responds. It says “Nevermore”.

The speaker never expected the bird to respond to him, and what it uttered conveyed little meaning to him. He feels that no one alive has ever witnessed such a vision before him: A talking bird named “Nevermore”. Maybe it is a reference to the fact that no one ever got the opportunity to see their loss in physical form. The Raven itself is the physical incarnation of the speaker's pain or loss. After saying the word 'Nevermore', the Raven did not utter another word, as if it had already poured its soul out. It quietly sat there. The speaker mutters about his friends who left him companionless, just like the Raven is about to do. On hearing this, the Raven once again said, 'Nevermore'. It seems the Raven is making a statement - the loss or pain the speaker experiences may not leave him alone. The sudden reply from the Raven startles the speaker. The speaker concludes that the raven knows only

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this word, which he might have learned from his erstwhile unhappy master. He imagines that the master of the raven must have experienced many hardships in his life, and because of that, he might have frequently used the word 'Nevermore'. The narrator tries to find a logical reason for the utterances made by the bird.

The speaker admits that he is fascinated by the raven. He places a seat before the raven and sits there, looking intently at it. He wonders what this ominous-looking bird means by 'Nevermore'. He sits there trying to guess the reasons behind the bird's behaviour. Throughout this time, he could feel the bird's fiery eyes on him. He was absorbed in his thoughts as he lay down on a soft velvet cushion. When the lamp light falls on the velvet cushion, he is reminded of the fact that Lenore will never touch that cushion again, now that she has left this world forever.

Suddenly, the speaker feels that the air around him is getting thicker with a fragrance. It seems he is having hallucinations. He imagines that the angels are bringing perfume to him. He calls himself a wretch because he feels that God has sent him a mythical medicine, 'Nepenthe', to forget the sorrow he feels over the loss of Lenore. Nepenthe is a mythological potion of forgetfulness. He yells at himself to drink 'Nepenthe' and forgets his sadness. To this also, the Raven says, 'Nevermore'. Now, the speaker becomes angry and screams at the bird and calls it 'evil' and a 'prophet'. The speaker says he doesn't know who sent the Raven to his chamber, whether a tempter sent it or it was tossed there by the tempest. He asks the Raven if he will find relief and if he will find Lenore again, to which also the bird responds, 'Nevermore'. 'Balm in Gilead' is a biblical reference used by Poe. According to the Bible, it is a healing substance that is made from a plant that grows in Gilead. The speaker again asks the Raven if he and Lenore might meet within the distant Aidenn or Eden. Then also the Raven says, 'Nevermore'.Earlier, the narrator mentioned that the raven is reproducing what he learnt by rote learning from his former master. But now, overcome by his passion, he takes the Raven very seriously and is devastated when it utters 'Nevermore'.

The angry speaker asks the Raven to leave him and go back to "the Night's Plutonian shore" and never return. The speaker asks the Raven not to leave any kind of sign that it had been there. He asks the bird to get away from the bust and the chamber room. But the Raven does not leave and continues to sit on the statue with evil gleam in its eyes. The lamp light falls on the Raven, casting its shadow on the floor. The speaker feels that this shadow imprisons his soul and he will never be released.

"The Raven" is about a young man who is traumatised by the death of his love, Lenore. The Raven represents the speaker's sorrow. It never leaves. Raven is the symbol of death, and it tells the man that he will never meet his loved one again. The poem is abundant with poetic devices. Edgar Allan Poe's use of poetic devices helps reinforce the melodramatic and gothic mood of the poem. His use of alliteration and personification are instrumental to the melodic nature of the poem.

"The Raven" represents the peak example of romanticism in American poetry. It features an imagined scenario, the dreamy thoughts of a lover, strong emotions, and beautiful word choices. The rhythm and sound all come together to form a great work of romantic poetry. It is no surprise that it became Poe's most famous poem.

2.1.6 The Theme of a Beautiful Woman's Death in "The Raven"

Poe's theory of poetry, which we discussed at the beginning of this unit, allows us to explore the themes he addresses in his poetry. He as-

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serts that beauty is the primary focus of poetry, with melancholy being the most significant emotional tone. On the basis of these beliefs, he concludes that the death of a beautiful woman would be the most poetical theme in the world. Poe has written a number of poems on this theme. The most famous and the most pleasurable is the poem "The Raven". Here, Poe depicts the profound grief of a man whose beloved has recently died and whom he cannot forget. The bereaved lover tries to drown his sorrow in the pursuit of learning, but he fails to forget the dead woman. This idea is conveyed to us by Poe by symbolic means. The raven, which perches itself on a bust of Pallas in the lover's chamber, symbolises mournful and never-ending remembrance, though at the same time, the raven symbolises fate. The raven's reply "Nevermore" to the lover's question of whether he would be reunited with his beloved in the next world clinches the issue. The lover then concludes that nothing can make him forget his dead sweetheart.

Not only does this poem deal with the theme of the death of a beautiful woman with conspicuous success, but the poem also fulfils the other requirements of Poe. The poem is only one hundred and eight lines in length. Suggestiveness is one of its most striking qualities. By means of just two lines, Poe conveys to us the fact that his beloved used to visit him in his chamber and used to sit by his side on the cushioned seat. An elaborate amorous scene is presented to our minds by means of these two suggestive lines. The raven, as a bird of ill omen, also carries many associations and many suggestions, and the bust of Pallas itself is highly suggestive.

"The Raven" stands out as one of Poe's remarkable achievements in poetry. From start to finish, the poem captivates our auditory senses. The effective use of rhyme, alliteration, assonance, and the repetition of words and phrases shows his skilful craftsmanship. It is an exceptional, magnificent, and memorable work.

2.1.7 The Atmosphere of Melancholy and Sadness

The tone of the poem is melancholy, though the melancholy is relieved at one point by a few amusing touches. The student feels somewhat amused on seeing the raven, which seems to him to have entered his chamber with a lordly bearing, and also when, in reply to the student's first question, the raven gives his name as "Nevermore". With the exception of this brief moment of mirth, the lover in the poem remains indescribably sad. In fact, the poem is enveloped in an atmosphere of sadness. It is a touching, moving, and poignant poem. Poe was not far wrong when he said that the death of a beautiful woman was the most poetic of all subjects. The poem ends on a note of anguish because the raven's reply of "Nevermore" has destroyed the lover's only remaining hope in the world; the hope has been that he would be reunited with his beloved in heaven. It now seems to the lover that there is no basis for his belief in immortality and life after death.

2.1.8 Symbolic Significance

Poe is the pioneer of symbolist poetry. "The Raven" illustrates its salient features to be taken up by French poets like Baudelaire and Mallarme. The Raven, a sign of death, is usually a symbol of something dark and sinister. It is an unreasoning creature. The croaking of the bird suggests the ugly, sad, and terrifying nature of this world. And there are inescapable realities which co-exist with the good, pleasant, and the beautiful. The refrain of the poem 'Nevermore' establishes it most disturbingly. Then, there is the knocking, a sign of endless horror, which drives the narrator into insanity.

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2.1.9 Poetic Devices

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /w/ in "While I pondered weak and weary", the sound /n/ in "While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping", and the sound /d/ in "doubting, dreaming dreams no mortal ever dared to dream before."

Assonance

Assonance is the repetition of the same or similar vowels in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /i/ in "rustling of each purple curtain, Thrilled me-filled me" and the sound /ea/ in "while I pondered, weak and weary".

Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech that states that one thing is another thing or an expression that draws a comparison between two unrelated objects. Poe uses the metaphor of fire multiple times; for example, he compares the eyes of the Raven to fire in "To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into my bosom's core". The metaphors help to make the raven seem more magical and mysterious.

Simile

A simile is a figure of speech used to compare two things. Unlike metaphors, similes use comparison words such as 'as' and 'like' to highlight the similarities. The most important similes used in the poem are "suddenly there came a tapping/As of someone gently rapping…." and "spoke only/That one word as if his soul in that one word he did outpour".

Personification

Personification is a poetic device where plants, animals, and even inanimate objects are attributed to human qualities. For example, the raven is attributed to human qualities in "The Raven, sitting lonely ……spoke only,/ That one word, as if his soul ….he did outpour."

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the creation of a new word that phonetically resembles or imitates the sound that it describes. For example, in the poem, the words "rapping" and "tapping" are used to describe the sound of knocking on the door. "Soon again, I heard a tapping/ Somewhat louder than before". The word "Nevermore" uttered by the bird is also an example of onomatopoeia. Apart from the literal meaning of no more, it could also be a reference to the sound produced by the Raven.

Imagery

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. The most significant instance of auditory imagery in the poem is " And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, 'Lenore'!/ This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word, 'Lenore!'/ Merely this and nothing more.

Allusion

The allusion is a reference to a person, an event or a literary work outside the poem. "Plutonian shore", mentioned in the line "Get thee back into the tempest and the Night's Plutonian shore", is a reference to Pluto, the God of the Underworld in Greek mythology. Shore is a reference to the shore of River Styx, where the dead cross reached the underworld. This mirrors the narrator's sense of anguish. "Balm in Gilead" is a biblical allusion. In the Bible, Gilead is a place in Jordan that is famous for its medicinal plants.

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Recap

- Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), a key figure in American Romanticism, is celebrated for his poetry, literary criticism, and as the originator of detective and horror fiction.
- Known for his Gothic style, Poe's works often explore psychological terror, death, madness, and the supernatural.
- Poe's writings, such as "The Tell-Tale Heart" and "The Black Cat," defined Gothic literature with their macabre imagery and themes of guilt and insanity.
- "The Raven," Poe's most famous poem, brought him national fame for its haunting narrative of grief and loss symbolised by the ominous bird.
- Through the melancholy of "The Raven," Poe examines themes of undying grief, despair, and the inevitability of death.
- The Raven in the poem symbolises the permanence of sorrow and the futility of seeking solace after loss.
- Using lyrical melancholy, Poe's poetry, including "The Raven," resonates with themes of love, death, and existential despair.
- The repeated refrain "Nevermore" in the poem reflects the narrator's descent into hopelessness and existential torment.
- Poe's symbolism, as seen in the raven and its ominous presence, influenced the later Symbolist movement in poetry.
- "The Raven" shows Poe's mastery of Gothic atmosphere and poetic devices, making it a cornerstone of Romantic literature.

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Objective Questions

1. What is the narrator doing at the beginning of the poem?
2. At what time does the poem take place?
3. Who is Lenore, as referenced in the poem?
4. What noise interrupts the narrator's thoughts initially?
5. What word does the raven repeatedly say throughout the poem?
6. Where does the raven perch upon entering the narrator's room?
7. What emotion dominates the narrator as he interacts with the raven?
8. What does the narrator ask the raven about the afterlife?
9. How does the narrator interpret the raven's presence by the end of the poem?
10. What is the final image or scene described in the poem?

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Answers

1. The narrator is reading and pondering over old books of lore in an attempt to distract himself from his sorrow over Lenore.
2. The poem takes place at midnight, described as a "dreary" and ominous time.
3. Lenore is the narrator's lost love, who has died.
4. A tapping or rapping sound at the door or window interrupts his thoughts.
5. The raven repeatedly says the word "Nevermore."
6. The raven perches on a bust of Pallas, the goddess of wisdom, above the narrator's door.
7. The narrator is consumed by a mix of curiosity, despair, and growing madness.
8. The narrator asks the raven if he will be reunited with Lenore in the afterlife, specifically in a place called the "Aidenn."
9. The narrator sees the raven as a symbol of eternal despair and hopelessness, believing its presence signifies that he will never escape his sorrow.
10. The final image is of the raven still perched on the bust of Pallas, with its shadow casting over the narrator, who feels his soul trapped beneath that shadow forever.

Assignments

1. Discuss the setting of the poem "The Raven"
2. What is the significance of mythology and fantasy in "The Raven"
3. Discuss the major themes dealt with in the poem "The Raven."
4. Discuss Poe's contribution to Gothic literature.
5. Prepare an appreciation of the poem.

Suggested Reading

- Dawn B.Sova *Critical Companion to Edgar Allan Poe: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*
- Benjamin F. Fisher *The Cambridge Companion to Edgar Allan Poe*
- M.A.R.Habib *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*
- Edgar Allan Poe *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe*

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Unit 2

The Emperor of Ice Cream

-Wallace Stevens

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- familiarise themselves with Wallace Stevens and his modernist poetry
- get acquainted with the enigmatic nature of the poem :The Emperor of Ice Cream"
- learn about elliptical poetry.
- become aware of the significance of the poem
- examine the role of sensuality and death in Stevens' poetry

Prerequisite

Wallace Stevens stands among the foremost voices of literary Modernism, a movement that sought to redefine artistic expression in the twentieth century. Though professionally trained as a lawyer, Stevens cultivated a poetic career distinguished by philosophical reflection and imaginative complexity. His poetry engages with fundamental questions about reality, perception, and the power of imagination. Influenced by Romanticism and European Symbolism, he developed a style marked by abstraction, rich imagery, and symbolic resonance. In works such as *Harmonium* and *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens challenges readers to consider how the mind shapes the world it perceives. His writing reflects the intellectual uncertainties of an era transformed by scientific progress and shifting worldviews. “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” exemplifies his ability to juxtapose the ordinary and the profound, confronting themes of life, death, and acceptance with striking imagery. This unit introduces students to the characteristics of Modernist poetry and prepares them to engage critically with Stevens’ symbolic language and philosophical insights.

Keywords

Elliptical poetry, ice cream, symbol, sensual pleasures, death

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2.2.1 Discussion

The Poem

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor
of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor
of ice-cream.

The poem was hard to explain for many years, but now critics view it as a setup for a wake. In the first stanza, there are Freudian images of the neighbours making ice cream and putting up flowers. The second stanza reveals the truth: the old woman is prepared for death in very simple conditions. The fanciful and deceptive elements fade away, revealing reality. This is a common theme for Stevens, who thought poetry 'must resist the intelligence'.

- Elliptical poetry is an indirect writing style that does not follow a straightforward meaning.
- It features rapid changes in word choice and references.
- The backstory is often only partially revealed, adding to its complexity.

2.2.2 Summary

"The Emperor of Ice-Cream" is frequently regarded as one of Stevens' most mysterious and thought-provoking works. Although the poem is brief, it is rich in striking images and symbols. It explores various themes, such as the fleeting nature of life, the connection between life and death, and how we face our own mortality.

The speaker of the poem, most probably a neighbour, is very dominant in nature and is heard giving instructions to someone unknown to the readers. The speaker commands this unknown person to call a muscular man who is famous for rolling big cigars. The muscular man is asked to whip up some curd in the kitchen cups, possibly due to a lack of funds to arrange an expensive ice cream mixer. In this context, "curd" refers to frozen desserts. The poem contains several sexual imagery, and the word "concupiscent" means "filled with sexual desires". The preparation of ice creams suggests that people who come there should have something to eat and drink. The speaker states that young women should be allowed to wear whatever they usually wear and need not dress up for any specific event they are getting ready for. The word "wenches" could also be a reference to prostitutes, and the clothes they wear may be suggestive. However, the speaker asks them not to change their attire in order to attend the funeral.

This talk of people being instructed to make various preparations takes place in the kitchen. From there, we are led to the nearby room, in which the corpse of a woman is lying. The neighbour continues to instruct others. He asks them to take a sheet from the dresser to cover her face. The sheet is kept in a dresser which has three knobs missing from it. He asks them to make sure that it is the same sheet on which the dead woman, when she was alive, embroidered the picture of the fan-

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tails. The sheet is not long enough to cover both her face and feet. So, it is possible that her feet with bunions on them may stick out from the end. Her feet will show us how dead she is. He insists that instead of lighting up a dim candle, the bright light should be turned on to illuminate the corpse of the woman and to show the world how dead she is. Stevens does not employ any of the euphemisms that are used in connection with death.

2.2.3 Critical Analysis

What did Wallace Stevens thought about "The Emperor of Ice Cream"?

"I think I should select from my poems as my favourite, The Emperor of Ice Cream. This wears a deliberately commonplace costume, and yet seems to me to contain something of the essential gaudiness of poetry; that is the reason why I like it."
- **Wallace Stevens**

In this poem, Wallace Stevens presents a fresh perspective on his favourite theme: the contrast between harsh reality and the imagination. How does the poet view the human condition? In what way does his creative vision alter this perspective? Stevens's imagination does not transport us to a realm of beauty or beyond our reality. Instead, it offers a vivid depiction of people's lives within this world.

The refrain of the poem 'the only emperor is the emperor of ice cream' declares that the only ruling power in the world is the Emperor of Ice Cream. The expression 'the Emperor of ice cream' connotes physical satisfaction. Wallace Stevens believes that sensual pleasures play a dominant role in the lives of human beings. Life will pursue honestly 'the festive concupiscent moods. For these modern people, the meaning of life is nothing but physical satisfaction. The roller of big cigars, the wenches, and the boys who bring flowers to their beloved represent physical pleasure. The poet's imagination focuses attention on this aspect of life.

In the second stanza, the poet gives us a picture of bare reality, which is exactly opposite to what is said in the first stanza. Giving a picture of the death of a slatternly woman, the poet says that the death is the real ruler. The dead body of the woman is lying on the floor of her house, and the body is to be buried soon. A few wenches (fellow prostitutes) and a man have assembled in her house to show their last respects, but they don't look at the body tearfully. Nowhere does the poet give us any hint of disrespect to the deceased woman of bad repute. The dressing table made of cheap wood without glass knobs and badly embroidered sheets that covered her body indicate that she was a poor woman.

The poem clearly shows that 'death' is the ultimate ruler and the true master of the world. It reveals the difference between how things seem and what they really are. People often chase after fleeting pleasures, but they need to recognize the harsh truth of 'death'. Any illusions of physical enjoyment will eventually give way to the reality of death.

The poem consists of two stanzas with eight lines each, with a recurring refrain - "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream". Here, the poet is ridiculing the people's tendency to regard ceremonies and emperors with unnecessary meaning and power. The speaker suggests that there is no need to take them seriously. The poet presents an antithesis between the domain of death and the domain of luxuries, represented by cigars and ice cream. The first stanza describes the preparations for an event, though we are unsure about its nature until later. The first stanza discusses the world of luxuries, while the second one discusses

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death. The occasion seems to be a funeral or a wake following the death of a poor woman. The poem is structured as a set of commands issued by an unknown person who is directing the neighbours about the tasks to be undertaken. The transience of life and acceptance of death are the important themes discussed in the poem.

The ice cream is used as a symbol for life. If one does not eat it right away, it melts and disappears. Life is similar to this. The poet urges us to accept the inevitability of death with happiness. Life should be enjoyed without any hesitation. The title suggests that human beings are no more resistant to death as ice creams are to the Sun. The preparation of ice creams for the funeral is an allusion to the ritualistic practice of offering food to the dead. It is common in some communities to offer food to the dead. It is suggested that this poem is based on Wallace Stevens' experience of Canadian tribes or Native American tribes.

The poet uses sexual imagery throughout the poem. The "concupiscent curds" is a sexually charged imagery. Concupiscent is an unusual term to refer to a food item. Concupiscent means "desirous or lustful". The theme of lust is evident in the portrayal of the muscular roller of big cigars and the wenches who dawdle around the ice cream maker. The sexual imagery continues in the second stanza, but in a different manner from the first stanza. "her horny feet" and "embroidered fantails" are reminiscent of the themes of lust and sex.

2.2.3 Poetic Devices

Assonance:

Assonance is the repetition of the same or similar vowels in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /i/ in the lines, "The muscular one, and bid him whip" and "the roller of big cigars".

Alliteration:

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /k/ in "In kitchen cup concupiscent curds", the sound /d/ on "dawdle in such dress" and the sound /l/ in "let the lamp".

Symbolism:

Symbolism is a poetic device which uses symbols to represent ideas or something beyond the literal meaning. In the poem, ice creams symbolise life, something sweet while it lasts. Ice creams also symbolise the opportunities that slip out of our hands. The embroidered fantails mentioned in the poem symbolises the futility of earthly endeavours.

Imagery:

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. The significant auditory imagery used in the poem is "Call the roller of big cigars". The poet made use of a few visual images such as "In kitchen cup concupiscent curds" and "And spread it so as to cover her face".

Enjambment:

Enjambment is a poetic device used to refer to the continuation of a sentence or a phrase from one line of poetry to the next. Enjambment provides flow and energy to the poem. An instance of enjambment in The Emperor of Ice creams is "On which she embroidered fantails once/ And spread it so as to cover her face".

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Recap

- This poem was published for the first time in Wallace Stevens' collection of poetry, Harmonium.
- Stevens divides the story into two stanzas, one is for the kitchen where the ice creams are prepared and the other one for the room where the woman's dead body is placed.
- The speaker, maybe a neighbour, is issuing orders in a house where somebody died.
- The roller of big cigars is called to whip ice creams.
- The wenches are asked to wear what they usually wear.
- Young boys are requested to bring flowers in the last day's newspaper.
- In the next room, the dead body of a woman is kept and her body is covered with a short cloth which exhibits her horny feet.
- The poet talks about the transience of life and the need to enjoy life to the fullest.

Objective Questions

1. Who is instructed to make the ice creams?
2. What does the woman's dresser lack?
3. What is wrong with the embroidered sheet?
4. Which part of the woman's body remains visible?
5. What do the boys bring to the house?
6. What word is used to describe the curds?
7. What is the central contrast of the poem
8. What does the poet mean by 'Let be be the finale of seem"?
9. What kind of ceremony is taking place in the poem?

Answers

1. The Roller of Big Cigars
2. Three Glass knobs.
3. It is too short.
4. Her feet.

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5. Flowers.
6. Concupiscent.
7. Life versus Death
8. Let reality replace illusion.
9. A wake is being held.

Assignments

1. Discuss the context and setting of the poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream."
2. Explain the various imagery employed in the poem.
3. Discuss the universality of death and the importance of leading a good life.
4. Discuss the concept of Carpe Diem in connection with the poem "The Emperor of Ice Cream"
5. Compare "The Emperor of Ice Cream" with the Malayalam poem "Veenapoovu" by Kumaranasan.

Suggested Reading

- *Wallace Stevens: The Poems of Our Climate*- Harold Bloom
- *Critical Essays on Wallace Stevens*- Ed. Steven Gould Axelrod and Helen Deese.
- *A Reader's Guide to Wallace Stevens*- Eleanor Cook.
- *The Poetic Music of Wallace Stevens*- Bart Eeckhout and Lisa Goldfarb.

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Unit 3

Harlem

-Langston Hughes

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the unit, the learners will be able to:

- analyse the cultural and historical significance of the Harlem Renaissance
- identify the central themes in Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem"
- explain the use of poetic devices such as similes, metaphors, and free verse in "Harlem"
- examine the historical context surrounding the poem
- evaluate the literary significance of Langston Hughes's work

Prerequisite

Langston Hughes was a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, a vibrant cultural and intellectual movement that celebrated African American identity in the early twentieth century. Hughes sought to capture the rhythms of Black life through poetry influenced by jazz and blues, blending artistic innovation with social commitment. Writing during a period marked by racial segregation, economic hardship, and systemic injustice, he gave voice to the aspirations and frustrations of his community. His poetry frequently explores themes of deferred dreams, equality, resilience, and collective dignity. The poem "Harlem", written in 1951, poses a powerful question about the consequences of postponed justice. Through vivid imagery and compressed expression, Hughes examines what happens when hope is continually denied. This unit prepares students to understand the historical context of the Harlem Renaissance, the social realities shaping Hughes' work, and the poem's enduring relevance as a reflection on racial inequality and human aspiration.

Keywords

Harlem Renaissance , Racial Segregation , Deferred, Dreams, Inequality, Justice

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2.3.1 Discussion



Fig.2.3.1 Langston Hughes

The poem

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

- Lorraine Hansberry's famous play, *A Raisin in the Sun,* includes a reference to "Harlem" in its title.
- The story focuses on an African American family facing issues of discrimination and money problems.
- The play debuted on Broadway in 1959, shortly after Hughes published "Harlem."

2.3.2 Critical Summary

The speaker wonders what happens to a dream that is deferred. He questions if it shrivels up like a raisin in the sun or if it oozes like a wound and then flows away. It could smell bad, like rotten meat or form a sugary crust. It might sag like a "heavy load," or it might explode.

The poem's title and its opening line set the scene and main idea. The title refers to a historic neighbourhood in New York City, where millions of black Americans migrated in the early 20th century. It highlights the racial inequalities and segregation faced by Harlem's residents. The first line, "What happens to a dream deferred," is aligned to the left, while the rest of the poem is indented, creating a connection to the title.

The dream mentioned in the first line is about a collective dream, a dream about social justice. The poet asks what happens to a deferred dream. He wonders if it dries up like a raisin in the sun or if it festers like a wound and starts oozing. The first image of the poem, "Does it

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dry up like a raisin in the sun?" suggests that the dream was once juicy, round, and fresh, but now it has become dried up and reduced in size. The second image, "Or does it fester like a sore and then run," conveys a sense of pain and infection. The disappointment over the deferred dream is compared to a sore that festers and oozes, suggesting that unfulfilled dreams become a part of our lives like an old injury that never heals. The word 'run' literally refers to the pus coming out of that decayed wound. The poet's next question is about the stinking smell that may come from a deferred dream. The question, "Does it stink like rotten meat?" intensifies the disgust. The fourth alternative guess about what may happen to a deferred dream is whether it may crust and sugar over like a sweet that has gone bad. The syrupy sweet is a reference to the American dreams of equality.

The third stanza comprises the only statements in the poem. Hughes says that the deferred dream may simply sag like a heavy load. The last line of the poem is another question which is suggestive of the fact that there is no definite answer to the original question. The poem does not offer any kind of solution. The short poem raises questions about the dreams of people and what might happen if they are not fulfilled. Langston wanted to give voice to the African American community in the USA.

Montage of Dream Deferred is a series of short poems or phrases that contribute to the creation of a longer poem. Harlem can be seen as both an individual poem and a section of a longer poem. It consists of seven short sentences, with the last six responding to the initial opening question. "The dream deferred" represents the long-delayed dream of the African American community - the dream of equality, freedom, justice, opportunity, and dignity. The poem reflects the post-World War II mood of African Americans. The war had ended and the Great Depression was over, but the dreams of the African American community remained deferred. In this poem, Hughes uses similes to depict what the deferred dreams resemble. He compares deferred dreams to dried-up raisins, rotten meat, and sticky candy.

2.3.3 Critical Analysis

- The Harlem Renaissance was a vibrant cultural and artistic movement in Harlem from the end of World War I to the mid-1930s, also known as the "New Negro Movement".
- This era attracted many black writers, artists, musicians, and scholars seeking a space to showcase their creativity and talents.
- The Great Migration, where millions of African-Americans moved to northern cities due to oppressive southern laws and labour demands during World War I, played a key role in this cultural flourishing.
- The Harlem Renaissance is famous for its literature and performing arts, featuring notable figures like Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston.
- Artists such as Duke Ellington and Ma Rainey also played important roles during this time.
- Sculptors, painters, and printmakers significantly contributed to this modern Afrocentric cultural movement, creating a black avant-garde in visual arts.

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"Harlem" is a short poem and one of Langston Hughes's most well-known pieces. It is often taught in American schools. Written in 1951, explores the theme of the American Dream's limitations for African Americans. In the early 1950s, America was still marked by racial segregation. African Americans were burdened by the legacy of slavery and often treated as second-class citizens, especially in the South. However, change was on the horizon. Hughes wrote "Harlem" just three years before the landmark Supreme Court ruling in Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, which deemed separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional. Hughes was acutely aware of the difficulties he faced as a black man in America, and his work reflects a range of emotions: sympathy, anger, hope, sadness, and resignation.

He named the poem "Harlem" after the New York neighbourhood that became the heart of the Harlem Renaissance, a vibrant cultural movement in music, literature, and art during the 1910s and 1920s. Many African American families viewed Harlem as a refuge from the widespread discrimination elsewhere. Sadly, the allure of Harlem diminished in the early 1930s with the onset of the Great Depression, leaving many families who had thrived there in poverty once again.

The speaker reflects on the consequences of a "dream deferred." It is unclear who the speaker is- possibly the poet, a professor, or an unnamed black individual. The question posed is impactful, leaving a moment of silence in its wake. Hughes employs striking metaphors to illustrate the concept of a dream that has been delayed. He envisions it drying up, festering, emitting a foul odour, becoming crusty, or ultimately, bursting. While these images are not overtly violent, they carry a sombre undertone. Each metaphor is strong enough to evoke the sensations associated with these neglected dreams. Langston Hughes suggests that a dream that is set aside does not simply disappear; instead, it transforms, moving toward a state of deterioration.

The speaker does not pinpoint a particular dream but implies that African Americans are unable to dream or aim for greatness due to the oppressive environment they face. Even if they dare to dream, their ambitions may linger so long that they end up decaying or even exploding. As critic Arthur P. Davis notes, "When [Hughes] depicts the hopes, the aspirations, the frustrations, and the deep-seated discontent of the New York ghetto, he is expressing the feelings of Negroes in black ghettos throughout America."

2.3.4 Poetic Devices

Harlem is written in free verse with no fixed metrical pattern.

Alliteration:

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /d/ in "What happens to a dream deferred?" and the sound /s/ in 'syrupy sweet'.

Anaphora :

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or expression in the initial parts of a poem. Anaphora works in several ways in Harlem. It provides a recognizable pattern and structure to the speaker's questions. The opening lines of the second stanza establish a pattern that repeats with slight variation. The pattern in which words and phrases repeat anaphorically-

"Does it ….

like…

Or…

Does it ..

Or…

Like…."

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Simile:

A simile is a figure of speech used to compare two things. Unlike metaphors, similes use comparison words such as 'as' and 'like' to highlight the similarities. In Harlem, the poet employs a series of similes comparing deferred dreams to raisins in the sun, sore and rotten meat. For example, "Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?", "Does it stink like rotten meat?" and "like a syrupy sweet".

Imagery:

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. "Like a raisin in the sun" and "Or does it explode" are examples of visual imagery. "Does it stink like meat?" is an example of olfactory imagery.

Enjambment:

Enjambment is a poetic device used to refer to the continuation of a sentence or a phrase from one line of poetry to the next. For example, "Maybe it just sags/like a heavy load".

Recap

- The poem Harlem addresses the lives and consciousness of the black community and the continuous experience of racial injustices within this community.
- The poem begins with a question. What happens when a dream is denied?
- The poet offers multiple answers to this question.
- He asks whether a deferred dream looks like a dried-up raisin, festers like a sore, stinks like rotten meat or resembles a candy crystallised over time. Or does it explode at the end?

Objective Questions

1. Who was Langston Hughes?
2. What is the Harlem Renaissance?
3. What year was Langston Hughes's first book, *The Weary Blues*, published?
4. Which poem by Langston Hughes is part of the sequence *Montage of Dream Deferred*?
5. In what year was the poem "Harlem" written?
6. What does the phrase "dream deferred" in Hughes's poem symbolize?
7. What cultural influence did Langston Hughes incorporate into his poetry?
8. Which event is reflected in the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes?
9. Which African American playwright's work references Langston Hughes's poem "Harlem"?
10. What does the metaphor "like a raisin in the sun" in "Harlem" represent?

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Answers

1. A poet and playwright
2. A period of African American cultural and intellectual revival
3. 1926
4. Harlem
5. 1951
6. The delay of social justice and racial equality
7. Jazz and bebop
8. The Harlem riots of 1935 and 1943
9. Lorraine Hansberry
10. A dream that fades away

Assignments

1. Discuss the relevance of Harlem Renaissance in the history of African Americans
2. Identify the importance of various imagery used in the poem.
3. Explain Langston Hughes's involvement in Harlem Renaissance
4. Read other poems written by Langston Hughes and learn about his poetic style
5. Understand the relevance of poetry and art in the movement called Harlem Renaissance.

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Suggested Reading

- *Modern Black Poets: A Collection of Critical Essays*- Donald B.Gibson
- *Langston Hughes: The Man, His Art, and His Continuing Influence*- Ed. James C. Trotman.
- Langston Hughes- Ed. Harold Bloom.
- The Life of Langston Hughes- Arnold Rampersad.

Unit 4

Buffalo Bill's

- E.E.Cummings

Learning Outcomes

After completing this unit, the learner will be able to:

- understand the poetic innovations of E.E. Cummings
- examine the themes of death, heroism, satire, and societal admiration in "Buffalo Bill's"
- explain the significance of concrete poetry as a 20th-century literary movement
- assess how Cummings uses satire to critique society's misplaced admiration for superficial heroics and flamboyance.
- discuss the interplay between visual structure and linguistic elements in Cummings' work

Prerequisite

E. E. Cummings represents the spirit of experimentation that defined twentieth-century poetry. Rejecting conventional grammar, punctuation, and capitalisation, he reshaped poetic language to emphasise individuality and emotional spontaneity. Influenced by movements such as Imagism and Surrealism, Cummings challenged established norms and celebrated personal freedom. His works often explore themes of love, nature, sexuality, and the tension between individual identity and social conformity. By manipulating visual layout and syntax, he transformed the page into a space of artistic innovation. "Buffalo Bill's" illustrates his unconventional technique, using fragmented structure and irony to reflect on heroism and mortality. This unit prepares students to appreciate how poetic form can itself convey meaning and how Cummings' stylistic rebellion mirrors the broader Modernist break from tradition.

Keywords

Buffalo Bill, William F. Cody, Death.

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2.4.1 Discussion

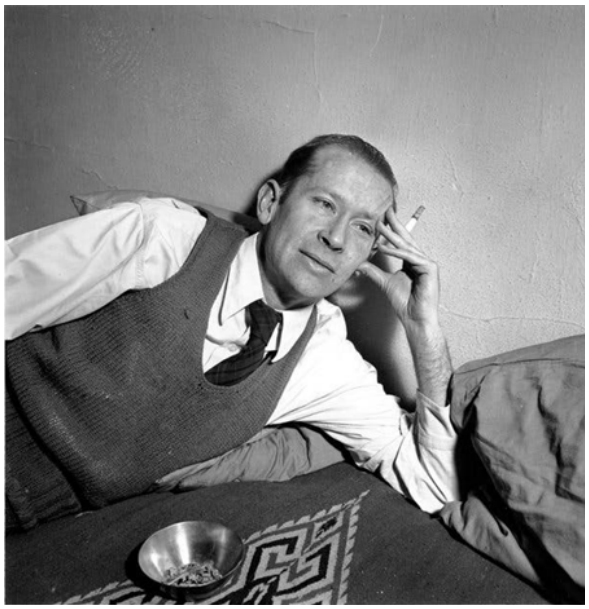


Fig. 2.4.1 Edward Estlin Cummings

The poem

Buffalo Bill 's
defunct who used to ride a watersmooth-silverstallion
and break onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustlikethat
Jesus
he was a handsome man
and what i want to know is
how do you like your blueeyed boy
Mister Death

Edward Estlin Cummings is famous for his bold experiments with form, punctuation, spelling, and syntax. He moved away from traditional methods and structures to develop a unique style of poetry.

2.4.2 Critical Summary

The poem discusses the inevitability of death. It begins with the announcement of Buffalo Bill's death. It is based on the legend of American cowboy William Frederick Cody. Cody was nicknamed Buffalo Bill because he won a buffalo hunting contest, where he reportedly killed around 68 buffalo. In 1867, he was hired as a buffalo hunter for the Kansas Pacific Railway, tasked with providing buffalo meat for the railway workers, during which he hunted a staggering 4,820 buffalo in just eighteen months. In 1883, he established the Great Wild West Show, which he took on tour across the United States and Europe.



Fig. 2.4.2 Buffalo Bill 's

The narrator is nameless and reflects on life and death upon the death of Buffalo Bill. The poem begins with the announcement of Buffalo Bill's death. The poem could be a tribute to him, but the poet uses the word 'defunct' to refer to Buffalo Bill's death, which is a rather inappropriate and unsympathetic word. 'Defunct' is usually used to refer to a machine or law that is no longer in use. 'Defunct' is also a portmanteau word, a cross between deflate and extinct. The word 'defunct' is a multi-layered word. In Latin, the word 'functio' means performance. According to Earl J. Dias, Wallace Stevens used the word 'defunct' instead of dead to state that Buffalo Bill's life had been a long performance. Buffalo Bill, when he was alive, used to ride a horse that looked like silver and moved smoothly like water, and he used to go hunting. He used to shoot down several

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pigeons at a time. It is revealed to us through the idiosyncratic arrangement of words made by the poet, "onetwothreefourfive pigeonsjustli". The poet recalls that Cody was a very handsome man. Then the poet laments, "Jesus," and wonders whether God would have liked the "blue-eyed boy" or Buffalo Bill. The usage 'blue-eyed boy' means a favourite person, and this term could also be a reference to the concept of racial superiority. The word 'Jesus' could be made applicable both to the preceding line as well as the succeeding line. Earl J. Dias, in his article "E.E.cummings and Buffalo Bill," argues that the name of Jesus "stands out emphatically in the poem - perhaps as a contrast to Buffalo Bill. Of the two types of individualism implied in the poem– the man of war and the man of peace–I submit that the latter is more akin to Cummings' basic ideas revealed throughout the body of his writing."

The poem is partly a tribute to the daredevil William F. Cody and partly a statement that death does not favour anyone. Buffalo Bill himself can be regarded as an agent of death since he killed so many bison. However, he himself was taken by Death. At the beginning of the poem, it seems that Cody is superior to everyone because of his hunting skills and his handsome face. But towards the end, the poem turns out to be a satire because Cody is a reckless person who does not have any regard for life. The poem brings to our attention how reckless Cody was. Cummings may have begun the poem as an elegy for a figure whom he regarded as a blend of hero and charlatan. The poem has an ironic tone and stands out with its dramatic characterization, typographical form, and linguistic structure.

2.4.3 Critical Analysis

This poem, which relies heavily on visual effects, describes Buffalo Bill's so-called heroic activities and his death. The poem describes Buffalo Bill's life and death satirically. The satire is directed against Buffalo Bill's flamboyance and the boyish admiration of the people for Bill's antics. People called him a great hero because he rode on horseback, entertained and excited people by his dashing appearance on and off the stage. He was a legend in his own lifetime for his antics. It is puzzling that modern people regard the buffoonery and the flamboyance of a showman as heroic activities. In other words, a showman's antics received accolades from the public. The poem conveys this idea through the covert signal. The boyish admiration of the people has gone to the extent of challenging 'death' by a rhetorical question in the last two lines. The question is whether death has the capacity to absorb the vitality of Buffalo Bill. The people are too foolish and shallow to understand the facts of life. Their admiration is similar to the awe of a child viewing Bill's performance. The joining of words with no spacing between them is Cummings' poetic technique that suggests boyish admiration for Bill's heroic deeds.

Bill stands for vitality and energy of life. But all his accomplishments are rendered meaningless. His achievements do not outlive him and therefore he is defunct now.

Buffalo Bill's is not an exception to Cumming's experimentation with language. He spaces words irregularly and uses capital words sparingly. The poem is written in free verse without any regular rhyme scheme or metre.

2.4.4 Poetic Devices

Alliteration:

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant sounds in the same line of a poem. For example, the sound /s/ in "watersmooth-silver/ stallion" and the sound /b/ in "blue-eyed boy".

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Allusion:

An allusion is a reference to a person, an event or a literary work outside the poem. The obvious allusion is to William Frederick Cody, who is famous for his Wild West shows. The poem also includes a biblical allusion to Christ and death.

Enjambment:

Enjambment is a poetic device used to refer to the continuation of a sentence or a phrase from one line of poetry to the next. Enjambment, as a poetic device, is used throughout the text.

Recap

- The poem begins with the announcement of the death of Buffalo Bill.
- The word 'defunct' is used to refer to his death.
- The poem appears to be an elegy.
- The poet talks about the silver stallion Bill used to ride.
- The poet admired the hunting skill exhibited by the handsome Buffalo Bill
- However skilled Buffalo Bill is, he is not exempted by death.
- Buffalo Bill could not escape death in spite of all his skills.

Objective Questions

1. Where was E.E. Cummings born?
2. What was the title of E.E. Cummings' first published book?
3. In which war did E.E. Cummings serve as a volunteer ambulance driver?
4. What poetic elements did E.E. Cummings experiment with?
5. Which literary movements influenced E.E. Cummings' work?
6. What themes are most commonly explored in E.E. Cummings' works?
7. What does the term "concrete poetry" emphasize?
8. Which word does E.E. Cummings use to refer to Buffalo Bill's death in the poem?
9. What rhetorical question does Cummings use in "*Buffalo Bill's"* to challenge the concept of death?
10. What type of verse structure is "*Buffalo Bill's*" written in?

Answers

1. Massachusetts.
2. *"The Enormous Room*."

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3. World War I.
4. Form, punctuation, capitalization, layout, spelling, and syntax.
5. Imagism, Dadaism, and Surrealism.
6. Love, sexuality, nature, and the relationship between man and society.
7. The visual arrangement of words as much as their meaning.
8. "Defunct."
9. "How do you like your blue-eyed boy, Mister Death?"
10. Free verse.

Assignments

1. Discuss the inevitability of death.
2. Discuss the poetic technique employed in concrete poetry
3. Write an appreciation of the poem Buffalo Bill's
4. Discuss how humans are powerless before Death.

Suggested Reading

- *E.E.Cummings: A Reference Guide*- Guy L.Rotella
- *E.E.Cummings: The Art of His Poetry*- Norman E.E.Freeman
- "The Posterity of Idiosyncrasies: E.E.Cummings"- Isabelle Afandary
- *Critical Essays on E.E.Cummings*- Ed. Guy Rotella.

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BLOCK - 03

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Short Fiction

Unit 1

Everyday Use

-Alice Walker

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- identify and analyse the major themes of the story"Everyday Use" including heritage, identity, and the conflict between tradition and modernity
- develop critical thinking skills by evaluating the differing perspectives on cultural heritage presented in the story
- recognise and analyse Walker's use of narrative style, dialogue, and characterisation
- gain insights into the complexities of cultural identity and the nuances of how heritage is perceived and valued across different generations

Prerequisite

Alice Walker is a significant voice in contemporary American literature, known for her exploration of race, gender, and cultural identity. Emerging from the historical realities of the American South, Walker's writing reflects personal experience as well as collective memory. Her acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* earned major literary recognition and established her as a powerful advocate for African American women's voices. In the short story "Everyday Use", Walker turns to the intimate setting of a rural family to examine the meaning of heritage. Through the contrasting perspectives of Mama and her daughters, the narrative questions whether cultural legacy is something ornamental or something deeply lived. This unit prepares students to explore themes of identity, authenticity, generational conflict, and the lived experience of African American culture within the broader framework of social history.

Keywords

Heritage, quilt, identity, family, cultural identity

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3.1.1 Discussion

Alice Walker, an influential American writer, poet, and activist, is widely celebrated for her literary work and dedication to social justice. Born in Georgia, a place marked by racial segregation, growing up in a highly racist society shaped her perspectives and writing. Walker gained national acclaim with her novel The Color Purple, published in 1982. This groundbreaking work won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award, and later inspired both a film adaptation and a musical. The novel tackles issues of race, gender, and strength in adversity.

Walker has written many novels, short stories, essays, and poems that explore African American life and the interconnectedness of race, gender, and social class. Her works often present themes of heritage, community, and women's experiences. Beyond literature, Walker has been a strong advocate for civil rights, women's rights, and environmental issues, using her platform to drive change and raise awareness.



Fig 3.1.1 Alice Walker

Important Works of Alice Walker

- The Color Purple
- "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens"
- You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down
- Possessing the Secret of Joy
- Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart

Known for her unique narrative style, Walker blends personal and social themes, securing her a respected place in contemporary American literature. Her storytelling and commitment to social justice continue to inspire readers and writers alike.

3.1.2 Summary



Fig. 3.1.2 Cover page of the book *Everyday Use*

My two daughters, Maggie and Dee, couldn't be more different. Maggie, my youngest, is quiet and shy, marked by scars from a fire that destroyed our old home years ago. She moves through life almost unnoticed, carrying herself with a humility that often tugs at my heart. She spends her days helping me around the house and will soon marry John Thomas. Maggie has settled into a simple life, finding comfort

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in the small things around her. Dee, however, has always tried to set herself apart. Growing up, she looked down on our home and everything she felt held her back. When the church and I scraped together money to send her to school, I hoped it would help her feel connected to her roots. But it seems to have driven her further away.

One hot day, Dee arrives home, and right away, I can see she's changed. She steps out of a flashy car with a man she calls Hakim-a-barber. Dee herself is dressed in bright, bold colours—yellows and oranges—with long earrings and jangling bracelets. Her presence is both captivating and distant. When she greets me with a strange, foreign phrase, I'm taken aback. She insists I call her "Wangero" instead of Dee, explaining that her old name represents oppression. I remind her that her name comes from our family—her aunt and grandmother—but she dismisses it. As she looks around, her eyes roam over our house and belongings, seeing them as objects of curiosity, not home.

Dee walks around snapping pictures of me and Maggie with our simple home in the background. She's like a tourist, fascinated by everything she once couldn't wait to leave behind. Even a cow wandering nearby catches her attention.

At dinner, Hakim-a-barber refuses to eat pork or collard greens, but I let it slide. Dee, on the other hand, eats heartily and marvels at the benches my late husband made when we couldn't afford chairs. Her enthusiasm confuses me, as these things are simply a part of our lives, not decorations. Then she asks if she can have some items to take back with her—like Grandma Dee's butter churn and dasher. She wants to turn them into "centrepieces" for display, not seeing their everyday use. I let her take them, but when she asks for two special quilts that Grandma Dee and Big Dee made, I hesitate. Those quilts mean a lot to us; they're made from scraps of clothes that carry memories of our family's past.

Dee's eyes light up at the sight of the quilts, but I tell her they're promised to Maggie for her wedding. She's upset, arguing that Maggie won't appreciate them and would use them "just on a bed." Maggie, standing quietly by, says Dee can have them, saying she doesn't need the quilts to remember Grandma Dee. This makes me realize that Maggie's connection to our heritage goes deeper. She doesn't need objects to hold onto family memories; she carries them inside.

In that moment, a sense of clarity washes over me. I do something I've never done before—I hug Maggie close and place the quilts in her lap. Maggie looks at them in shock, probably not believing I would choose her over Dee.

Dee, now angry, tells me that I don't understand my own heritage. She turns to Maggie and says, "You ought to try to make something of yourself, too, Maggie. It's a new day for us." She doesn't understand that our way of life is just as valid as her search for identity. She puts on her sunglasses and turns away, distancing herself from us once more.

As I watch her drive away, a calm settles over Maggie and me. For once, Maggie smiles a genuine smile. I ask her to bring me a dip of snuff, and we sit together, content. For us, heritage isn't something to display; it's something lived in quiet moments, in the things we use, and in the love we share every day.

3.1.3 Analysis

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" explores the different ways people understand and value heritage. For Mama and Maggie, heritage is woven into everyday life and practical experiences. Mama cherishes the quilts not just for their beauty but because they hold fami-

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ly memories; each piece of fabric tells a story from their shared past. Dee, on the other hand, views heritage as something to be displayed rather than lived. This contrast raises a central question about the essence of heritage. Is it enough to simply admire it, or should it be given a meaningful role in everyday life? For Mama, heritage is grounded in family history and tradition, while Dee sees it more as a symbol to be admired.

The story also explores the clash between traditional values and modern identity. Dee represents a younger generation seeking to reclaim cultural identity, but her approach feels disconnected from the reality of her family's roots. She adopts a new name and outward symbols of heritage, but they seem more performative than heartfelt. In contrast, Mama and Maggie hold on to the traditions and memories that give meaning to their lives, suggesting that while change can be valuable, it shouldn't come at the cost of losing one's roots. This dynamic raises questions about cultural authenticity and how heritage can sometimes be celebrated in ways that lack genuine connection.

Mama's journey in the story is also about finding her voice and standing her ground. Early on, she feels overshadowed by Dee's confidence, but her decision to give the quilts to Maggie marks a shift in her self-perception. In this moment, Mama recognises the value of her own understanding of heritage, which has been rooted in her life experiences and family bonds. This act not only empowers Maggie but also signifies Mama's acceptance of her role as a strong, capable woman who honours her past. Her transformation suggests that real strength comes from embracing one's own identity and making choices that reflect personal values.

The family relationships in the story reveal the complexities of identity within a shared history. Mama's relationship with Dee is tense, with Dee often showing a condescending attitude toward her family's way of life. In contrast, Mama and Maggie share a quiet bond of understanding and mutual support, which emphasises the importance of connection in shaping identity. The story suggests that family dynamics play a crucial role in how individuals understand themselves, showcasing that true appreciation for heritage and shared experiences must be lived rather than displayed.

3.1.4 Character Sketch

Mama: Mama is a practical, hardworking woman with a strong sense of identity rooted in her rural upbringing. She often sees herself as plain and unremarkable, feeling insecure in the face of Dee's more assertive personality. Yet, Mama is deeply connected to her home, her memories, and the things she's built her life around. Her character reflects the strength that comes from resilience and dedication to family. By the end, she grows into a more empowered figure, finding confidence in her role as the keeper of her family's history and values.

Dee (Wangero): Dee is confident, ambitious, and focused on forging a modern identity for herself. Her choice to rename herself "Wangero" shows her desire to claim a heritage that feels separate from her family's everyday life. While she values the symbols of her heritage, Dee often sees them more as items to showcase than as things to be used or remembered in the same way her family does. This sense of privilege and detachment underscores her misunderstanding of what heritage truly means. Her approach to identity ultimately distances her from her roots, leaving her with a surface-level connection to her family's legacy.

Maggie: Maggie is a gentle, reserved character with a deep appreciation for her family's

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traditions. Scarred from the fire that took their home, she represents a quiet resilience and an authentic connection to her heritage. Unlike Dee, Maggie doesn't need outward symbols to hold onto her family's past; she values the everyday use of things that carry their history. Her bond with her family is less about display and more about a sincere, lived connection. When Mama chooses to give her the quilts, it reflects Maggie's quiet strength and rightful place in their shared history, emphasising that heritage is best appreciated in the small, familiar moments.

Thus, Alice Walker's story "Everyday Use" intricately explores themes of heritage, identity, and the tensions between tradition and modernity. The conflict between Dee and Maggie reflects the broader struggle between different ways of honouring the past. While Dee's understanding is shaped by a contemporary, symbolic approach to heritage, Maggie's is grounded in the shared history of her family. As Mama grows into her role as a confident, capable woman, the story urges us to reflect on how we honour our heritage in daily life. In the end, "Everyday Use" offers a thoughtful reflection on family, identity, and the significance of embracing one's roots.

Recap

- Alice Walker is a prominent author and activist
- "Everyday Use" explores differing views on heritage
- Mama values heritage through practical, lived experiences
- Dee seeks to showcase heritage as a symbol of identity
- Maggie represents quiet strength and deep connection to heritage
- Dee's new identity alienates her from her roots
- Mama asserts her authority by giving Maggie the quilts
- The story contrasts tradition with modernity and cultural appropriation

Objective Questions

1. Who is Maggie engaged to?
2. What new name does Dee choose for herself?
3. Who is Dee's companion?
4. What item does Dee ask for as a centrepiece?
5. What food does Hakim-a-barber refuse to eat?
6. Who is the quilt's original recipient?
7. Who is the author of "Everyday Use"?
8. Where does Dee take pictures?
9. Who tells Maggie to do something for herself?

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10. Who taught Maggie how to quilt?
11. What is the primary theme of Alice Walker's "Everyday Use"?
12. Which character is described as quiet, shy, and scarred from a fire?
13. What is the primary conflict in "Everyday Use"?
14. What items does Dee want to take from Mama's house?
15. Why does Mama hesitate to give the quilts to Dee?

Answers

1. John
2. Wangero
3. Hakim-a-barber
4. Churn
5. Pork
6. Maggie
7. Alice Walker
8. House
9. Dee
10. Grandma Dee
11. Heritage and identity
12. Maggie
13. Family disagreements over heritage
14. Grandma Dee's butter churn and dasher
15. Because they have sentimental value and are promised to Maggie

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Assignments

1. How do Dee and Maggie's views on heritage and family reveal their characters?
2. How does "Everyday Use" explore identity through each character's view of heritage?
3. How does Mama's perspective shape our understanding of events and themes?

4. What do the characters' views on heritage reveal about their values, and what message does Walker convey?
5. How does your own sense of heritage and identity connect to the themes in "Everyday Use"?

Suggested Reading

- Gates, Henry Louis Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, editors. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 3rd ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.
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Unit 2

The Open Boat

- Stephen Crane

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- become aware of Stephen Crane's literary style
- identify and analyse the development of characters in the story "The Open Boat"
- acquaint themselves with the key theme of human struggle against nature
- explore how Crane's personal experiences influenced his writing

Prerequisite

Stephen Crane is closely associated with American Naturalism, a literary movement that portrays human life as shaped by forces beyond individual control. Drawing from his own experience of surviving a shipwreck, Crane crafted "The Open Boat" as a powerful exploration of vulnerability and endurance. The story recounts the ordeal of four men stranded at sea, confronting the indifferent power of nature. In this narrative, the sea becomes a symbol of fate, chance, and the vastness of the universe, indifferent to human struggle. Crane's realistic style and psychological insight reveal both the fragility and resilience of the human spirit. This unit introduces students to the principles of Naturalism and prepares them to analyse how Crane examines solidarity, fear, and existential uncertainty within extreme circumstances.

Keywords

Survival, nature, sea, human, waves, brotherhood, windmill

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3.2.1 Discussion

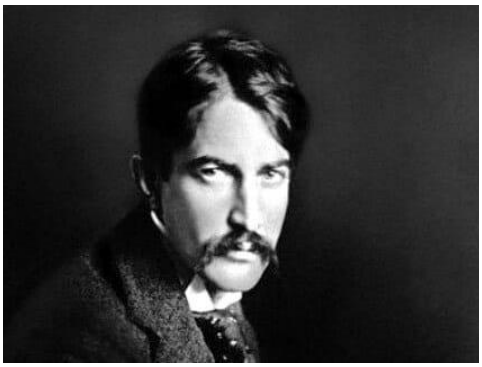


Fig 3.2.1 Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) captured the hearts of readers with his raw, realistic style. Born in 1871, his brief life, tragically cut short in 1900, was marked by both personal struggle and artistic brilliance. Crane's writing is a testament to the power of realism and naturalism. His novels and short stories delve deep into the human psyche, exploring the complexities of emotion and the impact of social and environmental factors. One of Crane's most celebrated works, The Red Badge of Courage, offers a vivid portrayal of a young Civil War soldier's experiences. The novel delves into the psychological turmoil of war, capturing the raw emotions of fear, courage, and the blurred lines between the two. Crane's ability to convey the visceral reality of combat has solidified his place in literary history.

Induced by his own harrowing experience of a shipwreck, "The Open Boat" is a gripping tale of four men adrift at sea, fighting for survival against the relentless forces of nature. The story not only showcases the physical and emotional toll of such an ordeal but also explores themes of camaraderie, resilience, and the human condition. Crane's writing style, characterised by its stark realism and psychological depth, has influenced generations of writers. His ability to capture the essence of human experience, both in times of peace and war, has secured his place as a literary giant.



Fig 3.2.2 Painting of "The Open Boat"

3.2.2 Plot of "The Open Boat"

The story begins with four men - an injured captain, an oiler named Billie, a cook, and a correspondent – adrift in a small boat after their ship sinks. Surrounded by immense, slate-coloured waves, they feel dwarfed by the sea's overwhelming power and realise their vulnerability to nature's force. Each man copes with the situation in his own way. The cook mutters about how little space separates them from being swamped, while the oiler, handling an oar, remains focused on steering despite the strain. The correspondent rows alongside him, quietly reflecting on their situation, and the captain, lying injured at the bow, mourns the loss of his ship but gives occasional instructions to keep them steady.

Their hope hinges on reaching a "house of refuge" near the Mosquito Inlet Light, though uncertainty clouds their plans. The cook believes help may be there, but the correspondent clarifies that such houses only store supplies for shipwrecked sailors; they lack resident crews. The captain suggests they continue south, but no rescue appears. By dawn, the sea transforms into shades of green and amber, but the beauty escapes the men's notice as survival remains their only concern.

As they endure the relentless waves, gulls circle them, unaffected by the turbulent waters. A gull's unblinking stare unnerves them, especially the captain, who gently shoo it away

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to avoid capsizing. The men continue rowing in shifts, an exhausting task that requires cautious coordination as they switch positions. Small clumps of seaweed occasionally drift by, hinting that they're moving toward land. Finally, they spot a lighthouse on the horizon, a possible sign of safety, but waves continue to flood their boat, forcing the cook to bail the water out constantly.

Night falls, and the men, exhausted and hungry, huddle together against the biting cold. They attempt to keep each other warm, with the correspondent noting how the cook and oiler sleep close together like 'babies of the sea', their fragility apparent amidst the sea's vastness. At one point, the correspondent allows a wave to splash into the boat, startling the oiler awake, but the oiler responds without anger, showing the camaraderie born from their shared ordeal. Later, as the correspondent rows alone, he feels a profound loneliness. The sight of a large fin trailing the boat briefly heightens his fear, adding to the ever-present threat of the sea.

In a rare moment of introspection, the correspondent reflects on his struggle against the indifferent sea, questioning why they came so close to land only to face the possibility of drowning. He recalls a poem about a soldier dying alone, which resonates now as he contemplates mortality and nature's disregard for human life. The men press on through the night, their hopes rising with each wave they conquer.

At dawn, the captain decides they should try to reach shore, though the beach seems deserted. Preparing for the surf, he instructs them to abandon the boat if it capsizes. When they attempt the landing, the waves overturn the boat, plunging them into the freezing water. The correspondent observes the others: the cook clings to an oar, the captain grips the dinghy, and the oiler swims ahead. Struggling, he sees a figure onshore coming to their aid. While the correspondent reaches the beach safely, he finds Billie, the oiler, face down in the sand, a tragic reminder of the ocean's impartial nature.

Survivors gather around, grateful yet deeply affected by the loss. As they reflect on their ordeal, they realise that nature, indifferent and unyielding, has claimed one of their own. The experience leaves them changed, aware of the sea's immense power and the fragility of human life in its wake.



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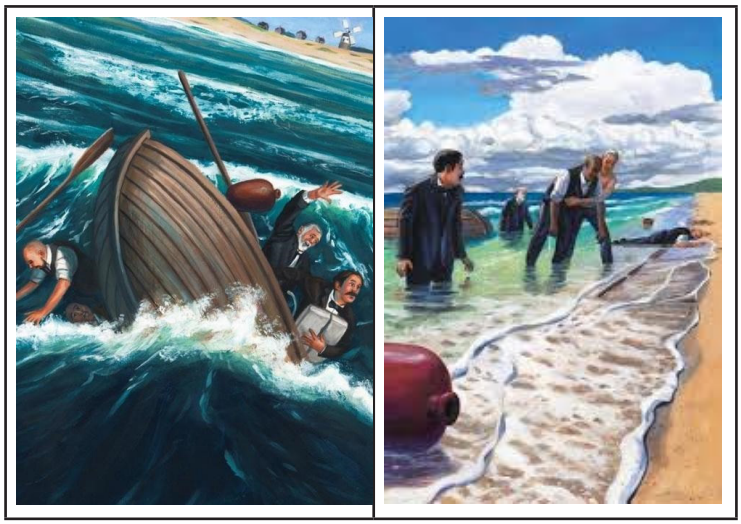


Fig 3.2.3 Dramatic paintings of the story

3.2.3 Analysis

In "The Open Boat", Stephen Crane crafts a narrative that explores nature's indifference, human resilience, and the uneasy bond between people and the natural world. Set against a vast, uncaring sea, Crane portrays four shipwrecked men – a captain, a cook, an oiler, and a correspondent – adrift in a small boat, where they wage a relentless struggle to survive. Through vivid imagery and moments of reflection, Crane transcends their immediate ordeal, touching on existential questions about life, fate, and human purpose.

The story opens with the dawn breaking over a turbulent sea, described as "the grey hue of the dawning." This image captures the uncertainty of their situation and foreshadows the harsh trials ahead. Moments later, Crane describes the water as "painted with carmine and gold," showing the contrasting beauty of nature. But the men cannot afford to dwell on the scenery, as they must focus on survival. In the distance, they see a windmill and cottages, symbols of civilization, yet these too seem indifferent to their plight, underscoring their sense of isolation. The setting reflects nature's duality: it is both serene and brutal, beautiful yet deadly.

The windmill becomes a metaphor for the natural world's indifference. It stands unmoved, its "back to the plight of the ants," symbolising how insignificant human lives seem in the broader scheme. This quiet, unchanging presence contrasts with the men's frantic struggle, underscoring the theme that nature is impartial and unaffected by human suffering. As the men fight for their lives, the windmill and other distant symbols of land remain unresponsive, a reminder that their fight is ultimately against forces beyond their control and that man is all alone in his struggles.

As they attempt to navigate the waves, the captain suggests they make a run for the shore if no rescue comes soon. His calm, matter-of-fact approach captures their determination, yet also their weariness. He offers guidance, but the situation is clear: their survival depends as much on luck as on any choice they make. The captain's leadership is a source of comfort to the others, and Crane uses their dialogue to reveal the tension, silent fears, and cooperation that come with such a crisis.

Throughout the journey, the correspondent becomes introspective, reflecting on his past as he faces the possibility of death. In one mo-

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ment of contemplation, he thinks of "the many faults in his own life," struck by regrets and a desire for a second chance. This moment of introspection highlights how facing death can change one's perspective. His inner struggle adds depth to the story, illustrating that in moments of crisis, physical survival is accompanied by a psychological and moral reckoning. Crane's blending of the men's physical ordeal with the correspondent's personal reflections enriches the narrative, reminding readers of the complexity of human emotion when faced with life's ultimate challenges.

As they brace for the final run through the surf, tension mounts. The captain cautions them to "keep cool and don't jump until she swamps sure." Crane's use of imagery here—"monstrous inshore rollers"—emphasises the vast power of the sea in contrast to the men's fragile dinghy. This language paints the waves as unstoppable, reminding the reader of nature's raw, indifferent force.

When the boat is inevitably capsized by a crashing wave, chaos ensues. Crane captures the terror and disorientation of the men, noting how the correspondent clutches a scrap of life belt in a desperate attempt to stay afloat. The "icy" water jolts him, underscoring the harsh truth of their situation. Earlier, the dawn over the sea hinted at beauty and possibility; now, the cold water and turbulent waves underscore the mercilessness of nature, which cares nothing for their survival.

In these moments of desperate swimming, the shore, once a symbol of safety, now seems unreachable. The correspondent observes it as "a bit of scenery on a stage," distant and dreamlike. This image represents the gap between hope and reality, the tantalising safety of land seeming nearly impossible to reach. His struggle against the current captures the deep isolation felt during crises, as he longs for solid ground but feels powerless against the relentless pull of the sea.

Crane also explores human urge for survival. The correspondent's disbelief as he wonders, "I am going to drown? Can it be possible?" reveals his shock and fear. These moments reflect human vulnerability and the fierce will to survive, even in the face of inevitable outcomes. Crane's portrayal of the correspondent's inner turmoil serves as a reflection of humanity's instinct to live, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable odds. The struggle between man and nature is the most apparent theme in the work. While the characters at first believe the sea to be a hostile force, the four men come to believe that nature, instead, is ambivalent. To quote from the text: "…the calm of Nature against the struggles of the individual—Nature in the wind, and Nature in the sight of men. Nature did not seem cruel to him then, nor kind, nor dangerous, nor wise. But she was not interested, completely not interested."

A turning point comes when a rescuer appears, hurriedly undressing to aid the men. This stranger's willingness to help stands in sharp contrast to nature's cold indifference. He symbolizes the human impulse to assist others, a reminder of the bonds that link people, especially in moments of crisis. The rescuer, "naked as a tree in winter," represents humanity stripped of pretensions, emphasising the fundamental need for connection and compassion.

Yet, the oiler's tragic fate – his body lying face down in the shallows – drives home the story's theme of life's unpredictability. Despite his efforts, he does not survive, a reminder that survival is not guaranteed. The image of the oiler's body highlights the randomness of fate and the fragility of human life.

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As the surviving men finally reach shore, they are met by strangers offering warmth and aid. This moment captures the bitter sweet nature of survival – the joy of being alive tempered by the awareness of the oiler's death. The shore's welcoming gestures contrast with the indifferent "hospitality" of the sea, which had shown no mercy. Crane's conclusion leaves readers with a mix of relief and sadness, a realisation that, while life continues, it often does so at a cost.

In the closing moments, as the men hear the waves, there is a sense of calm but also resignation. The ocean, now gentle under moonlight, serves as a reminder of life's cycles and the persistence of nature. While the survivors are forever scarred by their experience, nature itself remains unchanged. In "The Open Boat", Crane presents a powerful meditation on human existence, our struggle against forces beyond our control, and the fleeting yet vital connections that sustain us. Through the ordeal of these four men, Crane prompts us to consider our own lives, the value of survival, and the strength we draw from one another when facing life's most daunting challenges.

Recap

- Stephen Crane was a key naturalist writer in American literature
- "The Open Boat" reflects nature's indifference to human struggle
- Four shipwrecked men- Captain, Correspondent, Oiler (Billie) and Cook, struggle against relentless, indifferent waves
- Each character displays unique responses to survival challenges
- The windmill symbolises nature's apathy to human suffering
- The correspondent reflects on mortality and existential questions
- Oiler drowns, highlighting life's unpredictability

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Objective Questions

1. How many men are adrift in the small boat?
2. What is the name of the oiler?
3. What colour is the sea described as before dawn?
4. Which men are described as the "babies of the sea" while they sleep?
5. What colour does the sea become at dawn?
6. What type of bird disturbs the men?
7. Who does the correspondent feel a bond with?
8. What do the men struggle against while in the boat?
9. What does the captain try to do while lying at the bow?
10. Who drowns at the end of the story?

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Answers

1. Four
2. Billie
3. Slate
4. Oiler and cook
5. Green
6. Gull
7. Oiler
8. Waves
9. Guide
10. Oiler, Billie

Assignments

1. How do the personalities of the four men shape their responses to being adrift at sea?
2. How is nature's indifference to human suffering shown in the story?
3. What do the gull and lighthouse represent in the men's struggle for survival?
4. How does the correspondent's inner monologue reveal his feelings of helplessness and isolation?
5. How do shifts between hope and despair affect the story's tone?

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Suggested Reading

- Crane, Stephen. *The Open Boat: And Other Stories*. Dover Publications, 1993.
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Drama

Unit 1

The Emperor Jones

- Eugene O'Neill

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- trace the growth of modern American drama,
- outline the role of theatre groups in the revival of modern American drama.
- identify the literary works of Eugene O'Neill, including the formative influences, significant themes, style, and innovative techniques, as well as the triumph of Expressionism as manifested in *The Emperor Jones.*
- be equipped with the tools to evaluate Eugene O'Neill as a psychological playwright critically.
- describe the dramatist's tragic vision of life as embodied in the present play.

Prerequisite

Eugene O'Neill transformed American drama by introducing psychological complexity and innovative stage techniques. His plays departed from melodramatic conventions and embraced realism, symbolism, and expressionism. *The Emperor Jones* stands as one of his most influential works, depicting the dramatic rise and fall of Brutus Jones. Structured in episodic scenes, the play traces the protagonist's psychological disintegration as he confronts fear, guilt, and memory. Drawing inspiration from Greek tragedy and modern theatrical experimentation, O'Neill externalises inner turmoil through rhythmic sound effects and symbolic imagery. This unit prepares students to examine O'Neill's contribution to American theatre, the play's tragic structure, and its exploration of power, identity, and psychological conflict.

Keywords

Power and Pride, Racial memory, Journey to the self, spiritual disintegration

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Discussion



Fig 4.1.1. Eugene O'Neill

4.1.1 Eugene O'Neill: Life and Works

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City. He was the second child of the famous romantic actor James O'Neill and Ella Quinlan O'Neill. His early years were spent travelling across the country with his father's theatre company, which impacted his formal education. He attended Mount Saint Vincent Academy, a boarding school in New York City, and later Betts Academy in Stanford, Connecticut. He also spent a year at Princeton University. In 1990, he married Kathleen Jenkins and later went on a gold prospecting trip to Honduras. Their son, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, Jr., was born in 1910. In 1912, he attempted suicide and divorced Kathleen the same year. He then pursued a career as an actor and worked as a newspaper reporter for the New London Telegraph. He spent two years at sea, earning the "Able Seaman" certificate. After suffering from tuberculosis, he spent six months at the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Connecticut, where he read extensively, focusing on plays, and wrote his first one-act plays. In 1914, he enrolled in George Pierce Baker's drama classes at Harvard. His involvement with non-commercial theatre groups led to the creation and production of his experimental works. In 1918, he married Agnes Boulton, and the following year, their son Shane O'Neill was born, followed by their daughter Oona O'Neill in 1926.

He faced numerous tragedies throughout his life that deeply affected him. He observed the gradual decline of his father, who suffered from a stroke and intestinal cancer. In his insightful article "Celebrant of Loss: Eugene O'Neill 1888 - 1953," Stephen A. Black notes that during his father's final years, "father and son developed a close, almost collegial relationship. From March to August 1920, Eugene experienced profound grief as he watched his father endure a slow and painful death, spending countless hours at his bedside while James was often unconscious or barely aware".

O'Neill was a prolific writer, and his plays won widespread recognition. The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him a gold medal for drama, and Yale University awarded him a D. Litt. He won the Pulitzer Prize for drama thrice. He reached the pinnacle of success with the winning of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. His plays have been extensively translated into most of the languages of the world. Some of O'Neill's well-known plays are *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire under the Elms* (1925), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), *The Iceman Cometh* (1946)

When *The Hairy Ape* was produced, O'Neill was the only "advanced playwright' in the USA. The influence of all these tendencies is discernible in O'Neill; he experimented with ancient and modern tragic themes, techniques, and ideas. In *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), the chief

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concern is the tragic predicament of man struggling to understand and justify himself in a universe that is always mysterious and hostile. His view of man is essentially tragic, and is interested only in the relation between man and God.

His association with major theatre figures such as George Cram of the Provincetown Players in 1915, Kenneth Macgowan, and Robert Edmond Jones, who transformed the Players into The Experimental Theatre, as well as dramatists like George Jean Nathan and Joseph Wood Krutch, who shared his strong interest in tragedy, brought radical changes to the world of American theatre. His major plays preceded the Nobel Prize in 1936.

Ah! Wilderness (1933) and *Days without an End* (1934) were the last two plays he wrote before suffering a nervous breakdown and staying away from the stage for a decade. *Long Day's Journey into Night* and *The Iceman Cometh* came after the long theatrical silence. Both 1941 plays were produced posthumously in 1956 following his death in 1953. Often placed in the tradition of Greek tragedies, the plays are usually credited with an Ibsenian lineage

O'Neill was foremost among the playwrights who brought about a revolution in American drama. European drama had already been altered by the imaginative energy and inventiveness of dramatists like Ibsen and Strindberg. On the British stage, only Shaw was able to break the well-established conventions of the theatre. In the United States, Eugene O'Neill destroyed the stereotypes. Basically, he brought in psychological ideas. He did not echo himself in his dramas. He used the language of poetic symbolism.

O'Neill is the dramatist of an idea. One theme is prominent in his plays. It is an attempt to express and subdue the torment of a mind in conflict. Pity, anger and despair at the human position are feelings found in his plays. The plays attempt to explain and justify human suffering. Men with pride are destroyed. To O'Neill, God, Fate, and Mystery are all aspects of the subconscious. The tragic struggle is of the conscious will to assert itself against an unconscious will.

4.1.2 Eugene O'Neill and Twentieth-Century American Drama

American drama marks an interesting link between the literature of the war decade and that of the twenties. The renewed vitality in the theatre came a few years later than that in poetry, but when it did come it came with decided vigour. The work of Ibsen, Shaw and other great European playwrights had far overshadowed anything happening in American theatres up to the advent of Eugene O'Neill. The way was prepared for O'Neill through the interest shown in drama by two amateur groups in New York, the Washington Square Players and the Province Town Theatre. It was the latter group with which the early work of O'Neill was associated.

Eugene O'Neill and his family were deeply connected to the dramatic heritage of their nation. His father was a prominent actor, and the family travelled across the country with his theatre company. Eugene took part in performances of various plays, gaining insight into the norms of theatre, acting, and the frameworks that governed performances. During a time of significant change in the competitive theatrical landscape, O'Neill's works emerged as responses to the theatrical conventions of his era. As noted by Watermeier, his career was shaped by the expanding nature of theatre and the ongoing struggle between traditional values and innovative ideas.

Nobel Prize winner Sinclair Lewis attributes significant credit to O'Neill for positively re-

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shaping American Drama. During the 1932 Nobel Prize Ceremony, he urged the Swedish Academy to honour a more deserving writer, stating, "And had you chosen Eugene O'Neill, who has alone nothing much in the American Drama save to transform it utterly in ten or twelve years from a false world of neat and competent trickery into a world of splendour, fear, and greatness you would have been reminded that he had done something far worse than scoffing, that he had seen life as something not to be neatly arranged in a study, but as terrifying, magnificent and often quite horrible, a thing akin to a tornado, an earthquake or a devastating fire."

O'Neill continuously explored different dramatic forms, styles, and techniques. He never confined himself to one particular approach, even after achieving success; instead, he consistently sought out new methods throughout his career. Initially, he honed his skills in one-act plays before finding success with longer works. Regardless of success or failure, O'Neill viewed life with stark realism, avoiding any sentimental shaping of his material based on commercial outcomes or public sentiment. From the very beginning of his career, he embraced experimentation.

He is recognised for establishing naturalistic art on the American stage. As the first American playwright, he brought characters from various small occupations, regardless of their race or cultural background. He often employed colloquial language tailored to the needs of his characters. A notable example is *The Emperor Jones,* where he featured a black character as the main protagonist, a groundbreaking move for a white playwright in American theatre. Drawing inspiration from Strindberg, he incorporated expressionistic techniques in both The Emperor Jones and *The Hairy Ape*, marking a first for American theatre. He ensured that no scene was treated in a strictly naturalistic manner. In *Days Without End*, he divided the protagonist into two distinct characters, requiring two different actors for the roles. His innovative use of masks in *Strange Interlude* and *The Great God Brown* proved to be highly effective. His perspective on life was fundamentally tragic, focusing on the tragedies of ordinary people and contemporary existence.

The Emperor Jones is a play written by American playwright Eugene O'Neill in 1920. It follows the story of Brutus Jones, a clever and confident African American who was once a Pullman porter. After killing another man during a dice game, he is imprisoned but later escapes to a remote Caribbean island, where he declares himself emperor. The narrative unfolds through flashbacks as Brutus navigates the jungle, trying to evade his former subjects who have turned against him. Initially titled The Silver Bullet, this play is one of O'Neill's significant experimental pieces, blending expressionism with realism and featuring an unreliable narrator along with various perspectives. It also serves as a subtle critique of the U.S. occupation of Haiti following violent uprisings, a topic that was heavily criticised in O'Neill's progressive political circles in New York. *The Emperor Jones* is inspired by O'Neill's own vivid experiences while searching for gold in the Honduran jungle in 1909 and reflects on the harsh rule of Haiti's Vilbrun Guillaume Sam.

Many of O'Neill's plays are tragedies that explore themes of violence, murder, death, and suicide. His characters often display abnormal and irrational behaviour. This led Eric Bentley to harshly critique O'Neill, stating that his tragic dramas from the thirties were tragedies taken to an extreme level of insanity. O'Neill's sad perspective is evident in most of his plays. He examines each individual in the context of their social surroundings. His

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characters exist within a societal framework, enduring suffering, hunger, despair, and ultimately facing ruin due to a system indifferent to the welfare of society as a whole. His tragedies stand apart from traditional forms. He deviates from Aristotelian principles, presenting the tragedy of modern man living in the contemporary world. His tragic figures come from everyday life and lack the Aristotelian concept of hamartia or a tragic flaw. Many of his protagonists are simply victims of their social circumstances.

One significant aspect of O'Neill's early works, including plays like *The Emperor Jones* (1922) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), is how the social realities of his time influenced the dramatic narrative. O'Neill vividly depicts the struggles of the underprivileged in the emerging industrial landscape, presenting the hardships faced by industrial workers, sailors, and farmers. He also highlights the severe racial inequalities experienced by African Americans. His plays reflect a profound comprehension of contemporary human experiences, both in terms of situational and psychological dimensions. O'Neill consistently viewed individuals through the lens of their social contexts, leading him to critique the very fabric of American society. He portrays characters against a backdrop of powerful social forces. He offers a scathing critique of the social order within the industrial and psychological settings of many of his works, such as *Anna Christie*, *Strange Interlude*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. Although he believed that belonging to a social order was essential to humanity, he ultimately felt disillusioned, recognising his insignificance as an individual within that structure. He thought that a discriminatory social environment caused human suffering. He felt that the world lacked intelligent social organisation. In his eyes, it was filled with cruelty, selfishness, indulgence, ignorance, and hatred. He harshly criticised the social order, environment, and society as a whole, yet he offered no solutions for improving it.

O'Neill's Limitations

O'Neill's work, while influential, is not without flaws. A primary issue is the absence of humour in his plays, which frequently leads to excessive melodrama. His tone tends to be more satirical than genuine humour. Furthermore, his character development is uneven, with only a select few, such as Emperor Jones and Lavinia, being truly memorable.

His works also lack uplifting, catchy lines, and while his use of symbolism effectively reveals characters' inner struggles, it often conflicts with the naturalistic and melodramatic aspects of his writing. As Homer E. Woodbridge pointed out, these contradictions result in inconsistencies and vulnerabilities in his plays, with his creative attempts sometimes filling the gaps but never completely resolving the issues.

His limitations do not diminish his status as the greatest American dramatist and one of the most significant figures in 20th-century theatre worldwide. He was a dedicated and thoughtful writer who earned acclaim as a serious playwright due to his remarkable social consciousness. The Nobel Prize in Literature, four Pulitzer Prizes, and numerous other accolades serve as clear evidence of his importance. He motivated many playwrights to believe in their abilities and became a driving force for emerging dramatists. George Jean Nathan's comment would suffice to sum up: "With O'Neill's acceptance and success in the theatre, American playwrights suddenly took courage and proceeded, as best as in their fashion they could, to set themselves to a species of drama far removed from that to which they had been devoting their efforts. The newer and younger writers, led by O'Neill, threw off the shackles at once and tried to write honestly, faithfully, and truthfully."

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4.1.3 Popularity of the Play

The Emperor Jones is one of O'Neill's best plays. It is a brief work made up of eight scenes. The play focuses on Brutus Jones, a negro, who, after a life of crime in the United States, becomes the emperor of a Caribbean island. It premiered in November 1920 at the Provincetown Players Theatre and was a huge hit. The excitement it generated and the large crowds it attracted led to its move from the village theatre to Broadway, where it opened on December 27, 1920. Its popularity was instant and has lasted over time. It has consistently received praise from both audiences and critics wherever it has been performed.

4.1.4 Composition of the Play

O'Neill shared how he came up with the idea for The Emperor Jones and the influences behind it. He writes, "The idea of *The Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story about the late President Sam, who was currently in Haiti. This was to the effect that Sam had said they would never get him with a lead bullet, that he would get himself first with a silver one... This notion about the silver bullet struck me, and I made a note of the story. About six months later, I got the idea of the woods, but I could not see how it could be done on the stage, so I passed it up again. A year elapsed. One day, I was reading about the religious feasts in the Congo and the uses to which the drum is put there, how it starts at a normal pulse and is slowly intensified until the heartbeat of everyone present corresponds to the frenzied beat of the drum. There was an idea and an experiment. How would this sort of thing work on an audience in a theatre? The effect of the tropical forest on the human imagination honestly came about. It was the result of my own experience while prospecting for gold in Spanish Honduras". On another occasion, he claimed that the sound of his heartbeat in his ears during a malaria attack inspired the drum beat used in the play. This shows that the play is based on the playwright's personal experiences. Several of his favourite authors also influenced the play. For example, ideas came from Jack London's *The Call of the Wild* and Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness.* There are also strong similarities between Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* and *The Emperor Jones.* Clifford Leach believes that the key influences were the works of Wedekind and Strindberg.

4.1.5 Characters

Brutus Jones - Emperor

Henry Smithers - A Cockney Trader

An Old Native Woman

Lem - A Native Chief

Soldiers- Adherents of Lem

The Little Formless Fears- The dramatist describes them as "black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all, it is that of a grub-worm about the size of a creeping child."

Jeff- The Negro convicts; The Prison Guard; The Planters; The Auctioneer; The Slaves; The Congo Witch Doctor; The Crocodile God. Glossary to the text

4.1.5.1 Other Elements in the Play

Tom-tom

Tom- tom is a tall, narrow drum that is usually played with the hands associated with North American Indian, African, or Eastern cultures. From the beginning of the play to the end, we hear the tom-toms. The tom-toms begin at a steady rhythm at the rate of the normal pulse. As the play progresses and tension mounts, the speed of the tom-tom accelerates to a feverish pace.

Cockney

A native of East London,

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Stowaway

A person who secretly boards a vehicle, such as a ship, an aircraft, a train, a cargo truck or a bus, in order to travel without paying and without being detected.

Craps

A gambling game played with two dice, chiefly in North America.

Martinique

An insular region of France located in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies in the eastern Caribbean Sea.

Gunboat

A small, fast ship with mounted guns for use in shallow coastal waters and rivers.

Pullman porter

Someone hired to work on the railroads as a porter.

Panama hat

A wide-brimmed hat of straw-like material made from the leaves of a particular tropical palm tree, worn chiefly by men.

Witch-doctor

A magician credited with powers of magic and healing from the tribals

Silver bullet

The legend of the silver bullet is central to the play. The myth that rules the play is that only a silver bullet could harm Jones.

4.1.6 Summary of the Play

SCENE 1: In the Place of the Emperor Jones. Afternoon.

SCENE 2: The Edge of the Great Forest. Dusk.

SCENE 3: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 4: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 5: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 6: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 7: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 8: Same as Scene Two - The Edge of the Great Forest. Dawn.

The action takes place on a remote island in the West Indies, where Brutus Jones, an ex-convict Negro from the United States, has declared himself Emperor of the Negro-natives. However, the natives are now rebelling against their proud and greedy Emperor, and Jones tries to escape through the dark forest to find safety.



Fig. 4.1.2 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

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SCENE I

Outline

The first scene takes place in the audience chamber of Emperor Jones' palace. This spacious room features stark white walls, with only the Emperor's bright scarlet wooden throne as furniture. Various doorways and passages lead out of the chamber. The scene unfolds late in the afternoon, with the sun still shining and the heat oppressive.

As the curtain rises, an elderly Black woman enters, carrying a bundle over her shoulder. She moves cautiously as if afraid of being caught. Just as she is about to exit, Henry Smithers, a tall, bald white man with a menacing demeanour, appears. He is a ruthless London trader, armed and holding a riding whip.

Smithers, suspicious of the woman, stealthily approaches and grabs her by the shoulder, accusing her of theft. The woman, frantic and terrified, begs him not to inform the Emperor of her attempted escape. Smithers inquires about the situation, noting that all the servants have vanished.

Fearing violence, the woman quickly admits that the native servants have fled to the hills, and she intends to join them. This revelation pleases Smithers, as he knows the natives will soon begin to beat their drums and prepare to hunt down the Emperor, whom they despise for his arrogance and cruelty.

The setting of the first scene is the audience chamber of Emperor Jones's palace. It is a large room with bare white walls, and the only piece of furniture is the Emperor's wooden throne, painted bright scarlet. There are doorways and passages leading out of the chamber. The scene opens late in the afternoon. The sun is still up, and the atmosphere is terribly hot.

The curtain rises on an old Negro woman carrying over her shoulder a bundle. She sneaks into the chamber as if scared of being discovered. As she is about to slip out of the chamber, Henry Smithers, a tall, bald white man, appears. He is a mean and dangerous-looking London trader. He is armed and has a riding whip in his hand.

Smithers is suspicious about the woman, tiptoes behind her, and catches her by the shoulder. He accuses her of stealing. The woman seems frantic and terrified and pleads with him not to tell the Emperor that she is sneaking away. Smithers asks her what is going on since all the servants have also disappeared.

The woman does not risk getting beaten up and quickly confesses that the native servants have all run away to the hill. She is going to join them. On hearing this, Smithers has a means of satisfaction. He knows that up there, the natives will soon beat their drum (tom-tom) and prepare to hunt down the Emperor, whom they hate for being proud and cruel.

Smithers, in turn, condemns the Emperor and his subjects for being "bleeding niggers." Though the Emperor does not yet know anything about the imminent danger, Smithers knows that he is smart enough to find out soon. The woman takes this opportunity to run away, and Smithers does not bother to stop her.

Just then, Emperor Jones walks in. He is a powerfully built middle-aged Negro whose face shows great willpower and confidence. His cunning and intelligent eyes command respect. His gaudy uniform has brass buttons, gold chevrons and braids, and red and blue stripes down the sides of his trousers. In spite of this preposterous grandeur, he looks majestic.

Jones's language has a heavy Negro accent. He is irritated because someone whistled and disturbed his sleep. Smithers shows himself and tells the Emperor that he has important news for him. The Generals and Cabinet have

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disappeared, but Jones seems least bothered. He knows that they usually run off when the Emperor sleeps to drink and brag in the town. Jones smirked at Smithers and asked him why he was not with them that day.

Smithers replies that drinking with the natives is part of his business. He reminds him that they had been together since Jones first landed on the island when he hadn't been so proud and arrogant. Jones does not tolerate the white man's insolence and majestically threatens him to servility. Smithers apologises, and Jones tells him that they have both been crooks once, but Jones is now an Emperor, not a crook. Smithers wants to be credited for giving Jones "a start", but Jones reminds him that he has been of great help to Smithers, too.

It was through his own intelligence and efforts that Jones became the Emperor. He was anti-romantic, and it was the wealth, not the glory, of the throne that attracted him to it. All the money he made has been deposited in a foreign bank, and he has always allowed Smithers to exploit the islanders with his heavy taxes. From their conversation, it is clear that Jones is the more clever and smarter of the two crooks, and Smithers resents this.

Smithers now tells him that the silver bullet was his luck. Jones agrees that it was indeed luck, but he was the one who turned the luck in his favour. Once, Lem, a native chief, had tried to shoot Jones but missed. Knowing that the natives would never get hold of silver, Jones made up a story that he had a charm that saved him from lead bullets. Only a silver bullet would kill him. The natives believed him and feared his magic powers. Jones had also spread the news that he had a silver bullet on him, with which he would ultimately kill himself. He now shows Smithers his revolver with five lead bullets and one silver.

Jones knows that his game will be up someday, and hence, he makes hay while the sun shines. When the natives rise against him, he will get away and enjoy his wealth. Smithers thinks Jones would not flee to the US because he had once broken out of prison there. Jones at first denies this, but when provoked, he admits that he did get into a fight with another Negro, Jeff, and killed him. In prison, when a prison guard hit him, he split his head with a shovel and escaped. Jones warns Smithers that if he breathes a word of this to anyone, his exploitation of the natives will come to an end. Smithers, of course, swears silence.

Smithers now mocks Jones and says it is probably time for the Emperor to resign with a silver bullet in his head, as none of the servants and guards are in the palace anymore. Jones carelessly suggests that they might be lazing away somewhere. However, when he rings, no one comes, and he realises that his game is up. He now proclaims that he is resigning from the Emperor's job at that very minute and is preparing to go.

Now Smithers tells him that all the horses have been taken away, so he can't escape on horseback. Jones still keeps his cool and decides to flee on foot. The time is just three-thirty in the evening, and he is confident that he can escape. Smithers, however, is cynical and thinks that Lem would not let Jones getaway. Jones is not the least bit afraid and thinks poorly of those "low-flung bush niggers." For some time now, he has been familiarising himself with the forest and believes he can easily outwit them all. However, deep within, he seems to have an unsettling nervousness.

At this time, the low, vibrating sound of the tom-tom is heard for the first time from the hills. When it begins, it corresponds to a normal pulse beat, steadily becoming faster, finally reaching a feverish rhythm at the end of the play. The Negroes have begun their ritual war dance. Jones continues to be unperturbed and jokes that the natives are seeing him off

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with drumbeats, if not a brass band. He bids farewell to Smithers and walks out majestically through the front door. Smithers looks on with astonished admiration.

Analysis

Scene one is a brilliant exposition in the realistic mode, influencing and annotating both character and action. The old woman sets the atmosphere of tension, mystery, and suspense. The dialogues between Smithers and Jones lay bare their evil past, which is the reason for Jones's present persecution. Also effectively evoked is the character of the Emperor, supremely confident, majestic, and powerful, to which Smithers is a foil. Compared to Jones, Smithers is weak, ineffectual, and shadowy. But, as evident in the first and last scenes, Smithers is the only character who understands and appreciates Jones, though he hates the very sight of him.

This long scene also introduces the main motifs of the play: the silver bullet and the tom-tom. The silver bullet has a vital role in Jones's life as well as in the action of the play. The tom-tom, symbolic of the natives' rebellion and of Jones's own conscience that haunts him, is an invisible witness to the events that are to follow.

A significant theme evoked in the introductory scene is the problematic and complex relationship Jones has with the other Negroes, and with the white man, Smithers. Having lived in the United States, Jones has acquired the character and attitudes of the whites and, like the white imperialist, considers the West Indian natives uncivilised savages. Having the hyphenated identity of the Afro-American, Jones is neither African nor American and is an eternal wanderer in the forest in search of roots, in search of a haven. Though subordinate to the Emperor, Smithers feels the 'superiority' of his skin and condemns Jones's blackness as much as his success.

The scene also overtly critiques the sham of contemporary politics and imperialism. These have unethical and anti-social dimensions, overruled by subjective and material concerns. The history of Western imperialism, underneath the pretences of civilisation and 'white man's burden, comprises many mini-narratives that correspond to the plight of Emperor Jones.

SCENE II: Nightfall at the Edge of the Forest

Jones has now crossed the plain and reached the edge of the forest, which is like an enormous edifice of darkness. O'Neill describes it as a character, the embodiment of gloom and sombre silence. Making sure that he is on the right path, Jones throws himself on the ground, extremely tired and rather unsure about going into the dark forest. His energy is dissipating, but he tries to talk himself out of fear and fatigue. Hunger gnaws at him, and he searches for food he had stowed away under a white stone for emergencies. Stone after stone is overturned, revealing no food packet. There was only one white stone where he hid the food, but here, there were many. Jones is frantic but soon tells himself that he must have mistaken the place.

Little formless fears now creep out of the blackness of the forest. These are ugly, black and grub-worm-like, about the size of a creeping child. The creatures, external manifestations of Jones's innermost fears, move noiselessly about.

Jones stands perplexed, unable to discern anything from the inky blackness. The forest, which he had prided himself on knowing inside out, was now menacing and unfamiliar. He thinks the woods are playing a trick on him, and the fears laugh mockingly at his desperation. Jones jumps at the sound, shouts in a quivering voice, and fires his revolver. The formless fears disappear into the forest, and

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the only sound now is that of the tom-tom.

The sound of the shot and the reassuring feel of the revolver in his hand somewhat restore his shaken nerves. He regrets having fired and nearly given himself away to the natives. Then, with greater resolve, he plunges into the darkness of the forest.

Analysis

This short and powerful scene introduces another major character in the play: the forest itself. The very presence of the forest shakes Jones's supreme self-confidence. The deeper layers of Jones's character are now unravelled, and there is a strong suggestion that the worst is yet to come. The dark and ominous forest is a representation of Jones' troubled psyche, where he encounters his repressed fears, obsessions, and past sins in a rapid progression to primitiveness.

This expressionistic scene also introduces the technique of interior monologue, which powerfully delineates and realises the psychological terrors of the protagonist.

SCENE III: Nine O' Clock: In the Forest

Outline

It is now nine o'clock at night in the forest, and the sound of the tom-tom echoes through the trees. The moon casts an eerie light, deepening the shadows. Slowly, Jeff's dark shape becomes visible as he rolls dice on the ground. Jones's footsteps and voice can be heard approaching.

Jones feels relieved by the moonlight. His face is scratched, his hat is missing, and his uniform is torn. Despite being tired from the heat and the long walk, he pushes himself to keep moving. Suddenly, he hears a "clicketty" sound, like dice being thrown.

Then, he sees Jeff, the man he killed years ago. Jones is unsure if Jeff is alive or just a ghost. He tries to speak to him, but Jeff remains silent. Filled with fear and anger, Jones fires another shot, and Jeff vanishes. Jones is shaken but displays a strange, desperate confidence. The tom-tom grows louder and closer as Jones quickly slips into the underbrush.



Fig 4.1.3 A scene from *The Emperor Jone*

Analysis

In this second expressionistic scene, the symbolic significance of the forest and tom-tom is clearer. Jones is trapped within the dark forest of his psyche, and the more he tries to escape, the more the forest closes in on him, and the tom-tom gets nearer. As he regresses into the primitive darkness, all traces of his confidence and majesty are lost.

In this scene, the repetitive use of the forest and tom-tom motifs establishes their universal significance. These represent every human being's psyche, the latent fears and obsessions that haunt and repress a person throughout life, as psychoanalytic critics such as Freud and Jung have explicated.

SCENE IV: Eleven O 'Clock: In the Forest

Outline

Jones, by midnight, has stumbled onto a dirt road in the forest that looks ghastly in the moonlight. He does not remember such a road and is puzzled. He is melting with heat and tears off his coat, jacket, and spurs. Devoid of his Imperial attire, he feels better. But he is scared to hear the tom-tom still nearer after all the running.

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Looking into the darkness, he thinks he sees more strange figures. The thought of being killed by the natives terrifies him, and, being a Christian, he believes he is civilised and safe from the ignorant natives. He reasons that hunger and fatigue might have caused his illusions and that there is really no danger.

Reassured, he decides to move on and comes upon a gang of Negro convicts, heads shaven, one leg dragging a heavy ball and chain. They carry pickaxes and shovels. A white correctional officer signals to them to stop, and Jones's eyes bulge out in terror. He tries to flee but could not move.

The prison guard cracks his whip and motions to the convicts and Jones to start working. Everyone, including Jones, complies as if hypnotised. The guard turns away, and Jones lifts his shovel and brings it down to the guard's skull.

Jones suddenly realises that his haunts are empty. He shouts for a shovel, but the other convicts are motionless, their eyes on the ground. Then Jones fires his revolver a third time and flees madly into the forest. The tom-tom beats even more loudly and rapidly.

Analysis

This highly theatrical scene completes the regression of Jones into a primitive animalistic state. He has lost his clothes, the sign of civilisation and power, and re-enacts his savage instincts. There is also an ironic reference to the Baptist parson who preaches that Christianity is civilisation and salvation. The scene subtly hints that "civilisation," like Christianity, is a farce, and there is an animal in every human being. No rational explanation of Jones's state comes to his rescue, and he is not able to curb his irrational fears. There is also a critique of the soundness of Western Civilisation that banks on religion, science, and material progress.

SCENE V: One O' Clock; Great Forest-a Large Circular Clearing

Outline

It is an hour past midnight in a clearing in the forest with a big tree stump in the middle. Jones enters in tattered trousers and shoes, moaning and praying miserably to Jesus. Jones confesses all his sins one after another but also tries to justify himself. He is maddened by the tom-tom and scared of ghosts. He takes off his patent leather shoes and sighs dejectedly at his plight.

Meanwhile, a group of white people, well-to-do planters, an auctioneer, and a crowd of curious spectators gather quietly in the clearing. Their movements are stiff and unreal, and the auctioneer takes his place at the stump. An attendant brings in a group of slaves - three men and two women, one with a baby in her arms.

Jones sees the enslaved people and others around him and is paralysed with horror. The auctioneer points at Jones and begins his silent speech. Jones is healthy and strong, with sturdy muscles; he is intelligent and of good disposition. The planters all want to possess Jones. The bidding starts, and Jones speaks up hesitatingly. He asks them what right they had to sell and buy a free Negro. He is enraged and fires two simultaneous shots at the auctioneers. As ever, everyone disappears, and only darkness and the frenzied thump of the tom-tom remain.

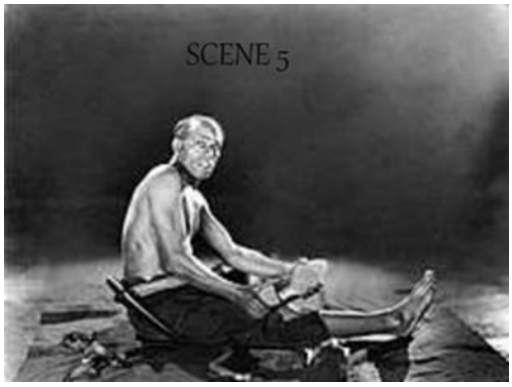


Fig 4.1.4 A scene from *The Emperor Jone*

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Analysis

The pathos of Jones' condition is now fully evoked; so is the rotten hollowness of Western civilisation. It is now clear that the forest is not merely Jones's individual psyche. The auction scene from a southern state of the United States is, in Jungian terms, Jones's "collective unconscious" part of his racial memory. The sins of Jones's past are balanced with the sins of the Western world, and Jones evolves as a truly tragic hero.

SCENE VI: Three O'clock, a Clear Space in the Forest

Outline

Jones stumbles into another forest clearing. He still prays to Jesus that the ghosts may not come after him, for he has only the silver bullet left in his revolver. His trousers are so torn that they look like loin-cloth around his waist. He flings himself down on the forest floor. Two rows of seated Negroes in loin cloths appear beside him. They begin to sway slowly, and a melancholic murmur is heard against the throb of the tom-tom.

The murmur soon becomes a wail, and Jones looks up in terror. He quickly hides his face in the ground but soon begins to wail along with the others. As the wail reaches the highest pitch of sorrow and desolation, Jones sits up with the others, swaying back and forth. The light fades out, voices die down, and Jones is heard to run off. The tom-tom beats even more quickly and loudly.

Analysis

This expressionistic scene symbolically completes Jones's identification with the "collective unconscious" of his race. It serves to intensify the already tight action to a powerful climax.

SCENE VII: Five O'Clock: The Foot of a Tree by a River



Fig 4.1.5 A scene from *The Emperor Jone*

Outline

At five o'clock in the morning, Jones reached a river in the forest. On the bank, there is a gigantic tree and a structure of boulders that looks like an altar. Jones kneels in devotion before the altar and quickly stands up, wondering where he is and what he is doing. He is in a pathetic state and crawls away from the altar.

From behind the tree appears a Witch Doctor carrying a bone rattle and a charmed stick. He begins to dance and chant, and the rhythm of the tom-tom rises accordingly. At first, Jones watches motionlessly, as if hypnotised; then he joins in the incantation and begins to sway to and fro. The voice becomes a howl of despair and rises in savage hope.

The Witch-Doctor now points with his stick to the tree, the river, the altar, and finally, ferociously, at Jones. He is demanding Jones' self-sacrifice. While Jones cries for mercy, the Witch-Doctor summons a huge crocodile from the river, towards which Jones has to creep, begging Jesus for mercy. Finally, in great desperation, with an anguished cry, he fires the silver bullet, and the crocodile disappears into the river. Jones hides his face in the ground and cries as the tom-tom beats away furiously.

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Analysis

Jones' regression to his primitive self of the unconscious is complete in this forceful scene. Jones's physical, spiritual, and psychological dilemmas are juxtaposed here. He is now a raw man, near-naked, and experiencing the pains and ugliness of the body. He is under much psychological trauma, obsessed with his past and wallowing like an animal. The altar represents his spiritual awakening, and in expiation and sacrifice, he meets his real evil self in the form of the crocodile. For salvation, he has to sacrifice himself with the special silver bullet, which in turn symbolises the evil of materialistic greed.

SCENE VIII: Dawn, the Dividing line of Forest and Plain

Outline

It is dawn, and the setting is the edge of the forest. The tom-tom is at its loudest, and Lem and his band of soldiers, followed by Smithers, enter the scene. They are armed and on the lookout for Jones. This is the spot where Jones entered the forest, and Smithers sneers at the inefficiency of the Negroes in not hunting down the fleeing Emperor. However, Lem is quite confident of catching him.

While Lem and Smithers talk, they hear the sound of snapping twigs, and the soldiers disperse quietly into the forest. Soon, the reports of several shots are heard, and the tam-tom stops abruptly. Lem triumphantly tells Smithers that the Emperor is dead. Smithers is sceptical and asks how he knows that for sure. Lem tells him that the soldiers were moulding silver bullets all night long since Jones could not be killed with lead bullets. Because the soldiers had silver bullets, Lem is certain that one of them must have killed Jones. Smithers is amused and contemptuous of the stupidity of the natives.

The soldiers now bring Jones' limp body in. Lem mocks at His Majesty's lifeless body, and they all walk away. Smithers thinks that despite the evil within him, Jones was a much better man than any of the Negroes who killed him.



Fig 4.1.6 A scene from *The Emperor Jone*

Analysis

This final realistic scene reaffirms Jones' grandeur and unbeatable spirit and establishes him as a tragic hero. Despite his wretched condition, he lived as he died, and it did require a silver bullet to bring him down. All his racial, spiritual, and psychological sins and traumas are in various ways expiated and atoned for in the circle of the life forest, and he emerges as a better human being.

4.1.6 The Character of Emperor Jones

The central character of the play, Brutus Jones, is to be analysed at three levels - as an individual, a Negro, and every human being. Jones' personality is outlined at the very outset of the play as a tyrannical and arrogant ruler, hated and feared by his subjects. Even when plotting against him, the natives do not quite rebel outright; they need to muster courage and superhuman powers to counter him.

Jones's appearance and conversation with Henry Smithers lay bare other dimensions of

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his character - his confidence, majesty, and power. He dresses gaudily, but he wears it well and looks majestic. He is supremely confident in himself and does not panic even in the face of the gravest danger. The conversation between the two reveals that both Jones and Smithers have an evil past - both were crooks and have been in prison, and both are exploiting the native islanders now. Jones's failure lies in the fact that he imitated white business people and imperialists in exploiting his fellowmen. Now, he has to return to the black forest of his origins to atone for his sins.

Smithers acts as a foil to Jones' character, accentuating Jones's magnanimity and later atonement and sacrifice through his petty meanness and treachery. Smithers' character remains stagnant, while Jones embarks on a journey of self-discovery and redemption. As Jones traverses the dark forest, symbolising his own psyche, he confronts his past sins and achieves redemption by sacrificing his evil self, represented by a crocodile. When he ultimately succumbs to physical death, he becomes immortal, having already undergone spiritual death and salvation. This is a transformative journey from death to rebirth.

In the later scenes of the play, Jones's sins are rather overshadowed by the larger racial sins of the Western world. The slave trade, annihilation of native cultures, and exploitation at economic and other levels by the whites have brought untold miseries to the black race. The subordination of the black race is perpetrated even in contemporary times, as indicated by Smithers' contempt towards Jones and his subjects. In this regard, Jones is every Negro bearing the burden of racial memory. In the play, he joins his fellowmen in wailing - a sound that breaks out across generations and races.

Jones' journey to self-discovery is, in fact, every man's undertaking. His sins and fears have universal relevance, as does his redemption and death. Through Jones, O'Neill dissects the sickness of a whole generation and race.

Jones is a tragic hero in the classical sense. He is noble and powerful despite his sinful past, and pride is his fatal flaw. His pride and moral indifference are violently overcome in the end, and through sacrifice, he attains salvation and eternal glory.

4.1.7 Themes, Ideas and Techniques

The Emperor Jones is a complex work of art that suggests a number of themes and ideas. It is the first serious play about a Negro, an expression of the so-called Negro Renaissance - a revival of interest in the primitive, consequent upon the rise of romanticism both in England and America. It is the first of all Negro plays in which Negro actors played the roles of the Negro characters. It showed that even a humble American Negro could be the subject of a play of absorbing interest and rise to the lofty heights of a tragic hero. The play has been interpreted by various critics and scholars. Some have interpreted it as a record of "the shedding of masks" acquired by the Negroes through their association with the whites and the gradual attainment of self-knowledge through suffering. Others regard it as a study of atavism, i.e., the gradual regression and disintegration of the central figure and his return to his primitive state.

Classical Elements

The Emperor Jones is classical in its simplicity and austerity. In the manner of the ancient dramatists, the action of the play begins on the afternoon of the most crucial day in the life of the protagonist, and we are told of his past retrospectively through the dialogue between Jones and Smithers. The classical device of re-enactment has also been used with great effect. The murders Jones had committed in the past are presented on the stage as his halluci-

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nations. The action begins in the afternoon and ends at the dawn of the next day. The scene of action is first the palace of Jones and then the Great Forest, at not too great a distance. There is only one single action, and the movement is swift and straightforward, without any subplots, episodes, or digressions. By the end of the play, the tragic hero (Jones) has shed his pride and arrogance and attained self-knowledge. He dies in the end, but he is killed by a silver bullet and not a lead one. As Smithers puts it, he died at "the height of style".

Technical Maturity

Technically, *The Emperor Jones* represents the maturity of O'Neill's art. It is the best illustration of his feeling for the stage, his grasp of theatrical effect, and his technical mastery of pace and suspense. It opens with a dumb show (the old woman creeping stealthily into the palace of the Emperor), which at once captures attention and creates suspense. The beating of the Tom-tom at a distance, gradually increasing in intensity and rapidity of movement, has been used effectively to convince the world of its reality, and it coincides with the increasing terrors of the protagonist. Like the Great Forest, the Tom-tom, too, becomes a force that influences both character and action. The play also shows O'Neill's command over the Negro dialect, which has been used confidently and effectively. The use of sustained monologue throughout the central scenes is a unique feature of the play and has contributed much to its success and popularity.

Expressionism:Blending with Realism

Emperor Jones is visualised in a careful blend of realism and expressionism. O'Neill had been greatly influenced by Strindberg's expressionistic plays. The two modes are quite different in orientation. Realism envisages man as part of the natural order, subservient to the supreme forces of fate and truth. This mode of narration affirms the pre-eminence of scientific progress and representation truthful to objective reality. Expressionism is concerned with the representation on the stage, in a concrete manner, of what happens in the mind and soul of some character under the stress of external incidents and circumstances. It is an objectification of the dark depths of the human psyche, and for this purpose, symbols are extensively used. Man is the centre of interest in all expressionistic art. It condemns science for reducing man to a machine and seeks truth within man's nature, subconscious. Hence, expressionism is primarily subjective. It also presents a deliberately distorted, exaggerated representation of external reality, as seen through the protagonist's eye. Consequently, expressionistic techniques involve flashbacks, non-linear progression, dreams, soliloquies, and monologues.

The Emperor Jones is one of the major American plays that use this technique. Its action takes place in the mind of the protagonist. The stage is dominated by the Negro and his hallucinations. The little, nameless fears are projections of his terror, and the next two apparitions conjured up are the victims of his past crimes, while the last scenes take us farther back into the past of the Negro race, with its memories of the slave auction and witch-doctor.

This play, however, is not a purely expressionist play. It mixes realism with expressionism. The first and last scenes of the play are in the realistic mode, and the middle six illustrate expressionism. The first scene serves to introduce Jones as a tragic hero, with his qualities and flaws, who has to set out on a fateful journey to save his life. The middle scenes provide a window into Jones's innermost self, its repressed fears, conflicts, and thoughts. These scenes give a more intimate and subjective picture of the protagonist, and the readers/audience empathise with his penitence and self-sacrifice. This gives the play its

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force and greatness. The final scene re-establishes Jones as a tragic hero who lives even in physical death.

The expressionistic technique of the play is closely bound to psychological realism and symbolism. The expressionistic scenes amount to Jones' journey from the artifice of civilisation to the reality of his unconscious, from death to rebirth. His layers of white civilisation are stripped one by one to reveal the crude black savage within. This realisation of his true self itself is salvation. The powerful symbols of the forest, the tom-tom, the Witch-Doctor, and the crocodile externalize Jones's psychological traumas and mark the progress of this journey.

4.1.8 Critical Overview

Critics often place the works of Eugene O'Neill in the tradition of Greek tragedy. "Greek drama in tragedy is the noblest ever," remarked O'Neill, declaring his devotion to the Greek tradition in tragedy. He continued exploring the future of this genre by experimenting with a theatrical study of tragedy. *The Emperor Jones* reflects this tradition to a great extent. Magnificent and inclusive, the dramatist evokes a sense of completeness and finality of the tragic experience through powerful symbols and images.

The concept of the tragic vision in his plays was inherited from the great Greek dramatists such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. The greatness of a tragedy lies in its ability to provide insights into the underlying truths that define and govern life, and this finds expression in all of his tragic plays. O'Neill believed that the significance of tragedy lies in its ability to reveal truth, which is essentially beautiful. The tragic vision is based on the idea that the mysterious structure of the human mind itself is responsible for its own tragedy. *The Emperor Jones* demonstrates several parallels to the Greek tragic elements mentioned by Aristotle. Firstly, the play evokes in both the protagonist and the audience a heightened sense of pity and fear, which is the purpose of tragedy. The protagonist has a hamartia or tragic flaw, and the play observes the unities of time and space. The scenes are also spectacular, and although it does not have an actual chorus, it does have chorus characters.

O'Neill made persistent experiments in dramatic art to give adequate expression to human tragedy. Tragedy has an ennobling influence on human life. "To me, the tragic alone has that significant beauty which is truth. It is the meaning of life and hope. The noblest is eternally the most tragic ". This sums up O'Neill's sad vision, which illuminates his plays.

The play traces the voyage of Brutus Jones from being a convict to that of an emperor. Brutus Jones, the ex-convict, who, by means of skillful political deception, becomes the self-styled emperor of one of the islands in the West Indies. He is gradually reduced to the condition of a helpless, half-naked negro slave. The return is to racial primitivism and archetypal savagery. Man, however refined and advanced he is, cannot escape from himself, his fears, superstitions, and misconceptions of this mysterious universe.

In terms of technique, *The Emperor Jones* marks progress in O'Neill's art. Instead of dividing the play into acts, he deals with the theme progressively in eight scenes. Rejecting the old theatrical rule against monologue, he fashioned a touching and absorbing drama heavily based on the utterances of the central character.

"Language and dialect are elements in defining characters and dramatic tensions," remarks Krishna Sen. O'Neill, with his use of poetic symbolism, dramatic monologue, chorus, and arrangement of scenes in Lazarus Laughed,

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along with the experiments in stage lighting and sound design in The Emperor Jones and The Great God Brown, says Ashok Sengupta, was able to develop a dramatic experience which was termed as 'total theatre.'

O'Neill experimented with the Negro as a theme for the theatre. Negro and Negro life are used as pure dramatic material rather than as political or racist devices. The characters, the setting, the thumping tom-tom, the silver bullet, the primitive forest, and the crocodile god are all factors which contribute to externalising the terror, agony, distress, decay, and disintegration of the tragic hero. Colours and colour contrasts have a deeper meaning, which increases and benefits the expressiveness of language. White and scarlet red dominate the hall of the emperor. As he escapes through the forest, it is black and red, the black forest and red blood, which surface. White has a moral as well as racial meaning, and Jones' tragedy is caused when he is unable to distinguish between the two.

The apparitions from the past explore the possibilities of expressionistic theatre that employed grotesque and exaggerated effects to highlight characters' troubled psyche. The play has achieved profound depth, and the symbols aid the dramatist in presenting vast concepts on a small canvas. Through suggestive dialogue, symbolic setting, minimal external action, and maximum internal action, the audience is able to see the inner picture of things. The techniques employed include a minimalistic setting, a minimum number of characters, realistic and expressionistic scenes, colourful native life, the beating drum, and the symbolic movement back to the jungle - all contributing to the total effect where the audience is able to experience the magnitude of the tragic vision portrayed.

O'Neill employs an innovative technique to propel the action forward: the use of the tom-tom drum. It also captures the increasing terrors of the protagonist. Towards the end of Scene One, the tom-tom, which has been at the normal pulse rate of the human heart, "continues at a gradually accelerating rate from this point uninterruptedly to the very end of the play". As the rebels close in on Jones' position, his hallucinations get worse, striking terror into his soul. The drumbeat gets faster and closer.

O'Neill had read about drumbeats in Congo festivals, which started at 72 beats per minute and slowly intensified and accelerated until everyone's heartbeat corresponded to the frenzy of the drumming. O'Neill remarked that this was 'an idea and an experiment' to see how it would work on the audience in a theatre. The drum technique, along with the apparitions, the firing of bullets, the auction, the slave figures, the witch doctor, the crocodile god, and the progressively dimming lights, resulted in a brilliant innovative experience.

With a perfect hold on theatrical effects, technical mastery of pace and suspense, O'Neill's play was an astonishing theatre experience for the American audience. The astounding story of the charmed Negro emperor, enacted to the frenzy of the tom-tom, the sustained monologue, the forest with its primaeval terror, the ritualistic incantation, and the legend of the silver bullet rapidly shifting setting framed into one single desperate action made *The Emperor Jones* one of the greatest American expressionistic plays.

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Recap

- American drama saw a revival of vitality during the twenties, with Eugene O'Neill's work emerging as a transformative force
- O'Neill's early career was supported by New York's amateur theatre groups, especially the Provincetown Theatre
- His groundbreaking plays featured diverse characters, naturalistic language, and innovative techniques, such as masks and divided roles
- *The Emperor Jones* combines expressionism and realism to depict a protagonist's descent into madness and confrontation with his past
- Brutus Jones, a manipulative ruler, undergoes a symbolic journey through the forest, confronting his psyche and achieving redemption
- The play explores the lasting impact of Western imperialism and racial oppression through Jones's ultimate confrontation with his past
- O'Neill masterfully blends realism and expressionism, using hallucinations and symbolism to depict Jones' transformation from arrogance to salvation
- Innovative techniques like sustained monologues, rhythmic drumbeats, and minimalist settings amplify the play's emotional and psychological intensity
- Drawing on Greek tragedy, O'Neill portrays Jones as a flawed yet noble hero whose pride leads to both his downfall and spiritual rebirth

Objective Questions

1. What are the three levels at which Brutus Jones' character is analysed?
2. What is Jones' fatal flaw as a tragic hero?
3. How does the tom-tom drumbeat contribute to the play's atmosphere?
4. What symbolic act represents Jones's redemption in The Emperor Jones?
5. What theatrical technique does Eugene O'Neill extensively use in the central scenes of the play?
6. What does the Great Forest symbolise in Brutus Jones's journey?
7. How does the play adhere to the classical unities?
8. What are some of the expressionistic techniques used in the play?
9. How does Smithers serve as a foil to Brutus Jones?
10. What does Jones' journey represent on a universal level?

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Answers

1. As an individual, a Negro, and every human being.
2. His pride.
3. It mirrors the protagonist's increasing terror, accelerating progressively throughout the play.
4. Sacrificing his evil self, symbolised by a crocodile.
5. Sustained monologue.
6. The dark depths of his psyche and his journey toward self-discovery.
7. It observes the unities of time and space, with a single continuous action unfolding over one night.
8. Hallucinations, flashbacks, symbolic apparitions, and exaggerated effects to depict psychological trauma.
9. Smithers's petty meanness and treachery accentuate Jones's magnanimity, atonement, and eventual sacrifice.
10. Every man's undertaking of self-discovery, confronting fears and sins, and achieving redemption.

Assignments

1. O'Neill's Contributions to modern American theatre
2. Symbolism in *The Emperor Jones*
3. Blending of realism and expressionism in *The Emperor Jones*
4. The process of degeneration in Jones
5. The role of fear in *The Emperor Jones*

Suggested Reading

- Callens, Johan. "'Black is white, I yell it out louder 'n deir loudest': Unraveling the Wooster Group's The Emperor Jones." *The Eugene O'Neill Review* 26 (2004): 43–69.
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BLOCK - 05

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Novels

Unit 1

Huckleberry Finn

- Mark twain

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, learners will be able to:

- identify Mark Twain's life, career, and contributions to American literature
- describe plot, setting, characters, and picaresque structure of *Huckleberry Finn*
- explain slavery, racism, freedom, childhood, moral development, and social criticism
- analyse Twain's humour, satire, dialect, realism, symbolism, and romantic conventions
- assess the Mississippi River, Huck's growth, and relationship with Jim

Prerequisite

Learners should have a basic understanding of American literature and its major historical and cultural contexts. Familiarity with the major developments in American literary history, particularly colonial literature, Transcendentalism, Realism, the Civil War, and post Civil War literature, will help learners understand the social background of *Huckleberry Finn*. An awareness of the historical significance of slavery and the racial divisions in nineteenth century America will also be useful.

Learners are expected to have some familiarity with the basic elements of fiction, including plot, characterisation, setting, narrative point of view, symbolism, satire, and theme. Since *Huckleberry Finn* is narrated by Huck, attention to first person narration and the relationship between a narrator's understanding and the reader's understanding will be particularly useful. Knowledge of the picaresque tradition will also help learners understand the episodic structure of the novel.

Learners should approach the novel as both an entertaining adventure narrative and a serious examination of American society. The novel contains humour, deception, violence,

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social prejudice, and moral conflicts, and these elements need to be considered in relation to one another. Learners should therefore be prepared to examine the difference between social rules and individual conscience, especially through Huck's relationship with Jim and his experiences along the Mississippi River.

Keywords

Picaresque Fiction, Slavery, Racism, Moral Development, Social Satire, Mississippi River

5.1.1 Introduction to Mark Twain

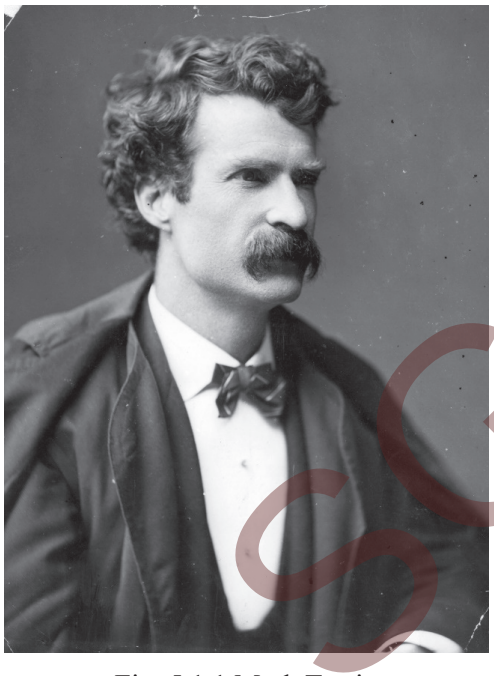


Fig. 5.1.1 Mark Twain

Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), one of the most important American writers of the nineteenth century. Born in Florida, Missouri, he spent much of his childhood in Hannibal on the Mississippi River, an experience that profoundly influenced his imagination and later fiction. His early working life exposed him to printing, journalism and river navigation, and his experiences as a Mississippi river pilot became an important source for his writing. He began his literary career with humorous sketches for newspapers and gradually established himself as a celebrated humourist and storyteller. His major works include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Gilded Age*, written in collaboration with Charles Dudley Warner. His writing combines humour with a sharp awareness of human weakness and social contradictions, giving him a distinctive place in American literature.

Twain's importance extends beyond his reputation as a humourist. His experience of the Mississippi and his close observation of American society enabled him to develop a distinctive narrative voice grounded in ordinary speech and everyday experience. His fiction frequently moves between comedy and pathos, allowing humour to expose serious problems beneath the surface of social life. His storytelling reflects the oral traditions of the American South and West, particularly the tradition of the tall tale, while his use of colloquial American English gave his fiction a fresh literary voice. His work therefore occupies an important position in the development of American realism and in the emergence of a recognisably American literary style. His friend and fellow writer William Dean Howells regarded him as an exceptional figure in American literature, while later critics have

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particularly valued the combination of humour, realism and social criticism in his best works.

5.1.2 Introduction to *Huckleberry Finn*

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, generally known as *Huckleberry Finn*, is one of Mark Twain's most important novels and a recognised classic of American literature. The novel follows Huck Finn, a young boy who travels down the Mississippi River on a raft with Jim, an enslaved man seeking freedom. The journey provides the framework for a series of encounters and adventures through which Huck gradually develops a more independent understanding of morality and human relationships. Although the novel has a strongly episodic structure, the Mississippi River provides continuity, while Huck's first-person narration holds the different episodes together. His growing recognition of Jim's humanity gives the journey its deeper emotional and moral significance.

The novel is often described as a picaresque narrative, although Huck does not fit the traditional image of the picaro as a dishonest or calculating rogue. He is essentially a young boy trying to survive difficult circumstances, and his adventures arise from the situations into which he is drawn. The episodic movement of the narrative allows Twain to introduce different people, communities and forms of social behaviour along the river. Through these encounters, the novel gradually exposes the prejudices, violence, hypocrisy and moral contradictions of the society in which Huck lives. The river itself becomes more than a setting: it provides a temporary space in which Huck and Jim can experience a degree of freedom from the social world on the shore.

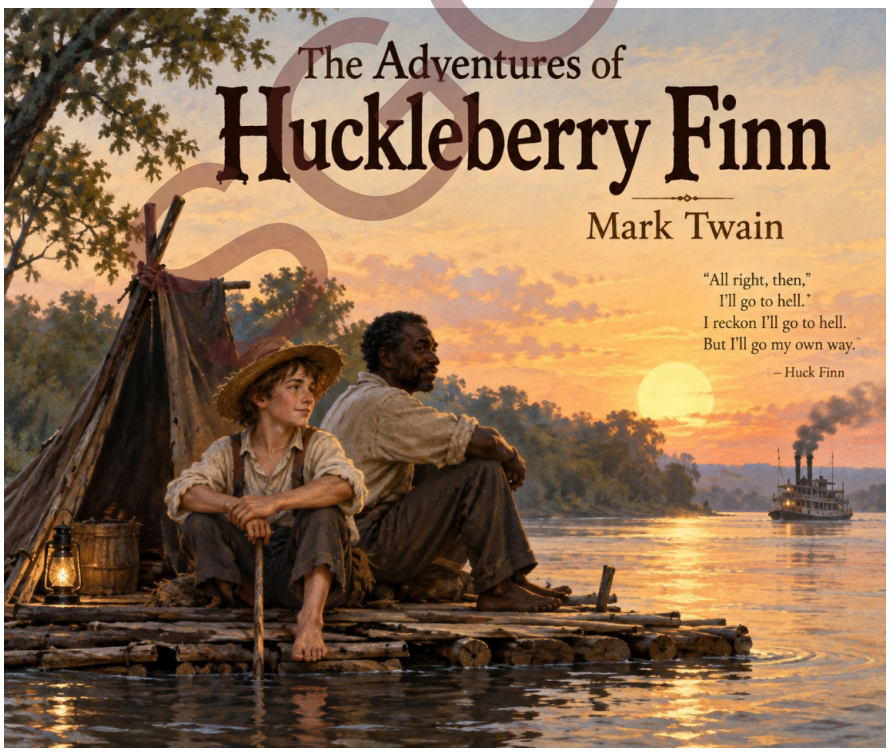


Fig. 5.1.2 Huckleberry Finn

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Language is central to the achievement of *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain allows Huck to tell the story in a colloquial voice that reflects his age, education and social background rather than imposing a conventional literary style upon him. The language is direct, flexible and closely connected with spoken American English. Huck's narration gives the novel an immediacy that would be difficult to achieve through a formal narrative voice. The distinctive expressions, grammatical variations and rhythms of his speech contribute to the realism of the novel and establish a new relationship between American speech and literary expression. The novel's language therefore becomes an essential part of its artistic design rather than simply a means of telling the story.

At a deeper level, *Huckleberry Finn* is a study of freedom, conscience and the failure of social values. Huck has been taught that helping a runaway enslaved person is morally wrong, yet his personal relationship with Jim gradually challenges what he has been taught. The emotional climax comes when Huck decides to help Jim even though he believes that doing so may condemn him to punishment. This conflict between social teaching and personal conscience lies at the heart of the novel. Twain also uses the adventures on the Mississippi to satirise the society of the American South, exposing its violence, prejudice, hypocrisy and misplaced moral confidence. The novel's humour and picturesque river journey therefore conceal a serious criticism of the society through which Huck and Jim travel.

5.1.3 The Time and Setting of *Huckleberry Finn*

The setting of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is closely connected with Mark Twain's own childhood and early experiences. Much of the novel recreates the people, places, customs, and atmosphere that Twain knew while growing up in Missouri and travelling along the Mississippi. His boyhood memories of Florida and Hannibal, Missouri, his experiences of rural life during holidays, and his later work as a steamboat pilot provided important material for the novel. The world of Huck Finn therefore has a strong autobiographical foundation, although Twain transforms these experiences into fiction rather than simply recording them. The novel also recalls the carefree but sometimes troublesome activities of boyhood, including swimming secretly, smoking, running away, disliking church, and joining children's gangs, while combining these familiar experiences with more dramatic events such as theft, murder, violence, and starvation.

The novel is set against the social and economic world of the antebellum Mississippi region, where slavery was an important part of social life and a major source of political and moral conflict. Missouri, Twain's own state, was a slave-owning state, although slavery was less extensive there than in the Deep South. The novel's Mississippi setting enables Twain to present the manners, social conventions, material conditions, and everyday realities of this river culture through Huck's experiences. At the same time, the fictional world goes beyond Twain's childhood memories, since his later travels and wider experience shaped his understanding of American society. The presence of slavery gives the setting a deeper historical significance: the river journey takes Huck and Jim through a society in which freedom, race, social status, and human dignity are constantly in conflict.

5.1.4 Character Sketches

Huckleberry Finn

Huckleberry Finn, usually called Huck, is the thirteen-year-old protagonist and narrator of the novel. He is the son of Pap Finn, a violent and unreliable drunkard, and has grown up without the stability or education expect-

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ed of a respectable child. Huck is intelligent, observant, practical, and capable of looking after himself, but he is also influenced by the attitudes of the society in which he has been raised. His lack of formal education, however, allows him to question some of the beliefs that adults accept without thought. As the story progresses, Huck increasingly relies on his own judgement rather than simply following social conventions.

Huck's importance lies in the conflict between what society teaches him and what his own conscience tells him. His friendship with Jim gradually changes the way he understands slavery and human worth. Although Huck initially believes that helping a runaway slave is wrong, his experiences on the river lead him to recognise Jim as a loyal friend and a human being deserving of freedom. His decision to help Jim, even when he believes that doing so will send him to hell, represents the moral turning point of the novel. Huck is therefore not a perfect or fully mature hero, but a young boy learning to think independently and to trust his own sense of right and wrong.

Jim

Jim is one of Miss Watson's household slaves and becomes Huck's companion during the journey down the Mississippi. At first, Huck sees Jim partly through the racial attitudes he has inherited from his society. As they spend more time together on the raft, however, he comes to recognise Jim's intelligence, affection, courage, and deep concern for his family. Jim is practical and resourceful, but he is also emotionally sensitive, particularly when speaking about his wife and children. His character gradually challenges the assumptions about race and slavery that dominate the society around him. Jim's relationship with Huck is central to the moral development of the novel. Although Jim is legally treated as property, his actions repeatedly demonstrate his humanity and dignity. Twain places Jim in situations where other characters humiliate or exploit him, exposing the cruelty and absurdity of the social system that denies his freedom. Huck's growing affection for Jim eventually becomes stronger than the moral lessons he has been taught about slavery. Jim therefore serves not merely as Huck's companion but as the person through whom Huck begins to question the values of his society.

Pap Finn

Pap Finn is Huck's father, a violent drunkard who repeatedly fails to fulfil the responsibilities of a parent. He resents Huck's education and becomes angry when he learns that his son has access to money. Pap's behaviour reveals the instability and brutality of the family environment from which Huck has escaped. His attempt to control Huck and take possession of his property eventually forces Huck to seek greater independence. Pap also has a wider significance in the novel. His ignorance, prejudice, and violence expose the moral failures of the society in which Huck has grown up. He represents an extreme form of the adult world that Huck learns to distrust. By escaping from Pap, Huck begins a journey towards physical freedom; through his relationship with Jim, he gradually moves towards a deeper form of moral independence.

The Duke and the Dauphin

The Duke and the Dauphin are two professional con men whom Huck and Jim encounter during their journey. The older man pretends to be the rightful heir to the French throne, while the younger man claims to be the Duke of Bridgewater. Huck and Jim quickly realise that both men are frauds, but they remain under their control because Huck is a child and Jim is a runaway slave. The pair carry out a series of increasingly dishonest schemes against the people they meet. Their presence adds humour to the narrative while

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also exposing the greed and gullibility of the society around them. Their treatment of Jim becomes increasingly cruel, culminating in their decision to sell him for money. Twain uses the two characters to show that dishonesty is not confined to criminals or outsiders; respectable communities can also be driven by greed, prejudice, and self-interest.

Tom Sawyer

Tom Sawyer is Huck's close friend and the central character of Twain's earlier novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. In *Huckleberry Finn*, he serves as an important contrast to Huck. Tom is imaginative, adventurous, and fascinated by the conventions of adventure stories. He prefers elaborate plans and romantic ideas even when a simple solution would be more sensible. His approach to Jim's escape reflects his tendency to treat real suffering as an opportunity for adventure. The contrast between Tom and Huck is important to the novel's development. Huck gradually learns to respond to real situations with practical judgement, whereas Tom remains attached to fictional conventions and dramatic fantasies. Through this contrast, Twain gently mocks the romantic adventure tradition while highlighting Huck's growing ability to distinguish between imaginative entertainment and the realities of human suffering.

Widow Douglas and Miss Watson

The Widow Douglas and Miss Watson are sisters who take Huck into their home and attempt to reform his behaviour. The Widow Douglas is relatively kind and patient, while Miss Watson is stricter and more openly committed to the religious and social values of the community. Their attempts to "sivilize" Huck represent the pressure placed upon him to conform to conventional ideas of respectable behaviour. Miss Watson is particularly significant because she teaches Huck the moral values of a society that accepts slavery. This contradiction becomes increasingly important as Huck's friendship with Jim develops. The women therefore represent two sides of conventional respectability: the Widow Douglas shows some genuine kindness, while Miss Watson's moral teaching exposes the gap between religious belief and social practice.

The Grangerfords

The Grangerfords are a wealthy rural family who take Huck in after he becomes separated from Jim when their raft is struck by a steamboat. They appear courteous and hospitable, and Huck initially admires their comfortable home and refined manners. Yet beneath this respectable appearance lies a violent feud with the Shepherdson family. The conflict has continued for generations and eventually results in the deaths of several members of both families. The Grangerford episode allows Twain to expose the absurdity of social conventions and inherited violence. The family's cultivated appearance exists alongside their willingness to kill one another, revealing a disturbing contradiction between civilisation and brutality. Huck's experience of the feud strengthens his growing awareness that respectable society is not necessarily moral.

The Phelps Family

The Phelps family consists of Sally and Silas Phelps, who become involved in the attempt to recover Jim. They are presented as decent and well meaning people, yet they accept the institution of slavery and hold Jim in custody as though he were property. Huck encounters them while searching for Jim and becomes involved in Tom Sawyer's elaborate plan to free him. The Phelps household is significant because it appears to provide the kind of stable family environment that Huck has lacked. At the same time, its acceptance of slavery reveals the contradiction at the heart of apparently respectable society. Through the Phelps family, Twain shows that ordinary kindness

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does not necessarily prevent people from participating in an unjust social system.

Sherburn

Sherburn is a wealthy man whose confrontation with a drunken mob provides one of the novel's sharpest criticisms of social behaviour. When the townspeople gather to lynch him, Sherburn challenges their courage and exposes their dependence on collective violence. His speech reveals the cowardice and hypocrisy that can lie beneath the appearance of public morality. Although Sherburn himself is far from an admirable figure, his criticism of the mob echoes some of the lessons Huck is learning throughout his journey. The episode reinforces Twain's wider attack on violence, prejudice, and the failure of individuals to think independently.

5.1.5 Summary of the Novel

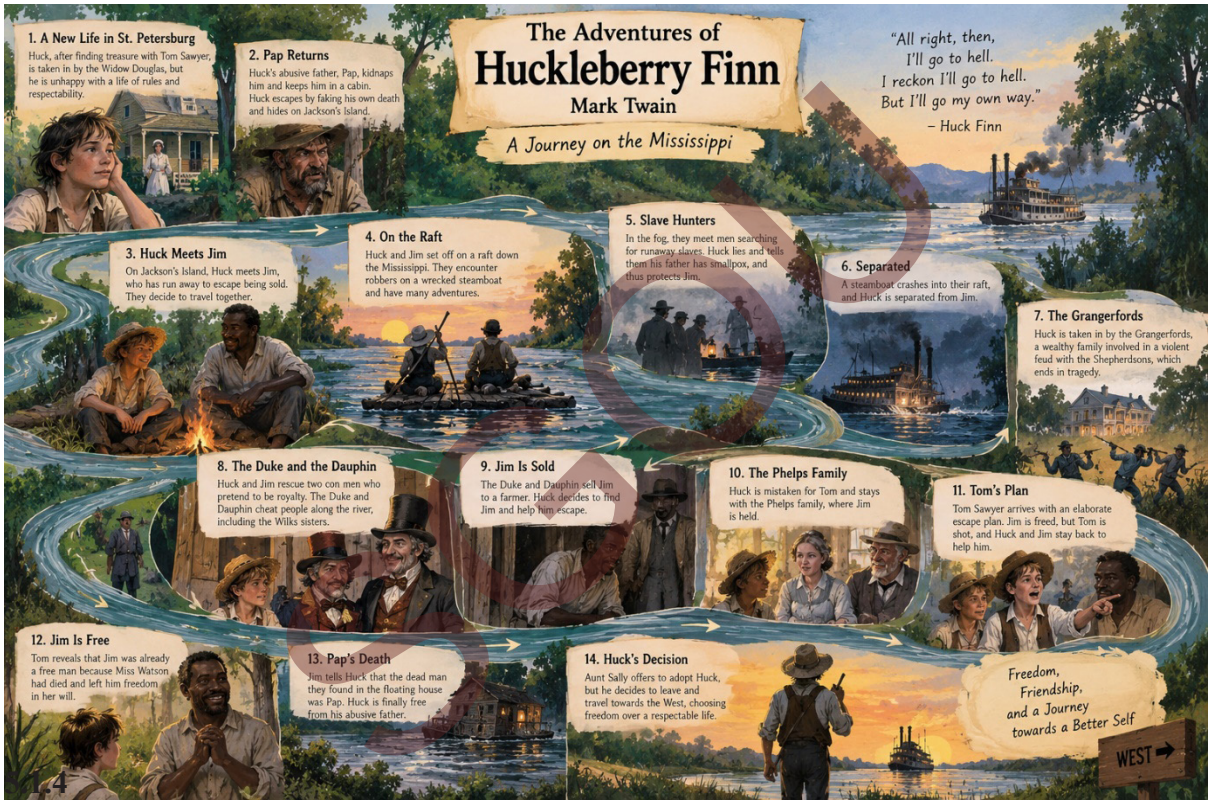


Fig. 5.1.3 Summary of the Novel

5.1.5.1 The Opening and Huck's Earlier Adventures

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn begins by referring to the events of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Huck Finn is a poor boy living in St Petersburg on the Mississippi River. At the end of the earlier novel, Huck and Tom discover a large amount of stolen gold, and Huck becomes wealthy. The Widow Douglas adopts Huck and tries to make him live a respectable life. She expects him to maintain cleanliness, attend school, go to church, and follow the manners of civilised society. Huck finds this new life restrictive, but he agrees to endure it because Tom tells him that he must remain respectable if he wants to join his proposed robbers' gang. Huck's new life is disrupted by the return of his father, Pap Finn. Pap is a

violent drunkard who wants control of Huck and his money. Judge Thatcher and the Widow Douglas attempt to protect Huck through legal means, but the new judge believes that a father has a natural right to his son. He even takes Pap into his home in the hope of reforming him. The attempt fails, and Pap soon returns to his drinking and abusive behaviour. He eventually kidnaps Huck and keeps him locked in a cabin across the Mississippi River.

5.1.5.2 Huck's Escape

Pap frequently locks Huck inside the cabin and beats him whenever he becomes drunk. Fearing that the violence will become worse, Huck decides to escape. He carefully prepares a false scene suggesting that he has been murdered and throws the townspeople off his trail. He then hides on Jackson's Island in the Mississippi and watches from a distance as people search the river for his supposed body. His escape marks the beginning of the central journey of the novel.

While living on the island, Huck discovers Jim, one of Miss Watson's slaves. Jim has run away after learning that Miss Watson is considering selling him to a plantation farther south. He fears being separated from his wife and children and facing harsh treatment. Huck is initially troubled because he has been taught that helping a runaway slave is morally and legally wrong. Nevertheless, he and Jim decide to travel together. Their relationship becomes the emotional centre of the novel. A violent storm causes the Mississippi to rise, and Huck and Jim find a large log raft floating past the island. They take possession of it and later enter a floating house in search of useful things. Inside the house, they discover the body of a murdered man. Jim prevents Huck from looking closely at the dead man's face. Their peaceful stay on Jackson's Island cannot continue because Huck learns that people have noticed smoke rising from the island and suspect that Jim is hiding there. Huck also discovers that a reward has been offered for Jim's capture.

5.1.5.3 The Journey Down the Mississippi

Huck and Jim leave the island on their raft and begin travelling down the Mississippi. Their plan is to reach the mouth of the Ohio River and then travel north towards the free states, where slavery has been abolished. The river becomes both their means of escape and the setting for most of their adventures. For Huck, the raft provides a temporary space away from the restrictions of ordinary society; for Jim, it offers the possibility of freedom. During their journey, Huck and Jim encounter a wrecked steamboat occupied by robbers. They manage to escape from the dangerous situation and take some of the robbers' possessions. Their experiences on the river repeatedly place them in situations where they must rely on their own judgement and resourcefulness. The journey is therefore not simply a movement from one geographical place to another; it becomes a process through which Huck gradually develops his understanding of people and society.

One night, heavy fog causes Huck and Jim to miss the mouth of the Ohio. They are carried farther south, away from the route to freedom. Soon afterwards, they meet men searching for runaway slaves. Huck experiences a serious moral conflict because he knows that the men are looking for Jim, whom society regards as the property of Miss Watson. Yet Huck chooses to protect Jim. He tells the men that his father is suffering from smallpox. Fearing infection, the men refuse to approach the raft and even give Huck money. Huck and Jim continue down the river, but their journey is interrupted when a steamboat crashes into their raft and separates them.

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5.1.5.4 The Grangerfords and the Family Feud

After being separated from Jim, Huck reaches the shore and is taken in by the Grangerfords, a wealthy Southern family. They treat him kindly and give him shelter. Huck is impressed by their manners and comfortable way of life. However, he soon discovers that the family is involved in a long-running feud with the Shepherdsons. The families maintain a tradition of hatred and violence even though the original cause of the feud has almost been forgotten. The situation becomes tragic when a Grangerford daughter elopes with a young man from the Shepherdson family. The resulting confrontation leads to a gun battle in which members of the Grangerford family are killed. Huck is horrified by the violence. The episode exposes the contradiction between the family's appearance of refinement and the brutality of their actions. While Huck is caught up in this conflict, Jim repairs the raft, and the two companions escape together down the Mississippi.

5.1.5.5 The Duke and the Dauphin

Huck and Jim later rescue two men who are being chased by armed men. The strangers claim to be members of European royalty. One calls himself the Duke of Bridgewater, while the other claims to be the Dauphin, the lost heir to the French throne. Huck and Jim soon recognise that the two men are frauds. However, because Huck is a young boy and Jim is a runaway slave, they have little power to drive the two men away. The Duke and the Dauphin therefore become part of their journey.

The two con men carry out a series of scams in the towns along the river. Their most elaborate deception occurs when they hear about the death of Peter Wilks, a wealthy man. They pretend to be Wilks's brothers, Harvey and William, who are supposedly arriving from England. The dead man's three daughters accept them, and the impostors begin taking control of the estate. Huck feels sympathy for the sisters and becomes increasingly uncomfortable with the deception.

Huck decides to act against the Duke and Dauphin. He steals the money they have taken from the Wilks estate and hides it in the dead man's coffin. He later tells the eldest Wilks daughter about the fraud. His attempt to expose the impostors is complicated when the real Wilks brothers arrive from England. The townspeople become confused and angry, and the competing claims lead to violence. In the resulting confusion, the Duke and Dauphin manage to escape. Huck and Jim also return to the raft, taking the two con men with them.

5.1.5.6 Jim Is Sold

The Duke and Dauphin continue their dishonest activities until they commit their most serious betrayal. They sell Jim to a local farmer after falsely claiming that he is a runaway slave for whom a large reward is available. Huck is devastated when he discovers what has happened. He has already come to regard Jim as his friend, and the possibility of losing him forces Huck to make a decisive moral choice. He resolves to find Jim and help him escape. Huck reaches the house where Jim is being held and is unexpectedly welcomed by a woman who calls him Tom. Huck quickly discovers that the woman is Sally Phelps, the aunt of Tom Sawyer. Her husband, Silas Phelps, is also involved. They have been expecting Tom to visit them, and because Huck resembles the expected visitor sufficiently, they mistake him for Tom. Huck decides to maintain the deception.

5.1.5.7 Tom Sawyer's Escape Plan

Huck encounters Tom Sawyer and explains the situation. Tom immediately becomes excited by the prospect of helping Jim escape. Instead of choosing the simplest method, Tom

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creates an elaborate plan based on the conventions of adventure stories and prison escapes. Huck believes that the plan is unnecessarily complicated and dangerous, but he agrees to cooperate with Tom. Their preparations involve secret messages, ropes, tools, tunnels, and other devices that have little practical purpose because Jim is not heavily guarded. The escape preparations cause considerable trouble for the Phelps family. Huck and Tom secretly manipulate the household and create confusion while carrying out Tom's plan. Eventually, Jim is released, but the escape goes wrong when Tom is shot in the leg by a pursuer. Huck must make a difficult decision. Instead of simply fleeing with Jim, he returns to obtain medical help for Tom. Jim also chooses to remain behind and care for the injured Tom, even though doing so places his own freedom in danger.

5.1.5.8 Jim's Freedom and Huck's Decision

The next morning, Tom reveals an important truth. Jim was already a free man because Miss Watson had died two months earlier and had left instructions in her will for his freedom. Tom had known this but had treated the rescue as an adventure. His elaborate plan had therefore turned Jim's escape into a game rather than a genuine struggle for freedom. The revelation exposes the difference between Tom's romantic imagination and Huck's increasingly serious understanding of Jim's situation.

Aunt Polly arrives and exposes the identities of the two boys, revealing that "Tom" is actually Huck and "Sid" is Tom. Huck becomes anxious about what will happen to him, particularly because of the possibility that his father might return. Jim then reveals that the dead man they had found in the floating house near Jackson's Island was Pap Finn. Huck is therefore finally free from the threat of his abusive father. Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck and provide him with a respectable home. Huck, however, has already experienced the restrictions of being "sivilized" and does not want to return to the life he had previously rejected. He decides to leave and travel towards the West. His decision brings the novel to a close with Huck choosing uncertainty and independence over the conventional life that others want to impose upon him.

5.1.5.9 The Notice and Explanatory

Before the first chapter, Twain places a humorous "Notice" and an "Explanatory". The Notice jokingly warns readers not to search for a motive, moral, or plot in the book, threatening exaggerated punishments for anyone who does so. The Explanatory focuses on the different dialects used by the characters and insists that Twain has reproduced them carefully and accurately. These opening statements establish the playful tone of the novel while also drawing attention to its distinctive use of language.

The humour of these opening statements should not be taken to mean that the novel lacks serious concerns. The refusal to announce a moral actually prepares the reader for a work in which questions of morality, slavery, freedom, and social hypocrisy become central. Similarly, Twain's emphasis on dialect establishes the realistic quality of Huck's narration. The novel combines humour and adventure with a serious examination of the society through which Huck and Jim travel.

5.1.6 Analysis

5.1.6.1 Character Analysis

Huck Finn: A Developing Moral Consciousness

Huck Finn is at the centre of the novel not simply because he narrates the story, but because the reader experiences the moral conflicts of the world through his developing conscious-

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ness. He is about thirteen, comes from a poor and unstable background, and has not been fully absorbed into the values of respectable white society. His father is abusive and unreliable, while the community that attempts to reform Huck fails to protect him adequately. This marginal position makes Huck sceptical of the social rules imposed upon him. At the same time, he remains a child and therefore vulnerable to the authority of adults and to the prejudices he has inherited.

Huck's moral development is expressed through his growing ability to question conventional ideas. According to the law and the social order of the South, Jim is Miss Watson's property. Huck, however, gradually comes to understand that helping Jim is more humane than obeying a law that treats a person as property. His encounter with the slave hunters is particularly important. Although he has been taught that lying is wrong, he invents the story about smallpox to prevent them from discovering Jim. Huck learns through experience that an act condemned by society can sometimes be morally right.

Huck's development is therefore not presented as a simple transformation from ignorance to complete moral wisdom. He continues to carry prejudices learned from his society and sometimes allows Tom Sawyer to influence his decisions. These limitations make him a convincing child character rather than an idealised moral hero. His importance lies in his willingness to think, feel, and question. By the end of the novel, he has learnt to judge people and situations through personal experience rather than merely accepting the rules imposed by society.

Jim: Humanity under Slavery

Jim is one of the most important characters in the novel because his presence exposes the contradiction between the legal status imposed upon enslaved people and their actual humanity. He is intelligent, compassionate, loyal, and deeply attached to his family. His decision to run away is motivated not by selfishness but by the fear of being separated from his wife and children. During the journey, he also becomes a protective presence for Huck, caring for him and shielding him from painful experiences. Jim's apparent passivity needs to be understood in relation to his position within the social structure. As a runaway slave, he is constantly vulnerable to capture, violence, and betrayal. Even Huck, whom Jim trusts, possesses the power to return him to slavery. His limited ability to act openly is therefore a consequence of the society in which he lives rather than evidence of a lack of intelligence or courage. In contrast to many of the white characters, Jim often provides the novel with a mature and humane example.

Tom Sawyer as Huck's Foil

Tom Sawyer provides a sharp contrast to Huck. Tom has grown up in relative comfort and has absorbed both conventional social beliefs and the romantic ideas found in adventure literature. He believes in following rules, but these rules are often concerned more with dramatic style than with human welfare. Huck, by contrast, increasingly judges situations according to their practical and moral consequences. Their difference becomes particularly clear in the plan to rescue Jim. Tom's treatment of Jim also reveals the limitations of romantic adventure. Tom knows that Jim is already free, yet he prolongs the escape simply because he enjoys the excitement of a complicated adventure. His behaviour causes suffering for Jim and distress for the Phelps family. Through Tom, Twain shows how apparently harmless literary fantasies can become cruel when applied to real human lives. Tom's character therefore functions both as a source of humour and as a criticism of the romantic conventions that influence him.

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5.1.6.2 Major Concerns

Racism and Slavery

Racism and slavery form the central social concern of *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain examines slavery not merely as a historical institution but as a system that distorts moral judgement. Jim is a compassionate and responsible human being, yet the law permits even morally degraded white people to exercise power over him. The novel repeatedly places Jim in situations in which his humanity is obvious while the society around him refuses to recognise it. The novel's treatment of slavery also draws attention to the persistence of racial prejudice after emancipation. By writing about slavery in the years following the Civil War, Twain could expose the underlying assumptions that continued to support racial oppression. The novel shows that racism damages not only those who are oppressed but also the moral character of those who participate in or accept oppression. The contrast between Jim's humanity and the behaviour of many white characters makes this criticism particularly powerful.

Education and Moral Development

The novel can be read as a story of intellectual and moral education. Huck begins as a boy who has received little formal schooling and who distrusts the respectable society that attempts to reform him. His journey down the Mississippi becomes an alternative form of education. Away from the direct control of adults, he observes people, experiences danger, makes decisions, and gradually develops his own understanding of right and wrong. Huck's education is therefore more than learning to read and write. He learns to "read" the world around him. His experiences with Jim force him to reconsider the racial assumptions he has inherited. The repeated moments when he chooses Jim's welfare over the rules of society show the development of an individual conscience. His famous willingness to accept punishment or even damnation rather than betray Jim marks the deepest stage of this moral growth.

Critique of Civilised Society

Twain repeatedly questions what society calls civilisation. Huck is expected to become respectable through education, religion, cleanliness, manners, and obedience, but the supposedly civilised world around him is filled with violence, exploitation, prejudice, and irrational rules. The judge's decision to return Huck to Pap, despite Pap's obvious inability to care for him, is one example of a social system that values formal rights above human welfare. The same contradiction appears in the treatment of Jim. People who appear respectable can accept slavery without considering its moral implications. The Phelps family, for example, may appear ordinary and kindly, yet they participate in a system that denies Jim his freedom. Sherburn's confrontation with the mob further exposes the weakness of collective justice. Through such episodes, Twain suggests that civilisation is meaningful only when it is guided by reason, compassion, and justice rather than by empty conventions.

Childhood and Innocence

Childhood gives the novel much of its energy and humour while also strengthening its social criticism. Huck and Tom are young enough to approach the world with curiosity and imagination, but they are also exposed to adult failures that they do not fully understand. Huck's youth allows him to question established beliefs in a way that adults often cannot. His moral development becomes possible partly because he has not completely accepted the prejudices of the adult world. Huck's childhood also creates an important contrast with Jim. Both are vulnerable, but their vulnerabil-

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ity is shaped by race and social status. Huck, despite his poverty, possesses privileges that Jim does not. The novel's humour similarly arises from the contrast between childish adventure and serious social realities. Twain uses the freshness of a child's perspective to make his criticism of slavery and social hypocrisy more immediate and accessible.

Lies, Deception and Moral Ambiguity

Lying and deception occur throughout the novel. The Duke and Dauphin use lies to exploit innocent people for money, making their deception clearly destructive. Huck, however, also lies repeatedly, most importantly when he deceives the slave hunters in order to protect Jim. The difference between these forms of deception raises an important moral question: whether an action should be judged simply by the rule it breaks or by the purpose and consequences of the action. Huck's experiences gradually teach him that moral decisions are often more complicated than the rules he has been taught suggest. A lie motivated by greed can cause suffering, while a lie told to protect another person can become an act of compassion. Twain uses these contrasting forms of deception to challenge simple distinctions between right and wrong and to show Huck developing a more mature moral judgement.

Superstition and Alternative Knowledge

Superstition is closely associated with Jim throughout the novel. Huck initially regards many of Jim's beliefs as foolish, but his experiences gradually make him respect Jim's understanding of the natural world. Some of Jim's apparently superstitious observations seem to possess practical or predictive value. Twain thereby creates an alternative form of knowledge that exists outside the formal education and social assumptions of the dominant culture. Jim's superstition also contributes to the novel's wider questioning of accepted wisdom. The people who consider themselves educated and civilised frequently behave irrationally, while Jim, who has been denied formal education, often shows practical intelligence and sound judgement. The contrast encourages readers to question who has the right to define what counts as knowledge or intelligence.

Romanticism and Literary Conceits

Twain frequently satirises characters who imitate the conventions of other forms of literature. Tom Sawyer is the clearest example, since he models his behaviour on adventure stories and insists on turning Jim's escape into a complicated romantic adventure. The Grangerfords provide another example. Their ideas of family honour are connected to the conventions of Southern aristocratic culture, even though those ideas ultimately lead to destruction. The novel also mocks sentimental artistic traditions through figures such as Emmeline Grangerford, whose poems and paintings dwell excessively on death and sorrow. Twain's humour in these episodes has a serious purpose. He shows how inherited literary and cultural conventions can become dangerous when people follow them without questioning their relevance to real life.

The Mississippi River as a Symbol

The Mississippi River is the central symbol of freedom in the novel. On the raft, Huck and Jim temporarily escape the rules and prejudices of the communities along the riverbanks. For Jim, the journey represents movement towards freedom; for Huck, it means escape from Pap and from the pressure to become "civilised". The river also creates a space in which Huck and Jim can develop their friendship away from social supervision. The river, however, is not an uncomplicated symbol of safety. Floods, fog, wrecks, criminals, and the constant movement southwards repeatedly expose Huck and Jim to danger. Their failure

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to reach the Ohio River is particularly significant because the river carries them towards the regions where slavery is more deeply entrenched. The Mississippi therefore changes from an apparent paradise of freedom into a complicated route through danger. Its changing character mirrors the contradictions of the society surrounding it.

Humour and Social Satire

Humour is one of the most distinctive features of *Huckleberry Finn*, but it is closely connected with the novel's serious concerns. Twain places absurd situations, exaggerated characters, scams, feuds, and childish adventures alongside slavery, violence, and social injustice. This combination prevents the novel from becoming a straightforward moral tract. Instead, readers are encouraged to recognise the absurdity of a society that calls itself civilised while permitting cruelty and injustice. The opening Notice and Explanatory establish this method from the beginning. Twain jokingly warns readers not to search for a moral while simultaneously drawing attention to the importance of dialect and realism. The apparent refusal to take the novel seriously actually prepares the reader for its deeper concerns. Humour and moral criticism consequently operate together throughout the novel, making its social satire both entertaining and disturbing.

5.1.5.3 The Picaresque Element

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn has many characteristics of the picaresque tradition represented by works such as Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, *Lazarillo de Tormes*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and *Gil Blas*. Picaresque fiction generally presents a realistic picture of society through the experiences of a roguish or socially marginal central character. The narrative is usually episodic, with the protagonist travelling from place to place, encountering different sections of society and becoming involved in a series of adventures. In Twain's novel, Huck occupies this central position, while Jim accompanies him during their journey down the Mississippi. The novel's episodic structure allows Twain to bring Huck into contact with different people, communities, customs, and forms of social corruption. The river provides the central movement that holds these otherwise loosely connected episodes together.

Huck possesses several qualities associated with the picaresque protagonist. He is an outsider who distrusts conventional respectability and observes society from a position somewhat removed from it. His journey exposes him to criminals, slave hunters, feuding families, con men, hypocritical respectable people, and other representatives of American society. The novel does not develop through a tightly organised plot; instead, one episode leads to another as Huck and Jim move along the river. Huck's central consciousness becomes the principal linking element through which these varied experiences are presented. His colloquial American speech further strengthens the realistic and anti-romantic character of the narrative.

At the same time, Twain uses the picaresque form to satirise romantic and adventure literature. Tom Sawyer's elaborate plan for Jim's escape deliberately imitates the conventions of medieval romances and adventure stories, turning a relatively simple escape into an unnecessarily complicated spectacle. The Duke and the Dauphin, the wrecked steamboat, the absurd schemes, and the exaggerated ideas of honour and aristocracy also contribute to Twain's satire of romantic conventions. Thus, *Huckleberry Finn* combines realistic social observation, episodic adventure, humour, colloquial language, and satire. It may therefore be understood as both a picaresque narrative and a comic epic in prose, with the Mississippi serving as its great moving force and carrying Huck and Jim through a changing social landscape.

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Recap

- Mark Twain was the pen name of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, whose experiences of Missouri and the Mississippi River strongly influenced his fiction.
- Huckleberry Finn draws upon Twain's knowledge of the Mississippi region while transforming personal memories and social realities into fiction.
- Huck Finn is a thirteen year old boy who narrates the novel and gradually develops an independent moral consciousness.
- Jim, a runaway slave, becomes Huck's companion and one of the most important figures in his moral development.
- The novel follows Huck and Jim as they travel down the Mississippi River on a raft.
- The picaresque element is evident in the novel's episodic structure, travelling protagonist, realistic social observation, humour, and satire.
- Twain uses Huck's perspective to expose the contradictions and hypocrisy of supposedly civilised society.
- Racism and slavery form the central social concerns of the novel and shape Huck's relationship with Jim.
- Huck's moral education develops through his experiences and his growing ability to question the values taught by society.
- Tom Sawyer acts as a foil to Huck because Tom follows romantic adventure conventions while Huck increasingly relies on practical judgement.
- The novel contrasts the freedom of the river with the restrictions and injustices found in the communities along its banks.
- The Grangerford episode exposes the absurdity of inherited violence and exaggerated ideas of family honour.
- The Duke and the Dauphin represent deception, greed, exploitation, and the darker comic elements of the novel.
- Twain satirises romantic literature through Tom's elaborate plan for Jim's escape and other exaggerated literary conventions.
- The novel combines humour and adventure with serious criticism of slavery, racism, social hypocrisy, and the failures of conventional morality.

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Objective Questions

1. What was the real name of Mark Twain?
2. In which American state did Samuel Langhorne Clemens spend much of his childhood?
3. Who is the narrator and central character of Huckleberry Finn?
4. Who is Jim?
5. Why does Jim run away from Miss Watson?
6. What river forms the principal setting of Huck and Jim's journey?
7. What literary genre is strongly associated with the structure of Huckleberry Finn?
8. Why does Huck tell the slave hunters that his father has smallpox?
9. Who are the Duke and the Dauphin?
10. Who are the Grangerfords?
11. How does Tom Sawyer function in relation to Huck?
12. What does the Mississippi River symbolise for Huck and Jim?
13. What major social institution is criticised throughout the novel?
14. How does Huck's moral understanding develop during his journey?
15. What is the significance of the novel's colloquial language and dialect?

Answers

1. Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens.
2. He spent much of his childhood in Missouri, particularly in Hannibal.
3. Huckleberry Finn, or Huck, is the narrator and central character.
4. Jim is Miss Watson's slave who runs away and becomes Huck's companion during the journey down the Mississippi.
5. Jim runs away because he fears that Miss Watson will sell him to a plantation where he may be separated from his wife and children and treated harshly.
6. The Mississippi River forms the principal setting of their journey.
7. *Huckleberry Finn* has strong characteristics of picaresque fiction.
8. Huck invents the smallpox story to frighten the slave hunters away and protect Jim from capture.
9. The Duke and the Dauphin are two con men who pretend to be members of European royalty in order to deceive people and make money.
10. The Grangerfords are a wealthy Southern family involved in a violent feud with the Shepherdsons.

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11. Tom Sawyer functions as Huck's foil. His romantic imagination and dependence on adventure stories contrast with Huck's increasingly practical and independent moral judgement.
12. The Mississippi River symbolises freedom and escape. It provides Huck and Jim with temporary freedom from the restrictions and injustices of society.
13. Slavery, together with the racism and social hypocrisy that sustain it, is one of the major social institutions criticised in the novel.
14. Huck gradually learns to question the moral rules imposed by society and begins to rely on his own experience, reason, and conscience. His decision to protect Jim represents the highest point of this development.
15. Twain's use of colloquial American speech and local dialects gives the novel a realistic narrative voice and helps establish its distinctive literary style.

Assignments

1. Examine *Huckleberry Finn* as a picaresque novel, paying particular attention to its episodic structure, travelling protagonist, social realism, and satire.
2. Discuss Huck Finn's moral development through his relationship with Jim.
3. Analyse Mark Twain's treatment of slavery and racism in *Huckleberry Finn*.
4. Examine the Mississippi River as a symbol of freedom and as a reflection of the social realities of the American South.
5. Discuss how Twain uses humour and satire to criticise the idea of civilised society in *Huckleberry Finn*.

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Suggested Reading

1. Twain, Mark. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Penguin Classics.
2. Gerber, John C. *Mark Twain*. Twayne Publishers.
3. Bradley, Sculley, Richmond Croom Beatty, and E. Hudson Long, eds. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*. W. W. Norton.
4. De Voto, Bernard. *Mark Twain's America*. Houghton Mifflin.
5. Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. Oxford University Press.

BLOCK - 06

Essays and Non-Fiction

SSOU

Unit 1

"The Battle Of The Ants"

- Henry David Thoreau

Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of this unit, the learner will be able to:

- explain Thoreau's life, Transcendentalist thought, and contribution to nature literature
- analyse themes, imagery, humour, and techniques used in Thoreau's essay
- explain nature, warfare, human behaviour, and social criticism in essay
- examine personification, historical allusions, satire, and symbolism in passage closely
- evaluate relationship between nature observation and reflection in Thoreau's writing

Prerequisite

Learners should have a basic understanding of American literature and its major literary movements. Familiarity with Transcendentalism, particularly its emphasis on individual experience, nature, self reliance, and independent thought, will help them understand Thoreau's intellectual background. Some awareness of nineteenth century American history will also be useful because the essay refers to important battles and political events.

Learners should be familiar with the basic elements of prose analysis, including theme, imagery, symbolism, personification, irony, humour, satire, analogy, and historical allusion. Since "The Battle of the Ants" develops from a close observation of nature into a reflection on human society, learners should pay attention to the movement between literal description and figurative interpretation.

Learners should approach the prescribed essay as both nature writing and philosophical prose. The passage presents an apparently ordinary incident involving ants, but Thoreau connects it with human warfare, heroism, patriotism, violence, and social conflict. Reading the essay carefully will help learners understand how observation of the natural world can become a means of questioning human assumptions and social values.

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Keywords

Transcendentalism, Nature Writing, Personification, Satire, Warfare, Historical Allusion

6.1.1 Introduction to Henry David Thoreau

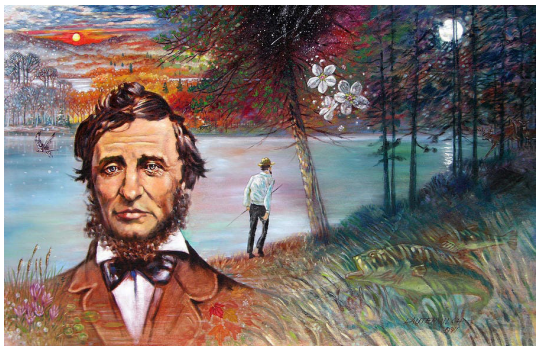


Fig. 6.1.1 Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) was an American essayist, poet, philosopher, and nature writer closely associated with the Transcendentalist movement. He was born in Concord, Massachusetts, and developed a deep interest in nature, individual freedom, simple living, and philosophical reflection. His friendship with Ralph Waldo Emerson was particularly important in shaping his intellectual development. Emerson introduced Thoreau to Transcendentalism and became one of his important influences. Thoreau's writing combines close observation of the natural world with philosophical and social reflection. His reputation as one of America's major nature writers rests especially on his ability to find wider meanings in ordinary experiences of the natural environment.

Thoreau's most celebrated work, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, grew out of his experiment in simple living at Walden Pond near Concord. He built a small house on land owned by Emerson and spent two years there, observing nature, reflecting on human life, and developing the ideas that shaped *Walden*. The work established his distinctive style, in which careful observation, historical references, humour, philosophical thought, and criticism of conventional life come together. Thoreau's writing does not treat nature as something separate from human experience; instead, the natural world becomes a means through which he examines human behaviour, society, morality, and civilisation.

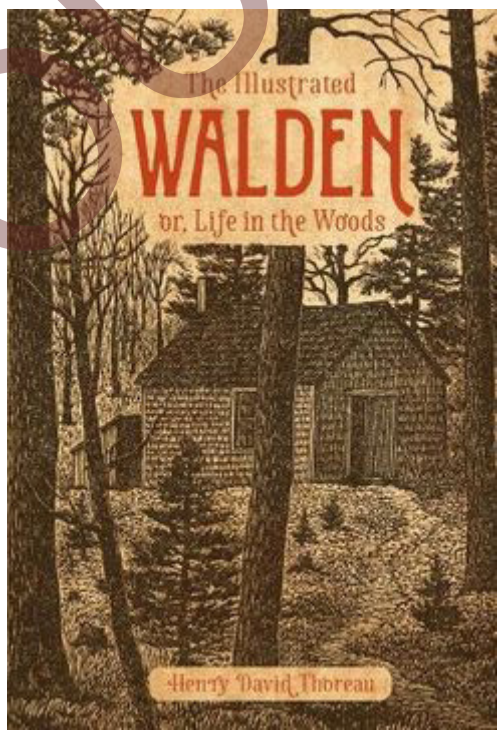


Fig. 6.1.2 Walden

6.1.1.1 A Note on Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was an important intellectual and literary movement that developed in nineteenth century New England, particularly around Concord, Massachusetts. It em-

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phasised the importance of the individual, intuition, independent thought, and a direct relationship with nature. Transcendentalists questioned excessive dependence on established institutions and conventional social values. They believed that individuals could discover truth through personal experience, inner reflection, and close engagement with the natural world. Ralph Waldo Emerson was one of the leading figures of the movement, and his ideas had a strong influence on Henry David Thoreau.

Nature occupies a central place in Transcendentalist thought because it was regarded as a source of spiritual and intellectual insight rather than merely a physical environment. Thoreau's writing reflects this principle through his careful observation of plants, animals, seasons, landscapes, and everyday natural events. In *Walden*, ordinary experiences in nature become opportunities for philosophical reflection on human life and society. "The Battle of the Ants" illustrates this approach particularly well: Thoreau observes a small conflict between ants and uses it to reflect on warfare, heroism, violence, patriotism, and human behaviour. Thus, the natural world in Thoreau's writing becomes a means of examining the assumptions and contradictions of human civilisation.

6.1.2 Introduction to "The Battle of the Ants"

"The Battle of the Ants" is an episode from Chapter 12 of Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. In the passage, Thoreau observes a fierce struggle between red and black ants in his wood-yard. What initially appears to be a small and ordinary natural event gradually becomes, through his imaginative description, an extraordinary spectacle resembling a large human battle. He observes the determination, violence, suffering, and death of the ants and compares their struggle with famous battles from human history. The tiny creatures are presented as warriors, while the wood-yard becomes a battlefield.

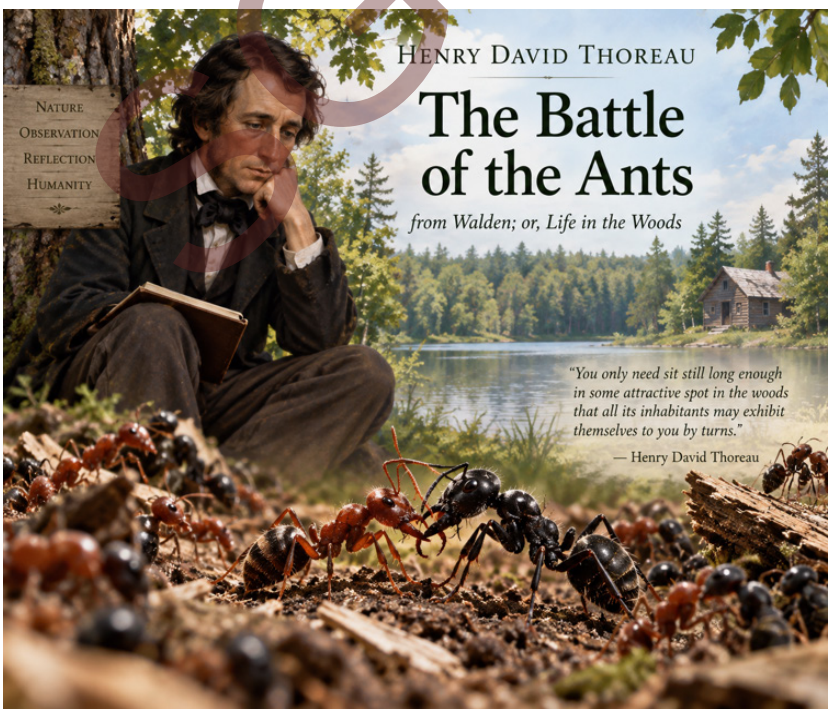


Fig. 6.1.3 The Battle of the Ants

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The essay is characteristic of Thoreau's method of combining close observation of naith reflection on human society. He uses military language, historical allusions, humour, personification, and irony to transform the ant battle into a meditation on war, heroism, patriotism, violence, and human vanity. At the same time, the passage questions the supposed difference between human beings and other living creatures. Thoreau's detailed observation of the ants ultimately leaves him emotionally disturbed, as though he had witnessed a human battle. The natural event thus becomes a means of examining the values and contradictions of human civilisation.

6.1.3 Summary of "The Battle of the Ants"

Thoreau Observes the Ants

Thoreau begins by suggesting that a person who remains quietly in an attractive natural setting will eventually witness the activities of its inhabitants. His own quiet observation leads him to an unexpected sight in his wood-yard. He notices two ants fighting fiercely, one red and the other black. As he looks more closely, he discovers that the struggle is not an isolated fight between two individuals. The wood-yard is filled with red and black ants engaged in combat, with many already dead or dying. Thoreau humorously elevates the small creatures into the status of human armies. He describes the red ants as "republicans" and the black ants as "imperialists", transforming the wood-yard into a political and military landscape. Although the ants make almost no sound that he can hear, their determination impresses him. He watches one small red ant locked in combat with a much larger black ant. Neither appears willing to retreat, and the struggle continues with extraordinary persistence.



Fig. 6.14 Summary of the Essay

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The Red Ant and the Black Ant

The unequal fight between the red and black ants particularly captures Thoreau's attention. The smaller red ant attaches itself firmly to the black ant and continues biting one of its feelers. The stronger black ant, meanwhile, throws the red ant from side to side and tears away several of its limbs. Despite its injuries, the red ant refuses to give up. Thoreau compares the ants' determination with that of human soldiers and imagines their struggle as an act of heroic warfare. Another red ant approaches the combat and joins the fight against the black ant. Thoreau playfully compares this newcomer to Achilles coming to avenge or rescue Patroclus. He imagines the ants as if they possessed the institutions and rituals of human armies, even imagining that they might have musical bands playing their national songs to encourage the fighters. His imagination deliberately enlarges the tiny event and makes it resemble a great historical battle.

The Ant Battle and Human Warfare

As Thoreau continues watching, he begins to compare the ant battle with famous human conflicts. He refers to the battles of Austerlitz and Dresden and then compares the struggle with the Concord fight and the Battle of Bunker Hill. He jokingly suggests that the ants display greater numbers, courage, patriotism, and determination than the human participants in famous American battles. This comparison is both humorous and serious. Thoreau's language makes the ants appear heroic, but at the same time it encourages readers to question the language through which human beings glorify war. Terms such as patriotism, heroism, honour, and sacrifice are commonly used to celebrate human battles. By applying the same language to ants, Thoreau makes such descriptions appear strange and exaggerated. The comparison therefore turns a natural observation into a subtle criticism of human ideas about warfare.

The Battle Under the Tumbler

Thoreau takes the piece of wood on which the three ants are fighting and carries it into his house. He places it under a tumbler so that he can observe the struggle more closely. Using a microscope, he examines the red ant and discovers the terrible extent of its injuries. Its body has been badly damaged, while the black ant continues fighting despite its own wounds. The battle continues for a considerable time. Eventually, the black ant kills the red ants and is itself severely injured. When Thoreau removes the tumbler, the surviving black ant struggles away across the window-sill. Thoreau does not know whether it survives. He also never discovers the original cause of the conflict or which side can truly be regarded as the victor. The experience nevertheless affects him deeply, leaving him with the feeling that he has witnessed the violence and suffering of a human battlefield.

Historical Records of Ant Battles

After describing his own observation, Thoreau refers to earlier accounts of battles between ants. He mentions the writings of Kirby and Spence and refers to historical descriptions by Aeneas Sylvius and Olaus Magnus. These references show that people before him had also been fascinated by conflicts between ants. Thoreau places his own observation within this longer tradition of recording and interpreting the behaviour of ants. Thoreau ends by locating the ant battle in a particular historical period. He notes that it took place during the presidency of James K. Polk, five years before the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. This final reference brings the natural event back into the context of American political history. The ants' struggle, therefore, becomes connected with the conflicts and tensions of the human world.

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6.1.4 Analysis

Nature as a Mirror of Human Life

"The Battle of the Ants" demonstrates Thoreau's distinctive approach to nature writing. He begins with an ordinary observation in his wood-yard but gradually discovers a subject rich in philosophical and social implications. The ants are not simply objects of scientific observation; their behaviour becomes a means of thinking about human life. By watching the creatures closely, Thoreau is led to reflect upon courage, conflict, suffering, patriotism, and death. His method suggests that nature can reveal important truths about human behaviour when observed patiently and attentively.

War and Violence

War is the central concern of the passage. Thoreau describes the ants using the vocabulary of human warfare: armies, combatants, warriors, battlefields, patriotism, heroism, and victory. He compares their struggle with famous historical battles, including Austerlitz, Dresden, Concord, and Bunker Hill. The comparison is comic because the creatures are extremely small, yet it also makes the reader reconsider the way human beings describe and glorify their own wars. The ants fight with remarkable determination, but their violence also produces terrible suffering and death. Thoreau does not present warfare as an uncomplicated expression of heroism. His detailed description of injured and dying ants forces the reader to see the physical consequences of combat. The apparent grandeur of battle is thus placed beside its brutality. Through this contrast, Thoreau's humour acquires a serious moral dimension.

Personification and Humour

One of the most striking techniques in the passage is personification. Thoreau gives the ants characteristics associated with human beings. The red and black ants become rival political groups; individual ants become warriors; the battle acquires the appearance of an organised military campaign. He even imagines musical bands playing national airs to encourage the combatants. These imaginative touches create much of the humour of the passage. The humour, however, is not merely decorative. By presenting ants in human terms, Thoreau reverses the usual perspective. Human beings normally regard themselves as superior to other creatures, but Thoreau's comparison makes human warfare appear strange when viewed from the scale of the natural world. His statement that the difference between the ants and human beings becomes smaller the more closely one thinks about it is central to the passage's philosophical effect.

Historical Allusions and Satire

Thoreau fills the passage with references to historical battles and military heroes. His allusions to Achilles, Austerlitz, Dresden, the Concord fight, and Bunker Hill create a humorous contrast between the enormous significance normally attached to human history and the tiny battle taking place in his wood-yard. The comparison allows him to satirise human pride and the tendency to celebrate military conflict through heroic language. The final reference to the presidency of Polk and the Fugitive Slave Act is especially significant because it brings the observation of nature into the political history of America. The ants' battle is thus placed alongside a period marked by serious conflicts over slavery and freedom. Thoreau's method connects the apparently insignificant event in nature with larger questions about violence and social conflict.

The Limits of Human Superiority

The passage challenges the assumption that human beings are fundamentally different from other creatures. Thoreau is struck by the determination and suffering of the ants and

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admits that he becomes emotionally involved in their struggle as though they were human beings. The ants display qualities that humans often claim as uniquely their own, including courage, persistence, loyalty, and sacrifice. At the same time, Thoreau does not simply claim that ants and humans are identical. Instead, he uses the comparison to question the confidence with which human beings place themselves above nature. The passage encourages readers to look more carefully at the natural world and to recognise that complex forms of behaviour exist beyond human society.

Nature and Human Society

The wood-yard becomes a miniature version of human society. The division between red and black ants resembles political and military divisions among human communities. The language of republicans and imperialists, together with references to national music and patriotism, gives the natural scene a political dimension. Thoreau thus creates a parallel between the organisation of the ants and the conflicts of human civilisation. This parallel does not mean that the ants consciously behave according to human political principles. Rather, it exposes the tendency of human beings to interpret conflict through familiar ideas of nationality, heroism, and political loyalty. The reader is left to consider whether the language used to justify human conflicts is any more meaningful than the imagined motives attributed to the ants.

Thoreau's Style

The style of "The Battle of the Ants" combines scientific observation, imaginative description, humour, historical allusion, and philosophical reflection. Thoreau begins with precise observation and gradually expands the event through analogy and metaphor. His writing is highly self-conscious but remains accessible because the serious ideas are carried through an engaging narrative. The passage exemplifies the nature writing style associated with *Walden*, in which close attention to the natural world leads to broader reflections on human existence. The essay also illustrates Thoreau's ability to move between different scales of experience. He can focus on the tiny physical details of an ant's injured body and then immediately place the scene beside major battles in human history. This movement between the minute and the immense gives the essay its distinctive energy and allows an apparently insignificant natural event to acquire wider philosophical significance.

The Significance of "The Battle of the Ants"

"The Battle of the Ants" is significant because it demonstrates how Thoreau transforms a simple observation of nature into a complex meditation on human society. The passage is entertaining because of its humour, exaggeration, and imaginative comparisons, but beneath this surface lies a serious examination of violence, suffering, heroism, patriotism, and human pride. The ants become both objects of natural observation and mirrors in which human beings can recognise aspects of their own behaviour. The essay therefore captures an important feature of Thoreau's writing: nature is never merely a background. It is a source of knowledge and a means of questioning accepted ideas about civilisation. By observing the ants with patience and imagination, Thoreau turns a small incident in his wood-yard into a reflection on the larger conflicts of human history and society.

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Recap

- Henry David Thoreau was an important American essayist, philosopher, and nature writer.
- Thoreau was closely associated with Transcendentalism and influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* developed from Thoreau's experiment in simple living at Walden Pond.
- "The Battle of the Ants" appears in Chapter 12 of *Walden*.
- The essay begins with Thoreau's observation of red and black ants fighting in his wood-yard.
- Thoreau transforms the small struggle into an imagined military battle.
- The red and black ants are presented as opposing political and military groups.
- Thoreau compares the ants' struggle with famous battles from human history.
- Personification allows the ants to be described through human ideas of courage, patriotism, and heroism.
- Humour arises from the contrast between the tiny ants and the grand language of warfare.
- The essay questions human glorification of violence, war, patriotism, and military heroism.
- Thoreau's detailed observation of the wounded ants emphasises the suffering caused by combat.
- Historical references connect the natural event with American political and military history.
- The essay demonstrates how observation of nature can lead to philosophical reflection.
- "The Battle of the Ants" combines nature writing, humour, satire, observation, and social criticism.

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Objective Questions

3. Who wrote "The Battle of the Ants"?
4. With which literary movement is Henry David Thoreau closely associated?
5. Who was an important friend and intellectual influence on Thoreau?
6. What is Thoreau's best known work?
7. Where did Thoreau conduct his experiment in simple living?

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8. From which chapter of Walden is “The Battle of the Ants” taken?
9. What two kinds of ants does Thoreau observe fighting?
10. Where does Thoreau observe the battle between the ants?
11. What does Thoreau compare the ant battle to?
12. How does Thoreau describe the red and black ants politically?
13. Which Greek warrior does Thoreau associate with the attacking red ant?
14. Name one major human battle mentioned by Thoreau.
15. What literary device does Thoreau use by presenting ants as human warriors?
16. What larger human concern does the ant battle represent?
17. What political event does Thoreau mention at the end of the passage?

Answers

1. “The Battle of the Ants” was written by Henry David Thoreau.
2. Henry David Thoreau is closely associated with Transcendentalism.
3. Ralph Waldo Emerson was an important friend and intellectual influence on Thoreau.
4. Thoreau's best known work is *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*.
5. Thoreau conducted his experiment in simple living at Walden Pond near Concord.
6. “The Battle of the Ants” is taken from Chapter 12 of *Walden*.
7. Thoreau observes red ants and black ants fighting.
8. He observes the battle in his wood-yard.
9. Thoreau compares the ant battle to a human military conflict.
10. He describes the red ants as republicans and the black ants as imperialists.
11. He compares one of the red ants to Achilles.
12. One of the human battles mentioned is the Battle of Bunker Hill. Thoreau also refers to Austerlitz, Dresden, and the Concord fight.
13. Thoreau uses personification by attributing human qualities and actions to the ants.
14. The ant battle represents human warfare, violence, heroism, patriotism, and conflict.
15. Thoreau mentions the passage of the Fugitive-Slave Bill during the presidency of James K. Polk.

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Assignments

1. Discuss “The Battle of the Ants” as an example of Thoreau's nature writing.
2. Analyse Thoreau's treatment of war and violence in “The Battle of the Ants”.
3. Examine the use of humour, personification, and historical allusions in the essay.
4. Discuss how Thoreau transforms an observation of ants into a reflection on human society.
5. Examine “The Battle of the Ants” as a combination of nature observation and social criticism.

Suggested Reading

1. Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*. Ticknor & Fields, 1854.
2. Elder, John, and Robert Finch, editors. *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*. W. W. Norton, 1990.
3. Cramer, Jeffrey S., editor. *Walden: A Fully Annotated Edition*. Yale University Press, 2004.
4. Richardson, Robert D. *Henry David Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*. University of California Press.
5. Harding, Walter. *The Days of Henry Thoreau: A Biography*. Princeton University Press.

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MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS

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END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION – FIFTH SEMESTER
MAJOR DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE - SGB24EG504ME

AMERICAN LITERATURE

2024 – 25 Admission Onwards (SET - A)

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any eight of the following questions in one word or sentence (8 x 1 = 8)

1. Which religious group established Puritanism in Massachusetts in 1639?
2. Which pamphlet did Thomas Paine publish in 1776?
3. Which cultural movement was also known as the New Negro Movement?
4. What single word does the raven repeatedly utter in Edgar Allan Poe's poem?
5. What does the phrase 'dream deferred' signify in Langston Hughes's 'Harlem'?
6. Which word does E. E. Cummings use to announce Buffalo Bill's death?
7. Who narrates Alice Walker's 'Everyday Use'?
8. What recurring sound accompanies Brutus Jones's flight through the forest?
9. Who is the narrator of Huckleberry Finn?
10. From which work is 'The Battle of the Ants' taken

SECTION B

Answer any six of the following questions in one or two sentences (6 x 2 = 12)

11. Distinguish between Realism and Naturalism in American literature.
12. State two characteristic features of Puritan writing.
13. How does the refrain 'Nevermore' intensify the speaker's grief in 'The Raven'?
14. What does the visual arrangement of words contribute to 'Buffalo Bill's'?
15. How do Dee and Maggie differ in their attitudes towards family heritage?
16. Why does Brutus Jones believe that only a silver bullet can kill him?

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17. Why is Huck's first-person narration important to the novel?
18. How does Thoreau present the ants as human-like warriors?

SECTION C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. (6 x 5 = 30)

19. Trace the movement of American literature from colonial imitation towards a distinct national voice.
20. Explain the importance of the Harlem Renaissance in African American literary history.
21. Discuss the symbolic significance of the raven and Lenore in Poe's poem.
22. Analyse the imagery and similes through which Hughes presents a deferred dream in 'Harlem'.
23. Explain how 'The Open Boat' presents nature's indifference to human struggle.
24. Discuss the use of setting and sound to express Jones's fear in The Emperor Jones.
25. Examine Huck's moral conflict over his friendship with Jim.
26. Explain how 'The Battle of the Ants' turns a scene from nature into a satire on human warfare.

SECTION D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. (2 x 10 = 20)

27. Analyse the conflict between lived heritage and displayed heritage in 'Everyday Use'.
28. Discuss how Eugene O'Neill blends realism, symbolism and expressionism in The Emperor Jones.
29. Examine Mark Twain's treatment of slavery, racism and Huck's moral growth in Huckleberry Finn.
30. Discuss 'The Battle of the Ants' as nature writing and as a critique of war.

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AMERICAN LITERATURE

2024 – 25 Admission Onwards (SET - B)

Time: 3 Hours Max Marks: 70

SECTION A

Answer any eight of the following questions in one word or sentence (8 x 1 = 8)

1. Which period of American literature is associated with the years 1765 to 1790?
2. Who wrote 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream'?
3. Who wrote the short story 'Everyday Use'?
4. What physical marks on Maggie's body were caused by the house fire?
5. Which member of the boat's crew is named Billie?
6. Who wrote The Emperor Jones?
7. Which stage sound grows faster as Jones moves deeper into the forest?
8. What metal is used for the bullet that Jones reserves for himself?
9. Which river forms the principal setting of Huckleberry Finn?
10. What two colours identify the opposing armies in 'The Battle of the Ants'?

SECTION B

Answer any six of the following questions in one or two sentences (6 x 2 = 12)

11. What central ideas are associated with American Transcendentalism?
12. Explain the meaning of the command 'Let be be finale of seem' in 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream'.
13. Distinguish Dee's idea of heritage from Maggie's lived experience of it.
14. Why does Mama decide to give the quilts to Maggie?
15. What dramatic purpose does the drumbeat serve in The Emperor Jones?

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16. How do Jones's hallucinations reveal his personal and racial past?
17. What features make Huckleberry Finn a picaresque novel?
18. Why does Thoreau compare the fighting ants to human soldiers?

SECTION C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph. (6 x 5 = 30)

19. Describe the major developments in American literature from Realism to Modernism.
20. Explain how 'The Emperor of Ice-Cream' places vitality and ordinary life beside death.
21. Analyse the effect of Mama's narrative voice in 'Everyday Use'.
22. Discuss how the four men in 'The Open Boat' develop fellowship in the face of danger.
23. Trace Brutus Jones's psychological regression during his journey through the forest.
24. Explain how the forest, the drumbeat and the apparitions function symbolically in The Emperor Jones.
25. Discuss the Mississippi River as both a physical route and a symbolic space in Huckleberry Finn.
26. Explain how the close observation of ants expands into an imaginative account of battle.

SECTION D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words. (2 x 10 = 20)

27. Survey the major phases of American literature from Native American oral traditions to contemporary multicultural writing.
28. Compare the treatment of death and human response in the prescribed poems by Poe, Stevens, Hughes and Cummings.
29. Analyse Huckleberry Finn as a social satire, with particular reference to slavery and the idea of civilisation.
30. Examine Thoreau's use of observation, humour, classical allusion and satire in 'The Battle of the Ants'.

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സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യയാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
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ജ്ഞാനകേന്ദ്രമേ ജ്വലിക്കണേ

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