MODULE - I

1

TERMS AND CONCEPTS
PART I

Unit Structure

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will make the students aware of

- The historical and socio-political knowledge of 20th Century American Literature
- Liberal Humanism
- The Lost Generation
- Southern Renaissance

With this knowledge the students will be able to locate the particular works in the American literary context.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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

The major literary themes of the Modernist Era are confusion, isolation, and disillusionment. These themes reflect the mindset of the American people and the feelings that plagued them throughout the early 1900s. T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is a good representation of the theme of confusion by not only being confusing to read because of its fragmentation, but also by showing a man (Prufrock) who is grappling with decision making and trying to figure out what class of society he belongs in like many during this time period did.

The theme of isolation shows not only in everyday relationships but as the American people's take on world affairs. The U.S. desired to remain neutral through both World Wars, but eventually were forced into participation. “In Another Country,” by Ernest Hemingway portrays the isolation felt by soldiers and common Americans.

The theme of disillusionment is arguably the most common theme of the Modernist era. There was a disillusionment in the American people that the first world war would be quick and painless. The Great Gatsby displays the theme of disillusionment in that he truly believes that he can recreate his past with Daisy. Katherine Anne Porter’s story, “The Jilting of Granny Weatherall,” shows confusion and disillusionment that accompanies growing old and dying. Overall, this widespread disillusionment reflected the loss of values and faith that suddenly occurred in the American people at the turn of the century. Writers of the 20th century distinguished themselves from well-established literary patterns, structures, and norms through the use of fragmentation and alternative narrative forms. The postmodernism of this era “emphasized self-consciousness and pop art,” evident in strategies such as the stream-of-consciousness approach and biased or untrustworthy narrators (Pen and the Pad). New perspectives in literature also emerged throughout the 20th century, including those from urbanized and marginalized communities.

For many people in the United States, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of tremendous change in almost every facet of life. Breakthroughs in science-including Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, as well as the increasing influence of Charles Darwin’s theories of evolution-challenged conventional views of both the world we live in and our place within it. In the social sciences, the increasingly popular ideas of Sigmund Freud became conceptual tools used by many to question the sexual and social restraints of a tradition-bound culture they saw as highly repressed. Meanwhile, technological advances began to create the vast array of consumer goods we take for granted today, including movies, automobiles, airplanes, radios, and myriad other items-all produced on a massive scale previously unknown in human history. The industry needed to produce all these goods helped accelerate yet another great shift in American life as people migrated in ever greater numbers from their traditional, rural homes-where agriculture was the main focus of life-to the ever-expanding urban, industrial centers, such as Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia. However, much of this migration was from the South to the booming cities of the North-notably Chicago and New York-a trend that began around the time of the Civil War and continued into the mid-twentieth century. The period marked the first time in American history. that fewer people lived in rural than urban areas, and as the focus of American life moved to the cities, the consumption of mass-produced goods became every bit as important as their production. Historians sometimes refer to the massive social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century as distinctively “modern.” For many-and especially for many writers during the period-such great change and social upheaval raised the question: What kind of life is the best to live? Is the “modern” world headed in the right direction, or are we

going the wrong way? For writers in the South, such questions often involved a desire to protect tradition and myth from being destroyed by the influx of new ways of thinking and living. that fewer people lived in rural than urban areas, and as the focus of American life moved to the cities, the consumption of mass-produced goods became every bit as important as their production. Historians sometimes refer to the massive social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century as distinctively "modern." For many-and especially for many writers during the period-such great change and social upheaval raised the question: What kind of life is the best to live? Is the "modern" world headed in the right direction, or are we going the wrong way? For writers in the South, such questions often involved a desire to protect tradition and myth from being destroyed by the influx of new ways of thinking and living.

1.2 LIBERAL HUMANISM

Humanism is a philosophical and literary movement which has human being as its central concern. It also holds a general belief that human nature is something fixed and constant. Now, Liberal Humanism is a term which falls within the domain of literary criticism. During the 1970s, the hour of literary theory, as it was known, Liberal Humanism was a term applied to theory that came before 'theory'. The word 'Liberal' defines something it is not, that is not 'radically political' and thus evasive on political commitment, on how it is aligned. Humanism in this context also means something similar, that is something not-Marxist, not-Feminist or not-Theoretical. Liberal Humanists also believe in the fixedness and constancy of human nature as expressed in great literature. There is an implication by an influential school that if you are not a Marxist-critic or a Structuralist or a Feminist critic for that matter, then you are a Liberal Humanist by default even if you recognise this or not.

Survey of Criticism before theory:

Aristotle's Poetics was the first literary theory. In this work, Aristotle "offers famous definitions of tragedy, insists that literature is about character, and that character is revealed through action, and he tries to identify the required stages in the progress of a plot." Around 1580, Sir Philip Sidney wrote his groundbreaking "Apology for Poetry." In this work, he made the radical claim that literature was different from other forms of writing in that it "has as its primary aim the giving of pleasure to the reader, and any moral or didactic element is necessarily either subordinate to that, or at least, unlikely to succeed without it."

Samuel Johnson was another important figure in the history of critical theory. Johnson's in depth commentary on Shakespeare was the first time one had given "intensive scrutiny" to a non-sacred text. The Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, and Shelley all engaged in a great detail of literary criticism. Notable Victorian literary critics include George Eliot, Matthew Arnold, and Henry James.

The three major literary critics in the first part of the twentieth century were I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis (both of whom were from Cambridge) and T.S. Eliot. In his Practical Criticism (published in 1929), Richards claimed that readers should focus on a text's actual words and not its historical context. One of Leavis' major contributions was to claim that literature should be moral, that it should strive to instil its readers with values.

T.S. Eliot made three major contributions. First, he claimed that a "dissociation of sensibility" (that is, a radical separation of thought from feeling) "occurred in the seventeenth century." Second, he advocated the idea of impersonality, which claims that one should view poetry, "not as a pouring out of personal emotion and personal experience, but as a transcending of the individual by a sense of tradition which spoke through, and is transmitted by, the individual poet." Third, he advocated the objective correlative, which claims that "the best way of expressing an emotion in art is to find some vehicle for it in gesture, action, or concrete symbolism, rather than approaching it directly or descriptively." In other words, the artist should try to show and not tell emotions.

There are two "tracks" in the "development of English criticism." The "practical criticism" track (which "leads through Samuel Johnson and Matthew Arnold to T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis") focuses on "the close analysis of the work of particular writers, and gives us our familiar tradition of 'close reading.'" "The other track is very much 'ideas-led' rather than 'text-led': it tends to tackle big general issues concerned with literature-How are literary works structured? How do they affect readers or audiences? What is the nature of literary language? How does literature relate to the contemporary and to matters of politics and gender? What can be said of literature form a philosophical point of view?" This second track is interested with many of the same issues that literary critics have been since the 1960s. Liberal humanism is the type of criticism that "held sway" before "theory" emerged in the 1960s. Barry describes ten tenets of liberal humanism.

Ten tenets of liberal humanism:

First, good literature transcends the culture in which it was written; it speaks to people throughout all ages.

Second, a text "contains its own meaning within itself. It doesn't require any elaborate process of placing it within a context, whether this be" socio-political, literary-historical, or autobiographical.

Third, one should strive to approach a text with an open mind, "without priori ideological assumptions, or political pre-conditions."

Fourth, "Human nature is essentially unchanging." Therefore, "continuity in literature is more important and significant than innovation."

Fifth, every person has a unique "essence," which transcends his "environmental influences." Though one can "change and develop" this

essence ("as do characters in novels"), "it can't be transformed-hence our uneasiness with those scenes (quite common, for instance, in Dickens) which involve a 'change of heart' in a character, so that the whole personality is shifted into a new dimension by force of circumstance-the miser is transformed and changes his ways, or the good man or woman is corrupted by wealth."

Sixth, "The purpose of literature is essentially the enhancement of life and the propagation of human values," but not in a preachy, propaganda-like way.

Seventh, "Form and content in literature must be fused in an organic way, so that the one grows inevitably from the other. Literary form should not be like a decoration which is applied externally to a completed structure."

Eighth, writers should be sincere and honest. For example, he should avoid clichés, or "over-inflated forms of expression." In so doing, the writer "can transcend the sense of distance between language and material, and can make the language seem to 'enact' what it depicts, thus apparently abolishing the necessary distance between words and things."

Ninth, "What is valued in literature is the 'silent' showing and demonstrating of something, rather than the explaining, or saying, of it." According to this view, "words should mime, or demonstrate, or act out, or sound out what they signify, rather than just representing it in an abstract way. This idea is state with special fervency in the work of F.R. Leavis."

Tenth, the "job of criticism is to interpret the text, to mediate between it and the reader. A theoretical account of the nature of reading, or of literature in general, isn't useful in criticism."

In the 1960s, scholars began to reject liberal humanism in favor of "critical theory." In the Sixties, Marxist criticism, psychoanalytic criticism, linguistic criticism, and feminist criticism all emerged. The Seventies saw the rise of structuralism and post-structuralism. In the Eighties, "history, politics, and context were reinstated at the centre of the literary-critical agenda." New historicism and cultural materialism, both of these take what might be called a 'holistic' approach to literature, aiming to integrate literary and historical study while at the same time maintaining some of the insights of the Structuralists and Post-Structuralists of the previous decade."

1.3 THE LOST GENERATION

The Lost Generation:

The term "Lost Generation" refers to the generation of people who reached adulthood during or immediately following World War I. In using the term "lost," psychologists were referring to the "disoriented, wandering, directionless" feelings that haunted many survivors of what had been one of the most horrific wars in modern history.

In a deeper sense, the lost generation was "lost" because it found the conservative moral and social values of their parents to be irrelevant in a post-war world. In the United States, President Warren G. Harding's "back to normalcy" policy calling for a return to the way of life before World War I, left the members of the lost generation feeling spiritually alienated from facing what they believed would be hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren lives.

The "Lost Generation" reached adulthood during or shortly after World War I.Disillusioned by the horrors of war, they rejected the traditions of the older generation.Their struggles were characterized in the works of a group of famous American authors and poets including Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and T. S. Eliot.

Common traits of the "Lost Generation" included decadence, distorted visions of the "American Dream," and gender confusion.

Having witnessed what they considered pointless death on such a massive scale during the war, many members of the generation rejected more traditional ideas of proper behavior, morality, and gender roles. They were considered to be "lost" due to their tendency to act aimlessly, even recklessly, often focusing on the hedonistic accumulation of personal wealth.

In literature, the term also refers to a group of well-known American authors and poets including Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and T. S. Eliot, whose works often detailed the internal struggles of the "Lost Generation."

The term is believed to have come from an actual verbal exchange witnessed by novelist Gertrude Stein during which a French garage owner derisively told his young employee, "You are all a lost generation." Stein repeated the phrase to her colleague and pupil Ernest Hemingway, who popularized the term when he used it as an epigraph to his classic 1926 novel The Sun Also Rises.

In an interview for The Hemingway Project, Kirk Curnutt, author of several books about the Lost Generation writers suggested that they were expressing mythologized versions of their own lives. Said Curnutt:

"They were convinced they were the products of a generational breach, and they wanted to capture the experience of newness in the world around them. As such, they tended to write about alienation, unstable mores like drinking, divorce, sex, and different varieties of unconventional self-identities like gender-bending."

Decadent Excesses:

Throughout their novels The Sun Also Rises and The Great Gatsby, Hemingway and Fitzgerald feature the decedent, self-indulgent lifestyles of their Lost Generation characters. In both The Great Gatsby and Tales of the Jazz Age Fitzgerald depicts an endless stream of lavish parties hosted by the main characters.

With their values so completely destroyed by the war, the expatriate American circles of friends in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises and A Moveable Feast live shallow, hedonistic lifestyles, aimlessly roaming the world while drinking and partying.

Fallacy of Great American Dream:

Members of the Lost Generation viewed the idea of the "American Dream" as a grand deception. This becomes a prominent theme in The Great Gatsby as the story's narrator Nick Carraway comes to realize that Gatsby's vast fortune had been paid for with great misery.

To Fitzgerald, the traditional vision of the American Dream-that hard work led to success-had become corrupted. To the Lost Generation, "living the dream" was no longer about simply building a self-sufficient life, but about getting stunningly rich by any means necessary.

The term "American Dream" refers to the belief that everyone has the right and freedom to seek prosperity and happiness, regardless of where or into what social class they were born. A key element of the American dream is the assumption that through hard work, perseverance, and risk-taking, anyone can rise "from rags to riches," to attain their own version of success in becoming financially prosperous and socially upwardly mobile.

The American Dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaims that "all men are created equal" with the right to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

American freelance writer and historian James Truslow Adams popularized the phrase "American Dream" in his 1931 book Epic of America:

"But there has been also the American dream; that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."

Since the 1920s, the American Dream has been questioned and often criticized by researchers and social scientists as being a misplaced belief that contradicts reality in the modern United States.

Gender-Bending and Impotence:

Many young men eagerly entered World War I still believing combat to be more of a chivalrous, even glamorous pastime than an inhumane struggle for survival.

However, the reality they experienced-the brutal slaughter of more than 18 million people, including 6 million civilians-shattered their traditional images of masculinity and their perceptions around differing roles of men and women in society.

Left impotent by his war wounds, Jake, the narrator and central character in Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises, describes how his sexually aggressive and promiscuous female lover Brett acts as the man, trying to be "one of the boys" in an effort to control the lives of her sexual partners.

In T.S. Eliot's ironically titled poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," Prufrock laments how his embarrassment from feelings of emasculation has left him sexually frustrated and unable to declare his love for the poem's unnamed female recipients, referred to as "they."

(They will say: 'How his hair is growing thin!')

My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,

My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin-

(They will say: 'But how his arms and legs are thin!')

In the first chapter of Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, Gatsby's trophy girlfriend Daisy delivers a telling vision of her newborn daughter's future.

"I hope she'll be a fool-that's the best thing a girl can be in this world, a beautiful little fool."

In a theme that still resonates in today's feminist movement, Daisy's words express Fitzgerald's opinion of his generation as spawning a society that largely devalued intelligence in women.

While the older generation valued women who were docile and subservient, the Lost Generation held mindless pleasure-seeking as the key to a woman's "success."

While she seemed to bemoan her generation's view of gender roles, Daisy conformed to them, acting as a "fun girl" to avoid the tensions of her true love for the ruthless Gatsby.

Belief in an Impossible Future:

Unable or unwilling to come to grips with the horrors of warfare, many of the Lost Generation created impossibly unrealistic hopes for the future.

This is expressed best in the final lines of The Great Gatsby in which narrator Nick exposed Gatsby's idealized vision of Daisy that had always prevented him from seeing her as she really was.

"Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgiastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter-tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther…. And one fine morning-So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

The "green light" in the passage is Fitzgerald's metaphor for the perfect futures we continue to believe in even while watching it get ever farther away from us.

In other words, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, the Lost Generation continued to believe that "one fine day," our dreams will come true.

A New Lost Generation?:

By their very nature, all wars create "lost" survivors.

While returning combat veterans have traditionally died of suicide and suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at much higher rates than the general population, returning veterans of the Gulf War and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are at an even higher risk. According to a 2016 report from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, an average of 20 of these veterans a day die from suicide.

Could these "modern" wars be creating a modern "Lost Generation?" With mental wounds often more serious and far more difficult to treat than physical trauma, many combat veterans struggle to reintegrate into civilian society. A report from the RAND Corporation estimates that some 20% of returning veterans either have or will develop PTSD.

1.4 SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

"Southern Renaissance" explores some of the ways writers who lived in, wrote about, or were otherwise associated with the South between 1920 and 1950 responded to the many changes during the period. Those changes included new developments in science, rapid industrialization, increasing urbanization, and large-scale immigration-primarily from the sagging South to the more robust North. Historians sometimes refer to these massive social and cultural transformations of the early twentieth century as distinctively "modern." For many of the writers, the change to "modern" times raised questions: What kind of life is the best to live? Is the "modern" world headed in the right direction, or are we going the wrong way?

The Southern Renaissance was a movement within Southern American literature in the 20s and 30s. William Faulkner is widely regarded as one of the most important writers to come out of this time. He was awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949.

The Southern Renaissance, and her authors, were responding to the notion that the South was behind the rest of the world. They left behind that "Lost Cause" narrative that romanticized life before the Civil War, and took up explaining the cultural nuances of the regional south. It was a movement that sought to give an identity and a voice to Southern characters. Emily Glaser writes, "Members of the Southern Renaissance all share common themes among their various works, whether poems, short stories, novels, or theater. Each work addresses the history of the South with a sense of

realism and honesty; unlike their predecessors, these writers did not romanticize the past, but instead exposed the harsh realities of slavery, the Reconstruction, and coping with military defeat. Works of the Southern Renaissance also tend to target the conservative culture that defined, and to an extent continues to define, the South. For inhabitants of the South, life was governed by the broad values family, religion, and community, which displaced the importance of one's personal life. And finally, these writers addressed head-on the South's troubled past in regard to race."

They were also striving to modernize, according to Daniel Singal, in his book "From Victorian to Modernist Thought in the South." As a result of the Civil War and Reconstruction, "Southern intellectual life by 1900 was a full generation behind, and Southerners had the 'task of deliberately and rapidly catching up.' Since the change of values in the South occurred 'in far more concentrated fashion' than elsewhere, it was accompanied by 'greater tension and drama' so that 'the process of transition (is) easier to observe.'"

One of the most common techniques utilized by Southern Renaissance writers was the "stream of consciousness" style of narration. Faulkner employs this throughout As I Lay Dying. On page 61, "Then I pass the stall. I have almost passed it. I listen to it saying for a long time before it can say the word and the listening part is afraid that there may not be time to say it. I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone, and the process of coming unalone is terrifying. Lafe. Lafe. "Lafe" Lafe. Lafe. I lean a little forward, one foot advanced with dead walking. I feel the darkness rushing past my breast; past the cow; I begin to rush upon the darkness but the cow stops me and the darkness rushes on upon the sweet blast of her moaning breath, filled with wood and with silence" (61-2). Here, we are wholly inside Dewey Dell's head, experiencing what he is thinking, feeling, seeing, and hearing. It makes very little logical sense, but still the experience seems vivid. It not only employees the stylistic techniques of the Southern Renaissance, but deals with those themes of identity and defining one's self on your own.

Of course, no one defines a movement until it has concluded. No one knew at the time that they were writing for, and during, the Southern Renaissance. We have assigned meaning to the name and books to the category, after. But As I Lay Dying, we now know, fits snugly within the realm of the Southern Renaissance of American literature.

There was a diverse wealth of voices in the early-twentieth-century South especially the works of John Crowe Ransom, Zora Neale Hurston, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren, Richard Wright, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Welty, Tennessee Williams, and Flannery O'Connor.

Faulkner captured the complicated, often tangled layers of southern history in countless novels and short stories. Intricately weaving the importance of time and place into everything he wrote, Faulkner was also a modernist who rebelled against linear storytelling. As I Lay Dying, with

its nearly ludicrous plot and modernist style, is a good example of this stylistic innovation, while Absalom, Absalom!-a soul-searching indictment of the South-shows how some poor nineteenthcentury whites tried to elevate themselves through racism, as a reaction against their own oppression.

- While Faulkner explored myths about white southerners, Zora Neale Hurston turned to African American folk traditions to present a positive view of black southern life. Hurston was a flamboyant storyteller, an anthropologist, and a respected writer.

(* The above material has been compiled and edited from various internet resources*)

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is liberal humanism in literary criticism?
2. What is the main concern of liberal humanism?
3. What is the liberal humanist view of good literature?
4. How did the Lost Generation change literature?
5. What is the main idea of the Lost Generation?
6. What were the major themes of the Lost Generation?
7. What were the major ideas of Lost Generation writers?
8. How do Southern Renaissance writers portray American identity differently from writers from other regions?
9. How do Southern Renaissance writers use race, class, and gender as part of identity?
10. What roles do history, tradition, and heritage play in the work of these writers?

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2

TERMS AND CONCEPTS
PART II

Unit Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will make the students extend their knowledge of American literary concepts and movements

- Beat Generation
- The Harlem Renaissance
- The Civil Rights Movement
- Expressionism in American Drama
- African American women writers

With this knowledge the students will be able to locate the Movements with the texts under study

2.1THE BEAT GENERATION

The Beat Generation was a movement that was focused on rethinking the way that writers regarded contemporary culture, the past, and the future. The writing the came out of the Beat Generation explored, more freely than ever, the human condition. This meant writing openly about sex, love, and in addition to darker topics. The most important writers of the period were Herbert Huncke, Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, and Lucien Carr. This group met one another around the Columbia University campus in New York City, an interesting origin considering that their work is broadly considered to be anti-academic.

The group sought to write in an authentic style that was unfettered by poetic norms or academic expectations. Ginsberg used the following quote to describe their work:

First thought, best thought:

They were experimental with the construction of their poems, as well as their subject matter and how they approached it. They were influenced by the work of poets like William Blake, in addition to the music of the period, specifically jazz, surrealism, and Zen poetry. Drugs also played a role in their understanding of their art, as did a broader disillusionment with literature in the post-World War II period.

The name "Beat Generation" was introduced by Jack Kerouac, one of the original founders of the group. He used it as a way to allude to the perceptions of the group as underground and anti-conformist. The word "beat", Kerouac said, was actually first used by Herbert Huncke and Kerouac appropriated it to mean "upbeat." The group also liked the association with music. The Beat Generation was a literary movement that began in the 1940s and entered the public consciousness in the 1950s. It was based around the social and creative circle of Jack Kerouac, William S. Burroughs, and Allen Ginsberg.

The 1950's is known for many lasting influences in technology, music, movies, food and popular culture. It was a decade of affluence and innovation. In the late 1950's there was the beginning of a shift in culture, inspired by the Beat Generation.

Beat Generation Characteristics:

- Sexual liberation and exploration.
- Portraying the human condition clearly.
- Experimentation with psychedelic drugs.
- Rejection of materialism
- Exploring religion, Western and Eastern.
- Rejection of narrative.
- Non-conformity
- Spontaneous creativity.

Outside of recurring themes depicting the rebellion against traditional values and an interest in American and Eastern mythology, the Beat Movement was also characterised by some existing techniques such as stream of consciousness prose. Inspired by Herbert Huncke, the Romantics, and poets like Walt Whitman and William Carlos Williams, they emphasised the personal, free-thinking, and spontaneous writing. Key characteristics also included an interest in jazz rhythms and the generalised rejection of academic formalism.

The Beat writers (and many of the 'Beat generation') developed their own and a highly idiosyncratic style. Their convictions and attitudes were unconventional, provocative, anti-intellectual, anti-hierarchical, and anti-

middle-class (the 'squares'). They were influenced by jazz, by Zen Buddhism and by American Indian and Mexican Peyote cults, and their Bohemian lifestyle was popularly associated with drugs, free' sex, drink, and permissive living in general. It was in some respects anarchic and provoked considerable hostility.

Allen Ginsberg's Howl and Other Poems (1956) represents as well as anything the disillusionment of the beat movement with modern society, its materialism and militarism and its outmoded, stuffed-shirt, middle-class values and mores. Ginsberg's Kaddish (1960), an elegy for his mother, and Reality Sandwiches (1963) were other important publications.

Other most famous writings of beat movement are Lawrence Ferlinghetti's Pictures of the Gone World (1955) and A Coney Island of the Mind (1958), Gregory Corso's Gasoline (1958) and Bomb (1959), and Gary Snyder's collection of work songs and haikus (q.v.) in Riprap (1959).

Jack Kerouac himself made memorable contributions to the Beat movement and literature with his prose works On the Road (1957), The Dharma Bums (1958), and Big Sur (1962). The novels of William Burroughs (e.g. Junkie, 1953, The Naked Lunch, 1959, Minutes to Go, 1960) and John Clellon Holmes (e.g. Go, 1952, The Horn, 1958 8) are also closely associated with the Beat movement, whose influence was to go far beyond the English-speaking world. It is discernible, for instance, in the work of the Russians Yevtushenko and Voznesensky. It created a cult and affected pop culture.

In the late 1950's Beat writers and artists began moving to Greenwich Village because the rents were low. Here many like-minded people created art, music and literature and collaborated together, including Jackson Pollock. The city of San Francisco was also an important location for the Beat Generation, as many writers spent time there together.

The term "beatnik" was coined by Herb Caen, a writer for the San Francisco Chronicle, on April 2, 1958. The word is a combination of Sputnik and Beat generation, and is meant to imply that beatniks are "far out of the mainstream of society." The word became associated with a particular stereotype of a man with goatee and beret, playing the bongos and reciting poetry.

The Beat Generation is known for its rejection of materialism and the standards of the day, experimentation with drugs, and spiritual and sexual liberation. It evolved in the 1960's to become part of the hippie and larger counterculture movements. Two of the important novels by Beat Generation authors ended up in the center of literary and legal battles over obscenity which ultimately resulted in helping to bring down literary censorship.

Importance of the Beat Generation:

During the 1950's America was still recovering from the devastating effects of WW2. Events like The Second Red Scare, otherwise known as McCarthyism caused people to live under fear of communism. McCarthyism led the idea of false accusations of communism onto other people without any evidence to support their claim. People everywhere were scared of the wretched communists, scared that the person living next to them for 15 years as a neighbor was in fact a communist, scared that their 2nd grade teacher was in fact a communist.

Because of this fear, many people were led to idea of conformity, encouraged by political figures such as President Eisenhower. And during the 50's, anything that political figures encouraged was among the norm. People took this literally and anybody who was different than the regular customs of the surrounding society, they were automatically a communist!

To go against this idea of conformity, the Beat Generation thus rose to express their ideals among society. The Beat Generation was a group of American writers, producers, and artists who experimented with drugs, alternative forms of sexuality, interest within the Eastern religious culture, rejection of materialism, and the idealizing of means of expression.

Now in the new era, many people think that the Beat Generation is long gone, but to think otherwise, it is easy to see their marks on American History. Their influence can be seen on the Hippie movement of the 60's and 70's. Their presence led to a new development of the time's literature and music which is what led to today's results. Beatniks such as Allen Ginsberg and Ken Kesey led to the icon of psychedelic bus travels. But apart from the LSD and free formed life away from "the man," there were also beatniks with a different purpose. Such as Jack Kerouac who was against the idea of "flower children" as he perceived that they lacked a sense of sincerity within their spiritual pursuits. Many beatniks experimented with Eastern religion and philosophy, leading to ideas such as "make love, not war" and a new attitude towards different sexuality and more freedom of expression. More hippies equaled more bisexual or homosexual movements, leading to today's more open and accepting community.

Some of the most long lasting affects we have today from the Beat Generation include the revolution of the music industry. Throughout the 60's and 80's, the pop and rock music industry underwent a new reform. Popular music essentially came from the poems of beatniks. For example, the Grateful Dead's music was inspired and traveled with Ken Kesey's Kool-Aid tests, Allen Ginsberg was Bob Dylan's favorite poet, Pink Floyd and The Soft Machine rose to fame after events such as the International Poetry Festival. There are endless connections between the beatniks and music from the times. The sparse and libertarian style of the beatnik's works influenced the music industry to adopt a new freer style, both lyrically and melodically.

Of course, with every movement, there is an opposing side. One of the more notable critics of the Beat Generation was Norman Podhoretz, a student of Columbia who was acquaintances with Kerouac and Ginsberg. in 1958, and article called "The Know-Nothing Bohemians" was published expressing discontent with this new movement. "There is a suppressed cry in those books [of Kerouac]: Kill the intellectuals who can talk coherently, kill the people who can sit still for five minutes at a time." "The Bohemianism of the 1950s" is "hostile to civilization; it worships primitivism, instinct, energy, 'blood.'" For Podhoretz, "This is the revolt of the spiritually underprivileged."

The Beat Generation can't be said to have very impacting effects on America in all fields. The Beat Generation led a new wave of reform within social and cultural aspects of society. It can be said that the Beat Generation was like the Lost Generation, where people who couldn't fit in with the norms of society would naturally find themselves as a beatnik or hippie. The most influential effects from the Beat Generation arose from the Hippie movement from the 60's and 80's and the influence within the musical industry and rise in consumerism.

Effects of the Beat Generation:

- Spiritual liberation, sexual "revolution" or "liberation," i.e., gay liberation, somewhat catalyzing women's liberation, black liberation, Gray Panther activism.
- Liberation of the word from censorship.
- Demystification and/or decriminalization of some laws against marijuana and other drugs.
- The evolution of rhythm and blues into rock and roll as a high art form, as evidenced by the Beatles, Bob Dylan, and other popular musicians influenced in the later fifties and sixties by Beat generation poets' and writers' works.
- The spread of ecological consciousness, emphasized early on by Gary Snyder and Michael McClure, the notion of a "Fresh Planet."
- Opposition to the military-industrial machine civilization, as emphasized in writings of Burroughs, Huncke, Ginsberg, and Kerouac.
- Attention to what Kerouac called (after Spengler) a "second religiousness" developing within an advanced civilization.
- Return to an appreciation of idiosyncrasy as against state regimentation.
- Respect for land and indigenous peoples and creatures, as proclaimed by Kerouac in his slogan from On the Road: "The Earth is an Indian thing."

The essence of the phrase "beat generation" may be found in On the Road with the celebrated phrase: "Everything belongs to me because I am poor."

Principal writings of the Beat Generation:

- On the Road by Jack Kerouac (1957)
- Junky by William S. Burroughs(1953)
- Howl and other Poems by Allen Ginsberg (1956)
- Naked Lunch by William S. Burroughs (1959)
- The First Third by Neal Cassady (1970)
- Minor Characters by Joyce Johnson (1983)
- Dinners and Nightmares by Diane Di Prima (1961)

2.2 THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

The Harlem Renaissance was the name given to the cultural, social, and artistic explosion that took place in Harlem between the end of World War I and the middle of the 1930s. During the time it was known as the "New Negro Movement" named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke. Amid this period Harlem was the Mecca where black writers, artists, musicians, photographers, poets, and scholars traveled in order to find a place where they could freely express their talents.

One of the factors contributing to the rise of the Harlem Renaissance was the Great Migration of African-Americans to northern cities between 1919 and 1926. The two major causes that fueled the Great Migration were the Jim Crow segregation laws of the south and the start of World War I. When World War I began in Europe, foreign workers were no longer able to emigrate to America and the factories in the north needed a new labor source and they looked to the south for this work force. Hundreds of thousands of blacks migrated during this period, but it is estimated that five million blacks migrated from the south between 1900-1960.

The Harlem Renaissance was a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement that kindled a new black cultural identity. Its essence was summed up by Alain Locke when he declared that through art, "Negro life is seizing its first chances for group expression and self-determination." Harlem became the center of a "spiritual coming of age" in which Locke's "New Negro" transformed social disillusionment into racial pride. The Harlem Renaissance was successful in many ways. It brought the Black experience clearly within the "corpus" of American cultural history and encouraged a new appreciation of folk roots and culture. On a sociological level it redefined how America and the world viewed African-Americans from rural undereducated peasants to one of urban sophistication. The Renaissance influenced future generations of black artists, writers, and musicians through sharing their rich cultural experiences.

As Harlem transformed into a hub for African Americans in the early 1900's, African American writers began to thrive in the new, intellectually-charged atmosphere. By the 1920's, many works were receiving critical praise in mainstream literary circles and popular acclaim among both black and white audiences. Originally dubbed the New Negro Movement, this outpouring of literature came to be known as The Harlem Renaissance.While some black poets continued to write primarily in traditional English literary forms, others explored black vernacular speech and lyrical forms while creating works that identified with the African American masses. The politics and ideals born from this era would serve as inspiration to African American artists for years to come and would also help to lay the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.

In addition to being published authors, many writers were poets, playwrights, journalists, and editors. Though the literary themes that arose in this period are diverse, they are generally focused on promoting racial pride and embracing indigenous African sentiment. Many works addressed feelings of alienation experienced by minorities in American society, seeking to uplift those burdened by continuing racism and stereotyping. The result was a rich and complicated union of progressive ideals with traditional African American customs and folklore.

Some of the writers are discussed below:

Angelina Weld Grimké (1880-1958):

Playwright, poet, teacher, journalist. Angelina was born in Boston, MA into an unusual and distinguished biracial family. Her family, within the three preceding generations, included slaveholders and slaves, free black people and white abolitionists. Her father, Archibald Grimke, was African American and graduated Harvard Law School and became a prominent lawyer, diplomat, author, editor, publisher and vice president of the NAACP. Her mother came from a middle class white family who opposed the marriage of Angelina's parents on racial grounds, and ultimately, Angelina was abandoned by her mother and was raised solely by her father and some of his relatives. She attended the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics and Harvard University. She had essays and short stories published in The Crisis and in Harlem Renaissance anthologies. Angelina is best known for her play titled 'Rachel' which centers around an African-American woman who rejects marriage and motherhood. It is only in her poetry that Angelina reveals her romantic love towards women.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967):

Poet, social activist, novelist, playwright, and columnist. Hughes is known as one of the central figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Although Hughes was born in Joplin, Missouri, he ended up spending most of his childhood living with his grandmother in Lawrence, Kansas after his parents divorced. During the 1920s, Hughes first traveled to West Africa and Europe as a crewman on the S.S. Malone. He then spent time in Paris and England. When he returned to the U.S., Hughes lived in Washington D.C.

while working and publishing poetry on the side. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, Hughes moved to Harlem, where he lived the rest of his life.

Langston Hughes was easily the most prolific and most influential writer of the Harlem Renaissance. In the forty-odd years between his first book in 1926 and his death in 1967, he devoted his life to writing and lecturing. He wrote sixteen books of poems, two novels, three collections of short stories, four volumes of "editorial" and "documentary" fiction, twenty plays, children's poetry, musicals and operas, three autobiographies, a dozen radio and television scripts and dozens of magazine articles. In addition, he edited seven anthologies. Hughes was one of the few prominent black writers to champion racial consciousness as a source of inspiration for black artists and he was one of the earliest innovators of the literary art form called jazz poetry (known to have jazz-like rhythm or the feel of improvisation).

Arna Bontemps (1902-1973):

Poet, novelist, librarian. Bontemps was born in Louisiana to a Creole family. During the Great Migration his family moved to California, where he spent his childhood. After he graduated from Pacific Union College he was drawn to Harlem during the Renaissance in 1924. Bontemps published poetry while teaching at Harlem Academy. In both 1926 and 1927, he received the Alexander Pushkin Prize of Opportunity, a National Urban League published journal. He also won the Crisis Poetry Prize, the official journal of the NAACP, in 1926. Throughout his life, Bontemps continued to write poetry, novels, and children's books, as well as teach at universities.

Gwendolyn Bennett (1902-1981):

Author, poet, playwright, editor, artist. Born in Texas, moved to the Paiute Indian Reservation in Nevada, then when she was four years old her family moved to Washington D.C. Bennett attended Columbia University and the Pratt Institute at the same time and received degrees from both institutions in 1924. In her undergraduate studies, Bennett's poem "Heritage" was published in Crisis magazine and Opportunity magazine in 1923. After graduating she was hired by Howard University to teach fine arts but only taught for one semester because she received a scholarship in December of that year enabling her to study abroad in Paris, at Sorbonne. She then continued her fine arts education at Academic Julian and Ecole du Pantheon in Paris. During her studies in Paris, Bennett worked with a variety of materials, including watercolor, oil, woodcuts, pen and ink, and batik which was the beginning of her career as a graphic artist. After returning to the United States, Bennett worked as an assistant to the editor of Opportunity, which was the National Urban League's academic journal, and was given the chance to publish articles on literature and the fine arts.

James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938):

Author, educator, lawyer, diplomat, songwriter, and civil rights activist.

Weldon was born in Jacksonville, Florida and after graduating from Atlanta University, Johnson worked as a principal in a grammar school, founded a newspaper, The Daily American, and became the first African American to pass the Florida Bar. He and his brother, a composer, moved to New York City where they successfully wrote music on Broadway. After this Johnson went on to be a US Consul in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Johnson was also the first black person to be the executive secretary of the NAACP and the first African American professor at NYU.

2.3 THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The Civil Rights Movement is an umbrella term for the many varieties of activism that sought to secure full political, social, and economic rights for African Americans in the period from 1946 to 1968.

Civil rights activism involved a diversity of approaches, from bringing lawsuits in court, to lobbying the federal government, to mass direct action, to black power.

The efforts of civil rights activists resulted in many substantial victories, but also met with the fierce opposition of white supremacists.

Black writers began responding to Civil Rights struggles by the late 1950's and early 1960's. Poets like Gwendolyn Brooks who won a Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for Margaret Danner, Langston Hughes, Rob Annie Allen (1949), ert Hayden, Melvin B. Tolson, Sterling Brown, and Mary Elizabeth Vroman, expressed their feelings and concerns for the conflict in their poetry. Others expressed themselves in short stories, plays, novels and essays. They include Ralph Ellison and his ce lebrated novel It on the Mountain Invisible Man (1952), James Baldwin and his first novel (1953), Paule Marshall and her first novel Brown Girl, Brownstones Go Tell (1959), Lorraine Hansberry, Mari Evans, William Melvin Kelley, and Ernest Gaines. Lorraine Hansberry's A Raisin in the Sun (1959), partly addressing segregated housing policies at the time, was the first play by an AfricanAmerican woman to reach Broadway. Considered by some as "integrationist drama," much like the drama of Loften Mitchell and Alice Childress, the play also earned Hansberry the honor of being the youngest American to receive the New York Cr Circle Award in 1959. itics For the first time since the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's, events of the 1960's afforded Black writers Africanthe opportunity to explore and foreground the beauty and uniqueness of American culture. This concept was particularly aroused by the rigid prescriptions of the Black Arts and Aesthetic movements. African MadAmerican writers like Hansberry, Haki Hubuti, Baraka, Askia Muhammad Toure, Langston Hughes, Lethonia Gee, Larry Neal, Odaro, Ahmed Alhamisi, and Reginald Lockett, openly celebrated and incorporated into their lives and their writings the stories, rituals, songs, and customs of their African and AfricanAmerican ancestry. In addition to reclaiming and tapping from lost or disregarded Black aesthetic and social values, these movements mandated that Black literature be functional,

After the riots in the urban ghettoes in the mid-1960s, African-American poetry was used as a political weapon. Poets like Robert Hayden, Lucille Clifton, Etheridge Knight, Sonia Sanchez, Baraka, Alice Walker, Madhubuti, Nikki Giovanni, and Dudley Randall employed their poetry for communal purposes, as a dramatic voice primarily for all African-Americans, but sometimes expressing universal themes. Effects of the Black Power and Arts movement on the novelist and short story-teller was evident in the works of William Melvin Kelley (Dem, 1967), Ishmael Reed (The Free-Lance Pallbearers, 1967), and Ernest Gaines (Catherine Carmier 1964, Of Love and Dust, 1967 and Bloodline, short stories, 1968). Writers like Paule Marshall, C.H. Fuller, Jr., Ernest Gaines, Charlie Cobb, and Julia Fields also expressed the movement in short stories. Autobiographies and biographies appeared on the scene, proving to be very powerful and insightful. They include works like Malcolm X's The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1964), Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice (1968), and Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (1970). Playwrights like Baraka whose Dutchman (1964) propelled him into theatrical prominence; Douglas Turner Ward, well-known for his Day of Absence (1965); Charles Gordone and his highly celebrated No Place to Be Somebody (1967); and Ed Bullins, acclaimed for his In the Wine Time (1966); brought the new socio-aesthetic and political awareness to the stage. Other playwrights of this period include Charles Patterson, Lonnie Elder III, Carol Freeman, Joseph White, and Ben Caldwell. Some of the writers of this era were clearly more radical than others, moving away decisively from the integrationist and apologetic protest themes of the 1950's.

Any good literary scholar might argue that murmurs of the Civil Rights movement took root in fiction of the mid-twentieth century. Just before World War II broke out, Richard Wright, who was born in Mississippi but moved north to Chicago in adulthood, published Native Son (1940). The novel addressed the results of racial prejudice and segregation, suggesting that legal violence to individual rights ultimately could lead to murder. The novel tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a Black chauffeur in Chicago, who kills the daughter of his employer. But the circumstances are more complicated than a mere plot summary, and the book ultimately suggests that the country as a whole may be responsible for such criminality.

By the early 1950s, Ralph Ellison had published Invisible Man (1952). This novel follows an African American narrator from social and political struggles in the American South up to Harlem. There, he learns that racism is not geographically confined, but rather pervades the American consciousness.

All these authors had an enormous impact on the Civil Rights literature of the 1960s, which took on an even more explicitly political tone as writers sought to dismantle segregation and other racist social structures. Two of the most important works of the Civil Rights Era were Martin Luther King Jr.’s 1963 “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and Malcolm X’s 1965 autobiography co-written with Alex Haley.

In more recent decades, significant female voices have emerged strongly on the literary scene, such as those of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison. In her early 1980s epistolary novel The Color Purple (1982), Walker depicted segregated existence in 1930s Georgia. The book won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, and it was later adapted into a film that was nominated for eleven Academy Awards.

During the same decade, Toni Morrison published Beloved (1987), a novel that brings contemporary readers back to the injuries of slavery during the period of the American Civil War. Like Walker, Morrison won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988. Other notable novels by Morrison include The Bluest Eye (1970), Sula (1973), and Song of Solomon (1977). She won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993.

2.4 EXPRESSIONISM IN AMERICAN DRAMA

Expressionism is a broader movement that envelops many different art forms. It was at the beginning of the 20th century that expressionism started as a modernist movement in the field of drama and theatre. It has its roots first in Europe and then it came to America. In Europe itself, Germany was the first place from where expressionism evolved as a theatre movement. In Germany, Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller were strong supporters and also the practitioners of this movement. Besides Kaiser and Toller, Reinhard Sorge, Walter Hasenclever, Hans Henny Jahnn, and Arnolt Bronnen are the other significant contributors to the Expressionistic theatre of Germany. In fact, the writers of this school "looked back to the Swedish playwright, August Strindberg and German actor-dramatist, Frank Wedekind as the precursors of their dramaturgical experiments."

The first Expressionist play that was performed in Vienna was Murderer, the Hope of Women by a well-known dramatist, Oskar Kokoschka. It entered into the theatre on July 4, 1909 and shook many traditional concepts of dramaturgy. The play presented "an unnamed man and woman struggle for dominance. The Man brands the woman; she stabs and imprisons him. He frees himself and she falls dead at his touch." The spectators are shocked when they witness the man slaughtering everybody around him at the end of the play. The play became noteworthy because of "the extreme simplification of characters to mythic types, choral effects, declamatory dialogue and heightened intensity" which later became characteristic features of Expressionist plays. The success of Murderer led to the writing of the first full-length Expressionist play named, The Son by Walter Hasenclever. Though published in 1914, it reached to the theatre only in 1916.

However it has to be taken into consideration that Expressionism was just one more technique of writing a play and any attempt to take extremist position would be worthless. A comparative study of Realism and Expressionism as the techniques of drama writing shows that there was every possibility of stretching both of them to the extremes. The best known examples of these extremes are Ibsen and Brecht. Here it has to be

taken into consideration that "great drama could be produced either way or by combining both modes, as Tennessee Williams was to do with brilliant success in A Streetcar Named Desire and Arthur Miller in The Death of a Salesman."

The works of the practitioners of Expressionism were being published in Der Sturm and Die Aktion, two reputed journals of the time. The regular contributors of Der Sturm were Richard Dehmel, Alfred Döblin, Max Brod, Knut Hamsun, René Schickele, Arno Holz, Karl Kraus, Selma Lagerlöf, Adolf Loos, Heinrich Mann, Paul Scheerbart, and Peter Altenberg. These writer published their poems and prose works in this journal. Der Sturm also spared space for "the writings, drawings, and prints from Kokoschka, Kandinsky, and members of Der blaue Reiter."

Oskar Kokoschka wrote his playlet, Murderer, The Hope of Women in 1909 which is generally considered to be the first expressionist play. In this play, Oskar Kokoschka presents the story of "an unnamed man and woman struggle for dominance. The man brands the woman; she stabs and imprisons him. He frees himself and she falls dead at his touch." The spectators are shocked to witness the man slaughtering everybody around him at the end of the play. This play exhibited many of the features of Expressionist play. These features are "the extreme simplification of characters to mythic types, choral effects, declamatory dialogue and heightened intensity." Expressionism dominated the German theatre of the early 20th-century. The main dramatists of this period were Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller. They were followed by other dramatists like Walter Hasenclever, Hans Henny Jahnn, Arnolt Bronnen and Reinhard Sorge. In America, Expressionism had its followers in Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice and Sophie Treadwell. Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, The Emperor Jones and The Great God Brown, Sophie Treadwell's Machinal and Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine are some of the brilliant plays written in Expressionist tradition.

A close analysis of Expressionist plays shows that they "often dramatise the spiritual awakening and sufferings of their protagonists." Some of these plays have an episodic dramatic structure and they are known as Stationendramen meaning "station plays, modeled on the presentation of the suffering and death of Jesus in the Stations of the Cross." Such type of plays present "the struggle against bourgeois values and established authority, frequently personified by the Father." This form of play was popularized by August Strindberg. His autobiographical trilogy To Damascus is a well-known example of such play.It is observed that the speech in Expressionist drama is "either expansive and rhapsodic, or clipped and telegraphic."

The people closely related with the movement of Expressionism are Director Leopold Jessner, the Symbolist director and designer, Edward Gordon Craig, playwrights Georg Kaiser, Ernst Toller, Reinhard Sorge, Bertolt Brecht, Seán O'Casey, Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett, poets Georg Trakl, Gottfried Benn, Georg Heym, Else Lasker-Schüler, Ernst Stadler, August Stramm, and Rainer Maria Rilke, and the novelists Alfred Döblin, and Franz Kafka.

2.5 AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN WRITERS

African American women writers have tackled the hard work of representing a diverse spectrum of lived and imagined experiences, including their own.

This labour occurs against the backdrop of centuries-long struggles with racist oppression and gender-based violence, including - but not limited to - slavery's culture of endemic rape, forced or interrupted motherhood, infanticide, concubinage, fractured families and egregious physical and mental abuse. Once emancipated, African American women still faced staggering impediments when pursuing educational, entrepreneurial and employment opportunities. Political participation meant restrictions on voting rights both as women and as people of colour. Racist caricatures impugned everything from a woman's intelligence and moral capacity to her skin colour, texture of hair and body shape.

Here is a short list of pivotal texts by African American women from the past century. These writers are but a small sample of the artists and intellectuals whose output resisted the force of what contemporary feminist critic Moya Bailey has termed misogynoir, or the corrosive fusion of anti-Blackness and misogyny prevalent in popular culture today. These women have completed the groundwork – and hard work – of envisioning a more just, inclusive society going forward.

Quicksand (1928) and Passing (1929) by Nella Larsen:

These novellas follow mixed-race women whose uneasy status on the colour line (including the lure of passing as white) complicates their lives in dangerous, even fatal ways. Passing is revolutionary for its depiction of homoerotic tension between two upper-middle-class Black women. Quicksand offers insight into the exoticization of African American women abroad and the contest between art and domesticity as viable avenues for a fulfilling life.

Their Eyes Were Watching God (1937) by Zora Neale Hurston:

This story is the lyrical account of thrice-married Janie Crawford who finds a mature vision of love and fulfillment amid incessant gossip and a difficult family history. The all-Black township of Eatonville, Fla., and the rich "muck" of the Everglades contribute to a portrait of community health, daily striving and resolute self-awareness.

The Street (1946) by Ann Petry:

This social realist novel follows single mother Lutie Johnson as she attempts to make a life for her young son in a predatory urban space. Weathering sexism, racism, classism, poverty and intense personal frustration, Lutie attempts to resist the brutality of the environment that gives the novel its loaded name.

The Bluest Eye (1970) by Toni Morrison:

This book is a searing portrait of a young girl's coming-of-age and eventual undoing in the years following the Great Depression. Tumultuous family dynamics, psychological trauma and incest, the quest for compassion and self-love, and the toxic myth of Black ugliness coalesce in this first novel by the Nobel Laureate and author of neo-slave narrative Beloved (1987).

Kindred (1979) by Octavia Butler:

Oscillating between the 1970s and the early 19th century, this science fiction odyssey (re)connects a contemporary Black woman writer and her white husband with her ancestors on a Maryland plantation. The novel is buoyed up by the dramatic tension of time travel and the juxtaposition of the pre-civil War Antebellum-era with Civil Rights-era racial attitudes, including those about interracial love and allyship.

The Women of Brewster Place (1982) by Gloria Naylor:

Structured like a narrative quilt, these interconnected experiences of seven women span different generations, professions, class backgrounds and understandings of their place in the world. The eroded apartment complex that links them is the backdrop for unbearable pain as well as the promise of transformation and reconciliation.

The Color Purple (1982) by Alice Walker:

A tale of two sisters, Celie and Nettie, this novel constellates their love and longing via letters and imagined conversations across the Atlantic. Unsparing in its critique of domestic violence and toxic masculinity, yet tender in its treatment of various human weaknesses, the novel underscores Black women's need for self-regard and mutual care. Not only are these acts revolutionary, but they also offer a glimpse of the divine.

(* The above material has been compiled and edited from various internet resources*)

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Write short notes on the following:
    1. Beat Generation
    2. The Harlem Renaissance
    3. The Civil Rights Movement
    4. Expressionism in American Drama
    5. African American women writers

2. Why was the Beat Movement important?
3. What important issues did writers of the Harlem Renaissance address?
4. What were the key elements of the Harlem Renaissance?
5. Write an essay about the major writers during the Civil Rights Movement
6. What is Expressionism in American drama?
7. Discuss the contribution of African American women writers.

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3

TERMS AND CONCEPTS
PART III

Unit Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will make the students extend their knowledge of American literary concepts and movements

- Impact of the World Wars on American Literature
- Confessional Poetry
- Postmodernism in American Fiction
- Jewish American Literature

With this knowledge the students will be able to locate the Movements within the texts under study

3.1 IMPACT OF THE WORLD WARS ON AMERICAN LITERATURE

The twentieth century has witnessed a significant development in the literature of America and the impact of the two World Wars on the literature and its growth has been most significant. They both post-war kinds of literature of America represent the revolutionary transformation in the world view of the literary figure and the employment of the most modern tools of interpreting the war-affected world. In fiction as well as poetry, a notable shift in the themes, tools, and methods of literature is visible. These changes are reflected in the various spheres of American literature. “Between the beginning of World War I and the end of World War II (1914–1945), the United States became a “modern” nation… Art to some writers, such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams, offered an alternative way of understanding the world, eventually giving rise to the idea of “two cultures”—science vs. letters…

During the Harlem Renaissance, black Americans such as Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston became prominent and applied modernist techniques to speak of the realities of black cultural and political life. Women writers also contributed in vital ways to the heterogeneity of the literature during the interwar period…" (American Literature Between the Wars, 1914 – 1945: Overview). Therefore, it is remarkable that the two world wars have been so influential as to shape a new kind of American literature in both poetry and fiction. It is also important to note that both the World Wars had different types of roles in the shaping of American literature. Thus, in this paper, a comparative analysis of the influence of poets as well as prose writers belonging to both post-world war periods is carried out which ultimately reflects the shaping of modern American literature altogether.

Critics and historians of literature have ever recognized the pervading role of the two world wars on the shaping of American prose and poetry. "The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a "second flowering" of American writing. Certainly, American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. (American literature After World War II). A reflection of the world views and literary outputs of poets such as Ezra Pound, TS Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, William Carole Williams, et al suggests the development of modernism, with experiments in the form of poetry during the post World War I. Similarly, an analysis of the main prose writers of American prose writers of the same period such as Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, O'Neill, and Katherine Anne Porter illustrates the influence of the war on fiction pointing to the development of American realism.

"Although American prose between the wars experimented with viewpoint and form, Americans wrote more realistically, on the whole, than did Europeans. Novelist Ernest Hemingway wrote of war, hunting, and other masculine pursuits in a stripped, plain style; William Faulkner set his powerful southern novels spanning generations and cultures firmly in Mississippi heat and dust, and Sinclair Lewis delineated bourgeois lives with ironic clarity. The importance of facing reality became a dominant theme in the 1920s and 1930s: Writers such as F. Scott Fitzgerald and the playwright Eugene O'Neill repeatedly portrayed the tragedy awaiting those who live in flimsy dreams." (Modernism and Experimentation: 1914-1945: Prose Writing, 1914-1945: American Realism).

Conspicuously, a similar influence of World War II is visible in the literature of the period in both prose and poetry. "Events after World War II produced for many writers a sense of history as discontinuous: Each act, emotion, and moment was seen as unique. Style and form now seemed provisional, makeshift, reflexive of the process of composition and the writer's self-awareness. Familiar categories of expression were suspect; originality was becoming a new tradition." (American Poetry, 1945-1990: The Anti-Tradition). There was an evident shift in the way the writers developed their world view which is reflected in their works. Therefore,

all the critics are in agreement with the observation that the post-war American literature reflects the considerable impact of the world war.

The reality that was experienced in the life situation was given free outflow in the literary creations. “World War II had an enormous impact on American writing… The literature that emerges from the experience of World War II…shows a nation that was united and confident in its powers to endure and to lead – though it isn’t without its sense of the bleak side of war and war’s effects… The 50s saw amazing growth in American literature of all sorts: Eudora Welty from Mississippi; Saul Bellow from Chicago; Norman Mailer, Arthur Miller, and Bernard Malamud from Brooklyn; James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison from Harlem; Flannery O’Connor from Georgia; and many others. One of the chief characteristics of these emerging novelists was their engagement with the world around them.” (American Literature after World War II).

To analyze the creations of writers belonging to both the post-world war I and II, let us note that one of the most influential poets of the time Robert Lowell (1917-1977), “began traditionally but was influenced by experimental currents.” His shift from traditionalism to modernism was influential to the later poets as well. The development of the poet in Lowell illustrates the influence of the period on a poet of post-war literature. (American Poetry, 1945-1990: The Anti-Tradition). The worldview of this great confessional poet suggests the impact of the World War on the literature of America. Thus, it is remarkable to consider the fact that “Lowell’s work grew from his own unhappiness and the social, political, and ideological movements in the U.S. during the Post World War II decades.” (Robert Lowell (1917-1977)). He was a clear objector of the war and his convictions led him to be actively involved in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the 1960s. He protested to the demand of the government for military service during the time of war and was arrested for being an objector of the war. The life experience he gathered from the war world has been very well reflected in his poems as well. Therefore the worldview of Lowell as reflected in his poems, as well as his brave actions, helps us recognize the influence of the world wars on the shaping of American literature.

The impact of the post War society is present in the realist legacy of the fiction of the period. Thus, the period witnessed the growth of a new group of writers such as the poet-novelist-essayist Robert Penn Warren, dramatists Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, and Tennessee Williams, who “explored the fate of the individual within the family or community and focused on the balance between personal growth and responsibility to the group.” (American Prose, 1945-1990: Realism and Experimentation). The plays of Arthur Miller, a great artist of genius, can be cited as an example of the influence of the post-war world on the literature of America. “In the period immediately following the end of World War II, American theater was transformed by the work of playwright Arthur Miller.

Profoundly influenced by the Depression and the war that immediately followed it, Miller tapped into a sense of dissatisfaction and unrest within

the greater American psyche. His probing dramas proved to be both the conscience and redemption of the times, allowing people an honest view of the direction the country had taken." (Arthur Miller). The world view of the great literary genius illustrates how the post-war world experience contributed to the development of American literature. Some examples of the influence of war on his writings can be gathered from the post-war paranoia and intolerance as reflected in the play The Crucible and the impact of the post-war economic boom on the life of Willy Loman, the protagonist of The Death of a Salesman. Thus, an analysis of World War II American literature proves that it has been a significant milestone in the growth of American literature.

However, the influence of the post-war world had been evident in the literature of the America of post-World War I. Therefore, the influence of the post-war world is seen in the worldview of the writers of post-World War I. This worldview has resulted in the modernism and experimentalism of American literature post World War I. Thus, "Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) developed an analog to modern art… Henry James, William Faulkner, and many other American writers experimented with fictional points of view." (Modernism and Experimentation: 1914-1945). It is most relevant to notice that the works of one of the prominent novelists of American literature, William Faulkner, reflect the significant influence of the post-war world. The world view of the novelist forms a major background of many of his novels. His novels such as The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying, Absalom! Absalom!, A Fable, and many others represent the world view of the novelist in the background of World War. All these writings clearly specify the significance of the post-war worldview of the novelist and thus illustrate the influence of the world war on the development of American literature.

A similar influence of the post-war world is visible in the poems of the writers such as Ezra Pound, TS Eliot, Wallace Stevens et al. the poems of TS Eliot (1888-1965), the American born poet, illustrates the influence of the post War experience of the entire world. The worldview of the poet has been influential in the creation of the most remarkable poems such as The Waste Land, and the various critical essays. The experience of the modern man and women of the post-war world has reflected in the critically acclaimed poem The Waste Land. The disintegration of the world is beautifully reflected in the poem by Eliot. Therefore, the influence of the post-war world can be seen in the poem where people have great difficulty in finding meaning to life as well world as such.

Therefore, in an ultimate conclusion, it will be seen that the two World Wars have been influential in the shaping of American literature. The literature of America has been on the growth for quite a long period and the post War experience of the world has contributed heavily to the development of the literature and most remarkably the American literature in the present age enjoys a prominent position among the literature of the world.

3.2 CONFESSIONAL POETRY

The phrase "confessional poetry" burst into common usage in September of 1959, when the critic M.L. Rosenthal coined it in his review of Robert Lowell's Life Studies in the Nation. The book, which contained poems that unsparingly detailed Lowell's experiences of marital strife, generational struggle, and mental illness, marked a dramatic turn in his career. The personal had always been fodder for poetry, but Lowell, Rosenthal claimed, "removes the mask" that previous poets had worn when writing about their own lives. The poems in Life Studies felt like a "series of personal confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal."

For most contemporary critics, confessional poetry marked a revolution in poetic style as well as specific subject matter and the relationship between a poem's speaker and self. Confessional poets wrote in direct, colloquial speech rhythms and used images that reflected intense psychological experiences, often culled from childhood or battles with mental illness or breakdown. They tended to utilize sequences, emphasizing connections between poems. They grounded their work in actual events, referred to real persons, and refused any metaphorical transformation of intimate details into universal symbols. In the 1950s and 1960s, decades saturated with New Criticism dictates that the poet and "speaker" of a poem were never coincident, confessional poets insisted otherwise. Their breaches in poetic and social decorum were linked. According to scholar Deborah Nelson, Lowell's "innovation was to make himself … available, not as the abstract and universal poet but as a particular person in a particular place and time."

Confessional poetry is the poetry of the personal or "I." This style of writing emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s and is associated with poets such as Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and W. D. Snodgrass. Lowell's book, Life Studies, was a highly personal account of his life and familial ties and had a significant impact on American poetry. Plath and Sexton were both students of Lowell and noted that his work influenced their own writing.

The confessional poetry of the mid-twentieth century dealt with subject matter that previously had not been openly discussed in American poetry. Private experiences with and feelings about death, trauma, depression, and relationships were addressed in this type of poetry, often in an autobiographical manner. Sexton, in particular, was interested in the psychological aspect of poetry, having started writing at the suggestion of her therapist.

The confessional poets were not merely recording their emotions on paper; craft and construction were extremely important to their work. While their treatment of the poetic self may have been groundbreaking and shocking to some readers, these poets maintained a high level of craftsmanship through their careful attention to and use of prosody.

The confessional poets of the 1950s and 1960s pioneered a type of writing that forever changed the landscape of American poetry. The tradition of confessional poetry has been a major influence on generations of writers and continues to this day; Marie Howe and Sharon Olds are two contemporary poets whose writing largely draws upon their personal experience.

As the name implies, confessional poetry is poetry of self-revelation. Brought to light in the 1950s and '60s by poets like Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and W.D. Snodgrass, confessional poetry serves to reveal an author's repressed anguish or deepest emotions through verses about the most personal of subjects. Although feelings and emotions have long been considered a core thematic element of poetry, the risqué content conveyed in confessional poetry sets it far apart from more traditional genres.

One of the most well-known poems by a confessional poet is "Daddy" by Plath. Addressed to her father, the poem contains references to the Holocaust but uses a sing-song rhythm that echoes the nursery rhymes of childhood:

Daddy, I have had to kill you.

You died before I had time-

Marble-heavy, a bag full of God,

Ghastly statue with one gray toe

Big as a Frisco seal

Another confessional poet of this generation was John Berryman. His major work was The Dream Songs, which consists of 385 poems about a character named Henry and his friend Mr. Bones. Many of the poems contain elements of Berryman's own life and traumas, such as his father's suicide. Below is an excerpt from "Dream Song 1":

All the world like a woolen lover

once did seem on Henry's side.

Then came a departure.

Thereafter nothing fell out as it might or ought.

I don't see how Henry, pried

open for all the world to see, survived.

The main characteristics of Confessional poetry are as under:

Intimate Subject Matter:

The most defining characteristic of confessional poetry is that it focuses on subject matter once considered taboo. Issues like drug abuse, sexual guilt, alcoholism, suicide and depression, which were typically considered

shameful or embarrassing, were discussed openly. For example, in her poem "Daddy," Sylvia Plath writes about how much she hates her father: "Daddy, I have had to kill you," and later, "I have always been scared of you."

First-Person Narration:

According to Poets.org, confessional poetry is the poetry of the "I." In other words, all confessional poems are written from a first-person point of view, allowing the reader to delve closely into the thoughts and feelings of the author. According to Edward Byrne, a published poet and English professor at Valparaiso University, confessional poets use first-person narration to "widen the scope of the poem" and as a "tool to increase a reader's emotional identification with the writer." In essence, confessional poems invite the reader to live vicariously through the poem.

Autobiographical by Design:

By nature, confessional poems are autobiographical, meant to record the sometimes sordid and often dismal personal lives of their authors, a now-common practice found in countless autobiographies, memoirs and essays. However, unlike other "I" poems, in confessional poems, the speaker doesn't just represent the poet; rather, the poet and the speaker are one in the same and interchangeable, and the speaker draws upon his or her own life as the sole form of reference.

Lyrical Craftsmanship:

It may be easy to assume that confessional poets simply put pen to paper and poured out their feelings in a free-flowing, nondescript manner. However, quite the opposite is true. According to Poets.org, the original confessional poets maintained a "high level of craftsmanship" and paid careful attention to the use of rhythm and intonation in their poems. W.D. Snodgrass in particular, long considered a "father" of confessional poetry, was a master of literary technique, incorporating everything from metaphor to allusion to aphorism in his works.

3.3 POSTMODERNISM IN AMERICAN FICTION

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, modernist literature was the central literary movement. However, after World War II, a new school of literary theory, deemed postmodernism, began to rise.

Postmodern literature is a literary movement that eschews absolute meaning and instead emphasizes play, fragmentation, metafiction, and intertextuality. The literary movement rose to prominence in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a reaction to modernist literature's quest for meaning in light of the significant human rights violations of World War II.

Common examples of postmodern literature include Gravity's Rainbow by Thomas Pynchon, Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut, and Catch-22

by Joseph Heller. Literary theorists that crystalized postmodernity in literature include Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard, Jacques Derrida, Jorge Luis Borges, Fredric Jameson, Michel Foucault, and Jean-François Lyotard.

Characteristics of Postmodern Literature:

Postmodern literature builds on the following core ideas:

1. Embrace of randomness:

Postmodern works reject the idea of absolute meaning and instead embrace randomness and disorder. Postmodern novels often employ unreliable narrators to further muddy the waters with extreme subjectivity and prevent readers from finding meaning during the story.

2. Playfulness:

While modernist writers mourned the loss of order, postmodern writers revel in it, often using tools like black humor, wordplay, irony, and other techniques of playfulness to dizzy readers and muddle the story.

3. Fragmentation:

Postmodernist literature took modernism's fragmentation and expanded on it, moving literary works more toward collage-style forms, temporal distortion, and significant jumps in character and place.

4. Metafiction:

Postmodern literature emphasized meaninglessness and play. Postmodern writers began to experiment with more meta elements in their novels and short stories, drawing attention to their work's artifice and reminding readers that the author isn't an authority figure.

5. Intertextuality:

As a form of collage-style writing, many postmodern authors wrote their work overtly in dialogue with other texts. The techniques they employed included pastiche (or imitating other authors' styles) and the combination of high and low culture (writing that tackles subjects that were previously considered inappropriate for literature).

Here are some notable authors who contributed to the postmodern movement:

1. John Barth:

Barth wrote an essay of literary criticism titled The Literature of Exhaustion (1967), detailing all writing as imitation and considered by many to be the manifesto of postmodern literature. Barth's fourth novel, Giles Goat-Boy (1966), is a prime example of the metafiction characteristic of postmodernism, featuring several fictional disclaimers in the beginning and end, arguing that the book was not written by the author and was instead given to the author on a tape or written by a computer.

2. Samuel Beckett:

Beckett's "theatre of the absurd" emphasized the disintegration of narrative. In the play Waiting for Godot (1953), Beckett creates an entire existential narrative featuring two characters who contemplate their day as they wait for the ambiguous Godot to appear. However, he never arrives, and his identity is not revealed.

3. Italo Calvino:

Calvino's novel If on a winter's night a traveler (1979) is an excellent example of a metanarrative-the book is about a reader attempting to read a novel titled If on a winter's night a traveler.

4. Don DeLillo:

Following an advertising executive in New York during the Nixon era, DeLillo's Underworld (1997) is an exceptionally fragmented narrative, exploring the rise of global capitalism, the decline of American manufacturing, the CIA, and civil rights, and other themes. White Noise (1985) reframes postmodernism through consumerism, bombarding characters with meaninglessness.

5. John Fowles:

Fowles's The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969) is a historical novel with a major emphasis on metafiction. The book features a narrator who becomes part of the story and offers several different ways to end the story.

6. Joseph Heller:

Heller's Catch-22 (1961) tells many storylines out of chronological order, slowly building the story as new information is introduced. Heller also employs paradox (a literary device that contradicts itself but contains a plausible kernel of truth) and farce (a type of comedy in which absurd situations are stacked precariously atop one another) to complicate the narrative further.

7. Gabriel García Márquez:

Márquez's One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967) is an exceptionally playful novel that follows several characters sprawled out over an extended length of time, emphasizing the smallness of human life.

8. Thomas Pynchon:

Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow (1973) is the poster child of postmodern literature, using a complex, fragmented structure to cover various subjects such as culture, science, social science, profanity, and literary propriety. The Crying of Lot 49 (1965) employs a significant amount of silly wordplay, often within contexts of seriousness.

9. Kurt Vonnegut:

Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse Five (1969) is a non-linear narrative in which the main character has been "unstuck in time," oscillating between the present and the past with no control over his movement and emphasizing the senseless nature of war.

10. David Foster Wallace:

Wallace's Infinite Jest (1996) embodies postmodernism through its eclectic, encyclopedic structure, characters trapped within the postmodern condition, obsessive endnotes and footnotes, and meandering consciousness. The Pale King (2011) is also highly metafictional, employing a character named David Foster Wallace.

3.4 JEWISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

Jewish-American literature is one of the most important literary phenomena in the history of American literature. Jewish-American literature is being practiced by these writers almost for a century. During its initial period between 1885 and 1935, though Jewish-American literature was written in Yiddish by the immigrants, nowadays it is primarily written in English as Yiddish is 'hardly used in America at the beginning of the 21st century.' This literature is said to be a 'corpus of writing about the Jewishness in America'. However, there are some Jewish writers who oppose to be called as 'Jewish' as they feel that such a reference to their literature is harmful as it limits the horizons of their works.

Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Delmore Schwartz, Grace Paley, Paul Goodman, and their Yiddish cousin, Isaac Bashevis Singer, were the first major Jewish writers in America to sustain major careers, not as immigrant writers but in the mainstream of American letters. As modernism replaced naturalism as the dominant literary mode, as fresh influences like psychoanalysis and existentialism exploded the sociological approach of many prewar writers, a new generation found powerful new vehicles for dealing with their experience. Straightforward realism was never an option for Jewish writers in America; it belonged to those who knew their society from within, who had a bird's-eye view, an easy grasp of its manners and values. Such a realism produced minor novels attacking anti-Semitism, like Arthur Miller's Focus (1945) and Laura Z. Hobson's Gentleman's Agreement (1947); it contributed to important war novels, among them Norman Mailer's The Naked and the Dead (1948) and Irwin Shaw's The Young Lions (1948); compounded with melodramatic formula and wish fulfillment, it gave rise to some of the best-selling fiction of the 1950s, including Herman Wouk's The Caine Mutiny: A Story of World War II (1951) and Marjorie Morningstar (1955) and Leon Uris's epic account of the founding of Israel, Exodus (1958). While these books reached a large audience, especially in their movie versions, they did not become a major literary current. Instead, as newcomers dealing with complex questions of identity, the best Jewish

writers became specialists in alienation who gravitated toward outrageous or poetic forms of humor, metaphor, and parable—styles they helped establish in American writing after the war.

The key to the new writers was not only their exposure to the great modernists-Franz Kafka, Thomas Mann, Henry James-but their purchase on Jews not simply as autobiographical figures in a social drama of rebellion and acculturation but as parables of the human condition. Though Saul Bellow admired the power of an authentic naturalist like Theodore Dreiser, though Flaubert helped forge his aesthetic conscience, his first two novels, Dangling Man (1944) and The Victim (1947), were more influenced by Dostoyevsky and Kafka than by any writers in the realist tradition. Bellow and his friends were the children of the Holocaust rather than the ghetto. They did not write about the recent events in Europe-they had not directly experienced them-but those horrors cast their shadow on every page of their work, including the many pages of desperate comedy.

The atrocities of the Holocaust, the psychology of Freud, and the dark vision of certain modern masters encouraged Jewish writers to find some universal significance in their own experience. Kafka was the prophet, not of totalitarianism-that was too facile-but of a world cut loose from will and meaning, the world as they experienced it in the 1940s. Saul Bellow's engagement with the themes of modernist culture can be traced from novel to novel, but even a writer as private as Malamud was able to combine the stylized speech rhythms of the ghetto with a form adapted from Nathaniel Hawthorne and Kafka to turn parochial Jewish tales into chilling fables of modern life. This was the brief period when the Jew became the modern Everyman, everyone's favorite victim, schlemiel, and secular saint. Yet there was also an innovation in language, a nervous mixture of the literary and the colloquial, of art talk and street talk, that was almost poetic in its effects. Bellow himself brought the buoyant, syncopated rhythms of the vernacular into his prose. As he put it in his eulogy of Malamud after his death in 1986: “Well, we were here, first-generation Americans, our language was English and a language is a spiritual mansion from which no one can evict us. Malamud in his novels and stories discovered a sort of communicative genius in the impoverished, harsh jargon of immigrant New York. He was a myth maker, a fabulist, a writer of exquisite parables.”

We can find these effects almost anywhere we turn in Malamud's stories, from animal fables like The Jewbird and Talking Horse to wrenching tales like Take Pity, which he put at the head of his last collection of stories. It includes the following bit of dialogue, supposedly between a census taker, Davidov, and a recalcitrant citizen named Rosen:

“How did he die?” “On this I am not an expert,” Rosen replied. “You know better than me.” “How did he die?” Davidov spoke impatiently. “Say in one word.” “From what he died?-he died, that's all.” “Answer, please, this question.” “Broke in him something. That's how.” “Broke what?” “Broke what breaks.”

Eventually we discover that the man answering the questions in this Kafkaesque exchange is himself dead, and his reckoning with the census taker takes place in some bare, shabby room of heaven or hell, though it feels like a forlorn pocket of the ghetto. (Malamud himself later described it as "an institutional place in limbo.") Rosen, a former coffee salesman, has killed himself in a last-ditch effort to impose his charity, pity, or love on the fiercely independent widow of the man who died. Rosen takes pity on her, but she will not take his pity. Even after he turns on the gas and leaves her everything, she appears at the window, adrift in space, alive or dead, imploring or berating him in a final gesture of defiance.

Like all of Malamud's best work, this is a story of few words but resonant meanings. Anticipating Samuel Beckett, Malamud strips down the sociology of the ghetto into a spare, postapocalyptic landscape of essential, even primitive emotions, finding eerie comedy on the far side of horror. After her husband's death, as the business disintegrated, the woman and her children came close to starving, but the story is less about poverty than about the perverseness of the human will. Again and again Rosen tries to help the widow, but she adamantly refuses to be helped. Both are stubborn unto death, and the story explores the fine line between goodness and aggression, generosity and control, independence and self-sacrifice. Rosen will get the proud woman to take his help, whether she wants to or not, but neither can truly pity the other; their unshakable self-will isolates and destroys them. And the interrogator, standing in for both author and reader, makes no effort to judge between them. The story leaves us with a sense of the sheer human mystery.

The raw power of Malamud's stories is based on a simple principle—that every moral impulse has its Nietzschean dark side, its streak of lust or the will to power, just as every self has its anti-self, a double or shadow that exposes its vulnerabilities and limitations. This dialectic of self and other is at the heart of Malamud's stories and novels. The self in his stories is often a stand-in for the writer, the artist as assimilated Jew—someone fairly young but never youthful, well educated but not especially successful, Jewish but nervously assimilated, full of choked-up feeling. Repeatedly, this figure is brought up short by his encounter with some ghetto trickster, a wonder-working rabbi, an ethnic con man who represents the suppressed, tribal part of his own tightly controlled personality.

Modern Jewish American novels often contain (a few or many) Jewish characters and address issues and themes of importance to Jewish American society such as assimilation, Zionism/Israel, and antisemitism, along with the recent phenomenon known as "New antisemitism."

Four interrelated qualities distinguish Jewish folk literature:

(a) historical depth,

(b) continuous interdependence between orality and literacy,

(c) national dispersion, and

(d) linguistic diversity.

Even though the culture of the Jews was different, they expected to follow the culture of Americans. Due to their migration to America, these Jews adopted a new culture and formed as Jewish American Culture. This culture influenced even the writers too. So the impact of the culture became a spark in the Literature. The growth of writings and fame in Literature is dependent on the culture of the people

The identity of Jewish American writer is understood through American fiction and nonfiction. Along with the Jewish novels even the poetry paved it's way in American Literature. The twentieth century American poetry in English contains the presence of Jewish identity. The American poets of Jewish origin proved their identity even in poetry. According to David Bleich, Jewish American poetry represents: "an inquiry into history and society, done privately and modestly, with humor and dignity, without frivolousness or solemnity, within a tradition of American poetry that is already marginalized" (Bleach 2000: 179 = 80) Jewish American poetry is a major augmentation and it is a part of success to American literature. The Jewish culture not only had a big change in its tradition and society, it brought change even in literature where novels and poetry played a vital role. The sufferings of Jewish people due to their immigration are proved clearly in Jewish American novels and poetry. The Jewish people's collaboration with Americans created Jewish American literature with Jewish background. It is very clear that the American Jewish literature is identified as a unique part of American literary history. The growth of American Jewish literature has been the responsibility of abundant studies concentrating primarily on the authentic forces that described the lives of Jewish immigrants to America. The conclusion of this development is an enormous collection of literature exhibiting the individuality of a particular culture in multi-cultural America.

(* The above material has been compiled and edited from various internet resources*)

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the themes of confessional poetry?
2. Explain the features of confessional poetry?
3. In what way did the two world wars affect American Literature?
4. Discuss the common Themes and Techniques of Postmodern Literature
5. Explain the major themes adopted in modern Jewish American novels
6. What makes Jewish literature Jewish? Elaborate
7. What type of literature of Jews is known as the modern Jewish literature? Discuss

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MODULE - II

4

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF ROBERT FROST'S "OUT, OUT--" "A ROADSIDE STAND" AND "FIRE AND ICE"

Unit Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The Unit focuses on the three famous poems of Robert Frost, Out, Out, Fire and Ice and A Roadside Stand, focusing on the major trend of Frost's expressive writing. Based on a very personal note the poem Out, Out brings out the tragic anecdote keeping the rural background in its charming and serene form. In Fire and Ice Robert Frost ignites the enthralling question prevalent since pre-historic times about how the world will come to an end – whether it will be the fire or the ice. In A Roadside Stand Frost presents a contrasting picture of rural and the urban world bringing out the concerns like ignored poverty, pompous city-life behavior, neglecting modern attitude, ingenuous country-side approach, the innocent poor and the meticulous rich, the pleading and the insensitive.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Robert Frost (1874-1963), the poet known for his realistic depiction of real life, had a wonderful command on the colloquial American speech and had frequently used rural life and settings in his writings depicting the ordinary people in everyday situations. The only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry, he became America's rare 'public literary figures.' An institution in himself, Frost was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 1960 and was named the poet laureate of Vermont in 1961. In a way Frost's poetry is an amalgamation of the 19th century traditional propensities and 20th century contemporary modernism as he stands on the crossroads of the two centuries. Taking his symbols from public domain, he developed a sense of directness in his poetic approach which reflected the imagism of Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. Believing that the purpose of art was to 'strip life to form', he considered that there should be integration between style and language. The meaning of the poem can

be unfolded from the style itself and Frost achieved apparently with his simple diction and great art. Frost's style has a blending of digression, compressions, anomalies, irregular beat, fragmentary sentences, repetitions, abrupt openings and endings and impulsive ejaculations. It seems at times the speaker has no patience to complete the sentence and suddenly pulls oneself out and at times the speaker is too excited to complete in the middle of everything.

4.2 ANALYSIS OF "OUT, OUT--" AND "A ROADSIDE STAND"

Set in an idyllic rural landscape in Vermont, the poem Out, Out is based on a true story of a young boy, Frost's friend's son, who lost his life in an accident at a very young age. Somewhere the title has an indirect refence to Shakespeare's famous line in Macbeth, 'Out, out brief candle! Recreating a true life-tale where a young man is cutting wood with a powerful manufacturing saw against the backdrop of a beautiful mountainous landscape, the author creates a contrasting picture of modern equipment in the lap of serene nature. This rural setting is so beautifully enlisted by the poet that it very easily touches the readers who are immediately carried away to the enchanting aroma of such serene beauty. As the dust of the wood being cut sends a sweet aroma everywhere with the help of the soft and serene breeze, the readers are caught in the fragrance of bewitching beauty. The topical scene of the five mountain ranges, one behind the other, adds to the glamourous and captivating setting. And the far away sunset at Vermont just glorifies the setting to make it perfect. Throughout the boy has been working faultlessly under the backdrop of such a faultless scenery and no one could have imagined that anything would go wrong.

But then boy is interrupted by his sister's call for supper who wanted to give her brother a half an hour break from the monotonous job that he was going on with. But this sweet call of his sister changed his destiny – as he turns to go the saw suddenly comes in contact with his hand, chopping it and oozing out a lot of blood. The first outcry of the boy was a regretful laugh, maybe mocking at his own folly. He rushes towards the others holding up his hand 'half in appeal, but half as if to keep the life from spilling'. The boy then realized the gravity of his wound for he was now a big man mainly because he was doing the job of a grown up man. Very emphatically does the poet connect the bigness of a man to the innocence of a child – 'since he was old enough to know, big boy doing a man's work, though a child at heart'.

Even taking him to the doctor does not bring any relief who puts him under the effect of ether. The heart-touching pathetic cry of the young lad wrenches the heart of every reader and creates an atmosphere of ultimate bereavement – 'Don't let him cut my hand off – the doctor, when he comes. Don't let him sister!' But unfortunately, it is not just his hand that is cut off; the boy succumbs to the injury. The loss of life of a young boy on such an unanticipated trifling cause raises the question of insignificance

of life. Vehemently has the author presented the factual interpretation of the boy's final moments – his tears, his despair and then the final pause. All those who watched him listened to his painful cry with patience and then, once he was gone, walked their way with no remorse. The heavy loss of blood and the tremendous shock kills the young man despite medical assistance. But surprisingly everyone else moves on because they are not dead. Using various literary devices like personification, juxtaposition, enjambment, and alliteration the author brings out the tragedy of the young man on one side and the cold response of the working class on the other – such a common event as death does not require too much attention.

The author initiates the poem with a very ordinary scene – an idyllic pastoral surrounding and a common working class young man doing his job with a saw. Neither is there any anticipation of calamity nor any apprehension of divine injustice. So casually has the saw been stated that there is hardly any disturbed apprehension or growing concern. The typical young man performing his daily chores and the sister's crying out to him for supper is a very normal day to day situation that everyone is aware of. But the tragedy strikes as it often strikes unexpectedly, and one wrong move changes the course of fate. The suddenness of the event is expressed through the boy's immediate reaction of laugh and then holding his arm half in appeal and half from spilling his life. Various questions related to misfortune and destiny trigger in the minds of the readers; but one thing becomes clear that death cannot stop the flow of life and like the other onlookers everyone has to move on till death does not hit them. Written in Blank Verse and retaining a very discrete impersonal tone through a personal narrative the poem captures the mesmerizing interference and the poignant shock. The personal involvement of the speaker becomes clear – he must have known the family and maybe the boy too. Capturing the everyday speech of rural England, the author is justifying the locale and the ambience to give the poem the significance it deserves.

In Fire and Ice Robert Frost ignites the enthralling question prevalent since pre-historic times about how the world will come to an end. Most probably the poet was inspired by Dante's 'Inferno', Canto 32 (the first book of his 14th century 'Divine Comedy') which focuses on the issue of sinners in a flaming hell with a lake of ice up to their necks. Many other sources assert that the poem was conceived following a conversation with the astronomer Harlow Shapley regarding the end of the world – it seems that the distinguished astronomer, when questioned by Frost, replied that either the sun will explode, or the earth will gradually freeze. In his own unique way, Robert Frost must have picked both the beliefs and has expressed the duality of fire and ice in his own typical rhythmic style by using a modified version of the terza rima rhyming scheme where the first tercet rhymes completely with the first and third lines of the next – a structure designed by Dante in Divine Comedy. And if one delves deeper one might even find how Dante's Inferno touched the senses of Frost when he was creating this poem – the nine lines of the poem can be related to the nine circles of hell mentioned by Dante. There seems to be a connection with the virtuous concepts of human nature brought out by the

Greek philosopher Aristotle who believed that because human beings are the only ones capable of rational thinking, they should realize that to live a constructive life one needs to control passion by reason. This very idea is infused in the poem where 'fire' and 'ice' are 'passion' and 'hate'. So, whether it is passion or hate the end of the world is destined through the actions and emotions of the human race. This metaphoric exclamation with which the poem opens, that whether it should be fire or ice, suggests one thing that people have entirely conflicting viewpoints.

Focusing on the general disagreement going on in the society through generations, Frost puts into his views with a very clear concept – 'some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice'. Based on his encounters with very overwhelming emotions like 'desire' – suggesting greed, craving, fury, etc. he feels that fire will engulf the world. But if the world is likely to end twice, however, the speaker feels that based on his understanding of human hatred it will be ice which is an equally effective source of devastation and annihilation. He is of the opinion that like fire even ice will do its job of destruction in the most efficient way.

Though written in a very conversational tone. somewhere the poem hints at the special propensity of human beings towards self-destruction. The two natural elements, 'fire' and 'ice' can very well relate to natural disaster but gradually these naturalistic ends are diverted towards a symbolic approach – the ability of human beings to call upon their own disaster. Linking fire to 'desire', the speaker knows very well how desire can be detrimental in a world of enthusiasm, resentment, aggression, avarice, etc. and he also feels that the world has ruined itself so much that humanity has the capability of destroying it the second time – and this time it will be a cold annihilation. A historical and contemporary analysis can justify 'fire' and 'ice' to the World War scenario of hatred and violence and the Climate Change consequence leading to destruction and disgust. Though contradictory in nature ice and fire here justifies one common element – the vicious and detrimental capacity of humanity. Ice and Fire, the two extremes, can cause immense damage thus becoming appropriate metaphors of harbingers of mortality. Fire becomes desire related to passion and ice becomes hate related to reason – the heart and the head – the major impulses of human existence – guiding humanity to the final submission of death.

But somewhere deep within the poet also seems like referring to something very symbolic – the positive connection – thus expressing a lot about what is unsaid in the poem rather than what is being said. The optimistic connotations of fire, i.e. light and warmth should not be forgotten. And ice has the special essence of balancing and neutralizing the severe effects of the sweltering and excruciating temperature. But forgetting all these appreciating qualities humanity has as if chosen the iniquitous side of these natural sources and working on it with high determination to make it successful in every possible way. Maintaining a very natural tone, the poet clarifies that the world has to end, be it either fire or ice, as a collective failure of humanity is very obvious.

Frost's A Roadside Stand focuses on the negative side of modernization with a sad note of the past that is gradually fading by. Starting with a concept of the decline of agricultural affluence, the poem encroaches the life of a seller who stands in the corner of a road pleading to the people passing by to buy his berries. The description of the surrounding is very minutely given – the old house, the new shed, the road, the speeding vehicles – everyone can very easily visualize. The poet describes the roadside stand as well where the seller stands pathetically desiring to sell his produce and earn a little money to take care of his household – 'a little new shed in front of a little old house' – from where the cars sped away, not caring its existence. The flow of money in the society – the cash flow that keeps the surrounding beautiful and happy – has not diminished; it is only that the mindset is screened. One is blind towards these deprived families, not realizing that they too are a part of this flowery society, and they too require money to meet their requirements. A stand on the roadside indicates both – the exposure of adversity and the necessity of compassion – 'a roadside stand that too pathetically pled'.

But the 'polished traffic' hardly bothers, it just moves on. Preoccupied with their own profession and the city life they belong to, these flourishing ones just pass through the countryside without caring about the want and wish of the surrounding. And, if by chance, they forget about their much engaging life in the city and notice the landscape and the surrounding they are filled with judgement and criticism. They are disgusted with the presence of the shed and the old rustic signs – critically comment and deride about how the 'signs N and S have turned wrong'. Hardly do they notice the wild berries and the golden squash, and their juices kept in old-fashioned jars – 'offered for sale wild berries on wooden quarts'. These city-bred humans feel low and ashamed to buy these goodies and feel it to be below their status and dignity. Rather they consider that these badly painted and put-up things are spoiling the beauty of nature – the beauty that would otherwise have rested in the beauty and serenity of the mountain range.

The criticism by the rich offends the farmers and they ask the rich to keep their money if they go on with their cruel and mean approach. The farmer is hurt not because they don't notice his stand but because they treat him with disrespect and scorn. The humble villagers fight to keep their hardships and they regret of not getting enough money to lead a comfortable life. They too wish to lead a life like the city people with money and comfort as they have seen in movies and media, but unluckily for them even the political parties are in favour of the city people denying these destitute farmers from any kind of luxurious life. All the promises that the party in power has given them is futile as they no longer are interested in keeping these promises.

It is obviously there in the news that there are some compassionate people who want to do away with poverty and their intention is to buy these properties on the roadside and build theatres and stores there and thus it will help in the development of the place. These well-wishers will make the villagers believe that from this advancement they will gain a lot,

keeping their hidden motive in total darkness. Fulfilling their secret and mysterious intentions, these so-called good doers of the society try to change the mindset of the villagers who are unwilling to shift from their ancestral houses and these villagers know very well that no one will either take their consent or understand their emotions. Disturbing the lifestyle of these innocent villagers by shifting and huddling them together, these manipulators enjoy all benefits and even try to persuade the villagers to change their disciplined good habits. They even try to train them to sleep throughout the day – an obvious indication of spoiling the age-old good habits of devoted hard labour. Befooling them, these beneficiaries try to take the maximum benefit of the situation – 'And by teaching them how to sleep they sleep all day; Destroy their sleep at night the ancient way'.

Bringing a personal touch in the poem the poet is touched by the farmer's maltreated life – sans hope, sans opinion, sans existence. Their sadness clings on to the open window of the farmer's thatched house where the screeching sound of the brakes of one among thousand passing cars suddenly halts – the unnecessary false alarms which create a kind of hope but is finally remitted into nothingness. How can the polished traffic ever think of unpolished exposures – all they require is some guidance when lost:

'And one did stop, but only to plow up grass

In using the yard to back and turn around;

And another to ask the way to where it was bound;

And another to ask could they sell it a gallon of gas

They couldn't (this crossly); they had none, didn't it see?'

It is very clear always that for the development of a country the city folks contribute a lot – the financial stability of the country is based on the survival of the city people whereas the villagers add nothing but poverty and depression. Somehow the speaker wants to feel connected with the country folk trying to empathize with their agony, understanding their hardship and realizing that the old world will gradually pass by and will also soon be forgotten. He also realizes that the world might see him as an outdated person who had lived a very simple life trying to achieve the basic outcomes in a world filled with complex realities and destinations. There is a kind of social criticism that is very well expressed in the poem. To uplift the spirit of these downtrodden people, the poet tries to sympathize with their pain and suffering for he knows how difficult it is for those who cannot fulfill their daily needs. He strongly believes that these people should be taken out from the clutches of pain and relieved from the hardships of existence. He even imagines himself in the same position and envisions how his reaction would be when such a consoling help would reach him out. He assures that it will definitely be a happy and surprising moment, but he also knows that such moments are momentary and so a very temporary relief for the farmers too. The yearning and the ignoring, the vulnerability and the frustration are very fervently articulated through each word and manifestation of the poet.

4.2 CONCLUSION

Robert Frost, one of the greatest American poets, has immensely contributed to the richness of English literature with his appealing yet simple poetry. It has been very rightly observed that the poems of Frost are deceptively simple and a majority of his poems offer more than one interpretation. There is also a fine and gorgeous texture in his poems which create an everlasting excellence. Ample use of poetic devices such as epigram, analogy, simile, metaphor, symbols, irony, wit, personification, etc. can be noted in his poetry and with the use of such poetic devices he bestows his poetry with a consistent pattern and an organic vision. Repetition also plays a very forceful device in his poetic formation. Writing in a very natural everyday kind of speech, he always uses a very thorough and selective approach towards the arrangement of words. His carefully selected vocabulary conveys a beautiful picture of conviviality and absurdity, distress and despair, realism and antagonism. The conversational tone that Frost uses in his poetry just adds an enchanting aroma to the craving delicacy that he creates.

Robert Frost's poetry has a charismatic appeal and all the poems prescribed here adhere to the fact that he has a fantastic power and grip over language and delivery. The emotions are beautifully captured creating an essence of connection and compassion. The passionate thrust in Out, Out combined with the personal attachment, the inquisitive question in Fire and Ice justified by assertive ambiguity, the conflicting portrayal in A Roadside Stand expressed through unwelcome injustice – every poem is an inscription in itself – justifying the greatness of one of the greatest and most appreciated American poets, Robert Frost.

4.3 QUESTIONS

a. The major themes as reflected in the poems prescribed by Robert Frost?

b. Analyze the point of view and the message delivered by the author in the poem Out, Out.

c. What do 'fire' and 'ice' stand for in Frost's poem Fire and Ice and what is the general opinion regarding the world that the poet has portrayed?

d. The contrasting picture of the peasant and the passers by as reflected in the poem A Roadside Stand by Robert Frost.

e. The pain of the poet as expressed in A Roadside Stand by Robert Frost.

f. Frost's poetic style with reference to the poems prescribed.

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5

CRITICAL STUDY OF WALLACE STEVENS' "ANECDOTE OF THE JAR", "ANOTHER WEEPING WOMAN" "DOMINATION OF BLACK" AND "A RABBIT AS THE KING OF THE GHOSTS"

Unit Structure

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The Unit highlights the four amazing poems of Wallace Stevens, A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts, Anecdote of the Jar, Another Weeping Woman and Domination of Black, establishing the fact about his wonderful poetic expression. A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts brings out a very challenging but realistic dilemmatic approach highlighting the emotions and understanding and confirming one's existence. In Anecdote of the Jar the connection between the accurate and the eventual is brought out in a candid and confessional style. In Another Weeping Woman a genuine and authentic counsel comes from the poet of moving ahead, letting the past go by. Domination of Black transmits one to the dark and fearful approach of night and death.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955) one of the most reputed American poets of the 20th century was a philosopher of aesthetics who explored the conception of poetry bringing in an ultimate synthesis of 'creative imagination and objective reality'. He was a master stylist with an amazing power of vocabulary and a magnificent accuracy while crafting his poems. Stevens's complex stanza and rhyming pattern are in themselves a school of poetry and each of his poems has so much novelty and authenticity that each requires a separate study. His most famous collection of poetry, Harmonium, was published in 1923 which bears sufficient indications of Stevens's extensive capacities – an extraordinary vocabulary, an aptitude for outstanding terminology, a proficient sense of imagery and the capacity to exhibit both sarcasm and philosophy.

5.2 CRITICAL STUDY OF WALLACE STEVENS' "ANECDOTE OF THE JAR", "ANOTHER WEEPING WOMAN" "DOMINATION OF BLACK" AND "A RABBIT AS THE KING OF THE GHOSTS"

Wallace Stevens has a wonderful way of handling his context and emotions and at times he does it so methodically that one can, at times, very well enjoy the beauty of a poem without getting fervently involved into it or, at other times, become too emotional with 'much ado about nothing'. Stevens has always made his writing exclusive with his choice of 'intellect first' which has stimulated a kind of fascinating effect on his readers. In the poem A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts, with a very confrontational but factual opening statement, he infuses into the minds of the readers a kind of dilemma about whether one should agree or argue. Obviously the setting of an image of 'the end of the day' is lodged in the minds which gradually shift to the next imagery of 'the shapeless shadow' covering the sun indicating either cloudy atmosphere or evening ambience. It is understood that there are two characters in the poem – a rabbit and a cat – and the speaker addresses the rabbit first with 'your fur'.

In the second stanza the speaker introduces the cat who has been draped by the speaker in all Christmas colors – 'Fat cat, red tongue, green mind, white milk'. A cat with a bowl of milk must be a very disturbing imagery for the rabbit, but the speaker creates an unmusically contrasting picture saying that August is the most peaceful month. And then the speaker moves on mirroring the previous image of serenity – someone relaxing on the grass in the 'peacefullest time'. And at this moment the cat becomes a monument and is forgotten in such a way as if it resides in moon. With the mention of the cat in the moon, the speaker is trying to create an alien concept of distance and distress, ambiguity and abnormality. Beautifully does Stevens also bring out the childlike quality through the rabbit which the readers can very exquisitely connect to – how the evils of the world can disappear with the night or with just closing one's eyes.

The emotions gradually heighten with the escalation of intellect as the intensity of the poem gradually deepens and moves further. The speaker does not just make the evil disappear but focuses on the self – the rabbit-self that feels that light is only the rabbit light. It is such a childhood petition where a kid, in moments of distress, wishes to retreat to such a place where everything is his/hers and he/she is protected so cozily by the surroundings that not a word need to be uttered. The shelter that a child seeks for, might be the shelter of the parents or the seclusion of a hiding place – the child looks up to that secure area that requires no comments or justifications. The sentiments and understanding of the rabbit is linked to that of the child in its desire for everything that it means for itself – a supreme seclusion where nothing but the rabbit matters. From such a place where nothing matters and the rabbit has nothing to think for, it is jolted back, by all forces, into the world of reality. It is as if the east and the west are running down to make the rabbit aware of its physical existence. Wonderfully does the speaker combine the fulness of the grass to the

fulness of the rabbit – the physical reality to the psychological self. The rabbit is further comforted with endorsements like 'The trees around are for you, the whole of the wideness of night is for you', as if consoling a small child trying to make him/her feel the importance of being. The speaker is trying to simplify to the rabbit that all the four corners of the night are completely reserved for him; the rabbit can utilize the night in its own way. The assurance is put forward again and again with the deliberate saying that the rabbit can take advantage of the night and become its own self, not just restricted to one place but all the four corners of the night. The rabbit can feel fearless and free for it is the time when the as 'the red cat hides away in the fur-light'. The rabbit now has the complete authority and can now hump high and up and even go higher and higher and reach out to the sky. The cat seems to have vanished and the night assures the rabbit a free reign to rule as the obstruction of the cat is washed away by the night. So, the rabbit sits with its head high, enjoying the freedom of space and the cat, maybe asleep somewhere is just a memory – 'And the little green cat is a bug in the grass'.

As the poem ends, a very different realization hits hard – maybe the speaker is not just focusing on the emotions of a rabbit or a child, his finger might be towards people in general. Even the four corners of the night might be a deliberate assumption of how human beings limit and interpret their own existence when it comes to the understanding of things and situations. As the cat becomes just a 'monument' to the rabbit and the nighttime provides an assurance of freedom and safety, so is the case with human beings who try to justify every situation based on their own perspective and consideration. The poem very well justifies the poet as it deals with knowledge but also hanging upon emotions though not literally seeking for it.

The poem Anecdote of the Jar starts with an anecdotal note definitely – telling the readers of an incident of the past. The first-person narration in the poem creates an appeal as the speaker talks about how he had kept a big and beautiful jar upon a cluttered hill in Tennessee. Imagination flies high as the readers visualize someone placing a big round jar on a hill and the poet creates a contrasting image and the wonderful contrasting picture that is projected there – the jar, an object created by human being and the hill on which it is placed, a natural creation. Talking about the specifications, the reader is unaware about how big the jar is, or it is of which color; all that the readers understand is that it is round. The jar attracts the unruly attention as it is highlighting the disheveled wilderness that is surrounding the hill.

The wilderness surrounding the jar seems to flourish around the jar until it was no longer wild. The jar, as if, has taken over everything, standing impressively upon the hill. Despite being grey and bare it showed its prominence, hardly caring for the nature around. The poet's emphatic presentation of the jar definitely creates a reasonable question in the minds of the readers that how such a significant thing as the jar can create such an impressive impact on the 'wilderness'.

Somewhere maybe Stevens is trying to relate to a situation where perfection mandates attention and appreciation – the idea suggests so – the placement of the jar upon the hill so that the wilderness has to extend itself to reach the superior position. The twist in fact is in the general demonstration of transition from completely natural to something focused on man-made engineering. The jar might be a representation of the industrial advancement towards which the world is moving to and the 'wilderness' trying to adjust around such modifications. The emptiness of the society is also made visible rough the lack of quality substance (representation of a grey color jar that is bare and empty) and still having an impact on everything. The dull jar can be a representation of humanity with nothing inside it, whereas, on the other hand, nature provides so much keeping the world rich with vegetation and the animal kingdom. The element of 'wilderness' of Tennessee, which can be considered the 'wilderness' of the world, offers a lot of substance but still the jar stands elite in its surroundings – a man's conquest over nature.

With his honesty and confessional style the poet makes the poem incredibly effective with the basic theme of the relation between reality and imagination. It is humanity that imposes some kind of command upon nature through his artistic creation – the impression is that art which is the creation of imagination can execute a disordered state of affairs. As is the case with most of Stevens's poetry, the underlying theme of this poem too is the separation between the natural and the imaginative territories – a study of conflict between the outer and the inner worlds – and, above all, the frequently conflicting connection between the authentic and the ultimate.

In Another Weeping Woman Wallace Stevens gives everyone a very sincere and solemn advice of moving on and letting go things of the past. The word 'another' indicate a repetition of action and the poet is trying to make people realize that preserving unhappiness in one's heart and making one's heart so bitter with it. It's better to forget the past and move on towards a promising future because grieve will definitely not add sweetness to our lives rather will make us feel more miserable. The woman is characterized as an unhappy, severely disenchanted self for whom tears act as a humanizing release of emotions but even her genuine grief is unable to soften or sweeten her extreme melancholy. And as the tears are rolling down they are adding more of poison to the self – the more one cries, the more bitter grows the heart. And the more bitter the heart grows the darkness around increases. These tears are gradually nurtured into 'black blooms' and they keep rising, thus making one more and more wretched and depressed.

As the poem moves forward it seems as if Stevens has an intimate understanding of death and also the bitterness, misery and darkness that are associated with death. On the other hand, he uses such optimistic words like 'sweeten, blooms, imagination' – maybe directing towards positivity and rebirth. He talks about the 'magnificent' cause of existence, signifying that one should not lose hope whatever the situation. He then focuses on the truth of imagination, a strong notion that can take one away

from the world of hardcore reality. And then, finally, he talks about that one reality that this abstract world ensures – 'Leaves you with him' – as if the poet wants to say that death is not the final destination but it is the beginning of another. And at this juncture 'no phantasy moves' as she 'is pierced by a death'. The grief that started in the first stanza is justified with the death in the last, making the readers to come to a conclusion that the woman must be crying for her dead husband or a dead child. The poet seems like suggesting that getting self-indulged in the grieving process after the death of a near and dear one is no better than death itself. It seems as though the poet is reconnoitering into the horrifying and disturbing nature of death, though trying to convince himself and others that there should be an end to grief for those of us who are alive. Undoubtedly we grieve for a loved one who dies but that is not the end of existence for all those who are living. One has to move on for the sake of memory and remembrance of the person who is no more and also for our own sake. Grief definitely has a purpose but we shouldn't allow it to overpower us and that is the reason we have to put it aside or let it go though it might sound selfish by all. It is indeed very difficult to imagine moving on with just the memory of our loved one who is no longer physically present by our side and yet we have to attain that strength because that is what we need to do in this inescapable and unpreventable cyclic journey of life and death.

It seems as though Stevens might have had some tragic life experiences to emanate such kind of in-depth cognizance. The personal touch in the poem creates an impression that the wailing woman is known to the speaker but the relationship and the intimacy are not clear. Do they know each other? Or is she just his poetic imagination? This obscure reference generates curiosity and obscurity and the poem seems to be located in a posterior world where relationships fall apart and closeness remains undisclosed – indicating a conflicting concept of how associations are actually untrue. But that remains the truth of life for everyone, be it a common man or a poet – generalizing our personal trivial miseries into universal facts.

Domination of Black starts with describing a man sitting at night watching a fire and the flames remind him of the color of the fallen leaves which in turn reminds him of the bright colors of the peacock and its bizarre and harsh cry. The poem requires the readers to see a fire with the colors of leaves turning inside a room – peacock tails in a fire and loud hemlocks. It seems as if the leaves themselves are turning in the wind as if making one to suspend all normal expectations. The poet expresses all the images literally, the descriptions extend beyond the accuracy of the scene and it goes straight into the heart like a thorny arrow.

The colors of the tails of the peacocks where similar to that of the leaves which were being turned by the wind during the evening time – 'the twilight wind'. They swept so ferociously into the room that it seemed like 'they flew from the boughs of the hemlocks'. So powerfully did the wind blow to the ground that it resembled the cry of the peacocks. The severity and the shrillness of the wind are justified by the cry of the peacocks, giving the ambience a powerful and pulsating touch. The questions are

now raised – what kind of a cry was it? 'Was it a cry against the twilight?' – as if reacting to the overcoming darkness. Or was it against the leaves themselves? – revolting against their rough rustling. And then the poet uses all the 'turning' around –

'Turning in the wind,

Turning as the flames

Turned in the fire,

Turning as the tails of the peacocks

Turned in the loud fire'

Thus creating the effect of repetition and gradually as if the poem is growing out of the objects and progressively developing a special meaning altogether. The fire, for example, seems so warm and comfortable initially and is compare to leaves that are pleasantly turning in the wind. There is a kind of soft and calm touch in the atmosphere and serenity and solace in sensation. But then the expression shifts as the wind becomes the 'twilight wind' which is connected to the cry of the peacocks and the fire is transformed into the threatening 'loud fire' linked to both the tails and the cry of the peacocks. And then the loudness increase and the poet wonders whether it was the loud hemlocks or the shrill cry of the peacock 'against the hemlocks?' there is an intense rhythm at the backdrop of an intended pause leading to a sensational and metrical climax.

The final stanza begins with a rhythm that is very close to the sequence of the first stanza. The poet looks out of the window and see the planets gather perceiving that they also turn like the leaves and the flames. The night comes closer with a confident stride like that of the color of the 'heavy hemlocks'. The sight of the advancement of the night acquiring such rich and bright colors sparks a shiver in the poet. His fright reminds him of the shriek cry of the peacocks and the readers too feel the chill creeping down their bones. The predominant approach of the night accompanied by fear and death infuses an unnerving environment and the readers can very well comprehend the unnerving terror that gradually takes over – the shift from the essence of innocence and harmlessness to that of horror and panic. There is a shifting change in the significance of the title as well – a title that looks initially inoffensive and innocent, steadily gathers prominence and by the end of the poem it is 'black' that becomes the cause of fear for the poet and the reason of the cry of the peacocks. It is the hue of the surging night that seems to threaten the continued existence of the universe.

In the poem Stevens generates a corporeal whirlwind, compelling the readers to challenge the correlation between perception and reality. The readers are forced to look beyond what they immediately see and relate so that they can realize the fragility of certainty and this the poet does by turning upside down the conventional situational comprehensibility. While creating this mirrored structure Stevens does not allow the readers to

escape from the sense of being flabbergasted rather throws them again and again into the same experience.

The poem becomes a representation of decay and death and a grim mood sustains in the poem throughout. The repetitions used in the poem bind the concept and expression of the thoughts together. The repetitions build a kind of hypnotism too – as if the poet, along with the readers, is moving along with the wind and the fire and the hemlock and the peacock. The setting, starting from night time by a fire indoors, shifts to the changed colors of the fallen leaves and the bushes outside as is visible to the person sitting by the fireplace. From here it shifts to the striding color of the large hemlocks, as if they are walking and coming closer to the indoor setting. From there it moves to an image of the cry of the peacocks that is heard which gives a kind of musical tone to the poem. The poem moves in the form of an abstract painting – only the words taking the shape of the strokes. The meaningful trends expressed in the poem sets the grimness of the mood – the approaching night, autumn in its extreme form – clearly symbolizing the associations with death or its gradual approach. A dark disposition prevails throughout and also a feeling of fear and apprehension, taken to the maximum with the haunting cries of the peacock.

5.3 CONCLUSION

Wallace Stevens, the philosophical poet, has often stroked the pages with his creative images mainly to explore the world around us. Often these images are a product of dreams or nightmares and the symbolic paintings used by him might be a painting from a modern gallery – maybe a very common object at a vey uncommon setting. From heightening emotions to escalation of intellect, from passion to forbearance, from apprehension to adaptability – the concepts of his poetry vary from one end to the other. His enigmatic and empowering approach leads to a kind of sublimity and serenity in his poetic approach. In the poem A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts how beautifully does the poet express the dilemma and apprehension of a rabbit and then pointing it towards humanity in general. Taking the readers to an incident of the past in Anecdote of the Jar the poet transfers the readers to the height of imagination. Another Weeping Woman highlights the inescapable and unpreventable cyclic journey of life and death. And through literal images in Domination of Black the readers are transported to the world of distress and death. So vast is the poet's concept and range of ideas and imaginations that after reading his poems one feels enriched with emotion and intellect.

5.4 QUESTIONS

a. The underlying theme of Wallace Stevens's poetry.

b. Anecdote of the Jar shows a division between the natural and the artistic realms. Elucidate.

c. Express the essence of modernism as reflected in Anecdote of the Jar.

d. Explicate the realization that is visible in A Rabbit as King of the Ghosts.

e. Explain the suffering of a woman and the philosophy of life and death as portrayed in Another Weeping Woman.

f. The poem Domination of Black expresses fear and death. Justify.

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6

CRITICAL STUDY OF NIKKI GIOVANNI'S "A JOURNEY"

"CRUTCHES" "LIFE CYCLES" AND "I WROTE A GOOD OMELET"

Unit Structure

6.0 OBJECTIVE

The main objective of this unit is to gain a better understanding of Nikki Giovanni's prescribed poems. Her work delves into a variety of social issues, including inequality, race, gender, sexuality, identity issue and the African American family set up. She wrote as part of the Black Art Movement to strengthen the black experience in the arts. This unit also seeks to interpret her poems in light of her black experience.

6.1 NIKKI GIOVANNI: BRIEF BIOGRAPHY AND LITERARY CONTRIBUTIONS

Brief Biography:

Nikki Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, in 1943. She is a poet, writer, critical theorist, activist, and educator of African descent. She is a poet whose works range from calls for Black power to poems for children and cherished personal declarations.

Giovanni grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Knoxville, Tennessee. She enrolled at Fisk University in Nashville in 1960. After earning a university degree in 1967, she became devoted to the Civil Rights Movement and the concept of Black power. She explores herself radical and covers with intentional elucidation of experience through a Black perception in her first three collections of poems, Black Feeling, Black Talk (1968), Black Judgement (1968), and Re: Creation (1970).

Giovanni is the recipient of several honours, including the Langston Hughes Medal and the NAACP Image Award. Her poetry album, The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection, has been nominated for a Grammy Award. She has also been named one of Oprah Winfrey's 25 "Living Legends."

Literary Contributions:

Giovanni writes about social injustice and racial prejudice for Americans while also writing a book of children's poetry. Her poems are simple to read and understand, and her work can reach people of any age, race, gender, or social class. In an interview with Arlene Elder, she stated, "I don't think writers ever changed anyone's mind." "I believe we preach to the saved." The "saved" are those who are capable of understanding, forgiveness, and change, all of which are characteristics of her own poetry and writing.

Giovanni is one of the most prolific African American poets and a leading surviving member of the Black Arts Movement. Her thoughts on Black Nationalism have been central to her work as a poet and an activist. Her poetry expresses unconditional love for Black people and Black women as subject.

Giovanni is one of the most well-known African-American poets in the world. Poetry collections, poetry recordings, nonfiction, and children's literature are among her works. She has published eleven collection of poetry which include Black Feeling, Black Talk (1970), Black Judgement (1969), Black Feeling, Black Talk/Black Judgement (1979), Recreation (1970), Spin a Soft Black Song: Poems for Children (1971), My House (1972), Ego Tripping and Other Poems for Young People (1973), The Women and the Men (1975), Cotton Candy on a Rainy Day (1978), Vacation Time: Poems for Children (1980) and Those Who Ride the Night Winds (1983) etc.

Giovanni's non-fiction publications comprises of Night Comes Softly: An Anthology of Black Female Voices (Edited) (1970), Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty-Five Years of Being a Black Poet (1971), A Dialogue: James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni (1972) and A Poetic Equation: Conversations between Nikki Giovanni and Margaret Walker (1974).

In addition to her poetry collections, Giovanni is the author of eleven illustrated children books. It includes The Genie in the Jar (1996), The Sun is So Quiet (1996), Knoxville, Tennessee (1994), Vacation Time: Poems for Children (1979), Ego Trippin and Other Poems for Children (1973) and Spin a Soft Black Song (1971).

6.2 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "A JOURNEY"

A Journey:

It's a journey . . . that I propose . . . I am not the guide . . .

nor technical assistant . . . I will be your fellow passenger . . .

Though the rail has been ridden . . . winter clouds cover . . .

autumn's exuberant quilt . . . we must provide our own guide-posts . . .

I have heard . . . from previous visitors . . . the road washes out sometimes . . .

and passengers are compelled . . . to continue groping . . . or turn back . . .

I am not afraid . . .

I am not afraid . . . of rough spots . . . or lonely times . . .

I don't fear . . . the success of this endeavior . . .

I am Ra . . . in a space . . . not to be discovered . . . but invented . . .

I promise you nothing . . . I accept your promise . . . of the same we are simply riding . . .

a wave . . . that may carry . . . or crash . . .

It's a journey . . . and I want . . . to go . . .

(**Source:** https://www.poemhunter.com)

Analysis:

In her poetry collection, The Collected Poetry of Nikki Giovanni: 1968-1998, the poem "A Journey" is included. The poet discusses her perspective on life's journey and how to succeed by overcoming any obstacles that stand in the way of your goals in life. She demonstrates how poised and ready she is to meet all difficulties and problems that will arise.

In a masterful use of literary tropes, Giovanni depicts a dramatic voyage of transformation which culminates in a beautiful moment of self-realization. She does this through the use of imagery, mirrored repetition, and symbolism. The poem's use of symbolism and imagery creates a stunning emotional ballet that is masterfully staged.

The poet claims at the beginning of the poem that the path she has chosen in life is not simple and that she is not even aware of the difficulties and challenges. She communicates as a traveller, not as a guide or a superior, but as a fellow traveller who is merely making their way through life in order to succeed. In addition, she compares "rail" to a state of affairs that is full of challenging situations. She claims that everything looks so numb and deflated at that key moment that we must figure out how to escape the circumstance on our own. The poet here wants to be independently handling the situations, without depending on others.

In addition, the poet shows that the wise people she previously met shared

with her personal accounts of situations in which they were forced to accept their recommendations. It is because they were unable to make their own decisions. In these situations, the poet says, she was forced to stand up for herself and render her own decisions in the interest of her goodness. In essence, the poet is trying to say that each person will encounter their own unique set of challenges.

In the poem's final section, she declares that she is prepared to face all obstacles and stand up for herself because she no longer fears about anything. She also claims that she is strong enough that whether people support or reject her, she will not feel threatened because the success she will experience in the future will make her feel ecstatic. She portrays herself as a distinctive person with inventive potential. She proclaims that, rather than being found and given a name under someone else, she would create herself and be a remarkable individual.

In the final line, she makes it clear that she had no idea whether she would succeed or not because that was out of her control, but that she would put up great effort and give it her all. Now, it was up to fate to decide whether she would triumph or fail.

According to Giovanni, one would encounter a large number of individuals in his or her life. Some may have a large impact on our lives and share a large part in our success or failure, while others may have little impact on us, leaving unnoticed prints on our lives. But, in any case, nothing should de-motivate us or prevent us from achieving our goals. We must be graceful; just as we must accept success gracefully; we must also admit defeat gracefully, which will make us a great human being.

6.3 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "CRUTCHES"

Crutches:

it's not the crutches we decry
it's the need to move forward
though we haven't the strength
women aren't allowed to need
so they develop rituals
since we all know working hands idle
the devil
women aren't supposed to be strong
so they develop social smiles
and secret drinking problems
and female lovers whom they never touch
except in dreams

men are supposed to be strong

so they have heart attacks

and develop other women

who don't know their weaknesses

and hide their fears

behind male lovers

whom they religiously touch

each saturday morning on the basketball court

it's considered a sign of health doncha know

that they take such good care

of their bodies

(**Source:** https://www.poemhunter.com)

Analysis:

The crutch is a walking aid used by people who are injured or unable to walk on their own. Crutches provide support to a needy person. In this poem, Giovanni relates the title crutches to the overall message of the poem. The use of the word "crutch" in the poem and title refers to women's social status. The crutch represents comfort for someone who has a deficit or who has been a victim of circumstance. Society has provided a crutch, so that they (man and woman) cannot walk very far without using it again.

The poem's theme is a deep thought, but it is a topic that needs to be highlighted in today's world. She discusses the duality of male and female gender roles. She addresses how society portrays men and women, but she does so in a way that reveals a new generation of gender roles. In its most basic form, Giovanni presents a theme of "battle of the sexes," a kind of war that has rampaged for hundreds of years.

The poet begins the poem with a broad statement and then delves into the specifics of how people behave in our society. She discusses how society during her time teaches men and women how to act solely based on their gender. She states in the first stanza that women must keep moving forward despite the fact that they lack strength and are not permitted to express their needs. In this first stanza, she attempts to explain the situation of a woman in which women are viewed as caregivers who possess great power and strength but are not permitted to demonstrate it.

Giovanni goes on to say in the second stanza that women are not supposed to be strong; they are supposed to be good wives to their husbands, housewives, and provide for their significant others. The irony of this preposition causes women to struggle with internal conflicts because, while they are not expected to be as strong as men. They are also not

expected to be weak. They must always be "put together" to care for her husband's children and family. She exudes that because women aren't allowed to be strong, "they develop social smiles." This means that no matter what a woman is feeling or going through, she has to smile and act as if nothing is wrong. It is because their feelings do not matter in the end. It is the subject here because the idea that people are constantly trying to be strong and hide their inner problems that many of us have experienced at some point in our lives. According to several critics, it is a great way for her to express her feelings about our society's customs, traditions, norms and cultural values. The poet highlights how physical/external pain is acceptable but emotional/internal pain should be hidden.

The following lines, "female lovers whom they can never touch except in dreams," explain a very important concept: females are not permitted to love other females, or to be lesbians. She is genuinely attempting to communicate societal thinking to the readers.

The poet speaker discusses the societal ideal male in the third stanza; men are supposed to be strong. Men are expected to be breadwinners, working so hard that they may develop health problems. Giovanni expresses his desire to "develop other women who are unaware of their weaknesses and hide their fears behind male lovers."

It is indeed interesting how Giovanni says, "men are supposed to be strong, so they have heart attacks," which is a contradictory statement. For men, society's crutch is used to support them rather than hinder them, as it is for women. The crutch, however, is to remain invisible to women so that they do not lose faith in them. She believes that males have more difficult roles than females because of the standards that society has placed on them. Men may be secretly depressed, overwhelmed, and experiencing emotional outbursts, but they are not allowed to express it due to their portrayal of a strong personality. They only need to stick to the "family man" mantra. In subsequent lines, she describes sports such as basketball as an outlet for a man's power to be displayed. What does this say about human nature? Where is humanity heading? Are the questions presented by Giovanni didactic?

In the second part of the poem, the speaker represents crutches to a person who is trying to be okay and keep moving, which represents courage. The very first line of the fifth stanza reveals as if she is allowing us to see into her thought process as she writes this. She describes a person who has been hurt, but because of the crutch of "self sufficiency," he fails to notify anyone that he requires assistance. Her message acknowledges what Dalai Lama once said when asked what surprised him about humanity:

"Man sacrifices his health to make money, then he sacrifices that money to recuperate his health, and then he is so worried about his future that he doesn't enjoy his present, and as a result, he doesn't live in his present nor in the future; he lives as if he will never die."

And then dies, never having lived this analysis goes beyond gender. It explains the human conditions mentioned earlier in the stanza by

Giovanni. She believes that itches are bad because they reveal a person's weakness because they try to solve the problem by scratching it rather than enduring it and being considered strong.

"I really want to say something about all of us," she exclaims in the sixth stanza, "am I shouting, I want you to hear me." Essentially, she wants us to acknowledge that this is the life we are living and the crutches on which we rely, whether as a woman, a man, or a human, as Dalai Lama elaborated. Finally, she preaches, concluding what she has been wanting to say throughout the poem: throw away those crutches. "Emotional falls are always/ the Worst/ and there are no crutches/ to swing back on," she writes in the final stanza. The crutches on which society expects you to rely are only for materialistic values, but only you can save yourself.

In lines like "since we all know Working hands idle the devil" and "it's a good sign of health doncha know," the poet's tone is also very teasing at times. She uses these cliché sayings or phrasings that one believes, to paint a picture of who is upholding these societal values. The tone of the poem is difficult to determine because the speaker appears serious in some stanzas and sarcastic in others.

To summarize, Giovanni wishes to convey the message that the purpose of contrasting Men and Women was to highlight the similarities between the two sexes. As a species, we are all striving to be the next big thing. Does the fact that we live in a faster-paced world require us to move at the same rate? Isn't it true that an unripe apple is less sweet and juicy than one that has had time to grow and mature? So why do we have to rush things that take time? Giovanni's message is that we do such things because we rely on a crutch or an ideology that only moves when the desired opportunity presents itself.

As a reader, one believes this is the root Giovanni was attempting to unearth. The thinking, mentality on the concept of male and female projected by society actually is a burden on the two sexes that does not allow them to live their life freely, be it men or women, and so in the modern era people have become rebellious because they cannot be what society wants them to be, we are in an era where self identity is the most important concept we all are focusing on. The final stanza implies that you can't control nor save yourself from your emotions. This poem by Nikki Giovanni is a must-read because it comments on and expresses societal reality.

6.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF “LIFE CYCLE”

Life Cycles:

She realized

she wasn't one

of life's winners

when she wasn't sure

life to her was some dark
dirty secret that
like some unwanted child
too late for an abortion
was to be borne
alone

She had so many private habits
she would masturbate sometimes
she always picked her nose when upset
she liked to sit with silence
in the dark
sadness is not an unusual state
for the black woman
or writers
She took to sneaking drinks
a habit which displeased her
both for its effects
and taste
yet eventually sleep
would wrestle her in triumph
onto the bed…

(**Source:** https://www.poemhunter.com)

Analysis:

Nikki Giovanni poem "Life Cycles," appears in her poetry collection Black Feeling, Black Talk, which was published in 1968. Nikki, a black writer, pens down the struggles and pains of a woman's life in the poem. It is written in the third person. She uses herself as a point of reference to describe the struggles of most women. Throughout the poem, she uses the word "she" to embrace her life's purpose and the connection she shares with other women. The writer conveys a clear message through the standard and alignment of her poem. In this poem, she is firmly focusing on the rebellious feminism section. Nikki used lexical repetitions to emphasize a significant image "she".

In the first stanza, the poet compares herself to an unwanted child, a loser who was supposed to be aborted but was saved because it was too late. Nikki is attempting to convey through her choice of words that she feels useless – like a lost person who doesn't belong anywhere – as if she has been cast out of this world. Her choice of words also suggests that life was dark for her – something that did not accept her existence and bothered her. This is also relatable to many women, in the sense that women have been given less priority and opportunity for centuries, as if they were a beautiful vase with only one purpose: to stay in one place and carry flowers. As the porcelain shine of the vase fades, so will the outer appearance of a woman; will she then be treated as a broken vase? Outcast - and dumbed down? The only thing that will help a woman shine forever are her accomplishments, which clearly society does not allow the woman to achieve or work on, making most feel like they are this unwanted child – too late for abortion – and are doomed to be alone.

The poet discusses private habits she developed over time, such as maturation and nose picking, in the second stanza. This indicates that the poet is no longer young, and she now copes with her stress through masturbation and other private habits. Later, she mentions that she finds solace in solitary sexual activities in the darkness of the night when she is alone. Picking her nose when she is upset which indicates that the poet is either over-thinking about what is bothering her, causing her to pick her nose unconsciously. Because she is sexually unsatisfied, the poet engages in such activities. Lack of satisfaction also suggests that her partner is not always present to cherish and be intimate with her.

As a result of her unpleasant life, the poet is now seeking solace in the silence of darkness while also pleasing herself. On the other hand, this is relatable to a large number of women today and in the past. Masturbation became popular during World War II, when many women were experiencing sexual tension because their partners were not present. As a result, many women have turned to self-solitary sexual activities. Instead of understanding this aspect of women's lives, society began to label such actions as sin and even went so far as to label them as a mental illness. According to society, such activities are acceptable for men, but it is preferable for women to self-satisfy in the silence of darkness.

Nikki discusses her other habit, drinking, in the third stanza. Although she dislikes the taste and effects of alcohol, she continues to consume it in the hope of sleeping well at night. Even alcohol does not appear to be able to alleviate her distress. This also shows that women are fed up with society and its demands on them and those women are finally breaking through all the boundaries and thick walls that surround them. She had now chosen the rebellious path for the sake of their happiness. In the end, it is seen that society is so obstinate that no matter how hard women try to break their thick chains, society will try to bring them down again. Making them drown with heavy loads on their backs, which alcohol cannot even help to alleviate.

Although the poem appears negative and dark, it also states the reality – the bitter reality of women. Women have been through a lot throughout history, and revolutionary changes were only seen when women stood up for themselves. Many artists, including Nikki Giovanni, not only used their voices but also their talents. Their creative and thoughtful words are their writing talent.

Nikki's poem also encourages and reassures women that it is okay to engage in certain activities. That it is acceptable to seek self-satisfaction. That it is acceptable to drink like a man. That it is acceptable to oppose society. It was not easy for the poet to publish such poems as a woman, especially a black woman, especially when she uses words like "masturbate," but she believes that not only through her words, but also through her actions, she could bring about a revolutionary change in society for the betterment of women.

Finally, the poet has wonderfully and openly displayed her disagreements, pain, and how she copes with it throughout her poem. She also claims that, while life is difficult for women in general, it is especially difficult for black women. Is it because of racism, or is it true that a woman is the enemy of another woman? This makes life difficult for all women in general. This is a thought worth considering!

6.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF "I WROTE A GOOD OMELET"

I wrote a good omelet:

I wrote a good omelet...and ate

a hot poem... after loving you

Buttoned my car...and drove my

coat home...in the rain...

after loving you

I goed on red...and stopped on

green...floating somewhere in between...

being here and being there...

after loving you

I rolled my bed...turned down

my hair...slightly

confused but...I don't care...

Laid out my teeth...and gargled my

gown...then I stood

...and laid me down...

To sleep...

after loving you

(**Source:** https://www.poemhunter.com)

Analysis:

The poem "I Wrote a Good Omelet" was included in Nikki Giovanni's poetry collection Love Poems (1997). The poem starts with a line that sounds as enticing as writing an omelette; this piques the reader's interest. The uncertainty about what it could mean persists throughout the poem as we progress.

Giovanni wrote the poem in such a fragmented fashion that the first reading would be meaningless. She mentions buttoning her car and gargling in her gown. These behaviour patterns, while perplexing at first, begin to make sense as we pay attention. Beginning with the first line, she compares writing an excellent omelette to eating a hot poem, attributing the action characteristics of one to the other. This is replicated throughout and makes sense when reversed, as in the second stanza, where she is driving the car and buttoning her coat. Through the lines, it is possible to deduce that she is perplexed.

The use of ellipses is highlighted in the second element for greater effect. The speaker poet uses ellipses to lengthen the action after each perplexing action she takes. This indicates a much foggy and floating mental state. This, combined with the disorientation mentioned in the previous paragraph, causes whatever is causing her to detach from her current life and move through life with a much more fleeting awareness of the outside world.

That being said, the most important statement to take note of here is "after loving you." The speaker used ellipses after almost every action, as previously stated. This does not occur after the words "after loving you." If we consider ellipses to be a symbol of haziness and confusion, this means that the only thing she knows for certain is that she loves this unknown person. The poem's amorphous structure and the placement of the sentence at the end imply that, while she is certain of her love, it confuses her.

Therefore, we understand why the poem is written in such a haphazard manner. Giovanni turns the simple and well-written subject of loving someone upside down. Many love ballads express how the protagonist's love has blinded them. The poem portrays love as the one thing that takes over one's life, leaving little time for anything else. Giovanni has taken this concept literally and expressed it vividly, allowing the reader to understand how love has taken over her life.

Throughout the poem, even if in a hazy sense, one can easily grasp a sense of Giovanni's day. The imagery depicts a typical day as seen through the

eyes of someone going about their business almost unconsciously. She is disoriented and befuddled, but she is madly in love. She spends the entire day thinking about the individual, and it is noticeable her falling asleep at the end. It's almost as if she is reminiscing about her day. But now that she has been overcome by love, she remembers everything in a jumbled mass.

There is also a constant repetition of "after loving you," as if highlighting the significance of that love. When one reads the poem again, one finally admits how eloquently she captures the act of love and its enormous influence on one's life.

5.6 MAJOR THEMES

1. Theme of love in "I Wrote a Good Omelet:

The poem "I Wrote a Good Omelet" exemplifies how language can paint a picture of a person's mood, mindset, and situation. The jumbled words provide us with a clear picture of the individual's mindset. It demonstrates mental haziness, and the liberal use of ellipsis creates a sense of slowness and drowsiness.

The repetition of "after loving you" and the mention of this other person indicate that this is a person who is drowsy as a result of being with someone else, whether sexually or physically. What matters is that the person eating breakfast, driving home and going to bed is exhausted to the point of difficulty speaking after whatever they were doing together, which is "loving them." It is interesting to see where the majority of the poem is not offset, with a direct rotation of the two jumbled pieces.

With the last lines of the poem phrasing "laid me down to sleep," it almost feels as if this "you" character involved in the poem could be something more than an individual, such as God, people, or themselves. There is no clear definition of who they are, and if we look at the bolded areas, it appears to me that this is where the poem is aiming the reader.

The poem is about an action, about doing something, but the areas that are just not jumbled are thought oriented, acknowledging it's raining, trying to understand where they are and where they've been, deciding it doesn't matter where they are or where they've been, until finally the individual is almost tagging a bedtime prayer many use with "laid me down to sleep," especially since "to sleep" is one of the few short lines.

Eventually, it has been observed that the play with words switching to show emotion, mindset, and character of the story really shows the strength of language, which I enjoy. I like how the poet used traditional actions to create clarity within confusion and structured it to keep the reader from becoming too jumbled. Overall, the poem was tasty and hot.

2. Battle of the sexes and Societal Reality in the poem "Crutches":

The speaker of the poem "Crutches" employs the metaphor of becoming disabled to demonstrate the reader the influence of the entire world being

impaired rather than just one. Throughout the poem, the narrator addresses the audience in an insightful tone. In stanza one, the speaker states that it is not the assistance that we condemn, but the motivation to continue even when we can't, that makes everything so difficult. Throughout the poem, the author tells the sexist viewpoint that a "woman is to stay in her place." Stanza two discusses what a woman should and should not do. She implies that society has conditioned the world to believe that a woman has no need for anything, so they turn to religion to find a common purpose for themselves.

Throughout the poem, there is also a comparison of man versus woman, with women being unable to be as strong as men, so they hide their anger with smiles and alcohol. Men, on the other hand, can be strong, and it drives them insane emotionally. As you can see, the speaker addresses emotional strength versus physical strength, which has stereotypically shaped both men and women's thoughts.

In order to illustrate how the human mind functions, Giovanni also uses the themes of helplessness and hurt. She demonstrates how, regardless of where we all emotionally land, we typically desire to be independent, which leaves us with no one to turn to for support. Both men and women attempt to demonstrate a point by hinting that crutches are irrelevant, but in reality, they both require crutches since they serve as a fallback when all else fails. In the second to last verse, the speaker starts to summarize her point by hinting that, while feeling bad about asking for help, going through life without somebody to deal with your irritations might be disastrous.

3. The Duality between Negative and Positive Sentiments in "Life Cycle":

In the poem Life Cycles, the speaker embraces her life's purpose by contrasting unpleasant and positive emotions and using the pronoun "she" repeatedly. The reader may see from the annotations that negative emotion is expressed in the poem more frequently than happy emotion. The speaker, Giovanni, addresses a fresh group of listeners in the opening stanza. She is speaking in the third person instead of the first, as though "she" is speaking for other people. The poem's style is traditional, and the lines are evenly spaced, suggesting that the message should be uncomplicated. Due to the speaker's repeated usage of "she" to convey a more feminist point of view, the poem appears to be directed at the opposing sex.

The speaker in verse one seems to have come to the realization that she was undesirable and had been kept out of the world on purpose. The reader can infer from this that the speaker is writing about her life's purpose. The speaker keeps exploring her path to resolution as the poem progresses. When Giovanni says in line two of stanza two, "she had so many private habits...in the dark," one can infer that when "she" or the "average woman" is alone, she would engage in activities that made her feel good to help her get over her loneliness because she was alone or shut out in the first place.

As the poem progresses, it also appears that this poem is intended to defend how women change who they wish to be as a result of being socially moulded into something else. The poem describes their response to the change, which has more of a negative than a positive impact. The poem's final line, "planting in her emotional garden to see what weeds might rise to choke her," alludes to the fact that as long as society plays with "her" emotions, she will have to watch as the barriers try to engulf her.

6.7 QUESTIONS

1. Elucidate on the theme of self-satisfaction in Nikki Giovanni's prescribed poems.

2. Elaborate on Nikki Giovanni as an African-American rebellious feminist with reference to the poems prescribed.

3. "Nikki Giovanni's poems specify the new generation gender roles." Explain.

4. Comment on Nikki Giovanni's account of societal reality of womanhood highlighted in her poems.

5. Explain how NikkiGiovanni's poems describe the battle of the sexes.

6. Critically comment on Explain the race consciousness in Nikki Giovanni's poem.

7. Comment on the sketch of Political, Social, Black Artistic, Familial and Personal Scenes in Nikki Giovanni's poems.

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MODULE - III

7

CRITICAL STUDY OF JOSEPH HELLER'S CATCH 22

Unit Structure

7.0 OBJECTIVES

1. To introduce students to an important American author Joseph Heller.
2. To examine war time novel Catch-22.
3. To study the characters, important themes, and other literary elements in the novel.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Joseph Heller, (May 1, 1923 - December 12, 1999) was an American writer whose novel Catch-22 (1961) was one of the most significant works of protest literature to appear after World War II. The satirical novel was a popular success, and a film version appeared in 1970.

During World War II, Heller flew 60 combat missions as a bombardier with the U.S. Air Force in Europe. After receiving an M.A. at Columbia University in 1949, he studied at the University of Oxford (1949–50) as a Fulbright scholar. He taught English at Pennsylvania State University (1950–52) and worked as an advertising copywriter for the magazines Time (1952–56) and Look (1956–58) and as promotion manager for McCall's (1958–61), meanwhile writing Catch-22 in his spare time.

Released to mixed reviews, Catch-22 developed a cult following with its dark surrealism. Centring on the antihero Captain John Yossarian, stationed at an airstrip on a Mediterranean island during World War II, the novel portrays the airman's desperate attempts to stay alive. The "catch" in Catch-22 involves a mysterious Air Force regulation that asserts that a man is considered insane if he willingly continues to fly dangerous combat missions but, if he makes the necessary formal request to be relieved of such missions, the very act of making the request proves that he is sane

and therefore ineligible to be relieved. The term catch-22 thereafter entered the English language as a reference to a proviso that trips one up no matter which way one turns.

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

7.2 SUMMARY

During the second half of World War II, a soldier named Yossarian is stationed with his Air Force squadron on the island of Pianosa, near the Italian coast in the Mediterranean Sea. Yossarian and his friends endure a nightmarish, absurd existence defined by bureaucracy and violence: they are inhuman resources in the eyes of their blindly ambitious superior officers. The squadron is thrown thoughtlessly into brutal combat situations and bombing runs in which it is more important for the squadron members to capture good aerial photographs of explosions than to destroy their targets. Their colonels continually raise the number of missions that they are required to fly before being sent home, so that no one is ever sent home. Still, no one but Yossarian seems to realize that there is a war going on; everyone thinks he is crazy when he insists that millions of people are trying to kill him.

Yossarian's story forms the core of the novel, so most events are refracted through his point of view. Yossarian takes the whole war personally: unswayed by national ideals or abstract principles, Yossarian is furious that his life is in constant danger though no fault of his own. He has a strong desire to live and is determined to be immortal or die trying. As a result, he spends a great deal of his time in the hospital, faking various illnesses in order to avoid the war. As the novel progresses through its loosely connected series of recurring stories and anecdotes, Yossarian is continually troubled by his memory of Snowden, a soldier who died in his arms on a mission when Yossarian lost all desire to participate in the war. Yossarian is placed in ridiculous, absurd, desperate, and tragic circumstances—he sees friends die and disappear, his squadron get bombed by its own mess officer, and colonels and generals volunteer their men for the most perilous battle in order to enhance their own reputations.

Catch-22 is a law defined in various ways throughout the novel. First, Yossarian discovers that it is possible to be discharged from military service because of insanity. Always looking for a way out, Yossarian claims that he is insane, only to find out that by claiming that he is insane he has proved that he is obviously sane - since any sane person would

claim that he or she is insane in order to avoid flying bombing missions. Elsewhere, Catch-22 is defined as a law that is illegal to read. Ironically, the place where it is written that it is illegal is in Catch-22 itself. It is yet again defined as the law that the enemy is allowed to do anything that one can't keep him from doing. In short, then, Catch-22 is any paradoxical, circular reasoning that catches its victim in its illogic and serves those who have made the law. Catch-22 can be found in the novel not only where it is explicitly defined but also throughout the characters' stories, which are full of catches and instances of circular reasoning that trap unwitting bystanders in their snares - for instance, the ability of the powerful officer Milo Minderbinder to make great sums of money by trading among the companies that he himself owns.

As Yossarian struggles to stay alive, a number of secondary stories unfold around him. His friend Nately falls in love with a whore from Rome and woos her constantly, despite her continued indifference and the fact that her kid sister constantly interferes with their romantic rendezvous. Finally, she falls in love with Nately, but he is killed on his very next mission. When Yossarian brings her the bad news, she blames him for Nately's death and tries to stab him every time she sees him thereafter. Another subplot follows the rise of the black-market empire of Milo Minderbinder, the squadron's mess hall officer. Milo runs a syndicate in which he borrows military planes and pilots to transport food between various points in Europe, making a massive profit from his sales. Although he claims that "everyone has a share" in the syndicate, this promise is later proven false. Milo's enterprise flourishes nonetheless, and he is revered almost religiously by communities all over Europe.

The novel draws to a close as Yossarian, troubled by Nately's death, refuses to fly any more missions. He wanders the streets of Rome, encountering every kind of human horror—rape, disease, murder. He is eventually arrested for being in Rome without a pass, and his superior officers, Colonel Cathcart and Colonel Korn, offer him a choice. He can either face a court-martial or be released and sent home with an honorable discharge. There is only one condition: in order to be released, he must approve of Cathcart and Korn and state his support for their policy, which requires all the men in the squadron to fly eighty missions. Although he is tempted by the offer, Yossarian realizes that to comply would be to endanger the lives of other innocent men. He chooses another way out, deciding to desert the army and flee to neutral Sweden. In doing so, he turns his back on the dehumanizing machinery of the military, rejects the rule of Catch-22, and strives to gain control of his own life.

7.3 CHARACTERS

John "Yo-Yo" Yossarian:

The novel's protagonist, Yossarian is a captain in the US Army Air Force who becomes tired of flying dangerous missions. At first he tries to get medically grounded on the basis of insanity, but Doc Daneeka, the group's medic, argues that Yossarian cannot be insane if he wants to avoid death

by getting out of having to fly. This is termed a Catch-22. Yossarian spends the remainder of the novel trying to combat the Catch-22 and convince the military brass, including Colonel Cathcart, the he should be sent home. Yossarian eventually refuses to fly missions and escapes the Army all together, fleeing to Sweden.

Chaplain Tappman:

The group's chaplain, Tappman is a shy man who loves his wife and family, loves God, and wonders what exactly he is to do in the military. Although he is initially bullied by men like Cathcart, Korn, and Captain Black, Tappman decides that they cannot shake his faith or his commitment to helping his fellow officers to fly their missions safely and return home. The chaplain ends the novel encouraging Yossarian to flee.

Doc Daneeka:

The group's medic, Daneeka is not permitted to ground soldiers on account of insanity, according to orders issued by Cathcart. Daneeka has his name placed on the flight rolls of McWatt's plane, despite not actually flying, in order to collect his combat pay. When McWatt's plane goes down, Daneeka is treated by the army as if he has died, even though he continues to live and work on Pianosa.

Chief White Halfoat and Flume:

A Native American soldier and assistant to Captain Black, Halfoat enjoys tormenting "the white man," including his tent-mate, Flume, whom he vows to murder in his sleep. At the same time, Halfoat promises that he himself will die of pneumonia come winter. Halfoat does indeed end up dying this way.

Aarfy:

A former fraternity man in college, Aarfy proclaims he is too dumb to understand the danger of his combat missions. He is a navigator with a poor sense of direction, and Yossarian is always telling him,

while on the plane, to get out of Yossarian's way; Aarfy pretends not to understand. Aarfy ends up raping and murdering a woman in Rome, much to Yossarian's horror, but is confident he will not be prosecuted for his crimes, and is correct in that belief.

Nately's Whore and her kid sister:

Nately's prostitute, initially resistant to becoming Nately's girlfriend, becomes extremely distraught on finding out that Nately has died. Both Nately's prostitute and her twelve-year-old kid sister assume Yossarian, who breaks the news to them, is responsible for Nately's death. They follow him for the rest of the novel, and Nately's prostitute nearly kills Yossarian on multiple occasions.

Milo Minderbinder:

The group's mess officer, Milo ends up starting a business - M & M Enterprises - that delivers black-market goods throughout the Mediterranean. It is not clear how this business works, since Milo appears to be selling goods at a loss, but he claims "everyone" in the group "gets a share." Milo eventually begins dealing with the Germans to expand his business, and it is revealed he has been named mayor or leader of various countries throughout the Mediterranean region.

7.4 MAJOR THEMES IN THE NOVEL

Paradox and Impossibility:

Catch-22 is founded upon a specific "catch," or logical paradox, introduced in a conversation between Doc Daneeka and Yossarian. This formulation is the novel's most memorable: because war is dangerous, it is sane behavior to avoid war. So if Yossarian wants to stop flying missions, he is sane and fit to fly, and must therefore fly more missions. Only if Yossarian did want to fly these dangerous missions would he be insane, and subsequently disqualified from flying.

Yossarian is frustrated by Catch-22s, which occur in different forms throughout the novel. Whenever Yossarian has flown sufficient missions, Cathcart raises the required mission total, meaning Yossarian never can fulfill his duty, even when he is fulfilling it. Doc Daneeka lies and places his name on McWatt's flight roll while avoiding flying - but when McWatt dies in a plane crash, the military refuses to recognize that Daneeka wasn't actually killed, even though Daneeka is standing right there on the ground. Orr's logical paradoxes infuriate Yossarian, but Yossarian does not recognize how much he values Orr until Orr disappears. Major Major so fears his subordinates that he will allow them into his office to meet with him only when he is away. And Yossarian only realizes how much he loved Luciana, his primary love interest, after he rips up her address, making it impossible to find her.

Heller employs paradox and impossibility for two reasons. First, much of the humor in the book derives from these contortions of logic. It often appears that only Yossarian has a rational view of the events going on around him, and the gap between his view and others' irrationality generates humor and surprise. Second, the book investigates these paradoxes on a serious, philosophical level. Many characters wonder whether war and killing, love and loyalty, are really as straightforward as they seem. The novel maintains a balance between these serious considerations and numerous funny stories and set-pieces.

War and Bureaucracy:

The novel also offers a commentary on the absurdity of war, and of the bureaucracies wars create. For example: Major Major appears to have been promoted to his position simply because of his name, not his aptitude, and he remains in this position while doing nothing. The

chaplain's assistant, Whitcomb, is an atheist who will carry out none of his superior's directives out of a desire to ascend to the role of chaplain himself. Scheisskopf, whose only military skill is a love of organizing parades, is promoted to general, and eventually outranks even Dreedle and Peckem. The CID men dispatched to investigate mail-tampering and forgery eventually settle on the chaplain as the culprit—even when the chaplain's handwriting doesn't match the letters', he is still suspected. Major Sanderson, the staff psychiatrist, uses his sessions with Yossarian to expound on his own neuroses and paranoia. And Milo uses military men and material to serve his own economic interests, even going so far as to aid the Germans to broaden his market.

These are examples of the comic dimension of military bureaucracy: Heller does an exquisite job of sending up the Army's absurdity. But there is also a tragic dimension. Cathcart's insistence on continued missions leads to dangerous flights over unnecessary targets, and encourages the slaughter of innocent civilians. These missions result in the death of many characters, including Nately, Clevinger, and Havermeyer. The military makes Dunbar "disappear" for his insubordination. And many officers insist on continued air strikes even after the outcome of the war tilts decidedly in the Allies' favor. These officers, including Peckem, Dreedle, Korn, and Cathcart, are more concerned about their own promotions and recognition than about the lives of their men or of civilians on the ground. Thus the initially comic nature of military bureaucracy obscures the selfishness, narrow-mindedness, and cruelty of many officials that seems to be the product of that bureaucracy.

Communication and Miscommunication:

The novel opens with Yossarian censoring letters—blocking out important military information—while lying in the hospital. He begins signing his name as Washington Irving or Irving Washington. This introduces a theme of communication, and garbled communication, that runs throughout the text. Appleby, a soldier and superlative Ping-Pong player, is told by Orr that he has flies in his eyes, but hears that he has "sties in his eyes." Aarfy claims not to be able to hear Yossarian when they're flying, even though Yossarian makes plain, via body language, what he desires (usually, to get out of the plane's crawl-space). Orr consistently leads Yossarian in linguistic circles when the two are tent-mates. The chaplain is never able to communicate with his fellow officers, many of whom, like Whitcomb and Cathcart, believe he is strange and militarily unnecessary. Whitcomb desires that form-letters be sent by the chaplain to families of bereaved soldiers, but when these letters are sent, they are so general as to seem mocking and absurd—they indicate no personal knowledge of the soldier at all. And a good deal of the novel takes place during the soldiers' "rest leave" in Rome, where they must communicate with Italians in a hodge-podge of English and other languages, often with comedic effect.

While funny, the outcomes of these miscommunications are occasionally quite serious. Because Yossarian has signed one of his censored letters with the chaplain's name, the chaplain is nearly tortured and imprisoned

by military police. Yossarian seems never to escape from this web of miscommunication, but his decision to flee to Sweden at the end of the novel indicates a willingness to sever all communicative ties with the Army and with his native country.

Gallows Humor:

Much of the humor in Catch-22 is gallows humor (or black humor)—the kind that takes on serious subjects without sacrificing its funiness. Some of the novel's characters use gallows humor good-naturedly; others, less so. McWatt, for example, is always "buzzing" the camp, flying low over it, but one day he flies too low and accidentally kills Kid Sampson.

Captain Black and Corporal Whitcomb make fun of the chaplain constantly, because they find his religious beliefs and non-combat assignment to be inherently funny. This bullying nearly drives the chaplain to abandon his beliefs altogether. Many of the novel's subordinates make fun of their commanders, including Korn, who spends much of the novel reacting to Catchart's stupidity and vanity. Major de Coverley's strange abilities—horseshoe-playing and the renting of apartments in

recently-liberated cities—are celebrated among the soldiers. De Coverley finds these apartments for the men despite the many dangers associated with flying to these far-flung locales. The Soldier in White and the Soldier Who Saw Everything Twice, two wounded men who eventually die, supply comic relief for Yossarian and others—until the presence of these injured soldiers make Yossarian and his friends fear that they, too, will succumb to injuries and not survive the war.

Indeed, a turning point occurs when Yossarian encounters Aarfy on their last visit to Rome. Aarfy, who has long joked about his behavior with women during his college fraternity days, tells Yossarian he has just raped and killed a woman. Yossarian is aghast, and is doubly horrified that Aarfy passes this behavior off as a joke. This traumatic event, coupled with the other horrors Yossarian has seen in destroyed and ransacked Rome, and with the death of many of his fellow soldiers, causes Yossarian to rethink his moral obligations, and his willingness to continue to fight in the war.

Self-interest, Altruism, and Morality:

Many characters in Catch-22 undergo moral crises, wherein they must decide between self-interest (a concern for their own safety and wellbeing) or altruism (a concern for the wellbeing of others). The chaplain, initially a morally-upright and religious man, flirts with immorality by pretending to have a fake disease and asking to spend time in the hospital. He realizes, however, that he ought instead to follow his orders and resist military authority without actively revolting against his superiors. Many commanding officers, however, decide to serve their own interests. Korn wants Cathcart's job, Cathcart wants to become a general, and Dreedle and Peckem constantly fight for control of the other's office.

But it is Yossarian's personal development, his progression from self-interest to altruism that defines the moral arc of Catch-22. In the beginning, Yossarian is content to forge the chaplain's signature, resist his bombing runs, and otherwise either devise stratagems to avoid responsibility or "go with the flow" in his time with the Army. But as his friends—including Clevinger, Orr, Nately, and Dunbar—either die or disappear, Yossarian's attitude changes. He loses Luciana and Nurse Duckett; he learns that Aarfy has committed rape and murder; he sees scenes of total destruction in Rome, and of great human suffering. He realizes, like Dunbar, that he can no longer bomb innocent civilians for no reason, just to please his superiors.

Yossarian's personal development reaches a climax in his full recollection of Snowden's death. In a bomb-run over Avignon, a man name Snowden is hit by flak in the back of the plane, and Yossarian,

caring for a smaller leg wound, misses Snowden's large chest wound. When Snowden finally shows this second wound to Yossarian, his insides spill into the cabin of the plane, horrifying Yossarian and causing him to see, firsthand, the frailty of human life.

Later, Yossarian is called on to make a moral choice. He can either accept Cathcart and Korn's deal, leaving the Army and abandoning his fellow soldiers, or continue flying missions. Yossarian accepts neither alternative. He does not choose total altruism—he does not continue to work with his fellow soldiers—and he does not take a deal that would send him home immediately. Instead, Yossarian flees Pianosa, thus recognizing the horrors and immoralities of warfare while maintaining his independence, and refusing to compromise on his decision to stop flying bombing missions. Yossarian, ultimately, takes a moral stand against war, and what it does to the individuals who are forced to fight in it. In the end, Yossarian is en route to Sweden, fittingly a neutral country, where he will wait out the war's remainder.

7.5 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The United States of America entered World War II in December 1941, immediately after a Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. naval base on the south coast of Oahu in Hawaii, near Honolulu. Most of the action in Catch-22 is based on Joseph Heller's experiences as a young officer and bombardier stationed on Corsica, an island off the west coast of Italy, with the Army Air Forces in 1944. In the novel, Yossarian's squadron is on Pianosa, a real but tiny island east of Corsica and a few miles south of Elba. As Heller points out in a prefatory note, "It is very small and obviously could not accommodate all of the actions described. Like the setting of this novel, the characters, too, are fictitious." The setting for Heller's war, however, was very real.

The reader should be aware of a few significant dates. On June 6, 1944, called "D-day," Allied forces, including the United States, entered a massive invasion of western France. The Allies were already in southern

Italy, as referred to in the novel, and had captured Rome. On August 25, 1944, the Allies liberated Paris. On May 8, 1945, a few months after the end of the novel, the Allies declared victory in Europe (VE-day). So most of the novel takes place during approximately the last year of the war in Europe.

Italy had entered World War II in June 1940, on the side of Nazi Germany; the two countries formed a union known as the Axis (later joined by Japan). Benito Mussolini (Il Duce, "the leader") was head of the Italian Fascist Party and the country's dictator. His military preparations were inept, however, and

King Victor Emmanuel dismissed Mussolini on July 25, 1943, aligning the official government with the Allies who were in the process of invading southern Italy. (This act of diplomacy reminds the reader of the philosophy of the old man who argues with Nately at the brothel, in Rome, in Chapter 23 of the novel.) The Allies were then opposed primarily by German troops in Italy.

Despite its setting in World War II, it is important to remember that Catch-22 was written in the 1950s. This was a decade of considerable repression in America, exemplified by a U.S. senator from Wisconsin named Joseph Raymond McCarthy. The loyalty oaths and political paranoia in the novel reflect McCarthyism. In February 1950, McCarthy accused the Department of State of employing 205 "known" Communists (later reducing the number to fifty-seven). Although the accusations were never proven, McCarthy became a national figure and the most infamous leader of a witch-hunt rivaling that of Salem in 1692. In the early 1950s, as head of the Senate subcommittee on investigations, McCarthy expanded his search for Communist influence, which contributed to what William Manchester (author of The Glory and the Dream) titled "the age of suspicion." Blacklists, which banned the accused from employment, appeared across the country. State legislatures demanded that college professors, for example, sign loyalty oaths pledging their allegiance to the United States and disavowing any association with Communism. UCLA fired 157 professors who protested that such an oath was unconstitutional; in fact, the teachers pointed out, belonging to the Communist Party was not, in itself, illegal. In the entertainment industry, numerous writers, directors, and actors were blacklisted for years, their careers ruined.

Catch-22 is set in World War II, but its tone is shaped by the events of the 1950s and an attitude toward all wars, not just that one. Looking back, Heller recognized that World War II was a relatively "popular" war for most Americans, a factor in some critical rejection of the novel. Catch-22 grew in popularity during the years of the Vietnam War, when the general population became more attuned to Yossarian's point of view.

Critical Reception of Catch-22:

Initially, the critical response to Joseph Heller's first novel, published in the autumn of 1961, was mixed. Some of the most prestigious reviews were quite negative. Richard G. Stern, in The New York Times Book

Review (October 22, 1961), wrote that the novel "gasps for want of craft and sensibility" and that the book was "no novel." He compared Heller to an artist who throws "all the ideas in his sketchbooks onto one canvas, relying on their charm and shock to compensate for the lack of design." The New Yorker (December 9, 1961) agreed that the book was hardly worthy of being called a novel and confidently asserted that it "doesn't even seem to have been written; instead it gives the impression of having been shouted onto paper." Even generally favorable reviews complained that the novel was too long, repetitious, and confusing. The worst was yet to come. Despite a gestation period of more than a year, Daedalus, Vol. 92 (Winter 1963) showed no mercy. For this anonymous reviewer, the novel was derivative, awkwardly fashionable, and without either story or interesting characters. "[I]ts author can not write," the critic concluded. He thought the book immoral, appalling, and completely lacking in propriety. Many of the negative reviews found fault through a failure to comprehend the very qualities that others see as the novel's strengths.

Other reviews seemed more reasonable but found plenty to dislike. John J. Murray, writing for Best Sellers, Vol. 21, No. 16 (November 15, 1961), appreciated the comic aspects of the novel but felt that the serious parts fell short. He repeated the accusation that this was not a novel at all and judged Yossarian to be "oversexed" as he was "solicitous of his pal's whore's kid sister," a dreadful misrepresentation of the story. Milton R. Bass, in the Berkshire (Mass.) Eagle (October 31, 1961), offered the odd warning that this work, albeit a piece of genius, should be kept from women and children. Shimon Wincelberg, The New Leader, Vol. 65 (May 14, 1962), appreciated many of Heller's observations, such as, "There are now fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can't all be worth dying for." But he thought Heller delighted too much in his own cleverness and that the characters were two-dimensional. The London Observer (June 17, 1962) agreed that the novel was too long, repetitive, and "slick"; but its reviewer thought the book was "the greatest satirical work in English since Erewhon" (by Samuel Butler, 1872).

Among the early favorable reviews was that in The Nation, Vol. 193 (November 4, 1961). Nelson Algren found the hilarity "so wild that it hurts" and believed that the novel was not only antiwar but a repudiation of all the horror, greed, complacency, ignorance, and "endless cunning" in our civilization. The New Republic, Vol. 145 (November 13, 1961), called it "one of the most bitterly funny works in the language."

Respected literary figures such as S. J. Perelman and Studs Terkel publicly praised the book. John Chancellor, host of NBC's Today show in the summer of 1962, had stickers privately printed, reading "YOSSARIAN LIVES," and posted them around Manhattan. Paul Newman, Jack Lemmon, and Anthony Quinn were among the leading actors who saw possibilities in a film version and expressed interest in playing Yossarian. (The part went to Alan Arkin in the 1970 film written by Buck Henry and directed by Mike Nichols.) Although the hardback won no prizes and was not a best seller in the United States, it did well from the beginning in England. The novel initially was a cult favorite in America, but the

paperback edition (published in September 1962) set sales records. In the decades since, Catch-22 has established itself as a classic satire and antiwar novel.

7.6 QUESTIONS

1. Define the logic of Catch-22. What part does this logic play in the story being told?

2. Catch-22 is an allegory of the common man vs. the bureaucracy of modern-day America. In Catch-22, how does the administration of the Air Force abuse its power? How does it keep its men enlisted and active? If it doesn't care for the well-being of its men, what are its goals?

3. Few of the characters ever form lasting friendships with fellow soldiers. How is the individual kept isolated from his peers? In what ways do characters cope with their loneliness?

4. Why is Yossarian so obsessed with death? Is he correct in assuming everyone is out to kill him? How do the deaths of Nately and Snowden change him?

5. How does Yossarian maintain his personal integrity amidst all the corruption and apathy in Pianosa? What particular characteristics does he value? And what moral lines does he refuse to cross?

6. Do you consider the ending of Catch-22 a happy or sad one? How might it be construed as a triumph for Yossarian? A defeat? Is it the only way out of the mad system of Catch-22?

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8

CRITICAL STUDY OF STUDY OF GLORIA NAYLOR'S MAMA DAY

PART I

Unit Structure

8.0 OBJECTIVE

The unit attempts to look at the various factors shaping the creative potential of writer. The students would understand here an author and appreciate his literary qualities in a given period of time. A writer is the product of his time and so is Gloria Naylor, who, greatly influenced by the African American women writers, formed her writing career after them. The unit focuses on the life and shaping influences on the author along with the introduction to the prescribed novel including the plot overview and a guide to the prologue of the novel.

8.1 GLORIA NAYLOR: A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Gloria Naylor (1950-2016) was an American novelist who taught writing and literature as professors at various universities including George Washington University, New York University, Boston University, University of Kent, University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University. She became the Zale Writer-In-Residence in 1989 at Newcomb College of Tulane University.

As a creative author, Naylor remains one of the strong voices among the African American Women Writers. Her novels portray resilient and powerful women and reveal the impact of racism, sexism and the extreme desire for material gain. She was inspired during her college days by the influential authors such Tony Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston and began to write and publish stories addressing the issues of African-American women.

Naylor's very first novel was The Women of Brewster Place was published in 1982 and it immediately gained attention. The novel won the National Book Award for First Novel in 1983 and was adapted by Oprah Winfrey's Harpo Productions in 1989 as a television mini-series by the same name. The novel cleverly explores the interconnected lives of seven urban women and foregrounds the resemblance of all women experiences in their unfulfilled dreams.

Naylor's second novel Linden Hills was published in 1985. The novel is designed on the pattern of Dante's Inferno and delineates the impact of materialism on lives of African-Americans striving for upward social and economic mobility in a suburban location called the Linden Hills. Naylor's third novel Mama Day was 1988 published in 1988 and

Gloria Naylor's novels are critically acclaimed for her subtle and the diverse portrayal of the struggles of African-American women, her unique narrative structure and the beautiful blend of the traditional with the modern. Naylor died in 2016 following a heart attack at the age of 66. In her short span of life, Naylor has contributed substantially to African-American writing and remained a key force in the black feminist movement. She had been the recipient of various prestigious awards like the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, Candace Award, National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Guggenheim Fellowship 1988 and Lillian Smith Award.

8.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE NOVEL 'MAMA DAY'

Mama Day is an enthralling novel by Gloria Naylor brimming with postmodern elements like intertextuality, Bakhtinian polyphonic voices, multiplicity of perspectives, magic realism and a continuing sense of the presence of alternative worlds that deny the centrality and dominance of any specific one. The novel was published in 1988. Ingeniously evoking the elements from Shakespeare's The Tempest, the novel beautifully interweaves the chilling dark world of black magic, the healing power of love and the tradition of African Americans, especially the hoodoo medicinal practices. Gloria Naylor straddles two different worlds in the novel– one of the realistic New York City and the other of the magical town of Willow Springs and thus brings wonderful magical realism to her text. The mysterious fictional town of Willow Springs on which major part of the novel is set is situated on an island in-between South Carolina and Georgia and it resonates with the history and folklore of African American tradition. Thematically also, the novel develops on this idea of liminality or the feeling of being in-between just like the location of the island. The novel explores and questions the concept of reality.

The novel has a unique narrative style. It is told through the point of view of three characters: Ophelia "Cocoa" Day, George Andrews, and an unnamed, omniscient, third-person narrator. The repeated shifting in the point of view gives the novel a truly Bakhtinian polyphonic voice. The novel follows this point of view mostly to illustrate the thoughts of Mama Day, the novel's titular character and the happenings in Willow Springs.

The reader is forced to suspend disbelief and to shed rationality while understanding the fantastical world of Mama Day. The novel is at once a romantic chronicle of the love between Cocoa and George and also a narrative enigma portraying every possible influence on this relationship: the familial, the historical, the psychological, the gendered, the social and the spiritual including the mystical.

8.3 PLOT

Gloria Naylor's 1988 novel, Mama Day begins with a prologue which provides important information on Willow Springs, the mysterious fictional island on which part of the novel is set. The prologue narrates the legend of Sapphira Wade who was sold as a slave to Bascombe Wade, the supposed infamous wizard of the fictional island of Willow Springs. The people of the island assumed Bascombe Wade of "extreme mischief and suspicions of delving in witchcraft" (9). The legend says that Sapphira bore seven sons to Bascombe Wade and then killed him in mysterious conditions. Among the locals, Sapphira has earned a reputation for possessing supernatural powers -"She could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand" (10). Mama Day, the titular character of the novel, is a direct descendant of Sapphira and bears a similar reputation for holding uncanny, mystical powers.

The novel is divided into two large parts. After the fantastical introduction to the lives and legends of mysterious Willow Springs in the Prologue, Part 1, contrastingly opens in the realistic city of New York. It is told from the point of view of Ophelia Day, or 'Cocoa'-the name by which her family calls her. The part is narrated in second person and we learn that Cocoa is currently unemployed. She reflects on her encounter with George at a coffee shop and also evaluates her position for the job interview that she will be facing at the Andrews & Stein Engineering Company. She feels confident that her chances of getting the job are bright because she has topped her class in the business school and thus well-qualified for the post. Then there is a change in the point of view. This part is narrated from the perspective of George Andrews. George reflects on his past experience of growing up as an orphan in Staten Island's Wallace P. Andrews Shelter for Boys and Mrs. Jackson, the strict disciplinary matron. George recalls the dictum Mrs Jackson frequently coached into the boys -"Only the present has potential, sir" (40).

Cocoa faces her interview and Mr. Andrews, who apparently is George that Cocoa had earlier met earlier at a coffee shop, interviews her. Although Cocoa tried to focus on her qualification, her personal life and history interests George more than anything else.

Cocoa wants to visit her grandmother Abigail Day and great aunt Mama Day before joining the job. The readers are taken once more to the mysterious supernatural ambience of Willows Spring in Cocoa's stay in the island. The point of view changes again embracing the third person omniscient narration and focuses on Mama and Abigail as they prepare for

Cocoa's arrival. Meanwhile, Bernice Duvall, Miranda's neighbour stops by to visit Miranda. Bernice reveals that she has been trying to get pregnant and worries that her husband, Ambush, will leave her if she cannot have a baby. They both discuss a fertility drug that is according to Bernice is "supposed to work miracles" (73). But Miranda expresses her doubts on the efficacy of the fertility drug and says that "the only miracle is life itself. And when it comes, it comes" (73).

Then there is an ambiguous reference to an "other place," a seemingly supernatural location that remains cloaked in mystery for the first part of the novel. Bernice suggests that the two go to the 'other place' to help her conceive but Miranda quickly changes the topic revealing her discomfort in continuing the discussion. Miranda then goes to Abigail's house to wait for Cocoa. Miranda and Abigail discus Ruby, another woman in Willows Springs who shares Miranda's reputation for supernatural powers but her reputation is notoriously infamous in the community. Ruby is extremely jealous of anyone who flirts with Junior Lee, a poor local who dates older women for money. He is currently dating a local woman named Frances. People believe that Ruby uses her abilities for mischief and manipulation and has apparently been "working roots" (159) on Junior Lee to make him fall in love with her and leave his girlfriend, Frances.

While Abigail and Miranda are discussing the 'juicy' situation of Ruby and Junior Lee, Bernice's husband Ambush Duvall comes there seeking Miranda's help. Ambush reveals that his wife Bernice "is awful sick" and thinks that 'she's gonna lose the baby" (120). He frantically implores Miranda to come his house revealing that Bernice had consumed some of the fertility drugs. Bernice works at the drug store of Dr. Brian Smithfield and she in fact, had stolen the drugs. Miranda comes with Ambush and finds out that Bernice is not actually pregnant. She tells Ambush to call Dr. Brian Smithfield and sneaks onto Dr. Buzzard's property to get the provisions for one of her home remedies. She cures Bernice.

Back in New York, Cocoa and George continue to date but their share a tumultuous relationship. Sometimes they get along well and sometimes they fight severely. George reveals to Cocoa about his ex-wife Shawn. Cocoa pretends not to be bothered by the fact but her inner thoughts disturb her. But both share similar tastes while enjoying Shakespeare plays.

The action again alters to Willow Springs and Miranda is preparing for Candle Walk, a local celebration which is "a way of getting help without feeling obliged" (186). The Candle Walk takes place on the 22nd December Night and neighbours exchange homemade gifts. Miranda and Abigail meet Ambush and Bernice on their Walk who gift Miranda a rocking chair made by Ambush. Abigail declines Miranda's offer to walk to the 'other place' saying –'"It's too much, sister" (197). Abigail leaves and Miranda continues her quiet walk through the woods that she knows thoroughly well. The narrator describes that "Miranda could walk those west woods stone blind" (198) but she struggles to make the walk, closing it with "she wasn't meant to get to the other place tonight" (198).

The spring arrives and the small town of Willow Springs is buzzing with happy news. It is not only Cocoa and George is getting married but Ruby and Junior Lee too. There is also the ambiguous reference by the narrator at the subtle changes in Bernice implying her pregnancy and her quiet preparation for childbirth. Bernice "goes unnoticed as she quietly moves about the business of preparing for her miracle" (227).

Miranda and Abigail labour to stich a quilt to gift to Cocoa and George for their marriage.

Then, there is backward move in time where the narrator describes Bernice and Miranda's encounter at the other place. The description is mysterious just as the description of the island and the other place is a house where Miranda performs a ritual for Bernice to help her conceive.

When Bernice arrives at the other place, symbolically enough, Miranda is seen massaging a newly-hatched chick. The narrator describes the place where there are - "pine chips smoking on the fire blazing in the parlor hearth…the dining table is covered in a white sheet and has padded boards nailed upright on one end" (235). Bernice is seen lying on the table "Pulsing and alive—wet—the egg moves from one space to the other" (236). Miranda conducts her ritual and there is an evocation that the ritual is successful as Bernice is waiting for the miracle to happen in the spring time. But, Naylor very cleverly evades providing concrete proof about Bernice's pregnancy.

Part 2 of the novel begins about five years after Cocoa and George's marriage when the couple decides to pay a visit to Abigail and Miranda in Willow Springs. The part opens with Miranda's preparation to welcome the couple. Miranda visits Ruby as she falls short of peaches while making the cobbler. The conversation between the two, although harmless, is uncomfortable and Ruby lets Miranda pick as many peaches as she needs. While plucking the peaches, Miranda feels that "there's something funny going on" (287).

Although George is happy being able to visit Willow Springs finally, he is surprised at the island's odd geographical situation. He says that he "really did want to go, but I wanted to know exactly where I was going" (288). At the dinner, Abigail and Miranda reveal to cocoa and George that they have planned for a small party with the locals to celebrate their marriage. Ruby and Junior Lee arrives at that time with more peaches as gifts to the couple. Abigail instantly invites them to the forthcoming party.

George gets a disturbing dream that night. He dreams that he is swimming in The Sound, the body of water that splits up the island of Willow Springs from the mainland. One morning, George meets Miranda in the morning and he decides to go fishing. They converse a lot about fishing and fishing folklore. Miranda forewarns George that it is bad luck to talk to an old woman before going fishing. But George dismisses Miranda's warning as superstition saying, "I've always made my own luck" (337). They both take a long walk through the woods Miranda leading the way and George notices the tombstone of Bascombe Wade. Miranda informs

George that Wade "fell under the spell of a woman he owned—only in body, not in mind" (340).

On the night of the party at Abigail's house, people are preoccupied with the weather as a tropical storm is expected by the next morning. All have a very uncomfortable dinner. George reacts coldly to Cocoa as he is hurt by the earlier fight about Shawn. Wounded Cocoa goes out to the back porch. Junior Lee comes onto Cocoa. When Ruby, being jealous of the situation confronts her husband, Junior Lee lies and says that it was Cocoa who 'tricked' him (397-98) into being alone with her. Under the pretext of apologising for her husband's lewd behaviour, Ruby invites Cocoa to her house. Cocoa innocently accepts Ruby's invitation and visits the next day. They sit on the porch together and Ruby massages a poisonous substance, "a solution" into Cocoa's scalp while braiding her hair (405).

Cocoa suffers terrible hallucinations after that and falls ill. The expected hurricane strikes Willow Springs but the locals remain calm. For them, storms are a regular occurrence, and they know if anything gets destroyed, all of them will come together to set it right. The narrative voice informs - "if anything gets blown down, it's understood everybody will get together and put it back up" (410). Miranda, Abigail, Cocoa, and George - all go to the other place in stony silence and endure the storm. The storm destroys the only bridge connecting the island to the mainland. This completely stops George from getting professional medical help for Cocoa who is seriously ill. George who has been sceptical about superstition and even religion has no option but to depend on Miranda's home remedies.

Meanwhile, Miranda discovers the poison in Cocoa's hair and does whatever she can to take the poison out but reveals that she cannot heal Cocoa completely as "the rest was just about out of her hands" (437). Miranda learns that it was Ruby who was responsible for Cocoa's plight. Furious Miranda goes to confront Ruby at her house. Ruby locks herself in her house when she sees Miranda. Seeking revenge, Miranda scatters a strange silver powder all over the property and leaves the place.

Desperate to save Cocoa's life, George tries to help the locals to repair the bridge but the folk has to stop the work for attending a funeral for Little Caesar. George is surprised to experience the rituals of the funeral. It is not like traditional Christian funeral that "called for a sermon, music, tears—the belief in an earthly finality for the child's life" (443). The people gathered one by one at the front of the church and talked about when they first saw him. George noticed that Bernice and Ambush didn't even cry. After the brief service at the church, the coffin is buried. The men-folk then return to their work on the bridge.

George is angry to find out that the men-folk have used his boat and this would further delay in getting medical help for cocoa—if he ever can. Abigail urges George to take Miranda's help at the other place but George prefers to keep working on repairing the bridge so that he can get out of the island to cure Cocoa. George talks to Dr. Buzzard after working for hours and even Dr. Buzzard tries to convince him to work with Miranda.

Feeling helpless, he finally yields and goes to the other place where Miranda is holding John-Paul's cane in one hand and Bascombe Wade's ledger in the other. Miranda instructs George to take the cane and ledger, go to her chicken coop, find an old red hen, search in her nest, and "come straight back here with whatever you find" (486).

George dismisses the instructions calling them "mumbo-jumbo" (486) and goes back to Cocoa. But when sees Cocoa's condition worsening, he begins to feel the effects of the poison. He relents and returns to Miranda whom he had once called a crazy old woman. Following her instructions, he takes up the cane and ledger and performs the provincial or rather magical ritual. He goes to a particular chicken coop to retrieve the contents but tries in vain to find something in the old red hen's nest: "There was nothing there—except for my gouged and bleeding hands. The readers are already informed that George has a weak heart in the earlier part of the novel and therefore, in his rage and frustration at his situation, easily succumbs to the hen's attack and dies in a heart attack. Mama Day had informed George that if Cocoa is to be healed, every one of her closest human connections, especially George, to whom she is connected emotionally, must embrace the truths of Willow Springs. While retrieving the contents of the hen's nest from Mama Day's chicken coop, George is supposed to prove his willingness to bond with the provincial reality and traditions of Willow Springs, which is, an integral part of Cocoa's heritage. George tries but with half-hearted involvement. George's death saves Cocoa. Soon after George's death, Cocoa begins to recover and ultimately regains her former vitality. George writes from his grave. Three years after his death, Cocoa marries again but she could never forget George. In the subsequent years, she gives birth to two sons and names one after George in honour of her undying love for him and in respect for the sacrifice he made for her.

8.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROLOGUE

The novel begins with an intriguing prologue dating August 1999 and reaches back to 1823 providing important information on the history and folklore of Willow Springs, the mysterious fictional island on which major part of the novel is set. The prologue offers a pedigree of the island and its inhabitants dating back to 1799 by following an elaborate map of the fictional island of Willow Springs, a family tree of the Day lineage, and a bill of sale for Sapphira Wade, the young slave woman sold to Bascombe Wade in 1819.

The Prologue introduces a conversational, colloquial voice of Willow Springs itself, a narrator that returns later in the novel. The narrator is an enigmatic one because it is a first person plural voice referring to the collective island voice. But, at the same time, it knows and remembers more than the island people. The narrative voice poses an intriguing question on the memory of the narrator because it remembers the unknowable name of Sapphira. The very mention of Sapphira's name suggests deep depths of memory and the collective consciousness drawn by all minds whether dead or alive. The narrative voice says that the island

people knows the legend of the slave woman and Bascombe Wade but can neither remember her name nor produce any proof of the woman who supposedly stole and killed the white master landowner. This implies the distinction between the knowledge of the local islanders and the knowledge of the narrative plural voice. To the locals, Sapphira is a legend about whom they don't have any specific knowledge but to the narrative plural voice which has been around since the beginning, the knowledge is easily available from deep recesses of collective memories of the island people-dead or alive.

The collective voice plays important role in the developing and foreshadowing the relationship between Cocoa and George also. It is the same voice that alerts and advices Mama and Cocoa of George's heartbreak and which George fails to hear leading to miscommunication and eventual failure.

The significance of the prologue not only lies in establishing the tone and diction of the 'collective island voice' but also in hinting at the subject of the book. It also sets the mystical aspect of the island. The anecdote of Reema's boy foreshadows the return of Cocoa to her ancestral homeland. Reema's boy also had gone once to the mainland to get education and he became an outsider. He wanted to conduct and collect research on the islanders but his efforts are thwarted by his inability to understand them. The collective voice suggests that if he had gone to the right place like the grave and to the right people, he might have got his answers.

The significance of the prologue comes most apparent at the end of the novel. The prologue narrates and emphasises the happenings of the past and thus foreshadowing the tragic possibilities of the future. Unlike the singular narrative voices of Cocoa and George, the island voices express feelings and thoughts of multiple people with anecdotes and stories that apparently doesn't have any connection to the main events.

8.5 MAGICAL REALISM IN MAMA DAY

The intriguing plot and thematic structure of Mama Day conjures the postmodern trope of magical realism that blurs the boundary between the real and the fantastic. Naylor very effectively questions the very foundation of our understanding of the reality by creating the fictional world of Willow Springs. George, the New York bred man, represents the modern consciousness of reality. Although unable to understand the weird supernatural workings of Willow Springs, he finally has to succumb to the new reality of his life. The "real" aspects of the novel are associated with the rationality imbibed from modern education and the white world of the United States mainland. The magical aspects are derived from African folk medicine and beliefs which are centred on the island of Willow Springs.

In Willow Springs the everyday and the supernatural coexist. The magical becomes the "real" as the characters suffer the effects of the magical and the real becomes distant and unreachable and thus becomes a fantasy.

When the hurricane strikes the island, the only bridge connecting the island to the mainland is broken making the world of Willow Spring the only reality where fantasy is a part of everyday life: Mama Day helps Bernice get pregnant with a mysterious fertility ritual involving chicken egg, Cocoa hears the voices of her ancestors at the other place, Ruby braids her hair with poisons and drives Frances insane. Mama Day conjures lightening to burn down Ruby's house seeking revenge on her for poisoning Cocoa.

There are of course realist elements in Willow Springs like Mama Day watching "The Phil Donahue Show" and Bernice falling sick after consuming fertility pills. After George is stuck in the island after the hurricane Willow Springs becomes a place where the "real" and the "magical" intersect and even peacefully coexist. The plural voices, magic realism and rich symbolism in Mama Day unveil the text's many interpretive possibilities.

8.6 LET'S SUM UP

Mama Day offers an intricately structured plot of a classic abounding in repetitions and foreshadowing mingled with the pleasures of folk tale with its oral rhythms and supernatural occurrences. The novel also tries to provide its wisdom as expressed by Mama Day that "everybody wants to be right in a world where there ain't no right or wrong to be found" (230).

8.7 QUESTIONS

1. Throw light on the life and work of Gloria Naylor
2. Write a note on the plot structure of the novel.
3. Discuss the prologue and its significance
4. Write a note on the plural narrative voice –the island voice of the novel
5. Write short notes on-

   a) Magic Realism of the novel

   b) Ethos of Willows Springs

8.8 REFERENCES

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9

CRITICAL STUDY OF STUDY OF GLORIA NAYLOR'S MAMA DAY

PART II

Unit Structure

9.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to offer in a nutshell the various aspects of the novel 'Mama Day' that can be unlocked for thorough study and analysis. Therefore, the students are advised to study the text for appreciating the postmodern elements, magic realism, intertextuality, African American themes, the unique narrative style, the setting and hoodoo religious practices along with the simple pleasure of a tragic love story to prepare better for the examination.

9.1 NARRATIVE STYLE

The use of multiples narrators is one of the most striking and perplexing aspects of the novel Mama Day. The perplexity arises from the multiplicity of perspectives as Cocoa tells George at the end- "There are just too many sides to the whole story."

The conversation between George and Cocoa, expressed in alternating first-person narratives makes up for more than half of the novel. These sections of conversations happening after George's death and within their separate and shared consciousness are separated from the rest of the text by three diamonds.

Throughout the novel, Naylor presents three different narrators - those of George, Cocoa, and what many critics identify as the plural voice "of the island of Willow Springs, an ancestral choral voice". The narrator at times sounds like an omniscient narrator overseeing everything without being a part of the story while at other times becomes the voice from Mama Day's consciousness. The novel's prologue introduces this choral voice of

Willow Springs. It says to the reader in the prologue- "Think about it: ain't nobody really talking to you. We're sitting here in Willow Springs, and you're God-knows-where…. Really listen this time: the only voice is your own."

This unidentified narrator takes on different perspectives, even including the reader in its magic circle proving the importance Naylor places on the multiple perspectives. The three differing perspectives of the novel reflect the differences in each voice's cultural background and history as well as the differences among the past, the present, and the future.

The narrative of the novel honours the shared African-American identity of the two principal characters –Cocoa and George and the "ancestral voice" and integrates their multiple perspectives through love, magic, and sacrifice.

9.2 CHARACTERS

Cocoa Day:

Cocoa is one of the two protagonists of the tragic love story and is also one of the three narrative voices in the novel. Her real name is Ophelia Day and is the last living Day of her generation. She is wilful and obstinate and has strong familial and traditional bonding. When the novel opens, Cocoa has been living in New York City since the last seven years but she visits her ancestral home at Willow Spring every August to spend time with her mother and family. In New York, she meets George and falls in love with him. Cocoa is the grandniece of Mama Day, the novel's titular character. She falls in love with George Andrews, a practical minded engineer in New York City representing Western rationalism and gets married to him. Her marriage to George Andrews acts as a bridge between the two worlds that the novel unfolds –the world of African-American mysticism and of Western rationalism. Leaving Willow Springs for schooling and job, she feels a kind of liminality, a sense of hanging in-between and is forever scared of losing touch with her heritage. She visits Willow Springs every August for two weeks but still she feels that she is becoming more and more a part of George's world who introduces her to the "real" New York. Cocoa earns a degree in history and it reminds the reader of Reema's boy, who goes to the mainland and earns an advanced degree only to return to the island a stranger. After four years of marriage, finally George and Cocoa visit Willow Springs. Cocoa is actually anxious to show him off to the locals of Willow Springs because they always viewed her curiously because of her lighter skin. Her family had nicknamed her Cocoa because it means to "put some colour on her". But George's inability to understand her insecurities leads towards a fight that threatens to rip them apart. While Cocoa is preoccupied with mending her relationship with George, she falls prey to jealous Ruby, the antagonist in the novel. Never suspecting the feelings of Ruby, she lets Ruby braid her hair. But, Ruby poisons her scalp. The seemingly innocent provincial ritual which has always helped her to bond with her own community has turned out to be disastrous because of Ruby's ill intention and cruel action.

Cocoa falls ill after that and has horrific hallucinations. She assumes that worms have invaded her body and are eating her alive from the inside out. She believes that only the soothing strokes of her grandmother can keep the parasites from devouring her. Thus she pushes George away from her. George sacrificed his own life to save her. Once Cocoa comes back to health, she decides to leave her life in New York and settles in Charleston, a Southern city which keeps her near her home but not fully a part of it. Cocoa marries again in Charleston and has two sons. She names one of them after George paying homage to his sacrifice, and she visits Willow Springs often to talk to her first husband about what happened. Mama Day notes that Cocoa is the only Day woman who has finally been given the meaning of peace.

George Andrews:

George Andrews is one of two protagonists of the novel and is married to the other protagonist Cocoa Day. He is an engineer working for Andrews & Stein Engineering Company in New York. His first-person narration, explaining to Cocoa his perspective on their courtship, marriage, and visit to Willow Springs, makes up about one third of the novel. It is only towards the end of the novel the readers learn that George is dead and he is speaking from the grave. An orphan, George was raised by whites in an orphanage where he learnt the guiding principles of his life that "only the present has potential" and only "facts" are relevant. George's situation of being an orphan cuts him off from any familial or historical lineage placing him as a clear contrast to Cocoa who displays a strong connection to her family and tradition. George has a weak heart and to control his condition, he takes a pill twice a day with strict regularity. George is passionate about football. The mathematical possibilities of football fascinate him. George's rationality leads him to eschew emotions, beliefs, myths, or superstitions. George's world turns upside down when he meets Cocoa. The readers are told that George, while interviewing Cocoa, seemed to be more interested in her family and past in Willow Springs. She brings to him a wonderful world of emotions and mysteries and he envies her sense of belonging and tradition.

But George, rather than going home with Cocoa to Willow Springs after their marriage, spends his vacations traveling to the NFL play-off games. It takes almost five years for him to finally make the desired trip with Cocoa to the fantastical island. Although at first, George romanticizes the island and its inhabitants, his gradual encounter with the darker forces of the island subverts his understanding of reality.

George embodies rationality infused by modern education and reality. He is the representation of contemporary urban African-Americans who while adopting the white customs and beliefs, have lost touch with their roots. George's Western rationalism makes him see Mama Day as a "crazy old woman" rather than a powerful conjurer. The only ways he can think of to save Cocoa from her mysterious illness is by traveling to mainland and getting her a modern doctor. Since the single bridge connecting the mainland to the island is destroyed by a storm, George half-heartedly

adopts the weird instructions of Mama Day. But, unable perhaps to decipher the true meanings of Mama Day's instructions, he loses control and dies in a heart attack in his rage. His own death salvages Cocoa. He is buried on the island where Cocoa frequently returns to visit him.

Miranda/Mama Day:

The real name of the title character Mama Day is Miranda Day and her name brings into mind Shakespeare's The Tempest. Like Prospero in the play, Miranda Day is a controlling power in the island of Willow Springs with all her conjuring power and black magic. She is the eldest in Willow Springs, nearly hundred years old and still strong. Thus she embodies the authority of historical knowledge, spiritual powers and practices... Although Miranda Day never married or had children of her own, she has acquired her moniker because of her role as a midwife who has helped to bring into the world nearly every other inhabitant of the island. A clever funny and wise old lady, Mama Day not only serves her community as a foremother but also as a doctor, possessing a vast knowledge of herbal remedies, of traditional medicines and of how to treat most illnesses. Dr. Brian Smithfield, the medical doctor from mainland calls Mama Day a colleague who displays holistic approach in her healing methods. Dr. Brian Smithfield held a resentful respect for her since she performed a performed a Caesarean section birth with great expertise without sophisticated apparatuses and training. Mama Day listens, sees and believes her patients and thus incorporating all the logical aspects for diagnosis and treatment the aural, visual and also emotional. The utmost respect that Mama Day earns from all the inhabitants of Willow Springs as the direct descendant of Sapphira Wade and the inheritor of her foremother's conjuring powers, establishes her as the most powerful matriarch of the community. Mama Day knows the true story of her great ancestors and of Sapphira Wade who is "the great, grand Mother". Mama Day knows her world thoroughly well: a world that runs on the magic of belief. And she needs to impart these truths to her great-niece, Cocoa who is formidable woman just like Mama Day herself and more importantly to Cocoa's New York–bred husband, George.

In the first part of the novel, Mama Day cures Bernice with her home remedy when she a disastrous reaction from the fertility pills she was consuming and helps her to become pregnant by performing a mysterious ritual with the help of her chickens. Mama Day's true "gift," she believes, is to help things grow. "Can't nothing be wrong in bringing on life, knowing how to get under, around, and beside nature to give it a slight push," she tells herself." "But she ain't never, Lord, she ain't never tried to get over nature."(228)

In the second part of the novel, it is Mama Day's loving grandniece Cocoa who needs her help. Although Mama Day always tried to protect Cocoa but couldn't save her from Ruby's fatal jealousy. She could only enact revenge on Ruby for poisoning Cocoa and so sprinkles a yellow metallic powder at Ruby's house causing lightning to burn down the house. Mama then retreats to the other place to learn from her Day ancestors how to save

Cocoa. She finds a ledger with the bill of sale for a slave woman, her great-great-grandmother but she could never find the name as time has washed away most of the words in the bill, leaving only the letters Sa. She learns the name Sapphira in a dream and learns that she must listen to the past pain of her mothers. She comprehends that George being part of Cocoa's emotional, spiritual, legal, familial life is the soul who can help to her life. But George does not trust Mama Day and her magical powers and therefore, he couldn't bring back the symbol of life from the chickens' nests as instructed by Mama. Rather, he attacks the chickens and destroys them and himself in the process. But Cocoa is saved by his sacrifice.

When the novel ends, Mama Day is still alive at the age of 104 anticipating a sneak-peak into the next century before she finally dies.

Ruby:

Ruby is the singular antagonist to Mama Day. She possesses equivalent magical powers like Mama Day but her reputation is notoriously infamous as she uses them to hurt other women, especially those to whom Junior Lee is attracted. Ruby is extremely jealous of anyone who flirts with Junior Lee, a poor local who dates older women for money. People believe that Ruby uses her abilities for mischief and manipulation and has apparently been "working roots" (159) on Junior Lee to make him fall in love with her and leave his girlfriend Frances, a local woman. Ruby first puts hex on Frances and she goes mad. Lee leaves Frances and marries Ruby but never stay away from making advances to other woman when he gets a chance. Although Ruby keeps a watchful eye over him, Lee nevertheless talks to Cocoa alone at a dinner party. When Ruby catches Junior Lee making advances towards Cocoa, she confronts her husband. Scared of Ruby, Lee lies to her and tells that it is Cocoa who tricked him to go alone with her. Ruby pretends to make apology for her husband's behaviour and invites her to her house. Never suspecting anything, Cocoa lets Ruby to braid her hair as she had been doing that since Cocoa was a girl. Ruby combs poison into her hair and scalp and Cocoa falls sick. Learning Ruby's evil act, Mama Day takes revenge on her by using her superior powers and kills Ruby with lightning as a result.

Abigail Day:

Abigail Day is a central nurturing figure in the novel. She is Cocoa's grandmother and Mama Day's sister. When her daughter and Cocoa's mother Grace Day died of grief after her husband cheated on her, Abigail Day raised Cocoa. She does not possess the power and knowledge of the natural and supernatural worlds that her sister Mama Day does and therefore, remains helpless in most situations. She has also cut herself off from her past by refusing to visit the other place, the home where she grew up and advises George to visit the other place seek Mama Day's help to save Cocoa. When Cocoa falls deadly ill, she cannot do anything but only sing and hope and try to feed her and thus remaining only as a powerless mother.

Ophelia Day:

Ophelia Day was Abigail's and Mama Day's mother. She evokes Shakespeare's Hamlet. Just like Shakespeare's Ophelia went mad, Ophelia Day in the novel also went mad when her baby Peace Day died. Peace Day was the youngest sister of Mama and Abigail who drowned in the sound between the island and the mainland. Abigail also named her first daughter Peace, and that child also did not live past infancy.

Sapphira Wade:

Sapphira Wade is "the great, grand Mother" of Mama and Abigail Day. In 1823, Sapphira persuaded her master to charter the island to his slaves who "bore him seven sons in just a thousand days" (p. 3), and killed him before she disappeared in a gust of flame. The residents of the island no longer know her name but remember her as a clever slave woman and a powerful conjurer who convinced her master, Bascombe Wade to contract the island to his slaves. The legend says that after giving birth to seven sons, she flew back to Africa.

Bascombe Wade:

Bascombe Wade is a Norwegian slave owner who owned the great grand-mother of Mama and Abigail Day. His family originally owned the island of Willow Springs. He fell in love with his slave Sap-phira. Although he owned Sapphira physically, he could never own her emotionally and his grief over this inability to possess her completely announced the tragic history of the Day family.

9.3 SETTING

The novel alternates between two different locations representing different worlds and different versions of reality. A part of the novel is set in the New York City representing the modern sense of reality founded on Western rationalism. The other part of the novel takes place in the small fictional town of Willow Springs located off the coast of Georgia lying near its border with South Carolina. Interestingly none of the two countries claims it and thus the island enjoys an independent status voting only for presidential elections.

The two worlds presented by Naylor offer a stark contrast. While New York is one of the most famous cities of the world while Willow Springs is a small unknown rural island that even does not even exist on map. In fact, the inhabitants are happy like that and rather loathe the visibility on the map - "Part of Willow Springs's problems was that it got put on some maps right after the War Between the States."

The multi-racial, multi-cultural and the polyglot New York City is ruled by strict and apparently callous codes of love and survival where George, one of the tragic protagonist lovers, learns his worldviews. On the other hand, the beliefs and customs of Willow Springs are antiquated resembling more closely to those brought over from Africa by its

ancestors than the ones George has acquired in New York. The culture is homogenous and the long standing culture and traditions unite the islanders as opposed to the vast cultural diversity of New York. The laws and customs of the island don't follow the laws of the mainland. The inhabitants maintain a sense that the dead remain with the living and that the living must honour the connections with the dead. This is in stark contrast to George's idea that only the present has potential. The past is always living with the inhabitants of Willow Springs.

The island is also geographically inaccessible and there is only one bridge connecting the island to the mainland and that too gets destroyed in the hurricane during the latter part of the novel. Although the island has phone lines and the sound and television signals are received well, its connections to the mainland are very tenuous: "We done learned that anything coming from beyond the bridge gotta be viewed real, real careful."

Willow Springs is inhabited solely by the descendants of slaves and is a place immune to the laws of nature. The often racist laws of man visible in New York is absent in the world governed evidently by the laws of nature.

Each of these worlds is given its own narrative voice and a narrator. New York in fact has two narrators in the beginning- George and Cocoa. These two worlds of seemingly opposing realities are brought together when George and Cocoa falls in love and comes to Willow Springs after marriage. When Cocoa succumbs to the island's darker forces, the methodically rational and self-reliant George learns that the only way to save his wife is by casting reason and self-reliance aside. He acquiesces to the traditional wisdom, familial customs and the magical powers of Mama Day whom he thinks is a crazy old woman.

The coming together of both the worlds through the marriage of Cocoa and George Naylor symbolically reunites the scattered children of Africa with their first, true home represented by Willow Springs which is rich and willing to retain its connection to the history and tradition of African American culture. The union also helps in the squaring-off of several components while simultaneously exploring the impacts of such diverse reconciliations between the black rural past and the black urban present, between individuals and communities, between myth and history between faith and logic and also between the living and the dead.

9.4 THEMES

Liminality:

One of the important motifs of the novel is liminality or the feeling of in-between-ness. Cocoa, although has been living in New York City for many years but still she feels drawn to her home at Willow Springs.

The location of Willow Springs is also lies in between Georgia and South Carolina and none of the countries claim to own it. There is only one bridge connecting the island to the mainland and thus, one has to cross

over the bridge to connect to the people of Willow Springs. Cocoa and George must cross over this singular bridge and this crossing over has literal as well as figurative significance. George and Cocoa literally have to cross-over from the world of New York City to the world of Willow Springs and figuratively adapt to the new surroundings. Cocoa

In her determination to establish herself as a working New York City professional, she presents herself as a woman who like George has the capacity to survive on her own means but she feels deeply tied to her family history in Willow Springs and these competing aspects of her identity unsettles her often. On the other hand, George's materialistic philosophy of living on the present is in direct contradiction to the liminality Cocoa feels she is caught up with. Although she thinks that, "A person is made up of much more than the 'now'" (213), suggesting her appreciation and bonding with her past, she, however, often implies her desire to escape the dilemma. She struggles to navigate the vast differences in the respective rituals of the two places although proving herself better than George at it. The reader can observe this in the beginning itself when Cocoa subtly changes her dialect depending on where she finds herself like she did in her interview with George. She avoided the use of colloquialisms because that would mark her as a woman from the South.

Supernatural:

Supernatural occurrence is an integral part of the novel. The inhabitants of Willow Springs have inherited the hoodoo religion from their slave ancestors. As a part of their religion, they have faith in in the supernatural. Towards the end of the novel, the readers learn that George has been dead for fourteen years and that his wife Cocoa often speaks to him.

But it is only Mama Day, the title character of the novel and Ruby, the antagonist who possess this power of the supernatural. Mama Day has inherited a "gift" from her slave great-grandmother Sapphira Wade. The legend of the Willow Springs states that Sapphira was a "conjure woman" who "could walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of the lightning to start the kindling going under the medicine pot…. She turned the moon into salve, the stars into swaddling cloth, and healed the wounds of every creature walking up on two or down on four." Even the bill of sale for Sapphira that preambles the novel says that she "has served on occasion in the capacity of midwife and nurse, not without extreme mischief and suspicions of delving in witchcraft."

There is a contrast in the initial introduction to Sapphira Wade and her supernatural powers and later descriptions of Mama Day's powers and actions. The language of the prologue expresses the white world's view on Sapphira's supernatural powers but the novel demystifies and depicts the powers Mama Day in an encouraging light.

The novel also makes it very clear that magic/conjuring is a tool which can be used for a good or a bad purpose. The hoodoo that Mama Day

practices is for benevolent purposes-healing the sick, helping women to give birth and to protect the inhabitants. But what Mama's antagonist Ruby practices is used for her own selfish and evil purposes. Thus the novel distinguishes between conjuring powers for larger communal purpose and for petty personal gain and revenge.

While helping Bernice to get pregnant, Mama Day reveals that she gets "joy" "from any kind of life." and she admits her limitations that she cannot go beyond the nature and works in tandem with nature to help things grow. She says that her job is "bringing on life, knowing how to get under, around, and beside nature to give it a slight push." Ruby, on the other hand, uses spells, poisons, and herbal mixtures with graveyard dust to drive insane, kill and poison the women she fears are close to her husband. The only time Mama Day is seen to use her power for personal revenge is when she attracts lightning to Ruby's house for Ruby's poisoning of Cocoa. There is also Dr. Buzzard also claims to heal but his remedies turn out to be fake and consist mostly of alcohol and nothing of medicinal value. He is seen exploiting the villagers' fears and beliefs in ghosts to sell his trickeries.

Mama Day's healing practices are described in great detail in the novel to emphasize her vast knowledge of the traditional herbal medicines. Mama is seen using her understanding of psychology. For example, she gives Bernice her black and gold seeds which symbolise her negative feelings about her mother-in-law and her hopes for her baby. Here, rather than possessing supernatural powers, Naylor has shown Mama having good understanding of the human mind and thus demystifies some of the supposed magical practices to reveal that her supernatural powers are actually the natural extensions of her understanding of the "real" world.

Cultural Heritage:

One of the important themes of the novel is cultural heritage. Cocoa must learn that she cannot escape her past. Although Cocoa has been learning from George how to be open to people of diverse cultures in a multicultural polyglot city like New York, she has to eventually return to Willow Springs and her heritage. The return to Willow Springs is the return to the past, to the fateful destiny of loss of "peace" that the women in her lineage have suffered.

George is unable to offer help as being an orphan he has no past and no understanding of heritage. For him the present is everything. When George is unable to understand the rich heritage of Day family like why they have to put moss in their shoes when they walk in the west woods where her ancestors are buried, Cocoa can only say - "it is a tradition" and "it shows respect."

Intrigued by the "other place," the Day ancestral home George shows his desire to be a part of it although he doesn't know its sad history. When Cocoa hears the 'island voices' that tells her that "you'll break his heart," George doesn't hears anything. He consoles her by saying that "we could defy history."

When Mama Day goes to the other place to find out ways of saving Cocoa after she falls sick from Ruby's poisoning, she understands that Cocoa has put a significant part of herself in George's hands which necessitates George's help. George, however, is unable to logically comprehend and therefore unable to surrender fully to the ways of Mama Day and make the "bridge for Baby Girl to walk over". He therefore must sacrifice his life let go of Cocoa. Only then Mama Day's remedies can return Cocoa to health and her cultural heritage, making her the first Day to learn "the meaning of peace". George can become a part of the island and its heritage only in death.

Ritual:

The novel presents many traditions and rituals related to the hoodoo religion of the African Americans at Willow Springs and also some of the white Christian rituals. But, the novel never present one set of rituals as better than another. It rather suggests the hazards of clinging to one's rituals and remaining closed off to others. George is unable to let go of his own traditions and rituals. His inability to understand the customs of Willow Springs results in his tragic death.

African American Identity and Racial History:

Gloria Naylor has constructed an alternative world in the fictional town of Willow Springs which is populated exclusively by African-Americans and ruled by a homogenous culture. This island is presented as the only possible place in the American South where blacks can vote and have been able to vote without any interruption since the 19th century. But, although the island apparently has been free from many cruel episodes of America's racial history, yet, it many ways embodies and in some ways magnifies the racial history of black Americans. This begins with the fact of slavery. The inhabitant of the fictional island could live on their own terms respecting and protecting their traditions because Sapphira with her great conjuring power could usurp the deep in the name of the slaves. Naylor has rather invented a mystical world to comment on America's racial history and amplifies the distinctiveness of African American race.

9.5 SYMBOLISM

Mama Day is rich in symbolism and the island of Willow Springs itself is an important symbol. The rural, isolated community of Willow Springs represents another world - neither American nor African where real and the imaginary gets blurred. It is a space where the past is always living and boundaries between the living and the dead often dissolves.

Many things attain symbolic importance on this emblematic island where boundaries between past and present, real and magical, natural and the supernatural are fluid.

The chickens and the eggs with which Mama Day performs her supernatural rites become symbols of fertility and female-ness.

George's battle with the chickens symbolises his confrontation of the mysterious forces of Cocoa, the Day family, and Willow Springs.

The quilt that Abigail and Mama Day weave for Cocoa as her wedding gift symbolises the weaving together of the Day family and a mark to remind her of her familial and cultural heritage.

The singular bridge of the island between the island and the mainland forms not only a real but also a symbolic link between Willow Springs (the imaginary and the past) and the mainland (the real and the present).

Even hands assume a symbolic role in Mama Day's envisioning of her connection to her ancestors and what must be done to save Cocoa. George must "hand" over his belief in himself to Mama Day: "She needs his hand in hers—his very hand—so she can connect it up with all the believing that had gone before…. So together they could build the bridge for Baby Girl to walk over." Symbolically, by joining hands, they could heal Cocoa together.

9.6 LET'S SUM UP

Mama Day is a brilliant experimentation with the narrative style, form and content. Though perplexing at times, the novel is significant in dealing with the issues of fertility, femaleness, African American identity and heritage. The need for sacrifices, surrender and crossing over one's own ideology in love and marriage is also beautifully presented. The novel also espouse the belief that life more enigmatic than that can be understood by science, logic and rationality and that there is a life which is ruled by faith and is beyond the understanding of reason.

9.7 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the plot-structure of the novel 'Mama Day'.
2. Discuss the important of the novel
3. Throw light on the important characters of the novel
4. Write a note on the narrative structure of the novel
5. Discuss the symbolism used in the novel
6. Discuss how the unique narrative style adds value to the novel
7. Write a note on the themes of the novel
8. Critically evaluate the strength of the novel.
9. Write short notes on the role and character of

   a) Mama Day

   b) Cocoa

c) George

d) Ruby

e) Abigail Day

9.8 REFERENCES

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MODULE - IV

10

CRITICAL STUDY OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S THE HAIRY APE

PART I

Unit Structure

10.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to introduce Eugene O'Neill, a prolific American playwright and Nobel laureate in literature. The unit will enable students to understand the background of the author, complete with his biographical details, and other major works. The unit also provides a brief overview of the plot of the play titled The Hairy Ape, along with scene wise descriptions. The detailed observations about Eugene O'Neill and his play will enable a thorough understanding of the author, his style, and more specifically, the themes and characterization of the play, The Hairy Ape.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Eugene Gladstone O'Neill a popular American playwright and Nobel laureate in literature lived in the first half of the twentieth century. He is known for his realist and expressionist plays, which are often poetically titled. He is also credited with introducing the drama technique of realism into the U.S., which was earlier associated with Russian playwright Anton Chekhov, and others.

O'Neill's plays are known to be among the first that include speeches by characters in vernacular American English. The plays also often involve characters from the fringes of society. "The characters are seen struggling to maintain their hopes and aspirations, but ultimately seen sliding into disillusion and despair. Almost all plays by Eugene O'Neill involve some degree of tragedy and personal pessimism."

The Hairy Ape is an expressionist play by Eugene O'Neill, first performed

in 1922. “The play is about Yank, who is a beastly and unthinking laborer. The protagonist of the play, Yank, is shown searching for a sense of belonging in a world controlled by the rich.” This play also conforms with O’Neill’s usual theme of struggling characters, from the fringes of the society. At first, the central character, “Yank, feels secure as he stokes the engines of an ocean liner. He is depicted as a highly confident man, with faith on his physical power, and his men.” However, the plot changes when the rich daughter of an industrialist, who we later come to know also owns the oceanliner, refers to him as a "filthy beast". Yank is seriously affected by the reference and undergoes a crisis of identity. “This incidence also starts his mental and physical deterioration. He then leaves the ship and is seen wandering into Manhattan, only to be disappointed further and find that he does not belong anywhere, neither with the then socialites, nor with the more down to earth labor organizers on the waterfront. One can see that Yank's mental state disintegrates into animalistic nature in his struggle for social belonging. In the end, he is defeated by an ape, in which O’Neill has very cleverly tried to reflect Yank's character.” The Hairy Ape is thus Eugene O’Neill’s attempt at making a comment on how the industrialization and social class has an impact on the dynamic and confident nature of people, portrayed through his protagonist, Yank.

10.2 LIFE AND WORKS

Eugene O’Neill was the son of Irish immigrant couple James O'Neill and Mary Ellen Quinlan. While his father suffered from alcoholism, his mother was addicted to morphine, that was prescribed to relieve the pains during the difficult birth of her third son, Eugene. He was born on October 16th 1888, in a hotel, the Barrett House, at Broadway and 43rd Street, at Times Square, which was then known as the Longacre Square. His father was often on tour with a theatrical company, accompanied by his mother. As a result, in 1895, O'Neill was sent to a Catholic boarding school. In the year 1900, O’Neill enrolled as a day student at the De La Salle Institute.

Eugene O'Neill spent several years at sea, during which he is known to have suffered from depression, alcoholism and dereliction. In spite of this, “he had a deep love for the sea and it later became a prominent theme in many of his plays.” Several of O’Neill’s plays are set on board ships like those on which he is known to have worked. He later joined the Marine Transport Workers Union of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which was then fighting for improved living conditions for the working class. “O'Neill's parents and elder brother Jamie, died within three years of one another, immediately after he had begun to make his mark in the theater. (ace)” He decided to devote himself full-time to writing plays after his experience in at a sanatorium, where he was recovering from tuberculosis. The events immediately prior to going to the sanatorium are depicted in his masterpiece, Long Day's Journey into Night. O'Neill worked at the New London Telegraph, writing poetry as well and reporting. In the fall of 1914, he entered Harvard University to attend a course in dramatic technique by Professor George Baker.

O'Neill was a regular on the Greenwich Village literary scene, where he also befriended many radicals, most notable among them being the founder of the Communist Labor Party of America, John Reed. His acquaintance with Reed was so well known that Eugene O'Neill was portrayed by Jack Nicholson in the 1981 film Reds, which was about the life of John Reed. "O'Neill's involvement with the Provincetown Players began in 1916, where he reportedly arrived for the summer with "a trunk full of plays". The Provincetown Players records show that they performed many of O'Neill's early works. These performances were held both in Provincetown, and on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village. Some of these early plays, such as The Emperor Jones, later began downtown and then moved to Broadway. (ace)"

Eugene O'Neill's "first published play, Beyond the Horizon, opened on Broadway in the year 1920. It was met with great acclaim, and was even awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama." His first major hit was the play titled The Emperor Jones, which ran on Broadway in the same year 1920. The play obliquely commented on the U.S. occupation of Haiti. O'Neill's best known plays include Anna Christie, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1922, Desire Under the Elms (1924), Strange Interlude, which also went ahead to win yet another Pulitzer Prize in 1928, Mourning Becomes Electra (1931), and his only well-known comedy, Ah, Wilderness! After successful stints with his plays in the Broadway, Eugene O'Neill received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1936. O'Neill dedicated much of his acceptance speech to describing Swedish writer August Strindberg's influence on his work. In conversation with Russel Crouse, O'Neill said that "the Strindberg part of the speech is no 'telling tale' to please the Swedes with a polite gesture. It is absolutely sincere. [...] And it's absolutely true that I am proud of the opportunity to acknowledge my debt to Strindberg thus publicly to his people" (Tomqvist).

Eugene O'Neill suffered multiple health problems, including depression and alcoholism, over the years. He ultimately faced a severe Parkinsons like tremor in his hands, which made it impossible for him to write during the last 10 years of his life. O'Neill wrote three largely autobiographical plays, The Iceman Cometh, Long Day's Journey into Night, and A Moon for the Misbegotten. He managed to complete Moon for the Misbegotten in 1943, just before losing his ability to write. "O'Neill died in the Sheraton Hotel on November 27, 1953, at the age of 65" (ace). As he was dying, he whispered his last words: "I knew it. I knew it. Born in a hotel room and died in a hotel room" (Sheaffer). In 1956, "O'Neill's wife arranged for his autobiographical play Long Day's Journey into Night to be published, although his written instructions had stipulated that it not be made public until 25 years after his death. The play was produced on stage to tremendous critical acclaim and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1957. This last play is widely considered to be his finest. Other posthumously published works of Eugene O'Neill include A Touch of the Poet (1958) and More Stately Mansions (1

10.3 A BRIEF SUMMARY

The Hairy Ape is an expressionist play by Eugene O'Neill, first performed in 1922. The play is about Yank, who is a beastly and unthinking laborer. The protagonist of the play, Yank, is shown searching for a sense of belonging in a world controlled by the rich.

In the play, “the firemen, who are known as the workers who shovel coal into the engine of a Transatlantic Ocean Liner, are seen sitting in the forecastle of the ship drinking and having fun. The group has set out on a journey and are an hour out of New York City. The planned journey will make them have seven more days aboard the ship” (zala). The men are shown to be burly and muscular. The protagonist, Yank, is the fiercest looking of all the men, “and is shown sitting in the foreground quietly. Whenever Yank speaks, the other men immediately stop talking. Yank asks for a beer and the men immediately give one to him” (ace). As Yank and the men continue drinking, “Yank remains in control. He is shown as the leader of the group. Yank and his men joke about ‘thinking’ as they drink. Yank, in a joke repeated during the play, tells the men to be quiet, because he is trying to "tink." The men are shown mockingly repeating after him, "think" and then erupting into a chorus” (Ramiz) of "Drink, don't think!" After a while, “cutting through the general mayhem, a drunken sailor sings a tune about his lass at home. The mere mention of home outside the ocean liner infuriates Yank and he tells the sailor to be quiet. After a while, Long, one of the sailors, stands up and makes a Marxist speech. In the speech, he preaches to the men that if the ship is home, their home is hell, and the Upper Class put them there. In reply to the speech, Yank tells him to join the Salvation Army and get a soapbox. Paddy, a wise and older fireman tells the men that life on an Ocean Liner is hell by comparison to his life on a Clipper Ship. Paddy remembers the freedom he enjoyed, the purpose he had and skill for which he was valued. Yank tells Paddy that he is dead, because he is "living in the past of dreams". He glorifies his own job as the strength of the ship's speed and force.”

In another scene, according to Ramiz, “Mildred and her Aunt are seen waiting on the promenade deck of the Ocean Liner. While waiting, the two discuss Mildred's need to do service for the poor. The character of Mildred worked with the poor in Manhattan's Lower East Side and is currently on her way to do more service projects in Europe. Mildred's Aunt describes Mildred's service as "slumming". She also says that she does not understand why she has to do it internationally. The aunt tells Mildred that her service work just makes the poor feel poorer. In the scene, Mildred is shown currently waiting for the second engineer to take her down into the stokehole. When he arrives, the engineer escorts Mildred, clad in a white dress she refused to change out of, down into the stokehole.” As they proceed, we see “Yank and the men, hard at work, shoveling coal in the noisy stokehole. Yank leads the men at work. The moment the men take a break from their work, an anonymous whistle blower, from somewhere above them in the darkness, commands the men to keep working. “Yank

gets angry, and in a rage, screams up at the whistle-blower. He suddenly realizes that the men have stopped working" (Vyas). Still fuming, Yank turns to face Mildred. At the sight of Yank, Mildred cries for the men to take her away from the filthy beast and faints into the arms of the engineers" (Vyas).

In the next scene, "the men gather again in the stokehold. They are seen replaying and rehashing the Mildred scene and mocking Yank, the "filthy beast." Paddy tells Yank that Mildred looked at him scared as if he was a big "hairy ape." Enraged, Yank dives toward the door to find Mildred, but is restrained by the other Firemen." Later, the two characters, Yank and Long, are shown having traveled to New York City. Long intends to show Yank that all upper class people are like Mildred. To verify the same, "Yank tries to attract attention to himself by deliberately bumping into people and even accosting a young woman. He receives no response but "I beg your pardon." Finally, Yank is arrested because a gentleman misses a bus due to his antics" (Vyas). Yank is imprisoned on Blackwell's Island and is shown conversing with the other prisoners. "The other prisoners tell him that if he wants to get even with Mildred and her father's company he should join the Wobblies or the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.)." Yank then realizes that Mildred's father built both the physical and metaphorical cage he is currently trapped in. In a fury, Yank, with his strong arms, actually bends the bars of his cell, but is restrained by the guards.

Upon his release, "Yank visits the local office of Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.). Yank's radicalism, coupled with willingness to blow things up and his continuous preoccupation with "belonging" make them suspicious of him. Yank is thrown out on the street. Yank spends the night at the Battery and the next morning decides to visit the Monkey House at the Zoo. In the Zoo, Yank attempts to befriend the ape. He tells the ape that they are alike, they are both caged and taunted. Yank believes that he and the ape belong to the same club and even calls him brother. In a show of empathy, Yank releases the gorilla from his cage and approaches the ape to shake his hand. The gorilla immediately springs on Yank, crushes him with his massive arms and then tosses him into his erstwhile cage" (Ramiz). Yank dies in the cage.

10.4 PLOT SUMMARY

Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, written in 1921 and first performed in 1922, seems to be testing the boundaries of what dramas can do. O'Neill has mixed Mixing brutal expressionism with satiric ridicule. "The play depicts a portrait of the working man, Yank, in the industrial age, his muscle used to increase the wealth of the wealthy. At the same time his mind is dismissed as primitive" (LAtimes), something less than human.

The opening scene makes it very clear that Eugene O'Neill "knew well the drinking and bawling ship workers that he was writing about. O'Neill knew that The "firemen" in The Hairy Ape, the men in the stokehole whose job is to feed the ship's furnaces with coal, are anything but saints.

When not working, they can usually be found fighting until they pass out from either the drinks or each other's blows. The protagonist, Yank, is the king of this forecastle. He is shown as a man who earns respect through his superior strength. He is the drama's famed Prometheus, the tortured protagonist who wants revenge after another character, Mildred, who is the daughter of a steel tycoon, calls him a "filthy beast". Mildred is seen venturing down into the stokehole to examine the working conditions only to leave fleeing in horror at the sight of "the filthy beast" roaring at his fellow workers" (LAtimes).

At the beginning of the play, Yank feels superior to others because of his physical strength. O'Neill makes the readers realize that this strength makes him seem like an animal. When Yank is first introduced to the idea of being a hairy ape, he likes it, but he soon understands that such a label causes him trouble. He eventually makes an effort to rise above that role. O'Neill shows him struggling to understand the world and his place in it. Despite all his efforts at higher thinking, he is not successful at figuring it out. His resulting confusion often sends him into uncontrollable rages. The readers see Yank projecting his own doubts and faults on others. When Eugene O'Neill makes his protagonist say that others don't belong in society, he is really making Yank announce his own alienation. The character of Yank only begins to realize his true state as he dies.

Yank initially feels that he is above the first-class passengers on the ship. He reassures himself that the ship would not run without people like him. The climactic incidence with Mildred makes him realize that the rich are getting richer from his efforts while his own rewards remain worthless. After all, it is Mildred's father who owns the steel works as well as the ocean liner. Yank realizes that it is people like Mildred who can afford all the luxuries at the most expensive places. They are living the good life by exploiting workers like him. Yank realizes that he is only a wheel in the machine. He also understands that he is not the center of the industrial universe, as he had envisioned. This realization plants the first seeds of Yank's disillusionment. Before the incidence with Mildred, the protagonist, Yank, had not been directly exposed to the upper class. His perceived himself as one of an elevated status. He realizes the fact that the true mark of high status, money, is in the hands of the rich.

Eugene O'Neill's central character is haunted by the idea that Mildred, a rich girl viewed him as nothing more than a "hairy ape". This revelation makes him embark on a journey of revenge. During this journey, he stumbles through the wealthy neighborhoods and marginalized underbelly of New York society, along with his sailor friend, Long. Yank fails to realize his position in the city and begins pondering over his identity and place in the world. Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape deals with the theme of belongingness. The protagonist's quest for identity is very tragic. In fact, the tragedy of Yank can be viewed as the tragedy of millions in the modern age.

In this play Eugene O' Neill makes it clear that search for identity is the greatest problem of the modern civilization. O'Neill makes his central

character move from here to there aiming to find a solution to this problem. But he fails to get any solution. Yank reviews his situation in the world to find that his greatest crime was that of being born. O'Neill's play shows clearly that the existence of mankind is in danger in this machine civilization. Wages, food, home, family, etc. are just gimmicks and do not act as suitable remedy to the issue of identity. O'Neill shows that as the machine age created wealth, it went ahead to destroy the joy of living. Thus, The Hairy Ape has presented the paradox of modern civilization with great insight into its fundamental tragedy.

10.5 LET'S SUM UP

Eugene O'Neill, "in the final line of his complicated stage directions, suggests that "perhaps" it is only in death that "the Hairy Ape at last belongs." It can well be concluded that death provides the sole escape from the cages thrown up around us by modern times. Many critics believe that it is a proposition O'Neill incessantly defends in the body of his work" (Zala).

Audiences "confront much that is disturbing in Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, beginning with the title itself. When it was first produced in 1922, by the Provincetown Players, The Hairy Ape starkly divided the critics. The Freeman called it "without question not only the most interesting play of the season, but the most striking play of many seasons." Billboard even accused the play of smelling "like the monkey house in the Zoo, where the last act takes place and where the play should have been produced." It is reported that the members of the audience believed, after watching Eugene O'Neill's plays, that they had either just witnessed a work of unparalleled genius or were on the receiving end of a complicated prank. Nevertheless, O'Neill's convincing use of dialect, his blending of naturalism, expressionism, and psychological treatment of alienation in the modern world" (Zala), make the play one of his best works, as well as a revolutionary play of his time. All the literary styles employed by O'Neill went ahead to later become the hallmark of "American style" theater.

10.6 QUESTIONS

1. What is the objective to study Eugene O'Neill's life and his works?
2. Give your opinion on the life and struggles of Eugene O'Neill in emerging as a celebrated American playwright.
3. Explain the significance of the title of the play The Hairy Ape.
4. Eugene O'Neill's play The Hairy Ape is a commentary on one's struggle for self-identity in the world. Explain.
5. With reference to The Hairy Ape, explain how Eugene O'Neill uses psychological elements like Alienation to convey his message.

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11

CRITICAL STUDY OF EUGENE O'NEILL'S THE HAIRY APE

PART II

Unit Structure

11.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to enable students to understand the various critical comments on Eugene O'Neill's play The Hairy Ape. An analysis of the reformative themes and brilliant characterization help in developing the analytical thinking skills of the students. O'Neill explores the themes of identity crisis, human regression, industrialization, social classes, etc. in his play. A comprehensive study of the play will enable students to critically evaluate the text and understand O'Neill's writing style, critics' remarks, as well as different perspectives of life.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Eugene O'Neill has himself acknowledged that his play The Hairy Ape incorporates and depicts a number of styles. In 1921, in an article, he wrote, "It seems to run the gamut from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism—with more of the latter than the former". The initial response to the play by the audience and some critics were quite predictable. They believed that the O'Neill "focused on the skill of the play's staging and its strong impact on the viewers." Alexander Woollcoot of the New York Times, while praising Eugene O'Neill's skill with voicing the struggles of the working men, said, "Squirm as you may, he holds you while you listen to the rumble of their discontent, and while you listen . . . it is true talk, all of it, and only those who have been so softly bred that they have never really heard the vulgate spoken in all its richness would venture to suggest that he has exaggerated it."

Eugene O'Neill has very graphically depicted the situation of the sailors, the working men on a ship. Critics believe that O'Neill intended the stokehole as a depiction of Hell. Although, for the lead character, Yank,

this isn't a problem. Richard Skinner wrote in Eugene O'Neill: A Poet's Quest, "There is both splendor and terror at Yank's pride at being at the bottom." However, the pride does not work too well for Yank. It takes him through a number of episodes, all of which culminate into the face to face meeting with a real hairy ape, in the zoo. In Yank's monologue directed to the gorilla, Skinner found "the most profound problem of the disjointed and divided soul. Man is searching for peace in mere animal instinct and finding that then he cannot throw off his manhood. The answer? Escape even from thought."

Critics, over the years, have been divided over their opinion on The Hairy Ape. Many have declared the play to be a challenging piece of theater. However, the majority of the critics termed The Hairy Ape as a success. The critics have further been divided over what the central issue in the play is. Some critics have claimed that it is about the capitalist oppression of the workers, the subaltern, while many others have termed the play as a depiction of alienation in human society, leading to identity crisis.

Many critics have focused on the theme of alienation. They write about the sense of dislocation that affects the firemen. Yank and the other sailor characters may believe themselves to be in better touch with the world, when compared to the rich folks. The other workers may even echo their leader, Yank's sentiment that it is they who drive the world, which in a manner of saying, is true. But as Edwin Engel wrote in The Haunted Heroes of Eugene O'Neill, Yank relishes "a false sense of belonging to something, of being part of steel and of machinery, whereas he is actually their slave." As Yank slowly realizes that he doesn't really belong anywhere, the idea of enslavement gradually dawns on him.

The beginning of this realization is when the rich character of Mildred visits the stokehole. Mildred, with her words and reaction seems to have laid him bare. After the episode, Yank fails to realize where he fits into the world. His entire identity in the world becomes incomprehensible to him. This also becomes the reason for him to begin wandering around, in search for revenge. In the background of the revenge lies his sad quest for a community where he could feel one with them, and sense acceptance.

As the play begins, the audience sees the protagonist Yank totally satisfied in the secluded underworld of the stokehole. He is even shown quite proud of himself. However, Mildred's visit shattered that insularity. Immediately after her appearance, the downward spiral begins, and Yank starts referring to himself as the hairy ape. With his tragic end, many critics have viewed O'Neill's final message as one of permanent despair. Skinner wrote, "'The Hairy Ape' was to be only a symbol of the dark despair that sometimes sweeps over the soul to disappear later in a triumph of sheer will,"

11.2 CRITICAL COMMENTARY

It is important to question where does Eugene O'Neill's play The Hairy Ape fit into the body of works that have led many to declare him as the

most important American playwright? According to O'Neill, this play was very important, and it does seem to be his most clear exploration into the theme of identity crisis, and how human beings are lost from their past and present. The Hairy Ape is not considered in the same standard as O'Neill's other play, Long Day's Journey into Night, which is often regarded as a masterpiece. The Hairy Ape is still noted as one of the Eugene O'Neill's important dramatic works. It is also regarded as a highly effective example of American expressionist theater.

At first glance Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, seems to be making a political statement regarding the working class. He portrays a stark contrast between the sweaty firemen, Yank and his friends, whose sheer strength seems to propel the ship. Their efforts provide pleasure to the privileged class, who travel on the upper decks. The play has several references to exploitation of the workers and the working class. It can be argued, that although The Hairy Ape, has multiple references to capitalism and socialism, the play is really about the existential condition of man, that stems from the oppression faced by the working class. The play portrays the idea that humans rarely feel like they fit in, and Yank's character seems to convey that humans are essentially always alone and separate.

Eugene O'Neill ventured into expressionism with this play, The Hairy Ape, which is why, the audience seems a number of characters who seem to be only stick figures. For instance, there is Mildred, the spoilt daughter of a rich businessman, who cannot seem to face reality. This is in contrast to the fact that she talks about social activism and charity all the time. Despite her social stance, her true self is clearly visible. Her aunt is seen advising her to "be as artificial as you are." Ultimately, artificial is all Mildred seems to be, although, it must be acknowledged that her intentions are good and she does appear to have a good heart. The other character named Long, is seen mouthing socialist ideas, but is not given any real personality or character in the play. Paddy, a character who dwells on the past, is shown without any dimension. It is only the protagonist Yank, who is depicted as a swarthy, beastly king of the stokehole, who is a multidimensional and round character. And this central character, Yank, personifies O'Neill's consideration of the human condition. Andrew Malone in Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill writes, "Yank . . . is the only character who really lives, all the others merely serve as background against which he stands out."

As the play progresses, the audience sees how Yank changes from being the cocky leader of the strong firemen, to a defeated human being, who is crushed physically and morally. While he was confined to the limits of the stokehole, Yank is showed to possess a comfortable worldview. O'Neill makes him show disdain for the upper classes, the same upper class that another character Long criticizes. Yet, Yank believes that these upper class, who behave as oppressors are in reality inconsequential. According to Yank, "They don't belong." He repeats this sentence throughout the play. O'Neill makes Yank roar out his defiance toward the upper class, believing that his expertise of the furnace defines him and even raises him above all others.

Travis Bogard wrote in Contour in Time, "In the stokehole, Yank belongs. His credo, that he is the force at the bottom that makes the entire mechanized society move, is right. He is such a force until the meeting with Mildred causes him to doubt himself and sends him out in a frenzied effort to destroy the God of power he has served in his furnace altar." It can be therefore said that Yank's sense of place is shaky at best. The stokehole that others refer to as hell, makes him feel a strong connection. But it can be noticed that this feeling of connection does not go beyond the stokehole of the ocean liner. The stokehole therefore appears as the center of the universe for Yank.

Eugene O'Neill stages Yank's fateful encounter with Mildred, to shake his ideas about the world. Yank becomes an entirely different person, when her look of horror and revulsion makes a mark on his mentality. The encounter completely shatters his worldview, and he realizes that he is not the king of anything. Later, the audience sees him setting out roaring like a wounded beast. One can now sense that his only connections are with steel, in fact, earlier in the play, the audience recollects that he has called himself steel: "I'm steel—steel—steel! I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it!" As the play progresses, the audience sees how he is forced to admit his lack of connection with other humans. The character of Yank is seen totally alienated from the society.

Eugene O'Neill emphasizes this idea of alienation throughout the play, by employing a number of symbols. The steel, that can be seen in multiple forms, the clanging door of the furnace, the shovel, which is also an extension of Yank's arm, or even the bars of the prison and the cage of the gorilla at the zoo, is hard and ultimately alienating.

11.3 CHARACTER ANALYSIS (MAJOR CHARACTERS)

The Hairy Ape is an amalgamation of many characters, each of which plays a role in delivering the message of alienation, identity crisis and capitalism in the play.

Yank:

Yank is portrayed as a foot soldier in the industrial revolution, his profession is that of a fireman, one whose job is to stoke the massive furnaces that power a ship. He is shown boasting that he loves the heat of the stokehole in which he works. He even compares the heat of the stokehole to the heat of the fires in hell. Eugene O'Neill makes him a caricature of masculinity itself. He is show as the ultimate macho man. The audience sees him hating anything that is soft or "sissy" and he even makes fun of anyone who appears anything less than his idea of a strong man. O'Neill makes his physical strength the only factor that sustains him. Yank feels that his physical strength is the only thing on which he can depend upon. His physical strength becomes his only source of pride.

At the beginning of the play, Yank feels superior to others because of his physical prowess. As the play moves forward, he slowly realizes that this

brute strength makes him appear like an animal. After the episode with Mildred in the stokehole, where he is first introduced to the idea of being a hairy ape, he likes it. But, very soon, he finds out that the label of a hairy ape causes him trouble, both psychologically and physically. He is then shown eventually making efforts to rise above that image of a hairy ape. Yank struggles to understand the world and his place in it. Yank makes a lot of effort towards higher thinking, but unfortunately, he is not able to make any sense of it. Audience sees that his resulting confusion often sends him into uncontrollable rages. Yank also projects his own doubts and faults on others, as a result of being unable to place himself clearly in the world. It can be very evidently seen that Yank is announcing his own alienation, when he says that others (the upper class) don't belong in the society. One can begin to sympathize with him as one sees that he only begins to realize his true state as he dies.

Mildred Douglas:

Mildred appears as a vision in white, this portrayal is reasonably appropriate for her role as a member of the upper class promenade deck. She is young and shown as an idealistic person. Although, at the same time, she is also shown strangely aware that her efforts at idealism is without any real impact or significance. During her conversation with her aunt, the audience sees that she has a history of social activism and empathy for the lower class. This is despite the huge amount of wealth accumulated by her grandfather and father, who are steel tycoons. It is made very clear that the wealth amassed by Mildred's forefathers were made due to the efforts of workers such as Yank. One can sense that there is a hint of guilt in her inquiry into the state of the workers. It is also evident from her interaction with the aunt that her interest in the social causes lacks vitality. She is shown shrinking back in fear from the brutal sight of the stokehole and Yank, who is portrayed as the typical fireman.

Mildred's Aunt:

The aunt is a character with a small role to play. She is accompanying Mildred on the ship and does not agree with her charitable tendencies. This lack of sympathy is depicted in the banter between the two women. Eugene O'Neill makes the aunt criticize her niece for being insincere. She also suggests that artificiality is a much more natural pose for Mildred.

Long:

Long is a character, who like the other sailors, is also criticized by Yank. Yank does so because of his Socialist leanings. In spite of that Long still has much in common with Yank. The audience see that Long is the only character who sees the dehumanization that is occurring and also ties it to the growing importance of the machine. Long is shown agreeing with Yank when he sees the people in first class. These people in first class represent the upper, aristocratic ruling class. These are the people who have quite literally enslaved the workers like Yank, by putting them in front of the brutal furnace. At the beginning of the play when Yank

glorifies his position with the furnace, Long proposes socialist solutions to the problem of dehumanization and enslavement.

Paddy:

Paddy is a worker on the ship like Yank, and is shown as a person who dwells on the past. His dialogues appear as the voice of the past. He is shown often spending his time in a reverie, recollecting the pleasures he derived from sailing in the old days. According to him, it was back then when he could feel the wind and the waves. He is shown longing for the simplicity of the time gone by. As the conversation progresses, audience can understand that he has very reluctantly accepted the new mechanized form of water transportation. He is an old person, physically tired, and in general tired of life, and is shown wanting time to reflect on his life in the past. The soft character of Paddy acts as a contrast to Yank's brute strength. It serves as a recollection and reflection on the earlier days before industrialized society shaped dehumanized creatures such as Yank because of inhuman working conditions. These inhuman working conditions are also very clearly depicted on the ship where Paddy, and the other characters are sailing.

The Second Engineer:

The Second Engineer is shown escorting Mildred to the stokehole. He thus plays a small but important role of bringing the two vastly different worlds of the elite upper class and simple subaltern class together. He even cautions Mildred about the dirt she may encounter, which could also imply that he knows she may not like the sight of the working class, in their dirty outfits. He suggests that she change her outfit.

The Guard:

The guard's only duty is to keep the prisoners in control. He is faced with Yank, who is physically very strong and surprisingly out of control. His failure at controlling Yank can be a statement that the working class is sooner or later going to emerge all powerful, and the upper class will not be able to prevent their rebellion in any way possible.

11.4 THEMES

Class Conflict:

In Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, the protagonist, Yank, is an ultimate example of the lower class, the working category among people. People like Yank, and his friends, the other sailors, with their efforts and sheer physical strength, make the great capitalist machine run. Yank has the brawn but not the brain. In other words, he has the physical strength necessary for menial labor, but lacks the intellect to get it done smartly. Yank, and his peers provide the brute force that is expected to push America to the forefront of the industrial revolution. Unfortunately, the system exploits these efforts. The system enables reaping great profits for those who own the machines, but in contrast, offering very little to no reward for those who operate them.

In the play, the audience sees Yank evolving as a character. Initially, he imagines himself above the first class passengers who travel on the ship, because he believes that without people like him the ship would not sail. With time, and especially after the incidence with Mildred. he realizes that the rich are getting richer from the efforts of people like him, whereas his own rewards remain negligible. He even comes to know that it is Mildred's father who owns the steel works and the ship line. And with the money that comes with such ownership, people like Mildred who can afford all the luxuries. They are able to live the good life, but at the cost of exploiting the workers.

This realization that he is only a wheel in the machine, and not the center of the industrialization, marks the beginning of Yank's disillusion. Yank had not been directly exposed to the upper class before Mildred's visit in the stokehole. Earlier, he perceived himself as belonging to an elevated class. After the confrontation with Mildred, he comes to realize the fact that the true mark of elevated class, money, is in the hands of people like Mildred, and not those who bring in the money with their sheer hard work.

Human Regression:

In today's technologically advanced world, the job of the coal stoker, that was earlier done by people like Yank, is now done by a machine. This development forces workers into jobs that need nothing more than physical labor. This has, in turn, caused a steady deterioration of the working class into a Neanderthal, or Ape like state. This idea is made clear by Eugene O'Neill's stage direction for the play, which directly indicates that the firemen look like Neanderthals. He even describes Paddy, one of the oldest workers, as "extremely monkey-like." It can be understood that the longer the firemen work, the farther backwards they fall on the human evolutionary path. With this logic, Paddy, who happens to be one of the oldest workers on the ship, is particularly "monkey-like." In general, the play can be considered as a close investigation of this regressive pattern through the chief character, Yank. The play The Hairy Ape, marks his regression from a Neanderthal on the ship to an actual ape at the zoo.

Industrialization:

One of the major themes of Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape is the impact of industrialization and technological progress on the working class. O'Neill effectively portrays how Industrialization has reduced the human worker into a machine. In the play O'Neill shows how the men are programmed to do one task, and are almost always turned on and off by whistles. He very clearly demonstrates, with the help of the firemen characters how the working class are not required to think independently.

11.5 LET'S SUM UP

In Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, the message being conveyed is that for one to belong one needs to have an identity, one needs to possess self-confidence, and one must be a recognized member of a group and be

worthy of its respect. It can be seen that Yank loses his sense of belonging with Mildred's horrified cry. He does make an attempt to re-establish his identity, but his quest to reconcile his humanity with society is unsuccessful. He later even attempts to find his identity in the gorilla, but fails there as well. It can be inferred that he is a modern alienated human being.

Yank's character may come across to be naturalistic in nature, But Eugene O'Neill has employed a stylistic method, which can be categorized into expressionistic. This expressionistic stylistic method is inspired by August Strindberg. It can be seen that the psychological realism of Yank's behavior is in stark contrast with the visual and auditory devices usually associated with animal life and imprisonment. It is worth noting that Eugene O'Neill indicates in the stage directions for the first scene, that the setting is not to be naturalistic. It is also strange to note that when the bell rings, the men form a "prisoners' lockstep"; they begin shoveling coal rhythmically, like "chained gorillas." The motif of the cage, which is repeated in the jail on Blackwell's Island, and later again in the cage at the zoo, suggests that individuals are imprisoned by forces beyond their control.

The Hairy Ape is one of Eugene O'Neill's early plays, and it comes across as a powerful drama that verges on tragedy. The protagonist Yank, during his journey from his confident self, at the beginning of the play, to the lonely, broken figure at the time of his death, is portrayed as a larger-than-life human being. Yank's struggle against his fate appears compelling and heroic. Eugene O'Neill's has very critically portrayed the modern materialism and alienation, that has in turn defined the major themes of American drama. His attempt foreshadows the social and political works of other playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Sam Shepard, and Emily Mann.

11.6 QUESTIONS

1. How does the play comment on the life of the industrial worker and Yank's capability for thought?

2. In your opinion, does Yank find a sense of "belonging"? Does this change throughout the text?

3. With specific reference to the play, explain how the Transatlantic Liner becomes a representative of a specific worldview.

4. How do characters feel about Hell? Pick two characters and compare their views on hell and how this is indicative of their class status.

5. Why would O'Neill describe Paddy as "extremely monkey-like"? What does this say about Paddy's character and history?

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12

CRITICAL STUDY OF MARSHA NORMAN'S NIGHT MOTHER

Unit Structure

12.0 OBJECTIVES

- To critically analyze Marsha Norman's 'Night Mother'
- To understand important themes and symbols used in the drama

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Written by American playwright Marsha Norman, 'Night Mother' , premiered in 1983 and won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and was nominated for the Tony Award for Best Play. The play focuses on the tumultuous conversation between daughter Jessie, and her mother, Thelma as Jessie confesses that she plans to commit suicide that very evening. The dialogue unravels Jessi's reasons for coming to this decision and planning the culmination of the play thoroughly.

12.2 PLOT

The play happens in real time wherein the clock onstage shows the time to be 8:15 as the play begins and runs normally over the 90 minute duration of the play. It is set at Thelma Cates' - who is in her late fifties or sixties - house that she currently shares with her daughter, Jessie Cates, who is in her late thirties. The play opens with Jessie casually cleaning up the house, collecting newspapers, plastic bags and her father's gun as she mentions her plans to end her life that night. Naturally, Thelma tries to fruitlessly convince Jessie against her decision while the daughter cleans the house and works through a list of household practicalities that Thelma will need to know to remain functional after Jessie is gone. Thelma tries to call her son, Dawson, and an ambulance but Jessie responds with a threat to kill herself before the ambulance could reach them.

To distract her distressed mother, Jessie suggests that Thelma make them some hot chocolate and caramel apples. While Thelma agrees she still cannot come to terms with Jessie's reason that sadness has driven her to the extremes. Thelma is determined to understand that Jessie wants to kill herself; the two women then have a very open and frank discussion about their lives, relationships and feelings. Jessie mentions that she was closer to her late father and shared a very stoic relationship with him, however Telma says that she never understood or loved him. Jessie married Cecil, a carpenter that Thelma had hired with an intention of setting him up with Jessie. Jessie also has a son named Ricky who has become a criminal. Jessie then explains how she had suffered from epileptic shocks since a horseback riding accident leading Cecil to leave her. Jessie then moved in with her mother and now rarely ever leaves the house and is unemployed, stuck taking care of her mother. Without family or career, Jessie is left with a never-ending sense of dread and deep existential angst so severe that she views suicide to be her only respite.

About her epilepsy, Thelma confesses that it began during Jessie's childhood and that her biological father also suffered from seizures. However, neither Jessie nor her father knew about these because Thelma always covered up the incidents. Throughout the rest of the play Thelma bargains, pleads and threatens Jessie to not commit suicide but her daughter remains unyielding. Jessie further explains that their conversation that evening was to be kept private. She gives instructions and steps that her mother should take after her death and for her funeral. Jessie explains that Thelma should tell people who ask that Jessie simply said "'Night mother" and then went to her room and unexpectedly killed herself. Jessie then tells her mother that it is time for her to go. Outside her locked bedroom Thelma begs and screams until hears a gunshot. Then in shock she follows Jessie's directions and calls her son.

12.3 CHARACTERS

Jessie Cates:

Jessie is the protagonist of this play and is a suicidal women on the verge of middle age. Jessie is divorced from the man she loves but not enough to quit smoking that was an essential part of him leaving her. She is epileptic, overweight, pale and incharge of her strong minded mother. Her epilepsy makes it impossible for her to keep a job, leading her to not leave the house at all. She also is a mother to a son on the voice of being a rebel. By the end of the play we see Jessie take the shocking decision of committing suicide.

Thelma:

In her late 50s, Thelma is a woman who takes the world at its face value. Until the very last few hours of Jessie's life Thelma has never been confronted over this attitude of hers. Over the 90 minute duration of the play Thelma has to come clean about many things that she never thought she would confess to Jessie including her epilepsy. She spends most of the

play naturally trying to deter her daughter from committing suicide by trying to distract her with conversations that flow from one listless topic to another.

Dawson:

Dawson is Jessie's brother and like the rest of the characters that follow, he is only mentioned in the play and never comes on stage. Jessie is rigidly against inviting her brother as she thinks that his presence would only make her feel worse for not killing herself long ago.

Cecil:

Jessie's ex-husband who gave her a choice to quit smoking or lose him. She chose smoking and lost him.

Ricky:

Jessie's son. Jessie does not know where she is but knows that he is living the life of a rebel.

12.4 THEMES

Dignity:

The conflict of the play lies within the fact that Jessie chooses suicide over struggling against her odds. Jessie's life is full of desperation with no reprieve or hope at the horizon. The play thus makes an emotional appeal in favour of suicide rather than struggle as Jessie's condition seems completely hopeless in light of her overbearing mother. While suicide might not be the most dignified way to go, Jessie finds dignity in choosing something for herself rather than letting hopelessness steer her into more despair.

Alienation:

Although Jessie is very lonely, through her explanations it is clear that she has chosen loneliness for herself at every turn. She has her mother and had she given up smoking, she would have her husband. Yet, Jessie actively chooses to alienate herself from people and consequently feels stifled enough to choose extremes.

Identity Dysphoria:

It is evident that Jessie struggles with forming a strong sense of self and constantly defines herself through her relationships as Thelma's daughter, Dawson's sister, Cecil's wife and Ricky's mother. This shaky foundation of her identity causes the dissatisfaction in her life to increase. This leads her to taking drastic and unhealthy decisions to form some semblance of self - be it through risking her relationship by continuing to smoke or by taking the most selfish decision to commit suicide that only leaves destruction in its wake.

Free Will:

With an overbearing mother and an inherited condition that does not allow her to keep a job, Jessie finds herself feeling as though she lacks any sort of control on her life. Even her marriage to Cecil happens only under her mother's intentions. The only time Jessie chooses anything for herself, she chooses to smoke leading her to lose yet another person from her life. Thus, to exercise her free will and control on her own life, Jessie reaches the extreme decision of ending her life altogether.

12.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In 'Night Mother' we find psychological profiles of the two main characters: Jessie and Thelma. The play excels in another measure that is minimalism - just through a single day's conversation between a mother and a daughter the playwright is able to paint rich personal and emotional tapestries of the main characters. By articulating the psychological motivations of their thoughts and actions Marsha Norman is able to showcase the character's depth. Norman's plays including "'Night Mother" depict the following recurring motives:

The relationship between parent and child, usually mother and daughter; the inescapable encroachment of the past the present; and perhaps most tellingly, the struggle between rationalism and faith. The plays encourage the possibility of religious faith but with choice as an essential ingredient: Faith - like feminism - demands autonomy. (Coen, 1992, p. 22)

Monologues, similarly, are employed to capture the characters' personality. In "'Night Mother" monologues serve as a key device for improving the theatrical and dramatic effect of the play. Through this device, we learn that Jessie, despite her drastic resolution to end her life, is actually trying to gain control of her life. This is a reflection of how things outside her circle of influence have straddled on her will, autonomy and dignity. (The Christian Science Monitor, 2004, p. 15)

Further the author's explanation of the particular life circumstances that Jessie and her mother share, Marsha Norman is acknowledging universal human concerns. For instance, one of the major reasons why Jessie decides to end her life is that she feels utterly lonely and helpless frequently. Jessie makes it clear to her mother that Thelma's company does not alleviate her loneliness even momentarily. Moreover, Jessie's physical ailment, that is epilepsy, leads to her having a very restricted lifestyle and less than limited job opportunities, creating numerous frustrations for Jessie which lead to frequent bouts of depression and suicidal thoughts. Jessie is not an unusual case in modern society as we see tens of millions of psychiatric prescriptions get written everyday. People go through higher degrees of stress in workplaces with work-life balance often being skewered. When health complications like that are faced by Jessie and added to the mix of her already hopeless and bleak life, we see her logic in choosing the extremes. What Norman as a playwright seems to be suggesting is that Jessie's life is a symbol of a

broader social fact. Thus, "'Night Mother" is a poignant deception of modern human condition and the several mental issues that are born through the same.

However, despite all of the positive aspects of the play, especially the psychological probing and concern towards the human condition in modern times, one of its major flows should also be pointed out. Feminists received the play with a sense of ambiguity towards the culmination of the play. The major criticism received was towards the implication that suicide is an easy choice to solve women's problems. Feminist were of an opinion that this decision seems like a tame response especially when considering the absence of supportive male characters for Jessy viz divorced from her husband, estranged from her brother, her dead father and her rebel son. (Coen, 1992, p.23)

12.6 SYMBOLS

Daddy's Gun:

Jessie choosing her father's gun to end her own life is a clear symbol of the proximity and kinship that her and her father shared. It also stands as a symbol of the comfort and love that she associated with him which is why she depends on a belonging of his to regain that semblance of comfort in her otherwise bleak life. She gets to spend a final night with her mother and she gets to connect with her father again by using his shotgun to shoot herself.

Comfort Food:

When Jessie suggests that Thelma make her some hot chocolate and caramel apples to distract her Mama we get the first and undeniable evidence that Jessie and her Mama find comfort and reassurance in food. Food that is near and dear to their heart acts as a safe haven during instances that bring along emotional distress. While Jessie prepares details to take care of her mother once she is dead, she orders Mama enough snowballs to last her weeks, she refills the sugar jar and the honey jar. Jessie wants to give her mother as much help as she can, including helping her deal with the death by securing her sources of comfort.

Jessie's epilepsy:

Through the multiple instances that shape Jessie's character on stage, the most evident trait she exhibits is her shaky sense of identity. Jessie has had her life carved out for her and has little to no control over the course of it. Symbolically this is highlighted by her epilepsy - a condition in which a person collapses and their body behaves without their conscious brain controlling it. People who suffer from epilepsy miss out on hours and days of their life that they would never be able to recall. Jessie realizes that life is going on without her and even if she wanted to keep up with life, she doesn't always have the choice.Thus, her condition acts as a symbolic representation of her restrictive life and as an agent of constraint.

12.7 REFERENCES

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