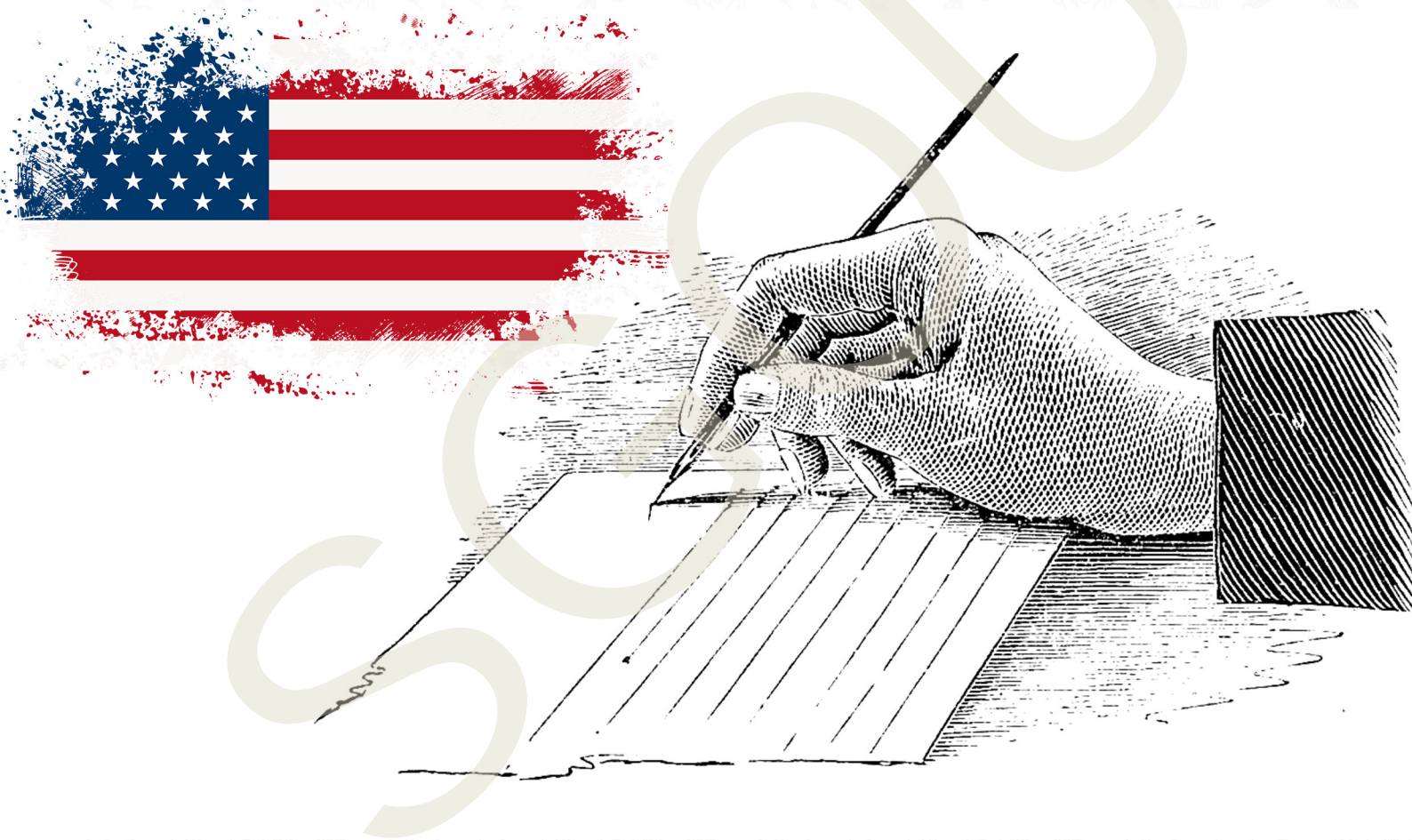




SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

American Literature

Postgraduate Programme in
English Language & Literature



SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

COURSE CODE: M21EG07DC

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

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

SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Vision

To increase access of potential learners of all categories to higher education, research and training, and ensure equity through delivery of high quality processes and outcomes fostering inclusive educational empowerment for social advancement.

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.

Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

American Literature
Course Code: M21EG07DC
Semester-II

Master of Arts
English Language and Literature
Self Learning Material



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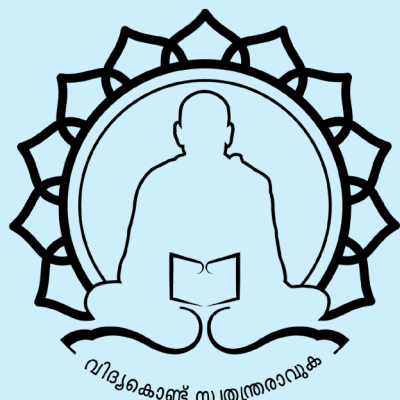
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The State University for Education, Training and Research in Blended Format, Kerala

Documentation

M21EG07DC

American Literature



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ISBN 978-81-963914-0-9



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March 2023

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Message from Vice Chancellor

Dear

I greet all of you with deep delight and great excitement. I welcome you to the Sreenarayanaguru Open University.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University was established in September 2020 as a state initiative for fostering higher education in open and distance mode. We shaped our dreams through a pathway defined by a dictum 'access and quality define equity'. It provides all reasons to us for the celebration of quality in the process of education. I am overwhelmed to let you know that we have resolved not to become ourselves a reason or cause a reason for the dissemination of inferior education. It sets the pace as well as the destination. The name of the University centres around the aura of Sreenarayanaguru, the great renaissance thinker of modern India.

Sreenarayanaguru Open University rests on the practical framework of the popularly known "blended format". Learner on distance mode obviously has limitations in getting exposed to the full potential of classroom learning experience. Our pedagogical basket has three entities viz Self Learning Material, Classroom Counselling and Virtual Modes. This combination is expected to provide high voltage in learning as well as teaching experiences. Care has been taken to ensure quality endeavours across all the entities. The PG programme in English Language and Literature is benchmarked with similar programmes of other state universities in Kerala. We assure you that the university student support services will closely stay with you for the redressal of your grievances during your studentship.

The University is committed to provide you stimulating learning experience. The Self Learning Materials have been drawn up with a very clear prescription. It recognizes the autonomy of an adult learner and a journey through the treasures of the curriculum structured with provisions for interactive learning, interrogative reflections on the content and didactic discussion through illustrative scenarios. The University takes a strong position that the learner is to be engaged in a dialogue with the content and the materials are shaped to elicit reflections in the form of questions. The questions of the learner are considered to be the vital milestones in the pedagogy of the system of the University as well as the trajectory of the learner's progression. I would like to request you to bestow your personal attention in generating questions after having an intense dialogue with the content, as it has connection with the internal assessment.

Feel free to write to us about anything that seems relevant regarding the academic programme.

Wish you the best.



Regards,

Dr. P.M. Mubarak Pasha

01.03.2023

Contents

BLOCK-01	Socio-political and Literary Contexts	1
Unit 1	History	2
Unit 2	Poetry	37
Unit 3	Drama	64
Unit 4	Prose and Fiction	93
BLOCK-02	Poetry and Drama	161
Unit 1	Poetry Detailed Study	162
Section 1	Walt Whitman: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking	165
Section 2	Emily Dickinson: There is Something Quiter than Sleep and I am Afraid to Own a Body	169
Section 3	Sylvia Plath: Daddy	172
Section 4	Langston Hughes: The Negro Speaks of Rivers	176
Section 5	Wallace Stevens: The Emperor of Ice cream	179
Section 6	Robert Frost: Birches	181
Section 7	Maya Angelou: Phenomenal Woman	185
Unit 2	Drama Detailed Study	190
Section 1	Eugene O'Neill: Long Day's Journey into Night	192
Unit 3	Poetry Non-detailed Study	212
Section 1	E. E. Cummings: Buffalo Bill	213
Section 2	Allen Ginsberg: Sunflower Sutra	215
Section 3	William Carlos Williams: The Red Wheel Barrow	217
Unit 4	Drama Non-detailed Study	222
Section 1	Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie	223
Section 2	Sam Shepard: The Buried Child	228
BLOCK-03	Prose and Fiction	237
Unit 1	Prose - Detailed	238
Section 1	Ralph Waldo Emerson: Self-Reliance	239
Unit 2	Prose - Non Detailed	251
Section 1	Adrienne Rich: The Domestication of Motherhood	252

	Section 2	Toni Morrison: Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination (Chapter 1)	256
Unit 3	Fiction		264
	Section 1	Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter	265
	Section 2	Toni Morrison: The Bluest Eye	273
Unit 4	Short stories		287
	Section 1	Edgar Allan Poe: "The Cask of Amontillado"	288
	Section 2	Ernest Hemingway - The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber	293
	Section 3	Raymond Carver: Boxes	301
BLOCK-04	Critical Responses		311
Unit 1	Poetry - Detailed		312
	Section 1	Walt Whitman: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking	313
	Section 2	Emily Dickinson: There is Something Quieter than Sleep	318
	Section 3	Emily Dickinson: I am Afraid to Own a Body	320
	Section 4	Sylvia Plath: Daddy	323
	Section 5	Langston Hughes: The Negro Speaks of Rivers	326
	Section 6	Wallace Stevens: Emperor of Ice cream	329
	Section 7	Robert Frost: Birches	332
	Section 8	Maya Angelou: Phenomenal Woman	334
Unit 2	Drama - Detailed		338
	Section 1	Eugene O'Neill: Long Day's Journey into Night	339
Unit 3	Prose - Detailed		345
	Section 1	Ralph Waldo Emerson: Self-Reliance	346

Socio-political and Literary Contexts

BLOCK-01

Block Content

Unit 1 History

Unit 2 Poetry

Unit 3 Drama

Unit 4 Prose and Fiction



Unit 1

History

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of the historical evolution of American Literature
- ▶ contextualise the significant socio-political contexts in which American Literature developed
- ▶ possess an understanding of the significant literary periodisations in American Literature
- ▶ critically contextualise some of the significant authors and literary works in American Literature

Background

The literature that is popularly referred to as American Literature is that which is produced in that part of the American continent known as the United States. This implies that what can be called American literature is determined by the national space called America. It is that literature which in terms of author and content explores issues of the American people, their ideology, beliefs, and cultures. American literature is interwoven with American history. There is an inextricable relationship between the history and cultural values of that country and the literature produced therein.

American literature, like the country itself, has roots in colonial England. What is today the United States of America was established by settlers from England who came for diverse reasons. These include religious controversy; the need for expansion of empires; the quest for adventure; and the need to ship off populations that were filling up English cities in disillusionment for lack of employment and poverty and those convicted of crimes such as theft, murder, and delinquency.

The early settlers of America were immigrant Englishmen who brought the English language, books, culture and literature across the Atlantic. English literature formed the bedrock of the writings that later emerged from that space. The early settlers did not even see themselves as anything but Englishmen. The colonies that were to become the United States were inherently English



in culture and law. It was in the process of creating a national identity during the American Revolution [1765-1783] that the people began to regularly call themselves American. The country on 4th July 1776 declared its independence.

Keywords

History, Socio-political background, Literary periods, Significant authors, Influential works

Discussion

1.1.1 Historical Background

England's expansion into America started as early as 1497 when King Henry VII of England commissioned John Cabot to go in search of heathen peoples and lands. Cabot discovered North America and claimed it for England and King Henry. It was not until 1584 and 1585 that England took up the exploration of America. This was under Sir Walter Raleigh who set sail for America in two expeditions to establish the settlement of Virginia. This settlement was named in honour of England's virgin Queen Elizabeth I. Though Raleigh's expedition failed due to poor planning, it marked the start of an outpour of English men into the American continent.

► European presence in America

The first permanent English settlement in North America was Jamestown, Virginia in 1607. Among the settlers was Captain John Smith who was an English Soldier of fortune. Reports about explorers' travels and settlements which were published in the 1600s were among the first works to emerge from the new colonies. Captain Smith's accounts of the New World formed the basis for American literature. Images and events of euphoric proportions and myths about a land of endless possibilities were in the reports he sent to England. This contributed immensely to the influx of more migrants into North America. In "The New Land" as America was referred to, Captain Smith depicted such grand abundance waiting to be utilized. He encouraged anyone who wished to have experience of such an incredible place to migrate.

► Settlement



► Different groups

Other European countries also ventured into America. France, Spain, and the Netherlands had major colonization programs that took their armies to the continent. There were settlements such as New Sweden made up of Swedes and Finns and New Netherland for the Dutch. The Province of Pennsylvania was established for English Quakers who migrated to the New World for religious purposes. Similarly, the English Puritans and pilgrims founded New England comprising of the Plymouth Plantation and the Massachusetts Bay Colony. These diverse groups among many others became part of the United States in 1776 when it gained its independence from England.

► Religious settlers

The first English settlers who made it to the New World were Pilgrims and Puritans. They were people who sought a land where they could practice their brand of religion. They needed a place away from the Old World of England and the practice of the Church of England. The Pilgrims from Holland settled in Plymouth in 1620 while the Puritans took the great migration to the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1628 and 1643.

► Renaissance period

The Renaissance marked the end of the Middle Ages and the rebirth of classical learning, while the Reformation was a period of Protestant separation from the Roman Catholic Church. The reformers protested against many doctrines of the Church, believing it had deviated from the true path of worship. They rebelled against the priests and leaders of the Church for their corruption and were dubbed Protestants.

► Establishment of Church of England

Protestantism in England was the result of King Henry VIII's split with Pope Clement VII. King Henry VIII separated England from the Roman Catholic Church, establishing the Church of England. This caused a wave of protests that broke the single uniting religion, leading to the end of the single church uniting Europe. The Church of England was later to give rise to a radical group of individuals who rebelled against its principles. They were disillusioned by the remnants of the Catholic Church's practises, were against the worship of images and symbols, and saw little difference between authority of the Catholic priests and the Protestant priests. This led to the same feelings of dissatisfaction that were popular against the Roman Catholic Church.



The radical group, which was dubbed the Puritans, was very conservative. They saw themselves as chosen people who would do God's will. They strove to purify church worship from anything that alluded to Roman Catholicism. The Church of England did not sufficiently achieve this, as many elements of the Roman Catholic Church were still in place. The Bible was their handbook, and anything not contained therein was expunged from their lives. The Bible was their guide for everything they did. This staunch adherence to the Bible and craving to be pure led to their being named Puritans. They had the reputation of being solemn and gloomy. They were known to be against entertainment and beauty. The Puritans were persecuted for their beliefs and refused to obey the doctrines of the Church of England. They fled to Holland in the early 17th century, leading to their later pilgrimage to America, where they established the Plymouth Plantation and were known as the Pilgrims.

► Dissent

In 1620, another wave of radicals made the great migration to America. Thousands of Puritans from England migrated in search of a less restrictive space for their beliefs. These Puritans were to establish the Massachusetts Bay colony. There, they maintained their religious stance. The Pilgrims and Puritans in America instituted a tradition of independent congregations. That is, they started a culture of freedom to determine their own doctrines. This led to a tradition of independence and freedom that is an enduring hallmark of the American nation.

► Culture of freedom

The Puritan doctrines were influenced by two theologians: Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther derived the philosophy that priests were not holier or better than other believers, and sermons became the most prominent literary form. Education was given emphasis to promote the study of the Bible and the composition of sermons, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony became a cultural and learning centre. Harvard University was established in 1636, and the first colonial press was established in 1638. The Bay Psalm Book was published in 1640, and The Boston News-Letter was established in 1704. This marked the beginning of active journalism in the colonies.

► Journalistic writings



1.1.2 Literature of the Colonial World

American literature began with the works of English adventurers and colonists who wrote for the benefit of readers in their motherland, England. Many of the works were written as reports of explorers and adventurers which were sent to England. Many of these reports painted glorious pictures of the New World. The works were also intended to encourage migration to America. Some of these early works included those by Captain John Smith and the historical narratives of William Bradford and John Winthrop.

- Documenting the New World

The colonial period was dominated by Puritan beliefs, but there were also accounts and reports by adventurers about their voyage to America. Major writings that emerged from the colonial period were influenced by Calvinist beliefs, making them a dominant corpus in later literature. These works had a long-reaching impact on later literature, making them a dominant corpus in America's literary history.

- Lasting impact

The English settlers were not the only immigrants to America, as there were also Frenchmen, Dutch, Germans, and Spaniards. Christopher Columbus, an Italian navigator was the first European to discover the "New World." The American Indians were the earliest to arrive, coming from Asia about 30,000 B.C. Their culture was oral, and their literature was transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth. However, the large and diverse number of communities of American Indians and the absence of written literature ensured that they had little or no influence on the English culture.

- Oral culture

1.1.3 Romanticism

The Romantic period was a time when particular thoughts and ideologies permeated different cultures and societies. It influenced different fields, such as music, art, and especially literature. The strongholds of the Romantic Movement were England and Germany. It is through the historians of English and German literature that a convenient set of terminal dates for the period can be identified. The period is given as beginning in 1798, the year of the first edition of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* and of the composition of *Hymns to the Night* by Novalis. It is also said to have ended in 1832, the year that marked the



► Revolutions

deaths of both Sir Walter Scott and Goethe. In America, the movement started much later. This period coincides with what is often called the “age of revolutions”. This includes the American Revolution of 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. This was an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions. It was the age that witnessed the initial transformations due to the Industrial Revolution.

► Social and cultural change

In literature, the Romantic movement placed intuition and imagination over reason. Known variously as the Romantic Era, Romanticism, or the Romantic Period, it was a movement that reached several aspects of society and came as a change and revolt against all that was real and scientific to focus on feelings and emotions. The end of the 18th century saw a revolution against the aristocracy and social and political norms of the age of enlightenment, which gave prominence to the soul, instincts, and emotions. This period saw the emergence of new artistic, literary, and intellectual waves in literature and the arts, and encouraged a rejection of many of the values of the Renaissance. Nature became the new object of love and emotion, and Romanticism defined an artistic and philosophical movement that influenced the way people thought about themselves and their world. The era started as a reaction to the classical way of life that people used to live.

► Influence

Writers and artists during the romantic era saw themselves as revolting against the “Age of Reason” or “Enlightenment” period, which was at its peak between 1700 and 1770. There was a celebration of imagination and intuition as opposed to reason. Spontaneity was encouraged instead of control. Subjectivity and metaphysical musing trumped objective facts. Romanticism was the wave that replaced all the old traditions, physics, and reason that were buried in people’s minds with a more spiritual and modern way of thinking. Eventually, the British romantic movement inspired a strain of romanticism in American life and literature as well.

Thomas Paine’s ideas inspired the American Revolution and were reflected in literary works that sought freedom in literature through imagination, spirituality, and the purity of nature. In the first half of the nineteenth century, New Englanders attempted to establish a distinct culture



► Arrival of romantic tendencies

by purchasing foreign books and creating a foreign bookstore and reading room. Poets and prose writers produced a literature in which beauty, power, and knowledge were often combined, a style discouraged by the Puritan authorities.

The Romantic era in America lasted from about 1830 to 1870. It represented what was buried in the human soul. This was especially so since Americans were suffering from capitalism, industrial crises, and many other problems that made it hard for them to live. It represented nature as a source of instruction, delight, and nourishment for the soul. Novels, short stories, and poems transmitted the suffering of individuals, wilderness, and savagery, whether implicitly or explicitly. It was a time when America witnessed the industrial revolution, a period of great and huge development and expansion in all fields of life. American society at the time of Romanticism was experiencing the industrial revolution. People were living in a time of great progress. Migration to cities was widespread. As the country continued to develop, cities started to become dirtier and more congested. The authors were affected by these negative consequences of the industrial revolution, as was everyone else.

► Industrial life and Romanticism

A new trend in literature, escapism, became a popular motif in writing, in which authors would literally escape their unsatisfying reality into a better world. Characters in American Romantic literature escaped civilization and modern life and went to nature, looking for freedom and purity. "Rip Van Winkle" by Washington Irving (1783–1859) can be considered one of the best examples of the use of imagination and escapism by authors. The main character in this short story escapes civilization and responsibility and goes to the woods, where he falls asleep for a long time. When he wakes up and goes back to his old life, he discovers the death of his wife and the change in society.

► Escapism

The anxiety to be free from European values aided the American adoption of individualism. The will to create a nation of their own influenced their way of thinking and writing. They asserted the importance of the individual and took a lot of interest in their relationship with nature. The Romantics also focused on the importance of following their own intuition and emotions, far away from their parents' beliefs. Even with religious topics, authors

► Individualism

wrote about different themes from the Bible, but in a way that was not limited to the dictates of the government or church. Romanticism thus became a movement wherein authors, artists, and writers reacted to the constraints of Neoclassicism. They moved towards the individual by focusing on them as unique. The truth could be achieved only through the experience of that individual.

► Authors

The Romantics believed that poetry was the highest expression of human imagination, and compared it to science. Edgar Allan Poe, for instance, called science a “vulture” preying on the hearts of poets. As a reaction against the rationalism that characterised the Age of Reason, the impact of the Industrial Revolution was a crude awakening. To the Romantics, imagination, spontaneity, individual feelings, and wild nature were of greater value than reason, logic, planning, and civilisation. Edgar Allan Poe, William Cullen Bryant, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell are notable American Romantic poets.

1.1.4 The American Dream

► Symbolic

The American Dream is a national ethos of the United States, a set of ideals including democracy, rights, liberty, opportunity, and equality, in which freedom denotes the opportunity for prosperity and success, as well as upward social mobility for the family and children, achieved through hard work in a society with few barriers. The term “American Dream” was coined by James Truslow Adams in his best-selling 1931 book *Epic of America*, saying that “life should be better, richer, and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement,” regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.

The concept of the American Dream has been used in popular discourse, and its use in American literature ranges from the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Willa Cather’s *My Ántonia*, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925), Theodore Dreiser’s *An American Tragedy* (1925), and Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* (1977). Other writers who used the American Dream theme include Hunter S. Thompson, Edward Albee, John Steinbeck, Langston Hughes, and Giannina Braschi. The

► Thematic significance

American Dream is also discussed in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, as the play's protagonist, Willy, is on a quest for the American Dream. The American Dream is also a recurring theme in the fiction of Asian Americans and African Americans.

1.1.5 Puritanism

► Growth of Puritanism

Puritanism began as an agitation within the Church of England in the latter half of the 16th century. It was a movement for the reform of the Anglican Church. In the 1530s, the Church of England had broken with the Roman Catholic Church. Puritanism was the belief that the reform should be continued, many abuses remained to be corrected, and many practices survived from the days of Papacy. They held that the Church of England should be restored to the 'purity' of the first century Church as established by Christ himself.

► Religious beliefs

The Puritans believed in the Bible as the source of all authority, accepted "inner light" as a source of understanding, and maintained a rigid faith in hard work and duty. They were mostly influenced by the French religious reformer Jean Calvin (1509–1574), whose beliefs in "Predestination" and "Grace" they fully accepted. According to the theory of "Grace", God's ways are unknown to men. Men only have to work hard and pray hopefully, but which souls are to be saved and whose to be condemned is not decided by one's devotion to God and the holiness of one's life but by God Himself, although purity of thought and action is important. Hence, all life was a stage for the constant struggle between the forces of good (God) and evil (Satan).

► Corruption of human race

There were four basic tenets of Puritanism. They are:

1. **Total Depravity:** Adam and Eve, the creations of God, were in the Garden of Eden; they were tempted by the devil. Because of their disobedience to God, they were thrown out of Eden. Belief in the fact of the fall was the basis of all Puritan thought. Puritans believed that with this fall came Total Depravity; that is, all nature and all humans were corrupted and incapable of perfection; 'In Adam's Fall/ We sinned all', as the New England primer pithily expressed it.

► Limited salvation

► Condition of being redeemed

► Unalterable fate

► Impact on culture and society

► Symbolic nature

2. **Limited Atonement:** Contrary to the belief that Christ's crucifixion had made redemption available to all, the Puritans believed in Limited Atonement; that is, only a minority, called the elect, were to be saved. The majority were damned or reprobate.
3. **Irresistible Grace:** The doctrine stated that the condition of being elect or reprobate was unalterable.
4. **Predestination:** As in the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, God had determined the course of human history since the beginning of time, and this included deciding who would be damned and who would be saved. Good works could not bring about salvation, although it was believed that individuals could show a readiness for grace by moral conduct.

Due to its rigid principles, the influence of Puritanism in the colonies waned with the increased immigration of non-Puritans. The critics of Puritanism have seen it as a blight on American history and culture. Ezra Pound called Puritanism 'blood poison' in a 1920 letter to William Carlos Williams. It has been held responsible for the American repression of sexuality, a fear of the body, a dualistic world view, the denigration of women, and the cultivation of censorship. In addition to the rich legacy of Puritan literature, Puritanism profoundly affected many later American writers, including Hawthorne, Melville, T. S. Eliot, and Emily Dickinson.

1.1.6 Expansion and Closing of the Western Frontier

The American frontier, also known as the Old West or the Wild West, encompasses the geography, history, folklore, and culture associated with the forward wave of American expansion in mainland North America that began with European colonial settlements in the early 17th century and ended with the admission of the last few western territories as states in 1912 (except Alaska, which was not admitted into the Union until 1959). The legends, historical events, and folklore of the American frontier have embedded themselves into United States culture so much that the Old West, and the Western genre of media specifically, has become one of the defining periods of American national identity.



► Archetypal concept

The archetypal Old West period is generally accepted by historians to have occurred between the end of the American Civil War in 1865 until the closing of the Frontier by the Census Bureau in 1890. A frontier is a zone of contact at the edge of a line of settlement. Leading theorist Frederick Jackson Turner went deeper, arguing that the frontier was the scene of a defining process of American civilization: "The frontier," he asserted, "promoted the formation of a composite nationality for the American people." He theorised it was a process of development: "This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward...furnishes the forces dominating American character." Turner's ideas since 1893 have inspired generations of historians (and critics) to explore multiple individual American frontiers, but the popular folk frontier concentrates on the conquest and settlement of Native American lands west of the Mississippi River, in what is now the Midwest, Texas, the Great Plains, the Rocky Mountains, the Southwest, and the West Coast.

1.1.7 'Americanness' of American Literature

► Nature of American literature

Americanness is a concept with a historically specific semantic field that constitutes the intersection of several concepts in different stages of their respective histories, like nation, representation, individualism, sympathy, race, womanhood, etc. The United States recognised a racial hierarchy in which whiteness operated as the apex of the social structure. Indeed, the construction of Americanness depended on the fiction of racial difference. Valerie Babb describes the rise of a notion of whiteness, informing the formulation of an American identity, this way: "To the different ethnicities and classes who left Europe to come to an unfamiliar wilderness where new structures had to be devised to meet new needs, whiteness furnished a social order that forged a nascent national identity and minimised potential class warfare".

Because race, or "whiteness," operated as a critical determinant of American citizenship, the building block of American nationhood, the notion of racial categories was central to the construction of a national identity for the newly formed United States of America. The

- Race as determining factor

Americanness that was emphasised in the literature that grew out of the experience of Americans abroad in the period from 1870 to 1920—the so-called international novel as a distinct American genre and also the international theme as a distinct American subject matter—is linked to the experience of its authors as short-term tourists, medium-term holders of diplomatic assignments, and long-term expatriates.

1.1.8 Nineteenth Century

- American identity

The 19th century was an incredibly rich time in American history. In the wake of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, the United States was still in the early stages of forming its own identity and culture. This time period, historically remembered as the Romantic Era, greatly affected American thought and could be credited as the period that gave birth to what it means “to be an American.”

- Changes in the period

The US underwent dramatic changes in the period under review, especially during the 19th century, in terms of the geographic area to which it related. There were also some major technological and economic changes in the 19th century US, not least the arrival of the railroad and the revolution in the publishing industry, both of which would greatly impact the location of markets and opportunities for writers.

- Literary development

In the early to mid-19th century, after the American Revolution and especially after the War of 1812, the emphasis in American writing was on native literature, and as a result, Edgar Allan Poe and others initiated what is seen as a great period of literary development. What is of interest are the economic circumstances that each of these writers experienced. Poe began to sell short stories to magazines, and, in 1835, he became the editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* with an acute awareness of reader tastes, reflected in soaring sales figures.

Earlier, famous writers also had careers in journalism, including Washington Irving (1783–1859) and William Cullen Bryant (1794–1888), who came from wealthy backgrounds. Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), his masterpiece being *The Scarlet Letter*, was a New Englander like so many from this time. He also came from a wealthy background and held various jobs,



► Popular novels

including contributing to magazines. *The Scarlet Letter* was one of the first mass-produced novels in America and became an instant best seller, with over 2,500 copies sold in the first two weeks. Hawthorne's literature had a marked effect on Herman Melville (1819–1891), another important author during this time, notable for his book *Moby-Dick*.

► Writing as career

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) and Emily Dickinson (1830–1866), two of America's most important poets, also date from this period and were from New England. Whitman was a working man, a traveller, served as a nurse during the Civil War, and later took up government jobs. Dickinson, in contrast, was reclusive, rarely travelled, was very well educated, and came from a wealthy background. Thus, during this period, most writers appear to have come from wealthy backgrounds, were able to earn money through contributions to magazines and journals, could get employment in government agencies, lived in or close to New England, and had close ties to Europe, especially the 'mother' country, England. This was in marked contrast to the situation in Germany at the time, where even the most famous writers were utterly dependent on the ruling classes, secular and ecclesiastical, for employment and income, with writing for money viewed as immoral.

► Significant works

After the war with Britain in 1812, there was an increasing desire to produce uniquely American literature and culture. Literary figures who took up the cause included Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, and James Fenimore Cooper. Irving wrote humorous works in *Salmagundi* and the satire *A History of New York by Diedrich Knickerbocker* (1809). Bryant wrote early romantic and nature-inspired poetry, which evolved away from their European origins. Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* about Natty Bumppo (which includes *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826)), treated uniquely American material in ways that were popular both in the new country and Europe.

1.1.9 Transcendentalism

The Transcendentalist movement was a reaction against 18th-century rationalism and a manifestation of the general humanitarian trend of 19th century thought. The movement was based on a fundamental belief

► Spiritual beliefs

in the unity of the world and God. The soul of each individual was thought to be identical with the world — a microcosm of the world itself. The doctrines of self-reliance and individualism developed through the belief in the identification of the individual soul with God. Transcendentalism was intimately connected with Concord, a small New England village 32 kilometres west of Boston. Concord was the first inland settlement of the original Massachusetts Bay Colony.

► Unique viewpoint of the individual

Surrounded by forest, it was a peaceful town close enough to Boston's lectures, bookstores, and colleges to be intensely cultivated but far enough to be serene. The Transcendentalists published a quarterly magazine, *The Dial*, which lasted four years and was first edited by Margaret Fuller and later by Emerson. Reform efforts engaged them as well as literature. A number of Transcendentalists were abolitionists, and some were involved in experimental utopian communities such as Brook Farm and Fruitlands. Unlike many European groups, the Transcendentalists never issued a manifesto. They insisted on individual differences—on the unique viewpoint of the individual.

► Authentic voice and literary form

The American Transcendental Romantics pushed radical individualism to the extreme. American writers often saw themselves as lonely explorers outside of society and convention. The American hero, like Herman Melville's Captain Ahab, Mark Twain's Huck Finn, or Edgar Allan Poe's Arthur Gordon Pym, typically faced risk, or even certain destruction, in the pursuit of metaphysical self-discovery. For the Romantic American writer, nothing was a given. Literary and social conventions, far from being helpful, were dangerous. There was tremendous pressure to discover an authentic literary form, content, and voice — all at the same time. It is clear from the many masterpieces produced in the three decades before the U.S. Civil War (1861–65) that American writers rose to the challenge.

As a group, the transcendentalists led the celebration of the American experiment as one of individualism and self-reliance. They took progressive stands on women's rights, abolition, reform, and education. They criticised government, organised religion, laws, social institutions, and creeping industrialisation. They created an American “state of mind” in which imagination was



- American state of mind

better than reason, creativity was better than theory, and action was better than contemplation. And they had faith that all would be well because humans could transcend limits and reach astonishing heights.

1.1.9.1 Transcendental Poets

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882) is the undisputed founder of the Transcendental Movement. He was born in New England. He studied at Harvard and became a Unitarian minister. Unitarianism was a movement that appeared at the beginning of the 19th century. It developed at Harvard University, an institution in which most Transcendentalists were students. Unitarianism came as a revolt against Calvinism, a religious doctrine at the heart of American Protestantism. Emerson suddenly broke free from his Unitarian Church because he felt stifled. Emerson then devoted himself to another sort of religion. He became committed to a personal and non-institutional form of faith that needed no church or ministers. He took time off to travel. He visited Europe and became familiar with the European ideas of the time. These were essentially Romanticism and German idealism. When he returned, he settled near Boston in a town named Concord, where he became a teacher, a lecturer, and a writer. It was there that he published his first and only short text, *Nature*, which gave birth to transcendentalism. Many thinkers of the period who were trying to find their own ways felt immediately attracted to Emerson's new ideas. Many of them came to Concord, which quickly became an intellectual and spiritual centre.

- Early life

In *Nature*, Emerson expresses his pantheistic view of the world. He posited that nature is the place where God can be found. He described nature as sacred. It was to be considered a source of nourishment, beauty, and inspiration. It is in nature, therefore, and in nature alone, that man can find what he needs. Man was therefore to turn to nature in order to discover what Emerson calls his true self. The concept of self was a dominant idea in Emerson's whole work. With this, Emerson chose nature as his new religion.

- Spiritual connection with nature

In *Nature*, Emerson also advocated the necessity for a new way of looking at the world. The man was to learn



to open his eyes. He was to learn to look at the world differently, getting rid of his preconceptions and his moral or educational influences. The following year, in 1837, Emerson delivered a lecture entitled “The American Scholar”. This has been described as the “American intellectual Declaration of Independence”. In this address, he urges his fellowmen and women to reject tradition, imitation, and foreign influences. Emerson argued for a national culture, a typically American culture that would not be linked to European cultures. He also added the notion of the “self”, which he had already introduced in *Nature*. He maintained that a writer who wants to discover new forms and write truly national literature must be true to himself. He must first discover himself in order to listen to and trust it without yielding to external influences.

- Focus on the individual

Henry David Thoreau

Thoreau (1817–1862) was born in Concord, the town in which Emerson settled and founded the Transcendentalist Club. Just like Emerson, he attended Harvard. There, he became familiar with revolutionary ideas. These include Unitarianism and Romantic ideas coming from Europe. Like Emerson, he first worked as a teacher, but he decided to resign when he was forced to administer corporal punishment to students. In his view, such punishments did not respect the basic rights of the individual. He soon joined the transcendentalist movement. Emerson became his mentor and deeply influenced him.

- Inspired by transcendentalism

Thoreau started to write for *Dial* (the Transcendentalist newspaper). In 1845–47, Thoreau decided to launch into an experiment that truly changed his life. He decided to try out Emerson's ideas and principles. He cut himself off from society. He rejected its materialism and commercialism as well as its rapid pace. He felt isolated in modern US society and therefore decided to isolate himself, to free himself from it, and to see what kind of life he could build for himself. He therefore chose a place in the heart of nature called Walden Pond, near Concord. There he decided to experience solitude in order, first, to distance himself from society and, second, to discover himself. By doing so, Thoreau considered that he was concretely following Emerson's principles. He was establishing a new relationship with nature in which he hoped to find his self and his true individuality.

- Discovering nature



The project was ambitious and extremely simple at the same time. On July 4, 1845, Thoreau left for Walden Pond. He began by building himself a hut in the middle of the woods, which he arranged in a most simple way, taking with him only the basic objects he needed. Then he spent two years by himself, in complete solitude, living the simple and ascetic life of a truly self-reliant man. He worked hard to find and produce his own food. He grew his own vegetables, and he cut his own wood. He fixed his hut when needed, and he proved he could be independent, able to live alone with no external help, taking care of his own needs. He also spent a lot of time studying the flora and fauna. He paid attention to the smallest details of natural life, such as the weather, the light, and the cycle of seasons. He took long walks, getting to know the surroundings of his hut with great accuracy.

► Reclusive life

Thoreau spent his two years at Walden Pond reflecting on social matters. He meditated on various topics such as the dangers of religion and material success, the development of civilisation, and the importance of the individual. He realised that being away from the tumult of society helped him to distinguish between what was necessary and what was futile. He wrote his journal regularly and published the narrative of his experience in 1854 in a book called *Walden*. The book is an autobiographical account of two years in the life of a man, as well as a philosophical or sociological essay.

► Significant work

This book remains an extraordinary testimony on solitude as a document on an extreme experiment with the self and on the progressive development of inner life. It is also a reflection on autobiography and American nature. Even after the experiment at Walden Pond and the publication of the book, Thoreau continued to spend as much time as he could in nature. He went on with his patient and loving observation of it. Definitely influenced by Emerson's theories, he never stopped considering nature as a powerful force—the only one, indeed, that could offer man this necessary physical, intellectual, and spiritual regeneration.

► Nature as universal force

1.1.10 The Period of the World Wars

Many historians have characterised the period between the two world wars as the United States'

► Impact of the World Wars

traumatic “coming of age,” despite the fact that U.S. direct involvement was relatively brief (1917–1918) and its casualties were much fewer than those of its European allies and foes. John Dos Passos expressed America’s post-war disillusionment in the novel *Three Soldiers* (1921), when he noted that civilisation was a “vast edifice of sham, and the war, instead of crumbling, was its fullest and most ultimate expression.” Shocked and permanently changed, Americans returned to their homeland but could never regain their innocence.

► Lost Generation

Despite outward gaiety, modernity, and unparalleled material prosperity, young Americans of the 1920s were “the lost generation”—so named by literary portraitist Gertrude Stein. Without a stable, traditional structure of values, the individual lost a sense of identity. The secure, supportive family life; the familiar, settled community; the natural and eternal rhythms of nature that guide the planting and harvesting on a farm; the sustaining sense of patriotism; the moral values inculcated by religious beliefs and observations—all seemed undermined by World War I and its aftermath.

► Literary resonances

Numerous novels, notably Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and Fitzgerald’s *This Side of Paradise* (1920), evoke the extravagance and disillusionment of the lost generation. In T.S. Eliot’s influential long poem *The Waste Land* (1922), Western civilization is symbolised by a bleak desert in desperate need of rain (spiritual renewal).

► The Great Depression

The world depression of the 1930s affected most of the population of the United States. Workers lost their jobs, factories shut down, businesses and banks failed, and farmers, unable to harvest, transport, or sell their crops, could not pay their debts and lost their farms. Midwestern droughts turned the “breadbasket” of America into a dust bowl. Many farmers left the Midwest for California in search of jobs, as vividly described in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

At the peak of the Depression, one-third of all Americans were out of work. Soup kitchens, shanty towns, and armies of hobos—unemployed men illegally riding freight trains—became part of national life. The Depression turned the world upside down. Not only did the war spawn enormous literature during and after the war, but it also led to a reaction against the war and



► Financial crisis

the culture that supported it. This response to the war contributed significantly to two different outcomes: first, the radicalism of the 1930s, and second, a shift in literature that widened the gap between popular and high literary culture.

When the war began in Europe, American writers expressed opinions about it ranging from pacifistic opposition to the very idea of war to passionate support for U.S. intervention on the side of the Allies (notably Britain, France, and Russia) or, less frequently, the Central Powers (led by Germany and Austria-Hungary). While opposition to the war did find literary expression, especially during the period of American neutrality, the overwhelming majority of wartime writing supported direct American involvement. Even before the United States declared war, the publishing industry largely favoured pro-war writing. But once war was declared, the suppression of the mail—devastating in a vast country in which the left was heavily dependent upon the postal service to distribute its papers and journals—had the effect of eliminating most of the venues in which anti-war poetry could be published. Moreover, many socialists, especially socialist intellectuals, were recruited to the war effort by the relatively progressive character of some of the Wilson administration's policies, which to some extent foreshadowed the New Deal of the 1930s. W.E.B. DuBois' call in 1918 for African Americans to “forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy” for the duration of the war represents a general sentiment.

► Literary reactions to war

While the literature and popular memory of the First World War occupies a significant place in European memory, in the United States it has been overshadowed by the Second World War, probably because this country did not assume the globally hegemonic position following the First World War that it would claim after the Second. Still, the war left a complex, curious, and lasting cultural legacy. On the one hand, the reaction against the war had a direct political impact by helping to fuel the radicalism that germinated in the 1920s and blossomed in the 1930s.

► Global position of power

In addition to poetry and short fiction, novels such as Dos Passos' *Three Soldiers* (1921), E. E. Cummings' *The*



► Significant literary contributions

Enormous Room (1922), and Thomas Boyd's *Through the Wheat* (1923), to name just a few, by reacting against the war also exposed some of the coercive nature of American society and the enormous gap between high-minded ideals and often sordid reality. Even when apolitical, as in Cummings, this forthright exposure of the actual experience of war, the military, and the special insights into American society made available by this experience contributed to the turn to the political left we see in the thirties.

► Reactions to warfare

At the same time, post-war literature often featured a detached, ironic aesthetic that lasted well into the century and is in some ways with us still. As the inflationary pro-war rhetoric was so overheated and sentimentally manipulative, the anti-war rhetoric often became cold and anti-sentimental. Post-war modernism's emotional austerity fed and was fed by a distrust of the society that had manipulated people's feelings so effectively. Often, this led to a distrust of society as such, with the isolated individual left as the sole repository of value. One could say something similar about much of the hardboiled crime fiction of the period. Justified as a response to a horrific war that revealed that the industrial capitalism that proved so materially productive was also massively destructive. This aesthetic could, and often did, lead to a radical separation between the individual, the artist or art, and the social and political. Literary modernism became so subversive as to be anti-social at times.

1.1.11 Civil Rights Movement Era

A large migration of African Americans began during World War I, hitting its high point during World War II. During this Great Migration, black people left the racism and lack of opportunities in the American South and settled in northern cities like Chicago, where they found work in factories and other sectors of the economy. This migration produced a new sense of independence in the black community and contributed to the vibrant Black urban culture seen during the Harlem Renaissance. The migration also empowered the growing American Civil Rights movement, which made a powerful impression on black writers during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. Just as Black activists were pushing to end segregation and racism and create a new sense of Black nationalism, so too were black authors attempting to address these issues with their writings.

► Great migration



► New perspectives

One of the first writers to do so was James Baldwin, whose work addressed issues of race and sexuality. Baldwin, who is best known for his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, wrote deeply personal stories and essays while examining what it was like to be both Black and homosexual at a time when neither of these identities was accepted by American culture. In all, Baldwin wrote nearly 20 books, including such classics as *Another Country* and *The Fire Next Time*.

► Significant authors

Baldwin's idol and friend was author Richard Wright, whom Baldwin called "the greatest Black writer in the world for me." Wright is best known for his 1940 novel, *Native Son*, which tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a Black man struggling for acceptance in Chicago. Baldwin was so impressed by the novel that he titled a collection of his own essays *Notes of a Native Son*, in reference to Wright's novel. However, their friendship fell apart due to one of the book's essays, "Everybody's Protest Novel," which criticised *Native Son* for lacking credible characters and psychological complexity. Among Wright's other books are the autobiographical novels *Black Boy* (1945), *The Outsider* (1953), and *White Man, Listen!* (1957). The other great novelist of this period is Ralph Ellison, best known for his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, which won the National Book Award in 1953. Even though Ellison did not complete another novel during his lifetime, *Invisible Man* was so influential that it secured his place in literary history. After Ellison's death in 1994, a second novel, *Juneteenth* (1999), was pieced together from the 2,000-plus pages he had written over 40 years. A fuller version of the manuscript was published as *Three Days Before the Shooting* (2008).

The Civil Rights time period also saw the rise of female black poets, most notably Gwendolyn Brooks, who became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize, which was awarded for her 1949 book of poetry, *Annie Allen*. Along with Brooks, other female poets who became well known during the 1950s and 1960s were Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. During this time, a number of playwrights also came to national attention, notably Lorraine Hansberry, whose play *A Raisin in the Sun* focuses on a poor Black family living in Chicago. The play won the 1959 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Another playwright who gained attention

► African American voices

was Amiri Baraka, who wrote controversial off-Broadway plays. In more recent years, Baraka has become known for his poetry and music criticism. It is also worth noting that a number of important essays and books about human rights were written by the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the leading examples of these is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham Jail."

1.1.12 Harlem Renaissance

Between 1919 and 1934, African American artists flocked to New York City, specifically Harlem. This era was to become one of the most prolific periods of African American writing. What Alain Locke called in 1925 a "New Negro Movement" was later defined by historians as the Harlem Renaissance. Among the poets who gained popularity during this era were Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer, Arna Bontemps, Anne Spencer, Gwendolyn Bennett, Helene Johnson, Angelina Weld Grimké, and James Weldon Johnson. Many leading fiction writers also emerged during this period, including Zora Neale Hurston, Rudolph Fisher, Jessie Redmond Fauset, Nella Larsen, and Wallace Thurman. Moreover, many of the poets of this era also wrote fiction. The Harlem Renaissance also included the creative works produced by brilliantly talented and prolific dancers, musicians, visual artists, and photographers.

► Location for new literary movement

Several conditions enabled this renaissance: Booker T. Washington's death, World War I, deteriorating southern racial conditions, greater publishing opportunities, and Marcus Garvey's influence on racial pride. When Booker T. Washington, a former slave and founder of Tuskegee Institute, died in 1915, W. E. B. DuBois, the first African American to take a Ph.D. from Harvard and one of the principal organisers of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), replaced him as the principal spokesperson for African Americans. Although he held tremendous respect for Washington, DuBois disagreed strongly with his conciliatory attitude towards racial injustice in the South. DuBois endorsed more urgent demands for social change.

► Changing attitudes

When World War I ended in 1918, returning Black soldiers, especially those who had been recognized in France for their heroic achievements, were angered by racial conditions that remained unchanged in the United



► Veterans
discontent

States. When, in 1917, Woodrow Wilson proclaimed U.S. involvement in the war as a means to make the world safe for democracy, many African American soldiers felt certain that U.S. discrimination would be dismantled. Confronted by the same racial injustice and violence they left behind, many Black veterans joined their anger with a rising spirit of unrest that was beginning to pervade the country.

► Shift to American
North

Racial conditions in the South were becoming unbearable for African Americans, especially in rural areas. Workers faced unfair sharecropping arrangements, lynching, and segregation, as well as inferior schools and living conditions. Many began moving north with the hope of finding greater economic opportunity in the industrial cities of New York, Chicago, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Pittsburgh. Soon, African American professionals followed. This huge influx of African Americans to the North became known as the Great Migration. Many settled in Harlem, which was rapidly becoming known as a centre for artistic opportunity.

► Representation

A variety of styles and literary devices, including dialect, strict standard English, high and low culture, parody, irony, and satire, filled the pages of Harlem Renaissance writings, creating a window into the rich diversity of perspectives alive in African American communities. Yet artists continued to debate the best way to represent Blacks, which classes to foreground in their work, and whether or not to use dialect. In addition, writers struggled against the mean-spirited images of Blacks as promiscuous. Some artists considered downplaying the theme of sexuality, which, when used unwisely, could only fuel the harmful effects of this stereotype. Others, like Hughes, insisted that artists should not be servants to outside approval.

► Success of Harlem
artists

Toomer was the first artist to enjoy widespread critical acceptance of his first work, *Cane* (1923), a success that charged the confidence of other Harlem Renaissance writers. The collection, containing a novella, poetry, and short fiction, as well as drawings, is most noted for its focus on the strength and beauty of rural black women, such as Fern. In his free verse, Hughes treats themes of Black pride, Black unity, racial violence, Black poverty, Black womanhood, African heritage, and integration. He also transcribed blues, jazz, and gospel into poetic verse.

► Poets of the era

While the movement often seemed to be dominated by men, women also managed to leave their enduring mark on the poetry of the era. Georgia Douglas Johnson attended to racial themes, yet was equally drawn to romanticism, sentimentalism, and issues concerning the human condition. Angelina Weld Grimké treated racial themes with a lyric sensibility. Much of Anne Spencer's work is more concerned with gender than race. Other important writers of the period include Eric Walrond, Sterling A. Brown, and Dorothy West. Walrond wrote of his experiences as a West Indian in Harlem; Brown continued Hughes's emphasis on the poetics of blues culture; and West examined the wealthy class of Blacks, writing and publishing well into her nineties.

► Sense of optimism

In opposition to the radical modernist movement and poets, such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, Harlem Renaissance poets did not view the entire modern world as a wasteland. Instead, a sense of optimism pervaded their work, unlike the fatalism and pessimism found in many works of modernism. Like blues music, the poetry transformed hopelessness with love and laughter; the words and images were infused with the power of persistence.

1.1.13 Transnationalism

► Increased access to different parts of the world

Transnationalism is an economic, political, and cultural process that extends beyond the boundaries of nation-states. The concept of transnationalism suggests a weakening of the control a nation-state has over its borders, inhabitants, and territory. Increased immigration to developed countries in response to global economic development has resulted in multicultural societies where immigrants are more likely to maintain contact with their culture of origin and less likely to assimilate. Therefore, loyalty to the state may compete equally with allegiance to a culture or religion. With increased global mobility and access to instantaneous worldwide communication technology, boundaries dissolve and the territorial controls imposed by the traditional nation-state become less relevant. However, state definitions of citizenship and nationality and the rules for political participation may become more relevant for transnational groups.



1.1.13.1 The Transnational Turn

► Changing idea of nation

Despite the doubts raised by such an apparent oxymoron, a “transnational turn” has been heralded in the discipline of “American literature” since the 1990s. Already in 1991, Gregory Jay had announced “The End of ‘American’ Literature,” decrying the excessive emphasis on the national myth, most conspicuous in the common institutional practise of “organising courses on the basis of national entities,” a move that “inevitably reproduce[d] certain biases and fallacies.” This warning reappeared in Carolyn Porter’s insightful analysis of the “remapping” of the discipline of American literature, which she saw as a direct result of the erosion of the territorial and historical boundaries that had once solidly marked off what constituted “America.”

► Literature and transnationalism

The questioning of the nationalist paradigm was not unique to American literature but affected other fields of literary study, most notably “English.” It was imperative to adopt a transnational perspective in English literary studies because it could provide the proper context for the myriad of literary traditions in English, especially those emerging in “diaspora conditions,” which otherwise ran the risk of merely being “assimilated to a narrow, nationalist paradigm.” On the other hand, the new methodological approach would help to lay bare the very transnational nature of more consolidated disciplines like British or American literature. In other words, the transnational paradigm in English literary studies, while not entirely dispensing with the national paradigm, would focus on the discipline’s historical involvement with the nation-state, encouraging students to explore “the instrumental role literature has played in the complicated world of transnational political and cultural relations.”

► Significant changes

1.1.14 Twentieth Century American Literature: Writings from 1914 to 1945

Important movements in drama, poetry, fiction, and criticism took shape in the years before, during, and after World War I. The eventful period that followed the war left its imprint on books of all kinds. The literary forms of the period were extraordinarily varied, and in drama, poetry, and fiction, the leading authors tended towards radical technical experiments.

1.1.14.1 Drama

American drama imitated English and European theatre until well into the 20th century. Often, plays from England or place translated from European languages dominated theatre seasons. An inadequate copyright law that failed to protect and promote American dramatists worked against genuinely original drama. So did the “star system,” in which actors and actresses, rather than the actual plays, were given the most acclaim. Americans flocked to see European actors who toured theatres in the United States. In addition, imported drama, like imported wine, enjoyed higher status than indigenous productions. During the 19th century, melodrama with exemplary democratic figures and clear contrasts between good and evil was popular. Plays about social problems such as slavery also drew large audiences; sometimes these plays were adaptations of novels like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Not until the 20th century would plays attempt aesthetic innovation. Popular culture showed vital developments, especially in vaudeville (popular variety theatre involving skits, clowning, music, and the like). Minstrel shows, based on African American music and folkways and performed by white characters using “blackface” makeup, also developed original forms and expressions.

► Early drama

Eugene O’Neill

Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953) was a great figure of American theatre. His numerous plays combine technical originality with freshness of vision and emotional depth. His earliest dramas concern the working class and the poor; later works explore subjective realms, such as obsessions and sex, and underscore his reading of Freud. His play *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) recreates the passions hidden within one family; *The Great God Brown* (1926) uncovers the unconscious of a wealthy businessman; and *Strange Interlude* (1928) traces the tangled loves of one woman. He continued to explore the Freudian pressures of love and dominance within families in a trilogy of plays collectively entitled *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931). His later plays include *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) and *Long Day’s Journey Into Night* (1956).

► O’Neill’s contributions



Thornton Wilder

Thornton Wilder (1897–1975) is known for his plays *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) and for his novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927). *Our Town* conveys positive American values. It has all the elements of sentimentality and nostalgia — the archetypal traditional small country town, the kindly parents and mischievous children, and the young lovers. Still, innovative elements such as ghosts, voices from the audience, and daring time shifts keep the play engaging. It is, in effect, a play about life and death in which the dead are reborn, at least for the moment.

► Positive American values

Clifford Odets

Clifford Odets (1906–1963), a master of social drama, came from an Eastern European Jewish immigrant background. Raised in New York City, he became one of the original acting members of the Group Theatre, directed by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford, which was committed to producing only native American dramas. Odets's best-known play was *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), an experimental one-act drama that fervently advocated labour unionism. His *Awake and Sing!*, a nostalgic family drama, became another popular success, followed by *Golden Boy*, the story of an Italian immigrant youth who ruins his musical talent (he is a violinist) when he is seduced by the lure of money to become a boxer and injures his hands. Like Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and Drieser's *An American Tragedy*, the play warns against excessive ambition and materialism.

► Social Drama

Arthur Miller

Arthur Asher Miller (1915-2005), integrated societal consciousness with a keen interest in the inner lives of his characters. Miller was moulded by the Great Depression, which devastated his father, a tiny manufacturer, and proved to him the uncertainty of contemporary life. He is best known for his Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which made Miller a national phenomenon. Many reviewers saw *Death of a Salesman* as the first great American tragedy, and Miller rose to prominence as a guy who grasped the spirit of America.

► Capturing the spirit of America

Tennessee Williams

Tennessee Williams (Thomas Lanier Williams) (1911-1983) was an American dramatist whose plays depicted

► New Drama

a world of human discontentment in which sex and violence lurked under a veneer of romantic gentility. Williams' breakthrough came with the play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944). Williams' second significant work, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), earned him the Pulitzer Prize. He pushed theatre into new directions, pushed the boundaries of individual drama, and was one of the creators of the so-called "New Drama." The fugitive and running away are recurring themes in Williams' plays. It frequently comprises absentee dads, enduring (if unpleasant) moms, and dependent relatives. His plays have been translated and performed in many other countries, and his name and work have become familiar even to individuals who have never seen a production of his works.

Sam Shepard

Samuel Shepard Rogers (1943-2017) is an American playwright and artist whose plays deftly integrate imagery of the American West, pop themes, science fiction, and other popular and youth culture components. His first forays into playwriting, a flurry of one-act pieces, found a sympathetic audience in Off-Off-Broadway shows. Shepard received Obie Awards (given by the Village Voice newspaper) for his plays *Chicago*, *Icarus' Mother*, and *Red Cross* during the 1965-66 season. Shepard's work may be divided into a few main eras and genres. His early work is highly experimental and unconventional. Over time, Shepard's writing became more realist, but with heavily tragicomic elements and themes like complicated, often darkly funny familial relationships (and family secrets), a touch of surrealism, seemingly rootless or aimless characters, and characters and places on the outskirts of society (specifically, American society). His plays are typically set in rural America, reflecting his own Midwestern origins as well as his fascination with these often-isolated people and towns.

► Experimental drama

Edward Albee

Edward Franklin Albee (1928 -2016), American playwright and producer is best known for his play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), which depicts marital life in shocking detail and with clever banter. The most successful of Albee's early one-act pieces were *The Zoo Story* (1959), *The Sandbox* (1959), and *The American*



► Critiquing America

Dream (1961), which established him as an insightful critique of American ideals. Albee's writings continued to criticise American morality. His popularity was based in part on his ability to bridge the gap between the traditional and the avant-garde, mixing the realistic and the fantastical.

1.1.14.2 The New Poetry

Poetry ranged between traditional types of verse and experimental writing that departed radically from the established forms of the 19th century. Two New England poets, Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost, who were not noted for technical experimentation, won both critical and popular acclaim in this period. Robinson, whose first book appeared in 1896, did his best work in sonnets, ballad stanzas, and blank verse. In the 1920s, he won three Pulitzer Prizes: for his *Collected Poems* (published in 1921), *The Man Who Died Twice* (1925), and *Tristram* (1927). Like Robinson, Frost used traditional stanzas and blank verse in volumes such as *A Boy's Will* (1913), his first book, and *North of Boston* (1914), *New Hampshire* (1923), *A Further Range* (1936), and *A Masque of Reason* (1945). The best-known poet of his generation, Frost, like Robinson, saw and commented upon the tragic aspects of life in poems such as "Design," "Directive," and "Provide, Provide." Frost memorably crafted the language of common speech into traditional poetic form with epigrammatic effect.

► Technical Experimentation

T.S.Eliot's first volume, *Prufrock and Other Observations*, was published in 1917. In 1922 appeared *The Waste Land*, the poem by which he first became famous. Filled with fragments, competing voices, learned allusions, and deeply buried personal details, the poem was read as a dark diagnosis of a disillusioned generation and of the modern world. As a poet and critic, Eliot exercised a strong influence, especially in the period between World Wars I and II. In what some critics regard as his finest work, *The Four Quartets* (1943), Eliot explored through images of great beauty and haunting power his own past, the past of the human race, and the meaning of human history. Eliot was an acknowledged master of a varied group of poets. Eliot's influence was clear in the writings of Archibald MacLeish, whose earlier poems showed resemblances to *The Waste Land*.

► Influential writer

1.1.14.3 Fiction

► Early publications

The little magazines that helped the growth of the poetry of the era also contributed to the development of its fiction. They printed daring or unconventional short stories and published attacks on established writers. *The Dial* (1880–1929), *Little Review* (1914–29), *Seven Arts* (1916–17), and others encouraged modernist innovation. More potent were two magazines edited by the ferociously funny journalist-critic H.L. Mencken—*The Smart Set* and *American Mercury*. A powerful influence and a scathing critic of puritanism, Mencken helped launch the new fiction.

► Psychological portrayals

In 1920, critics noticed that a new school of fiction had risen to prominence with the success of books such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, fictions that tended to be frankly psychological or modern in their unsparing portrayals of contemporary life. Novels of the 1920s were often not only lyrical and personal but also, in the despairing mood that followed World War I, apt to express the pervasive disillusionment of the postwar generation. Novels of the 1930s inclined towards radical social criticism in response to the miseries of the Great Depression, though some of the best, by writers such as Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Henry Roth, and Nathanael West, continued to explore the modernist vein of the previous decade.

► Disillusionment and social criticism

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920) showed the disillusionment and moral disintegration experienced by many in the US after World War I. *The Great Gatsby* (1925) was a novel about the promise and failure of the American Dream, and Fitzgerald lived out this theme himself. He went on to do some of his best work in the 1930s. Unlike Fitzgerald, who was a lyric writer with real emotional intensity, Sinclair Lewis was best as a social critic. His onslaughts against the "village virus" (*Main Street* 1920), average businessmen (*Babbitt* 1922), materialistic scientists (*Arrowsmith* 1925), and the racially prejudiced (*Kingsblood Royal* [1947]) were satirically sharp and thoroughly documented, though *Babbitt* is his only book that still stands up brilliantly at the beginning of the 21st century. Similar careful documentation, though with little satire, characterised James T. Farrell's naturalistic *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1932–35), which described the stifling effects of growing up in a



lower-middle-class family and a street-corner milieu in the Chicago of the 1920s.

The ironies of racial identity dominate the stories and novels produced by writers of the Harlem Renaissance, including harsh portraits of the Black middle class in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929) and the powerful stories of Langston Hughes in *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), as well as the varied literary materials—poetry, fiction, and drama—collected in Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923). Richard Wright's books, including *Uncle Tom's Children* (1938), *Native Son* (1940), and *Black Boy* (1945) were works of burning social protest, Dostoyevskian in their intensity, that dealt boldly with the plight of American Blacks in both the old South and the northern urban ghetto. Zora Neale Hurston's training in anthropology and folklore contributed to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), her powerful feminist novel about the all-Black Florida town in which she had grown up.

► Racial identity and literature

A number of authors wrote proletarian novels attacking capitalist exploitation, as in several novels based on a 1929 strike in the textile mills in Gastonia, N.C., such as Fielding Burke's *Call Home the Heart* and Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (both 1932). Other notable proletarian novels included Jack Conroy's *The Disinherited* (1933), Robert Cantwell's *The Land of Plenty* (1934), and Albert Halper's *Union Square* (1933), *The Foundry* (1934), and *The Chute* (1937), as well as some grim evocations of the drifters and "bottom dogs" of the Depression era, such as Edward Anderson's *Hungry Men* and Tom Kromer's *Waiting for Nothing* (both 1935). The radical movement, combined with a nascent feminism, encouraged the talent of several politically committed women writers whose work was rediscovered later; they included Tillie Olsen, Meridel Le Sueur, and Josephine Herbst.

► Against capitalist exploitation

Particularly admired as a protest writer was John Dos Passos, who first attracted attention with an anti-World War I novel, *Three Soldiers* (1921). His most sweeping indictments of the modern social and economic system, *Manhattan Transfer* (1925) and the U.S.A. trilogy (*The 42nd Parallel*, 1919, and *The Big Money* [1930–36]), employed various narrative innovations such as the "camera eye" and "newsreel," along with a large cast

► Mocking the American Dream

of characters, to attack society from the left. Nathanael West's novels, including *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *A Cool Million* (1934), and *The Day of the Locust* (1939), used black comedy to create a bitter vision of an inhuman and brutal world and its depressing effects on his sensitive but ineffectual protagonists. West evoked the tawdry but rich materials of mass culture and popular fantasy to mock the pathos of the American Dream, a frequent target during the Depression years.

► Hemingway's contributions

Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck all showed a shift from disillusionment in their writings. Hemingway's early short stories and novels were full of existential disillusionment. The Spanish Civil War, however, led him to espouse the possibility of collective action to solve social problems. He regained some of his form in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) and *A Moveable Feast* (1964). Hemingway's writing was influenced by his journalism background and Gertrude Stein's Modernist style. The author's deceptively simple prose style and the tough but vulnerable masculinity created a myth that haunted the WWII generation.

► Faulkner's portrayal of America

Hemingway's great rival as a stylist and mythmaker was William Faulkner, whose writing was as baroque as Hemingway's was spare. Influenced by Sherwood Anderson, Herman Melville, and especially James Joyce, Faulkner combined stream-of-consciousness techniques with a rich social history. Works such as *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *As I Lay Dying* (1930), *Light in August* (1932), *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), and *The Hamlet* (1940) were parts of the unfolding history of Yoknapatawpha County, a mythical Mississippi community, which depicted the transformation and decadence of the South. Faulkner's work was dominated by a sense of guilt going back to the American Civil War and the appropriation of Indian lands. Though often comic, his work pictured the disintegration of the leading families and, in later books such as *Go Down, Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), showed a growing concern with the troubled role of race in Southern life.

Steinbeck's career marked by uneven achievements began with a historical novel *Cup of Gold* (1929) in which he voiced a distrust of society and glorified the anarchistic individualists typical of the rebellious 1920s. He showed his affinity for colourful outcasts,



► Depiction of class struggle

such as the *paisanos* of the Monterey area, in the short novels *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *Cannery Row* (1945). His best books were inspired by the social struggles of migrant farm workers during the Great Depression, including the simply written but ambiguous strike novel *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and his flawed masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). The latter, a protest novel punctuated by prose-poem interludes, tells the story of the migration of the Joads, an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family, to California. During their almost biblical journey, they learn the necessity for collective action among the poor and downtrodden to prevent them from being destroyed individually.

► Poetic writing

An interesting development in fiction, aided by modernism, was a shift from naturalistic to poetic writing. There was an increased tendency to select details and endow them with symbolic meaning, to set down the thought processes and emotions of the characters, and to make use of rhythmic prose. In varied ways, Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Cabell, Dos Passos, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Faulkner all showed evidence of this—in passages, in short stories, and even in entire novels. Faulkner showed the tendency at its worst in *A Fable* (1954), which, ironically, won a Pulitzer Prize.

Summarised Overview

The current unit traces the evolution of American literature from the vantage point of its social and historical background. It delineates important episodes in the development of a uniquely American literature and literary forms. Ranging from the first English settlements on American soil, the colonial era, the revolutionary period, and American romanticism to the advent of modern American literature, the unit examines the prominent writers, works, and philosophies across the years. It also looks at significant symbolic precepts such as the American Dream and the Western Frontier. In critically discussing the development of various genres from 1914 to 1945, the unit provides the necessary background for learners to study American literature.

Assignments

1. Examine the historical background of the first English settlements on American soil.
2. Explore the development of Romanticism in American literature.
3. Write a short note on the doctrine of Puritanism.
4. Explain the concept of the American Dream.
5. Write a brief account of the symbolism of the Western Frontier in American literature.
6. Discuss the development of American literature in the nineteenth century.
7. What is Transcendentalism? How did its principles impact American literature?
8. In what ways did the period of the two World Wars influence the historical evolution of American literature?
9. Provide a critical account of the Civil Rights Movement and the Harlem Renaissance in American literature.
10. Critically examine the socio-historical backgrounds of American Literature from 1914 to the 1950s, referring significant genres and writers.

Suggested Readings

1. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
2. Halleck, Rueben Post. *History of American Literature*. Digicat, 2022.

References

1. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
2. Halleck, Rueben Post. *History of American Literature*. Digicat, 2022.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

SGOU

Unit 2

Poetry

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of the historical evolution of poetry in American Literature
- ▶ contextualise the significant socio-political contexts in which American poetry developed
- ▶ possess an understanding of the significant literary periodisation in American poetry
- ▶ critically contextualise some of the most significant American poets and poetic works

Background

Poetry in the United States of America has a history that extends from the oral traditions of the Native Americans and the poetic works of the colonists. While the poetry of the first European settlers on American soil had religious dimensions, it also contained descriptions of the new territory they found themselves on. Eventually, they turned also to secular poetry with social and cultural trappings. During the colonial and revolutionary eras, poetry carried patriotic sentiments, calling for values such as liberty and independence. It was in the succeeding years, with the turn of the nineteenth century, that American poetry came into its own. There was a desire for discovering a literary and national identity that was truly unique to the newly independent nation.

The current unit explores the evolution of American poetry, from its early strains to its developments in the twentieth century; it studies the socio-political conditions across the years that allowed American poetry to evolve into its diverse, contemporary form.

Keywords

History, Socio-political background, Literary periods, Significant poets, Influential works



Discussion

1.2.1 The Colonial Period

► The Puritans and New England

It is likely that no other colonists in the history of the world were as intellectual as the Puritans. Between 1630 and 1690, there were as many university graduates in the north-eastern section of the United States, known as New England, as in the mother country — an astounding fact when one considers that most educated people of the time were aristocrats who were unwilling to risk their lives in wilderness conditions. The self-made and often self-educated Puritans were notable exceptions. They wanted education to understand and execute God's will as they established their colonies throughout New England.

► Puritan belief

The Puritans defined good writing as that which brought home a full awareness of the importance of worshipping God and of the spiritual dangers that the soul faced on Earth. Their style varied from complex metaphysical poetry to homely journals and crushingly pedantic religious history, but certain themes remained constant: life was seen as a test, failure led to eternal damnation and hellfire, and success led to heavenly bliss. Many Puritans excitedly awaited the “millennium,” when Jesus would return to Earth and inaugurate 1,000 years of peace and prosperity. Scholars have long pointed out the link between Puritanism and capitalism, both of which rest on ambition, hard work, and an intense striving for success. Wealth and status were sought not only for themselves but also as welcome reassurances of spiritual health and promises of eternal life.

The Puritans interpreted all things and events as symbols with deeper spiritual meanings and felt that in advancing their own profit and their community's well-being, they were also furthering God's plans. They cited the Bible by chapter and verse to reveal their spiritual meaning, and history was a symbolic religious panorama leading to the Puritan triumph over the New World and to God's kingdom on Earth. The first Puritan colonists who settled in New England exemplified the seriousness of Reformation in Christianity. Known as the “Pilgrims,” they were a small group of believers who had migrated from England to Holland — even then known for its religious



► The Pilgrims

tolerance — in 1608, during a time of persecution. They read and acted on the text of the Second Book of Corinthians, and formed underground “covenanted” churches that swore loyalty to the group instead of the king. Seen as traitors to the king and heretics damned to hell, they were often persecuted, but their separation ultimately took them to the New World.

1.2.1.1 Edward Taylor (c. 1644-1729)

► The life of Edward Taylor

Edward Taylor was an intense, brilliant poet and minister of the congregational church at Westfield. He was born in England in 1668. He studied at Harvard College and was the best-educated man in the area. He accepted a lifelong job as a minister in Westfield, Massachusetts, 160 kilometres into the thickly forested, wild interior. He never published his poetry, which was discovered only in the 1930s. He wrote a variety of verse, including funeral elegies, lyrics, a mediaeval “debate,” and a 500-page Metrical History of Christianity. His best works are a series of short preparatory meditations.

1.2.2 Postcolonial Poetry

► Major Postcolonial poets

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878) was the first notable poet of the independent United States, whose major contribution was to create rhapsodic poetry on the majesty of grasslands and woodlands. Other notable poets from the early and middle nineteenth centuries include Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), and Sidney Lanier (1842-1881). The works of these writers are often linked by a striving for a distinct American voice to set them apart from their British colleagues. To that purpose, they used the environment and customs of their ancestral nation as inspiration for their poems.

► American poetry model

Longfellow’s *The Song of Hiawatha* may be the most notable example of this pattern. This poem is based on Native American stories gathered by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, Michigan’s commissioner of Indian affairs from 1836 to 1841. Longfellow also emulated the Finnish epic poem Kalevala’s metre, probably to avoid British models. While the final poem was a great triumph, it did not serve as a model for future American poets.



► Impact of transcendentalism

Another thing that differentiated these poets from their British predecessors was the impact of the poet/philosophers Emerson and Thoreau's transcendentalism. Transcendentalism was an Americanised version of the English Romanticism that began with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Emerson, the originator of transcendentalism as much as anyone else, had visited England as a young man to meet these two English writers, as well as Thomas Carlyle. While in post-reform England, Romanticism mellowed into Victorianism, it grew increasingly fervent in America from the 1830s through the Civil War.

► Influence of Edgar Allan Poe

During this time, Edgar Allan Poe was perhaps the most well-known American poet outside of the United States. His writings impacted a wide range of authors in France, Sweden, and Russia, and his poem "The Raven" spread over Europe and was translated into other languages. Poe was the sole firm foundation on which American poetry was grounded in the twentieth century, according to American poet William Carlos Williams.

1.2.2.1 William Bryant

► William Bryant

William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), poet and editor, was one of the most prominent names among the 19th-century American poets, best known for his masterpiece "Thanatopsis." A descendant of early Puritan settlers. Bryant's thinking and personality were primarily shaped by his familial circumstances in Cummington, Massachusetts, a little community in the Berkshire Hills.

► Bryant's works

Bryant's religious conservatism was expressed in devout doggerel, while his father's political conservatism inspired "The Embargo" (1808), in which the 13-year-old poet sought President Jefferson's resignation. However, in "Thanatopsis" (from the Greek "a view of death"), which he wrote when he was 17 and which made him famous when it was published in *The North American Review* in 1817, he abandoned Puritan theology in favour of Deism; he became a Unitarian after that. Turning away from Federalism, he joined the Democratic Party and transformed the *Post* into an advocate for free trade, workers' rights, free speech, and abolition. Bryant was a Free-Soiler for a period before becoming a Republican Party founder. Bryant cemented his literary reputation at the age of 27 with *Poems* (1821). In his final years, he spent a lot of time translating.

1.2.2.2 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, professor of modern languages at Harvard, was the best-known American poet of his day. He was responsible for the misty, ahistorical, legendary sense of the past that merged American and European traditions. He wrote three long narrative poems popularising native legends in European meters — “Evangeline” (1847), “The Song of Hiawatha” (1855), and “The Courtship of Miles Standish” (1858). Longfellow also wrote textbooks on modern languages and a travel book entitled *Outre-Mer*, retelling foreign legends and patterned after Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book*. Although conventionality, sentimentality, and facile handling mark the Long poems, haunting short lyrics like “The Jewish Cemetery at Newport” (1854), “My Lost Youth” (1855), and “The Tide Rises, The Tide Falls” (1880) continue to give pleasure.

- Merged American and European Traditions through his works

1.2.3 Poetry of the Nineteenth Century

The history of nineteenth-century American poetry was filled with continual experiments in the technique of versification. American poetry was in upheaval and revolution. The American poets worked hard and together to give it a sense of direction. They attempted to explore the potential of American poetry and give it a new facelift. By the end of the nineteenth century, American poetry had solidified its place.

- It was an age of experiments in poetry

The Romantic fervour predominated in nineteenth-century American poetry. There was a tremendous pushback against the eighteenth-century spirit. American poets rose up against Europe’s collapsing rulers and structures. They questioned their elders’ customs and searched their own emotions with a restlessness born of feverish inquiry. They refused to be governed by eighteenth-century literary and intellectual conceptions that had outlived their usefulness.

- Reaction to the 18th century poetry

The nineteenth century American poets revolutionised the sensibility of the people by revolting against the authority of the eighteenth-century neo-classicism. They challenged the philosophy of neo-classicism which was based on the infallibility of reason. The poetry of the Romantics was known for its spontaneous emotional flow, reflecting the entire gamut of human emotion. Intense emotion supported and fed the new poetry. They led the



► Poetry of emotions

reader to the strange areas of human experience. Often, they succeeded in transmuting emotion into forms of enduring beauty. W.C. Bryant primarily conceived of poetry as feeling, not intellect. Poe's verse showed his perennial tendency to go for the beauty in "Alone." H.W. Longfellow preferred to be called 'the dreamer of dreams' and R.H. Stoddard was interested in remote lands and unfamiliar things.

► Stress on imagination

Imagination, freed from the constraints of the eighteenth-century religion of reason, drove nineteenth-century American poetry. Imagination was considered as a creative and elastic power by Romantics, and the new blooming of creative energy was the result of the downfall of eighteenth-century neo-classicism. The American poets were aware of the chasm between the fleeting world of appearance and the eternal, limitless realm of ideal truth, and they valued the power of imagination highly.

► Individualism

Classical literature served as a focal point of reference for everyday human experience. Neo-classicists had a strong confidence in society, thinking that the individual's existence was derived from and conditioned by social norms. The nineteenth-century American romantic poets stopped speaking on behalf of a complete community and began speaking solely for themselves. They were staunch believers in the worth and quality of the individual man, as well as the dignity of the human soul in its direct relationship with God. They sought respect for the individual spirit and saw man with compassion.

► Self-reliance

American poets of the nineteenth century believed strongly in the worship of the individual. Thoreau, Emerson, Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Sidney Lanier, and Edgar Allan Poe all believed in the individual cult. Thoreau believed in self-sufficiency and refused to let society interfere with his own development. Emerson attributed high value to the cult of individualism, but Whitman stated that everything emerges out of individuals as they find them. Emily Dickinson frequently used the word "I," and her accomplishments were personal. Sidney Lanier's early poems were centrifugal, but Poe developed his own poetic rules and used them to measure poetry.

A strong feeling of the past pervaded nineteenth-century American poetry. The poets were enamoured with the distant and remote, the novel, the exotic,



► Sense of the past

and the unknown. They looked to the Middle Ages for beauty, romance, and passion, as well as magical myths, mythology, and vivid historical periods. The Indian was seen by American poets as a survival of an old people living in a primal state, and the prehistoric characteristics of the Ohio valley had an allure akin to that of the distant in antiquity. The ideal romantic poet fashioned the past rather than reconstructing it. Longfellow was engrossed with the past, both European and American, and picked subjects from the latter in *Evangeline* and *Hiawtha*. Whittier was a charming balladist of New England life and bygone eras, while Sidney Lanier's *The Revenge of Hamish* was rich in mediaeval balladry.

► Nature as theme

During the nineteenth century, American poets were drawn to the study of Nature. They began to leave the city's manicured environment and venture out into the open countryside to study Nature for themselves. Nature piqued people's attention not just as a source of beautiful scenery, but also as a source of information and spiritual inspiration. Nature communion tends to foster core values such as religious respect, courage, self-reliance, and honesty. Nature was seen as a moral teacher by Romantic poets.

► Nationalism

Another significant element of nineteenth-century American poetry was the rise of nationalism. The Romantic Movement steadily heightened public awareness. The American poets praised national pride, instilling sentiments of national greatness and instilling a love for the country. They were influenced by American history, culture, and the regional climate of the United States. A request was made for a fresh and indigenous corpus of literature. The rise of nationalism boosted domestic production and gave rise to idealistic impulses; W.C. Bryant was the first national poet to embody the national spirit in his poetry. He was an early supporter of labour rights and abolition.

► Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism, which originated about 1830 in the writings of Emerson and Thoreau, impacted nineteenth-century American poetry. It advocated confidence in man's intuitive ability to comprehend truth by gaining information beyond the realm of the senses. Nature was seen as a representation of the spirit, and consciousness was regarded as God's ultimate gift. Thoreau was a proponent of the richness and worth of experience, and



he strove to obtain it at a higher level of human awareness. To Thoreau, the inner life was a goal in itself.

American poetry in the nineteenth century shifted towards realism, dealing with everyday life and individual rights. The Local Movement was a sincere endeavour to understand American society. Whittier, Allston, Bret Hart, and Henry Timrod were all poets from low backgrounds who wrote about life in a cabin, mining camp, or gambling hall. The Local Movement was a sincere endeavour to understand American society.

► Realism

1.2.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was a renowned exponent of New England Transcendentalism and an orator, poet, and essayist. Emerson is known for questioning conventional wisdom. In the local literary community, Emerson was known as “The Sage of Concord,” and he became the leading voice for Transcendentalism, the American philosophical and literary movement. Emerson was also the first major American literary and intellectual personality to really investigate, write about, and endeavour to enlarge the home audience for ancient Asian and Middle Eastern writings. He not only introduced innumerable readers to non-Western ways of thought, philosophical conceptions, and holy mythology he also influenced how following generations of American authors and philosophers regarded Asia’s and the Middle East’s immense cultural resources.

► Emerson

Emerson’s poetry was characterised by spiritualism, theology and man’s original relationship with God. He wrote his first book *Poems* in 1847 and his next collection *May-Day and Other Pieces* in 1867. According to Emerson a poet is an Aeolian harp that trembles to the cosmic breath, a Merlin, the traditional bard, the wise man, the magician, and whose blows are strokes of fate. He believes that the poet records the celestial music and philosophizes like Melville’s philosopher in *Mardi*.

► Characteristics of his poetry

Emerson thinks that poetry should have a clear subject focus; ideally, a poem should demonstrate nature’s oneness. Emerson defines beauty as the characteristic of resemblance in all of nature’s items; hence, for a poem to be genuinely beautiful, it must illustrate the unity that exists in nature’s different objects. Emerson

► Poetry and poet

considers the poem, the poet, and the creative process to be inextricably linked. The poet must have a specific personality, almost like a philosophical mystic who intuitively knows the truth. He must be able to put this fact on writing while being economical.

1.2.3.2 Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), the novelist and poet, was born in Massachusetts in 1817 to a typical New England family. He is without a doubt one of the most renowned nineteenth-century Americans, a fervent philosopher, abolitionist, and historian. In Emerson's company, Thoreau's aspiration to become a poet looked not only suitable but also attainable. When the 1840s began, Thoreau formally began his career as a poet. *The Dial* magazine was founded by the transcendentalists, led by Emerson. Its first issue, published in July 1840, had Thoreau's poetry "Sympathy" and an article on the Roman poet Aulus Persius Flaccus. Despite the fact that it is disguised as a book In July 1842, *The Dial* published more of Thoreau's poetry, followed by the first of his outdoor articles, "Natural History of Massachusetts." Though disguised as a book review, it revealed that a distinguished nature writer was on the way. Then came additional songs, and they were good ones, such as "To the Maiden in the East" and another nature essay, "A Winter Walk." *The Dial* discontinued publishing with the April 1844 edition, having covered a wider range of Thoreau's writing than any other journal had done before.

► Henry David Thoreau as a poet

1.2.3.3 Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) reputation as a prominent figure in global literature is founded entirely on his brilliant and deep short tales, poems, and critical ideas, which provided a very influential rationale for the short form in both poetry and fiction. *Tamerlane and Other Poems* was his first book of poems, published in 1827. He released his second collection, *Al Aaraaf, Tamerlane, and Minor Poems*, in 1829. "The Raven," his poem, has been frequently adapted for cinema and television, and it is still a popular work for theatrical recitation. Several of Poe's later poems, like "Annabel Lee," "Lenore," and "The Bells," have been extensively read and remembered for their lyrical tone and superb presentation of a coherent topic and their emotional effect.

► Poe as a poet



► Poe's themes

Poe's poetic output has a number of recurring themes, notably those concerning the dual issues of love and death. Several of his poems, such as "Ulalume" and "Annabel Lee," feature a lonely protagonist who has lost a beloved woman and deals with his grief and love experience in various ways. Others, such as "To Helen" or "The Conqueror Worm," deal with love or death individually, and not all of Poe's poems achieve the same conclusions. In all cases, however, Poe seeks to integrate the many aspects of a poem into a dynamic whole, utilising literary strategies ranging from rhyme to repetition and alliteration to communicate a coherent thought. Poe prioritised the aesthetic depiction of a unified notion in his writing and creation.

► Originality

1.2.3.4 Walt Whitman (1819-1892)

Walt Whitman, whose brilliant, innovative works expressed the country's democratic spirit. He left school at the age of 11 to go to work, missing the sort of traditional education that made most American authors respectful imitators of the English. He worked as a part-time carpenter and was a man of the people. He was self-taught and wrote *Leaves of Grass* (1855), which contained "Song of Myself," the most original poem ever written by an American. Emerson and others praised the book, but it was not a popular success.

► American epic

A visionary book celebrating all creation, *Leaves of Grass* was inspired largely by Emerson's writings, especially his essay "The Poet," which predicted a robust, open-hearted, universal kind of poet uncannily like Whitman himself. The poem's innovative, unrhymed, freeverse form, open celebration of sexuality, vibrant democratic sensibility, and extreme Romantic assertion that the poet's self was one with the poem, the universe, and the reader permanently altered the course of American poetry. *Leaves of Grass* is as vast, energetic, and natural as the American continent; it was the epic that generations of American critics had been calling for, although they did not recognise it.

More than any other writer, Whitman invented the myth of democratic America. "The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States is essentially the greatest poem." When Whitman wrote this, he daringly turned upside

► Free imagination

down the general opinion that America was too brash and new to be poetic. He invented a timeless America of the free imagination, peopled with pioneering spirits of all nations. D.H. Lawrence, the British novelist and poet, accurately called him the poet of the “open road.”

► Innovative poetry

Whitman’s greatness is evident in his poems, such as “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry,” “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking,” and “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d.” His essay “Democratic Vistas” (1871) criticises America for its “mighty, many-threaded wealth and industry” and calls for a new kind of literature to revive the American population. His voice electrifies modern readers with his proclamation of the unity and vital force of all creation. He was enormously innovative.

1.2.3.5 Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

► Radical life

Emily Dickinson is a link between her era and the literary sensibilities of the turn of the century. She was born and spent her life in Amherst, Massachusetts, a Calvinist village. She was a radical individualist who found inspiration in nature and spent her later life as a recluse due to her sensitive psyche. She loved nature and found deep inspiration in the birds, animals, plants, and changing seasons of the New England countryside.

► Modern and innovative

Dickinson was a shy, withdrawn village woman who created some of the greatest American poetry of the 19th century. Her terse, often imagistic style is even more modern and innovative than Whitman’s. Her best poems have no fat, many mock current sentimentalities, and some are even heretical. She explores the dark and hidden parts of the mind, dramatising death and the grave, yet she also celebrated simple objects such as a flower, a bee etc. Her poetry exhibits great intelligence and often evokes the agonising paradox of the limits of human consciousness trapped in time.

She had an excellent sense of humour, and her range of subjects and treatments was amazingly wide. Her poems are generally known by the numbers assigned to them in Thomas H. Johnson’s standard edition of 1955. They bristle with odd capitalizations and dashes. A nonconformist, like Thoreau, she often reversed the meanings of words and phrases and used paradox to great effect. Dickinson’s 1,775 poems continue to intrigue



► Nonconformism

critics, who often disagree about them. Some stress her mystical side, some her sensitivity to nature; many note her odd, exotic appeal. One modern critic, R.P. Blackmur, comments that Dickinson's poetry sometimes feels as if "a cat came at us speaking English." Her clean, clear, chiselled poems are some of the most fascinating and challenging in American literature.

1.2.3.6 Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)

Poet, historian, biographer, novelist, musician, and essayist — Sandburg, son of a railroad blacksmith, was all of these and more. A journalist by profession, he wrote a massive biography of Abraham Lincoln that is one of the classic works of the 20th century. To many, Sandburg was a latter-day Walt Whitman, writing expansive, evocative urban and patriotic poems and simple, childlike rhymes and ballads. He travelled about reciting and recording his poetry in a lilting, mellifluously toned voice that was a kind of singing. At heart, he was totally unassuming, notwithstanding his national fame. What he wanted from life, he once said, was "to be out of jail...to eat regular.. to get what I write printed,...a little love at home and a little nice affection hither and yon over the American landscape,...(and) to sing every day."

► Diverse themes

1.2.4 Twentieth Century Poetry

The turbulent period that followed the war left its mark on all forms of writing. The literary genres of the time were extremely diverse, and the prominent authors favoured daring technical innovations. T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, Amy Lowell, Langston Hughes, and others experimented with new forms. Robert Frost enjoyed both critical and popular praise, while Amy Lowell experimented with free verse and Langston Hughes sought comfort in old moulds. *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot was a grim diagnosis of a disillusioned generation and the modern world.

► Turbulent period reflected in poetry

1.2.4.1 Robert Frost

Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963) was born in California but raised on a farm in the north-eastern United States until the age of 10. Like Eliot and Pound, he went to England attracted by the new movements in poetry there. A charismatic public reader, he was renowned for his tours. He read an original work at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 that helped spark

► Universal subjects

a national interest in poetry. His popularity is easy to explain: he wrote of traditional farm life, appealing to a nostalgia for the old ways. His subjects are universal — apple picking, stone walls, fences, country roads.

► Appeal to wide readership

Frost's approach was lucid and accessible. He rarely employed pedantic allusions or ellipses. His frequent use of rhyme also appealed to the general audience. Though Frost's work is principally associated with the life and landscape of New England—and, though he was a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics who remained steadfastly aloof from the poetic movements and fashions of his time — Frost is anything but merely a regional poet. The author of searching, and often dark, meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken, in the psychological complexity of his portraits, and in the degree to which his work is infused with layers of ambiguity and irony.

1.2.4.2 Ezra Pound

► Imagism

Ezra Pound was one of the most influential American poets of the 20th century. From 1908 to 1920, he resided in London, where he associated with many writers, including William Butler Yeats, for whom he worked as a secretary, and T.S. Eliot, whose *The Waste Land* he drastically edited and improved. He was a link between the United States and Britain, acting as a contributing editor to Harriet Monroe's important Chicago magazine *Poetry* and spearheading the new school of poetry known as Imagism, which advocated a clear, highly visual presentation. After Imagism, he championed various poetic approaches. He eventually moved to Italy, where he became caught up in Italian fascism.

► New literary possibilities

Pound furthered imagism in letters, essays, and an anthology. In a letter to Monroe in 1915, he argued for a modern-sounding, visual poetry that avoided “clichés and set phrases.” In “A Few Don'ts of an Imagiste” (1913), he defined “image” as something that “presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.” Pound's 1914 anthology of 10 poets, *Des Imagistes*, offered examples of Imagist poetry by outstanding poets, including William Carlos Williams, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Amy Lowell. Pound's interests and reading were universal. His adaptations and brilliant, if sometimes



flawed, translations introduced new literary possibilities from many cultures to modern writers.

► Obscure poetry

His life's work was *The Cantos*, which he wrote and published until his death. They contain brilliant passages, but their allusions to works of literature and art from many eras and cultures make them difficult. Pound's poetry is best known for its clear, visual images, fresh rhythms, and muscular, intelligent, unusual lines, such as, in *Canto LXXXI*, "The ant's a centaur in his dragon world," or in poems inspired by Japanese haiku, such as "In a Station of the Metro" (1916).

1.2.4.3 T. S. Eliot

Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was born in St. Louis, Missouri, to a well-to-do family with roots in the north-eastern United States. He received the best education; better than that of any major American writer of his generation at Harvard College, the Sorbonne, and Merton College of Oxford University. He studied Sanskrit and Oriental philosophy, which influenced his poetry. Like his friend Pound, he went to England early and became a towering figure in the literary world there. One of the most respected poets of his day, his modernist, seemingly illogical, or abstract iconoclastic poetry had a revolutionary impact. He also wrote influential essays and plays and championed the importance of literary and social traditions for the modern poet. As a critic, Eliot is best remembered for his formulation of the "objective correlative," which he described in *The Sacred Wood* as a means of expressing emotion through "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events" that would be the "formula" of that particular emotion that the poet feels and hopes to evoke in the reader.

► Poet and critic

In October 1922, Eliot published *The Waste Land* in *The Criterion*. Composed during a period of personal difficulty for Eliot — his marriage was failing, and both he and Vivienne suffered from disordered nerves — *The Waste Land* is often read as a representation of the disillusionment of the post-war generation. Even before *The Waste Land* was published as a book (December 1922), Eliot distanced himself from the poem's vision of despair: "As for *The Waste Land*, that is a thing of the past so far as I am concerned and I am now feeling toward a new form and style" he wrote to Richard



► Modernism

Aldington on November 15, 1922. Despite the alleged obscurity of the poem — its slippage between satire and prophecy, its abrupt changes of speaker, location, and time its elegiac but intimidating summoning up of a vast and dissonant range of cultures and literatures—it has become a touchstone of modern literature, a poetic counterpart to a novel published in the same year, James Joyce's *Ulysses*. Among its famous phrases are "April is the cruellest month"; "I will show you fear in a handful of dust"; and "Shantih shantih shantih," the utterance in Sanskrit which closes the poem.

1.2.4.4 Gertrude Stein

Gertrude Stein (1903-1946), an avant-garde supporter, helped develop an artistic movement that sought a new mode of expression and a conscious rupture with the past. Although Stein created novels, plays, and poems, one of her most notable achievements was the wise guidance she gave to other artists and her ability to link them. Stein studied psychology at Radcliffe College, an experience that influenced the poetry she wrote subsequently. Stein was a prolific writer who wrote poetry, novels, plays, and nonfiction. Despite her obvious brilliance and tremendous effect on other writers, critical response of her work has been uneven, with some critics dismissing it as incomprehensible. Given Stein's interest in rewriting poetry and developing whole new forms, it's impossible to categorise many of her pieces into any clear poetic genre. While many of her poems appear in a number of journals, *Tender Buttons*, a collection of short prose poems released in 1912, is one of her most noteworthy direct contributions to modernist poetry. The poems appear to be more contemplative free verse than traditional formal poetry, with a lot of repetition. Another distinguishing aspect of Stein's poetry is the layering of images and sounds, which creates a collage-like effect.

► Gertrude Stein as a poet

1.2.4.5 Wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens (1879–1955), born in Pennsylvania, was educated at Harvard College and New York University Law School. He practised law in New York City from 1904 to 1916, a time of great artistic and poetic activity there. On moving to Hartford, Connecticut to become an insurance executive in 1916, he continued writing poetry. His life is remarkable for its compartmentalisation: His



- Life and poetic career

associates in the insurance company did not know that he was a major poet. In private, he continued to develop extremely complex ideas of aesthetic order throughout his life in aptly named books such as *Harmonium* (enlarged edition, 1931), *Ideas of Order* (1935), and *Parts of a World* (1942).

- Rich vocabulary and imagery

Some of his best-known poems are “Sunday Morning,” “Peter Quince at the Clavier,” “The Emperor of Ice Cream,” “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” and “The Idea of Order at Key West.” Stevens’s poetry dwells upon themes of the imagination, the necessity for aesthetic form, and the belief that the order of art corresponds with an order in nature. His vocabulary is rich and varied. He paints lush tropical scenes but also manages dry, humorous, and ironic vignettes. Some of his poems draw upon popular culture, while others poke fun at the sophisticated society or soar into intellectual heaven. He is known for his exuberant word play: “Soon, with a noise like tambourines / Came her attendant Byzantines.”

1.2.4.6 William Carlos Williams

- Use of colloquial speech

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963) was a practising paediatrician throughout his life; he delivered over 2,000 babies and wrote poems on his prescription pads. Williams was a classmate of poets Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle, and his early poetry reveals the influence of Imagism. He later went on to champion the use of colloquial speech; his ear for the natural rhythms of American English helped free American poetry from the iambic metre that had dominated English verse since the Renaissance. His sympathy for ordinary working people, children, and everyday events in modern urban settings makes his poetry attractive and accessible.

- Inspired by photography

Williams cultivated a relaxed, natural poetry. In his hands, the poem was not to become a perfect object of art as in Stevens or a carefully recreated Wordsworthian incident as in Frost. Instead, the poem was to capture an instant of time like an unposed snapshot — a concept he derived from photographers and artists he met at galleries like Stieglitz’s in New York City. Like photographs, his poems often hint at hidden possibilities or attractions.

He termed his work “objectivist” to suggest the importance of concrete, visual objects. His work often

► Objectivist poetry

captured the spontaneous, emotive pattern of experience and influenced the “Beat” writing of the early 1950s. Like Eliot and Pound, Williams tried his hand at the epic form, but while their epics employ literary allusions directed at a small number of highly educated readers, Williams instead wrote for a more general audience. Though he studied abroad, he elected to live in the United States.

► Examination of possibilities

His epic, *Paterson* (five volumes, 1946–1958), celebrates his hometown of Paterson, New Jersey, as seen by an autobiographical “Dr. Paterson.” In it, Williams juxtaposed lyric passages, prose, letters, autobiography, newspaper accounts, and historical facts. The layout’s ample white space suggests the open road theme of American literature and gives a sense of new vistas, even open to the poor people who picnic in the public park on Sundays.

1.2.4.7 E. E. Cummings

► Visual poetry

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962), commonly known as e.e. cummings, wrote attractive, innovative verse distinguished for its humour, grace, celebration of love and eroticism, and experimentation with punctuation and visual format on the page. A painter, he was the first American poet to recognise that poetry had become primarily a visual, not an oral, art. His poems used much unusual spacing and indentation, as well as dropping all use of capital letters.

► Popularity

In 1917, Cummings published an early selection of poems in the anthology *Eight Harvard Poets*. In 1920, *The Dial* published seven poems by Cummings, including “Buffalo Bill’s.” Serving as Cummings’ debut to a wider American audience, these “experiments” foreshadowed the synthetic cubist strategy Cummings would explore in the next few years. In his work, Cummings experimented radically with form, punctuation, spelling, and syntax, abandoning traditional techniques and structures to create a new, highly idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. Later in his career, he was often criticised for settling into his signature style and not pressing his work towards further evolution. Nevertheless, he attained great popularity, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful style, and his attention to subjects such as war and sex.



- Critically acclaimed poet

Poet and critic Randall Jarrell once noted that Cummings is “one of the most individual poets who ever lived—and, though it sometimes seems so, it is not just his vices and exaggerations, the defects of his qualities, that make a writer popular. But, primarily, Mr. Cummings’s poems are loved because they are full of sentimentally, of sex, of more or less improper jokes, of elementary lyric insistence.” During his lifetime, Cummings received a number of honours, including an Academy of American Poets Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1958, and a Ford Foundation grant.

1.2.4.8 Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

- African American poet

One of many talented poets of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s — in the company of James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, and others — was Langston Hughes. He embraced African American jazz rhythms and was one of the first Black writers to attempt to make a profitable career out of writing. Hughes incorporated blues, spirituals, colloquial speech, and folkways in his poetry.

- Significant Contributions

An influential cultural organizer, Hughes published numerous Black anthologies and began Black theatre groups in Los Angeles and Chicago, as well as New York City. He also wrote effective journalism, creating the character Jesse B. Semple (“simple”) to express social commentary. One of his most beloved poems, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” (1921, 1925), embraces his African — and universal — heritage in a grand epic catalogue. His first collection of poems, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926. Other collections that appeared over the next forty years include *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927), *Harlem* (1942), *Montage of a Dream Deferred* (1951), and *Ask Your Mama* (1961). And all of it is marked by a powerful commitment to the notion of a separate and distinctive Black identity, a sense of the shared presence of African Americans, that Hughes announced in his seminal essay, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926).

His poetry shows him to be more interested in the ordinary men and women of the fields and streets, and in particular of Harlem, than in the Black bourgeoisie — who, on the few occasions when they do appear in his

- Focus on ordinary life

work, are “buked and scorned.” Like Whitman, Hughes’s aim is clearly identification, imaginative empathy with these people.

1.2.4.9 Robert Lowell (1917-1977)

- Anti-war social commentator

Robert Lowell was an influential poet of the period who began traditionally but was influenced by experimental currents. He was a descendant of the Boston Brahmin family. He left Harvard to attend Kenyon College in Ohio, where he converted to Catholicism and was jailed for a year as a conscientious objector in WWII. He later publicly protested against the Vietnam conflict as well. His early books, *Land of Unlikeness* (1944) and *Lord Weary’s Castle* (1946), won a Pulitzer Prize. They revealed great control of traditional forms and styles, strong feelings, and an intensely personal yet historical vision.

- Experimental poetry

Lowell’s early work, *Children of Light* (1946), is a harsh condemnation of the Puritans who killed Indians and burned surplus grain. His next book, *The Mills of the Kavanaughs* (1951), contains moving dramatic monologues in which members of his family reveal their tenderness and failings. His style mixes the human with the majestic, but experimental poetry gave him his breakthrough into a creative individual idiom.

- Autobiographical mode

Lowell later dropped many of his obscure allusions; his rhymes became integral to the experience within the poem instead of being superimposed on it. The stanzaic structure, too, collapsed; new improvisational forms arose. In *Life Studies* (1959), he initiated confessional poetry, a new mode in which he bared his most tormenting personal problems with great honesty and intensity. In essence, he not only discovered his individuality but celebrated it in its most difficult and private manifestations. He transformed himself into a contemporary, at home with the self, the fragmentary, and the form as process. Lowell’s transformation, a watershed for poetry after the war, opened the way for many younger writers. In *For the Union Dead* (1964), *Notebook 1967–68* (1969), and later books, he continued his autobiographical explorations and technical innovations, drawing upon his experience of psychoanalysis. Lowell’s confessional poetry has been particularly influential. Works by John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath (the last two of his students), to mention only a few, are impossible to imagine without Lowell.



1.2.5 Confessional Movement

Confessional poetry is the poetry of the personal or “I.” This style of writing emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W.D. Snodgrass. Lowell’s book *Life Studies* was a highly personal account of his life and familial ties, and had a significant impact on American poetry. Plath and Sexton were both students of Lowell and noted that his work influenced their own writing. The content of confessional poems is autobiographical and marked by their exploration of subject matter that was considered taboo at the time. This subject matter included topics like mental illness, sexuality, and suicide.

► First person poetry

The school of poetry that became known as “Confessional Poetry” was associated with several poets who redefined American poetry in the generation following World War II, including Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, John Berryman, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, and W. D. Snodgrass. Some key texts of the American “confessional” school of poetry include Lowell’s *Life Studies*, Plath’s *Ariel*, Berryman’s *The Dream Songs*, Snodgrass’ *Heart’s Needle*, and Sexton’s *To Bedlam and Part Way Back*. One of the most prominent, consciously “confessional” poets to emerge in the 1980s was Sharon Olds, whose focus on taboo sexual subject matter built off of the work of Ginsberg.

► Confessional poets

The confessional poetry of the mid-twentieth century dealt with subject matter that had previously not been openly discussed in American poetry. Private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, depression, and relationships were addressed in this type of poetry, often in an autobiographical manner. Sexton, in particular, was interested in the psychological aspect of poetry, having started writing at the suggestion of her therapist. The confessional poets were not merely recording their emotions on paper; craft and construction were extremely important to their work. While their treatment of the poetic self might have been ground breaking and shocking to some readers, these poets maintained a high level of craftsmanship through their careful attention to and use of prosody.

► Psychological and private aspects

1.2.5.1 Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath (1932–1963) lived an outwardly exemplary life, attending Smith College on scholarship, graduating

► Women's experiences

first in her class, and winning a Fulbright grant to Cambridge University in England. There she met her charismatic husband-to-be, the poet Ted Hughes, with whom she had two children and settled in a country house in England. Under the fairy-tale success festered unresolved psychological problems evoked in her highly readable novel *The Bell Jar* (1963). Some of these problems were personal, while others arose from her sense of repressive attitudes towards women in the 1950s. Among these were the beliefs — shared by many women themselves — that women should not show anger or ambitiously pursue a career and instead find fulfilment in tending to their husbands and children. Professionally successful women like Plath felt that they lived in contradiction.

► Development of poetry

Plath's storybook life crumbled when she and Hughes separated, and she cared for the young children in a London apartment during a winter of extreme cold. Ill, isolated, and in despair, Plath worked against the clock to produce a series of stunning poems before she committed suicide by gassing herself in her kitchen. These poems were collected in the volume *Ariel* (1965), two years after her death. Robert Lowell, who wrote the introduction, noted her poetry's rapid development from the time she and Anne Sexton attended his poetry classes in 1958.

► Imagery

Plath's early poetry is well crafted and traditional, but her late poems exhibit a desperate bravura and proto-feminist cry of anguish. In "The Applicant" (1966), Plath exposes the emptiness of the current role of the wife, who is reduced to an inanimate "it". Plath dares to use nursery rhyme language with brutal directness. She has a knack for using bold images from popular culture. Of a baby, she writes, "Love set you going like a fat gold watch." In "Daddy," she imagines her father as the Dracula of cinema: "There's a stake in your fat black heart / And the villagers never liked you."

1.2.5.2 Anne Sexton (1928-1974)

Like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton was a passionate woman who attempted to be a wife, mother, and poet on the eve of the women's movement in the United States. Like Plath, she suffered from mental illness and ultimately committed suicide. Sexton's confessional poetry is more



- Women in patriarchal settings

autobiographical than Plath's and lacks the craftiness Plath's earlier poems exhibit. Sexton's poems appeal powerfully to the emotions, however. They thrust taboo subjects into close focus. Often, they daringly introduce female topics such as childbearing, the female body, or marriage seen from a woman's point of view. The titles of her works indicate their concern with madness and death. They include *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* (1960), *Live or Die* (1966), and the posthumous *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975).

1.2.6 Beat Poetry

- New brand of poetry

Beat poetry was written by a group of American writers who wrote their works after the end of World War II. These writers were inspired by the circumstances created by the World War and went on writing about them in their works. The chief features of the poetry of the Beat Generation were "the rejection of received standards, innovations in style, experimentation with drugs, alternative sexualities, an interest in Eastern religion, a rejection of materialism, and explicit portrayals of the human condition."

- Appropriated usage of 'beat'

The phrase Beat Generation was coined by Jack Kerouac 'to characterise a perceived underground, anti-conformist youth movement in New York.' The adjective 'beat' means 'tired' or 'beaten down' within the African American community of the period and had developed out of the image "beat to his socks", but Kerouac appropriated the image and altered the meaning to include the connotations "upbeat," "beatific," and the musical association of being "on the beat".

- Opposition to mainstream culture

The origins of the Beat Generation are found on the campus of Columbia University. The followers of this movement are Allen Ginsberg, Gary Snyder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, and Gregory Corso, who opposed the ideology of mainstream politics and culture. The group of these poets later came to be known as the Beat generation, who were interested in changing consciousness and defying conventional writing. The works of these poets present them as bringing forth innovative ideas about current socio-political affairs. This ideology has a close resemblance to 'poets of the San Francisco Renaissance movement, such as Kenneth Rexroth and Robert Duncan.'

► Women's participation

The female contemporaries of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs were intimately involved in the creation of Beat philosophy and literature, and yet remained markedly absent from the mainstream interpretation of the most important aspects and figures of the movement. Further, the Beat writings of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs often portrayed female characters in flat, traditional gender roles most typical of an ideal 1950s American housewife. Rather than offering liberation from social norms, Beat culture actually often marginalised and further culturally repressed American women and, more specifically, many of the female writers of the time period. Although women are less acknowledged in the histories of the first Beat Generation, the omission may be due more to the period's sexism than to reality. Joan Vollmer, for instance, did not write, although she appears as a minor figure in multiple authors' works. She has become legendary as the wife of William S. Burroughs, documented in Kerouac's novels, and killed by Burroughs in a drunken game of William Tell. Corso and Diane Di Prima, among others, insist that there were female Beats, but that it was more difficult for women to get away with a Bohemian existence in that era.

► Queer representation and censorship

Some Beat writers were openly gay or bisexual, including two of the most prominent (Ginsberg and Burroughs). Some met each other through gay connections, including David Kammerer's interest in Lucien Carr. One of the contentious features of Ginsberg's poem *Howl* for authorities were lines about homosexual sex. William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* contains content dealing with same-sex relations and paedophilia. Both works were unsuccessfully prosecuted for obscenity. The publishers' victory helped curtail literary censorship in the United States. Considered racy at the time, Kerouac's writings are now considered mild. *On the Road* mentions Neal Cassady's bisexuality without comment, while *Visions of Cody* confronts it. However, the first novel does show Cassady as frankly promiscuous. Kerouac's novels feature an interracial love affair (*The Subterraneans*) and group sex (*The Dharma Bums*). The relationships among men in Kerouac's novels are predominantly homosexual.

The battle against social conformity and literary tradition was central to the work of the Beats. Among this group of poets, hallucinogenic drugs were used to achieve

► Substance abuse

higher consciousness. These drugs include alcohol, marijuana, benzedrine, morphine, peyote yage and LSD. The use of these drugs, they thought, inspired their intellectual interest as well as simple hedonism. Though the actual results of the use of these drugs are difficult to determine, it is claimed that some of these drugs can enhance creativity, insight, or productivity. Along with the drugs, these writers also believed that meditation and Eastern religion also inspired their consciousness. Among the Eastern religions, Buddhism was important to many of the Beat poets. Poets like Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg intensely studied this religion, and it figured into much of their work.

► City Lights and San Francisco

Allen Ginsberg's first book, *Howl and Other Poems*, is often considered representative of the Beat poets. In 1956, Lawrence Ferlinghetti's press, City Lights, published *Howl*, and Ferlinghetti was brought to trial the next year on charges of obscenity. In a hugely publicised case, the judge ruled that *Howl* was not obscene and brought national attention to Ginsberg and the Beat poets. Besides publishing the Pocket Poets Series, Ferlinghetti also founded the legendary San Francisco bookstore City Lights. Still in operation today, City Lights is an important landmark of Beat generation history. Several of the surrounding streets have been renamed after Beat poets as well, commemorating their important contribution to the cultural landscape of San Francisco.

► Poetry and fiction

Other Beat poets included Diane di Prima, Neal Cassady, Anne Waldman, and Michael McClure. Although William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac are often best remembered for works of fiction such as *Naked Lunch* and *On the Road*, respectively, they also wrote poetry and were very much part of the Beats as well. Kerouac is said to have coined the term "Beat generation," describing the down-and-out status of himself and his peers during the post-war years.

1.2.6.1 Allen Ginsberg

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) is one of the most celebrated American poets of his period, whose epic poem *Howl* (1956) is regarded as one of the most significant creations of the Beat movement. Ginsberg, along with Burroughs and Kerouac, became recognised as a member of the "Beat Generation," a group that revolted

- ▶ Allen Ginsberg as a poet

against the socioeconomic and literary bourgeoisie that characterised the 1950s. Ginsberg's literary philosophy was straightforward and personal: Poetry is sanity. His outspoken sexuality and unusual ravings called into question conceptions of appropriateness and decorum left over from seventeenth-century puritanism, which had been exacerbated by eighteenth-century conservatism and nineteenth-century caution. Purists dismissed him as a drugged-out degenerate, but contemporaries regarded him as a libertarian warrior, and he gained admiration from certain members of the literary elite, notably poet William Carlos Williams.

1.2.6.2 Jack Kerouac

Jean-Louis Lebris de Kerouac (1922–1969), an American novelist, poet, and leader of the Beat movement, Kerouac himself coined the actual phrase. His novel *On the Road* (1957), had broad cultural influence before it was recognised for its literary merits. *On the Road* captured the spirit of its time as no other work of the 20th century had. The success of the novel garnered Kerouac celebrity status as a major American author, and his friendship with Ginsberg, Burroughs, and Gregory Corso cemented the influence of what became known as the Beat Generation. Though best known for his novels, Kerouac is also associated with the poetry of the Beat movement, including spoken word. Kerouac wrote that he wanted "to be considered as a jazz poet blowing a long blues in an afternoon jazz session on Sunday." *Scattered Poems* (1971), published posthumously, and *Mexico City Blues* (1959), among others, are his two major poetry collections.

- ▶ Jack Kerouac as a poet

Summarised Overview

The current unit traces the evolution of American poetry from the vantage point of its social and historical background. It focuses on significant milestones in the development of a poetic genre that is uniquely American. The unit examines the prominent writers, works, and philosophies across the years, ranging from the colonial to the modernist eras. It also looks at the important demarcations that define different kinds of poetry and poetic innovations. In critically discussing the development of American poetry, the unit provides the necessary background for learners to study the genre.



Assignments

1. Comment on the development of the poetic genre during the colonial period in American literature.
2. Discuss the important poets of the postcolonial period (1770s-1800s) in American literature.
3. In what ways did American poetry evolve during the nineteenth century?
4. Critically evaluate the emergence of Transcendentalism in American poetry.
5. Detail the significant contributions of the American poets of the nineteenth century.
6. How did twentieth century American poetry reflect the turbulent socio-political conditions of the age?
7. Write a critical essay on the rise of confessional poetry in American literature.
8. Provide a brief account of the poetry of Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens.
9. Highlight the literary and cultural impacts of American Beat poetry.
10. Trace the significant contributions made by women poets in the history of American literature.

Suggested Readings

1. Beat Poets. United Kingdom, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2002.
2. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Unit 3

Drama

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of the historical evolution of drama in American Literature
- ▶ contextualise the significant socio-political contexts in which American drama developed
- ▶ possess an understanding of the significant literary periodisation in American drama
- ▶ critically contextualise some of the most significant American playwrights and dramas

Background

Drama emerged in the American colonies in the 17th century, transforming over the years to achieve its diverse form today. While early American theatre was predominantly influenced by British dramas, the post-revolutionary period saw the rise of plays with more American themes and narratives. By the end of the 19th century, American drama was steeped in realism, even in the case of comic and tragic plays. Soon, a wide variety of issues – race, gender, sexuality, and death – came to be explored through the dramatic medium. With the arrival of the 1920's and the entry of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams, American drama was centralised as a form that could uniquely address and critique the nation.

The current unit explores the evolution of American drama from its humble beginnings in the colonies to its literary developments in the twentieth century. It contextualises the historical and socio-political conditions, as well as the significant playwrights and seminal works that shaped American drama.

Keywords

History, Socio-political background, Literary periods, Significant playwrights, Influential works

Discussion

1.3.1 The Beginnings

The relationship between the theatre and the larger American culture has been contentious from the beginning. Although the Southern colonies welcomed the diversion of the occasional performance—the first recorded play in English presented in the American colonies, *Ye Bear and Ye Cubb* by William Darby, was staged in Virginia in 1665—many Northern colonists had carried the Puritan anti-theatrical prejudice with them from England. While Charleston became an early centre for theatrical activity, in the rapidly developing cities of the north—Boston, Providence, Philadelphia, and New York—would-be producers of plays, shows, and other entertainments faced hostility from a large proportion of the colonial population and often from colonial legislative bodies well into the eighteenth century.

► Religious prejudice

In the interest of creating a virtuous American republic, the Continental Congress called in 1774 for the states to discourage “every species of extravagance and dissipation,” including horse racing, gaming, cockfighting, shows, and plays. The people’s desire for performance and other entertainment was not quelled by such censorship, however, and enterprising theatrical troupes found various ways of getting around legal strictures, such as presenting plays in the guise of “moral lectures.”

► Censorship

Far from diverting the people from their purpose during the Revolution as the lawmakers had feared, the production of plays proved to be useful in articulating the new nation’s values, rallying the emotions of patriotism, and ridiculing the enemy. George Washington, an enthusiastic theatregoer, was present at a performance of Addison’s pro-republican tragedy *Cato* at Valley Forge in 1778. The best-known playwright of the Revolutionary period was Mercy Otis Warren, the sister of prominent Boston patriot, James Otis. Several playwrights participated in the mythicizing of events and figures from the revolution, notably Hugh Henry Brackenridge, who wrote *The Battle of Bunkers Hill* (published 1776) and *The Death of General Montgomery* (published 1777), and Robert Munford, who wrote *The Patriots* (c.



► Articulating political values

1777). Although few of the plays were performed, their popularity as texts proved both the people's appetite for the genre and the utility of drama for the revolutionary cause.

In the years following the revolution, the restrictions on performance were eased in most areas of the new country, and, along with British touring companies performing a British repertoire, a number of American playwrights used drama as a vehicle for formulating the distinguishing characteristics of the new country. One of the most accomplished was Royall Tyler, whose polished comedy of manners, *The Contrast* (1787), was the first comedy by an American to be staged professionally. By contrasting the honest, straightforward Patriot veteran Col. Manly with the silly Anglophile Billy Dimple, who has been to Europe and adopted all the affectations of the London fop, the play constructs a virile and virtuous America against an effeminate and corrupt Europe, a strategy for American social comedy that became standard in the early nineteenth century, reaching its high point in Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (Philadelphia, 1845). Susanna Rowson's comic opera *Slaves in Algiers, or, A Struggle for Freedom* (Philadelphia, 1794), which was suggested by a series of attacks on American merchant ships by Barbary pirates, created a sensational background for the same fundamental conflict.

► Rise of the theatre

Many of the serious plays of the Federal period display a fervent desire to create heroic American myths and narratives. William Dunlap's *André* (1798), which he later adapted into a patriotic spectacle in *The Glory of Columbia, Her Yeomanry* (1803), contributed powerfully to the mythicization of George Washington. Similar heroic dramatisations of American history, such as C.E. Grice's *Battle of New Orleans* (1816) and Mordecai Noah's *The Siege of Yorktown* (1824), were popular in the early years of the nineteenth century. American playwrights made use of the continent's indigenous population to embody the Romantic notions about the powers of nature to ennoble that are articulated in Washington Irving's essay on "Indian Character" in *The Sketch Book* (1819). The casting of the Indian in the role of natural hero is evident in Anne Kemble Hatton's *Tammany, the Indian Chief* (1794) and William Dunlap's adaptation of the German playwright August von Kotzebue's *Pizarro in Peru, or, The Death of Rolla* (1800).

► Mythicisation of national values and heroes

1.3.1.1 Lewis Hallam Jr.

Lewis Hallam Jr. (1740–1808) was an England-born American actor and theatre manager, the son of Lewis Hallam, one of the pioneers of theatre in the United States, and Sarah Hallam Douglass. He was the leading actor of the Old American Company, at the time the only theatre in America, and the manager of the same company from 1779 to 1796. Hallam came to America in 1752 with his family as a member of the company of his father and uncle, the future Old American Company. His mother, who was also an actress, was a relative of Christopher Rich, a theatre manager. This was the first professional theatre in North America. They toured the colonies and performed *The Merchant of Venice* and *The Anatomist*.

► Actor

Hallam first performed in Williamsburg, Virginia. He was the “earliest known American Hamlet and played Arsaces, the hero of the first professionally produced American play, *The Prince of Parthia*,” in 1752. Lewis Jr.’s style was described as declaratory rather than realistic, but he was much admired and became known as America’s leading Shakespearean interpreter. Lewis Jr. is believed to have been the first actor in America to perform in blackface in 1769. He played opposite his mother in contemporary British comedies. In 1769, he performed “Dear Heart! What a Terrible Life I Am Led”, the first documented white stage performance of an African American-styled song. In January 1775, Hallam performed in England, playing Hamlet at Covent Garden. This stint was his first and last performance in Europe. Hallam continued to work in American theatre throughout his life, except for a period during the American Revolutionary War when the Old American Company left for Jamaica, where it was active until it returned to the United States in 1785.

► Old American Company

1.3.1.2 Thomas Godfrey

Thomas Godfrey was an American poet and playwright, the son of inventor Thomas Godfrey, who invented the quadrant. He is most famous for *Prince of Parthia*, the first play written by a Native American to be produced on a professional stage. Godfrey’s lyric and narrative verse were in the style of the Cavalier poets; his pastorals had a certain sprightliness, and his one poem to be published in book form during his lifetime, *The Court of Fancy*



► Godfrey's contributions

(1762), had passages of imaginative power. But, as he himself pointed out, it was imitative of Chaucer and Pope, and its main interest lay in its superiority to anything else of its kind that had been written in the Colonies up to that time.

► Significance of play

Prince of Parthia was important chiefly because it was no mere closet drama. Godfrey definitely wrote it for the American Company of Actors and was inspired to write it by his associations. The play was produced by Douglass on April 24, 1767, at the Southwark Theatre, in Philadelphia, according to advertisements in the Pennsylvania Journal and Pennsylvania Gazette. It was a romantic tragedy, laid down in Parthia at the beginning of the Christian era. Godfrey's plot was largely his own, outside of a general resemblance to the royal murders that were recorded in the history of Parthia. His dramatic models were Shakespeare, Beaumont, and Ambrose Philips. The play is well constructed, the blank verse is varied and forcible, and when the drama was revived by undergraduates at the University of Pennsylvania in 1915, its acting qualities were apparent.

1.3.2 Post-Independence Period

► Famous theatres

Post-independence, theatre's popularity grew as questions surrounding its morality declined. It wasn't until the mid-1850s that actors finally gained a foothold in the public's eye. Some of the key actors were William Charles Macready, Edwin Forrest, and Edwin Booth (the older brother of John Wilkes Booth). Around this time, theatres started popping up around the country, but nowhere seized the opportunity quite like New York. These New York theatres included the Anthony Street Theatre (1813), the Chatham Garden Theatre (1824), the Lafayette Theatre (1826), the Bowery Theatre (also 1826), the Opera House (1833, becoming the National Theatre in 1836), the Franklin Theatre (1835), and the Broadway Theatre (1847, the first of that name).

► Representations

As excitement grew, so did the number of American playwrights and indigenous American actors. No longer were Shakespearean plays the most popular, instead, they were rip-offs of Shakespeare where the "bad" guys were British characters. The audience and public loved it. However, many shows included racist portrayals of African Americans through "minstrel shows."



1.3.2.1 Royall Tyler

► First American comedy

Royall Tyler (June 18, 1757–August 26, 1826) was an American jurist and playwright. He was born in Boston, graduated from Harvard University in 1776, and then served in the Massachusetts militia during the American Revolution. He was admitted to the bar in 1780, became a lawyer, and fathered eleven children. In 1801, he was appointed a justice of the Vermont Supreme Court. He wrote a play, *The Contrast*, which was produced in 1787 in New York City, shortly after George Washington's inauguration. It is considered the first American comedy. Washington attended the production, which was well received, and Tyler became a literary celebrity.

► Career

In 1787, his comedy *The Contrast* was performed in New York City, the first American comedy to be performed by professional actors. The play's first public showing was shortly after George Washington's inauguration, and Washington and several members of the First Congress attended. Tyler continued to write and frequently collaborated with his friend Joseph Dennie, including co-writing a satirical column that appeared in Dennie's newspaper, *The Farmer's Weekly Museum*. He published *The Algerine Captive* in 1797 and wrote several legal tracts, six plays, a musical drama, two long poems, many essays, and a semifictional travel narrative, 1809's *The Yankey in London*.

1.3.2.2 William Dunlap

► Life

William Dunlap (1766–1839) was a pioneer of American theatre. He was a producer, playwright, and actor, as well as a historian. He managed two of New York City's earliest and most prominent theatres, the John Street Theatre (1796–98) and the Park Theatre (1798–1805). He was also an artist, despite losing an eye in childhood. He was born in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, the son of an army officer wounded at the Battle of Quebec in 1759. In 1783, he painted a portrait of George Washington while staying at Rockingham in Rocky Hill. The painting is now owned by the United States Senate. He later studied art under Benjamin West in London. Another teacher was Abraham Delanoy, with whom he had a handful of lessons in New York. After returning to America in 1787, he worked exclusively in the theatre for 18 years before resuming painting out of economic necessity in 1805. By 1817, he was a full-time painter.



► Contributions to American drama

In his lifetime, he produced more than sixty plays, most of which were adaptations or translations of French or German works. A few were original; these were based on American themes and had American characters. However, he is best known for his encyclopaedic three-volume *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, which was published in 1834 and is now an invaluable source of information about artists, collecting, and artistic life generally in the colonial and federal periods. His plays include *The Father* (1789), *Andre* (1798), *The Virgin of the Sun* (1800), and *Memoirs of George Frederick Cooke* (1813). In 1825, Dunlap was one of the founders of the National Academy of Design and taught at its school. He published his *History of the American Theatre* in two volumes in 1832.

1.3.3 Nineteenth Century

The developing genre of the Western play paralleled the United States's escalating efforts to contain or eradicate the Indian population in the middle of the nineteenth century. Louisa Medina's popular adaptation of Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1839) glorified the frontiersman and signalled a new attitude towards the Indians, who are depicted as bloodthirsty savages. This and subsequent plays, like W.R. Derr's *Kit Carson, the Hero of the Prairie* (1850), were built on the original image of Colonel Nimrod Wildfire in James Kirke Paulding's *The Lion of the West* (1831) to create an image of the frontiersman as a man of action, embodying the American virtues of independence, self-sufficiency, rebelliousness to authority, and antipathy to civilization. In a sense, the appropriation of the myth of the Noble Savage was completed in these plays, in which the virtues that had originally been represented as naturally belonging to the Indian were attributed to the Americans, and the "savagery" that had been a dark underside in the earlier plays came to constitute the whole of the Indian character. The genre of the Western play was born in this dramatic equivalent of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. It remained popular throughout the nineteenth century.

► Popular dramatic forms

The representation of American culture in these plays was intrinsically related to the development of melodrama, the dominant dramatic genre of the nineteenth century. Recent critics and historians such as Bruce McConachie and Jeffrey Mason have shown that the development of

► Melodrama

melodrama in the US was a natural response to a deeply unsettled post-revolutionary political and social order. Melodrama depicts a simplified moral universe in which good and evil are clearly recognisable traits of a hero and a villain who are locked in a struggle for dominance that is often violent and sensational. In melodrama, the forces of good usually win, affirming the established social order and assuring the audience that its moral values will triumph in the end, despite the unsettled times.

► Social, moral, and racial issues

Many of the nineteenth-century American melodramas centre on an innocent and vulnerable female character who faces the threat of evil, usually sexual, from a villain and is rescued, and often married, by a hero. This melodramatic paradigm is often used to address particular social and moral concerns, which in the US are often related to class, race, and ethnicity. The single most popular theatrical phenomenon of the nineteenth century was the representation in many adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The most popular of these, by George L. Aiken, assuaged the country's anxieties about slavery, abolition, racism, and Christian values by containing them within the familiar melodramatic paradigm.

► Race and American identity

As the focus of the nation's greatest cultural anxiety in the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was the subject of a number of melodramas besides *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, notably *The Escape; or, A Leap for Freedom* (1857) by William Wells Brown, an abolitionist lecturer who had himself been born into slavery, and Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana* (1859). Melodrama was used to assuage a number of other anxieties in the nineteenth century as well, such as the disturbing issues arising from ever-increasing immigration, urban poverty, and alcoholism.

Many melodramas grew out of the Temperance movement, which was well-suited to the histrionic excess, sensationalism, and sentimentality of the genre. The best known is W.H. Smith's *The Drunkard, or, The Fallen Saved* (Boston, 1844), which presents traditional religious and domestic values as the nation's best hope against the temptation of demon rum. Like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* after it, *The Drunkard* was used by theatrical impresarios like P.T. Barnum to try to draw a respectable middle-class audience into the theatre. Along with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

► Middle class audiences

and William Pratt's adaptation of T.S. Arthur's *Ten Nights in a Barroom and What I Saw There* (1854), *The Drunkard* had a great effect on the nature of the American theatre and the composition of its audience. The depiction of what came to be known as "urban low-life" began with Benjamin A. Baker's *A Glance at New York* (1848) and a series of sequels featuring Mose the Bowery B'hoy, an urban thug with a heart of gold, whose good-natured image helped to assuage the very real threat to social stability that was posed by New York street gangs. A more serious treatment of urban poverty appeared in Dion Boucicault's adaptation of the French melodrama *Les Pauvres de Paris* into *The Poor of New York* (1857) and Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* (1867), which owes a good deal to Charles Dickens's depictions of London.

► Representation of women

A number of nineteenth-century melodramas represented young girls whose virtue faced the double threat of poverty and male sexual dominance. In these plays, virtue often triumphs through the agency of an honest hero. These plays functioned simultaneously as wish fulfilment, of the sort that Stephen Crane imputes to Maggie Johnson in his novella, *Maggie, A Girl of the Streets* (1893), for the audience that paid its dime or quarter down on the Bowery, and as reassurance to the middle class that the poor were not a threat to their way of life and simply needed a lucky break in order to share their orderly domestic life.

► Beginnings

1.3.3.1 The Walnut

The Walnut Street Theatre, founded in 1809 at 825 Walnut Street on the corner of S. 9th Street in the Washington Square West neighbourhood of Philadelphia, is the oldest operating theatre in the United States. The Walnut Street Theatre was built by the Circus of Pepin and Breschard, which toured the United States from 1807 until 1815. Pepin and Breschard constructed numerous venues in cities along the East Coast of the United States, which often featured, along with performances of their circus, classical plays as well as horse dramas.

When the theatre opened its doors on February 2, 1809, the pounding of hooves mingled with the shrieks of delight from the crowd as teams of horses circled a dirt riding ring. A few years later, an 80-foot dome was added to the theatre, making it the tallest structure

► Structure

in Philadelphia at that time. The theatre's career as an equestrian circus did not last long, however, and by 1812 the building was converted to a legitimate theatre, featuring a real stage where the ring had stood. The Walnut's first theatrical production, *The Rivals*, had President Thomas Jefferson and the Marquis de Lafayette in attendance on the opening night.

► Assassination of Abraham Lincoln

In 1820, Edwin Forrest, a young Philadelphian who would have a profound impact on American drama, made his professional debut on the Walnut stage at age 14. In 1828, John Haviland, the most prominent architect of his day, designed major renovations to the interior and exterior of the building. The present façade is based on his original design. In 1863, the theatre was purchased by Edwin Booth, the son of one of the most famous theatrical families of the day. Unfortunately, fame would soon turn to notoriety for Booth when his brother, John Wilkes Booth, assassinated President Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC. Edwin Booth, with his business partner and brother-in-law, John Sleeper Clark, managed to hold on to the Walnut in those dark days and go on to guide it for many years.

► Famous plays

During the 1880s, the Walnut experienced many renovations, including a new stage for more elaborate musical comedies. In 1920, the interior was again rebuilt within the old exterior using structural steel to a design by William H. Lee. The Walnut remained a significant player on the American theatre scene throughout the twentieth century. Purchased by the Shubert Organisation in the 1940s, the theatre was home to many pre-Broadway try-outs of plays that would go on to become American classics, such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* starring Marlon Brando, *A Raisin in the Sun* featuring Sidney Poitier, and *The Diary of Anne Frank* featuring Susan Strasberg. *Mister Roberts*, starring Henry Fonda, opened at the Walnut in 1948. Fonda, recently discharged from the Navy, used his own uniform in the play. His daughter, Jane Fonda, appeared in *There Was a Little Girl* in 1960. In 1961, Neil Simon's first Broadway play, *Come Blow Your Horn*, debuted.

The Walnut's rich history is evident backstage as well, as it is one of only a few remaining "hemp houses" in the country. To this day, it continues to operate the original grid, rope, pulley, and sandbag system that was in use



► Renovations

nearly two centuries ago. The theatre's hand-painted fire curtain, which still hangs above the stage, displays a reproduction of *The Liberty Bell's First Note*, 1753, originally painted by Jean Leon Gerome Ferris. In 1964, Walnut Street Theatre was designated a National Historic Landmark. Then, in 1969, the theatre was renovated again to become a Performing Arts Center. During this period, a variety of live entertainments were represented at the Walnut, including dance, music, and theatre. In 1976, the Walnut hosted the first televised Carter-Ford presidential debate. The Walnut began its most recent incarnation as a self-producing, non-profit regional theatre when Bernard Havard took the helm in 1982, founding the Walnut Street Theatre Company with a vision of once again creating theatre in a space that is so steeped in American theatre's traditions and history.

1.3.3.2 William Henry Brown

► First Black playwright

William Alexander Brown, also known as William Henry Brown (1790–1884), was an American playwright and theatrical producer. He is considered the first known black playwright in America. Brown was born in the West Indies and worked there as a ship steward. After retiring from his maritime work, he settled in a community of free Blacks in the lower Manhattan district of New York City. In 1816, he opened a summer tea garden in New York called the African Grove Theatre, the first resident all-black theatre company in America, to cater for the community of free Blacks. The African Grove featured music, theatre, and occasionally outdoor entertainment until officials closed it down in 1821.

► All Black theatre companies

Brown re-formed his group of performers in the African Theatre and continued to perform outdoors. Brown's theatre company was constantly harassed by "White hoodlums". Eventually, the nearby Park Theatre, fearing competition, and the city sheriff forced the African Theatre to close. Brown continued performing outdoors illegally. The last recorded performance of the African Theatre was on Mercer and Houston Streets in January 1824. It was not until after the American Civil War that all-Black theatre companies began to emerge again. The African Theatre presented a programme of classical plays, popular plays, ballet, music, and opera. The theatre produced Shakespearean works as well as plays written by Brown.



- African American history represented in plays

Brown also wrote a number of original plays for them to perform. His most notable play, *The Drama of King Shotaway* (1823), based on the life of Black Carib leader Joseph Chatoyer (whom Brown called Shotaway in the play) and his revolt against British rule, is considered the first play written by a person of African descent in America. It is thought that Brown may have had firsthand experience of the Carib Wars when he worked as a ship's steward at the time of the Atlantic slave trade. William Brown established the first US theatre that catered for the black people in ways that only white audiences had been catered for previously. It was one of the first spaces that gave free Blacks a sense of inclusion as well as the ability to immerse themselves in theatrical culture and see a reflection of themselves in works written by Black playwrights and performed by Black actors.

- Racial identity emphasised

The African Theatre, or the American Theatre, produced its first play on September 17, 1821, which was *Richard III*. The African Theatre moved to 1215 Mercer Street in New York City in 1822. Brown has been said to allow a White audience in the theatre, but they were only allowed to sit in the back of the house. He said, "Whites do not know how to conduct themselves at the entertainments of ladies and gentlemen of Colour." The company then went on to produce more plays, such as William Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry*.

1.3.3.3 Minstrel Show

- Imitation of African American performances

While melodrama assuaged the cultural anxieties surrounding phenomena such as slavery, the Civil War, poverty, alcoholism, massive immigration, and ethnic conflict through sentiment, a number of theatrical forms assaulted them through humour. Minstrelsy, an imitation of African American song and dance that was done almost exclusively by white men in black face, began in 1829 with T.D. "Daddy" Rice's "Jump Jim Crow" song and dance. Rice performed a full evening of songs in black face at the Bowery Theatre in 1832, and the first full minstrel show debuted in New York in 1843. The minstrel show appropriated some aspects of African American culture while presenting the Black man as an essentially ridiculous figure, creating some enduring racist stereotypes that lasted well into the twentieth century.

The minstrel show was used effectively as a disturbing cultural metaphor at the end of the twentieth century by



► Comic entertainment

Black writers such as Ntozake Shange in *spell #7* (1979), George C. Wolfe in *The Colored Museum* (1986), and Spike Lee in his film *Bamboozled* (2001). Ethnic humour of all kinds was a staple of vaudeville, the creature of B.F. Keith and Edward F. Albee, who began in the mid-1880s to create an empire of variety shows that became the major source of popular entertainment between 1890 and 1940 and extended at its height to more than 700 theatres and 20,000 acts, including singers, animal acts, acrobats, dancers, comedians, and other entertainment as well as short plays. Having honed his comic writing skills in more than 80 vaudeville sketches, Edward Harrigan wrote a number of comedies in the 1870s and 1880s that were based on the relations between competing ethnic groups in New York during the enormous wave of immigration between 1848 and the turn of the century. Harrigan was praised by realist critic William Dean Howells for dramatising “the actual life of this city,” a move towards dramatic realism at a time when the American stage was dominated by melodrama, and his often-raucous physical comedy helped to diffuse the tensions surrounding ethnic differences among millions of recent immigrants jammed into America’s cities.

► Flourishing of theatres

1.3.4 Post-war Theatre

During the postbellum North, theatre flourished as a post-war boom allowed longer and more frequent productions. The advent of American rail transport allowed production companies, actors, and large, elaborate sets to travel easily between towns, which made permanent theatres in small towns feasible. The invention and practical application of electric lighting also led to changes to and improvements in scenery styles, as well as changes in the design of theatre interiors and seating areas.

1.3.5 Theatrical Syndicate

Syndicate agreements continued for five-year periods until the last agreement ended on August 31, 1969. By 1910, having conquered the revolt of the actors and the revolt of the managers, the Syndicate reached its height. It continued to battle the press and the Fiskes; but the Trust’s biggest competitors, the Shuberts and the movies, were soon to shake its power. In the meantime, the Syndicate exerted tremendous influence over all aspects of theatre in the United States. The Syndicate expired

- Syndicate agreements

in 1916 because it was no longer useful, but during its lifetime, it had been a positive influence on American theatre.

1.3.6 Realism

- Character dramas

It was not until the last quarter of the nineteenth century that realism of a kind came into vogue and American settings became more common. Character drama began to make its appearance with *Margaret Fleming* (1890) by James Horne (1839– 1901), a work that showed the influence of Ibsen in its portrait of a woman reconciling herself to the infidelity of her husband and assuming responsibility for his illegitimate child when its mother died.

- Realism

Once established, realism was to dominate the American stage for most of the twentieth century. In the 1920s and 1930s, male-female relations continued to be the dominant focus of increasingly sophisticated discussion plays by playwrights such as Rachel Crothers, Philip Barry, and Sidney Howard, in which the characters were in conflict over issues, and dramatic closure occurred only with the issue's resolution. The discussion play was put to many uses beyond the domestic realm, however, ranging from academic freedom in Susan Glaspell's *Inheritors* (1921) to Prohibition in Augustus Thomas's *Still Waters* (1926), to war and pacifism in Robert Sherwood's *The Road to Rome* (1927) and *Idiot's Delight* (1936), to the United States's stance on fascism in Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* (1939) and S.N. Behrman's *Rain from Heaven* (1934) and *No Time for Comedy* (1939).

1.3.6.1 David Belasco

- Early life

David Belasco, fondly remembered as the “Bishop of Broadway,” was a significant contributor to turn-of-the-century theatre. Born on July 25, 1853, in San Francisco, David Belasco got his start as a child actor and was featured in the play *Richard III*. After his first acting job, he joined a stock company, or a group of actors that worked full-time for the same theatre company. He travelled around the west to different mining towns to perform. In addition to acting, he started writing his own plays, many of which he starred in himself. One of his biggest successes at the time was a play that he co-wrote and starred in called *Hearts of Oak*.



► Belasco Theatre

Initially, Belasco managed a number of New York theatres but was adversely affected by the Theatrical Syndicate. Fed up with the Syndicate's influence, Belasco built a theatre of his own in 1906 and, of course, named it the Belasco Theatre. Belasco's productions drew a crowd for several reasons. He had amazing taste and attention to detail. His plays featured stunning sets that dazzled the audience. Belasco was also responsible for revolutionising certain aspects of production, especially lighting. He used different lighting and colours to set a certain mood. After years of living under the lights of the stage, Belasco died on May 14, 1931, in New York City.

1.3.7 Twentieth Century American Drama

► Imported drama

American drama imitated English and European theatre until well into the 20th century. Often, plays from England or translated from European languages dominated theatre seasons. An inadequate copyright law that failed to protect and promote American dramatists worked against genuinely original drama. So did the "star system," in which actors and actresses, rather than the actual plays, were given the most acclaim. Americans flocked to see European actors who toured theatres in the United States. In addition, imported drama, like imported wine, enjoyed higher status than indigenous productions.

► Reaction against realism

The achievements of realism at the end of the 19th century continued to resonate through the turn of the 20th century, but the most influential innovations in early 20th-century theatre came from a vigorous reaction against realism. Just as the visual arts exploded into a chaos of experiment and revolt generating numerous styles and "isms", so the theatre seized upon a variety of sources to express the contradictions of the new age. Inspiration was sought in machines and technology, Asian theatre, symbolism, nihilism, the psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud, and the shock of a world war that spawned widespread disillusionment and alienation. The results of this eclecticism were often anarchic and exhilarating: designers and directors were as influential as playwrights, though relatively little drama of lasting value was produced. Nevertheless, such experiments set the tone and widened the theatrical vocabulary for all the innovations that followed.

The beginnings of the revolt against realism were already hinted at before the 19th century was over,

► Influence from other countries

sometimes in the works of the realist writers themselves. Ibsen, for example, turned increasingly towards symbolism in his later plays, such as *The Master Builder* and *When We Dead Awaken*). Frank Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* began its study of adolescent love in the slice-of-life naturalistic mode and ended in the realm of ghosts and dreams, foreshadowing Expressionism, which was to preoccupy other German dramatists during the 1920s. Strindberg is also regarded as one of the fathers of expressionism by virtue of his later works, such as *A Dream Play* and *The Spook [Ghost] Sonata*. In France, the marionette play *King Ubu*, written in 1888 by Alfred Jarry at age 15, created a scandal when it was later performed with live actors in 1896. Its anarchic use of puppet techniques, masks, placards, and stylized scenery was to be taken up decades later in French avant-garde theatre.

► 'New Negro' movement

During this period, the writers of the 'New Negro' movement relied primarily on a combination of melodrama and folk plays to dramatise the issues that were of vital importance to African Americans. The New Negro theatre movement of the 1920s had a clear agenda that was articulated by W.E.B. Du Bois and two members of the Howard University faculty who founded the theatre programme there in 1921- Alain Locke and Montgomery T. Gregory. Du Bois articulated four principles for the drama of a Negro theatre: the drama must be about, by, for, and near "the mass of ordinary Negro people." While Du Bois favoured and occasionally wrote didactic "race plays," meant to educate African Americans about their history and the contemporary issues facing them, Locke and Gregory dissociated themselves from didacticism and promoted folk drama. Encouraged by Locke and Gregory, playwrights such as Willis Richardson, Zora Neale Hurston, Mary P. Burrill, May Miller, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and Eulalie Spence produced a substantial body of folk drama, although only Richardson's *The Chip Woman's Fortune* (1923) and *The Broken Banjo* (1925) were produced on Broadway.

During the Great Depression, new forms of theatre appeared, confronting the economic, social, and political conditions of the 1930s more aggressively than realism did. The major source for this was agitprop, the European agitation-propaganda play that was brought to the US by the labour movement and by the political Left. Agit prop employs type characters and simple

situations punctuated by songs, slogans, and direct challenges to the audience to incite involvement in the cause. It makes little use of sets or props and can be put on in any available space, such as a union or lecture hall. It was the mainstay of leftist theatre groups such as the New Playwrights Theatre, the Workers Laboratory, and the Theatre Collective, which had agitation for political and social change as their chief agenda. The techniques of agitprop were also adapted in a number of ways. Hallie Flanagan, the director of the only federally subsidised theatre in the US history, the WPA's Federal Theatre Project (1935–9), had experimented with Living Newspapers as the director of the theatre at Vassar in the early 1930s. In the FTP, these combinations of news story and editorial, staged with agitprop techniques, were produced on such issues as the housing shortage (*One Third of a Nation*, 1938), the farm crisis (*Triple-A Plowed Under* 1936), and public ownership of utilities (*Power*, 1937). Clifford Odets's *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), written for a leftist theatre in support of a New York taxi strike, eventually became a hit on Broadway in a production by the Group Theatre.

► Class and agitprop

1.3.8 The Modern American Theatre

In the period between 1944 and 1960, the United States enjoyed its greatest success in the context of world theatre. While straightforward realism continued to be the mode of choice for a playwright like Lorraine Hansberry, whose *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959) makes a clear statement about the economic forces and social attitudes arrayed against a black family in contemporary Chicago, the look of the American theatre began to change. In collaboration with theatre artists like designer Jo Mielziner and director Elia Kazan, a generation of young playwrights who emerged after World War II developed a new and distinctive theatrical idiom that became known internationally as "The American Style."

► Different dramatic styles

Beginning with Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1945), and continuing with his *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949), Ketti Frings's adaptation of Thomas Wolfe's novel, *Look Homeward, Angel* (1958), and many other plays, American playwrights created a body of work in the

► Development of subjective realism

mode of Subjective Realism. This mode is unique in that it synthesises two opposing aesthetics of the early twentieth-century theatre: realism, which aims to create an illusion of objective reality on the stage (the illusion that the audience is eavesdropping on real events through a transparent “fourth wall”), and expressionism, which dramatises the subjective reality that is perceived by one or more characters. The full development of subjective realism can be seen in *Death of a Salesman*, where the events in Willy Loman’s mind are, as Arthur Miller said, quite as real as what is happening around him, and they are represented on stage with equal ontological status to the “real time” stage events with which they are juxtaposed.

► Subjectivity

Although he acknowledged his part in it, Arthur Miller criticised this trend in the 1950s for creating what he called, in an allusion to its subjective stagecraft, “an era of gauze.” Miller criticised the theatre of the period for its intense inward focus on personal psychological experience and the individual’s relation to the family and for its neglect of the pressing social and political issues that were staring it in the face during the Cold War, particularly McCarthyism’s threat to the performing arts through blacklisting and censorship. Miller and a number of other playwrights did engage with this reality, but it was under the cover of historical analogy, as in the treatments of McCarthyism in Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953), Barrie Stavis’s *Lamp at Midnight*, and Maxwell Anderson’s *Joan of Lorraine* (1946), or allegory, as in Tennessee Williams’s *Camino Real* (1953) and Archibald MacLeish’s *J.B.* (1958).

The theatre’s failure to engage directly with the political realities of the 1950s was due in part to the financial conditions of the Broadway theatre. In the 1950s, success on Broadway was a necessity for the survival of an American play. The development of enormous theatrical trusts that controlled bookings throughout the country and the rise of the Broadway “road company” during the early twentieth century spelled the end of the old regional repertory and stock companies, and theatre proceeded out from New York to the rest of the country. In New York, the rising costs of production had made producers increasingly less willing to take risks in the theatre, whether on subversive

► Improvisational theatre

political statements or experimental aesthetics. With the success of the Off-Broadway production of Jack Gelber's *The Connection* (1959), a daringly new improvisational theatrical work about drug addicts that was staged by the Living Theatre, the state of things began to change. Off-Broadway producers were not in the theatre to make a fortune; Off-Broadway theatres were exempt from many of the union regulations that made Broadway shows so expensive to produce; and Off-Broadway audiences were tolerant of minimal staging in productions that were avant-garde, experimental, and perceived as subversive. The development of the Off-Off-Broadway theatre and the even more experimental Off-Broadway cafés like La Mama and Caffé Cino, allowed the work of experimental playwrights such as Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, Maria Irene Fornés, and Megan Terry to be produced and became the centre for a theatrical counter-culture that replicated itself in many smaller cities throughout the country, where playwrights as different as David Mamet, Marsha Norman, Lanford Wilson, and A.R. Gurney were nurtured.

► Black theatre

The theatrical counterculture took many forms. The first group with a clearly articulated agenda was the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, whose guiding spirit was Amiri Baraka. Its revolutionary agenda was expressed in plays like Baraka's *Dutchman* (1964) and *The Slave* (1964), which rejected white liberalism and promoted black separatism through violence if necessary. During the 1960s, directly confrontational political drama reappeared in the Off-Off-Broadway theatre, beginning with Barbara Garson's satire of Lyndon Johnson, *MacBird!* (1967), and Megan Terry's *Viet Rock: A Folk War Movie* (1966), the first Vietnam anti-war play. In California, Luis Valdéz's El Teatro Campesino, an outgrowth of the farmworkers' movement led by César Chávez, not only produced memorable revolutionary theatre pieces and satiric plays like *Zoot Suit* (1978), which made it to Broadway, but also inspired the formation of several other Latino/a theatre groups.

Off-off Broadway and its regional analogues also made a feminist theatre possible in the 1970s. Feminist theatre groups worked towards the development of self-consciously feminist drama and theatre. They emphasised collaborative creation and improvisation, resisted linear plots, and created the concept of "transformational"

► Feminist theatre

characters with no fixed identities to oppose the concept of essentialist identity. Such plays as Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962), Megan Terry's *Calm Down Mother* (1965), and Alice Childress's *Wedding Band* (1966) established a feminist aesthetic that was taken to the mainstream in the next decade in Marsha Norman's *Getting Out* (1977), Maria Irene Fornés's *Fefu and Her Friends* (1977), Tina Howe's *The Art of Dining* (1979), and Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* (1976), which had a successful run on Broadway.

► Theatrical organisation

1.3.9 Provincetown Players

Provincetown Players, a theatrical organisation that began performing in 1915 in Provincetown, Mass., U.S., was founded by a non-theatre group of writers and artists whose common aim was the production of new and experimental plays. Among the original Provincetowners who staged the first plays in members' homes were Mary Heaton Vorse, George Cram Cook, Susan Glaspell, Hutchins Hapgood, Wilbur Steele, and Robert Edmond Jones.

► Stimulated dramatic talent

In 1916, the group produced in New York City Eugene O'Neill's *Bound East for Cardiff* and *Thirst*, thus launching the career of one of America's distinguished playwrights. That winter, the Provincetown Players took up residence in New York City's Greenwich Village and for years thereafter discovered and developed the work of such noted writers, designers, and actors as Floyd Dell, Edna St. Vincent Millay (*Aria da Capo*), Donald Oenslager, Kenneth Macgowan, Jasper Deeter, and Paul Green, whose *In Abraham's Bosom* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1927. From its inception to its demise in 1929, the Provincetown Players flourished as a non-commercial theatre; it stimulated the work of many theatrical talents that otherwise might have remained obscure.

1.3.9.1 Eugene O'Neill

Eugene O'Neill (1888–1953) is the greatest figure of American theatre. His numerous plays combine enormous technical originality with freshness of vision and emotional depth. O'Neill's earliest dramas concern the working class and poor; later works explore subjective realms, such as obsessions and sex, and underscore his reading in Freud and his anguished attempt to come

► Psychological drama

to terms with his dead mother, father, and brother. His play *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) recreates the passions hidden within one family; *The Great God Brown* (1926) uncovers the unconsciousness of a wealthy businessman; and *Strange Interlude* (1928), a winner of the Pulitzer Prize, traces the tangled loves of one woman. These powerful plays reveal different personalities reverting to primitive emotions or confusion under intense stress. O'Neill continued to explore the Freudian pressures of love and dominance within families in a trilogy of plays collectively entitled *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), based on the classical *Orestes* trilogy by Aeschylus. His later plays include the acknowledged masterpieces *The Iceman Cometh* (1946), a stark work on the theme of death, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1956) - a powerful, extended autobiography in dramatic form, focusing on his own family and their physical and psychological deterioration, as witnessed in the course of a single day.

► Innovations

O'Neill redefined the theatre by abandoning traditional divisions into acts and scenes (*Strange Interlude* has nine acts, and *Mourning Becomes Electra* takes nine hours to perform); using masks such as those found in Asian and ancient Greek theatre; introducing Shakespearean monologues and Greek choruses; and producing special effects through lighting and sound. He is generally acknowledged to have been America's foremost dramatist. In 1936, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, becoming the first American playwright to be so honoured.

1.3.9.2 Arthur Miller

► Literary career

Arthur Asher Miller was born in Harlem on October 17, 1915, the son of Polish immigrants, Isidore and Augusta Miller. Miller's father had established a successful clothing store upon coming to America, so the family enjoyed wealth; however, this prosperity ended with the Wall Street Crash of 1929. Financial hardship compelled the Miller family to move to Brooklyn in 1929. Miller's prolific writing career spans a period of over sixty years. During this time, Miller has written twenty-six plays, a novel entitled *Focus* (1945), several travel journals, a collection of short stories entitled *I Don't Need You Anymore* (1967), and an autobiography entitled *Timebends: A Life* (1987). Miller's plays generally address social issues and centre around an individual in a social dilemma, or an individual at the mercy of society.



► Class issues

Miller's first play, *No Villain*, produced in 1936, explores Marxist theory and inner conflict through an individual facing ruin as a result of a strike. *Honors at Dawn*, 1937, also centres around a strike and contrasting views of the economy, but focuses on an individual's inability to express himself. *The Great Disobedience*, 1938, makes a connection between the prison system and capitalism. *The Golden Years*, 1940, tells the story of Cortes despoiling Mexico, as well as the effects of capitalism and fate on the individual.

► Focus on the individual

Miller produced two radio plays in 1941: *The Pussycat and the Expert Plumber Who Was a Man*, and *William Ireland's Confession*. Miller's third radio play, *The Four Freedoms*, was produced in 1942. *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, 1944, revolves around a person who believes he has no control over his life but is instead the victim of chance. *All My Sons*, 1947, explores the effect of past decisions on the present and future of the individual. *Death of a Salesman*, 1949, addresses the loss of identity, as well as a man's inability to accept change within himself and society. *The Crucible*, 1953, recreates the Salem witch trials, focusing on paranoid hysteria as well as the individual's struggle to remain true to ideals and convictions. *A View from the Bridge*, 1955, details three people and their experiences in crime. *After the Fall*, 1964, focuses on betrayal as a trait of humanity. *Incident at Vichy*, 1964, confronts a person's struggle with guilt and responsibility. *The Price*, 1968, tells the story of an individual confronted with free will and the burden of responsibility.

► Societal challenges

Fame, 1970, tells the story of a famous playwright who is confronted but not recognised. *The American Clock*, 1980, focuses on the Depression and its effects on the individual, while, *Elegy for a Lady*, 1982, addresses death and its effects on relationships. *Some Kind of Love Story*, 1982, centres on society and the corruption of justice. *The Ride Down Mountain Morgan*, 1991, centres around a man who believes he can obtain everything he wants. *The Last Yankee*, 1993, explores the changing needs of individuals and the resulting tension that arises within a marriage. *Broken Glass*, 1994, tells the story of individuals using denial as a tool to escape pain.

Miller wrote the screenplay for the movie version of *The Crucible*, which was produced in 1996. Miller has

► Critical acclaim

received numerous honours and awards throughout his career. Miller's accolades include: the Michigan's Avery Hopwood Award, 1936 and 1937; the Theatre Guild's Bureau of New Plays Award, 1937; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1947; the Pulitzer Prize, 1949; the New York Drama Critic's Circle Award, 1949; the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson Awards, 1953; and the Gold Medal for Drama by the National Institutes of Arts and Letters, 1959. Miller was also elected President of PEN (Poets, Essayists, and Novelists) in 1965.

1.3.9.3 Tennessee Williams

► Southern dramatist

Tennessee Williams is considered one of the greatest American playwrights of the 20th century. A master tragedian with a strong sense of the poeticism of the Southern Gothic, Williams' work has been widely performed on stage for decades, and many of his plays have been turned into critically acclaimed films. His plays include *A Streetcar Named Desire* (for which he received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama), *The Glass Menagerie*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, and *The Night of the Iguana*.

► Early life

Williams was born in 1911 in Columbus, Mississippi. His birth name was Thomas Lanier Williams, and he described his childhood as happy until the family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, at which point his parents' marriage began to fall apart. It was at this time that he began writing, a hobby that would turn into a vocation, stalled at various points by Williams' disapproving father. When his father brought Tennessee home to work as a sales clerk, pulling him out of journalism school, the young writer suffered a nervous breakdown.

► Dramatic career

After recovery, Williams eventually returned to college at the University of Iowa before moving to New Orleans, where he was inspired to begin writing plays. He wrote for the Works Progress Administration, a federally funded New Deal agency established by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. His first play, *Battle of Angels*, was a flop, but he followed up with *Orpheus Descending*, which was turned into a film starring Marlon Brando and Anna Magnani. In 1945, his play *The Glass Menagerie* premiered on Broadway and catapulted Williams to fame. In 1947, *A Streetcar Named Desire* premiered, and it earned Williams a Pulitzer Prize and was turned into a successful film.

► Prolific oeuvre

Once he established himself as a notable dramatic talent, Williams wrote more hit plays, including *Camino Real*, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *The Rose Tattoo*, *Garden District*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. In the 1960s, Williams faced some professional and artistic failures, and he descended into dependency on drugs and alcohol. When his partner, Frank Merlo, died in 1963, his depression and substance abuse became worse. His plays throughout the 1960s and 1970s include *Kingdom of Earth*, *In the Bar of a Tokyo Hotel*, *Small Craft Warnings*, *The Two Character Play*, *The Red Devil Battery Sign*, *Vieux Carré*, *Clothes for a Summer Hotel*, and *A House Not Meant to Stand*. Williams also wrote two novels, *The Roman Spring of Mrs. Stone* (1950) and *Moise and the World of Reason* (1975), essays, poetry, film scripts, short stories, and an autobiography, *Memoirs* (1975). His works won four Drama Critics' awards and were widely translated and performed around the world.

1.3.9.4 Sam Shepard

► Multifaceted career

Samuel Shepard Rogers (1943–2017) was an American actor, playwright, author, screenwriter, and director whose career spanned half a century. He wrote 58 plays as well as several books of short stories, essays, and memoirs. Shepard received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979 for his play *Buried Child* and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor for his portrayal of pilot Chuck Yeager in the 1983 film *The Right Stuff*. Shepard's plays are known for their bleak, poetic, surrealist elements, black comedy, and rootless characters living on the outskirts of American society. His style evolved from the absurdism of his early off-off-Broadway work to the realism of later plays like *Buried Child* and *Curse of the Starving Class*.

Shepard moved to New York City in 1963 and found work as a busboy at the Village Gate nightclub. The following year, the Village Gate's head waiter, Ralph Cook, founded the experimental stage company Theatre Genesis, housed at St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery in Manhattan. Two of Shepard's earliest one-act plays, "The Rock Garden" and "Cowboys", debuted at Theatre Genesis in October 1964. It was around this time that Steve Rogers adopted the professional name Sam Shepard. In 1965, Shepard's one-act plays *Dog* and *The Rocking Chair* were produced at La MaMa Experimental Theatre



► Contributions

Club. These were the first of many productions of Shepard's work at La MaMa during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In 1967, Tom O'Horgan directed Shepard's *Melodrama Play* alongside Leonard Melfi's *Times Square* and Rochelle Owens' *Futz* at La MaMa. In 1969, Jeff Bleckner directed Shepard's play *The Unseen Hand* at La MaMa. *The Unseen Hand* later influenced Richard O'Brien's musical, *The Rocky Horror Show*.

► Diverse engagements

Several of Shepard's early plays, including *Red Cross* (1966) and *La Turista* (1967), were directed by Jacques Levy. A patron of the Chelsea Hotel scene, he also contributed to Kenneth Tynan's *Oh! Calcutta!* (1969) and drummed sporadically from 1967 through 1971 with the band The Holy Modal Rounders, appearing on their albums *Indian War Whoop* (1967) and *The Moray Eels Eat The Holy Modal Rounders* (1968). After winning six Obie Awards between 1966 and 1968, Shepard emerged as a screenwriter with Robert Frank's *Me and My Brother* (1968) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point* (1970).

► Critical renown

In 1975, Shepard was named playwright-in-residence at the Magic Theatre in San Francisco, where he created many of his notable works, including his Family Trilogy. One of the plays in the trilogy, *Buried Child* (1978), won the Pulitzer Prize, and was nominated for five Tony Awards. This marked a major turning point in his career, heralding some of his best-known work, including *True West* (1980), *Fool for Love* (1983), and *A Lie of the Mind* (1985). A comic tale of reunion, in which a young man drops in on his grandfather's Illinois farmstead only to be greeted with indifference by his relations, *Buried Child* saw Shepard stake a claim to the psychological terrain of classic American theatre. *True West* and *Fool for Love* were nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Some critics have expanded the trilogy to a quintet, including *Fool for Love* and *A Lie of the Mind*. Shepard won a record-setting 10 Obie Awards for writing and directing between 1966 and 1984.

1.3.9.4 August Wilson

Influenced by the Black arts movement of the late 1960s, the distinguished African American dramatist August Wilson (1945–2005) co-founded Pittsburgh's Black Horizons Theatre. Wilson's plays explore the African American experience, organised by decades.

► African American experiences

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (1984), set in 1927 Chicago, depicts the famous blues singer. His acclaimed play *Fences* (1985), set in the 1950s, dramatises the conflict between a father and a son, touching on the all-American themes of baseball and the American dream of success. *Joe Turner's Come and Gone* (1986) concerns boarding-house residents in 1911. *The Piano Lesson* (1987), set in the 1930s, crystallises a family's dynamic by focusing on the heirloom piano. *Two Trains Running* (1990) takes place in a coffeehouse in the 1960s, while *Seven Guitars* (1995) explores the 1940s.

► Balance between communal and individual narratives

His works delve into the African American experience as well as examinations of the human condition. Other themes range from the systemic and historical exploitation of African Americans, as well as race relations, identity, migration, and racial discrimination. Since Wilson's death, two of his plays have been adapted into films: *Fences* (2016) and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (2020). Wilson has devoted his career to dramatising these tensions within the black community, even while he upholds the dignity of the individuals who struggle with their past.

1.3.9.5 Lorraine Hansberry

► First African American Broadway play

Lorraine Hansberry (1930–1955) was an American playwright whose 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* was the first drama by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway. Hansberry was interested in writing from an early age and, while in high school, was especially drawn to the theatre. She attended the University of Wisconsin in 1948–50 and then briefly the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and Roosevelt University (Chicago). After moving to New York City, she held various minor jobs and studied at the New School for Social Research while refining her writing skills. In 1958, she raised funds to produce her play *A Raisin in the Sun*, which opened in March 1959 at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre on Broadway and met with great success. A penetrating psychological study of the personalities and emotional conflicts within a working-class Black family in Chicago, *A Raisin in the Sun* was directed by actor Lloyd Richards, the first African American to direct a play on Broadway since 1907.

It won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award, and the film version of 1961 received a special award at the



► Black politics

Cannes Festival. Hansberry's next play, *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window*, a drama of political questioning and affirmation set in Greenwich Village, New York City, where she had long made her home, had only a modest run-on Broadway in 1964. Her promising career was cut short by her early death from pancreatic cancer. In 1969, a selection of her writings, adapted by Robert Nemiroff was produced on Broadway as *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* and was published in book form in 1970.

Summarised Overview

The current unit charts the growth of American drama in terms of its social and historical background, emphasising the historical development of drama as an American genre. It studies the different ages through which drama evolved, addressing a wide range of themes, issues, and writing styles, vis-à-vis the contributions of significant dramatists. From the early colonial period to the revolutionary, and to the modern period, American drama shows serious transformations in form, language, and plot; these correspond largely to the literary periods in which they were conceived. In critically discussing these changes, the unit provides the necessary background for learners to contextualise the genre of American drama.

Assignments

1. Why was the relationship between Early American theatre and the public contentious?
2. Provide a brief critical account of pre-independence American drama.
3. Examine the development of post-independence American theatre with special reference to the contributions of William Dunlap and Royall Tyler.
4. Trace the evolution of American drama in the nineteenth century.
5. Detail the historical evolution of African American drama.
6. Discuss the growth of American drama in the postwar era.
7. Who were the significant American playwrights of the twentieth century? How did their contributions impact the genre of drama in America?
8. Write a critical essay on modern American theatre.
9. Examine the role of women dramatists in the development and enrichment of American theatre.
10. How did the plays of Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, and Tennessee Williams shape modern American theatre?



Suggested Readings

1. A Concise Companion to Postwar American Literature and Culture. Germany, Wiley, 2008. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
2. Halleck, Rueben Post. *History of American Literature*. Digicat, 2022
3. The Oxford Handbook of American Drama. United Kingdom, OUP USA, 2014.

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1. <https://www.studysmarter.co.uk/explanations/english-literature/american-literary-movements/modern-american-drama/>
2. <https://www.thoughtco.com/biography-of-sam-shepard-american-playwright-4797699>
3. <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/national-humanities-medals/august-wilson>

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Unit 4

Prose and Fiction

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of the historical evolution of prose and fiction in American Literature
- ▶ contextualise the significant socio-political contexts in which American prose and fiction have developed
- ▶ possess an understanding of the significant literary periodisation in American prose and fiction
- ▶ critically contextualise some of the most significant American writers, prose and fiction

Background

American literature, like other national literatures, was shaped by the history of the country that created it. For over a century and a half, America was only a collection of colonies distributed along the eastern shore of the North American continent, from which a few brave men went westward. The arrival of English-speaking Europeans in what would become the United States marks the beginning of the history of American literature. Initially, American literature was a colonial literature written by Englishmen who believed and wrote as such. John Smith, a wealthy soldier, is credited with starting American literature. *A True Relation of...Virginia* (1608) and *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624) were among his most important works. Although these books frequently praised their author, they were ostensibly meant to inform Englishmen about colonising chances. Each colony was eventually characterised in a similar manner: Daniel Denton's *Brief Description of New York* (1670), William Penn's *Brief Account of the Province of Pennsylvania* (1682), and Thomas Ashe's *Carolina* (1682) were just a few of the numerous books hailing America as a place of economic promise.

Keywords

History, Socio-political background, Literary periods, Significant writers, Influential works



Discussion

1.4.1 Writings of Pre-colonial Times

During pre-colonial times, allegiance to the British was acknowledged by some of the early writers, but others stressed the differences of opinion that spurred the colonists to leave their homeland. More importantly, they argued about questions of government involving the relationship between church and state. In *The Simple Cobar of Aggawam in America* (1647), Nathaniel Ward of Massachusetts Bay expressed an attitude that was heavily criticised by many authors. Ward amusingly defended the status quo and railed at colonists who sponsored new-fangled notions.

- Differences of opinion

A variety of counter arguments to such a conservative view were published. John Winthrop's *Journal* (written 1630–49) told sympathetically of the attempt of Massachusetts Bay Colony to form a theocracy—a state with God at its head and with its laws based upon the Bible. Later defenders of the theocratic ideal were Increase Mather and his son Cotton. William Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* (through 1646) showed how his pilgrim Separatists broke completely with Anglicanism. Even more radical than Bradford was Roger Williams, who, in a series of controversial pamphlets, advocated not only the separation of church and state but also the vesting of power in the people and the tolerance of different religious beliefs.

- Theocracy vs democracy

1.4.2 Exploration Narratives

An exploration narrative, also known as travel literature or travel writing, is an author's description of his experience seeing an unfamiliar place. Unlike travel guides, which tell people about places to visit while on vacation, travel writing is a subjective look at a place through the eyes of the author. While travel guides inform, exploration narratives describe and entertain. American Literature as it is known today began to be recorded at the end of the 15th century and beginning of the 16th. These early writings consisted largely of explorers taking note of their discoveries and explorations for European readers back home. Many of these writers, that included the likes of Christopher Columbus, Bartolomé de las

► Exploration narrative

Casas, and Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, came from a variety of different backgrounds, roles in exploration, and viewpoints. This would lead their writings to understandably have very different attitudes towards what they would find, and give an in-depth look into.

► Columbus

One prominent writer of note from this period was Columbus, the Italian navigator who through a navigation error while on a mission for the monarchy of Spain accidentally brought about first contact of Spain with the New World. His expedition being the first to reach the Americas, his writings come from the very early years of exploration and consist mainly of information about the new lands that had as of yet been unseen by European eyes. Significant writings of his include letters to notable dignitaries such as court official Luis de Santangel in his first voyage and Ferdinand and Isabella, the monarchs of Spain, in his fourth.

► Description of the new land

These letters read very much like he is trying to sell to them his new discoveries, in the hope of recognition for his accomplishments and further investment in his voyages. He describes lush and beautiful landscapes filled with abundant resources and timid, peaceful people. His true motives lie in taking advantage of these discoveries, declaring “of them all I have taken possession for [the king and queen], by proclamation made and with royal standard unfurled, and no opposition was offered to me”. These letters reveal Columbus to be exploitative, thinking only of his own agenda, and leading Europe on the path it would take for the next few centuries of invading and imprinting into the Americas and throwing the natives aside.

► Bartolomé de las Casas

Another writer of this period whose writings provide a stark contrast to those of Columbus was Bartolomé de las Casas. A Spanish priest who first visited the New World in 1502, about a decade after Columbus' first landing, he would go on to spend much of his life in the Americas, taking part in early colonization efforts and observing the interactions between the Spanish and the natives.

These observations would lead him to be a vocal critic of the barbaric treatment of the natives by the Spanish, decrying the atrocities as counter-intuitive to the Christian beliefs the Spanish claimed to be spreading. He recognised the effort begun by Columbus under

► de las Casas's observation

the pretences of converting the native population as the genocide it had become, saying of Hispaniola "This was the first land in the New World to be destroyed and depopulated by the Christians, and here they began their subjection of the women and children, taking them away from the Indians to use them and ill-use them, eating the food they provided with their sweat and toil." His descriptions, like Columbus', paint the natives as being very different and "other", yet he strives to reach out for their protection and the end of the tyranny forced onto them. De las Casas uses his accounts to further the sensationalism of America as an exotic and beautiful land, but strives to make apparent the injustices currently being committed in the exploration of it. These writers provide us with a complex view of the Americas, giving us a deeper look into the events and attitudes surrounding this new land as exploration by the people who would eventually come to dominate it started to commence.

1.4.2.1 Sir Walter Raleigh

► Sir Walter Raleigh

Sir Walter Raleigh (1552 - 1618) was an English statesman, soldier, writer, explorer, and a favourite courtier of the English Queen Elizabeth I. One of the most notable figures of the Elizabethan era, he played a leading part in English colonisation of North America, suppressed rebellion in Ireland, helped defend England against the Spanish Armada and held political positions under Elizabeth I.

► Raleigh's explorations

In 1594, Raleigh heard of a "City of Gold" in South America and sailed to find it, publishing an exaggerated account of his experiences in a book that contributed to the legend of "El Dorado". After Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, Raleigh was again imprisoned in the Tower, this time for being involved in the Main Plot against King James I, who was not favourably disposed towards him. In 1616, he was released to lead a second expedition in search of El Dorado. During the expedition, men led by his top commander ransacked a Spanish outpost, in violation of both the terms of his pardon and the 1604 peace treaty with Spain. Raleigh returned to England and, to appease the Spanish, he was arrested and executed in 1618.

1.4.3 Historical Writings

Historical Writing is a genre in Literature that reconstructs the past. The historical writing takes

► A type of genre

its setting, characters and events from history. Historical events and issues become crucial for the central characters and the narrative. Concreteness, impersonality and objectivity are the best qualities of historical writings.

► Utilitarian writings of the 17th century

The utilitarian writings of the 17th century included biographies, treatises, accounts of voyages, and sermons. There were few achievements in drama or fiction, since there was a widespread prejudice against these forms. Bad but popular poetry appeared in the *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640 and in Michael Wigglesworth's summary in doggerel verse of Calvinistic belief, *The Day of Doom* (1662). There was some poetry, at least, of a higher order. Anne Bradstreet of Massachusetts wrote some lyrics published in *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), which movingly conveyed her feelings concerning religion and her family. Ranked still higher by modern critics is a poet whose works were not discovered and published until 1939: Edward Taylor, an English-born minister and physician who lived in Boston and Westfield, Massachusetts. Less touched by gloom than the typical Puritan, Taylor wrote lyrics that showed his delight in Christian belief and experience. All 17th-century American writings were in the manner of British writings of the same period. John Smith wrote in the tradition of geographic literature, Bradford echoed the cadences of the King James Bible, while the Mathers and Roger Williams wrote bejewelled prose typical of the day.

► John Smith

1.4.3.1 Captain John Smith

John Smith (1580-1631) was an English soldier, explorer, colonial governor, Admiral of New England, and author. He played an important role in the establishment of the colony at Jamestown, Virginia, the first permanent English settlement in America, in the early 17th century. He was a leader of the Virginia Colony between September 1608 and August 1609, and he led an exploration along the rivers of Virginia and the Chesapeake Bay, during which he became the first English explorer to map the Chesapeake Bay area. Later, he explored and mapped the coast of New England.

Jamestown was established in 1607. Smith trained the first settlers to work at farming and fishing, thus saving



► Jamestown

the colony from early devastation. Harsh weather, lack of food and water, the surrounding swampy wilderness, and attacks from Native Americans almost destroyed the colony. With Smith's leadership, however, Jamestown survived and eventually flourished. Smith was forced to return to England after being injured by an accidental explosion of gunpowder in a canoe. Smith's books and maps were important in encouraging and supporting English colonization of the New World. Having named the region of New England, he stated: "Here every man may be master and owner of his own labour and land. ... If he have nothing but his hands, he may...by industries quickly grow rich." Smith died in London in 1631.

► The second wave

In the 17th century, pirates, adventurers, and explorers opened the way to a second wave of permanent colonists, bringing their wives, children, farm implements, and craftsmen's tools. The early literature of exploration, made up of diaries, letters, travel journals, ships' logs, and reports to the explorers' financial backers - European rulers or, in mercantile England and Holland, joint stock companies - gradually was supplanted by records of the settled colonies. Because England eventually took possession of the North American colonies, the best-known and most-anthologized colonial literature is English. As American minority literature continues to flower in the 20th century and American life becomes increasingly multicultural, scholars are rediscovering the importance of the continent's mixed ethnic heritage. Although the story of literature now turns to the English accounts, it is important to recognize its richly cosmopolitan beginnings.

► Bradford

1.4.3.2 William Bradford

Growing up among radical nonconforming Protestants in rural northern England, William Bradford (1590–1657) embraced their cause at a young age. Early in the seventeenth century, he accompanied them on their exile in the Netherlands, where they settled in Leiden. Edward Winslow (1595–1655) was brought up in relative ease in Worcestershire, closer to London, largely untouched by spiritual concerns. He encountered Bradford and the other exiles while traveling in Leiden and, embracing the new sense of purpose that he found in their spiritual life, in 1620 he joined them on their voyage to America.

► Bradford and Winslow

Once the colonists had established themselves at Plymouth, Massachusetts, Bradford and Winslow became important public figures: each, for instance, served several terms as governor. The book they wrote together during their first months in New England, *Mourt's Relation* (1622), suggests their common objectives and shared viewpoint. In later decades, the two went their separate ways. After returning to England on public business in 1646, Winslow became involved in Oliver Cromwell's Puritan government. He died of yellow fever in the West Indies after jointly commanding an unsuccessful military campaign against the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo. Bradford remained at Plymouth, serving as its governor for more than three decades, and writing the main account of its history, *Of Plymouth Plantation*.

► Mayflower Compact

Bradford also recorded the first document of colonial self-governance in the English New World, the "Mayflower Compact," drawn up while the Pilgrims were still on board ship. The compact was a harbinger of the Declaration of Independence to come a century and a half later. Puritans disapproved of such secular amusements as dancing and card-playing, which were associated with ungodly aristocrats and immoral living. Reading or writing "light" books also fell into this category. Puritan minds poured their tremendous energies into nonfiction and pious genres: poetry, sermons, theological tracts, and histories. Their intimate diaries and meditations record the rich inner lives of this introspective and intense people.

1.4.4 Religious Writings

► Power of religion

The power of religion had greatly affected the way American literature was philosophised and written in the 1700s. It greatly motivated and influenced the actions and mentalities of many travellers, as well as Native Americans. The enforcement of religion mainly arose from foreigners that travelled from other countries to America. People such as William Bradford and Mary Rowlandson lived their lives and made decisions according to their Christian religion. Overall, religion shaped American literature by affecting earlier people's actions, mentality, and the views people had on Native Americans.

These narratives have helped us to better understand earlier civilization and their mindset. For more than 100



► Narratives

years after the Pilgrims landed in 1620, life and writing in New England were dominated by the religious attitude known as Puritanism. To understand colonial life and literature one must understand Puritanism, one of the major influences on American life.

► Protestants

The early settlers in New England were Protestants. England had become a Protestant country when Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic church. Some Englishmen, however, felt that the break was not complete. They wanted to “purify” the church of Catholic features; they were therefore known as Puritans. Another group, the Separatists, wanted to separate, or break away entirely, from the Church of England. These were the Pilgrims. Both groups came to the New World in order to worship God in their own way and to escape persecution by English authorities. They felt they had a divine mission to fulfil. It was the will of God, they believed, that they establish a religious society in the wilderness. This belief must have helped them endure the hard life they faced as colonists.

► Puritan view

In the Puritan view, God was supreme. The Puritans held that He revealed His will through the Bible, which they believed literally. Clergymen interpreted the Bible in sermons, but each man and woman was obliged to study it for himself too. The people had to be educated in order to read the Bible, to discuss it, and to write about it. Harvard College was founded in 1636 partly to meet this demand for an educated populace. Other colleges and public schools followed. Indeed, the intellectual quality of New England life, which later influenced other parts of the country, is traceable to the Puritans’ need for a trained and literate population.

► Independent nation

American writing in the colonial days, as has been seen, dealt largely with religion. In the last 30 years of the 18th century, however, people turned their attention from religion to the subject of government. These were the years when the colonies broke away from England and declared themselves a new and independent nation. It was a great decision for Americans to make. Feelings ran high, and people expressed their opinions in a body of writing that, if not literature in the narrow sense, is certainly literature in the sense of its being great writing.



1.4.4.1 John Winthrop

John Winthrop (1588–1649) was the governor and an early Puritan leader whose vision for a godly commonwealth created the basis for an established religion that remained in place in Massachusetts until well after adoption of the First Amendment. It was, however, eventually superseded by ideas of separation of church and state. Born in Edwardstone, Suffolk, England, the son of a lord, Winthrop attended Trinity College and later received legal training at Gray's Inn. He was rising in English legal circles when he decided to settle in America, where he hoped Puritanism, the reformed Protestantism that he embraced, could flourish. Winthrop emigrated in 1630 and would serve many terms as governor of Massachusetts, in which capacity he exercised generally good judgment that helped the colony through its early perilous years.

► John Winthrop

Winthrop helped to establish a commonwealth where voting was limited to male church members and he generally favoured rule by an aristocratic elite, subject to some democratic control. Like fellow Puritans, Winthrop did not believe it was possible to separate church and state; the state was responsible for enforcing provisions against Sabbath breaking, blasphemy, and the like. Winthrop resisted the extreme separatism initially advocated by Roger Williams, as well as Williams's ultimate universalism. Winthrop appears, however, to have passed information on to Williams that enabled him to escape to a neighbouring colony rather than face deportation to England for his perceived heresies. Although moderated by his own judicious temperament, Winthrop pronounced similar sentences against Anabaptists, who opposed infant baptism and who argued, as had Williams, that the state should not enforce laws relative to man's duties to God. Winthrop's importance has been enhanced by the posthumous publication of his journals that detail many of the events of New England until his death in 1649.

► John Winthrop and Roger Williams

1.4.5 Political Prose

Political fiction is literature that uses its narrative to provide commentary on political systems and theories. Political fiction can be based on past or current political events and set in a theorized future or alternate reality.



- Political fiction

Political intrigue stories can be metaphorical, satirical, or allegorical, and they usually carry an underlying message. The study of literature and politics always been mutually complementary endeavours, each discipline casting interesting “cross-lights” one upon the other. Literary works can make large and sometimes impersonal historical, political, and social forces vivid and palpable.

1.4.5.1 Jefferson Franklin Long

- First African American congressman from Georgia

Jefferson Franklin Long (1836 -1901) was a U.S. congressman from Georgia. He was the second African American sworn into the U.S. House of Representatives and the first African American congressman from Georgia. Long was the first African American Representative to speak on the floor of the U.S. House, opposing the Amnesty Bill that exempted former Confederates serving in the House from swearing allegiance to the Constitution. He remained the only African American to represent Georgia until Andrew Young was elected in 1972.

Long was born into slavery to an enslaved mother and a white father near the city of Knoxville in Crawford County, Georgia on March 3, 1836. He taught himself to read and write, which was an illegal act for slaves, while setting type for the newspaper in Macon, Georgia. By 1860 Long had married Lucinda Carhart and had started a family. By the end of the American Civil War an emancipated Long had become a successful merchant tailor in Macon, Georgia. Long had established himself as a prominent member of the Republican Party in 1867 and was elected in 1870 as a Republican to the Forty-first Congress to serve a term from January 16 to March 3, 1871. Georgia had no congressional representation from March 1869 to December 1870 due to the state’s failure to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. He was not a candidate for re-election in 1870 due to anti-Reconstruction efforts by the white-majority Georgia GOP, but remained active in politics and served as a delegate to the Republican National Convention from 1872 to 1880. After his congressional term, Long returned to his tailoring business in Macon which he ran with one of his sons. Long died from influenza on February 4, 1901, and was interred at Linwood Cemetery in Macon.

- Jefferson Franklin Long

1.4.6 Slave Narratives

In 1619, as early American settlers struggled to

► Slaves

generate an adequate food and labour source, a Dutch ship carrying 20 African slaves came ashore. Slaves were originally indentured servants who never got released from their work commitments. As time went on, the American economy, specifically the Southern plantation farmers, became dependent on slavery.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade ripped slaves from their homes, friends, and families, and brought them to America to be auctioned off to the highest bidder. The transport of slaves through the Middle Passage entailed filthy, overcrowded conditions that resulted in the death of many slaves. In America, slaves were considered the property of their masters and received no rights or legal protection from abuse. Slaves were treated more like livestock than human beings and they constantly suffered from violence, isolation, and subjugation. Most perpetrators of slavery believed their actions were justified by Christian rhetoric. The Curse of Ham was often interpreted as God's assertion of African's destiny to be slaves. Christian rhetoric was also used to suggest that slaves were saved from the savageness of Africa. Many people believed in the biological inferiority of Blacks. Anti-miscegenation laws and the rise of eugenics in the nineteenth century supported oppression and constraint of blacks to maintain white superiority. The fugitive slave laws, forcing the North to be complicit in returning escaped slaves, expanded slavery into a country-wide political issue. The American reform movement developed in part to criticize slavery, which was abolished in 1865 with the passing of the thirteenth amendment.

► The Curse of Ham

Slave narratives were a central part of the abolitionist movement because they allowed African Americans to expose the brutalities they faced through slavery. Slave narratives put a name and a face to the victims of slavery, helping people realize the true cruelty of the institution. There were often problems of representation when white writers tried to highlight racial issues because the writers unintentionally maintained myths and discrimination of the African Americans. For this reason, Blacks saw the need to write their own stories in order to show their personal experiences with oppression and exhibit what they did to overcome it. Showing their agency, the authors of slave narratives created a platform of literature that aimed to ignite moral change in America.

► Slave narratives



► Slave narratives

Three of the best-known slave narratives, written by Equiano, Jacobs, and Douglass, aimed to expose the harsh truths of slavery. In addition to highlighting the abuse experienced by slaves, the narratives also wanted to show how slavery as an institution harmed the dominant culture by promoting rape and disrupting family structures. Masters treated their slaves like property in order to avoid the true wretchedness of their actions. Slave narratives tried to debunk the “kind master” myth while simultaneously showing how slave ownership could transform the kindest person into a cold, harsh monster. Another important goal of slave narratives was to oppose the “Darkest Africa” myth, which assumed that the African Americans’ darker complexion was a biological indication of their inferiority. To contrast this myth, slaves wanted to challenge racial assumptions and stress that blacks did not want to be enslaved, even if they did not actively revolt. It was important for these authors to foster a positive race consciousness in order to limit the lasting effects of racism once slavery was abolished.

► “free” Americans

By showing the problem of slavery to be the institution as a whole, slave narratives pushed for the abolition of slavery to create a more ethical America. Authors highlighted the hypocrisy of Christian rhetoric in oppressing slavery and focused on the power of education and literacy in helping slaves exert agency in their own situations. Another important aspect of slave narratives was showing the struggles the slaves undertook in gaining freedom and living as “free” Americans. Authors wanted to resist the saviour narrative, where a white person purchased a slave’s freedom. Equiano, Jacobs, and Douglas were all powerful writers who knew the importance of exposing the brutalities of slavery to the public. These abolitionist writers knew they had to share their stories in order to inspire change and abolish slavery in America.

During the period of early African American literature, the purpose of coloured authors was to expose the brutality of slavery, to demonstrate how slavery was bad for the dominant culture, to foster a positive race, and to exhibit what blacks did and how they could contribute to the American culture. Harriet Jacobs successfully accomplished these goals in her work *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In this work of literature, Jacobs recognises

- Purpose of co-
loured authors

her own relative privilege. In her work she shows ways she exhibits agency in how she has tried to improve the social conditions of the African Americans.

1.4.6.1 Fredrick Douglass

- Fredrick Douglass

During his life, from 1818 to 1895, Fredrick Douglass was an advocate for abolition. His freedom was purchased in 1846 for \$711; however, he rose to prominence and got his works published while still in bondage. Douglass felt that Blacks needed to represent themselves in American literature rather than be represented by White writers. With a belief in the promises of America's founding principles, Douglass wrote in order to exact the change that would enable him and all others burdened by servitude to attain their American Dream.

- Masculinist focus

In his *Narrative*, Douglass assumes a more confrontational tone than his fellow slave narrative writer, Equiano. In comparison to Jacobs, Douglass takes on a masculinist focus, depicting the ways men are unable to be men under slavery. While his main work is a narrative, he does much more than narrate. He is persuasive in his unpacking of popular myths about slavery and uses his variety of living circumstances to add an abundance of contextual information to his writing.

- Dynamic between
slave and master

Throughout the text, Douglass examines the dynamic between slave and master and between master and mistress. Masters are given absolute power arbitrarily, which can begin to affect the relationship between husband and wife. When masters choose to exert their power over slaves by having mixed-race children and increasing their personal property, the traditional family model is broken. This, in turn, leads to resentment from the mistress towards the slave women. Additionally, Douglass illuminates the Curse of Ham paradox, often used to justify the institution of slavery. As can be seen in the deterioration of Christian family values, slave owners were obviously cherry-picking specific points from the Bible to favour slavery.

Not only were relationships crumbling under slavery, but individuals as well. Another method Douglass employs to subvert oppression is demonstrating the adverse effects such institutions have on slave owners. He demonstrates the detriment slavery poses to all parties involved. While within the confines of slavery, Douglass continued to exert his own agency in order to better his



- Douglass challenges Jefferson's assertions

circumstances. With the growth of his reading and writing abilities, Douglass challenges Jefferson's assertions, disrupting the Whites' ability to think of Blacks as an inferior race and making it harder for them to treat slaves inhumanly. Slaves do indeed have the capacity to learn and are cunning in their ways of doing so. According to Douglass, people who represent freedom, equality, and equal opportunity couldn't continue to uphold slavery. He leaves behind a legacy of leveraging one's own personal agency for the betterment of an entire group, in addition to fighting for one's rights through the use of words.

1.4.7 American Romanticism

- Literary movement

In the mid-1850s, as the United States was beginning to shape its own identity within the realm of literature, American Romanticism emerged. This literary movement holds unique importance to American history because it is known to be the first full-fledged literary movement in America. This movement saw the emergence of writers celebrating American beauty and identity. The American Renaissance period saw the publication of timeless masterpieces by authors including Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, and Emily Dickinson. In short, American Romanticism emerged in response to nationalist values and began to develop a distinct American literary style.

- Emergence

Much like the Italian Renaissance of the 15th century, the emergence of American Romanticism saw the celebration of the common man. In an effort to move away from Puritanism and Calvinism, Romanticism, as explained by Ann Woodlief, "was a Renaissance in the sense of a flowering, excitement over human possibilities, and a high regard for individual ego." In other words, American Romanticism celebrated the unknown – as Americans began to venture westward into newly acquired territories, authors began to write about the beauty of the natural landscape, untouched by man. The aesthetic of nature is something that was extremely important to American Romantic writers and is reflected in works such as the *Leatherstocking Tales*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, and even *Moby-Dick*, a work that epitomises what Romanticism is all about.

Furthermore, American Romanticism was composed of a couple of different themes, including the theme



of nature, and the great unknown was told through stories of the frontier – a land unexplored that promised opportunity for expansion, growth, and freedom. Venturing into this unknown brought forth a newfound spirit of optimism, a well-known American ideal that any person can achieve anything they set their mind to. Other characteristics included the power of the universe and exploring how it worked in mysterious, incomprehensible ways. These characteristics thus tie back to the theme of the unknown. The most important aspect, though, of American Romanticism was that it had its own individualistic elements, apart from those of its European counterparts. For the first time in history, a movement came about that was entirely belonging to the United States, and the American writer's identity thus was a result of it.

► Themes

Walt Whitman was an influential writer during the Romantic period. A few qualities of Romanticism are the glorification of nature, elevation of the common man, the supernatural, and nationalism, which Whitman really embraced in his writing. Even in his own life, he adopted the persona of the “common man.” Most portraits of Whitman are more casual than the typical portraits from this time period. For example, in the portrait he used for the cover of *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman is standing in a casual pose, his hat is cocked, and he is staring straight at the camera. This image went against the traditional route and aligned Whitman with working people.

► Whitman

Whitman's poetry is often described as lyric nationalism. Lyric is the private and individual voice defining opposition, and nationalism defines what it means to be an American. Walt Whitman is famous for combining the two genres. His poems have an observant and documentary element to them because he points out the subtleties of America. One reason he is considered a nationalist poet is because he points out what makes America special or different.

► Lyric nationalism

In his poem, “Song of Myself,” Whitman broke with formal poetic conventions. He uses a kind of free verse instead of a structured line arrangement. His poems still have a rhythm and order to them, but they're less structured and more free-flowing. In “Song of Myself,” Whitman is visualising himself as one person in a land of many people, but he is also writing a long poem to



► Free verse

himself. The idea is that one person among a group of people deserves to be celebrated. This shows a parallel between Romanticism and transcendentalism.

1.4.8 Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was a theological, literary, and political movement that emerged in the 1820s and 1830s from New England Unitarianism. It is primarily associated with the work of essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, journalist and feminist theorist Margaret Fuller, Unitarian minister and antislavery advocate Theodore Parker, and essayist, naturalist, and political theorist Henry David Thoreau. The transcendentalists began by extending the Unitarian theological struggle against Puritan Calvinism, pushing towards a post-Christian spirituality that regarded each man and woman capable of spiritual development and completion. They created literary and theological modes of expression, probably having a greater influence on American literary and aesthetic culture than on American religion.

► Origin

The transcendentalists, especially Emerson, promoted the notion that authors are seers. It is the writer's responsibility to view the world clearly and to bring the world to life. Emerson referred to poets as 'liberating gods.' Literature served as a platform for liberation, assisting individuals in seeing what needed to be seen: nature, spirituality, self-identity, and social injustice. The Transcendentalists were outspoken opponents of slavery and gender inequity. Every person must be honoured in transcendental philosophy since each individual has a global soul.

► Transcendentalists

Transcendentalists also placed significant emphasis on imagination. Imagination allows the mind to be resourceful and form new ideas that are not present to the senses. As the writer or reader imagines it, he transcends himself. This allows him to move beyond his personal experience, his mind, and body, to consider something anew. The ability to imagine can effect change. The Transcendentalists wanted their work to have an altering effect on individuals and on society as a whole. For the transcendentalists, man needed to live in the world, participate in it, look at it closely, and take action.

► Imagination

1.4.8.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson

During the nineteenth century, America continued to establish its own identity separate from Europe. Various reforms took place, including prison improvement, abolitionism, women's rights, and the Second Great Awakening. America worked to better itself as a nation and overcome any of its shortcomings. As Americans determined the national rhetoric for the budding country, the notion of individualism characterised the climate of change. Individualism, which falls directly under the umbrella of transcendentalism, stresses that we are each responsible for bettering ourselves and our community. Many leaders of this movement emphasised their reliance on themselves and the environment to answer their questions instead of God, scripture, or previous philosophers. Ralph Waldo Emerson's writings pushed for these ideals, asserting his belief that humans contain an innate sense of right and wrong independent of religious views. Ultimately, Emerson's writings became a key player in helping America create its own distinct literary movement during the nineteenth century.

► Transcendentalism

In his first essay, *Nature*, which was not widely recognised on publication, Emerson presented numerous philosophical concepts and the foundation of transcendentalism. Although his piece could give advice to any American at the time, it specifically spoke to the hearts of other budding American Transcendentalist writers, encouraging them to invent their own style rather than imitating former creators. Emerson's most famous essay, "Self-Reliance," consists of journal entries compiled throughout his lifetime as well as excerpts from multiple lectures he delivered. Because Emerson had gained more of a following by the time of this essay's publication, he targeted this piece towards his general audience of American readers. He sought to nourish confidence in his readers' ideas and encourage them to try new things, overall pushing America to form a strong self-identity.

► Self-Reliance

Throughout Emerson's "Self-Reliance," he continually focuses on the importance of staying true to oneself and discovering originality. The writer encourages his readers to follow their individual will and not conform to social expectations. He also discusses the need for open-mindedness in order to grow as a person, stating that if



- Follow their individual will

you are not changing your opinions and learning new information every so often, then you are not advancing yourself as a person. Furthermore, Emerson disputes organised religion in his writing, instead pointing to the idea of experiencing spirituality through living in the present moment. He also discourages the imitation of former great masters of the arts and sciences; he instead believes that greatness is intrinsic and not something that can be copied. Overall, Emerson argues that reliance on oneself frees individuals to uncover their true identity and achieve ultimate independence.

- Individualist agenda

Emerson's "Self-Reliance" serves to push the individualist agenda of the nineteenth century. While discussing the importance of open-mindedness, Emerson advises that "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines." Here, Emerson's emphasis on being open to different perspectives ties in with the individualism ideology. He believes that people often feel they must be consistent for other people, not for themselves.

- Perfection of self

However, the Transcendentalist Movement stresses perfection of self, which encourages one to not care what other people think. Additionally, Emerson demonstrates his objection to organised religion when he speaks of the "purity of the present moment". This quote encourages one to find spirituality through one's own experiences and to trust one's own beliefs rather than archaic ideas of the divine. This is a direct opposition to Protestant and other traditional Christian beliefs of the 19th century, which demanded one must know God through the scriptures.

- Major works of Emerson

Major works of Emerson include, *Essays: First Series* (1841), *Essays: Second Series* (1844), *Poems* (1847), *Nature, Addresses and Lectures* (1849), *Representative Men* (1850), *English Traits* (1856), *The Conduct of Life* (1860), *May-Day and Other Pieces* (1867), *Society and Solitude* (1870), *Natural History of the Intellect: the last lectures of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1871) and *Letters and Social Aims* (1875).

1.4.8.2 Henry David Thoreau

Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), of French and Scottish descent, was born in Concord and made it his permanent home. From a poor family, like Emerson, he worked his way through Harvard. Throughout his

► Thoreau

life, he reduced his needs to the simplest level and managed to live on very little money, thus maintaining his independence. In essence, he made living his career. A nonconformist, he attempted to live his life at all times according to his rigorous principles. This attempt was the subject of many of his writings.

► Walden Pond

Thoreau's masterpiece, *Walden, or, Life in the Woods* (1854), is the result of two years, two months, and two days (from 1845 to 1847) he spent living in a cabin he built at Walden Pond on property owned by Emerson. In *Walden*, Thoreau consciously shapes this time into one year, and the book is carefully constructed so the seasons are subtly evoked in order. The book is also organised so that the simplest earthly concerns come first (in the section called "Economy," he describes the expenses of building a cabin); by the end, the book has progressed to meditations on the stars.

► Retreat and concentration

In his journal for January 30, 1852, Thoreau explains his preference for living rooted in one place: "I am afraid to travel much or to famous places, lest it might completely dissipate the mind." Thoreau's method of retreat and concentration resembles Asian meditation techniques. The resemblance is not accidental; like Emerson and Whitman, he was influenced by the Hindu and Buddhist philosophies. His most treasured possession was his library of Asian classics, which he shared with Emerson. His eclectic style draws on Greek and Latin classics and is crystalline, punning, and as richly metaphorical as the English metaphysical writers of the late Renaissance.

► Collective American experience of the 19th century

In *Walden*, Thoreau not only tests the theories of transcendentalism, he also re-enacts the collective American experience of the 19th century as well: living on the frontier. Thoreau felt that his contribution would be to renew a sense of the wilderness in language. *Walden* inspired William Butler Yeats, a passionate Irish nationalist, to write "The Lake Isle of Innisfree," while Thoreau's essay "Civil Disobedience," with its theory of passive resistance based on the moral necessity for the just individual to disobey unjust laws, was an inspiration for Mahatma Gandhi's Indian independence movement and Martin Luther King's struggle for black Americans' civil rights in the 20th century.

Thoreau is the most attractive of the Transcendentalists



► Transcendentalists

today because of his ecological consciousness, do-it-yourself independence, ethical commitment to abolitionism, and political theory of civil disobedience and peaceful resistance. His ideas are still fresh, and his incisive poetic style and habit of close observation are still modern. His important works include *The Service* (1840), *A Walk to Wachusett* (1842), *Paradise (to be) Regained* (1843), *The Landlord* (1843), *Sir Walter Raleigh* (1844), *Herald of Freedom* (1844), *Wendell Phillips Before the Concord Lyceum* (1845), *Reform and the Reformers* (1846–48), *Thomas Carlyle and His Works* (1847), *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849), *Slavery in Massachusetts* (1854), *A Plea for Captain John Brown* (1859), *Remarks After the Hanging of John Brown* (1859), *The Last Days of John Brown* (1860), and *Walking* (1862).

1.4.8.3 Margaret Fuller

► New England intellectual community

Margaret Fuller (1810–1850), one of the most important American feminists of her day, was a philosopher, journalist, and literary critic. She belonged to the New England intellectual community called the transcendentalists, which also included Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Her most important written work is *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), an expansion of her article entitled “The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men, Woman versus Women” (1843). Fuller is remembered not only for her writings but also for her life, a series of undertakings to live up to her own ideal of transcending the then-customary gender differentiations.

► Channing

Margaret Fuller’s personal quest for self-realisation as well as her ardent feminist programme for the self-realisation of all women took inspiration from Channing. Even though she abandoned the Unitarian church and stopped attending any religious services, Fuller never lost her admiration for Channing. Fuller set forth her mature religious principles in “A Credo” around June 1840.

Fuller was an advocate of women’s rights and, in particular, women’s education and the right to employment. Fuller, along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, wanted to stay free of what she called the “strong mental odor” of female teachers. She also encouraged many

► Fuller

other reforms in society, including prison reform and the emancipation of slaves in the United States. Many other advocates for women's rights and feminism, including Susan B. Anthony, cite Fuller as a source of inspiration. Many of her contemporaries, however, were not supportive, including her former friend Harriet Martineau. She said that Fuller was a talker rather than an activist. Shortly after Fuller's death, her importance faded; the editors who prepared her letters to be published, believing her fame would be short-lived, censored or altered much of her work before publication. Margaret Fuller became the first woman granted library privileges at what was then an all-male university. Her important works include *Summer on the Lakes* (1844), *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), *Papers on Literature and Art* (1846), *Memoirs of Margaret Fuller Ossoli* (1852), *At Home and Abroad* (1856), and *Life Without and Life Within* (1858).

1.4.9 Twentieth Century Prose

► Experiments

Although in the beginning and during the course of the 20th century books lost some of their influence due to new forms of mass media like the radio, television, and recently the internet, American literature became more and more influential on an international level. By the turn of the century, writers of prose as well as poets and playwrights were keen on experimenting with new techniques and topics. The rather idealistic point of view authors had taken in the 19th century was no longer up-to-date, and especially after the First World War, another style of writing became popular. Perhaps it would be the best description to say that realism got even more realistic. Ernest Hemingway, for example, had a very realistic, straightforward style without the romantic ornaments that had been used before. He became famous first with his two anti-war novels, *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, published in 1926 and 1929.

American authors, in general, began to reject the emotional aspects of literature more and more. Instead, they became fascinated with describing and analysing the psychologic depths of their characters. An example of this development is Ellen Glasgow, who described in her novels the transformation of the American South from a rural to an industrial economy and the role of southern women caught in the traditional southern codes of domesticity, piety, and dependence. The 1920s, also



► Transformation

known as *The Roaring Twenties*, brought change again. Society, and thus also the society of writers, started to reject the Puritan and Victorian values and ideals that had been established. Writers felt that now they had much more freedom in choosing their topics and also in choosing their ways of life.

► Lost Generation

The most important people on the American literature scene at that time were surely a group of people called the “Lost Generation.” They were mainly influenced by the consequences of the First World War, which were personal disillusionment and the loss of old values. The most important author of the Lost Generation, who was even called the most important American author of the 20th century, was certainly Ernest Hemingway. Another very important person, especially for the Lost Generation and also for every other writer, was the Irishman James Joyce. With his stream-of-consciousness technique, the use of many symbols, and his prose style that was rather lyric, he set new standards not only for Europeans but also for Americans.

► Harlem Renaissance

The second important literary movement of the early 20th century was the so-called Harlem Renaissance. This name describes the literary work of African American novelists, whose creative centre was Harlem, N.Y. These people wanted to evoke a new kind of cultural self-confidence in their Black brothers and sisters spread all over the country and to support the idea of the “New Negro”, a topic that was described by Alain Le Roy, a sociologist, in 1925. An author of the Harlem Renaissance was Langston Hughes, who wrote poems as well as short stories. His most famous invention is the short story character Jesse B. Simple, who is the prototype of an African American living in a big city. Another very popular subject at that time was the so-called Southern Gothic, which means the American South and its problems. William Faulkner created in his 1940 novel *The Hamlet*, as well as in other books, a very humorous picture of the South, for which he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1949.

Other authors occupied with this subject were Truman Capote and Robert Penn Warren, not only a novelist but also a critic who was in 1946 drawing the portrait of a politician in the South in his novel *All the King's Men*. After the Second World War, Jews became an ethnic minority

► Ethnic minority

in the U.S. The Jews became more and more creative. In their novels, short stories, and poems, they described their lives as Jews in American cities, sometimes humorous, sometimes marked by despair. One of these Jewish authors, Saul Bellow, even won the Nobel Prize in 1979. In general, prose after the Second World War can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there was the realistic and naturalistic way of describing things, and on the other, there was literature full of black humour and strange phantasies.

► Kurt Vonnegut

Kurt Vonnegut was one of the many authors to publish anti-war novels because of his own experiences. His most famous book is *Slaughterhouse - Five* (1969), which is about a group of prisoners in Germany during the Second World War who are suddenly sent to a fictitious planet, a subject that is very similar to Science- Fiction Literature.

► American provincialism

The writers of the twentieth century emerged from the war to find their world in a state of upheaval, and the literature of the period reflects these profound changes. After the challenge and excitement of the battlefields, many of these young writers returned to America to find that their country had suffered few of the cruel realities of war. Disillusioned and bitter, the young writers turned against the self-satisfaction of their country, many of them moving to Europe, disgusted with what they called American provincialism. This move away from America resulted in a period of stock-taking and rapid technological development. In America, writers of prose fiction began to discuss problems of national rather than regional interest.

1.4.9.1 Amiri Baraka

Amiri Baraka, born Everett LeRoy Jones also called Imamu Amiri Baraka, (1934–2014), was an American poet and playwright who published provocative works that assiduously presented the experiences and suppressed anger of Black Americans in a white-dominated society. During the 1960s, Baraka lived in New York City's Greenwich Village, where he knew many artists and writers, including Frank O'Hara and Allen Ginsberg. By 1965, Baraka had started the Black Arts Repertory Theatre in Harlem, the Black section of New York City. He portrayed black nationalist views

► Amiri Baraka

of racism in disturbing plays such as *Dutchman* (1964), in which a White woman flirts with and eventually kills a younger Black man on a New York City subway. The realistic first half of the play sparkles with witty dialogue and subtle characterization. The shocking ending risks melodrama by dramatising racial misunderstanding and the victimisation of the Black male protagonist.

► Black nationalism

Following the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, Jones became increasingly focused on Black nationalism. That year, he left his white Jewish wife and moved to Harlem. There he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre, which staged many of his works prior to its closure in the late 1960s. In 1968, he adopted the name Amiri Baraka, and his writings became more divisive, prompting some to applaud his courage and others to deplore sentiments that could foster hate. In the mid-1970s, he became a Marxist, though his goals remained similar.

► Major works

Among Baraka's other works are *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963), *Black Magic: Collected Poetry 1961–1967* (1969), *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka* (1984), and the piercing *Tales of the Out & Gone* (2006), a fictional social commentary. Baraka taught at Columbia, Yale University, and, from 1979, at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, where at the time of his death he was emeritus professor of Africana studies. *S O S: Poems 1961–2013* (2015) was a posthumous collection containing a wide selection from his oeuvre, including some previously unpublished verse.

1.4.9.2 Kate Millet

Katherine Murray Millett (1934–2017) was an American feminist writer, educator, artist, and activist. She has been described as “a seminal influence on second-wave feminism”, best known for her book ‘Sexual Politics’, widely viewed as the movement’s manifesto. In ‘Sexual Politics,’ Millett offers a critique of patriarchy within Western literature. In her words, sex-based oppression is both political and cultural. To substantiate her position, Millett identified the roles of both sexism and heterosexism within modern novelists. The portrayal of women (particularly lesbian women) was therefore largely degrading. Millett concludes that patriarchy demands a revolution in the domestic division of labour

► Millett

with radical alterations to personal and family lifestyles. As a solution, she advocates undoing the traditional family unit. For her, this holds the path towards a true sexual revolution.

► Second-wave feminism

As something of a spokesperson for second-wave feminism, Millett has been politically active in terms of campaigns to end the oppression of women. Millett has also raised awareness of how females who experience sexual, physical, and emotional abuse face a set of power dynamics. That said, her concerns have gone beyond feminism with a consideration of human rights, anti-psychiatry, and civil rights. She has also been active in several feminist campaigns, such as those of the pressure group NOW and Radical Lesbians. This is a somewhat unusual combination in that both organisations pursue different strategies in terms of securing the objectives of the feminist movement. The former is located within the liberal feminist tradition, whereas the latter offers a more radical and exclusive approach.

► Subordinate roles of women

Sexual Politics (1970), an important document of the second wave of feminism, argues that patriarchy was a political institution that relied on the subordinate roles of women and that Western social institutions are covert ways of manipulating power. Like de Beauvoir, Millett believed that women were subjected to artificially constructed ideas of the feminine and that all aspects of society and culture functioned according to a sexual politics that encouraged women to internalise their inferiority until it became psychologically rooted in them. Millett identified literature as a tool for political ideology because it recreated sexual inequalities and reinforced patriarchal values in society. To expose the depth of this insidious indoctrination, Millett examined the work of four 20th-century male authors, including DH Lawrence (*Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in which Millett exposes a sustained celebration of masculine sexuality and a misogynistic presumption of female passivity).

Millett's analyses rocked the foundations of the literary canon by castigating classics — DH Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, and Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*—for their use of sex to denigrate women. In contrast, she applauds the gender politics of homosexual writer Jean Genet. Millett is also noted for her distinction

► Gender politics

between the concepts of “sex”, which is rooted in biology, and “gender”, which is culturally acquired.

► Major works

Millett wrote several books on women's lives from a feminist perspective, including *The Prostitution Papers: A Candid Dialogue* (1973), *Flying* (1974), *The Basement: Meditations on a Human Sacrifice* (1979), *Going to Iran* (1982), and *The Politics of Cruelty: An Essay on the Literature of Political Imprisonment* (1994).

1.4.9.3 Elaine Showalter

► Founder of gynocriticism

Elaine Showalter is a literary critic, teacher, and founder of gynocriticism, a feminist critical theory and approach that focuses on the woman writer, the meaning of her text, and the structure of literature written by women, including its history, themes, and genres. She introduced this new method of reading specific texts and its application in an essay, “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979). Because of the relative success of gynocritics, especially of Showalter herself, whose prolific works demonstrate the method in all its possible combinations (*Daughters of Decadence*, highly praised by the *Times (London) Literary Supplement* when it was published in 1993, applies gynocritics to 19th-century short fiction in Britain), the very foundations of feminism have shifted from practical concerns to intellectual ones.

► Showalter

In the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Showalter is named “one of the founders of feminist criticism and still one of its most important and influential practitioners.” She began by concentrating on British women novelists, studying their work not as part of a tradition dominated by male writers but as a separate tradition altogether, even a subculture with its own “values, conventions, experiences, and behaviours.” Her subsequent books, especially *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (1990), include literary histories that contribute to the modern area of “gender studies,” since she is concerned with the language, especially the rhetoric, of popular fiction and periodicals, as these reflect the changes in themes and tensions at the end of the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th.

Showalter's leap to national prominence came in April 1997, when she appeared with Lynne Cheney on *Crossfire Sunday*, a popular confrontational television show, as a guest during a discussion of the causes



► Gulf War Syndrome

of Gulf War Syndrome. Her recent book, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (1997), proposes that afflictions like Gulf War Syndrome arise not from exposure to chemicals but from the mind of the individual. Naturally, this was not a popular opinion or one that people suffering from modern maladies like chronic fatigue syndrome were going to admit without loud arguments against it.

It must be said that Showalter does not consider these conditions faked or made up; on the contrary, she contests these claims by suggesting that “we’re a society that doesn’t understand or really take seriously the effects of psychological stress, conflict, anxiety, and a certain kind of helplessness on our bodies and on our emotions.” Indeed, the shrill tone of her loudest critics makes it absolutely necessary to read and understand Showalter’s position on hysteria and psychosomatic illness. It is characteristic of Showalter that she continues to work as editor of two prestigious scholarly publications, *Women’s Studies* and *Signs: Journal of Women, Culture, and Society*, and to contribute regular essays to respected academic periodicals. Her other important works include *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Writers from Brontë to Lessing* (1977), *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (1985), *Speaking of Gender* (1989), *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing* (1991), *Hysteria Beyond Freud* (co-author, 1993) and *Scribbling Women: Short Stories by Nineteenth Century American Women* (1997).

► Showalter’s works

1.4.9.4 Lionel Trilling

Lionel Trilling (1905–1975) was an American literary critic, author, and teacher. Trilling was a frequent contributor to the *Partisan Review* and a member of the group known as “The New York Intellectuals,” a group of American writers and literary critics based in New York City in the mid-twentieth century. They advocated left-wing political causes but were also firmly anti-Stalinist. The group is known for having sought to integrate literary theory with Marxism and Socialism, while rejecting Soviet Communism as a workable or acceptable political model.

► The New York Intellectuals

Trilling maintained a lifelong association with Columbia University, becoming the first Jewish professor



► Trilling

to receive a tenure in the Department of English. A popular professor, he taught Columbia's Colloquium on Important Books for 30 years with the equally notable writer and critic Jacques Barzun. Trilling is closely associated with the *Partisan Review*, an American political and literary quarterly that broke with the Soviet line in 1937 in the wake of the Moscow Trials, becoming stridently anti-Soviet after the Great Purges of Stalin.

► Criticism of the New Left

Although he never established a new school of literary criticism, Trilling is viewed as one of the great literary critics of the twentieth century for his ability to trace the cultural, social, and political implications of the literature of his time and for his emphasis on the moral dimension of literature as a higher expression of the human spirit than the machinations of politics. While a socialist, he is also known for his criticism of the New Left for failing to acknowledge the crimes of Stalinism. His 1950 collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*, is often cited as the high-water mark of liberalism, leading to a conservative resurgence in the writings of intellectuals such as James Burnham and William F. Buckley Jr.

► Major works

Trilling published two complex studies of authors Matthew Arnold (1939) and E. M. Forster (1943), both written in response to a concern with "the tradition of humanistic thought and the intellectual middle class, which believes it continues this tradition." His first collection of essays, *The Liberal Imagination*, was published in 1950, followed by the collections, *The Opposing Self* (1955) -focusing on the conflict between self-definition and the influence of culture, *Freud and the Crisis of Our Culture* (1955), *A Gathering of Fugitives* (1956), and *Beyond Culture* (1965) - a collection of essays concerning modern literary and cultural attitudes towards selfhood.

Trilling was chosen the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard University in 1970. Established in 1925, this annual post has been held by some of the most important literary figures in the English-speaking world, including T. S. Eliot, Robert Frost, e. e. cummings and Octavio Paz among others. He later published a book based on the lecture series, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), in which he explores the ideas of the moral self in post-Enlightenment Western civilization. Trilling posits that the moral category of sincerity



► Charles Eliot
Norton Professor
of Poetry

arose at a historical moment during the age of William Shakespeare, later to be replaced by the moral category of authenticity. He wrote the introduction to *The Selected Letters of John Keats* (1951), in which he defended Keats's notion of Negative Capability, as well as the introduction, "George Orwell and the Politics of Truth," to the 1952 reissue of George Orwell's book, *Homage to Catalonia*.

While Trilling considered himself one of the voices of that liberalism, he nonetheless expressed some despair over its failure to address the threat of Soviet tyranny. It was this view of liberalism that Trilling could not abide. He became an important critic of liberalism, and although he did not make the transition to the neo conservatism that Irving Kristol and some others made, he helped provide an intellectual heft to their anticommunism. He used his literary criticism as a vehicle for developing the moral imagination as a corrective to the simplicity of much of the ideological bent of politics. *The Middle of the Journey* (1947), *Of This Time, Of That Place and Other Stories* (1979), *The Journey Abandoned: The Unfinished Novel* (2008) are the other important works by Trilling.

► Soviet tyranny

1.4.10 Fiction

During the 1780s, Americans developed a growing interest in the relatively new literary form of the novel, reading books by British novelists such as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding, as well as European authors. One particular favourite was German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774), the story of a sensitive, alienated young romantic who commits suicide. The novel became especially popular after an American edition was published in Philadelphia in 1784. Yet despite the rise of novel reading, Americans in general remained highly ambivalent about the novel.

► Novel

Some critics called novels frivolous and immoral diversions and expressed the fear that fiction would lure popular attention away from serious and edifying works such as history or religion. They also distrusted novels because of their imaginative quality (a deeply rooted prejudice with origins in the Puritan view that works of fiction were essentially lies). A more immediate source of this distrust was Scottish common sense philosophy, which had an immense influence on early



► Scottish common-sense philosophy

national American thought and culture. Common sense philosophers such as Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, Henry Home, and Lord Karnes gave primacy to actual experience over the realm of the possible or the ideal as the embodiment of reality. As a result, they were sceptical about the realm of the imagination, which dealt only with possible experiences. In their view, then, novels were dangerous because they lacked any grounding in reality and truth. In January 1789, a twenty-four-year-old Bostonian, William Hill Brown, sought to capitalise on the popularity of the novel in particular, *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, by publishing *The Power of Sympathy*, a tale of seduction generally considered the first American novel. Written in the epistolary, or novel-in-letters, form employed by Richardson in his widely read seduction novels *Pamela* (1740–1742) and *Clarissa* (1747–1748), Brown's book received little attention.

Aware of the deeply rooted social and philosophical misgivings about novels, Brown tried to address concerns about the morality of fiction by giving his novel a didactic purpose: “to represent the specious causes, and to expose the fatal consequences, of seduction; to inspire the female mind with a principle of self-complacency, and to promote the economy of human life.” Brown used the main plot—the story of Harriot and Harrington—to convey this lesson. Harrington is a rake who plots to seduce the beautiful Harriot, an orphan without wealth or social connections. Although Harrington repents of this scheme and decides to marry Harriot, the news that they are half-brother and half-sister results in the deaths of both characters: Harrington commits suicide with a copy of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by his side, and Harriot dies from shock. While Brown expressed the hope that the tragic consequences of Harrington's plans to seduce Harriot would serve as a warning against such immoral behaviour, the sensationalistic appeal of his novel undermined his stated moral objectives. Brown also sought to legitimise his work by emphasising its basis in fact, highlighting this quality with his subtitle, “The Triumph of Nature. Founded in Truth.” One of the subplots in his novel was based on a true story—the local scandal caused by the affair between Perez Morton, husband of poet Sarah Wentworth Morton, and the poet's sister, Fanny Apthorp, who gave birth to her brother-in-law's child. Brown drew directly on this series of events,

► Brown

which led to Fanny Apthorp's suicide, in his story of Ophelia's seduction by her brother-in-law, Mr. Martin, and her eventual suicide.

► *The Power of Sympathy*

Brown's novel went largely unnoticed—owing at least in part to attempts by the Apthorps and Mortons to suppress its publication. Yet, as Kenneth Silverman has pointed out, the publication of *The Power of Sympathy* marks the beginning of a huge upswing in Americans' novel reading. Between 1744, when Benjamin Franklin published an American edition of *Pamela*, and 1789, fifty-six foreign novels were reprinted in America. Between the appearance of *The Power of Sympathy* and 1800, there were some 350 American editions of such works.

1.4.11 1900s

► Modernist experimentation

During the era, the growth of poetry was aided by small publications, which also played a role in the development of fiction. These publications featured bold and unconventional short stories and critiques of established writers. The *Dial* (1880–1929), *Little Review* (1914–29), *Seven Arts* (1916–17), and other magazines encouraged Modernist experimentation, but the most influential were *The Smart Set* and *American Mercury*, both of which were edited by the witty journalist-critic H.L. Mencken. Mencken was a powerful force in promoting new fiction and was known for his harsh criticism of puritanism.

► Challenged societal norms

Mencken was passionate about literature, particularly the works of Joseph Conrad and Theodore Dreiser. He also championed lesser-known writers who challenged societal norms, such as James Branch Cabell, or who rebelled against the constraints of rural life, like Zona Gale and Ruth Suckow. Among these writers, Sherwood Anderson stood out as the most distinguished. His collections of short stories, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) and *The Triumph of the Egg* (1921), depicted the struggles of villagers plagued by phobias and repressions. Anderson went on to write several novels, with *Poor White* (1920) being his finest work.

Amidst the literary scene of 1920, a new genre of fiction emerged with works like F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*, which delved into psychological complexities and



- Psychological complexities and modern portrayals of society

modern portrayals of society. The literature of the 1920s was marked by a poetic and introspective quality that mirrored the disillusionment of a generation reeling from the aftermath of World War I. The 1930s saw a shift towards a more radical social critique in response to the Great Depression, though notable authors like Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Roth, and West continued to explore the Modernist style of the previous decade.

1.4.11.1 Washington Irving

Washington Irving (1783–1859) was an American short-story writer, essayist, biographer, historian, and diplomat of the early 19th century. He is best known for his short stories “Rip Van Winkle” (1819) and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820), both of which appear in his collection *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* His historical works include biographies of Oliver Goldsmith, Muhammad, and George Washington, as well as several histories of 15th-century Spain that deal with subjects such as the Alhambra, Christopher Columbus, and the Moors. Irving served as the American ambassador to Spain in the 1840s.

- Irving

Born and raised in Manhattan to a merchant family, Irving made his literary debut in 1802 with a series of observational letters to the *Morning Chronicle*, written under the pseudonym Jonathan Old Style. He temporarily moved to England for the family business in 1815, where he achieved fame with the publication of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, serialised from 1819 to 1820. He continued to publish regularly throughout his life, and he completed a five-volume biography of George Washington just eight months before his death at age 76 in Tarrytown, New York.

- Jonathan Old Style

Irving was one of the first American writers to earn acclaim in Europe, and he encouraged other American authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Herman Melville, and Edgar Allan Poe. He was also admired by some British writers, including Lord Byron, Thomas Campbell, Charles Dickens, Mary Shelley, Francis Jeffrey, and Walter Scott. He advocated for writing as a legitimate profession and argued for stronger laws to protect American writers from copyright infringement.

- Influence of Irving

1.4.12 Historical Novel

Historical novel is a literary genre in which the plot takes place in a setting related to past events but is fictional. An essential element of historical fiction is that it is set in the past and pays attention to the manners, social conditions, and other details of the depicted period. Authors also frequently choose to explore notable historical figures in these settings, allowing readers to better understand how these individuals might have responded to their environments. The historical romance usually seeks to romanticise eras of the past. Some subgenres, such as alternate history and historical fantasy, insert intentionally ahistorical or speculative elements into a novel.

► Historical fiction

Works of historical fiction are sometimes criticised for lack of authenticity because of reader criticism or genre expectations for accurate period details. This tension between historical authenticity, or historicity, and fiction frequently becomes a point of comment for readers and popular critics, while scholarly criticism frequently goes beyond this commentary, investigating the genre for its other thematic and critical interests.

► Historical authenticity

1.4.12.1 James Fenimore Cooper

James Fenimore Cooper is the first major American novelist and author of the novels of frontier adventure known as the 'Leatherstocking Tales,' featuring the wilderness scout called Natty Bumppo, or Hawkeye. They include *The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841).

► Cooper

The first of the renowned Leatherstocking Tales, *The Pioneers* (1823), followed and adhered to the successful formula of *The Spy*, reproducing its basic thematic conflicts and utilising family traditions once again. In *The Pioneers*, however, the traditions were those of William Cooper of Cooperstown, who appears as Judge Temple of Templeton, along with many other lightly disguised inhabitants of James's boyhood village. No known prototype exists, however, for the novel's principal character- the former wilderness scout Natty Bumppo, alias Leatherstocking. The Leatherstocking of *The Pioneers* is an aged man, of rough but sterling character, who ineffectually opposes "the march of progress,"



► Leatherstocking Tales

namely, the agricultural frontier and its chief spokesman, Judge Temple. Fundamentally, the conflict is between rival versions of the American Eden: the “God’s Wilderness” of Leatherstocking and the cultivated garden of Judge Temple. Since Cooper himself was deeply attracted to both ideals, he was able to create a powerful and moving story of frontier life. Indeed, *The Pioneers* is both the first and finest detailed portrait of frontier life in American literature; it is also the first truly original American novel.

► Natty

Cooper intended to bury Leatherstocking in *The Prairie*, but many years later he resuscitated the character and portrayed his early maturity in *The Pathfinder* (1840) and his youth in *The Deerslayer* (1841). These novels, in which Natty becomes the centre of romantic interest for the first time, carry the idealisation process further. In *The Pathfinder*, he is explicitly described as an American Adam, while in *The Deerslayer*, he demonstrates his fitness as a warrior-saint by passing a series of moral trials and revealing a keen, though untutored, aesthetic sensibility.

► The sea novel

The “Leatherstocking” tales are Cooper’s great, imperfect masterpiece, but he continued to write many other volumes of fiction and nonfiction. His fourth novel, *The Pilot* (1823), inaugurated a series of sea novels that were at once as popular and influential as the “Leatherstocking” tales. And they were more authentic: such Westerners as General Lewis Cass, governor of Michigan Territory, and Mark Twain might ridicule Cooper’s woodcraft, but old salts like Herman Melville and Joseph Conrad rightly admired and learned from his sea stories, in particular *The Red Rover* (1827) and *The Sea Lions* (1849). Never before in prose fiction had the sea become not merely a theatre for, but the principal actor in, a moral drama that celebrated man’s courage and skill at the same time that it revealed him humbled by the forces of God’s nature. As developed by Cooper and later by Melville, the sea novel became a powerful vehicle for spiritual as well as moral exploration. Not satisfied with a mere fictional treatment of life at sea, Cooper also wrote a meticulously researched, highly readable *History of the Navy of the United States of America* (1839).

1.4.13 Puritanism

The Puritans had a significant impact on American literature and continue to have an impact on moral

► Puritan Impact

judgements and religious views in the United States to this day. Puritan writing was meant to exalt God and more intimately link God to our reality. Puritan writing was known for taking a realistic approach to life. The Puritans produced little creative literature. They did not welcome the theatre any more than the Puritans did when they closed the London theatres in 1642. Fiction writing was in its infancy in England, and it is likely that immigrants in the New World did not consider composing stories. Poetry was their sole inventive literature, and it, like everything else in Puritan life, was driven by religion.

► Writing style

Many Puritan authors preferred to write in the first person and thus made their written pieces more approachable. It also demonstrated how the narrator integrated God and the Bible into their daily life. By making a human connection, the reader is more likely to accept and follow the underlying message of the written work. The author's values are most evident when written in the form of a sermon or letter.

► Didactic literature

Puritan writing was not intended to be enjoyable. It was intended to teach the reader about religious topics and how to live a more virtuous and pious life according to God's word. The fundamental concept was predestination, which indicated that everyone is born a sinner and that God's will has selected a select few to enter paradise. Because no one knows whether they have been chosen by God or not, everyone should live virtuously and ethically.

► Main purpose

Puritan literature's principal objective was to teach and offer frameworks for living a life that followed God's and the Bible's teachings. Because the Puritans did not see literature as a means of amusement, they avoided sophisticated and complicated styles of writing. They instead wrote plainly and directly. This enabled the author to make their argument more quickly and clearly. It also allowed the author to write for a broader audience because it appealed to a variety of educational levels in society.

► Biblical allusions

Most biblical allusions include the author mentioning a biblical figure or event and then connecting that biblical character or event to a character or event in a work of literature. Puritan authors would also employ references to create parallels between a modern difficulty and a



biblical conflict, in the hopes of helping the reader find clarity or a solution to the situation.

► The notion of fear

Fear was frequently employed in Puritan literature and Puritanism. By establishing fear of God's might in the reader, they would be more inclined to make changes in their life to live in accordance with God's word and the Bible. Puritan authors would frequently explain the everlasting torment that a sinner would face if they led a life that contradicted God's word and the Bible. Emotional methods such as terror had a significant influence and impact, particularly when it came to the hereafter.

1.4.13.1 Nathaniel Hawthorne

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864) was an American novelist and short-story writer who was a master of the allegorical and symbolic tale. One of the greatest fiction writers in American literature, he is best known for *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). The presence of some of the leading social thinkers and philosophers of his day, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Bronson Alcott in Concord made the village the centre of the philosophy of transcendentalism, which encouraged man to transcend the materialistic world of experience and facts and become conscious of the pervading spirit of the universe and the potentialities for human freedom. Hawthorne welcomed the companionship of his Transcendentalist neighbours, but he had little to say to them. Artists and intellectuals never inspired his full confidence, but he thoroughly enjoyed the visit of his old college friend and classmate Franklin Pierce, later to become president of the United States. At the Old Manse, Hawthorne continued to write stories, with the same result as before: literary success, monetary failure. His new short-story collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, appeared in 1846.

► Hawthorne

Hawthorne's high rank among American fiction writers is the result of at least three considerations. First, he was a skilled craftsman with an impressive architectonic sense of form. The structure of *The Scarlet Letter*, for example, is so tightly integrated that no chapter, no paragraph, even, could be omitted without doing violence to the whole. The book's four characters are inextricably bound together in the tangled web of a life situation that seems to have no solution, and the tightly woven plot has

► *The Scarlet Letter*

a unity of action that rises slowly but inexorably to the climactic scene of Dimmesdale's public confession. The same tight construction is found in Hawthorne's other writings also, especially in the shorter pieces, or "tales." Hawthorne was also the master of a classic literary style that is remarkable for its directness, clarity, firmness, and sureness of idiom.

► Moral insight

A second reason for Hawthorne's greatness is his moral insight. He inherited the Puritan tradition of moral earnestness, and he was deeply concerned with the concepts of original sin and guilt and the claims of law and conscience. Hawthorne rejected what he saw as the Transcendentalists' transparent optimism about the potentialities of human nature. Instead, he looked more deeply and perhaps more honestly into life, finding in it much suffering and conflict but also finding the redeeming power of love. There is no romantic escape in his works, but rather a firm and resolute scrutiny of the psychological and moral facts of the human condition.

► Mastery of allegory and symbolism

A third reason for Hawthorne's eminence is his mastery of allegory and symbolism. His fictional characters' actions and dilemmas fairly obviously express larger generalisations about the problems of human existence. But with Hawthorne, this leads not to unconvincing pasteboard figures with explanatory labels attached but to a sombre, concentrated emotional involvement with his characters that has the power, the gravity, and the inevitability of true tragedy. His use of symbolism in *The Scarlet Letter* is particularly effective, and the scarlet letter itself takes on a wider significance and application that is out of all proportion to its literal character as a scrap of cloth. Hawthorne's work initiated the most durable tradition in American fiction—that of the symbolic romance that assumes the universality of guilt and explores the complexities and ambiguities of man's choices. His greatest short stories and *The Scarlet Letter* are marked by a depth of psychological and moral insight seldom equalled by any American writer.

1.4.13.2 Herman Melville

Herman Melville (1819–1891) was an American novelist, short-story writer, and poet, best known for his novels of the sea, including his masterpiece, *Moby Dick* (1851). He attended Albany Classical School in 1835 and became an active member of a local debating



► *Typee*

society. He studied surveying at Lansingburgh Academy to equip himself for a post with the Erie Canal project. When the job did not materialise, Gansevoort arranged for him to ship out as a cabin boy on the “St. Lawrence” a merchant ship sailing from New York City for Liverpool. After a grinding search for work, he taught briefly at a school that closed without paying him. In January 1841, Melville sailed on the whaler “Acushnet” from New Bedford, Massachusetts, on a voyage to the South Seas. His adventures here, somewhat romanticised, became the subject of his first novel, *Typee* (1846).

► *Omoo and Mardi*

Melville and a companion jumped ship in July and spent four months as guest-captives of the reputedly cannibalistic Typee people. In August, he was registered on the crew of the Australian whaler “Lucy Ann”. Despite intimations of danger, Melville represented the exotic valley of the Typees as an idyllic sanctuary from a hustling, aggressive civilization. He joined a mutiny that landed the mutineers in a Tahitian jail, from which he escaped. On these events and their sequel, Melville based his second book, *Omoo* (1847), on his travels through the islands, accompanied by Long Ghost, formerly the ship’s doctor, now turned drifter. The carefree roving confirmed Melville’s bitterness against colonial and missionary debasement of the native Tahitian peoples. In 1847, Melville began a third book, *Mardi* (1849), and became a regular contributor of reviews and other pieces to a literary journal.

► Polynesian adventure

Melville resented this somewhat patronising stereotype, and in her reminiscences, his wife recalled him in a different aspect, writing in a bitterly cold, fireless room in winter. He enjoined his publisher not to call him “the author of *Typee* and *Omoo*,” for his third book was to be different. When it appeared, the public and critics alike found its wild, allegorical fantasy and medley of styles incomprehensible. It began as another Polynesian adventure but quickly set its hero in pursuit of the mysterious Yillah, “all beauty and innocence,” a symbolic quest that ends in anguish and disaster. Concealing his disappointment at the book’s reception, Melville quickly wrote *Redburn* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850) in the manner expected of him. In October 1849, Melville sailed to England to resolve his London publisher’s doubts about *White-Jacket*. He also visited the continent, kept a journal, and arrived back in America in February 1850.

► *White-Jacket*

Critics acclaimed *White-Jacket*, and its powerful criticism of abuses in the U.S. Navy won it strong political support. But both novels, however much they seemed to revive the Melville of *Typee*, had passages of profoundly questioning melancholy. It was not the same Melville who wrote them. He had been reading Shakespeare with “eyes which are as tender as young sparrows,” particularly noting sombre passages in *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear*. This reading struck deeply sympathetic responses in Melville, counterbalancing the transcendental doctrines of Ralph Waldo Emerson, whose general optimism about human goodness he had heard in lectures.

► *Moby Dick*

Melville’s novel was published in London in October 1851 as *The Whale* and a month later in America as *Moby-Dick, or The Whale*. It brought its author neither acclaim nor reward. Basically, its story is simple. Captain Ahab pursues the white whale, Moby Dick, which finally kills him. At that level, it is an intense, superbly authentic narrative of whaling. In the perverted grandeur of Captain Ahab and in the beauties and terrors of the voyage of the “Pequod,” however, Melville dramatised his deeper concerns: the equivocal defeats and triumphs of the human spirit and its fusion of creative and murderous urges. In his private afflictions, Melville had found universal metaphors.

► Satire

In 1856, Melville set out on a tour of Europe and the Levant to renew his spirits. The most powerful passages of the journal he kept are in harmony with *The Confidence-Man* (1857), a despairing satire on an America corrupted by the shabby dreams of commerce. This was the last of his novels to be published in his lifetime. Three American lecture tours were followed by his final sea journey in 1860, when he joined his brother Thomas, captain of the clipper “Meteor,” for a voyage around Cape Horn. He abandoned the trip in San Francisco.

► Deceptiveness of realities

In the internal tensions that put him in conflict with his age lay a strangely 20th-century awareness of the deceptiveness of realities and of the instability of personal identity. Yet his writings never lost sight of reality. His symbols grew from such visible facts, made intensely present, as the dying whales, the mess of blubber, and the wood of the ship in *Moby Dick*.



1.4.13.3 Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849), a southerner, shares with Melville a darkly metaphysical vision mixed with elements of realism, parody, and burlesque. He refined the short story genre and invented detective fiction. Many of his stories prefigure the genres of science fiction, horror, and fantasy so popular today. Poe's short and tragic life was plagued with insecurity. Like so many other major 19th-century American writers, Poe was orphaned at an early age. Poe's strange marriage in 1835 to his first cousin Virginia Clemm, who was not yet 14, has been interpreted as an attempt to find the stable family life he lacked. Poe believed that strangeness was an essential ingredient of beauty, and his writing is often exotic. His stories and poems are populated with doomed, introspective aristocrats (Poe, like many other southerners, cherished an aristocratic ideal). These gloomy characters never seem to work or socialise; instead, they bury themselves in dark, mouldering castles symbolically decorated with bizarre rugs and draperies that hide the real world of sun, windows, walls, and floors.

- Invented detective fiction

Poe's gothic settings are not merely decorative. They reflect the overly civilised yet deathly interior of his characters' disturbed psyches. They are symbolic expressions of the unconscious and are thus central to his art.

- Disturbed psyches

Poe's verse, like that of many southerners, was very musical and strictly metrical. His best-known poem, in his own lifetime and today, is "The Raven" (1845). In this eerie poem, the haunted, sleepless narrator, who has been reading and mourning the death of his "lost Lenore" at midnight, is visited by a raven who perches above his door and ominously repeats the poem's famous refrain, "nevermore."

- Poe's verse

Stories like "The Gold Bug" and "The Purloined Letter" are more tales of ratiocination, or reasoning. The horror tales prefigure works by such American authors of horror fantasy as H.P. Lovecraft and Stephen King, while the tales of ratiocination are harbingers of the detective fiction of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, Ross Macdonald, and John D. MacDonald. All of these stories reveal Poe's fascination with the mind and the unsettling scientific knowledge that was radically secularising the 19th-century world view.

- Poe's fascination with the mind



- Poe explores the psyche

In every genre, Poe explores the psyche. Profound psychological insights glint throughout the stories. “Who has not, a hundred times, found himself committing a vile or silly action, for no other reason than because he knows he should not,” we read in “The Black Cat.” To explore the exotic and strange aspects of psychological processes, Poe delved into accounts of madness and extreme emotion. Deep anxiety and psychic insecurity seem to have occurred earlier in America than in Europe, for Europeans at least had a firm, complex social structure that gave them psychological security.

- The grotesque

The resulting chaos of styles was particularly noticeable in the United States, which often lacked traditional styles of its own. The jumble reflects the loss of coherent systems of thought as immigration, urbanisation, and industrialization uproot families and traditional ways. In art, this confusion of symbols fuels the grotesque, an idea that Poe explicitly made his theme in his classic collection of stories, *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840).

1.4.14 Realism and Naturalism

- Civil War

The U.S. Civil War (1861-1865) between the industrial North and the agricultural, slave-owning South was a watershed in American history. The innocent optimism of the young democratic nation gave way, after the war, to a period of exhaustion. American idealism remained but was rechannelled. Before the war, idealists championed human rights, especially the abolition of slavery; after the war, Americans increasingly idealized progress and the self-made man.

- The era

This was the era of the millionaire manufacturer and the speculator, when Darwinian evolution and the “survival of the fittest” seemed to sanction the sometimes-unethical methods of the successful business tycoon. Business boomed after the war. War production had boosted industry in the North and given it prestige and political clout. It also gave industrial leaders valuable experience in the management of men and machines. The enormous natural resources - iron, coal, oil, gold, and silver - of the American land benefitted business.

The new intercontinental rail system, inaugurated in 1869, and the transcontinental telegraph, which began operating in 1861, gave industry access to materials,



► Influx of immigrants

markets, and communications. The constant influx of immigrants provided a seemingly endless supply of inexpensive labour as well. Over 23 million foreigners - German, Scandinavian, and Irish in the early years, and increasingly Central and Southern Europeans thereafter - flowed into the United States between 1860 and 1910. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino contract labourers were imported by Hawaiian plantation owners, railroad companies, and other American business interests on the West Coast.

► The transformation

From 1860 to 1914, the United States was transformed from a small, young, agricultural ex-colony to a huge, modern, industrial nation. A debtor nation in 1860, by 1914 it had become the world's wealthiest state, with a population that had more than doubled, rising from 31 million in 1860 to 76 million in 1900. By World War I, the United States had become a major world power. As industrialization grew, so did alienation. Characteristic American novels of the period - Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Jack London's *Martin Eden*, and later Theodore Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* — depict the damage of economic forces and alienation on the weak or vulnerable individual. Survivors, like Twain's Huck Finn, Humphrey Vanderveyden in London's *The Sea-Wolf*, and Dreiser's opportunistic Sister Carrie, endure through inner strength involving kindness, flexibility, and, above all, individuality.

► Naturalism

Naturalism is essentially a literary expression of determinism. Associated with bleak, realistic depictions of lower-class life, determinism denies religion as a motivating force in the world and instead perceives the universe as a machine. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers had also imagined the world as a machine, but as a perfect one, invented by God and tending toward progress and human betterment. Naturalists imagined society instead as a blind machine, godless and out of control.

Like Romanticism, naturalism first appeared in Europe. It is usually traced to the works of Honoré de Balzac in the 1840s and seen as a French literary movement associated with Gustave Flaubert, Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant. It daringly opened up the seamy underside of society and such topics as divorce, sex, adultery, poverty, and crime. Naturalism

► Naturalism flourish

flourished as Americans became urbanised and aware of the importance of large economic and social forces. By 1890, the frontier had been declared officially closed. Most Americans resided in towns, and business dominated even remote farmsteads.

1.4.14.1 Mark Twain

► Mark Twain

Samuel Clemens (1835–1910), better known by his pen name Mark Twain, grew up in the Mississippi River frontier town of Hannibal, Missouri. Ernest Hemingway's famous statement that all of American literature comes from one great book, Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, indicates this author's towering place in the tradition. Early 19th-century American writers tended to be too flowery, sentimental, or ostentatious, partially because they were still trying to prove that they could write as elegantly as the English.

► Realism

Twain's style, based on vigorous, realistic, and colloquial American speech, gave American writers a new appreciation of their national voice. Twain was the first major author to come from the interior of the country, and he captured its distinctive, humorous slang and iconoclasm. For Twain and other American writers of the late 19th century, realism was not merely a literary technique; it was a way of speaking the truth and exploding worn-out conventions. Thus, it was profoundly liberating and potentially at odds with society. The most well-known example is *Huck Finn*, a poor boy who decides to follow the voice of his conscience and help a Negro slave escape to freedom, even though Huck thinks this means that he will be damned to hell for breaking the law.

► Reality and illusion

The unstable relationship between reality and illusion is Twain's characteristic theme and the basis of much of his humour. The magnificent yet deceptive, constantly changing river is also the main feature of his imaginative landscape. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain recalls his training as a young steamboat pilot when he writes: "I went to work now to learn the shape of the river; and of all the eluding and ungraspable objects that ever I tried to get mind or hands on, that was the chief." Twain's moral sense as a writer echoes his pilot's responsibility to steer the ship to safety.



1.4.14.2 Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane (1871–1901) was born in New Jersey and had roots going back to Revolutionary War soldiers, clergymen, sheriffs, judges, and farmers who had lived a century earlier. Primarily a journalist who also wrote fiction, essays, poetry, and plays, Crane saw life at its rawest, in slums and on battlefields. His short stories—in particular, “The Open Boat,” “The Blue Hotel,” and “The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky”—exemplified that literary form. His haunting Civil War novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, was published to great acclaim in 1895, but he barely had time to bask in the attention before he died, at 29, having neglected his health.

► Crane

He was virtually forgotten during the first two decades of the 20th century but was resurrected through a laudatory biography by Thomas Beer in 1923. He has enjoyed continued success ever since—as a champion of the common man, a realist, and a symbolist. Crane’s *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) is one of the best, if not the earliest, naturalistic American novels. It is the harrowing story of a poor, sensitive young girl whose uneducated, alcoholic parents utterly fail her. In love and eager to escape her violent home life, she allows herself to be seduced into living with a young man, who soon deserts her. When her self-righteous mother rejects her, Maggie becomes a prostitute to survive, but soon commits suicide out of despair. Crane’s earthy subject matter and his objective, scientific style, devoid of moralising, earmark *Maggie* as a naturalist work.

► Champion of the common man

He would, however, get plenty of attention with his next novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*, a story depicting the realistic, psychological horrors of war, something no one had yet done. Using the fame of *The Red Badge*, Crane published a second edition of *Maggie*, subduing some of the more graphic scenes. Its second time around would prove much more successful. During his time in England, he wrote several stories, including *The Open Boat and Other Tales of Adventure* (1899), *The Monster and Other Stories* (1899), and the novel *Active Service* (1899), which recalled his experience with war in Greece. Stories published after his death include *Whilomville Stories*, *Wounds in the Rain*, *Great Battles of the World*, *Last Words*, and *The O’Ruddy*.

► Major works

1.4.14.3 Charlot Perkins Gilman

Charlotte Anna Perkins Gilman (1860–1955) was an American feminist, lecturer, writer, and publisher who was a leading theorist of the women's movement in the United States. After her move to California, Perkins began writing poems and stories for various periodicals. Among her stories, "The Yellow Wall-Paper," published in *The New England Magazine* in January 1892, was exceptional for its starkly realistic first-person portrayal of the mental breakdown of a physically pampered but emotionally starved young wife. In 1893, she published *In This Our World*, a volume of verse. For a time in 1894, after her move to San Francisco, she edited, with Helen Campbell, the *Impress*, an organ of the Pacific Coast Woman's Press Association. She also became a noted lecturer during the early 1890s on such social topics as labour, ethics, and the place of women, and, after a short period of residence at Jane Addams's Hull House in Chicago in 1895, she spent the next five years on national lecture tours. In 1896, she was a delegate to the International Socialist and Labour Congress in London, where she met George Bernard Shaw, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, and other leading socialists.

► Perkins

In 1898, Perkins published *Women and Economics*, a manifesto that attracted great attention and was translated into seven languages. In a radical call for economic independence for women, she dissected with keen intelligence much of the romanticised convention surrounding contemporary ideas of womanhood and motherhood.

► Womanhood and motherhood

1.4.15 Modernism

American modernist literature was a dominant trend in American literature between World War I and World War II. The modernist era highlighted innovation in the form and language of poetry and prose, as well as addressing numerous contemporary topics such as race relations, gender, and the human condition. Many American modernists became expatriated in Europe during this time, often becoming stalwarts in the European movement, as was the case for T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Gertrude Stein. These writers were often known as the Lost Generation.

► Modernist era



► Nativism

As a reaction to this trend, many American authors and poets began a trend of 'nativism', seeking to represent the modern American experience in America. Notable contributors to this trend include William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore. These poets were often critical of the works of expatriate writers such as Eliot and Pound, as evidenced by poems like "Spring and All" by William Carlos Williams.

► War experience

Influenced by the First World War, many American modernist writers explored the psychological wounds and spiritual scars of the war experience. The economic crisis in America at the beginning of the 1930s also left a mark on literature, such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. A related issue is the loss of self and need for self-definition, as workers faded into the background of city life, unnoticed cogs within a machine yearning for self-definition.

► Madness and its manifestations

American modernists echoed the mid-19th-century focus on the attempt to 'build a self' - a theme illustrated by Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. Madness and its manifestations seem to be another favourite modernist theme, as seen in Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, Hemingway's *The Battler*, and Faulkner's *That Evening Sun*. Nevertheless, all these negative aspects led to new hopes and aspirations, and to the search for a new beginning, not only for the contemporary individuals, but also for the fictional characters in American modernist literature.

► Regional trends

Modernist literature also allowed for the development of regional trends within American literature, including the Harlem Renaissance and southern modernism. The Harlem Renaissance marked a rebirth for African American arts, centralised in the Harlem area of New York. Writers and thinkers such as Alain Locke, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston were among the key figures of the movement. The movement was connected to a vogue for African American culture, as seen in the popularity of jazz music, with many writers financed by white patrons. Many writers of this movement used modernist techniques to represent African American life, for instance, incorporating the rhythms of jazz music and dialects of African American culture into poetry and prose. Southern modernism similarly represented the life and unique experiences of the South using modernist aesthetics, with celebrated figures including William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams.

1.4.15.1 Henry James

- Innocence and exuberance of the New World

Henry James (1843–1916) was an American novelist and, as a naturalised English citizen from 1915, a great figure in transatlantic culture. His fundamental theme was the innocence and exuberance of the New World in clash with the corruption and wisdom of the Old, as illustrated in such works as *Daisy Miller* (1879), *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Bostonians* (1886), and *The Ambassadors* (1903).

- Self-made American millionaire

During 1875–76, James lived in Paris, writing literary and topical letters for the *New York Tribune* and working on his novel *The American* (1877), the story of a self-made American millionaire whose guileless and forthright character contrasts with that of the arrogant and cunning family of French aristocrats whose daughter he unsuccessfully attempts to marry. In Paris, James sought out the Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev, whose work appealed to him, and through Turgenev was brought into Gustave Flaubert's coterie, where he got to know Edmond de Goncourt, Émile Zola, Alphonse Daudet, and Guy de Maupassant.

- James's reputation

James's reputation was founded on his versatile studies of "the American girl." In a series of witty tales, he pictured the "self-made" young woman, the bold and brash American innocent who insists upon American standards in European society. James ended this first phase of his career by producing his masterpiece, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), a study of a young woman from Albany who brings to Europe her narrow provincialism and pretensions but also her sense of her own sovereignty, her "free spirit," her refusal to be treated in the Victorian world merely as a marriageable object. As a picture of Americans moving into the expatriate societies of England and of Italy, this novel has no equal in the history of modern fiction. It is a remarkable study of a band of egotists while at the same time offering a shrewd appraisal of the American character. James's understanding of power in personal relations was profound, as evinced in *Washington Square* (1881), the story of a young American heroine whose hopes for love and marriage are thwarted by her father's callous rejection of a somewhat opportunistic suitor.



► Conservative masculinity

In the 1880s, James wrote two novels dealing with social reformers and revolutionaries: *The Bostonians* (1886) and *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). In his novel of Boston life, James analyses the struggle between conservative masculinity embodied in a Southerner living in the North and an embittered man-hating suffragist. *The Bostonians* remains the fullest and most-rounded American social novel of its time in its study of cranks, faddists, and “do-gooders.” In *The Princess Casamassima*, James exploited the anarchist violence of the decade and depicted the struggle of a man who toys with revolution and is destroyed by it. These novels were followed by *The Tragic Muse* (1890), in which James projected a study of the London and Paris art studios and the stage and the conflict between art and “the world.”

1.4.16 The Lost Generation

► Origin

The Lost generation is an American generation that attained early adulthood during World War I (1914-1918). The Lost generation, in its literary context, refers to the writers who came from this social group and reflected their disappointment with post-war socioeconomic frameworks in their work. Gertrude Stein invented the word to describe a group of American authors who relocated to and resided in Paris during the 1920s. Ernest Hemingway popularised it by writing in the epigraph of *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), “You are all the lost generation.”

► The writers of the generation

The Lost Generation writers were born between the close of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries. Following the Industrial Revolution (1760-1844), their society was distinguished by industrialization, as well as an increase in consumption and media. The writers who comprised the Lost Generation all agreed that the ideals and aspirations of previous generations were no longer appropriate in the postwar climate. These writers conveyed similar sentiments in their works through the presentation and critique of a variety of issues that marked their writing.

► Rejection of materialism

The Lost Generation fiercely criticised and satirised the excessive luxury of the 1920s. Following the loss of life and humanity during World War I, many individuals were unable to reconcile with the decadent excesses of the 1920s. In response to this disenchantment, the Lost Generation writers questioned American materialism,

believing that money and luxury could not bring happiness.

1.4.16.1 Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) is widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's most important writers. He was an excellent journalist and war correspondent in addition to being well known for his novels and short tales. From the start of his writing career in the 1920s, Hemingway's writing style drew a lot of attention and criticism. A typical Hemingway novel or short story is written in straightforward, plain style. His early journalistic background may have influenced his manner. "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" is a great example of Hemingway's style. There is no maudlin romanticism in this short story; the plot is basic yet incredibly intricate and tough. Hemingway talks as little as possible while focusing on an old guy and two waiters. He lets the characters talk for themselves, and through them, we learn about two of the men's inner loneliness and the callous biases of the other.

► Hemingway's writing style

1.4.16.2 F. Scott Fitzgerald

Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald (1896-1940) rose to popularity as a jazz-era chronicler. The popularity of his debut novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), catapulted him to fame. *The Great Gatsby* (1925), his third novel, was well received. Fitzgerald was a pivotal player in the post-war Western Modernist movement. Fitzgerald, like other Modernist authors, disregarded conventional ideals and institutions. His writings were frequently satires and stinging critiques of conventional wisdom about love, prosperity, and happiness. Although he published a number of short stories and magazine pieces (including "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button"), he is most known for his five novels. *The Great Gatsby*, his most enduring masterpiece, analyses the emptiness of worldly prosperity and the loss of the American Dream. Today, this work stands out as a flawless portrayal of the Jazz Age and the post-war pessimism of the 1920s. Unfortunately, Fitzgerald's personal life reflected many of his literary themes.

► Fitzgerald's writing

1.4.17 Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was the cultural, social, and artistic boom that occurred in Harlem between the



► The beginning

end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s. It was known as the “New Negro Movement” at the time, after Alain Locke’s 1925 anthology. During this time, Harlem was the Mecca for Black authors, painters, musicians, photographers, poets, and intellectuals looking for a place to freely express their abilities.

► Cultural and artistic movement

Harlem Renaissance literature was created and published during the Harlem Renaissance, which lasted from the 1920s until the 1930s. The majority of African Americans resided in the South, where they were subjected to Jim Crow laws, denial of their rights, and violent white nationalists. To flee many African Americans relocated to the north. The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural and artistic movement focusing on Black excellence. African Americans demonstrated their pride in their race via the creation of art, music, scholarly essays, and works of fiction. Because Black newspapers and journals began to appear during the Renaissance, African Americans were offered greater opportunities to become published authors.

► Variety in subjects and forms

Depending on the author, the Harlem Renaissance literature featured a variety of subjects and forms. Others concentrated on African American life and double awareness, while others wrote about injustice and segregation. There was discussion on what kind of metre to use and how African Americans should be represented. Many of the pieces addressed issues like racism, injustice, segregation, and slavery. Because the purpose was to develop a new genre of writing, many of them shared themes yet were separate genres.

► Du Bois

1.4.17.1 W.E.B. Du Bois

W.E.B. Du Bois was an American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and activist who was the most important Black protest leader in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. He shared in the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in 1909 and edited *The Crisis*, its magazine, from 1910 to 1934. His collection of essays, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), is a landmark of African American literature.

In 1945, he published the “Preparatory Volume” of a projected *Encyclopedia Africana*, for which he had been appointed editor in chief and towards which he had

► Major works

been working for decades. He also produced two major books during this period. *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (1935) was an important Marxist interpretation of Reconstruction. Du Bois also wrote several novels, including the trilogy *The Black Flame* (1957–61). *The Autobiography of W.E.B. Du Bois* was published in the United States in 1968.

1.4.17.2 Ralph Ellison

Ralph Waldo Ellison (1914–1994) was an American writer who won eminence with his first novel (and the only one published during his lifetime), *Invisible Man* (1952). Following service in World War II, he produced *Invisible Man*, which won the 1953 National Book Award for fiction. The story is a bildungsroman that tells of a naive and idealistic (and, significantly, nameless) Southern Black youth who goes to Harlem, joins the fight against White oppression, and ends up ignored by his fellow Blacks as well as by Whites. The novel won praise for its stylistic innovations in infusing classic literary motifs with modern black speech and culture while providing a thoroughly unique take on the construction of contemporary African American identity. However, Ellison's treatment of his novel as first and foremost a work of art—as opposed to a primarily polemical work—led to some complaints from his fellow Black novelists at the time that he was not sufficiently devoted to social change.

► Ellison

After *Invisible Man* appeared, Ellison published only two collections of essays: *Shadow and Act* (1964) and *Going to the Territory* (1986). He lectured widely on Black culture, folklore, and creative writing and taught at various American colleges and universities. *Flying Home and Other Stories* was published posthumously in 1996. He left a second novel unfinished at his death; it was published in a much-shortened form as *Juneteenth* in 1999. *The Selected Letters of Ralph Ellison* were released in 2019.

► Major works

1.4.17.3 Richard Wright

Richard Wright was a novelist and short-story writer who was among the first African American writers to protest white treatment of blacks, notably in his novel *Native Son* (1940) and his autobiography, *Black Boy*



► Tradition of protest

(1945). He inaugurated the tradition of protest explored by other black writers after World War II. Wright's grandparents had been slaves. His father left home when he was five, and the boy, who grew up in poverty, was often shifted from one relative to another. He worked at a number of jobs before joining the northward migration, first to Memphis, Tennessee, and then to Chicago. There, after working in unskilled jobs, he got an opportunity to write through the Federal Writers' Project. In 1932, he became a member of the Communist Party, and in 1937, he went to New York City, where he became the Harlem editor of the Communist *Daily Worker*.

► Major works

After World War II, Wright settled in Paris as a permanent expatriate. *The Outsider* (1953), acclaimed as the first American existential novel, warned that the black man had awakened in a disintegrating society not ready to include him. Three later novels were not well received. Among his polemical writings of that period was *White Man, Listen!* (1957), which was originally a series of lectures given in Europe. *Eight Men*, a collection of short stories, appeared in 1961. The autobiographical *American Hunger*, which narrates Wright's experiences after moving to the North, was published posthumously in 1977. Some of the more candid passages dealing with race, sex, and politics in Wright's books had been cut or omitted before their original publication. Unexpurgated versions of *Native Son*, *Black Boy*, and his other works were published in 1991, however. Other posthumously released works included a novella, *Rite of Passage* (1994), and an unfinished crime novel, *A Father's Law* (2008). In addition, *The Man Who Lived Underground*, a rejected manuscript (1941) that was later condensed into a short story, was released in its entirety in 2021. The novel centres on an African American man who is coerced into confessing to two murders he did not commit.

1.4.17.4 William Faulkner

William Faulkner (1897–1962) was an American novelist and short-story writer who was awarded the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature. His first novel, *Soldiers' Pay* (1926), given a Southern though not Mississippian setting, was an impressive achievement, stylistically ambitious, and strongly evocative of the sense of alienation experienced by soldiers returning from World War I to a civilian world of which they seemed no longer

► Faulkner

a part. A second novel, *Mosquitoes* (1927), launched a satirical attack on the New Orleans literary scene, including identifiable individuals, and can perhaps best be read as a declaration of artistic independence.

The quality of Faulkner's writing is often said to have declined in the wake of the Nobel Prize. But the central sections of *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) are challengingly set out in dramatic form, and *A Fable* (1954), a long, densely written, and complexly structured novel about World War I, demands attention as the work in which Faulkner made by far his greatest investment of time, effort, and authorial commitment. In *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959), Faulkner not only brought the "Snopes" trilogy to its conclusion, carrying his Yoknapatawpha narrative beyond the end of World War II, but also subtly varied the management of the narrative point of view. Finally, in June 1962, Faulkner published yet another distinctive novel, the genial, nostalgic comedy of male maturation he called *The Reivers* and appropriately subtitled "A Reminiscence." By the time of his death, Faulkner had clearly emerged not just as the major American novelist of his generation but as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century, unmatched for his extraordinary structural and stylistic resourcefulness, for the range and depth of his characterization and social notation, and for his persistence and success in exploring fundamental human issues in intensely localized terms.

► Major works

1.4.18 Experimental Novels

The word *experimental* is a contested and historically contingent term when applied to fiction. Any new writing will owe something to the past and also something to the future in the shaping of ideologies and styles. However, it can be said, the novel is often a product of its time and place. Although, experimental literary works become comprehensible after their unfamiliar structures, forms and content have been conventionalized over time.

► Ideologies and styles

It can be acknowledged that there have been writers throughout history whose intention has been to experiment and create fiction that sets out to break new ground and deviate from traditional realist fiction. Virginia Woolf, for example, declared in her diary that she sought to experiment with her craft and, as a result, discovered a *new* form for a *new* novel. Jack Kerouac also

► Experiment

set out to experiment with his writing and produce work that contested mainstream, middle-class America. He felt that his writing could not be fully realised through existing traditional novel conventions; they would simply not allow him to tell the story he wanted to tell. By creating his own *rules*, or *essentials*, as he referred to them, Kerouac did not produce novels but a *new* prose-narrative form. He used the technical devices of epic poetry, which, together with his spontaneous prose, revitalised his writing and resulted in the poetic sprawl *On the Road*.

► Experimental fiction

Experimental fiction can be literary works that are in direct opposition to traditional realist works or are inherently concerned with innovation and risk-taking. The most consistent structuring principle of premodernist novelists—the orderly progression of time—was rejected by many modernists. Modern novels do not “progress” through time in the conventional sense; instead, they follow the inner, subjective, shifting logic of a character’s thoughts. Indeed, the two great innovations of modernist fiction—stream of consciousness and non-chronological structure—are inseparable in the modern novel.

► Major works

Among the most famous and earliest practitioners of these techniques were James Joyce (especially *Ulysses*, 1922, and *Finnegan’s Wake*, 1939), Woolf (especially *Jacob’s Room*, 1922; *Mrs. Dalloway*, 1925; and *To the Lighthouse*, 1927), and Faulkner (especially *The Sound and the Fury*, 1929; *As I Lay Dying*, 1930). Many of the experimental works of post-World War II long fiction extended these techniques, offering intensely subjective narrative voices and often extreme forms of stream of consciousness, including disruptions of orderly time sequences.

1.4.18.1 Thomas Pynchon

Thomas Pynchon’s works combine black humour and fantasy to depict human alienation in the chaos of modern society. After earning a B.A. in English from Cornell University in 1958, Pynchon spent a year in Greenwich Village, writing short stories and working on a novel. In 1960, he was hired as a technical writer for Boeing Aircraft Corporation in Seattle, Washington. Two years later, he decided to leave the company and write full-time. In 1963, Pynchon won the Faulkner Foundation

► Thomas Pynchon

Award for his first novel, *V* (1963), a whimsical, cynically absurd tale of a middle-aged Englishman's search for "V," an elusive supernatural adventure appearing in various guises at critical periods in European history. In his next book, *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), Pynchon describes a woman's strange quest to discover the mysterious, conspiratorial Tristero System in a futuristic world of closed societies. The novel serves as a condemnation of modern industrialization.

► National Book Award

Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) is a tour de force in 20th century literature. In exploring the dilemmas of human beings in the modern world, the story which is set in an area of post-World War II Germany called "the Zone," centres on the wanderings of an American soldier who is one of many odd characters looking for a secret V-2 rocket that will supposedly break through Earth's gravitational barrier when launched. The narrative is filled with descriptions of obsessive and paranoid fantasies, ridiculous and grotesque imagery, and esoteric mathematical and scientific language. For his efforts, Pynchon received the National Book Award, and many critics deemed *Gravity's Rainbow* a visionary apocalyptic masterpiece. Scenes from the novel were adapted as part of the German film *Prüfstand VII* (2002).

► Detective novel

Pynchon's next novel, *Vineland*, which begins in 1984 in California, was not published until 1990. Two vast, complex historical novels followed: in *Mason & Dixon* (1997), set in the 18th century, Pynchon took the English surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon as his subjects, and *Against the Day* (2006) moves from the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 through World War I. *Inherent Vice* (2009; film 2014), Pynchon's rambling take on the detective novel, returns to the California counterculture milieu of *Vineland*. *Bleeding Edge* (2013) chronicles the efforts of a fraud investigator to untangle the nefarious doings of a New York computer security firm in the year leading up to the September 11 attacks of 2001, all the while attempting to parent her children in the wake of domestic difficulties.

Of his few short stories, the most notable are "Entropy" (1960), a neatly structured tale in which Pynchon first uses extensive technical language and scientific metaphors, and "The Secret Integration" (1964), a story in which

Pynchon explores small-town bigotry and racism. The collection *Slow Learner* (1984) contains “The Secret Integration.”

1.4.18.2 Vladimir Nabokov

Vladimir Vladimirovich Nabokov (1899–1977) was a Russian-born American novelist and critic, the foremost of the post-1917 émigré authors. He wrote in both Russian and English, and his best works, including *Lolita* (1955), feature stylish, intricate literary effects. Nabokov published two collections of verse, *Poems* (1916) and *Two Paths* (1918), before leaving Russia in 1919. He and his family made their way to England, and he attended Trinity College, Cambridge, on a scholarship provided for the sons of prominent Russians in exile. While at Cambridge, he first studied zoology but soon switched to French and Russian literature; he graduated with first-class honours in 1922 and subsequently wrote that his almost effortless attainment of this degree was “one of the very few ‘utilitarian’ sins on my conscience.” While still in England, he continued to write poetry, mainly in Russian but also in English, and two collections of his Russian poetry, *The Cluster* and *The Empyrean Path*, appeared in 1923. In Nabokov’s mature opinion, these poems were “polished and sterile.”

His second novel, *King, Queen, Knave*, which appeared in 1928, marked his turn to a highly stylized form that characterised his art thereafter. His chess novel, *The Defense*, followed two years later and won him recognition as the best of the younger Russian émigré writers. In the next five years, he produced four novels and a novella. Of these, *Despair* and *Invitation to a Beheading* were his first works of importance and foreshadowed his later fame. Nabokov’s first novels in English, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941) and *Bend Sinister* (1947), do not rank with his best Russian work. *Pale Fire* (1962), however, a novel consisting of a long poem and a commentary on it by a mad literary pedant, extends and completes Nabokov’s mastery of unorthodox structure, first shown in *The Gift* and present also in *Solus Rex*, a Russian novel that began to appear serially in 1940 but was never completed. *Lolita* (1955), with its antihero, Humbert Humbert, who is possessed by an overpowering desire for very young girls, is yet another of Nabokov’s subtle allegories - love examined in the light of its seeming

► Major works

opposite, lechery. *Ada* (1969), Nabokov's 17th and longest novel, is a parody of the family chronicle form. All his earlier themes come into play in the novel, and, because the work is a medley of Russian, French, and English, it is his most difficult work.

1.4.18.3 J D Salinger

J.D. Salinger's (1919–2010) novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) won critical acclaim and devoted admirers, especially among the post-World War II generation of college students. His corpus of published works also consists of short stories that were printed in magazines, including *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire*, and *The New Yorker*. Salinger was the son of a Jewish father and a Christian mother, and, like Holden Caulfield, the hero of *The Catcher in the Rye*, he grew up in New York City, attending public schools and a military academy. After brief periods at New York and Columbia universities, he devoted himself entirely to writing, and his stories began to appear in periodicals in 1940. After Salinger's return from service in the U.S. Army (1942–46), his name and writing style became increasingly associated with *The New Yorker* magazine, which published almost all of his later stories. Some of the best of these made use of his wartime experiences: "For Esmé—with Love and Squalor" (1950) describes a U.S. soldier's poignant encounter with two British children; "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" (1948) concerns the suicide of the sensitive, despairing veteran Seymour Glass.

► Salinger

Major critical and popular recognition came with the publication of *The Catcher in the Rye*, whose central character, a sensitive, rebellious adolescent, relates in authentic teenage idiom his flight from the "phony" adult world, his search for innocence and truth, and his final collapse on a psychiatrist's couch. The humour and colourful language of *The Catcher in the Rye* place it in the tradition of Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and the stories of Ring Lardner, but its hero, like most of Salinger's child characters, views his life with an added dimension of precocious self-consciousness. *Nine Stories* (1953), a selection of Salinger's short stories, added to his reputation. Several of his published pieces feature the siblings of the fictional Glass family, beginning with Seymour's appearance in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." In works such as *Franny and Zooey* (1961)



► Writing style

and *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters and Seymour: An Introduction* (1963), the introspective Glass children, influenced by their eldest brother and his death, navigate questions about spirituality and enlightenment.

► Reclusive habit

The reclusive habits of Salinger in his later years made his personal life a matter of speculation among devotees, and his small literary output was a subject of controversy among critics. The last work Salinger published during his lifetime was a novella titled *Hapworth 16, 1924*, which appeared in *The New Yorker* in 1965. In 1974, *The Complete Uncollected Short Stories of J.D. Salinger*, an unauthorised two-volume work of his early pieces, was briefly released to the public, but sales were halted when Salinger filed a lawsuit for copyright infringement.

1.4.18.4 Saul Bellow

► Saul Bellow

Saul Bellow (1915–2005) was a writer who achieved worldwide acclaim and recognition culminating in the award of Nobel Prize for Literature. Although he was born in Canada and raised in America, his writings traverse gender, race, and country. His novels echo the ideas of isolation, spiritual dissociation, and the importance of the human awakening.

► Jewish-American heritage

He remains one of the forerunners in shedding a positive light on the Jewish-American heritage. His characters are humorous, charming, a bit disillusioned, and slightly neurotic. Thus, his novels survive the passing of years as the universal themes continue to be applicable. Bellow cherished and championed Judeo-Christian religious values and scorned such studies as absurdism and nihilism. He thought nothing was as important as simple, ordinary lives being lived as best the person could live. Saul Bellow's best-known work is *The Adventures of Augie March*. He won many awards and prizes, including the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1976, for *Humboldt's Gift*.

1.4.18.5 John Updike

John Updike (1932–2009) is an American writer of novels, short stories, and poetry, known for his careful craftsmanship and realistic but subtle depiction of “American, Protestant, small-town, middle-class” life. Updike often expounded upon characters from earlier novels, eliding decades of their lives only to place them in the middle of new adventures. *The Witches of*

► Major works

Eastwick (1984; filmed 1987), about a coven of witches, was followed by *The Widows of Eastwick* (2008), which trails the women into old age. *Bech: A Book* (1970), *Bech Is Back* (1982), and *Bech at Bay* (1998) humorously trace the tribulations of a Jewish writer. Updike's several collections of short stories included *The Same Door* (1959), *Pigeon Feathers* (1962), *Museums and Women* (1972), *Problems* (1979), *Trust Me* (1987), and *My Father's Tears, and Other Stories* (2009), which was published posthumously. A substantial portion of his short fiction oeuvre was published in the two-volume *John Updike: The Collected Stories* (2013). He also wrote nonfiction and criticism, much of it appearing in *The New Yorker*. It has been collected in *Assorted Prose* (1965), *Picked-Up Pieces* (1975), *Hugging the Shore* (1983), and *Odd Jobs* (1991). Essays examining art and its cultural presentation were featured in *Just Looking: Essays on Art* (1989), *Still Looking: Essays on American Art* (2005), and *Always Looking: Essays on Art* (2012). *Due Considerations* (2007) collects commentary spanning art, sexuality, and literature.

1.4.18.6 Thomas Berger

► Thomas Berger

Thomas Berger (1924–2014) is an American novelist whose darkly comic fiction probes and satirises the American experience. Berger graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1948. His first novel, *Crazy in Berlin* (1958), grew out of his experiences in the U.S. Army during World War II. This work inaugurated a tetralogy about Carlo Reinhart, who, in the first novel, is an adolescent American soldier in Germany. Reinhart's story is continued in *Reinhart in Love* (1962), *Vital Parts* (1970), and *Reinhart's Women* (1981). Perhaps Berger's most popular novel is *Little Big Man* (1964), in which the narrator, the 111-year-old Jack Crabb—who claims to be the only white survivor of the Battle of the Little Big Horn—tells his life story. *The Return of Little Big Man* (1999) is purportedly Crabb's long-lost addendum to the original story.

Berger's other novels include *Killing Time* (1967); *Who Is Teddy Villanova?* (1977), a humorous pulp detective story; *The Feud* (1983), a commentary on people's hostile reactions to minor situations; *The Houseguest* (1988); *Meeting Evil* (1992) and Berger's most serious work, *Suspects* (1996). He also wrote



► Major works

modern versions of several ancient myths and literary classics: *Arthur Rex: A Legendary Novel* (1978) is a parody of the legend of Camelot; *Orrie's Story* (1990) retells the ancient Greek tragedy of Aeschylus's trilogy the *Oresteia*; and *Robert Crews* (1994) is a modern version of *Robinson Crusoe*, concerning a middle-aged wealthy alcoholic whose struggle for survival in a forest cures his lifelong depression. Later novels include *Best Friends* (2003), about a decaying friendship between two men, and *Adventures of the Artificial Woman* (2004), concerning the exploits of a female robot who develops sentience.

1.4.18.7 Philip Roth

► Philip Roth

Philip Roth (1933–2018) is an American novelist and short story writer whose works are characterised by an acute ear for dialogue, a concern with Jewish middle-class life, and the painful entanglements of sexual and familial love. In Roth's later years, his works were informed by an increasingly naked preoccupation with mortality and the failure of the ageing body and mind. He first achieved fame with *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), whose title story candidly depicts the boorish materialism of a wealthy Jewish suburban family. The collection earned a National Book Award. Roth's first novel, *Letting Go* (1962), was followed in 1967 by *When She Was Good*, but he did not recapture the success of his first book until *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), an audacious satirical portrait of a contemporary Jewish male at odds with his domineering mother and obsessed with sexual experience.

► Major works

Several minor works, including *The Breast* (1972), *My Life As a Man* (1974), and *The Professor of Desire* (1977), were followed by one of Roth's most important novels, *The Ghost Writer* (1979), which introduced an aspiring young writer named Nathan Zuckerman, who is Roth's alter ego. Two later novels, *Zuckerman Unbound* (1981) and *The Anatomy Lesson* (1983), trace his writer-protagonist's subsequent life and career and constitute the Zuckerman trilogy. These three works were republished together with the novella *The Prague Orgy* (film 2019) under the title *Zuckerman Bound* (1985). After a fourth Zuckerman novel, *The Counterlife* (1986), Roth released *Sabbath's Theater* (1995), about the ageing and lascivious Mickey Sabbath, a former puppeteer; it won the National Book Award.

1.4.18.8 Joseph Heller

Joseph Heller (1923–1999) is an American writer whose novel *Catch-22* (1961) was one of the most significant works of protest literature to appear after World War II. The satirical novel was a popular success, and a film version appeared in 1970. During World War II, Heller flew 60 combat missions as a bombardier with the U.S. Air Force in Europe. After receiving an M.A. at Columbia University in 1949, he studied at the University of Oxford (1949–50) as a Fulbright scholar. He taught English at Pennsylvania State University (1950–52) and worked as an advertising copywriter for the magazines *Time* (1952–56) and *Look* (1956–58) and as promotion manager for McCall's (1958–61), meanwhile writing *Catch-22* in his spare time.

► Joseph Heller

Released to mixed reviews, *Catch-22* developed a cult following with its dark surrealism. Centring on the antihero Captain John Yossarian, stationed at an airstrip on a Mediterranean island during World War II, the novel portrays the airman's desperate attempts to stay alive. The "catch" in *Catch-22* involves a mysterious Air Force regulation that asserts that a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions, but if he makes the necessary formal request to be relieved of such missions, the very act of making the request proves that he is sane and therefore ineligible to be relieved. The term "*catch-22*" thereafter entered the English language as a reference to a proviso that trips one up no matter which way one turns.

► Catch - 22

Heller's later novels, including *Something Happened* (1974), an unrelievedly pessimistic novel, *Good as Gold* (1979), a satire on life in Washington, D.C., and *God Knows* (1984), a wry, contemporary-vernacular monologue in the voice of the biblical King David, were less successful. *Closing Time*, a sequel to *Catch-22*, appeared in 1994. His final novel, *Portrait of an Artist, as an Old Man* (2000), was published posthumously, as was *Catch As Catch Can: The Collected Stories and Other Writings* (2003). Heller also wrote an autobiography, *Now and Then: From Coney Island to Here* (1998), and his dramatic work includes the play *We Bombed in New Haven* (1968).

► Major works



1.4.19 Women's Writing

► Women's Writing

The academic discipline of Women's Writing is a discrete area of literary studies which is based on the notion that the experience of women, historically, has been shaped by their sex, and so women writers by definition are a group worthy of separate study, "Their texts emerge from and intervene in conditions usually very different from those which produced most writing by men." It is not a question of the subject matter or political stance of a particular author, but of her sex, *i.e.* her position as a woman within the literary world.

► Women's literature

Women's writing, as a discrete area of literary studies and practice, is recognised explicitly by the numbers of dedicated journals, organisations, awards, and conferences which focus mainly or exclusively on texts produced by women. Women's writing as a recognised area of study has been developing since the 1970s. The majority of English and American literature programmes offer courses on specific aspects of literature by women, and women's writing is generally considered an area of specialisation in its own right. Women's literature gained widespread prominence by the end of the 19th century. Feminist causes and the expansion of education for women led to many more female writers than any preceding century.

► Feminine genres

Despite living in a patriarchal society, female writers fought for acceptance in the literary community. In previous eras, women's writing was relegated primarily to writing for children and poetry. These works, characterised by sentimentality, morality, and depth of feeling, were considered works of feminine genres. During the 19th century, the women's suffrage movement reacted to the social, legal, and political inequalities placed on women. Women's literature reflects the feminist movement through theme, characterization, and situations. The works of Kate Chopin and Charlotte Perkins Gilman reveal women's individuality and speak out against oppressive social expectations of women. Louisa May Alcott created strong, self-reliant female characters, presenting a new definition of the role of women in America. Feminine literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries presented readers with realistic views of women's intellect, desires, and potential, ranging far beyond the limitations of submissive domestic life.

1.4.19.1 Willa Cather

Willa Cather (1873–1947) was an American novelist noted for her portrayals of settlers and frontier life on the American plains. She turned to teaching in 1901, and in 1903 she published her first book of verses, *April Twilights*. In 1905, after the publication of her first collection of short stories, *The Troll Garden*, she was appointed managing editor of *McClure's*, the New York muckraking monthly. After building up its declining circulation, she left in 1912 to devote herself wholly to writing novels. Cather's first novel, *Alexander's Bridge* (1912), was a factual story of cosmopolitan life. Under the influence of Sarah Orne Jewett's regionalism, however, she turned to her familiar Nebraska material. With *O Pioneers!* (1913) and *My Ántonia* (1918), which has frequently been adjudged her finest achievements, she found her characteristic themes- the spirit and courage of the frontier she had known in her youth. *One of Ours* (1922), which won the Pulitzer Prize, and *A Lost Lady* (1923) mourned the passing of the pioneer spirit.

► Willa Cather

In her earlier *Song of the Lark* (1915), as well as in the tales assembled in *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920), including the much-anthologized "Paul's Case," and *Lucy Gayheart* (1935), Cather reflected the other side of her experience—the struggle of a talent to emerge from the constricting life of the prairies and the stifling effects of small-town life. A mature statement of both themes can be found in *Obscure Destinies* (1932). With success and middle age, however, Cather experienced a strong disillusionment, which was reflected in *The Professor's House* (1925) and her essays *Not Under Forty* (1936). Her solution was to write of the pioneer spirit of another age, that of the French Catholic missionaries in the Southwest in *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) and of the French Canadians at Quebec in *Shadows on the Rock* (1931). For the setting of her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), she used the Virginia of her ancestors and her childhood.

► Major works

1.4.19.2 Toni Morrison

Morrison's richly woven fiction has gained her international acclaim. In her compelling, large-spirited novels, she treats the complex identities of Black people in a universal perspective. In her early work, *The Bluest*



► Complex identities of black people

Eye (1970), two strong-willed young Black girls tell the story of Pecola Breedlove, who is driven mad by an abusive father. Pecola believes that her dark eyes have magically become blue and that they will make her lovable.

► African American experience

The central theme of Morrison's novels is the African American experience; in an unjust society, her characters struggle to find themselves and their cultural identity. Her use of fantasy, her sinuous poetic style, and her rich interweaving of the mythic gave her stories great strength and texture. Morrison once said that she was creating her own sense of identity as a writer through *The Bluest Eye*: "I was Pecola, Claudia, everybody." *Sula* (1973) describes the strong friendship of two women. Morrison paints African American women as unique, fully individual characters rather than as stereotypes. Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) has won several awards. It follows a Black man, Milkman Dead, and his complex relationships with his family and community.

► Major works

In *Tar Baby* (1981), Morrison deals with Black and White relations. *Beloved* (1987) is the wrenching story of a woman who murders her children rather than allow them to live as slaves. It employs the dreamlike techniques of magical realism in depicting a mysterious figure, Beloved, who returns to live with the mother who has slit her throat. *Jazz* (1992), set in 1920s Harlem, is a story of love and murder; in *Paradise* (1998), males of the all-black Oklahoma town of Ruby kill neighbours from an all-women's settlement. Morrison reveals that exclusion, whether by sex or race, however appealing it may seem, ultimately leads not to paradise but to a hell of human devising. In her accessible nonfiction book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), Morrison discerns a defining current of racial consciousness in American literature. Morrison has suggested that though her novels are consummate works of art, they contain political meanings: "I am not interested in indulging myself in some private exercise of my imagination...yes, the work must be political." In 1993, Morrison won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

1.4.19.3 Alice Walker

Alice Walker (1944–) is an American writer whose novels, short stories, and poems are noted for their

► Alice Walker

insightful treatment of African American culture. Her novels, most notably *The Color Purple* (1982), focus particularly on women. Walker's first book of poetry, *Once*, appeared in 1968, and her first novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970), a narrative that spans 60 years and three generations, followed two years later. A second volume of poetry, *Revolutionary Petunias and Other Poems*, and her first collection of short stories, *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women*, both appeared in 1973. The latter bears witness to sexist violence and abuse in the African American community. After moving to New York, Walker completed *Meridian* (1976), a novel describing the coming of age of several civil rights workers in the 1960s.

► A "womanist" writer

A "womanist" writer, as Walker calls herself, she has long been associated with feminism, presenting Black existence from the female perspective. Like Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, the late Toni Cade Bambara, and other accomplished contemporary Black novelists, Walker uses heightened, lyrical realism to centre on the dreams and failures of accessible, credible people. Her work underscores the quest for dignity in human life. A fine stylist, particularly in her epistolary dialect novel *The Color Purple*, her work seeks to educate. In this, she resembles the African American novelist Ishmael Reed, whose satires expose social problems and racial issues.

► Major works

Walker's *The Color Purple* is the story of the love between two poor black sisters that survive a separation over years, interwoven with the story of how, during that same period, the shy, ugly, and uneducated sister discovers her inner strength through the support of a female friend. The theme of the support women give each other recalls Maya Angelou's autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which celebrates the mother-daughter connection, and the work of white feminists such as Adrienne Rich. *The Color Purple* portrays men as basically unaware of the needs and realities of women. Although many critics find Walker's work too didactic or ideological, a large general readership appreciates her bold explorations of African American womanhood. Her novels shed light on festering issues such as the harsh legacy of sharecropping (*The Third Life of Grange Copeland*, 1970) and female circumcision (*Possessing the Secret Joy*, 1992).



Summarised Overview

The current unit maps the evolution of American prose and fiction in terms of its social and historical background, emphasising the historical development of the genres, American prose and fiction. It focuses on significant milestones in the development of prose and fiction which are uniquely American. It studies the different ages through which prose and fiction have evolved, addressing a wide range of themes, issues, and writing styles, vis-à-vis the contributions of significant writers. From the early colonial period to the revolutionary, and to the modern period, American prose and fiction show serious transformations in form, language, and plot; these correspond largely to the literary periods in which they were conceived. In critically discussing these changes, the unit provides the necessary background for learners to contextualise the genre of American prose and fiction.

Assignments

1. Provide a detailed account of Exploration narratives.
2. Write a short note on Historical writings.
3. Explain the contributions of John Smith in the establishment of English settlement in America.
4. Write short note on Puritan views of life and literature.
5. What are slave narratives?
6. Briefly explain American Romanticism.
7. Elucidate Transcendentalism in American prose and fiction.
8. Write notes on Nathaniel Hawthorne as an American novelist.
9. Briefly describe realism and naturalism in American fiction.
10. What are Lost Generation? Explain.

Suggested Readings

1. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
2. Halleck, Rueben Post. *History of American Literature*. Digicat, 2022
3. The Cambridge Companion to American Fiction After 1945. United States, Cambridge University Press, 2011.

References

1. Gray, Richard. *A History of American Literature*. Wiley, 2011.
2. Halleck, Rueben Post. *History of American Literature*. Digicat, 2022
3. <https://www.britannica.com/art/American-literature/Fiction>
4. <https://www.history.com/topics/roaring-twenties/harlem-renaissance>

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Poetry and Drama

BLOCK-02

Block Content

- Unit 1 Poetry (Detailed Study)
- Unit 2 Drama (Detailed Study)
- Unit 3 Poetry (Non-detailed Study)
- Unit 4 Drama (Non-detailed Study)



Unit 1

Poetry

Detailed Study

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ identify major American poets from the 19th and 20th centuries and demonstrate an appreciation for diverse ideas and perceptions.
- ▶ understand and evaluate the significance of literary texts as by-products of the times they are produced.
- ▶ examine the ideological and perceptive shifts in Modern American poetry.
- ▶ develop skills in close reading and critical thinking.

Background

American Literature encompasses writings from the United States of America and the colonies that preceded it. The colonial period marks the beginning of American poetry in terms of its inception; however, the publication of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* in 1855 changed the course of American poetry. William Carlos Williams remarked, "It is very easy to talk about American poetry because there isn't any such thing". His observation raises a poignant question regarding the historicity of American poetry. The early writings, especially the ones produced before the establishment of the United States of America, evinced heavy influence of British Literature as well as Puritan ethos. The notable writers of this era are John Smith and Anne Bradstreet. Their poems demonstrated the tension between the old and new worlds (England and New England respectively). Jupiter Hammon voiced against the system of slavery in America. He is also known as a founder of African American literature, as his poem published in 1761 in New York was the first by an African American in North America.

The Post-Independence American literature saw a detour from the classical approach; the major movements during this period were Romanticism and Transcendentalism. The writers prioritized imagination and individualism over form and reason. The American Romantics revived interest in the native culture and expressed their love for nature in their writings. Thus the literary production of this period was the least religious or political. Washington Irving,



James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson etc. were the prominent writers of American Romanticism. The American Romantics focussed on the individual, a celebration of nature, and the imagination. For Whitman, nature was a source of spirituality. It was Transcendentalism that embodied the development of a noticeably American approach to poetry. The movement rejected materialism and stressed on subjective intuition and omnipresence of God. Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leading proponent of the movement, is considered the Father of Transcendentalism. It is believed that Emerson's works set the momentum for American Romanticism. He inspired his friend and contemporary Henry David Thoreau who authored *Walden*, a philosophical treatise on individualism and celebration of nature. The writings of the Romantics and Transcendentalists among others catapulted the American Renaissance.

The Renaissance period roughly covers the time between 1830s till the end of the Civil War in 1865. There were two groups of American humourists whose works appeared between 1830 and 1867. One group comprised of Seba Smith, James Russell Lowell, and Benjamin P. Shillaber who portrayed the manners and mannerisms of New England. The other group included writers as Davy Crockett, Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson J. Hooper, Thomas Bangs Thorpe, Joseph G. Baldwin, and George Washington Harris who presented lively pictures of the jovial frontier and showed the interest in the common man. Writers such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes; James Russell Lowell were humorously addressed as the New England Brahmins. They appropriated the European model of story-telling and narration into American writings.

The two decades from 1890 to 1910 were less productive in actual poetic and dramatic achievement. The two world wars along with civil issues in America marked many mutations in literature. Most of the writers expressed their disillusionment with war in their works. This period also witnessed a new kind of poetry, the more radical and experimental types. Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg, and Edna St. Vincent Millay deviated from the American poetic idiom—the free metric and direct emotional expression of Whitman, and the gnomic obscurity and irony of Dickinson. T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound gained international recognition and inaugurated the Modernist phase in poetry. They brought in fragmentation, ellipsis, allusion, juxtaposition, ironic and shifting personae, and mythic parallelism in American poetry. Wallace Stevens, Hilda Doolittle, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams and so on demonstrate the modernist ethos in their poetry. The founding of the magazine *Poetry* in Chicago in 1912 under the leadership and sponsorship of Miss Harriet Monroe is often considered the most tangible single factor in the beginning of the New Poetry or the Poetic Renaissance as it is frequently called. In 1913, *Poetry* published T.S. Eliot's "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" which brought him public attention. The



magazine also presented Carl Sandburg's "Chicago", Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo" and the early works of many beginning writers.

The period from 1910-1930 witnessed the development of African American identity owing to Harlem Renaissance. Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen among others challenged the racial discrimination prevalent in the society. Harlem Renaissance encouraged the African Americans to celebrate their cultural legacy and exalt the "The New Negro" identity. Harlem Renaissance was also called the New Negro Movement.

The period from 1930s is referred to as the Depression Era. Realism and Escapism were the dominant approaches in the works produced during this era. Following the Depression Era, the American society outlined reality in a subjective way in the post Second World War era. The holocaust and atomic bomb episodes made a deep wound in people's minds and a reflection of this can be seen in the works produced during this era. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X who led the Civil Rights Movement transformed the racial dynamics in America; the African American identity began to be acknowledged by society. The Harlem Renaissance, the Civil Rights Movement laid the foundations for Black Arts Movement that emphasized on Black consciousness. The prominent figures associated with the movement are Amiri Baraka, Maya Angelou, James Baldwin, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, Lorraine Hansberry among others. A major shift in American poetry occurred with the rise of The Beat Generation. The writers sought sexual liberation, experimentation with psychedelic drugs and engagement with human condition. Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac were the notable Beat writers. John Ashberry, Charles Bukowski, Gary Snyder, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath, were among the influential poets of the mid-20th century.

Keywords

American Literary History- Harlem Renaissance- Beat Poetry-The Great Depression

Discussion

Section 1 2.1.1 Walt Whitman: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking

The title *Leaves of Grass* was drawn from leaves as in leaves of pages and Grass as something of no value. Hence it was intended to mean, more or less, "Pages of Crap."

Walt Whitman began his career as a painter. Later at the age of 17, he started teaching in the one-room schoolhouses of the island. He shifted his focus on journalism by 1841 and founded a weekly newspaper *The Long-Islander*. Alongside, he also edited a few Brooklyn and New York papers such as *Aurora*, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* and so on. His writing career gained momentum during the 1840s and he published his poems and pieces of fiction in the papers. He established himself as a poet par excellence with the publication of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855.

Whitman witnessed the major socio-political and cultural changes in America- The Civil War, abolition of slavery, rise of America as a super power. His poems dwell on the spirit of the age he lived in. He wrote, "the proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it."

► Walt Whitman

Written in free verse, the poem was published in the year 1859 in *Saturday Press* as "A Child's Reminiscence". The title was changed to "A Word out of the Sea" in its inclusion in Whitman's 1860 edition of *Leaves of Grass*. The poem appeared with the final title in the 1871 version. It is considered one of Whitman's complex and intense poems. The poem is meditative in nature; it takes us through the journey of an ordinary boy becoming an adult and then a poet. "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking", like Whitman's poem, "When Lilacs last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" is a great hymn to death. Similarly, he uses three images in fusion, the boy, the bird and the sea. The boy is the poet himself 'in the making', the poem is actually a grown-up's reverie over a body's experience. The bird, though a traditional symbol in poetry is seen and interpreted in a new light. Whitman has no use for



the pleasing assumption that birds sing out of unalloyed happiness. In the poem, we find that the song of the bird is a lament, one of the most poignant poems of loss ever written, with lines from a heart with infinite pathos:

- An Overview of “Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking”

Low-hanging moon!

What is that dusky spot in your brown yellow?

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

O moon do not keep her from me any longer.

The poem unfurls as narrative memory as can be seen in the first stanza. The speaker of the poem recounts how as a boy he left his bed and wandered alone ‘bareheaded’ and ‘barefoot’ in the night. He yearns to be that “little boy again” and in that reminiscence he recites the poem. The title of the poem reminds how once we leave the cradle, life offers endless challenges making life seem like constant flux or in a state of endless rocking. He, who we can also identify as the poet owing to the autobiographical nature of the poem, reminisces his childhood days in Paumanok. Whitman employs Periphrasis, a technique of using long-winded sentences to convey an idea as can be seen in the opening lines of the poem.

- Narrative Memory/Memory Poem

The next stanza talks about how as a boy, the poet used to be fearless and curious and he stepped out in the dark and walked aimlessly. By the beach, he saw a pair of mocking-birds living in bliss and harmony. The poem can also be looked at as an elegy or a love poem, the deeper signification of the poem is the connection between art and suffering. The title symbolizes birth. The sea, sun, moon, wind, land, stars and so on contribute to the symbolic signification in the poem. They accentuate the emotional quotient incorporated in the poem. The reference to mocking-birds seems like an effort to assert American symbolism.

- Symbolism

In the following three stanzas, the he-bird asks the sun to shine brighter as they bask together in love. The song emphasizes their unity, eternal love and bliss. Whitman’s interest in opera can be observed in that the poem has been arranged in terms of rhythm. The she-bird fails to return one day and her male companion lives in agony awaiting her. The poet recalls how he alone could decipher the pain in the bird’s song. The blissful union



► Themes of Love, Separation and Hope

is marred by separation of the two lovers. The he-bird implores the sea winds to blow intensely and bring to him his partner who is lost somewhere in the vastness. Whitman touches upon three key themes associated with a romantic relationship: love, separation and hope. The bird hopes to see his mate again, without realizing how futile his hope is. The longing to unite with his beloved pushes the bird into further sorrow and pain

► Central Theme of the Poem

The sixth stanza presents contrasting images: when the stars glistened, the he-bird sank in agony and darkness not knowing what happened to his mate. The starry night is contrasted with the darkness spread in the bird's life. The bird's song that reverberated in optimism is fraught with anxiety and sorrow. The boy says unlike others, he is able to understand the bird's song and has taken into account every note of the song. He remains in the darkness, blending himself with the shadows cast ashore. He listens to the song carefully to recreate it later. This recounts his journey towards the art of poetry. The central theme of the poem is the relationship between suffering and art. The poem demonstrates the transformation of an ordinary boy into a poet through his encounter with the questions regarding life and death. Interwoven with the theme of the bird's lament is the surge of the sea, the mother-earth endlessly rocking.

► Nature as Supreme Power

In stanza VII, the bird sings frantically calling upon all forces of nature to bring his beloved back. Whitman employs epiphora (a rhetorical device that consists of repeating a sequence of words at the end of adjacent clauses to give them emphasis.) with the word "carols" being repeated at the end of consecutive lines. The themes of love, sexual union and subsequent death, separation and loss discussed in relation to the birds entwine to portray the unpredictability of life. Going by the Romantic tradition that looks at Nature as a pivotal force, Whitman depicts Nature as a powerful entity in the poem. He believed in maintaining harmony with Nature as we are all her children.

The eighth stanza begins with the fall of the bird. The aria or the song is sinking, and everything else continues in their own course. Here, the poet discusses the old mother (sea) moaning fiercely as she alone knows the truth feared by the bird. The trio- the bird, the boy and the sea- are now connected by the same factor that the



► 'The birth of the poet' Trope

first two seek and the latter knows; the bird is fading with his song, the boy is transforming into a poet, and the sea holds the secret regarding life and death. The boy knows the meaning of the bird's song, and his heart and soul are touched by it. As he walks ashore, he can feel his tears. Here begins the journey of the poet. This is also a common trope in Romanticism where writers talk about a natural entity or occurrence inspiring a simple child into the art of poetry.

As the trope continues in the ninth stanza, the boy wonders if the bird is singing to him or the she-bird. It becomes a moment of realization for him as he is able to understand the bird's language, song and pain. This phase channels his thoughts towards the art of poetry, he says "in a moment I know what I am for, I awake". A thousand singers awake in him that is his mind becomes prepared to decipher the multifarious voices a poet would hear, and these voices shall never leave until death--- a poet is born in the boy. He tells the bird that from that moment onwards he shall never be able to return to the carefree child he once was. He won't be able to escape the throngs of unsatisfied love he comprehended from the bird's song. The writhing pain has transformed into unextinguished fire that shall burn creating 'the sweet hell' within him. The Oxymoron "Sweet Hell" refers to the poet's awareness and partaking of the agony/pain of humanity which he is destined to give poetic rendition to. Since it is pain he shares, it is "hell"; and since his awareness leads to poetic creation, it is "sweet." The bird evolves as the poet's Muse. He seeks some clue to procure the knowledge to overcome that phase of pain. Soon the plea turns into an emotional outpour. He becomes concerned about his destination or future, there is confusion in his words. He requests Nature to provide him with the one word "superior to all."

► Yearning for Poetic Genius

For all the queries the boy had, the poet receives the answer from the sea in the last stanza. In that same manner the bird sang "Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved! Loved!", the sea says "Death, Death, Death, Death, Death". In the concluding stanza all dualities referred to in the poem reconcile: child and man, love and loss, happiness and sorrow, life and death, ignorance and knowledge, darkness and light, sound and silence and so on. He recollects his journey again, remembers the bird and

- Philosophy of Life and Death

Section 2

- Elizabeth Barrett Browning's writings

its song and promises to always remember the secret shared by the sea. The birds' story acts as a backdrop in discussing the philosophy of human life. Whitman equalizes the human and non-human world thereby taking away the centrality of humans and establishes Nature as the supreme force. The bird-song, the song of the poet and the whispering of the sea blend to create that note of tranquillity transcending all grief; and it is on this note that the poem closes.

2.1.2 Emily Dickinson: There is Something Quiter than Sleep and I am Afraid to Own a Body

Emily Dickinson was a renowned lyric poet of the 19th century. Most of her early works are in the form of letters, both her poems and letters during those times appear as her way of dealing with her solitude. Her exposure to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's writings inspired her to come up as a writer. She felt the literary encounter as an empowering act. Over the years, she withdrew from the social scene and confined herself within her home. Around 1858, she collated all her works; whether she intended to get them published or not is still a matter of debate.

The letters addressed to Master were found after her death. Her sister kept her promise to the poet and destroyed the letters and hence we don't have much evidence regarding her personal life.

Emily Dickinson wrote her poems as she lived her life in extreme individuality, at the same time surrounded and partly bound by conventionality. One intriguing fact that remains a mystery is her correspondence with a person identified as Master. A few poems were addressed to 'Master', 'Sir' and 'Signor'. Her sister, Lavinia Dickinson published Emily Dickinson's poems realising their worth. She wrote on a range of topics such as life, death, Nature, God, religion, love, contemporary social scene, virtue and so on. She wrote more than five hundred poems on the single subject of death- a sincere attempt to understand the true nature of death. She was a Romantic who saw beauty in the simplest experiences of life. The uniqueness about her writing is its originality. She experimented with language and stylistic modes. A



- Emily Dickinson's writing style

complete and scholarly edition appeared, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, edited by Thomas H. Johnson in 1955 in three volumes. He edited *The Letters of Emily Dickinson* in 1958 which introduced the readers to the mind of the poet.

- Emily Dickinson's affinity

Emily Dickinson has affinity with Emerson and the transcendentalists, with the hymns of the New England churches, especially the hymns of Isaac Watt, with the metaphysical poets in her turns of wit and her elliptical metaphors, with the poets of the twentieth century in her detail, her "imagism," her use of half-rhymes and dissonant qualities.

- An Overview of "There is Something Quieter than Sleep"

2.1.2.1 There is Something Quieter than Sleep

"There is Something Quieter than Sleep" is developed like a puzzle. Emily Dickinson's way of dealing with the theme of death stands unique in the entire opus of American Literature. She was preoccupied with this theme her entire life and the best manifestation of it is seen in "Because I could not stop for Death" where Death is personified as a gentleman who stops to fetch the speaker in his carriage.

- Personification of Death

The poem begins with the statement that there is something in the room which is quieter than sleep. She uses the pronoun 'it' to suggest that it is non-human, only to reveal later that she is referring to Death rather than the deceased person. She creates an idea of death as a silent, invisible presence felt in the room. She personifies Death, and describes its appearance; she says it is wearing a sprig on its chest, the reference to the wake ceremony or viewing, the time family and friends come to pay last respect to the deceased person before the funeral. She gets annoyed as the corpse is unwilling to reveal its name.

- The non-cooperative dead body

In the second stanza, Dickinson uses the literary device of anaphora (repetition of a word or expression at the beginning of consecutive phrases, clauses, sentences, or verses especially for rhetorical or poetic effect) when she repeats the word "some" in "Some touch it", "some kiss it", and "some chafe its idle hand". The term 'idle' compliments her annoyance at it for it "will" not tell its name. She implies that the dead body chose to not respond. She projects an idea of a non-cooperative dead body that refuses to yield. It could also be her way of establishing the supremacy of Death as it conquers all, no one can escape it.



- Commentary on general expression of grief

In the following stanza, she goes on to say that if she were in those people's place, she would not have sobbed like them. She says that such expressions are rude and might scare the silent fairy back to its physical body, and that goes against the natural law of life. The fairy could also refer to the soul that is waiting to leave the body or the continuum of life into death. By weeping, they are also breaking the silence of Death as well. Here, we find the poet providing a commentary on how grief and sorrow are expressed by people. This gains clarity when she draws the difference between commoners and poets in the last stanza.

- The Quotidian versus the Philosophical

The last stanza reveals a speaker amused at the simple-hearted, naïve neighbours recounting how young the departed soul was. "We," referring to poets, say the 'birds have fled'. The analogy is between Soul and birds, like birds, the Soul is capable of flying. It goes back to the celestial realm. The poet brings in a philosophical dimension rather than dealing with Death as macabre reality.

2.1.2.2 I am Afraid to Own a Body

- An Overview of "I am Afraid to Own a Body"

The poem "I am Afraid to Own a Body" traverses through four realms— personal, metaphysical, spatial and gendered. When looked at as an autobiographical poem, it gives us an insight into her own predicament and thoughts about her body. The poem builds on what can be rightly called the 'Double Estate' trope, negotiating between polarities of body and soul, physical and metaphysical significations, resistance and submission and so on.

- Body versus Soul

In the first stanza, the speaker exclaims how she is afraid to own a body. She extends the idea to stating her anxiety over possessing a soul as well. By juxtaposing the words Profound and precarious Property, the poet refers to the duality of Soul and the body respectively, where Soul represents the philosophical side and body the material entity. The individual does not have any choice but to own the body.

The ownership happens by chance, the individual does not have any control over what body he or she possesses. However, in the case of a woman, she owns the body, does she have complete agency over it? Does the patriarchal society understand this ownership? The



- Politics of Ownership

Section 3

male-centric society presides over the society; however, he cannot own the property as long as all things shall return to God. The timeline coincides with the Abolition Movement and Women's Suffrage. There is a possibility of reading the poem along those lines of understanding body in the context of slavery or patriarchal set up.

2.1.3 Sylvia Plath: Daddy

Sylvia Plath is a seminal figure of the twentieth century American Literature. Her poetry falls under the Confessional Movement popularized by Robert Lowell. The world recognized her talent more after her death at a young age of 30. Her writings can be categorised into three phases. The first phase, from 1950 through 1955, deals with oppression of women in a male-centric world. She is credited to have written 220 poems in this phase. The second phase is from 1956 through 1960 where she showcased her art along the lines of confessional poetry. It was in 1956 she married Ted Hughes and moved to England. The third phase is reflective of her mental turmoil from 1960 till her death in 1963. Her writings signified the trauma she suffered as a result of her failed marriage. The poems written during the last phase touch upon disturbing allusions such as the Holocaust, Nazis, and so on. Throughout her life, she grappled with psychological issues, and in 1963 she committed suicide. Her works reflect her sense of alienation, mental turbulence, anxiety and depression.

- Sylvia Plath

She published her much acclaimed novel, *The Bell Jar* in 1963 under the pseudonym, Victoria Lucas. It is the only novel she ever published.

- Overview of "Daddy"

"Daddy," Plath said, "is spoken by a girl with an Electra complex." It is based on her relationship with her father, Otto Plath (who died when she was still young), her equation with her husband, Ted Hughes, her attempts at suicide, and her frantic need to come to terms with all these things. The poem was written in 1962, four months before her death and one month after her separation from Ted Hughes, but was published posthumously in 1965 as part of the collection, *Ariel*. It has very morbid tones and imagery including death, suicide and the Holocaust.

In the first stanza, she compares herself to a foot living

► Theme of Oppression

in a black shoe; she says the painful situation remained unchanged for thirty years. There is no sense of freedom, or vibrancy but darkness and suffocation. Unlike a regular obituary, the poem doesn't lament the loss of a loved one; rather she expresses a sense of relief. The emotional metaphors used in the poem elucidate the fear and suppression Plath suffered within the relationship with her father. Her father is the shoe, and she is the foot trapped in the shoe.

► The Desire to kill her Father

In the following stanza, she expresses her relief over her father's death that he died before she could have killed him. She relates him to a giant figure, "marble-heavy" with one grey toe as big as San Francisco seal. The grey toe possibly refers to the amputation of her father's leg. The juxtaposition of "marble-heavy" and "grey toe" is suggestive of the frozen state. He appears like "a bag full of God;" either it signifies how she looked up to him as a godly figure or he is simply of large stature. The desire to kill emanates from her frustration of not being able to liberate herself from the oppression that she felt both in his presence and absence. The killing is metaphorical, only then will she be able to embrace her individual self.

► Allegory

The third stanza also describes the father as a giant like statue with his head being located in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, near the coastal town of Nauset in Massachusetts. She says she wanted him to return from the dead. The stanza ends with a German phrase meaning, "oh, you". The allegory of a giant statue acts as a prologue to the magnanimous character she will be sketching out in the later stanzas. The idea is to create an overarching figure of a man who controlled all expanses of her mind. The statue stands as a metaphor for male authority. She believed her father was a Nazi sympathiser.

In the fourth and fifth stanzas, she tries to uncover the roots of her father's ancestry. He hails from a city in Poland, a country horrendously destroyed by wars and under the control of the Nazis. "In the German tongue" is the continuation of the previous line, "Ach, du" which means "Oh, you." Her prayer to recover her father was made in the German language. Though the idea closes there, Plath passes on the information about her father's ancestry in the following words. She tells her Polish friend the name of the town her father hails from and in response the friend says that there must be at least



- Tracing her father's ancestral roots

twelve towns of that name. She feels, since she lacked that information she could never communicate with him. It was like her tongue was stuck in her jaw.

Her inability to talk to her father is likened to the barbed wire snare. She repeats the pronoun "I" in German four times expressing her difficulty to talk. She says she mistook every German to be her father, and considered the German language vulgar. The anger she has towards her father is extended to his land and language. She explains further in the following stanza how she regarded the German language. She feels it was like the engine of a train, taking her off like the Jews to the concentration camps in Dachau, Belson and another camp situated in Auschwitz, German-occupied Poland. She realizes that she began to speak like a Jew or she might have become one. The line is filled with the trauma of the Jewish community being inhumanely executed by the Nazis. The anti-Semitic violence perpetrated by the Nazis inspired similar sentiments in other parts of Europe.

- Reference to the Holocaust

In the following stanza, she draws parallel between the dark and bleak imagery of the previous stanza and the serene and pure images of snow-capped mountain peaks of Tyrol or the Vienna beer which she says are not true or pure. Possibly, what looks pure in pristine form might not be as pure as they appear to be. Since the Holocaust was centred on the idea of pure race, Plath sarcastically says that even the snow or the beer that are known to be pure should also be wiped off from earth by the Nazis. She talks about her ancestry; her mixed ancestry makes it relatable to the plight of the Jews and gypsies who were killed by the Nazis. She talks about the Tarot cards which are used to foretell events. Here, the future is so dark that their relevance itself is far more confusing.

- Satire on Holocaust

She describes her father who kept a neat moustache and had blue, Aryan eyes evocative of Hitler's image. The pure Aryan race was part of the Nazi agenda justifying the mass killing of the Jews. The racial superiority appealed to both the masses and the nobility. She subtly compares her father to Hitler. Panzer-man refers to the German tank drivers. There is fear in her words as she utters Panzer-man again. "O You" in the stanza captures the disappointment and fear she has on seeing him in

- Analogy between the father and Hitler

that gruesome role. This stanza builds upon the horrors of the Holocaust and rise of Hitler as a ruthless dictator. By likening her father to Hitler, she is depicting how terrorized she was both during his life and even after death.

- The Nazi Imagery

She claims that her father is not a God but a Swastika, the symbol of the Nazi regime. Her father is the metaphor of the Nazi atrocities. The Swastika is in black colour symbolizing death and darkness for her. She goes on to state that women love Fascists who thrash their face with their boots. Perhaps, she is also referring to her marriage with Ted Hughes. She calls her father a brute. She latently confesses how she fell for a brutal man like Ted Hughes and suffered in the marriage for several years. The Nazi imagery employed here showcases the plight of the poet in her relationship with her father and with her husband. The words “dark”, “fascists” and “brute”, stand as symbols of her pain and inner turmoil.

- Theme of Disappointment

She recalls a photograph of her father standing at the blackboard. Her father was a teacher by profession and this stanza amounts to be the most personal account as well. He had cleft chin but she feels that he might have cleft feet like devils do. She calls him a black man, a dark hearted man who broke her red heart into two, that is an evil person who disappointed her for eternity.

- Childhood trauma

In the twelfth stanza she recalls she was only ten when he passed away. At the age of 20, she attempted suicide to return to him. His death pushed her into eternal trauma she could never overcome. Her suicide attempts, as she says, are a way of re-uniting with her father. According to her, his absence is the root cause of all her psychological problems.

- The Holocaust as a Metaphor

In the following stanza, she talks how she was “glued” back to life. She made a model of him, a man wearing black with a “Meinkampf” look (*Mein Kampf* is Hitler’s autobiography). The reference is a continuation of the 11th stanza where she implied Ted Hughes as a ruthless person. The reference aligns with Holocaust as a metaphor employed throughout poem to suggest how she felt victimized by male authority as Jews were at the hands of the Nazis. The analogies drawn among Hitler, her father and Ted Hughes bear testimony to this reading.



► Lack of Empathy

► Extended Metaphor for Unhappy Marriage

► “Daddy” as a Confessional Poem

The fourteenth stanza captures the poet's agony. The words “rack” and “screw” present her mental trauma caused by her unfaithful husband. She sought her husband as a substitute for the male authority in her life. The failed marriage accentuated her anger towards her father even more for she feels she would not have married a replica of him if he were alive. She lets go her guard off when she says “I’m through”. She looks at the telephone that is unplugged and says now the words cannot reach her. The lines also imply the isolation and misery the poet felt being unable to articulate her fears to an empathetic person.

In the next stanza she claims to have killed him if she is to take the blame of killing one man. She killed the man who claimed to be like her father, the reference is again to Ted Hughes who is likened to a vampire feeding on her blood. She speaks of the time she invested in the unhappy marriage. She tells her father can rest now.

In the concluding stanza she talks about the wooden stake piercing her father's “fat black heart” and villagers dancing and stomping on him. The imagery is evocative of the traditional belief of killing a vampire by thrusting a shaft piercing the vampire's heart. There is ambiguity here regarding the villagers. Who were they? Were they actual people who despised her Nazi father? Or are they figments of her imagination? “Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I’m through,” Plath concludes. The suggestion is more that she is “through” in the sense of being over and done with. There is a possibility the poem brought a closure to her pains, insecurities and trauma. The poem qualifies as a Confessional one for its direct reference to the poet's personal and intimate life. Confessional Poetry emerged in the late 50s and early 60s. Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and W.D. Snodgrass were the poets associated with it. Plath contemplates her final adieu to the world.

Section 4

2.1.4 Langston Hughes: The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes was a multifaceted literary figure. He was poet, essayist, short-story writer, social activist and playwright. He shot to fame during the Harlem Renaissance by creating a distinct African American literary voice. He had a complex ancestry; paternal



► Multifaceted literary figure

great-grandmother was an enslaved African whereas paternal great-grandfather was a white slave owner. It was his maternal grandmother, Mary Patterson Hughes who raised him, introduced him to Black American oral tradition and encouraged him to find pride in his race.

He had to drop out from Engineering in Columbia University in 1921 because of the racial prejudices he encountered there. Later in 1929, he earned a Bachelor's Degree from Lincoln University.

► Central figure in the Harlem Renaissance

He became interested in the abolitionist cause and became a central figure in the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem in New York was the hub of this cultural revival. Initially the place was occupied by the Whites; however, with the passage of time, property developers failed to attract them and shifted their focus on to the middle class Black families. This acted as the basis of the influx of African Americans from the South to Harlem. This also led to the migration of the White population from Harlem to different parts of America. In 1926, he published his first book of poetry titled *The Weary Blues*. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" from this collection is considered as his signature poem.

► Langston Hughes works

Hughes received a Harmon Foundation Medal for his novel, *Not Without Laughter* in 1930. His poetry became more radical during the 1930s. His poems came under immediate scrutiny for the stringent criticism levelled against religious and political set up. "Goodbye Christ" (1932) became controversial for touching upon his conflict with Christianity. Another poem, "Good Morning Revolution" revealed his devotion to Marxism. The corpus of his literary works comprises of poetry, seven collections of short stories, two novels, two autobiographies, ten children's books, four nonfictional works and over 25 plays. His writings identified him as the central figure of Harlem Renaissance.

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was published in 1921 in the journal *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the National Association of the Advancement of Coloured People. The poem was later anthologized in *The Weary Blues* in 1926. The poem was written by Hughes as he was travelling by train to meet his father. Hughes is also reminded of



► An Overview of the Poem

his people who bore the trauma of enslavement and torture. It is interesting to note that such a dense poem was written by Hughes when he was just 18 years old. It is to be considered that the poem was written during the Great Migration, a movement of African Americans out of the Southern United States into Northern cities like Chicago was taking place. Hence the poem can be understood both as Hughes's perception about his life and reality as well as an insight into African American experiences.

► Establishing the Historical Roots and Routes

Hughes was intrigued how the enslaved Africans would have felt crossing the Mississippi River to be sold and tortured in America. He says that he has known many rivers- as old as the world and older than the blood flowing through human veins, that is, human civilization itself. The poem speaks volumes about racial injustice and discrimination. The Eurocentric history excluded the contributions by the African communities towards the development of the world. Hughes deems it important to acknowledge this neglect and draw the historical route to the ancient past.

► Symbolism

It draws a parallel between the rivers and human soul. His soul has grown deep like the rivers. He bathed in the Euphrates during the early days of the civilization. The world's oldest civilization developed along the banks of two rivers, Tigris and Euphrates. The reference to Euphrates reminds the reader of any individual's, in this case, the black man's right to the past or history which has been systemically erased by the oppressors. He built his hut by the banks of the Congo River. It lulled him to sleep. The hut here stands for Africa that was home to black people who were brought to America as slaves.

► Claiming the ancestral history of African-Americans

The place assured contentment once, and due to the white man's exploitation became a breeding ground for inhuman practices. The natives who once slept peacefully in their land were brutally harmed by the colonizers. He saw the Nile River, and helped in the construction of the pyramids. He also heard the Mississippi River singing in celebratory tone when Abraham Lincoln travelled on it to New Orleans. He saw its muddy waters turn golden during the sunset. The poem recalls the perseverance, tolerance and endurance of the African American community that has contributed a lot towards the progress of civilizations. However, their accomplishments have been side-lined by the mainstream White society.



► Cosmic Voice of the poem

The poem ends on re-establishing that he has known rivers, old and dusky. The refrain that his soul has grown deep like the rivers is a means of establishing his ancestry that dates back to the beginning of human life on earth. His attempt to reclaim the roots would reverse self-ethnic negation caused by the historical omission of the role of African community. The soul escapes the temporality of the body, and hence has a cosmic and eternal element to it. The poet creates a cosmic voice, a sense of divinity when he says that his soul has grown like rivers, the rivers that witnessed the birth of civilization. The rivers have known human experiences, historical occurrences and by likening the soul to the rivers, the soul becomes a metaphor for wisdom and knowledge.

Section 5

2.1.5 Wallace Stevens: The Emperor of Ice cream

► Modernist poet

Wallace Stevens is celebrated as an influential American modernist poet. He wanted to focus his career as a writer but dismissed that pursuit later. He practised law until 1916 after graduating from New York Law School in 1903. In 1916, he joined the legal staff of Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, an insurance company he worked for the rest of his life, and made Hartford, Connecticut, his lifelong home. In 1923, Stevens published *Harmonium*, an anthology comprising 85 poems. Throughout that time, he was active in the New York Literary circle, and shared warm relationship with his contemporaries such as William Carlos Williams, Marianne Moore, and E. E. Cummings.

In 1935, at a party in Key West, an inebriated Stevens drunkenly insulted Robert Frost, disapproving his poetry as too academic. Frost, in response, said Steven's style is too executive.

► Wallace Stevens's poems

His poems are considered complex, partly due to his unconventional use of language and partly due to the psychological impulse in them. His poems display his affinity for Realism and Naturalism. The philosophical or spiritual dimension of his writings is attributed to his acquaintance with the Spanish-American philosopher, George Santayana. His poem, "To an Old Philosopher in Rome" was about Santayana. His later poems show the influence of the German philosopher, Friedrich



Nietzsche. He passed away in 1955 leaving his ambitious project of rewriting Dante's *Divine Comedy* behind.

"The Emperor of Ice cream" was published in 1922 in his anthology titled *Harmonium*. Paul Mariani who is Stevens's biographer identifies the poem as one of Stevens' personal favourites. Stevens wrote to William Rose Benét that the poem, "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". Later he gave a different explanation to Benet for liking his "Emperor":

► The letter

I do not remember the circumstances under which this poem was written, unless this means the state of mind from which it came. I dislike niggling, and like letting myself go. This poem was an instance of letting myself go. Poems of this sort are the pleasantest on which to look back, because they seem to remain fresher than others. This represented what was in my mind at the moment, with the least possible manipulation.

Stevens avoided saying anything about the background or creative circumstances of the poem for several probable reasons: because he considered aesthetic theory as well as the experience of the poem to be more important; because it was not his practice to point out his sources; and because he wanted his poem to stand on its own, to be a unique concentration, "momentarily the complete idiom of that which prompted it." The poem is divided into equal stanzas, the first stanza is about preparation of ice cream and the second stanza is about preparing the deceased woman for her funeral. The first stanza deals with the present and the living and the latter is about past and the dead. Stevens places the themes of life and death side by side to portray how they complement each other and need not be prioritized over the other. There is no pompousness in the wake ceremony.

► An Overview of
"The Emperor of
Ice cream"

The poem begins with the speaker commanding someone to bring in the muscular man who rolls cigars, and get him to preparing ice-cream from concupiscent or lusty curd. He says that the women maintain the dress code they usually wear. The boys are asked to bring flowers wrapped up in old newspapers. The poet



► Major Themes and Imagery

talks about death in a mundane way, there is no great expression of grief or sorrow. The women are asked to wear their regular clothes, the flowers need not be wrapped in fancy papers. The old newspaper shall do. The artificialness and vanity of life melt at the threshold of reality. All material pursuits end there. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream that is all power is elusive. The first stanza resonates in sexual overtones, the description of the roller of cigars, in the usage of concupiscent curd, addressing women in the archaic way as wenches. The implication that the youth will be waiting for the ice-cream suggests how the living revel in material pleasures.

In the following stanza, he commands someone to take a bedsheet from the dresser. It is made from some cheap quality wood and three glass knobs on it have fallen off. He asks the person to spread the sheet in such a way that it covers her face. The sheet on which the deceased once embroidered fantail pigeons covers her face (the art or “seeming” of the pigeons contrasts with the reality of the sheet and what it covers; and, like ice cream, the embroidery is a confection, a thing made). Even the feet protruding are acceptable and appropriate since they confirm the reality of her death. He tells the person listening to fix the lamplight on her. The line where the speaker asks to fix the lamp is evocative of illumining the reality where nothing matters. The lamp is put beside the body to set up the proper formal tableau for the wake. He says it is fine even if the sheet does not cover the deceased person’s entire body, the feet would remind people of the coldness of death. The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. By this line, repeated at the end of each stanza, Wallace Stevens means that the only power worth heeding is the power of the moment, of what is passing, of the flux.

► Commentary on Death

Section 6

2.1.6 Robert Frost: Birches

Robert Lee Frost became a professional poet by the age of 20. He went to Harvard but had to drop out to support his family. He worked on his farm all day, and devoted the early hours of the morning to poetry. Most of his famous poems were written during this phase. His experience in husbandry and craftsmanship made an impact upon his poetry, both in subject matter and in style. He demanded of his poetry the honesty and simplicity of the scythe or

► Robert Frost’s subject matter and style



the plow.

► Robert Frost's works

He won many awards and honours during his lifetime. He was launched upon his poetic career with the publication of *North of Boston* in 1914 though he published *A Boy's Will* the previous year. He won four Pulitzer prizes in his lifetime for the following works: *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* in 1924, *Collected Poems* in 1931, *A Further Range* in 1937, and *A Witness Tree* in 1943. Sadly, his successful life as a poet sheathed his personal tragedies; he lost his wife to cancer. The bleakness in them is believed to have emerged from his life in rural New England.

► Master-poet

Robert Graves, the English poet wrote about Frost, "The truth is that Frost was the first American who could be honestly reckoned a master-poet by world standards.... Frost has won the title fairly, not by turning his back on ancient European tradition, nor by imitating its successes, but by developing it in a way that at last matches the American climate and the American language." Frost used the natural flexibility of language within the structure of meter, bringing originality in a personal style to the conventional patterns of poetry. That is, what he said about poetry aptly informs his own writing: "Poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom."

Robert Frost is the first poet to address a US Presidential Inauguration.

► An Overview of "Birches"

The poem, "Birches" is written in blank verse and maintains a conversational tone. It is a single stanza poem consisting of 59 lines. It was initially titled "Swinging Birches," however Frost continued with the present title. It was published in 1915 in *The Atlantic Monthly* along with his other poems, "The Road Not Taken" and "The Sound of Trees" as "A Group of Poems". "Birches" was later included in Frost's third collection of poetry, *Mountain Interval* in 1916. The poem captures the ethos of New England rural life and as is said of all his poems, it begins in delight and ends in wisdom. Enriching the complexity of "Birches" is Frost's masterful handling of the poem's sounds and images. His use of a variety of auditory and visual devices enhances the formal sense of the work.

(Lines 1-13): When the poet sees the birch trees, he likes to think some boy has been swinging them. He says



► Reality versus Fantasy

he knows that swinging cannot make them bend like that the way ice-storms do. People get to see the trees covered in ice on a bright day after winter rains. The thin sheets of ice make the trees appear as coated with enamel. As the wind blows, the trees sway making clicking sounds, and rays passing through the ice sheets create a multihued visual treat. As the sun shines brighter, the shards of ice melt and fall upon the snow clad ground. The sight of the shards that resembles broken pieces of glass make the poet think if the inner dome of heaven had collapsed and fallen on the ground. With a graphic description of how he would like to imagine the scene, he is offering an alternate way of fantasizing reality.

► Visual Imagery

(Lines 14-20): The birches are bent with the burden of ice and snow; it looks that they are dragged to the withered shrubs on the ground. The poet gives a simple, concrete description of the habits of the birches and of the changes wrought upon them by wind and ice-storms. Though the trees don't break, they will never be able to straighten themselves after being bent so low for long. One may see them arching towards the ground even after so many years due to this. Their leaves trail along the ground similar to young girls sitting on their hands and knees tossing their hair forward for drying it in the sun. The comparison attributes a feminine quality to birches. Frost captures the visual beauty of the snow-clad birches in a way that his imagined way looks more aesthetic than the actual scene. He describes the objects of nature vividly and forcefully. This reminds us of Keats who placed Imagination over Reality.

► Romantic Vision of Childhood as a phase of fearlessness and liberty

(Lines 21-32): Line 21 reintroduces his fantasy about the bent down birches with which the poem opens. He would prefer to believe that it was some village boy who bent the trees down. He goes back to his fantasy and imagines a boy who, while tending cows, made a sport of holding on to the branches and bending them. The boy lived in a remote countryside that this was the only source of amusement for him. He could not go to the town and learn baseball. Be it any time of the year, he bent all the trees that all birches on his father's land were ridden down by him. The trees lost their stiffness and became flexible. He had conquered all of them. The lines exuberate the Romantic ideals of liberty and carefree attitude associated with childhood. The boy feels empowered having gained control over the trees.



He subtly brings in the difference between the rural and urban lives here. As the boy enjoys his childhood, he is also tending cows as a means of helping his family.

- Precision and the Mastery over Nature

(Lines 32-40): The boy who had by now learnt the technique of climbing birches would climb atop without bringing the tree down. His precision reminds the poet of how careful one needs to be. When the boy reaches the top, he flings forward stretching out his legs, kicking his way in such a way that he reaches the ground unharmed by bending the tree. The poet continues with the idea of a young child gaining mastery over Nature owing to his fearless attitude.

- The poet's philosophy of a temporary retreat to spiritualism, only to come back to earth

(Lines 41-49): Until now the poet has been providing us with a matter-of-fact description of the act of swinging birches. From Line 41 onwards the poet suddenly turns philosophical attributing a spiritual connotation to the whole act of swinging. The poet recalls he was like the boy once upon time. He would swing from the birches. He longs to go back to those cheerful days of childhood. He talks about adulthood as 'pathless wood' full of challenges and responsibilities. The face irritated by the cobweb, or one eye hurt by the twig speak of the uncertainties of life. He wants to take a break from his adulthood, resume life after that. As he utters his wish, his is worried of being misunderstood by Fate who will 'half-grant' his wish and take him away permanently from the world. Fate is personified here.

(Lines 50-59): He says that Earth is the right place for love and he cannot think of a better place than earth. If he has to leave Earth, he wants it to be by climbing a birch tree, he wants to climb the snow covered trunk directed towards heaven, till the tree cannot bear his burden and take him back to the ground. This feeling of leaving and returning to the same place is beautiful. There are worse things in the world than being a birch swinger. The poet does not talk of heaven or hell but Earth as the only abode. The poet would ask for a temporary retreat to spirituality ('heaven' of Line 56), but he wants to come back to Earth, the only place for love. In a way it is the same as the ending of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening":

- Theme of Escapism

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,



And miles to go before I sleep.

Section 7

2.1.7 Maya Angelou: Phenomenal Woman

Maya Angelou had a disturbing childhood; she was raped at age of seven by a man named Freeman, her mother's boyfriend. The trauma struck her more when the man was found dead later. She believed she was responsible for his death and she went mute for almost 5 years. This incident was captured in her first autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. She was born as Marguerite Annie Johnson. It was her brother who called her Maya. Upon the suggestion of people around her at the club she worked, she changed her name to Maya Angelou, Angelou being her ex-husband's surname. She recorded her first album *Miss Calypso* in 1957 after which she moved to New York to focus on her writing career. She became an integral part of Harlem Writers Guild which sought to provide a platform for the African American writers to present their art without being subject to racial and intellectual discrimination. She wrote seven autobiographies and several poems.

► Maya Angelou

After her successful stint in films, she directed *Down in the Delta* (1998), and is credited as the first African American woman to direct a motion film. She is also credited as the first African-American screenplay writer for the film, *Georgia, Georgia* (1972).

► An Overview of
“Phenomenal
Woman”

“Phenomenal Woman” was published in Angelou's third volume of poetry, *And Still I Rise*, 1978. The poem departs from the standardized notions of beauty and offers a new perspective about womanhood and beauty. The poem comprises of 4 stanzas of unequal length. Each stanza raises a question and the resolution is provided along and like most of her works touches upon the issues of racism and sexism. The poem celebrates self-acceptance, pride, womanhood and self-love, no wonder Harold Bloom considers the poem a “hymn-like poem to woman's beauty.” Angelou often performed “Phenomenal Woman” which she considered her “personal theme-poem.”

In the first stanza, the poet says pretty women wonder about her secret and when she reveals it to them, they



► Symbolism

express disbelief. She does not fit into any beauty types or standards. Her beauty lies in the reach of her arms, wide hips, her confident step and her smile. She claims she is an extraordinary woman; they stand as symbols of her dream, pride, progress and voice respectively. The poem gives an idea about the social condition of a Black woman. When she asserts that a phenomenal woman means her, she is talking to all Black women out there to look at the mystique that will guide them in their survival in a racially divided society. Historically, African slaves were exhibited as exotic objects, the merciless human zoos shall always remind us of the shameful past. The Black woman is either looked at as a sensual, exotic object or one who does not fit into the conventional beauty norms dictated by the white society. The poet evinces a great sense of self-assurance when she describes herself a phenomenal woman.

► Theme of Self-acceptance

In the second stanza, she discusses her becoming the centre of male attention. She enters the room calmly, and men swarm around her like bees. They crave for her attention. The commotion is created by the fire of liveliness in her eyes, her confident smile, the way her waist sways, and the joyfulness in her gait. She repeats she is an extraordinary woman, and phenomenal woman means her. “That’s me” and “phenomenal woman” are repeated throughout the course of the poem so as to emphasize the phenomenality she associates with womanhood.

► Reasoning Phenomenality

In the third stanza, she tells her readers that men wonder why they are so much attracted to her. They make attempts to find the reason or her “inner mystery” just to fail learning the truth. They cannot see the secret of her beauty even when she tries to show them it. She says it is there in her walk, every aspect of her physicality, her smile, breasts and style. The refrain that she is an extraordinary woman, and phenomenal woman means she asserts this. Men find it difficult to articulate their feeling which is a reversal of the black woman’s plight who could not voice her angst and suffering. She compares her smile to sunshine celebrating the grace exuding from her confidence and assurance. The poet establishes how self-contentment and self-confidence can lead the people around baffled, aiding any woman to become a phenomenal woman.

► The Mystique surrounding the speaker

Having said that, in the last stanza she reasons out why she never bows her head before anyone. She does not need to shout or jump to make her visible to others. It is all in her confidence that whenever anyone sees her walk, they feel proud. The mystique surrounding her is symbolic of her inner strength and pride which in turn comes the celebration of her femininity. She says it is in the click of her heels, the way her hair sways, in the way she holds out her hand, in the way others want her to care for them. Her mysterious charm challenges all sorts of categorization making her an extraordinary woman, and phenomenal woman means her.

Summarised Overview

The unit has given an overview of American Poetry of the 19th and 20th centuries. Imagination was the key element in the 19th century American Poetry. The poets engaged with the whole gamut of human emotions in their writings. The period also evinces strong support towards individualism over society. The Romantic Movement slowly woke national consciousness. The writers were inspired by American history and American culture. With the turn of the 20th century that witnessed internal wars, social movements, and the two World Wars, the literary scene created a platform for realistic writings over Romanticism of the previous century. The following units will discuss seminal literary figures of the Modern and Post-modern Literary Tradition of America, and examine their works in detail.

Assignments

1. Discuss Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" as a memory poem.
2. How does Whitman draw connection between art and suffering in "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking?"
3. Elaborate on the treatment of the theme of death in Emily Dickinson's "There is Something Quieter than Sleep."
4. Examine the politics of ownership in Emily Dickinson's "I am Afraid to Own a Body."
5. Why do you think Sylvia Plath's "Daddy" departs from the regular obituary tradition?
6. Elucidate the Nazi imagery employed in Plath's "Daddy".
7. Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" is a way of documenting African history. Evaluate.



8. How does Langston Hughes trace his people's route to ancient past in "The Negro Speaks of Rivers?"
9. Comment on the thematic structure of Wallace Stevens' "The Emperor of Ice-cream."
10. Explain how Wallace Stevens "The Emperor of Ice-cream" deals with the universality of death.
11. Examine the theme of reality versus fantasy in Robert Frost's "Birches."
12. In what ways does Maya Angelou subvert the stereotype of feminine beauty in "Phenomenal Women?"
13. What is the mystique surrounding the phenomenal woman? Illustrate with suitable examples from Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman."

Suggested Readings

1. Gray, Richard. *A Brief History of American Literature*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.
2. Johnson, Thomas H., ed. *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960.
3. Oliver, Egbert S. *American Literature 1890-1965 An Anthology*. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, 1984.

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1. MacLeod, Glen. "Stevens and Surrealism: The Genesis of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar.'" *American Literature*, vol. 59, no. 3, 1987, pp. 359–77. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2927121>. Accessed 17 May 2023.
2. Oliver, Egbert S. *American Literature 1890-1965: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Eurasia Publishing House, 1984.
3. Schichler, Robert L. "Several Strokes to Perfection: Deliberate Artistry in Robert Frost's 'Birches.'" *The Robert Frost Review*, no. 25, 2015, pp. 39–69. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43973858>. Accessed 17 May 2023.
4. Shakespeare, William, et al. "Commonplace Costumes and Essential Gaudiness: Wallace Stevens' 'Emperor of Ice-Cream.'" *College Literature*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1974, pp. 230–35. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25111043>. Accessed 17 May 2023.
5. Untermeyer, Louis. *Modern American Poetry*. Harcourt, Brace and Company. 1921. Original from the New York Public Library Digitized Oct 6, 2006.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Unit 2

Drama

Detailed Study

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ Demonstrate understanding of the artistic movements that shaped the modern American theatre and drama.
- ▶ Evaluate Eugene O'Neill's contribution to the development of modern American drama.
- ▶ Appreciate the ethos of the times the text under discussion portrayed.
- ▶ Assess the significance of critically engaging with a text to identify and interpret the cultural, social, historical and political aspects of it.

Background

Drama had not been a major art form in the 19th century. Although the Puritan bias against theatre had completely vanished and a great many plays had been produced, they were anything but significant. There were playwrights of some talent such as Clyde Fitch whose plays such as *The Truth* were very popular. Another notable figure was Langdon Mitchell whose *New York Idea* combined dialogue and deft satire. Playwrights such as William Vaughan Moody, Edward Sheldon, Augustus Thomas succeeded to revive the American theatre; however, they were handicapped by a tendency towards sentimentality and readiness to follow theatrical convention.

With the turn of the century, experimentation occurred in drama as a revolt against the superficiality of the commercial stage. The rise of the Little Theatre Movement around 1912 brought liberation of American drama from conventional shackles imposed by the commercial theatre. The movement catapulted modern American drama. The proponents of the movement were inspired by the ideas of Max Reinhardt, a German director, the designing techniques of Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig, and the staging methods at the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Freie Bühne in Berlin, and the Moscow Art Theatre. Community playhouses such as the Toy Theatre in Boston (1912), the Little Theatre in Chicago (1912), and the Little Theatre, New York City (1912) were centres of the experimental activity.

The author of *American Drama Since 1918*, Joseph Wood Krutch wrote in his book;



In February 1915, an enthusiastic group of young amateurs calling themselves the Washington Square Players waved a solemn manifesto in the face of New York Drama critics and opened the Bandbox theatre near the corner of 57th Street and Third Avenue. Just a year and a half later, another group equally young and equally enthusiastic came home from a summer on Cape Cod to take possession of a stable in MacDougal Street to be known as the theatre of Provincetown Players. Eugene O'Neill acted a role in *Bound East of Cardiff*, the first playlet on its first bill, and thus New American Theatre which had been born once on Third Avenue, was born again in MacDougal Street.

The Washington Square Players started as a semi-amateur Little Theatre and then matured into a Repertory theatre with its own touring company and drama school. After the troupe stopped functioning, a few of its members such as Lawrence Langner, Philip Moeller, Helen Westley and Theresa Helburn founded The Theatre Guild, a theatrical society in New York City in 1918. The guiding spirit of the Provincetown Theatre was George Cram Cook. Its early productions were varied like those of the Washington Square Players. If the dramatists of the Washington Square Players were influenced by Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw and Maurice Maeterlinck, dramatists like Eugene O'Neill of the Provincetown Theatre were inspired by the works mainly of August Strindberg.

The American theatre in the 1920s experimented in many directions. It tried to represent life more concretely through abstractions, tried to moralize, satirize, lyricize in terms of new manipulations of space and movement, new concepts and sequences of dialogue, new versions of characterization. Expressionism was imported to American from Europe. It made remarkable contribution to the development of the American theatrical spirit. Eugene O'Neill was the genius behind the change that came over American theatre in the 1920s and 1930s. His obituary in *Times* read: "Before O'Neill, the United States had theatre: after O'Neill it had drama", such is his status in American Literature. John Gassner, a notable American theatre historian wrote, "The stature of Eugene O'Neill casts a long shadow on the American theatre. Whether it stretches or contracts in the critical estimates of a particular period or critic, this much is certain: the height and breadth of the American theatre is measured by it. Find fault with O'Neill and you find fault with the entire American stage." The other notable playwrights of 1930s are Maxwell Anderson, S.N. Behrman, Robert E. Sherwood, Philip Barry, Clifford Odets and Lillian Anderson.

Keywords

Love and Forgiveness, Loneliness and Isolation, Religion, Nostalgia and Regret, Drug addiction and Alcoholism



Discussion

2.2.1 Eugene O'Neill: Long Day's Journey into Night

Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) was born to the Irish immigrant actor James O'Neill (once popular Shakespearean actor) and Mary Quinlan who were also the inspiration for many of his stories. His brother was an alcoholic and his mother suffered from an addiction to morphine which was prescribed as a part of treatment after O'Neill's birth. This account is recreated in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. His first stage production was *Bound East for Cardiff* in 1916; it was *The Emperor Jones* that established him as an indefatigable force in the American Theatre.

► O'Neill's life

O'Neill is indisputably the greatest American dramatist even today. His bold theatrical experimentation of the 1920s and 30s revolutionised the American theatre and earned it a niche in world drama. His dramatic writings have never failed to appeal theatre goers around the world since his early plays like *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* caught world attention in the 1920s. His thematic concerns still enjoy contemporaneity thanks to the existential problems they deal with. He probes into the mystery of life frequently shifting his angle of perception in his attempt to explain fundamental human problems. He once explained, "I'm always, trying to interpret Life in terms of lives, never just lives in terms of character. O'Neill's dramatic concerns which have such a profound impact has their origin from the convoluted hate-love relationship of his parents, brother and himself. O'Neill was obsessed with the family unit because all his agony had its origin from the heat and fume of family togetherness and family conflict. The centrality of the family thus plays a major role in giving his plays the great swing from autobiography to universality.

► O'Neill as a playwright

O'Neill was inspired by the works of the ancient Greek dramatists such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Consequently, his plays also have sombre moral purpose. His in-depth study of Freud and Jung made him determine the contemporary equivalent of the gods in the Unconscious. He won the Nobel Prize for

Literature in 1936 and four Pulitzer awards, of which one was awarded posthumously. He drew inspiration from Anton Chekov, Henrik Ibsen and August Strindberg. He conceived of tragedy differently; he saw a celebration of life in it. He said, "Life in itself is nothing. It is the dream that keeps us fighting, willing – living!" This idea is drawn from Nietzsche and he incorporates this philosophy in all his plays.

► Eugene O'Neill's inspiration

Long Day's Journey into Night was published posthumously in the year 1956 and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1957.

Eugene O'Neill wrote *Long Day's Journey into Night* in 1939-1940 and dedicated the play to his third wife, Carlotta Monterey on their 12th wedding anniversary as a tribute to her love and compassion that brought stability to his life. The inspiration for the four main characters of the play is drawn from his own family life- his parents, older brother and himself. The play, therefore, is autobiographical. The setting is based on his house in Connecticut. The play engages with the domestic and psychological situations of the Tyrone family. James Tyrone's stinginess, Mary Tyrone's addiction to morphine, Jamie's debauchery and Edmund's illness depict the world of the Tyrone family as dealing with fragmentation, frustration, anxiety and disappointment. All the male characters are alcoholic as well and the mother a drug addict. O'Neill called it a "play of old sorrow, written in tears and blood." In other words, *Long Day's Journey into Night* is O'Neill's most autobiographical play. The plot of the play exactly parallels the family story of the O'Neills. In a single day of the play's title, the whole history of the O'Neills is depicted with brutal frankness highlighting the father's stinginess, the mother's drug addiction, his elder brother's alcoholism and bohemian life and O'Neills years as a derelict and his infliction of tuberculosis.

► The autobiographical nature of the play

O'Neill's tragedy began with the marital incompatibility of his parents. James O'Neill, his father was a touring actor manager whose vocation required it of him that he travel from place to place, stay in hotel rooms that came handy, mostly second-rate ones, eat bad food, and be reconciled to the lack of a settled life, As a result, he could not provide his wife with the home she longed for. All O'Neill knew of a home was a New London summer



► O'Neill's father

house- the Monte Cristo Cottage. Ella O'Neill, his wife, could not take it for a home.

Three sons were born to the couple- Jamie, the eldest followed by Edmund, five years his junior and Eugene. When the second son, Edmund was two years old, Jamie was afflicted by measles. He entered the child's room against the warning given him by his mother. The child contracted the disease and succumbed to death. Ever since, Ella has accused him of jealousy of his little brother and deliberately infecting him. It was to relieve her of her sense of guilt and pain that they had a third child- Eugene. She never wanted to have another baby and was afraid to bring him to this world as Mary Tyrone complains in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. It was a difficult delivery and Ella was in terrible pain. They were at that time in a second-rate hotel and James engaged a cheap hotel quack of a doctor. He gave her morphine to relieve her of the pain. It was the beginning a twenty-five year long morphine addiction of Ella.

► O'Neill's siblings

Ella's drug addiction and her constant accusation of Jamie of fratricide drove him to self-destructive ways. He got expelled from the university and found emotional asylum in alcohol and whores. When Eugene was fifteen, he also had to be told of Ella's addiction and he followed the example of Jamie, ten years elder to him. He also got expelled from the university, frequented bars and whorehouses and worked as a seaman (sailor) for a period. Afflicted by malaria he returned to his father and started another bout of drunken existence. In 1912, he contracted tuberculosis and underwent treatment in a tubercular sanatorium— the Gaylord Farm, founded by the state. *Long Day's Journey into Night* is the dramatization of the family history of the O'Neills upto August 1912.

► The family history

O'Neill wrote *Long Day's Journey into Night* "with deep pity and understanding and forgiveness for all the haunted Tyrones." It was written "in tears and blood." His third wife Carlotta Monterey reminisces, "Poor Gene. He would come down the stairs from his study. His eyes were so red that I knew he had been crying..." In writing the play, O'Neill was creating a purgatory where the Tyrones (the O'Neills) confess, suffer and purify themselves. Hence his treatment of his father as a miser, his mother as a drug addict, and his brother as a lost alcoholic and a destructive influence on the author.

► The play as a purgatory for mind

► The title of the play

The long day of the title is divided into four distinct parts of the day- morning immediately after breakfast, noon, during and after lunch, evening, dinner time and finally midnight. The day represents and covers the incidents of the past, present and an implied bleak future.

► Act I as the exposition

Act I takes place immediately after breakfast, the scene serves as exposition. We are informed of everything that is going to lead us to the darkness and gloom of each scene that is going to follow. The family has been happy during the two months that Mary has been with them “cured” of an illness (drug addiction). Everybody is cautious not to give her any worry since she might relapse to her addictive habit. They are especially anxious because Edmund, the youngest son, her pet, has developed a “summer cold” which all knew is consumption. Moreover, she was restless and sleepless the previous night and slept in the spare room which was her habit when she was addicted to morphine. By the end of the scene all the three men—Tyrone, Jamie and Edmund – know that Mary has fallen back to the evil habit though they do not want to admit it among themselves, except perhaps Jamie who is the most affected by his mother’s addiction and hence the most cynical, suspicious and sharp-tongued.

► The causes of family curse

Act II has two scenes— before and during lunch. We get further information about the causes of the family curse. Mary complains of the lack of a home, a settled life, and being forced to reconcile to the miserly and substandard ways of Tyrone. He economises even on essentials. We also come to know of the constant feud between James and Jamie. James does not leave a single opportunity to taunt Jamie, the alcoholic and the failure in life after having shown brilliant promise as a boy. Jamie on the other hand is the most sharp and pungent in vilifying James calling him “Old Gaspard” and “tight-fisted bastard.” Edmund is looked at with concern by all mainly because of his illness. He is the most shocked by his mother’s relapse.

Act III shows the further disintegration of the family ties. With darkness and fog falling on them, Mary is getting more and more lost in the drug and the fog well indicates her condition of oblivion to the family and her men. Act III witnesses the confirmation of Mary’s relapse. She has started blaming everybody and everything for her failure as a wife, mother and householder. She



► The disintegration of family ties

accuses Tyrone of stinginess, Jamie of fratricide and Edmund of being born. We learn at the opening of Act III that Mary had purchased morphine from the drugstore. In her drug-induced friendly conversation with Cathleen the maid, we learn about her early girlhood, her days of innocence, her dreams of being a nun or a concert pianist and her meeting and falling in love with James Tyrone. Left alone, she feels both relieved and lonely and disturbed and happy when Tyrone and Edmund come back home. Mary is far gone in drugs. She reminisces her past, her life with Tyrone, Tyrone's cheap and stingy ways, all in a tone of regret and resignation. She rakes up a negative trait of Tyrone in one moment and at the next she forgives him for it. Edmund desperately tries to bring her back to a listening attitude by telling her that his sickness is not a summer cold but consumption. She does not want to admit it even to herself; instead she berates Dr. Hardy and all doctors who are fools and wicked people who would do anything to keep one going to them. He loses his temper and speaks out the cruellest words to her. He says: "It's pretty hard to take at times, having a dope fiend for a mother," Mary no longer hides her relapse. At the end of Act III, she withdraws to the upper room without eating anything. She admits: "I have to go upstairs. I haven't taken enough."

Act IV is set around midnight. At the opening Tyrone is playing solitaire who is immediately joined by Edmund. A long session between father and son follows: they accuse, confess, justify and stand absolved of their big and small failings in life. Tyrone, particularly, reveals his early childhood poverty, his being the man of the family at the age of ten, his mother scrubbing in Yankee houses, his two sisters keeping home, their lack of enough food all through their life. It was then he learned the value of a dollar. There is a lot of fresh insight and understanding between father and son. Tyrone also speaks of his career, his yielding to the temptation of easy money and giving up and the possibility of being one of the finest actors of America— all for the easy money brought by the huge success- Count of Monte Cristo- which he played for twenty five years. Edmund also speaks about his experiences on the lap of the sea mother, the moments of emotional escape to the call of the sea and his confession that he as an artist, can only stammer; and never verbalize his feelings in profound



► The big and small failings in life

words. They are joined by Jamie, drunk. James withdraws fearing the sharp tongue of Jamie. There is a confessional scene between Jamie and Edmund. Jamie says, he always loved his kid brother but hated his guts; he was jealous of “mama’s baby, papa’s pet”. Jamie had led Edmund to evil ways out of hatred; not the whole of him, but a part of him.

The confession of Jamie is overheard by James. He reminds Edmund he had always warned him against the evil influence of Jamie. But even he says, Jamie had a lot of affection for Edmund. By this moment of the play, all the Tyrone family have confessed their failings, offered some kind of justifications and stand absolved before the other members and the audience. The play closes when Mary comes down fully drugged, withdrawn to her convent days, wearing her faded wedding gown. She has regressed so completely that she no longer wants to be touched or brought back to the reality of the present. The curtain lines go to Mary: “That was in the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes. I remember, I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time”,

► Synopsis

In real life, Ella got cured of her addiction only after the death of James O’Neill.

► Setting of the play

The play is set in Connecticut, in Monte Cristo Cottage, the home of the Tyrone family. The play captures the occurrences from around 8.30 a.m. to midnight of a single day in August, 1912. The setting is the seaside Connecticut home of the Tyrone family, Monte Cristo Cottage.

2.2.1.1 Characterization

The four main characters are the semi-autobiographical representations of O’Neill himself, his elder brother, and their parents. The Tyrone family comprises of James Tyrone Sr. , his wife Mary Cavan Tyrone, their sons, James Jr. (Jamie). and Edmund. They have a maid named Cathleen who is in her twenties. There are several characters referred to in the play, however, they don’t appear on the stage.

James Tyrone Sr. is 65 years old patriarch of the Tyrone family. He used to be a popular actor and a true thespian. His stinginess acts as the main reason behind his family scorning him. His wife, Mary Tyrone complains that he never could provide her a home or bring in stability to the



family owing to his alcoholism and stinginess. He blames his stinginess on his impoverished childhood where he had to take up the responsibility of the family at the age of ten. Despite being wealthy, he prefers investing more in property than providing good medical care to his wife or tuberculosis ridden son, Edmund.

Mary Cavan Tyrone is 54 years old and is unable to come out of her drug addiction. She often slips back into her memories and reminisces her youthful days when she was full of dreams and aspirations. She wanted to be a nun or a concert pianist, however, her meeting with James Tyrone changed her life altogether. Though the initial days of their courtship and marriage were filled with love and passion, Mary soon got disappointed with James's frequent travels and stays in cheap hotels. She yearned for a home which he could not provide despite having money. Lack of stability and frustration with her life pushes her into severe disillusionment with life. After losing their second son, Jamie's carelessness, she did not want to bear any more children. After delivering their third son, Mary needed medical care and James arranged for a quack of a doctor who prescribed morphine for her. She sought refuge in morphine thereafter and towards the end of the play relapses into her past indefinitely.

James Jr. (Jamie) is 33 years old. He is the eldest son of the Tyrones. Mary constantly blames him of fratricide and James considers him a bad influence on Edmund. His alcoholism and debauched life show how rootless and alienated he feels in the family. He is envious of his younger brother, Edmund; at the same time he is very fond of him as well. He questions James of his stinginess that has brought havoc in the family. In a certain way, Jamie is the victim of a dysfunctional family. Jamie can be seen as the representative of the American youth who are lost between the American dream and their lack of focus in life.

Edmund is the youngest son of the Tyrones; he is 23 years old. Mary is closer to Edmund and he is the only character who listens to Mary's musings on life. He worked as a sailor before returning to his parents. He suffers from tuberculosis, and the family keeps this as a secret from Mary for their fear of her relapse to morphine addiction. He is also alcoholic; however, Mary sees a future for him. Despite knowing his medical condition,



he does not pay attention to his habits which shows his attitude towards life.

The play is divided into four acts. Act 1 provides an insight into the Tyrone household. The act clearly shows how unstable and fragile the family dynamics is. There is discord in the family, at the same time, they are bound by love. It portrays what O'Neill said about his family: "We were a very close family; perhaps too close". Act 2 is divided into Scenes 1 and 2. Act 2 provides deeper vision of Mary's addiction and mental turmoil, the debauched life led by Jamie; Edmund's ill health and alcoholism and James' alcoholism and stinginess. Act 3 deals with Mary's engagement with her past and the fourth act culminates in her total relapse to her past. It also depicts the male characters as helpless and unable to save her or themselves.

► Structure of the Play

2.2.1.2 Detailed Analysis

Act I

The setting is the family living room which is adjacent to the kitchen and dining room. James Tyrone and Mary Tyrone embrace while their sons Jamie and Edmund loiter in the kitchen. James appears to be assured whereas Mary reveals her nervousness with her constantly fidgeting hands. Mary is happy to have gained weight despite eating less, James comforts saying she looks healthy. They soon enter into an argument over his decision to invest in real estate. They are distracted by Edmund's coughing in the next room. She thinks it is common cold, but James appears concerned. James consoles Mary saying that she need not worry about Edmund but she retorts by asking what makes him think she is upset. The opening act sets the tone of the play in momentum. It is evident that the family is dysfunctional, it lacks mutual trust and harmony.

► Dysfunctional family

Soon enough James overhears Edmund and Jamie laughing, and he assumes that they must be joking about him. The sons enter the stage, Jamie seems content seeing his mother in great form whereas Edmund looks fragile and sick for a 23 year old youth. When all of them share the stage, the scene becomes bitter. The sons touch upon James's snoring habit which he deems a sensitive topic to be discussed in front of the family. The father who is

- The in-between social situation of the Tyrone family

angry picks on Jamie for being aimless and idle. There is frustration in every member's words. Edmund tries to pacify the situation by talking about a resourceful, Irish tenant named Shaughnessy who resides on the family land of Tyrone. James Tyrone is bemused by the resourcefulness of his fellow Irishman but as reluctant to show it. He calls Edmund a socialist.

- Concern regarding Edmund's failing health

The spiteful atmosphere worsens and Edmund takes leave saying he needs to pick a book from upstairs. As he climbs the stairs, his cough worsens. Mary remarks, "A summer cold makes anyone irritable." Jamie intervenes and says, "It's not just a cold he's got. The kid is damned sick." James signals him to stop but he does not see it. James handles the situation by saying that Dr. Hardy, their family doctor will find a cure to it. Mary, very suspicious of doctors, passes a jibe but self-conscious about her hair, an indication that she has started her relapse to her morphine addiction. Both James and Jamie reassure of her grace and beauty. As soon as Mary leaves the scene, James rebukes Jamie for his callousness. The scene shows the pathetic reality of the Tyrone family: the men in the family try to protect the mother who is gradually relapsing to her drug addiction. It is just a month or so since her return after a "cure."

- Lack of consistency

Jamie accuses his father of taking Edmund to a "third class" doctor like Dr. Hardy. He feels if a good doctor is consulted on time, Edmund would have received the appropriate medication and cure. The topic drifts to Jamie's alcoholism. He counter-accuses James of stinginess and investing in "bum property." He accuses James of economizing even on Edmund's treatment. They know that Edmund is suffering not just from a "summer cold" but tuberculosis. Jamie even says that if Edmund were a bum property, James would spend any amount of money.

Jamie loses his temper and scolds his father for carrying his "Irish peasant idea" that consumption does not have cure for he feels with the modern treatment in America, Edmund could be cured. James is offended and warns not to mention his Irish ancestry in such a light ever again. He further blames Jamie of being a bad influence on his brother. Later, he restrains himself and consoles Jamie. Jamie justifies that whatever he said or did was to save Edmund from the mistakes he did with

► Fragile family dynamics

his life. James warns Jamie not to tell Mary of Edmund's disease. He fears she will have a nervous breakdown, also because her father died of consumption. Jamie is convinced. Again they quarrel over James's miserliness in getting good doctors for treating Mary and Edmund, Jamie feels that both were quacks. Jamie tells James that Mary was awake the previous night and he pretended to sleep so that she does not notice she is being observed. James blames it on his snoring habit. Mary returns, and wants to participate in their conversation but they manage to distract her into other things.

► Mary's escapism from reality

Mary has a conversation with Edmund. She expresses her desire to have had a female friend or a companion she could share her thoughts with. She sighs, "You go out. But I am alone. I've always been alone." It is then she says she had been awake all night because of James's snoring, and how James pretended to sleep when he saw her walking in the hall. She says she knew that even Edmund was pretending to sleep as a way of checking on her when she entered his room. Mary is aware of what is going around her but partakes of the dramatics staged by her husband and sons. Her longing for a permanent home and stability is evident in the first act.

Act II

Scene 1

► Edmund as a stubborn character, contrary to his appearance

Edmund asks Cathleen, the maid to fetch his parents and Jamie for lunch. She suspects if Edmund would sneak a peg from the bottle of whiskey she just brought in. She says that Mary is not asleep but lying with eyes open. Jamie joins Edmund and he drinks as well and fills the bottle to the mark with water so that James does not find out that he drank from it. James is busy talking to the neighbour, Captain Turner and joins the family for lunch much late. Until then Jamie tells Edmund to refrain from drinking considering his ill health. Edmund emerges as very stubborn and defends his stand by saying that he will, once he hears about his health from the doctor.

Jamie seems concerned about their mother's absence and chides Edmund for leaving her on her own for such a long time. Edmund despises Jamie's attitude to which he responds that being the youngest, he does not have much clue to their mother's addiction. When Mary appears at the table, it is clear that she has relapsed. She rebukes



► Theme of loneliness

Jamie for being disrespectful towards their father when he passes a joke on him. However, when they all grow impatient waiting for him, Mary starts blurting out her frustration of not having a home. She feels her loneliness is also rooted in not having a proper home.

► Irony

Jamie expresses his suspicion non-verbally and Mary gets annoyed. She instigates Edmund into getting him against Jamie. After doing so, when Edmund fights with his brother, she feels guilty and she chastises James for not building a home for them. Edmund understands the situation but he does not want to believe it. He gets ready for another drink. It is ironic to see Edmund wanting to stop his mother's addiction but not being able to stop his own.

► Theme of Denial

Once James arrives for lunch, all the men drink. Mary expresses her displeasure at the father not dissuading the sons from drinking. Mary like Edmund, is in constant denial of facts. She draws a comparison between her father and Edmund, but instantly she retreats from it. Mary cannot tolerate the men staring at her, she cannot handle the distrust and suspicion. James finds it meaningless to even bring up the discussion on her addiction.

Scene 2

► Resignation from reality

James Tyrone and Mary dispute over the past. As usual she shifts the focus from her to other members of the family. She worries over Edmund's eating habit and health. She constantly tries to focus on the family members in order to save herself from being observed for drug addiction. She says she longed for a home but that does not bother her anymore. There are signs of withdrawal in all the characters; they withdraw from reality. They appear tired struggling to bring stability to their lives. Mary blames it on James for taking her to a quack who put her on some addictive medication. She constantly shifts the focus on exterior factors to establish she is a victim of circumstances.

It is confirmed that Edmund is suffering from consumption and needs to be sent to a sanatorium for treatment. Jamie insists on a good place for Edmund. Immediately, James retracts saying that he does not have that kind of money. Once again, James's stinginess is brought to light here. Though he is the one who holds

► James's stinginess

the family together, we get an idea that he is partially responsible for the misery as well.

As James leaves the house, Mary complains of being left alone. The conversation slips to Edmund's appointment with Dr. Hardy. Mary is happy that Jamie will be accompanying Edmund to Dr. Hardy, however, she is concerned if Jamie would return drunk. James mocks at his own life, saying he has got every reason to drink. Mary acts ignorant and James asks her to go on a drive to overcome her loneliness. Mary uses that as an occasion to express her displeasure at James buying her a second-hand car. She says she does not like driving around in the car. She feels that is not the solution to her inner turmoil. She assures him that she knows how much he loves her. He pleads with her to stop for their family's sake. What he meant is her addiction to morphine, but she acts ignorant. She does not want to overcome her addiction and finds excuses to take more doses.

► Mary's drug addiction

Mary attempts to cover up the helplessness of the family regarding her addiction by saying they have always loved each other and shall continue to do so. She takes a trip down the memory lane recalling her days of youth. She enjoyed visiting her friends, and welcoming them home as well. She is engulfed in the past, and romanticizes the past as a way of escaping from her current family situation.

► Theme of Nostalgia

James reminds Mary of the night she ran out in frenzy and tried to throw her off the dock. Realizing he could have hurt her, he apologizes soon after. To his surprise, Mary is unwilling to accept it and says that nothing of that sort happened and he might have dreamt of such an incident to have happened. She laments that she was never sick before she conceived and delivered Edmund. She wants to establish that she became so sick and the treatment by the quack led her to morphine. James pleads to her to leave the past behind to which she responds, "How can I? The past is the present, isn't it? It's the future, too. We all try to lie out of that but life won't let us."

► Theme of Denial Extended

Mary opens up about the sorrows of her life. James and Mary had a son named Eugene, who died in infancy. She feels guilty for having left the ailing baby in her mother's care to join James on his trip. Indirectly, she wants to blame James when she says she did so as James wrote



► Theme of Guilt

to her that he felt lonely in her absence. Jamie, who was only seven then contracted measles and went to the baby room passing the disease onto Eugene. Mary cannot accept it as a child's negligence but a strategy born out of sibling rivalry, Jamie never liked the baby so she thinks he did that on purpose. Eugene O'Neill is known for his engagement with the expressions of human minds and the play substantiates his talent for fathoming the inner thoughts of his characters.

► Theme of Fatalism

Edmund enters the scene seeking money from James to meet Dr. Hardy. He advises Mary to stop taking drugs as it is easier to stop in the beginning stage. Mary justifies her case saying the doctors at the sanatorium had asked to avoid any upsetting situation at home but she is worried over Edmund's health. She feels repentant and says that is not an excuse. Suddenly, she slips back to past reminiscing the days she spent as a young woman in the convent. She revelled in those happy moments. She wishes she could pray again to Virgin Mary but she, in another moment, remembers that she need to go to the drug store.

► Mary's inner thoughts

She warns Edmund to not give any money to Jamie who would spend it on alcohol. She also asks him to promise that he would quit drinking as it would affect his health adversely. It is ironic that everyone is trying to control the other rather than practising self-control. When he leaves, we are exposed to Mary's thoughts about her family. She prefers the loneliness she constantly complains of to their being around to spy on her.

► Mary's desire to have a listener

Act III

Act III opens at 6.30 in the evening, Mary has been to the drug store being accompanied by Cathleen. When the scene opens, it is evident that she has had more of the drugs. She is paler and displays a strange detachment. What follows is her reminiscence of her youthful days, her first meeting and falling in love with James Tyrone, and her dreams of being either a nun or a concert pianist, both of which she gave up for her love for Tyrone. She treats Cathleen with whiskey in order to ensure her company.

Mary's plan fails as she hears Eugene and James entering the house. She is upset that Jamie is not with them, she surmises that he might have gone out for

- Mary's mentality of pitting one against the other

drinking. She warns Edmund of not imitating Jamie's ways. She considers that Jamie holds the hatred he had for Eugene against Edmund as well. At this juncture, a petrified James alerts Edmund of not taking his mother's words seriously. It is very clear that Mary has great influence over Edmund. She further says that Jamie's alcoholism has brought disgrace to the family. James warns her by saying "when you have the poison in you, you want to blame everyone but yourself" and asks her to stop her ranting.

- The toxic love-hate relationship

Mary asks James if he remembers their first meeting. They share happy moments of recollection. But she ruins the moment by referring to James' drinking habits and how he left her alone in hotel rooms while he was out drinking. The play touches upon the toxic cycle of love-hate equation in every sequence. She then starts remembering her wedding dress and wonders where she has kept it.

- Mary's altering emotions

As James goes to fetch a bottle of whiskey, Mary shares with Edmund, the account of James' past. His father left his mother and six children including him in America and went back to Ireland and he died there. James had a tough childhood that made him stingy. Edmund is annoyed and says he has heard it a thousand times. He is offended that his mother does not care about what the doctor said about his health. Edmund tells Mary that he needs to go to the sanatorium for treatment. Mary is in a state of disbelief and accuses him of being dramatic like his father. As she hurries to go upstairs to take more drugs, she tells James that she is scared if Edmund would die. James consoles her saying he will be cured in six months and they need to have dinner together. She says she needs some rest. James remarks angrily, "up to take more of that God-damned poison is that it? You'll be like a mad ghost before the night's over!" Mary as usual acts ignorant.

Act IV

It is midnight and James has turned off all lights to save money. A heated argument takes place between Edmund and him regarding this when Edmund stumbles on something in the dark. They start avoiding confrontation even when they are discussing matters the other does not like. Edmund tells his father he ended up giving



- James's and Edmund's opening of their minds to each other

Jamie half the money he gave him and now he might be in some brothel. They recite poems, as they find relief in the excess of whiskey. They talk about Jamie and Mary. He confesses to Edmund about being money-oriented in his acting days. It was his attitude that ruined his career by purchasing the production rights of "Count of Monte Christo." He appears practical when he says that there is no point in regretting anymore. When he says he would like to turn off the lights as they are bright for his eyes, Edmund laughs it off as he knows he is trying to cover up his stinginess.

- Jamie confesses his manipulations to Edmund

Jamie appears on the scene, all drunk. He calls Mary "hophead" and gets punched on the face by Edmund. He apologizes to Jamie afterwards and Jamie expresses his concern over Mary's addiction. He confesses that he purposefully exposed his brother to his wild lifestyle so that there won't be any comparison between the two. He admits his belief that Mary's condition worsened after Edmund's birth. Since he is in a drunken state, we do not know the genuineness of his feelings.

- Theme of Forgiveness

Jamie picks up a quarrel with his father but both decide to resign from it. The three men are startled when they hear Mary playing the piano. She appears on the scene like "it is a marble mask of girlish innocence, the mouth caught in a shy smile." She has draped her wedding dress over one arm and it is sweeping along the floor. The scene acts as a prologue to Mary's resignation from reality. She has relapsed to the time before her marriage. Jamie remarks, "The Mad Scene", "Enter Ophelia!" and, Edmund slaps him across the face.

- Mary's hallucinations and submission to the past

Mary has fully regressed to the past. She worries if Sr. Theresa would rebuke her for playing the piano so bad. When James tried to help her with the gown, she thanks him as if he were a stranger. She says, "I don't know what I wanted it for. I'm going to be a nun—that is, if I can only find—." James tries to bring her back to reality but Jamie says that there is no use. Edmund grabs her arm and exclaims that he has got consumption. For a moment, Mary looks frightened but turns away from reality as she says, "You must not try to touch me. You must not try to hold me. It isn't right, when I am hoping to be a nun."

The men resort to alcohol as a way of coping with their harsh realities. As they have had enough drinks and have

emptied their minds of their individual and collective agonies, Tyrone proposes that they catch a few winks “since he is dead tired” Exactly then, Mary appears and says that Mother Elizabeth had spoken to her. She was informed that she could return to the convent having lived life like other girls do. She recalls that it was during that phase she fell in love with James Tyrone. As she finishes sharing her thoughts, it becomes evident that Mary has completely plunged into her past. Her family realizes they have lost her forever and the curtain closes. The long day fades into night, or absolute darkness. The journey signifies the struggles of the family that is addicted to drug or alcohol to attain peace with themselves. This was how Normand Berlin opened his full-length analysis of O’Neill’s plays in his book, *Eugene O’Neill*. His opening chapter is on *Long Day’s Journey into Night*:

Long Day’s Journey into Night is exactly that: long (four hours playing time, long because endless, long because repetitive, long because painful), day (the day of the play- 8.30 a.m. to midnight, a day in the life of the Tyrones, a day in life, the day of life), journey (a trip from day to night, a trip in time-both forward and backward- a quest for causes, a pilgrimage through life), night (the night of the play, the night of dreams, death). Each literal word, like the play’s realism, suggests more beyond itself, ripples of significance ever widening.

► The significance of the title of the play

The play epitomises the concerns of O’Neill—loneliness, the ideal frustrated by the facts of life, the search for ultimate motive, the desire to “belong”. The quest for identity is a dominant theme of the play. The play presents the post-War American ethos affecting the most certainties in the domains of morality, ethics and in the play, legal as well drifting into uncertainties. The family members often end up in discord, however, the very foundation that holds them together is love and forgiveness. For instance, Jamie forgives his brother for beating him up, James is apologetic for his ruthless remarks. But, they all engage in a vicious cycle of blame and guilt and are in constant denial of their flaws and addictions. Mary refuses to admit her drug addiction, James covers up for his stinginess, Jamie does not work towards a better life and Edmund sinks into alcoholism despite his ill health. Their beliefs are fatalistic, they ask



► Major themes of the play

each other to refrain from their addictions but owe their issues to fate or circumstances. The idea of home is an equally potent theme of the play as it touches upon the sense of belonging. Mary's submission to the past is also rooted in her lack of a home. The derangement in the family is also partially related to the elusiveness created by this lack. They try to fix the issue by finding solace in unacceptable habits.

O'Neill employs a lot of symbols in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The fog, the foghorn and Mary's glasses are the most poignant ones among the many. The fog reminds the audience of drug abuse as well as the unclear, incoherent situation of the family. The sequences of hallucinations, poetic renditions, alcoholism and substance abuse point towards the family's withdrawal from actuality. In the daylight, as in Act I, when the sun is shining, everything looks normal. With the haze gathering in Act II, the disjointed family's real pictures come to the fore. A wall of fog against the window pane in Act III signifies the intensified tensions of the family. The foghorns that keep Mary awake (as she claims) warn of futility. In Act IV, Edmund claims that the fog is where he wanted to be. The long conversation between Tyrone and Edmund in the last act, are dialogues between a pre and post-modern view of literary authority. Tyrone insists on the timelessness of Shakespeare, which makes him superior to the more modern poets and philosophers preferred by his sons. Great art, to Tyrone senior, is that which has universal significance.

► Symbolism

Though Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* does not have any character meeting tragic end, the play is a tragedy. It is a modern tragedy for it deals with the degeneration and deterioration of an ordinary protagonist, realistic timeline and setting. Each character has a tragic flaw and are always in a state of denial of their faults. They find it hard to communicate no sooner than they engage in arguments with each other. The children endured the dysfunctional family situation and are not in a place to create a niche for themselves. The parents are disappointed with their sons for still being dependent on them. There is no sense of belonging, the mother blames it on the father who never built a home for the family. The play qualifies as a tragedy for it leaves scanty hope for future. Mary's appearance in the climax

- *Long Day's Journey into Night* as a modern tragedy

scene evokes the idea that there is no hope of renewal or salvation or nurture. Every act of help extended by the family for its members go as futile. If Greek tragedies showcased the struggle between man and God, O'Neill portrays through the play, the struggle with one's own self, one's past and future.

Summarised Overview

The drama of the modern United States of America before World War I was in many ways not a modern drama at all. In the years before the Little Theatre Movement gave rise to a generation of American playwrights who experimented with European realisms and anti-realisms. The unit deliberated on how drama had always been a weak spot in American Literature until the rise of Eugene O'Neill who established himself as a representative American dramatist. He started off as a realist but soon he blended realism with symbolic and suggestive modes. He experimented with a lot of forms: he inter-mixed naturalism and symbolism, suggestiveness and symbol, realism and expressionism. His contributions to American theatre and drama shaped the modern American drama and opened up new directions for his successors to experiment with different theatrical techniques and forms thus catapulting American drama to international fame as well develop a unique place for itself. The following unit will focus on the plays produced towards the latter half of the twentieth century.

Assignments

1. Examine Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* as a tragic play.
2. Comment on Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* as a play dealing with dysfunctional family dynamics.
3. Discuss Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* as an autobiographical play.

Suggested Readings

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3. Hartnoll, Phyllis and Peter Found eds. *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. Oxford: OUP, 1972.
4. Krasner, David ed. *A Companion to Twentieth-Century American Drama*. UK:Blackwell, 2005.
5. <https://www.britannica.com/art/little-theatre-American-theatrical-movement>

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU

Unit 3

Poetry

Non-detailed Study

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ appreciate the different poetic techniques employed by the modern and postmodern American poets
- ▶ evaluate the new directions and shifting paradigms in modern and postmodern American poetry
- ▶ gauge the impact of socio-cultural changes on literature
- ▶ possess a deeper understanding of how human consciousness is shaped by social circumstances

Background

The mid-twentieth century witnessed many movements and experimentations in American poetry. The Black Mountain poets, also referred to as projectivist poets, rose to prominence as the American avant-garde or postmodern poets. They were called so as they were associated with the Black Mountain College in North Carolina. The group including Charles Olson, Robert Creeley, Robert Duncan, Edward Dorn, and Denise Levertov, treated the poem as an unfolding process rather than a containing form. Along with them, the works of A. R. Ammons, John Ashbery, Robert Bly, Robert Creeley, Allen Ginsberg, James Merrill, W. S. Merwin, Frank O'Hara and James Wright redefined the American poetic idiom established by their predecessors. Their notable early works appeared between 1955 and 1970. John Ashbery, Barbara Guest, James Schuyler, Kenneth Koch, and Frank O'Hara were also part of the New York School of poets who brought into their works the mundane, pop culture, humour, and spontaneity, seeking to capture life as it happened.

E.E. Cummings can be identified as a poet whose work provides a bridge between modern and postmodern traditions of American literature whereas William Carlos Williams is identified as a high priest of American Modernism. The writers of Post- World War II period rejected the conservative attitude of the previous times over quest for liberation. Fragmentation, minimalism, black humour, irony, intertextuality, the overlapping of fact and fiction and dreams formed the salient features of the Post-modernist American Literature. The writings also show the substantial influence of the literary output in the fields of Feminist and Postcolonial Studies.



Keywords

Themes, Style, Movements, Experimentations, Modernism, Post-modernism

Discussion

Section 1

2.3.1 E. E. Cummings: Buffalo Bill

E.E. Cummings's writing career began in 1917 and in the same year, he volunteered as ambulance driver in World War I. After his service, he resumed his writing, *The Dial* published seven of his poems in 1920, introducing him to a wider American audience. He won Academy of American Poets Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, and the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship at Harvard, the Bollingen Prize in Poetry in 1958, and a Ford Foundation grant during his lifetime. In Cumming's poetry it is not at all unusual to come across a parenthetical mark that falls in the middle of a word or a capital letter; he always prints the first-person singular "i" in lower case, as a small letter (also God is never capitalized).

► E.E.Cummings

Cummings's name is often styled "e.e. cummings"

"Buffalo Bill" was published in 1920 in the first issue of *The Dial*. The title of the poem refers to William Frederick Cody, known as Buffalo Bill who was an American soldier and hunter turned entertainer. Cody received the nickname after the Civil War when he had a contract to supply buffalo meat to the workers. It is believed that he slaughtered over 4000 buffaloes in one and a half years. Unlike the title suggests, the poem is not a tribute to Buffalo Bill but rather a satire of the hunter's reckless killings.

► Title of the poem

The opening stanza demonstrates the poet's cynicism towards the legend of Buffalo Bill. The use of term 'defunct' suggests that eventually any individual would become defunct or invalid in death. All the glory, fame and material pursuits become insignificant with the end



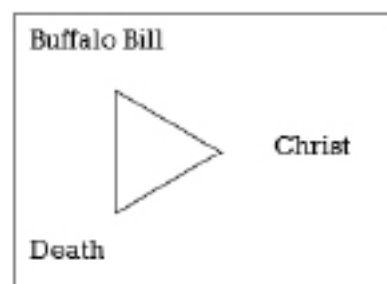
► Theme of Death

of a person's life. He rode a stallion and killed pigeons recklessly. The compound word 'watersmooth-silver' is employed by the poet to draw comparison between the colour of the stallion and water that looks silvery. The usage "onetwothreefourfive" and "pigeonsjustlikethat" indicate the callousness of the hunter who took killing as a sport.

► Allusions in the poem

The placement of the Christ comes in stark contrast against the core idea of the legend of Buffalo Bill. Christ symbolizes tolerance, endurance and spirituality whereas Buffalo Bill stands for wildness, dominance and materialism. The exclamatory reference that Jesus, Bill was a handsome man stands in an ironical juxtaposition with the line following it when the poet expresses his desire to know how Mister Death liked the blue-eyed boy. Death is personified here. The blue-eyed refers to Bill; as well it is evocative of the coldness and indifference of Death. Death becomes an equalizer who dominates over every mortal being on earth. The poem touches upon the notions of heroism, violence on animals and irony of fate that is applicable to all alike. There is an intermingling of tones, the celebration of the legendary hero slides into a wider perspective on abject reality where no one can escape fate, thus providing a modernist approach to the legend of Buffalo Bill.

The poem is written in free verse and has unique stanza breaks and vocabulary. His rejection of capitalization of words, the line-breaks, spaces, compounding of words adds to its distinctiveness. The lack of space in "onetwothreefourfive" and "pigeonsjustlikethat" contributes to the idea of swiftness with which the hunter performed his act of killing. The placing of the words forms a pistol like pattern that connects the notions of materialism, spirituality and death where death emerges as an equalizing principle.



► Structure of the Poem

Cummings deviated from the traditional writing style with regard to the diction, syntax and structure of the poems. The poem prefigures the complex Cubist strategy he would experiment with in his later poems. As foundation, he begins the poem about Buffalo Bill but progresses with a shift of perspective concluding in a stronger context.

Cubism was a revolutionary and unique painting technique, invented by influential artists, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in 1907-1908.

Section 2

2.3.2 Allen Ginsberg: Sunflower Sutra

Allen Ginsberg continues and reaffirms a long-standing American poetic tradition of the poet as cultural hero. He was inspired by the works of Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs and Walt Whitman among others. He is considered the founding father of the Beat generation that paved way for the counterculture of the late 20th century with his path-breaking works such as *Howl* and "Kaddish". The Beat writers subscribed to a liberal way of expressing their selves through their works, they were stringently critiqued for their explicit imagery and language. Allen Ginsberg's incantatory, prophetic *Howl* (1956) and his moving elegy for his mother, "Kaddish" (1961), gave powerful impetus to the Beat movement.

► Allen Ginsberg

People were tired of the routine and they felt "beaten" down by the traditional life style. It was in 1948 that Jack Kerouac and John Holmes stated that the period after the Second World War should be called the Beat Generation.

► An overview of the poem

Ginsberg composed "Sunflower Sutra" in 1955. It is part of his anthology *Howl*. It talks about a withering sunflower in an immensely polluted environment. The word 'sutra' reckons Buddhist form of literature that comprises of aphorisms.

The opening lines begin as a lamentation over rapid urbanization. The poet walks on the banks of the dock to sit by the shade of not a tree but a locomotive to watch the sun setting over the box house hills and cry. He was



- Lamentation over rapid urbanization

not alone; he had the company of Jack Kerouac who shared similar thoughts and sentiments. He brings in reference to industrial blight when he says their thoughts were surrounded by “gnarled steel roots of trees of machinery”. The river was covered with oil films, there were no fish in the stream, no hermits living in tranquillity in the hills but only them watching over these ruins like “rheumy-eyed and hung-over like old bums”. The teary-eyed men appeared bums; in the Beat vocabulary, bum referred to a holy figure.

- Metaphorical significance of the sunflower and the locomotive

Kerouac asks the poet to look at the sunflower that appeared like “gray shadow against the sky.” He remembers the vision where he heard Blake described the enchanting beauty of the sunflower. The reference is to Blake’s poem “Ah! Sunflower”. If Blake’s sunflower was the epitome of beauty mankind yearned for, the sunflower Kerouac showed him symbolizes degeneration and contamination. The flower grows in an unlikely environment, surrounded by garbage representing man’s survival in a polluted environment. The sunflower has lost its natural charm and beauty and has begun resembling the stationary locomotive. The locomotive which stood as a metaphor for industrialization in the opening stanza gains deeper meanings as the poem progresses. It can be seen as a metaphor for the lost American Dream that seemed promising in the beginning whereas in reality it brought in despair and disillusionment.

- A commentary on the automated society

The sunflower looks deformed, “bleak and dusty with the smut and smog” in the gloomy industrial scene of post-war America. There are crude sexual overtones in the poet’s description of the surroundings as he describes how the roots of the sunflower are tangled in the skin of machinery, the guts and innards of the weeping coughing car, the smoked ashes of some cock cigar, the cunts of wheelbarrows and the milky breasts of cars and so on. The personification of wheelbarrows, breasts etc. imply how the organic and natural landscape has been side-lined by the urbanization, industrialization and modernization.

The poem resorts to optimism towards the end when the poet says how the sunflower cannot lose its inherent beauty: “you there/standing before me in the sunset, all your glory/in your form”. The flower has been cursing “the heavens of the railroad” and its “flower soul.”

► Theme of Hope

He reminds the flower that it is not like the inanimate locomotive, “You were never no locomotive, Sunflower, you were a sunflower! /And you Locomotive, you are a locomotive, forget me not!” Here, Ginsberg subtly changes the meaning of the locomotive. First, it denoted the industrial revolution of the 19th century and the way the revolution ended up paving a path of devastation. In the repetition, he means himself, Kerouac and other Beat poets. They have taken on the character of the locomotive— always in motion, powerful and dominant of their artistic landscape. The flower becomes a symbol of America and the poem evolves as a hope for America regaining its lost peace and bliss.

► The prophetic tone

In the last section, which the poet calls “sermon to my (his) soul, and Jack’s soul too, and anyone who’ll listen,” he says that the American people cannot be “bleak dusty imageless locomotives”, the sunflower stands for every American as well as the spirit of America and they could regain their lost charm and values. The optimism Ginsberg wields around the dying flower reminds us of Whitman who found beauty everywhere. The poem gains a prophetic tone towards the end, as the poet creates the idea of idyllic place sans industrial devastation.

Section 3

2.3.3 William Carlos Williams: The Red Wheel Barrow

► William Carlos Williams

William Carlos Williams was a physician by profession. His family’s Caribbean ancestry had significant influence on his perception and thoughts. In 1909, he published his first book titled *Poems*. He was drawn towards the Imagist movement, however, later he deviated towards a modernist approach. He won the first National Book Award for Poetry. He was posthumously awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1963 for *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* and the Gold Medal for Poetry of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. In his introduction to William Carlos Williams’ *Collected Poems, 1921 -1931*, Stevens points out that Williams is anti-poetic because he is romantic, and that his “essential poetry is a result of the conjunction of the real and the unreal, the sentimental and the anti-poetic, the constant interaction of two opposites.

“The Red Wheel Barrow” was published without a title in Williams’s *Spring and All* in 1923. His inspiration for the poem, in his words,



...sprang from affection for an old Negro named Marshall. He had been a fisherman, caught porgies off Gloucester. He used to tell me how he had to work in the cold in freezing weather, standing ankle deep in cracked ice packing down the fish. He said he didn't feel cold....I liked that man, and his son Milton almost as much. In his back yard I saw the red wheelbarrow surrounded by the white chickens.

► An overview of the poem

As he recounted, the poem provides a vivid picture of the red wheel barrow, making it an exemplary Imagist poem. He wrote to William Rose Benet, "I find the poem quite perfect".

The poet says that the wheelbarrow is not "simply wet" but "glazed with rain/water". It is placed beside the white chickens. The odd part of this poem is that the object that seems to be the most important is not at the centre of the picture. The chickens are at the centre of the picture; the wheelbarrow is besides, subordinate yet absolutely essential in its contingency as a symbol. The wheelbarrow stands as a metaphor for civilization, farming, rural way of life and physical labour involved in transporting materials. Williams maintained that "in my own work it has always sufficed that the object of my attention be presented without further comment" and this method is illustrated religiously in "Red Wheelbarrow." The poem's structure reminds us of the Japanese Haiku where the poet elaborates on a single image and its significance is felt throughout the poem. The red wheelbarrow and the white chickens provide a visual contrast of colours lending the mundane an exquisite feel.

► Symbolism in the poem

Summarised Overview

The Unit details an outline of the 20th century American poetry that witnessed many literary movements such as Imagism, Cubism and so on. The shift from modernism to postmodernism is evident in the texts discussed. If modernism sought order in chaos, the postmodern writers considered meaning as an impossible quest. The postmodern writers celebrated fragmentation and disorder which establishes the major shift in the literary tradition that was there before. The breakaway from the conventional writing style is one of the major features of postmodern American poetry. The following unit will highlight the nature of Modern American Drama.

Assignments

1. Why do you think E.E. Cummings brings in references to Buffalo Bill and Christ in "Buffalo Bill?"
2. Discuss the major allusions in E.E. Cummings's "Buffalo Bill."
3. How does Allen Ginsberg critique the automated American society in his "Sunflower Sutra?"
4. Elaborate on the symbolism used in Allen Ginsberg's "Sunflower Sutra."
5. Comment on the symbolism in William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow."

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

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SGOU



Unit 4

Drama

Non-detailed Study

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ demonstrate understanding of the shift from tradition to varied experimentations in American drama.
- ▶ demonstrate knowledge of the notable works of the major playwrights of modern American drama.
- ▶ understand the significance of American dream for the modern American society, especially the youth as depicted in the texts under discussion.
- ▶ appreciate a text by locating it within a particular cultural and social context.

Background

Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams put American drama on the international map. The post- Second World War dramatic scene was dominated by Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Williams was very much influenced by the contemporary concern with psychological problems. To secure his close approach to the real truth, he often used expressionistic and other unconventional techniques which were quite imaginative. The use of lightning effects, music, telephone and symbols on the stage was a part of his expressionistic technique. Miller belonged largely to the tradition of social drama of the thirties. His plays focussed on a small segment of human conflict. All his plays used the family as the testing place for the protagonist. He was known for his intricate and catastrophic representation of inner emotions as well as disappointment with American society and the American dream.

Edward Albee, Sam Shepard, David Mamet, August Wilson, Tony Kushner, Suzan-Lori Parks and so on rose to prominence in the later half of the twentieth century. Sam Shepard shares some striking similarities with Eugene O'Neill. Both moved from avant-garde experimentation in subject and form early in their careers toward more realistic, traditionally shaped dramas, drawing ever more directly on biographical sources and writing what can be regarded, on one level, at least, as domestic drama. A significant turn was the rise of African American playwrights, including Lorraine Hansberry, Amiri Baraka, and August



Wilson. Contemporary American drama is a product of the traditions inherited from the pre-war period and from the neo-avant-garde of the sixties—especially the radical drama of African Americans and of women writing in the seventies. The instability and complexity of American identity, particularly in terms of the visibility of marginalised identities in American culture, was a topic that had begun to be increasingly addressed by playwrights after the 1960s. The contemporary period witnesses myriad developments and experimentation in American drama that it has become almost impossible to categorize the shifts in dramatic trends.

Keywords

American Dream, Gender roles, Escapism, Familial responsibility, Unfulfilled desire, Family and its demise, Religion

Discussion

Section 1

2.4.1 Tennessee Williams: The Glass Menagerie

Tennessee Williams was born as Thomas Lanier Williams III, however, he is known by his pen name Tennessee Williams. Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams are known as the three pillars of 20th century American drama. Williams has been an advocate and practitioner of poetic symbolist-realist technique. In his introduction to *The Glass Menagerie*, he says, "truth, life or reality is an organic thing which the poetic imagination can represent or suggest, in essence, only through transformation, through changing into other forms than those which were merely present in appearance." Thus, he contributed towards a new, plastic theatre in place of the exhausted theatre of realistic conventions.

► Tennessee Williams

Plastic theatre employs props, sound, stage direction, and costume to depict poetic truths through symbolism. It is not intended to be realistic, but symbolic.



► Synopsis of the play

The Glass Menagerie is a memory play and was premiered in 1944 in Chicago. The play became a huge success that it was staged in Broadway where it won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award in 1945. Instead of dividing the play into acts, he categorized the action sequences into seven scenes. The play unravels its course of action from the memories of the narrator, Tom Wingfield who is frustrated having to take up the responsibility of looking after his family comprising of his mother and differently abled sister.

2.4.1.1 Characterization

Tom Wingfield is the narrator and protagonist of the play. As narrator, Tom insists on a keen social awareness, punctuating his story with references to the Spanish revolution, political unrest in Europe, and the general discontent of a people at home who were, at last, "having their fingers pressed forcibly down on the fiery Braille alphabet of a dissolving economy." He is a man of dreams who is forced to give up on his dreams for the sake of his family. Tom tells his mother why he cannot be happy with his job or, by implication, with anything about his present life, which the job is seen to represent: "Man is by instinct a lover, a hunter, a fighter, and none of those instincts are given much play at the warehouse!" In Joseph K. Davis's words, "Tom Wingfield emerges as Williams's prototypical 'fugitive' - a sensitive, modern individual who is artistic in impulse and temperament."

Laura Wingfield is Tom's sister who is slightly crippled due to a childhood illness. Laura is innocent to the evils around her, and her shyness sets her up to be an almost helpless victim, as is shown by her tragic interaction with Jim. Twice in the play, her precious glass animals are symbolically broken as a representation of her innocent hopes and dreams, and she is unable to protect them. It is through her meeting with Jim, the readers gain access to her inner world. She admired Jim during schooldays and when she learns that he is the gentleman caller Tom invited for dinner, she becomes nervous. Jim helps her come out of her anxiety. In a moment of passion, he kisses her on the lips. However, he also leaves her hurt for life after he reveals that he is in a "regular" with another girl. Thus, Laura retreats to her loneliness forever. Elin Kazan, director of several of Williams's most successful plays once said: "Everything

in his life is in his plays, and everything in his plays is in his life." His sister Rose "became the prototype for Laura," and Amanda resembles Tennessee's description of his mother, Edwina, who also had "many gentlemen callers". According to Allean Hale, the apartment portrayed in the play is a transformation of Williams's early childhood home in Sr. Louis, and Jim's character emerged from a fraternity brother in Missouri.

Amanda Wingfield is their overbearing mother. Amanda's insistence on controlling Tom is clearly a product of her genuine fear that he is meant to turn out like his father. This sense overcomes her in scene four, when she begs Tom to ignore his "craze for adventure" a while longer and to own up to what she sees as his responsibilities: "Oh, I can see the handwriting on the wall as plain as I see the nose in front of my face! It's terrifying! More and more you remind me of your father..." Amanda uses her past life and glory as a defence to guard her from reality. She is always reminiscing her youth and her many "gentleman callers." In fact, the only memories she will allow of her run-away husband are from the times they were happy in love. On the contrary, her behaviour is shaped by the economic disparity and lack of familial stability. She rebukes Tom: *You live in a dream; you manufacture illusions! ... Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job! Don't let anything interfere with your selfish pleasure! Just go, go, go-to the movies!* Towards the end of the play, it becomes evident that she was indeed right about Tom for he never attains fulfilment that he thought he would gain from his adventures.

Jim O'Connor is Tom's colleague whom he invites for dinner at his place. He is described as a "nice, ordinary, young man." He is interested in sports. He is not able to understand Tom's illusive drives to escape from the warehouse. He appears content in his working-class, ordinary lifestyle. As a foil to Tom's character, Jim embraces his reality and finds contentment in it unlike Tom and Amanda who have set unattainable standards for themselves. It is Jim's mundane outlook that attracts Laura and brings her out of her solitary world though for a brief moment.

The portrait of Tom's and Laura's father Mr. Wingfield who abandoned them while they were young is placed in the living room. Though absent on the stage, he has a looming presence throughout the play.



The setting is a congested St. Louis apartment in the 1930s. In the opening scene of the play, Tom Wingfield addresses the audience where he says the progression of the play is based on his memory: he calls it “memory play, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic.” He introduces himself: “I am the narrator of the play, and also a character in it. The other characters are my mother Amanda, my sister Laura and a gentleman caller who appears in the final scene.” It is through Tom Wingfield that we can begin to infer about the poet-novelist of the drama. The autobiographical similarity between Tom Wingfield and Tennessee Williams has long been recognized, but even without these affinities, Tom, the narrator/ character/poet/playwright, can furnish insights into how Williams works. Tom is the acknowledged narrator of this play in which he is also a major character. The scene takes place on the fire escape outside their apartment. He recalls joining Amanda and Laura at the dining table. Amanda is a domineering figure. She suggests Laura should be adept at typing, simultaneously, stay fresh for gentlemen callers. She recounts her youth and how she was popular among men. Though the children have heard it multiple times, they endure the story. Tom plays the music mechanically on Laura’s insistence. Laura informs her mother that she doesn’t seem to be welcoming any gentlemen callers as she isn’t popular like her. The setting and sequences exhort the frustration, disappointment and hopelessness of the Wingfield’s experience. It is an amalgamation of the unfulfilled American dream, alienation owing to financial and social decline.

► Theme of futility

The second scene opens with a display of blue roses, it also illumines Laura’s mental turbulence. Amanda learns that Laura stopped attending the business college. Laura who is seen maintaining a glass menagerie responds coldly that she instead had been walking in the zoo, the park and the museum. Laura wants to escape the monotony of her world that is determined by her mother. Amanda considers that marriage is the only way to assure any place for Laura in the society now that she does not have any career prospects.

► Depiction of Laura’s world

The third scene shifts to Tom standing on the fire escape signifying both his inability to leave the fire escape as well his desire to escape from his reality. He tells the audience of Amanda’s desire for Laura to

► The fragility of the family

welcome a gentleman caller without realizing Laura's situation. She tries to find her past, lost youth and beauty in her daughter who is on the verge of a mental breakdown. In order to raise extra income Amanda takes up a telephone campaign for selling subscriptions of a woman's magazine. Her over-enthusiasm causes one of her customers to hang up on her. She picks a quarrel with Tom when he is about to leave for a movie at night, stating her concern of him losing his job to which he responds in a sardonic way that he leads a debauch life. In the end he says if he were like his father he would have abandoned them. He accidentally shatters the glass menagerie. Laura is left in shock and Tom is unable to console her. The scene vividly depicts the fragility of the family, their desire for happiness and disappointment with their lives.

► Symbolism

The fourth scene abounds in symbols and significations. Tom's routine of watching movies at night is a way of escaping the morbid and dark realities of his home and family. He brings a rainbow hued scarf for Laura which contrasts the colourless glass menagerie of hers. He describes to Laura the magic show he had been to. The coffin trick where a man is nailed into coffin but he escapes without moving any of the nails is symbolic of Tom's longing for an escape from his family and his home. The cold war between Amanda and Tom ends and they finally talk. Amanda makes him promise that he will not turn into a drunkard and says how proud she is about her children. Her overbearing nature becomes evident in the fourth scene. She asks Tom to keep to his Christian beliefs whereas Tom's temperament shows him to be a man of instincts trapped in an unhappy home.

► Jim and Laura

Tom finally gets a colleague to his home. Amanda is excited as she feels he would be a suitor for Laura. She re-arranges the apartment, dresses up Laura for the meeting. When Laura learns that it is Jim O'Connor who she loved in high school, she becomes nervous. She feels her world would collapse when they meet and he would eventually reject her. Amanda does not heed to Laura's fears and concern and Tom is unable to make Amanda understand the harsh reality of how Laura is different from other girls of her age. Laura stumbles and falls down and Amanda sends her to the living room. Amanda hints at Tom to encourage Laura's and Jim's meet up. The Christian values Amanda spoke of in the previous scene gets side-lined by her coquettish behaviour.



- The title of the play

The entire house is in dark as Tom has not paid the electricity bill. Amanda sends Jim to Laura; her handing over the candelabrum to him is symbolic of how she sees in him a ray of hope. Laura overcomes her anxiety in Jim's company. Jim does not remember Laura but when she utters 'blue roses' he is able to recollect her face. It is evident he was never interested in her, Laura talks about her glass collections and hands over to him her favourite piece, a unicorn. He places it on the table and it breaks when Jim leads her in an inept waltz around the room and they bump into the table. He is able to bring in some assurance in her and says now the unicorn is like any other horses in the menagerie. For a moment, Laura embraces a new self, feeling no different from others, and Jim kisses her. He immediately regrets his action and lights a cigarette reminding Tom's smoking habit as an escape from his reality. He confesses to her that he is engaged and like the broken piece of unicorn, Laura's dreams shatter. As he is about to leave, Amanda reminds him to visit them often. He tells her about his fiancé and like Laura, Amanda too crumbles inside. She blames Tom of tricking her but he leaves for movies. Tom, the narrator tells the audience that he wandered from place to place like his father. Every piece of glass or flash of light reminded him of Laura. On the stage, Laura blows out the candle as he bids adieu to the audience. It could also mean that he is finally able to liberate himself from the family ties and Laura has sunk into endless darkness. The title of the play becomes meaningful as it captures the fragility of the characters and the world they are trapped in.

Section 2

2.4.2 Sam Shepard: The Buried Child

Sam Shepard was a multifaceted personality who dabbled in theatre and films alike as actor, director and screenplay writer. He is known for employing bleak and surrealist elements, dark comedy and drifting characters living on the outskirts of the American society in his plays. The noted British critic, C.W.E. Bigsby, argues that the contradictions one discovers in *Buried Child* are essential, locating Shepard in the absurdist tradition of Camus and Beckett. *Buried Child*, he writes, "taunts us with our capacity for concealing truth and for the fragility of the structures which we build out of personal relationships and the apparent coherences of art." There are striking similarities between Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* and Shepard's *The Buried Child*.

► Sam Shepard

He received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1979 for his play *Buried Child*.

► Synopsis of the play

Shepard's first true commercial success, *Buried Child* is the second in his trilogy of family plays, bookended by *Curse of the Starving Class* in 1977 and *True West* in 1980. *The Buried Child* was premiered in 1978 and portrays the life of an agricultural family impacted by the economic crisis and their less prosperous farm. Also, the family is concerned with a horrendous past or family secret that has upset its equilibrium. With its themes of infanticide and incest, it has understandably undergone considerable psychoanalytic criticism.

2.4.2.1 Characterization

Dodge, an American farmer in 70s and Halie, his 60 year old wife, their sons Tilden and Bradley, Tilden's son Vince, Shelly who is Vince's girlfriend and Father Dewis, a 60 year old protestant minister are the major characters of the play.

Dodge: He is the central character and aging patriarch of the family. His once-prosperous farm is now barren and neglected. He is an alcoholic who tries to hide his drinking from his wife. He is confined to the front room of his farmhouse during the day and following morning of the play, at which time he wills the farm to his grandson Vince and dies. There is a looming dark secret the family hides. It is revealed in the course of the play, that Dodge murdered the child born out of the incestuous relation between his wife Halie and their son, Tilden. His revelation can be seen as his last attempt of saving the family from abject dysfunction.

Halie: Dodge's wife is caught up in a strange amalgamation of dark past, religion, alcoholism and extra-marital relationship. She is upset with her surviving sons, Tilden and Bradley and always recedes to her past praising their late son, Ansel. The play gives hints that part of her memory of Ansel is fictionalized. At the same time, she is mute about the child she had with her son, Tilden. She blames Dodge of cynicism and meanness and declares her affinity towards religion; on the contrary, the life she led or leads is in stark contrast to the values she claims to possess.



Tilden: He is Dodge and Halie's elder son. He is in late-forties. He got into trouble in New Mexico, and has come back to the family farm in Illinois. He used to be a former All-American football player who is now "burned out," "profoundly displaced." He even appears to be mentally deranged in the play. His failure to achieve success symbolises the failure of the American Dream. He has a son named Vince who he fails to recognise. Instead he says: "I had a son once but we buried him." His yearning for love and support is revealed in the scene where he goes over to Shelly and holds her jacket, he cradles it like a baby. Throughout the play he harvests vegetables from the fields that Dodge and Halie assume to be barren. At the end of the play he exhumes the corpse of the buried child—the child he had with his mother and, who was murdered by his father.

Bradley: He is Dodge and Halie's younger son, five years younger to Tilden. He damaged one leg in a chain-saw accident so it had to be amputated above the knee. He is ill-tempered and asserts his authority over other characters in the play. In the scene where he awfully inserts his fingers into Shelly's mouth speaks volumes of his offensive attitude towards women. Dodge disowns him: Bradley doesn't even live here" and "he doesn't belong in this house." He loses his authority when his prosthetic leg is taken away from him. He becomes powerless and insignificant towards the end of the play.

Vince: He is Tilden's son. He and his girlfriend, Shelly stop by the farm unannounced; no one in the family has seen him for six years and at first does not recognize him. His return to the family suggests how the idea of family is to bring people together. Nothing is told about his mother. Dodge bequeaths his assets to Vince making him the new patriarch of the family.

Shelly: She is Vince's girlfriend who anticipates a warm reunion of Vince with his family. She says the house looks like a Norman Rockwell cover. To her dismay, she finds the family to be disintegrated and strange. When Vince leaves her at the farm for a brief period, she uncovers the hidden truth about the family. Her presence in the play provides an objective perspective about the family. She is the opposite of Halie who puts on the garb of a traditional and assertive matriarch. Shelly displays contempt for traditional values.

Father Dewis : He is a Protestant minister, who is Halie's drinking companion, possibly her lover too. His presence in the play symbolizes the corruption of the religious system.

Ansel: A third son is mentioned who seems to have died under mysterious circumstances in a motel room on his honeymoon with his Italian girlfriend. Ansel might have been a basketball player, though Bradley denies it, and a soldier, which his mother claims he was. Halie is intent on having a bronze statue erected to Ansel with a rifle in one hand and a basketball in the other.

Act I shows a tired Dodge sitting on a couch in his living room. He is an alcoholic. His wife, Halie seems to be concerned about his health and blames it on the bad weather in Illinois. She warns him not to watch horse racing on the television for it would get him excited. Soon she slips into her promiscuous past and recounts her acquaintance with a handsome who escorted her to horse race. Dodge gets agitated and insults her for her wayward past. She informs him that their son, Bradley would be coming over to cut Dodge's hair. She says their other son, Tilden is at home for Dodge's rescue from Bradley. Dodge scoffs at this. The scene speaks volumes about a dysfunctional family where the husband and wife scorn each other and their sons are not capable of taking care of their ageing parents.

► Dysfunctional Family

Tilden is shown as an emotionless person possibly suffering from mental trauma. He has a corn in his hand which he says is from their field, and Dodge is curious from where he got that as they have not grown any corn since 1935. He asks Tilden to return the corn to where it belongs but he in an unlikely manner for a man of 40 puts it in Dodge's lap and leaves. Dodge feels that he is mentally upset and inquires what made him return from New Mexico. As Tilden asks Dodge for a drink, Halie alerts Dodge to not give him any. She enters into a lengthy monologue lamenting her fate. Bradley's leg had to be amputated due to a chainsaw accident and Tilden has become a failure. She does not see any hope in her family's future. She laments the death of their youngest son Ansel who died in a motel room. He, as Halie reminisces, was the epitome of American youth. However, the way he died diminishes the magnanimity she weaves around him.

► Theme of Hopelessness



► Theme of death

A brief argument takes place between Dodge and Tilden. Dodge claims that his flesh and blood is buried in the field which sets the momentum of the play where the title becomes relevant as well as the focus shifts towards the mystery surrounding the family. Later when Dodge falls asleep, Tilden covers him up with corn husk symbolizing the act of burial as well as illumining Tilden's mental condition. Bradley finds Dodge in that bizarre situation and he shaves off his hair, which again is symbolic of the rituals associated with death.

Act II

► An outsider in the family

Dodge is seen sleeping, with his scalp bleeding because of the haircut. Vince and Shelly appear on the scene. Vince is apprehensive of how the family would react to his home-coming after a gap of six years whereas Shelly is amused seeing the idyllic setting of the place. Her fascination about the place transforms into confusion and alienation as soon as she finds that Dodge does not even recognize Vince. His father, Tilden cannot relate to his presence and says, "I had a son once but we buried him." The entire act touches upon the bleak and dark side of the family. Vince's efforts to be recognized as a family member stress on the importance of the familial system. Shelly is the only character who does not share the eccentricities of the family. She gets into an argument with Bradley for his insensitive remarks on Dodge. He asserts his dominance by putting his fingers in her mouth. The scene throws light into Bradley's innate nature and his desire for power. Shelly's character gives an objective idea about the family.

Act III

There is tension associated with Vince's prolonged absence. The situation seems to return to normalcy as Shelly tells Dodge that she has overcome her fears when she met the family the previous day. Dodge assures that she need not be bothered by Bradley as he can be turned useless if she throws away his prosthetic leg. His words suggest how he is eager to weaken Bradley's position in the family. The conversation between Dodge and Shelly can also be seen as insider-outsider encounter that would eventually provide objective reality concerning the family. Shelly inquires about a family photograph taken on a farm full of wheat and corn, where Halie is

- Photograph as a key to the past

seen holding a baby. The photograph acts as a medium for Shelly to unearth the family's past. Dodge digresses from the topic until she confronts him asking if it is the child Tilden referred to having been buried. Unlike Halie, Dodge navigates away from the past and asks where Tilden is. She tells him that Bradley chased him out.

- The declining state of religion

They hear Father Dewis and Halie talking in the porch and Dodge pleads to Shelly to protect him from the minister. Father Dewis's appearance and mannerisms are not befitting a religious person and suggest how even the religious institution is in the hands of corrupt people. They enter the house and find themselves caught in a bizarre situation on seeing Shelly. Their embarrassment on seeing an outsider reveals the nature of the relationship they share. Halie covers Dodge with the same blanket the fast asleep Bradley is covering his amputated leg with. The act re-asserts the symbolic burial in the previous acts.

- The family's secret and Dodge's confession

It is ironic to note that even Halie is not able to recognize her grandson but keeps talking about the past. Shelly's presence unsettles the dynamics of the dysfunctional family. Bradley hurls abuses at her and she avenges the situation by pulling off his prosthetic leg. The scene is an enactment of what Dodge had instructed her to do to overcome Bradley's dominance. The tension becomes worse when Dodge decides to reveal the truth about the buried child to Shelly. At the heart of the play lies still another critical mystery: who (or what) is the buried child and who is its father? In some ways, Shepard's treatment of this question is highly realistic, as in Ibsenesque fashion he drops clues throughout the play. Finally, Dodge confesses that he killed the child born to Halie and Tilden out of shame. Halie slips into the past and does not show any remorse which highlights her moral corruption. He drowned the child and buried it in the backyard. Soon, Vince enters the scene in an inebriated state and the grandparents recognize him now.

Halie and Father Dewis go upstairs, leaving behind Dodge, Vince, Shelly and Bradley. Shelly leaves Vince. Dodge bequeaths his house to Vince. Vince asks Father Dewis to leave the house and throws away Bradley's wooden leg. He notices that Dodge has died and covers him with the blanket. The act of burial gains its finality with Dodge's actual death. Tilden appears on the stage



- Ambiguity regarding the ending of the play

with the corpse of the buried child and Halie is in the upstairs musing over the vegetables in the field. The play ends on an ambiguous note as it is not clear if Vince will be able to restore the equilibrium of the family and the symbolic resurgence of crops on the once barren land also problematizes the climax— it is unclear if it assures hope or a resurgence of the family's horrendous past.

Summarised Overview

The Unit, through the plays discussed, threw light on the American social, political and cultural scenario depicting modern man's predicaments and crises. By introducing the learners to some of the fundamental texts that define twentieth century American drama, the unit has given insights into the various theatrical techniques and methods that shaped Modern American Theatre. The playwrights of the later half of the twentieth century demonstrate a tendency to dissociate themselves from obviously defined schools and styles and to assimilate realist, absurdist, and epic techniques into the broader range of a new dramatic productivity.

Assignments

1. Examine the theme of alienation as depicted in Tennessee Williams's *Glass Menagerie*.
2. Discuss the portrayal of a fragile family space in Tennessee William's *Glass Menagerie*.
3. Analyse how memory is used as a trope in Sam Shepard's *The Buried Child*.
4. Share your thoughts on the title of the play, *The Buried Child*.

Suggested Readings

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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

Prose and Fiction

BLOCK-03

Block Content

- Unit 1 Prose - Detailed
- Unit 2 Prose - Non detailed
- Unit 3 Fiction
- Unit 4 Short stories



Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of the principles of American transcendentalism
- ▶ contextualise Ralph Waldo Emerson as a significant writer in American Literature
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected text
- ▶ critically elaborate on the concepts discussed in the selected text

Background

With the dawn of the nineteenth century, American literature began to display a desire for producing literary works that uniquely explored the American national identity. Across different genres, the writings of the period predominantly emphasised selfhood and individuality. For instance, John Neal, a nineteenth century American critic, argued that American writers must stop relying on old British literary conventions and “must resemble nobody.” Particularly in the backdrop of the American revolution in the preceding years, there was a drive towards defining a literature and culture that was American to the core.

The rise of American Romanticism, roughly from the 1830s to the 1870s, also enshrined the individual, subjective experience, and emotions over society, objectivity, and reason. Just as in poetry and fiction, this tendency was witnessed in the prose writing of the era. This included the work of humourists such as Seba Smith, Davy Crockett, and Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, along with the prose works of the Boston Brahmins (an upper-class group of writers), H.D. Longfellow, and Oliver Wendell Holmes among others.

The prose writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, and Bronson Alcott, largely grouped under the school of Transcendentalism (1830s-50s), show many of the significant features of this period. As part of their collective philosophy, they centralised the individual,

intuition, and nature. It is in this intertwined context of American identity, American Romanticism, and Transcendentalism, that we must understand the essay “Self-Reliance” and its message. The current unit enters into detail about the transcendentalist ideology and themes explored in the work.

Keywords

Self-reliance, Originality, Intuition, Nature, Selfhood, Transcendentalism

Discussion

3.1.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson: Self-Reliance

The mid-nineteenth century in the United States saw the rise of Transcendentalism, an intellectual and spiritual movement of writers and philosophers in the New England area. It was based on an idealistic system that enshrined “the essential unity of all creation...” Transcendentalists believed in the “innate goodness of humanity” and considered intuitions and feelings to be superior to logic. Transcendentalist philosophy emphasised individualism, placing great significance on seeking truth through one’s inner experiences.

Followers of Transcendentalism rejected conventional order and social structures, condemning society’s influence on the individual. They expressed dissatisfaction with organised religion, established ways of living, and materialism. One of the most important doctrines of Transcendentalism is ‘self-reliance’. Transcendentalists advocated the idea of oneness with nature, through which individuals could escape the influence of social norms; the focus was on building a personal relationship with the divine and strengthening one’s own instincts.

Among the key figures in the American transcendentalist movement were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody, George Ripley, and Bronson



Alcott. Emerson and Fuller founded *The Dial* (1840-44), a magazine, wherein writings by many of the Transcendentalists appeared. The Transcendentalists experimented with reforms in religion and society, setting up utopian communities such as Brook Farm (1841-47). The movement also spawned literature across different genres from poetry to short fiction, and novels. The writings of the Transcendentalists played a major role in the development of American Renaissance (1830s-1860s), fostering the idea of national spirit and culture.

The essay “Self-Reliance” by Ralph Waldo Emerson was first published in 1841 as part of the collection *Essays: First Series*. The work is an important statement of the principles of Transcendentalism; particularly the need for the individual to escape the trappings of conformity and materialism, strengthening their inner instincts. This is seen in the essay’s focus on the idea of self-reliance as well as on the relationship between self-reliance, individuals, and society.

3.1.1.1 Summary

Ralph Waldo Emerson begins his essay with three epigraphs on the theme of self-reliance. The first of these is a Latin maxim coined by the Stoic poet Persius: “Ne te quæsieris extra”, which translates to “Do not look for yourself outside yourself.” The second quote is from the epilogue to *The Honest Man’s Fortune* (1647), a play by English dramatists, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher. Emerson uses six rhyming lines, beginning with the statement “Man is his own star...”, which suggest that an honest and perfect man has power over fate. The third quote comes from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s own poem “Power.” It describes a child raised by wild animals and hints at the ideas of individualism and self-reliance. These epigraphs preview the significance of self-reliance.

► Epigraphs

The essay opens with a discussion of the lines of the famous painter, Washington Allston. According to Emerson, his lines are full of original and not conventional ideas. He says that human beings should give primary importance to their inner thoughts, instead of valuing the thoughts established by great books and traditions. The thoughts of Moses, Plato, and Milton are regarded

► Originality of thought

with utmost importance because they expressed their original thought without fear. According to Emerson, humans should learn to feel the voice of his inner mind, the divine impulse which flashes across the mind from within.

► Over-Soul and the human mind

The innermost thought, i.e. the thought of the Over-Soul becomes the experience of the human mind. The light of this divine impulse is brighter than that of the stars. The stars here stand for the poets and sages of heaven. Emerson says, modern man ignores this inner impulse by considering it as worthless. But he says, in every work of a great mind, the modern man finds his own impulse that he had rejected as valueless. Thus, Emerson asks individuals to depend on their own self, and not to seek answers outside themselves. Human beings should get answers from their own soul that receives inspiration from the divine impulse. In other words, individuals dismiss their insights only because they come from their own imagination. These realisations are to be considered even more valuable than those of famous writers and philosophers. Only mature thinkers understand that it is the originality of thought rather than imitation which is the key to greatness.

In Transcendentalist philosophy, the Over-Soul is a unifying force that holds every individual's being, and connects all existence with each other. The idea of the Over-Soul or a universal soul is not unique to Transcendentalism; many world religions contain references to similar concepts such as *Anima Mundi* (Greek) and *Paramatman* or the Supreme Soul (Hinduism) to name but a few.

► Trusting oneself

According to Emerson, every person must "trust" themselves. Great personalities and children had always done so. Their actions revealed the faith in their soul. Their soul guided them in every facet of their life. They obeyed the dictates of their divine impulse. Worldly-minded people possess divided, rebellious and distrustful minds. It is because they have come to the conclusion that the strength and means of divine impulse are opposed to their purpose of earning wealth. But the minds of infants, children, and larger animals are not distorted by the considerations of wealth.



► Individual liberty

The worldly-minded people are astonished to see peace and happiness in the faces of these infants and animals. The mind of an infant is totally free from the control of the elders. Each state of human beings; youth, puberty and manhood, has special merits. The youth have clear and quite emphatic minds. A youth knows how to speak to his contemporaries. The indifference of the boys who are free from worldly cares and anxieties of earning their livelihood represents basic human nature. They are free from responsibilities. They never bother about results. They give an independent, real judgement in society. Emerson also claims that boys with “their independent attitudes, lack of respect for authority, and willingness to pass judgment on everything they encounter, are examples of this complete trust in the self.” Grown-ups have been trapped by their consciousness into the prison of their interest. Society is a place which denies freedom of speech and action to its members. In a society, people agree to each other for the sake of their material interests, thus giving up their individual liberty. Thus, it favours sociable men while oppose the creators and realities of the soul.

► Social conformity

For Emerson, the voices of the soul are heard in the lonely regions of the heart. The voices grow weak and inaudible when men enter areas of worldly life. Through strong divine impulses, they earn the supporting views of the Universal Soul. The right action is taken in accordance with the divine impulse. The wrong one is that which is against the voice of the soul. According to Emerson, even in the face of all opposition, men must work according to the dictates of his soul. Emerson says people surrender their individuality to earn badges and names, to become members of larger society. Emerson is of the opinion that one should be honest and vital, and speak the unpleasant truth plainly.

► Virtuous actions

Emerson argues that virtues are rare. Men perform a virtuous action as a work of courage and charity. Their good work is generally done as an apology or their price for living in this world. Thus, their virtues are their penances. Good actions do not necessarily make good men. Emerson wants to live his life in a natural manner and not as an atonement for his sins. His life is meant for himself. He wants to be a man of free thoughts and speech.



► Exemplary individual

A great man is one who follows his conscience amidst ordinary people. Following outdated traditions causes the loss of valuable time and tarnishes one's character. It fails to bring out your true nature. To counter this, Emerson suggests that an individual perform his work. This will cause them to be known and reinforce their selfhood. On the other hand, conformity would place them amidst false praise, flattery, politeness etc. They would put on the artificial posture of self-praise and forced smile even when they do not feel at ease. Non-conformity invites displeasure. So a man must learn to face displeased faces around him. The displeasure of the educated classes is prudent and decent while that of unintelligent is dangerous, and so a non-conformist should be like a God, who should pardon them.

► Disregarding tradition

Another obstacle of self-reliance is the love and respect men have for their past. According to Emerson, foolish conformity is a matter of weak minds like those of statesmen, philosophers and theologians. A great soul has nothing to do with consistency. Conformity and consistency should be dismissed and considered as ridiculous, says the author. "Speak what you think now in hard words, and to-morrow speak what to-morrow thinks in hard words again, though it contradict everything you said to-day" (7). You are sure to be misunderstood, but it is not bad to be misunderstood. Even then, always speak your innermost voice. Even Pythagoras, Socrates and Jesus were misunderstood. Every pure and wise spirit has been misunderstood. Great men cannot go against their true nature. Emerson intends to record his honest thoughts of the present moment without looking back on to his past or looking forward into the future. It is the will of a person that keeps his actions united. So a man must do what is right in spite of the opposition of the people. Emerson says that American people love honour because honour is not a trivial and short-lived thing. They worship honour because it is self-independent, self-born, and of pure origin.

Emerson offers many examples of people whose force of character and ability to resist conformity are etched in history. Julius Caesar is remembered even after the fall of the Roman Empire. Jesus Christ is born and millions of people become his followers. His virtue and greatness is so much exaggerated and considered him as Son of God.



► Influence of strong personalities

Similarly, many institutions are founded on the name of single persons; for instance, Monasticism is founded on the teachings of St. Antony, Reformation is founded on the principles of Martin Luther, Quakerism on the thesis of George Fox, Methodism on the principles of Wesley, and the idea of Abolition of Slavery came from the principles of Clarkson. Thus, the whole of human history revolves round the personality of a few great and strong characters through the ages.

► Discovering self-worth

Emerson writes: "Let a man then know his worth and keep things under his feet. Let him not peep or steal or skulk up and down with the air of a charity-boy, a bastard, or an interloper, in the world which exists for him. But the man in the street, finding no worth in himself which corresponds to the force which built a tower or sculpted a marble god, feels poor when he looks on these. To him a palace, a statue, or a costly book has an alien and forbidding air, much like a gay equipage, and seem to say like that, 'Who are you, Sir?'" In other words, the world commands the individual who does not know his own worth. It is for the individual to judge, exercise his reason, and thus find himself a "true prince" in the world.

► False idea of history

In the essay, Emerson depicts his view that when we read history, our imagination represents things on a false basis. We look for Kings, Kingdoms and lords, power and estates, while we pay little attention to ordinary people even when the Over-Soul is the same for both. People look upon King Alfred the Great, Scanderbag, the national hero of Albania, or Gustavus, the Swedish King. The world has been taught that the culture spread by the Kings is virtuous, and considers kings to be a symbol of great political power. The private acts of individuals hold as great a stake as the public and virtuous acts of Kings. This, in turn, would enhance the actions of gentlemen as much as those of the kings.

The power of influence or charm comes from the self which is the essence of great intellect, virtue and life. The sense of being rises from our souls. Souls are the receivers of truth. It reflects itself in man's involuntary perceptions and impulses. The relations of the individual soul to the Over-Soul are mainly spiritual. The Universal Soul communicates with the individual soul through

► Understanding the soul

impulses. It sends messages to all the souls. It fills the world with its voice and light. Only a simple mind receives divine impulses from it. The soul transcends the limitations of the body and the mind, and shines in its own light. It sees its past and future in the present. In that state, all the trivial and particular qualities of the individual disappear. Then it shines as the Universal Soul. The soul is beyond time and space. It is light. Where it is present, it is day. Where it is not, is night. History is an impertinence and an injury if it is unrelated or detached from the individual's being and becoming. It is only a being in the past and a possibility of the future.

► Religion and truth

Man is timid and apologetic to religion. He is a blind follower of religion. He does not dare to say "I think", "I am". Man does not live in the present. Instead, he regretfully remembers the past and restlessly imagines his future, unlike nature that lives a satisfied life in the present. According to Emerson, nature provides true perceptions that enable man to move away from old-beliefs. The perception of truth is born of divine impulses. It is the highest truth on the subject. By rising above the universe of the human mind, the individual soul sees that it is identical with other souls. Life makes the soul transcend the worldly mind. With death, the soul loses its power to perceive worldly experiences and sensations. The power is withdrawn from the dying body by the soul. The soul which is immortal possesses power to transcend the power into the embryo of the next world. Emerson here talks about the ability of self-reliance to have after-life. The real virtue of man lies in raising the soul above the worldly mind.

The universe together with all its things exists in the Over-Soul. The Over-Soul is the greatest cause of the Universe and it is self-existent. Its trait is goodness. The Over-Soul reflects itself in nature as the power of conversation and growth. Power in nature is the established measure of right. Everything has to be self-sufficing. Every person has to be a self-relying soul. Thus all souls are associated with the Universal Soul. The divine soul is within us. But man is ignorant of his internal ocean, the Over-Soul. According to Emerson, each person should declare a war on their temptations. For that each one should speak the truth. There is a need to give up false manners to show hospitality and



► Power of the Over-Soul

affection. One should focus on their duties. Even though man nourishes his parents, supports family and be chaste and honest to one's wife, his behaviour shall be governed by the voices of the soul. Man should go on his own ways. He should not suppress his soul to save the sensibility of a worldly-minded man. In this way one shall elevate one's soul into the presence of the Over-Soul.

► Transformation

Those who put themselves into the hands of the self acquire new powers. The moment that a man acts in accordance to the dictates of the Universal Soul, of which he is an incarnation, he rejects all customs, conventions, and books. He thus becomes an original thinker and doer and can become valuable to all in history. A greater reliance on the Self can bring a complete change in the outlook of man regarding religion, education, occupations and ways of living.

► Connection with the divine

Man seeks God's blessing as he wants some external gifts or blessing. He thinks that it will come to him through God's virtue and not through his own. A true prayer is the contemplation of the facts of life made by a person from the noblest point of view. It is an address to God of a thankful soul. A prayer made to fulfil private needs is born of meanness. When a man feels himself one with God, he will not beg to God. Instead, his prayer will unite him to God and communicate his mind to Him. For example, Caratach, the principal character in the play *Bonduca* (1614) by Fletcher claims to know the mind of the God called Audate. He tells that Audate's meaning lies in our efforts and that our bold steps are "our best Gods." Another kind of prayer arises from our regrets expressed for God. Dissatisfaction with fate arises from want of self-reliance. It represents weakness of the will. The misfortune gradually loses its power. Instead of sympathising with the sufferers, one should awaken them to the fact that they possess a noble soul. In their hard times, people should give them spiritual strength and bring them in communication with the Over-Soul.

In Emerson's view, the religious system that exists in society is a kind of disease. Weak-minded followers idolize these institutions and consider its walls to be surrounding the whole universe and God. They call the universal light their own and believe that the followers

► Collective light

of other religious systems have no right to see their light. But the reality is that the Universal light rules over the whole universe and not any particular religion.

Emerson submits that man has to work hard to make his life better. He shouldn't imitate or copy another's life. According to him, envy is ignorance and imitation is suicidal. Man has the power to do things. But he is ashamed of expressing his divine message. When a man puts his heart into his work and makes the best efforts, he feels happy and cheerful. At the same time, when he does his work without sincerity and with half a heart, he loses mental peace. Emerson says that one should never imitate but always insist on the self. Imitation is a borrowed thing of unfinished nature. The best art can be taught by the soul. Every great man is unique. No imitation of Shakespeare can create another Shakespeare. Even though the Universal Soul is rich, eloquent and possesses a thousand-voiced tongue, it will probably not repeat itself. Man should live a simple, noble life and obey the dictates of divine impulses. Then our soul will be able to foresee the image of the future world.

► Rejection of imitation

Reliance on property or government points to the lack of one's self. Generally people respect one another on the basis of the status of wealth. But a spiritually rich man is ashamed of property as his soul is his living property. Once he raises himself above the worldly mind, it becomes his peculiar possession; one that nobody can take from him and that renews itself whenever he breathes. Thus Emerson asks to use our will power against worldly possessions and try to acquire the wealth of the soul. Then the wheel of chance or time will stand still as if chained. Thus one can sit comfortably without fearing the change of fate. Peace can be got only by our self, by the victory of the spiritual principles of selflessness.

► Peace of mind

'Our age is retrospective,' wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) at the beginning of perhaps his most famous work, *Nature* (1836). 'It builds the sepulchres of the fathers. It writes biographies, histories, and criticism,' he continued. 'The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face, through their eyes. Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe?'



Emerson concludes his essay by applying the abstract concept of self-reliance to specific social instances. He argues that society can be revolutionised by the practice of self-reliance. Indeed, it is important that individuals should stop praying for something outside of themselves to save them, instead of acting on their own. They should reject the superiority of religions and philosophies over experiences and intuition. Americans, especially, should stop travelling abroad in search of enlightenment and culture. They should create and develop their own arts, literature and culture from the material found on home soil. Emerson also believes that society does not achieve progress in a straight line, and not only because of the constant push towards it. It is rather dependent on people understanding that the most valuable part of a man is inside of him, and not in property or wealth. The application of self-reliance in politics is equally important. Emerson suggests that instead of being governed by political parties, each man govern himself by intuition. He notes that self-reliance is the true path to peace.

► Applications of self-reliance

Summarised Overview

Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his essay “Self-Reliance”, issues a powerful argument against social conformity and imitation, both of which are detrimental to the inner growth of the individual. Instead, he advocates for individuals to trust in and insist on themselves; to allow their emotions, intuitions, and feelings to guide them as opposed to the beliefs and established conventions of society and culture. It is originality of thought, courage to follow one’s conscience, and inner freedom that defines greatness in men. The essay also goes on to discuss the need to discard outdated traditions and follow the path to oneness with the Over-Soul and the divine. It specifically elaborates on the various applications and advantages of being self-reliant, highlighting examples from history and other spheres of life. Essentially, the work exhorts its readers to practice self-reliance and achieve an authentic peace of mind.

Assignments

1. What is the significance of the three epigraphs used at the beginning of the essay “Self-Reliance”?
2. Why do individuals dismiss their own insights?
3. How are the youth different from grown-ups in the matter of individual liberty?
4. Which social group does Emerson view as “complete examples” of self-trust and why?
5. Elaborate on Emerson’s views on the individual’s conformity to society and traditions.
6. How does Emerson present the need for strong and self-reliant personalities using historical examples?
7. According to Emerson, how does religion affect individuals?
8. What are the dangers of imitation as depicted in the essay “Self-Reliance”?
9. What are the characteristics of ‘greatness’ according to Emerson?
10. Discuss the major themes explored in Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance.”

Suggested Readings

1. Mudge, Jean McClure. *Mr. Emerson’s Revolution*. Open Book Publishers, 2015.
2. Roberson, Susan L. *Emerson in His Sermons: A Man-Made Self*. Univ. of Missouri Press, 1995.

References

1. Sacks, Kenneth. *Understanding Emerson “the American Scholar” and His Struggle for Self-Reliance*. Princeton University Press, 2003.
2. Schumann, Claudia. “The Self as Onwardness: Reading Emerson’s Self-Reliance and Experience.” *Foro De Educación*, vol. 11, no. 15, 2013, pp. 29–48., <https://doi.org/10.14516/fde.2013.011.015.001>.



Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

Unit 2

Prose

- Non Detailed

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ Acquire a general understanding of the socio-cultural politics of gender and race in America
- ▶ Contextualise Adrienne Rich and Toni Morrison as significant prose writers in American Literature
- ▶ Critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected texts
- ▶ Critically elaborate on the concepts discussed in the selected texts

Background

As observed by J.D. Logan in his essay “American Prose Style” (1901), American prose has reflected the spirit of the American people “most originally and most characteristically.” In other words, it has been able to effectively convey the unique historical and socio-cultural contexts in which and the purposes for which it was crafted. It carried out many functions throughout the course of its evolution in the twentieth century, alternatively providing information, educating through comedy and analysis, and providing individual perspectives on a variety of issues.

Of all the different aspects of prose, a predominant aspect has been the capacity of twentieth century American prose for social critique. The late twentieth century (1950s onwards) was increasingly an age of contention where hegemonic identities and cultural institutions were being challenged. At the height of the American Civil Rights Movement (1950s-60s), Queer Rights Movement (1950s-1970s), and the Second-Wave Feminist Movement (1960s-80s) prose writings were a powerful vehicle for critique. Many of the leaders of these movements wrote non-fiction books, manifestos, essays, articles, and pamphlets advocating their views and introducing them to the public.

The current unit explores such examples of prose writing that foregrounds the struggle of two marginalised communities in American society – women



and African Americans. These writings, both by women, represent dissenting voices against patriarchy and racism in a gendered, racially ordered world. A detailed examination of these works throw light on the way American society, culture, and literature respond to these pressing issues, as well as on the critical perspectives taken up by the authors in engaging with them.

Keywords

Gender, Patriarchal oppression, African American identity, Racial discrimination, Marginalisation

Discussion

Section 1

3.2.1 Adrienne Rich: The Domestication of Motherhood

An American feminist and queer activist, poet, and essayist, Adrienne Rich examines the patriarchal systems and political institutions that define motherhood in “The Domestication of Motherhood,” which first appeared as a chapter in her work *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976). Looking back to prehistorical times, Rich demonstrates how the power of procreation has always been coveted by men. She examines how they replaced it with the power of ownership and symbolic filiation in a revolution that involved the shift from polytheism to monotheism and the advent of capitalism and private property.

► Social power

Rich presents motherhood as a potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction, and to children who had been constructed as a cultural institution. She says that the main aim of constructing children as a cultural institution is that all women shall remain under male control. The patriarchal system has alienated women from their bodies by imprisoning them into categories like the private and the public.

► Creation of binaries

► Fear of being controlled

The women's power has two aspects; the first being biological power or the capacity to give birth and to nourish human life. The second aspect is the magical power which is given to her by men in the form of goddess worship or the fear of being controlled by her. In Hindu culture and in Roman-Greek mythologies, there is evidence of magical power being assigned to women. However, history proves that women have been crushed under the patriarchal domain for this magical power (considered to be possessed by females), as men feared that it would gain women an upper hand over them.

► Attitudes towards family

Rich notes that social and revolutionary movements often take place under male leadership. Even the Bolshevik revolution, led for economic equality, neglected the issue of women's oppression. Further, the Marxists followed a traditional division of labour within the family that considered heterosexuality as a "natural" condition. Nineteenth-century masculine creations - psychoanalysis and Marxism - consider "the family" as a problem, and disregard the attitudes held by men towards women. For a man, a woman is not just an "exploited worker" or the "the other", but a mother who has to be possessed, reduced, controlled or else she might swallow him or turn him to a stone with her stare.

► Decision-making and gender

Robin Fox, a prominent anthropologist, has highlighted the socio-cultural belief that the "basic female function" is motherhood. She explains that the essential human bond, the foundation of all social bonds, is the bond between mother and child. This assigned connection resulted in woman's preoccupation with bearing and nurturing for a long time. According to Fox, this created a system that considered mothers as figures to be "protected." While Frederick Engels sees male dominance as evolving from the possession of private property, Robin Fox sees it as naturally evolving from this "protective role" assigned to motherhood. This protective group was always denied the role as decision makers. The role of decision making was inseparably attached to the male. In fact, "protection" stands for the power and force that men exerted on women in the name of motherhood. Women's child-nurturing function caused a "natural" division of all labour, which was equally accepted by both men and women.



► Ideas of motherhood

One of the themes of post-Freudian psychology is that cultural contributions made by men represent compensations for the lack of the elemental, creative, power of motherhood. Male initiation in a society are reflections and results of male envy for the female reproductive power. According to Karen Horney, it is this phallogentric thinking that caused the devaluation of motherhood. Horney finds that women, as the elemental force, sexual temptress, and consumer of male sexual energies, are viewed as figures of anxiety for men. Women are projected as figures who possess magical powers that can hurt the male. This validates the subjugation of women. Thus, the idea of "Motherliness" is torn apart from both sexual attractiveness (the temptress) and "motherhood" (the power Goddess); mothers are then widely accepted as "nurturing, selfless, self-sacrificing" figures.

► Symbolic associations

Joseph Campbell finds that in the early stages of human history, women were assigned magical powers which men looked upon with wonder. This prodigious power assigned to women has been one of the chief concerns of men, who tried to break and control this power. Female potency was the great subject of Aurignacian sculptures, says G. Rachel Levy. Indeed, no cult of a male divinity is discoverable in Neolithic archaeology. According to Joseph Campbell, female figurines were the first objects of worship by Homo Sapiens. Just as how the "Great Mother" was assigned the life-giving aspect, they were also assigned destructive power like violence, death, and bloodshed like the Goddess Kali. Women's blood is associated with "curse" and the mysteries of the menstrual taboo, with the "mana" of defloration, the transformation mystery of birth, and with fertility.

According to Mycenaean myth, Apollo had to battle a female dragon before he could enter Delphi, which became his shrine. Patriarchy, by nature, has always tried to "kill the dragon" in the negation of women. An adult woman in a patriarchal society still often find an adolescent son or lover, who wants her for his emotional sustenance. Yet, within himself, he would also fear castration and death at her hands. This fear is the real dragon that must be destroyed, according to Adrienne Rich. Due to his dissociation from the process of conception, man first experiences himself as son, and

► Patriarchal anxiety

only much later as father. He asserts his paternity to claim power over women and children, as a revenge for his previous condition as son-of-the-mother. Patriarchal monotheism (the doctrine or belief that there is only one God), not only shifted its emphasis from the vagina to the phallus of the deity, but also tore apart the universe of female divinity. It sanctioned women as mother or as the daughter of a divine father. Thus, she was rendered as the property of her husband and father.

► Power of reproduction

Children are present assets or able bodies to take over patrimony. A wife's "barrenness" was a curse because she was ultimately the means of reproduction. A man needed children, particularly sons, to enhance his position in the world. According to Frederick Engels, the structure of the patriarchal family is such that the husband is the bourgeois, and the wife and children are the proletariats. Thus, patriarchal man impregnates "his" wife and expects her to deliver "his" child. Her elemental power is perceived as a service she renders, a function she performs. The Mother Goddess is gradually devalued and rejected, and the human woman finds her scope and dignity being increasingly reduced.

► Patriarchal influence on mother-child relationship

According to Briffault, the first love in the world is the love between mother and child. Man perceived tender feelings as secondary female sexual characteristics, evolved from the biological nature of the female organism. The son experienced this desire for tenderness from his mother, which in return induced him to modify his own sexual instinct in accordance with the mating or stabilizing impulse of women. In patriarchal life, the sacred, the potent and the creative were symbolized as female. This ritual acknowledgement of female powers ruling life and death made patriarchal man feel like an outsider. According to Margaret Mead, to be a father is something that takes place outside his own body. Patriarchal man was created out of a mixture of sexual and affective frustrations, blind need, physical force, ignorance, and intelligence. It is a system which turns woman from her own organic nature, the source of her awe and the original powers. Thus, in a sense, female evolution was mutilated by patriarchal men.

Mother-child relationship is the essential human relationship. In the patriarchal system, violence is done



- Fear of motherhood

to this fundamental human unit. The female generative organs became the prime target of patriarchal technology. Even safely caged as “the maternal”, she remains as an object of mistrust, suspicion, misogyny in both outside and insidious forms of the system.

Adrienne Rich brings out patriarchy as an institutionalization of motherhood, trapping women into standards, ideals, and experiences that perpetuate patriarchy and the control of women. Domestic life is still ruled and regulated by a patriarchal society. According to Rich, man relates to a woman as a mother in a practical mode. Man expects woman to look after the home because he sees domesticity as being part of the domain of motherhood. Domesticity isn't viewed as being serious work even though it forms a part of motherhood. Rich finds that procreation, which was considered her divine power in the pre-patriarchal period, is now considered her weakness. Mothers are left confined to their roles under the protection of the fathers, who took the ownership of the symbolic power of creation. The fact remains that men created with their minds and their tools only, while women create with their bodies.

- Creation as strength and agency

Section 2

3.2.2 Toni Morrison: *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination* (Chapter 1)

In her 1992 literary study, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison explores the signs and representations of “blackness” in American literature. In doing so, she makes the case that literary representations of blackness perform a dual function: on the one hand, such representations write a dominating script for blackness that bars self-representation and on the other hand, the construction of “blackness”, especially in literature, entails the construction of “whiteness”. The first chapter of the work, titled “Black Matters”, invites critical attention to literary figurations of blackness in America. In doing this, Morrison does not aim to condemn discriminatory representations. Instead, she aims to expand literary imagination to include the presence of blackness in American literature; a feature which, in her view, distinguishes it from the literature of other nations.

- Black representation in American literature

► Critical project

One of the aims of the work is to open as much space as possible for discovery, intellectual adventure, and a close exploration of the New World. This is outlined as a fruitful and provocative critical project. In engaging in the same, Morrison enters a space from which she is estranged. It reflects how free she can be as an African American woman writer in a gendered, sexualized, wholly radicalized world. In her view, imagination is not merely looking at oneself or taking oneself to the 'other'. Rather, Imagination is for the purposes of the work of becoming.

► Traditional knowledge

The "knowledge" that is conventionally accepted among literary historians and critics uphold the view that traditional, canonical American literature is 'free' of Africans and African American representation. This knowledge assumes that the African American presence that shaped the Constitution and the entire history of the American culture has no influence on the origin and development of that culture's literature. This knowledge also assumes that the characteristics of American literature emerges from a particular "Americanness" that is separate from and unaccountable to African American presence. These precepts are widely accepted among the literary scholars of America, and seems to advocate the perspective that American literature has clearly been the preserve of White male views, genius, and power, and is unconnected to the overwhelming presence of Black people in the United States.

► Literary features and African American presence

Morrison points out that this knowledge is assumed about a population that precedes every American writer of renown. The cultural ignorance about African Americans in American literature had made Morrison wonder about the championed characteristics of American literature – such as individualism, masculinity, social engagement, opposition to historical isolation, ambiguous moral problematics, the thematics of innocence, and an obsession with figurations of death and hell. In fact, these features might be a response to the dark, abiding Africanist presence.

According to Morrison, the very characteristics that distinguish American literature as a coherent entity exist because of that unsettled and unsettling population, the Africans. Through significant omissions,



► Construction of identity

startling contradictions, heavily nuanced conflicts, and the way that American writers project the bodies of African Americans, it is evident that a real or fabricated Africanist presence is crucial to the very sense of Americanness. This discovery of Africanist presence has become an informal study of African Americanism, which is an investigation into the ways in which a non-white, Africanist presence or persona was constructed in the United States.

► Role of Africanism

Toni Morrison uses the term “Africanism” to denote and connote the blackness that African people have come to signify, as well as the entire range of views, assumptions, readings and ‘misreadings’ that accompany Eurocentric learning about them. As a disabling force within literary discourse, in the Eurocentric tradition, Africanism has become a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability. Africanism provides a way of confronting chaos and civilizations, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom.

► Racism and identity-building

The systematic exclusion of African presence by Europeans through the assigning and designation of value to certain knowledge, has led to the popular and academic notion that racism is a “natural” phenomenon. Due to the absence of real-knowledge or open-minded inquiry about Africans and African Americans, an American brand of Africanism emerged that is strongly urged, thoroughly serviceable, companionably ego-reinforcing, and pervasive. While European cultural hegemony was continued in many ways, but not valorised, it became important to set up Africanism as a cultural binary on which to build American identity. The main reason for the paucity of critical material on Africanism is that, in matters of race, silence and evasion have historically ruled literary discourses. Yet another reason for the absence of Africanism in literary discourses is the pattern of thinking about racism in terms of its consequences on the victim. The issue of racism was always dealt in how it affected its objects, and the impact it had on the object. Racism was always analysed as an inevitable, permanent, and eternal part of all social landscapes.

► Erasure of racial issues

According to Morrison, studies on racism should study the impact of racism on those who perpetuate it. It is poignant to analyse the effect of racist inflection on the subject. A criticism that needs to insist that literature is not only “universal” but also “race-free”, risks lobotomizing that literature, and diminishes both the art and the artist. Such critical works show evidence of scholarly lapses in ‘objectivity’. In a wholly racialized society, there is no escape from racially inflected language. Morrison says that many powerful literary critics in the United States have never read any African American text and are proud to say that out loudly.

► Lack of critical enquiry

Morrison says that the critics who studied Henry James’s *What Maisie Knew*, Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*, and Willa Cather’s *Sapphire and the Slave Girl*, had barely mentioned the problems that race causes in the Black characters. These critics see no excitement or meaning in the tropes of darkness, sexuality, and desire in Ernest Hemingway or in his cast of Black men. They see no connection between God’s grace and Africanist “othering” in Flannery O’Conner. Many of William Faulkner’s later works which focused on race and class are often rated as minor contributions of the writer.

► Parallel with women’s writing

This indifference to African American presence in literature is paralleled by the treatment meted out to women and women’s issues. There have been instances of blatant sexism and disregarding of feminist discourses, much in the same way that conventional criticism negates African American representation in American literature. However, women have been successful in their capacity to appropriate and take ownership of their own discourse.

► Examining the writers

If the traditional institution of literary criticism is indifferent to Africanism, then American national literature seems to be focused on the “architecture of a new White man.” The writers, who are the forefront of the creative enterprise, are “sensitive” and “intellectually anarchic”, and thereby endowed with the capacity to probe or investigate. They have the power to imagine the other, to familiarise the strange, and to mystify that which is familiar. Their language and socio-historical context determine the limits of that power. So, Morrison turns to the writers themselves to understand the construction and impact of Africanism in American literature.



- White authors and African American presence

Approaching American literature as a reader, Morrison discovers that Black people signified little or nothing in the imagination of White American writers. They were represented as objects, often used to give an idea about local/regional conditions, provide authenticity to the narrative, supply a moral gesture, comic relief, or tragedy. Black people did not make an appearance other than these marginalised roles. Morrison initially considered this to reflect the 'marginal impact' that African Americans had on the lives of the other characters and the creative imagination of the author.

- Significance of Africanism in literature

However, re-reading the works as a writer, Morrison notes the importance of reacting to Africanism as a crucial aspect of the American cultural and historical condition. The literatures that she revered and loathed behaved in certain ways as they encountered racial ideology. In certain ways, American literature was complicit or involved in the fabrication of racism just as it was involved in undermining racism. It was equally significant to consider how Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom worked within literary texts and the writer's imagination. In attempting to contextualise this, Morrison asks the following questions: "How does literary utterance arrange itself when it tries to imagine an Africanist other? What are the signs, the codes, the literary strategies designed to accommodate this encounter? What does the inclusion of Africans or African Americans do to and for the work?"

Often, it seemed as though nothing happened to Black characters and their descendants in these works; they were only present to display the writer's technical expertise. Wherever the author was not Black, the appearance of the Africanist characters, narrative, and idiom in a work could never be about anything other than the "normal", unracialized, illusory white world that provided the fictional backdrop for the story. Morrison arrives at the understanding that the "subject of the dream is the dreamer." In other words, the literary works of a White author can only ever be a powerful examination of the fears, desires, terror, shame, and magnanimity of that self. It cannot be about Africanist presence in any meaningful, authentic way. Rather, they project the self-evident ways in which Americans choose to talk about

- Cultural and literary bias

themselves through an allegorical, and sometimes metaphysical, but always neglected, representation of an Africanist presence

Summarised Overview

The unit explores two crucial aspects of American history through the powerful critical perspectives of Adrienne Rich and Toni Morrison – the nation's cultural and literary attitudes towards women and African Americans. Both these marginalised social categories face intense discrimination and oppression under the hegemonic patriarchal, racist power that is centred in American mainstream life. Rich and Morrison explore historical and socio-cultural sources to reveal the underlying patterns and institutions that validate and sustain the subjugation of women and African Americans. Rich's essay "The Domestication of Motherhood" emphasises the gendered and constructed nature of 'motherliness'; she traces the historical routes by which motherhood, once regarded as a woman's power, was eventually used to relegate women to domesticity and patriarchal control. In particular, she points out the dual roles of monotheism, capitalism, and the family in achieving male dominance. Morrison's chapter, entitled "Black Matters", examines the politics of African American representation in 'canonical', euro-centric American literature. She submits that the literary features associated with American literature seem to be a response to Africanist presence. While White critics and authors largely disregard Black characters and often project racist ideologies in their representation, Morrison considers this to be a reflection of the way that they construct their own American selfhoods.

Assignments

1. Why are children constructed as a cultural institution according to Adrienne Rich?
2. What magical powers were assigned to women in prehistorical times?
3. Discuss Robin Fox's theorisation of the patriarchal protection given to motherhood.
4. Explore the various mythologies associated with the patriarchal fear of women's powers.
5. Detail Adrienne Rich's views on the domestication of motherhood.
6. Define Africanism.



7. What are the aims of Toni Morrison's critical project in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*?
8. How did Africanist presence influence the major characteristics of American literature?
9. Discuss Toni Morrison's experiences of reading 'canonical' American literature as a reader and as a writer respectively.
10. Elaborate on the relationship between Africanist presence and American literature as discussed by Toni Morrison in the book *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and Literary Imagination*?

Suggested Readings

1. Carr, Anne E., et al. *Motherhood: Experience, Institution, Theology*. T & T Clark, 1989.
2. Garren, Jonathan. "Bodily Evidence: Racism, Slavery, and Maternal Power in the Novels of Toni Morrison." *South Carolina Libraries*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.51221/sc.scl.2020.4.2.7>.
3. Ghosh, Biswajit. "The Institution of Motherhood: A Critical Understanding." *Motherhood Demystification and Denouement*, 2016, pp. 17–29.

References

1. Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Vintage Books, a Division of Random House, Inc, 2019.
2. Morrison, Toni. *Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature*. University of Michigan, 1989.
3. Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2021.
4. Rué, Emma Domínguez. "Her story Unwritten: Trauma, Memory, Identity and History in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*." *Trauma Narratives and Her story*, 2013, pp. 141–152., https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137268358_10.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Unit 3

Fiction

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of fiction as a key genre in American literature
- ▶ contextualise Nathaniel Hawthorne and Toni Morrison as significant fiction writers in American Literature
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected texts
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant stylistic elements of the selected texts

Background

The development of the genre of novels in American Literature is associated with a long literary history. Beginning in the late eighteenth century in the wake of the American Revolution when writers were attempting to create a national identity, the novel evolved over the centuries. It dealt with different thematic binaries: Sin and romantic optimism; determinism and free will; idealism and materialism; European aristocracy and democracy; capitalistic prosperity and economic struggles. The current unit studies two representative novels in American literature, both of which engage with several of these themes.

The first of these, *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) is a testament to the influence of Puritanism in American culture and literature, while the second, *The Bluest Eye* (1970) chronicles the effects of racism on an unfortunate African American family. Set in different time periods, these novels capture the changed landscape and rich diversity of America across the years. It is also important to note the common broad themes that characterise these works – the human condition, the search for identity, the hostility of society, and the inevitability of fate.

Keywords

Fiction, Settings, Plot, Characterisation, Themes

Discussion

Section 1

3.3.1 Nathaniel Hawthorne: The Scarlet Letter

American short story writer and romance novelist, Nathaniel Hawthorne experimented with a wide variety of genres and techniques. His two widely read novels are *The Scarlet Letter* (published in mid-March 1850) and *The House of Seven Gables* (1851). A large portion of Hawthorne's writings, along with that of Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe, falls under the category of Dark Romanticism. This genre is characterised by a stress on human fallibility, which leads to errors in judgement that causes upright men and women to wander towards sin and self-destruction. The unforeseen effects and difficulties that result from well-intentioned attempts at societal transformation are frequently highlighted in these works. *The Scarlet Letter* provides a fine example of a dark romantic work, as can be seen in the detailed exploration below.

3.3.1.1 Summary

At the beginning of the novel, a huge crowd gathers at the Puritan town of Boston to witness the punishment of a beautiful young woman named Hester Prynne. She is accused of adultery and is ordered to wear a scarlet letter A on her breast as a sign of her sin. She is also made to stand on a scaffold for hours, subjecting her to public humiliation. She refuses to reveal the name of the father of her child Pearl. Even after being questioned by Reverend John Wilson and the local church minister, Arthur Dimmesdale, she refuses to name her lover.

► Sin of adultery

All the while, a man is present in the crowd. She recognises him as her old husband who was presumed to be lost at sea. It was while waiting for him that she fell in love and had a child out of wedlock. The husband now



► Disguised Identity

vows to take revenge upon Hester and her lover. In a bid to expose the lover, he assumes the identity of a doctor named Roger Chillingworth.

► Living on her own terms

After the passage of several years, Hester, being a headstrong woman, settles down in a cottage in the countryside. She raises Pearl by herself, working as a seamstress and leading a sober life. Meanwhile, Pearl grows to become a wilful and unruly child. The church community decides to take Pearl away from Hester. But with the timely intervention of Dimmesdale, Pearl remains with her mother.

► Revelation

Nonetheless, Dimmesdale suffers from a mysterious health condition, and is continually tormented by many psychological issues. Roger Chillingworth, the new physician, begins treating Dimmesdale and suspects that his disease is a result of a sin he has committed in the past. Furthermore, he surmises a connection between the illness of Dimmesdale and the past of Hester Prynne. In due course of time, he finds a scarlet A on the chest of the sleeping Dimmesdale. This confirms that his suspicions are correct.

► Penance

The guilt and anguish suffered by Dimmesdale deepens, he begins to torture himself. One night, while Pearl and Hester are returning home, they see Dimmesdale standing in the scaffold as punishment for his sins. They decide to join him, but he refuses to acknowledge his sins in public. Meanwhile, Dimmesdale sees a giant meteor formation in the shape of the letter A. Pearl sees a shadowy figure who turns out to be Roger Chillingworth. Hester decides to break her vow of silence; she goes to him asking not to torment Dimmesdale. He refuses it.

► Search for happiness

Some days later, Hester arranges a meeting with Pearl and Dimmesdale in the forest. They decide to flee to Europe and live together in anonymity there. Both feel relieved. Hester removes her scarlet letter and lets down her hair. Ironically, Pearl does not recognise her mother without the letter A, forcing Hester to wear the scarlet symbol again. However, Dimmesdale knows that he is dying and loses his interest in the plan.

Hester comes to know that Roger Chillingworth is privy to their secret plans, and is a passenger on the

► Redemption

same boat that she, Pearl, and Dimmesdale are trying to board. On election day, Dimmesdale gives his best sermon. Upon seeing Hester and Pearl, he impulsively climbs the scaffold with his lover and daughter. There, he confesses his sin, exposing a scarlet letter in his chest. He falls dead and Pearl kisses him.

► Reunion

Chillingworth loses his interest in taking revenge and dies a year later, leaving Pearl a great amount of money. After many years Hester returns to Boston alone and begins her charity work living in the old cottage. She still has her scarlet letter on her chest. Pearl is married to a European aristocrat. When Hester dies, she is buried next to the grave of Dimmesdale. They share a single tomb stone bearing the letter "A".

3.3.1.2 Detailed Analysis

► Introductory narration

The Scarlet Letter opens with an introduction that provides an overview of the narrative. The unnamed narrator claims to have taken on the post of the "chief executive officer" or surveyor of the Salem Custom House (A place where taxes are calculated and paid). Looking to pass time, he finds a manuscript, marked by a scarlet A, attributed to a man named Jonathan Pue. It documents events from the mid-seventeenth century, about 200 years before the narrator's own time. The narrator does not wish to make a career out of writing, because he feels that his Puritan ancestors would disapprove of it. Yet, when he loses his politically appointed job at the custom house, he begins to write a romance based on the manuscript which becomes the main body of the current novel.

► Alienated for a moral crime

The opening chapter of novel depicts the public punishment meted out to Hester Prynne, a woman who has become pregnant out of wedlock. Her husband has been missing for a long while and she is condemned as an adulteress. The crowds are gathered around a scaffold where Hester and her illegitimate infant are to be publicly displayed; many among the crowd criticise the ornate embroidery of the scarlet A which she is ordered to carry on her clothes as a punishment. She tries to reconcile with her current fate and misfortune, while the children and adults in the crowd taunt and stare at her. From this point in the narrative, Hester and her child are completely isolated from the towns folk.



- Refusal to name the lover

Hester's husband has already returned to town and is among the crowds. Without revealing his identity, he enquires about the proceedings of the punishment and the identity of Hester's lover. He comes to know that Hester has refused to reveal the name of her fellow sinner. As a consequence, she has been sentenced to three hours on the scaffold and a lifetime of wearing the scarlet letter A, embroidered on her clothes. Even as Governor Bellingham, Reverend Wilson, and Reverend Dimmesdale demand the truth from her, Hester only answers that the child would seek a heavenly father.

- Surviving ostracization

Later, Chillingworth, as Hester's husband has come to identify himself, visits her in her prison cell. He offers her a potion which she thinks might be poison; but he claims that he wishes to keep her alive so that he may have his revenge. He clearly plans to exact revenge on the lover. Several months pass in this fashion and Hester is let out of prison. Unwelcome in town, she settles with her infant child at its edges. This further symbolises her ostracization from the everyday life of the townsfolk. Being an expert embroiderer, she takes to making beautiful clothes and other items as a means of survival. All the major events in the town are enriched by products that she has stitched or embroidered. However, she is not invited to stitch or embroider items for marriages as the townsfolk find it inappropriate.

- Mother-daughter relationship

Hester's daughter Pearl grows up untrained in the manners and customs of society. She refuses to pray to or believe in God and is not allowed to mingle with other children. The townsfolk often treat her cruelly. In fact, she beats her loneliness by creating imaginary characters to play with. Often, Hester herself wonders if the child is a demon-child as believed by the people of the town. This rumour strengthens so much that Hester fears that Pearl might be taken away from her to prevent her sin being transferred to the child.

Arthur Dimmesdale, the town minister, has been suffering from a mysterious health condition. Chillingworth has been assigned the charge of his care. Though the townspeople are initially glad that the doctor is looking after the minister, they soon start to theorise that he is the devil who has been sent to take away Dimmesdale's soul. In the cases of both Pearl and Chillingworth, it is possible to see the townspeople



► Illness

resorting to supernatural explanations. Whenever they find a phenomenon to be strange or beyond understanding, it is attributed to the dark forces of sin. Chillingworth begins to suspect a psychological origin for the illness when he notices Dimmesdale pretending not to be affected by the presence or sight of Hester and Pearl.

► Moral hypocrisy

Dimmesdale's condition worsens; however, he transforms his internal suffering into fiery sermons for his laity. Soon, he begins to torture himself physically as well – whipping himself, holding extreme fasts, and extended vigils. One night, he decides to hold a night vigil on the same scaffold that, years ago, Hester was forced to stand upon. As chance would have it, Hester and Pearl, who happen to pass by, also join him. Pearl asks him if he would stand there with them at noon, the next day. He refuses and reveals his hypocrisy, despite being tormented by guilt. Chillingworth finds them there, but does not confront the minister. Instead, he takes him home and settles him in bed.

► Chillingworth as foe

Seven years after Pearl's birth, Hester is taking a more active part in society. She engages in charity and often aids people in times of trouble. The townsfolk have begun to interpret her A as standing for 'Able', rather than 'Adulteress'. At the same time, she is increasingly disturbed by the thought of Chillingworth being so close to Dimmesdale. Hester meets with him and asks him to abandon his plans of revenge. He refuses and states "Let the black flower blossom as it may!"

Her worries also extend to Pearl as the child is growing up. The child intuitively makes the connection between Hester's scarlet letter and Dimmesdale's habit of clutching his chest – he has carved the scarlet letter onto his own body. Hester is surprised by the perceptiveness of her daughter. She arranges for a meeting between Dimmesdale and Pearl in the forest. Having escaped the public eye, they discuss the events of the past and ask each other for forgiveness. Hester reveals Chillingworth's true identity as her husband. The lovers plan to escape to Europe where they might live as a family with Pearl. In other words, the social circumstances around them would not permit them to reveal their relationship and live in peace. This is seen in the minister's refusal to walk into town, hand-in-hand,



► Plans of escape

with Hester and Pearl. He goes back to town to prepare a sermon for Election Day, which marks the beginning of a new legislative session.

► Confession and redemption

On Election Day, a large crowd is gathered in the market square. This is reminiscent of the beginning of the narrative where the public has come together to see Hester punished. Among the crowd are the sailors of ship to take to Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale to Europe. However, one of them confirms that Chillingworth is coming on the ship as a member of Hester's party. She realises that her plans have been foiled. Soon, Dimmesdale, looking healthy, walks in with the Election Day procession. Pearl wonders whether she should go give him a kiss and Hester scolds her for saying so. After delivering a brilliant sermon that moves the people of the town, he calls for Hester and Pearl. He walks with them, hand-in-hand, onto the scaffold and reveals the letter A carved on his chest. Having finally confessed his sins, he falls to the ground and passes away. Pearl kisses him on the forehead. Chillingworth finally realises that Dimmesdale has escaped the scope of his revenge.

► Resolution

In the concluding passage, the narrator discusses the aftermath of Dimmesdale's confession and death. Most of the people cannot agree upon what they saw on the minister's chest – many say the mark was caused by Chillingworth's dark magic or by the minister's own guilt. In any case, they took it as a sign that even the holiest of men could be guilty of sin, as much as Hester was guilty of adultery. Chillingworth, left without an object for his revenge, passes away in a year. Hester and Pearl disappear for a long time afterwards, causing the townsfolk to save the scaffold and the cottage as proof of their story. Many years later, Hester returns and resumes her charity work, having married Pearl off to a European aristocrat. The 'A' that she still wears has lost all negative meaning attached to it. After her death, she is buried next to Dimmesdale and both their tombstones bear the scarlet letter A on a black background.

3.3.1.3 Characterisation

Hester Prynne:

Although Hester Prynne is the protagonist of *The Scarlet Letter*, the focus of the narrative is on the factors that mould her and the changes those forces have on her

► Nature

rather than on her inherent character. Not much is known about Hester before her relationship with Dimmesdale and the subsequent public humiliation. Although she was reported to have married Chillingworth despite her distaste for him, the reason for this is never made clear. The first chapters give the impression that Hester had a strong personality and was impulsive before she was married. She may have once been passionate, based on the fact that she has an affair.

► Character development

However, it is what transpires after Hester's affair that shapes her into the character the reader is familiar with. Hester withdraws into herself as a result of being humiliated and cut off from the community. She often ponders about societal structure, human nature, and fundamental moral issues. Hester's struggles make her an independent thinker. Her experiences also lead to her developing into an empathetic, maternal figure. She controls her tendency to act rashly since she is aware that doing so could result in the loss of her daughter Pearl. Hester is also a mother in terms of society; she looks out for the underprivileged and offers them clothing and food. Her scarlet letter's associated shame has long since been negated.

► Negativity of thought and action

Roger Chillingworth:

Interestingly, the novel uses Roger Chillingworth's physical features – misshapen shoulders and body – as a reflection of the darkness in his soul. He was not an ideal spouse to Hester in their early days of marriage and neglected her for large portions of time. He seems to feed off the vitality and energy of those around him. Having discovered Dimmesdale's role in Hester's infidelity, he embarks on a quest for revenge. Dimmesdale passes away because he no longer has targets for his vengeance. In fact, Dimmesdale's confession of adultery frees Hester from Chillingworth's control. Their passionate affair, though sinful in the eyes of society, was motivated by love; Chillingworth's actions are born out of a desire to cause harm.

Arthur Dimmesdale:

Arthur Dimmesdale, like Hester Prynne, is an individual whose identity owes more to external circumstances than to his nature. He has an unusually active conscience



- Driven by guilt and need for redemption

which allows him to be empathetic. Yet, he cannot show the courage to own up to his part in Hester's illegitimate pregnancy. Here, the struggle between his moral compass and hypocritical desire for self-protection causes him great mental anguish. Ironically, this makes him an eloquent and emotionally powerful speaker as well as a compassionate leader. He is able to draw on his personal conflict and provide his congregation with meaningful spiritual guidance. Later, when Dimmesdale confesses his sin, most of the townsfolk do not believe it completely. Having been idolized by the entire town and protected by Hester's silence, he internalises his guilt and self-punishment till Election Day.

Pearl:

Pearl, Hester's daughter, largely serves as a symbol. Her real significance, however, rests in her capacity to provoke the adult characters into thinking and reflecting. She confronts them with probing questions and calls attention to the adult world of hidden or disregarded truths. *The Scarlet Letter* portrays Pearl as the most perceptive character in the narrative. She repeatedly draws attention to her mother's scarlet letter and the culture that created it. She has been fixated on the insignia since a young age. Pearl's innocent—or perhaps instinctive—comments on the letter pose significant issues regarding its intent. Similar to this, she makes inquisitive observations on the relationships between Hester and Dimmesdale. The text's toughest and most insightful criticism of Dimmesdale's refusal to acknowledge his infidelity comes from Pearl. Pearl is no longer required in this symbolic role once her father's identity is made clear; with Dimmesdale's passing, she fully reverts to “human” status, leaving behind her otherworldliness and her supernatural vision.

- Symbolic function

3.3.1.4 Themes:

Question of sin: The concept of sin and the question of how to engage with it, is interspersed through the novel. Beginning with Hester's adultery, Pearl's rebellious ways, and Dimmesdale's covert guilt, the narrative focuses on how sin may be understood. The idea of punishing sin, which is a prominent concept of Judeo-Christian traditions, drives the story forward. While Hester is seen to have repented because of her public punishment and

► Sin as a concept

subsequent social isolation, Dimmesdale suffers for his sins in secret. He goes through great mental torment and guilt which eventually affects him physically. Even as Hester's and Dimmesdale's sins are motivated by their love for one another, Chillingworth's actions represent a sinful desire to cause harm to others. Thus, society's definition of sin seems to be contradictory to Christian values such as forgiveness and salvation.

► Regulating the individual

Individual in a Puritan Society: Puritanism, being an extreme form of faith, enforces strict moral and religious codes. The desires of the individual, represented here by Hester's affair, are often disruptive to these rules. *The Scarlet Letter* thus provokes its readers to think about the lack of personal freedom and oppression faced by the individual in such a society. Pearl's refusal to follow such conventions and rules shows how the individual can express him/herself and retain a sense of identity in such circumstances.

► Challenging ideal femininity and patriarchal control

Patriarchal Control: One of the most significant threads in the novel is the use of patriarchal control to police and regulate women's sexuality and independence. Hester becomes a powerful symbol of deviance because of her passionate and impulsive affair. She is able to use her talents as a seamstress to survive and thrive despite the townsfolk's ostracization. Her responsibilities as a single parent further force her to be resourceful and independent, negating patriarchal ideals of submissiveness and docility.

► Binaries

Nature and Society: A strong contrast has been set up between nature and society. The ways of society, represented by the town and its ordered existence, run contrary to the ways of nature. In a sense, Hester is punished for acting out her natural desires; Pearl is considered to be a demon-child for not following social conventions. They live at the edge of the town, in a cottage near the forest. Even the reunion of Hester, Pearl, and Dimmesdale happens in the forest where they can follow their natural impulses, instead of having to obey the moral demands of the society.

Section 2

3.3.2 Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye*

American novelist, essayist, and feminist icon, Toni Morrison produced novels that are now considered classics. Her works are renowned for their epic themes,



► Craft of the novelist

engaging dialogues, and well-developed characters. Morrison's novels reflected the experiences of the African American race, casting Black characters as protagonists. She provoked discussions on racism and the African presence in the United States by presenting characters who struggle to discover their individual and cultural identities in an unjust world. Her innovative narrative technique uses poetic language, fantasy, and mythical elements. Her most famous novels include *Beloved*, *Sula*, and *Song of Solomon*. *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Her first novel chronicles the dark side of the human condition, providing essential humanity to all the characters she depicts.

3.3.2.1 Summary

► Prologue

The Bluest Eye opens with a prologue; it's written as a series of sentences from a children's story book. A house and the family that lives in the house is described, with the following characters: Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane. The brief narrative focuses on Jane, who wishes to play with the pet cat. However, when it will not play with her, she asks her mother to play. The mother only laughs. She turns to her father who only smiles. The dog also runs away instead of playing with Jane. Finally, a friend comes to play with Jane. This sequence of events is repeated verbatim without punctuation, and then is repeated a third time without spaces between the words or punctuation.

► Conventional overview

The second section of the prologue is a more conventional summary of the story. In it, an unnamed narrator reveals the fact that Pecola, a slightly older girl, is pregnant with her father's child. The narrator, along with her sister, is trying to plant marigolds. If the marigold seeds bloom successfully, Pecola's child would be born safely. Unfortunately, the marigolds do not bloom, and the child passes away. The narrator indicates that it would be difficult to explain why these events happened, so she will settle for relating the events as they happened.

The novel is set at the end of the Great Depression in America. Frieda MacTeer, 10, and Claudia MacTeer, 9, both reside with their parents in Lorain, Ohio. Although the girls' parents are more focused on getting by than on lavishing attention upon their children, there is a strong

► Setting of the novel

undercurrent of stability and affection in their home. Henry Washington, a boarder, and Pecola, a tiny child, are both taken in by the MacTeers. Claudia and Frieda feel bad for Pecola because her father attempted to set fire to their home. Pecola admires Shirley Temple, a child actor, because she believes that whiteness is beautiful. She considers herself unattractive.

► Standards of beauty

Pecola returns to live with her family, but she has a rough existence. Her mother is distant, her father drinks, and the two of them frequently beat each other. Sammy, her brother, frequently runs away. Pecola is of the notion that if she had blue eyes, people would adore her and her life would be completely different. She associates other people's hostility and mistreatment of her as a reflection of her own beauty. This perception of unattractiveness is further reinforced by the fact that boys make fun of her, the grocery store clerk sees right through her when she buys chocolates, and Maureen, a light-skinned girl who briefly befriends her, also makes fun of her. She is falsely accused of killing a boy's cat and is referred to as a "nasty little black bitch" by the boy's mother.

► Harsh back-grounds

The lives of Pecola's parents have been harsh since their youth. Her mother, Pauline, has a lame foot and has always felt alienated. She loses herself in films that only help to reinforce her belief that she is ugly and that romantic love is only for the attractive. She supports her violent husband's actions in order to maintain her own martyrdom. She feels the most alive when she is at her work, cleaning a white woman's house. Though she hates her own home, she adores this one. Cholly, Pecola's father, was raised by his great aunt after his parents abandoned him; she passed away when he was just a young adolescent. Two white men interrupt him during his first time having sex; they humiliate him by forcing him to continue as they watched. He tried to track down his father, but was turned away by him. When he first met Pauline, he was an erratic and rootless individual. Now, he has lost interest in life and feels stuck in his marriage.

One day, Cholly comes home and rapes Pecola while she is doing the dishes. Pecola's mother finds her unresponsive on the floor and, not believing her, beats her. Pecola visits a fake mystic named Soaphead Church and requests for blue eyes from him. He doesn't assist her; instead, he uses her to kill a dog he doesn't like.



► Conclusion

When Claudia and Frieda learn that Pecola has been impregnated by her father, they want the baby to be born alive, in contrast to the rest of the neighbourhood. They sow marigold seeds and give up the cash they have been saving for a bicycle. They think that if the seeds grow, Pecola's child will, too. The blossoms won't open, and Pecola's prematurely born child dies. Cholly, who flees upon having raped and impregnated his daughter, dies in a workhouse. Pecola, losing her mind, is convinced that her long-held ambition to have the bluest eyes has come true.

3.3.2.2 Detailed Analysis

► Function of prologue

The prologue offers a metaphorical overview of the novel as a whole. It sets us up for the child narrator who interprets the world and presents the story. While the language of the prologue is cheerful and simple, as in most children's books, its content is disturbing and lacks cohesion. Even though the narrative states that the family in the description is happy, Jane appears to be isolated. Not only do her parents and pets refuse to play with her, they also do not communicate with her. This lack of connection is paralleled in the story of Pecola and her family in the main narrative of the novel. The second, more conventional part of the prologue offers a closer understanding of the novel. It introduces the main characters, Pecola and Cholly. It also generates curiosity in the readers as to how the events happened and why the characters acted in that particular way.

► Contrasting families

The MacTeer family, including the sisters, Claudia and Frieda, is portrayed as struggling financially but emotionally connected to one another. They take on boarders to improve their economic situation. It is in this capacity that Pecola Breedlove comes to live with the family. She is currently in the custody of the county because her abusive father has set her house on fire, and left her and her mother homeless. There is a clear contrast between the MacTeers and Breedloves in terms of familial dynamics and social functioning. Claudia, emboldened by her family's stability and love, is able to reject Eurocentric standards of beauty (blue eyes, golden hair). This is seen in her dislike of the white doll gifted to her. Pecola, on the other hand, is unable to see herself as anything but unattractive. She idolises Shirley Temple and wishes to possess blue eyes which are seen as a definitive standard of white female beauty.

► Violent interactions

Once Cholly Breedlove is out of jail, the family moves into a small apartment, which was once a storefront. The furnishings and rooms of the apartment are not very attractive, and seems to represent the unfair social and cultural conditions that the Breedloves face throughout their lives. This space is the scene for many of the fights between Cholly and his wife, Pauline. They always engage in violent and abusive behaviour against each other, particularly if Cholly has been drinking. In one of the fights, Pauline douses cold water on Cholly to wake him up and Cholly beats her. In the end, she knocks him out with the help of Sam, her son. Sam urges Pauline to kill the unconscious Cholly, but Pauline calms him down. A nauseated Pecola lies in bed, listening to all of this unfold. This points to how normalised these episodes of violence have become in the household.

► Class difference

During winter, a light-skinned, wealthy Black girl named Maureen Peal arrives at the school that Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola go to. She enchants everyone in the school and causes great envy in Claudia. Though at first Maureen seems to be sympathetic to Pecola's plight, she treats her badly later on. When Claudia objects, Maureen tells the girls that they are black and ugly. This causes Claudia to secretly worry that this is true. Being wealthy and more light-skinned than the girls allows Maureen to be seen as attractive; this enforces the euro-centric standards of beauty that Pecola believes in. In fact, the difference in class is also seen in the episode between Junior and Pecola. Junior, a young boy from a well-to-do family, kills his mother's pet cat and blames it on Pecola. The mother believes her son and curses Pecola for killing her beloved pet.

Henry Washington, a boarder with the MacTeers, inappropriately touches Frieda. He is chased away by Mr. MacTeer. The girls are worried that Frieda is ruined, and so decide to find Pauline Breedlove to ask for some whisky (a way of terminating pregnancy). They visit the house of the white family where Pauline works. There, they are told to wait in the laundry room while Pauline finishes her chores. The young white girl of the family refers to Pauline as 'Polly', a fact that enrages Claudia. When Pecola, who is helping her mother out, accidentally knocks over a dessert, Pauline beats her. She then comforts the white child who starts crying, speaking to

► Pauline's attitude towards whiteness

her in a soft voice. In short, Pauline seems more at home and happy in the pretty house where she works than with her own children and her own home.

In her youth, Pauline accidentally impales her foot on a nail. This causes her to walk with a slight limp. In her mind, this is the incident that undermines her destiny. She develops her own happiness by ordering and arranging things in the house, though she is mostly isolated from her family members. By fifteen, she oversees her siblings and wishes that a stranger would take her away. In a way, young Pauline had a strong romantic side to her personality. When she meets Cholly Breedlove, she falls in love with his tender ways. They get married and move to Lorain, Ohio. Being from the countryside, she is isolated and unwelcome among the women there. She longs to dress and behave in ways that will make her acceptable. Slowly, life becomes hard and money becomes an issue; Cholly also takes to drinking.

► Background

To make ends meet, Pauline takes up a job as a housekeeper in a white woman's house. However, a drunk Cholly shows up and demands money from her. This causes her to lose the job as the white woman demands that Pauline leave her husband. Soon, she becomes pregnant, and has her first child. She turns to the movies for an escape from the routines of married life. They validate her ideas about physical beauty and romantic love, and she resolves to dress and appear like movie stars. But she loses her tooth in an accident, and since then, cannot view herself as worthy of love. She soon gives birth to a second child, Pecola, but is convinced that the baby is ugly.

► Concept of beauty and love

Cholly, on the other hand, was abandoned at birth by his mother. His Great Aunt, Jimmy rescues him and brings him up. Jimmy, however, passes away when he is a young teenager. He is taken in by O.V., Aunt Jimmy's brother, and his family. To impress his cousin, he takes him to a place where the girls of the town hang out. There, Cholly is infatuated with a girl named Darlene. They soon become physically intimate. As they are engaging in sex for the first time, two white men interrupt them. They force the young couple to continue while they watch. As a consequence of this, Cholly is irrationally enraged at Darlene; he knows that it would be detrimental for him to be angry with white people. Fearing that he has

- Rejection and lack of connection

impregnated Darlene, he leaves the town in search of his father. When he finally does meet his father, the man curses at and chases him away.

- Disinterested in life

This renders him indifferent to life and its many struggles. He considers himself to be dangerously free. He loves and abuses women, takes and leaves jobs. It is mentioned that he has killed three white men, having lost all consideration as to how or when he dies. Though he loves Pauline and marries her, the marriage leaves him feeling trapped. He begins to drink to escape the monotony of his life. Even more unfortunate is the fact that he does not know how to relate to his own children. In the present day, Cholly comes home and finds Pecola doing the dishes. Overcome with feelings of tenderness and rage, he rapes her. When she faints, he covers her with a quilt and leaves her there for Pauline to find later.

- Taking advantage of insecurity

Pecola goes to Soaphead Church, a self-declared 'minister' or a priest in the Black community. She requests him to give her blue eyes – a request that Soaphead understands because he too grew up in a household that valued European physical features. However, since he cannot grant her the wish, he takes advantage of the situation by telling her to feed some meat to an old dog that he dislikes. He tells Pecola that if the dog reacts, her wish would be granted. But unknown to her, he has secretly poisoned the meat. The dog convulses and dies, and a fearful Pecola runs away.

- Solidarity with Pecola

Claudia and Frieda discover that Pecola has been impregnated by her father. They do not understand the incestuous nature of the act or the scandal that it has caused in the community since they do not know how babies are made. They are sad and hurt that the adults around them feel it would be best for Pecola to be taken out of school, and for her baby to die. Claudia feels that it is important for Pecola's baby to live so that it would counteract everyone's love of white dolls and little white girls. The girls decide to sacrifice the money they had collected by selling Marigold seeds, burying it near Pecola's house. They also plant the rest of the seeds in their own yard. Claudia will sing and Frieda will say the magic words. They feel that this would magically protect Pecola's baby. The girls' lack of understanding of the real world is highlighted in their actions here.



► Imaginary Conversation

In the final chapter, Pecola is engaged in a conversation with an imaginary friend. The friend scolds her for constantly looking in the mirror. But Pecola cannot help admiring her new blue eyes. She says that she is discriminated against for having the bluest eyes. The friend also discusses Cholly's sexual advances, revealing that it happened a second time as well. To Pecola's dismay, the friend suggests that she enjoyed Cholly's sexual attention. But she refutes this. Mostly, Pecola seems to be worried that someone, somewhere else might have bluer eyes than hers. The friend departs for the time being.

► Biases and prejudices

Claudia narrates the course of Pecola's madness; the young girl starts to walk around town, jerking her arms as if she were trying to fly. Claudia and Frieda feel guilty since their sacrifice did not work and the baby is stillborn. Cholly dies in a workhouse, which leaves the Breedloves to move to a house at the edge of town. Claudia contends that the town has used the young Pecola like a scapegoat, dumping its hatred and negativity on her. Her perceived ugliness allowed all the others to believe they were beautiful, healthy, and sanctified. She concludes by saying that it is far too simple to blame the town's attitude for the tragedy, but it is now far too late for change.

3.3.2.3 Characterisation

Pecola Breedlove:

The Bluest Eye's protagonist, Pecola, is passive and enigmatic despite her significant place in the novel. Morrison states in her novel's afterword that she deliberately uses many points of view to narrate Pecola's story to preserve Pecola's honour and, to some extent, her mystery. In this way, readers are stopped from categorising Pecola or from reducing her character to familiar tropes. At the beginning, Pecola is a weak and sensitive youngster, but by the end, violence has nearly entirely wrecked her. Her emotional life is first driven by two goals: first, she wants to learn how to win people over; Second, she simply wants to vanish after being made to witness her parents' violent arguments. Pecola's dream world, which is her sole means of escaping the agony of her life, is forced upon her as both of her wishes are denied. She believes that having blue eyes would

► Imaginary world

alter both how she is perceived by others and what she is made to see. She deludes herself into thinking that her dream has been fulfilled by the novel's conclusion, but only at the expense of her sanity. Because Pecola is not given any means of escaping her reality, she is sentenced to a destiny worse than death.

► Collective guilt

Pecola also represents the Black community's self-hatred and conviction in their own ugliness. Her father, mother, and Geraldine, as well as other members of the neighbourhood, express hatred for her to cope with their own feelings of self-loathing. Pecola has been used as a scapegoat for the entire town. Her ugliness has made them feel beautiful, her pain has made them feel comparatively fortunate, and her silence has given them the chance to speak. Pecola's aimless wandering at the fringe of town, however, haunts the neighbourhood, reminding them of the ugliness and hatred that they have attempted to bury because she lives on after going insane. She reminds them of their own cruelty and self-hatred.

Claudia MacTeer:

► Rebellious spirit

Some of the passages of *The Bluest Eye* are narrated by Claudia, alternately from the viewpoint of a young kid and an adult looking back. The fact that Claudia has a supportive and loving family makes all the difference in her life even though she shares Pecola's problems with discriminatory beauty standards and financial insecurity. Claudia fights when she is mistreated, in contrast to Pecola, who is quiet. She dissects and destroys a white doll that she is given and does not desire. She assaults the boys she sees teasing Pecola when she discovers them. She and her sister devise a strategy to prevent Pecola's baby from being rejected by the community after discovering that Pecola is expecting.

Claudia contends that she is brave because she has not yet discovered her boundaries and, more importantly, because she has not yet discovered the self-hatred that so many adults in the neighbourhood suffer from. Claudia is an invaluable guide to the happenings in Lorain. The suffering that eventually makes Pecola crazy does not cloud her eyes. Her presence in the book serves as a reminder that most Black families are not like Pecola's; instead of disintegrating in the face of

- Claudia as narrator

hardship, most Black families come together. Claudia's viewpoint is beneficial since it combines the viewpoints of an adult and a youngster. This makes her a symbol of both suffering and hope.

Cholly Breedlove:

Even though Cholly Breedlove is an antagonistic character in the novel, Morrison manages to humanise him through his sympathetic backstory. His early abandonment in the junkyard and mistreatment at the hands of the white men add to the misery of his life. The rejection that he faces at the hands of his father only furthers his emotional suffering. He develops an indifference to life which leads him to act out in criminal and violent ways to those around him. The freedom that he enjoys by not caring about the consequences of his actions leads to his downfall and to the tragedy of his wife and daughter.

- Dangerous sense of freedom

Pauline Breedlove:

Pauline causes her daughter, Pecola, a lot of emotional and physical misery. But Morrison sympathetically portrays the conditions of life that caused her to become that way. Her lame foot convinces her that she is destined for seclusion, and the snobbishness of the city women in Lorain condemns her to loneliness. She encounters more subtle forms of humiliation than Cholly. She is especially susceptible in this situation to the ideas propagated by white society, which suggests that acquiring material goods and being beautiful are the key to happiness. When she dresses up like the white sex icon Jean Harlow for a movie, she loses a tooth while munching on candies. Pauline discovers another ideal world—the white home for which she cares—despite the failure of her fantasy of being like Harlow. Although this fantasy world is more realistic than her impersonation of Hollywood stars and more socially acceptable than Pecola's fantasy world, it is just as successful in severing her from the family that she ought to love. In a way, Pauline's life is similar to her daughter's in that both are tormented and deluded.

- Reacting to losses and pain in life

3.3.2.4 Themes

- 1. Whiteness as Standard of Beauty:** White physical features, ways of living, and behaviour are frequently cited as desirable or attractive. Motifs

such as blue eyes, golden hair, and white dolls reinforce this ideal. Most of the characters, including Pecola, believe in this stereotype, while Claudia is able to challenge this idea to an extent.

2. **Self-Image:** Many of the characters in the novel struggle with self-hatred and an inability to see themselves as worthy of love and respect. While Pecola views other people's treatment of her as a reflection of her self-worth, Pauline is constantly worried about winning over the city women and looking like a movie star. Worldly wealth and appearance, particularly the colour of their skin, becomes tied in with their self-image.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse and its aftermath are one of the key themes of *The Bluest Eye*. The trauma of the sexual humiliation meted out to Cholly by the two white men are transferred to Pecola through his abuse and rape. In both cases, Darlene and Pecola, the women, bear the brunt of the town's displeasure. Pecola is beaten by her mother who does not believe her account of the incident. Even Frieda, who is touched by Henry Washington, is feared to have been 'ruined'.
4. **Race and Class Differences:** The racial and class-based biases and prejudices of society play a huge role in determining the fates of the characters. Throughout her interactions with various townsfolk and children, Pecola faces cruel discrimination due to her appearance which is tied in with her race and class. This ultimately leads her to believe that whiteness is an ideal beauty standard. Even the home in which they stay is associated with their social status and racial identity. Similarly, Pauline and Cholly's childhoods and adult personalities are constructed through their exposure to racism and classist ideologies. In turn, they pass down the generational trauma that they experienced to their children.

Summarised Overview

The current unit offers a detailed examination of two classics of American literature – *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Bluest Eye*. Nathaniel Hawthorne presents a serious, allegorical study of a woman whose life is upheaved by her impulses and passion. It looks at the Puritan town in which Hester Prynne lives at a deeply patriarchal, morally rigid setting, where the gentle Christian values of forgiveness and redemption are neglected. Hester symbolises the power of the individual to rise above adversity and express their vital will to live; her development from a helpless 'adulteress' at the beginning of the narrative to the resourceful maternal figure at its conclusion is evidence of the same. On the other hand, *The Bluest Eye* depicts the destruction of an individual at the hands of a hostile, racist society. Pecola Breedlove is as much a victim of her circumstances as much as Pauline and Cholly Breedlove are. Those who are responsible for her tragic condition are trapped in the same exploitative and indifferent system as she is. Toni Morrison reveals the underlying humanity and helplessness of her characters, provoking deep questions about the impact of racism, psychological trauma, and generational abuse on individuals.

Assignments

1. Discuss the characterisation of Hester and Pearl as subversive female characters in a patriarchal society.
2. How does guilt impact the life of Arthur Dimmesdale?
3. Examine the role of social control in the events that unfold in *The Scarlet Letter*.
4. Is Roger Chillingworth the antagonist of the narrative in *The Scarlet Letter*? Support your answer with examples from the novel.
5. Elaborate on the major themes explored in Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*.
6. Describe how Claudia and Pecola engage with the Euro-centric ideas of beauty.
7. In what ways have Cholly and Pauline Breedlove's childhoods impacted their adult lives?
8. How do racial and class differences determine the fates of the characters in *The Bluest Eye*?
9. Critically contrast the portrayal of the Breedlove family with that of the MacTeer family in *The Bluest Eye*.

10. Elaborate on the major themes explored in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*.

Suggested Readings

1. Bloom, Harold. *Bloom's Guides: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*. Infobase, 2010.
2. Lawrence, D.H. *Studies in Classic American Literature*, New York, 1923.
3. Matthiessen, F.O. *American Renaissance*, New York, 1941.

References

1. Male, Roy R. *Hawthorne's Tragic Vision*, Austin, 1957.
2. Middleton, Roy. *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism*. Taylor and Francis, 2016.
3. Stewart, Randall. *Nathaniel Hawthorne*. New York. 1948.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.

1.



SGOU

Unit 4

Short Stories

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire a general understanding of short stories as a key genre in American Literature
- ▶ contextualise Edgar Allan Poe, Ernest Hemingway, and Raymond Carver as significant short story writers in American Literature
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected texts
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant stylistic elements of the selected texts

Background

In the first half of the 19th century, as literary tastes began to change, there was a decline in interest for novels in periodicals and dailies. So American writers of fiction borrowed the form of the 'short tale' that was popular in Germany at the time and altered the same to suit American newspapers and magazines. This resulted in the literary form that is now known as the short story. During the time of its introduction, it was not considered a high artistic medium. The short story was seen only as a commercial product written by authors who wished to make a living out of their art.

However, as time went by, masters of the American short story elevated the genre into art. One of the first writers to do so was Edgar Allan Poe. His experiments with the short story genre incorporated elements of gothic horror and detective fiction. By the twentieth century, Ernest Hemingway wrote modernist, minimalist fiction which left quite a lot to the interpretation of the readers. Towards the end of the period, Raymond Carver revived the American short story, chronicling the lives of working-class characters and their everyday issues. The current unit explores short stories written by these seminal writers, emphasising their themes, narrative techniques, and literary significance.



Keywords

American short story, Themes, Narrative style, Characterisation, Symbols

Discussion

Section 1

3.4.1 Edgar Allan Poe: “The Cask of Amontillado”

Edgar Allan Poe was an American writer who contributed significantly to the genres of horror, mystery, and detective fiction. He was born on January 19, 1809, in Boston, Massachusetts, and is considered one of the most influential and celebrated authors in American literature. Poe's childhood was marked by tragedy and hardship. His father abandoned the family, and his mother passed away when he was just three years old. He was then taken in by John Allan, a wealthy merchant in Richmond, Virginia, who became his foster father. Although Allan provided him with a good education, Poe often clashed with him and felt like an outsider within the family.

► Childhood

Poe's passion for writing emerged at an early age. He excelled in his studies, particularly in languages and literature. However, financial difficulties forced him to leave the University of Virginia after only one year. He enlisted in the army and published his first collection of poetry, titled “Tamerlane and Other Poems,” in 1827, using his own money. Throughout his life, Poe faced numerous personal and professional challenges. He struggled with poverty, alcoholism, and the loss of loved ones. Despite these hardships, he dedicated himself to his writing and produced an impressive body of work.

► Struggles

Poe's writing style was characterised by its dark and mysterious themes, intricate plots, and vivid imagery. His stories often explored the human psyche, delving into themes of madness, guilt, and the supernatural. Some of his most famous works include “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Murders in the Rue Morgue.” Poe's contributions to the detective fiction genre were particularly ground-breaking. He is credited with inventing the modern detective story.



► Detective literature

with his character Auguste Dupin, who used deductive reasoning to solve crimes. This innovation laid the foundation for future detective literature and influenced renowned authors like Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes.

Despite his literary achievements, Poe struggled to make a living solely from his writing. He worked as an editor and a literary critic, but financial instability plagued him throughout his life. Tragically, Edgar Allan Poe's life ended prematurely. On October 7, 1849, at the age of 40, he was found in a delirious state on the streets of Baltimore and died four days later. The cause of his death remains a subject of speculation and debate. While Poe did not achieve great recognition during his lifetime, his works gained popularity and critical acclaim after his death. His writing had a profound influence on subsequent generations of writers and continues to captivate readers with its chilling atmosphere and psychological depth. The following section will discuss Poe's story "The Cask of Amontillado", published in the women's magazine *Godey's Lady's Book* in November 1846.

► Influence

3.4.1.1 Summary

"The Cask of Amontillado" is a dark and suspenseful short story written by Edgar Allan Poe. Set in an unnamed European city during carnival season, it follows the chilling tale of revenge enacted by the narrator, Montresor, upon his acquaintance, Fortunato. The story begins with Montresor confessing his deep-seated desire for revenge on Fortunato, who has insulted him. Montresor narrates, "The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could, but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge." This quote establishes Montresor's motivation and sets the tone for the impending revenge plot.

► Plans for revenge

Montresor carefully plans his vengeance, ensuring that he remains unnoticed. He manipulates Fortunato's weakness for wine, particularly Amontillado, to lure him into the catacombs beneath his palazzo. Montresor craftily states, "I have my doubts... And I was silly enough to pay the full Amontillado price without consulting you in the matter. You were not to be found, and I was fearful of losing a bargain."

► Deceit



► Language

Fortunato, who prides himself on his knowledge of wine, becomes intrigued by the prospect of tasting a rare cask of Amontillado. Montresor plays on his vanity and ego, saying, "As you are engaged, I am on my way to Luchresi. If anyone has a critical turn, it is he. He will tell me –" The two men venture into the damp and eerie catacombs, with Montresor leading Fortunato deeper into the labyrinth. As they descend, the tension and suspense intensify, with Poe's descriptive language heightening the sense of foreboding. Montresor describes the atmosphere, stating, "We had passed through walls of piled bones, with casks and puncheons intermingling, into the inmost recesses of the catacombs."

► Manipulated

Fortunato's intoxication allows Montresor to control him, as his judgment becomes clouded, and his senses dulled. Montresor takes advantage of Fortunato's impaired state, leading him further into the depths of the catacombs. Montresor states, "Come... We will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as I once was. You are a man to be missed. For me, it is no matter. We will go back; you will be ill, and I cannot be responsible."

► Revelation

In a pivotal moment, Montresor chains Fortunato to a wall deep within the catacombs. Fortunato, still believing it to be a jest, fails to comprehend the severity of the situation. Montresor reveals his true intentions, declaring, "The Amontillado!" "He!" Fortunato exclaims. "Yes," I said, "the Amontillado. As I said these words, I busied myself among the pile of bones of which I have before spoken. Throwing them aside, I soon uncovered a quantity of building stone and mortar."

► Conclusion

Montresor proceeds to brick up the wall, entombing Fortunato alive. The story reaches its climactic moment as Montresor finishes his task, leaving Fortunato trapped in darkness. Montresor concludes with the haunting line, "In pace requiescat!" which translates to "May he rest in peace." This quote emphasizes the chilling finality of Fortunato's fate. "The Cask of Amontillado" thus is a harrowing exploration of revenge, manipulation, and the darkest corners of the human psyche.

3.4.1.2 Analysis

"The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe is a macabre and suspenseful tale that warrants a critical

analysis. Through its themes, narrative techniques, and use of symbolism, the story explores the darker aspects of human nature, the nature of revenge, and the psychology of the characters involved. One of the prominent themes in the story is revenge. Poe delves into the depths of the human psyche to showcase the lengths to which individuals can go when seeking retribution. Montresor, the narrator, seeks vengeance against Fortunato for an undisclosed insult. The story raises questions about the morality and justification of Montresor's actions. Is revenge ever truly justifiable, or does it reveal the vengeful nature inherent in all human beings?

► Revenge

Poe employs a first person narrative technique, allowing readers to experience the story through Montresor's perspective. However, this limited point of view also raises questions about the reliability of the narrator. Montresor's motives and mental state are subjective, leaving room for interpretation and ambiguity. The story's unreliable narration contributes to its psychological depth, challenging readers to question the truth and morality of Montresor's account.

► Unreliable first person narrator

Symbolism plays a crucial role in "The Cask of Amontillado." The catacombs, dark and oppressive, represent the depths of human consciousness and the hidden aspects of the human psyche. The dampness and decay evoke a sense of inevitability and death. Additionally, the cask of Amontillado itself becomes a symbol of Fortunato's demise, representing his entrapment and impending doom.

► Symbols

The carnival setting serves as a contrasting backdrop to the darkness of the story. The festivities, masks, and revelry create an atmosphere of deception and disguise, mirroring the deceit and manipulation that drive Montresor's revenge. The carnival represents the duality of human nature, the masks people wear, and the hidden intentions lurking beneath the surface. Poe's mastery of suspense is evident throughout the narrative. The gradual descent into the catacombs, the constant tension between Montresor and Fortunato, and the ominous foreshadowing all contribute to the building sense of dread and anticipation. Poe strategically withholds information, creating a sense of unease and keeping readers on the edge of their seats.

► Suspense and intensity



► Power dynamics

The story also raises questions about the moral implications of revenge. While Montresor carries out his plan with cold calculation, the absence of remorse or reflection suggests a complete lack of empathy. The tale forces readers to confront the destructive nature of revenge and the toll it takes on both the avenger and the victim. It challenges conventional notions of justice and raises philosophical inquiries about the nature of good and evil. Furthermore, "The Cask of Amontillado" can be seen as a commentary on power dynamics. Montresor's manipulation of Fortunato's pride and vanity highlights the inherent imbalances in relationships. The story explores the abuse of power and the extent to which one individual can exert control over another.

3.4.1.3 Symbolism

"The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe is rich with symbolism that enhances the story's depth and meaning. These symbols contribute to the overall atmosphere, character development, and thematic exploration. Let's discuss some of the significant symbols in the story:

► Dark aspects

The Catacombs: The catacombs beneath Montresor's palazzo represent the hidden recesses of the human psyche and the inevitability of death. The dampness, darkness, and decay found within the catacombs create an atmosphere of dread and serve as a metaphor for the darker aspects of human nature.

► Temptation

The Cask of Amontillado: The cask of Amontillado represents both Fortunato's downfall and Montresor's twisted plan for revenge. It symbolizes the lure that entices Fortunato deeper into the catacombs, unaware of the impending doom awaiting him.

► Disguise

The Carnival: The carnival setting serves as a contrasting backdrop to the dark events unfolding in the story. The masks, costumes, and revelry of the carnival symbolize deception and the hidden nature of human motives. It reflects the idea that people often hide their true intentions behind a facade, just as Montresor conceals his vengeful plan beneath the guise of friendship.

The Montresor Coat of Arms: The Montresor family motto, "Nemo me impune lacessit" (No one provokes

- Familial conditioning

me with impunity), symbolizes the family's proud and vengeful nature. It represents the generations of pride and the need for retribution that drives Montresor to carry out his plan.

- Scheming

The Trowel and the Masonry: The trowel and the act of masonry symbolize the construction of Montresor's revenge and the entombment of Fortunato. They represent the meticulous planning and execution of his scheme, reflecting the idea of burying Fortunato alive both physically and metaphorically.

- Irony

Besides, Irony is a recurring element throughout the story. Fortunato's name, which means "fortunate" in Italian, is ironic considering his tragic fate. The ironic twist lies in the fact that Fortunato's expertise in wine becomes his ultimate downfall. This irony highlights the unpredictability of fate and the unforeseen consequences of one's actions.

Section 2

3.4.2 Ernest Hemingway - The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber

- Career

Ernest Hemingway, born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, was an influential American writer and journalist. Known for his distinctive writing style and impactful storytelling, Hemingway became one of the most celebrated authors of the 20th century. His works often depicted themes of war, love, loss, and the human condition, showcasing his unique perspective on life and his mastery of concise prose. Hemingway's early years greatly influenced his writing. He served as an ambulance driver during World War I, an experience that left a profound impact on him and shaped his view of the world. His time in war zones like Italy inspired his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Set in post-war Europe, the novel explores the disillusionment and emotional struggles of the Lost Generation, a term Hemingway popularized to describe the post-war generation deeply affected by the horrors of war.

Hemingway's writing style is characterized by simplicity, brevity, and an economy of language. He believed in conveying meaning through minimalistic prose, using short sentences and direct language. This style, often referred to as the "Iceberg Theory" or "Hemingwayesque," allowed readers to infer deeper meanings and emotions beneath the surface of the



► Writing style

narrative. Hemingway's writing had a significant impact on literature, influencing generations of writers who admired his concise yet evocative approach.

► Notable work

One of Hemingway's most celebrated works is *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which earned him the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Nobel Prize in Literature. The novella tells the story of an aging fisherman, Santiago, who engages in a battle of wills with a marlin. Through Santiago's struggle and determination, Hemingway explores themes of resilience, existentialism, and the human spirit's capacity to endure in the face of adversity. The novella's simple yet profound narrative showcases Hemingway's ability to capture the essence of the human experience.

► War

Another notable work by Hemingway is *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), set during the Spanish Civil War. The novel follows the story of Robert Jordan, an American volunteer fighting with Republican forces. Hemingway delves into the themes of war, sacrifice, and the complexities of human relationships. The novel's raw portrayal of the brutality of war and its impact on individuals earned Hemingway critical acclaim and solidified his reputation as a master storyteller.

► Autobiographical content

Hemingway's personal life was marked by his adventurous spirit and his love for travel. He travelled extensively, seeking inspiration for his writing and immersing himself in diverse cultures. These experiences fuelled his stories, such as *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), which drew from his time as a Red Cross ambulance driver during World War I, and *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* (1936), inspired by his African safaris.

Despite his literary success, Hemingway's personal life was not without challenges. He struggled with depression, alcoholism, and tumultuous relationships. These struggles eventually took a toll on his mental health, leading to his tragic suicide on July 2, 1961. Ernest Hemingway's impact on literature and his legacy as a writer cannot be overstated. His minimalist writing style, poignant storytelling, and exploration of universal themes continue to captivate readers around the world. Hemingway's ability to convey profound emotions through concise prose remains a hallmark of his work, inspiring generations of writers and solidifying his

► Significance

place in literary history. The following is the analysis of Hemingway's short story "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber", first published in September 1936 in *Cosmopolitan* magazine.

3.4.2.1 Summary

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" by Ernest Hemingway is a gripping tale that explores themes of courage, masculinity, and the complex dynamics of marriage. Set in Africa, the story follows the troubled relationship between Francis Macomber, his wife Margot, and their safari guide Robert Wilson. Here is a detailed plot summary of the story with selected quotes: The story begins with Francis Macomber, a wealthy American, and his beautiful but manipulative wife, Margot, on a safari in Africa. Francis is portrayed as a weak and cowardly man, lacking confidence and constantly seeking validation from others. Margot, on the other hand, exudes power and control, often belittling her husband.

► Setting

Francis Macomber, his wife Margot and their professional hunter guide, Robert Wilson are on a hunting expedition in Africa. In a flashback we are told that Francis frightenedly ran away from his wounded and charging lion that was shot down by Wilson. The whole incident was watched from the car by Margot, who was contemptuous of Macomber's cowardly act. Robert Wilson also has only contempt for him, but as a professional hunter guide, he does not show his displeasure. That night, Margot has sex with Wilson as an exhibition of her admiration for his courage and her contempt for her husband's cowardice. Francis has been awake for two hours when she comes back at three in the morning. A quarrel ensues between them and he openly declares that he hates the red-faced man-Wilson.

► Macomber's cowardice

The following day, Macomber and Wilson hunt together and shoot three buffaloes, killing two but merely wounding the first, which retreats into the bush. Macomber is now confident, completely out of his fear of these wild animals. The three drink whiskey to celebrate, but Margot is rather disturbed by Macomber's transition from fear to confidence. Wilson, on the other hand, is happy for his change to masculine confidence. The gun bearers report that the first buffalo has not died and has



- Transition from fear to confidence

gone into the tall grass. Wilson helps Francis track the wounded buffalo. He is confident this time. The buffalo charges at Macomber. He stands his ground and firm, but his shots are high and misses the buffalo. The buffalo keeps charging, Wilson also shoots. The two shoot at the buffalo, and Macomber shatters the buffalo's nose. The buffalo is down. At the same time, Margot fires a shot from the car which hits Macomber on the head and kills him. She puts up a big show of grief, crying hysterically. Wilson just tells her, he would have left her anyway. Or she could have poisoned him, as they do in England. The story ends when she pleads, "Please stop it" and he almost promises secrecy. "Please is much better. Now I'll stop."

3.4.2.2 Analysis

- Themes

Ernest Hemingway's "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" is a captivating and deeply layered narrative that explores themes of masculinity, power dynamics, and the complexity of human relationships. Through his distinct writing style and vivid storytelling, Hemingway invites readers to delve into the depths of the characters' psyches and examine the flaws and contradictions of their actions.

Masculinity and Courage

- Transformation

Ernest Hemingway explores the theme of masculinity and the concept of courage through the transformation of the protagonist, Francis Macomber. Initially, Francis is depicted as a timid and emasculated man, lacking the confidence to assert himself. However, as the story progresses, he undergoes a profound change and finds newfound bravery and assertiveness. This journey raises important questions about the nature of courage and how it can be achieved.

- Hunting as masculine practice

Hemingway portrays Francis's transformation as a result of his confrontation with fear and his ability to overcome it. When faced with the wounded lion during the safari, Francis hesitates and is unable to shoot it, exposing his vulnerability and fear. This incident further emasculates him in the eyes of his wife, Margot, and their guide, Wilson. However, during the buffalo hunt the next day, Francis manages to wound a buffalo. When the wounded animal charges at him, he faces it head-on and shoots it, displaying a newfound sense of bravery.



► Self-assertion

The story raises questions about the nature of courage. Is courage purely a matter of overcoming fear and taking risks? Does courage lie in facing external challenges, or does it also involve inner strength and self-assertion? Hemingway's portrayal of Francis's transformation suggests that courage can be attained by confronting one's fears and asserting oneself in the face of adversity. However, it is important to critically examine Hemingway's portrayal of masculinity and the limited perspective it presents.

► Traditional masculinity

Hemingway's depiction of masculinity in the story aligns with traditional notions of courage and strength. Francis's transformation is portrayed as a journey towards fulfilling the societal expectations of what it means to be a man. He moves from a position of weakness and vulnerability to embodying the traits traditionally associated with masculinity: bravery, assertiveness, and control. This portrayal reinforces the idea that courage is synonymous with traditional masculine attributes.

Power and Relationships

► Authority

Power dynamics within relationships are a crucial element of "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." Hemingway masterfully portrays the shifting dynamics between Francis, his wife Margot, and the safari guide Robert Wilson, creating a rich ground for analysis. Initially, Margot holds the dominant position in the relationship, exerting control over Francis and undermining his confidence.

► Control over Francis

Margot's dominance is evident from the beginning of the story. She belittles Francis and openly expresses her dissatisfaction with him, often mocking his perceived weaknesses. Her behaviour not only emasculates Francis but also diminishes his self-esteem. Margot's actions highlight the power imbalance within their marriage, where she wields control over Francis through her manipulative tactics and emasculating remarks.

► Losing power

However, as Francis begins to confront his fears and display newfound courage, the power dynamics between the characters undergo a significant shift. His transformation challenges Margot's dominance and undermines her control. Francis's growing confidence and assertiveness unsettle Margot, as she finds herself losing her position of power within the relationship.



► Resentful

Hemingway explores the complexities and struggles associated with power dynamics in relationships. The power struggle between Francis and Margot becomes evident as Francis's actions threaten Margot's established control. Margot's reaction to Francis's transformation highlights the fragility of dominance and the potential for manipulation. She becomes increasingly resentful and threatened by Francis's growing assertiveness, resorting to emotional manipulation to regain her control over him.

► Love triangle complicates everything

The power dynamics are further complicated by the presence of Robert Wilson, the safari guide. Wilson embodies a different form of power, one rooted in his expertise and knowledge of the African wilderness. He serves as a source of admiration and fascination for Margot, causing tension within the relationship. The introduction of Wilson adds another layer to the power dynamics, as Margot's infatuation with him challenges the established power dynamics between her and Francis.

► Nature as character

Nature and Wilderness

Nature and the African wilderness serve as powerful symbols in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber," enhancing the depth and meaning of the story. The vastness and wildness of the African landscape create a backdrop against which the characters' personal journeys unfold, reflecting their inner turmoil and struggles.

► Symbolism

The encounters with animals in the story carry significant symbolism. When the group comes across a wounded lion, Francis hesitates and is unable to shoot it, revealing his fear and vulnerability. This incident exposes the primal forces of nature and the instinctual fear that humans can experience when confronted with the untamed wilderness. The wounded lion represents the wild and unpredictable aspects of life, mirroring Francis's internal conflict and his struggle to find courage.

The buffalo hunt further emphasizes the contrast between civilization and the raw power of nature. As the characters track down the buffalo, they enter deeper into the untamed wilderness. The wounded buffalo charges at Francis, triggering a moment of newfound bravery

► Inner strength

and assertiveness in him. This encounter symbolizes the confrontation between human civilization and the primal instincts of the natural world. Francis's ability to face the charging buffalo represents his growing connection with the wild forces of nature, as well as his own inner strength and courage.

► Interior conflicts

The African safari setting also serves as a metaphor for the characters' internal struggles. Just as the African wilderness is vast and unexplored, the characters' inner worlds are complex and uncharted. The untamed nature of the African landscape mirrors the untamed aspects of their own psyches. The vastness of the wilderness mirrors the vastness of human emotions, desires, and fears.

► Tension between civilised and natural worlds

Hemingway's vivid descriptions of the African landscape create a sense of awe and wonder, capturing the beauty and grandeur of nature. The vast plains, the looming mountains, and the wide rivers contribute to the story's atmosphere and evoke a sense of awe and insignificance in the face of nature's power. By utilizing the African safari setting and the encounters with animals, Hemingway underscores the themes of human vulnerability, courage, and the juxtaposition of civilization and the untamed natural world. The story explores the tension between the controlled and constructed aspects of human existence and the uncontrollable and unpredictable forces of nature.

Pursuit of Happiness

► Validation from conformity

The pursuit of happiness is a central theme in the story, and Ernest Hemingway examines the complex journey of Francis as he seeks his own version of happiness. Initially, Francis's pursuit of happiness is based on conforming to societal expectations and seeking approval from his wife, Margot. He is portrayed as a timid and emasculated man, constantly seeking validation and happiness through external sources. Francis's relationship with Margot highlights his reliance on her approval for his happiness. He allows her dominant personality to dictate his actions and decisions, compromising his own desires and suppressing his true self. He hopes that by conforming to societal expectations and gaining Margot's admiration, he will find happiness.



- Own version of happiness

However, as the story progresses, Francis undergoes a transformation. His encounter with fear and his display of newfound courage lead to a shift in his pursuit of happiness. He starts asserting himself and challenging Margot's dominance in their relationship. This shift represents Francis's realization that true happiness cannot be attained solely through external validation. He begins to pursue his own version of happiness, independent of others' opinions and expectations.

- Social expectations

Hemingway prompts discussion on the nature of happiness and the different paths individuals take to find it. Through Francis's journey, the story raises questions about the authenticity of happiness derived from external sources versus happiness found through self-discovery and self-assertion. It suggests that true happiness lies in embracing one's true self, facing fears, and pursuing individual desires, even if it means challenging societal norms and the expectations of others.

- Own aspirations and values

The story also emphasizes the importance of personal growth and self-actualization in the pursuit of happiness. Francis's transformation from a timid and emasculated man to a courageous and assertive individual highlights the significance of self-discovery and self-empowerment. It suggests that true happiness can be found when individuals break free from societal constraints and live authentically, guided by their own values and aspirations. Hemingway's exploration of the pursuit of happiness prompts readers to reflect on their own notions of happiness and the paths they take to achieve it. It challenges the idea that happiness is solely derived from external sources and encourages individuals to search within themselves for fulfillment and self-actualization.

Margot as Femme Fatale

Along with this, critically examining the portrayal of Margot's character is crucial to understanding the story's nuances. Margot is depicted as manipulative, conniving, and unfaithful. Her actions, particularly her affair with Wilson, are presented as morally questionable. However, the narrative fails to delve deeper into Margot's motivations and fails to provide a more nuanced exploration of her character. This limited portrayal of women as femme fatales perpetuates stereotypes

► Characterisation

and does not offer a comprehensive understanding of Margot's experiences or agency.

Colonist Narrative

The story's colonialist undertones also warrant critical analysis. The African setting and the interactions between the white characters and native Africans reflect a colonial perspective. The native characters are primarily portrayed as subservient and exist to support the white characters' experiences. This raises questions about the portrayal of race and the perpetuation of colonialist attitudes. A more nuanced and balanced representation of African characters and a deeper exploration of the colonial context would have enriched the narrative.

► Colonial attitudes of characters

► Complexities of human experiences

The ending of the story, characterized by ambiguity and an unresolved climax, adds to its overall impact. The uncertainty surrounding Francis's death, with the reader left unsure of who fired the fatal shot, intensifies the themes of masculinity, power dynamics, and the consequences of actions. Hemingway leaves room for interpretation, inviting readers to reflect on the complexities of human experiences and the unpredictability of life.

Section 3

3.4.3 Raymond Carver: Boxes

Raymond Carver, born on May 25, 1938, and passing away on August 2, 1988, was an influential American short story writer and poet. He is often associated with the minimalist style of writing, known for his spare prose, economy of language, and focus on ordinary, working-class characters. Carver's works are renowned for their realism, capturing the struggles, frustrations, and moments of connection in the lives of everyday people. Carver's writing career was shaped by his personal experiences. He grew up in a working-class family in the Pacific Northwest, and his upbringing and later struggles with alcoholism and failed relationships often found their way into his stories. His writing reflects themes of blue-collar life, the breakdown of relationships, loneliness, and the search for meaning and connection in a fragmented world.

► Upbringing and career

Carver's short stories are characterized by their precise and concise language, leaving much unsaid and relying on the power of suggestion. He believed in the power of the "telling detail," capturing moments



► Writing style

of revelation or emotional impact through seemingly mundane observations. His stories often focus on the ordinary moments of everyday life, exploring the quiet struggles and unspoken desires of his characters. One of Carver's most notable collections of short stories is *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love* (1981). This collection exemplifies Carver's minimalist style, delving into the complexities of love, marriage, and human relationships. The stories are often characterized by a sense of unease, tension, and a lingering sense of loneliness.

Carver's writing style had a profound influence on contemporary American literature. His minimalist approach, with its emphasis on spare language and precise detail, has inspired countless writers. His work is often associated with the literary movement known as Dirty Realism, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, focusing on the lives of working-class individuals and the raw realities of their existence. Carver's influence extended beyond the realm of short stories. He was also an accomplished poet, with several collections of poetry published during his lifetime, including *Where Water Comes Together with Other Water* (1985) and *Ultramarine* (1986). His poetry, like his short stories, reflects his minimalistic style and keen observations of everyday life. Throughout his career, Carver received numerous accolades and awards for his writing. He was a recipient of the Guggenheim Fellowship and was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His stories have been widely anthologized and adapted for film and television, further solidifying his impact on contemporary literature and popular culture. Raymond Carver's writing continues to resonate with readers, offering profound insights into the human condition and the complexities of everyday life. His spare prose focuses on ordinary characters, and exploration of themes such as love, communication, and the fragility of human relationships has made him one of the most celebrated and influential writers of his time. This section of the unit explains his story "Boxes," originally published in *The New Yorker* on February 24, 1986.

► Influence on American literature

3.4.3.1 Summary

In Raymond Carver's short story "Boxes," the themes of disconnection and hopelessness are explored

► Setting

through the first-person narrative of an unnamed narrator whose mother decides to move from Longview, Washington, back to California. The choice of the town's name is symbolic of the narrator's emotional distance and strained relationship with his mother. The narrator is currently living with his partner, Jill, in Longview. His mother, who was previously married but is now widowed, has always had a desire to move, although it used to be for pleasure. Now, her motivation is to find inner happiness. Upon learning of the narrator's relationship with Jill, his mother decides to move to Longview to be closer to them, despite his warning that she would not enjoy the town's atmosphere. She disregards his advice and leaves sunny California for the colder climate of Washington.

► Connections in relationships

The dynamics among the three main characters are intriguing. The narrator is aware of his mother's unhappiness and strives to connect with her and make her happy. However, Jill does not share the same desire to spend time with the mother and does not put in much effort to build a relationship with her. When the narrator suggests attending a final dinner at his mother's place before her departure, Jill complains about their frequent visits. Nonetheless, they ultimately attend the dinner, which becomes a pivotal moment in the story.

► Concern

During the dinner, the narrator becomes increasingly concerned about his mother's pursuit of happiness, as she repeatedly alludes to the idea that death might be the only escape from her quest. The narrator, who is a heavy smoker, finds himself smoking multiple cigarettes throughout the evening as his stress and worry mount. He struggles to get a restful night's sleep, realizing that he may never see his mother alive again and wanting to bid her a proper farewell. Thus, he decides to visit her house as she prepares to leave.

After his mother drives off to California, she contacts the narrator, and it becomes evident that he misses having her close by. The story ends on a note of longing and longing for the connection that was strained and fragile but still held significance in the narrator's life. In "Boxes," Carver adeptly portrays the themes of disconnection and hopelessness through the complex relationships between the characters. The story captures the struggle to find meaning and establish meaningful connections in



► Themes

a world that often feels distant and unfulfilling. Carver's minimalist style and precise language contribute to the poignant exploration of these themes, leaving readers with a sense of introspection and an appreciation for the delicate nature of human relationships.

3.4.3.2 Analysis

► Introspection

In Raymond Carver's short story "Boxes," several themes are explored, including connection, worry, powerlessness, mortality, and apprehension. The story is narrated in the first person by an unnamed protagonist, focusing on the protagonist's mother's decision to move back to California from Longview, Washington. The choice of the setting, particularly the name "Longview," may suggest that the protagonist is taking a long, introspective look at his relationship with his mother.

► Lack of connection

The protagonist is aware that his mother's move may signify the last time he sees her, prompting a desire to connect with her or better understand her before her departure. However, it becomes evident that his girlfriend, Jill, makes little effort to establish a connection with the mother. This lack of connection is apparent during a dinner scene where Jill is disinterested in the mother's conversation, and the protagonist himself is preoccupied with worry.

► Finality

Throughout the story, the protagonist's worry intensifies as he realizes the possibility of not seeing his mother again. This concern is explicitly conveyed when he shares with Jill his difficulty sleeping and his preoccupation with thoughts of his mother. The protagonist's mother, in a conversation about her grievances with Larry Hadlock, indirectly triggers the protagonist's awareness of mortality and powerlessness. He recognizes that his mother's decision is final, and he is powerless to change it.

In "Boxes," the association of death with the mother is skillfully portrayed through the protagonist's observations and internal thoughts. One instance that highlights this association is when the protagonist notices a workman climbing a pole. This scene triggers his fears and anxieties as he contemplates the potential danger and the inability to save someone if they were to fall. This reflection parallels his feelings of powerlessness and helplessness in the face of his mother's impending

► Internal thoughts and observations

death. Just as he cannot physically prevent the workman from falling, he realizes that he also cannot control or prevent his mother's mortality.

► Metaphorical link

Furthermore, the protagonist associates the cold climate of Longview with his mother's mortality, intensifying his apprehensions. This association suggests a metaphorical link between the external environment and the internal turmoil he experiences. The coldness serves as a symbolic representation of the harsh reality of death, and the protagonist's anxiety is amplified as he contemplates the inevitability of his mother's eventual passing.

► Death as theme

These associations of death with external elements in the story provide insight into the protagonist's mindset and emotional state. They illustrate his deep-seated fears and the sense of powerlessness he experiences in the face of mortality. The workman climbing the pole serves as a poignant reminder of the fragility of life, while the connection between the cold climate and his mother's mortality reinforces the protagonist's anxieties. As the story reaches its conclusion, the mother is depicted preparing to depart for California, donning white attire that could symbolize a departure to the afterlife. This choice of colour evokes a sense of finality and separation. The protagonist, witnessing his mother's departure, experiences a renewed wave of powerlessness and an overwhelming realization that he may never have the opportunity to see her alive again. The weight of this understanding is palpable as he re-enters the house, his sadness lingering and gradually diminishing.

However, the longing for connection resurfaces when the mother contacts the protagonist from her new apartment in California several days later. This contact serves as a bittersweet reminder of the bond they share and the desire for emotional closeness. The protagonist's reminiscence of his father affectionately calling his mother "dear" adds another layer of nostalgia and warmth to the scene. As he converses with his mother on the phone, he, too, addresses her with the endearing term "dear" before concluding the call. This final interaction highlights the deep emotional connection between the protagonist and his mother, emphasizing their shared history and the longing to maintain that



► Familial love

connection despite physical distance. The use of the term “dear” serves as an expression of affection and a poignant reminder of the familial love that transcends time and space.

► Emotions

As the protagonist gazes out the window, he notices a neighbour’s porch light being turned off, potentially symbolizing the darkness the protagonist feels or will feel, knowing he may never see his mother alive again. The story leaves readers with a poignant sense of longing and the recognition of the fragility of human connections. Carver masterfully captures the complexities of relationships and the emotional weight associated with mortality and separation.

3.4.3.3 Themes

► Sense of disconnection and overwhelming feeling of despair

Raymond Carver’s short story “Boxes” has two prominent themes: the sense of disconnection and the overwhelming feeling of despair. From the outset, it becomes evident that the narrator and his mother share a distant relationship. Living far apart, the narrator receives an unexpected letter from his mother announcing her move to Longview, Washington, the narrator’s own town. The choice of the town’s name, “Longview,” serves as a metaphor for the emotional distance between the narrator and his mother. This theme of disconnection extends to the strained relationship between the mother and Jill, the narrator’s partner. Both the narrator and Jill express their reluctance to spend time with the mother, yet the narrator feels compelled to do so, aware that time with her is limited.

► Despair

The second theme, the feeling of despair, pervades the story, particularly during a pivotal dinner scene. As the narrator and Jill join the mother for a farewell dinner, the mood shifts when the mother broaches the topic of death. Her poignant statement, “I hate this g.d. place. I don’t know why I moved here. I wish I could just die and get it over with,” reveals her deep unhappiness and longing for escape from the town (p. 507). This moment plunges the narrator into a sense of hopelessness, realizing that he may never see his mother alive again once she moves away for good.

The pervasive feeling of despair arises from the narrator’s recognition of his mother’s discontent and the

► Consideration of morality

impending loss he faces. The story paints a poignant picture of the narrator's emotional state as he grapples with the inevitability of his mother's departure and the uncertain future it brings. The weight of despair intensifies as he confronts the harsh reality of mortality and the irreversibility of their separation. Through these themes, Carver portrays the complexities of human relationships, the disconnections that can arise between loved ones, and the deep emotional impact of impending loss. The story invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of disconnection and despair, evoking empathy for the narrator's struggle to navigate the complexities of family dynamics and the profound impact of mortality on personal relationships.

Summarised Overview

"The Cask of Amontillado" by Edgar Allan Poe is a dark and suspenseful tale of revenge set during carnival season in an unnamed European city. Montresor seeks retribution against Fortunato for an undisclosed insult, meticulously planning his revenge by exploiting Fortunato's weakness for wine. Symbolism, unreliable narration, and irony enrich the story's exploration of revenge, power dynamics, and the darker aspects of human nature. The catacombs represent the depths of the human psyche, while the cask of Amontillado symbolizes Fortunato's impending doom. The carnival setting highlights the duality of human nature, and the Montresor coat of arms signifies the family's vengeful nature. Irony is prevalent throughout the story, with Fortunato's name juxtaposing his tragic fate.

"The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" by Ernest Hemingway is a gripping tale set in Africa that explores themes of masculinity, power dynamics, and the pursuit of happiness. The story follows Francis Macomber, a timid and emasculated man, and his manipulative wife, Margot, on a safari. When Francis displays newfound courage by facing a charging buffalo, the power dynamics in their relationship shift. Margot becomes threatened by Francis's growing assertiveness and develops a subtle affair with the safari guide, Robert Wilson. Tensions escalate, leading to a confrontation during a hunting expedition, and Francis is tragically shot and killed. The story raises questions about the nature of courage, the complexities of power within relationships, the pursuit of happiness, and the contrast between civilization and the untamed wilderness.

In Raymond Carver's short story "Boxes," the themes of disconnection and hopelessness are explored through the first-person narrative of an unnamed narrator whose mother decides to move from Longview, Washington, back



to California. The choice of the town's name is symbolic of the narrator's emotional distance and strained relationship with his mother. The story delves into the dynamics among the narrator, his partner Jill, and his mother, highlighting the lack of connection between Jill and the mother. The narrator becomes increasingly worried about his mother's pursuit of happiness and contemplates mortality and powerlessness. The story concludes with a sense of longing and a recognition of the fragility of human connections. Carver skillfully captures these themes through minimalistic storytelling and precise language, leaving the readers with a profound understanding of the complexities of relationships and the weight of impending loss.

Assignments

1. How does Edgar Allan Poe use symbolism in "The Cask of Amontillado" to enhance the story's themes and atmosphere?
2. Discuss the role of revenge in "The Cask of Amontillado."
3. Analyze the significance of the carnival setting in "The Cask of Amontillado."
4. How does Ernest Hemingway explore the theme of masculinity and courage in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber?"
5. Discuss the power dynamics within relationships in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."
6. Examine the role of nature and the African wilderness as symbols in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber."
7. How does Raymond Carver explore the themes of disconnection and hopelessness in the short story "Boxes?"
8. Analyze the relationship dynamics among the three main characters in "Boxes."
9. Discuss the significance of the dinner scene in "Boxes."

Suggested Readings

1. Smith, Jennifer J. *American Short Story Cycle*. Edinburgh UP, 2017.
2. Redling, Erik and Oliver Scheiding. *Handbook of the American Short Story*. De Gruyter, 2022.

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1. Toolan, Michael. "Narrative Progression in the Short Story: First Steps in a Corpus Stylistic Approach." *Narrative*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2008, pp. 105–20. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30219278>. Accessed 2 June 2023.
2. Beck, Warren. "THE SHORTER HAPPY LIFE OF MRS. MACOMBER." *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1955, pp. 28–37. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26276895>. Accessed 2 June 2023.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



SGOU

Critical Responses

BLOCK-04

Block Content

Unit 1 Poetry

Unit 2 Drama

Unit 3 Prose



Unit 1

Poetry

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire familiarity with relevant scholars of American poetry
- ▶ contextualise relevant critical readings of the selected texts
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected texts
- ▶ critically elaborate on the predominant stylistic elements of the selected texts

Background

The history of American poetry extends back to the colonial era (1550s-1770s) when European colonists composed verses on the American continent. This type of poetry was often intended to convey information about the new land, its geography and emerging ways of living. Indeed, since the first Europeans in America were religious settlers, the earliest poetry to be produced by them had religious themes. By the 1600s, American poetry also turned its attention to social and family life.

With the advent of the revolutionary era in America (1770s-1780s), poetry began to take on secular and political overtones. Poems of the period extolled the values of independence and freedom, praising American patriots and war heroes. Yet, this style of poetry contained European influences in diction, imagery, and form. It was only with the dawn of the nineteenth century, and the eventual arrival of Transcendentalism, that uniquely American themes and styles were explored. Since then, over the centuries, American poetry has seen the rise of many literary movements, each of which has attempted to portray American experiences in their own way. The current unit offers the necessary critical context for understanding this layered history of American poetry. It does so by exploring the critical and theoretical backgrounds of selected poems discussed in Block II.

Keywords

Poetic language, Poetic devices, Themes, Style, Critical Readings



Discussion

Section 1

4.1.1 Walt Whitman: Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking

- Classic in American poetry

Walt Whitman, one of America's most celebrated poets, crafted a masterpiece titled "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking." This evocative poem has garnered strong appreciation from renowned critics throughout history, establishing its significance in the realm of literary discourse. Even in the contemporary world, influential figures have recognized the profound impact of this work, making it an essential study.

- Significance and musicality

From the moment of its publication in 1859, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" captivated readers and critics alike. One prominent critic, Richard Maurice Bucke, hailed it as a "work of deep beauty and profound insight into the human soul." Bucke praised Whitman's ability to evoke powerful emotions and paint vivid images through his poetic language. Another notable critic, William Michael Rossetti, commended the poem's ability to capture the essence of nature and its connection to human experiences, labeling it as a "lyrical symphony of the senses."

- Intertwined themes

Moving to more recent times, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" continues to resonate with contemporary scholars. Renowned poet Adrienne Rich described Whitman's work as a "transcendent exploration of longing and loss." She admired how the poem intertwines themes of love, death, and the eternal cycle of life, leaving a lasting impression on readers. Furthermore, esteemed literary critic Harold Bloom praised the poem's lyrical intensity and its ability to confront existential questions, making it a touchstone for all serious students of poetry.

The importance of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" cannot be overstated. This poem offers a profound examination of human emotions, the natural world, and the interconnectedness of all things. Its innovative use of language and poetic techniques challenges conventional norms, encouraging readers to explore new dimensions of artistic expression. By delving into Whitman's work, postgraduate learners can gain a deeper understanding



► Power of poetry

of the power of poetry and its ability to capture the complexities of the human experience.

Helen Vendler, a renowned literary critic, holds deep admiration for Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" and his remarkable ability to capture the beauty and intensity of emotions. Vendler recognizes the poem as a powerful testament to Whitman's poetic genius and his unique style of merging personal experiences with universal themes. Vendler appreciates how Whitman's poem delves into the depths of human emotions, allowing readers to connect on a deeply emotional level. She highlights the poem's ability to evoke a wide range of feelings, from joy to sorrow, from longing to despair. Whitman's portrayal of the speaker's journey through love and loss resonates with readers, tapping into the universal experiences of human emotions.

► Evoke wide range of feelings

One aspect of Whitman's artistry that Vendler particularly admires is his masterful use of language. She notes that the poem's language is rich and vivid, filled with sensory imagery that transports the reader into the world of the poem. Whitman's ability to paint vivid pictures with words creates a sensory experience for the reader, immersing them in the sights, sounds, and emotions of the narrative. Vendler emphasizes that Whitman's lyrical power lies in his skillful blending of the personal and the universal. Through his personal experiences, Whitman explores broader themes of love, loss, and the cyclical nature of life. This fusion of the particular and the universal allows readers to find resonance and relevance in the poem, as they see their own experiences mirrored in Whitman's words.

► Poetic language

Furthermore, Vendler praises Whitman's ability to create a transformative experience for readers. She recognizes that the poem's emotional depth and lyrical beauty have the power to move and inspire. Whitman's exploration of love, loss, and the longing for connection speaks to the core of human existence, inviting readers to reflect on their own emotions and experiences. Helen Vendler, a renowned literary critic, deeply appreciates Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" for its ability to capture the beauty and intensity of emotions. She recognizes Whitman's unique style of combining personal experiences with universal themes, creating a deeply resonant and transformative experience

► Artistry

for readers. Vendler highlights the richness of the poem's language and its ability to evoke powerful sensory imagery. She admires Whitman's skillful blending of the personal and the universal, allowing readers to connect on a profound emotional level. Vendler's appreciation for Whitman's artistry underscores the importance of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" as a work of enduring significance, showcasing its ability to evoke powerful emotions and illuminate the human experience.

► Exploration of spiritual and physical realms

Harold Bloom, a prominent literary scholar, holds Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in high esteem, praising it as a testament to Whitman's genius and a central work in the American literary canon. Bloom recognizes the poem's exploration of both the spiritual and physical realms, describing it as a "transcendent" experience that delves deep into the essence of human existence.

► Existential questions

Bloom emphasizes the power of Whitman's language and imagery in capturing the reader's imagination and emotions. He acknowledges that Whitman's poetic style is both sensual and profound, resonating with readers on multiple levels. The poem's vivid and evocative imagery brings to life the sounds, sights, and sensations of the natural world, drawing readers into a deeply immersive experience. Furthermore, Bloom highlights the poem's lyrical intensity and existential questioning as central to its enduring significance. He argues that the poem's exploration of themes such as love, loss, and the search for meaning in life makes it a touchstone for all serious students of poetry. According to Bloom, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" invites readers to confront fundamental existential questions and engages them in a profound introspection about the nature of existence.

► Seminal work

Bloom also emphasizes the lasting impact of the poem, noting its influence on subsequent generations of poets and its enduring value in the literary landscape. He asserts that "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" has left an indelible mark on American poetry, with its themes and poetic techniques serving as a source of inspiration for countless poets who followed Whitman. He admires Whitman's language and imagery, describing them as sensual and profound, and applauds the poem's lyrical intensity and existential questioning. Bloom's appreciation for the poem highlights its enduring impact



and value, underscoring its importance and its status as a seminal work in American poetry.

Rita Dove, a former U.S. Poet Laureate, holds Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" in high regard, emphasizing its timeless relevance and universal themes. Dove praises Whitman's ability to tackle profound subjects such as love, loss, and the search for meaning in a way that remains accessible and resonant across different time periods. Dove recognizes that Whitman's exploration of these themes extends beyond individual experiences, offering a broader reflection on the human condition. She appreciates how the poem delves deep into the complexities of human emotions and relationships, evoking a range of feelings and stirring readers' hearts. Whitman's poetic voice, according to Dove, captures the essence of the human experience and provides profound insights into the interconnectedness of all individuals.

► Essence of human experience

Moreover, Dove commends Whitman's ability to transcend the boundaries of time and space with his words. She believes that the poem's enduring impact lies in its capacity to evoke a sense of empathy and understanding, allowing readers to connect with the experiences and emotions of people from different eras. Whitman's exploration of universal human themes creates a sense of timelessness, making the poem relevant and resonant for readers across generations.

► Universal themes

Dove emphasizes the poem's profound exploration of human connections, underscoring its importance. She sees the poem as an essential study for understanding the depth and complexity of human relationships, as well as the fundamental questions that confront individuals throughout their lives. By examining Whitman's poetic language, imagery, and the emotional depths he reaches, postgraduate learners can gain valuable insights into the human condition and the universal experiences that shape our lives.

► Complexities of humanity

Dana Gioia, an influential poet and critic, offers insightful analysis of Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," focusing on its musicality and use of sound. Gioia appreciates Whitman's mastery of rhythm and meter, recognizing how the lines flow and resonate with a musical quality. He draws attention

► Musical qualities

to the connection between the rocking cradle and the rhythmic movement of the poem itself, creating a sense of motion and vitality. Gioia emphasizes that Whitman's skillful use of language and sound enhances the emotional impact of the poem. He acknowledges how Whitman's words, with their carefully crafted cadence and harmonious arrangement, evoke a sense of melody and musicality. Gioia believes that the poem's musical qualities contribute to its immersive nature, drawing readers into a rich sensory experience.

► Transformative power

Furthermore, Gioia highlights the transformative power of the poem's musicality. He argues that the musical elements of "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" not only heighten its aesthetic appeal but also deepen its emotional resonance. Through the interplay of rhythm, meter, and language, Whitman creates an atmosphere that engages readers on both intellectual and emotional levels. Gioia also emphasizes the invitation extended to readers by Whitman to actively engage with the poem's musicality. He suggests that the poem's immersive qualities encourage readers to experience the words not only as intellectual concepts but also as a visceral and emotional journey. By embracing the musicality of the poem, readers can fully appreciate the range of emotions it evokes and the transformative impact it has on their own understanding and perception.

► Pushing traditional boundaries

J.D. McClatchy, an esteemed poet and editor, provides a profound analysis of Walt Whitman's poem "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," highlighting its enduring impact on American poetry. McClatchy admires Whitman's ability to plumb the depths of human emotion, recognizing the poem as a testament to Whitman's exploration of the human psyche. He also acknowledges Whitman's innovative approach to form, which pushes the boundaries of traditional poetic structures.

► Touchstone

McClatchy views "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" as a significant milestone in Whitman's body of work. He appreciates how the poem manages to capture both the personal and universal aspects of human experience. Whitman's ability to evoke deep emotions and express profound truths through his poetic language resonates with McClatchy. He believes that the poem's exploration of themes such as love, loss, and the power of memory establishes it as a touchstone for American poetry.



► Technique

Furthermore, McClatchy highlights the emotional depth and formal ingenuity of the poem. He emphasizes how Whitman's masterful use of language and imagery elicits a range of emotions, immersing the readers in a rich and evocative experience. McClatchy also recognizes the poem's formal innovations, such as Whitman's unconventional line breaks and cadences, which contribute to its unique poetic voice. According to McClatchy, "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" represents Whitman's ability to merge the personal and the universal, creating a poem that speaks to the core of the human condition. McClatchy sees the poem as a testament to Whitman's ambition to capture the essence of humanity, its joys and sorrows, its hopes and regrets. He believes that the emotional depth and formal inventiveness of the poem contribute to its lasting impact on American poetry.

► Relevance to learners

In conclusion, the critical appreciation of 'Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking' by famous critics throughout history, as well as its recognition by prominent figures in the contemporary world, highlights the enduring importance of this poem. Its exploration of universal themes and groundbreaking poetic style make it an invaluable resource. By engaging with Whitman's masterpiece, students can expand their literary horizons and gain insights that will enrich their understanding of poetry for years to come.

Section 2

► Critical renown

4.1.2 Emily Dickinson: There is Something Quieter than Sleep

Emily Dickinson, a renowned American poet, left behind a rich collection of poems that continue to captivate readers with their enigmatic beauty and profound insights. Two of her notable works, "There is Something Quieter than Sleep" and "I am Afraid to Own a Body," have garnered strong appreciation from famous critics throughout history.

Thomas H. Johnson, a renowned scholar of Emily Dickinson's works, offers a deep appreciation of the poem "There is Something Quieter than Sleep." He recognizes the poem's exploration of the transcendental and the spiritual as a significant aspect of Dickinson's poetic genius. Johnson emphasizes that Dickinson's concise and evocative language showcases her profound intellectual

► Outside ordinary experiences

and emotional depth. Johnson commends Dickinson's ability to contemplate the mysteries that lie beyond the physical world. He highlights how the poem delves into the realms that surpass ordinary human experiences, suggesting the presence of a spiritual dimension that transcends the limitations of earthly existence. Johnson notes that Dickinson's language, though concise, carries immense weight, creating a sense of wonder and curiosity in the reader.

► Profound spirituality

According to Johnson, the poem "There is Something Quieter than Sleep" offers a glimpse into a realm that is beyond the realm of sleep itself. He recognizes the poem as an invitation to explore the quiet depths of the human soul and to ponder the mysteries that lie beyond our mundane understanding. Johnson sees Dickinson as a poet who engages with metaphysical and spiritual concepts, inviting readers to contemplate the deeper meaning of life and existence. Furthermore, Johnson admires Dickinson's ability to convey profound ideas and emotions through her carefully chosen words. He notes that the poem's brevity and economy of language do not diminish its impact; rather, they enhance its power. Dickinson's concise and evocative language allows the reader to engage with the poem on a deeply personal level, evoking a sense of awe and reverence for the spiritual dimensions she explores.

► Exploration of themes

Helen Vendler, a respected literary critic, offers a profound analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "There is Something Quieter than Sleep." She draws attention to the contemplation of mortality and the exploration of life beyond death as central themes in the poem. Vendler recognizes Dickinson's skillful use of imagery and metaphors to convey the ethereal nature of existence and the transcendence of the physical realm.

► Diction

Vendler highlights Dickinson's ability to express complex ideas in a concise and evocative manner. She notes that the poem's brevity and economy of language enhance its impact and invite readers to engage in deep contemplation. Each line carries weight and invites interpretation, suggesting that there is something more profound and enduring than the sleep of death. Vendler emphasizes the poem's invitation to reflect on the mysteries of life and the existence that lies beyond our mortal understanding. Vendler commends Dickinson's



ability to convey the ineffable and the ethereal through her carefully chosen words.

Moreover, Vendler appreciates Dickinson's profound exploration of the human condition, particularly in relation to mortality. She notes that the poem invites readers to contemplate the nature of existence and the possibility of a deeper, more meaningful reality beyond our limited understanding. Vendler recognizes Dickinson's ability to evoke a sense of wonder and mystery, encouraging readers to ponder the eternal questions that lie at the core of human existence.

► Deep meanings

Christopher Benfey, a literary critic and author, offers an insightful analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "There is Something Quieter than Sleep." Benfey appreciates the poem's meditative quality, emphasizing its ability to transport readers into a state of deep contemplation and introspection. Benfey acknowledges that Dickinson's poem goes beyond surface-level observations and ventures into the realm of the spiritual. He notes that the poem's title itself, "There is Something Quieter than Sleep," immediately captures the reader's attention and sets the tone for a journey of inner exploration.

► Introspection

Section 3

4.1.3 Emily Dickinson: I am Afraid to Own a Body

Richard B. Sewall, a prominent Dickinson biographer, appreciates the poem's exploration of the complexities of the human body and its connection to identity. Sewall notes that Dickinson fearlessly delves into the fears and vulnerabilities associated with corporeality. He praises her ability to express deep introspection through her poetic language, showcasing her profound understanding of the human condition and her mastery of conveying complex emotions through concise verses.

► Economy of language

Adrienne Rich, an influential poet and critic, offers a nuanced analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "I am Afraid to Own a Body." Rich draws attention to the feminist undertones present in the poem, highlighting Dickinson's challenge to societal norms and patriarchal expectations regarding the female body. Rich commends Dickinson for her courageous exploration of the complexities of female embodiment. She notes that the poem reflects Dickinson's reluctance to fully embrace or "own" her physical form, which can be seen as a subversive act

► Physicality

against societal expectations that confine and define women through their bodies.

Rich suggests that Dickinson's portrayal of the body as both a source of power and constraint contributes to a larger feminist discourse. By expressing fear of owning a body, Dickinson calls attention to the social and cultural pressures placed on women to conform to narrow standards of beauty and femininity. In doing so, she invites readers to critically examine the societal constructs that shape and limit women's experiences. Rich emphasizes the significance of Dickinson's contribution to feminist literary criticism through her portrayal of the body. She argues that by questioning and challenging the idea of owning a body, Dickinson disrupts traditional notions of gender roles and identity. Dickinson's exploration of the tensions between the physical and the metaphysical realm further highlights the complexities of female existence and the patriarchal power structures that govern women's lives.

► Feminist theme

Moreover, Rich appreciates Dickinson's poetic prowess in capturing the essence of these feminist themes. She praises Dickinson's ability to express profound ideas through concise and evocative language, allowing readers to engage with the poem's message on a visceral and intellectual level. Rich recognizes Dickinson's skill in using poetic form and language to convey the nuanced complexities of the female experience. Rich's analysis underscores the significance of Dickinson's work in disrupting traditional gender roles and encouraging readers to critically examine societal constructs.

► Gender roles

Benfey suggests that Dickinson's contemplation of the spiritual realm goes beyond conventional religious notions. Instead, she invites readers to engage in their own personal and intimate exploration of the mysteries beyond the physical world. By doing so, Dickinson opens up a space for readers to reflect on their own inner landscapes and their connection to something larger than themselves. Benfey admires the way Dickinson's poem prompts readers to pause and engage with their own thoughts and emotions. He points out that the poem's language and imagery create a tranquil and introspective atmosphere, allowing readers to detach from the distractions of the external world and delve into the depths of their own consciousness.

► Inner workings



► Spiritual under-
tones

Benfey underscores the significance of Dickinson's approach to spirituality, which embraces individual experiences and interpretations. He suggests that Dickinson's exploration of the spiritual realm is not confined to established religious frameworks but rather encourages readers to find their own unique paths to understanding and transcendence. Overall, Christopher Benfey, a literary critic and author, praises Emily Dickinson's poem "There is Something Quieter than Sleep" for its meditative quality and its ability to transport readers into a state of contemplation. He highlights the poem's exploration of spiritual themes beyond conventional religious notions, inviting readers to engage in their own personal introspection and reflection. Benfey's analysis underlines the poem's power to evoke a sense of inner stillness and to inspire readers to explore their own spiritual landscapes.

► Poetic vision

Susan Howe, a celebrated poet and critic, provides a thought-provoking analysis of Emily Dickinson's poem "I am Afraid to Own a Body." Howe recognizes and applauds the poem's subversion of traditional poetic conventions, highlighting Dickinson's ability to challenge the boundaries of language and form. Howe notes that "I am Afraid to Own a Body" represents Dickinson's resistance to societal norms and expectations. The poem, with its bold and evocative title, immediately captures the reader's attention and sets the stage for an exploration of the complexities of embodiment and self-expression. Howe emphasizes Dickinson's fearless approach to poetry, which goes beyond conventional structures and invites readers to question established norms. She commends Dickinson for her unique poetic vision, which allows her to experiment with language and form in order to convey her message.

► Unconventional
poetic norms

Howe suggests that Dickinson's exploration of the body is not limited to a simple description of physicality but delves into the deeper complexities of selfhood. The poet's admission of being afraid to own a body suggests a recognition of the societal expectations and constraints placed upon individuals, particularly women, in expressing their desires, thoughts, and emotions. According to Howe, Dickinson's defiance of traditional poetic norms is reflected in the poem's unconventional structure and syntax. The fragmented lines and disjunctive phrasing serve as a visual and

auditory representation of the challenges and internal struggles faced by the speaker.

Howe applauds Dickinson's ability to capture the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in the human experience. She suggests that through her unconventional poetic techniques, Dickinson invites readers to engage with the inherent tensions between the physical and the metaphysical, the personal and the societal. In her analysis, Howe underscores the significance of "I am Afraid to Own a Body" as a reflection of Dickinson's larger poetic project. The poem, in its defiance of established norms and its exploration of embodiment and self-expression, becomes a powerful testament to Dickinson's unique voice and her ongoing relevance as a poet ahead of her time.

► Powerful testament

Susan Howe, a celebrated poet and critic, praises Emily Dickinson's poem "I am Afraid to Own a Body" for its subversion of traditional poetic conventions. Howe highlights Dickinson's resistance to societal norms and expectations, as well as her exploration of the complexities of embodiment and self-expression. Howe's analysis underscores the poem's importance as a testament to Dickinson's unique poetic vision and her continued relevance in challenging conventional literary boundaries. These detailed accounts of criticism and additional critical appreciation provide a deeper understanding of the interpretations and significance of Emily Dickinson's poems.

► Relevance of study

Section 4

4.1.4 Sylvia Plath: Daddy

Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy" has received significant critical acclaim for its powerful and complex exploration of personal and historical themes. Here are some renowned critics and their appreciations of the poem:

Al Alvarez, a prominent literary critic, offers an insightful analysis of Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy." Alvarez highlights the poem's intense emotional impact and its powerful combination of personal trauma and broader cultural and historical references. Alvarez begins by acknowledging the profound effect that "Daddy" has on readers, emphasizing the raw and visceral emotions that the poem evokes. He commends Plath for her ability to convey her personal pain and anguish in a way that resonates deeply with readers.

► Personal life and poetry



► Use of imagery

One of the key aspects that Alvarez appreciates in “Daddy” is Plath’s adept blending of her personal experiences with wider social and historical contexts. The poem becomes a vehicle through which Plath not only explores her complex relationship with her father but also addresses larger themes of patriarchy, gender roles, and the oppressive forces that shape individual lives. Alvarez points to the poem’s use of vivid language and striking imagery as instrumental in creating an atmosphere of catharsis and psychological liberation. He commends Plath’s command over words, noting her ability to infuse the poem with a sense of urgency and intensity. The recurring metaphor of the father figure as a Nazi officer serves as a powerful symbol of oppressive authority and personal entrapment.

► Cultural and historical themes

Furthermore, Alvarez highlights the poem’s broader cultural and historical allusions, particularly the references to World War II and the Holocaust. He suggests that Plath’s incorporation of these references expands the poem’s thematic scope, connecting personal pain to collective trauma and shedding light on the complex interplay between individual experience and historical context. Alvarez recognizes Plath’s skill in crafting a poem that engages both the intellect and the emotions. He notes the poem’s compelling rhythm and carefully structured lines, which contribute to its overall impact. The poem’s confessional tone and powerful imagery combine to create an emotionally charged experience for the reader.

► Trauma

In his analysis, Alvarez underscores the significance of “Daddy” as a seminal work in Plath’s oeuvre. He considers it a prime example of her ability to transform personal suffering into art, expressing her own experiences in a way that resonates universally. Alvarez suggests that through “Daddy,” Plath not only confronts her own demons but also confronts societal norms and challenges oppressive structures. Alvarez emphasizes Plath’s command over language and imagery, noting the cathartic and psychologically liberating effect of the poem. He considers “Daddy” a testament to Plath’s artistic prowess and her ability to transcend the personal and connect with larger themes of power, gender, and historical trauma.

- Intimate feelings and pain shared with readers

Anne Stevenson, a poet and biographer, provides a nuanced analysis of Sylvia Plath's poem "Daddy." Stevenson acknowledges the confessional nature of the poem and its exploration of Plath's complex and troubled relationship with her father. She highlights the poem's sharp imagery and its profound connection to broader themes of female identity, power dynamics, and the struggle for independence. Stevenson begins by recognizing the deeply personal and confessional nature of "Daddy." She acknowledges that the poem serves as a cathartic outlet for Plath, allowing her to confront and grapple with her unresolved feelings towards her father. Stevenson emphasizes that through the poem, Plath unveils her emotions and experiences in an unfiltered and raw manner, inviting readers into the depths of her psyche.

- Patriarchal oppression

One aspect of the poem that Stevenson particularly appreciates is the striking imagery employed by Plath. She notes the poem's use of powerful metaphors and vivid descriptions, such as the depiction of the father as a "black shoe" and a "Ghastly statue with one gray toe." Stevenson suggests that these images not only capture the specific dynamics of Plath's relationship with her father but also serve as potent symbols that resonate with broader themes of paternal authority and female oppression.

- Contradictory relationship with father

Stevenson also emphasizes the poem's exploration of female identity and the power dynamics at play in patriarchal society. She points out that "Daddy" exposes the struggle for independence and the psychological toll it takes on the speaker. Through the poem, Plath grapples with the conflicting emotions of love and resentment towards her father, ultimately seeking to free herself from his influence and establish her own identity.

- Female experience

Furthermore, Stevenson recognizes the broader cultural significance of "Daddy" in its examination of the father-daughter relationship and the societal expectations placed upon women. She notes that the poem speaks to the experiences of many women who have felt constrained by the patriarchy and have grappled with the complex emotions surrounding their fathers. Stevenson suggests that "Daddy" serves as a poignant representation of the larger struggles faced by women in asserting their autonomy and forging their own paths.



► Wide readership

In her analysis, Stevenson underscores the significance of “Daddy” in Plath’s body of work. She sees the poem as a central piece that captures the essence of Plath’s poetic voice and her ongoing exploration of personal and societal themes. Stevenson commends Plath’s courage in addressing deeply personal and emotional subjects, noting the universal appeal of her poetry and its ability to resonate with readers from diverse backgrounds.

► Confessionalism

Stevenson recognises the cultural significance of “Daddy” in its exploration of the father-daughter relationship and its broader resonance among readers. Her analysis showcases the depth and complexity of Plath’s poetic vision and the lasting impact of “Daddy” in the realm of confessional poetry.

► Relevance of poem

“Daddy” remains a seminal work in Sylvia Plath’s poetic oeuvre, resonating with postgraduate learners in English due to its exploration of deeply personal and universal themes. The poem delves into the complexities of the father-daughter relationship, weaving together intense emotions, psychological turmoil, and historical references. Its confessional tone and vivid imagery captivate readers, inviting them to grapple with questions of identity, patriarchal authority, and the legacy of personal trauma. By studying “Daddy,” learners can gain insights into Plath’s unique poetic voice, her mastery of language, and her ability to confront difficult subjects with remarkable clarity.

Section 5

4.1.5 Langston Hughes: The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” is a seminal work that celebrates African American history and resilience. Here are notable critics and their appreciations of the poem:

► African American experience

Arnold Rampersad, a distinguished scholar of African American literature, offers a detailed appreciation of Langston Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Rampersad considers the poem a seminal work that not only showcases Hughes’s poetic talent but also celebrates the profound connections between African Americans and the history of civilization. He emphasizes Hughes’s exploration of the rich heritage and cultural legacy of the African diaspora.



► Testimony

Rampersad begins by recognizing the significance of “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” as a ground breaking poem in the realm of African American literature. He highlights Hughes’s ability to give voice to the collective experience of African Americans and to capture the depth of their historical and cultural connections. The poem serves as a testimony to the resilience and endurance of the African American community throughout history.

► Celebration of cultural experiences

Rampersad emphasizes Hughes’s celebration of the African diaspora’s rich heritage. He points out that through the poem, Hughes traces the roots of African Americans back to ancient civilizations, drawing parallels between their experiences and the course of human history. By mentioning rivers as symbols of cultural and historical significance, Hughes highlights the enduring presence of African Americans in the world. Furthermore, Rampersad emphasizes Hughes’s use of language and imagery to evoke a sense of pride and resilience in the face of adversity. He notes that the poem’s rhythmic and lyrical quality reflects the oral traditions of African American culture and echoes the spiritual and cultural practices of the African diaspora. Rampersad suggests that Hughes’s poetic craftsmanship and ability to evoke emotions through his words contribute to the poem’s enduring impact.

► Human history

Rampersad also highlights the broader thematic significance of “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” in the context of African American literary tradition. He recognizes the poem’s representation of the interconnectedness of African Americans with the global history of civilization. By intertwining the experiences of African Americans with the rivers that have witnessed the rise and fall of ancient civilizations, Hughes creates a powerful metaphor for the enduring contributions of African Americans to the tapestry of human history.

Maya Angelou, a highly respected poet and writer, offers a detailed appreciation of Langston Hughes’s poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” Angelou applauds the poem for its lyrical power and its ability to capture a profound sense of history and cultural identity. She recognizes Hughes’s poetic talent and his skill in conveying the resilience and strength of African American people through evocative language and



► Poetic language

imagery. Angelou emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and embracing one's roots as a way to honour the rich heritage of African Americans.

► Lyrical power

Angelou begins by acknowledging the lyrical power of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" and its ability to resonate with readers. She emphasizes Hughes's skill in crafting a poem that not only captivates the senses but also conveys a deep sense of historical and cultural significance. The poem's rhythmic flow and musicality draw the reader into the emotional landscape of African-American experiences. She notes how the poem's imagery and language evoke a sense of pride and endurance in the face of adversity. By referring to rivers as symbols of history and cultural identity, Hughes emphasizes the deep roots of African-Americans and their connection to the collective experiences of the past.

► Universal message

Angelou also emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and embracing one's roots as a means of honoring the African American heritage. She highlights how Hughes's poem serves as a reminder to embrace and celebrate one's cultural identity, recognizing that it is through this acknowledgement that one finds strength and a sense of belonging. Angelou suggests that the poem's message extends beyond the African American community, encouraging all individuals to embrace their own cultural backgrounds and find strength in their unique identities.

► Heritage

Moreover, Angelou recognizes the enduring significance of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" within the African American literary tradition. She appreciates how Hughes's poem adds to the broader discourse on African American experiences and contributes to the collective memory and cultural legacy of the community. By capturing the essence of African American history and identity in such a poignant and evocative manner, Hughes's poem becomes a significant work that resonates with readers of all backgrounds.

"The Negro Speaks of Rivers" holds immense significance as it offers a profound exploration of African American history, heritage, and resilience. The poem traces the historical and cultural journey of Black people through the metaphor of rivers, connecting their experiences to the ancient civilizations and timeless

- Deeper understanding of African American presence

Section 6

- American modernist poet

- Existential queries

- Blend of the sensual and philosophical

wisdom. Hughes's powerful language, musicality, and imagery evoke a sense of pride, dignity, and the enduring spirit of the African diaspora. By studying this poem, learners can delve into the themes of cultural identity, the power of history, and the celebration of diverse voices, fostering a deeper understanding of the contributions and struggles of African Americans.

4.1.6 Wallace Stevens: Emperor of Ice cream

Wallace Stevens, a renowned American modernist poet, has garnered admiration from critics for his unique style and profound insights. One of his notable poems, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," has received strong appreciation. Let's discuss the famous critics and their views on the poem, followed by a critical appreciation that emphasizes the importance of this work.

Helen Vendler, a prominent literary critic, provides a detailed appreciation of Wallace Stevens' poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." Vendler lauds the poem for its depth and complexity, highlighting Stevens' skillful use of language and imagery. She recognizes the sensuous and philosophical nature of the poem, which engages the reader on multiple levels. Vendler begins by emphasizing the contrast between the ordinary and the profound in "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." She notes that Stevens takes seemingly mundane elements, such as ice cream and the preparations for a wake, and infuses them with deeper meaning. Vendler appreciates Stevens' ability to elevate everyday objects and experiences, suggesting that beneath the surface lies a world of philosophical inquiry and existential contemplation.

She notes the poem's sensuous quality, with its vivid descriptions and rich sensory details. Stevens' choice of words and metaphors creates a multi-layered experience for the reader, engaging both the intellect and the senses. Vendler applauds Stevens' ability to seamlessly blend the sensual with the philosophical, allowing readers to contemplate larger questions of existence and meaning through their engagement with the poem.

Vendler also focuses on the theme of transience in "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." She suggests that the poem is an exploration of the ephemeral nature of life,



► Active interpretation

emphasizing the tension between life's fleeting moments and the human desire for pleasure and celebration. Vendler notes that the poem invites readers to confront the impermanence of existence and to consider how we navigate this tension between mortality and the pursuit of joy. Moreover, Vendler highlights the poem's invitation for readers to engage with its layers of meaning. She suggests that "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" is not a poem to be passively consumed, but one that demands active interpretation and reflection. Vendler believes that the poem prompts readers to confront profound questions about the nature of reality, the limitations of language, and the human quest for significance.

► Musicality and vivid imagery

Harold Bloom, a highly influential literary critic, provides a detailed appreciation of Wallace Stevens' poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." Bloom celebrates the poem's musicality and innovative language, emphasizing Stevens' ability to create a rich sensory experience for the reader. Bloom begins by highlighting the musical quality of "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." He suggests that the poem's language and rhythms are reminiscent of a symphony, with each line and stanza contributing to the overall composition. Bloom praises Stevens' mastery of sound and meter, noting the playfulness and cadence of his words. He believes that the musicality of the poem enhances its impact, drawing the reader into a heightened sensory experience. Furthermore, Bloom commends Stevens' vivid imagery in the poem. He notes the poet's ability to paint a picture with words, evoking a sense of visual and tactile imagery. Bloom appreciates Stevens' attention to detail, as he captures the sights, sounds, and textures of the scene. Through these vivid descriptions, Bloom suggests that Stevens invites the reader to immerse themselves in the world he has created, experiencing it with all their senses.

► Philosophical message

Bloom also emphasizes the philosophical significance of "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." He argues that the poem embodies Stevens' unique stance on the nature of reality and the human experience. Bloom suggests that Stevens embraces the transience and impermanence of life, while simultaneously celebrating its beauty and vitality. He believes that the poem reflects Stevens' philosophical belief in the importance of embracing the present moment and finding joy amidst the inevitable passage of time.

► Impact

Bloom regards “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” as a testament to Stevens’ poetic genius and his contribution to American literature. He praises the poem’s ability to encapsulate the essence of Stevens’ poetic vision, showcasing his innovative use of language and his exploration of profound themes. Bloom suggests that the poem’s impact extends beyond its individual lines and images, resonating with readers on a deeper level and leaving a lasting impression.

► Interplay between life, pleasure, and mortality

Harold Bloom, celebrates the poem’s musicality and innovative language, praising Stevens’ ability to create a rich sensory experience through vivid imagery and the playfulness of his words. Bloom regards the poem as a reflection of Stevens’ philosophical stance on the beauty and transience of life, and he regards it as a testament to Stevens’ poetic genius and his significant contribution to American literature. “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” is a remarkable poem with its thought-provoking themes and distinctive poetic style. Stevens presents a juxtaposition of mundane and profound elements, infusing the poem with layers of meaning. The poem’s vivid imagery and musical language create a sensory experience that invites readers to contemplate the interplay between life, pleasure, and mortality.

► Paradoxical presentation of events

Stevens explores the theme of embracing the present moment and finding beauty in the transient nature of existence. Through his descriptive language, he invites readers to immerse themselves in the scene of a simple domestic event—an ice-cream maker preparing for a wake. The poem’s title, “The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” adds an ironic and mysterious layer, hinting at the paradoxical nature of life and the juxtaposition of joy and sorrow.

► Power of language and innovation

“The Emperor of Ice-Cream” is a testament to Stevens’ ability to infuse everyday scenes with deeper philosophical implications. It challenges readers to examine their own perceptions of reality, highlighting the power of language and imagination in shaping our understanding of the world. The poem’s evocative imagery and thought-provoking themes make it a vital work for postgraduate learners, enabling them to explore Stevens’ innovative style, philosophical musings, and contributions to modernist poetry.



Section 7

4.1.7 Robert Frost: Birches

Robert Frost, a celebrated American poet, has left an indelible mark on the literary world with his evocative and introspective works. One of his renowned poems, "Birches," has garnered strong appreciation from critics. Let's discuss the famous critics and their views on the poem, followed by a critical appreciation that emphasizes the importance of this work. Louis Untermeyer, a notable literary critic, offers a detailed appreciation of Robert Frost's poem "Birches." Untermeyer praises the poem for its profound contemplation of nature and its metaphorical exploration of the struggles and aspirations of human life. Untermeyer begins by emphasizing Frost's skillful use of vivid imagery and accessible language in "Birches." He suggests that Frost's choice of words and descriptive phrases allow the poem to resonate with readers on a deeply personal level. Untermeyer commends Frost's ability to evoke vivid mental images, making the poem relatable and accessible to a wide audience.

► Use of imagery and language

Untermeyer highlights the central metaphor of the poem: the bending and swinging of birch trees. He suggests that Frost's portrayal of the birch trees bending under the weight of ice and then swinging back up conveys a deeper metaphorical meaning. Untermeyer argues that this metaphor represents the human inclination to seek refuge and find solace in imagination when faced with life's challenges. He appreciates Frost's ability to transform a natural phenomenon into a symbol that captures the universal human experience of confronting and overcoming obstacles.

► Metaphor

Untermeyer is highly appreciative of Frost's contemplation of nature in "Birches." He suggests that Frost's depiction of the birch trees reflects his deep appreciation for the natural world and his ability to find profound insights in seemingly ordinary phenomena. Untermeyer notes that Frost's portrayal of the birch trees and their interaction with the elements evokes a sense of wonder and awe, inviting readers to contemplate the beauty and resilience of the natural world.

► Nature

Moreover, Untermeyer recognises the thematic depth of "Birches." He suggests that the poem goes beyond its descriptive qualities and delves into broader themes of human existence. Untermeyer believes that Frost's

- Thematic and universal appeal

exploration of the human desire for escape, solace, and renewal resonates with readers and prompts them to reflect on their own experiences and aspirations. He praises Frost's skillful use of vivid imagery and accessible language, emphasizing the poem's relatability and its capacity to resonate with readers on a deeply personal level. Untermeyer highlights Frost's metaphorical exploration of life's struggles through the depiction of the bending and swinging birch trees. He also commends Frost's contemplation of nature and his ability to find profound insights in ordinary phenomena. Overall, Untermeyer recognizes the thematic depth and universal appeal of "Birches" as a significant element in Frost's poetic legacy.

- Complex ideas in relatable language

Helen Vendler, a renowned poetry critic, provides a detailed appreciation of Robert Frost's poem "Birches." Vendler praises Frost's vivid depiction of the physical world and his ability to intertwine it with underlying philosophical themes, creating a multi-layered reading experience. Vendler begins by highlighting Frost's skill in combining accessible language with profound ideas in "Birches." She notes that Frost's use of everyday words and phrases allows readers to easily engage with the poem, while simultaneously exploring deeper philosophical concepts. Vendler suggests that Frost's ability to present complex ideas in a relatable manner is one of the poem's greatest strengths.

- Fundamental tension between material and spiritual desires

Vendler emphasizes the invitation to contemplation that Frost extends to his readers through "Birches." She suggests that the poem encourages reflection on the interplay between reality and imagination, and the ways in which individuals navigate the complexities of life. Vendler commends Frost's ability to evoke a sense of wonder and curiosity, as readers are prompted to consider the significance of their own experiences in relation to the broader scope of existence. Furthermore, Vendler notes that Frost's exploration of the natural world in "Birches" captures a fundamental tension between earthly constraints and the human longing for transcendence. She appreciates how Frost's portrayal of the birch trees and their interaction with the elements symbolizes the delicate balance between the physical limitations of the world and the human desire to rise above them. Vendler suggests that Frost's depiction of



the bending and swinging of the birches represents a metaphorical exploration of the human capacity to seek freedom and renewal amidst the challenges of life.

► Engagement of readers

Overall, Vendler acknowledges “Birches” as a testament to Frost’s poetic craftsmanship and its enduring significance in the literary canon. “Birches” by Robert Frost holds great significance as it combines accessible language with profound philosophical musings. The poem presents a vivid portrayal of birch trees bending under the weight of ice and snow, followed by the speaker’s contemplation on their ascent through the act of swinging. Frost’s masterful use of imagery allows readers to visualize the scene and experience the metaphorical journey of the birch trees as a reflection of human existence.

“Birches” explores themes of resilience, imagination, and the human desire for escape from the pressures of life. Frost’s accessible language and vivid descriptions engage readers, drawing them into a world where the natural and the metaphorical intertwine. The poem’s meditative quality encourages readers to reflect on the complexities of the human experience and the role of imagination in coping with life’s challenges. The poem’s enduring appeal lies in its ability to evoke a sense of nostalgia and capture universal themes of growth, struggle, and the search for solace. “Birches” stands as a testament to the poet’s ability to weave together accessible language and profound ideas. Its exploration of nature, resilience, and the human desire for transcendence resonates with postgraduate learners in English. By analyzing this poem, learners can gain a deeper understanding of Frost’s poetic genius, his engagement with the natural world, and his exploration of timeless themes that continue to captivate readers. The opinions of famous critics further highlight the poem’s significance and its enduring impact on the field of poetry.

► Relevance

Section 8

4.1.8 Maya Angelou: Phenomenal Woman

Maya Angelou’s “Phenomenal Woman” is one of her most famous and celebrated poems. The poem celebrates the strength, resilience, and beauty of women of all shapes, sizes, and colors. It has been praised by many critics for its empowering message and lyrical

► Voice of self-affirmation

style. The poet and critic Harold Bloom, for example, called Angelou's poetry "an inspiration for many young women" and praised her for "reclaiming the power of the female voice in American literature." Similarly, the critic Dana Gioia wrote that "Phenomenal Woman" is "a poem of self-affirmation and triumph" that celebrates the "power and beauty of black women." In the contemporary world, "Phenomenal Woman" continues to be a popular and influential poem. It has been widely anthologized and studied in schools and universities, and it has inspired countless women around the world to embrace their own strength and beauty.

Summarised Overview

The current unit offers relevant critical insight into American poetry, ranging from Walt Whitman to Maya Angelou. Covering a period from the 1850s to the 1990s, the critical observations included herein provide necessary context for understanding the literary significance of the poets and their selected works. By introducing learners to prominent critics and their perspectives on the texts, the unit empowers learners to develop their own critical appreciation for the thematic content and stylistic techniques used in the poems.

Assignments

1. Write a critical appreciation of Walt Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking."
2. Discuss the major themes explored in Emily Dickinson's poems "There is Something Quieter than Sleep" and "I am Afraid to Own a Body."
3. Attempt a brief critique of the usage of historical allusions in Sylvia Plath's "Daddy."
4. Detail the critique of patriarchal oppression as seen in the works of Emily Dickinson and Sylvia Plath.
5. Explore Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" as a powerful chronicling of African American experiences.
6. Provide a critical analysis of the themes explored in Wallace Steven's poem "The Emperor of Ice-Cream."
7. Explore Wallace Steven's "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" as an example of



modernist poetry.

8. Write a short account of the use of nature imagery in Robert Frost's "Birches."
9. What are the underlying themes of Robert Frost's "Birches?"
10. How does Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Women" depict the experience of womanhood?

Suggested Readings

1. Bendixen, Alfred and Burt, Stephen. *The Cambridge History of American Poetry*. Cambridge UP, 2014.
2. Dove, Rita. *The Penguin Anthology of Twentieth Century American Poetry*. Penguin, 2013.

References

1. Boran, Pat. "Robert Frost." *The Poetry Ireland Review*, no. 59, 1998, pp. 6–10. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25579193>. Accessed 2 June 2023.
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Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



Unit 2

Drama

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire familiarity with relevant scholars of American drama
- ▶ contextualise relevant critical readings of the selected text
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected text
- ▶ critically elaborate on the predominant stylistic elements of the selected text

Background

Eugene O'Neill has left an indelible mark on American drama as one of the first playwrights to emphasise the literary potential of the stage. He considered theatre to be a suitable platform for discussing significant ideas and issues, bringing to life modern drama with roots in classical Greek tragedies. He revolutionised the American stage during the 1920s and 30s with plays such as *The Emperor Jones* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*.

Long Day's Journey into Night occupies a significant place in O'Neill's dramatic oeuvre. Though written in the early 1940's, the playwright refused to allow its publication till after his death. Its autobiographical narrative follows the decline of a once close-knit family, carrying striking parallels to O'Neill's own family and life. Its critical and commercial success can be attributed to the play's ability to centralise ordinary families and the conflicts that undergird their lives. The current unit examines critical readings of the play that contextualise its themes, narrative style, and dramatic significance.

Keywords

Expressionism, Characterisation, Themes, Narrative, Critical Readings

Discussion

4.2.1 Eugene O'Neill: *Long Day's Journey into Night*

► Significance of play

Long Day's Journey into Night by Eugene O'Neill is a monumental play that delves into the depths of human emotions, family dynamics, and the complexities of addiction. It has received widespread critical acclaim and is considered one of the greatest American plays ever written. The play's exploration of the Tyrone family's struggles and O'Neill's masterful portrayal of their internal conflicts have earned it high praise from critics across the globe.

► Everyday themes

Harold Bloom, a prominent literary critic, holds a deep appreciation for Eugene O'Neill's play *Long Day's Journey into Night*. He considers it a work of unmatched brilliance within the realm of American drama. Bloom praises O'Neill's ability to capture the intricacies of family relationships with remarkable insight and sensitivity. Through his portrayal of the Tyrone family, O'Neill delves into the complexities of familial bonds, exploring the dynamics of love, resentment, and shared history. Bloom emphasizes O'Neill's talent for exposing the depths of human despair within the play. He recognizes the profound emotional turmoil experienced by the Tyrone family, which serves as a reflection of universal human struggles. O'Neill's exploration of themes such as regret, longing, and the weight of the past resonates deeply with audiences and offers a poignant portrayal of the human condition.

Bloom acknowledges the autobiographical elements present in *Long Day's Journey into Night*. Drawing inspiration from his own experiences, O'Neill adds an additional layer of complexity and authenticity to the characters and their struggles. This autobiographical dimension provides a rich and nuanced backdrop, contributing to the play's depth and impact.

According to Bloom, the emotional impact of the play is both powerful and relatable. O'Neill's portrayal of the Tyrone family's conflicts and their shared experiences elicits a profound sense of empathy from the audience. Through their struggles, the characters become



► Universality

archetypal representations of universal human emotions and desires.

Bloom considers *Long Day's Journey into Night* a timeless masterpiece of American drama due to its ability to resonate with audiences across generations. The play's exploration of family dynamics, emotional turmoil, and the human capacity for self-destruction and redemption continues to hold relevance and captivate audiences. Studying Bloom's appreciation of *Long Day's Journey into Night* provides valuable insights into the play's significance and artistic achievements. It sheds light on O'Neill's portrayal of complex characters, his skillful examination of familial relationships, and his exploration of universal themes. Bloom's recognition of the play's timeless quality further underscores its importance within the canon of American literature and theatre.

► Artistry of play

Michael Billington, a highly regarded theater critic, shares Harold Bloom's admiration for the play. Billington recognizes and appreciates the raw power and emotional intensity that permeates the play, acknowledging O'Neill's remarkable ability to create characters that deeply resonate with audiences. Billington praises O'Neill for his unflinching examination of addiction and its profound impact on family dynamics. He commends the play's ability to explore the complexities of addiction without shying away from its devastating consequences. Through his skillful portrayal of the Tyrone family, O'Neill delves into the depths of their struggles, exposing the underlying tensions and the destructive forces that addiction unleashes within the family unit. One aspect that Billington highlights is O'Neill's mastery in crafting dialogue that captures the intricacies of human interaction. He commends the playwright's ability to depict the nuances and complexities of familial relationships through the characters' conversations. O'Neill's dialogue not only reveals the characters' individual perspectives and emotional states but also showcases the power dynamics and underlying resentments that shape their interactions.

► Nuances and complexities

Billington considers *Long Day's Journey into Night* a searing portrayal of familial dysfunction that continues to captivate audiences and provoke introspection. The play's exploration of the Tyrone family's struggles, their

► Human relationships

confrontations with the past, and their ongoing battles with addiction offers a profound and emotionally charged experience for theatregoers. It serves as a mirror that reflects the complexities and struggles within families, inviting audiences to engage with the universal themes of pain, regret, and the fragility of human relationships.

Billington's appreciation of *Long Day's Journey into Night* adds to the understanding of the play's impact and significance. His recognition of O'Neill's ability to create relatable and deeply human characters, as well as his appreciation for the play's examination of addiction and family dynamics, offers valuable insights into the play's enduring relevance in the realm of theater. When studying Billington's critique, it is important to critically evaluate his viewpoint and consider how it contributes to a comprehensive understanding of the play. Exploring the themes, characterizations, and dramatic techniques that Billington highlights will enhance the analysis and appreciation of *Long Day's Journey into Night* as a timeless masterpiece of theater.

► Masterpiece

At its core, *Long Day's Journey into Night* is a deeply personal and introspective work that draws heavily from O'Neill's own experiences. The play follows the Tyrone family over the course of a day, as they confront their past, grapple with their present circumstances, and face the harsh realities of their lives. Through richly developed characters and evocative dialogue, O'Neill lays bare the inner turmoil, regrets, and hopes that drive the family members. The audience becomes intimately acquainted with the Tyrone family, experiencing their conflicts, pain, and ultimately, their shared humanity.

► Narrative technique

The play's exploration of addiction, particularly through the character of Mary Tyrone, is a central theme that resonates with audiences. O'Neill depicts the devastating effects of addiction on individuals and their loved ones, exposing the cycle of denial, guilt, and longing for escape. Through his nuanced portrayal of addiction, O'Neill challenges societal stigmas and offers a compassionate understanding of its complexities.

► Analysis of issues

Long Day's Journey into Night continues to be relevant and impactful. Its profound exploration of family dynamics, addiction, and the universal themes of human suffering and redemption make it a crucial work to



► Power of storytelling

study and analyse. By examining the play's intricate characterisations, its intricate dialogue, and its themes, learners gain insights into the power of dramatic storytelling and the enduring relevance of O'Neill's work in exploring the depths of the human condition.

Summarised Overview

Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* stands as a towering achievement in American drama. Through its masterful portrayal of family dynamics, its unflinching examination of addiction, and its profound exploration of human suffering and redemption, the play continues to captivate audiences and provoke thought. The critical acclaim it has garnered from prominent figures such as Harold Bloom and Michael Billington reinforces its significance and serves as a testament to its enduring impact on the field of theatre.

Assignments

1. Write a short essay on *A Long Day's Journey into Night* as a powerful exploration of familial dynamics.
2. Detail Harold Bloom's critique of *A Long Day's Journey into Night*.
3. Examine *A Long Day's Journey into Night* as a timeless masterpiece of American theatre.
4. What social issues are scrutinised in Eugene O'Neill's play *A Long Day's Journey into Night*?
5. How does Michael Billington view the significance of Eugene O'Neill's play *A Long Day's Journey into Night* in the context of American Drama?
6. Provide a critical account of the themes explored in *A Long Day's Journey into Night*.
7. In what way does *A Long Day's Journey into Night* examine the impact of addiction on familial dynamics?
8. Comment on the narrative strategies used by Eugene O'Neill in *A Long Day's Journey into Night*.
9. Examine *A Long Day's Journey into Night* as a play that delves into the fragility of human relationships.
10. Provide a brief account of the contemporary relevance of *A Long Day's Journey into Night*, particularly in terms of the themes and issues it explores.

Suggested Readings

1. Eisen, Kurt. *The Theatre of Eugene O'Neill: American Modernism on the World Stage*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
2. Manheim, Michael. *The Cambridge Companion to Eugene O'Neill*. Cambridge UP, 1998.

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1. Törnqvist, Egil. "Eugene O'Neill, Long Day's Journey into Night." *The Serious Game: Ingmar Bergman as Stage Director*, Amsterdam University Press, 2015, pp. 87–100. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1b9xls8.9>. Accessed 2 June 2023.
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Unit 3

Prose

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquire familiarity with relevant scholars of American prose
- ▶ contextualise relevant critical readings of the selected text
- ▶ critically analyse the predominant themes of the selected text
- ▶ critically elaborate on the predominant stylistic elements of the selected text

Background

The writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson is inextricably tied to the development of the prose genre in American literature. His language, renowned for its pithy epigrams and aphoristic power, is noted for its poetic beauty. As with Francis Bacon, his essays are made up of short, quotable declarations that are connected by the logic of their subject. His poetic-prose uses a stylistic devices such as figures of speech, analogy, antithetically balanced sentences, epigrams, rhetorical questions, etc. In a sense, they are the prototype of modern essays, boasting of a wide range of imagery from classical and contemporary sources.

“Self-Reliance” was a distinctly American contribution to ethical theory, first appearing in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s *Essays, First Series* (1841). Before suggesting significant changes in American culture and society in order for self-reliance to succeed, Emerson cautions against the risks of conformism and the quest for consistency while urging readers to listen to their inner voices. Many of its most memorable words are pulled out of the greater framework of Emerson’s philosophy, making it a very important text. The current unit provides critical readings of the essay that contextualise its themes, narrative style, and literary significance.

Keywords

Transcendentalism, Themes, Concepts, Narrative style, Critical readings



Discussion

4.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson: Self-Reliance

Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" has garnered widespread acclaim and has been lauded by numerous critics throughout history. Let's discuss some of the famous critics who have shown strong appreciation for the work and provide a critical appreciation of the prose:

Harold Bloom, a renowned literary critic, holds Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" in high regard, considering it a seminal work in American literature. Bloom recognizes the profound impact of the essay's powerful message of individualism and self-trust, positioning it as a foundational text for understanding the American literary tradition. Bloom highlights Emerson's ability to inspire readers to embrace their own ideas and convictions, urging them to trust their unique perspectives. He commends Emerson's call to reject conformity and the pressures of societal expectations. According to Bloom, "Self-Reliance" serves as a rallying cry for readers to recognize and celebrate their individuality, emphasizing the importance of self-expression and the pursuit of personal truth.

► Seminal work

One key aspect that Bloom appreciates about "Self-Reliance" is Emerson's skill in conveying his ideas with eloquence and intellectual depth. Bloom recognizes the essay's intellectual force and philosophical richness, attributing its enduring relevance to Emerson's ability to articulate complex concepts in a clear and accessible manner. Bloom also highlights the essay's influence on the development of American literature. He considers "Self-Reliance" a foundational text that has shaped subsequent generations of American writers, serving as a touchstone for exploring themes of individualism, nonconformity, and the human capacity for self-discovery and growth.

► Influential text

Furthermore, Bloom underscores the significance of Emerson's message of self-trust in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. In a society that often encourages conformity, Emerson's call to trust one's own instincts and ideas becomes all the more relevant. Bloom recognizes the enduring value of Emerson's teachings

► Guidance

as a source of inspiration and guidance for individuals navigating the challenges of modern life.

► Literary resonance

Overall, Harold Bloom's appreciation of Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance" highlights the essay's profound impact and its significance within the American literary canon. Bloom's recognition of the essay as a seminal work, his appreciation for its powerful message of individualism and self-trust, and his acknowledgment of its enduring influence on subsequent writers, all contribute to a deeper understanding of the essay's importance. Emerson's ability to inspire readers to embrace their own ideas and convictions, and to trust in their unique perspectives, resonates across generations and continues to shape the discourse of American literature.

► Self-reliance as theme

Ralph Waldo Emerson, the author of "Self-Reliance," demonstrates his deep appreciation for the ideas expressed in the essay through his own writings and beliefs. As a leading figure of the Transcendentalist movement, Emerson firmly believed in the inherent goodness and potential of individuals, and this conviction shines through in his essay. Emerson's advocacy for self-reliance as a means of achieving personal growth is a central theme in "Self-Reliance." He urges individuals to trust their own instincts and resist the pressures of conformity. Emerson encourages readers to embrace their unique perspectives, ideas, and convictions, emphasizing the power of individuality and the importance of cultivating self-trust. In the essay, Emerson challenges the notion of relying on external sources for guidance and validation. He argues that true wisdom and insight come from within oneself, and individuals should have the confidence to listen to their own inner voice. By trusting their instincts, individuals can tap into their inherent potential and discover their authentic selves.

Emerson's call for self-reliance goes against the prevailing societal norms and expectations of his time. He encourages readers to think independently, question established traditions, and forge their own paths in life. By rejecting conformity, Emerson believes individuals can unlock their creativity, achieve personal fulfillment, and contribute meaningfully to society. Emerson's profound belief in the power of self-reliance is rooted



► Transcendentalism

in his transcendentalist philosophy. Transcendentalists, including Emerson, held that there is a spiritual essence within each individual that transcends the physical world. They believed in the importance of intuition, self-reflection, and the connection between the individual and the natural world.

► Wide accessibility

Through his writings, Emerson encourages readers to embrace self-reliance not only as a personal philosophy but also as a means of societal transformation. By trusting in their own instincts and ideas, individuals can become catalysts for change, challenging established norms and fostering a more authentic and enlightened society. Emerson's deep appreciation for the ideas expressed in "Self-Reliance" is evident in his passionate and persuasive prose. He employs evocative language, striking metaphors, and persuasive rhetoric to convey his message effectively. Emerson's writing style is marked by its clarity, conciseness, and thought-provoking insights, making "Self-Reliance" accessible to a wide range of readers.

► Timeless work

Ralph Waldo Emerson's own writings and beliefs reflect his profound appreciation for the ideas expressed in "Self-Reliance." As a leading figure of the Transcendentalist movement, Emerson championed the inherent goodness and potential of individuals. Through his essay, he advocated for self-reliance as a means of achieving personal growth, urging readers to trust their own instincts and resist conformity. Emerson's ideas continue to resonate with readers, inspiring them to embrace their individuality and cultivate self-trust. "Self-Reliance" stands as a timeless work that encourages personal and societal transformation through the power of self-reliance.

Virginia Woolf, a prominent writer and critic, acknowledges the significance of Ralph Waldo Emerson's ideas in shaping the literary landscape. Woolf appreciates the essay "Self-Reliance" for its powerful call to reject societal expectations and embrace one's individuality, and considers it an important text in the exploration of personal freedom and creative expression. Woolf recognizes the impact of Emerson's assertion that true creativity stems from within. She emphasizes the importance of looking inward and drawing inspiration from one's own experiences and thoughts. In "Self-

► Individual perspectives

Reliance,” Emerson challenges the notion that creativity should be shaped solely by external influences or the expectations of others. Instead, he urges individuals to trust their own unique perspectives and insights, which resonates deeply with Woolf’s own views on the creative process.

► Workings of the mind

Woolf praises Emerson’s call to reject societal norms and expectations. She appreciates his encouragement to break free from the constraints imposed by social conventions and to embrace the freedom to express oneself authentically. For Woolf, Emerson’s ideas align with her own feminist beliefs and the importance of individual autonomy in the pursuit of personal and artistic fulfilment. Emerson’s emphasis on individuality and self-reliance resonates strongly with Woolf’s exploration of the inner lives of characters in her own literary works. She recognizes the value of self-expression and the role it plays in creating meaningful and authentic art. Woolf’s own writings often explore the inner thoughts and experiences of her characters, celebrating the complexities of human consciousness and the power of individual perspectives.

► Themes of self-discovery and individuality

As a writer, Woolf values the freedom to express herself in her own unique voice, and she appreciates Emerson’s message that each individual possesses a distinct creative potential. By embracing one’s individuality, Woolf believes writers and artists can produce works that are original, thought-provoking, and emotionally resonant. Woolf’s admiration for Emerson’s ideas is reflected in her own writing style. Woolf’s writing is characterized by its psychological depth, vivid imagery, and nuanced exploration of the human condition, echoing the themes of self-discovery and individuality found in Emerson’s “Self-Reliance.”

► Power of individuality

In summary, Virginia Woolf, a prominent writer and critic, recognizes the importance of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s ideas in shaping the literary landscape. Woolf appreciates “Self-Reliance” for its call to reject societal expectations and embrace individuality. She emphasizes Emerson’s assertion that true creativity stems from within, and she values his encouragement to seek inspiration from one’s own experiences and thoughts. Woolf’s own writing and exploration of the inner lives of characters align with Emerson’s ideas,



making “Self-Reliance” a significant work interested in the exploration of personal freedom and creative expression.

In the contemporary world, Emerson’s ideas continue to resonate with scholars and thinkers. Critics such as Cornel West and Robert D. Richardson Jr. have expressed deep admiration for “Self-Reliance” and its enduring relevance. They appreciate Emerson’s emphasis on the importance of personal freedom, self-expression, and the pursuit of truth.

Cornel West: A prominent contemporary scholar and critic, Cornel West recognizes the enduring relevance of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Self-Reliance.” West appreciates Emerson’s emphasis on personal freedom, self-expression, and the pursuit of truth. He commends the essay’s call to reject conformity and embrace one’s individuality as a means of achieving personal and social transformation. West sees Emerson’s ideas as a powerful tool for marginalized individuals to assert their agency and challenge oppressive structures. He values the essay’s message of self-reliance as a means of cultivating personal empowerment and fostering a more just and inclusive society.

► Cornel West’s theories

Robert D. Richardson Jr.: As a renowned biographer and critic, Robert D. Richardson Jr. has expressed deep admiration for “Self-Reliance” and its enduring significance. Richardson recognizes the profound impact of Emerson’s ideas on the American literary tradition and intellectual discourse. He appreciates the essay’s exploration of individuality, self-trust, and nonconformity. Richardson emphasizes Emerson’s call to tap into one’s own inner resources and trust one’s instincts as a source of wisdom and guidance. He values the essay’s relevance in contemporary society, where conformity and societal pressures can hinder personal growth and creative expression.

► Richardson’s perspectives

Both Cornel West and Robert D. Richardson Jr. highlight the enduring relevance of Emerson’s ideas in the contemporary world. They appreciate his emphasis on personal freedom, self-expression, and the pursuit of truth. They see “Self-Reliance” as a powerful tool for individuals to assert their agency, challenge oppressive structures, and cultivate personal empowerment.

- Key beliefs expounded

West and Richardson recognize the importance of Emerson's call to reject conformity and embrace one's individuality in fostering personal growth, creativity, and social transformation. Their admiration for "Self-Reliance" showcases its enduring significance and the impact of Emerson's ideas on contemporary intellectual and literary discourse. Postgraduate learners in English can benefit from exploring the perspectives of these contemporary figures, as they shed light on the continued importance of Emerson's ideas and their relevance in navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Summarised Overview

"Self-Reliance" is a significant work due to its enduring relevance and impact on the realm of literature and philosophy. Emerson's call for individuality, self-trust, and the rejection of conformity offers valuable insights into the human experience. The essay's exploration of the power of independent thought and the potential for personal growth resonates with readers across generations. Emerson's prose in "Self-Reliance" is characterized by its clarity, conciseness, and compelling rhetoric. He employs vivid imagery, thought-provoking metaphors, and memorable aphorisms to convey his ideas. The simplicity and lucidity of his writing style make the essay accessible to readers, allowing them to grasp the core concepts and engage with the profound themes it presents. "Self-Reliance" has received strong appreciation from critics throughout history and continues to be regarded as a seminal work in American literature. "Self-Reliance" encourages readers to embrace their individuality, trust their own judgment, and cultivate a sense of self-reliance, making it a vital piece to explore and contemplate.

Assignments

1. Examine "Self-Reliance" as a testimony to individuality and the rejection of conformity.
2. Write a brief account of Harold Bloom's critique of the essay "Self-Reliance."
3. Detail the underlying themes of Ralph Waldo Emerson's seminal essay "Self-Reliance."
4. Critically analyse Virginia Woolf's perspectives on the significance of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance."



5. How does Ralph Waldo Emerson visualise self-reliance as a principle for individual and social transformation?
6. Write a critical appreciation of Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Self-Reliance" as a manifesto of transcendentalism.
7. Discuss the critiques raised by Cornel West and Robert D. Richardson Jr. about "Self-Reliance."
8. In your opinion, what is the contemporary relevance of the concept of "Self-Reliance?" Support your answer with appropriate examples.
9. Elaborate on the role of self-reliance in empowering the individual, as detailed in the essay "Self-Reliance" by Ralph Waldo Emerson.
10. What are the advantages of self-reliance as discussed by Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Self-Reliance?"

Suggested Readings

1. Sacks, Kenneth. *Understanding Emerson "The American Scholar" and His Struggle for Self-Reliance*. Princeton University Press, 2003.
2. Schumann, Claudia. "The Self as Onwardness: Reading Emerson's Self-Reliance and Experience." *Foro De Educación*, vol. 11, no. 15, 2013, pp. 29–48., <https://doi.org/10.14516/fde.2013.011.015.001>.

References

1. Michaud, Régis. "Emerson's Transcendentalism." *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1919, pp. 73–82. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1413661>. Accessed 2 June 2023.
2. Gougeon, Len. "Emerson, Self-Reliance, and the Politics of Democracy." *A Political Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson*, edited by Alan M. Levine and Daniel S. Malachuk, University Press of Kentucky, 2011, pp. 185–220. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jckvx.13>. Accessed 2 June 2023.

Space for Learner Engagement for Objective Questions

Learners are encouraged to develop objective questions based on the content in the paragraph as a sign of their comprehension of the content. The Learners may reflect on the recap bullets and relate their understanding with the narrative in order to frame objective questions from the given text. The University expects that 1 - 2 questions are developed for each paragraph. The space given below can be used for listing the questions.



സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

കുരിശുട്ടിൽ നിന്നു ഞങ്ങളെ
സൂര്യവീഥിയിൽ തെളിക്കണം
സ്നേഹദീപ്തിയായ് വിളങ്ങണം
നീതിവൈജയന്തി പാറണം

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American Literature

COURSE CODE: M21EG07DC

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ISBN 978-81-963914-0-9



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