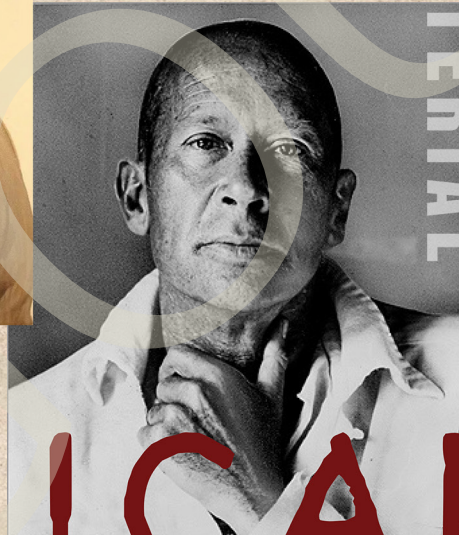
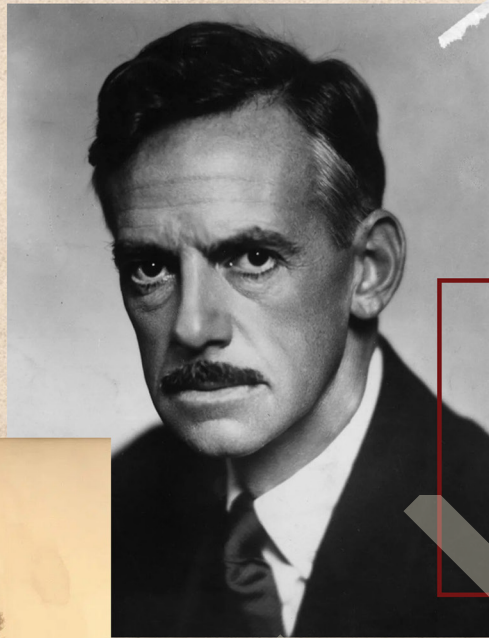


SELF LEARNING MATERIAL



AMERICAN Literature

COURSE CODE: B21EG04DE
Undergraduate Programme in English
Discipline Specific Elective Course



SREENARAYANAGURU
OPEN UNIVERSITY

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

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Pathway

Access and Quality define Equity.

American Literature
Course Code: B21EG04DE
Semester - V

Discipline Specific Elective Course
Undergraduate Programme
English Language and Literature
Self Learning Material
(With Model Question Paper Sets)



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AMERICAN LITERATURE

Course Code: B21EG04DE

Semester- V

Discipline Specific Elective Course
BA English Language and Literature

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Dr. Manoj S.
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Priyanka Rajasekharan
Christy Clement
Dr. Gireesh J.
Dr. Blessy John

Development of the Content

Dr. Anu Alphons Sebastian
Akhiles U.
Dr. Deepthi Viswambharan
Dr. Indu P.

Review and Edit

Dr. C. Ajayan
Dr. S. Subhash Chandran

Linguistics

Sujith Mohan

Scrutiny

Dr. Anupriya Patra, Dr. Anfal M.,
Dr. Anu Alphons Sebastian,
Salim M., Akhiles U.

Design Control

Azeem Babu T.A.

Cover Design

Jobin J.

Co-ordination

Director, MDDC :
Dr. I.G. Shibi
Asst. Director, MDDC :
Dr. Sajeevkumar G.
Coordinator, Development:
Dr. Anfal M.
Coordinator, Distribution:
Dr. Sanitha K.K.



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MESSAGE FROM VICE CHANCELLOR

Dear learner,

I extend my heartfelt greetings and profound enthusiasm as I warmly welcome you to Sreenarayanaguru Open University. Established in September 2020 as a state-led endeavour to promote higher education through open and distance learning modes, our institution was shaped by the guiding principle that access and quality are the cornerstones of equity. We have firmly resolved to uphold the highest standards of education, setting the benchmark and charting the course.

The courses offered by the Sreenarayanaguru Open University aim to strike a quality balance, ensuring students are equipped for both personal growth and professional excellence. The University embraces the widely acclaimed "blended format," a practical framework that harmoniously integrates Self-Learning Materials, Classroom Counseling, and Virtual modes, fostering a dynamic and enriching experience for both learners and instructors.

The university aims to offer you an engaging and thought-provoking educational journey. The undergraduate programme in English Language and Literature has been designed to be on par with the high-quality academic programmes offered at state universities throughout the country. Considerable emphasis has been placed on incorporating the latest trends in the delivery of programmes focused on English Language and Literature. Our aspiration is that this programme will augment your aptitude for comprehending both the language itself and its accompanying literary works. The Self-Learning Material has been meticulously crafted, incorporating relevant examples to facilitate better comprehension.

Rest assured, the university's student support services will be at your disposal throughout your academic journey, readily available to address any concerns or grievances you may encounter. We encourage you to reach out to us freely regarding any matter about your academic programme. It is our sincere wish that you achieve the utmost success.



Regards,
Dr. Jagathy Raj V. P.

01-01-2025

Contents

Block 01	Background Study	1
Unit 1	American Literature: An Introduction	2
Block 02	Poetry	19
Unit 1	The Raven - Edgar Allen Poe	20
Unit 2	The Emperor of Ice Cream - Wallace Stevens	33
Unit 3	Harlem - Langston Hughes	40
Unit 4	Buffalo Bill's - E.E.Cummings	47
Block 03	Short Fiction	53
Unit 1	Everyday Use - Alice Walker	54
Unit 2	The Open Boat - Stephen Crane's	61
Block 04	Drama	69
Unit 1	The Emperor Jones - Eugene O'Neill	70
Block 05	Novels	92
Unit 1	Adventures of Huckleberry Finn - Mark Twain	93
Block 06	Essays and Non-Fiction	104
Unit 1	The Battle of the Ants - Henry David Thoreau	105
	Model Question Paper Sets	112

BLOCK - 01

Background Study



American Literature: An Introduction

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

American literature has a rich and dynamic history that traces the evolution of the nation's identity from its early colonial roots to its modern-day literary achievements. Despite its relatively shorter history, compared to European traditions, American literature has produced an impressive array of voices, including many esteemed poet laureates. The story of American literature is intertwined with the history of the land itself, from the indigenous oral traditions that flourished before the arrival of European settlers to the diverse, multifaceted voices that emerged as the country developed its own national character.

In the early colonial period (1600-1625), European settlers arrived in the New World, establishing colonies that would grow into the United States. The Puritans and royalists who settled in places like Virginia and New England brought with them a literary tradition shaped by their religious and social contexts. Colonial writing was largely imitative of English models, and authors produced utilitarian works that reflected their practical, religious, and historical concerns. The Puritans, in particular, left a distinct mark on American literature, with figures like Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet making contributions to the poetic tradition.

This early period of settlement set the stage for the complex relationship between literature and the shaping of American identity. As the colonies expanded and the movement for independence gained momentum, literature began to reflect the evolving ideas about freedom, governance, and national identity. Writers like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson were instrumental in creating the foundational texts of the American Revolution, including the Declaration of Independence and the Federalist Papers.

Following independence, American literature saw the rise of new voices and genres, with the early national period marked by the development of uniquely American forms. Writers such as Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, and Nathaniel Hawthorne helped establish American literary traditions distinct from their European counterparts, paving the way for the Romantic and Transcendentalist movements. The era of the American Renaissance saw the flourishing of poets and novelists who sought to articulate the complexities of the American experience, such as Herman Melville, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman.

As the country expanded and industrialized, so too did its literary output. The post-Civil War period saw the rise of Realism and Naturalism, with writers like Mark Twain and Henry James capturing the complexities of American society and the effects of rapid change. These literary movements reflected the realities of a growing, diverse nation, grappling with issues of race, class, and identity in the wake of the Civil War.

The evolution of American literature is thus a reflection of the nation's own journey - from its colonial roots, through the struggles for independence and identity, to its emergence as a modern nation defined by its own unique literary traditions. This rich tapestry of voices and experiences continues to shape the literary landscape of the United States, offering insight into the ongoing development of American society and culture.

Keywords

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

1.1.1 Introduction

“America” was only one of the several names for a dream dreamed by Europeans, “for a land so preserved by Nature out of a desire to show mankind existence of a New Eden,” remarks Richard Gray, in *A History of American Literature*. The histories of the struggle for inde-

pendence, the Civil War, the value of the Puritan inheritance, the non-European myths of Manifest Destiny, the frontier, cultural myths and values and the specific historical processes distinguish American literature and make it different from British literature. Racial and ethnic diversity shape the American ethos.



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

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

1.1.2 Native Americans and colonialism -1600 -1625

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

During the puritan migration that continued up to 1640, the New England population grew

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

1.1.3 Colonial literature

Edward Taylor was America's greatest colonial poet. He produced a remarkable manuscript book of poetry. In 1939 Johnson compiled and published selections from the manuscripts. “God's Determinations.” In a highly unorthodox fashion, the work celebrates the primacy of divine mercy for man caught in the continuing war between Christ and Satan; “Five Poems;” and “Sacramental Meditations,” express a fervent yearning and ecstasy in acceptance by Christ. The colonial writings focused on religious, practical, or historical themes. The most influential writers include John Winthrop, Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, and Anne Bradstreet.

1.1.4 Puritanism and New England

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

The world around being an expression of the divine imagination, literature was made to shape the human spirit towards a better under-

standing of the divine metaphysic. 17th century saw chronicles, detailing the individual and the collective experiences of the Puritans in New England. According to the Puritans, the church being the body of Christ, each member an integral part distress to one person meant that the entire body was affected.

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

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

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

ter (1615-91) in his popular work, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1650). Puritan poetics were characterized by a generous use of biblical typology.

"Jeremiad" is the term to include formula such as letters, covenant renewals and confessions. Samuel Danforth's (1626- 1674) *A Brief Record of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*, Increase's *A Renewal of Covenant the Great Duty Incumbent on Decaying und Distressed Churches* (1677), *Pray for the Rising Generation* (1678), and *Heaven to the Present and Succeeding Generations* (1679) are other examples to cite for this genre.

Anne Bradstreet a woman puritan poet wrote *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America. Or, several Poems, compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning, Full of Delight . . . By a Gentlewoman*. Her poems were attempts to versify not only her moral and religious sentiments but also to convey contemporary scientific ideas, and they reflected the psychology, physiology, physics, natural sciences, and "correspondences" of the Renaissance. Published as "Quaternions," the poems included the "The Four Elements," "The Four Ages of Man," "The Four Humours in Man's Constitution," "The Four Seasons of the Year" and "The Four Monarchies."

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



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

1.1.5 Literature of the Revolutionary Period

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

1.1.6 Post-Independence Era and Nationalism

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

1.1.7 Early National Period

Consolidation of the government of the inde-

pendent USA, along with territorial expansion, was referred to as “the expanding frontiers”. The Early National Period of American Literature saw the beginnings of literature that can be identified as “American”. American literature slowly freed itself from English influence to produce literature of its own. The first American comedy written for the stage was *The Contrast*, by Royall Tyler, in 1787, and the first American novel was *The Power of Sympathy*, by William Hill, in 1789. American literature was written in the English style, but the settings, themes, and characters were authentically American. Poets wrote poetry that was relatively independent of English precursors. Three of the most popular writers were Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe.

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

1.1.8 American Renaissance

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

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

1.1.9 Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism as a movement started with the publication of “Nature” in 1836. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s work marked the beginning of the intellectual movement known as *Transcendentalism*. Emerson founded the transcendental club along with George Ripley, Bronson Alcott and a few others. He also gave a series of lectures on philosophy, the one at Harvard in 1837 was titled “The American Scholar” which is rightly called as “the declaration of America’s intellectual indepen-

dence.” He had a lasting friendship with Thoreau, Russell and Lowell.

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

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

The doctrines of Transcendentalism were partly harmonious but often contradictory in nature. According to scholars Transcendentalism was an eclectic embracing of the prime



values of individual feeling, intuition, conscience and idealistic imagination of a consequent faith in the potentialities of the common man, in democracy, in nature and in a gentle, fraternal, pervasive God and an associated indifference to high society, cold science and systematic institution like schools and churches.

The transcendental beliefs can be summarised as follows:

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

Emerson says, "Man determines his own existence. He makes the world by making himself." His thought starts and ends with the

centrality of man, and from this centre, he develops his.

1.1.10 1870 – 1900

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

1.1.11 Civil War

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

place characters, who were introduced for the first time in literature by authors such as Mark Twain, Henry James, Bret Harte, Mary Wilkins Freeman, George W. Cable, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Kate Chopin.

1.1.12 Rise of Literary Realism

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

1.1.12.1 1900 to 1930

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

1.1.13 Modernism

American writing of the early twentieth century evidenced a critical attempt to comprehend the tumultuous industrial and technological changes that transformed the economy, society, and culture of the country. American modernism, characterised by its attempt to overcome the limitations of being a region-

al literature, acquired a global dimension. Though there were other popular genres of writing, drama came to prominence in the early twentieth century. According to Richard Gray, modernism came to American drama; so did realism, experimentalism, and Americanism. Henry Adams, a professor of History at Harvard, defined modernism as characterised by “multiplicity, diversity, complexity, anarchy, and chaos.” These five terms are definitive of American modernism.

American Literature from 1914 to 1939 is marked as “The Beginnings of Modern Literature”. The American Modernists experimented with subject matter, form, and style to create remarkable works in all literary genres. American Modernist poets such as Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay, and E.E. Cummings were prominent during this period. Prose writers of the period included Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis, and Willa Cather. There were also various subgenres, with F. Scott Fitzgerald belonging to The Jazz Age, Langston Hughes and W.E.B. DuBois being a part of The Harlem Renaissance, and Gertrude Stein, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway being writers of ‘The Lost Generation.’

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



1.1.14 Jazz Age and Harlem Renaissance

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

The period also witnessed the advent of the Harlem Renaissance a cultural movement honouring and celebrating African American art, literature, and music. Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay contributed to the movement with their works acknowledging and validating black culture, spirituality and identity, addressing issues as racial discrimination and injustice and inequality. The Harlem Renaissance period being a time of immense creativity and innovation, helped shape the course of American literature. Marcus Garvey, the progenitor of Black pride and Black Nationalism contributed to the ideological concept for the Harlem Renaissance and also for the New Negro Movement. With no particular literary style, ideology or doctrine, the movement was more like a quest for identity. The renaissance was a declaration of the blacks to be free. The demand was for freedom from inequality, freedom from subordination, freedom from discrimination, freedom from racism. The

black artists, writers, performers believed in themselves and wanted to follow their own artistic intelligence and express their vision and diversity. Black spirituality, dance, music and songs, folktales, customs, dialect became the motive force of cultural awakening. The writers, poets, musicians, and artists sought a true expression of the black identity. “Blues and jazz, folk idioms and urban vernacular would become the building blocks of black modernism.” (Walls 5) There is no perfect moment of the beginning of the Renaissance but it gained momentum after the World War I.

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

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

1.1.15 Great Depression and Literature

The Great Depression marked the end of

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

1.1.16 Post-War Literature

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

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



by a rejection of traditional values and institutions; its focus on personal experience and self-expression, involved a detailed exploration of the impact of war on individuals and society.

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

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

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

African American writing deals with the culture, belief, patterns, practices and attitudes derived from entirely different cultures separated by time and space. African culture related to oral tradition and American culture based on written narratives makes Afri-

can-American literary tradition bi-cultured in nature, style, genres and narrative forms. It explores the myriad journeys and trajectories of the African diaspora. It also provokes introspection into the multilayered individual identities and delineates the possibility of a final voyage home.

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

African women have been in America since 1619 and have played a heroic role in the struggle for equality and freedom in America. Women were involved in the development of African-American literature from the beginning: Georgia Douglas Johnson, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Nella Larsen, Jessica Fauset, Dorothy West, Helen Johnson and the list continues; still the world of black literature in the United States continued to be dominated by the black patriarchy relegating women to a secondary position often towards an invisibility. Critical writing and history of the Harlem renaissance included *New Negroes* entirely from the male sex.

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

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

1.1.17 Broadway

Broadway, the street in New York city has been associated with American theatrical activity since 1735 when the first theatre opened in the street. The word Broadway refers to the theatrical district in New York associated with the American musical. The trend in musicals towards the integration of songs with plot to make a cohesive whole began in 1920's with *Showboat* by Kern and Hammerstein in 1927. *Oklahoma* in 1943 and the *South Pacific* in 1947 are worth mentioning in this genre. It provided an experimental milieu and welcomed beat poetry, and music integrating songs and plot, with innovative works like the *West Side Story* in the 1950s. After a decline it was revived in the 1990s with Disney mu-

sicals. Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber are influential musical theatre figures of the 20th century. More sophisticated productions such as *My Fair Lady* in 1956 and *Guys and Dolls* in 1950 were Broadway successes. In the 21st century, Broadway theatres produce more new works than revivals and underwent several changes as to employing the music for social commentary.

1.1.18 Developments in Drama, Poetry, Fiction

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

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

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was the most outstanding dramatist of the interwar period, who is credited as to have created art in "blood, sweat, and tears." O'Neill was the first American dramatist to win the Nobel Prize and his



plays are regarded as being in the tradition of the great Greek tragedies. A prolific dramatist who won the Pulitzer Prize for literature five times and Nobel Prize for literature in 1936, O'Neill is the central figure in the new school of American dramatists. The Nobel Prize was awarded "for the power, honesty and deep-felt emotions of his dramatic works, which embody an original concept of tragedy."

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

The Provincetown Playhouse gave O'Neill an audience, though small. His early one act play *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916) was produced by Provincetown Players and subsequently two more plays of O'Neill, *Beyond the Hori-*

zon (1920) and *The Emperor Jones* (1920) were staged. Bernard Hewitt observed that with these plays, American drama had finally "come of age." They were essentially romantic though they were also termed realistic and a few were melodramatic too. We can notice the predominant influence of certain doctrines or philosophies in his early plays. The nihilistic pessimism of the tortured playwright is discerned in the expressionist plays of O'Neill. *The Hairy Ape* fuses discordant elements into a new whole. Like *Emperor Jones*, the play is expressionistic.

Americans travelling to Europe came across a vital, flourishing theatre; they returned and initiated the *Little Theatre Movement* all across the United States. Experiments with new dramatic modes and methods of production were tried; the initiative slowly gathered momentum with more college educated, playhouse-trained actors, producers and dramatists joining the movement. There were two rival little theatres near the Provincetown Playhouse; Neighbourhood Playhouse and the Washington Square Players. O'Neill was the playwright of the 'Little Theatre.' His plays were soon produced before a larger audience in the 'Greenwich Village Theatre'.

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

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

Expressionism an artistic movement that began in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century under the influence of the Swedish dramatist August Strindberg (1849-1912) reached its height in the decade 1915-1925. It manifests itself in painting, music as well as literature. The most persistent influence of expressionism has been felt in the theatre. The mingling of the realistic and the fantastic or symbolic has been ascribed to Strindberg. His work ranges from studies of abnormal psychology as *The Father* (1887) to masterpieces of symbolism such as *The Dream Play* (1902).

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

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

are like those in dreams. Experiments of this kind abound in the works of Eugene O'Neill. From realism in his early plays he shifted to expressionism in later plays.

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

Modern American poetry of the period is significant for its remarkable variety; represented by Wallace Stevens (1879-1955), William Carlos Williams (1893-1963) along with Robert Frost (1874-1963). The poetry of Robert Frost serves as a bridge connecting older traditions and the search for newness. Wallace Stevens, the poet of the modern period, firmly believed that poetry is a record and a continuous interaction of the mind and the world. Wallace Stevens drew inspiration from the poetry of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.

1.1.19 American Multiculturalism and Contemporary Literature

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



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

in the promotion of cross-cultural dialogue towards realising the vibrant dream of an interconnected global community.

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

Recap

- ▶ The unit combines African oral traditions and American written forms.
- ▶ Explores identity, cultural clashes, and the search for home.
- ▶ Harlem Renaissance highlighted African American arts and literature.
- ▶ Black women writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison explored black womanhood.
- ▶ Themes in black women's writing include victimization, self-consciousness, and spiritual rebirth.
- ▶ Broadway evolved from song-integrated plots (1920s) to Disney's revival in the 1990s.
- ▶ Stephen Sondheim and Andrew Lloyd Webber were influential in musical theatre.
- ▶ Eugene O'Neill shaped modern American drama with expressionist plays.
- ▶ O'Neill's work broke traditional American theatre forms, influenced by European traditions.
- ▶ Multiculturalism in literature emerged in the 1960s, promoting inclusivity and cultural understanding.
- ▶ American literature was enriched by celebrating diverse voices and experiences.
- ▶ Writers like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost

bridged traditional and modern forms.

- Modern American fiction and poetry addressed complex social themes while evolving stylistically.

Objective Questions

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

Answers

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



Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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BLOCK - 02

Poetry

Unit 1

The Raven

-Edgar Allen Poe

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites



Fig.2.1.1
Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is an American poet, short story writer, editor, and literary critic. He is a prominent voice of Romanticism in American literature. Poe is regarded as the forerunner of the “art for art’s sake” movement in 19th-century literature. His first poetry collection was titled *Tamerlane, and Other Poems* (1827). His stories identify him as the originator of both detective and horror fiction. He is one of the early critics who focused on the effect of style and structure in a literary work. His most famous short stories are “The Tell-Tale Heart,” “The Fall of the House of Usher,” “Some Words with a Mummy,” “The Black Cat,” and “Ligeia.”

Poe is widely regarded as one of the most influential writers of Gothic literature. His use of psychological terror, macabre imagery, and supernatural elements helped to define the genre and inspire generations of writers to come. The most interesting feature of Poe’s poetry is the lyrical evocation of the state of melancholy. His iconic works, such as “The Raven” and “The Tell-Tale Heart,” are known for their dark and haunting tone, which often explored themes of death, madness, and the human psyche.

"The Raven" is a narrative poem, published in 1845 in the New York Evening Mirror, and is the best-known poem in American literature. A narrative poem has all the elements of a story and is usually larger in size. The poem consists of eighteen six-line stanzas. He explores his recurrent theme, loss and death, in the poem. In it, an unknown narrator laments the death of his lady love, Lenore. The narrator is visited by a raven that repeats the word "Nevermore". The poem which records a melancholy evocation of lost love, brought Poe national fame. Poe's Raven is regarded as the prophet of ill omen. It can never be considered an ordinary bird. This unit will explore Edgar Allan Poe's literary contributions, his poetic theory, and provide a comprehensive summary and analysis of the poem "The Raven."

Keywords

Raven, Lenore, Nevermore, Gothic

Discussion

2.1.1. Edgar Allan Poe: His Major Works

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

Prose Fiction

The only full-length work of prose fiction written by Poe was *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, which appeared in 1840 in the

collection of his stories entitled *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque*.

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

4. "MS. Found in a Bottle"
5. "The Fall of the House of Usher"
6. "Morella"
7. "Berenice"
8. "Ligeia"
9. "William Wilson"
10. "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"
11. "The Mystery of Marie Roget"
12. "The Pit and the Pendulum"
13. "The Tell-Tale Heart"
14. "The Masque of the Red Death"
15. "The Purloined Letter"
16. "The Gold-Bug"
17. "The Cask of Amontillado"



18. "Hop-Frog"
19. "The Black Cat"
20. "The Assignment"
21. "A Descent into the Maelstrom"
22. "The Sphinx"
23. "The Man of the Crowd"
24. "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether"

In all, Poe wrote about seventy short stories.

Critical Essays

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

Poems

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

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

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

Miscellaneous

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

2.1.2 Poe's Theory of Poetry

Poe had clear views on the essence and purpose of poetry. He articulated a coherent, though sometimes inconsistent, aesthetic theory in his works such as "Letter to B," "The Poetic Principle," and "The Philosophy of Composition." He believed that the primary goal of a genuine poem is to evoke pleasure rather than to instruct. According to Poe, po-

etry should not serve to impart moral lessons but rather to delight the reader. He strongly rejected what he termed the “heresy of the didactic.” Additionally, he argued that music is a fundamental component of poetry. For him, poetry arises when music is paired with a pleasurable idea. Another significant assertion by Poe is that beauty is the rightful domain of poetry, which he defined as the rhythmic creation of beauty. This concept of beauty encompasses not only the tangible forms and objects we observe in the world but also the ideal beauty that exists beyond our sight, accessible only through imagination. In essence, Poe's notion of beauty includes both the ideal or Platonic forms and the concrete beauties visible in our universe, as well as those we can envision based on our experiences. Thus, the role of a true poet is to arrange words in a manner that offers the reader a glimpse of Platonic beauty, inspiring pleasure and uplifting the soul through encounters with beauti-

ful things. Furthermore, Poe emphasised that a poet should evoke feelings of beauty in the reader through suggestive techniques. This means that a poet must select words carefully so that their sounds and associations convey meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions.

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



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

2.1.3 Summary

One night, when a young student was meditating upon a volume of ancient, forgotten learning, he heard a gentle tapping at his chamber door. The student got the impression that some visitor was knocking. It was a gloomy December night. The coals in the fireplace had already burnt themselves out. The student was in a sorrowful mood because he had lost his beloved, Lenore, who had died a premature death. The death of Lenore, “the rare and radiant maiden”, had come as a great blow to the student. He knew that she had left this world forever. But the tapping at the door produced a vague feeling in him that it might be Lenore standing outside. At the same time, the thought came to him that it was not his beloved but somebody else who needed shelter from the storm that was blowing outside. The student then opened the door and said that he was sorry for having delayed the opening of the door and that the delay was due to the fact that he had been napping. However, the student found nobody at the door. There was only darkness outside and nothing more. The student spoke once more, this time only whispering the name of Lenore. In reply to his whispering this name, he heard an echo of what he had spoken. The echo repeated the name of Lenore.

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

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

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

The student now began to meditate upon the word “Nevermore”, which the raven had learnt by rote. This word was the raven's only stock and store, and the raven had learnt this word from its owner, who had undoubtedly suffered some misfortune and who had, there-

fore, taught only this mournful word to his pet bird. There was also a feeling of amusement in the students' meditations. Smiling, he pulled a cushioned seat close to the bust of Pallas on which sat the raven. He gave free reins to his fancy, wondering what this bird of ill omen signified. In its appearance, the raven was grim, ugly, and ghastly. The traditional belief was that the raven was a bird of ill omen, and here was a raven uttering the word "Nevermore" whenever spoken to.

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

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

Addressing the raven, the student asked whether it was a bird or a devil. He called the

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

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

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

2.1.4 Theme or Subject-Matter

The subject of this poem is not a raven but the death of a woman with whom the speaker in the poem was in love and the consequent grief and sense of loss of the speaker. The speaker is a young student deeply interested in scholarly studies. His beloved used to visit him in his chamber, where he now sits in a sad mood because she is no longer in this world. The night is stormy. A raven, which has escaped



from the custody of its owner, is seeking shelter from the violence of the storm. The time is midnight. The raven flutters its wings against the window of the student's chamber, and the student opens the door, thinking that some passing traveller has come for shelter. Finding nobody outside, the student turns to the window and sees a raven outside. He now opens the window, and the raven enters the chamber and perches itself on a statue of Pallas lying close to the chamber door. The student playfully asks the raven its name, and the raven utters the word 'Nevermore.' Actually, 'Nevermore' is the only word the raven has learnt, and therefore, it always utters whenever spoken to. Accordingly, the raven utters the same word, 'Nevermore', every time the scholar speaks to it. The scholar, whose heart is burdened with the grief of his beloved's premature death, seeks some consolation or relief in his misery, and therefore, he asks the raven if he could someday meet his beloved in the other world and clasp her in his arms. The student expects that some encouraging answer might come from the raven, but the raven, which knows only one word, utters the same word, 'Nevermore', every time the scholar speaks to it. The student becomes furious at the same negative reply given by the raven, even to this crucial question he asked. He now orders the raven to leave his chamber, but the raven continues to sit on the bust of Pallas. The student feels that his grief will never end. The raven's reply of 'Nevermore' even to his all-imp and supreme question produces in him the thought that there is no life after death and that this hope of meeting his beloved in another world has, therefore, no validity.

2.1.5 Critical Analysis

"The Raven" begins with a dramatic line, "Once upon a midnight". An unnamed speaker is sitting in his chamber on a December night, reading an ancient text. He is tired and

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

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

point to his hope of seeing Lenore outside the chamber.

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

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

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

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

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



narrator mentioned that the raven is reproducing what he learnt by rote learning from his former master. But now, overcome by his passion, he takes the Raven very seriously and is devastated when it utters 'Nevermore'.

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

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

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

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

Poe's theory of poetry, which we discussed at the beginning of this unit, allows us to explore the themes he addresses in his poetry. He asserts that beauty is the primary focus of poet-

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

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

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

It is an exceptional, magnificent, and memorable work.

2.1.7 The Atmosphere of Melancholy and Sadness

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

2.1.8 Symbolic Significance

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

2.1.9 Poetic Devices

Alliteration

Alliteration is the repetition of consonant

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

Assonance

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

Metaphor

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

Simile

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

Personification

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

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia is the creation of a new word that phonetically resembles or imitates the sound that it describes. For example, in the



poem, the words “rapping” and “tapping” are used to describe the sound of knocking on the door. “Soon again, I heard a tapping/ Somewhat louder than before”. The word “Nevermore” uttered by the bird is also an example of onomatopoeia. Apart from the literal meaning of no more, it could also be a reference to the sound produced by the Raven.

Imagery

Imagery is the use of descriptive words or language to create a mental image. The most significant instance of auditory imagery in the poem is “And the only word there spoken was the whispered word, ‘Lenore!’/ This I whispered, and an echo murmured back the word,

‘Lenore!’/ Merely this and nothing more.

Allusion

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

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

Answers

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

Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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



The Emperor of Ice Cream

-Wallace Stevens

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) was born in 1879 in Reading, Pennsylvania. He graduated from New York Law School in 1903 and practised law until 1916. His literary career began with a group of poems titled "Phases", which he sent to Harriet Monroe as entries for a war poem competition organised by Poetry Magazine. His first anthology, *Harmonium*, exhibited strong influences of English Romantics and French Symbolists. His major works include *Ideas of Order* (1935), *The Man with the Blue Guitar* (1937), *Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction* (1942), and a collection of essays on poetry titled *The Necessary Angel* (1951). Wallace Stevens died in Connecticut in 1955. *The Collected Poems* of Wallace Stevens won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1955.

Wallace Stevens was a modernist poet whose work explored complex philosophical themes and challenged traditional poetic conventions. His writing reflected the cultural and intellectual changes of the early 20th century, including the rise of science, technology, and existentialism. Stevens used a highly symbolic and abstract style, often incorporating images from nature, art, and mythology to explore themes of reality, perception, and the nature of existence. Stevens' contemporaries in the modernist movement included poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and William Carlos Williams, all of whom sought to break with traditional poetic forms and explore new possibilities for expression. Stevens' work was also influenced by the Symbolist movement in Europe, which emphasised the use of symbols and metaphors to express abstract ideas and emotions.



Modernism

- The exact beginning of Modernism as an artistic and philosophical movement is still debated.
- By the early 20th century, the ideas and expressions from the Romantic and Victorian periods quickly became outdated due to various scientific and social changes.
- The harsh technologies introduced during World War I pushed artists to find new ways to express themselves and connect with the changing world.



Fig 2.2.1
Wallace Stevens

“The Emperor of Ice-Cream” is one of the most popular poems written by the American modernist poet Wallace Stevens. It was first published in his first collection of poetry, “Harmonium,” in the year 1923. The major concern of Stevens was aesthetics. He strongly believed that art provides the necessary substitute in a world which lacks faith. His poems were characterised by extravagant imagery and original metaphors.

“The Emperor of Ice-Cream” is an example of elliptical poetry. Elliptical poetry is a term coined by the poet and critic Stephen Burt in 1998. Elliptical poetry is rather oblique and without a logical sequence of meaning. This kind of poetry makes the readers feel like they are missing a major part of the information that fills in the narrative.

Keywords

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

2.2.1 Discussion

The Poem

*Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys*

Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.

Let be be finale of seem.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

*Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once*

And spread it so as to cover her face.

If her horny feet protrude, they come

To show how cold she is, and dumb.

Let the lamp affix its beam.

The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

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

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

2.2.2 Summary

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

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

This talk of people being instructed to make various preparations takes place in the kitchen. From there, we are led to the nearby room, in which the corpse of a woman is lying. The neighbour continues to instruct others. He asks them to take a sheet from the dresser to cover her face. The sheet is kept in a dresser which has three knobs missing from it. He asks them to make sure that it is the same sheet on which the dead woman, when she was alive, embroidered the picture of the fan-tails. The sheet is not long enough to cover both her face and feet. So, it is possible that her feet with bunions on them may stick out from the end. Her feet will show us how dead she is. He insists that instead of lighting up a dim candle, the bright light should be turned on to illuminate the corpse of the woman and to show the world how dead she is. Stevens does not employ any of the euphemisms that are used in connection with death.



2.2.3 Critical Analysis

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

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

-

Wallace Stevens

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

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

In the second stanza, the poet gives us a picture of bare reality, which is exactly opposite to what is said in the first stanza. Giving a picture of the death of a slatternly woman, the poet says that the death is the real ruler.

The dead body of the woman is lying on the floor of her house, and the body is to be buried soon. A few wenches (fellow prostitutes) and a man have assembled in her house to show their last respects, but they don't look at the body tearfully. Nowhere does the poet give us any hint of disrespect to the deceased woman of bad repute. The dressing table made of cheap wood without glass knobs and badly embroidered sheets that covered her body indicate that she was a poor woman.

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

The poem consists of two stanzas with eight lines each, with a recurring refrain - "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream". Here, the poet is ridiculing the people's tendency to regard ceremonies and emperors with unnecessary meaning and power. The speaker suggests that there is no need to take them seriously. The poet presents an antithesis between the domain of death and the domain of luxuries, represented by cigars and ice cream. The first stanza describes the preparations for an event, though we are unsure about its nature until later. The first stanza discusses the world of luxuries, while the second one discusses death. The occasion seems to be a funeral or a wake following the death of a poor woman. The poem is structured as a set of commands issued by an unknown person who is directing the neighbours about the tasks to be undertaken. The transience of life and acceptance of death are the important themes discussed in the poem.

The ice cream is used as a symbol for life. If one does not eat it right away, it melts and dis-

appears. Life is similar to this. The poet urges us to accept the inevitability of death with happiness. Life should be enjoyed without any hesitation. The title suggests that human beings are no more resistant to death as ice creams are to the Sun. The preparation of ice creams for the funeral is an allusion to the ritualistic practice of offering food to the dead. It is common in some communities to offer food to the dead. It is suggested that this poem is based on Wallace Stevens' experience of Canadian tribes or Native American tribes.

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

2.2.3 Poetic Devices

Assonance:

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

Recap

- ▶ This poem was published for the first time in Wallace Stevens' collection of poetry, *Harmonium*.
- ▶ Stevens divides the story into two stanzas, one is for the kitchen where the ice creams are prepared and the other one for the room where the woman's dead body is placed.
- ▶ The speaker, maybe a neighbour, is issuing orders in a house where somebody died.

Alliteration:

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

Symbolism:

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

Imagery:

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

Enjambment:

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

- ▶ The roller of big cigars is called to whip ice creams.
- ▶ The wenches are asked to wear what they usually wear.
- ▶ Young boys are requested to bring flowers in the last day's newspaper.
- ▶ In the next room, the dead body of a woman is kept and her body is covered with a short cloth which exhibits her horny feet.
- ▶ The poet talks about the transience of life and the need to enjoy life to the fullest.

Objective Questions

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

Answers

1. The Roller of Big Cigars
2. Three Glass knobs.
3. It is too short.
4. Her feet.
5. Flowers.
6. Concupiscent.
7. Life versus Death
8. Let reality replace illusion.
9. A wake is being held.

Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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



Harlem

-Langston Hughes

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Langston Hughes or James Mercer Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was born in New York. He was an important figure in the Harlem Renaissance. His literary career started with the publication of the poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers", published in 1921. His first book, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926. He continued to write numerous poems, prose, and plays, and he was a popular column for the *Chicago Defender*. In 1921, he enrolled at Columbia University, and during this period, he became part of the Harlem Renaissance.

The Harlem Renaissance was an intellectual and cultural revival of African American culture, mainly in the creative arts, spanning from the late 1910s to the mid-1930s. Harlem Renaissance poets such as Claude McKay and Georgia Douglas Johnson explored the beauty and pain of black life. They tried to define themselves and their community outside of white stereotypes.

The poem "Harlem" was written in 1951, more than a decade before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The poem was written in the aftermath of the 1935 and 1943 Harlem riots, both triggered by segregation, police brutality, and prevailing unemployment. "Harlem" was written as part of "Montage of Dream Deferred," a poetry sequence inspired by jazz and blues. This poem analyses the lives and consciousness of the African community in Harlem. The poet talks about the harm caused when the dream of racial equality is continuously delayed.

- *Montage of a Dream Deferred* is a free verse work that explores various aspects of life in Harlem.
- A key feature of this work is Hughes's incorporation of jazz and bebop styles, which gives his poetry a distinctly African American vibe.
- He uses varied rhythms and sound effects like "pop-a-da!" to reflect the essence of jazz, symbolizing the core of the African American experience.

Keywords

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

2.3.1 Discussion



Fig.2.3.1 Langston Hughes

The poem

What happens to a dream deferred?

*Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?*

Or fester like a sore—

And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over—

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

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

2.3.2 Critical Summary

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

The poem's title and its opening line set the scene and main idea. The title refers to a historic neighbourhood in New York City, where millions of black Americans migrated in the early 20th century. It highlights the racial in-

equalities and segregation faced by Harlem's residents. The first line, "What happens to a dream deferred," is aligned to the left, while the rest of the poem is indented, creating a connection to the title.

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

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

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

2.3.3 Critical Analysis

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

- Artists such as Duke Ellington and Ma Rainey also played important roles during this time.
- Sculptors, painters, and print-makers significantly contributed to this modern Afrocentric cultural movement, creating a black avant-garde in visual arts.

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

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

The speaker reflects on the consequences of a “dream deferred.” It is unclear who the speak-



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

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

2.3.4 Poetic Devices

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

Alliteration:

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

Anaphora :

Anaphora is the repetition of a word or expression in the initial parts of a poem. Anaphora works in several ways in Harlem. It provides a recognizable pattern and structure to the

speaker's questions. The opening lines of the second stanza establish a pattern that repeats with slight variation. The pattern in which words and phrases repeat anaphorically-

“Does it

like...

Or...

Does it ..

Or...

Like....”

Simile:

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

Imagery:

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

Enjambment:

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

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

Answers

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



Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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



Buffalo Bill's

-E.E.Cummings

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Edward Estlin Cummings (1894-1962) is regarded as an important voice in modernist poetry. He was born in 1894 in Massachusetts. His early poems were published in the anthology *Eight Harvard Poets*. In 1917, he enlisted as a volunteer ambulance driver in World War I. Cummings published his first book, *The Enormous Room*, in 1922. Cummings belonged to the generation of American writers that brought about a revolution in the 20th century. His writings reflected a distrust of established institutions, and his works exhibited a conviction that organised religion is a failure. He abandoned traditional techniques of poetry, experimenting with form, punctuation, capitalization, layout, spelling, and syntax to create an idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. There were extensive word gaps, line breaks, and a lack of punctuation marks in his poems.

His works mainly focused on love, sexuality, nature, and the relationship between man and society. Cummings' philosophy rejected any form of social forces that hinder the expression of individualism, such as conformity, artificiality, and imitation. It promoted imagination and rejoiced in romantic and sexual love. He was influenced by Imagism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. His most important literary works are *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), *XLI Poems* (1925), *Eimi* (1933), *IXI* (1944), and *95 Poems* (1958).



“Buffalo Bill’s” is an example of concrete poetry or shape poetry. Concrete poetry is the only significant literary movement in the 20th century. It is a kind of linguistic art in which the way words and looks look is as important as what they mean. The most important feature of concrete poetry is the arrangement of language or words in visual form. Concrete poetry uses some kind of visual presentation to enhance the impact of the poem. This literary movement was deeply inspired by the Concrete Art Movement. The early concrete poets borrowed elementary visual designs directly from Concrete Art pieces and arranged letters and words in basic visual forms such as columns, grids and spirals. Concrete poems use sounds and space to communicate meaning. It is more visual than other poems. John Hollanders, E.E.Cummings, Ezra Pound, and Lewis Carroll have been associated with this literary movement.

- Concrete poetry is a key literary movement of the 20th century, focusing on the visual arrangement of words as much as their meaning.
- - This style enhances poems through visual elements inspired by the Concrete Art Movement, using simple designs like grids and spirals.
- - Notable poets linked to this movement include John Hollander, E.E. Cummings, Ezra Pound, and Lewis Carroll.

Keywords

Buffalo Bill, William F. Cody, Death.

2.4.1 Discussion



Fig.2.4.1 Edward Estlin Cummings

The poem

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

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

2.4.2 Critical Summary

The poem discusses the inevitability of death. It begins with the announcement of Buffalo Bill's death. It is based on the legend of American cowboy William Frederick Cody. Cody was nicknamed Buffalo Bill because he won

a buffalo hunting contest, where he reportedly killed around 68 buffalo. In 1867, he was hired as a buffalo hunter for the Kansas Pacific Railway, tasked with providing buffalo meat for the railway workers, during which he hunted a staggering 4,820 buffalo in just eighteen months. In 1883, he established the Great Wild West Show, which he took on tour across the United States and Europe.



Fig. 2.4.2 Buffalo Bill 's

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

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

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

2.4.3 Critical Analysis

This poem, which relies heavily on visual ef-

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

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

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

2.4.4 Poetic Devices

Alliteration:

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

Allusion:

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

and death.

Enjambment:

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

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

Answers

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



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

Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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

BLOCK - 03

Short Fiction



Everyday Use

-Alice Walker

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Alice Walker is a literary giant whose works have shaped conversations about race, gender, and identity in America. Born in the racially segregated South, her personal experiences with injustice fuelled her powerful writing. Walker's acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* (1982) not only earned her the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award, but also became a cultural touchstone, sparking discussions on the resilience of women and the complexity of race relations in America. Yet, Walker's influence stretches far beyond just her awards; her voice is a call for a deeper understanding of heritage, personal identity, and social change.

One of her most compelling short stories, "Everyday Use", explores the concept of heritage and the different ways people understand and connect with their past. Through the lens of a family, Mama and her two daughters Maggie and Dee, Walker explores how heritage can be perceived not just as something to be displayed, but something to be lived. Dee, the confident and outwardly ambitious daughter, seeks to reclaim her African roots through external symbols, wanting to display her heritage as an accessory. In

contrast, Mama and Maggie view heritage as something far more intimate and practical, deeply woven into their daily lives and familial bonds.

As we read “Everyday Use”, Walker forces us to ask: What is heritage? Is it just a set of cultural symbols to showcase, or is it something that is lived, something that carries the weight of everyday life? Through the conflict between Dee’s flashy, performative approach to heritage and Maggie’s quiet, meaningful connection to it, Walker challenges us to reflect on how we relate to our own roots. Do we wear our heritage like a fashionable statement, or do we live it, quietly and consistently, in the choices we make each day?

In this story, Walker invites us to consider how we understand and honour our own pasts, pushing us to think critically about identity, family, and tradition. As we explore the lives of Mama, Dee, and Maggie, we’re not just reading about one family’s struggles, we’re being asked to reflect on how we honour and carry forward the legacies that shape us.

Keywords

Heritage, quilt, identity, family, cultural identity

3.1.1 Discussion

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

Walker has written many novels, short stories, essays, and poems that explore African American life and the interconnectedness of race, gender, and social class. Her works often present themes of heritage, community,

and women’s experiences. Beyond literature, Walker has been a strong advocate for civil rights, women’s rights, and environmental issues, using her platform to drive change and raise awareness.



Fig 3.1.1 Alice Walker

Important Works of Alice Walker

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

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

3.1.2 Summary



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

My two daughters, Maggie and Dee, couldn't be more different. Maggie, my youngest, is

quiet and shy, marked by scars from a fire that destroyed our old home years ago. She moves through life almost unnoticed, carrying herself with a humility that often tugs at my heart. She spends her days helping me around the house and will soon marry John Thomas. Maggie has settled into a simple life, finding comfort in the small things around her. Dee, however, has always tried to set herself apart. Growing up, she looked down on our home and everything she felt held her back. When the church and I scraped together money to send her to school, I hoped it would help her feel connected to her roots. But it seems to have driven her further away.

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

Dee walks around snapping pictures of me and Maggie with our simple home in the

background. She's like a tourist, fascinated by everything she once couldn't wait to leave behind. Even a cow wandering nearby catches her attention.

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

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

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

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

ty. She puts on her sunglasses and turns away, distancing herself from us once more.

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

3.1.3 Analysis

Alice Walker's "Everyday Use" explores the different ways people understand and value heritage. For Mama and Maggie, heritage is woven into everyday life and practical experiences. Mama cherishes the quilts not just for their beauty but because they hold family memories; each piece of fabric tells a story from their shared past. Dee, on the other hand, views heritage as something to be displayed rather than lived. This contrast raises a central question about the essence of heritage. Is it enough to simply admire it, or should it be given a meaningful role in everyday life? For Mama, heritage is grounded in family history and tradition, while Dee sees it more as a symbol to be admired.

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



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

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

3.1.4 Character Sketch

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

Dee (Wangero): Dee is confident, ambitious,

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

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

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

1. Who is Maggie engaged to?
2. What new name does Dee choose for herself?
3. Who is Dee’s companion?
4. What item does Dee ask for as a centrepiece?
5. What food does Hakim-a-barber refuse to eat?
6. Who is the quilt’s original recipient?
7. Who is the author of “Everyday Use”?
8. Where does Dee take pictures?
9. Who tells Maggie to do something for herself?
10. Who taught Maggie how to quilt?
11. What is the primary theme of Alice Walker’s “Everyday Use”?
12. Which character is described as quiet, shy, and scarred from a fire?
13. What is the primary conflict in “Everyday Use”?
14. What items does Dee want to take from Mama’s house?
15. Why does Mama hesitate to give the quilts to Dee?

Answers

1. John
2. Wangero
3. Hakim-a-barber
4. Churn



5. Pork
6. Maggie
7. Alice Walker
8. House
9. Dee
10. Grandma Dee
11. Heritage and identity
12. Maggie
13. Family disagreements over heritage
14. Grandma Dee's butter churn and dasher
15. Because they have sentimental value and are promised to Maggie

Assignments

1. How do Dee and Maggie's views on heritage and family reveal their characters?
2. How does "Everyday Use" explore identity through each character's view of heritage?
3. How does Mama's perspective shape our understanding of events and themes?
4. What do the characters' views on heritage reveal about their values, and what message does Walker convey?
5. How does your own sense of heritage and identity connect to the themes in "Everyday Use"?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Gates, Henry Louis Jr., and Nellie Y. McKay, editors. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. 3rd ed., W.W. Norton & Company, 2014.
- ▶ Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1937.
- ▶ Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1987.
- ▶ Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. Harcourt, 1982.



The Open Boat

-Stephen Crane's

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Life often gives us the illusion of control. We make decisions, follow routines, and navigate the ups and downs with a sense of agency. But what happens when we are faced with forces far beyond our control forces so vast and powerful that we are left powerless in their wake? What does it truly mean to be helpless, to face a challenge so enormous that it strips us of everything we thought we knew about ourselves and our place in the world?

In this unit, we invite you to explore these profound questions through a story of survival, fear, and human endurance. Imagine being stranded at sea- lost in the middle of an endless, turbulent expanse of water. Alone, with no land in sight, no shelter, and no certainty of rescue, you are forced to confront your deepest fears. The sea, once a symbol of adventure and freedom, now becomes a merciless force that seems to defy your every attempt at survival. Every wave that crashes against you serves as a reminder of your own insignificance in the face of nature's raw power.

The story we examine is a fascinating narrative that draws inspiration from the real-life experiences of the author Stephen Crane, a writer whose own encounters with the forces of nature shaped his understanding of human vulnerability. Through this lens, the narrative plunges us into the lives of four individuals who find themselves at the mercy of the



sea, battling not just the elements but also their own inner turmoil and fear. Their journey is one of profound struggle, not only to stay alive but also to make sense of their place in a world that seems indifferent to their suffering.

Each of the characters in this tale represents a different aspect of the human experience when confronted with the overwhelming forces of nature. The sea, in all its might, becomes a metaphor for the uncontrollable forces of life - be they physical, emotional, or social. As the characters fight to survive, we witness the breaking down of human pride and the gradual erosion of their willpower. They must grapple with the reality that their survival depends not on their control over the situation, but on their ability to surrender to the uncontrollable, to adapt to the whims of nature, and to accept their vulnerability.

In the midst of this battle for survival, the story illuminates the resilience of the human spirit. It forces us to confront the question: how far can we push ourselves before we break? What happens when we no longer have control over our fate, and all that is left is the will to endure, to fight, and to survive, no matter the odds? It is a journey that exposes the limits of human strength, but also uncovers the boundless depths of courage that lie within, even in the most desperate of circumstances.

Through this harrowing narrative, we come face-to-face with the uncomfortable truth that sometimes, we are not in control. The forces of nature, much like the challenges of life, can be overwhelming and unyielding. But it is in our response to these challenges, in the way we fight against them or yield to them, that we find our true strength.

Keywords

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

3.2.1 Discussion

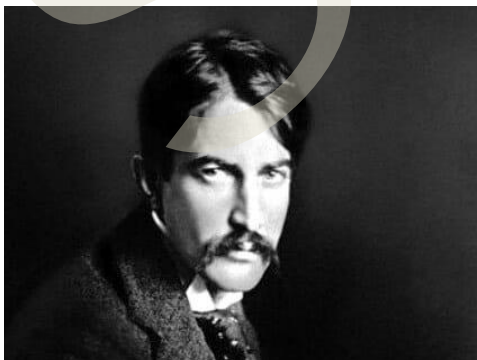


Fig 3.2.1 Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane (1871-1900) captured the hearts of readers with his raw, realistic style. Born in 1871, his brief life, tragically cut short in 1900, was marked by both personal struggle and artistic brilliance. Crane's writing is a testament to the power of realism and naturalism. His novels and short stories delve deep into the human psyche, exploring the complexities of emotion and the impact of social and environmental factors. One of Crane's most celebrated works, *The Red Badge of Courage*, offers a vivid portrayal of a young

Civil War soldier's experiences. The novel delves into the psychological turmoil of war, capturing the raw emotions of fear, courage, and the blurred lines between the two. Crane's ability to convey the visceral reality of combat has solidified his place in literary history.

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



Fig 3.2.2 Painting of "The Open Boat"

3.2.2 Plot of "The Open Boat"

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

ly reflecting on their situation, and the captain, lying injured at the bow, mourns the loss of his ship but gives occasional instructions to keep them steady.

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

As they endure the relentless waves, gulls circle them, unaffected by the turbulent waters. A gull's unblinking stare unnerves them, especially the captain, who gently shoo it away to avoid capsizing. The men continue rowing in shifts, an exhausting task that requires cautious coordination as they switch positions. Small clumps of seaweed occasionally drift by, hinting that they're moving toward land. Finally, they spot a lighthouse on the horizon, a possible sign of safety, but waves continue to flood their boat, forcing the cook to bail the water out constantly.

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

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

At dawn, the captain decides they should try to reach shore, though the beach seems deserted. Preparing for the surf, he instructs them to abandon the boat if it capsizes. When they attempt the landing, the waves overturn the boat, plunging them into the freezing water.

The correspondent observes the others: the cook clings to an oar, the captain grips the dinghy, and the oiler swims ahead. Struggling, he sees a figure onshore coming to their aid. While the correspondent reaches the beach safely, he finds Billie, the oiler, face down in the sand, a tragic reminder of the ocean's impartial nature.

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



Fig 3.2.3 Dramatic paintings of the story

3.2.3 Analysis

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

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

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

As they attempt to navigate the waves, the

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

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

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

When the boat is inevitably capsized by a crashing wave, chaos ensues. Crane captures the terror and disorientation of the men, noting how the correspondent clutches a scrap of life belt in a desperate attempt to stay afloat. The “icy” water jolts him, underscoring the harsh truth of their situation. Earlier, the dawn over the sea hinted at beauty and possibility;



now, the cold water and turbulent waves underscore the mercilessness of nature, which cares nothing for their survival.

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

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

A turning point comes when a rescuer appears, hurriedly undressing to aid the men. This stranger’s willingness to help stands in sharp contrast to nature’s cold indifference. He symbolizes the human impulse to assist

others, a reminder of the bonds that link people, especially in moments of crisis. The rescuer, “naked as a tree in winter,” represents humanity stripped of pretensions, emphasising the fundamental need for connection and compassion.

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

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

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

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

Answers

1. Four
2. Billie
3. Slate
4. Oiler and cook
5. Green
6. Gull

7. Oiler
8. Waves
9. Guide
10. Oiler, Billie

Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Crane, Stephen. *The Open Boat: And Other Stories*. Dover Publications, 1993.
- ▶ Gallo, Donald R. *Stephen Crane: A Study of His Novels and Short Stories*. Twayne Publishers, 1994.
- ▶ Kuehl, John. *Stephen Crane: A Biography*. Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- ▶ Shaw, Howard. *The Short Stories of Stephen Crane*. Macmillan, 1962.

BLOCK - 04

Drama



The Emperor Jones

-Eugene O'Neill

Learning Outcomes

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

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

Prerequisites

Eugene O'Neill was the one who drastically changed the course of American Drama. He brought a fresh perspective to American theatre through his unwavering originality and experiments. *The Emperor Jones* stands out as one of the greatest works. This one-act play is made up of eight brief scenes. It has significantly influenced American drama. The title refers to the main character, Brutus Jones. This unit comprises segments on the life and literary works of Eugene O'Neill; a brief introduction to the American drama and his contributions; a summary and critical analysis of *The Emperor Jones*; the great Greek tragic tradition that O'Neill followed; theatrical features of the play; a glossary to the text; questions for assignments; and points for discussion, followed by a list of reference books for further study.

Keywords

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

Discussion



Fig 4.1.1. Eugene O'Neill

4.1.1 Eugene O'Neill: Life and Works

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill was born on October 16, 1888, in New York City. He was the second child of the famous romantic actor James O'Neill and Ella Quinlan O'Neill. His early years were spent travelling across the country with his father's theatre company, which impacted his formal education. He attended Mount Saint Vincent Academy, a boarding school in New York City, and later Betts Academy in Stamford, Connecticut. He also spent a year at Princeton University. In 1900, he married Kathleen Jenkins and later went on a gold prospecting trip to Honduras. Their son, Eugene Gladstone O'Neill, Jr., was born in 1910. In 1912, he attempted suicide

and divorced Kathleen the same year. He then pursued a career as an actor and worked as a newspaper reporter for the New London Telegraph. He spent two years at sea, earning the "Able Seaman" certificate. After suffering from tuberculosis, he spent six months at the Gaylord Farm Sanatorium in Connecticut, where he read extensively, focusing on plays, and wrote his first one-act plays. In 1914, he enrolled in George Pierce Baker's drama classes at Harvard. His involvement with non-commercial theatre groups led to the creation and production of his experimental works. In 1918, he married Agnes Boulton, and the following year, their son Shane O'Neill was born, followed by their daughter Oona O'Neill in 1926.

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

O'Neill was a prolific writer, and his plays won widespread recognition. The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him a gold medal for drama, and Yale University awarded him a D. Litt. He won the Pulitzer Prize

for drama thrice. He reached the pinnacle of success with the winning of the Nobel Prize for literature in 1936. His plays have been extensively translated into most of the languages of the world. Some of O'Neill's well-known plays are *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), *Desire under the Elms* (1925), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), *The Iceman Cometh* (1946)

When *The Hairy Ape* was produced, O'Neill was the only "advanced playwright" in the USA. The influence of all these tendencies is discernible in O'Neill; he experimented with ancient and modern tragic themes, techniques, and ideas. In *The Emperor Jones* (1920) and *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931), the chief concern is the tragic predicament of man struggling to understand and justify himself in a universe that is always mysterious and hostile. His view of man is essentially tragic, and is interested only in the relation between man and God.

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

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

an Ibsenian lineage

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

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

4.1.2 Eugene O'Neill and Twentieth-Century American Drama

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

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

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

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

timent. From the very beginning of his career, he embraced experimentation.

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

The Emperor Jones is a play written by American playwright Eugene O'Neill in 1920. It follows the story of Brutus Jones, a clever and confident African American who was once a Pullman porter. After killing another man during a dice game, he is imprisoned but later escapes to a remote Caribbean island, where he declares himself emperor. The narrative unfolds through flashbacks as Brutus navigates the jungle, trying to evade his former subjects who have turned against him. Initially titled *The Silver Bullet*, this play is one of O'Neill's significant experimental pieces, blending expressionism with realism and featuring an unreliable narrator along with various perspectives. It also serves as a subtle critique of the U.S. occupation of Haiti following violent



uprisings, a topic that was heavily criticised in O'Neill's progressive political circles in New York. *The Emperor Jones* is inspired by O'Neill's own vivid experiences while searching for gold in the Honduran jungle in 1909 and reflects on the harsh rule of Haiti's Vilbrun Guillaume Sam.

Many of O'Neill's plays are tragedies that explore themes of violence, murder, death, and suicide. His characters often display abnormal and irrational behaviour. This led Eric Bentley to harshly critique O'Neill, stating that his tragic dramas from the thirties were tragedies taken to an extreme level of insanity. O'Neill's sad perspective is evident in most of his plays. He examines each individual in the context of their social surroundings. His characters exist within a societal framework, enduring suffering, hunger, despair, and ultimately facing ruin due to a system indifferent to the welfare of society as a whole. His tragedies stand apart from traditional forms. He deviates from Aristotelian principles, presenting the tragedy of modern man living in the contemporary world. His tragic figures come from everyday life and lack the Aristotelian concept of hamartia or a tragic flaw. Many of his protagonists are simply victims of their social circumstances.

One significant aspect of O'Neill's early works, including plays like *The Emperor Jones* (1922) and *The Hairy Ape* (1922), is how the social realities of his time influenced the dramatic narrative. O'Neill vividly depicts the struggles of the underprivileged in the emerging industrial landscape, presenting the hardships faced by industrial workers, sailors, and farmers. He also highlights the severe racial inequalities experienced by African Americans. His plays reflect a profound comprehension of contemporary human experiences, both in terms of situational and psychological dimensions. O'Neill consistently viewed indi-

viduals through the lens of their social contexts, leading him to critique the very fabric of American society. He portrays characters against a backdrop of powerful social forces. He offers a scathing critique of the social order within the industrial and psychological settings of many of his works, such as *Anna Christie*, *Strange Interlude*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *All God's Chillun Got Wings*. Although he believed that belonging to a social order was essential to humanity, he ultimately felt disillusioned, recognising his insignificance as an individual within that structure. He thought that a discriminatory social environment caused human suffering. He felt that the world lacked intelligent social organisation. In his eyes, it was filled with cruelty, selfishness, indulgence, ignorance, and hatred. He harshly criticised the social order, environment, and society as a whole, yet he offered no solutions for improving it.

O'Neill's Limitations

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

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

His limitations do not diminish his status as the greatest American dramatist and one of the most significant figures in 20th-century

theatre worldwide. He was a dedicated and thoughtful writer who earned acclaim as a serious playwright due to his remarkable social consciousness. The Nobel Prize in Literature, four Pulitzer Prizes, and numerous other accolades serve as clear evidence of his importance. He motivated many playwrights to believe in their abilities and became a driving force for emerging dramatists. George Jean Nathan's comment would suffice to sum up: "With O'Neill's acceptance and success in the theatre, American playwrights suddenly took courage and proceeded, as best as in their fashion they could, to set themselves to a species of drama far removed from that to which they had been devoting their efforts. The newer and younger writers, led by O'Neill, threw off the shackles at once and tried to write honestly, faithfully, and truthfully."

4.1.3 Popularity of the Play

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

4.1.4 Composition of the Play

O'Neill shared how he came up with the idea for *The Emperor Jones* and the influences behind it. He writes, "The idea of *The Emperor Jones* came from an old circus man I knew. This man told me a story about the late President Sam, who was currently in Haiti. This was to the effect that Sam had said they would

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

4.1.5 Characters

Brutus Jones - Emperor

Henry Smithers - A Cockney Trader

An Old Native Woman

Lem - A Native Chief

Soldiers- Adherents of Lem

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



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

4.1.5.1 Other Elements in the Play

Tom-tom

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

Cockney

A native of East London,

Stowaway

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

Craps

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

Martinique

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

Gunboat

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

Pullman porter

Someone hired to work on the railroads as a porter.

Panama hat

A wide-brimmed hat of straw-like material

made from the leaves of a particular tropical palm tree, worn chiefly by men.

Witch-doctor

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

Silver bullet

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

4.1.6 Summary of the Play

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

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

SCENE 3: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 4: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 5: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 6: In the Forest. Night.

SCENE 7: In the Forest. Night.

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

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



Fig. 4.1.2 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

SCENE I

Outline

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

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

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

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

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

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

Smithers is suspicious about the woman, tiptoes behind her, and catches her by the shoulder.

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

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

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

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

Jones’s language has a heavy Negro accent. He is irritated because someone whistled and disturbed his sleep. Smithers shows himself and tells the Emperor that he has important news for him. The Generals and Cabinet have disappeared, but Jones seems least bothered. He knows that they usually run off when the Emperor sleeps to drink and brag in the town. Jones smirked at Smithers and asked him why he was not with them that day.

Smithers replies that drinking with the natives is part of his business. He reminds him that

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

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

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

Jones knows that his game will be up someday, and hence, he makes hay while the sun shines. When the natives rise against him, he will get away and enjoy his wealth. Smithers thinks Jones would not flee to the US because he had once broken out of prison there. Jones at first denies this, but when provoked, he admits that he did get into a fight with another Negro, Jeff, and killed him. In prison, when

a prison guard hit him, he split his head with a shovel and escaped. Jones warns Smithers that if he breathes a word of this to anyone, his exploitation of the natives will come to an end. Smithers, of course, swears silence.

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

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

At this time, the low, vibrating sound of the tom-tom is heard for the first time from the hills. When it begins, it corresponds to a normal pulse beat, steadily becoming faster, finally reaching a feverish rhythm at the end of the play. The Negroes have begun their ritual war dance. Jones continues to be unperturbed and jokes that the natives are seeing him off with drumbeats, if not a brass band. He bids farewell to Smithers and walks out majestically through the front door. Smithers looks on with astonished admiration.

Analysis

Scene one is a brilliant exposition in the re-

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

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

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

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



mini-narratives that correspond to the plight of Emperor Jones.

SCENE II: Nightfall at the Edge of the Forest

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

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

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

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

darkness of the forest.

Analysis

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

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

SCENE III: Nine O' Clock: In the Forest

Outline

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

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

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



Fig 4.1.3 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

Analysis

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

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

SCENE IV: Eleven O 'Clock: In the Forest Outline

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

Looking into the darkness, he thinks he sees

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

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

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

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

Analysis

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

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

Outline

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

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

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



Fig 4.1.4 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

Analysis

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

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

Outline

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

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

Analysis

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

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



Fig 4.1.5 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

Outline

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

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

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

pears into the river. Jones hides his face in the ground and cries as the tom-tom beats away furiously.

Analysis

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

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

Outline

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

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

of the natives.

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



Fig 4.1.6 A scene from *The Emperor Jones*

Analysis

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

4.1.6 The Character of Emperor Jones

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

perhuman powers to counter him.

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

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

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

racess.

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

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

4.1.7 Themes, Ideas and Techniques

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

Classical Elements

The Emperor Jones is classical in its simplicity and austerity. In the manner of the ancient dramatists, the action of the play begins on the afternoon of the most crucial day in the life of the protagonist, and we are told of his past retrospectively through the dialogue between Jones and Smithers. The classical device of

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

Technical Maturity

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

Expressionism: Blending with Realism

Emperor Jones is visualised in a careful blend of realism and expressionism. O'Neill had been greatly influenced by Strindberg's expressionistic plays. The two modes are quite



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

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

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

and subjective picture of the protagonist, and the readers/audience empathise with his penitence and self-sacrifice. This gives the play its force and greatness. The final scene re-establishes Jones as a tragic hero who lives even in physical death.

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

4.1.8 Critical Overview

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

The concept of the tragic vision in his plays was inherited from the great Greek dramatists such as Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Euripides. The greatness of a tragedy lies in its ability to provide insights into the underlying truths that define and govern life, and this finds expression in all of his tragic plays. O'Neill believed that the significance of tragedy lies in its ability to reveal truth, which is essentially beauti-

ful. The tragic vision is based on the idea that the mysterious structure of the human mind itself is responsible for its own tragedy. *The Emperor Jones* demonstrates several parallels to the Greek tragic elements mentioned by Aristotle. Firstly, the play evokes in both the protagonist and the audience a heightened sense of pity and fear, which is the purpose of tragedy. The protagonist has a hamartia or tragic flaw, and the play observes the unities of time and space. The scenes are also spectacular, and although it does not have an actual chorus, it does have chorus characters.

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

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

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

"Language and dialect are elements in defining characters and dramatic tensions," remarks Krishna Sen. O'Neill, with his use of poetic symbolism, dramatic monologue, chorus, and arrangement of scenes in *Lazarus Laughed*, along with the experiments in stage lighting and sound design in *The Emperor Jones* and *The Great God Brown*, says Ashok Sengupta, was able to develop a dramatic experience which was termed as 'total theatre.'

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

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



and the symbolic movement back to the jungle - all contributing to the total effect where the audience is able to experience the magnitude of the tragic vision portrayed.

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

O'Neill had read about drumbeats in Congo festivals, which started at 72 beats per minute and slowly intensified and accelerated until everyone's heartbeat corresponded to the fren-

zy of the drumming. O'Neill remarked that this was 'an idea and an experiment' to see how it would work on the audience in a theatre. The drum technique, along with the apparitions, the firing of bullets, the auction, the slave figures, the witch doctor, the crocodile god, and the progressively dimming lights, resulted in a brilliant innovative experience.

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

Recap

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

Objective Questions

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

Answers

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

Assignments

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

Suggested Reading

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BLOCK - 05

Novels



Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

-Mark Twain

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ have a general understanding of Mark Twain as a novelist
- ▶ identify key features of Twain's writings
- ▶ understand the key themes and symbols in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- ▶ have an understanding of the cultural background of pre-Civil-war America

Prerequisites

Are you familiar with the picaresque novel? Originating in 16th-century Spain, it is a distinctive literary form that follows the adventures of a roguish protagonist known as a "pícaro." This character, typically from a lower social class, embarks on a series of episodic adventures that reveal the shortcomings and corruption of society. Unlike traditional novels that focus on a central plot or moral development, picaresque novels are characterized by their episodic nature, with each episode highlighting the pícaro's cleverness and survival skills. Through its satirical and often humorous portrayal, the genre critiques social norms and explores the complexities of class and morality. Classic works like *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605 Part I, 1615 Part II) exemplify how the picaresque novel uses its irreverent narrative style to offer insightful commentary on societal flaws. Now that we have a clear understanding of the picaresque novel and its characteristics, let's delve into the story of a pícaro hero by the name of Huck in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Keywords

Civilise, Slavery, Friendship, Mississippi river, Race, Social norms, Morality





Fig 5.1.1 Cover page of the novel *Huckleberry Finn* showing Huck and Jim

Discussion

5.1.1 About the Author- Mark Twain (1835-1910)

Mark Twain, born Samuel Langhorne Clemens, is a towering figure in American literature, renowned for his sharp wit and humour that often veils a profound social commentary. In his most celebrated works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Twain masterfully depicts the complexities of life in pre-Civil War America. Twain's experience of growing up along the Mississippi River, heavily influenced his storytelling, imbuing his narratives with a sense of place and an authentic regional voice.

5.1.2 Plot of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

I'm Huck Finn, and most folks just call me Huck. You probably haven't heard of me unless you've read Mark Twain's *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. After Tom and I found a treasure, we ended up with \$6,000 each. Then, the Widow Douglas took me in to try and civilize me. She wanted me to learn manners, go to school, and stop swearing. But I'm more comfortable in the woods, wearing old clothes, and living free.

My dad, Pap, showed up out of nowhere. He wasn't a good man—always drunk and mean. When he heard about my money, he kidnapped me and took me to a cabin in the woods. I didn't mind being away from the widow, but

I couldn't stand Pap's beatings anymore. So, I escaped by smashing up the cabin, killing a pig, and spreading its blood to fake my own death.

I hid out on Jackson Island for a while, thinking I was alone. But one night, I ran into Jim, Miss Watson's slave. Jim had run away because he heard she was going to sell him south. I wasn't sure about teaming up with a runaway slave at first, but Jim wasn't just anybody to me—he was a friend. So, we stuck together.

After a few days on the island, we got worried folks might be looking for us. To find out what was going on, I decided to dress up like a girl and sneak into town. Jim and I found some old clothes, and I became "Sarah Williams". I walked right into a stranger's house, and it worked—at first. The woman, Mrs. Loftus, started talking about how Huck Finn had been murdered, and how Jim was a suspect. She even told me her husband was going to Jackson Island that night to search for him. But after a while, she got suspicious of me, especially when I didn't sew properly and couldn't throw like a girl. I had to change my story fast, telling her I was actually a boy running away from a cruel family. I made it out of there before her husband got back, and when I told Jim, we packed up our things and left the island that very night.

Floating down the river was peaceful, but every so often, something strange would turn up. Like the time Jim and I found a house floating down the river. It looked abandoned, so we went inside to see what we could find. The place was a mess, but then Jim came across something that spooked him—he wouldn't let me look at it. He just told me not to ask questions and to keep away. Later, I found out it was a dead man lying there. Jim kept it from me, knowing it wasn't something a boy like me needed to see.

Not long after that, Jim and I got separated in a thick fog one night. I was in the canoe, and Jim stayed with the raft. We drifted for hours, calling out for each other, but couldn't see a thing. When I finally found him again, I thought it would be a good joke to pretend we'd never been separated, to make Jim think he'd dreamed the whole thing. He fell for it at first, but then he saw all the signs on the raft, like the branches and dirt, and realized I was fooling him. Jim looked so hurt that I felt bad about it. He told me how scared he'd been, thinking he'd lost me, and it hit me—Jim wasn't just a runaway slave, he was my friend. I apologized to him, and from that point on, things were different between us. I didn't see him as property anymore, just a man who deserved to be free like anyone else.

That's what we were aiming for, too—freedom. Jim had a plan. We were going to get to Cairo, down in Illinois, where the Ohio River meets the Mississippi. Once we reached Cairo, Jim could head further north into free states, where he wouldn't have to worry about being captured. He was hoping to work and save up enough money to buy his wife and children out of slavery. That's all Jim ever talked about—his family. It wasn't much of a plan, but it was all we had.

But things got complicated again when we stayed with a family called the Grangerfords. I got separated from Jim after we had a run-in with a steamboat, and I ended up on the Grangerfords' doorstep. They were a nice enough family, but I soon learned they were caught up in a deadly feud with another family, the Shepherdsons. I didn't understand why they hated each other so much, but the tension was always there, even at church, where they carried guns hidden in their coats. I got especially close to one of the Grangerford boys, Buck. He was about my age, and we spent time together hunting and talking. But the feud took



a tragic turn when Sophia Grangerford, one of the daughters, ran off to marry a Shepherdson boy. The families went to war over it, and in the chaos, Buck got killed. I saw him lying in the river, lifeless, and it shook me up badly. I couldn't stand to be around all that bloodshed any longer, so I found Jim, and we got back on the raft as fast as we could. The river seemed like the only safe place left.

Then, we picked up two con men—calling themselves the Duke and the King. They were crooked, always trying to scam people. They even put on a fake show to steal money from a bunch of townspeople. But what really made my blood boil was when they sold Jim to some farmers, telling them he was a runaway slave. I knew I had to do something, even though the law said I was supposed to turn Jim in. That was the hardest part for me. I sat down to write a letter to Miss Watson, thinking maybe I ought to do what I was told was right and give Jim up. But then I thought about how Jim had been there for me, like the time he kept watch while I slept, or when he called me his only friend. It didn't seem right to betray him, so I tore up the letter. “All right, then, I'll

go to hell!” I said to myself, and I meant it. I was ready to face whatever might come, but I wasn't about to give up Jim.

So, I set out to get him back. It wasn't easy, but I found him at a farm. I came up with a plan, though it was Tom Sawyer who made it all complicated. Tom showed up out of the blue, and being Tom, he couldn't resist turning a simple rescue into some grand adventure. We dug tunnels and made a big fuss, even though Tom knew something I didn't—Jim had already been set free in Miss Watson's will after she died. Tom never told me that until it was all over; he just wanted the thrill of the escape.

In the end, Jim was a free man, and Tom got his fun, though he got shot in the leg during all the commotion. We patched him up and made our way out of there. As for me, I found out something that surprised me—Jim finally told me that the dead body we'd seen in the floating house all those weeks ago was my Pap. He kept it from me to protect me, knowing I'd feel better not knowing right away. So, I didn't have to worry about Pap anymore. Folks wanted me to settle down and live a proper life, but that's not for me. I think I'll



Fig 5.1.2 A pictorial map of events in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

head out west, into the territories. There's too much out there for me to see to be tied down. And that's my story. It's nothing fancy, just the way it happened. Me and Jim, we learned a lot floating down that river. More than what one could learn in a school. We found our way, somehow, even when the world tried to tell us we couldn't.

5.1.3 Critical analysis

5.1.3.1 Themes

Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, presented through Huck's first-person narrative, is a timeless exploration of themes like freedom, slavery, morality, friendship, and societal hypocrisy, cleverly disguised as the young boy's journey down the Mississippi River.

From the outset, the novel contrasts Huck's personal quest for liberation with Jim's struggle for physical freedom from slavery. The Widow's attempts to civilise Huck symbolize the oppressive rules and moral double standards that Twain critiques throughout the narrative. Huck's initial rebellion against these attempts sets the stage for his larger journey of self-discovery and freedom. As Huck fakes his own death and runs away, he encounters Jim, a runaway slave also seeking freedom. The Mississippi River, which becomes the central setting of their journey, symbolizes more than just a physical escape; it represents a liminal space between the constraints of society and the possibility of freedom. For Huck, the river offers a refuge from his father's abuse and the oppressive expectations of civilization imposed by the widow and her sister. For Jim, it is a literal pathway to liberation and a chance to reunite with his family. By the end, Huck's decision to "light out for the Territory" reveals his continuous quest for autonomy, rejecting societal norms even as Jim gains his physical freedom.

Friendship is another recurring theme in the novel, particularly through Huck and Jim's relationship. At the beginning of the novel, Huck sees Jim as Miss Watson's property, but as they travel together, Huck begins to see Jim as an equal, a friend, and someone worthy of his loyalty. Throughout their voyage, Huck's evolving relationship with Jim highlights significant shifts in his moral perspective. Huck provides Jim with protection and helps him navigate his escape, while Jim gives Huck emotional support and, in many ways, serves as a surrogate father. Jim's selflessness and care for Huck—such as when he sacrifices his sleep to watch over Huck—build a bond of trust. Huck's loyalty to Jim, even when it goes against everything he's been taught, reflects the power of friendship to transcend societal boundaries. This transformation is crystallized in the moment Huck resolves to help Jim escape, even if it means going against the moral teachings he has been raised with. Huck's internal struggle, exemplified by his declaration, "All right, then, I'll go to hell," (chapter 31) marks a critical point in his moral development. He chooses personal loyalty and friendship over societal norms, demonstrating a profound shift in his understanding of right and wrong.

Another significant theme in the novel is moral development. Huck's journey is not just physical but moral and emotional. At the beginning of the novel, Huck is influenced by the values of the racist, violent society he lives in. His upbringing has taught him that slaves are property and that aiding an escaped slave is wrong. However, as he travels with Jim, Huck starts questioning these values. His growing bond with Jim forces him to rethink what is right and wrong. Huck's inner conflict is especially evident when he decides to tear up the letter that would betray Jim, choosing to prioritize his own moral sense over society's expectations. It also explores societal hypoc-



ris, especially through the contrast between appearances and reality. For instance, the "civilised" people Huck encounters often act in ways that are far from moral. The Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, who attend church regularly, are involved in a violent feud, and the "Duke" and "King" are conmen who exploit people for their own gain. Twain critiques the moral contradictions in society, particularly in the way that people who claim to be Christian or "civilised" still uphold slavery and violence. Similarly, the feud between the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons is portrayed as a senseless continuation of long-forgotten grievances, highlighting the absurdity of entrenched social conflicts and violence.

Twain's portrayal of race and slavery is complex, particularly given the novel's historical context. Written after the Civil War but set before it, *Huckleberry Finn* highlights the deeply ingrained racism of the American South. Twain often critiques the hypocrisy and cruelty of slavery and racism through Jim's character. Twain critiques the hypocrisy of a society that upholds slavery while professing Christian values. The character of Miss Watson, who owns Jim while considering herself pious, exemplifies this contradiction. Twain's portrayal of Jim challenges the stereotypical caricatures of the time, presenting him as a figure of intelligence, empathy, and moral integrity. Jim's relationship with Huck becomes a powerful testament to the possibility of overcoming racial prejudices and forming genuine human connections.

As the story nears its conclusion, the arrival of Tom Sawyer introduces a contrasting perspective to Huck's pragmatic approach. Tom's elaborate and often absurd schemes to "rescue" Jim, despite Jim's already having been freed, represent a return to the romanticized notions of adventure and heroism. This shift in narrative tone can be interpreted as Twain's

ridicule of the trivialization of serious social issues. While Tom's antics serve as a comic counterpoint to Huck's earlier, more earnest struggles, they also underscore the novel's distaste for romanticizing adventure at the expense of genuine human concerns.

Overall, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* offers a nuanced exploration of freedom, morality, and social criticism. Through Huck's journey and his evolving relationship with Jim, Twain interrogates the contradictions of a society built on both personal and institutionalized forms of oppression. The novel remains a compelling and complex examination of human nature and societal values, resonating with readers through its enduring themes and richly drawn characters.

5.1.3.2 Symbols

The Mississippi River emerges as the central symbol in the novel enriching the story's exploration of freedom and self-discovery. As Huck Finn and Jim travel along the river, it becomes clear that the river represents more than just their physical path; it embodies their quest for personal liberation and a break from societal constraints.

For Huck, the river is a haven from the chaos and oppression he faces in his life in St. Petersburg. With his abusive father and the rigid expectations of his community exemplified by Widow Douglas' attempts to civilise him, Huck finds a sense of escape and peace on the water. The river offers him a space where societal judgments and constraints seem to drift away, providing a temporary refuge where he can forge his own path.

Twain uses the river's varied moods to reflect Huck and Jim's experiences. At times, the river is tranquil, symbolizing hope and the possibility of renewal. These peaceful moments highlight the characters' sense of freedom and their dreams of a better life. For instance,

during the calm stretches of their journey, Huck and Jim enjoy moments of companionship and respite, underscoring their growing friendship and shared sense of liberation.

However, the river also presents significant challenges. Its unpredictable currents and sudden storms serve as metaphors for the difficulties Huck and Jim encounter. These dangers remind them—and the reader—that their quest for freedom is fraught with obstacles and uncertainties. The turbulent aspects of the river symbolize the struggles they face in their pursuit of a more liberated existence, emphasizing that freedom often comes with its own set of trials.

The river's symbolism extends to Huck's internal journey as well. As Huck drifts down the river, he is also moving away from the societal norms that have shaped his moral beliefs. The river's flow mirrors Huck's evolving sense of right and wrong, as he begins to question and ultimately reject the prejudices he was raised with. This symbolic journey demonstrates Huck's moral growth and his increasing alignment with his own sense of justice rather than societal expectations.

The Mississippi River in Twain's novel is a powerful symbol that captures the tension between the desire for freedom and the challenges of achieving it. It represents both the sanctuary Huck and Jim seek and the obstacles they must overcome. Mark Twain also employs several other symbols to convey deeper themes.

The raft serves as a symbol of freedom and safety. For Huck and Jim, it represents a place where they are free from societal constraints and racial prejudice. It's a refuge where they can form their own rules and live on equal terms. However, the fragility of the raft also highlights how their freedom is constantly under threat from the outside world.

While the raft represents freedom, the shore symbolizes the opposite: the constraints of society. Every time Huck and Jim encounter life onshore, they face deception, violence, or moral dilemmas. This contrast between life on the river and on the shore reflects Twain's critique of civilization's hypocrisy and corruption.

Jim can be viewed as both a character and a symbol. As a runaway slave, he represents the plight of enslaved African Americans and the injustices of slavery. His humanity, kindness, and dignity challenge the racial stereotypes of the time, making him a symbol of the moral conscience of the novel. The Mississippi River while discussed already is not just a setting but a dynamic symbol of change, life, and the possibility of transformation. It offers Huck and Jim a journey toward freedom, but it also carries dangers and unpredictability, symbolizing the complexity of freedom itself.

The Duke and the King, con men represent the deceit, corruption, and moral bankruptcy of society. Their ability to manipulate others for profit reflects Twain's criticism of human greed and the ease with which people are fooled by outward appearances and titles.

The Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, the feuding families are symbols of the absurdity of entrenched traditions and the destructive nature of senseless violence. Their feud is never explained, highlighting how people often continue destructive behaviours without questioning them.

Huck's change in clothing throughout the novel is symbolic of his internal struggle between civilization and freedom. Whenever Huck is in "civilized" clothes, he feels uncomfortable and constrained, symbolizing society's expectations of conformity. When he's in ragged clothes, he's more in touch with his own nature, representing his preference for a



life unbound by society's rules. Each of these symbols deepens the novel's exploration of themes like freedom, society, morality, and race.

5.1.3.3 Characters

Huckleberry Finn:

The novel's young narrator is a figure of remarkable complexity and depth. Raised in the small town of St. Petersburg, Missouri, Huck's life is characterized by a lack of stability and structure, largely due to his father's alcoholism and the absence of a nurturing mother. His upbringing in such an environment has instilled in him a keen sense of independence and survival, often manifested through his quick thinking and resourcefulness. Despite his rough demeanour and minimal formal education, Huck possesses an intrinsic moral compass that becomes increasingly evident as the story unfolds. His internal conflict over aiding Jim, a runaway slave, illustrates his struggle to reconcile his innate sense of justice with the prejudiced societal norms he has inherited. Huck's journey along the Mississippi River symbolizes his quest for both literal and metaphorical freedom, representing his desire to break away from societal constraints and define his own ethical values.

Jim:

Jim is a character of profound emotional and moral strength. As a runaway slave seeking liberation from the bonds of slavery, Jim's quest for freedom is not just a personal journey but a powerful critique of the institution of slavery itself. Despite the harsh realities he faces, Jim is portrayed with great dignity, compassion, and intelligence. His relationship with Huck evolves from a simple companionship into a deep, mutual bond that transcends societal prejudices. Jim's wisdom and selflessness, particularly in his protective role towards Huck, highlight his humanity and challenge the dehumanizing stereotypes of

the time. His character embodies a poignant critique of the systemic racism and moral failings inherent in the society of the period.

Tom Sawyer:

Huck's friend offers a striking contrast to Huck's practical and morally driven character. Coming from a more stable and respectable family, Tom is characterised by his vivid imagination and a fondness for romantic adventure. His love for grandiose plans and storytelling often leads him to devise elaborate schemes that, while thrilling, are impractical and disconnected from the realities faced by those around him. Tom's involvement in Jim's escape is driven more by a desire for excitement and adventure than genuine concern for Jim's plight. His tendency to view life in a romanticised way serves as a foil to Huck's more grounded and pragmatic approach. Tom's return to his fanciful ideas at the end of the novel underscores the contrast between his idealism and Huck's hard-earned moral insight.

The Duke and the King:

The two conmen who appear later in the story, represent the darker side of human nature and societal corruption. These characters, who assume self-styled royal identities, engage in a series of fraudulent schemes that exploit the trust and gullibility of those they encounter. Their actions—ranging from elaborate scams to deceitful performances—highlight their dishonest nature and lack of moral integrity. Through their schemes and eventual downfall, Twain provides a sharp critique of the ease with which people can be deceived by appearances and the inescapable moral decay within society. The Duke and the King's portrayal underscores Twain's satirical examination of social and ethical corruption, illustrating the impact of deceit and exploitation on both individuals and communities.

Recap

- ▶ A picaresque novel follows the adventures of a roguish protagonist known as a "picaro."
- ▶ Huck in Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a picaro hero,
- ▶ Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens
- ▶ Twain is a towering figure in American literature, renowned for his sharp wit and humour.
- ▶ His experience of growing up along the Mississippi River heavily influenced his storytelling.
- ▶ Tom and Huck found a treasure.
- ▶ Widow Douglas took Huck in to try and civilise him.
- ▶ Huck's father, Pap kidnaps him to get the money
- ▶ Huck fakes his death and runs away
- ▶ He finds a runaway slave Jim and befriends him
- ▶ They have an adventurous journey through the Mississippi River
- ▶ Finds two conmen- The Duke and the King but they sell Jim
- ▶ Tom and Huck plan to rescue Jim
- ▶ In the end, Jim is free and Huck wants to go West
- ▶ Huck learned a lot more floating down that river than one could learn in a school
- ▶ the novel offers a nuanced exploration of themes of freedom, morality, and social criticism.
- ▶ The River Mississippi is the central symbol in the novel

Objective Questions

1. What is Mark Twain's real name?
2. Who is the narrator of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
3. In which year was *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* first published?
4. What is the name of Huckleberry Finn's best friend who also appears in the novel?
5. The setting of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* primarily takes place along which river?
6. Which character in the novel is an escaped slave who travels with Huck?

7. Which genre best describes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*?
8. In which literary period was *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* written?
9. What major social issue do *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* prominently criticize?
10. Who is Huck's alcoholic and abusive father in the novel?
11. In which town does Huck plan to free Jim by travelling?
12. What disguise does Huck use when he sneaks into town to gather information?

Answers

1. Samuel Clemens
2. Huck
3. 1884
4. Tom Sawyer
5. Mississippi River
6. Jim
7. Satire
8. Realism period
9. Slavery and Racism
10. Pap Finn
11. Cairo
12. A girl named Sarah Williams

Assignments

1. Explore the theme of freedom and slavery in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. How do Huck and Jim's respective quests for freedom differ, and how does their journey on the river symbolize these desires?
2. Analyze the character development of Huck Finn in the novel. How does his moral compass evolve from the beginning to the end? Provide specific examples of key turning points in his character arc.

3. Discuss the use of satire in Twain's depiction of the Southern society. How does Twain criticize issues such as racism and social class through the characters and events in the novel?
4. Evaluate the role of the Mississippi River as both a setting and a symbol in the novel. How does the river function as a space of liberation, danger, and moral ambiguity for Huck and Jim?
5. Examine Twain's portrayal of Jim as a character. How does Jim challenge or conform to the racial stereotypes of his time, and how does his relationship with Huck redefine notions of friendship and humanity?
6. Critically analyse the ending of the novel. Some critics argue that the final chapters undermine Huck's moral growth. Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Defend your position with textual evidence.
7. Compare and contrast the characters of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. How do their differing approaches to adventure and morality reflect in the novel?
8. Explore the concept of the "civilized" world versus the "natural" world in the novel. How does Huck's conflict between societal expectations and his desire for freedom shape his journey?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Robinson, Forrest G., ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*. Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- ▶ Kiskis, Michael J., ed. *Mark Twain's The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Casebook*. Oxford University Press, 2004.
- ▶ Bush, Harold K. *Mark Twain and the Spiritual Crisis of His Age*. University of Alabama Press, 2007.
- ▶ Scholes, Robert and Robert Kellogg. *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: OUP, 1966.
- ▶ Cox, James Melville. *Mark Twain: The fate of humor*. Vol. 1. University of Missouri Press, 2002.

BLOCK - 06

**Essays and
Non-Fiction**



The Battle of the Ants

- Henry David Thoreau

Learning Outcomes

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

- ▶ acquaint themselves with the relevant period and social milieu in which Thoreau as a writer emerged.
- ▶ become familiar with Thoreau's oeuvre.
- ▶ analyse Thoreau's narrative style and themes.
- ▶ understand the philosophical and allegorical dimensions of the text.

Prerequisites

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was an American philosopher, poet, and essayist best known for his works *Walden* and the essay "Civil Disobedience". Thoreau was a key figure in the Transcendentalist movement, emphasizing the importance of nature, individual thought, and simplicity in life. His most celebrated work, *Walden*, documents his experiment of simple living in natural surroundings beside Walden Pond. Thoreau believed that nature was not just a backdrop for life but a profound source of insight, moral guidance, and spiritual renewal. *Walden* reflects his philosophy of individualism, self-reliance, and the importance of living deliberately, ideas that align closely with the core tenets of Transcendentalism. This movement emphasized the intrinsic value of nature and the importance of personal intuition over societal norms and materialism. "The Battle of the Ants" is an excerpt from *Walden*. Through this narrative, Thoreau captures the natural world with philosophical insights. The story, framed as a description of ants engaged in a battle, serves as a metaphor for human conflict, raising questions about the nature of war, survival, and individual struggle.

Keywords

Nature, Transcendentalism, War and Conflict, Individualism vs. Collectivism

Discussion

6.1.1 Introduction



Fig.6.1.1 Henry David Thoreau

“You only need sit still long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns.”

Henry David Thoreau

It is impossible to discuss American Literary Canon without mentioning the name of Henry David Thoreau. He was a genius in all meaningful senses, whether we consider his personal, political, or literary life. Often regarded as the pioneer of American essay writing, his works have had great influence in many aspects of the American literary and cultural milieu. He was part of the literary and cultural movement called Transcendentalism

along with other prominent figures like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Transcendentalism became a major movement in the 1830s with the publication of Emerson's essay “Nature” and the founding of the transcendental club in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by prominent New England intellectuals, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Putnam and Frederic Henry Hedge. It is a philosophical movement centred in and around the New England region of the United States in the mid-19th century. At its core is the belief in an ideal spiritual state that transcends the physical and the empirical, and is only realised through the individual's intuition rather than through the doctrines of established religions. When Thoreau was a student at Harvard University, Emerson delivered a lecture titled “Nature”, which greatly influenced him to the ideological onset of transcendentalism, self-reliance and minimalism. There began a lifelong friendship between two great minds of all time in the history of America. Emerson was a thinker, and Thoreau was more of a practitioner. He asked the basic question: is it possible to live the life of a transcendentalist with self-reliance and minimalism? The answer is his book *Walden*, based on his minimalistic life in a single-room cabin beside Walden Pond in the woods for two years, two months and two days, from which the prescribed text is taken. *Walden* reflects his philosophy of individualism, self-reliance, and the importance of living deliberately, ideas that align closely with the core tenets of Transcendentalism. This movement emphasized the intrinsic value of nature and the importance of personal intuition over social norms and materialism.

In “The Battle of the Ants”, an excerpt from *Walden*, Thoreau narrates a small but intense conflict between two colonies of ants. At first glance, the narrative seems to be a simple observation of nature. However, the story quickly evolves into an allegory for human conflict and war, mirroring the struggle for power and survival that also defines human societies. Thoreau’s use of detailed observation and philosophical reflection highlights the Transcendentalist belief that nature offers profound lessons about life and morality. The narrative not only captures the harsh realities of survival in the natural world but also raises timeless questions about the futility of conflict and the meaning of struggle, both in nature and in human society.

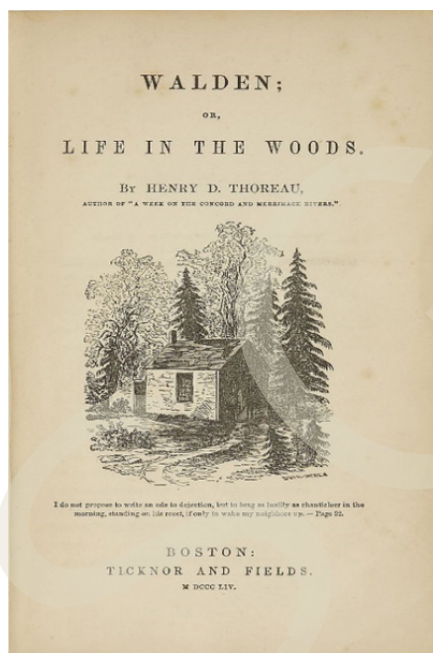


Fig.6.1.2 Cover page of *Walden or Life in the Woods*

6.1.2 Summary & Analysis

“The Battle of the Ants” is an excerpt from Chapter 12 of Thoreau’s most famous book, *Walden Pond*. The title of the chapter from which the insightful piece was taken is “The

Brute Neighbours.” At the beginning of the essay, the author talks about a day in his life when he witnessed two ants fighting ferociously on his wood pile. He noticed and identified their colour and size: one was red and small, and the other one was black and larger than the red. He saw them fighting hard and not letting go. Looking around, he realised that it was not an isolated fight, but two armies of red and black ants were fighting each other, making the woodpile and surroundings a battlefield filled with dead and dying bodies of ants from both sides. The author says that this is the first combat that he witnessed watching a battle so close. He calls the red ants “the republicans” and the blacks “the imperialists” and adds that they seem to fight more silently and seriously than humans. Then, he narrated events from the battle with the picturesque description of a couple of ants embracing each other and fighting ferociously. A red ant had attacked the feelers of a black ant and cut it off while the black ant dashed him from side to side. He saw a red ant coming to the scene, singing like Achilles to rescue his friend Patroclus. So far, he had not lost his limb, and when he got an opportunity, he grabbed a black ant, and the three of them were fighting for their lives. The author felt that some of the ants were singing their national anthems to soothe and cheer their slow and dying ant soldiers. He thought of them like humans, and the more he thought of them like humans, the fewer differences they had. He took a chip on which the three ants were fighting to his room and placed it under a microscope to see that the red ant had cut the foreleg and severed the feeler of the black ant. While doing this, his own breast was torn away. Witnessing this battle for another half an hour, the author saw that the black ants had cut off the heads of the white ants and carried their heads as trophies. After raising the glass of the microscope, the author saw the black ant walking over the window crippled. Thoreau did not know who

won and what the causes of this fearsome battle were, but he witnessed the same as if he were witnessing the struggle and ferocity of a human war.

The language used to describe the ants mirrors that of human warfare, with references to generals and heroes. Thoreau marvels at the bravery of the combatants, particularly one black ant that fights two red ants simultaneously. Despite the ants' small size, the intensity of their fight leaves a profound impression on the author. He reflects on how this seeming-

ly insignificant battle mirrors human conflicts and wars; both are driven by instinct, survival, and the desire for power, yet both seem senseless and tragic upon closer reflection. Through this description, Thoreau invites readers to question the purpose of conflict. He subtly suggests that, like the ants, humans are often caught in struggles that ultimately lack meaning or resolution.

Thoreau's writing aligns with Transcendentalist ideals, where nature is viewed as a teacher. The battle between ants is presented as a mi-



Fig 6.1.3 Thoreau's house and cabin

crocosm of life, offering lessons about the human condition. His portrayal of the ant battle is not merely a description of natural events; it serves as an allegory for human behaviour. The conflict reflects how humans engage in wars, often driven by pride, survival instinct, and the need for dominance. The ants' struggle prompts Thoreau to reflect on the futility of violence and war. He suggests that conflict,

whether in the animal kingdom or in human society, may be unavoidable but is rarely productive. The emphasis on the heroism of individual ants invites readers to ponder over the personal costs of conflict.

The narrative emphasises both individual bravery and collective effort. The ants' actions parallel the human experience, where

individuals strive for survival within larger societal conflicts. His ability to find meaning in a seemingly ordinary event demonstrates the Transcendentalist belief in the importance

of careful observation and contemplation. The narrative encourages readers to find significance in everyday occurrences.

Recap

- ▶ The author observes two ants, one red and small, the other black and large, fighting fiercely in his woodpile.
- ▶ He soon realises that a larger battle between two races of ants is underway, with the battlefield covered in dead and dying ants.
- ▶ The author compares the red ants to Republicans and the black ants to Imperialists, noting their serious and soundless combat.
- ▶ He sees a red ant lose one of its limbs while being dashed around by a black ant and imagines their battle cry as “conquer or die.”
- ▶ Another red ant arrives, like Achilles rescuing Patroclus, and joins the fight against the black ant.
- ▶ The author imagines the bands playing national songs for the slow and dying, blurring the line between ant and human conflicts.
- ▶ He takes the fighting ants into his house, places them under a microscope, and sees the red ant cut the black ant’s limbs but suffer a torn breast in the process.
- ▶ After half an hour, the black ant decapitates both red ants and carries their heads as trophies.
- ▶ The black ant, crippled, is released by the author, but it crawls away through the window.
- ▶ The author, unsure of the battle’s cause or victor, reflects on the war’s intensity, comparing it to human struggles.

Objective Questions

1. What is the main subject of Thoreau's observation in "Battle of the Ants"?
2. What does Thoreau symbolise in the ant battle?
3. How does Thoreau compare the red and black ants?
4. What phrase does Thoreau identify as the ants' battle cry?
5. To what does Thoreau compare the persistence of the ants in their struggle?
6. To which mythological figure does Thoreau compare the red ant’s rescuer?



7. What historical comparison does Thoreau make to describe the ant battle?
8. How does Thoreau compare the number of dead ants to?
9. What musical imagery does Thoreau imagine the ants would play if they had bands?
10. What did Thoreau observe about the black ants' condition?

Answers

1. A battle between armies of red ants and black ants.
2. Human war
3. Republicans and Imperialists.
4. "Conquer or die."
5. Thoreau compares the persistence of the ants in their struggle with Bulldogs.
6. Achilles.
7. Austerlitz, Dresden and the Concord Fight.
8. Thoreau compares the number of dead ants to the Battle of Bunker Hill.
9. National airs.
10. Crippled

Assignments

1. What is the significance of the phrase "Conquer or die" in relation to the ants' behaviour? How does it reflect their struggle?
2. How does the narrator characterise the intensity of the ant battle compared to human conflicts? Provide specific examples from the text.
3. What does the narrator suggest about the broader implications of the ant battle compared to significant historical human battles?
4. How does Thoreau's observation of the ant battle relate to his philosophy of simple living and appreciation for nature? What lessons can be learned from his approach?
5. Analyse the use of personification in the passage. How does it affect the way readers view the ants and their actions?

Suggested Reading

- ▶ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. Concord: Ticknor and Fields, 1854.
- ▶ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1836.
- ▶ Thoreau, Henry David. *Civil Disobedience*. Boston: David Reed, 1849.

MODEL QUESTION PAPER SETS



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY
Set A

QP CODE:

Reg. No:

Name:

B.A. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION
DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ELECTIVE COURSE
B21EG04DE – AMERICAN LITERATURE
(CBCS – UG)

2022-23 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Section A

Max Marks: 70

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1=10)

1. Who is considered the father of the short story in American literature?
2. What was the main theme of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"?
3. Who wrote the Federalist Papers during the Revolutionary period?
4. Name one African American writer associated with the Harlem Renaissance.
5. What genre of literature does the term "Jeremiad" belong to?
6. Who was the author of "Common Sense," published in 1776?
7. Identify one of the leading figures of the Transcendentalist movement.
8. What event does the Great Depression mark the end of in American literary history?
9. Name the first American novel written for the stage.
10. Which 20th-century poet is known for "The Emperor of Ice-Cream"?
11. What is the subject of Toni Morrison's writings during the post-war era?
12. Which play by Eugene O'Neill marked the beginning of modern American drama?
13. Which American Enlightenment thinker authored Poor Richard's Almanack?
14. Name the novel by John Steinbeck that portrays the struggles of migrant farmers during the Great Depression.
15. What is the period referred to as the "Age of Nationalism" in American literary history?



Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences.

(5×2=10)

16. How did colonial literature reflect the early social and political context of America?
17. Briefly explain the influence of Puritanism on early American literature.
18. What role does the bust of Pallas play in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven"?
19. What themes are explored in the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance?
20. How did the Jazz Age influence American literature?
21. Discuss the concept of individualism in Emerson's Transcendentalist philosophy.
22. What role did literature play during the American Revolutionary period?
23. How did Native American oral traditions influence early American literature?
24. How did African American folklore inspire the writings of Zora Neale Hurston?
25. How did post-war American literature address existential themes?
26. How does Emily Dickinson's poetry reflect themes of solitude and introspection?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph.

(6×5=30)

27. How does F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* critique the notion of the American Dream?
28. Discuss the significance of the Puritan migration in shaping American literary history.
29. How does Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem" reflect the struggles of African Americans?
30. What does the term "Beat Generation" signify in post-war American literature?
31. Explain the elements of Gothic literature in Edgar Allan Poe's works.
32. Describe the contribution of the Harlem Renaissance to the development of jazz music and literature.
33. How does O'Neill's play *The Emperor Jones* reflect the experimentalism of early 20th-century drama?
34. Evaluate the impact of the Great Depression on American literary themes.
35. Discuss the portrayal of class struggles in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.
36. How did the frontier experience shape early American literature?
37. What is the significance of Walt Whitman's representation of democracy in *Leaves of Grass*?

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

(2×10=20)

38. Examine the significance of Transcendentalism in American literature, with a focus on Emerson and Thoreau.
39. Discuss how post-war American literature addressed the themes of identity and resistance through African American writers.
40. How does post-war American literature explore themes of disillusionment and trauma through the works of writers like Kurt Vonnegut and Sylvia Plath?
41. Evaluate the representation of multiculturalism in contemporary American literature.



SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY
Set B

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B.A. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
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B21EG04DE – AMERICAN LITERATURE
(CBCS - UG)
2022-23 Admission Onwards

Time: 3 Hours

Max Marks: 70

Section A

Answer any ten of the following questions in one word or sentence. (10×1=10)

1. What is the central theme of Langston Hughes' "Harlem"?
2. Name the first newspaper established in America.
3. Which Transcendentalist author wrote the essay "Nature"?
4. Identify the African American cultural movement associated with jazz and literature in the 1920s.
5. What was the title of Edgar Allan Poe's first published poetry collection?
6. Who was the first American dramatist to win the Nobel Prize for Literature?
7. Name one major work of Nathaniel Hawthorne during the American Renaissance.
8. What event marked the beginning of the Great Depression?
9. Who authored "The Declaration of Independence"?
10. What literary genre became popular during the Post-Independence era?
11. Which poet is associated with the concept of "The Poetic Principle"?
12. What is the title of Eugene O'Neill's play that is based on expressionist techniques?
13. What does the term "American Renaissance" signify in literary history?
14. Who was the first African American poet to gain national recognition?
15. Name one famous work by William Faulkner that reflects the Great Depression.



Section B

Answer any five of the following questions in one or two sentences.

(5×2=10)

16. How did Puritanism influence the development of early American poetry?
17. What is the significance of “Nevermore” in Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven”?
18. Describe the key characteristics of Harlem Renaissance literature.
19. What are the philosophical foundations of Emerson’s Transcendentalism?
20. How did the Civil War influence the rise of realism in American literature?
21. What role did Toni Morrison play in post-war American literature?
22. How did Emily Dickinson’s poetry challenge the conventions of 19th-century American literature?
23. How did the Great Depression influence the themes of American fiction?
24. Describe the influence of the Enlightenment on early American writing.
25. What does the concept of “Manifest Destiny” reveal about the themes in 19th-century American literature?
26. What role did African American spirituals and songs play in shaping the themes of the Harlem Renaissance?

Section C

Answer any six of the following questions in one paragraph.

(6×5=30)

27. Explain the role of Puritan poetics in the emergence of American literature.
28. How does Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Emperor of Ice-Cream” reflect modernist themes?
29. Discuss the influence of multiculturalism on contemporary American literature.
30. What is the significance of the Jazz Age in shaping African American art and literature?
31. Evaluate the representation of individualism in the works of Henry David Thoreau.
32. Analyze how post-war literature reflects existentialism through the works of Albert Camus and its influence on American writers.
33. Discuss the experimental techniques used in Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*.
34. What are the central themes explored in E.E. Cummings’ “Buffalo Bills”?
35. Analyze the role of myth in Native American oral traditions.
36. What are the key characteristics of post-war confessional poetry?
37. Evaluate the portrayal of social injustice in John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Section D

Answer any two of the following questions in 300 words.

(2×10=20)

38. Examine the evolution of American literature from colonial writings to the Revolutionary period.
39. Analyze Edgar Allan Poe's contributions to Gothic literature with reference to his poems and short stories.
40. Discuss the thematic concerns of the Beat Generation in post-war American literature.
41. Evaluate the role of Transcendentalism as a bridge between Romanticism and realism in American literature.

സർവ്വകലാശാലാഗീതം

വിദ്യായാൽ സ്വതന്ത്രരാകണം
വിശ്വപൗരരായി മാറണം
ഗ്രഹപ്രസാദമായ് വിളങ്ങണം
ഗുരുപ്രകാശമേ നയിക്കണേ

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SREENARAYANAGURU OPEN UNIVERSITY

Regional Centres

Kozhikode

Govt. Arts and Science College
Meenchantha, Kozhikode,
Kerala, Pin: 673002
Ph: 04952920228
email: rckdirector@sgou.ac.in

Thalassery

Govt. Brennen College
Dharmadam, Thalassery,
Kannur, Pin: 670106
Ph: 04902990494
email: rctdirector@sgou.ac.in

Tripunithura

Govt. College
Tripunithura, Ernakulam,
Kerala, Pin: 682301
Ph: 04842927436
email: rcedirector@sgou.ac.in

Pattambi

Sree Neelakanta Govt. Sanskrit College
Pattambi, Palakkad,
Kerala, Pin: 679303
Ph: 04662912009
email: rcpdirector@sgou.ac.in

American Literature

COURSE CODE: B21EG04DE



Sreenarayanaguru Open University

Kollam, Kerala Pin- 691601, email: info@sgou.ac.in, www.sgou.ac.in Ph: +91 474 2966841

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