SHIVAJI UNIVERSITY, KOLHAPUR

CENTRE FOR DISTANCE EDUCATION

(Elective Group 4 : Paper-VII)

20th Century American Literature

For

M. A. Part-II
Centre for Distance Education  
Shivaji University, Kolhapur

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Preface

Dear Learner,

20th Century American Literature is an optional paper No. VII (Elective Group 4, American Literature : Paper-VII) at M. A. Part-II. The Syllabus contains - five general topics; four novels; four plays; and three poets. The general topics throw light on the prevailing social conditions and their reflection on literature. To understand the novelists and the playwrights, one has to go through the general topics like The American Dream or Expressionism. The remaining topics are - four novels, four dramas and twelve poems of the three poets - Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and Anne Sexton. All these topics are covered in the book. The learners have to read and refer to a number of books, given at the end of each chapter. It is rather difficult for the distant learners to get all these books and understand on their own without the help of a teacher.

Realizing the problem of the distant learners, Shivaji University has undertaken the responsibility of preparing 'Self Instructional Material' in most of the subjects. This book is also prepared keeping in mind the needs, difficulties and problems of the distant learners.

Each unit in this book begins with the objectives followed by an introduction of the topic. It is divided into sections as per the syllabus, so that the students will feel comfortable when they go through it. There are comprehensive questions given under the heading "Check Your Progress" which will enable them to self-evaluate their understanding of the topic. The answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit.

The learners will find the book easy to understand because the language used in it is simple. The difficult words are glossed. The list of reference books is also provided under each unit for additional reading. The exercises will definitely
help them to prepare well for the examination.

The editors have been fortunate to receive encouragement, guidance and co-operation from many people in accomplishing this great task. We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to all who contributed to the making of this book.

Editors
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Each Unit begins with the section Objectives -

Objectives are directive and indicative of:

1. What has been presented in the Unit and
2. What is expected from you
3. What you are expected to know pertaining to the specific Unit once you have completed working on the Unit.

The self check exercises with possible answers will help you to understand the Unit in the right perspective. Go through the possible answer only after you write your answers. These exercises are not to be submitted to us for evaluation. They have been provided to you as Study Tools to help keep you in the right track as you study the Unit.
1.1 Objectives:
After studying this unit, you will be able:

- to know what is Expressionism
- to know what are the main characteristics of Expressionism
- to know how expressionism being used as a dramatic technique
- to examine the plays such as *The Hairy Ape* in the light of expressionistic technique
- to know expressionism is used not only in drama but also other forms of art such as painting, etc.

1.2 Introduction:
Students of 19th century American Literature (M.A. Part I) studied four literary movements, namely, Puritanism, Transcendentalism, The Frontier and the Adamic...
myth. You have also seen how these literary movements have profoundly influenced 19th century American literature. You are aware of the fact that literature and the social milieu have close relations. In M.A. Part II, you have different literary movements, such as Expressionism, Naturalism, the Lost Generation, the American Dream, and Southern Renaissance. Literature tends to reflect the dominant tendencies of its era. Unless you understand The Lost Generation movement, it is difficult to study the novels. Unless you understand Expressionism, it is difficult to understand a play like *The Hairy Ape*. Samuel Johnson has rightly observed; “To know a work of art, you transport to that age.”

The students of American literature should note that the conditions prevailing in that particular age would not only affect but also shape the literary work. The influence of the American Dream can be traced in the plays of Arthur Miller (*All My Sons*) Clifford Odets (*The Big Knife*) Naturalism, Expressionism, the Lost Generation, The American Dream and Southern Renaissance reflect the tendencies of the age. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see these general topics what the role they have played in shaping American literature.

### 1.3 Expressionism

1.3.1 **Self Assessment Questions**

(a) **Answer the following questions in one word / phrase / sentence each:**

1. What do you mean by expressionism?
2. Who are the popular American dramatists used expressionism as dramatic technique in their plays?
3. Who wrote The Adding Machine?
4. In what play does Willy Lowman appear?
5. What do you mean by convention?
6. Which is the earliest expressionist play?
7. What would happen to drama if Expressionism technique has not appeared in twentieth century?

(b) **Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct option:**

1. If Expressionism is used as dramatic technique in the plays, .................... is used as a novelistic technique in the novel.
1.4 Model Answers of Self Assessment Questions

Sub section 1.3.1 (a)

1. Expressionism is an early 20th century movement in the Arts, characterized by the use of distortion, abstraction exaggeration, and symbolism to depict subjective experience ratter than objective reality.

2. O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams

3. Elmer Rice

4. Death of a Salesman

5. Tradition

6. From Morn to Midnight

7. Drama should have remained a dead art.

Sub Section 1.3.1 (b)

1. c 2. a 3. b 4. b 5. a 6. b

1.5 Summary:

As is life, so is literature. Drama is a form of literature. What kind of life was in prevalent when Expressionism was the most dominated technique of the century?
Life in twentieth century was full of contradictions. It is in the twentieth century that man's faith in all accepted values has been entirely shaken. He has lost his faith in entirety and no longer does he bother about immortality. Having lost its center the absolute human life has become peripheral and relative. Hence, attention from God and society has become the dominant theme of the twentieth century literature.

Eliot, Yeats, Fry, Claudel and others wrote plays that ran counter to this attitude but they did not succeed. Their plays failed to be effective even as plays. Lorca, Synge, Pirandello and others wrote plays that succeeded artistically but their attitude too was irrelevant to modern times, and therefore, they remained to be authors of merely idyllic and sentimental plays.

With the emergence of expressionist playwrights of the 1920s and the existentialist playwrights of the 1940s, all the nice idealism of old world have completely disappeared. People have outgrown religion, political systems, and established convictions and certainties. They have been thrown into a state of bewilderment and apathy. Human existence with its corruption has outraged them and their plays bear powerful testimony to the anguish they felt within. “Brecht became a Marxist, Genet turned out to be a pederast and a criminal.” Ionesco became the greatest mocker of man. Satre reduced life to an absurdity and O’Neill offered every man the “warm dark peace of annihilation”. Since Kaiser's *From Morn to Midnight*, these plays have expressed the bedeviled position of man and his sordid legacy. Nausea Claustrophobia, lack of communication are the dominant themes of modern drama. Adisgust with life, a waiting for death and sense of Pascalian horror of emptiness all around characterize these plays. The people in them are persons cut adrift from all values venerated by tradition.

In all of them there is, however, a poetic striving to state the ineffable and this impelled each one of them to create a mystique of his own. Their language is full of fresh poetry and profound insights. It is needless to state that the twentieth century has unfolded newer and wider possibilities of drama. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see expressionist movement and its implication. *The New International Webster's Dictionary Thesaurus & Atlas* defines the term expressionism as “an early 20th century movement in the arts characterized by the use of distortion abstraction exaggeration and symbolism to depict subjective experience rather than objective reality” Stephen Matterson defines the same in different words. Matterson says “Term that originated in art criticism of the early years of the 20th century and is used broadly to refer to a style of writing in which representation of
the writer's emotions and subjectivity is privileged over the representation of surface objective reality. According to Elmer Rice, the great playwright, “Expressionism attempts to go beyond mere representation and to arrive at interpretation. The author attempts not so much to depict events faithfully as to convey to the spectator what seems to be their inner significance. To achieve this end the dramatist often finds it expedient to depart entirely from objective reality and to employ symbols, condensations and a dozen devices which to the conservative must seem arbitrarily fantastic.”

The expressionist dramatist does not maintain any pretense of showing life as we ordinarily see it. He concentrates directly on what goes on in the mind of the hero without any concern for naturalistic portrayal of his suffering. The setting is also made purposefully of unfamiliar pieces. Sometimes it is so unfamiliar that it may appear to be too theatrical. On the stage we are made to see so many weird and fantastic images of experience.

The characters themselves become mental images explaining a mental process.

So many of the old conventions have been used by the expressionist dramatist in different ways. In the old plays, the chorus served the purpose of a commentator. The hero would reveal his innermost thoughts to them and elicit their comments. Sometimes the aside helped the hero reveal his inner motives. In the Greek and Roman theaters, masks were used as a way of presenting the inner working of the characters' mind. In expressionist plays these devices varied according to the theme and the situation and the whims of the playwright. In *The Emperor Jones* the characters wear masks to reveal the private and the public masks that people wear in their lives. Arthur Miller used the flash back in his *Death Of Salesman*. Willy Loman, the protagonist, recalls to his mind the past events in his life and they are thus featured simultaneously on the stage.

In most of these plays, the set itself serves as an allegorical form for the substance of the play. From Morn to Midnight the earliest expressionist play George Kaiser presents life as a seven-day bicycle race. While the race is on, the people keep on hoping that there will be a serious accident. In an image like this Kaiser finds a dramatic equivalent for the futile competition in which man's life is wasted.

In *The Adding Machine* we are given a dull accountant whose name is Mr. Zero. He murders his employer and for this he is made to work in the Elysian Field on an adding machine. He works at it till he becomes a soulless slave of it. This play is also...
a comment on the mechanization of man.

In *The Skin Of Our Teeth*, Thornton Wilder brings a dinosaur and a man on stage to indicate the pre-historic times of man. The playwright tries to present the story of the survival of man from pre-historic times to modern times.

In *The Automobile Graveyard*, Fernando Arrabel sets the play in a restaurant, constructed of abandoned rusting automobiles complete with a valet and a prostitute who kisses every one good night. The play shows the sordid comfort man creates for himself in the wretched waste of an industrialized society.

In *Waiting For Godot* Samuel Beckett presents two tramps and stunted tree from the entire stage setting. The two tramps wait for someone who never comes. They do not know the name of the person whom they expect to see and they are not certain whether he exists at all.

O’Neill wrote two plays, *The Hairy Ape* and *The Emperor Jones*. Expressionistic technique is used in these two plays. *The Emperor Jones* is the portrayal of a man who is tortured by fears whose purport he can not understand. *The Hairy Ape* unfolds the gap between the individual and the system that is growing wider and beyond control. Yank is a symbol of deep protest that rises like a wave against the artificial values of modern life. Like Yank, the modern man, often asks, “Where do we go from here?” The only answer is “Hell”. *The Hairy Ape* is superior to *The Emperor Jones* in the sense that the expressionistic element in the former is controlled by realism. *In The Emperor Jones* the successive settings of the jungle scenes symbolize Jones’s fears and indicate the relationship between his overweening attitude and the forest that destroys him. In *The Hairy Ape* expressionism heightens the effect of realism. The play has been described by a critic as “truly gigantic dehumanization of pessimism...a bitter brutal, wildly fantastic play of nightmare hues and nightmare distortion”.

It was, however, Strindberg who wrote the earliest and the most influential expressionist plays. *A Dream Play, The Ghost Sonata, The Caucasian Chalk Circle* are popular plays written in the technique of expressionism. Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and a host of others who made use of expressionism in their plays.

Expressionism has certainly shown signs of decay in the hands of extremists. They have completely divorced it from reality and carried it to its extremes. They have overlooked the fact that any new technique in drama can survive only when it
is well integrated with realism. Without an ingredient of realism, a play has to subsist only on airy nothings. Great playwrights have never given up a strong realistic basis for any new technique they have developed knowing fully well that realism often tends to be dismally dull.

To sum up, it is to be noted that twentieth century has unfolded newer and wider possibilities of drama. Expressionism is the most dominant technique of the century. Still even today to be expressionistic is to be ‘modern’.

1.6 Exercises:

1) What is Expressionism?
2) What are the distinguished features of Expressionism?
3) What was the contribution of ‘O’Neill, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams to expressionistic drama?
4) What are the literary conventions used by the expressionists in their plays?
5) Write a note on expressionism and Impressionism?
6) What are the differences between Expressionism and Impressionism?
7) Write a note on Expressionism as a dramatic technique

1.6.1 Exercises with model answers

Q. 1 Write a note on Expressionism as a dramatic technique?

Impressionism is to the novel, Expressionism is to the drama. Expressionism is used as a dramatic technique. Expressionism is the result of the revolution in the field of drama. The two great playwrights, Ibsen and Strinberg brought a revolution in drama. Ibsen broke with the past and fully concentrated on individual interior world. Ibsen tried to delineate human passions instead of the history of persons and their achievements. Strinberg has gone a step further in that he probed the human psyche and presented the aberrations in human character. Breaking the barrier between the normal and the abnormal, he has shown that the insane may be more rationale than the so-called normal man or woman. Neurosis is no longer a disease of the mind, but something born in reaction to the irrationality of existence. His dramas are full of neurotic characters. Thus Stringberg, more than Ibsen, becomes the progenitor of the most powerful schools of modern drama.

Expressionism emerges in 1920s when man lost his faith in society and God.
The playwrights chose nausea, claustrophobia and lack of communication as the themes of their plays. In order to project their reality of life, the playwrights not only picked up the old conventions but also invented new techniques. The chorus, the ‘aside’, mask, flashback are the old conventions which again appeared in twentieth century drama. From Gorge Kaiser to ‘O’ Neill, the technique became popular and was widely used later in T.S. Eliot, W.B.Yeats, Fry and Claudel.

Expressionism, at the outset, was largely used in painting. In painting, it refers to a movement begun in Germany around 1905, in which a group of painters, among them Kokoschka, Kandinsky, These painters rejected the imitation of external reality in order to try to express the inner self or some essential vision of the world. When it was used in literature, especially in drama form, it refers to the author’s subjective vision. Expressionist works have usually been experimental and often anti-realist. In American writing, expressionism developed as part of the modernist movement and was especially important in the development of drama. Prominent examples of expressionistic drama include. The Adding Machine (1923) by Elmer Rice, the early plays of Eugene ‘O’ Neill, and works by Thornton Wilder, Tennesse Williams and Arthur Miller. William Faulkner uses expressionist techniques in his early novels, as does T.S. Eliot in The Wasteland.

The expressionist plays fail, as Ionesco says, because they are the mouthpiece of ideologies. Despite this, the revolution in American drama is still continuing.

Q-2 What are the characteristics of Expressionism?

If Impressionism is to novel Expressionism is to drama. Expressionism is a dramatic movement, born and flourished in twentieth century. The plays written during 1920s bear the characteristics of Expressionism. There are a host of playwrights like 'O' Neill, Arthur millar Tennessee Williams Strindberg, who employed expressionistic technique in their plays. The writers focus on the inner life of the individual rather than his history and achievements. Themes, like nausea, claustrophobia and lack of communication are dominant themes. With this perspective at the back of mind let us see the distinguished characteristics of expressionism. The distinguished features are:

1. Most of plays shunned up writing drama in act-wise. The plays were written in scene-wise. The Emperor Jones was in eight scenes. Each scene is tight and compact.

2. Nausea, claustrophobia, lack of communication are the themes that recur in
plays.

3. The characters are limited in number and they are shown abnormal. They have been thrown into a state of bewilderment and apathy.

4. Because of a deliberate simplification of character and incident, dialogue was necessarily pared down to represent the basic feelings of man in the mass. It was not possible to have complicated conversation, for that would take on particularity world incorporate that element of the at least apparently haphazard that emerges when real people communicate. Dialogue is the soul of the play.

5. Old conventions such as the chorus, the aside, the flashback, the symbols are used to expose the characters

6. Creation of myth is another characteristic of the expressionist plays. In *The Emperor Jones* one notices that Jones always says “Only silver bullet kills him”.

7. Use of symbols or symbolism plays a vital role in defining the characters. A symbol is more suggestive than a word. The dramatist creates various symbols and symbolic devices to project the inner world of the play on the stage.

8. The language that the characters make use of is full of fresh poetry and profound insights.

9. Like masks, the flash back technique reveals the inner mind of the character. Arthur Miller used flash back in his *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman, the protagonist recalls to his mind the past events in his life.

10. The expressionist drama is based on psychological realism. To the expressionist dramatist reality is something that man daily cheats himself into believing. To him realism is mere illusion which preserves only the appearance of reality and not a revealing image of it, and therefore he tries to throw some special light on reality by shifting his dramatic focus from the external to the interior.

11. In the wake of the various innovations made by these two dramatists - 'O' Neill and Strindberg-there followed modified forms of expressionism such as surrealism constructivism, symbolism, epic realism, selective realism and so on and so forth.

12. It is argued that the expressionist dramatists are didactic writers who would like to convey a massage through their art.

13. The playwrights make drama a mouthpiece of ideologies. The playas of
Strindberg centered around the individual and not society.

14. Another characteristic is that the dramatist makes use of different colours such as white, black, scarlet. The colours are used according to the demand of situation.

15. Use of music like tom-tom which reveals the unconscious mind of the character. The fears of Emperor Jones are well revealed through the use of the music tom-tom.

16. 'O' Neill makes use of masks in the play, *The Emperor Jones*

'O' Neill recommended the use of masks in the *Emperor Jones*. He wanted all the figures in Jones's flight to be masked.

17. The setting is also important in the expressionist plays. The expressionistic setting in *The Hairy Ape* explains the theme most effectively. These are and a few more are the characteristics of expressionist technique.

1.7 Activities / field work :

1. Make a list of expressionist playwrights who have enriched dramatic writing.

2. Study the prescribed play *The Hairy Ape* in the light of expressionist theory.

1.8 Further reading :


1.1 Objectives:
After studying this unit, you will be able to:
- know what is Naturalism
- know the chief exponents of naturalism
- know the chief traits of naturalism
- Examine novelist in the light of naturalistic theory
- Assess the American novelists who made use of naturalism
- Realise the difference between Naturalism and Realism

1.2 Introduction
There are a number of literary movements which shape American Literature. Twentieth century is regarded as the age of inventions, experiments and innovations. In the previous literary movement, that is expressionism has acted as a dramatic technique. Similarly, naturalism is the technique for the naturalistic novelists. What
is the naturalism? How does it differ from Realism? What are the traits of naturalism? Who practised naturalism? These questions come in mind when we seriously think of the literary movement Naturalism.

Naturalism is defined as an extreme form of realism. The New International Webster’s Dictionary Thesaurus & Atlas define the terms as “the doctrine that phenomena are derived from natural causes and can be explained by scientific laws”. In literature, art, etc. naturalism means “literal and unidealised representation of life and nature.” It is clear from these two definitions that Naturalism – is a literary movement; an extreme form of realism; everything is related to scientific knowledge; naturalism maintains that no supernatural realities to the study exist. Zola, the great theorist propounds the theory of naturalism. According to Zola, the novelist should be like the scientist performing an experiment, independent of moral conventions or preconceived theories. Writers like Emile Zola, impressed with the new scientific thought of the nineteenth century which included social, psychological, philosophical and aesthetic implications, came out with a new catchword naturalism. To put it briefly, it was the novelist’ response to the revolution in thought that modern science had produced. Naturalism is a complex literary movement in which the distinctive strains of traditional humanistic values and contemporary deterministic beliefs are integrated.

1.3 Naturalism

1.3.1 Self Assessment Questions

a) Answer the following questions in one word / phrase / sentence each:
1. What is Naturalism?
2. Who is the exponent of Naturalism?
3. Who wrote McTeague?
4. Who is Stephen Crane?
5. Which is the popular novel of Theodore Dreiser?
6. Is naturalism indigenous movement?

b) Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct option
1. Emile Zola is a ................ writer.
   a) Indian  b) French  c) Russian
2. Naturalism came from ............ to the United States
   a) England    b) France      c) Germany
3. Democracy was a biting satirical novel by ...........
   a) Henry Adams b) E.W. Howe    c) Stephen Crane
4. Maggie has a sub – title by name ..................
   a) A Girl of the Streets  b) a loose girl   c) A sexy girl
5. Naturalism is a literary movement in American literature from......... to ........ period
6. ............... is the heroine of the novel , The Awakening
   a) Edna Pontellier  b) Maggie       c) Celia

1.4 Model Answers of self – Assessment questions.

Sub section 1.3.1 (a)
1. Naturalism is an extreme form of realism
2. Emile Zola is the exponent of Naturalism
3. Frank Norris Wrote McTeague.
4. Stephen Crane is an American Naturalist.
5. The American Tragedy is the popular novel of Theodore Dreiser
6. Naturalism is not American movement.

Sub – section 1.3.1 (b)
1. b  2. b  3. a  4. a  5. a  6. a

1.5 Summary:

It is said that a good novel projects society, and the society is the bone of the story of the novel. The novelists have invented a number of techniques to project the society. Naturalism or Naturalistic technique is one of the techniques which projects the prevailing society of 1890 s. The technique continues until the 1920s. The movement, first, spread in Europe. Later, it came to the United States; remained from
The 1890s until the 1920s. Naturalism is strongly associated with realism. It is defined as the extreme form of realism. Naturalism is more than a literary technique, involving as it does the philosophy of determinism. Naturalism is anti-romantic in emphasizing the limited reality of human to impose will upon their own destiny. There is no place for imagination. For the naturalist, it is the duty of the writer to present to reader reality without illusion, to offer a scientific, detached view of it rather than to adorn or mislead or simply please the reader. The writer is also seen to have a diagnostic function, scrutinizing the ills if society, and the scientific element of naturalism has it origins in the theories of Darwin and, after Marx, in the development of the social sciences during the nineteenth century.

The great exponent of Europe, namely, Balzac, Flaubert and Goncourt brothers, by and large, made use of naturalism in their works. The brothers Goncourt conceived of the novel in terms of science. “The novel of today is made with documents narrated or copied from nature, just as history is made with written documents”, they declared in their journal in 1865, and they proceeded to put this principle into practice by gathering voluminous information upon the life of the Second Empire, showing a marked favouritism toward the sordid and the sensational.

Emile Zola was the first thorough going exponent of “scientific naturalism”. Zola was fascinated by the Darwinians, Comte, Marx and Taine. Zola enthusiastically presented himself as an evolution, a positivist, and a materialist. According to Zola, heredity and social environment are important factors in the lives of the people. The protagonist was society itself, from salon to coal mine, from mansion to brothel. There is no sentimentalizing, no promise of ultimate Utopia; the picture is one of unrelieved decadence, of an unregenerate middle-class society riding to political and moral destruction.

For other forms of literature, America borrowed from England, Russia and other countries. Now, it was the country France which influenced America for its development of naturalism. American naturalism, which after a timid beginning in the 1890s was to grow into our most prevalent literary attitude during the first half of the twentieth century, owes little or nothing to England, where the movement has never been strong in creative writing. The French writers and the Russian writers Tolostoy and Dostoveski inspired the American writers. These writers were also influenced by Flaubert, Zola and the Goncourts.

There are some important reasons for the advent of naturalism in the country. The fanatic attitude of the Calvinists is the most important reason. The society was
suffering from Puritanism and Calvinism. The writers of the period did not believe in Puritanism or Calvinism. Instead of Predestination, they saw man as a bio-chemical phenomena, a bundle of reflexes responding mechanically and helpless to stimuli too powerful to be controlled. Instead of original Sin, they saw man damned by his weakness against the forces of the universe, suffering endless and pointless agonies merely because, as Yank bitterly remarks in O'Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*: “I was born – get me?” In place of God, God of science occupies in the minds of the people.

The second most important reason for the rise of naturalism is the emergence of industrial and political growth. The machine, though the economy was improved, made human beings dull and drab. The rich became richer, and the poor became poorer. The ordinary man was the victim of sweatshops, starvation wages, unfair competition, and erratic and irresponsible price. What Oliver Goldsmith said is very true: “Where wealth accumulates, men decay.” These two important reasons have profoundly influenced on thinkers and writers. The attitude of the people became pessimistic. The novels of Steinbeck like *Grapes of Wrath* reflect upon the society which was suffering from these ills. *Democracy*, the novel of Henry Adams, is a biting satirical novel on the prevailing conditions. According to Adams, “history itself is the result of scientific forces, a branch of physics, an accelerating succession of stages in which man was governed first by instinct, than by increasingly shorter cycles of faith, mechanics, electricity, and pure thought, after which all would disintegrate into cold and inert mathematics”. Because of science, man lost his faith and harmony of life. O’Neill has rightly observed: “Man must have some sort of God to believe in the dilemma of the modern age. Science has killed the old god and has failed to supply the necessary substitute.

Among the pioneer works in naturalistic vein were E.W. Howe’s *The story of a Country Town*, (1883) and Joseph Kirkland's *Zury, The Meanest Man in Spring Country* (1887). Hamlin Garland, though not a naturalist, paved the way for the coming writers. Garland enabled subsequent writers to portray life in America with far greater strength and veracity than formerly.

Following Garland was Stephen Crane (1871–1900). His best writings are - *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), and two collection of short Stories - “The Open Boot” (1898) and “The Blue Hotel” (1988). Crane’s portrayal of the emotions of ordinary men and his bitter sense of the cruel and insignificant role of man in the universe make a sudden and striking contrast to the timidity of the genteel tradition. His writings are still among the front rank in the history of American fiction and compare
very favourably with the work of such modern writers as Hemingway and Faulkner.

Other outstanding naturalists were Frank Norris (1870–1902), Jack London (1876–1916), Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945). The first two excelled in examining the brute in man and in presenting the close kinship between humanity and the jungle. Norris wrote and published *McTeague* (1899), *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). London wrote and published *The Sea Wolf* (1904) and *The Call of the Wild* (1903). Norri’s *Blix* (1899) is an excellent study in adolescence; *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Pit* (1903) are highly interesting projections of the weakness of man before the deterministic forces of Trade. Dreiser, the most famous of these authors and one generally regarded as the bellwether of modern fiction, was a clumsy but powerful writer who was both fascinated and repelled by the naturalistic attitude and whose works, particularly *Sister Carrie* (1899), *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911) and the *Cowperhood trilogy* (*The Financier* 1912, *The Titan* 1914, *The Stoic* 1947) represent a combination of reluctant naturalism and normal idealism.

It is to be noted that none of these authors ever attained the completely naturalistic outlook any more than did Zola himself. Though gloomy, pessimistic, and often bitter, none could accept the view of an amoral and predatory universe. And, above all, none could adopt a thoroughgoing scientific attitude, without prejudice, in his portrayal of the American scene.

Naturalism in literature is a moral and spiritual absolute zero, conceivable but unattainable, and the term “naturalistic” when applied to a book or an author must be taken only in a relative sense. Perhaps Vernon L. Parrington has been clearer than any other critic when he listed the criteria of naturalism in the fiction as:

1. An attempted objectivity.
2. Frankness
3. An amoral attitude toward material
4. A philosophy of determinism
5. Pessimism
6. The projection of “strong” characters of marked animal or neurotic nature.

For all practical purposes, a book in which some of these characteristics are found to a marked degree can be classed as “naturalistic”, the purely naturalistic work has never been written and, if written, probably could never be read.
Naturalism symphonizes the loss of individual dignity in a world grown smaller, more mechanized, more collectivistic., it removes from mankind most of the spiritual belief that formerly had served as a bulwark in times of adversity., it paints for the distant future only the most academic and improbable Utopias. In the late nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold saw himself “standing between two worlds; one dead, the other powerless to be born” and Henry Adams in 1905 looked sourly upon the Dynamo and saw in it a symbol of Infinity, of a crazy, impersonal God leading the world into centrifugal chaos.

1.6 Exercises

1. What is Naturalism?
2. What are the characteristics of Naturalism?
3. Write briefly the note on Naturalists of American literature
4. How were the American naturalists influenced by Emile Zola?
5. Write a note on Realism versus Naturalism
6. What are the drawbacks of naturalistic technique?
7. Write a note on Theodore Dreiser as a naturalist.

1.6.1 Exercises with model Answers

Q.1 Write a note on the impact of Naturalism on the American novelists

OR

Trace the development of Naturalism in American Fiction.

Although its origins were European, naturalism was an important movement in American literature from the 1890s until the 1920s. Naturalism is the extreme form of realism. Naturalism is anti romantic. Naturalism is more than a literary technique, dealing with the philosophy of determinism. The American naturalists were profoundly influenced by Emile Zola, Comte, Tain, Goncourt brothers. These writers believe in: to present reality without illusion, to offer a scientific detached view of it rather than to adorn.

American naturalism developed broadly in two directions, one examining the social and political dynamic of American urban life and the other examining the biological aspects of deterministic thought. The influence of Marx is frequently
evident in the former branch and that of Darwin in the second. American writers endorsed this view of the writer’s responsibility to analyse. Stephen Crane is one of the pioneers of American naturalism. He wrote a number of novels of which Maggie, A Girl of the Streets 1983) is a classic of American naturalism. Maggie became the victim of environment. The environment of New York town compelled Maggie to the verge of suicide. The novel of Crane has a number of features of naturalistic technique.

The impact of social and economic forces is shown in the novels of W.D. Howells, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser. The elements of naturalism are present in the works of Upton Sinclair and John Steinbeck. Sinclair and Steinbeck brought a progressive socialist political commitment to the movement. Dreiser wrote his notable novel An American Tragedy (1925). Norris wrote McTeague 1899), The Octopus 1901 Vandover and the Brute (1914). These novels were particularly significant in exploring the fate of the individual during the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the United States. Naturalist writing is closely linked to American social change during a period of dramatic capitalist growth and the rise of big business. Social Darwinism forms an important part of naturalism at the end of the 19th century.

The deterministic concern with biological forces is generally less evident in American writing than it is elsewhere. It emerged in the writings of Mark Twain (especially Pudd’n head Wilson, 1894), Kate Chopin (The Awakening, 1899), Jack London (The Sea – Wolf, 1904). Naturalism was most influential in the period 1890 – 1925. Some aspects of naturalism survived into modernism. Hemingway’s early work often uses the naturalistic concept of the individual who is being tested by extreme circumstance and learning to live without self – delusion. Realist writers like Sherwood Anderson and Sinclair Lewis made use of naturalistic idioms in their analysis of human motivation and circumstance.

1.7 Activities / Field Work

1. Make a list of American writers who made use of naturalistic technique in their works.

2. Make a list of European writers who influenced the American writers.
1.8 Further Reading


Unit-2 (A)
THE AMERICAN DREAM

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2.1 Objectives
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2.4 Model Answers of self-Assessment Questions
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2.8 Further Reading

2.1 Objectives:
   After studying this unit, you will be able to:
   • trace the American Dream as one of the important movements of American literature.
   • to trace the effects of the American Dream on the American society.
   • to pinpoint the role of American Dream in American society
   • to assess and evaluate the constructive and destructive part of the American Dream
   • Know how American Dream has been used in Literature
   • Know the reasons for the decline of the American Dream
2.2 Introduction

The American literature is quite fabulous due to a number of national and international literary and philosophical movements which play a crucial role in expanding and strengthening the various forms of literature. The trends and movements like the frontiers the transcendentalism, the enlightenment, the puritanism, the expressionism, naturalism, the lost generation, pragmatism and the Adamic myth played vital role in shaping American history and literature. The pioneers of these movements were either men of letters or philosophers who genuinely contributed to the development of American literature. Mention must be made of transcendentalists who, in different forms of American literature brought-fresh, innovative and rhetoric contribution and paved the way for forthcoming generation.

The American Dream is one of the important movements which has been playing the significant role throughout the history of American literature. It is appropriate to say that the American Dream does not merely refer to the identity of an individual, it also refers to American society which was consistently struggling hard to escape from the clutches of the orthodox religious conventions. The American Dream, unlike other movements has unlimited horizon. In poetry, in novels, in the drama and in other forms of literature, one can witness the reflection and different implications of American Dream. Hence it is very paramount to dive deep and see the various colours of American Dream in American literature.

It is to be noted that all the literary movements of American literature, in the course of time, came and disappeared but the American Dream is still persisting and influencing. It is still seen and felt in every walk of life.

The American culture is, more or less, found coloured by the American Dream. It is commonly noted that the Americans are fond of dreams and everything which is bigger as a result of American Dream.

2.3 The American Dream

2.3.1 Self Assessment Questions

a) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each:

1. Who popularised the term American Dream?
2. What is the concept of American Dream?
3. Who was John Calvin?
4. Who wrote The American Idea of Success?
5. Who wrote The European Dream?
6. Who taught the philosophy of rags to riches?

b) Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct option:
1. Epic of America was published in-------------------
   (a) 1930    (b) 1935    (c) 1910
2. Facing up to the American Dream was written by -----------------
   (a) Jennifer H. Mochschild (b) Emerson (c) Benjamin Franklin
3. During the time of American Depression,-------------was the president of America.
   (a) Robert Kennedy (b) Barak Obama (c) Franklin Roosevelt
4. The Negro's Place in American Dream was written by ------------
   (a) Carl T. Rowan (b) Robert A. Devine (c) Herbert Hoover
5. The Money Man was a historical novel, written by -------------------
   (a) Thomas Costain (b) Samuel Shellabarger (c) Ardia Locke Langley
6. 'Man is the measure of all things' is the key note of ------------------
   (a) Individualism (b) Humanism (c) Romanticism

2.4 Model Answers of Self Assessment Questions

sub section 1.3.1 (a)
2. The concept of American Dream is the vision and the story of American success
3. John Calvin was the pioneer who divorced Old World seeking religious liberation and economic opportunity.
5. Jeremy Rifkin wrote The European Dream.
6. Horatio Alger taught the philosophy of rags to riches.

**Sub – section 1.3.1 (b)**

1. a 2. a 3. c 4. a 5. a 6. b

**2.5 Summary:**

There are literary movements that are directly or indirectly related to an individual. There are movements that are directly or indirectly related to society. Adamic myth and America Dream relate to society and an individual at large. The American Dream emerges when the environment of society was quite congenial and favourable.

Gilbert Chinard, speaking of the American Dream, affirms that “as a state of mind and a dream, America had existed long before its discovery”. Ever since the days of western civilization people had dreamt of a lost paradise, a new Eden, a golden age characterized by abundance and a lack of sweat and oil. There are factors such as the crucial importance of the American dream, self-trust expansion and transcendentalism as formative influences leading to the humanistic perspective.

In its purest form the American Dream is an ideal for society rather than for the individual, being a vision of a society that permits individuals to develop their potential without reference to their background or origins. Thus it is about a society that fosters opportunity and fulfillment, and not about individual success or accumulation of wealth. The term “American Dream” was in its modern sense in the 1930s, and the historian James T. Adams is credited with popularizing it. In The Epic of America (1931), he wrote:

> [the] American dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtless counted hurly. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in older civilizations, unrepressed
by social orders which had developed for the
benefit of classes rather than for the simple
humanbeing of any and every class (Adams 9).

In Facing up to the American Dream (1995), Jennifer L. Hochschild usefully identifies four tenets of the dream. They are:

1. that every one may participate equally in society,
2. that every one may have a reasonable anticipation of success,
3. that success comes from one’s own efforts,
4. and that failure is a result of lack of talent or will.

Personal advancement for an individual success to become financially able was the earnest feeling of every American close to their heart. As the concept of American Dream has intimate concern to American idea of success the analysis of the concept requires to go through the comprehensive study of the American idea of success.

Richard M. Huber, in his work, The American Idea of success (1971), elaborately discusses the typical American notion of success. For most the American "success is making money and translating it into status" (1971). Herman Melville, Cotton Mather, Jeremy Rifkin, Winthrop, William Penn, Benjamin Franklin, Horatio Alger Jr. William Thayer, Russell Conwell, Emerson and a host of others wrote a number of books reflecting upon the different aspects of American Dream. Like other writers on different fields, Emerson wrote about the individualism of an American. Emerson appeals to his ambitious fellow countrymen to practise an intellectual bent of personality and self consciousness to make the fullest possible use of opportunities available.

Americans are outstandingly passionate for wealth and achievement. They did not hesitate to worship wealth as 'almighty dollar'. Later we notice that a number of books were written on the American Dream and its rapid progress. This craziness of the American Dream or success begins to appear in all forms of literature. The plays, the novels, and the stories were coloured by this notion of success in American literature. Some playwrights like 'O' Neill viewed American Dream as junk heap of delusions and bitter fantasies. The Blacks, the Jews and the Feminist writers took American Dream according to their culture and society. The Negro dreams of
freedom opportunity and abundance. Women dreamed of liberation and equal rights. The Jews dreamed of finding a secure place like America.

Though the American Dream has been highly successful, yet it has been criticized in literature on various grounds. First, the material aspect of the dream is a corruption of its social vision. Secondly, The American Dream is an illusion through which inequalities are maintained and class realities are concealed. Thirdly, it fosters individual achievement at the expense of social progress. Fourthly, it supports truthless plutocracy. Sixthly, it equates personal fulfillment with material gain and finally it results in a narrowly selfish definition of success.

In his book, The European Dream, Jeremy Rifkin comments on the American Dream saying that – The American Dream is languishing, but new European Dream is beginning to capture the attention and imagination of the world. European Union of twenty five states are joined together to frame European Dream which is universally applicable and appealing.

American Dream and European Dream have certain similarities. In both these dreams, 'to be free and secure' is the common vital idea. But in American Dream, to be free and secure has a negative implications, negative in the sense that the freedom is related to the autonomy and to be autonomous one needs to be financially sound. To Americans material prosperity provides absolute independence. Whereas the European Dream believes in existing in embeddedness. To be free for European Dream seekers is to have free access and free interdependent relationship. It enlarges the idea and canvas of the success which imparts competitive and comparative analysis and assessment of the success. All inclusive nature of European Dream assures absolute security.

American Dream failed miserably. Rifkin argues that we have become a people who have grown fat, lazy and sedentary, who spend much of our time wishing for success but are unwilling to 'pay our dues' and certain personal commitment required to materialize the dreams and desires. Workaholic American Dream seekers believe in 'live to work', whereas European Dream advocates 'work to live., The over work results into the physical, psychological and above all social illhealth. An increasing number of mental asylums, counselling centres are the indicative results of over work tension of American Dream. European Dream prefers the safer secure and easy life. It supports the shared responsibilities on the other hand American Dream is all about rugged individualism. It is an individual journey towards material attainment.
As once, America was the ‘city upon a hill’, Europe has become now new ‘city upon the hill’, inviting attention of the minds of the progress seekers. The world is looking forward to this grand new experiment in transnational governance, hoping it might provide some much needed guidance when the humanity is heading towards the globalizing world. European Dream with its emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, quality of life, sustainability and deep play, universal human rights of nature and the peace increasingly attractive to a generation anxious to be globally connected and at the same time, locally embedded.

2.6 Exercises

1. What is the American Dream?
2. What is the European Dream?
3. Compare and Contrast American Dream and European Dream?
4. Write a note on American Dream and its shortcomings?
5. What are the reasons that led to the growth of American Dream?
6. Write a note on American Dream and its impact on novel in American literature
7. Write a note on American Dream and its impact on drama in American Literature

2.6.1 Broad Questions with Answers:

Q. 1 Write a note on American Dream and its shortcomings.

One of the leading movements of American literature is The American Dream. Like Naturalism or The lost Generation, The American Dream produced a specific literature. Drama, novel, poetry and other forms of literature are enriched by the American Dream. Prior to the American literature of the American Dream, there were certain factors which enabled and gave rise to the American Dream.

Encompassing the puritan belief in 'calling, Thomas Jefferson's 'ideal of an open society, the Protestant belief in work, Benjamin Franklin’s financial opportunism, Emerson’s Self–Reliance and Horatio Alger's fictional trajectory of rising in the world, the American Dream has been perhaps the primary ideological means by which Americans have defined themselves in contrast to other nations. In its purest form the American Dream is an ideal for society rather than for the individual, being a vision of society that permits individuals to develop their potential without
reference to their background or origins. We know that the transcendentalists highly praised in their work ‘individualism’. Walt Whitman has rightly summed up “Myself I sing, I sing Myself.” The transcendentalists never bothered for society. They were bothered for individualism. Emerson’s Self–Reliance' is a good example in this context. Whereas, those who attempted in literature were men of letters who happened to see the rise of individual in the society. Thus, it is about a society that fosters opportunity and fulfillment, and not about individual success or accumulation of wealth. The term 'American Dream' was used in its modern sense in the 1930s, and the historian James T. Adams is credited with popularizing it. In The Epic of America (1931) he wrote:

The American Dream that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of merely material plenty, though that has doubtless counted heavily. It has been much more than that. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class (Matterson 10).

Jennifer L. Hochschild, in his book Facing Up to the American Dream (1955) usefully identifies four tenets of the dream. They are:

1) that every one may participate equally in society;
2) that everyone may have a reasonable anticipation of success;
3) that success comes from one’s own efforts;
4) and that failure is a result of lack of talent or will.

The American Dream is the subject of innumerable American texts. The immense popularity of works such as those of Alger testifies to the power of belief in the dream. It has also been much criticised in literature on various grounds, for example: that the material aspect of the dream is a corruption of its social vision; that it is an illusion through which inequalities are maintained and class realities are
concealed; that it fosters individual achievement at the expense of social progress; that it equates personal fulfilment in the material gain, and that it results in a narrowly selfish definition of success.

'O' Neill has shown in *The Hairy Ape* the disintegration of the American Dream. The rich are hollow men; the stokers are all muscles. There is nothing to choose between Yank and Mildred. In both, there is a loss of identity and a loss of soul. It is the isolation of the individual in space and time. Yank and Mildred lack a sense of spiritual fulfillment of life that can not be measured in material things, and they suffer a sense of frustration and despair.

For almost two centuries, Americans have been living the American Dream. According to Jeremy Rifkin, American Dream is languishing, but new European Dream is beginning to capture the attention and imagination of the world. European Union of twenty five states are joined together to frame European Dream which is universally applicable and appealing.

To sum up, American Dream, like Adamic myth, plays a vital role in projecting the American Society.

### 2.7 Activities / Field work

1) Make a list of all novels which reflect upon the American Dream

2) Find out the novels which deal with European Dream

### 2.8 Further Reading:


2.1 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able:

- to know what is the meaning of lost generation
- to know who used this phrase to whom
- to know the writers who were active immediately after world war 1
- to know that this phrase was used to American expatriate writers associated with 1920s Paris:
- to study Ernest Hemingway as a lost generation writer
- to know the mood of the writers
2.2 Introduction

Like all American literary movements, The Lost Generation is also an important movement that produces Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and a host of others. The period that these writers cover up in their work was that of 1920s, that is, soon after the first World War. The first World War had been a sort of “catalytic agent” in releasing the ‘stark fact of nothingness and absurdity’ at the root of traditional values. Not only the physical health, but also the emotional, moral and religious health were shattered. There was a visible degradation in moral standards; religion no longer was a soothing force and the emotional life of men was paralysed. Because of the sudden and rude jolt to their sensibilities, there grew up in that generation a swarm of perverts like psychotics, neurotics, homosexuals, fakes and freaks. Man felt alienated from fellowmen, and there is a peculiar tendency to scoff at the sanctities and traditions of the past. The meaninglessness of life or to use the words of Carlyle this “vast circumambient reign of nothingness and night” effected a pessimistic bent of mind and encouraged a tendency to cynicism. The sense of insecurity, shock and helplessness aroused an impulse to annihilate the horrifying reality. That is why there was a desperate inclination to drain life away into ‘receding blue notes of jazz orchestra’ and excessive drinking.

1.3 The Lost Generation

1.3.1 Self Assessment Questions

(a) Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each:

1. What does the phrase ‘lost generation’ signify?
2. Who used the phrase ‘You are all lost generation?’
3. Who wrote the novel The Sun Also Rises?
4. What is the full name of Fitzgerald?
5. Are the lost generation writers affected by the first World War or the second World War?
6. What do you mean by expatriate writers?

(b) Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct option:

1. The lost generation term is used to describe the generation of writers active immediately.
2.4 Model answers of self Assessment questions.

Subsection 1.3.1 (a)

1. The phrase signifies a disillusioned post-war generation characterized by lost values, lost belief in the idea of human progress, and a mood of futility and despair.

2. Gertrude Stein used this phrase the lost generation.

3. Ernest Hemingway wrote the novel The Sun Also Rises.

4. The full name of Fitzgerald is F. Scott Fitzgerald.

5. The Lost Generation writers were affected by the First World War.

Subsection 1.3.1(b)

1. a 2. c 3. a 4. a 5. a 6. c

2.5 Summary:

‘Lost generation is an important phrase. It is used by Gertrude Stein for the first time. The phrase sums up the overall condition of the war oppressed society of the 1920s. The writers who wrote actively after World War 1 tried to project in their
 works the bitter experience of the people.

Gertrude Stein used the phrase in conversation with Ernest Hemingway, supposedly quoting a garage mechanic saying to her ‘You are all a lost generation.’

The phrase signifies a disillusioned post-war generation characterised by lost values, lost belief in the idea of human progress, and a mood of futility and despair leading to hedonism.

Hemingway used the phrase ‘You are all a lost generation’ as the epigraph to his first novel The Sun Also Rises (1926). Hemingway violently reacted to the situation, and wrote the novel The Sun Also Rises. It is this instinctive and compulsive force to represent his immediate society that led Hemingway to go to school with Gertrude Stein. He learnt to make the contemporary social atmosphere a living and authentic thing. It is because of this that The Sun Also Rises becomes a concentrated and viable picture of the 1920s. The novel is a cultural document which holds a mirror to the prevailing temper of the times. Hemingway honestly presents the genuine feature of the 'chard countenance' of his age. According to prof. Oscar Cargil, the novel depicts the genuine picture of the people to whom the first world War costs upon their lives and their morals. Barner is a shell-shocked and emasculated man. The Count Mippipopolous is a badly wounded person. Georgette reduces love to the level of monetary exchange. Jack calls himself ‘a rotten catholic’ and Brett feels that her ‘face was not meant for religion’ Brett seems to have no moral values, as she goes from man to man. For Cohn, life becomes a hopeless affair. The artists and intellectuals ( Frances, Clyne, Braddocks, Prentiss) in Montparusse have noting better to do than to drink and dissipate around cafes. This dissolute collection of aimless people which seems to constitute a wasteland, is denounced by Jake Barnes in the following words, though they are addressed only to Cohn ‘You are an expatriate. You have lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You hang around the cafes’

Hemingway does not merely represent life, he also interprets it. Much of his strength as a writer lies in the fact that he tries to make us feel a meaning and purpose in life.

To sum up, 'Lost generation' played an important role during 1920s & 1930s. A number of writers like Scott fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Hemingway, Gertrude Stein enriched American Literature by providing us a number of novels Malcolm
Cowley, an influential critic, used lost generation in various studies of expatriate writers.

2.6 Exercises:

1. What does the phrase Lost Generation signify?
2. What is the impact of the First World War on Hamingway, Faulkner, and Fitzgerald? How did they react to war and its effect?
3. Who is Gertude Stein? What is her contribution to American Literature?
5. The Sun Also Rises becomes a concentrated and viable picture of the 1920s. Discuss
6. Write a note on the expatriate writers
7. Trace Hemingway’s critical indictment of the Lost Generation in The Sun Also Rises

2.6.1 Broad questions with answers.

Q. What does the phrase 'Lost Generation signify?

OR

Write a short note on the Lost Generation

American literature has produced a number of literary movements. These movements enable us to understand the particular aspects of literature. To understand Hawthorne and Melville, the study of puritanism is a must. So every movement has a specific significance. 'Lost generation' is one type of such movement.

'Lost generation' is a term used to describe the generation of writers active immediately after World War 1. It was Gertude Stein, who coined the phrase 'lost generation'. The phrase signifies a disillusioned post war generation characterized by lost values, lost belief in the idea of human progress, and a mood of futility and despair leading to hedonism. The mood is described by F. Scott Fitzgerald in This Side of Paradise (1920) when he writes of a generation that found “all gods dead, all wars fought all faiths in man shaken” 'Lost generation' usually refers specifically to the American expatriate writers associated with 1920s. Paris, especially Hemingway and Fitzgerald, and to a lesser extent T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound. Hemingway used the phrase 'you are all a lost generation' as the epigraph to his first novel, The Sun Also
Rises (1926). Malcolm Cowley, an influential critic, used lost generation 'in various studies of expatriate writers.

2.7 Activities /Field work

1. Refer to a good American literature book, and list all the novelists who wrote novels during the period of 1920s.

2. Make a list of all the novels of Ernest Hemingway, and point out the leading themes.

2.8 Further reading


Unit-2 (C)
THE SOUTHERN RENAISSANCE

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2.1 Objectives :
After studying this unit, you will be able to :-

● Know the significance of the general topic that has shaped American Literature.
● Know the historical background that has shaped American Literature.
● Examine the general topic in relation to American Literature.
● Know different implications of the Southern Renaissances.
● Know about the chief contributors to this literary movement.

2.2 Introduction :
The Southern Renaissance is one of the most important Literary movements in American Literature. The Civil war was fought from 1861 to 1865 on the issue of ‘Slavery’. The Civil war ended in the triumph of Northern States over Southern States. Even after independence America was divided into two regional diversities. This gave rise to cultural and literary polarity. So the Southern Renaissance is a conscious literary movement of Southern Writers of the 20th Century in America.
2.3 The Southern Renaissance:

It is a critical commonplace that the American South has produced some of the most important literature written in English in the 20th Century. It is equally true that the South has produced very little of merit before that time i.e. in the 19th Century. H.L. Mencken wrote in 1920 that the South was the ‘Sahara of Bozart’, a cultural and literary desert. Virtually no writer of national merit and reputation was emerged from the Southern states in the first century. Of major American writers only E.A. Poe was unquestionably a Southerner. There are many reasons for the inadequacy of imaginative literature. The region was rural, isolated and under-educated.

If one is interested in American Literature in the second half of the 19th Century, one must consider the Southern local color stories which dominated the period. These stories should prove of great interest to anyone concerned with 20th Century American Literature. The local color stories popularized a vision of the south which has affected most Southern writers like Faulkner, Wolfe, Warren, Flannery O’Connor and Eudora Welty of the 20th Century.

A group of teachers and students of Vanderbilt University in Tennessee began to meet to read and criticize each others poetry. The young poets in 1922 founded a magazine called ‘The Fugitive’ to serve as an outlet for their verse. Within three years the fugitive poets – Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren made their marks with a new kind of Southern poetry characterized by wit, irony and restraint. They are known as Fugitive Poets.

Southern Renaissance is a movement associated with 1920’s. It marks change in the attitudes of the Southern writers. The south had its own identity from the beginning. So Americans south is not only the American geographical part but it marks particular sensibility. South is a kind of Polarity against north. First we see a sense of failure among southern writers. This sense is related to military defeat and 1861 military occupations. There is also a sense of guilt. This guilt comes from the racial treatment that negros were maltreated in south & also great poverty. The southern writers had a sense of frustration because they could not cope up with their conditions but after the civil war the southern writers tried to run away from these tragedies. There were two types of writers. First group of writers portray colourful life of south. These writers gave extra importance to the Local life. They portrayed remote south. Second group of writers called as writer of plantation life. They glorified their past and portrayed very ideal picture of south. So both types of writers
idealized and glorified the past. So south became “a myth”. It became a literary fantasy and romance. It came to an end in 1920. A young group of poets founded a magazine called ‘The Fugitive’. These young poets declared their revolt against “traditional romanticism”. Another magazine ‘The Double Dealing’ was started by them. In these magazines new writers, poets, critics started writing. There was an outburst of new literary literature. This is known as Southern Renaissance.

A consciousness and history and self are fundamental in southern novelists. They are the students and mediators of history as the necessary mode of the modern existence. They were especially aware of the expedient character of the economy and social life. African chattel slavery for 30 years before the civil war and many years after it, the southern writers were possessed with self interpretation of modern history. After the first world war this crisis broke out of its imprisonment. A larger vision of southern history was slowly opening to the writers in the south. The war for southern Independence and the south’s defeat, the darkness of construction and the ironic rise of a new materialistic south appeared as vivid symbols of the southern participations in the final transit from the traditionalist to the modern society. Southern novelists of 1920’s realized the possibilities of portraying south as a changing phenomena. They created in the southern novel, a compelling drama of self and history - notably in the works of William Faulkner.

The American south was in the past distinctively individualized culture and in many ways differentiated the culture of the north. The plantation culture of the south had its own decorum and amenities.

The north and the south conceived and gave rise in the course of time to two different but equally representative states of mind. The southern writers had begun feeling of the burden and pressure of their divided heritage. It was to declare its literary independence in the manifesto of the fugitives: “I will take my stand” (1930).  

The Southern Agrarians

The emergence of the Southern Renaissance as a literary and cultural movement has also been seen as a consequence of the opening up of the predominantly rural South to outside influences due to the industrial expansion that took place in the region during and after the First World War. Southern opposition to industrialization was expressed in the famous essay collection *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), written by authors and critics from the Southern Renaissance who came to be known as Southern Agrarians. Many Southern writers
of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s were inspired by the writers of the Southern Renaissance, including Reynolds Price, James Dickey, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor along with many others.

2.4 Chief Contributors of the Southern Renaissance

1) William Faulkner:

Faulkner’s chief contribution is the creation and marvelous peopling of the mythical country in North Mississippi called Yoknapatawpha County. Faulkner presents south as mystery of unresolved historical emotions, legendary memories & cultural abstractions. The south is at once a fiction and fact a dream as well as nightmare. His fictional world truthfully records the human condition about the south. He is chronicler and the historian of the southern consciousness and also its critic. A large part of the understanding of Faulkner’s novel depends upon readers understanding of its physical location since nearly all the works are located in his mythical Yoknapatawpha country. He makes frequent references to the fields and poor conditions of roads. The area is large agricultural and only a few people possessed of wealth. The fields are barren and the forests are thick. The account of his mythical country is so realistic that he has been called a regional writer.

Faulkner’s first eight novels are grouped together. They are ‘Sartoris’, The Sound and the Fury, ‘As I Lay Dying’, ‘Light in August’, ‘Absolam Absolam’, ‘The Hamlet’, ‘Go down Moses’, ‘Sanctuary’. The world created in these eight novels is the first cycle of the Yoknapatwpha Saga. It is a Balzacian representation of the southern history. But it is more profoundly the embodiment of Faulkner’s imagination of history and myth as a modes of human existence. Faulkner presents agrarian culture of the south. It consists of cattle’s, farmers and crops. It is the family of farmers. By the time when he completed these novels in 1962 he had written a historical chronicle of the south covering nearly hundred and fifty years. But he was not a historical novelist. As he was principally concerned with historical forces and the significance of great events. One may read “The Sound and the Fury” as a commentary on the decline of the old southern ruling order. Faulkner’s characters may be seen as ‘types’ of Southerners but only by readers and critics after the fact that these characters become part of southern mythology. In his first four Yoknapatwpha novels, Faulkner can be seen as a dispenser of southern gothic, chronicler of a primitive and frightening south. And his other two tragedies ‘Light in August’ (1932) ‘Absolam Absolam’ (1936) enhanced that reputation. These two
novels reveal a breadth of vision, a social dimension and historical sense. Faulkner returned to racial themes in the latter half of his career.

2) **Robert Penn Warren**:

   In contrast to Faulkner’s attempt to establish a generalized relation between a myth of man and history, Robert Penn Warren attempted to achieve a special goal i.e. to discover a connection between the self and American history. Warren is basically Hebraic and Christian rather than classical in his outlook. We find his hunt for the American self through an interesting sense of protagonist. His major novels are ‘Night Rider’ ‘At Heavens Gate’, ‘Band of Angels’, ‘A place to come’ ‘All the Kings Men’ He was concerned with general fate of American man. Warren takes problem of ‘Search for identity’. So his themes are modern. Warren portrays the south as a corrupt, violent land.

3) **Thomas Wolfe**:

   In 1930’s Faulker’s contemporary Wolfe was better known. He was heir to the tradition of southern rhetoric. Wolfe was a writer in the tradition of the poet, Walt Whitman, who held that the function of the artist is lyrical, excessive self-expression. Wolfe presented typical southern characters and landscapes. His novels are a legitimate picture of the south. His two major novels are ‘Of Time and The River”, ‘You can’t Go Home Again’

4) **Eudora Welty**:

   Eudora Welty of Mississippi presents a south which is eccentric and often backward. She is supreme comic writer of the modern south. Her major novels are - Delta Wedding, Losing Battles, The Robber, Bridegroom.

   The impact of Southern Renaissance is more precisely illustrated in the stories of three Southern Roman Catholic writers - Flannery O’Connor, Walker Percy and John Corrington. Several novelists who began their career in writing stories about their native south later on diverted from fiction to other forms of literature and the southern scene.

**2.5 Self Assessment Questions.**

1) What was the name of the magazine published by the Southern poets in 1922?

2) Who is the creator of Yoknapatwapha Country?
3) Mention any Three fugitive poets.
4) Mention any Three writers of the Southern Renaissance.
5) What is Southern Renaissance.
6) What type of movement Southern Renaissance is?

2.6 Model Answers of Self – Assessment Questions.

1) The Fugitive
2) William Faulkner
3) Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, Eudora Welty.
4) William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, Robert Penn Warren
5) A conscious literary movement in American Literature.
6) The first mainstream movement within Southern Literature.

2.7 Exercise:

(1) Trace the development of fiction during the period of ‘Southern Renaissance’.
(2) Write a brief note on ‘Southern Renaissance.’

2.7 Broad Question with Answer

Write an essay on Southern Renaissance

Answer:

The Southern Renaissance was the literary movement of American Southern literature that began in the 1920s and 1930s with the appearance of writers such as William Faulkner, Caroline Gordon, Katherine Anne Porter, Allen Tate, Tennessee Williams, and Robert Penn Warren, and a host of others.

Prior to this renaissance, Southern writers tended to focus on historical romances about the “Lost Cause” of the Confederate States of America. This writing glorified the heroism of the Confederate army and civilian population during the Civil War and the supposedly “idyllic culture” that existed in the South before the war (known as the Antebellum South).

The belief in the heroism and morality of the South’s “Lost Cause” was a driving force in Southern literature between the Civil War and World War I. The
Southern Renaissance changed this by addressing three major themes in their works. The first was the burden of history in a place where many people still remembered slavery, Reconstruction, and a devastating military defeat. The second theme was to focus on the South’s conservative culture, specifically on how an individual could exist without losing a sense of identity in a region where family, religion, and community were more highly valued than one’s personal and social life. The final theme that the renaissance writers approached was the South’s troubled history in regard to racial issues. Because of these writers distance from the Civil War and slavery, they were able to bring more objectivity to writings about the South. They also brought new modernistic techniques such as stream of consciousness and complex narrative techniques to their works as Faulkner did in his novel As I Lay Dying.

Among the writers of the Southern Renaissance William Faulkner is arguably the most influential and famous, having won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1950.

The Southern Renaissance in the 1920s had been preceded by a long period after the Civil War during which Southern literature was dominated by writers who supported the Lost Cause. Yet the critical spirit that characterized the Southern Renaissance did have roots in the era that preceded it.

From the 1880s onwards, a few white Southern authors, such as George Washington Cable. Mark Twain who is often considered a Southerner because he grew up in the slave state of Missouri, wrote about the South and dismissed this nostalgia by pointing out the blatant racism and exploitation of blacks at that time, and ridiculing the notion of Southern “chivalry”

In the 1890s, the writings of journalist Walter Hines Page and academics William Peterfield Trent and John Spencer Bassett severely criticized the cultural and intellectual mediocrity of the men who held power in the South. In 1903, Bassett, an academic at Trinity College angered many influential white Southerners when he called African-American leader Booker T. Washington “the greatest man, save General Lee, born in the South in a hundred years.” The most comprehensive and outspoken criticism directed against the tenets of the “Lost Cause” before the First World War were put forth by African American writers who grew up in the South, most famously by Charles W. Chesnutt in his novels “The House Behind the Cedars” (1900) and “The marrow of Tradition” (1901). However, before the 1970s, African-American authors from the South were not considered part of Southern literature by the white and mostly male authors and critics who considered themselves the main
creators and guardians of the Southern literary tradition.

The Southern Renaissance was the first mainstream movement within Southern literature to address the criticisms of Southern cultural and intellectual life that had emerged both from within the Southern literary tradition and from outsiders, most notably the satirist H.L. Mencken. In the 1920s Mencken led the attack on die genteel tradition in American literature, ridiculing the provincialism of American intellectual life. In his 1920 essay "The Sahara of the Bozart he singled out the South as the most provincial and intellectually barren region of the US, claiming that since the Civil War, intellectual and cultural life there had gone into terminal decline. This created a storm of protest from within conservative circles in the South. However, many emerging Southern writers who were already highly critical of contemporary life in the South were emboldened by Mencken's essay. On the other hand, Mencken's subsequent bitter attacks on aspects of Southern culture that they valued amazed and horrified them. In response to the attacks of Mencken and his imitators, Southern writers were provoked to a reassertion of Southern uniqueness and a deeper exploration of the theme of Southern identity.

The start of the Southern Renaissance is often traced back to the activities of “The Fugitives", a group of poets and critics who were based at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee Just after the First World War. The group included John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and others together they created the magazine The Fugitive (1922-1925), so named because the editors announced that they fled "from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South."

The emergence of the Southern Renaissance as a literary and cultural movement has also been seen as a consequence of the opening up of the predominantly rural South to outside influences due to the industrial expansion that took place in the region during and after the First World War. Southern opposition to industrialization was expressed in the famous essay collection I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition (1930), written by authors and critics from the Southern Renaissance who came to be known as Southern Agrarians. Many Southern writers of the 1940s, ’50s, and ’60s were inspired by the writers of the Southern Renaissance, including Reynolds Price, James Dickey, Walker Percy, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor and a host of others.
2.8 Activities:

1. Make a list of the American Negro – Writers of the South.
2. Write a brief note on the contribution of Southern Writers of the 20th Century.

2.9 Further Reading:

Unit-3 (A)

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

The Old Man And The Sea

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  3.2.8 Broad question with answer
3.3 Activities/ Field Work
3.4 Further Reading

3.0 Objectives

After studying The Old Man and The Sea, you will be able to know:

- Ernest Hemingway made the words “the lost generation famous.”
- The Old Man and The Sea is Hemingway’s magnumopus.
- The underlying theme of Interdependence.
- The role played by Manolin, Lions and Marlin
- Santiago as a hero.
- The use of symbolism in The Old Man and The Sea
3.1 Introduction:

Ernest Hemingway was a colourful personality in his life time and a very conscientious artist in literature. His style is direct and the subject matter is intensely masculine, reflecting his love of hunting, fishing and bullfighting, his physical courage and his fascination with war.

Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899 at Oak Park, Illinois, the middle-class capital of the world. He was the second of the six children of the Hemingways. After early work as a journalist, he was a combatant in the First World War, and then acted as a war correspondent during both the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. After serving with distinction in the First World War, he returned home and worked in Chicago, writing and doing odd jobs. He then went to Paris where he mixed with a number of expatriate writers, like Scott Fitzgerald, Ford Madox and Ezra Pound, whom Gertrude Stein dubbed ‘the lost generation’.

His earliest work was Three Stories and Ten Poems (1923). In Our Time (1925), a book of short stories, followed and then the novel The Sun Also Rises (1926, published as Fiesta in Britain), about a group of amoral American and British expatriates living in France and Spain after the Great War. More short stories occurred in Men Without Women (1927) and Winner Take Nothing (1933). Hemingway’s second important novel A Farewell to Arms (1929), a poignant story of a young American officer serving in Italy during the Great War who falls in love with an English nurse. Two works of non-fiction followed with Death in the Afternoon (1932), about bullfighting, and a book about big-game hunting in Tanganyika, The Green Hills of Africa (1935). To Have and Have Not (1937) is set in Key West, Florida during the great Depression, while The Fifth Column and the First Forty-nine Stories (1938), contains further short stories, including the well-known The Snows of Kilimanjaro. His next major novel, For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), drew on his experience in the Spanish Civil War, and is the story of an American who joins a Republican guerrilla group behind Nationalist lines. Across the River and Into the Trees (1950) received little acclaim, but The Old Man and The Sea (1952) was awarded Pulitzer Prize in 1953. Other posthumous works include A Moveable Feast (1964), Islands in the Stream (1970), The Garden of Eden (1987), The Dangerous summer (1985). True at First Light, a ‘fictional-memoir, was completed by his son, and was published in 1999.
Many of his novels and stories were made into films and he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. In 1960, Hemingway was treated for depression and mental illness, but a year later he took his life.

3.2 The Text

3.2.1 Glossary and Notes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>skiff</td>
<td>a light rowboat, a small, light sailing vessel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mast</td>
<td>a pole, as of round timber, set up right in a sailing vessel to sustain the yards or sails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Di Maggio</td>
<td>A baseball-player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nauseate</td>
<td>to affect with nausea or disgust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sack</td>
<td>in baseball slang, a base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lance</td>
<td>a long shaft with a spearhead, used as a thrusting weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shark</td>
<td>any of a large order of mostly marine fishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salao</td>
<td>an expression used for expressing badluck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scar</td>
<td>the mark left after the healing of a lesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the gaff</td>
<td>a sharp iron hook at the lesion end of a pole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the harpoon</td>
<td>a barbed missile weapon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shaft</td>
<td>the long narrow rod of an arrow spear, lance, harpoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sardine</td>
<td>a small fish preserved in oil as a delicacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shack</td>
<td>to live or stay briefly at a specific place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the gear</td>
<td>a set of moving parts that transmit motion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coral</td>
<td>the calcareous skeletons secreted by various marine polyps and deposited in various forms and colours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2.2 Summary:

The story is narrated against the background of the vast sea. The old man, Santiago, is the fisherman and his preparation for the big catch has been completed by his having gone without taking a fish for eighty-four days. The fish that he
catches is more noble, greater in size, calmer, and more grand than any he has seen ever before.

His relations with the boy Manolin are those of a master and his pupil. He treats the boy with affection and love. The boy in his turn respects him and considers him the greatest fisherman. When others lose faith in the old man’s ability the boy still believes in him. The boy supplies the old man with the necessities of life and does not desert him even in his hard days. He very much wishes to go with the old man fishing but his parents have prevented him from doing so. There is a clash of loyalties but the old man knowing that Manolin is with a lack of boat does not insist on his going with Santiago.

In the harbour the fisherman leads a harmonious life. Martin, the owner of the Terrace, gives the old man an occasional meal. The common stock of the shark liver oil is there for everybody to share. The fish are sent to Havana market whereas the sharks are sent to the local factory for processing.

The old man’s character is brought out in the initial few pages beautifully. The old man’s pride and humility are underscored and they arouse in the reader a sense of expectation. That the old man wants to go out far into the sea on the eighty-fifth day also anticipates in a way that there is going to be a drama of intense struggle. The sense of tragedy is implicit even in the first few pages. It is the ancient definition of the tragedy, given by Aristotle, that is turned upside down because Santiago is not a great man in social standing. Hemingway seems to be emphasizing that a simple man like Santiago, old as he may be, can attain heroic proportions.

The old man sets out all by himself. In this simple action Hemingway has emphasized that if man is to meet his destiny he must meet it alone. He will be so far away from other human beings that no help is possible. The loneliness of the human spirit is emphasized. In spite of the help that the community renders him, Santiago, in his final hour of trial, must be alone.

Santiago is depicted as an old man. In spite of his old age, he devoted to his craft and continuously draws inspiration from DiMaggio, a base-ball champion. He does not dream of women or other pursuits in which young men are usually interested. He dreams of long white and golden beaches of Africa which he had visited during his younger days. On these beaches come young lions to play. The young lions are the noble beasts whose ferocity is not depicted. But it is their
mobility and strength that the old man remembers. He derives as much strength from
the lions as he does from Manolin or DiMaggio.

Santiago is an expert fisherman. He knows well natural phenomena. The way
Santiago lets his baits drift with the current, the way he covers the hooks with bait,
how he wants them to be at specific depths in the sea and his feel for the fish when it
takes the bait all these throw light on Hemingway’s realism.

Santiago experiences a sense of brotherhood with the turtles, the Marlin, with
the stars, and the moon and the sun. Santiago knows the strength of the fish. He
knows that the fish would overwhelm him. But he never shows any anger or
resentment against the fish. So close is his identification with the fish that he does
not care who kills who. Santiago is all praise for the mako shark while the galanos
are scavengers and foul-stinking.

Another noticeable quality of Santiago is that he is not religious. What he feels
is that he is a fisherman and it is his duty to fish. He thinks that there is no sin in
killing the fish if he loves it at the same time. He does not kill the fish to keep him
alive. He kills it because he is a fisherman. He does not want to think about sin
because he has no understanding of it.

By eating the fish Santiago identifies himself with the fish completely. The
Christian qualities of endurance, humility and nobility that were formally associated
with the fish now become associated with Santiago. He must display the same
qualities in his fight against the sharks. He must fight nobly and without panic. The
Christological imagery is reinforced when Santiago returns to the village. Like
Christ, he must climb up the hill carrying his cross on his shoulders. He must fall on
the way with the mast across his shoulder. Instead of a dug a cat passes by, oblivious
of Santiago’s suffering. He sleeps Christ-like with his face down, his arms straight
out and the palms of his hand up. The tourists are the ignorant populace who have
never experienced agony and greatness and will never understand what it means to
suffer. Their casual chatter reveals their shallow character. They are “the outsiders”,
while Santiago and the boy are “the initiated”.

Only the old fishermen and Manolin, the spiritual descendent of Santiago, can
understand what Santiago must have gone through, what the eighteen-foot long
skeleton means and what it means to be a man in a crisis. Santiago gives away the
spear of the fish to Manolin. It is his legacy to the boy but with it he symbolically
transfers all his powers to the young fisherman who will take his place in the world.

3.2.3 Check your progress:

A. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase/sentence each:
1. Which novel of Hemingway was awarded a Pulitzer Prize?
2. Who was Jack Barnes?
3. Who coined the term “The Lost Generation”?
4. Who was DiMaggio?
5. What do the tourists in The Old Man and the Sea symbolise?
6. What does Santiago mean in Spanish?
7. What does a fish symbolise in Christianity?
8. Mention two leading themes of the Old Man and the Sea.
9. What do you mean by The Code hero of Hemingway?
10. What kind of domestic animal Hemingway was fond of?

B. Fill up the blanks:
1. The Nobel Prize was awarded to Ernest Hemingway in ___.
   a) 1954  b) 1962  c) 1970  d) 1935
2. The term ‘The Lost Generation” appears in the novel ___.
   a) A Farewell to the Arms  b) The Old Man and the Sea
   c) The Sun Also Rises  d) For Whom the Bell Tolls
3. Robert Jordan appears in the novel ___.
   a) To Have and Have Not  b) For Whom the Bell Tolls
   c) A Farewell to Arms  d) The Green Hills of Africa
4. Hemingway died of ___.
   a) Cancer  b) malaria  c) severe fever  d) bullet
5. ___ is a new character created by Hemingway.
   a) Quentin Compson  b) Nick Adams
   c) Philip  d) Robert Jordan
3.2.4 Key to check your progress:

A)  
1. The Old Man and the Sea was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.  
2. The main character of the novel, The Sun Also Rises.  
3. Gertrude Stein coined the term “The Lost Generation”.  
4. DiMagie was the best base-ball player.  
5. The tourists are the ignorant populace who have never experienced agony and greatness and will never understand what it means to suffer.  
6. Santiago means Saint James, fisherman, apostle and martyr.  
7. The fish has been recognized traditionally as a symbol for Christ.  
8. The two leading themes of The Old Man and the Sea are – interdependence and man versus nature.  
9. The Code hero, as exemplified by Santiago, has learnt to bear pain stoically and remain undaunted by frequent defeats.  
10. Hemingway was fond of cat.  

B) 1) a 2) c 3) b 4) d 5) b

3.2.5 The Old Man and the Sea: Major Themes:

Ernest Hemingway is preoccupied with the problem of old age and how one can still be a man when the physical powers that he had idealised decline. In the Old Man and the Sea, Santiago, a heroic figure, refuses to yield to the omnipotent forces of nature but he retains his dignity. He is still undefeated even though his prize has been snatched from him.

Hemingway preferred the “iceberg” metaphor for his prose. He observes:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things a strongly as though the writers had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.

If we bear in mind this credo it is obvious that certain important aspects of his work will not be so apparent as some others but they will be there nevertheless.
The novel has been critically analysed on the following grounds. As the novel is so complex that it has layers of meanings. The following are the themes:

1. The theme of Interdependence in The Old Man and the Sea.
2. The portrayal of Santiago who embodies the essential nobility of human striving.
3. The novel is analysed on the symbolic level.
4. In The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway celebrates the religion of Man.
5. The Old Man and the Sea as a tragic story.
6. The significance of the title: The Old Man and the Sea.
7. Santiago as a hero.
8. The role played by Manolin in The Old Man and the Sea.
9. The role of Lions in The Old Man and the Sea.
10. The role of the Marlin in The Old Man and the Sea.

3.2.6 The Code Hero:

Critics have succeeded in dividing Hemingway’s major characters into two categories – the Hemingway hero and the Code hero. Earl Rovit calls them ‘the tyro’ and ‘the tutor’. The Hemingway hero is either a young boy or a young man and is learning to live in the world where there is chaos, violence, uncertainty and anxiety. Whereas the Hemingway hero is young and inexperienced, lost and confused in this valueless world, the code hero is usually an older man who has become what he had to become. He has realised the potentialities and known the area of his operation. He is usually a professional – a bull fighter, a fisherman, a veteran soldier, or a prize fighter. He is sure to excel in the area of his choice and he does not easily step out of that. He possesses immense resources of courage and endurance. Since he has known how to excel he also knows how to face defeat with dignity.

In Hemingway’s novels and short stories the code hero sets an example for the Hemingway hero to imitate if he possibly can, while the Hemingway hero admires him. The former finds the latter’s standard of conduct too high.

Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea, in spite of his old age, exhaustion, hunger, and the knowledge that he might eventually love, does not let the marlin
escape. He fights the battle to its bitter end until he is successful. It is with the same
courage and dignity that he defends his prize against the sharks. He knows that it is a
useless struggle and it would be too much of luck to get away with his prize specially
in the big sea and when the Marlin is bleeding but to give up would be unmanly. He
attains stature in the face of heavy and even insurmountable odds.

These are the qualities that the Hemingway hero admires and finds extremely
difficult to imbibe in his life. The code hero’s responses are almost automatic and
there is no room for thought which hampers the Hemingway hero from acting.

It is not to say that the code hero is more successful than the Hemingway hero.
He also suffers defeat but he wins moral victories. He refuses to compromise his
dignity at any cost. Santiago loses the marlin but he has the satisfaction that he did
all he could. And it is this satisfaction that lends him dignity and even grandeur.

The Hemingway code has been criticised by the critics. If this code is valid for
extreme situations, such as struggle between life and death, a threat to one’s security
or life, or an assault on one’s honour and dignity, then Hemingway seems to be
implying that this code is usually valid for everyday existence.

To conclude, Hemingway has formulated as rigid a set of rules for living and for
the attainment of manhood as can be found in any religion.

3.2.7 Exercises:

1. Give an account of the character of Santiago and show how he embodies the
   essential nobility of human striving.

2. Discuss the symbolism implied in the struggle of old man against the sea.

3. After the nihilism of his early fiction Hemingway in The Old Man and the Sea
   has come to some positive affirmation. Discuss.

4. Discuss The Old Man and the Sea in the light of the following statement by
   Santiago: “But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not
defeated.”

5. Bring out the tragic elements in The Old Man and the Sea.

6. “All literature has a social or moral or religious purpose.” Examine The Old
   Man and the Sea in the light of the above statement.
7. How far would you agree with the opinion that The Old Man and the Sea is didactic in its intent?

8. Write short notes:
   1. The Hemingway Code hero.
   2. The role played by Manolin in The Old Man and the Sea.
   3. The role of Lions in The Old Man and the Sea.
   4. The role of the Marlin in The Old Man and the Sea.
   5. Use of symbolism in The Old Man and the Sea.
   6. The character-sketch of Santiago.
   7. The Tourists at the end of The Old Man and the Sea.

3.2.8 Give an account of the character of Santiago and show how he embodies the essential nobility of human striving.

   OR

Hemingway’s heroes are broken men who win moral victories. Discuss.

   OR

Discuss The Old Man and the Sea in the light of the following statement by Santiago: “But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.”

   OR

The Old Man and the Sea exemplifies the nobility of the human spirit in the face of defeat.

The Old Man and the Sea is a popular novel. The novel is so popular that it is transformed into a film. As the title indicates that the novel is about the old man and his life and profession at the sea. By profession, he is a fisherman who launches on the zeal irrespective of the trials and tribulations that he faces.

The novel is very short in its length but it has layers of meanings. Because of its complexity of theme and style, the novel was awarded the nobel prize in 1954.

In this novel, Hemingway has portrayed Santiago as an old fisherman. He is
“thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck.” His hands are scarred from handling heavy fish on the cord but all these scars are as old as “erosions in a fishless desert.” According to Hemingway, “everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.” He sails in a small skiff and the sail of this small boat, when furled, “looked like the flag of permanent defeat.”

The old man survives on the food provided by Martin, the owner of the Terrace, and whatever the boy Manolin can buy for him. The boy encourages the old man when the others laugh at him. The boy calls him the best fisherman. Moreover, he himself says that he is a strange old man and he knows many tricks.

Santiago exemplifies the Hemingway code. Hemingway’s code demands that a man may be destroyed but not defeated. Santiago does not believe in withdrawing from the fight because he believes that man is not made for defeat. He also does not rely on external crutches like religion or prayer where an outside agency can relieve man of the responsibility of his action and influence the result in his favour. His reliance on his own strength, skill, resolution and the power to endure is so great that our Fathers and Hail Marys are no more than a mechanical reiteration of prayers that he had learnt in his childhood.

Having spent many days without a single fish, Santiago decided on his eighty-fifth day to test his luck. The marlin is too big to be pulled out of water by Santiago. Hemingway described beautifully the fight of Santiago and the marlin. Despite the strength of marlin, Santiago endures and never bothers the pain that marlin caused. On his return journey he knows that he will be lucky if he does not meet any sharks. Sharks are like a necessary condition of human existence. The trail left by the blood of the marlin attracts sharks inevitably and when come Santiago meets them courageously. The sharks take away his harpoon, then his oar and knife, his club and finally the tiller is splintered. He goes on fighting until there is nothing left of the marlin to defend. He fights against the sharks because that is what his code tells him to do. As he was born to be a fisherman, to admit defeat at the hands of the sharks, because his action is futile, will be a betrayal of the code. After having killed the fish and partaken of its flesh his identification with the fish is complete.

Santiago, an ordinary fisherman, rises to the height of a tragic hero by virtue of his action. Santiago has been interpreted as a symbol for mankind. Whatever the
odds befall, mankind should strive continuously. It is through his action that he rises to the status of a Christ-like figure who has to lay down his life in defence of his actions and his beliefs. In action alone can he realise himself and know what it is to be a man. Age, isolation, exhaustion and the difficulty of the obstacles to be overcome are all peripheral to the central theme of action. By his deeds he emphasises the necessity to go on acting irrespective of the cost. Through action alone he becomes an archetypal figure and in his struggle he becomes a symbol of the modern hero who is capable of achieving decency, dignity, and even heroism.

Q.2 Discuss The Old Man and the Sea as a symbolic novel.

OR

Discuss the symbolism implied in the struggle of the old man against the sea.

OR

Discuss the relevance of Santiago’s struggle as a parable of human effort.

The Old Man and the Sea is rich for its theme and symbolism. Symbols are often used in novels and short stories to portray more of a literal meaning. Conventional, literary, and allegory are examples of the different types of symbolism. Symbols can be displayed in many different ways. People, objects, and events are just a few of the ways. Throughout The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway uses symbolism in many areas.

The title, The Old Man and the Sea is one symbol that Hemingway uses. The old man represents mankind, and the sea represents nature. So, the title implies the leading theme of the novel—man versus nature. To analyse the symbolic significance of the struggle of the old man against the sea is like dissecting a beautiful flower to see wherein its beauty lies. The struggle is a highly suggestive symbol and it can be interpreted at a number of levels without fully exhausting its meaning. It is a myth of our times and even though it were not true to facts literally it would reveal something far deeper and more true than a literal description of facts.

A great deal of symbolism can be found by simply examining the name, Santiago. Santiago is a complex symbol. It means many things. Santiago in Spanish, is an apostle. Santiago stands for a creative artist like Hemingway himself. It does not matter how many times he has proved himself in the past. Everyday is a new day
and everyday he must prove himself. Hemingway has created a beautiful metaphor for all times for the creative artist. In Santiago’s struggle against the marlin there is a suggestion of the endless struggle that man has to wage to survive.

The fish is a symbol of what man can achieve and therefore without this achievement his life would have been meaningless. The fish in Christianity symbolises Christ. Santiago kills the fish. He is bound to carry in his subconsciousness the guilt of killing his true brother.

Similarly, the sharks that snatch away from Santiago his prize can have many meanings. They symbolise evil that permeates the world. They can also mean our adversaries who would not let us rejoice in our triumphs. In terms of Hemingway’s personal life they can mean the literary critic who pounced upon Hemingway’s Across the River and into the Trees. They can also mean the temptations that Hemingway mentions in Green Hills of Africa that ruin an author; more specifically they are money, women, drink, too much fame, too early success etc.

The three other important symbols are – Manolin, the boy, Di Maggio, and the lions on the white and golden beaches about whom Santiago dreams so often. Manolin is a powerful symbol of youth. DiMaggio acts as a tonic on the waning spirits of the old man, Santiago. If DiMaggio and the boy give the old man back some of his old vitality, the lions in their grade and dignity help the old man relax. Together these two embody the rhythm of life in which spurts of action must be followed by relaxation. The tourists symbolise ignorant populace who have never experienced agony and greatness and will never understand what it means to suffer. Their casual shatter reveals their shallow character. They are “the outsiders”, while Santiago and the boy are ‘the initiated.”

There are many religious symbols and events used in the novel with a view to reflect Jesus Christ and his crucifixion.

Critics have pointed out that there is a close parallel between Santiago’s ascent up the hill and Christ’s journey up the hill of Calvary. Santiago carries his most cross-like on his shoulder and lies in his bed Christ-like, face down-wards, stretched hands with his palm upwards. While Christ sat a number of times on his way up the hill, Santiago sits down five times. When Christ was going up the hill and unknowing day passed by oblivious of the suffering and the meaning Christ’s sacrifice. Santiago is accosted by a cat who is indifferent to what Santiago has
achieved and what he must be suffering.

It is difficult to exhaust the meaning implicit in the symbol of the old man’s struggle against the sea but in its richness it speaks to us of our lives, our struggles, our hardships, and our rewards. No specific meaning that can be given to it is complete in itself. It is at a subliminal level of comprehension that we can comprehend the full implication of Santiago’s struggle against the sea.

Q. 3 Write short notes on the following:

1. The role played by Manolin in The Old Man and the Sea.
2. The role of Lions in The Old Man and the Sea.
3. The role of the Marlin in The Old Man and the Sea.
4. Use of symbolism in The Old Man and the Sea.

1. The role played by Manolin in The Old Man and the Sea:

There is a special kind of relationship between Santiago and Manolin. The former cannot live without the latter and the vice-versa. The boy Manolin spent forty days with Santiago, even Santiago was down on his luck. The parents of Manolin did not Manolin to be with Santiago as he was down on his luck. Manolin on his part repaid his debt to Santiago by helping him carry his lines, harpoon, mast and sail to the boat before the old man set out for fishing.

Manolin shares the old man’s interest in base-ball and, of course, fishing. The boy expresses his feelings: “If I cannot fish with you I would like to serve in some way.” The boy also keeps his illusions alive. At the end of the novel it is the boy who has been to see the skiff before the others go there. He weeps for the old man’s deeply cut hands and has an imaginative sympathy by which he knows what the old man must have gone through in this thirty-day royal battle against the marlin.

The presence of Manolin in the story serves a number of functions. First is the dramatic function. When the boy cries at the end of the novel. Our heart goes out to him in his loss of the companionship of the old man. The second function is to inculcate or imbibe strength for the weakness of Santiago. Throughout the long ordeal two phrases “I wish the boy was here”, and ‘I wish I had the boy”, flash across Santiago’s mind frequently enough.

In Manolin, Santiago sees his own youth resurrected and in Santiago he sees his
own immortality. The boy, in short, along with the lions and DiMaggio, serves the useful purpose of sustaining the old man’s strength in all the crucial hours when a super-human effort is needed to meet the crisis.

2) The role of the Lions in The Old Man and The Sea:

Santiago in his youth had seen lions, the lords of the jungle, playing on the African beach. The lions “played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy.”

The lions symbolise for him the majesty of the lords of the forest, power and pride – qualities that the old man cherishes in others as well as in himself. The lions have been associated with his youth when all his powers were in their prime. In his old age he thinks of them and since they are linked with his youth we can interpret that the old man dreams about his own youth which has long slipped through his fingers. Whenever he dreams of the lions he is somehow happy though it is a mysterious process what makes him happy in the dream of lions.

3) The role of the Marlin in The Old Man and The Sea:

Like the boy Manolin, and the lions, Marlin also plays an important role in the life of Santiago. Throughout the book Santiago addresses him as a male. He lives so deep in the water, that the fisherman cannot see him. In his calmness and endurance of pain he sets an admirable example for Santiago to emulate.

He is the symbol of man’s isolation and it is one champion in his isolation pitched against the champion of another species in his isolation. It is he who draws out Santiago’s skill, courage, cunning and intelligence. So great is the fish that Santiago moves from pity to love for the fish in the course of this encounter. Santiago admires his fighting quality. Santiago calls him his “friend” and his “brother.”

The fish has been recognized traditionally as a symbol for Christ. He embodies some of the Christian’s virtues like love, courage, endurance of pain etc. Santiago has to kill this fish to know what his identity is but by taking the flesh of the fish he acquires some of his virtues and is thus able to meet the sharks.

The fish is also the symbol of the vision of the ultimate reality that man wants to seek. In the moment of his death the fish came alive and Santiago was tied to the fish at that moment. It seems as if something passed from the body of the fish into
the body of Santiago.

The spear of the fish is given to Manolin who would very much like to have it. The spear being the most potent weapon of the marling becomes a symbol of the legacy that Santiago is leaving for the boy. It is also symbolic of the boy’s commitment to the vocation of a fisherman.

4) Use of symbolism in The Old Man and the Sea

See answer of Q. 2.

3.3 Activities/Field Work

1. Try to see the film The Old Man and the Sea.
2. Collect the letters written by Hemingway to various persons.
4. Read Hemingway’s suicide.

3.4 Further Reading

3.0 Objectives:

After studying this novel, you will be able to know:

- Bernard Malamud as a Jewish writer
- The novel which depicts Jewish life
- Levin is in search for new life
- The bright character of Pauline
- The novel is a satire on academic life
3.2 Introduction:

American Literature is enriched by a number of minority literatures such as Afro-American, Jewish-American literatures. Writers like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, J. D. Salinger, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Philip Roth, Norman Mailer have mirrored Jewish life and its complexity and commotion. The theme of compassion is at the centre of these novelists. Malamud’s preoccupation with the theme of compassion is so consistent in his work that it merits a full length study. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see life and works of Bernard Malamud and his dynamic personality.

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn, New York, and educated at the City College of New York and Columbia University. He taught English at Oregon State University (1949-1961), and at Bennington College, Vermont, from 1961 onwards. A Jew himself, many of his books are concerned with the Jewish experience, particularly in the USA. His first novel, The Natural (1952) is a story that treats satirically a baseball player as the embodiment of the American mythical hero. This was followed by The Assistant (1957), a novel about impoverished Jewish life in Brooklyn, and A New Life (1961), a satire on the life of a Jewish Professor in an Oregon College. Perhaps his most famous book is The Fixer (1967) that brought him Pulitzer Prize. The Fixer is a moving and harrowing story, set in Russia and based on a true-life incident that occurred in 1911, about a poor, ill-educated and defenceless Jewish odd-job man who is accused of the ritual murder of a gentle child. Later novels are Pictures of Fidelman (1969), about a Bronx man who optimistically goes to Italy in the hope of becoming an artist, The Tenants (1971) about the tensions and conflicts between two writers, one white, and one black, who are neighbours in a run-down tenement, Dubin’s Lives (1979) and God’s Grace (1982). Short stories are to be found in The Magic Barrel (1958), Idiots First (1963) and Rembrandt’s Hat (1973). The Stories of Malamud (1983) is a selection of the author’s own favourites. His finest stories are realistic and unsentimental depictions of the bleakness and hardships of working-class immigrant urban life, which yet provide a sense of possible spiritual and emotional resonance, potentially giving luminous coherence to otherwise mundane and difficult existence.
3.2 The Text:

3.2.1 Glossary and Notes

- **filthy**: dirty, containing filth
- **shudder**: to tremble, or shake, as from fright or cold
- **mutter**: to speak in a low, indistinct tone
- **race**: (v) to move at great or top speed
- **murmur**: a low sound continually repeated
- **flop**: fall loosely and heavily
- **guzzle**: drink greedily or immoderately
- **curdle**: thicken, congeal, to change or turn to curds.

3.2.2 Summary:

The novel discusses with subtle irony the departmental objectives, politics, conservatism, and the oddities of the so called academicians of the Cascadia College.

Seymour Levin makes a long journey from the East to the West in search of a “new life”, his “manifest destiny”. He takes up the chosen career of a teacher of Cascadia and wants to seek “order, value, accomplishment love” in life. For some time he becomes a victim of wrong choice and fails to shed the burden of his past. He seeks physical love in Laverne – a waitress, Avis Fliss – his colleague, Nadalee – a student, and Pauline – his colleague. What begins as an act of adultery with Pauline ends in an irrevocable bond. To begin with, Levin tries to avoid Pauline “out of the fear of getting involved and the fear of Thanatos.” But eventually he evolves to a stage where he takes upon himself the burden of Pauline and her two adopted children at the cost of his career even while he is convinced that she no longer loves him. This evolution of Levin is variously interpreted as love, agape, caritas. Hyman interprets it as “a classical progress from eros, fleshly love to agape, the spiritual love of one of God’s creatures for another.” At the end of the novel, Levin achieves a kind of unsought heroism in sacrificing his career for the principle of love, a love in itself dormant, a memory beyond feeling. But it is compassion more than love, that prompts Levin to undertake the responsibility of pregnant Pauline and her adopted children. He discovers in his act ‘a way of giving value to other lives through
assuring rights.” This is prompted by compassion. If he fails to give his unstinted love, he succeeds in extending compassion. Compassion gives him the moral succour to hold the responsibility of Pauline, the ill-treated wife of Gilley, despite the grave problems such action poses. Levin’s act may appear to be one of disinterested responsibility especially in the final section of the novel.

In an interview with Miss Masilomani Malamud denies the impression that Levin has ceased to love Pauline at the end of the novel. He says:

Levin has not ceased to love her. There can be no responsibility without some love. The golden hoop rings he gave her which she fastened on to her ears are a symbol of love, to me symbolic of the wedding ring.

Levin’s love for Pauline is chastened by compassion. After his ambitions and dreams, Levin wakes up to the realization of the bitter fact that love goes not with freedom but with entanglement and commitment. He gave up “the Greek drama of freedom for the Jewish acceptance of responsibility and moral entanglement.” His sense of interpersonal responsibility and moral obligation gives him the courage to shoulder the responsibility of Pauline and when Gilley wonders as to why he was ready to take Pauline with her children at the expense of his promising career, Levin snubs with the retort “Because I can, you son of a bitch.” The courage with compassion makes Levin’s defeat a triumph.

Although Malamud provides an inside picture of the academic life and the politics that seized it, Levin appears completely an outsider. Levin is diminished as a character in those scenes set in Cascadia English department. The portraits of faculty people are merely stereotypes. The novel appears as though it is two books and not one. The character of Levin and his relations are not properly integrated into the academic life portrayed. This is the reason why A New Life is not as compact as The Assistant. The crooked politics of Department serves as a contrast to bring out the honesty of Levin who desperately fights against them. Through Levin, Malamud also vindicates his passion for liberalism and literature as against conservatism and mechanical language skills. The interest of the novel in the main lies in Levin’s evolution from selfish love to selfless compassion.
3.2.3 Check your progress :

A) Answer the following questions in one word/ phrase/ sentence each.

1. Who are the major Jewish novelists?
2. Which novel of Bernard Malamud brought him Pulitzer Prize?
3. In what college Levin was serving?
4. Who was Avis Fliss?
5. Who was Nadalee Hammerstad?

B) Fill in the blanks :

1. ----- was in search of “New Life”.
   a) Prof. Fairchild  b) Gerald Gilley
   c) Leo Duffy d) Seymour Levin
2. Morris Bober appears in the novel ----.
   a) New Life b) The Assistant c) The Fixer d) Dubin’s Lives
3. Bernard Malamud is a ---- novelist.
   a) Jewish b) black c) Afro-American d) American
4. The last novel of Bernard Malamud is ----.
   a) A New Life b) The Fixer c) The Assistant d) God’s Grace

3.2.4 Key to check your progress :

A) 1. Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, J. D. Salinger, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Philip Roth, Norman Mailer are the major Jewish novelists.
2. The Fixer brought Pulitzer Prize to Bernard Malamud.
3. Levin was serving at Cascadia College.
4. Avis Fliss was the colleague of Levin.
5. Nadalee Hammerstad was the student of Levin.

B) 1) Seymour Levin 2) The Assistant 3) Jewish 4) God’s Grace.
3.2.5 Major themes in the novel:

The contribution of Jewish novelists, like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, J. D. Salinger, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and a host of others, to American literature is greater. Like, Afro-American novelists, these Jewish novelists focus on the predicaments of the Jew, and his suffering not only in America but all over the world where the Jewish reside.

Bernard Malamud one of the prolific writers of the Jewish literature. He published novels and short stories where the Jew and his plight is at the centre. His popular novels are – The Natural (1973), The Assistant (1975), A New Life (1968), The Fixer (1979), Pictures of Fidelman (1980), The Tenants (1976), Dubin’s Lives (1979), God’s Grace (1982); he publish three collections of short stories – The Magic, Barrel, Idiots First and Rembrandt’s Hat. These novels and short stories contain a number of themes. The theme of compassion and the theme of trials and tribulations of a Jew are the major themes. With this perspective at the back of mind, let us see the major themes of the novel – A New Life.

A New Life has been analysed critically on various levels. Leslie Fiedler remarks that A New Life “is about the Fifties almost as much as it is about the West : the age of Mc Carthyism and Cold War.” The critics like John Hollander and Sally Daniels regarded the novel as “the best academic novel.” Granville Hicks points out that it is “basically a serious novel, about the difficulties of leading the good life.” Page Stegner finds the novel centrally concerned with Levin’s “gradual commitment to becoming a man of principles.” The novel depicts Levin’s quest for new life. There are critics who point out that the novel to some degree, derives from Malamud’s experience on the faculty of the Oregon State College which serves as the backdrop of the novel. Another important and underlying theme of A New Life is the theme of compassion. Compassion in Seymour Levin of A New Life gives him strength to give up his job and shoulder the responsibility of Pauline Gilley and her adopted children.

Leading Themes:

The novel depicts the following leading themes:

1. A New Life is an academic satire.

2. A New Life deals with Malamud’s experience (a bildungsro-man)
3. Levin’s quest for new life.

4. Seymour Levin is a typical Malamudian schlemiel who combines in himself the traits of a schlimazel.

5. The theme of compassion

3.2.6 Bernard Malamud’s art of characterization:

In regard to the delineation of his characters in his novels, Malamud observes:

I am an American, I’m a Jew, and I write for all men ... I write about Jews, when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going. I know something about their history, the quality of their experience and belief, and of their literature though not as much as I could like. Like many writers, I’m influenced especially by the Bible, both Testaments. I respond in particular to the East European immigrants of my father’s and mother’s generation.

The suffering of Jews including the tragedy of destruction of six million Jews has cast a distinct stamp on the sensitive mind of Malamud and he feels the need on the part of a writer to “cry” about it. He also asserts that “Jews are absolutely the very stuff of drama.” Despite these assertions, Malamud in his work transcends the regionalism and ethnic barriers in his depiction of human suffering and complexity of life.

The characters that Malamud depicts are seen in search of “new life.” Malamud’s protagonists do not just limit themselves to the struggle for survival in the “naturalistic world”, but enter into human relationships and live in a ‘world of interpersonal relationships which the existentialist psychoanalyst, Ludwig Bins Wanger calls ‘Mit welt’ literally ‘with world’. In one of his interviews given to The National Observer, Malamud makes clear that he is going to attempt man’s hidden strength. He observes:

One of my most important themes is a man’s hidden strength. I am very much interested in the resources of the spirit, the strength people don’t know they have until they are confronted with a crisis.

The inner strength of his characters is illustrated through a number of characters. In The Assistant Morris Bober is compassion-incarnate and lives and dies for others in the midst of crushing suffering. Frank Alpine, his gentle assistant, takes the role
of Morris Bober after his death and works day and night out of compassion and love for the Bober family.

Compassion in Seymour Levin of *A New Life* gives him strength to give up his job and shoulder the responsibility of Pauline Gilley and her adopted children.

Suffering chastens Yakov Bok of *The Fixer* who ultimately decides to suffer for the sake of his race, and does not yield to the tempting offers of release by the Tsarist officials despite inhuman torture.

Fidelman’s inability to understand the relation between art and life, and the values of love and compassion lead him to failure as painter and historian. Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint of *The Tenants* fail as writers due to lack of compassion and love, and seek to destroy each other at the end.

Dubin in *Dubin’s Lives* is torn with the conflict between his obligation for wife and lust for a promiscuous girl. Ultimately obligation wins over last.

In *God’s Grace* Cohn realises the value of compassion in the context of extinction of human life. He desperately struggles to infuse a sense of community into animals and becomes a victim of their hatred in the process. To conclude with the words of Peter L. Hays:

Malamud’s protagonists emerge as “secular saints” from “the hellish depths of human misery” with courage, compassion and humanity.

### 3.2.7 Exercises

1. What are the leading themes of *A New Life*?
2. Draw the character sketch of Seymour Levin.
3. Draw the character sketch of Gilley Pauline.
4. Discuss *A New Life* as an academic satire.
5. What are the autobiographical elements that we find in *A New Life*?
6. Illustrate the theme of compassion from *A New Life*.
7. Discuss Levin’s quest for new life.
8. What is the significance of the title *A New Life*?
3.2.8 Broad question with answer:

Q.1 Discuss *A New Life* as an academic satire. OR

**Discuss *A New Life* as the best academic novel.**

*A New Life* is a complex novel containing different layers of meanings. A host of critics have approached novel differently. John Hollander and Sally Daniels regarded the novel as “the best academic novel.” Robert Brown says: No other American novel gives as clear a report of normal state university life in the usual administrative procedures of departmental espionage, blackmail, subordination, and assorted shenanigans.” These critics and many others throw a flood of light on *A New Life* as an academic satire.

It is an open secret-particularly to academics that the world of our universities, the so-called seats of Higher Learning, is irrefutably, even if quite unfortunately, a veritable area of darkness, replete with people who are notorious for insidious jealousies and intrigues, malice and politics and bickering and backbiting, relieved only occasionally by beams of light emanating from genuine teachers who are real seekers and disseminators of knowledge and wisdom.

The novelist reveals some of the layers of this darkness by depicting the disconcerting, though eventually chastening, experiences of Seymour Levin who makes a long journey from the East to the West in search of a “new life”, his “manifest destiny.” He takes up the chosen career of a teacher at Cascadia and wants to seek “order, value, accomplishment, love” in life. For some time he becomes a victim of wrong choices and fails to shed the burden of his past. He seeks physical love in Laverne – a waitress Avis Fliss – his colleague, Nadalee – a student, and Pauline – his colleague. What begins as an act of adultery with Pauline ends in an irrevocable bond.

Contrary to the hopes of Levin, Cascadia is not a liberal arts college but mostly a science and technical college. It had liberal arts once but lost after First World War and never regained. It prefers composition to literature. The departmental objective as stated by Prof. Fairchild, head of the Department, is “to satisfy the needs of the professional schools on the campus with respect to written communication.” Gilley’s statement to Levin at his reception “one of the first things you’ll notice about the West is its democracy”, appears ironical since Cascadia never encourages
Levin only makes a feeble plea to Gilley and Prof. Fairchild that “Democracy owes its existence to the liberal arts.” Even his hopes of teaching literature are belied as Gilley makes clear that he cannot teach literature till he obtained Ph.D., the “union card to stay in College teaching.” Interestingly enough, the reason Gilley gives for preferring composition to literature is “You can just see those kids improving from one paper to the next. It is not easy to notice much of a development of literary taste in a year.” Levin is irked by the irrelevance of “teaching people how to write who do not know what to write.” He is scared by the persisting nightmare that he may be asked to quit Cascadia.

Levin feels at Cascadia that his ideals have no value in a world rocked by corruption and hypocrisy. With his high ideals, he is merely a fish out of water at Cascadia. Gilley’s suggestion that “If you are our type, it’s a good place to stay”, forewarns Levin of his impending troubles. There is no “democracy prevailing in the Department of English of Cascadia College. Levin who is not of the ‘type” Gilley describes, cannot obviously hope for a “worthwhile career” at Cascadia.

At the campus of Cascadia, Levin feels loneliness. He years for his “lost youth” and company. He envies the married people of the faculty. He is famished for love and wants to marry in vain. Malamud describes in detail the indulgence of Levin. Levin kept relation with so many women like Laverne, Avis Fliss, Nadalee Hammerstud. Later, he actually fell in love with Pauline who was the wife of Gilley. In spite of her love affair with Leo Duffy and have two adopted children, Levin extended his affair with Pauline. Malamud describes the coming of ups and downs in the lives of Pauline and Levin. Finally, despite her character, he wanted to live with her, with A New Life. He says:

I loved her; we loved. She loves me still, I have never been so loved. That was the premise, and the premise you chose was the one you must live with; if you chose the wrong one you were done to begin with, your whole life in jail.

Levin cannot escape the love of Pauline for the sake of freedom. Even without feeling he would hold on to her out of compassion.

Levin learns certain laws of politics from his experience at Cascadia – First weak leaders favour weak leaders, the mirror principle in politics; second, one becomes his victim’s victim; third, stand for something and somebody around will feed the persecuted. Levin’s “Laws” apply to his own life. Gilley becomes the
victim of Levin’s love for Pauline, his wife. But ultimately Levin becomes Gilley’s victim, that is ‘victim’s victim’. Levin stands for a good cause of education, but everyone including Gilley feels persecuted.

Levin’s defeat appears quite natural in the corrupt Cascadia College. The “new life” he seeks with Pauline has compassion for its motivating force and it humanises his response to life.

Q.2 What is the major theme of the novel A New Life?

OR

Write a note on Levin.

Bernard Malamud is a prolific writer. He wrote novels and short stories. He created a galaxy of characters such as Roy Hobbs, Yakov Bok, Morris Bober, Seymour Levin, Harry Lesser, Willie Spearmint, Dubin and Cohn. All these protagonists are in search for “new life”. In their quest for “new life”, Malamud’s protagonists do not just limit themselves to the struggle for survival in the “naturalistic world”, but enter into human relationships and live in a “world of interpersonal relationships.”

Seymour Levin is one protagonist of A New Life who is in search of “new life”. He enters the world of the Cascadia College, and encounters with a variety of experiences. As his ideal principles do not work in the Cascadia College, he indulges in sexual matters. He keeps relations Laverne, Avis Fliss, and Nadalee Hammerstad. But his relation with Pauline Gilley changed his entire life. Both Levin and Pauline confess their love to each other.

‘I love you, Lev. That’s my name for you.
Sy is too much like sigh, Lev is closer to love.
I love you. I’m sorry, you deserve better.’
I deserve you.

‘I should never have let you that day in the woods. But I love the kind of man you are, the kind I have to love.’

I love you willingly, with all my heart. (191).

Levin, however, is not free from his sense of guilt. The question of morality crops
up for him when “a man interfered with another’s rights”. He, however, consoles himself that Gilley himself is not guiltless. He doubts whether Gilley deserves Pauline’s fidelity when he has not used his “rights” well, “at the very least to keep her from sexual hunger.” Malamud goes on to describe the relationship between Pauline and Levin. Gilley feels that why Levin invites so many troubles at the cost of his career. Gilley observes:

An older woman than yourself and not dependable, plus two adopted kids, no choice of yours, no job, or promise of one, and other assorted head aches. Why take that load on you self (310).

Levin angrily retorts:

Because I can, you son of a bitch. (310)

Levin’s assertion reveals the strength of his compassionate understanding.

Levin accepts Pauline with compassion when she tells him that she has been two-months pregnant by him. Levin does not allow Pauline to think of abortion in any case. He is decisive about the child and says: “I want the child” (314). As he drives Pauline and the two adopted children in his old Hudson, he even thinks of buying a seven-passenger car. Having gone through “the Malamudian fire of passion and frustration, sacrifice and insight”, Levin finds true freedom in “liberation from the prison of self.” He gives Pauline the gold hoop earings which he had bought and kept for her. Levin’s act is symbolic of his true love for her.

The novel concludes with Gilley taking a snap of Levin and Pauline as they drove along by car and waving it aloft saying “Got your picture!” (316). Malamud interpreted it as a sign that Gilley will perhaps have been affected enough by Levin’s and Pauline’s commitments to learn something significant from the experience.

### 3.3 Activities/ Field Work

1. Make a list of all the Jewish novelists, and their works.
2. Focus on the theme of compassion.
3. Find out any novel of American literature, dealing with Jewish life, especially the academic part of the protagonist.
3.4 Further Reading:


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4.1 Objectives:

After reading this unit you will-

- get introduced to the Noble Prize Winning American novelist, William Faulkner and his works
- come to know about the racial problem in America
- become aware of the fact that how an individual is alienated and isolated in the post World War I period
- see that there is a lack of communication and co-ordination between two individuals and between individuals and society
- be able to look into the most complex and mysterious feminine psyche
- come to know about the innovative writing style and technique of Faulkner

4.2 Introduction:

William Cuthbert Faulkner (1897-1962) was born at New Albany, Mississippi in a businessman family. When the First World War was on, he wanted to join the American Army but was refused because of his size. Then he studied in the University of Mississippi for two years from 1919 to 1921. During this period he also worked in a New York bookstore. Later, he became a postmaster at the university but was dismissed for writing while on duty. Faulkner took it as an opportunity for the writer in him and in 1924 he published his first book, a collection of poems entitled The Marble Faun. A year later he came in contact with another writer named Sherwood Anderson. Anderson’s wife encouraged Faulkner to give up poetry for fiction. Before he wrote his first novel Soldier's Pay (1926), Faulkner toured Europe. The novel was soon followed by Mosquitoes (1927) and Sartoris (1929) but none of these gathered much attention from readers or critics. Yet, Faulkner continued to write fiction. In 1929 with the publication of his most ambitious work, The Sound and the Fury Faulkner earned much praise. It is a story of the downfall of the Compson family seen through the minds of several characters. His next novel Sanctuary (1931) is about the degeneration of Temple Drake, a young girl from a distinguished southern family. Its sequel, Requiem For A Nun (1951), centers on the courtroom trial of a Negro woman who was once a party to Temple Drake's debauchery. In Light in August (1932), prejudice is shown to be most destructive
when it is internalized, as in Joe Christmas, who believes, though there is no proof of it, that one of his parents was a Negro. The theme of racial prejudice is brought up again in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936). It narrates a story of a young man who is rejected by his father and brother because of his mixed blood. His later novel *Go Down, Moses* (1942) narrates the story of white or black descendants of Lucius McCaslin family. Faulkner's most outspoken moral evaluation of the relationship and the problems between Negroes and whites is to be found in *Intruder in the Dust* (1948). In 1940, Faulkner published the first volume of the Snopes trilogy, *The Hamlet*, followed by *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959). All of them trace the rise of the insidious Snopes family to positions of power and wealth in the community. Faulkner received the 1949 Nobel Prize for Literature and the 1954 Pulitzer Prize for his novel *A Fable* (1954). During the last ten years of his life, Faulkner travelled, lectured and became a blunt critic of isolation. He died of a heart attack in 1962.

4.3 Critical analysis of the novel *The Light in August*

4.3.1 The Plot:

Lena Grove is a young girl of twelve. Her parents are dead and hence she lives with her brother. While there, she gets pregnant by a man named Lucas Burch. Burch runs away promising her that he would soon send for her. When no message comes from Lucas for a long time, the pregnant Lena walks from Alabama into Mississippi looking for him and one day she arrives in Jefferson town. The same day, an old plantation house owned by Joanna Burden is set on fire. We later learn that Joe Christmas, who lived in an old slave cabin on the plantation and was having a sexual relationship with Joanna, is accused of the murder and is away. The townspeople seem angry that Joe is part black and has killed Joanna, the white woman. Byron Bunch, another worker in the mill welcomes Lena and introduces her to Reverend Gail Hightower, the disgraced clergyman. Byron also tells her that Joe Brown is no one else but Lucas Burch who came to the mill three years back. He worked for some time and then started a wine business in partnership with Joe Christmas. Both live in an old slave quarter on the grounds of an old plantation owned by Miss Joanna Burden, a grown up but unmarried woman. Despite a white, she always likes the company of the blacks.
As time passes, Byron’s affection for Lena grows. The story then recounts how Reverend Gail Hightower and his wife came to Jefferson long ago when Hightower was hired by a Jefferson Presbyterian church to be its minister. But soon the people come to know about Mrs. Hightower’s illegitimate relations with hotel man in Memphis, the nearby town. This affair turns against Mr. Hightower and he is forced to resign his position from the church. The town tries to force him to leave Jefferson but he refuses and continues to live there. He claims that he has done no wrong to the church or to the people. Joe Brown, who lived with Joe Christmas and who was present when Joanna was killed is questioned by the sheriff. Brown tells the sheriff about Christmas’s sexual relations with Joanna and also informs that Christmas is partly a black. The story then takes us to the childhood days of Joe Christmas. At the age of five, Christmas is kept in an orphanage because he knows nothing of his mother and father. One day, he catches the dietician and another orphanage employee having sex. The dietician thinks that the boy will tell that he saw her and the man together. Therefore she sends him to an orphanage for black children. A man named McEachern adopts Joe and takes him home. McEachern is unaware that Joe is part black.

Time passes and Joe grows into a teenager. At seventeen, he begins going out of the McEachern house and meets a waitress named Bobbie from town. Their relationship is sexual. Joe is more serious and immature about their relationship. McEachern begins to suspect and one night he sees Joe and Bobbie at a dance and shouts at Bobbie. Joe strikes McEachern with a chair and runs home. He then, gets the secret money and goes to meet Bobbie but she leaves with her parents who fear that Joe might have killed McEachern. As Joe loses Bobbie, he runs away. For fifteen years he wanders, travels between Chicago, Detroit, and Mexico, and finally arrives in Jefferson. There Joanna encourages him but one night he enters her bedroom, and enjoys sex with her. But then, troubled with himself, he avoids her until one day he finds her in his cabin, where she tells Joe the story of herself and her ancestors.

Joe and Joanna’s relationship goes through various phases. At one point, Joanna lies that she's pregnant. She also tries to get Joe to go to a school for blacks and then become a lawyer, but he refuses to do so. Lastly, she tries to get Joe to pray with her, but again Joe refuses. Joanna suggests that perhaps both she and Joe should kill themselves, but at the end he kills her and to hide his crime he sets fire to her house.
The sheriff searches for Joe but is unable to find him out. Byron Bunch speaks to Hightower and informs that he has taken Lena to live in the cabin where Lucas Burch and Joe Christmas lived once. Joe is caught in Mottstown. During Joe's capture, Mr. Doc Hines who is Joe’s grandfather arrives there with his wife and asks for Joe’s killing. Later, from Mrs. Hines we come to know that Joe is the son of Milly, their daughter. Listening to the tragic story of Joe, Byron brings Mr. and Mrs. Hines to Hightower's house and requests him to lie and say that Joe was with him when Joanna Burden was killed but Hightower refuses. Hightower helps Lena who gives birth to a boy. Soon Lena explains that Byron asked her to marry him and that she said no. Byron then quits the job and goes to the courthouse but promises Lena all possible help. He succeeds in bringing Lucas there who is surprised to see Lena, as well as the baby but then he runs away. Byron follows him to railway track. Seeing this, Lucas beats Byron and jumps onto a train and disappears. Meanwhile Joe Christmas is shoot down by Percy Grimm, the security guard.

The novel ends where we see Lena again on the road. Only this time she has Byron Bunch and her baby with her. Bunch wants to marry Lena, but Lena is not interested in him. On the other hand, she likes to find out Lucas Burch as she also likes travelling.

4.3.2 Characters:

4.3.2.1 Joe Christmas:

Joe Christmas is the novel’s central character. He is also known as Joe Hines or Joe McEachern. In his first appearance in the novel, he is a young man in his early thirties, dressed in wrinkled trousers, a soiled white shirt and tie, and a straw hat. He is a wanderer and has a rootless, overly independent quality to him. Others normally misinterpret him as cruel and lonely. He is bi-racial. He is also silent, unfriendly, and gloomy. His face consistently shows a cold and quiet look of dislike. He is complex, conflicted, and many-sided. He openly damages the little happiness that he is able to find for himself. He also consistently surprises his own attempts to find a place of belonging.

Joe is one of the novel’s most mysterious characters. He is an angry man and a shadow figure who walks the border. He lives neither lightly nor comfortably in both the black and white worlds. He rouses curiosity on the part of the mill workers, accompanied by hatred for his superior detachment and other attractive qualities.
Though Faulkner provides many details of Joe’s life, Christmas still remains an isolated, enigmatic and mysterious figure. At the mill he is nobody but a blank slate. Many believe that he comes from an unknown foreign country. Several connect his life to that of Jesus. The two figures share the same initials- Jesus and Joe, both having close association to ‘Christmas’. Jesus was left on the orphanage steps on Christmas, and Joe is killed in the confrontation in Hightower’s kitchen. But these suggestions of similarity are loose and allow Faulkner to complicate and darken the moral nature of his the central character.

Faulkner’s characterization of Joe Christmas challenges and ultimately challenges any Christ-like comparisons. Any attempt to see Joe Christmas as a victim is complicated by his life of violence and his general hatred for humanity. He emerges as a classically imperfect and conflicted modern antihero. He is sad, leads a lonely life without an identity. He does not know about his birth name, his racial heritage and so he wanders in a useless search for a place where he can belong. Unfortunately, he fails to get such a place till the last day of his life. Whereas Jesus’ life inspires a sense of equality and praise, Joe Christmas generates little sympathy from those around him. The harsh conditions that surrounded his upbringing do little to explain or dismiss his compelling need to force harm on others. His inner compulsion goes to such an extreme that he kills two persons. Christmas’s attempt to get back and establish his identity in the world is destroyed by a dislike for the very people. He believes that they could possibly provide him with the comfort. Nonetheless, he bears all the features of a protagonist.

4.3.2.2 Lena Grove:

Another significant character in the novel is that of Lena Grove. She is a pregnant teenager from Alabama. Orphaned at twelve, she comes to Jefferson on foot and by catching rides on carts along the way from her home outside Doane’s Mills. Inexperienced in the ways of the world, she is determined to find the man, Lucas Burch, who made her pregnant and left her behind with the promise. Lena is an easygoing presence who seems unconcerned about her unsettled status in life. Superficially, Faulkner uses Biblical imagery for Lena who suggests Mary journeying to Bethleh but Mary is a lost, wide-eyed teenager. Instead of a balanced, she gives birth to her son in a rustic cabin, eventually moving on with her substitute Joseph, Byron Bunch, in a cart. But there the comparison ends. More than anything, Lena can be seen as a simple embodiment of the novel’s life force. Whereas Joe
Christmas brings violence and death to Jefferson, Lena brings her developing child and a stony determination to find the baby’s father. She replaces Christmas and replaces his presence in the novel, giving birth to her son on a cot in the simple shelter that once housed the twin criminal Joes.

Joe Christmas is the classic tragic Faulkner figure. He is destined to struggle and fail. But Lena represents another Faulkner type. She is often reserved for select female characters in his fictional worlds. She is the wanderer, the young innocent, believable in her determination to make her baby legitimate. Lena is a survivor, yet she does not struggle against the challenges and the lack that she faces. At the same time, she does not allow her poverty, simplicity, and lack of education to plan against her. She accepts suffering with little opposition. She faces all these odds with her head-on. She resists the problems boldly. Her wanderings form the narrative of the novel. To begin with, at the beginning she enters Jefferson alone. Then in her brief, symbolic break of the journey, she gives birth to a son. This birth offers a brief shine of hope to a town witnessed by murder and racial conflict. Lena then takes to the road again. But now she is accompanied by her infant and older protector and admirer, Byron Bunch. In this way she embraces the freedom that once characterized Joe Christmas’s years of wandering. All these aspects of Lena clearly bring to our notice that next to Joe Christmas, she is the only character who combines boldness and shyness together. Hers is also one of the immortal female characters created by Faulkner in his fictional world.

4.3.2.3 Reverend Gail Hightower:

Reverend Gail Hightower is an exposed and tainted minister in Jefferson. He is tall, and overweight. He was once the minister of one of the town’s major churches. He got the post because his grandfather who was killed in Jefferson while stealing chickens. He is forced to step down after his immoral wife died in a fall from a hotel window in Memphis. Refusing to leave Jefferson, Hightower lives as an outsider. He shows his toughness and determination in enduring the gossip, oppression, and the final beatings he suffers at the hands of the town residents who drive him off.

Much of Reverend Hightower’s characterization centers around his unusual and obsessive nature. All the time he thinks and is inspired by the haunting memories of his grandfather. He carries the burden of this strange and unusual behavior on his shoulder up to the end. Through him, the past becomes a living thing that never dies.
Despite the increasing incidents of violence and racial conflict in Jefferson, Hightower is unmoved and unshaken. His life stands as a harsh reminder of the fact that there is no fresh start, no hope for a new direction or change. His wife’s unreliable behavior followed by her suicide starts a process of gradual decline. Hightower bears the guilt and stigma of the illicit affair of his wife. He punishes himself and the community by refusing to admit total defeat in leaving town after he has been dismissed from his duties.

Both on personal and social level Hightower’s life is disappointing. His life stands as a testament to the recovery and reassertion of dignity and personal pride. He attempts to recover the pride of self, his self-respect. He resists arrogance. In his meditations and thoughts, Hightower stands as the moral or philosophical center of the novel. Amidst tragedy and ill circumstances that has marked his life; he is able to recover greater strength, self-awareness, and wisdom. At the end of the novel, he is also able to face and lay the family ghosts and the painful past to rest. To conclude, the character of Reverend Hightower is anti-traditional and earns wrath and anger of the citizens who still worship a bishop as God. However, when readers come to know about his life story, they sympathize him.

4.3.2.4 Byron Bunch:

Byron Bunch is a mill worker in Jefferson. He is a man who is at first misidentified to Lena as Lucas Burch, the father of her baby. In his thirties, he is very hardworking, and devoted. He leads a quietly disciplined life. He works six days a week and then directs the group of a rural church. The church has continued uninterrupted in the same routine for years. Byron’s life severely shifts and becomes much hectic and tiresome. However, when he meets the young, pregnant Lena, his life takes a new turn and he decides to help the desperate girl by all means.

Byron’s life is damaged by the routine and bore dome work at the church. He lives in a detached and protected world. When Lena arrives at the mill in Jefferson, her plight changes his life altogether. No doubt, Byron is a good man. He lives an honest, straight life and directs the choir at a rural church each Sunday, returning for the start of his shift the following morning. But Byron is tired of this work which he has done for years. He has lived a moral life by avoiding rather than engaging the world around him. His growing attachment to Lena awakens in him a sense of dislike for Lucas. Again, Byron’s friendship with Hightower not only provides a source of
inspiration to Byron but also adds a new level of moral and philosophical complexity to his life. Byron turns to his friend for advice and wisdom and in turn is able to reveal his own desires and intentions through his dialogues with the exposed minister. Hightower throws doubt on the purity of Byron’s sentiments who all the time selflessly helps Lena. It is again Hightower who questions his supposed disinterest or lack of hidden motive in improving her situation. Byron is forced to resolve his feelings for Lena. He confronts both public opinion and his own selfishness. To conclude, he is an honorable man who chooses to live a more fully engaged and fully present life. Byron’s willingness to fight Joe Brown, to be beaten by the larger man, is the old reawakening that he needs. It reveals finally his resolve to be involved in the life of another and his willingness to risk personal injury. Byron is determined to stand by Lena and deal with the conflicting emotions and weaknesses that he experiences in loving another. In the end, Byron may still have much to learn when it comes to courting and caring for Lena. Nonetheless, he finds a freedom and a purpose to his life that was till then avoided or ignored.

4.3.2.5 Joe Brown alias Lucas Burch:

Joe Brown alias Lucas Burch is a gambler, bootlegger, and a cheater. He is young and tall and has a distinctive white wound beside his mouth. He first appears in dirty overalls in search of work at the mill. He is lazy but remains alert to any situation that is profitable for him. He moves in a confident boastfulness but he has the tendency to pull his head to the side. He also looks over his shoulder. He is a known liar and exaggerator. His black past and questionable dealings make him an object of mockery. He becomes an object of contempt in the eyes of those who know his history.

4.3.2.6 Joanna Burden:

Joanna Burden is an isolated lifelong resident of Jefferson. She was born and raised in the house where she still lives on the borders of the town. Miss Burden is still considered a northerner, as her family relocated to the South after Reconstruction. Her grandfather and brother, who supported voting rights for blacks, were killed by a local man, Colonel Sartoris. The residents still recall this tragedy. It appears from the novel that Miss Burden has sexual relations with Joe Christmas. She corresponds with the blacks. She also advises them from time to time. She is a white but has kind heart to give to the blacks. Hence, she occasionally travels to the
campsuses to meet with them in person. However, when she persists to go to school and study law or work for the blacks, she is first insulted and then killed by him.

4.3.2.7 Simon McEachern:

Simon McEachern is Joe Christmas’s foster-father. Mr. McEachern is a thick-bodied man and has a closely cropped brown beard. He has cold, light-colored eyes. He is stern and religious. His religiosity borders on extreme passion and is far away from kindness and sympathy. He is blinded by his extreme faith and belief in divine revenge. He shows contempt for humanity and the stupidity and sin of others. He maintains that hard work, self-sacrifice, self-denial, and personal suffering are the characteristics of a morally valued life. However, he supports violence. His has a firm and authoritarian presence. It compromises his essential humanity. And in the end he provokes the murderous anger of his foster son, Joe Christmas.

4.3.2.8 Mrs. McEachern:

Mrs. McEachern is Joe Christmas’s foster-mother. She is a shy and deformed woman. She looks very much older than her husband. She is silent and somewhat her presence is invisible in the family. She tries to earn her son’s love and respect by opposing her husband’s violence with excessive love and kindness. She also attempts to create a closer bond with her adopted son by creating and indulging in secrets. However, every attempt made by her to save her foster son ends in failure and she has to watch his death in her presence.

4.3.2.9 Mr. Hines alias Uncle Doc:

Uncle Doc is Joe Christmas’s biological grandfather. He is an untidy, angry, and unkind man whose violence and extreme behavior have kept him in jail more than once. He becomes infamous for his wild talk. He uses his religious fundamentalism to justify his natural belief in white superiority. His extreme, immovable sense of right and politeness corrupts his good and healthy intentions. It causes him to punish and deceive those who are closest to him. He mixes up the very mentally abnormal and confusing state that is interrupted only by his noisy attempts to provoke the residents of first Mottstown and then Jefferson to murder his grandson.

4.3.2.10 Mrs. Hines:

Mrs. Hines is Joe Christmas’s biological grandmother. She is short, fat, and round-faced. She is a shadow figure whom few in town recognize. She is strange and
emotional. Her weak grip on reality is compromised when the grandson is charged with the murder of Miss Burden. Her passivity and respect to her husband leads to a series of tragedies. She attempts to save the life of her grandson but in vain.

4.3.2.11 Miss Atkins:

Miss Atkins is the dietician at the orphanage. She feels insecure and unpleasant. She allows her paranoia and fear to strengthen her racist attitudes and revengeful nature. When Joe Christmas watches her sexual act with a person in the orphanage, she makes fuss of the black background of the boy. She manages to remove Joe from the orphanage very speedily. Had she not done this, Joe might not have turned to violent acts.

4.3.2.12 Bobbie Allen:

Bobbie Allen is a prostitute. She passes for a waitress at the diner in Jefferson. She is rough and poor. Bobbie brings her Memphis street smarts to Max and Mame’s seedy restaurant. There she seduces Joe Christmas and takes advantage of his inexperience and innocence.

4.3.3 Themes:

The novel may be interpreted on many levels. It suggests such themes as man's isolation in the modern world, man's responsibility to the community, the sacrifice of Christ, the search-for-a-father, man's inhumanity to man, and the theme of denial and flight as opposed to passive acceptance and resignation.

4.3.3.1 The Burdens of the Past:

Social history as well as Personal history emerges large in the novel. Miss Burden and Reverend Hightower each come from a complex inheritance of domestic pride, struggle, and shame. Miss Burden lives her life as a personal sacrifice to a cause. She feels a compulsion to honor her family’s hard commitment to eradicate the racial conflict in America. It is ironic on her part that her help itself causes her problems. She wishes to help Joe Christmas, but he brutally murders her when he hates and feels threatened by her pressure to improve. Reverend Hightower, meanwhile, is trapped in the past. He is torn between the romantic image of his grandfather who killed the chickens unlawfully and his father who is lover of peace. His unsettled relationship with his personal history makes a compromise with his effectiveness as a spiritual leader and a husband.
Joe Christmas is on the opposite front. He is a man without a history and is beyond personal memories of the past which he does not know. His past is so powerful that he cannot escape or resist it. He has a strange and mysterious nature. He dislikes the entire human kind and is also murderous in his approach. He has come to know about his grandfather only to the extent that he worked as caretaker at the orphanage. This much similarity both of them bear in common. But both are violent men and are in favour of antisocial behavior and murder.

Lena Grove emerges as the only figure able to avoid the oppressive burden of the past. She is a child of nature, free of personal stigma or shame. Like Christmas, she is an orphan. But due to her indomitable spirit exhibited right through the novel till the end, she succeeds in writing her own future with her own hand.

4.3.3.2 The Struggle for a Logical Sense of Identity:

Equal to the theme of burden of the past born by the major characters, the novel also explores the theme of the struggle for a logical sense of identity. Though there is an exploration of issues of gender and race specifically, they are the part of Faulkner’s larger, more all-encompassing inquiry. Faulkner is very much concerned about the nature of identity and how it is influenced by history, nature, society, and individual lives. The residents of Jefferson have accepted Reverend Hightower, Joanna Burden, and Joe Christmas, but each of these characters deliberately resists or throws away the deforming influence of a strict social and moral order. Society, as depicted by Faulkner attempts to force simplistic, restrictive ideas of identity based on broad categories, such as race and gender. Some individuals need these external signs to provide themselves with a sense of clarity, order and definition. Some others struggle under the weight of disturbing attempts to restrict and classify. For Joe Christmas, the lack of a stable and particular sense of self assumes tragic dimensions. His wanderings become a symbolic journey to find out who he is. It is a search for wholeness and self-completion. In short, there is a continuous search for identity on part of Joe Christmas and some other characters who have their own identities are in search of restoring logical sense in it.

4.3.3.3 The Isolation of the Individual:

Like other novels by Faulkner, this novel is also filled with lonely and isolated characters. They choose or are forced to live in the outer part of society. For example, Byron shields himself from the outside world with his unconscious
approach of aloofness. Lena is an deserted pregnant girl. She seeks the support of Joe Brown. She then realizes that she can stand alone. She also works like an agent who helps Byron’s final and delayed entrance into the world of human interaction and contact. Each of the characters faces his or her own crisis in life and each one of them is able to solve his or her own embarrassing situation. However, no one, in the true sense succeeds in driving happiness home.

Reverend Hightower and Joe Christmas both are described as living outside of time. They live in their own worldly order and a world of their own making. After the disloyalty that Christmas experiences at the hands of Bobbie Allen, copying the desertion and neglect that marks his childhood. He lives free and uncontrollable existence. He deliberately damages every opportunity to begin an emotional connection with another. Therefore, his one attempt to develop relationship with Miss Burden ends not in greater relationship and connectedness but in murder and extreme anger.

4.3.4 Symbolism:

A symbol is a person, place, thing, or event that has meaning in itself that also stands for something more than itself. For example, ‘white’ is a name of a colour and it also stands for ‘purity’. Symbolism, as we all know is the use of symbols to represent ideas. Faulkner treats some objects and animals symbolically in this novel. The followings are the major symbols used in the novel.

4.3.4.1 The Dead Sheep

The act of Joe Christmas’s killing of the sheep is a brief but telling example of Christian symbols. Like many youngsters, Christmas finds the beginning of his sexual urges, curiosity and knowledge unsettling. When he first becomes familiar with the workings of a woman’s menstrual cycle, he is disgusted by the knowledge. The only relief he finds is in the bloody sacrifice of a farmer’s sheep grazing in a field. The foolish and rash act indicates the two additional killings that come to disturb Joe and ultimately seal his fate. In addition, the sheep is indirectly established as a double for Christmas. The sacrifice of the lamb seeks his own death and destruction. The sheep’s brutal killing also indicates the shooting that awaits Joe in Reverend Hightower’s kitchen.
4.3.4.2 Smoke Rising from the Burden House

There is another important symbolic reference in the novel. The significant day on which Lena arrives in Jefferson is marked also by the killing of Miss Burden and the burning of her home. Until that day, Byron Burch pursues his relations with the lady. When he meets Lena at the mill, he is so troubled and upset by her presence that he never consciously sees the cloud of smoke rising on the horizon. Later, the narrator states that, when Byron realizes Lucas Burch and Joe Brown are one and the same, he suggests that there is warning in the sky and he is stupid to read it. However, Byron’s impression of the smoke as an ill sign of ill will is another example of misinterpretation in the novel. The smoke serves not as an indication of bad times to come but marks the ending or the passing away of an existing order. The fire at the Burden house serves as a ritualistic purification. It releases the tragedy and violence that has marked Jefferson that August and paves the way for Lena’s life-bearing presence and the new sense of commitment and responsibility in Byron.

4.3.4.3 The Street

The symbol of ‘street’ in the novel is very significant. It comes out as a powerful metaphor of the ongoing search for self-acceptance and belonging. This research is undertaken is undertaken by Lena and Brown. The image first appears after Christmas kills his stepfather and is then deserted by Bobbie Allen and her associates. In the fruitless wanderings, the street symbolizes Joe’s restless, self-defeating search for personal meaning. The street also takes on dimensions of a tempting release and escape from his self-imprisoning consciousness. But it is an illusion and a temptation. It delivers neither the decision nor the answers that Christmas searches. Lena’s ‘street’ is her personal journey. It leads to new hope and possibility, whereas Joe’s ‘street’ draws him headlong into additional suffering, bitterness, and eventually death.

Apart from these significant objects, Faulkner also gives symbolic names to the characters. For example, the isolation of the Reverend Father from society is seen in his name, Hightower. Mrs. Burden’s family is all the time under constant ‘burden’. Lena Grove, as the name implies is a ‘child of nature’. All the time she wanders among trees. The name and character of Joe Christmas reminds us of the Jews who do not have their own identity and cannot afford to happiness and peace of mind. In
this way the dead sheep, the smoke and the street and even the characters are the best
eamples of the use of symbols in the novel.

4.3.5 Significance of the title:

The title of the novel is very significant, apt and suggestive. It has its own
coincidental history of its own. Faulkner believes that late-summer light in the South
assumes unique qualities. It is an observation and as he has said that the title was
suggested by his wife. It happened that Faulkner was busy with the writing of this
novel. One August evening sitting in the corridor of their house his wife drew his
attention to the lightening in the sky which was unexpected and strange. Faulkner
took it be the title of the novel for many mysterious and unexpected events and
happenings take place in the novel. He refers to these unique properties of light in the
opening of Chapter 20, when Reverend Hightower revisits his life and arrives in
Jefferson as a young priest. Again, Hightower and Miss Burden enclose themselves
in the shadow world of their domiciles. These worlds are tempted by the world of
light, of reality and self-exposure that exists beyond their windows. Moreover, Miss
Burden’s relationship with Joe Christmas plays out only at night when there is no
light but darkness all over. In addition, some critics have traced the title of *Light in
August* to a colloquial, regional meaning of “light” as another term for pregnancy. It
thus refers to the renewed sense of hope. This belief trusts that Lena’s baby will be
the real light in the darkened world.

4.3.6 Self-assessment Questions:

A. Choose the correct alternative and rewrite the sentences.

1. Lena leaves her brother’s house because-
   a) she is wanted for theft by the Police.
   b) she is searching for her baby’s father.
   c) she is searching for her father.
   d) she fails to adjust herself in her brother’s house.

2. Joe Brown and Joe Christmas earn a living after quitting at the mill by-
   a) tending to Miss Burden’s house and property
   b) robbing trucks along the road to Memphis
   c) making and selling liquor
3. Joe Christmas kills his father at the school dance by-
   a) smashing a chair over his head
   b) shooting him
   c) strangling him
   d) beating him to death

4. Miss Burden tries to help Joe Christmas by-
   a) asking him to move into the main house
   b) hiring him as her personal assistant
   c) deeding all her property to him
   d) trying to send him to college

5. In Jefferson, Lena decides to live-
   a) with Reverend Hightower
   b) at Mrs. Beard’s boardinghouse
   c) in a tent with Byron
   d) in Joe Brown’s cabin on the Burden property

6. Joe Christmas is captured-
   a) in a cotton house
   b) on the main street of Mottstown
   c) on a train bound for Memphis
   d) at a backwoods church

7. The caretaker at the orphanage turns out to be-
   a) Joe’s father
   b) Reverend Hightower
   c) Joe’s grandfather
   d) Miss Burden’s father

8. Miss Burden’s family comes from-
   a) Canada
   b) New Hampshire
c) Maryland
d) Alabama

9. After the fire at the Burden house, Joe Christmas is revealed to be-
a) Miss Burden’s son
b) Miss Burden’s occasional lover
c) Miss Burden’s friend
d) an insurance agent

10. When Joe Christmas finds out that Bobbie Allen is a prostitute, he-
a) runs away
b) prays with her
c) asks her to marry him
d) beats her

B. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase or sentence only.

1. By which name is Lucas Burch known to the people in Jefferson?
2. How does Reverend Hightower’s wife die?
3. What does Byron ask Hightower to do after Joe’s arrest?
4. What does young Joe Christmas steal from dietician’s room at the orphanage?
5. What does Joe Brown do after his reunion with Lena?
6. What is Miss Burden’s first name?
7. Why did Hightower want to come to Jefferson in the first place?
8. Where do Lena and Byron go at the end of the novel?
9. Who is the central character in the novel?
10. When was the novel published?

4.4 Model answers to Self-assessment Questions

A. 1-b, 2-c, 3-a, 4-d, 5-a, 6-b, 7-c, 8-d, 9-b, 10-a

2. by falling from the window of a hotel.
3. Byron asks Hightower to claim falsely that Joe was with him the night of Joanna Burden’s murder.
4. Toothpaste.
5. After his reunion with Lena, Joe Brown runs away and escapes on a train.
7. Hightower wanted to come to Jefferson because he was very obsessive about his grandfather’s killing in Jefferson.
8. At the end of the novel Lena and Byron go in search of Lucas Burch.
10. 1932.

4.5 Summary:

The novel thus narrates three stories simultaneously. First is the story of Lena Grove, a young girl. She is in search of Lucas Burch, the father of her child and arrives in Jefferson town. There she meets Byron Bunch who hopes to marry her. Byron tells her that her Lucas Burch works there under the name of Joe Brown. Lena then gives birth to a son and hopes that Joe Brown will come to her. But when Joe comes to know about Lena’s arrival, he runs away. Lena and Byron go in search of Joe. Second and more tragic story is the story of Joe Christmas. He is a born black but is brought up in an orphanage and later is adopted by white parents. But nobody tells him about his birth and identity. Thus he arrives in Jefferson and works in a planning mil. There he falls in love with a white lady, Joanna Burden. But afterwards he kills her and runs away. After some days, he is caught and is killed. The third story in the novel is the story of Reverend Hightower. He arrives in Jefferson to avenge his grandfather’s death who was killed by the citizens on the charge on stealing chickens. But soon he is forced to quit the post due to his wife’s illicit relations with a man. His wife then kills herself by falling from a hotel window. Hightower thus loses honour and prestige and undergoes many bad experiences but still he firmly remains there.

These three stories are intermingled together by Faulkner. Through these stories, we come to know about the different themes such as the racial problem in America,
the plight of women in the modern world, the burden of the past on every individual, relationship between individual and society and loneliness of an individual in the modern age.

4.5.1 Novel at a Glance:

Genre: Modernist Southern morality story
Publication: 1932
Setting (Period): 1920s
Setting (Place): Jefferson, Mississippi; Mottstown in America
Themes: Racism, burdens of the past, women’s plight, loss of identity, isolation of an individual
Major characters: Lena Grove, Lucas Burch alias Joe Brown, Joe Christmas, Byron Bunch, Reverend Gail Hightower, Joanna Burden
Point of view: Third person narration, omniscient point of view

4.6 Exercises:

4.6.1 Broad Questions with Answers

Q.1 Explain the relationship between an individual and the society as explored by Faulkner in Light in August

Ans: Light in August is probably Faulkner's most complex and difficult novel. Here he combines numerous themes where many aspects of life are vividly portrayed. It is the novel in which Faulkner combines many of his previous themes with newer insights into human nature. In novels such as Sartoris, The Sound and the Fury, and As I Lay Dying, Faulkner examines the relationship of the individual to his family. In his next major novel, Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner returns to the family as the point of departure for his story. In Light in August, the family as a unit is replaced by the community serves as the point of departure.

The novel may be interpreted on many levels. It suggests such themes as man's isolation in the modern world, man's responsibility to the community, man’s inhumanity to man, a young girl’s untiring search for the father of her would be child etc. Yet, to the root of all these themes there lies a theme of the discord relationship
between the individual and his community. This disorder begins from the family unit only and at last reaches to the society at large.

The reaction of the various characters to the community offers another basic approach to the novel. The theme of isolation of man and his relationship in the community are the two views which go hand in hand. The isolation of each character only strengthens his struggle for status both with the community and with himself. The novel follows in the logical pattern set by Faulkner's two earlier novels, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*. Lena goes for isolation of her own. She chooses to leave for Lucas Burch, from whom she becomes pregnant. She never complains of her lot and never asks for help from anyone. However, she instinctively knows that people will help her; so she comes to accept their help at face value. Her simple faith in life is echoed by her belief that she ought to be with the father of her child. She constantly feels the need to commune and share her experience with others. Yet this wish of her never gets fulfilled.

Another major character that goes through this lonely experience is Byron Bunch. Before Lena's arrival, he only experiences feeling of loneliness along with Reverend Hightower. The community never notices him until he becomes involved with Lena. Merely by her passivity and her simple questions, Lena forces Byron to become involved. After revealing to her the identity of Joe Brown, Byron then feels responsible to her. Hightower has lived too long in his isolated world of self-abnegation and denial to see that Byron must feel responsible for Lena. He cannot understand Byron's actions and interprets them as possessing some ulterior motive. But Byron is tired of the long going tiresome life at the location. He, like Lena, has accepted his own isolation in Jefferson. However, when Lena arrives, he is forced to become involved in society. Not only does he commit the necessary acts of preparing for Lena's child and acting as her saviour, but also, he exceeds the demands made upon him when he follows when Brown runs away and fights with him. Thus Byron, after willing his own isolation, establishes relations with the community.

Hightower's isolation is also somewhat self-imposed. Initially, the isolation is borrowed from forces over which he has no control. His grandfather's ghost haunts his conscience until it forces him to marry a girl whom he does not love. He is haunted by two conflicting views of his grandfather- one is that of the romantic cavalry officer falling down the streets with drawn saber and the other is that of the
grandfather shot while stealing chickens. In this way all these characters take on their isolation willingly.

On contrary to this, Joe Christmas' isolation is forced upon him early in his life by outside forces and attitudes. Just before killing Joanna, he thinks that "Something is going to happen to me.” Joe's earliest attitudes were formed in the orphanage. It was here that he first discovered that he possessed Negro blood. His unknown father gave him his Negro blood, and this heritage, is the strongest influence upon his life. He is unable to establish a meaningful relationship with any of the other children first at the orphanage and then in the society. Therefore, during the rest of his life the result is disastrous. All the time he is caught between his own self and the self of others. Even a feeling of love also turns violent and disastrous when it comes to him.

In conclusion, it can be said that all the above developed characters except Joe Christmas willingly accept isolation and during the course of time also establish relations with the community but Joe’s is a forced isolation and he never succeeds in establishing good and healthy relations either with himself or with others.

Q.2 ‘The novel has a circular structure.’ Illustrate this statement with the help of examples from the novel and comment on it.

**Ans:** Like *As I Lay Dying*, the structure of *Light in August* is also circular. Joe Christmas is the central character of the novel. His story is the center of the novel. The circular image is first applied to Joe as a cage which keeps him isolated from mankind. The earliest instance of his isolation is seen in his life in the orphanage. Later in life, he thinks of women, marriage, and children as additional ways to keep men caged in. He even cuts off all buttons which can be seen as a circular image. But the strongest symbol of his imprisonment in a cage is expressed through the conflicting white and black blood in his body. Basically, the circular image is the principal image with Joe, whose life is presented in cyclic repetitions as he constantly travels around the country until he finally arrives in Jefferson, Mississippi.

Although Joe has spent his entire life trying to break out of his circle, he finally realizes that he has lived only when he has remained within the circle. Thus, he gets peace through self-realization only when he reaches an acceptance of his life and no longer tries to flee from the responsibility of his actions. In other words, Joe comes finally to realize that his lifetime struggle is futile since man can never escape from himself. The acceptance of this fact gives him the first peace of mind.
The circular image is used to correlate the action with the structure. The central scene of the novel is Joanna Burden's house and the cabin behind her house where Joe lives. It is described as the axle of a wheel where the numerous paths are like "wheel-spokes" caused by the Negro women "following paths which . . . radiated from the house." However, the circular image is first presented through Lena Grove. Her curving shape caused by her pregnancy suggests that she is "like something moving. . . an urn." The urn is used symbolically in connection with Lena to suggest her enduring qualities. It is also one of the many symbols that connect life with death, since the urn is also used in burial rites.

Other images suggest the completeness with which Lena views life. The final image of the first section is the circular column of smoke rising from Joanna Burden's house which again connects Lena to Joe Christmas' actions. Lena therefore seems to represent those qualities which will endure forever and the circular images connected with the moving of the earth round the sun tirelessly. Likewise, *Light in August* opens and closes with sections about Lena Grove who moves round the clock to get Lucas, the father of her child.

Structurally, therefore, the circular image is used to suggest connections between Joe and Lena. She is the outside frame for the whole novel and the outside frame of the wheel. Thus Joe's actions form the central part of the novel and are seen as the center of the actions, but Lena's actions are used to introduce the novel and close the novel. In between these two, there stands the figure of the Reverend Gail Hightower. As the wheel slowly frees itself from the sand, Hightower gradually realizes that life cannot be lived in isolation.

Therefore, in terms of the total structure of the novel, Hightower is the spokes of the wheel connecting the actions of Lena and Joe, who never actually meet each other. Lena remains as the person transcending all experiences. Joe is the character whose life is examined in the center of the novel. The final structure then may be summarized as follows: first, Lena; second, Hightower and then Joe Christmas. And the novel closes in exactly the same order.
4.6.2 Short notes with answers:

1. Use of Style in *Light in August*

Ans: Faulkner does not employ his typical style in *Light in August.* Usually, his style is complex and involves sentence structure. But here he uses a more straightforward narrative style. Yet, this straightforward style does not come in way of development of plot or characters any way. He changes according to characters and their role in the plot of the novel. Thus, the chapters handling Lena Grove are presented in the simplest prose and in rather straightforward narration. This type of style blends with Lena's personality, since she is seen as a simple person with one single aim. Faulkner employs a lot of dialect in narrating Lena's section and this use of dialect seems to capture the earthy nature of Lena Grove.

But the style changes when Hightower’s character is developed. There is no use of dialect in the Hightower sections. Instead, in these chapters, Faulkner uses a complex style which naturally becomes difficult to understand. This is because Hightower is going into a complex and difficult re-examination of his past life. With Hightower, Faulkner also uses the technique of the "stream-of-consciousness." This is a technique whereby the author writes as though he is inside the mind of the characters. This technique tries to capture this Hightower's mind. This is a difficult task and Faulkner employs a rather difficult and complex style in order to convey this difficulty.

With Joe Christmas, Faulkner again varies his style. In some of the transitional passages where Joe is in the process of returning back to the past, the style is extremely complex. For example, before he returns to the episode in the orphanage, the style is difficult: "Memory believes before knowing remembers". This complexity then suggests the difficulty of returning to the past through the memory. But once this transition back into the past is effected, the style becomes relatively simple. For example, the actual narration of Joe's affair with Bobbie Allen presents no special difficulties.

In short, the part of Faulkner's greatness lies in his style and the way he is able to adjust this style to fit the subject under narration. No wonder, the style will always shift in order to lend additional support to his subject matter.
2. **Significance of the title *Light in August***

   **Ans:** Faulkner was thinking of using *Dark House* as the title for the novel. But it is believed that the present title of novel was originally suggested by his wife when they saw the strange and unexpected light in the month of August. The appropriateness of the title can also be seen when Faulkner refers to these unique properties of light in the opening of Chapter 20, when Reverend Hightower arrives in Jefferson as a young and enthusiastic minister. The interplay of light and shadow figures into many of descriptions in the novel. Hightower and Miss Burden enclose themselves in the shadow world of their native place. They are tempted by the world of light, of reality and self-exposure which exists beyond their windows. Miss Burden’s relationship with Joe Christmas plays out only at night in darkness. In addition, some critics say that the word “light” in the title refers to Lena’s pregnancy. It also refers to the new aroused hope by Lena’s baby. In short, the title of the novel is simple but suggestive and interpretative.

4.8 **Activities/ Field Work**

- Study this novel from Eco-feminist perspective
- Visit a town or a village and study the problems created by Caste system
- Read other novels by Faulkner and compare them to this novel
- Collect data of virgin mothers in India if any, and study their problems

4.9 **Books, Articles for Further Reading**


Unit-4 (B)

SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1922-2007)

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4.8 Further Reading
4.1 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will –

- be introduced to a widely acclaimed 20th century American war novelist, Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.
- get introduced to the genre of war novel
- realize the senselessness of war in general and World War II in particular
- understand multiplicity of themes in *Slaughterhouse- Five* and its unusual and innovative structure
- come to know how a fictional writing such as novel portrays the horrors of war more effectively than a historical text
- see how a war novel can go closer to science fiction by moving in time - past and future

4.4 Introduction:

4.2.1 Kurt Vonnegut Jr., : Life and Works:

Born on November 11, 1922, Kurt Vonnegut is considered to be one of the most influential American writers of the twentieth century. After studying at Cornell University from 1940 to 1942, Kurt Vonnegut joined the U.S. army during the time of Second World War. There, he studied engineering. In 1944 he served in Europe and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. After this battle, Vonnegut was captured and was made a ‘prisoner of war’ by the Germans. He was in Dresden, Germany, during the Allied firebombing of the city, and saw the complete destruction caused by it. Vonnegut himself escaped unharmed because he was working in an underground meat locker. Soon after his return from the war back to the U.S., Vonnegut worked as newspaper reporter, teacher, and public relations employee in an electric company. Through the 1950s and 1960s, he published several novels and short stories. His first novel, *Player Piano* (1952), deals with life in corporate sector while the *The Sirens of Titan* (1959) takes place on several different planets, including a thoroughly militarized Mars, where the inhabitants are electronically controlled. Vonnegut once again focuses on the role of technology in human society in *Cat's Cradle* (1963). In *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* (1965), Vonnegut presents a generous but weak man
who attempts to use his inherited fortune for the betterment of humanity. War remains a recurring element in his works as in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). It is a novel that appeared during the climax of protest against American involvement in Vietnam. It is a story of Billy Pilgrim, a young soldier who is made a prisoner of war and works in an underground meat locker. The novel explores the human condition mixed with fantasy. In the works written after *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut often focuses on the problems of contemporary society in a direct manner. The novels such as *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) and *Slapstick* (1976) examine the widespread feelings of despair and loneliness that result from the loss of traditional culture in the United States. *Jailbird* (1979) recounts the story of a fictitious participant in the Watergate scandal of the Nixon administration and thereby condemns American political system. *Galapagos* (1985) predicts the terrible consequences of environmental pollution and *Hocus-Pocus* (1990) deals with the implications and aftermath of the war in Vietnam. In the 1990s, Vonnegut also published *Fates Worse Than Death* (1991) and *Timequake* (1997). In these works, Vonnegut seems to repeat the same themes presented in earlier works. Yet, Vonnegut remains one of the most honoured American satirists. He combines literature with science fiction humorously and offers social commentary through absurdity meaninglessness. He creates his own unique world in each of his novels and fills them with unusual characters. His works thus present a peculiar yet compelling vision of modern life. His most recent works include two collections of short fiction *Bagombo Snuff Box: Uncollected Short Fiction* (1999) and *God Bless You, Dr. Kevorkian* (1999). Vonnegut is at once mocking and highly moral and this rare combination has made his voice integral to American literature. Vonnegut continued to write creatively until his death in 2007.

Written in 1969, the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five or The Children’s Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death* can be placed under a number of fictional forms such as War fiction, Historical fiction, Science fiction and Semi-autobiographical fiction. The novel narrates experiences of its protagonist Billy Pilgrim during the Second World War and then stretches to America’s involvement in Vietnam in 1968. It is this historical setting and the Second World War experience of the protagonist that labels the novel as a war novel.
4.2.2 War novel: A brief survey

As the name implies, a war novel is a novel about war. War, which is an inseparable part of human history, has attracted innumerable creative minds since ancient times. In fact, the history of man is the history of wars. The main roots of the war novel lie in the epic poetry of the classical and medieval periods, especially Homer's *The Iliad*, and Virgil's *The Aeneid*. These epics show conflicts between different societies. Other important influences on the war novel include the tragedies of such dramatists as Euripides, Seneca, Marlowe, and Shakespeare. Shakespeare's *Henry V*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queen* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote* influenced the later development of war novel.

The war novel matured during the 19th century. Stendhal's *The Charterhouse of Parma*, which shows the Battle of Waterloo; Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, which is about the Napoleonic Wars in Russia; and Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, which exhibits the American Civil War; set the standards for the modern war novel. More or less, the same novel form has come down to us today. All of these works show realistic depictions of major battles, animal-like scenes of wartime horrors and killings, and significant insights into the nature of heroism and cowardice. Nonetheless, these works also focus on the aspect of morality shown by a few during wartime.

World War I produced innumerable war novels by writers from both the Allied and Axis group of countries. One of the first and most influential anti-war novels is *Under Fire* (1916) by the French novelist and soldier Henri Barbusse. Some other novels include Rebecca West's *The Return of the Soldier*. It is about a shell shocked soldier's difficult re-integration into British society and John Dos Passos's *Three Soldiers*, one of the best American novels about the First World War. The post-World War I period changed the conventional form of war novel. It brought psychology and the feeling of alienation into wartime experiences. The best example of this type is Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Other successful novels by the American writers are Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, William March's *Company K*, Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, Charles Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*. One particular development during the 1930s decade was the rise in popularity of historical novels about earlier wars. Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, which recalls the American Civil War, is an example of works of this type.
Unlike the World War I, the World War II novel was dominated by the American writers. Among the most successful American war novels are Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny*, James Jones's *From Here to Eternity*, and Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. More experimental and unconventional works in the post-war period are Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, Irwin Shaw's *The Young Lions*, William Woodruff's *Vessel of Sadness* and James Jones' *The Thin Red Line* explore the personal nature of war within the context of deep conflict. Parallel to the war novel genre, there developed another form known as the Holocaust novel. It emerged years after the World War II. A.M. Klein's *The Second Scroll*, Primo Levi's *If This is a Man* and *If Not Now, When?*, and William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* are the best examples of this form.

The Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnam War (1965-1973) also provided the American writers with plenty of war materials. Some of the representative war novels are Richard Hooker's *MASH: A Novel About Three Army Doctors*; William Styron’s *The Long March*; James Salter’s *The Hunters*; Tim O’ Brien’s *Going after Cacciato*; William Eastlake’s *The Bamboo Bed* and a few others. All these novels depict the war cruelties and condemn America’s role in these two wars.

The 9/11 terrorists attack on America changed the whole political, cultural, economic relations of America and of the world at large. Yet, the war writers got one big event to capitalize for their war writing. This big event produced a few more war novels that address current events in the War on Terrorism. One example is Chris Cleave's *Incendiary* (2005), which anticipated and presented the life that unfortunately came true with London bombings on 7 July 2005. Writers are still in exploring this subject through their fictional writing.

In short, be it traditional or post-modern in form, a war novel has always projected the respective war with all its cruelties and horrors and with certain exceptions; it continues to condemn the war sparing no person or system of rule across the world. The setting and characters which are usually drawn from the war life of the soldiers, the modern and the post-modern war novel differs from the conventional and traditional novel in its experimental technique and complex narrative style.
4.3 Critical analysis of *Slaughterhouse- Five*

1.3.1 Plot of the novel:

*Slaughterhouse-Five* is part memoir, part war novel. Many have called it the most important war novel to come out of World War II. Written in 10 short chapters, the novel tells the story of Billy Pilgrim, an American Prisoner of War (POW) in Germany during World War II. But his experiences as POW are interrupted by his movements in past and future.

Billy was born in Ilium, New York, in 1922. He joins the American army during World War II and then he is sent to Europe. His regiment is destroyed during the Battle of the Bulge in 1944 but Billy, two scouts and a sadistic tormenter named Roland Weary survive. While Billy is wandering with the other three soldiers, he gets the first experience of travelling to any point in his past and future before he returns to the present i.e. the year 1944. However, later the two scouts leave Billy and Roland. For this, Roland blames Billy. They are immediately captured by German soldiers who have killed the two scouts. Billy and Roland are taken to a prison camp in an overcrowded train. Several prisoners including Roland die on the way. But before he dies, Roland holds Billy responsible for his death and asks other soldiers to take revenge on Billy. After ten days, Billy and other prisoners arrive at the prison camp which was originally used for killing Russian prisoners. The British prisoners welcome Billy and other American prisoners in the camp. The British prisoners have been living there for over four years and are in good condition. But the Americans are shattered both physically and mentally. The British feel sorry to see the plight of the Americans and offer them food and clothing and also entertain them with a play of *Cinderella*. Yet, the Americans feel sick and Billy suffers from a hysterical fit and is admitted in the prison hospital. There he meets Paul Lazzaro, a friend of Roland. Lazzaro had promised Roland that one day he would kill Billy.

After some days, the American prisoners are shifted to Dresden, a German city which is unsafe and unsecured. The prisoners are kept in a slaughterhouse-Slaughterhouse-Five. They are visited by Howard W. Campbell, Jr. an American and Edger Derby, the unofficial leader of the prisoners. Suddenly, one night Dresden is firebombed by the Allied forces. When the soldiers come out of the slaughterhouse in the morning, they are shocked to see the destruction of the city and death of all its residents. The prisoners are then taken first to a suburb and are kept in a stable by the
German guards. They are then taken into the city and are forced to dig the ruins of the bodies. The German firing squad kills Edgar Derby when he attempts to take a teapot from the ruins. Finally, however, the war in Europe ends and Billy and other prisoners return home.

Back home, Billy restarts his education at the Ilium School of Optometry. Soon he is engaged to Valencia Merble, the wealthy daughter of the school owner. Unfortunately, Billy suffers a mild nervous collapse and has to undergo an electroshock therapy. Six months later, he marries Valencia. His father-in-law sets him up in an optometry practice and Billy earns money and material prosperity. The couple is soon blessed with a daughter named Barbara and a son named Robert. However, as in Europe so in America, Billy continues to experience his journey which is not stuck to time but he does not discuss about this condition with anyone.

Years pass and in 1967 on the wedding night of his daughter, Billy is kidnapped by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. The aliens take him to their planet and display him naked in a cage. Billy is then joined by Montana Wildhack, a movie actress. They become lovers and soon get a child. On Tralfamadore planet, Billy learns the time and death philosophy of the aliens. For the aliens time is not a linear progression of events, but a constant condition. They believe that all moments—past, present and future have existed and will exist. Like Billy, the aliens can travel back and forth to different moments in time. With regard to the concept of death, the aliens do not consider ‘death’ a significant event because when a person dies he or she is still very much alive in the past. The aliens advise Billy to concentrate on the happy moments of life and ignore the sad ones. Finally, Bill returns to the planet Earth but Montana stays behind to take care of their child.

Back on earth, Billy feels that he was still here when he left and did not miss even a moment. Initially, he does not tell anyone of his kidnapping but a year later on his way to attend an Optometrist’s convention, his plane crashes and everyone is killed except he and the copilot. Valencia tries to get to the hospital to see Billy but unfortunately she gets killed in an auto accident. Billy then travels to New York where he takes part in a radio talk show. When he tells the story of his captivity by the aliens on Tralfamadore, he is expelled from the studio. Billy’s daughter and her husband come to New York and take Billy home. After that, he begins to write letters to newspapers and tells them his experiences with the aliens.
On February 13, 1976 which is the anniversary of the Dresden bombing, Billy is shot down by a shooter employed by Paul Lazzaro who is still alive to fulfill the promise given to Roland of killing Billy. However, Billy is the ‘time traveller’ and has seen his own death many times before and is not concerned about this death. After the shooting, he experiences ‘death for a while’ and then ‘swings back into life again’ at a point in 1945. It is an hour after his life was threatened by Lazzaro. Like the aliens, Billy also regards death as living in past and waits for another moment.

The close reading of the novel shows that the events and incidents described in it are very much similar to those in Vonnegut’s life. Needless to say, that Billy Pilgrim is the persona of the author. Billy’s enlistment in the army, his assignment as an army assistant in Europe during the World War II, his captivity as the Prisoner of War, his experiences in the slaughterhouse at Dresden, Germany; his escape, his safe return to America, his mental disorder caused by the terrible experiences from the war, and to add to this, Billy’s birth date- are all evidences in the novel to confirm the fact that Billy is Vonnegut. However, this should not be the focus of the study and we should look at it as a coincidence. What is important is that the novel looks like an example of war fiction at the beginning but as it proceeds it tends to be a good example of fantasy or science fiction. In other words, the novel moves somewhere between a war fiction and science fiction. Nonetheless, as Vonnegut is interested in telling the story of World War II with all its necessary details such as the butchery and crime brought about by the war, the novel should be seen as a war novel.

4.3.2 Characters:

1. **Billy Pilgrim**

   Though Vonnegut writes in the novel that there are no characters in this story for majority of the people are sick, including Billy Pilgrim, it is he who is the protagonist of the novel. He is a World War II experienced soldier, POW survivor of the firebombing of Dresden, prospering optometrist, husband, and a father. He walks through a door at one moment in his life and suddenly finds himself in another time and place. This description fits Billy and it might be the reason why Vonnegut describes him as a character that has come unstuck in time. It is then as a prisoner that he first undergoes the unsticking experience in time. At Dresden he finds himself travelling into the past and future with no warning or signal of any kind. It is this
experience of Billy which makes the novel a work of fantasy marching towards science fiction. Billy is then kidnapped by the aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. The aliens believe that events cannot be changed by a person’s action. It is this idea that makes Billy passive throughout.

Like the aliens he believes that he is at the mercy of all ills and crisis caused by war and war fare affairs. He also thinks that everything is beyond his control and hence prefers passivity of mind and body. It is only at the end of the novel that we see him active when he publishes his experience about his kidnapping by the aliens. Though Billy survives the war he fails to celebrate his life. He marries, gets children and also becomes a successful optometrist but still his life becomes dull and boring for him. It is only in the company of the aliens that he is happy and gets peace of mind. It is on the planet Tralfamadore that he learns how to develop a peaceful perspective on life. The lesson which he learns from the aliens is that he cannot change events and so he devotes his remaining life in teaching this philosophy to the people on the planet Earth.

The study of Billy’s character is more a study of his passive action than a study of the protagonist. In other words, Billy lacks the essential qualities of a protagonist. Yet, his travelling experiences in time can be considered as a metaphor for the modern man’s alienation and dislocation. Billy’s character again can be taken as a copy of the plight of the modern man in face of the growing cruelty and violence caused by war. His name is also very symbolic. Bill means a cooking pan used in a campaign and a Pilgrim is a person who journeys to a sacred place. He journeys for an unknown but safe and quiet land. It is both a campaign and a journey in which Bill mediates between the aliens and his own people. The fragmented and distorted experience of Billy’s time builds the novel as short episodic account and shows how it is difficult to use unusual literary techniques in order to recount traumatic experiences in life.

2. Valencia Merble:

Valencia is Billy’s pleasant, wealthy but unattractive and fat wife. She loves him dearly but Billy never really loves her but sees her as a symptom of his disease. Valencia and Billy share one home and have two children together, but Billy consistently distances himself from his family. When Billy is hospitalized after he
survives the plane crash, Valencia on her way to the hospital is killed in a road accident. Her death indicates one more innocent victim of the uncaring world.

3. **Barbara Pilgrim**:

Barbara is Billy’s daughter. She is newly married at the age of twenty-one and faces the sudden death of her mother and the apparent mental breakdown of her father. She takes on the entire responsibility of her father’s plight. She represents the generation that is sensitive to their parents who fall victim to the war. His war suffering and false beliefs constantly upset her.

4. **Robert Pilgrim**:

Robert Pilgrim is Billy’s son. He fails in studies and is of criminal nature at school. But later on, he recovers from all ills and becomes a promising soldier in the Vietnam War. Robert’s presence in the story during Billy’s later life helps to explain the pervasiveness Billy’s war shock, who is even unable to communicate and relate to his own son. Robert’s successful change from disorderly behavior in school to a disciplined soldier in Vietnam War seems to indicate Vonnegut’s acceptance of the certainty of war.

5. **Lionel Merble**:

Lionel Merble is Billy’s father-in-law. He is wealthy and rich and so helps Billy in setting up an optometry practice. However, he is killed on his way to attend an optometrist’s conference. His interest in business and family comforts represents modern man’s love for materialistic and earthly pleasures.

6. **Kurt Vonnegut**:

Vonnegut is the novel’s author and he appears as a minor character throughout the first and last chapters in the novel. Vonnegut himself was a prisoner of war during the firebombing of Dresden, and he occasionally introduces himself in the narrative. For example, we see him when he becomes the incontinent soldier in the latrine in the German prison camp. Vonnegut’s presence as an author reappears throughout the novel particularly in the repeatedly used phrase, “So it goes” that follows each mention of death. Vonnegut’s commentary as a character and an author helps to give a more factual interpretation of a story. In the first chapter, he discusses his difficulty in writing the novel and in the last chapters he describes his visit to Dresden two decades after the end of the war. Thus, Vonnegut’s presence in the
novel surprises at the beginning but as the novel proceeds and then ends, his intentional intervention adds to the novel’s narrative beauty.

7. Roland Weary:

Roland Weary is one of the three soldiers captured with Billy Pilgrim after the Battle of Bulge by the German army. He is a stupid, cruel soldier and dislikes Billy for no concrete reason. He is fond of collecting instruments of torture with which he tortures Billy and others. He is a cheater and glory-seeker who fancies himself of something heroic. He accuses Billy when the two scouts leave them. He dies of gangrene on the train to Dresden but blames for his death and asks other soldiers to avenge him. His aggressive and violent character and his false belief in the romance of war stand for the militarism and hatred which Vonnegut condemns in the novel.

8. Paul Lazzaro:

Paul Lazzaro is another American POW in Dresden. He is friend to Roland Weary and promises to avenge his friend’s death. With the help of an assassin, he kills Billy at the end. Lazzaro bears a criminal tendency. It is only because of Roland’s death that he takes revenge on Billy.

9. Edgar Derby:

Edgar Derby is a high school teacher in America but later becomes the unofficial leader of the American prisoners in Dresden. He is basically a decent man and a natural leader. He is kind to Billy but dislikes Howard W. Campbell who mediates for POW with the German authorities. But when he is caught of stealing a tea pot from the ruins, the German firing squad shoots him down on the spot. His death is anticlimactic because Billy does not regret it but takes it as an inevitable event. His death however, shows how life becomes cheap in war times.

10. Tralfamadorians:

Tralfamadorians are the aliens who are the inhabitants of the planet Tralfamadore. They are shaped like toilet plungers. Each of them has one hand containing an eye in its palm. For the first time they kidnap Billy to their planet from Dresden then frequently from his home in America. In fact, Vonnegut does not represent them as individuals but it is through them that he provides the philosophy of time and death. They see time as a collection of moments existing simultaneously rather than as a linear progression, and the episodic nature of *Slaughterhouse-Five*
reflects this concept of time. Billy follows Tralfamadorians’ idea of death which leads the author to remark, “So it goes” at each mention of death.

11. Bernard V. O’Hare:

Bernard O’Hare is a wartime friend of Vonnegut. Vonnegut visits him and his wife in Pennsylvania while trying to do research and collect remembrances for his Dresden book. Like his wife, Mary, and Vonnegut himself, Bernard is a nonfictional character. Vonnegut actually met him in the Dresden firebombing. He is a real-life character with whom Vonnegut travelled back to Dresden in the 1960s.

12. Mary O’Hare:

Mary O’Hare is Bernhard’s wife and another real-life person in the novel. She gets upset with Vonnegut because she believes that he will glorify war in his novel. Vonnegut, however, promises her that he will not do so. Slaughterhouse-Five is a condemnation of war and Vonnegut decides to dedicate the novel in part to Mary suggesting how deeply he agrees with her that the ugly truth about war must be told. It is because of Mary’s fear that he gives the subtitle- *The Children’s Crusade* to the novel.

13. Gerhard Muller:

Gerhard is another nonfictional character. He is a taxi driver who takes Vonnegut and Bernard back to their Dresden slaughterhouse. Muller later sends Bernard a Christmas card that bears tidings of peace and Vonnegut dedicates the novel in part to Muller.

14. Wild Bob:

Wild Bob is an American prisoner of war who dies on the way to Dresden. But before he dies, he gives a speech to imaginary soldiers encouraging them to continue fighting the Germans and inviting them to visit him in America after the war. His hallucination and the glories of fighting war represent the absurdity of both war and the senseless attempt to control the uncontrollable. Wild Bob asks if Billy belongs to his regiment when all his men are dead. His uninformed death shows how the war makes such gestures both poignant and pointless.
15. Eliot Rosewater:

Eliot Rosewater is a friendly but strange person with whom Billy shares a hospital room after Billy’s mental breakdown. Rosewater occupies the bed near Billy in the mental ward of a prison hospital. Like Billy, Rosewater suffers from the consequences of war, and he finds escape. He also helps Billy find escape. Rosewater and Billy both find life meaningless due to war. It is Rosewater who introduces Billy to science fiction. Rosewater is also the title character of Vonnegut’s another novel, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*.

16. Kilgore Trout:

Kilgore Trout is a science fiction novelist. He is bitter, unappreciated in his writing and has a great influence on Billy. He lives in Ulium and earns his living by delivering newspapers. Billy meets Trout for the first time in 1964 and becomes his friend. Trout represents a way of trying to deal with the absurd tragedy of human existence. The appearance of Trout’s character is seen intentional for Vonnegut himself was a great fan of his writing.

17. Howard W. Campbell, Jr.:

Howard W. Campbell is an American who has become a Nazi. He speaks to the prisoners in the slaughterhouse and tries to recruit them for the free American corps which is a German army unit formed to fight the Russians. Campbell represents all that is wrong with war. He desires to use people for bad ends. Campbell is also the main character in Vonnegut’s novel, *Mother Night*.

18. Werner Gluck:

Werner Gluck is a young German guard at the slaughterhouse. He gets his first sight of a naked woman along with Billy. Their shared scheme and interest in the naked female body unites these two men from different sides. This reflects how fundamentally human feelings such as lust can bridge the differences of political ideology.

19. Montana Wildhack:

Montana Wildhack is a twenty year old American movie star who is kidnapped by the Tralfamadorians. She is made a mate to Billy during his captivity in the Zoo. Billy wins Montana’s trust and love, gets a child from her on the same planet. But then Billy sees false dreams about his experiences with Montana.
20. bertram copeland rumfoord:

rumfoord is a harvard history professor and the official u.s. air force historian. he is admitted in the same hospital where billy is treated after his plane crash. he is a patriot and an open supporter of the allied firebombing of dresden. he does not believe that billy was present during the dresden bombing. this suspicious attitude of rumfoord shows the popular attempt of the officials to glorify war. like roland weary, he is another example of a false belief both in the romance of war and humanity’s ability to control the uncontrollable.

4.3.3 themes:

the novel slaughterhouse-five treats multiple themes. some of them are- the destructiveness of war, illusion of free will or the concept of time and death, alienation and loneliness of modern man, apathy and passivity, and patriotism.

4.3.3.1 the destructiveness of war

whether we read slaughterhouse-five as a science-fiction novel or partly an autobiographical one, we cannot ignore the fact that the novel shows the destruction caused by the war. the story of billy pilgrim is the outcome of the firebombing of the german town of dresden during world war ii. billy’s life journey starts from his swimming lessons at the ymca. then, he delivers speeches at the lions club. later on, he is captivated as a pow in dresden and finally he is taken to the planet of tralfamadore. of all these stages in his life, his captivation by the german army proves to be a turning point in his life. his captivation at the meat house leads to his entry into an alien planet- tralfamadore.

however, vonnegut does not allow billy to evoke the destructiveness of the war in subtle ways. for instance, billy is quite successful in his postwar life from a materialistic point of view. he is a president of the lions club, works as a prosperous optometrist, lives in a thoroughly comfortable modern home, and is a father of two children and enjoys his family life. yet, this successful life of billy is made not by his industrious nature but by his father-in-law’s efforts. at one point in the novel, billy realizes that his children are unfamiliar with each other. hence his success is transitory and surface looking. beneath it, we see a man who is torn out by war and we hardly understand him. in fact, billy’s name also indicates that he is more an immature boy than a man.
In the latter part of the novel, Vonnegut brings in the scientific theory of time and death in Billy’s life. For this, he introduces an alien race named, Tralfamadorians to indicate how greatly the war has disrupted Billy’s existence. It seems that Billy fantasizes his experiences with the Tralfamadorians as a way to escape a world destroyed by war. It is a world which he cannot understand. Furthermore, the Tralfamadorian theory of time and death enables Billy to rationalize all the death with he has seen face-to-face. Unlike to the people on the Earth, time is a different concept altogether to Tralfamadorians. For them, it is not a linear progression but a constant condition. One, who is in present at one point of time, can be in past and future at another. Therefore, Billy is a troubled man who cannot come to terms with the destructiveness of war. It is intentionally created fantasy that helps him escape the traumatic memories of the war. This fantasy also helps him to shape the world the way he likes. The concept of death also appears strange to us. For the Tralfamadorians, death is not the end of life. When a person dies in the present, he lives in past simultaneously and hence he should not think that he is dead.

4.3.3.2 The Fantasy of ‘Free Will’

In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut uses the Tralfamadorians to discuss the philosophical question of whether free will exists. These aliens live with the knowledge which says that all moments of time occur continuously and endlessly. The aliens possess an attitude of acceptance about their fates. They believe that their fate cannot change them. According to the Tralfamadorians, there is the talk of free will only on Earth because humans mistake time by considering it a linear progression.

The development of the theme of the fantasy of free will can be seen from the life of Billy. Throughout his life, Billy prepares against forces that oppose his free will. For example, when Billy is a child, his father lets him sink into a pool in order to teach him how to swim. However, to his father’s disappointment, Billy prefers to go to the bottom of the pool. But, against his free will to stay there, he is rescued. Later, Billy is pushed into the war against his will. Even as a soldier, Billy becomes an object of fun. He lacks training, food, and proper clothing. He moves up and down like a puppet. His civilian shoes wave on his feet and he walks through the streets of Dresden making himself a witty and fun figure.
While Vonnegut admits the inevitability of death with or without war, he also tells us that he is against any kind of participation in an act of slaughter or manufacturing of any tool related to it. However, acting as if free will exists does not mean that it actually exists. Had Billy been trained like a good soldier, there is no guarantee of surviving death. Even good soldiers also died in the Dresden firebombing. That is to say, Billy’s survival is only a test of the deterministic forces which offer an illusion of free will.

4.3.3.3 Alienation and Loneliness of modern man

Like many other post modern novels, *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with the theme of modern man’s alienation and loneliness. Alienation is man’s inability to make connections with other individuals and with society as a whole. In this sense, Billy is an alienated individual. As he is unstuck in time, he fails to build relationships with others. He travels through time which metaphorically alienates him from the world in which he lives. Billy’s travelling is also followed by the violence caused by the war. To Vonnegut, this violence is a fact of life for humanity in the twentieth century. The only relationship which Billy builds in the novel is with the science fiction writer, Kilgore Trout. Trout is also alienated like Billy. Both deal with similar crisis in similar ways. They both find life meaningless for they have seen war. Loneliness is an intentional imposition drawn by an individual on himself. It is in fact the state of alienation that makes man lonely. Billy leads first an alienated and then a lonely life. Secondly loneliness is not only felt when one is alone; it is rather a mental and psychological state. One may be with others physically but one can still be lonely in mind. Billy is hardly alone. On Earth he is very much busy with his profession and his family life. On the Tralfamadore planet, he is accompanied by the aliens. Still he experiences loneliness. The novel thus very artistically but effectively explores the theme of alienation and loneliness.

4.3.3.4 Apathy and Passivity

Apathy means lack of interest or enthusiasm. Passivity implies accepting or allowing things to happen or act without any active response or resistance to it. Both are the natural responses to the idea which says that events and happenings are beyond our control. Throughout the novel, Billy does not act or react to the things. First, he is captured by the Germans and latter he is kidnapped by the aliens. He just takes both the happenings as a part of his routine life. It is only later in his life that he
tries to tell about his abduction but that also does not show his resistance. It is moreover a kind of response to his predetermined fate. What to say about other characters? They are there for the sake of characters only. Vonnegut himself clarifies this in chapter eight of the novel where he says, “There are almost no characters in this story, and almost no dramatic confrontations, because most of the people in it are so sick and so much the listless playthings of the enormous forces”. That is to say, the novel narrates the story of only one character; the protagonist Billy Pilgrim who is both indifferent and passive to the happenings around him. Nonetheless, Vonnegut underlines these aspects in the novel.

4.3.3.5 Death, Patriotism and Peace

Death, patriotism and peace are very much associated with war and war fare affairs. This novel is also no exception to it. Being a war novel these elements automatically peep in the thematic structure of the novel. For example, the response of the Tralfamadorians to death is, “So it goes”. In the novel, Vonnegut uses this phrase every time when someone or something dies. This repetition makes the novel a little humorous and light in its tone. However, by doing so, Vonnegut is not undermining the deaths of the innocent civilians and the army men killed in the war. On the other hand, he is mocking at the unkind act of war. Billy in his travels through time has seen his own death many times and he is little bothered about it because he knows he will always exist in the past.

Regarding the theme of patriotism, it can be seen that the world depicted in the novel is caught between nationalism and militarism. This pendulum like position of the novel unfortunately gives rise to the acts of violence and mass destruction. Characters such as Wild Bob or Bertrand Rumfoord who claim to be patriots are deceived and made wicked. Hence on both sides, there is no real exhibition of patriotic spirit. Moreover, the Germans are more realistic than the Americans. In a reaction to the firebombing, they say that there is nothing to be afraid of for many human beings are already killed there.

As the novel deals with Billy’s experience of the Second World War, it is but obvious that war is at its centre. Furthermore, it is no wonder that like any other war, the horrors of this war are immediately followed by the need for Peace. Despite an American by birth, Vonnegut seems to be in no mood to celebrate the Allied victory. The killing of 1,35000 German civilians in the Dresden firebombing is so dreadful
and unkind act that Vonnegut doubts his writing abilities to write about it. The trauma caused by war is so deep and long lasting that in the first chapter Vonnegut says, “It is so short and jumbled and jangled that there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre”. The only possible response possible to this horror is to distance oneself from it and Billy does the same. His alienation and aloofness, his unstuck in time offers an image of peace in the novel. Hence, it becomes clear that both war and peace become the thematic concerns for Vonnegut in this novel.

4.3.4 Significance of the title

Though the title of this book is Slaughterhouse-Five, the full title is actually Slaughterhouse-Five, or the Children's Crusade: A Duty-Dance with Death. The main character Billy Pilgrim ends up his military career in Dresden, Germany, as a prisoner of war (POW) in World War II. He and a hundred other American POWs are kept in a neglected slaughterhouse called Slaughterhouse-Five. That is the real meaning of the title. Yet, the title has also a metaphoric significance. After all, this is an anti-war book and what is war except slaughter? There is also one more meaning to the title, which is biographical. Of course, this book is fiction and there is plenty of aliens and time travel to go around. But there is also many biographical details from Kurt Vonnegut's own life. This includes the fact that he was an American POW in the city of Dresden during the infamous Dresden fire bombing. Vonnegut survived the bombing by sheltering in an underground meat locker on the grounds of the slaughterhouse where he was a prisoner. So Slaughterhouse-Five in the first place, is where Billy Pilgrim winds up during the war; secondly it shows figuratively, what war is; and thirdly, it is a place where Kurt Vonnegut actually spent several months at the end of World War II.

Then there is a second part to the title, The Children's Crusade. The Children's Crusade was a real historical event and also a huge wartime twist. It refers to the story of a boy named Nicholas Cologne who was fired up by the religious extremism. This expulsion of Nicholas inspired thousands of children who left France and Germany for Jerusalem to join the Crusades. Yet, most of them died along the journey. So the Children's Crusade proved to be a useless sacrifice of innocent life. This, in a way, relates to the novel's anti-war themes.

The Children's Crusade has also a symbolic significance in the book. In the very first chapter of the book, the narrator says that he promised the wife of his war
companion that he would call his war book *The Children's Crusade* so that it would never be misinterpreted as a heroic war story. *Slaughterhouse-Five* may be about war. It is a book about innocents who are sent to fight a war they do not understand. As a result, they suffer terrible things for no reason. This is similar to the story of the children who died for no fault of theirs.

With regard to the phrase *Duty-Dance With Death?* in the title, once again we have to listen to the narrator who quotes the French writer Celine. Celine spent his entire life fighting for France in World War I and felt that he was all the time dancing with death. In the novel, Billy also spends most of his life engaging with death. He sees it in his dreams and while travelling back to it in time, he tries to avoid it with the Tralfamadorians. But neither Billy's nor the narrator's dance with death is deliberate. Both of them have fought in a war beyond their control. So this is not a willing dance with death. It is more a duty-dance with death.

### 4.3.5 Self-assessment Questions:

**A. Choose the correct alternative and rewrite the sentences.**

1. Where is Billy Pilgrim from?
   - a. Ilium, New York
   - b. Ithaca, New York
   - c. New York
   - d. Schenectady, New York

2. Who lends Billy his science-fiction books?
   - a. Eliot Rosewater
   - b. Howard J. Campbell, Jr.
   - c. Bertram Copeland Rumfoord
   - d. Kilgore Trout

3. To whom does Vonnegut make the promise that he will call his book *The Children's Crusade*?
   - a. Bertram Copeland Rumfoord
   - b. Lily Rumfoord
   - c. Mary O’Hare
   - d. Gerhard Müller

4. Following which event is Billy taken prisoner?
   - a. The bombing of Dresden
   - b. The Battle of the Bulge
   - c. The Children’s Crusade
   - d. The Battle of Kursk
5. In what city does Kurt Vonnegut work for General Electric?
   a. Indianapolis, Indiana  
b. Chicago, Illinois  
c. Iowa City, Iowa  
d. Schenectady, New York
6. Which of the following is the title of a Kilgore Trout novel?
   a. *The Big Board*  
b. *Bluebeard*  
c. *The Clever Man and the Cutout*  
d. *Everything Was Beautiful, and Nothing Hurt*
7. What is Edgar Derby tried and executed for stealing?
   a. A diamond  
b. A clock in the shape of the Eiffel Tower  
c. A teapot  
d. A denture
8. What do the Tralfamadorians resemble?
   a. Windshield wipers  
b. Toilet plungers  
c. Humans  
d. Golliwogs
9. Which of the following thing happens to Billy for the first time in Dresden?
   a. He gets kidnapped by aliens  
b. He comes unstuck in time  
c. He sees a naked woman  
d. He feels “animal magnetism”
10. In what year does Billy die?
    a. 1967  
b. 1968  
c. 1970  
d. 1976

B. Answer the following questions in one word/phrase or sentence only.
1. What does Vonnegut say World War II did for people?
2. How do Tralfamadorians see time?
3. How do Tralfamadorians understand death?
4. What heavenly visions does Billy have?
5. What promise does Paul Lazzaro make to Roland Weary before he dies?
6. For what purpose was the German Camp constructed?
7. What is the first question Billy has for the Tralfamadorians?
8. What is the sweetest thing in life for Paul Lazzaro?
9. What is Campbell’s final argument in favour of fighting the Russians?
10. Which historical personage do the Tralfamadorians find interesting?

1.4 Model answers to Self-assessment Questions

A. 1- a,  2- d,  3- c,  4- b,  5- d,  6- a,  7- c,  8- b,  9- b,  10- d.

B. 1. World War II has made everyone very tough.
2. Tralfamadorians see time all at once, like a mountain range.
3. Tralfamadorians see death as just one bad moment, with plenty of other good moments of life existing along with it.
4. Billy sees Adam and Eve in a German soldier’s boots and a little paradise inside the guard’s boxcar.
5. Lazzaro promises to punish Billy Pilgrim for causing Roland Weary’s death.
6. It was constructed for the extermination of Russian captives.
7. Billy asks, “Why me?”
8. Revenge is the sweetest thing in life for Lazzaro.
9. Campbell says that the Americans will have to fight the Communists sooner or later.
10. The Tralfamadorians find the philosophy of Charles Darwin very interesting

4.5 Summary

Published in 1969, the novel Slaughterhouse-Five is part memoir and part war novel. Many have called it the most important war novel to come out of World War II. The novel is based on a historical event of the firebombing of Dresden, a German city. The Allied forces dropped flammable bombs on the city in 1945 in which the city was completely destructed and more than 1,3500 people died.

The novel is a story of Billy Pilgrim. He was born in 1922 in Ilium, New York. He is an ordinary man who becomes "unstuck in time." He travels back and forth in
time. He visits his birth, sees death and all the moments. He grows into a weak and awkward young man. He studies briefly at the Ilium School of Optometry and then joins the army. After minimal training, he is sent to Europe during the World War II. While wandering with his fellow soldiers he first realizes that he is “unstuck in time”. There, after the Battle of Bulge, he and other American soldiers are captured as Prisoners of War by the German army. On the way to the camp Roland Weary and many other companions of Billy die. But Paul Lazzaro, another POW promises that he will kill Billy to avenge his death. Afterwards, they are kept in a slaughterhouse near Dresden. To the shock of all, Dresden is bombed on February 13 and 14, 1945. As a result, the POWs get no food and water and are asked to dig the dead bodies from the destroyed city. When Edgar Derby one POW tries to steal a teapot from the dead body, he is killed by the German squad. In May, when Russians take the area, Billy is sent back to his hometown.

Billy finishes his optometry education in the school and soon Valencia, the daughter of the school owner, Lionel Merble falls in love with him though he does not really love her. He suffers a mental breakdown, undergoes a treatment and recovers. He then marries Valencia. Her father is wealthy, and with a little help from him, Billy grows rich. Soon Valencia becomes the mother of two children. On the wedding night of his daughter Barbara, he is kidnapped by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. The Tralfamadorians have a completely different view of time. For them, all moments happen simultaneously and always. They take him to their world and put him in a zoo, where he meets an actress called Montana Wildhack. Billy marries with her and she gets a child from him. Billy is then sent back to Earth but surprisingly he does not miss a moment from earth. Yet, he says nothing about the events until he suffers head injuries in a plane crash. His wife dies on her way to hospital to see him. After he goes home, Billy goes to New York and takes part in a radio talk in order to share his strange kidnapping experiences and the Tralfamadorian concept of time. Barbara takes care of Billy who is then mentally unbalanced. Billy claims to know how he will die. In 1976, after the U.S. is divided into little nations, he is killed by an agent of Paul Lazzaro. Yet, as per the death theory of the Tralfamadorians, he is still alive in past and can enjoy living in the present. Thus, by narrating the story of Bill Pilgrim, Vonnegut focuses on his emotions and thoughts. In the process, he transforms both what we think of as a ‘novel’ and what we think of ‘war’.
4.5.1 Novel at a Glance:

**GENRE:** antiwar novel, historical fiction, science fiction, semi-autobiographical novel

**PUBLICATION:** 1969

**SETTING:** Novel jumps around in time and location. Author’s narration in first and last chapters set in 1968. Billy lives from the 1920s to 1976. His war experiences are from 1944-45. Locations include Luxemburg; Germany; Ilium, New York; and the planet of Tralfamadore.

**MAJOR THEMES:**

The destructiveness of war, fantasy of free will, man’s alienation and loneliness in post war era, the concept of death, patriotism

**STYLISTIC ELEMENTS:**

Nonlinear narrative structure; irony; black humour; biblical and other literary references (Adam and Eve, Lot and Lot’s wife, Christ, Alice in Wonderland, Cinderella, etc.); historical references (bombing of Dresden, World War II, Vietnam War); science fiction elements (time travel, aliens); presence of narrator as a character

**CHARACTERS:**

**Kurt Vonnegut:** narrator of first and last chapters, introduces himself in action of other chapters, struggles to write war book

**Billy Pilgrim:** protagonist, chaplain’s asst. in WWII, captured in Battle of Bulge, optometrist, “unstuck in time,” weak and unheroic

**Bernard V. O’Hare:** Vonnegut’s war companion, accompanies him on trip to Dresden in 1967, survives bombing of Dresden

**Mary O’Hare:** Bernard’s wife, angry with Billy because she thinks that he’ll write a book that glorifies war

**Valencia Merble:** Billy’s wife, daughter of optometrist, fat, Billy describes marriage to her as not pleasant but manageable

**Robert Pilgrim:** Billy and Valencia’s son, troubled high school student, joins Green Berets and fights in Vietnam War
Barbara Pilgrim: Billy’s daughter, assumes responsibility for Billy after her mother’s death, frustrated with Billy’s belief in aliens

Roland Weary: POW in WWII, unpopular, possessed with torture and enjoys torturing others with new instruments

Edgar Derby: POW in WWII, high school teacher, older than average soldier, killed for taking teapot, patriotic

Paul Lazzaro: POW in WWII, values revenge, friend of Weary, promises Weary he’ll avenge his death, at the end kills Billy through an agent

Eliot Rosewater: roommate of Billy in veterans’ hospital, former infantry captain, fan of Kilgore Trout’s science fiction

Kilgore Trout: science fiction writer, manager of newspaper boys, bitter, has great influence on Billy

Tralfamadorians: aliens, shaped like toilet plungers, believe in fate, can see all time at once, accept death and focus on good moments

FIVE MAJOR EVENTS IN THE NOVEL:

1. Mary’s quarrel with Vonnegut: Vonnegut visits Bernard to discuss war memories. Mary becomes angry because she thinks that Vonnegut will write a book that glorifies war. Vonnegut assures her that his book won’t do that. He dedicates book to her and subtitles it as The Children’s Crusade.

2. Bombing of Dresden: On February 13, 1945, Allied forces bomb city of Dresden, Germany to end of the war as early as possible. Billy Pilgrim survives because he is in a meat locker, though 135,000 others die. Billy helps to find dead bodies and burn them.

3. Billy’s nervous breakdown: Billy commits himself to a veterans’ hospital because he suffers a nervous breakdown after the war. Rosewater introduces him to the science fiction writer Kilgore Trout.

4. Billy kidnapped by Tralfamadorians: The night of his daughter’s wedding in 1967, Billy is kidnapped by aliens. They take him to the planet Tralfamadore and display him naked in their zoo. Montana Wildhack is also kidnapped and put in zoo.
5. **Billy sees his own death:** Billy sees his own death on February 13, 1976, and describes the events into a tape recorder. He is speaking in Chicago when a hit man borrowed by Lazzaro shoots Billy. He is dead for a time, and then travels to a different moment in his life.

4.6 Exercises:

4.6.1 Broad Question with Answer

**Q.1 Discuss *Slaughterhouse-Five* as a war novel**

**Ans:** A war novel, as we all know, is a novel about war. This genre of novel is supposed to portray the conflict, combat and the confrontation between two groups or nations. Though the novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* deals with many different themes, its major concern is the horrors caused by the World War. To speak more specifically, the novel is the outcome of Dresden firebombing by the Allied group in 1945. Therefore, it is needless to say that the novel has a very valid and factual historical context which is also one of the features of a war novel.

Vonnegut took active part in the war. Yet for him, war is not an activity of glory and heroism but an uncontrolled tragedy for all those who are involved in it. Nonetheless, war has a long lasting impact on people who are far away from it. Although World War II is considered by most as justified conflict which defeated the inhuman rule of Nazi Germany, Vonnegut sees only victims on all sides. To him, the killing of 1,35000 innocent civilians by the Allied firebombing on Dresden is as condemnable act as the killing of one American soldier by the Germans. That is to say, to Vonnegut, each one’s life is precious irrespective of his/her nationality or religion. The horrors of war are so disturbing that Vonnegut doubts his ability to write about them and is unhesitant to tell openly in the very first chapter of the novel. Like Vonnegut, Billy Pilgrim, who is the novel’s protagonist is taken prisoner by the Germans and witnesses the Dresden firebombing. The more he gets involved in the war, the more he prefers to distance and alienate himself from its horrible memory. He is ‘unstuck in time’ and this strange quality in him offers him peace and then only he is able to watch a war movie. Captivated as POW by the Germans, Billy can travel to any given moment in how own past or future. This is nothing but the impact of war. The novel follows Billy’s war experiences in more or less chronological order. A scene of Billy in a German prison camp may be followed immediately by a scene of his wedding night or a time when his father taught him to swim as a child.
This condition of Billy is a symbol of the shock, confusion, dislocation and desire for escape from the horrible experiences of war. His time travel can be thus interpreted as the fantasy of an emotionally unstable man. On another level, this travel of Billy may be taken as an actual event that takes the novel close to Science fiction. In other words, it is again the war that enables Vonnegut to treat the novel as a work of science fiction. The most science-fictional element in the novel is Billy’s kidnapping by aliens from the planet Tralfamadore years after the war. Death, which is the result of war, is also looked at positively by Vonnegut through the philosophy of Tralfamadorians. According to them, when a person dies, he or she is very much alive in the past. Hence they respond to death as ‘So it goes’. Billy knows when he is going to die and so he is not concerned about it. As a result, at the time of his death, he finds himself returning to an earlier point in his life.

He, like Tralfamadorians concentrates on the happy moments of life ignoring the unhappy ones. In a way, it is Billy’s passive resistance and not the opposition to the evil that enables him to make the world better. To add to this, war destroys everything and affects everyone in one way or the other. As far as the characters in this novel are concerned, Vonnegut makes it clear in chapter eight of the novel that there are no characters and the people in it are so sick that they are helpless before the enormous evil forces. It is again the war that overshadows the life of the so called characters. This brings to our notice that to Vonnegut, characters are less important. What matters most are the events and the happenings that are beyond the control of man such as the war.

All the above discussion and explanation show that Slaughterhouse-Five is not an answer to the tragedy of war, but a response. It is the horror of World War II as represented by the Dresden firebombing, and the attempts of civilized people to settle with those horrors. The most memorable scenes in the novel are filled with these horrors.

Finally, though the novel is based on the writer’s experiences in World War II, the novel also makes certain references to the Vietnam War. There is a direct reference to this war in the novel when Billy, in 1967, listens to a speech by a Marine regarding the bombing of North Vietnam. There is also a reference to the killings of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968 when the war was on. The defeat of America in this war might be the reason for Vonnegut to maintain a passive
and ironic perspective towards war. In short, the novel is a perfect example of an ideal war novel.

4.6.2 Short note with answer

Q.1 Concept of ‘time’ in Slaughterhouse-Five

Ans: Slaughterhouse –Five is a war novel but unlike other war novels, it is not a traditional anti-war novel. What makes this novel unique and distinct in itself is the innovative use regarding the nature of time. In the novel, Vonnegut seems to be obsessed with this fleeting nature of time. He is vague and indefinite about time. For instance, he cannot remember the exact year he visited O’Hare, his friend. He cannot tell his wife what time it is but asks her to search him. This forgetfulness works as a shield for him to protect from obsession of time. In the early part of the novel, he is oppressed by the past, and idea of death. On his way to O’Hare’s house, looking at the river, he sees death as cold and frozen as the ice. This watery image is used by Vonnegut throughout the novel. Describing the procession of the Allied POWs, he says, ‘they were moving like water’. Looking at the dead bodies, Vonnegut says, they are blue and ivory’ to suggest that it is the time which does to us all both when we are dead and when we breathe. In other words, to Vonnegut, life is a state of slow but continuous decay. Thus, time, as it occurs in the initial part of the novel is author-character centric. But as the novel proceeds, the concept of time changes and we find Billy unstuck in time. It is under the influence of the Tralfamadorians that Billy realizes the new concept of time. Now, he can move to any point of time in past or future. The time philosophy of the Tralfamadorians argues that time cannot be broken into past, present or future. It is because of this strange concept of time that Billy dies in the present but can still enjoy life in the past for he is alive there. In other words, to Tralfamadorians, death is not the end of life.

4.7 Activities/ Field Work

- Compare and contrast Slaughterhouse-Five with another well known war novel such as Catch-22 or The Red Badge of Courage.

- Read more about the Dresden, Germany firebombing of World War II and compare Vonnegut’s account of the event with the historical record.

- Take an interview of a soldier or an army man who has taken part in war. Know more about war and warfare affairs from his experiences.
Compare some renowned war novels with their film versions.

4.8 Further Reading


Unit-5 (A)

ALL MY SONS

Arthur Miller (1915-2005)

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5.11 Some more facts about the life and works of Arthur Miller

5.12 Further Readings
5.1 Objectives:

After completing the study of this unit you will understand/be able to understand--

- Life and works of Arthur Miller.
- Background and the setting of the concerned play.
- Thematic concerns and the dramatic techniques exploited by the dramatist.
- Answer the questions asked on the play *All My Sons*.

5.2 Introduction

*All My Sons* is Arthur Miller's first commercially successful play. It opened at the Coronet Theatre in New York on January 29, 1947. It ran for 328 performances and acquired important critical acclaim for the dramatist, winning the prestigious New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Unlike his earlier play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), *All My Sons* brought Mailer all reputation which he deserved as a dramatist.

The play is now regarded as the first of Miller's major plays. The work also greatly helped the career of Elia Kazan, who had first won honour for his direction of Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* in 1942 and after directing *All My Sons* would continue to work with the plays of both Miller and Tennessee Williams to produce both legendary stage productions and important films.

In *All My Sons*, Miller evidenced the strong influence of both Henrik Ibsen and Greek tragedy. He has used the same formula brilliantly while writing his next play, *Death of a Salesman* (1949), which is regarded as his finest work.

5.2.1 Arthur Miller: A Biographical Sketch

The American Dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out. Arthur Miller said, "Whoever is writing in the United States is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story. People elsewhere tend to accept, to a far greater degree anyway, that the conditions of life are hostile to man's pretensions." In Miller's more than thirty plays, which have won him a Pulitzer Prize and multiple Tony Awards, he puts in question "death and betrayal and injustice and how we are to account for this little life of ours."
Nearly for six decades, Miller has been creating characters that wrestle with power conflicts, personal and social responsibility, the repercussions of past actions, and the twin poles of guilt and hope. In his writing and in his role in public life, Miller articulates his profound political and moral convictions. He once said he thought theatre could "change the world." The Crucible, which premiered in 1953, is a fictionalization of the Salem witch-hunts of 1692, but it also deals in an allegorical manner with the House Un-American Activities Committee. In a note to the play, Miller writes, "A political policy is equated with moral right, and opposition to it with diabolical malevolence." Dealing as it did with highly charged current events, the play received unfavourable reviews and Miller was cold-shouldered by many colleagues. When the political situation shifted, Death of a Salesman went on to become Miller's most celebrated and most produced play, which he directed at the People's Art Theatre in Beijing in 1983.

A Modern tragedian, Miller says he looks to the Greeks for inspiration, particularly Sophocles. "I think the tragic feeling is evoked in us when we are in the presence of a character who is ready to lay down his life, if need be, to secure one thing-his sense of personal dignity," Miller writes. "From Orestes to Hamlet, Medea to Macbeth, the underlying struggle is that of the individual attempting to gain his 'rightful' position in his society." Miller considers the common man "as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings was." Death of a Salesman, which opened in 1949, tells the story of Willy Loman, an aging salesman who makes his way "on a smile and a shoeshine." Miller lifts Willy's illusions and failures, his anguish and his family relationships, to the scale of a tragic hero. The fear of being displaced or having our image of what and who we are destroyed is best known to the common man, Miller believes. "It is time that we, who are without kings, took up this bright thread of our history and followed it to the only place it can possibly lead in our time-the heart and spirit of the average man."

Arthur Asher Miller, the son of a women's clothing company owner, was born in 1915 in New York City. His father lost his business in the Depression and the family was forced to move to a smaller home in Brooklyn. After graduating from high school, Miller worked jobs ranging from radio singer to truck driver to clerk in an automobile-parts warehouse. Miller began writing plays as a student at the
University of Michigan, joining the Federal Theater Project in New York City after
he received his degree. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*,
opened in 1944 and his next play, *All My Sons*, received the Drama Critics' Circle
Award. His 1949 *Death of a Salesman* won the Pulitzer Prize. In 1956 and 1957,
Miller was subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee and was
convicted of contempt of Congress for his refusal to identify writers believed to hold
Communist sympathies. The following year, the United States Court of Appeals
overturned the conviction. In 1959 the National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded
him the Gold Medal for Drama. Miller has been married three times: to Mary Grace
Slattery in 1940, Marilyn Monroe in 1956, and photographer Inge Morath in 1962,
with whom he lives in Connecticut. He and Inge have a daughter, Rebecca. Among
his works are *A View from the Bridge*, *The Misfits*, *After the Fall*, *Incident at Vichy*,
*The Price*, *The American Clock*, *Broken Glass*, *Mr. Peters' Connections*, and
*Timebends*, his autobiography. Miller's writing has earned him a lifetime of honors,
including the Pulitzer Prize, seven Tony Awards, two Drama Critics Circle Awards,
an Obie, an Olivier, the John F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award, and the
Dorothy and Lillian Gish prize. He holds honorary doctorate degrees from Oxford
University and Harvard University.

Throughout his life and works, Miller has remained socially engaged and has
written with conscience, clarity, and compassion. As Chris Keller says to his mother
in *All My Sons*, "Once and for all you must know that there's a universe of people
outside, and you're responsible to it." Miller's work is infused with his sense of
responsibility to humanity and to his audience. "The playwright is nothing without
his audience," he writes. "He is one of the audience who happens to know how to
speak."

As a student Miller had a tremendous influence upon him of the writers like
Dostoevsky. After reading Dostoevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov* he
decided that he was destined to become a writer. He had trouble getting into college
but was eventually accepted at the University of Michigan, where he began his
apprenticeship as a writer and won several student awards for his work.
5.2.2 Arthur Miller at his writing desk:

After college Miller returned to New York and worked briefly as a radio script writer, then tried his hand at writing for the stage commercially. His first Broadway play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), closed after only four performances, but it did win a Theatre Guild award and revealed the young writer's potential. He had more success with *Focus* (1945), a novel dealing with anti-Semitism. In fact, at the time he wrote *All My Sons* (1947), his first dramatic hit, he was better known as a writer of fiction than as a playwright.

*All My Sons* established Miller's standing as a bright and extremely talented dramatist. The play had a good run and won Miller his first New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Even the least favourable commentators recognized the playwright's great promise.

*All My Sons* was followed with three of his most critically and commercially successful plays: *Death of Salesman* (1949), *The Crucible* (1953), and *A View from the Bridge* (1955). In these works, Miller attempted to show that tragedy could be written about ordinary people struggling to maintain personal dignity at critical moments in their lives. With these plays, Miller joined Eugene O'Neill and Tennessee Williams in what in the post-World War II years was generally recognized as the great triumvirate of the American theatre.

Miller, a political leftist, gained some notoriety in the 1950s when he refused to cooperate with the House Un-American Activities Committee and was held in contempt of Congress. From this experience he found thematic material for one of his most famous and controversial plays, *The Crucible*, which focuses on the Salem Witch Trials of 1692.

After the 1955 production of *A View from the Bridge*, Miller took a nine-year break from playwriting. In the interim, Miller married and divorced the famous actress, Marilyn Monroe. He did adapt one of his stories, *The Misfits*, as a screen vehicle for his celebrated wife but did not complete another Broadway play until 1964, when both *After the Fall* and *Incident at Vichy* were produced. The former play, considered Miller's most experimental play, is also his darkest work, with many autobiographical parallels.
His last Broadway success was *The Price*, produced in 1968. After his next play, *The Creation of the World and Other Business* (1972), failed on Broadway, Miller stopped premiering works in New York. He continued to write plays, and enjoyed some success, but nothing that matched that of his earliest works. Many of his later plays were short one-act plays and works comprised of sketches or vignettes.

His greatest triumphs remain *Death of a Salesman* and *The Crucible*. Both have been revived with great success. In 1999, for example, the New York production of *Death of a Salesman* garnered four Tony awards, including one for best revival and one for best direction. At the age of eighty-four, Miller was also presented with a special, lifetime achievement award for his great contributions to the American theatre. Miller died from congestive heart failure on February 10, 2005, in Roxbury, Connecticut.

5.2.3 Check your Progress: I

**A. Choose the correct alternatives and complete the following sentences.**

   a) Coronet Theatre  
   b) Broadway Theatre  
   c) Alborg Theatre  
   d) Academy Theatre.

2. For which of the following plays Miller was conferred upon the prestigious New York Drama Critics' Circle Award.
   a) *The Crucible*  
   b) *Death of Salesman*  
   c) *A View from the Bridge*  
   d) *All My Sons*

3. Miller's became a famous writer after the publication of -----.
   a) *Focus*  
   b) *The Crucible*  
   c) *The Witch-hunt*  
   d) *Incident at Vichy*

4. Arthur Asher Miller, the son of a women's clothing company owner, was born in-----in New York City.
   a) 1918  
   b) 1916  
   c) 1915  
   d) 1917

5. The novel *Focus* by Miller deals with the theme of ------
   a) slavery  
   b) alienation  
   c) anti-Semitism  
   d) social disintegration
B. Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. The National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him the Gold Medal for Drama in -----.
2. Miller thought that he could become writer after reading Dostoevsky's great novel-------.
3. ------The Man Who Had All the Luck was Miller’s first Broadway play, performed.
5. Miller married and divorced the famous actress, -------.

C. Answer in one word/ phrase/ sentence

1. Which play is treated to be Miller’s most experimental play.
2. Name the play which is treated to be Miller’s last Broadway success produced in 1968.
3. Which play was a failure on the Broadway?
4. Apart from Death of a Salesman which of the second play by Miller is known to be his greatest triumph on the Broadway?
5. Mention the play which brought Miller an award for best Direction.

Answers:

Check your Progress: I

A. Choose the correct alternatives and complete the following sentences.

1–b; 2-d; 3-a; 4-c; 5-c

B. Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. 1959
2. The Brothers Karamazov
3. The Man Who Had All the Luck.
4. The Crucible
5. Marilyn Monroe

C. **Answer in one word/ phrase/ sentence**
   1. After the Fall
   2. The Price
   3. The Creation of the World and Other Business
   4. The Crucible
   5. Death of a Salesman

5.3 **Plot outline of *All My Sons***

Joe and Kate Keller had two sons, Chris and Larry. Keller owned a manufacturing plant with Steve Deever, and their families were close. Steve's daughter Ann was Larry's beau, and George was their friend. When the war came, both Keller boys and George were drafted.

During the war, Joe Keller's and Steve Deever's manufacturing plant had a very profitable contract with the U.S. Army, supplying airplane parts. One morning, a shipment of defective parts came in. Under pressure from the army to keep up the output, Steve Deever called Keller, who had not yet come into work that morning, to ask what he should do. Keller told Steve to weld the cracks in the airplane parts and ship them out. Steve was nervous about doing this alone, but Keller said that he had the flu and could not go into work. Steve shipped out the defective but possibly safe parts on his own.

Later, it was discovered that the defective parts caused twenty-one planes to crash and their pilots to die. Steve and Keller were arrested and convicted, but Keller managed to win an appeal and get his conviction overturned. He claimed that Steve did not call him and that he was completely unaware of the shipment. Keller went home free, while Steve remained in jail, shunned by his family.

Meanwhile, overseas, Larry received word about the first conviction. Racked with shame and grief, he wrote a letter to Ann telling her that she must not wait for him. Larry then went out to fly a mission, during which he broke out of formation and crashed his plane, killing himself. Larry was reported missing.
Three years later, the action of the play begins. Chris has invited Ann to the Keller house because he intends to propose to her--they have renewed their contact in the last few years while she has been living in New York. They must be careful, however, since Mother insists that Larry is still alive somewhere. Her belief is reinforced by the fact that Larry's memorial tree blew down in a storm that morning, which she sees as a positive sign. Her superstition has also led her to ask the neighbour to make a horoscope for Larry in order to determine whether the day he disappeared was an astrologically favourable day. Everyone else has accepted that Larry is not coming home, and Chris and Keller argue that Mother should learn to forget her other son. Mother demands that Keller in particular should believe that Larry is alive, because if he is not, then their son's blood is on Keller's hands.

Ann's brother George arrives to stop the wedding. He had gone to visit Steve in jail to tell him that his daughter was getting married, and then he left newly convinced that his father was innocent. He accuses Keller, who disarms George by being friendly and confident. George is reassured until Mother accidentally says that Keller has not been sick in fifteen years. Keller tries to cover her slip of the tongue by adding the exception of his flu during the war, but it is now too late. George is again convinced of Keller's guilt, but Chris tells him to leave the house.

Chris's confidence in his father's innocence is shaken, however, and in a confrontation with his parents, he is told by Mother that he must believe that Larry is alive. If Larry is dead, Mother claims, then it means that Keller killed him by shipping out those defective parts. Chris shouts angrily at his father, accusing him of being inhuman and a murderer, and he wonders aloud what he must do in response to this unpleasant new information about his family history.

Chris is disillusioned and devastated, and he runs off to be angry at his father in privacy. Mother tells Keller that he ought to volunteer to go to jail--if Chris wants him to. She also talks to Ann and continues insisting that Larry is alive. Ann is forced to show Mother the letter that Larry wrote to her before he died, which was essentially a suicide note. The note basically confirms Mother's belief that if Larry is dead, then Keller is responsible--not because Larry's plane had the defective parts, but because Larry killed himself in response to the family responsibility and shame due to the defective parts.
Mother begs Ann not to show the letter to her husband and son, but Ann does not comply. Chris returns and says that he is not going to send his father to jail, because that would accomplish nothing and his family practicality has finally overcome his idealism. He also says that he is going to leave and that Ann will not be going with him, because he fears that she will forever wordlessly ask him to turn his father in to the authorities.

Keller enters, and Mother is unable to prevent Chris from reading Larry's letter aloud. Keller now finally understands that in the eyes of Larry and in a symbolic moral sense, all the dead pilots were his sons. He says that he is going into the house to get a jacket, and then he will drive to the jail and turn himself in. But a moment later, a gunshot is heard--Keller has killed himself.

When the young playwright Arthur Miller began writing *All My Sons*, he was embarking on a project that would be either the beginning or the end of his career. His first and only play to be produced on Broadway, *The Man Who Had All the Luck*, was an unmitigated failure, lasting only four performances. A practical man who had lived through the depression, Miller decided to give himself one more chance. If he did not have success with his next play, then he would quit the business and find "another line of work."

Miller's plays are public works, with straightforward language, and which address issues of the individual's public persona and how people act. But he learned from Williams's success and set out to write a more commercial play, a drama that would "land" with audiences, in the language of the Broadway business. He also chose to write a play in a realistic style, a problem play in the manner of Henrik Ibsen, evoking a style he had not used in many years. The work of Ibsen influenced *All My Sons* structurally as well, for Ibsen had liberally applied the principle of Greek theatre that stresses the influence of the past on the present.

When the play was finished after five years of work, Miller asked his agent to send it to the director Elia Kazan. A former member of the Communist Party, Kazan had directed Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, and he would later direct the genre-redefining *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman* (and would win Academy Awards for *Gentleman's Agreement* and *On the Waterfront*). Kazan's career was tarnished in memory, however, and his relationship with Miller was
permanently severed when he chose to name names for the House Un-American Activities Commission during the Red Scare. But at the time, as a successful director with a talent for eliciting monumental performances from his actors, and as someone who shared Miller's leftist politics, Kazan was the perfect choice for All My Sons. The cast included such rising stars as Ed Begley (as Keller, later of *Inherit the Wind*), Arthur Kennedy (as Chris, later creator of the roles of Biff Loman and John Proctor), and Karl Malden. Luckily for Miller and for the American stage, *All My Sons* was a success. Opening at the Coronet Theatre on January 29, 1947, the first night's notices were mixed—with the crucial exception of the *New York Times*, whose Brooks Atkinson admired Miller as a genuine new talent. As usual, the *Times* review swayed all the others, and All My Sons ran for 328 performances (quite respectable at that time) and won the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for best play of 1947, beating out Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* (which at the time had been coolly received and would only become a landmark of American drama in retrospect).

Miller's success gave him financial stability, confidence, and the confirmation of Miller's identity as a playwright. This success was necessary for him to take a risk with his next work, *Death of a Salesman*.

**Check your Progress: II**

A. **Choose the correct alternatives and complete the following sentences.**

1. Keller's and Deever's were the partners in a manufacturing plant having a very profitable contract with-------
   a) the U.S. Army  
   b) the Russian Army
   c) the French Army  
   d) Japanese Army

2. Keller and Deever's contract was to supply--------
   a) Weapons  
   b) machine guns  
   c) airplane part  
   d) ordinance Steve

3. ------shipped out the defective but possibly safe parts on his own.
   a) Steve  
   b) Keller  
   c) Joe  
   d) Larry

4. The defective parts sent to the Army caused the death of ----- pilots.
   a) Twenty  
   b) sixteen  
   c) twelve  
   d) twenty one
5. Larry who died in an air crash was Keller’s--------
   a) Brother   b) son       c) stepson     d) own son.

B. Fill in the blanks with suitable words:
1. After Larry was reported missing the action of the play begins -------- years later.
2. Chris is interested in marrying--------.
3. ------never believes that her son Larry is dead.
4. ------accidentally that Keller has not been sick in fifteen years.
5. ----holds Joe Keller responsible for the death of her son Larry.

C. Answer in one word/ phrase/ sentence
1. Who tells Keller that he ought to volunteer to go to jail?
2. Whose confidence in his father is shaken?
3. Who kills himself in response to the family responsibility and shame due to the defective parts?
4. How many years it took to Miller to finish the play All My Sons?
5. Who begs Ann not to show the letter to her husband and son

Answers to Check your Progress: II

A. Choose the correct alternatives and complete the following sentences.
   1- a;  2- c;  3-a;  4-d;  5-d.

B. Fill in the blanks with suitable words:
   1. Three
   2. Ann
   3. Kate Keller
   4. Kate Keller
   5. Kate Keller
C. Answer in one word/phrase/sentence

1. Mother
2. Chris’s
3. Larry
4. Five
5. Mother

5.4 Major Characters:

1. Joe Keller:

   Middle aged and prosperous, Joe Keller is a family man whose world does not extend beyond the borders of his front yard or the gate around his factory. He is not a greedy, conniving caricature of capitalism, but rather a good-natured and loving man of little education, whose myopic perspective on his world stems from a devotion to his family and an education in a society that encourages generally antisocial behaviour. American rugged individualism alienated Keller, whose past misdeeds haunt the future of his family.

2. Kate Keller (Mother)

   Though she has a successful husband and a loving son, Mother cannot abandon the memory of her other son, who was lost in the war. Her delusions about Larry’s disappearance and her vehement self-denial are symptomatic of greater issues than just a grief-stricken mother’s inability to cope with the loss of a child. Nervous and suspicious, Mother has taken on the burden of her husband’s secret while he presents the face of an untroubled conscience to the world, while she suffers from headaches and nightmares. Her fantasies about Larry are constructed from a sense of self-preservation, and the flimsy basis for her hopes is threatened any time someone who loved Larry intimates that he or she may not share Kate’s confidence in his return.

3. Chris Keller

   Returning from the war as a hero, Chris found the day-to-day provincialism of his old life stifling. But Chris is a family man, and he is devoted to his parents. He is uncomfortable with the success his father’s business found during the war, when so
many of his comrades died pointlessly. He redirects his discomfort into idealism and an attitude of social awareness that is foreign to his family environment. Others perceive Chris’s idealism as oppressive, asking sacrifices of others that Chris himself does not make as he lives comfortably (if guiltily) on his father’s dime.

4. **Larry Keller**

Although he has been dead for some years by the start of the play, Larry is as much a character in the play as anyone who actually appears on stage. His disappearance haunts his family through his mother’s superstitious belief in his return, as well as through his brother’s wary but measured rejection of Larry’s claim on his childhood sweetheart. Larry is constantly compared to Chris throughout the play, ostensibly for the purpose of better defining the character of Chris, but in the end we learn that Larry’s own character had quite an effect on the story. Larry is portrayed by his father as the more sensible and practical of his sons, the one with a head for business who would understand his father’s arguments. Larry, not Chris, possessed the stronger sense of honour and connectedness, and Larry sacrificed himself in penance for his father’s misdeeds.

5. **Deever**

The beautiful Ann has not become attached to a new man since her beau Larry died in the war, but this is not through lack of suitors. Ann is mired in the past, though she has not been waiting for Larry to return. Rather, she has waited for his brother Chris to step forward and take Larry’s place in her heart. She is an honest, down-to-earth girl, and she is emboldened by the strength of certain of her convictions. Sharing Chris’s idealism and righteousness, she has shunned her father for his crimes during the war, and she fully understands his assertion that if he had any suspicions of his own father, he could not live with himself. Ann and her brother work to establish “appropriate” reactions to a father’s wartime racketeering.

6. **George Deever**

George serves a mostly functional role in the story of the Keller family. His arrival in the second act is a catalyst for a situation that was on edge from long-established tensions. His disdain is for the crime, not for the man, and now that he has been newly convinced of his father’s innocence, he is here to rescue his sister
from entering the family of the man he believes is actually guilty. Yet George is easily disarmed by Keller’s good humour, and his own convictions about his father’s innocence are almost undermined by his awareness of his father’s other faults and weaknesses.

7. Dr. Jim Bayliss

The neighbourhood doctor, Jim is a good man who believes in the duty of one man to help another, but he at the same time acknowledges a man's responsibility to his family. He is interested in medicine not for the money but to help people. This point is dramatized by his reluctance to bother with a hypochondriac. He once left his wife to do medical research, but he eventually went home, putting his responsibility to his family ahead of his responsibility to the world.

5.5 Minor Characters:

Sue Bayliss

Jim's wife Sue put her husband through medical school, and she expects more than gratitude in return. She blames Chris's infectious, insinuating idealism for her husband's interest in the fiscally unrewarding field of medical research.

Frank Lubey

A simple neighbor, Frank has an interest in astrology. Mother asked him before the start of the play to prepare a horoscope for Larry in order to determine his "favorable day."

Lydia Lubey

Now married to Frank, Lydia is a former sweetheart of George's, but she did not wait for him to return from the war. Seeing Lydia makes George wistful about the simpler life he could have had, if he had not left home for the greater world of New York.

Bert

Bert is a neighbourhood boy who plays cop-and-robber games with Joe Keller, to Mother's chagrin. Keller has allowed Bert and the other children to get the story of
his jail time wrong and to believe that he is a chief of police with a jail in his basement. Mother is made very anxious by these games.

5.6 Summary of Act I

_All My Sons_ takes place in a small American town in August, a few years after World War II. The events of the play occur on a single set, the back yard of the Keller home, where a tree has recently been torn down by a storm. The Kellers are solidly middle-class and have a working-class background. They are not rich, but they are financially comfortable, and there is a sense throughout the play that they worked hard to reach this state of stability.

At curtain rise, Joe Keller and Dr. Jim Bayliss are in the yard. Keller is a middle-aged father, uneducated but sensible and generally unexceptional. Jim, the local doctor, is making small talk with his neighbour. After some talk about the weather, another neighbour enters. Frank Lubey is younger, pleasant, and profoundly superstitious.

Keller is reading the want ads in the Sunday paper, and he is quietly impressed by all the different types of business there are nowadays. Frank notices the broken tree, and Keller replies sadly that it fell the previous night. His wife has not yet seen it. Frank refers obliquely to the fact that the tree was planted in memory of Keller's son Larry, who would have turned 27 this month. Frank knows Larry's birthday because he has been preparing a horoscope for Larry at the request of Keller's wife Kate (referred to in the stage directions as "Mother" throughout). She wishes to know if November 25th, the day on which Larry went missing in the war, was a favourable day for her son. According to those who believe in these things (that is, Frank and Kate, but not Keller), it would have been fairly impossible for Larry to die on a favourable day.

Keller mentions that a girl named Annie is upstairs sleeping, and the mention of her makes Jim and Frank excited. Jim is new to the neighbourhood, so he has never met Annie, and Frank is eager to see an old acquaintance. Sue Bayliss, Jim's wife, stops by to tell Jim that a patient is on the phone. Jim implies that the patient in question is a hypochondriac, and Sue suggests that he should be happy to take his doctor's fee whether the patient is really sick or not. Sue mentions that Annie should
Lydia Lubey, Frank's wife, enters to complain of a broken toaster, and then Frank exits. Lydia lingers for a moment to ask if Annie is still unmarried (she is). Lydia finds that hard to believe, and Keller replies bitterly that it is because of the war that Annie is single and that he has one son instead of two. She exits.

Chris Keller enters. He is an affectionate young man of 32, who clearly adores his father. They wonder what Mother will say about the broken tree. A little boy named Bert runs in. He and Keller have an extended make-believe game in which Keller is the police inspector and Bert has been deputized to arrest other children in the town. After being told that there is a jail in the basement of the house, Bert leaves to continue his patrol.

Chris and Keller resume conversation about the tree. Early that morning, during the storm, Chris saw his mother standing outside beside the tree when it cracked. She had been crying very hard and wandering around at night, like she did shortly after Larry died. Although Larry has been missing for several years, Mother still thinks that he is alive somewhere. Chris thinks it is dishonest that he and Keller allow her to hold onto this dream, while they themselves are rather certain that Larry is long dead. Keller is resistant to making this fact final, however, because they cannot prove that their son is dead, at least not to his wife, without a body or a grave.

Chris sits him down and says that he asked Annie to visit because he is going to propose to her. Keller is lukewarm about the idea, because Annie was Larry's girl. From Mother's perspective, Larry is not dead, so Annie is not available to Chris. But Chris insists that there is no other girl for him, even though they have not seen each other since the war. He declares an ultimatum: if his parents will not accept his marriage to Annie, then he and Annie will just get married and move elsewhere. Keller is shocked that Chris would leave behind the family business.

Mother appears. She is somewhat younger than her husband, and she is very loving. She says that it is funny that Larry's tree blew down in his birthday month, and this shows that he is coming back. Uncomfortable, Chris tries to change the subject and talk about how good Annie looks. Mother says that she loves Annie
because she did not run off with another man as soon as her beau was declared missing. Mother has a headache, perhaps from a bad dream in which she saw Larry reaching to her from the cockpit of his plane. She sees this as more evidence that they had been hasty in putting a memorial tree up for him.

Chris says that maybe they should be trying to forget Larry, and Mother is furious. Chris exits to get her some aspirin, and Mother asks Keller if Chris intends to propose to Annie. He answers noncommittally. Mother says that if Annie is still single, that means that she has been waiting for Larry, and they dare not take her faith away. Mother gets somewhat hysterical, claiming that if Larry is not coming back, then she will kill herself. She says that Keller in particular should still believe--but Keller does not understand why he in particular should believe. Bert reappears, but Mother shoos him away, saying that they must end that jail business.

Ann and Chris enter. She is beautiful and strong-willed. Their entrance cuts short the argument. Jim and Sue briefly enter and are introduced to Ann. Before she leaves, Sue tells Ann that she should never, not even in her mind, count her husband's money. Ann and the Kellers discuss their plans for the evening, and Mother mentions that the room Ann is staying in was Larry's room. She is shocked, because the closet is full of clothes and the shoes are shined. There is an awkward moment, and Mother pulls Ann aside to gossip. Ann says that her parents are not getting divorced. Mother asks if Ann goes out much, and Ann knows that she is really asking if she is still waiting for Larry. She says that she is not. Mother insists that deep in her heart she must think he is still alive. Ann asks why Mother still believes, and Mother says it is because "certain things can never be," not in a world with a God.

Frank enters and asks Ann about her brother George, the lawyer. He also asks when her father expects parole, and Ann clams up. After Frank leaves, she is dismayed to realize that the town is still talking about her father, even though he has been gone and in prison for years now. Keller claims that no one talks about the case any more, because when he got out of prison he walked down the street with his head held high. It is slowly established that Keller and Ann's father Steve had been in business together during the war, and they had sold a shipment of cracked cylinder heads to the Air Force, which made twenty-one P-40s crash. The two were tried, and
Steve was found guilty and sent to jail, but Keller went home. Ann is surprised that Keller does not hold any grudges against her father, even though her father had tried to blame the whole thing on him. Ann does hold a grudge, though; she has not spoken to her father since then. Chris agrees and calls Steve a murderer. For all they know, Ann says, one of those cracked cylinder heads could have been in the plane that crashed with Larry inside. Mother is angered by this remark, and she insists that it all has nothing to do with Larry. Keller says that Steve was a little man who followed orders when the army called for the cylinder heads, and that the incident was just a mistake, not murder.

The parents exit and Ann says that she will not stay. Chris changes her mind by confessing his love. But their embrace is unsatisfactory to Ann, and Chris explains that he feels uncomfortable in his happiness because he survived the war, while all the other men in his company did not. Ann says that Chris should be happy with his good fortune and proud of his money and his business.

Keller enters and says that George, Ann's brother, is on the phone. Ann exits to answer the phone. Keller expresses puzzlement that George is calling from Columbus, where his father's prison is. Keller is suspicious that George and Ann are trying to open up the case again, and Chris is angered by the insinuation. Keller changes the subject and says he wants to rename the business for Chris, but Chris is uneasy with the proposition. Keller suspects that Chris is ashamed of their money, and he insists that it is good money, moral money. Ann returns and says that George will be coming that night. She and Chris leave. Mother enters and is shaken by the fact that George needs to speak to Ann. She asks what it is Steve has to tell George that has required George to take an airplane from New York to see him. Keller insists there is nothing, and Mother twice questions his resolve on that matter. Mother finishes with a warning that Keller ought to be smart.

5.6.1 Analysis of Act I:

The important events in All My Sons have already transpired. The only action that occurs within the time frame of the narrative is the revelation of certain facts about the past, and it is important to track how the revelations change the relationships among the characters as well as their own self-definition. Arthur Miller carefully controls the flow of information rather than focusing on plot and action.
Thus the play, influenced by the work of the playwright Ibsen, is paced by the slow revelation of facts. In the first act, not much is said that is unknown to the characters, but it is all new to the audience. Miller takes his time revealing the background information to the audience by having the characters obliquely refer to Larry and to his disappearance again and again, until all the necessary information has been revealed through natural dialog. The explanation of Keller's and Steve's business during the war, and the ensuing scandal, is similarly revealed through insinuation and association. The first reference to Steve's incarceration occurs when Ann says that her mother and father will probably live together again "when he gets out." This does not mean much to the audience until Frank asks about Steve's parole. Therefore, Ann's estrangement from her father and the community's hostility and curiosity towards the man are established before the audience knows exactly where Steve is and how he got there. Miller's manipulation of the background information heightens the anticipation and the curiosity of the audience.

Again, very little new information is presented to the characters in this act. Chris reveals his intentions to marry Ann to his father, Ann learns of Chris's feelings of guilt for surviving the war and coming home to a successful business, and Mother learns that Ann has not exactly been waiting for Larry all these years. Yet Miller's skillful and carefully planned withholding of the characters' backgrounds prevents the first act from feeling like forty minutes of exposition— which, in function, it actually is. The slow pace of the first act also allows the horror of the crime to seep into the atmosphere, imbuing the audience with a sense that this idyllic, placid community has been injected with a slow poison.

In addition, as in many plays and written works, Miller's choices in establishing the relationships in this fashion allow him to closely manipulate the audience's inferences and judgments about each character. (The effect is not unlike that of F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby, in which the first-person narrator, speaking after the events of the narrative, slowly reveals Daisy Buchanan's character to the reader.) Yet Arthur Miller did not have the narrative tools of the novel at his disposal like Fitzgerald did. A playwright mainly employs dialogue. Therefore, readers and viewers should pay careful attention to the ways that Miller sets up the necessary details about each character and their relationships. Keller's insistence that Steve was
not a murderer, and Chris's strong belief that patching those cracked airplane heads was morally reprehensible, are not just foreshadowing. They are essential elements of each character's personal trajectory, and these elements express the principal concept of the play: the past has an enduring influence on the present which never quite goes away. Fitzgerald's work leaves the reader with the message that one "can't repeat the past," and Miller's adds the caveat that one cannot ignore the past either.

The first act also illustrates the tensions between the characters that will rise to the surface in the second and third acts. The Kellers seem like a happy family at first; it is even remarked that Chris is the rare sort of person who truly loves his parents. But there is resentment beneath the surface of their contented existence, resentment that reflects more than just grief at the loss of a son. Larry was clearly the favoured of the Keller boys. Keller compares Larry's business sense to Chris's lack of it, and Chris complains that he has always played second fiddle to Larry in the eyes of his parents and of Ann, who was first betrothed to Larry. The family sometimes implies bitterness that Chris, not Larry, was the son who survived the war. Chris is too idealistic, too soft about business. Like Michael Corleone in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*, Chris returned from the war with a new idealism that will not permit him to condone his father's shadier business practices. And like Vito Corleone, Keller believes that his actions are legitimate if he acts for the sake of his family. In the end, like Michael Corleone, Chris must compromise his values in order to protect his father and his own family.

Mother's insecurities are expressed through her obsessive delusions about her dead son. She is anxious, suspicious of Ann, and highly superstitious. She cannot handle her husband's casual "jail" game with the neighbourhood children, because there is something weighing on her conscience. Jail has been a real spectre in this family. When Keller responds to her worries with "what have I got to hide?" we see the first clue that he does have something to hide after all--and Mother knows all about it--and it makes her sick with worry.

Ann is more of a simple character, serving the purpose of the plot but not actually a focus of the plot herself. *All My Sons* is the story of the Kellers, so we do not see much of Ann's reaction to the realization that her father was largely innocent after all. She functions in this act as a catalyst, a femme fatale in the literal sense, the
woman who brings destruction to the false calm of the Kellers' life by churning up a past that some of the family, in some ways, has tried to ignore. She and George have their own family drama, but Miller keeps a tight focus, so Ann's and George's story is not the subject of this play except inasmuch as their disgust for their father heightens the tension between another son and a father who might be guilty.

5.7 Summary of Act II

The second act takes place later the same day. Mother tells Chris that she fears that George is coming to open up the case again. Mother leaves, and Ann tells Chris that they ought to tell her about the engagement soon. Chris leaves, and Ann gossips with the neighbour Sue for awhile. Sue complains that her husband resents her for having put him through medical school, saying that "you can never owe somebody without resenting them." Sue says that Jim wants to do medical research and that Chris is the one who put idealistic thoughts of helping the world into her husband's head. She thinks that Chris makes other men feel guilty about their lives, while Chris lives on his father's business--she implies that this is not clean money.

Chris enters, and Sue speaks cordially to him, then leaves. Ann tells Chris that Sue hates him and says that everyone thinks Keller is guilty. Chris says that there is no suspicion in his mind whatsoever, asking if she thought he could possibly forgive his father if he had been guilty. Keller enters, and they light-heartedly banter about his lack of education. Keller says that everybody is getting so educated that there will be no one left to take away the garbage. "It's gettin' so the only dumb ones left are the bosses ... you stand on the street today and spit, you're gonna hit a college man." Keller changes the subject and offers to give Ann's father a job when he gets out of jail, ostensibly so that he will not freeload on the newlyweds. Keller takes it as a personal insult when Ann implies that she would never have anything to do with Steve, father or not. Keller leaves.

Jim announces that George is about to enter, and he warns Chris that George has blood in his eye--he should not fight this out in front of his mother. George enters, and there is some cordial but strained small talk for awhile. Eventually, George cuts to the chase and tells Ann that she is not going to marry Chris, because his father ruined her family. George explains that he went to the jail to tell their father that Ann
was getting married, and he discovered that they had been wrong all along. They did a terrible thing in cutting their father out of their lives. Steve had been alone at work when the cracked cylinder heads came in, so he called Keller. Keller told him to weld the cracks and send the parts on to the army, but Steve was afraid to do it alone. Keller claimed that he had the flu and could not go into work. This excuse made it possible for him later to deny any involvement in the shipment. Chris says he heard all this before in court, but George says it was different hearing it directly from his father, a "frightened mouse" of a man who would never do such a thing on his own volition. Chris counters that he certainly would, and because he was such a frightened mouse he would throw the blame on someone else because he was not man enough to take the heat. George accuses Chris, saying that he must know the family secret, and that this is why his name is not on the business. Chris warns him not to start a fight.

Mother enters; there is a general pause. She gushes over George for a while, and he responds kindly, since they have always gotten along. Lydia stops by (she and George were old sweethearts), and it saddens him to see her. Everyone is happy and friendly until Keller enters. George says that his father is not doing well, and Keller is sympathetic. George tries to be hostile, but he keeps getting disarmed by Keller's friendliness. Keller says he is sad to hear that Steve is still angry at him and that Steve never knew how to take the blame. He rattles off a list of incidents in which Steve tried to blame others to save face. George knows that this is true, and his anger is diffused. He decides to stay for dinner after all, and he comments that everything looks the same and everyone looks well.

Mother responds proudly that her husband has not been sick for fifteen years. Keller hastily adds the exception of his flu during the war. Mother takes a moment before she realizes what he is talking about, and George notices the awkwardness. His suspicion is reawakened.

Frank enters and announces that he has finished Larry's horoscope. The day he disappeared was his favourable day, so Larry probably could not have been killed on that day. Mother insists that Larry is alive, and she says that she has packed Ann's bag and it is time for her to go. George keeps insisting on returning to Mother's slip-up on the matter of Keller's flu during the war, and George tries to get Ann to leave.
with him. She says she will not leave till Chris tells her to, and Chris throws George out. Ann runs after him, after all, to try to calm him down.

The Kellers are left alone. Chris yells at his mother for packing Ann's bag, but she replies that everybody has to wait for Larry to come home. She is very insistent on this point. Chris says that he has let Larry go a long time ago. Mother cries that Larry is alive, because if he is dead, then Keller killed him. "As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father." She runs out.

Chris turns to Keller, finally understanding. Keller does not deny it; he ordered those cracked cylinder heads to be shipped out. Yet, they did not go into the type of plane that Larry flew. Chris says that Keller killed twenty-one men, and Chris then calls him a murderer. Keller explains that it was a matter of business: you work forty years, and in one moment, one failed shipment, the contracts can be torn up and you can lose everything. He thought that the military would notice the cracks anyway and that if they did not, he would warn them. But it was too late--the news was all over the papers that the planes had crashed, and the police were knocking on the door.

Chris is flabbergasted that his father suspected the planes would crash. Furious and betrayed, he asks why his father would do such a thing. For him, his father replies--for Chris, for the family, for the business. Enraged, Chris rants about his father's small-mindedness, in particular his lack of empathy with his countrymen and the human race. "No animal kills his own, what are you? What must I do to you?" He stumbles away, weeping, as his broken father cries out to him.

5.7.1 Analysis of Act II

Much of Miller's drama focuses on the unexceptional man. His *Death of a Salesman* is a fanfare for the common man, putting the dreary plights and small ambitions of the lower middle class into the anti-hero of Willy Loman. Miller finds high drama in the life of a man so common that he could be anyone in the audience, and that is why *Death of a Salesman* continues to resound so strongly with audiences, especially men of a certain age. Likewise, in *The Crucible* Miller takes commonplace people and puts them in the extraordinary situation of the Salem witch trials. The drama of the everyman is a trope throughout Miller's oeuvre, and it begins to surface as well in *All My Sons*, his first prominent play. The theme is first made
apparent when Keller tries to justify Steve's actions during the war. He calls Steve a "little man," who buckled under pressure from the military when a shipment of cracked cylinder heads came through his inspection. Keller draws a distinction between men who are easily pressured and are natural followers (Steve) and men who can stand up for themselves and make the difficult choice in a bad situation (himself). The irony, of course, is that he is defending Steve a little too vehemently, because only he and his wife know that Keller actually belongs in the former category of the common follower. Keller may talk big, but we learn at the end of the second act that when the military was on the phone and he had to make a decision, Keller was the one who caved in to circumstance. The little man whom the hero patronizingly defends at the beginning of the play turns out to be rather like the hero himself.

Despite Keller's insistence that he was thinking of his family in the choice, it seems more likely that his first thought was on keeping his business. This emphasis, if true, reflects poorly not just on Keller but on the profit orientation of the capitalism within which he acts. Wartime racketeering and the merciless pursuit of business profit to the exclusion of human decency are, in Miller's worldview, part and parcel of the American capitalist system. Miller's leftist sympathies are no secret; the witch hunts of *The Crucible* are a thinly veiled allegory of the show trials of the McCarthy era, and *Death of a Salesman* is a virulent attack on a society that uses a man up during his working years and then leaves him out to dry when he is no longer useful. All My Sons was first produced before Miller's fame gave him the ability to launch more direct assaults on the ways that the profit-seeking elements of capitalism can tend to destroy American social structure, but the implicit critique is still salient here. Keller is not presented as a villain but as an ordinary man caught up in a bad situation and who makes a choice according to his own values. Indeed, if Keller really was thinking of his family, it would have been hard for him, in the Weberian, steel-hard shell of capitalist culture, to make a different choice. He might have lost the business and landed his family in poverty after all. Through Chris, nevertheless, Miller challenges Keller's individual or family values as misguided, ignorant, and destructive in relation to the larger social and cultural values he could have been paying attention to.
Even so, everyone intends to act in view of what one thinks is the good. Like Willy Loman, Keller is a tragic antihero, a relic from a simpler time before higher education and professionalization were widespread, when the nuclear family was truly the nucleus of a man's world and his community did not seem to extend to the whole world. Keller sees himself and his business as just one small cog in the American war machine, which is part of a world far beyond himself and his real influence. What he does not understand is that the actions of this small cog do have implications far wider than what he can see with his own eyes. He is answerable not to his family, but to his society. The issue is how to balance the competing claims of self, family, and society. Is it really acceptable to cause twenty-one people to die? His society thinks not, which is why Keller's associate was put in jail.

Moreover, Keller prefers to see himself as a victim of others. Instead of dealing with his complicity in a scandal that sent pilots to their deaths, Keller denies his involvement and passes off the blame, protecting his self-image and preserving the illusion that he has legitimately maintained his rightful place in society. When George opens up the old accusations, Keller is ready for him with a list of incidents in which George's father endangered the business. He is blind to the impulses within himself that make him just as dangerous as his meek and unassuming former partner, preferring to think of himself as a man among men, minding his own business (literally and figuratively). That is the true flaw in Keller's character; though he may not be fully faulted for imprecisely calibrating the complex values involved in his life, he denies the responsibility that he knows he should own up to. His denial, which keeps him out of jail, is paradoxically what ends up eating through his family's tranquillity and locking him in his own self-imprisonment of shame and deception. And when the truth is finally revealed, at first through his wife's slip of the tongue, Keller tries to mitigate his guilt by portraying himself as the victim once more, dealing with forces outside his control.

Whereas before he belittled Steve for caving under the pressure, now he claims that the very same actions were the only sensible, businesslike things to do. He rationalizes that he was just serving the principles of good business, and that he thought the parts would hold up just fine in the air. But when Chris forces him to admit that he had his doubts about the planes' safety, he again justifies his decision
by claiming that he was just one of thousands of men on the wartime profiteering bandwagon. "Who worked for nothin' in that war?" he asks. Yet his denials and deflections of blame, rather than assuaging his son, lead to Chris's complete disillusionment in the moral fiber of his father.

The dialogue in the second act varies between long, explanatory speeches, and fast exchanges characterized by extensive questioning. As the tension mounts, the questions grow shorter and more rapid-fire, increasing the pressure on Keller line by line. At the climax, the staccato dialogue heightens the drama of the courtroom-like confrontation between father and son. The stage directions indicate that "their movements now are those of subtle pursuit and escape." Where first Chris was asking questions about what happened and Keller was explaining, now Chris is hurling accusations and Keller is answering in defensive questions: "Dad, you killed twenty-one men!" "What, killed?" They are replaying the ancient dance of the archetypal father-son conflict. The act finishes with Chris's speech, building through eight questions, until he asks finally, "Don't you live in the world?" He then pulls back from that peak by redirecting the last question to himself, confessing that he does not know what to do. A son may find his father guilty, but how can he punish him?

5.8 Summary of Act III

It is now the middle of the night. Mother is outside on a rocking chair, waiting for Chris to come home. Jim appears and asks about the fight. He knows the truth about Keller and Steve—he figured it out a long time ago. Mother says she thought that Chris sort of knew, as well, and she did not realize it would be such a shock to him. Jim says that Chris would never know how to live with a thing like that. But he will come back, because every man has to compromise his ideals sometime. Chris probably just wanted to be alone to watch "the star of his honesty" go out. Jim points out that he returned to his wife after having left her to do medical research, because he is a good husband; likewise, Chris will return because he is a good son. Jim leaves.

Keller enters. Mother tells him that when Chris returns, Keller will have to explain himself, making sure that Chris knows that Keller understands the gravity of
his offense. That is, she wants Keller to offer to go to prison, should Chris ask him to. Keller does not like this plan, because he thinks he made the choice for the sake of his wife and son. Furthermore, he spoiled them rather than making them earn their keep. Mother says that these points do not excuse his crime. Keller insists that nothing is greater than the family, but there is something still greater in Chris's mind. Keller says starkly that Chris will forgive him, because "I'm his father and he's my son, and if there's something bigger than that I'll put a bullet in my head." Keller says that Larry would have understood; Larry had a head for business.

Ann enters and presents a plan to the Kellers. They have made Chris feel guilty for loving her, so she insists that Mother tell Chris that Larry is dead and she knows it, so that they can go away and be happy. "You had two sons. But you've only got one now," she says. But Mother refuses, because she knows in her heart that Larry is alive, and she knows that Chris and Ann must feel the same in their hearts. Ann says that she knows that Larry is dead. "Would I have looked at anyone else if I wasn't sure?" she asks rhetorically. Mother senses that there is something Ann is not saying.

Ann removes a letter from her pocket. It is a letter from Larry, which she never intended to show anyone unless it was necessary to allow her and Chris to get married. He wrote it right before he disappeared. As Mother reads the letter, she begins to moan, and Ann insists that the circumstances forced her to show the letter, since Mother would not believe Ann's word.

Chris returns and says that he will leave town because he cannot bear to be around his father with the knowledge he now has. He could jail him if he were human any more, but "I'm like everybody else now. You made me practical." Ann says she will go with him, but he says no, because in her heart she will always be asking him to send his father to jail. She says he should do what he has to do, but he cannot find a reason to make Keller suffer; after all, putting him behind bars will not raise the dead.

Keller returns and Chris walks away, saying that he has nothing to say to him. Keller asks what is bothering Chris--too much money? Then give it to charity. Chris can do what he wants with it; the money is his. Chris responds that the issue is what Keller wants to do. Keller rejoins that Chris cannot tell him to go to jail, because Keller clearly does not belong there. Besides, no one worked for free during the war.
Wartime is profit time, and if he has to go to jail then half the country has to go with him. Chris understands but had thought Keller was better than the average, being his father. Chris feels unable to look at Keller or himself.

Ann gives Chris the letter, though Mother tries to stop him, or at least stop him from telling Keller what is in the letter. But Chris reads the letter aloud. Larry's letter is from the day he died. He had just seen the papers and heard about his father and the planes crashing. Larry felt full of guilt and anger, and wrote that he could not face anybody. He wrote that he was about to go out on a mission and that he would be reported missing. The letter implies suicide. Larry's letter to Ann adds that he loves her but that she must not wait for him.

Keller is quiet. He understands. He calls for the car and is ready to go upstairs to get a jacket. Mother tries to stop him, saying that Larry would not have sent him to jail. But Keller says that this is exactly what Larry is saying in the letter. "I think to him they were all my sons"--all the pilots who died. He goes upstairs. Mother turns to Chris and pleads with him not to take Keller to jail, but Chris says that nobody could stop Keller now. Mother says that the war is over--all these things are over--he cannot take away her husband. Chris responds that Keller should not just feel sorry; Larry died not just for that. She asks what more could be done, and Chris gives her a way to become better: "Once and for all you can know there's a universe of people outside and you're responsible to it, and unless you know that, you threw away your son because that's why he died."

A gunshot is heard in the house. Chris runs inside and tells Ann to find the doctor. Mother stays outside and moans her husband's name. Chris comes out in tears and says, "Mother, I didn't mean to-" But she interrupts him and tells him not to take the blame for his father's suicide. "Forget now. Live."

5.8.1 Analysis of Act III

Like her husband, Mother is in denial. She knows about Keller's guilt, and it is the source of her anxiety and headaches throughout the play. She is complicit in Keller's denial, and as for her own denial, she is forcing her son to stay alive, if only in her mind, in order to allow her to continue to live with her husband in some acceptable way. That is, if she had to accept that her husband effectively killed their
son, then she could not bear it. But her loyalty to Keller ironically serves to separate the couple, since her knowledge of his guilt strains their relationship. Like her husband, she prefers to believe that there are forces outside her control--in her case, astrology and God's choice, both on Larry's side--that ultimately dictate life or death more than individual choice does.

But all this is not the blind trust of a grief-stricken mother. Just as she mistakenly thought that Chris always knew in the back of his mind that Keller was guilty, she always knew in her heart that Larry was dead, despite a play full of protestations to the contrary. When Ann shows her the letter that proves Larry's death, Mother suffers no great shock. Like Martha in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, she learns the "death" of a son who did not really exist anymore anyway. She knew--she always knew. What mattered was that no one said it aloud, because that way she would not have to examine the implications. And again like Albee's Martha, what truly died was not the son, but the mother's self-deception, the universe she had constructed inside her head in order to cope with the painful truth.

The title of the play becomes clear in Keller's final line. After years of denial, he is forced to acknowledge that the soldiers who died as a direct result of his actions were someone's sons, and they all might as well have been his sons. But this line, with the title, actually serves two independent arguments that run through the work. *All My Sons* has both an emotional centre and an intellectual centre. The emotional "All My Sons" has the Keller family at its core, being primarily concerned with the impact of shameful secrets on family relationships, in particular how their past can come back to haunt the present. When the work is performed, audiences are usually struck the hardest by the story of the crime and its consequences for the Keller family.

But the intellectual *All My Sons* is the story of that same crime and its consequences not for the Keller family, but for the world. If Miller is proposing a world-scale ethic of concern for everyone's sons, he proposes that Keller (and each member of the audience) should find in himself a kind of generalized care for all of the sons and daughters in the world. Miller later wrote that he wanted the play to be about "unrelatedness," describing Keller as a man who "cannot admit that he, personally, has any viable connection with his world, his universe, or his society."
The admission that the pilots were "all my sons" is, for Keller, an admission that he might as well have killed his own child. The admission is also a new understanding that it should not matter whether the dead pilots could have been his sons; rather, we all have an obligation to society to value everyone's sons as though they were our own. Whether that level of concern is possible or feasible, indeed whether it is healthy and desirable to refuse to help your own children and neighbours while you try to help the whole world, is a different question, but the idealist might give it a try.

The tension among these values is highlighted throughout the play in Keller's and Chris's conflicting moralities. For Keller, there is nothing more important in this world than the family. For Chris, the destruction of the war wrought a new "kind of---responsibility. Man for man." And in the play, Keller's morality actually eclipses Chris's, even though Miller is giving the audience a shot at accepting Chris's leftist argument. In the end, what draws audiences is the emotion of a comprehensible, identifiable unit of society--that is, the drama of the nuclear family. The primacy of Miller's un-relatedness argument is defeated by its own truth. We will always care more about the one son whose father we see before us and with whom we identify, than the twenty-one dead sons who are not our own. At least, however, we can rise to the responsibility of making wise and prudent decisions to honour both the one and the twenty-one as well as we can.

5.9 Exercises:

Questions based on the summary of All My Sons:

The summary given above could be used to answer the questions given below:

1. Write a note on the plot structure of the play All My Sons.
2. Write a detailed note on the who’s who in the play All My Sons.
3. Do you think that the title of the play is appropriate? If yes justify your answer with suitable reasons and inter-character relationships.
4. Who do you think is the protagonist of the play, All My Sons? Justify your arguments with reference to the text of the play.
5. Comment on the socio-moral message the play.
6. Account for All My Sons as a tragedy.
5.10 Major Themes:

1. Relatedness:

Arthur Miller stated that the issue of relatedness is the main one in All My Sons. The play introduces questions that involve an individual's obligation to society, personal responsibility, and the distinction between private and public matters. Keller can live with his actions during the war because he sees himself as answerable only to himself and his family, not to society as a whole. Miller criticizes Keller's myopic worldview, which allows him to discount his crimes because they were done "for the family." The principal contention is that Keller is wrong in his claim that there is nothing greater than the family, since there is a whole world to which Keller is connected. To cut yourself off from your relationships with society at large is to invite tragedy of a nature both public (regarding the pilots) and private (regarding the suicides).

2. The Nuclear Family:

The reverse side of Miller's relatedness argument is his downplaying of the family as the nucleus of society. Somehow people are to feel a more general caring for others that is not drawn off by family obligations. What, then, is the place of the family in the larger social system? Discussions of the family serve mostly to contrast characters' opinions about an individual's responsibilities to the family versus society at large. The family is also presented as a unit that can be corrupted and damaged by the actions and denials of its individuals, a small-scale example of the way individual actions can corrupt society.

3. Obsession with the Past: Guilty Conscience:

All My Sons is a play about the past. It is inescapable--but how exactly does it affect the present and shape the future? Can crimes ever be ignored or forgotten? Most of the dialogue involves various characters discovering various secrets about the recent history of the Keller family. Miller shows how these past secrets have affected those who have kept them. The revelation of the secrets is presented as unavoidable--they were going to come out at some point, no matter what, and it is through Miller's manipulation of the catalysts that the truths are all revealed on the same day. While the revelations are unavoidable, so are their fatal consequences.
4. Denial and Self-Deception:

How do we deceive ourselves and others? We select things to focus on in life, but do we also need to deny certain things in order to live well? What toll does denial take on the psyche, the family, and society? Two main facts about the Keller family history must be confronted. One is Larry's death, and the other is Keller's responsibility for the shipment of defective parts. Mother denies the first while accepting the second and Keller accepts the first while denying the second. The result is that both characters live in a state of self-deception, wilfully ignoring one of the truths so that the family can continue to function in acceptable ways.

5. Idealism:

Chris is described by other characters as an idealist, although we do not see this trait in action aside from his angry response to the wartime profiteering. Yet the others define him by his idealism, setting him apart as a man of scruples. Chris decides that he must abandon these scruples to the cause of practicality when he is faced with the prospect of sending his father to jail. Is idealism sustainable in a fallen, complex world? If ideals must be sacrificed, is there any supervening ideal or principle to help us decide which ideals should be sacrificed in which circumstances?

6. Business:

Keller argues that his actions during the war were defensible as requirements of good business practice. He also frequently defines himself as an uneducated man, taking pride in his commercial success without traditional book learning. Yet, his sound business sense actually leads to his downfall. This failure is connected with Miller's leftist politics and the play's overall criticisms (shared by some conservatives) of a capitalist system that encourages individuals to value their business sense over their moral sense. How could rules that govern business be exempt from the moral norms and laws governing the rest of society?

7. Blame:

Each character in the play has a different experience of blame. Joe Keller tries to blame anyone and everyone for crimes during the war, first by letting his partner go to jail. Later, when he is confronted with the truth, he blames business practice and the U.S. Army and everyone he can think of--except himself. When he finally does
accept blame, after learning how Larry had taken the blame and shame on himself, Keller kills himself. Chris, meanwhile, feels guilty for surviving the war and for having money, but when the crimes are revealed, he places the blame squarely on his father's shoulders. He even blames his father for his own inability to send his father to prison. These are just a few examples of the many instances of deflected blame in this story, and this very human impulse is used to great effect by Miller to demonstrate the true relationships and power plays between characters as they try to maintain self-respect as well as personal and family honour.

8. Report abuse:

Ann returns and says that George will be coming that night. She and Chris leave. Mother enters and is shaken by the fact that George needs to speak to Ann. She asks what it is Steve has to tell George that has required George to take an airplane from New York to see him. Keller insists there is nothing, and Mother twice questions his resolve on that matter. Mother finishes with a warning that Keller ought to be smart. This is an excerpt. It will really help with summary type.

9. Exercise:

Students can think on the possible answers to the following questions. They can write their answers in the light of the points given before every question which is likely to be asked in the examination.

1. Make a comprehensive statement on the thematic concerns reflected in the play All My Sons.

2. Several characters in the play believe in forces outside their control that influence the events of their lives. Kate turns to astronomy and God, while Keller argues that the pressures of business forced him to act as he did.
   - Examine the role of personal agency in the play. For example, does Keller's suicide reflect a new acceptance of his misdeeds?
   - Does he kill himself out of choice or mainly as a result of external pressures? Keller argues that no one "worked for nothing' in that war," insisting that if he has to go to jail, then "half the God dam country" is similarly culpable.
Is this an indictment of capitalism or of the wartime mentality? Does he believe in this argument, or is it mainly another attempt to deflect blame?

3. Did Kate (Mother) know that Larry was dead? Did Chris know that his father was guilty? How might the actors and director of the play keep these questions ambiguous or suggest that these facts were known all along? Did Miller possibly intend that the audience never know how much Kate and Chris had suspicions, or is the play better if the audience gradually learns that Kate and Chris knew the truth all along?

4. Bring out the conflict between the personal, familial and the Social value as reflected in All My Sons.

5. The tone of much of the second and third acts is accusatory, with a strong emphasis on questions and questioning. How do the characters use questions to deflect blame? Or, how does Miller use questions to pace the dialogue and heighten the tension? What counts as evidence of the facts? (Consider the courtroom scenes in The Crucible for comparison.)

6. How does Miller introduce the past and show the effects of the past on the Kellers without employing flashbacks?

7. How does Miller manipulate information? The entirety of the first act is exposition, yet the audience is kept guessing and alert through Miller's careful pacing of the revelation of facts. How does our experience of the play change after we have seen it the first time and know all the history? Do successive iterations of reading or watching the play help us pick up on additional details of the themes and characters?

8. The common theatrical device of “the letter” provides a way for Larry to personally enter the play after his death. What else makes the letter work well in this particular play? Consider, for instance, Miller’s careful manipulation of information throughout the play.

9. How does Miller characterize Larry, who never appears on stage but who is so fundamental to the events and the people? How can we reconcile or add together the various accounts of his character?
10. If the focus is on the Keller family, what is the point of including the Deever family as more than just a set of foils for the Kellers

5.11 Some more facts about the life and works of Arthur Miller

- Arthur Miller was one of the leading American playwrights of the twentieth century. He was born in October 1915 in New York City to a women's clothing manufacturer, who lost everything in the economic collapse of the 1930s. Living through young adulthood during the Great Depression, Miller was shaped by the poverty that surrounded him. The Depression demonstrated to the playwright the fragility and vulnerability of human existence in the modern era. After graduating from high school, Miller worked in a warehouse so that he could earn enough money to attend the University of Michigan, where he began to write plays.

- Miller's first play to make it to Broadway, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* (1944), was a dismal failure, closing after only four performances. This early setback almost discouraged Miller from writing completely, but he gave himself one more try. Three years later, *All My Sons* won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award as the best play of 1947, launching Miller into theatrical stardom. *All My Sons*, a drama about a manufacturer of faulty war materials, was strongly influenced by the naturalist drama of Henrik Ibsen. Along with *Death of a Salesman* (his most enduring success), *All My Sons* and *The Man Who Had All the Luck* form a thematic trilogy of plays about love triangles involving fathers and sons. The drama of the family is at the core of all of Miller's major plays, but nowhere is it more prominent than in the realism of *All My Sons* and the impressionism of *Death of a Salesman*.

- *Death of a Salesman* (1949) secured Miller's reputation as one of the nation's foremost playwrights. *Death of a Salesman* mixes the tradition of social realism that informs most of Miller's work with a more experimental structure that includes fluid leaps in time as the protagonist, Willy Loman, drifts into memories of his sons as teenagers. Loman represents an American archetype, a victim of his own delusions of grandeur and obsession with success, which haunt him with a sense of failure.

- Miller won a Tony Award for *Death of a Salesman* as well as a Pulitzer Prize. The play has been frequently revived in film, television, and stage versions that have
included actors such as Dustin Hoffman, George C. Scott and, most recently, Brian Dennehy in the part of Willy Loman.

- Miller followed Death of a Salesman with his most politically significant work, *The Crucible* (1953), a tale of the Salem witch trials that contains obvious analogies to the McCarthy anti-Communist hearings in 1950s America. The highly controversial nature of the politics of The Crucible, which lauds those who refuse to name names, led to the play's mixed response. In later years, however, it has become one of the most studied and performed plays of American theatre.

- Three years after The Crucible, in 1956, Miller found himself persecuted by the very force that he warned against, when he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller refused to name people he allegedly saw at a Communist writers' meeting a decade before, and he was convicted of contempt. He later won an appeal.

- Also in 1956, Miller married actress Marilyn Monroe. The two divorced in 1961, one year before her death. That year Monroe appeared in her last film, *The Misfits*, which is based on an original screenplay by Miller. After divorcing Monroe, Miller wed Ingeborg Morath, to whom he remained married until his death in 2005. The pair had a son and a daughter.

- Miller also wrote the plays *A Memory of Two Mondays* and the short "A View from the Bridge," which were both staged in 1955. His other works include *After the Fall* (1964), a thinly veiled account of his marriage to Monroe, as well as *The Price* (1967), *The Archbishop's Ceiling* (1977), and *The American Clock* (1980). His most recent works include the plays *The Ride Down Mt. Morgan* (1991), and *Broken Glass* (1993), which won the Olivier Award.

- Although Miller did not write frequently for film, he did pen an adaptation for the 1996 film version of *The Crucible* starring Daniel Day-Lewis and Winona Ryder, which garnered him an Academy Award nomination. Miller's daughter Rebecca married Day-Lewis in 1996.
5.12 Further Reading


Unit-5 (B)
THE HAIRY APE

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5.1 Objectives
5.2 Introduction to the dramatist.
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5.1 Objectives :
After studying this unit, you will be able :-

- To know Eugene O’Neill as a dramatist.
- To know the summary of The Play.
- To identify the characters in The Play.
- To discuss Themes in The Play.
- To discuss The technique of the play.
5.2 Introduction :- O’Neill and the American Theatre

The American social, cultural and economic scene at the turn of the century is one of great complexity and diversity. This complexity and diversity is fully reflected in the literature of the age. It was in the decades between the two Wars that American drama also came to its own. During this period Eugene O’Neill was undoubtedly established as the most able young playwright of the time. His dominance on the American Theatre for a generation is without question. He is a prominent dramatist of modern age.

In the first quarter of the 20th century many young American dramatists who had travelled through Europe had a fascination for European Drama, the Theatre Libre of Paris, Abbey Theatre of Dublin, the Moscow Art Theatre, The Kleines Theatre of Berlin. Coming back to America, these young dramatists established numerous community playhouses or workshops all over the country. The establishment of the Washington Square players in 1915 known later as the Provincetown players, revolutionized the American Theatre. Eugene O’Neill was the most distinguished member of The Provincetown players. He is acknowledged as the Father of American Drama. He wrote a very large number of plays and installed a new vigour into the American theatre by restoring it to realism from romanticism. He is winner of three Pulitzer awards and the Nobel Prize in 1936.

5.3 Eugene O’Neill (1888 - 1953) Life and Career

Eugene O’Neill was born in New York on 16th October 1888. His father James O’Neill, was one of the best-known of American actors. Eugene O’Neill accompanied his father on his long acting tours. He attended various Catholic and non-sectarian boarding schools from 1896 to 1902. From there he went to Princeton, he joined the university to study law to take his B.Litt. But he was attracted by drama and therefore decided to leave the college. His father sent him to Central America as an assistant on gold-mining expedition. But he returned empty handed from the expedition in 1910. In the winter of 1912-13 he was hospitalized for T.B. and he spent his time in a Connecticut sanitarium reading a wide range of dramatic literature, particularly Ibsen and Strindberg. His illness made him reflect upon his purposes and goals, and when he emerged from this decisive movement of his life,
he was a playwright. O’Neill joined G.P. Baker’s Academy at Harvard to take lessons in play writing. He wrote many plays and established himself as the leading American dramatist. He was awarded Pulitzer Prizes for his plays, Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie, Strange Interlude and Long Days Journey into night. He received the highest international recognition in the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died on 27th November, 1953. O’Neill won national fame, international recognition.

5.4 O’Neill as a Dramatist:

O’Neill experimented with a variety of dramatic forms and modes. He dealt with the problems of modern man, these problems were to be psychological. Thus he brought psychology into drama. O’Neill began as a realist, became an expressionist and turned into a symbolist. His early plays are realistic. At one stage in his career he fused realism and expressionism.

O’Neill’s early One - Act plays are romantic plays with mysterious mood, supernatural element, colour and action. They rest heavily upon the life of the seamen, and create an atmosphere of mystery and a sense of adventure. After one Act plays O’Neill’s career can be divided into three phases. In the first phase ‘The Naturalistic and Realistic phase, he wrote Beyond the Horizon, The Straw, Anna Christie, The First Man and The Desire Under the Elms. In the next phase ‘The Expressionistic Symbolic phase’ he wrote plays of psychological study exploring man’s loss of earlier integrity with soul or belongingness, of faith to social and religious institutions. The plays written during this phase are the Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, The Fountain, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughad Strange Interlude, Dynamo and Days Without End. In the last phase, he returned to realism again but mixed it with autobiographical and psycho realism in Ah,’Wildesness !, Mourning Becomes Electra, Long Day’s Journey Into Night, and A moon for the misbegotten.

O’Neill had used symbolism with great effect and mastery. O’Neill often uses symbolism as a means of expression. The titles, settings and characters are symbols. Words and images, legends and myths are also used as symbols. His plays are very rich in symbolism. In the Hairy Ape, Yank symbolizes the animality of man, the primitivism and the proletariat.
O’Neill used the archetypal myths, and reshaped, the contemporary American myths. He used historical myths and legends. He used the Biblical, Greek and contemporary myths to explore his subjects and means of generalization.

5.5 Summary of The Play

The Hairy Ape

A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life in Eight Scenes

Characters in the Play

Robert Smit, “Yank” A Guard
Paddy Second Engineer
Long A Secretary of an Organization
Mildred Douglas Stokers, Ladies, gentleman etc.
Her Aunt

Scenes

Scene I: The firemen’s forecastle of an ocean liner – an hour after sailing from New York.
Scene II: Section of promenade deck, two days out – morning.
Scene III: The Stokehole. A few minutes later.
Scene IV: Same as Scene I. Half an hour later.
Scene V: Fifth Avenue, New York. Three weeks later.
Scene VI: An island near the city. The next night.
Scene VII: In The City. About a month Later
Scene VIII: In The City. Twilight of the next day.

Scene I:

This scene is laid in the fireman’s forecastle. It is under the main deck, allotted to the crew of a large passenger ship which sails across the Atlantic. The ship sailed from New York only an hour ago. In the forecastle the men are nearly drunk – They
shout, curse, laugh and sing loudly. They produce a loud incoherent noise. The stokers duty is to feed coal into the furnace of the engine i.e. to feed the fire. The stokers are hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. These men resemble the Neanderthal man. i.e. a hairy ape.

The curtain rises on a tumult of sound. The stokers are drinking, singing, talking and jesting. As they all talk together, there is only an incoherent noise. The two of these come to blows and the other stokers join them. There is a huge and robust stoker named Yank. His real name is Robert Smith. The other stokers are afraid of him. They respect his superior physical strength. Yank wields great influence and authority over other stokers.

When Yank sees the stokers fighting and making noise, he speaks out with authority and orders them to stop all noise because he is “trying to think.” Then one drunken and sentimental stoker begins to sign a ‘song of home and beloved family members. Yank is very angry with him. He exclaims fiercely and cynically “Shut up, Yuh lousey book! Home, hell! I’ll make a home for you! I’ll knock yuh dead. Home! T’hell wit home! Dis is home, see? ……” Yankan declares that ship is their home. They belong to the ship.

Then a very drunk stoker says that the ship is their home, but that home is a Hell. They are condemned to suffer and work on the ship. The rich passengers who travel first class, stay in the best cabins on the upper deck of the ship and enjoy luxurious life where as the workers suffer in the stokehole. The other stokers greet him but Yank angrily asks him to shut up and sit down.

Yank says that stokers are superior to the first class passengers. They make the ship go. They are strong people doing man’s job. The rich passengers are just a baggage.

There is another stokers named Paddy who expresses his romantic yearning for the good old days. Paddy lives in the old, simple days of the past nostalgically. In a long speech, he points out how in the past, there was a harmonious relation between man and his civilization. The loss of this harmony makes him see no difference between working men and the “bloody apes I the Zoo.”
But Yank does not agree with him. He says that “he belongs” while Paddy”
does not belong”. Yank is happy because he has a sense of belongingness, the
feeling of security. He is proud of his muscle power.

“And I am what makes iron into steel ! steel, dat stands for de whole ting !.

He condemns Paddy. He says that thinking and dreaming is not of use because
they more the ship, he alone is responsible for the onward movements of the ship,
that he belonged.

Scene II

This scene takes place after two days, on the deck of the ship. There is a young
lady on the deck. Her name is Mildred Douglas. She is twenty years old and she is
accompanied by her aunt. Mildred is pretty and has sense of superiority. She seems
exhausted and anemic. She is dressed all in white. Her aunt is a fat old lady,
pompous and proud. This scene is pleasant one as compared to the previous scene of
fire manic fore castle. On the deck of the ship there are American upper class people.
But they do not have sense of brotherhood like the stokers.

Mildred Douglas is the daughter of the chairman of the Board of Directors of the
Nazarelz. Steel Co. She is interested in social service and as such wants to find out
how the other world i.e. The have-nots live. She has already studied their living
conditions in the East End of New York. Her father is an industrialist and has earned
countless millions. She has inherited the wealth acquired through steel, but not the
energy and strength which steel has. She wants to help have-nots, the poor people and
the needy, but does not have the necessary strength and vitality.

Mildred wants to study the conditions of the poor stokers on the ship. She has
decided to go down to visit the stokehole for this purpose. She has already obtained
the permission of the captain of the ship for the visit. But her aunt warns her that the
heat and the coal dust would be dangerous. Mildred likes to tease her aunt. She is
determined to go to the stokehole.

The second Engineer comes there to escort her down to the stokehole. He warns
her that it would be terribly hot in the stokehole but Mildred does not mind it. She
does not even mind spoiling her pure white dress. She goes with him to the
stokehole.
Scene III

This scene is dramatically significant. It is in the stokehole which is very narrow space before the furnace of the engine, where the stokers work and shave coal into it. The stokers are working in a line before the furnace doors. They bend over, handling their shovels with a strange, awkward, swinging rhythm. They use the shovels to throw open the furnace doors. A flood of terrific light and heat pours upon the stokers. They appear like chained gorillas.

There is a tumult of noise – The brazen clang of the furnace doors as they are opened and shut. The grating, teeth gritting grind of steel against steel, of crunching coal. This clash of sounds stuns one’s ears. But there is order rhythm in it. The roar of leaping flames in the furnaces and the monotonous beat of throbbing of the engine makes the situation worst.

The stokers takes rest for a moment when the furnace doors are shut. The engineers whistle sounds from time to time, reminding them that they must continue to feed the fire. This continued whistling irritates the stokers. They are working hard. Their backs are broken but they are forced to work. Yank loves his work and encourages his fellows to work hard. Yank has a feeling of belonging and therefore, asks them to follow his own example. But when the whistle keeps sounding continuously Yank looses his patience. He brandishes his shovel over his head and beats his chest with one hand “gorilla-like”. He bursts out angrily, “at the Engineer” come down and I’ll moider you! Puilin’ dat whistle on me, huh? I’ll drive yer teet down yer troat!....

At this moment Mildred Douglas comes down with the Engineer. The other stokers are surprised to see her there in the stokehole. But Yank whose back is towards her does not see her and continues his cursing, shouting and brandishing. When he turns his face towards her and looks into her eyes, she is terrified by his horrible appearance. She looks at his gorilla face and letters a low, chocking cry, runs away to shut out the sight of his face. She faints with fear and heat and immediately carried away, from there, she exclaims, ‘Oh, the filthy beast.’ Yank feels very insulted in “the very heart of his pride”. He roars with anger “God damn, Yuh!”
Scene IV

The scene again shifts to the (fireman’s forecastle) stokehole where the first scene was laid and it shows the effect on Yank of the meeting with Mildred in the last scene.

Yank is now a changed man. He is very serious and sits in the pose of Rodin’s “The Thinker”. The other stokers still drink, joke, laugh and talk as before but Yank is now a brooding figure. The other stokers have washed and cleaned themselves but Yank has not cared to do so. When they remind him all together to wash himself, he replied, “To Hell with washing”! He angrily asks them to let him alone because he is trying to think. Then Paddy teasingly suggests that perhaps he has fallen in love, with Mildred. To this Yank angrily reports that he has fallen in hate & not in love. Long tells him the purpose of Mildred’s visit to the stokehole and feels that her visit was an insult to them. She is the daughter of the capitalist. They are all his slaves and she comes down there to look upon the, “boldly animals” who work for her father. The engineer who brought her in the stokehole showed them to her as if they are animals in a zoo. They will not tolerate this insult and they would go to law about it. But Yank says that he believes in direct action. He do not believe in law or government. He will take personal revenge for the insult.

Paddy, another stoker tells Yank about what was happened when Mildred came in the stokehole. And there she was standing behind us, and the engineer pointing at us like a man you’d hear in a circus would be saying : In this cage a queerer kind of baboon than ever you would find in the darkest part of Africa. We roast them in their own sweat & she saw Yank was roaring, cursing and turning round with his shovel to brain her and she look at him, and he at her____

Yank says that she was all white and he thought she was a ghost. Then Paddy says she ran away from him with her hands over her eyes to shut out the sight of him. It was as if she had seen a great hairy ape escaped from the zoo!

Yank is terribly angry, in uncontrollable rage he bursts out that he would blow her brains out and teach her a lesson for calling him a hairy ape. She is a mere white ghost, a parasite who lives on the fruits of their labour. If she comes there again, he will throw her into the furnace. He rushes for the door to go to her cabin and fix
(kill) her there. But the other stokers hold him back. Yank roars angrily, “She has insulted me! I’ll show her who’s an ape!”

From this time onwards Yank seen himself as an hairy ape. His pride and sense of security has been slathered by the insult.

**Scene V**

The scene takes place three weeks later on a fine Sunday mornings on the Fifth Avenue, the locality where the rich people live. It is a very fashionable and expensive street. There is a jeweller’s shop and furrier’s shop which indicates the wealthy and commercial environment. The general effect is of a background of magnificence. Up the side street Yank and Long come strolling. They come there in search of Mildred and the people of her class, rich capitalists, who exploit them. Yank has come there to take revenge upon them. Long is very sensible & advises him to use only peaceful and lawful means to fight with the capitalist class. But Yank rejects his suggestions and calls such ideas fit only for women. He is determined to take revenge.

Then a crowd of well-dressed men and women comes out of the church. Yank wants to fight with them. But nobody looks at him and this makes Yank more furious. Long warns him to be careful otherwise the police will come. When Yank refuses to follow his advice, he leaves him. Then Yank approaches a lady and challenges her to fight with him but she does not look at him. All the people on the street ignore his presence, nobody is interested in him. Then one of the women looks at the monkey fur in the shop window and shouts loudly: “Monkey Fur,” and the other repeats her words. This maddens Yank and in a feat of angry mood he tries to pluck some “street yarbing” and then tries to pull off a lamp post. Just then a fat man rushing to catch his bus hits Yank. Yank is excited because at least some one has noticed him & wants to fight with him. Yank, with a roar of joy, gives powerful blow on the face of the fatman; who calls for police officer and the very next moment Yank is overpowered caught by the police. The police arrests Yank and he is sent to the jail. Thus madness of Yank brings him in the prison.
Scene VI

Yank is now in a prison on Blackwells Island. He is sitting in the posture of Rodin’s “The Thinker” in one of the prison cells. He is injured and a blood-stained bandage round his head. The words ‘hairy ape’ continue to torture him and he thinks that the place is a zoo. When Yank talks to himself lonely the other prisoners laugh loudly at the thought that the place is a zoo; and they are animals in their cages. Yank tells his fellow-prisoness that he was trying to get even with a girl who had insulted him and the judge sent him in the jail for thirty Days. Further Yank says “But I’ll get back at her yet, you watch! I’ll show her who belongs! I’ll show her who’s in de move and who ain’t. You watch my smoke!” He is furiously angry and determined to take revenge on Mildred Douglas the prisoner then tells him that if he wants to get even with her, he should join the organization known as I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World.) The prisoner reads a report of I.W.W. to Yank. The report says that the members of I.W.W. would soon make civilization a shambles, a desolation, where man would soon degenerate into the ape. Yank takes the paper in the hand and sits in the attitude of Robin’s The Thinker. After sometime he jumps to his feet with a furious groom as if some appalling thought had crashed on him. He has decided to join the I.W.W. With the help of I.W.W. he will take revenge on Mildred and her father. They have insulted him and their steel now keeps him in a cage, like a hairy ape.

Scene VII

After one month Yank is released from the jail. He comes to the office of the I.W.W. He moves cautiously, mysteriously. Yank opens the door slowly, gingerly as if afraid of an ambush. He looks around for secret doors, mystery is taken aback by the common placeness of the room and the men inside thinks that he has come to the wrong place. Yank is asked to make a card i.e. to register his name in the office of the union. For a while Yank forgets his read name. The secretary of the organization welcomes him and says that he can help the union by distributing their pamphlets among his fellow workers. Yank is glad, for he feels that now he belongs. Then secretary asks him about his ideas about the reformation of the working class. Yank tells the secretary that he can blow things up with the Dynamite. He would blow up all the factories, steamers, buildings, jails, everything that is made up of
steel. The secretary is shocked to hear it because the I.W.W. wants to change the unequal conditions of society by legitimate direct action and not by means of violence; using dynamite. Yank is very disappointed. Now the secretary feels that Yank is a spy of the secret service, and calls him “you are a brainless ape”. Yank is very upset and looses his patience but the very next moment, the secretary orders his boys to throw him out. The policeman on the street talk him idiot and asks him to go away. Disparate Yank asks the policeman where should he go? The policeman answers “Go to hell”.

Scene VIII

This is the last scene of the play. The place is the zoo. On one cage there is sign from which the word ‘gorilla’ stands out. The gigantic animal himself is seen squatting on his launches on a bench in much the same attitude as Rodin’s “The Thinker” immediately a chorus of angry chattering and screeching breaks out. The gorilla turns his eyes, but makes no sound or move.

Yank stands in front of the cage, and begins to talk in a friendly, confidential tone, half-mockingly, but with a deep undercurrent of sympathy. He regards the gorilla as his own brother, as a member of his own family, as a place he belongs to. Yank thinks that he and the gorilla are the members of the same club. Then gorilla rattles the bars of his cage and snarls. All the other monkeys set up an angry chattesing in the darkness. Yank says that the gorillas Heart belongs to the jungle. But he has no luck, he does not belong to the world. Obsessed with the idea of revenge, he is no longer capable of any reasoning. His mind has been thrown completely off the balance. The gorilla attest belongs to nature. Yank belongs to the world of man, but he has been rejected and thrown out by that world. He would like to have his revenge on that rejecting world. Yank breaks the lock and opens the door of the gorilla’s cage. He lets the gorilla out of the cage, shakes hand with it, intending to take him to the fifth Avenue and with his help have his revenge on the class to which Mildred belongs. But the gorilla crushes him to death, and as he dies he utters in deep anguish ‘Even him did not think I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at? Where do fit in?”
5.5.1 Self – assessment Questions

1) O’Neill was awarded The Nobel Prize for literature in the year
   a) November 12, 1936   b) Nov. 12, 1946

2) The Emperor Jones was written in the technique of
   a) Expressionistic   b) Impressionistic
   c) Naturalistic    d) Realistic.

3) What is the real name of Yank ?
   a) Long       b) Paddy
   c) Bob Smith  d) Robin Smith

4) Who is Mildred Douglas ?
   a) a teacher     b) social worker
   c) capitalist    d) daughter of the capitalist

5) How many scenes are in the play ‘The Hairy Ape’?
   a) Five     b) Two
   c) Eight    d) Six

6) What is the full name of O’Neill ?

7) The sub-title of The Hairy Ape is…………………

8) Where did Eugene O’Neill have his dramatic education ?

Answers : 1) a   2) b   3) c   4) d   5) c

   6) Eugene O’Neill
   7) A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life
   8) Prof. Baker’s Academy
5.6 Theme of Alienation and Social Criticism

Alienation and search for identity is the basic theme of the Hairy Ape. In the opening scene of the play, we find that Yank is quite confident and proud of his superior strength. He exercises great authority over his fellow stokers, who respect his superior physical capacity and obey him and are afraid of him. Yank is quite satisfied, for, as he himself puts it, he ‘belongs’, while they do not ‘belong’.

But Yank’s sense of security, his sense of belongingness is soon shattered as he is confronted with Mildred Douglas, who looks at him as if he were an ‘hairy ape’ and who calls him a filthy beast. It is now that Yank becomes aware of the fact that he does not belong”. The one thing which made his life endurable was that he felt that he “belonged”, that he was a necessary, vital and man part of a social order. But now he realizes that he counts nothing as an individual.

In The Hairy Ape, O’Neill reveals himself in sympathy with this search for identity. In this play the dramatist “examines in full the Psychological implications of the machine age.” What Yank wants is to know that he “belongs”. He wants to find out what it is that has happened to the world which separates him from the realization that what he is doing is a necessary and a fitting part of the life of the world.

In pursuit of the answer to this problem he receives blows and insults. The real danger to modern civilization is the stupidity and timidity of the ruling classes. Therein lies the real drama of this play. Yank is more than an individual. He is a symbol of the deep protest that rises like a wave against the whole structure of modern civilization. He is the man crying out against a system which has not only exploited man’s body but his spirit as well. The play is not a protest against low wages and unemployment, but it is a condemnation of the whole structure of machine civilization, a civilization which succeeds only when it destroys the psychological well-being of those who make it possible. It is this which gives the play universality and enlists the sympathy and understanding of the audience.

O’Neill makes this clear as Yank moves from one defeat to another, striving vainly to find some answer to his problem. In prison he heard of the I.W.W. and thought to find among them an answer. They threw him into the street just as the
communist of today would deny him a place. Yank’s speech after he has been thrown from the I.W.W.’s headquarters is an explicit summary of the whole situation. O’Neill shows that wages, distribution shorter hours and all the rest of it is no solution. Yank, in the pose of Rodin’s “The Thinker”, reviews the whole situation, ending by admitting that his greatest crime was that of being born.

A careful reading of Yank’s analysis makes further comment unnecessary. The machine age has done something to man that wages, food, home, family, shorter hours and a “lousy vote” won’t remedy. As the machine created wealth, it destroyed the joy of living, the only thing that wealth is good for. O’Neill has presented the paradox of modern civilization with great insight into its fundamental tragedy.

Yank is rejected by society, he does not belong to the world of man. But he cannot exist in isolation. He must have his moorings somewhere, if not in the world of man, then at least in the world of the brutes. Since Yank cannot move back and belong to man, he must move down and seek companionship with the brute creation. Perhaps he would belong there. Search for identity becomes an obsession with him and ultimately it takes him to the Zoo. There he stands to face with a gorilla in its cage, talks to it as to a brother because he thinks that they both belong to the same club, the “Club of the hairy apes”. He shakes hand with it and sets it free. But alas! the gorilla crushes him to death. It does not think that Yank ‘belongs’. Yank’s quest for identity, fittingly ends with his death. The tragedy of Yank is the tragedy of millions in the modern age.

5.7 Character of Yank

Most of O’Neill’s plays are tragedies. The Hairy Ape is also a great tragedy. But it is not a conventional tragedy in the Aristotelian tradition, but a modern tragedy. Its subject matter and theme is the same, but its form is different. It is a great tragedy with a difference.

Aristotle laid down that the hero of a tragedy must be an exceptional individual, a man of high rank, a king or prince, so at his fall from his former greatness would arouse the tragic emotions of pity and fear. But Yank, the hero of The Hairy Ape, not a man of high rank. He is not a king or a prince or some other exalted individual. He is an humble stoker whose business is to shove fuel into the furnace of the ship’s
engine. For long runs, he has to work in the cramped and low-roofed stoke hole. He is beastly, filthy, vulgar and coarse. He has no mind. He cannot think; he can use only physical force, like the hairy ape that it is.

Yank, the tragic hero, is not a man of high estate, a man of national importance in Aristotelian sense. Further, Aristotle had held that the hero must fall and suffer owing to some error of judgment or fault of his own. He must have some “tragic flaw” in his character. This was considered necessary because the fall from greatness of a perfectly good man would not be tragic but merely shocking and impious. The tragic hero must suffer because of some fault of his own, and not merely because of the utility of fate or some malignant deity.

In this respect also, Yank, the tragic hero of O’Neill’s play, refers from the tragic heroes of Aristotle. He does not suffer from any fault of his own; but because he is in conflict with his environment, with certain social forces that are much stronger than he. Yank is driven to his doom by these forces, against which he struggles, and which are too much for him. In the opening of the play he is quite contended and at ease, quite happy and self-confident because he has a sense of belongingness, a sense of identity. But this sense of security, this sense of belongingness, is soon shattered by Mildred, who comes down to the stokehole to look down upon them as on wild beasts in a zoo. She calls Yank a filthy beast and looks down upon him as if he were an hairy ape. Yank feels insulted in the very heart of his pride, his confident sense of belonging, is gone. He realizes that he is not steel and steam which make the ship go, but the slave of those who own the ship. There after there is gradual regression in Yank’s personality. As he cannot go up, he goes down, and ultimately ends in the cage of the gorilla who crushes him to death.

5.8 Symbolism in the Play “The Hairy Ape”

In “The Hairy Ape” symbolism runs throughout the play from the beginning to the end. O’Neill always sought new techniques of expression and communication. He began as a realist, but later on fused realism with symbolism and suggestive modes. In “The Hairy Ape” Yank Symbolises a number of ideas. He symbolizes the proletariat. Yank Symbolizes the animal nature of man, the instincts which man has inherited from his biological ancestor, the hairy ape. Yank also symbolizes every
man. Yank, though he has human attributes is a symbol – a complex symbol. The O’Neill Yank was “a man and everyone recognizes him as such: He is an individual on a quest – not an individual on personal quest but a reflection of Everyman’s search for belonging who is out of harmony both from his inner self as well as outer. His psychic disintegration in the opening scene is similar to Jones’ impending destiny at the bands of ‘racial-consciousness’. His sufferings symbolize the sufferings of many contemporary Americans who possessed alienated souls. Since his predicament is suggestive of every modern man in general and appeals beyond time and place, his tragedy becomes the tragedy of every man.

Yank, the hairy ape, has little brain but a lot of muscles. He behaves as an ape. Again, he symbolizes the lowest man caged in a steeled society. He goes on a spree of violent murderous mood and tries to provoke the people who are coming out of the church. He tries to pluck the street kerbing and to pull off a lamp post to use it as club. He punches his fist into a fat man’s face who is rushing to catch a bus. His senseless behaviour takes him to prison where he becomes a sort of modern hairy ape. It is symbolic of his retrogression in a so called progressive world. He retraces to man’s early stages of evolution till he seeks brotherhood with the gorilla in the cage. He symbolizes the animal nature of man, the impulses and instincts which man has inherited from his biological ancestor, the ape.

Yank symbolizes a class – the most perfect individual of a stoker. He symbolizes the proletariat. Further, he is a symbol of an epitomized protest against the structure of modern society – against a civilization feeding on exploitation of men and his body – against modern mechanized society.

Yank, Paddy and Long symbolize present, past and future. They represent the composite attitude of the dramatist. Yank’s is the attitude of seeking identification with the ship, its power and factory whistles, which is shattered when he realizes that he is controlled not by the ship but by those who own steel. The second attitude is that of Paddy whose nostalgia is wrapped in the ‘Husk’ of past and he craves to return to those days of freedom and oneness which Yank resents. This attitude is pitched against Long’s social anarchist longings for better future. Long represents the playwright’s radical outlook who thinks that the society’s structure is rotten due to the capitalistic system. Yet he suggests fighting with legal means, as he says, “We
must impress our demands through peaceful means – the votes of the one marching proletarians of the bloody world.

The ship is a symbol of the modern society where the workers represent different races with their attendant nostalgia and longings. It is a microcosm of mechanized society where the pressures of existence have bent the backs of the inhabitants and given them stooping postures. It is a mother-symbol also, for it feeds the workers and strokers who live caged existence where they cannot belong. Yank tried to seek belongingness with the ship. But it failed him. His alienation started from the ship which could not reciprocate the faith he had put.

Mildred symbolizes the rich capitalist class lacking in originality and vigour of life, but living in luxury and artificiality on the sweat of the hairy apes. Her encounter with Yank symbolizes the modern class conflict. Yank’s subsequent loss of faith, joy in work and frustration suggest the state of modern industrial worker who is caged by the very steel which he produces.

In Scene V, the procession of gaudy marionettes are symbolic of modern men who are sans will, sans brain, sans soul. The stockhole, the forman’s castle, the Fifth Avenue and the cell in the presence suggest caged consciousness of modern man and his caged existence.

The I.W.W. is also a symbol - suggesting tyranny, oppression and suspicion of workers’ union which inspite of providing security and fighting for them suspects him and throws him out, as was the case with Yank who was suspected as an agent provocateur (spy) by the I.W.W. official and was thrown in the street bodily. The I.W.W. proves to be an agent of Yank’s tragedy by aggravating his frustration and alienation.

The setting and language are also symbolic. The repetition of the word ‘belong’ by Yank suggests his obsession, and use of clipped and uneven phrases throughout the play conveys his agitation at his alienation. The dramatist used the gorilla’s growls and roars to approximate the conversation between man and the beast.

Yank’s quest for belonging from non-belonging is symbolic of the playwright’s quest on religious, social, physical and familial levels. He was not able to belong anywhere. Wherever he went, he fell in love with that place to realize later on that
he did not belong there ultimately. He was enabled by the symbols, weird fantasy and expressionistic techniques in evoking the feeling of pressurized existence of man and the hairy ape origin of human society.

5.9 Broad Question with Answers

5.9.1 Bring out the significance of the title “The Hairy Ape.”

The title “The Hairy Ape” refers to Yank (Bob Smith), the central figure in the play, and his rapid regression and disintegration as a result of his quest for identity or ‘belongingness’.

An ape is the very embodiment of physical strength and primitive simplicity. It has little brains, but a lot of sinews and muscles. It is incapable of thought and knows only the use of physical force, by which it can cause great destruction. It is exactly these qualities which Yank has. He is hairy-chested with long arms of tremendous power. He is broader, fiercer, and more powerful than the other stokers. Indeed, he and his companions crouching in the stokehole remind one of the pictures of the primitive Neanderthal man. Yank has great capacity for work. He can work for long hours unfatigued, and can inhale smoke and coal unaffected. Like the hairy ape, he has immense physical strength and great capacity of destruction.

In the beginning, we find that he is quite in harmony with his work, quite confident of himself and proud of his superior strength. As he says again and again, he ‘belongs’. However, his confident sense of ‘belongingness’ is soon shattered. Mildred Douglas, a student of sociology, comes down into the forecastle at a time when Yank is murderously flourishing his shovel above his head, and shouting and cursing. She looks at him as if he were an “hairy ape” escaped from the zoo. Yank feels insulted in the very heart of his pride. Till the very end of his days Yank is able to forget neither the spectacle of the girl in white looking at him with terror in her eyes, nor the way in which he had been insulted.

Throughout the play, he broods and broods over the words ‘hairy ape’ used for him. Desire for revenge burns hot in his heart. He must get even with her, he must find one way or the other of fixing her up. His confident sense of belongingness is gone, he realizes that the ship belongs to her (or her father who is a steel magnet) and he is simply a slave working to maintain her in luxury. He is no longer in harmony
with his work; the confrontation with the girl marks the beginning of disintegration and decay of his personality. He does not shave or clean himself like the other stokers. More and more he comes to look like the hairy ape.

And he also behaves like an hairy ape. His desire for revenge carries him to the Fifth Avenue. There he will revenge himself upon her by wrecking his vengeance upon the class of the rich to which she belongs. As the people come out of the church, he lurches into them thinking that this would provoke them to a fight. He strikes his fist forcefully in the face of a fatman, rushing to catch a bus. In short, he behaves senselessly and thoughtlessly like a hairy ape. The result is that he is arrested and sent to jail.

The thought that he is an hairy ape becomes an obsession with Yank. In the prison he actually imagines that he is an hairy ape imprisoned in a cage. It is in prison that he comes to know of the I.W.W., and supposes that he can have his vengeance by joining the organisation. Maddened by the thought that she is the owner of the steel, which has been used to cage him in, he bends the bars of his cell and comes out. In this respect also, he behaves like a gorilla. It is just like an hairy ape breaking free from its cage in the zoo and going out on its errand of destruction. However, the very next moment the hose is used upon him and he is caged in once again.

As soon as he is released, Yank goes to the office of the I.W.W. But he soon finds that he does not ‘belong’ even to this organisation. The hairy ape that he is, he would like to use physical force to destroy the steel works of Mildred’s father and use the bullet and the dynamite to cause havoc in the ranks of the rich. This is certainly primitive and ape-like, it is not the way in which mature people conduct themselves. The result is that he is considered a spy, an agent provocateur and is thrown out.

Thus Yank, the hairy ape, is rejected by civilized society. He has been rapidly disintegrating. He cannot go back and so he continues to go down. Regression alone is possible for him. Rejected by society, he goes to the zoo, thinking that there at least he must belong. He is an hairy ape, and so naturally he belongs to the brotherhood of the apes. Reaching the monkey house, he stands face to face with a gorilla in its cage, and talks to it as to a friend. They are both members of the same
club, and so they will stick together up to the end. But the gorilla wraps his arms round him and crushes him to death. It throws his body into the cage, and walks off menacingly.

The dramatist has given the play the sub-title “A Comedy of Ancient and Modern Life”. The ancient life is represented by the gorilla, the biological ancestor of man, and Yank represents modern life. He is the modern hairy ape. There is regression instead of progression. Yank psychologically retraces the stages of man’s evolution, till he sees himself as a hairy ape, the ‘brother’ of the gorilla in the cage. Thus there is a union or coming together of the ancient and modern hairy apes, and union is Comedy.

5.9.2 Discuss the use of expressionistic technique by O’Neill in “The Hairy Ape.”

Introduction:

The three pioneers of the American expressionist drama are Eugene O’Neill, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. The Emperor Jones was the first play in which O’Neill used Expressionistic technique. The methods of the German Expressionists have been effectively used by O’Neill in “The Hairy Ape.” But he uses expressionistic methods without completely abandoning realism.

Answer: In The Hairy Ape the realistic techniques have not been entirely abandoned, but they have been used to serve non-realistic purposes. Thus in the opening scene of The Hairy Ape the setting has been realistically given. But the dramatist warns us. “The treatment of this scene, or of any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship, imprisoned by white steel.” Thus the realistic setting is intended to create an imprisoned – here the impression of over-crowding-in the manner of an expressionist. The stokers have also been realistically described, “hairy-chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low, receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. All the civilized white races are represented, but except for the slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, eyes, all these men are alike. Yank the central figure of the play is seated in the foreground. He seems broader, fiercer, more truculent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest. They respect his
superior strength—the grudging respect of fear. Then too, he represents to them a self-expression, the very last word I what they are, their most highly developed individual.” Thus Yank is the representative of a class; he serves to create the impression of man as hairy ape; he symbolizes the primitive, the animal-like in man. Equally realistic as well as equally symbolic is Scene II. Both Mildred and her aunt are symbolic of the artificiality and enervation caused by the contemporary mechanized and materialized urban life. The description of the inhabitants of the Fifth Avenue in scene V is equally symbolic of modern life.

We get the exaggerated distortion of reality so characteristic of an expressionistic play. By this time, Yank’s self-confidence has already been shaken, he is already obsessed with the idea that he does not ‘belong’ and the description of expressive of his sense of bewilderment, fear and horror.

In an expressionistic play, the number of characters is cut down to the minimum. The attention is focused on the central figure, and the other characters are not individualized. They serve merely as a background to throw into sharp relief the central figure. Thus in Paddy and Long, they have not even been given any names. Similarly, the prisoners in the prison scene are mere nameless voices. The denizens of the Fifth Avenue are presented merely as a mechanical procession and the Secretary of the I.W.W., and the other people in its office, are equally lacking in individuality. This enables the dramatist to focus on the obsession of Yank and what goes on within his soul.

The scenes are short and the number of scenes is cut down to a minimum, each scene being a further stage in the deeper and deeper probing of the central figure’s consciousness. These scenes are not logically related nor sketched with the completeness of a realistic play. Much is left to the imagination of the audience, and the connections between the scenes are emotional and not logical. In this way the action is speeded up; this explains why an expressionistic play is much shorter than a realistic one.

The entire action is focused on the consciousness of Yank, the central figure, the only living personage in the play. The dramatist has exploited the technique of the “interior monologue”, to lay bare the suffering, anguished soul of Yank. The long monologue of Yank after he has been thrown out of the I.W.W. office is a clever
piece of psycho-analysis. Yank is bewildered and confused, and his mental confusion
has been skillfully rendered. He had come to the I.W.W. with the conviction that he
belonged to it; now his conviction receives a rude, shattering shock, a shock which is
too much for him. The I.W.W. is the conventional woman’s stuff, which would like
to feed and dress his body and give him shorter hours of work. But the thing which
hurts him is not in his belley, it is deep down at the bottom, and the I.W.W. cannot
tough him. In other words, his suffering- and that of the modern worker – is spiritual
and not physical, and it is the spirit which is being ignored in the modern mechanized
age. Man has been degraded and de-humanised. He has been reduced to a machine,
merely to a think of steel. The full bewilderment of Yank is thus expressed: “I’m a
busted Ingersoll, dat’s what. Steel was me, and I can’t see- it’s all dark, get me? It’s
all wrong! (He turns, a bitter, mocking face up, like an ape gibbering at the moon.)
Say, Youse up dere, Man in de Moon, yuh look so wise, gimme de answer huh? Slip
me de inside dope, de information right from de stable- where do I get off at, huh?”
He belongs neither to earth, nor to heaven. The proper place for him might be hell.
He might belong there.

The eighth scene of the play is one long monologue, the gorilla in the cage being
the only interlocutor. It is an admirable study of Yank’s thought-processes and it
fully brings out the disintegration of Yank’s personality. Carried away by his
obsession, Yank sees himself as a hairy ape. He addresses the gorilla as a ‘brother’
and thinks that they both belong to the same club, the club of ‘the Hairy Apes’. Obsessed with the idea of revenge he is no longer capable of any reasoning of
rational thought. His mind has been thrown completely off the balance. The gorilla
at least belongs to nature, but Yank does not belong even to that beautiful world. He
belongs to the world of man, but he has been rejected and thrown out by that world.
He would like to have his revenge on that rejecting world. He lets the gorilla out of
the cage. Shakes hand with it, intending to take him to the Fifth Avenue and with his
help have his revenge on the class to which Mildred belonged. But the gorilla
crushes him to death, and as he dies he mutters in deep anguish, “Even him did not
think I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?” Alienation and
isolation is the common lot of man in the modern industrialized and urbanised
society and full horror of the contemporary predicament has been forcefully
expressed by the use of the technique of the “interior monologue”, a technique which has been exploited with such advantage by modern novelists like James Joyce.

The Hairy Ape is an expressionistic play, but O’Neill’s expressionism is based on reality. The play does not have the complete formlessness of the expressionistic plays of the contemporary German character.

5.10 Activities

(1) Make a list of the American dramatists who used expressionistic technique in their plays.

(2) Read out some of the major plays of Eugene O’Neill, like, The Emperor Jones, Desire under the Elms, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, Mourning Becomes Electra.

(3) Write a brief note on expressionism in The American Stage.

5.11 Further Reading:


Unit-6 (A)
THE BIG KNIFE
Clifford Odets

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6.1 Objectives
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6.1 Objectives:
After studying this unit you will be able to:
- acquaint with the degeneration of American Dream as one of the major trends in 20th century American literature.
- understand changing implications of American Dream.
- appreciate and analyse the prescribed play, ‘The Big Knife’, written by Clifford Odets.
- know Clifford Odets as a remarkable playwright of an outstanding thematic and technical accomplishment.
6.2 Introduction

Clifford Odets – Life and Literary Contribution

Clifford Odets (1906-1963) a playwright of intense social sensitivity and consciousness, was born on July 18th, 1906, to his Jewish immigrant parents – Louis Odets and Pearl Geisenger.

His father, Louis came from typical Russian ‘Old World’ Jew family having strong love for music and quest for successful luxurious life whereas his mother belonged to Romanian Jew family. The poverty and will to struggle for success was common legacy to both of them.

Apart from native hatred and common suffering to the Jews in America, Odets family was struggling to make their life. Despite deliberate attempts of Clifford’s father – to shape up his life providing decent education and high rank profession later, Clifford Odets couldn’t do much in education and in commercial profession.

During his schooling, rather than education he showed inclination towards creative art and theatrical activities. Odets artistic desire and inability to succeed in the world in the eyes of his father aggravated relationship between father and son. In the course of time, when engaged in an active literary career, his preoccupation with artistic desire confronting with the idealistic world became the feature of some of his protagonists.

His love for acting profession brought him in concern with many amateur theatre groups. He was happy with even the speechless minor roles assigned to him. Throughout his life, he preferred to be creative artist. Along with his theatrical career, he worked as a disc – jockey for radio station. He even enjoyed his skill of oratory as a professional elocutionist. But his main concern was theatre and theatrical activities. He regarded technique of theatre is founded on life values and human experiences. His intention was to analyze the structure and the feel of the society; and he strongly believed that the theatre is the effective tool to do so and to convey the desired message.

Though later on, Odets’ career flourished as the playwrights of the middle class ethics and dilemmas of aspiration, initially he started his creative career by writing two radio plays – ‘Dawn’ and ‘At the Water Line’, in the year 1926. Both these plays, deal with the theme of men in spiritual crisis. In fact, it was the period slightly prior
to the Depression, when these plays were broadcasted. He had sensed the forthcoming turmoil of crisis and failure.

Of course, many of the critics have recognized Clifford Odets as influential writer. However, it seems that he is not paid much attention which he deserved. His connection with Hollywood and theatre and the gossips regarding that was the matter of more interest for some of the critics. So he became the victim of diverse opinions about his literary career. Some of the critics have criticized him as a ‘betrayed talent’ were as some critics honor him as a ‘golden boy of a theatre’.

Walter J. Meserve, in the volume, ‘American Literary Scholarship’ of 1969 makes the chronological categorization of the plays of Clifford Odets as:

1. The Early Plays: written in anger
2. The Middle Plays: written in moderation
3. The Post-War Plays: written in maturity (1978:p.3)

While criticizing the chronological approach of Walter Meserve, Harold Cantor in his extensive study, ‘Clifford Odets: Playwright-Poet’, points out the loopholes. Talking about the play, ‘Waiting For Lefty’, even if it is written in early phase of anger and outburst, he remarks that Odets shows his maturity of thought.

In the year 1935, Clifford Odets wrote his full-length play, ‘Awake and Sing’. It is a family drama with a predominant theme – a middleclass family facing extinction in an economic holocaust can sustain itself by tenderness and mutual loyalty. Beyond anything else, family relationship and trust in one another is important. ‘Awake and Sing’ (1935) is also remarkable for Odets’ love for music. It is a central symbol in the play.

‘Waiting for Lefty’ (1935) is Odets’ socio political play shows his Marxist bent of mind. The play is a call for action in which Odets appeals to the suffering mass to rise up and give voice to despair. Odets’ concept of Marxism was quite romantic and idealistic. But soon with the feeling of betrayal he left Marxist party as there was no space for his informal, spiritual and emotional nature.

The cry and the protest of society trapped in economic downfall and its consequences is the recurring theme of his most of the plays. ‘I Can’t Sleep’ (1936) is a monologue of an American businessman struggling to sustain and restlessness
among the working class is the theme of the play. Though the play didn’t get warm reception, it was genuine protest of hungry mouths and empty hands.

‘Paradise Lost’ (1936) is Clifford Odets another play written in early phase of anger. The play is a depiction of a family struggling to overcome the erosion of the society, disturbed by the inward and outward forces beyond control. Gordon family is, actually a miniature of the society suffering from the pressure of economic condition and the frustration.

‘Till the Day I Die’ (1936) is the play written by Clifford Odets as a curtain raiser to ‘Waiting for Lefty’. It was his first minor play having non-localized setting. In fact, it was first anti-Nazi play in America. Rather than dramatic the play has great historical significance.

Apart from commercial failure of Odets’ ‘Paradise Lost’ and unstaged play, ‘The Silent Partner’; ‘Golden Boy’ (1937), the play written in following year brought Odets a renewal of his status as a playwright. In the play, Odets harshly comments on the desire for money is an American malady. It is a disease brought by American Dream, which weakens the moral values.

In the present work, the play is extensively analyzed with the approach of success and failure of American Dream.

Along with identity-crisis and struggle to sustain, widening gap between family relationship specifically marital relations is the bitter fruit of material minded mentality. ‘Rocket to the Moon’ (1939) is another play of Odets; like ‘Paradise Lost’ it realistically speaks about love and marital relations. The play is about American optimistic idealism underlines Odets deep trust that the real salvation of America is not in money but in true love.

It is remarkable to note that Clifford Odets received diverse criticism for his literary creation. His ‘Night Music (1940) was almost neglected full-length play. Though it earnestly deals with the theme of homelessness, rootlessness and disorientation of Depression sticken society the critics harshly attacked the work. At the end of the play Odets hopefully expresses the note of optimism consoling degeneration of American Dream.

Like ‘Rocket in the Moon’, his next play, ‘Clash by Night’ (1942) displays an indulgence of ordinary souls in love affair. An external bitter weather is responsible
for violent passion. Even in love, people lose their temper if outward conditions are not complementary. The period of Depression brought much unhealthy condition to create restlessness in relationship of love.

As far as, writing of the plays is concern, after ‘Clash by Night’ Clifford Odets has spent seven years in passivity. ‘The Big Knife’ (1949) was the first play written by Odets in his last phase of his literary career. The play is the reflection of compromise of success minded people for whom moral values are least significant in the life than the material attainment. The play effectively speaks about inner and outer corruption and victimization of the people caused by. Odets bitterly reacts against Hollywood as wrapped and dishonest.

The play is elaborately analyzed further with the view of degeneration of American Dream as one of the predominant themes of the play.

In the play, ‘The Country Girl’ Odets mood is bit softer to treat Hollywood, like, ‘The Big Knife’, the central figures in the play are actors searching for self satisfaction and meaningful achievement. American Dream and idea of success made Americans to count material prosperity and status as the significant things in the life. Yet they are restless to know why there is a vaccum in the life even after attaining the money and status.

The play ‘The flowering Peach’ (1955) is the most appreciated work of Odets written in the phase of maturity. First time Odets is quite calm and composed to react about American society and human life all together. His play ‘The Flowering Peach’ is honored as the ‘testament to the endurance and native wisdom of mankind’. He is quite optimistic to pass over the message of hope.

Along with these plays discussed above, Odets has written a play ‘The Russian People’ (1943) adapted from a play by Konstantin Simonov. He wrote some screen-plays like, ‘The General Died at Dawn’ (1936), ‘None But the Lonely Heart’ (1944), ‘Deadline at Dawn’ (1945). ‘The Sweet Smell of Success’ (1957), ‘The Story on Page One’ (1959) and ‘Wild in the Country’ (1960). Three televisions scripts are credited to his name. It is remarkable to know that almost seven plays of Odets remained unpublished.

Clifford Odets a playwright determined to depict the problems of inequality, evils of money minded mentality and stretched domestic and social relationship under gone adverse criticism frequently. On the other hand his recurring themes of
loneliness, rootlessness, alienation and search for spiritual satisfaction gave him true recognition as playwright of social consciousness.

Clifford Odets – a playwright of great determination and dedication died of stomach cancer on 15th August 1963.

6.3 THE BIG KNIFE : Clifford Odets

6.3.1 Plot Development and Analysis :

Group Theatre played vital role in shaping Odets’ creative dramatic career. It was a kind of spiritual home for Odets, offered him a reputation as a promising playwright, where he got his protagonists longing for communal ideal.


In fact, it was the period of creative decline and confession for Odets. The disgusting experiences of hypocrisy, rivalry, immoral relationship and dollar-worship made him to confess for his involvement. The play, The Big Knife, in this sense, though Odets denies, it has subjective nature. The reflection of his personal experiences of Hollywood involvement is the inspiring force for The Big Knife. Through the play, his severe attack, through the play, against Hollywood invited lot of controversies and criticism.

Odets, too using different platforms, tried to advocate the objectivity of the play. But he could, seldom justify his stand. In an interview before the Boston opening of the play, Odets declared:

The Big Knife is that force in modern life which is against people and their aspirations, which seeks to cut people off in their best flower. The play may be about the struggle of a gifted actor to retain his integrity against the combination of inner and outer corruptions which assail him, but this struggle can be found in the lives of countless people who are not on the wealthy level of movie star. I have nothing against Hollywood per se. I do have something against a large set
up which destroys people and eats them up. I chose Hollywood for the setting for *The Big Knife* because I know it. I don’t know any other company town. But this is an objective play about thousands of people, I don’t care what industry they’re in. (1989:81, 82)

Clifford Odets himself experienced falsity of Hollywood and stress of the celebrity syndrome. The fame and fortune which he attained in his Hollywood business may be success in the practical and ruthless realistic world. But it made him to betray his consciousness, which led him to decline of his literary career. His dividedness is reflected through the protagonists like Joe Bonaparte (*The Golden Boy*) and Charlie Castle (*The Big Knife*). Odets prefers allegorical way to express his bitterness for Hollywood.

Daniel Aron refers him as the “Golden boy of left theatre” (1991:1) who failed to do justice with his potential. His compromise for practical success subdued his dramatic potential. His quest for practical success made him to leave the promising theatre career to join the bigger canvas of screen.

There is a close resemblance between Odets’ personal life and life of Charlie castle – the protagonist of the play, *The Big Knife* who left theatre career to become a big star of the Hollywood, finally realized the emptiness of the success. American Dream of Success for both-Clifford Odets himself and his character Charlie castle, proved disillusion.

Having bitter experiences of Hollywood, Odets shifted back to New York and started writing play, *The Big Knife* in 1948. Initially, he thought to entitle the play as *A Winter Journey*. A number of times he revised the play and finally titled it as, *The Big Knife*. In his explanation he said that “the earlier title implied a difficult passage in one’s life whereas a new one alluded to “a force that moves against people.” (1989:79)

Clifford Odets had to emphasize the role of the situation or exterior force in shaping up or disturbing the human life. An earlier title, *A Winter Journey*, implies the way of life full of crisis. It is a character-oriented title; hence he changed the title of the play as, *The Big Knife* which significantly implies the cutting exterior force affecting the human life.
The Big Knife was first presented by Dnight Deve Wiman, in association with Strasburg and Odets, at the National Theatre, New York, on February 24, 1949. It was Odets’ come back after eight years. Unlike Golden Boy, The Big Knife received severe criticism. The critics like Harold Clurman, Joseph Wood, who always supported Odets, too dismissed the play. Gabriel Miller, like many other critics complains protesting attitude of Clifford Odets, as:

Odets worked in Hollywood for many years after the collapse of the Group Theatre, was protesting too much. Having made great deal of money there, now it seemed, he was suddenly offering an extended bombastic apology for having abandoned his art and the serious work of the theatre.(1989: 79,80)

Whereas, Clurman criticized the play as the defeatist confession through which Odets was projecting his own sense of guilt into the society. Apart from such adverse criticism and Odets biographical parallel, the play shows Odets’ potential as a dramatist, probing into human psychology and understanding the meaninglessness of human efforts in the way of attaining success myth.

6.3.2 ACT- I

The play opens in a playroom of Charlie Castle’s (the protagonist of the play) house in the sophisticated locale of Beverly Hills, California– the Hollywood city. The material plenty is reflected through the setting.

Charlie Castle is a famous movie star of Hollywood. Castle’s personality is graced with glory of success. He knows the value of candor; his gestures and confidence compel others to realize his success.

Buddy Bliss his publicity personnel and close friend, taking care of Charlie’s public and press relations. At present, they are waiting for Patty Benedict – the famous movie columnist, for whom Hollywood is an ‘intimidated Oyster’. Odets describes her as, ‘authoritative, cynical and assured’ lady.

In fact, Charlie Castle is not happy to welcome her, but it is a requirement of his profession to keep as much as cordial relations with the press people. Buddy Bliss knows all the tactics to tackle with such situations. Both of them, pretending to be happy to welcome her, ready to entertain Patty, lightly and guying.
Fame and fortune are the fruits of American Dream. Both these aspects are comparatively easy to attain but difficult to sustain. The fame and popularity achieved by the people who work in entertainment industry, generally become the victim of stress of celebrity syndrome.

Patty – the Sunday columnist already has got some clues about the rumour of separation of Marion-Charlie’s wife. To Patty, this can be an interesting topic for her Sunday piece. The sweet smell of the success spreads too long, eventually; it invites an attention and curiosity to keep an eye on celebrity’s personal life. Nothing remains personal in their life. Success is always accompanied with rumours and gossips, enough to disturb the peace of mind of the celebrity.

Charlie and Buddy, with all their skill try to hide the matter from Patty. They convince her that Marion has gone to beach taking her son away because of polio scare. Patty, too, prolongs her talk to dig out the truth. In the course of conversation, she enquires about the new contract which was to be agreed between Charlie Castle and Marcus Hoff – the head of the studio. Charlie’s resentful remark is quite significant to express his unrest about the profession: “He is the head of studio, isn’t he? It doesn’t cost him anything to dream.” (1949:8)

In the way of attainment of success, Charlie has lost all his integrity and freedom. He has been realizing his guilt and helplessness. As he is now sold-out figure he has no any right to dream independently. So, he scornfully reacts to say that the masters alone can dream, the slaves don’t afford to dream. The quest for pursuit of success has dragged Charlie far away from his virtues and idealism. The way of success leads forward in one direction only, there is no way to get back but to repent on and express the homesickness. The realm of theatre and art is the true home for Charlie. His aspiration for success has evacuated him from his true home. So he is homesick to say: “We are homesick all our lives, but adults don’t talk about it, do they?” (1949:8)

Basically, Charlie Castle is a good person, brought up in ideal cultural legacy. He has read London, Upton Sinclair, Ibsen and Hugo. He recalls his Hugo reading, “… Hugo said me, “Be a good boy, Charlie love people, do good, help the lost and fallen, make the world happy, if you can!” (1949:8)
But as Patty looks at him with an eye of doubt and an interrogation, Charlie realizes that he is no more remained that virtuous person, who believed in Hugo. He has paid his virtues and idealism for success. Suddenly he adds to his remark, “I know before you say it, dear … I buy it all back.” (1949:8)

Patty reminds Charlie another most itching experience in his life. On a Christmas Eve, under the influence of heavy drinks and drugs, Charlie drove his car and met to an accident. He killed a child. In this, hit-and-run case Buddy Bliss saved Charlie from getting his career ruined. He took the charge upon himself and went to the jail for ten months. It was open secret that Charlie committed the crime and Bliss has been punished for that. Though he is an idealist, his half idealism made him to turn away from honesty and integrity to face the charge candidly. Moreover, he has lame excuses to save his skin; rather his business doesn’t allow him to be an honest. He admits his helplessness in the words, as: “I am in the movie business, darling. I can’t afford these acute attacks of integrity.” (1949:11)

Marion, Charlie’s wife has decided to separate from her husband that he has lost all his integrity and idealism. His hunger for success has taken him far away from the virtues once he was fond of. Charlie ‘Cass’ is now Charlie ‘Castle’, trapped in the compact fort of success. The studio owner Mr. Hoff is now his master.

Marion wants him to leave Hollywood and ‘go back to theatre’. She is ready to go back with him as she arrived here with Charlie ‘in a pumpkin coach’ because she wants to save her married life. Charlie, too, has realized the importance of married life. But as he is now a sold-out figure, he cannot forget the fact that he has lost his liberty to take any decision. Very helplessly he tries to convince his wife, as:

Don’t you think I want our marriage to work? But I have to face one horny fact: I’m Hoff’s prisoner now and signing the contract is ransom feel. (1949:15)

The mechanization of Charlie’s and life art in Hollywood has disgusted him. The emptiness of his life has divided his personality. He feels him an half—an incomplete man. He frankly admits the fact, saying to his wife,

Marion, in the whole world I care about only three and half people : you, little Billy (his son), Hank Tagle (Marion’s friend and writer) … and half a man that’s me. (1949:15)
Although he has been enjoying the fruits of American Dream, which he has attained seemingly, it has subdued his idealism and virtue which he, principally has cherished in the past. He can differentiate good and bad but cannot go with good. Though he is able to sense the breaking of marriage is the worst thing happening in his life, he is helpless to do anything to save his marital relation. Gabriel Miller focuses on Charlie’s dividedness, as:

Charlie has seemingly realized the American Dream, but the painfully decided consciousness resulting from recognition of the various betrayals involved in the achievement make Charlie a tragic creature. (1989:84)

Originally, Charlie an idealist and simplicist, surrendered to American Dream and Hollywood lure became entangled in a web of the fate. His half-idealism doesn’t allow him to forget the betrayals he committed; on the other hand, huge material temptation of American Dream is appealing his success-crazy notion. He is spilt into the ruthless demands of success sustenance and his consciences for betrayals, which is making him restless. Charlie now feels imprisoned by the compromise and the life that violets his better nature.

Besides her love for Charlie, Marion gives him ultimatum that if he signs the new contract with ‘Hoff-Fedrated’, she will renounce him. Because she knows that despite assurance of good deal of money, the contract can take away all the liberty and integrity of Charlie. Charlie, too, has decided to save his marital life by denying, signing the contract. But it is not easy to escape from the web of business world in which he is trapped.

Nat Danziger, a business agent, quite sympathetic about Charlie, is there now to make Charlie’s mind for the contract. American business mentality considering every citizen is a mere consumer and client is nothing but an object which can be sold or purchased. He tries to convince Charlie solid financial nature of the contract and argues to make him to sign it. But Charlie pinpoints the imprisonment nature of the pact. An Idealist in Charlie reacts, “The money factor isn’t everything.” (1949:18)

But Nat’s view is, “… But a million dollars is got an awful big mouth … And it’s legal tender for three million, seven hundred forty-four watermelons.” (1949:19)
Charlie does not know how to make the point clear and convince Nat. So in dire disgust he says: “You will drive me to suicide, Nat.” (1949:19) and finally, painfully but with concrete determination says: “I don’t want to sign this contract.” (1949:19)

Charlie almost has rejected further talk on the issue of the contract. Nat is disappointed to realize the futility of his efforts.

As already decided, Marcus Hoff, the studio owner and his colleague, Simley Coy enter there. Marcus Hoff, authoritative, powerful and pompous man of middle age is quite confident to make anything possible.

Nat informs him that Charlie is not willing to sign the contract. Marcus suggests Nat to make it more favourable for Charlie. But Charlie makes it clear that Marion doesn’t want him to sign the contract and he wants go back to theatre. All his disgust is reflected in his words as: “I want to leave Hollywood … I’m tired – I want to go away.” (1949:23)

Marcus Hoff is not happy to learn this decision, very calmly but with certain threat, he reminds Charlie, how in past he has helped Charlie. He does not hesitate to advice him, to give up his wife for better success. His philosophy is: “sometimes it becomes necessary to separate ourselves … from a wife who puts her petty interests before the multiplicity of great career!” (1949:25)

For Marcus, career and money matters are highly important in one’s life than the marital status and family relations. In his American Dream, there is no place for women, to him: “I realized an essential fact of life; the woman must stay out of her husband’s work when he’s making her bread and butter.” (1949:24) Marcus Hoff offers twenty five thousand dollars more for every release and threatens Charlie making him aware that at any rate he wants get this contract signed and Charlie is not in any position of bargaining.

Hoff, finally, very gravely shows his anger saying: “I offer you my hand and you spit in my face.”(1949:25) He makes him to know that he doesn’t want any good will of Charlie. He is the businessman he is just interested in “Charlie’s” physical presence and his body. Hoff does not want his dream broken which is very close his heart since long. His anger is burst in the words, as:
Charlie, I can’t tell you how many long months of constructive dreaming are in this moment. And I will let nothing or no one stand in the way of that dream. (1849:26)

The powerful Hoff wins to make Charlie sign the contract. Defeated Charlie couldn’t hide his sorrow and disgust to tell Marion: “he twisted my head like I was a ten sent doll! … I lost! (1949:31)

Clifford Odets employs his theatrical expertise in choosing same setting for the entire play. All the three acts of the play take place in the same playroom of Charlie Castle’s house, everybody else comes in and goes out, but Charlie remains there all the way. It, significantly, implies that Charlie Cass is imprisoned in a beautiful castle built by himself.

It symbolizes that his American Dream is fulfilled but finally turned into a complex web in which he is terribly trapped. He wants to escape from this wretched state. But as he tries to do so, he goes on drowning deeper in the filth.

6.3.3 ACT-II

A week later, the second act of the play, takes place in the same playroom of Charlie Castle’s house. Buddy Bliss and his wife Connie are present with Charlie and Marion. After having casual hospitality Bliss couple departs.

Charlie is quite upset because of Marion’s decision of separation. Still he is appealing her to remain with him. But Marion is ‘at the end’ of other side. To her Charlie has blown up the bridge so there is no way to reconcile. He tries to convince her importance of material prosperity in the life. As if he wants to say, if there is any bleak shade of guilt and betrayal, he has committed it to assure her better life. But for Marion it is just stupid justification.

Charlie further argues: “What do I have to justify? … What, making money? Is that the sin?” (1949:34) Marion’s reply is quite precise to make him introspective. “Your sin is living against your own nature. You are denatured – that’s your sin!” (1949:34)

In the eyes of the world, though Charlie Castle is successful, self-made man of fame and fortune, Marion underrates his success for the disintegrity and betrayals. She describes him, as:
... you’re helpless, you’re sick and unhappy ... you feel guilty and it makes you vicious! You have taken the cheap way out! Despite you best intentions, you’re horror. (1949:35)

Marion is, no longer, ready to believe in him. The feeling of insecurity has made her to take decision of abortion. To her, there love-song is almost came to an end. She feels more comfortable with Hank Tagle – a man of affectionate nature and a civilized man who respects a tremor in others. In fact, he is the man of integrity, mirror opposite of Charlie Castle. His ideas of successful life are quite clear. In fact, Odets, in the play, very skillfully employs him as an aloof observer of American society; who never hesitates to criticize the evil. To him: “Success has made them all so dull!” (1949:38)

Charlie comes to know that Marion and Hank are soon going to get married. In the way of success, after losing integrity and self-honor, for Charlie, to lose Marion was the last thing. This makes him to feel unbearable vacumm in the life. It was all he was being punished for his negligence towards marital life. His quest for material success has brought him other side of life leaving behind all his virtues and people who truly loved him. Ample material prosperity is around him but he has lost the deservigness for genuine affection.

Charlie realizes his dream turning disillusion. In a dire frustration he reacts: “It is all bleak and bitter dream... There is only two ways to forget everything – get drunk or stick a pencil in your eye.”(1949:38) He admits the downfall of his nature and integrity. He tries to convince Marion, that he has not willingly committed any wrong. As he was sold out figure, he had no alternative to choose than to flow with the waves. He expresses his agony in the words: “While I’m charming the world with my light fantastic ... I’m bleeding to death under my shirt.” (1949:39)

Charlie himself is responsible for his downfall and wretched condition. His target of hatred is, he himself. In the way of fame and future, his deviation from his true nature leads him to the corruption. Dreiser rightly examines the effect of ‘denaturing’ process leading to the sell out figure, as:

Once a man is mortgaged his true talent and become tainted by ‘Success’ – American style – he can never regain his full humanity. Realizing that he is a
mere commodity he lashes out at his friends and enemies, moved by guilt feelings and self-hatred. (1978:61)

Charlie feels desperately alone, when Marion goes away with Hank. Charlie’s life is full of complications. He is an example of the victimization of virtues surrendered to the ‘success’ attained by self-denaturing. His success is accompanied by many complications, such as, killing of a child in hit-and-run case, nomination of a minor studio flunky to take a blame, his marriage on the verge of break; death of his unborn child, in addition to this, hit-and-run case, becomes even further complicated by the fact, which not known to Charlie’s wife that along that ride he was with a young Hollywood starlet – Dixie Evans who likes to talk about that incident publicly. Ultimately, Hoff and his people get this piece of material to blackmail Charlie to hold him in Hollywood against his will.

Charlie, right from the beginning of the play shows his detest and bitterness about Hollywood. Falsity, deceit, shallowness, disintegrity and exploitation are the evils of Hollywood make him nostalgic about his days of theatre. Charlie Castle expresses his detest about Hollywood as, “California, think of it – a place where an honest apple tree won’t grow.” (1949:40)

Smiley Coy, business agent of Hoff senses the danger in Dixie Evans’ attitude regarding hit-and-run case. She expects Charlie should marry her to keep her mouth shut. But to Coy, this marriage can be harmful for Charlie’s Hollywood career, his marital relation turned bitter already and reputation of studio as well. To avoid all this, Coy thinks, ‘to remove’ her forever is the only way. Charlie is shocked to know this. He doesn’t want to commit one more crime to hide his earlier betrayals. Coy suggests him to check other choice to buy her.

Late in the night, Charlie calls Dixie at his home and very softly handles her to convince. She doesn’t show any interest in money. Dixie wants to make studio people ‘crawl and kiss her feet’, who have exploited her lot. She expresses her anger and bitterness in violent words: “I hate those studio bastards! … I hate them. They signed me up for my body and not to act. They hire girls like me to entertain the visiting sales force.” (1949:47)

An inhuman treatment received by Dixie underlines the unethical means of Hollywood to attain the material success. The art and artistic desires are subdued in
the game of money. Material temptation of Hollywood invites the attention of success-crazy artists. Despite practical success, the life becomes dull of compromises. At the end, if the consciousness is yet alive, the dream they seemingly realize turns disintegrated and life, instead of paradise of rewards becomes the hell of sleepless nights of repentance.

Marion, thinking about, Charlie’s state of mind, comes back to him. But it is an odd time. The presence of Dixie at home makes her more suspicious about Charlie’s character. Charlie is again at the position of self-justification. His prolonged passionate argument makes Marion to think twice about her decision of separation. He admits the guilt of denaturing himself. But he appeals Marion to remain sincere with her nature:

The merchant psychology of the country is in your blood, too. You bargain and trifle with your own nature! … Why you are willfully denaturing yourself. (1949:49)

Charlie admits that he is denatured, his integrity is impaired. He promises her to change himself. He appeals her to be with him in his efforts of escaping from the trap. Marion is convinced by this emotional appeal. At least, for the moment, all there indifferences are melted down in an affectionate embrace of reconciliation.

Charlie Castle’s impaired integrity and betrayals are the bitter fruits of his ‘success’ adversely affected his family life. He has painfully realized the nature of his success is stained with his impaired integrity and betrayals. It is, now heavy burden for him, either to save and sustain the ‘success’ or to regain the paradise of conjugal life.

6.3.4 ACT-III

The final act of the play takes place at Charlie Castle’s house. As a result of reconciliation Marion is quiet enthusiastic to perform her domestic responsibilities. She reveals now as bustling housewife, enjoying her functions. After giving him casual instructions, she rushes for shopping and there enters Nat Danziger, the business agent.

Nat is there to get an approval of Charlie on a script, as Marcus Hoff insisted him to do. Charlie denies approving the script because Charlie and Marion are
thinking about second honeymoon cruise. Nat is happy to know about come back of Marion to make Charlie’s life livelier. Nat departs wishing Marion best of his love.

Knowing the news of reconciliation, Hank Teagle comes to meet Marion. The talk between Hank and Charlie is quite significant to focus on changing attitude of material minded American society. They come to a conclusion that the quest for fulfillment of dream has wasted the life of Americans. And, nonetheless they belong to same American society.

Hank Teagle very sensibly comments:

I don’t want Marion joining the lonely junked people of our world – millions of wasted by the dreams of life they were promised and the swill they received ... I think lot of us are in for big shot of Vitamin D: defeat, decay, depression and despair. (1949:57)

To him, America has lost her past glory. In the course of success, the religious conviction and ethical values are subdued. “Eagle is no more American symbol”, it is Cocker Spaniel, paws up saying, “Like me, Like me, I am a good dog, Like me!” (1949:56)

He makes Charlie to realize that Marion stands in his life for idealism, which he has lost in the cat-and-rat race of so called success. Moreover, he is suffering from the torture of half-idealism and impaired integrity. So Hank, very philosophically advises him to choose either of the ways, better he should join the mass who least think of their idealism:

You’ve sold out! ... Charlie, -- don’t resist! Your wild, native idealism is a fatal flaw in the context of your life and here. Half-idealism is the peritonitis of the soul ... America is full of it! (1949:58)

Hank sincerely believes in his principle that the ‘failure’, accepted for saving moral ethics and integrity ‘is the best of American life’ than the ‘success’ attained by sacrificing the values. But the bulk of American society is victimized of practical success, making their life more miserable.

After Hank Teagle’s departure, Simley Coy enters with the twist in the plot. He has brought the news that Dixie Evans under the influence of the heavy drink is about to spill the story of hit-and-run case to the press, and Hoff Marcus has kicked
her severely to black and blue and he further adds that to saddle Dixie it needs to finish her to death.

Charlie doesn’t want to happen this; his consciousness doesn’t permit him to involve in one more crime. Meanwhile, Marcus Hoff and Simley Coy are there to sort out the problem. As defamation of Charlie can indirectly affect the business of ‘Hoff-Fedrated’, they want to save Charlie. Marcus Hoff has another solution of the problem that is than to kill Dixie Evans, Charlie should marry her. Moreover, he argues that, as Marion is no longer loyal to Charlie, he shouldn’t bother about his integrity. He has recorded evidence of Marion’s disloyalty.

Listening to all this, Charlie bursts into anger to slap Hoff. After an exchange of hot words and threatening Charlie to ruin, Marcus leaves the place. Charlie, too mentally and physically tired, goes upstairs to take bath.

Coincidently, Coy receives news that Dixie Evans has been dashed by a police car and she is dead. Consequently, with her death, the secret of Charlie’s involvement in hit-and-run case left buried in her heart. It is a matter of relief for everybody. Charlie’s doesn’t know about the death of Dixie. Coy and Marion both feel relaxed by the news of the death of Dixie Evans. Coy is now interested in resettling relationship between Charlie and Hoff. They are engaged in the talk of resettlement of relations already turned bitter. Meanwhile, Coy notices the dripping of water from the ceiling.

Marion calls Russel – the butler to see what has happened. Russel tries to open the door of bathroom but it is locked and Charlie is not giving response to any call from outside. Marion realizes something big and awful incident is happened in her life. She rushes to call Dr. Frary, their neighbor Coy and Russel rush to break the door of bathroom. Charlie has committed suicide. It was the only way for him to escape from the burden he was suffering from. Finally, the ‘success’ story of Charlie castle ends with suicide. All through the life, he remained cutting in the sharp edges of his idea of success and half idealism. The consequences of the success were too harsh to make him choose the way of tragic death.

Even after the death, Charlie doesn’t get the genuine treatment from commercialized Hollywood. They want to hide the truth about his death. They are ready with a press note: “Charles Castle, the renowned star of film, Hoff-Fedrated
pictures died today of a heart attack.” (1949:75) But Hank doesn’t want to get Charlie’s integrity insulted more. Hank, with all his emotional involvement and determination makes it clear that: “There will be no lies, no display … I will tell the story. He … killed himself, because that was the only way he could live .. a final act of faith.” (1949:76)

Throughout entire life, Charlie made betrayals with his idealism. His tragic suicide proved to be the only faithful act in his life. The curtain falls, covering Marion all shattered of the death of Charlie Castle. Harold Cantor has rightly assessed the death of Charlie, as: “Despite the critical bromide that Odets is a facile optimist, death is a way of breaking out of the existential trap” (1978:36) By the end of the play, Charlie’s death occurs as the only way of rescue from the existential trap of the exterior forces which make individual as well as social life miserable.

The way, which Charlie adopts to commit the suicide has spiritual significance, Harold Cantor interprets it, as:

Spiritually he was dead before his heart stopped beating. Though suicide – whether by police seem cowardly to certain sensibilities; Odets implies it brings a measure of peace and release from the intolerable pain of sell-out … for the sell out, suicide is partially an act of atonement but, more importantly, a form of transcendence. (1978:72)

However, the real killer is market minded industrial society, soul destroying materialism and burdens of dreams and expectations of which people like Charlie of half-idealism and semi-consciousness become victims.

The loss of Charlie Castle attains the dimension of tragedy because the man has come to recognize the futility of his worldly success as well as his own implication in the sordid business of maintaining it. (1989:92)

Charlie Castle’s compares himself with Macbeth, as he has committed series of crimes in the way of attainment of success. Of course, he has attained all that success, he dreamt, but his success is stained with the bloody shade of crime and betrayal. His self-assessment of his success compels him to realize the emptiness of it, and drags him to only faithful act in the life – the suicide.

The Hollywood background of the play, caused an issue of criticism for several critics, ‘Daily Mirror’ reviewed the play and the approach of Odets towards

Clurman, writing in ‘The New Republic’ sketches his observations about the excesses of The Big Knife.

The lack of coordination between plot and theme in The Big Knife arises from emotional confusion in the author … Odets never tells the truth about Charlie Castle, which is that he loves Hollywood with vicious zest, Odets thinks this love sinful … The self-loathing stems from a desire to punish oneself for one’s sin.( )

Keeping aside, subjective context of Odets Hollywood concern and adverse criticism resulting from that one can see, the play is appreciated for it’s remarkable treatment of the theme of ‘success’ and degeneration of American Dream.’ Variety’ – a periodical publication appreciates the play as:

“Written with bold strokes of authenticity it combines philosophy with stark realism to produce a provocative play based on the subject of ‘success’ and moral values.”(1949:82 )

Whereas, ‘The New York Times’ notices the freshness and dynamism of the dialogues to hold high the play. It appreciates the play as:

We witness the last few days of Charlie Castle, a top movie star and an idealist whose years of compromise with his beliefs for the sake of a Hollywood career have resulted in the slow destruction of his personality. We see his struggles to escape from the net of insincerity and falsehood in which he has trapped himself, and his ultimate defeat. (1949:82)

William Hawkins advocates the appropriateness the Hollywood background in his brief article contributed to ‘Critical Essays on Clifford Odets’ as:
His theme is the worship of Mammon, and his choice of background is Hollywood, which gives him two big advantages. In the first place the motion picture familiarly make the most exaggerated fiscal returns for success of any industry extant. Beyond that, there is no other setting where such a theme could be violently and crawly personal, because nowhere else is individual reputation is so vulnerable an asset. This is the story of Charlie Castle, a top-ranking picture star, disgusted with ordinary work he is doing, irritable, casual about his wife and yet captured by acclaim and wealth.(1991:31)

Whatever criticism Odets’ receives, his vision and loyalty is crystal clear. In an extensive interview he reacts: “My problem and business in the world is to present truth dramatically, appealing and entertainingly” and up to certain extent he conquers the ‘problem.’(1991:67)

The setting, Odets provides to the play, *The Big Knife* is thematically significant, and it has close resemblance to Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. Charlie remains at the centre of the play, onstage continually until he goes upstair to commit suicide. Other characters enter and leave as if everyone has access to the world outside except Charlie, who is confined to the Hollywood Castle that his name betokens.

Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* shares various motifs with *The Big Knife*, such as, fatal secrets of the past are exposed, captivity of the protagonists, quest for escape, entrapment of personal world. Ibsen’s Nora and Odets’ Charlie are confined to their limited world. Nora’s confinement to her drawing room and Charlie’s continuous stay at his play room symbolizes their imprisonment to the world which they themselves have made.

Odets demonstrates his versatility of technique and an excellence in thematic concern. The play, *The Big Knife* though is dealing with momentary dilemma; it reveals a timeless concern with man’s moral obligations and his capacities to surmount hostile external forces.

D. Venkateswarlu, in his essay, ‘America Gonef: The American Dream and the Jewish Dilemma’ included in an extensive work, *Humanism and Jewish American Drama*, analyses the play, *The Big Knife*, on the basis of myth of success, as:

*The Big Knife* figures in the same category where he talks about the corruption of personality as an inevitable process in the American system. He (Odets) tried
to attack the system which glorifies the ‘bitch goddess of success’ and ‘money’, ‘status’, ‘fame’ that contribute to it.(1990:64)

In the journey of attaining material success and translating it into fame, the character-ethic is subdued. It is an inevitable part of process, the external forces lead to the ethical downfall of the character. If, still the consciousness is alive, it merely brings the restlessness and repentance.

In this context, Richard M. Huber, registers his opinion in his work, American Idea of Success as:

Success was earned by being a loyal friend, or good husband. It was a reward for performance on the job. It is not the same thing as happiness – which is how you feel. Success was brutally objective and impersonal. It recorded a change in rank, the upgrading of a person in relation to others by the unequal distribution of money and power, prestige and fame. Your success was not simply being rich or famous. It meant attaining riches or achieving fame. You had to know where a man began and where he ended in order to determine how far he had come.(1971:1)

Of course, Charlie Castle, the protagonist The Big Knife attained money, prestige and fame but he no longer, remained a good friend and loyal husband. His life is full of betrayals and sins; making the friend undergo the prosecution and jail, sleeping with his wife, killing a child in an accident are the evidences of his unethical means of the life.

As far as concerning, wherefrom Charlie started his life and where did he reach to determine his success. It is quite awful journey, starting with fame and status to conclude in tragic suicide.

Like Joe Bonaparte in Golden Boy, Charlie Castle too failed to discriminate between success and happiness. Their false belief that money, fame should give a sense belonging and an identity has the seed of disintegration in itself. Their cry for peace of mind and ultimate death are not surprising events, the way which they marched on had the only destination – the tragic death.
6.4 Self Assessment Questions:

a) **Answer the following questions in one word / phrase / sentence each.**

1. Which were the two radio plays by Odets started his creative career?
2. What is the name of the first full length play wrote by Odets?
3. Which theatre did play vital role in shaping of Odets dramatic career?
4. What was the early title of the play, *The Big Knife*?
5. Where was the premiere of the play, *The Big Knife* was organized?
6. Who is the protagonist of the play?
7. What is the name of Charlie’s wife?
8. To whom does Charlie credit his ideal cultural legacy?
9. How does Charlie describe Hollywood?
10. What is ‘vitamin D’ to Hank Teagle, that America is suffering from?

b) **Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative:**

1. Daniel Aron regards Odets as _______.
   - a) Play Boy of left theatre
   - b) Golden Boy of group theatre
   - c) Golden Boy of left theatre
   - d) Play boy of Golden theatre

2. *The Big Knife* was first presented by _______.
   - a) Dnitch Deve Wiman
   - b) Marcus Hoff
   - c) Marion Castle
   - d) Hank Teagle

3. *The Big Knife* was first presented on _______.
   - a) Feb 24, 1950
   - b) Feb 22, 1949
   - c) Feb 24, 1949
   - d) Feb 22, 1950

4. The play opens at the locale of_______.
   - a) Beverly Hills, California
   - b) Winston Hills, California
   - c) Charlie Hills, Hollywood
   - d) Hank Hills, Hollywood
5. Charlie Castle is a famous -----.
   a) athlete    b) movie star    c) stuntman    d) writer

6. Buddy Bliss is a ------.
   a) news reporter  b) writer  c) movie artist  d) publicity personnel

7. Marcus Hoff is the head of the theatre ------.
   a) Hoff-Fedrated  b) Hoff-Syndicate  c) Hoff- Group  d) Hoff-Drama

8. Hank Teagle is a ------.
   a) writer  b) reporter  c) Hoff’s agent  d) police officer

9. Charlie Castle’s compares himself with ------.
   a) Macbeth  b) Hamlet  c) Othello  d) Ceaser

10. As far as setting is concerned, *The Big Knife* is rightly compared with Ibsen’s ------.
    a) *A Doll’s House*    b) *The Master Builder*
    c) *Ghost*    d) *An enemy of the People*

6.5 Answers to self Assessment Questions:

6.4.a

1. *Dawn* and *At the Water Line*.
2. *Awake and Sing*.
3. Group Theatre
4. *A Winter Journey*
5. New York
6. Charlie Castle
7. Marion
8. readings of London, Sinclair, Ibsen and Hugo.
9. a place where honest apple tree won’t grow.
10. defeat, decay, depression and despair.
6.4.b

1—c, 2—a, 3—c, 4—a, 5—b, 6—d, 7—a, 8—a, 9—a, 10—a.

6.6 Further Readings:


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6.1 Objectives:

After studying this unit you will be able to:

- acquaint with the degeneration of American Dream as one of the major trends in 20th century American literature.
- understand changing implications of American Dream.
- appreciate and analyze the prescribed play, American Buffalo written by David Mamet.
- know David Mamet as a remarkable playwright of an outstanding thematic and technical accomplishment.
6.2 Introduction:

DAVID MAMET: LIFE AND LITERARY CAREER

Mamet appeared on the scene of the American theatre when American society was experiencing the turmoil of violence and disillusionment in the American ethos. His deep social concern and crave for ultimate success of the contemporary society compelled him to react through his literary craftsmanship against the periodic crisis. His theatrical elegance and technical accomplishment ranked him as an ‘experimental playwright’ of his age he emphasized equally on the theme and the content of his plays.

David Alan Mamet was born in Chicago, Illinois, on November 30, 1947 to Jewish parents. His mother was a teacher and father was a labour lawyer and amateur semanticist. His sympathy for Jewish sufferers is inspired from his Jewish parentage. He completed his graduation in Arts from Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont. As a part of the fulfilment of his project at college, he first of all checked his literary genius by writing a short play, *Camel* (1968), which was appreciated for its treatment of theme and the technical accomplishment. In fact the credit of an outstanding theatrical competence of Mamet goes to the influence of acting theories of Stanislavsky, he received at the acting school in New York. Moreover, it instilled enough confidence in him to enable him as a teacher of drama at Marlboro College. Mamet, for Marlboro Theatre Workshop produced another short play *Lake boat* (1971). Ambitious Mamet was not enough comfortable with the opportunities at Marlboro College, returning back to Goddard College in 1971, he formed St. Nicholas Theatre Company, through which his plays, *The Duck Variation* (1972) and *The Reunion* were presented. In the year 1972, his first entirely professional play *Sexual perversity in Chicago* (1972) was staged by the Company. Basically Mamet, an intensely experimental playwright, got wide recognition alongwith the prestigious awards like Jefferson Award and Obie Award for his *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, the play is based on the theme of fake relationships. The play emphasises the hollowness of American life where sex and sexual relationship too, have turned into a kind of violence as a medium of aggressive desire.

Mamet is definitely a playwright of strong moral vision and social criticism. Steven Ho Gale in his work, *David Mamet: The Plays 1972-1980*, precisely
considers Mamet as a playwright of changing social and family relationships in the midst of excessive burden of desires and expectations, rather in the struggle for sustenance. Mamet's *The Duck Variations* (1972) is the play of relationship between George and Emil sharing their loneliness. The loneliness and homelessness of their old age has brought them together. They feel better at the park than their respective houses of ‘joyless, cold concrete Apartment,’ where they are absolutely unwanted. Mamet’s characters are the victims of despair and sense of emptiness; the painful realization of the fact that the life cannot be lived in nothingness makes them feel more miserable.

*American Buffalo* (1975), Mamet’s first major work, the winner of a New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award proved his dramatic genius of high rank. The play is appreciated for its remarkable characteristics such as a reliance upon contemporary American environment, an effective use of fractural utterances, and pauses of the characters significantly symbolizing inner conflict of characters aimlessly leading their lives in big vacuum and an examination of influence and state of popular American myth of success. To examine the play, the researcher predominantly intends to focus his critical attention on the aspect of American myth of success which is, further carried out an elaborate scale.

Mamet’s approach, particularly, in case of human relationship is loaded with emotional dimension and psychic depth. He is much worried about growing disconcern and widening generation gap. His play, *Reunion* (1976) deals with the parental support. An emotional support and mutual affection between different generations is widely recognized by Mamet as a survival strategy.

In the following years of the production of the play, *Reunion* (1976), Mamet’s five plays in succession saw the light of the stage; *All Men are Whores* (1977), *The Water Engine* (1977), *Dark Pony* (1977), *A Life in the Theatre* (1977) and *The Words* (1977) captured attention of theatre goers to recognize Mamet’s dramatic versatility. Like, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago, All Men are Whores: An Inquiry* comments on sex and violence. In the forms of abduction, rape defloration and in various sadistic practices sex is accompanied with violence. Whereas the play *The Water Engine* (1977), like *American Buffalo* once again criticizes the unethical business strategies and undue overestimation of importance of profit.

Mamet is definitely reputed, versatile literary craftsman. He has contributed more than twenty five plays, three children plays, two collection of essays, a book on film directing and twelve screen-plays. He is widely considered as one of the prolific and powerful voices of American theatre. His peculiarity lies in his sensitivity to language, keen observation and social concern and above all his assessment with post modern view penetrating the complete disconnection of present from historical, cultural and mythical dimensions of the tradition. His knowledge of classical tragedy and comedy, and specifically, his technical accomplishment in evaluating and employing drama as a prominent literary genre rank Mamet as an influential playwright of 20th century.

Mamet frankly acknowledges Chekov, Beckett and Harold Pinter for their thematic and structural influences. These influences have enabled Mamet to juxtapose and compare the present and the past adapting variety of thematic concerns.

Apart from the different contemporary issues, he dealt his literary creative genius with the place of American Dream and its changing implication. It has been a matter of close concern for Mamet particularly in his plays based on unethical business world. So, while tracing the development of American Dream as one of the major literary movements, the study of Mamet’s plays is an unavoidable task. Mamet is deservedly considered as the natural success of the playwrights such as Miller, Odets and O’Neil, for his criticism of American society, its capitalist ethos, increasing privatism, loss of spiritual meaning and social will.

Mamet in one of his lectures, offered to the amateur theatre artists, painfully asserted : “I think that the old order, whatever that means, the old America is finally
finished … that the frontier, the commercial drive, the mercantile drive was, in effect, a fad no longer alive” (1985 : 63).

Gradually, in the course of time, the American society has lost all its passion and close affinity for upward mobility and the pursuit of dream of success. In fact, the history records the fact that the very birth of America was inspired from the dream of prosperity accompanied with sincere efforts for its realization. Deep religious conviction instilled by spiritual leaders and social reformers’ consistent efforts encouraged then American society to pave the way of wealth and social status emerging from it.

With the emergence of Depression phase in America, along with economic downfall brought ethical downfall in American society. It created a hopeless vacuum and an atmosphere of distrust and despair. Aimlessness, emptiness and loss of individual identity were the bitter fruits of the age. The physical world was in a state of decay. In an unethical business society, the streets were full of aimless wanderers, petty criminals, pimps and prostitutes.

Mamet’s deep concern and conscience compels him to project this changing scenario, in his literary contribution. Most of his plays comment and criticise betrayals and hypocrisies of American society. In regard to Mamet’s social concern C.W.E. Bigsby rightly observes:

Mamet is by instinct, a social dramatist – if by that we mean someone concerned with exposing the myths, the values and the processes of society, with examining the nature of relationship between private and public worlds (Bigsby 68).

Specifically Mamet’s plays, namely, American Buffalo (1975), Glengarry Glen Ross (1982) and Speed-the-Plow are remarkably significant for profound interrelated social and economic transformation betraying the traditional myth of success. His focus of criticism is concentrated on absolute commercial business world; neglecting religious spirit, character-ethic and work-ethic and merely living with and for tiny aims of life.
6.3 *AMERICAN BUFFALO* (1983) – David Mamet

Plot Development and Analysis:

*American Buffalo*, Mamet’s widely acclaimed first major work, premiered at Goodman Theatre at Chicago on November 23, 1975, honoured by a coveted New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award. In 1977, the play was revised for Broadway presentation. The Broadway presentation of the play, too, got immense popularity that it was nominated for two Tony awards and four Drama Desk Awards. As the play is thematically multidimensional various critics and reviewers have appreciated the play with different perspectives. Most of them estimate the play concentrating their view on parodic version of American Dream and its fearless attack on business ethos extracting price upon human soul. Mamet himself, in one of his interviews comments about the play: “The play is about the American ethic of business. It is about how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business” (1983: 1). Mamet effectively tries to convince that the betrayals and ethical compromises are reached to an extent that the petty burglary is also a business and there is no matter of shame for the crooks indulged in. Of course, on the part Mamet, it is very harsh to compare the crooks with businessmen to prove the businessmen as the crooks, it is the fact that in an unethical business practices it is difficult to keep them separate.

6.3.1 Act-I

As far as number of characters is concern, in *American Buffalo*, Mamet is quite economical. Using three major characters and very simple plot with minimum stage directions, Mamet attains his thematic goal and achieves an ultimate success for the play. The plot of the play revolves around, Don Dubrow, the protagonist, in his late forties owner of a junk shop, Don’s Resale shop, Walter Cole known by the name Teach is an associate and friend of Don and Bob is described by the playwright as a gopher who helps Don to bring the junk objects for resale.

Once an amateur coin collector, casually visits Don’s junk shop and purchases a valuable buffalo nickel at the price of only 90 dollars. After his departure, Don realizes the coin was of more worth and the feeling that he has been unfairly taken advantage of, makes him determine to steal the coin back. To execute his plan, he gets Bob and Teach involved into. These three conspirators and crooks in a real sense work on their plan assuming that they are the businessmen and least bothering
for the legitimacy of their business, they hope for the success. The play is all about their plotting which at the end proves futile.

Mamet, with such a simple story line, effectively comments on unethical business practices, an aimlessness and hollowness of the American society and above all changing implications of American Dream of success. His typical obscene verbal exercise underlines the vulgarity, futility and amoral practices of the practical business world.

The entire play takes place at Don’s Resale Shop. Mamet shows his interest in classical theatre tradition by attaining unity of place and unity of time. Act I of the play takes place on Friday morning. Don and Bob are at the junk shop sitting idle and unenthusiastic. The way they talk to one another shows that they have ample time with them. In fact, how to make use of the time is the problem for them. Bob is given a task to keep an eye on coin collector that as he leaves the residence they can steal the buffalo nickel. But he has abruptly returned. Don is not happy with his arrival. He makes him to listen some words about so called ethics in business:

Don: … but this isn’t good enough. If you want to do business … If we got a business deal. It isn’t good enough. Just one thing, Bob. Action counts, Action talks and Bullshit walks (1975: 04).

To Don, action is all important in any kind of business. It brings the results in favour and prosperity. Of course, though it sounds like Fanklinsque wisdom and ethic, cherishing the vitality of studiousness in the way of success, the major difference is that Franklin’s American Dream, secular in nature, advocates the nobility of task and character. The honesty and the integrity are the vital virtues assuring definite success. Don and Bob have their business world full of burglary and betrayal. In fact, by realizing the importance of action, they are applying right mean for wrong objective. As they are the inhabitants of corrupt civilization, they neither have any awareness for spiritual and religious implication of success myth nor they consider the value of character ethic.

Don, while talking to Bob, insists on skill and talent. He refers to Fletch, a gambler and a cheat card player who by using his skill and talent in cheating makes lot of money. Betrayals and cheating are the prime requisites of the contemporary corrupt civilization. Don appreciates these qualities of Fletcher saying: “… you put
him down in some strange town with just a nickel in his pocket and by night fall he’ll have the town by the balls ...” (AB 04). Traditional American Dream of Mather and Franklin emphasizes religious bent of mind, virtues and honest hard work as the sacred way of success. While attaining the success, ethical way of virtues must be regarded. In fact, in an old American society, honour for virtues and anguish for vice was the general principle. They had deep trust in poetic justice. Their ideals and idols neglected the sinful ways. But the corrupt world of Don, Bob and Teach least care for poetic justice, rather they think little of long future, somehow, they, like many, want to make the present moment the success. They are the inhabitants of the society lacking the nobility of task and mean.

Moreover, Bob denies any born instinct and heritage which, in fact, for many generations was very close to American heart. The puritan belief, American as a ‘promised land’ and Americans as the ‘chosen people’ which encouraged America for many civilizations to pursue their dreams, is quite meaningless for modern civilization. Bob’s way of thinking is quite rebellious, for him there is no any born instinct as such. Far from right and wrong whatever skill, talent and experience, one has to learn it from the street only. In the practical business world common sense, experience and talent are the only things to make the difference.

Apparently, Bob’s so-called philosophy of success and business seems of higher standard, but it is quite ridiculous to see in the play petty burglary and trivial stealing are for him a part of business. And everything is fair in business. There is no place for relationships and long associations, he advises his gopher to know the difference between the relationship and business. The uncertainties and insecurities have intensified an atmosphere of doubt, beyond selfishness and greed nothing remained important for corrupt business society. They do not have faith in any kind of relationship. Bob warns his assistant – Bob that he fails to make the distinction between business and friendship, he cannot ever become successful. An aimlessness of Mamet’s characters is well reflected through the dialogues and the way they give undue importance to very trivial things in reality. The competitive and corrupt spirit of American society has driven certain people toward the bank of mainstream. It has, of course, created a kind of hollowness and vacuum in the lives of the people. The challenge of an existence is the priority of their life.

The traditional myth of American Dream always insisted the aspirers to believe in hardmanship and consistent honest labour. It encouraged people to work with
dedication assuring them the better fruits of success. Character-ethical and work-ethical were the true guiding forces for them. But in modern civilization, devoid and decline of ethical values has lost its moral sense and sensitivity for the success. In fact, it has been the tendency of modern civilization to attain, whatever mean dream or motif they have by adopting short-cut to achieve more without much labour.

In the play, Mamet introduces one more character, Teach as a typical product of the collapsing civilization brought up in an atmosphere of doubt and insecurity. He is the victim of his own complexes. Teach, a paranoid braggart is always under the impression that everyone is against him; scheming against him. In fact, in the play, he himself is the main conspirator and more violent. He enters using sluggish language for his gambling partners. Being cheated in the game he is turned restless. His anguish and anger is reflected from his extremely abusive language. He thinks, to kill them is the only way to treat such people. He accuses his cheating partner: “There is not one loyal bone in that bitch’s body” (AB 14).

Somehow Don could silence Teach. Keeping aside everything, as an expert, Teach now talks about their plan of snatching the buffalo coin back from that amateur coin collector. Teach is now chief-in of their projected conspiracy. Before talking about any further actions, he gets all the minute details from Don. Simply casual arrival of a coin-collector and without any bargaining his purchase of the coin has hurt his ego, assuming that he has been cheated by that amateur stuff collector. Now Don is of the view that the nickel coin must be of five times more worth than the price it is sold at. Already Don has collected lot of information about the whereabouts and the married life of the coin collector and he has appointed Bob to keep watch on him. As Bob has been working with Don since long, Don has shown faith in him to get involved into the conspiracy. But Teach a product of destructive socio-economic forces of contemporary society, feels doubt about the loyalty and an ability of Bob. Don insists on his attachment about Bob. But Teach successfully persuades him to avoid Bob in the name of loyalty and so-called business. His way of thinking is that there cannot be repeated chances in business and one cannot afford to get his plan flopped. More than any attachment and relationship the success in execution of the plan is crucial.

In this regard, C.W.E. Bigsby, in his critical survey A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century Drama, comments: “the central issue of American Buffalo is
whether vicious competition will outweigh personal attachments” (Bigsby 241). For the sake of business, Teach advises Don to forego Bob’s friendship. It is quite ridiculous, the business of petty burglary, too, does not recognize the worth of friendship. In fact, the frustration of failure and hopeless life of bleak present with an apprehension of insecurity has intensified the atmosphere of doubt and despair.

Mamet’s little business monsters have neither any time nor any place for emotions and relationships in their so called business dealing. There is least hesitation and shame in dropping Bob. Teach is really a cunning character, very skillfully convinces his expertise to Don, and before any execution of the plan, talks about bargaining. He claims fifty percent of the profit. Don disapproves his demand at first, but is convinced later by Teach’s cunning argument “fifty percent of some money is better than ninety percent of some broken toaster” (AB 37). Don, too, is well-impressed by the way Teach talks about the plan of a theft. They both agree, their business and planning is nothing less than any fort and whatever money they are going to make from, is a really a classical money for them. And naturally, for Teach, to serve the purpose of the plan, the people indulging in must be of certain standard. Apart from the fact that the crooks are working on a plan of petty burglary, but as a part of a prime requisite of the business, they are employing first rate plan for it. In the emptiness of corrupt civilization, people are compelled to utilize all their energy and potential for quite trivial things. It is really a tragedy of a land of opportunity where now, things like casual burglary are turned as the source of opportunities, and more painful matter is that people have no any hesitation to adopt these things as part of their life. It is complete surrender to the circumstances and consequences too. Fraud and deception are the common, normal business devices and greed for money and false professional pride are the outcome of laxity of values.

Teach makes Don to expel Bob from the business deal for the sake of ‘procedure’ which according to Teach, Bob does not know. By offering little amount Bob is removed from the task forever. Now, again Teach starts talking about their plan. He thinks their plan must not be loose one, because he believes, “people are loose, people pay the price … ” (AB 45). Moreover, he does not allow Don to loose his temper, it affects the business “Bad feelings, misunderstandings happen on job” (AB 45). In fact, Teach is teaching many things to Don. The way he talks, he expresses his egoistic attitude to exhibit his knowledge and experience of the world.
Anne Dean, regarding his resourcefulness observes:

(Teach) Can apparently conduct all the affairs in his life by means of speech alone; he can coerce and intimidate wheedle and confuse … he is linguistically so versatile that he constantly enmeshes others into his fantasies (1990:100).

Teach: … One thing. Makes all the difference in the world

Don: What?

Teach: Knowing what the fuck you’re talking about. And it’s so rare. Don. So rare (AB 49).

Or Teach’s assertion “Just that nobody is perfect” (AB 50), signifies his fake ‘all-knowing’ attitude. His verbal versatility can be seen through his dialogues. It is quite contradictory that principally, he knows most of the good things but employs all his wisdom for wrong objectives. Highly intensified consumerism in commercialized society has compelled misinterpretation of myth of success. It has narrowed its implication that people are using their abilities and potentials for wrong motif. In the changing socio-economic scenario, American society, along with concrete ambition has lost the deep trust in the peculiar nature of being a ‘chosen people’. Comparing to traditional American society of pre-Depression era, their dreams and aspirations and above all their quest for success; the modern society seems too tiny. They have lost all their grandeur. Teach, Don, Bob seem too small when they talk about petty burglary, precisely speaking, they seem an un-American.

Though Teach has taken charge of all the controls of the plan, Don is officially proprietor of the business; by the advice of Teach though, he has outweighed Bob from the plan, still, he is not happy to believe solely in Teach’s plan. He expects Fletch should be the part of their conspiracy. Don has already appreciated Fletcher for his skill in cheating. In fact, it is shame on American business mentality where prolonged friendship and loyalty of Bob is least important than the skill of cheating of Fletch.

While talking on American Buffalo, Mamet, in one of his interviews, deliberately reminds the words of Calvin Coolidge:

After all, the chief business of the American people is business. They are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and
prospering the world … The business of America is business, We’ve a nation of entrepreneurs (1992: 123).

On the background of these hallmark words, Mamet describes the play American Buffalo:

(The play) is about the American ethic of business. About how we excuse all sorts of great and small betrayals and ethical compromises called business. It is play about honour among thieves and myths this country runs on. The ethics of the business community is that you can be as predatory as you want within a structured environment (Kane 123).

Teach is, of course, not willing to get Fletch involved in. He is hurt by Don’s decision but finally for the sake of the business deal allows Fetch to be a part of the conspiracy. It is amazing to know that despite an unethical deal, the conspirators are quite systematic in their homework. It reflects through their dialogue:

Teach : Somebody watch for the cops … work out a signal.
Don : Yeah.
Teach : Safety in numbers.
Don : Yeah.
Teach : Three men job.
Don : Yeah.
Teach : A division of labour. (pause) Security, Muscle, Intelligence, Huh?
Don : Yeah (AB 52).

Planning, procedure, security, muscle, intelligence are their key words but lack of ethical motif all their assets seem futile.

By the end of Act I, Teach, as a part of physical preparation leaves to have a nap. Don is busy with setting contact with Fletch. As a proprietor of so-called business deal, he is looking more worried and anxious. His anxiety is apparent through his words as: “Fuckin business” (AB 55). All they have decided to assemble together by eleven O’clock of the same night at the same place. Excluding Bob, Don and Teach have designed their plan of stealing the American Buffalo coin. Now they are waiting for time of execution of the plan.
6.3.2 Act -II

The second act of the play opens at the same place – the junkshop of Don Dubrow. Don is eagerly waiting for Teach and Fletch, unexpectedly, Bob enters there. As Bob is expelled from the plan, Don is not happy to welcome him at this crucial juncture. Teach asks him about his intention to come. Bob replies, he has a buffalo head nickel with him, and if Don is interested in, he wants to sell it. In fact, Bob too wants to do a business deal. Knowing the interest of Don in a buffalo coin, he has somehow availed a coin. Don takes an advantage of Bob’s dire necessity of money. Meanwhile, Teach arrives there little late. Don, as a part of his business strategy neglecting Bob’s offer deviates his mode of discussion towards Teach’s late arrival. Teach justifies his late arrival with an excuse that his watch was broken and therefore, he could not keep the scheduled time. Teach is hurt more by Don’s suspect. He is ready to bet for his truthfulness. To make Bob depart as earlier, Teach asks Don to give some money for his nickel. And finally, the bargaining is settled at very marginal price. Hurriedly the payment is made to Bob and almost forced him to leave.

Teach and Don are eagerly waiting for Fletch. Very cunning, Teach, making phone at Fletch’s house gets it confirmed whether Fletch has left to arrive at junkshop or not. In the course of a conversation, Teach explains his idea of free enterprise in a modern social set up. He emphasizes an individual freedom as a cardinal aspect in the business to make a desired profit. In an implication of modern American Dream, upliftment of society or any particular community as such is completely missing. American Dream is absolutely turned in an individual upward mobility and quest for personal progress. And to attain this American Dream, the commercialized practical American society has no hesitance to reach to any extent of compromises, specifically negligence towards the ethical and moral values has been a general practice. Teach as a typical character, representing the modern American society admits that “The country is founded on this” (AB 73). The uncertainties and oddities have made American society to be suspicious and doubtful about everything. Teach is now really afraid of the success of their conspiracy – the so called business deal. According to him, for definite success, secrecy must be maintained. As the plan is now disclosed to many, he is doubtful about its successful execution. Teach, as violent braggart feels need of a weapon which makes him assured and
comfortable. In an atmosphere of distrust and insecurity protection is his prior necessity.

Kamlini Dravid in her elaborate study, entitled *David Mamet as a Social Critic*, explicitly asserts her observations about throat-cutting competitive spirit of American society in the light of social Darwinism:

Darwin’s theory of evolution seems to justify the philosophy of competition and reduces the human being to the level of an animal … The competitive social and economic sphere has made a society a battleground (2002:145).

Security and protection are the major requisites for the success of Teach’s plan. In fact, Darwin’s evolution is a natural law of progress based on the principle of survival of the fittest. But in *American Buffalo*, like many other plays of Mamet, the negative aspect of the survival of the fittest can be seen. As the life has lost its meaning, it is turned a cat-rat race where weak are feeling so insecure, it has become a principle now, if one has to survive one has to be strong. Moreover changing American society believes in a hook or crook attainment of material prosperity. For them violence, cheating, deceits and betrayals are the ways to be strong and to survive.

Teach and Don, still waiting for Fletch, meanwhile they are talking about their plan as if they are giving a finishing touch to it. Once again unexpectedly, Bob is at the door. Teach is not willing to allow him inside. But Bob insists and he is allowed to get inside. Now he is with a news that Fletch for whom they are waiting is mugged up, his jaw is broken and is admitted to a hospital. Bob is unable to tell the name of hospital where exactly Fletch is admitted. He is again trapped, because of his suspicious nature. Teach hits him violently to get the information from him. Don, too, forgetting Bob’s loyalty and friendship, supports Teach. They both suspect that Bob’s intention is to make their plan flop.

But finally knowing, Fletcher is really hit by some Mexicans and is admitted to certain hospital. Now Don is sympathetic and pitiful for Bob and angrily bursts out against Teach and asks him to get out from the junkshop. Teach is hurt by Don’s attitude, he feels insulted that he was honestly working for Don and he is now going to be thrown away from the plan. Don is, too aggressive to threaten Teach. Teach can not tolerate all this treatment and in a tone of utter disgust curses the whole world:
The Whole Entire World.
There Is No Law.
There Is No Right And Wrong.
The Word Is Lies.
There Is No Friendship.
Every Fucking Thing.
Every God-Forsaken Thing (AB 103).

This is what the realistic picture of corrupt contemporary society which shows no any sign of evolution in the life of a man and in the social fabric. The lawless illegitimate world is full of lies. There is no conscience and ethical parameters to discriminate the right and wrong. The emotional concern and relations are regarded of less value than the individual upliftment. And probably, devoid of ethical platform in an erection of the castle of dream and success is the strong reason of the failure and the delusion of the dream.

6.3.3 Act III

Teach, by the end of the play, deservingly admits, “We all live like the caveman” (AB 103). Certainly, there is a sense of repentance and confession. Here, Teach, appears as a mouthpiece of Mamet, is worried about deterioration of mankind. The cultural legacy, ethical values and above all passion for American Dream are no more existing in modern corrupt world. In fact, American Dream is a movement of all about progress. But in a dire frustration when Teach realizes that they all are living still like cavemen, it is an absolute failure of American Dream.

Mamet significantly uses an image of junkshop to symbolize present state of American society. Already, America has attained outstanding success in earlier generations. They have truly proved America as a land of promises and opportunities. For contemporary American society it has been the priority to sustain the past glories. But the Depression age brought worse things in the course which compelled American society to be aimless, meaningless and consequently to be the victim of the frustration and hopelessness. So America, for Mamet, is nothing but the junkshop where old and irrelevant things are more attentive and of more value.

Teach, Don and Bob are under the circumstances deviated from their plan of burglary. Though an unethical one, seriously talked objective they had, ultimately, is resulted into a big zero. The play has a circular development which ends with same
nothingness where it began from. As far as objective or motif of the trio is concerned, it remains unattained. All their activities just expose their fake relationships and unethical set up of the society.

Mamet in *American Buffalo* effectively employs the tool of parody to focus on contemporary American society. In an interview, after the performance of the play Mamet himself analyses the play as:

*American Buffalo* is about an essential past American consciousness, which is the ability to suspend an ethical sense and adopt in its stead a popular adopted mythology and use that to assuage your conscience like everyone else is doing (Kane123).

The missing of true ‘Americanism’, which ever regarded American Dream as their privilege and peculiarity, is the great loss of modern American society. Rather in the changing contexts of America, the genuine version of American Dream is parodied.

Matthew Roundane, in his extensive work *The Cambridge Companion to David Mamet* regards the play, *American Buffalo* as:

The play’s ostensible simplicity … expands into a parodic version of American dream, a social drama, a metaphysical work of surprising complexity and genuine originality. With its echoes of another America uncontaminated by entrepreneurial greed, a product of rhetoric than psychotic fear and aggression. *American Buffalo* offers a portrait of the Republic in terminal decay; its communal endeavour and individual resilience all but disappeared. The trust and unity invoked on its coinage have now devolved into paranoia, the security and hope it once offered into a frightening violence (2004: 123).

Whereas, Frank Rich, a notable columnist, reviews *American Buffalo* in New York Times as: “By the time *American Buffalo* is over, it … has pounded away at the American dream of success until is left in soiled, hideous tatters” (Nightingale 1).

Observing the reflection of changing socio-economical scenario of the Republic and fractured beings of the society endeavouring to struggle for survival and sustenance, in *American Buffalo*, besides many other thematic shades of the play, most of the scholars of Mamet have considered degeneration and decline of
American dream as the dominant theme. Newly emerging challenges against the survival itself have psychologically split and fractured the characters. An intense desperation and distress, emerged from their breaking dreams filled an air of doubt and despair. Consequently the parodist version of an American dream is no longer as driving force and cheering spirit for them. On the other hand, it is a matter of delusion and degeneration of their aspiration, extending mood of nostalgia and making them to brood over their miserable state. The backdrop of the glory and grace of traditional version of American dream significantly contrasts the contemporary version of American dream of success.

In fact, American Buffalo is a play all about the passivity, aimlessness, unethical mode of life and disconcern for relationship ultimately resulted into failure and decline of American Dream. The history of American progress, undoubtedly, regards the passion for American dream as the true spirit and secret of their success, but now by the eclipsing of the American Dream, its authenticity and reliability, is being questioned.

Mamet’s outstanding technical accomplishment supports his thematic presentation in American Buffalo. His peculiarities of using fractured utterances, pauses, indecency of verbal practices underline his cause rather he says much through unsaid. Though he is criticized for his obscene, bold and outrageous language of his characters, it focuses on desperation, immoral way of interaction of the society leading towards failure on both material as well as spiritual level. In the dark and discoloured space unethical business minded society, there is no place for realization of multicoloured desires and dreams. This delusion and degeneration of American Dream compels American society to look forward for something more applicable and durable in future.

6.4 Self Assessment Questions:

a) Answer the following questions in one word / phrase / sentence each.

1. How do critics regard David Mamet as?
2. What is the name of the short play with which Mamet started his creative career?
3. Where did Mamet write his short play, Lake boat?
4. Which Theatre company Mamet did form?
5. Which award did American Buffalo secure?
6. Where was the play *American Buffalo* premiered? When?
7. Who is the protagonist of the play?
8. How does playwright describe Bob?
9. Where does the entire play take place?
10. How does Mamet describe the play, *American Buffalo*?

B) Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative:

1. Mamet frankly acknowledges Chekov, ------ and Harold Pinter for their thematic and structural influences.
   a) Ibsen   b) Arthur Miller   c) Odets   d) Beckett

2. An amateur coin collector does purchase a valuable buffalo nickel at the price of only---- dollars.
   a) 60   b) 90   c) 40   d) 85

3. The real name of Teach is------.

4. To criticize contemporary American society, Mamet in *American Buffalo* effectively employs the tool of ------.
   a) irony   b) satire   c) pun   d) parody

5. According to Teach’s plan, ------ and protection are the major requisites for the success.
   a) fear   b) security   c) courage   d) patience

6. By the end of the play, Teach deservingly admits, “We all live like -----.”
   a) the brave man   b) the caveman   c) the businessman   d) the crooks

7. Fletch is a ------ and cheat card player.
   a) killer   b) gambler   c) coin collector   d) banker

8. In the play, *American Buffalo* is ------.
   a) an animal   b) the name of junkshop   c) a nickel coin   d) a zoo

9. The Broadway presentation of the play, was nominated for two Tony awards and------ Drama Desk Awards.
   a) five   b) four   c) six   d) two

10. ------ is expelled from the plan of burglary.
    a) Don   b) Bob   c) Teach   d) Fletch
6.5 Answers to self Assessment Questions :

6.4.a1. as the experimental playwright
   2. *Camel* (1968)
   3. at Marlboro Theatre Workshop.
   5. New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award
   7. Don Dubrow
   8. as gopher who helps to bring junk objects for resale.
   9. at Don’s Resale Shop.
   10. as the play is about American ethic and business.

6.4.b 1) d,  2) b,  3) b,  4) d,  5) b,
      6) b,  7) b,  8) c,  9) b,  10) b.

6.6 Further Readings:

Unit-7
The Poems of Robert Frost

Robert Frost (1874 –1963)

Index
7.1 Objectives
7.2 Introduction
7.3 His Life and Works
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7.9 The Text of the Poem, West Running Brook Robert Frost
7.10 Books for further reading

7.1 Objectives:
After completing the study of this unit you will understand/be able to understand--

- Life and works of Robert Frost, the most renowned experimental American poet of the 20th century.
- How to appreciate a poem and the imagery used in it.
- Background and the setting of the selected poems.
- Major themes and the poetic devices employed by the poet.
- Answer the questions asked on the selected poems.

7.2 Introduction:
Robert Lee Frost was an American poet. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life and his command of American colloquial speech. His work
frequently employed settings from rural life in New England in the early twentieth century, using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. A popular and often-quoted poet, Frost was honored frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

7.3 His Life and Works:

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, California, to journalist William Prescott Frost, Jr., and Isabelle Moodie. His mother was of Scottish descent, and his father descended from Nicholas Frost of Tiverton, Devon, England, who had sailed to New Hampshire in 1634 on the Wolfrana. Frost's father was a teacher and later an editor of the San Francisco Evening Bulletin (which later merged with the San Francisco Examiner), and an unsuccessful candidate for city tax collector. After his death on May 5, 1885, the family moved across the country to Lawrence, Massachusetts, under the patronage of (Robert's grandfather) William Frost, Sr., who was an overseer at a New England mill. Frost graduated from Lawrence High School in 1892. Frost's mother joined the Swedenborgian church and had him baptized in it, but he left it as an adult.

Although known for his later association with rural life, Frost grew up in the city, and published his first poem in his high school's magazine. He attended Dartmouth College for two months, long enough to be accepted into the Theta Delta Chi fraternity. Frost returned home to teach and to work at various jobs – including helping his mother teach her class of unruly boys, delivering newspapers, and working in a factory as a light bulb filament changer. He did not enjoy these jobs, feeling his true calling was poetry.

In 1894 he sold his first poem, "My Butterfly: An Elegy" (published in the November 8, 1894, edition of the New York Independent) for $15. Proud of his accomplishment, he proposed marriage to Elinor Miriam White, but she demurred, wanting to finish college before they married. Frost then went on an excursion to the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia, and asked Elinor again upon his return. Having graduated, she agreed, and they were married at Harvard University, where he attended liberal arts studies for two years.

He did well at Harvard, but left to support his growing family. Shortly before dying, Robert's grandfather purchased a farm for Robert and Elinor in Derry, New Hampshire; and Robert worked on the farm for nine years, while writing early in the
mornings and producing many of the poems that would later become famous. Ultimately his farming proved unsuccessful and he returned to the field of education as an English teacher at New Hampshire's Pinkerton Academy from 1906 to 1911, then at the New Hampshire Normal School in Plymouth, New Hampshire.

In 1912 Frost sailed with his family to Great Britain, living first in Glasgow before settling in Beaconsfield outside London. His first book of poetry, *A Boy's Will*, was published the next year. In England he made some important acquaintances, including Edward Thomas (a member of the group known as the Dymock Poets), T.E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound. Although Pound would become the first American to write a (favorable) review of Frost's work, Frost later resented Pound's attempts to manipulate his American prosody. Surrounded by his peers, Frost wrote some of his best work while in England.

As World War I began, Frost returned to America in 1915 and bought a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, where he launched a career of writing, teaching, and lecturing. This family homestead served as the Frosts' summer home until 1938, and is maintained today as The Frost Place, a museum and poetry conference site. During the years 1916–20, 1923–24, and 1927–1938, Frost taught English at Amherst College, in Massachusetts, notably encouraging his students to account for the sounds of the human voice in their writing.

For forty-two years – from 1921 to 1963 - Frost spent almost every summer and fall teaching at the Bread Loaf School of English of Middlebury College, at its mountain campus at Ripton, Vermont. He is credited as a major influence upon the development of the school and its writing programs; the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference gained renown during Frost's time there. The college now owns and maintains his former Ripton farmstead as a national historic site near the Bread Loaf campus. In 1921 Frost accepted a fellowship teaching post at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he resided until 1927; while there he was awarded a lifetime appointment at the University as a Fellow in Letters. The Robert Frost Ann Arbor home is now situated at The Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan.

Frost returned to Amherst in 1927. In 1940 he bought a 5-acre (2.0 ha) plot in South Miami, Florida, naming it *Pencil Pines*; he spent his winters there for the rest of his life. Harvard's 1965 alumni directory indicates Frost received an honorary degree there. Although he never graduated from college, Frost received over 40
honorary degrees, including ones from Princeton, Oxford and Cambridge universities; and was the only person to receive two honorary degrees from Dartmouth College. During his lifetime, the Robert Frost Middle School in Fairfax, Virginia, the Robert L. Frost School in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and the main library of Amherst College were named after him.

Frost was 86 when he spoke and performed a reading of his poetry at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy on January 20, 1961. He died in Boston two years later, on January 29, 1963, of complications from prostate surgery. He was buried at the Old Bennington Cemetery in Bennington, Vermont. His epitaph quotes a line from one of his poems: "I had a lover's quarrel with the world."

Frost's poems are critiqued in the *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* (Oxford University Press) where it is mentioned that behind a sometimes charmingly familiar and rural façade, Frost's poetry frequently presents pessimistic and menacing undertones which often are either unrecognized or unanalyzed.

One of the original collections of Frost materials, to which he himself contributed, is found in the Special Collections department of the Jones Library in Amherst, Massachusetts. The collection consists of approximately twelve thousand items, including original manuscript poems and letters, correspondence, and photographs, as well as audio and visual recordings. The Archives and Special Collections at Amherst College also hold a collection of his papers.

Robert Frost's personal life was plagued with grief and loss. In 1885 when Frost was 11, his father died of tuberculosis, leaving the family with just eight dollars. Frost's mother died of cancer in 1900. In 1920, Frost had to commit his younger sister Jeanie to a mental hospital, where she died nine years later. Mental illness apparently ran in Frost's family, as both he and his mother suffered from depression, and his daughter Irma was committed to a mental hospital in 1947. Frost's wife, Elinor, also experienced bouts of depression.

Elinor and Robert Frost had six children: son Elliot (1896–1904, died of cholera); daughter Lesley Frost Ballantine (1899–1983); son Carol (1902–1940, committed suicide); daughter Irma (1903–1967); daughter Marjorie (1905–1934, died as a result of puerperal fever after childbirth); and daughter Elinor Bettina (died just three days after her birth in 1907). Only Lesley and Irma outlived their father.
Frost's wife, who had heart problems throughout her life, developed breast cancer in 1937, and died of heart failure in 1938.

7.4 Major Themes:

7.4.1 Nature

Frost places a great deal of importance on Nature in all of his collections. Because of the time he spent in New England, the majority of pastoral scenes that he describes are inspired by specific locations in New England. However, Frost does not limit himself to stereotypical pastoral themes such as sheep and shepherds. Instead, he focuses on the dramatic struggles that occur within the natural world, such as the conflict of the changing of seasons (as in "After Apple-Picking") and the destructive side of nature (as in "Once by the Pacific"). Frost also presents the natural world as one that inspires deep metaphysical thought in the individuals who are exposed to it (as in "Birches" and "The Sound of Trees"). For Frost, Nature is not simply a background for poetry, but rather a central character in his works.

7.4.2 Communication

Communication or the lack thereof, appears as a significant theme in several of Frost's poems, as Frost presents it as the only possible escape from isolation and despair. Unfortunately, Frost also makes it clear that communication is extremely difficult to achieve. For example, in "Home Burial," Frost describes two terrible events: the death of a child and the destruction of a marriage. The death of the child is tragic, but inability of the husband and wife to communicate with each other and express their grief about the loss is what ultimately destroys the marriage. Frost highlights this inability to communicate by writing the poem in free verse dialogue; each character speaks clearly to the reader, but neither is able to understand the other. Frost explores a similar theme in "Acquainted with the Night," in which the narrator is unable to pull himself out of his depression because he cannot bring himself even to make eye contact with those around him. In each of these cases, the reader is left with the knowledge that communication could have saved the characters from their isolation. Yet, because of an unwillingness to take the steps necessary to create a relationship with another person, the characters are doomed.
7.4.3 Everyday Life

Frost is very interested in the activities of everyday life, because it is this side of humanity that is the most "real" to him. Even the most basic act in a normal day can have numerous hidden meanings that need only to be explored by a poetic mind. For example, in the poem "Mowing," the simple act of mowing hay with a scythe is transformed into a discussion of the value of hard work and the traditions of the New England countryside. As Frost argues in the poem, by focusing on "reality," the real actions of real people, a poet can sift through the unnecessary elements of fantasy and discover "Truth." Moreover, Frost believes that the emphasis on everyday life allows him to communicate with his readers more clearly; they can empathize with the struggles and emotions that are expressed in his poems and come to a greater understanding of "Truth" themselves.

7.4.4 Isolation of the Individual

This theme is closely related to the theme of communication. The majority of the characters in Frost's poems are isolated in one way or another. Even the characters who show no sign of depression or loneliness, such as the narrators in "The Sound of Trees" or "Fire and Ice," are still presented as detached from the rest of society, isolated because of their unique perspective. In some cases, the isolation is a far more destructive force. For example, in "The Lockless Door," the narrator has remained in a "cage" of isolation for so many years that he is too terrified to answer the door when he hears a knock. This heightened isolation keeps the character from fulfilling his potential as an individual and ultimately makes him a prisoner of his own making. Yet, as Frost suggests, this isolation can be avoided by interactions with other members of society; if the character in "The Lockless Door" could have brought himself to open the door and face an invasion of his isolation, he could have achieved a greater level of personal happiness.

7.4.5 Duty

Duty is a very important value in the rural communities of New England, so it is not surprising that Frost employs it as one of the primary themes of his poetry. Frost describes conflicts between desire and duty as if the two must always be mutually exclusive; in order to support his family, a farmer must acknowledge his responsibilities rather than indulge in his personal desires. This conflict is particularly clear in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," when the narrator
expresses his wish to stay in the woods and watch the snow continue to fall. However, he is unable to deny his obligation to his family and his community; he cannot remain in the woods because of his "promises to keep," and so he continues on his way. Similarly, in "The Sound of Tree," Frost describes a character who wants to follow the advice of the trees and make the "reckless" decision to leave his community. At the end of the poem, the character does not choose to leave (yet) because his sense of duty to those around him serves as the roots that keep him firmly grounded.

7.4.6 Rationality versus Imagination

This theme is similar to the theme of duty, in that the hardworking people whom Frost describes in his poetry are forced to choose between rationality and imagination; the two cannot exist simultaneously. The adults in Frost's poetry generally maintain their rationality as a burden of duty, but there are certain cases when the hint of imagination is almost too seductive to bear. For example, in "Birches," the narrator wishes that he could climb a birch tree as he did in his childhood and leave the rational world behind, if only for a moment. This ability to escape rationality and indulge in the liberation of imagination is limited to the years of childhood. After reaching adulthood, the traditions of New England life require strict rationality and an acceptance of responsibility. As a result of this conflict, Frost makes the poem "Out, Out--" even more tragic, describing a young boy who is forced to leave his childhood behind to work at a man's job and ultimately dies in the process.

7.4.7 Rural Life versus Urban Life

This theme relates to Frost's interest in Nature and everyday life. Frost's experience growing up in New England exposed him to a particular way of life that seemed less complicated and yet more meaningful than the life of a city dweller. The farmers whom Frost describes in his poetry have a unique perspective on the world as well as a certain sense of honor and duty in terms of their work and their community. Frost is not averse to examining urban life in his poetry; in "Acquainted with the Night," the narrator is described as being someone who lives in a large city. However, Frost has more opportunities to find metaphysical meaning in everyday tasks and explore the relationship between mankind and nature through the glimpses of rural life and farming communities that he expresses in his poetry. Urban life is
"real," but it lacks the quality and clarity of life that is so fascinating to Frost in his work.

Thus Frost’s poems deal with multiple themes ranging from the city life to the rural life. The canvas of his characters is rich with people from various backgrounds belonging to different trades, groups and professions.

7.5 Check Your Progress:

A) Choose the correct alternatives and complete the following sentences.

1. By profession R. Frost’s father was ------
   a. An Actor          d. a dancer          c. a musician        d. a journalist

2. Frost’ mother Check Esabele Moddie was of ------
   a. Scotish descent       b. American origin

3. Frost's father was a teacher and later --------of the San Francisco Evening Bulletin.
   a. An advisor       b. an editor     c. a co-editor        d. director

4. After William Prescott’s (R. Frost’s father) death, R. Frost had to live under the patronage of his --------
   a. Uncle          b. elder brother    c. grandfather     d. maternal uncle

5. Which one of the following schools did Frost have his bachelors degree
   a. Pinkerton Academy b. Lawrence High School c. College Dartmouth

B) Fill in the blanks with suitable words and complete the following sentences.

1. Robert Frost published his first poem in his --------.

2. Robert Frost said, "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life — the words are--------.

3. His first book of poetry, A Boy's Will, was published --------.

4. In 1921 Frost accepted a fellowship teaching post at the-----.

5. Frost was awarded a lifetime appointment as a Fellow in Letters at the University of-------- .
C. Answer in one word/phrase or a sentence---

1. When did Frost return to America?
2. Mention the place in America where Frost bought a farm in 1915 -----.
3. Mention the year in which Frost received and honorary Degree of Harvard University.
4. Mention the place where Frost composed two of his most famous poems, "Tree at My Window" and "Mending Wall."
5. Mention the epitaph engraved on histomb at Bennington Vermont.

Check Your Progress: (Answers)

A) 1-d; 2- a; 3 –b; 4- c; 5- b.

B) 1. High school magazine.
2. It goes on
3. 1913
4. University of Michigan
5. Michigan

C. 1. 1915
2. Franconia, New Hampshire
3. 1965
4. Farm in Derry, New Hampshire
5. "I had a lover's quarrel with the world

1.6 The Text of the Poem, Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there's some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
    But I have promises to keep,
    And miles to go before I sleep,
    And miles to go before I sleep.

The poem was written in 1922, and published in 1923 in his New Hampshire volume. Imagery and personification are prominent in this poem. In a letter to Louis Untermeyer, Frost called it "my best bid for remembrance".  

7.6.1 Summary of the poem:

On the surface, this poem appears to be very simple. The speaker is stopping by some woods on a snowy evening. He likes the lovely scene in near-silence, the beauty of the snow-clad forest and is tempted to stay longer there itself enjoying glamour of nature. But the very next moment he is reminded of the promises he has to keep and acknowledges the pull of those promises as obligations. The distance he has to travel is considerable and therefore he must travel before he can rest for the night. 

7.6.1.1 Form

The poem consists of four (almost) identically constructed stanzas. Each line is iambic, with four stressed syllables: Within the four lines of each stanza, the first, second, and fourth lines rhyme. The third line does not, but it sets up the rhymes for the next stanza. For example, in the third stanza, queer, near, and year all rhyme, but lake rhymes with shake, mistake, and flake in the following stanza.

The notable exception to this pattern comes in the final stanza, where the third line rhymes with the previous two and is repeated as the fourth line.
Do not be fooled by the simple words and the easiness of the rhymes; this is a very difficult form to achieve in English without debilitating a poem’s content with forced rhymes.

7.6.1.2 Critical analysis of the Poem:

This is a poem is a wonderful composition, marvellous in its structure and design. It is monumental just like a big statue, like a body of water, like a strong economy. It was forged once and for all the times. As Frost himself has agreed, ‘once made, it has always been there’. Frost claimed that he wrote it in a single night time sitting; it just came to him. Perhaps one hot, sustained burst is the only way to cast such a complete object, in which form and content, shape and meaning, are alloyed inextricably. One is tempted to read it, nod quietly in recognition of its splendour and multivalent meaning, and just move on.

Like the woods it describes, the poem is lovely but entices us with dark depths—of interpretation, in this case. It stands alone and beautiful, the account of a man stopping by woods on a snowy evening, but gives us a come-hither look that begs us to load it with a full inventory of possible meanings. We protest, we make apologies, we point to the dangers of reading poetry in this way, but unlike the speaker of the poem, we cannot resist.

The last two lines are the true culprits. They make a strong claim to be the most celebrated instance of repetition in English poetry. The first “And miles to go before I sleep” stays within the boundaries of literalness set forth by the rest of the poem. We may suspect, as we have up to this point, that the poem implies more than it says outright, but we can't insist on it; the poem has gone by so fast, and seemed so straightforward. Then comes the second “And miles to go before I sleep,” like a soft yet penetrating gong; it can be neither ignored nor forgotten. The sound it makes is “Ahhh.” And we must read the verses again and again and offer trenchant remarks and explain the “Ahhhh” in words far inferior to the poem. For the last “miles to go” now seems like life; the last “sleep” now seems like death.

The basic conflict in the poem, resolved in the last stanza, is between an attraction toward the woods and the pull of responsibility outside of the woods. What do woods represent? Something good? Something bad? Woods are sometimes a symbol for wildness, madness, the pre-rational, the looming irrational. But these woods do not seem particularly wild. They are someone’s woods, someone’s in
particular—the owner lives in the village. But that owner is in the village on this, the
darkest evening of the year—so would any sensible person be. That is where the
division seems to lie, between the village (or “society,” “civilization,” “duty,”
“sensibility,” “responsibility”) and the woods (that which is beyond the borders of
the village and all it represents). If the woods are not particularly wicked, they still
possess the seed of the irrational; and they are, at night, dark—with all the varied
connotations of darkness.

Part of what is irrational about the woods is their attraction. They are restful,
seductive, lovely, dark, and deep—like deep sleep, like oblivion. Snow falls in
downy flakes, like a blanket to lie under and be covered by. And here is where many
readers hear dark undertones to this lyric. To rest too long while snow falls could be
to lose one’s way, to lose the path, to freeze and die. Does this poem express a death
wish, considered and then discarded? Do the woods sing as a siren’s song? To be lulled
to sleep could be truly dangerous. Is allowing oneself to be lulled akin to giving up
the struggle of prudence and self-preservation? Or does the poem merely describe the
temptation to sit and watch beauty while responsibilities are forgotten—to succumb
to a mood for a while?

The woods sit on the edge of civilization; one way or another, they draw the
speaker away from it (and its promises, its good sense). “Society” would condemn
stopping here in the dark, in the snow—it is ill advised. The speaker ascribes
society’s reproach to the horse, which may seem, at first, a bit odd. But the horse is a
domesticated part of the civilized order of things; it is the nearest thing to society’s
agent at this place and time. And having the horse reprove the speaker (even if only
in the speaker’s imagination) helps highlight several uniquely human features of the
speaker’s dilemma. One is the regard for beauty (often flying in the face of practical
concern or the survival instinct); another is the attraction to danger, the unknown, the
dark mystery; and the third—perhaps related but distinct—is the possibility of the
death wish, of suicide.

Not that we must return too often to that darkest interpretation of the poem.
Beauty alone is a sufficient siren; a sufficient protection against her seduction is an
unwillingness to give up on society despite the responsibilities it imposes. The line
“And miles to go before I sleep” need not imply burden alone; perhaps the ride home
will be lovely, too. Indeed, the line could be read as referring to Frost’s career as a
poet, and at this time he had plenty of good poems left in him.
7.6.1.3. Exercises:

The following questions can be asked on this poem -

1. Explain the central motif of the poem “Stopping by woods-----”

2. The poem although appears to be simple in its tone but is received with high philosophical connotations. Illustrate.

3. Account for the nature imagery used in the poem and explain what morale does it communicate to the readers?

4. Comment on the poetic devices used in the poem and explain their relevance and significance in the light of the truth about life it tries to communicate.

5. Elaborate the motif behind using the contraction between duty and beauty, sensibility and responsibility in order to communicate the central message of the poem.

8.7 The Text of the Poem After Apple Picking

North of Boston 1914,

My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still.
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples; I am drowsing off.
I cannot shake the shimmer from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the water-trough,
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and reappear,
    Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
And I keep hearing from the cellar-bin
    That rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
    For I have had too much
Of apple-picking; I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
    Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall,
    For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised, or spiked with stubble,
    Went surely to the cider-apple heap
    As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
    Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it's like his
    Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
    Or just some human sleep.

7.7.1 Summary of the poem:

Actually, this poem has a very simple meaning. The Poet was collecting Apples from The Trees and filling them in the barrels. While doing so, since morning to evening, he was very exhausted and wanted to sleep. This Meaning is very much referred to as the life-span of a person. (A person is usually tired and exhausted when he is old and wish death..). So basically Robert Frost meant he wanted to die and was tired of his life. While collecting when he was sleepy, he still had many apples remaining to be collected. (This means that he still had many desires/ambitions/hopes to be fulfilled and to acquire, but then he is very much tired
and sleepy of collecting and filling them in the barrel..) He also says that way of looking to the world has changed a lot when he is looking through the ice.. he actually means that when he was a child, he couldn’t understand many things.. his way of seeing things was very childish and had no experience, but then as the ice kept on melting (Which is reoffered to he growing up, started to see things more clearly, his experience started to grow and things began to be clear..)He then says that the Ice Fell from his hand and he broke it which I don’t know the meaning of.

In other part he says that he is very sleepy and then at last sleeps, but he is not able to differentiate between his Sleep and Reality... he dreams that HUGE magnified apples coming towards him and they are about 10 thousands of them.. he sees them fully harvested which is very much being over enjoyed by him... however this means that his desires starts to get fulfilled, in the life after, this world which is often referred to heavens.... which he says in the 1st stanza of the poem..

8.7.2 Critical analysis of the Poem

In this very symbolic poem, Frost contemplates his life's achievements and his hard work by using the metaphor of a hard day's work picking apples and a dreamy sleep afterwards. The poem's form is not exact. It follows a rhyme scheme that is not preset. Also its rhythm and meter vary. It is basically iambic, which contributes to the sleepy, dreamy feeling of the poem and mostly in pentameter, but varies greatly in some lines. It was not originally organized into stanzas, but has been done on some sources and is written in 8 stanzas of 5 lines, ordered this way to separate transitions of events in the poem. The tone and mood of this poem can be described as sad and regretful. The speaker is saddened by what his work has turned him into and feels guilt; this causes the audience to feel sympathy for his problems. The poem is deeply symbolic. Frost's life was full of achievement which is symbolized by the hard work of apple picking. He also had a hard life in which many tragedies occurred. In the poem I believe the speaker represents Robert Frost who is contemplating his life and what it will be like when he dies. Some of the major symbols are the barrels representing his fulfilled and unfulfilled ambitions. The season of winter and sleep both represent the later stages in one's life and death. The most important symbol is the apple though. I believe that it represents the activities and opportunities in life. The speaker says with regret that he left some apples, meaning that many opportunities in his life have been passed up, but he also dreams
of the many apples he did pick. This represents the many achievements and good
times that this life had. This classic poem is a grim contemplation on the events of
his life and his regrets and guilt he feels for the way he lived. Overall this poem laced
with many metaphors and symbolism goes back to the influences of rural life and
nature in Frost's life which make it a great poem. The poem can be interpreted in
different ways. It is about death and stages in a person’s life. Almost everything in
the poem is symbolic, the largest symbol being the apples which is a lit motif. The
apples symbolise the persona's experience in life, good or bad.

The persona becomes tired of experiencing life and wonders what it will be like
to move on, he wants to move on but is afraid of what will happen due to the vision
through the "Pane of glass". The reference to "Winter sleep" is often interpreted as
death and it also seen in "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"

Frost’s writing style reveals the compact idiom of that region. New England was
to Frost, what the Lake District was to Wordsworth; his inspiration. He worked as a farm labourer which granted him the ability to get closer to nature.
Some sources say that he rivals Wallace Stevens as the greatest American poet of the
20th Century. He won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry four times! He was asked to read
at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy, due to his outstanding talent for
writing and success.

Frost found it easy to fill his poems with depth and emotion as he led such a
tragic life. This was because his wife and most of his children had died. As a result of
this, Frost was believed to have contemplated suicide which is an underlying theme
in Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening. Frost's poetry was seen as
‘revolutionary’ because most poems of this time period had a ‘romantic’ theme. His
poems were classical, realist and controversial. They were also reticent, slow and
ruminative. His writing reveals his roots in the New England countryside which was
the inspiration for much of his writing. Frost's writing also reveals a homely
philosophy but with a hint that the pioneering spirit has not yet died. Frost uses his
surroundings, past experiences and views on life to influence his poetry. Frost
himself once said, ‘A poem starts in delight and ends in wisdom’.

The poem concerns itself with the daily work of earning a living. In this case,
apple picking or possibly the feeling of fatigue and fulfilment after the work is
completed. This reflects his toil as a poet. The emotions shown in the poem are those
of someone between waking and sleeping. Due to memory and sleep his dreams are magnified or blurred and distorted, on a simple narrative level. On a deeper level the world of normal consciousness and the world that lies beyond it melt and mingle.

The speaker is tired after a long day’s work of apple picking. He was feeling drowsy and soporific since he looked through the translucent sheet of ice, which was almost like a veneer finish on the surface of the water. He now feels fatigued and can feel sleep coming on. He queries in his mind whether it is just an ordinary sleep or something more profound.

The poem is rich in end-rhymes but it has no regular arrangement. The length of each line also varies from long to short. The slow tempo and cadence suggests the recurrent labour has dissipated all of his energy. Both the tempo and rhythm are manipulated and varied with subtlety by the poet. This retains the activity of the words and sounds. It all coalesces to keep the reader intrigued and feeling volatile while the narrator meanders off into abeyance. ‘Sleep’ is all over the poem as its repetition is like a collection of orally transmitted poetic hymns. The word ‘sleep’ is mentioned 6 times throughout the poem which creates emphasis on how the speaker is feeling.

Through this poem the poet preaches us lesson that instead of great effort on the part of the human being there is something left in our effort that we don’t get what we desire and this process remains with each and every human being in their whole life. One can not completely satisfy in his/her own life. The day we feel satisfied is the day we are dead. This poem is based on Robert Frost’s life. He isn't fulfilled in life "There's a barrel i didn't fill" And that when he had the chance he didn't pick his love of his life when he had two or three opportunities as he says "There may be two or three apples i didn't pick upon some boughs" boughs meaning large branches. And after that he says, ‘He missed his chances in life.’ He’s done picking apples, saying, ‘He is too old and dying to find anyone anymore’. The rest just talks about how he feels missing his chances in life not being happy because ‘he didn't pick his apple.’

(The person he loved most)

Like every other poem of Frost “After Apple Picking” can be read on more than one level. The poet wants people to know that the dream and life of reality are correlated and linked with each other very closely. A person has lot of desires to fulfill in his life, which aren't fulfilled in reality. "Of the great harvest i myself..."
desired" He had a great desire of a rich crop. The line "There's a barrel I didn't fill" brings out his sense of emptiness. Apples here symbolize the goals and deeds of man which he strives to achieve and 'unfilled barrel' indicates the unfulfilled desires of man. ‘Drowsiness’ refers to encroaching of death and ‘dream’ refers sleepiness. Actually he is doubtful and baffled with as to 'what kind of sleep is it which is not allowing him to fulfill his desires? Is it a sleep of a woodchuck or an ordinary sleep of man? Therefore, he lets the readers to conclude it. Sleep actually in literature always meant death: sleep death and death long sleep. Thus, the poem has got multiple layers of meaning and therefore it could have multidimensional interpretations.

According to a few critics, the poem has to do with sex. The poet repeatedly uses the word "fruit", which is associated with virginity. Therefore, "Apple-picking" signifies the taking away of ones virginity. To put it bluntly, Frost is describing a man who has had a very active sexual life and is finally getting tired of living a life of waking up to a different woman in his bed each morning.

The poem could also be taken as the contemplation of the poet on his past life since it refers to the regrets for the things he could not do in his life. The apple is the "fruits of his labour" so to speak. He is nearing the end of his life and is looking back at his decisions. He has a few regrets, the apples that are "spiked with stubble", and the apples that have a "fleck of russet." Apples that have russet on the mare undesirable to the producers. If you replace the term 'apple picking' with the words sin he whole theme of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden becomes very apparent. The whole temptation of the apples becomes clear from the indulgent language the poet uses, including his description on their 'scent.' He says he has had 'too much of apple picking' perhaps because he is so close to the end of his life he is done with sinning. His 'instep arch not only keeps the ache, / It keeps the pressure of a ladder round. 'This strongly implies to the reader that because of his apple picking or rather his sinning that the ache is that of his aching conscience.

It is possible, for the most part, to replace the words 'apples' and 'apple-picking' with 'opportunities' or 'opportunity-choosing'. If feel this poem is about life and it's choices, the author saying he is done with it now, he is "overtired" and displayed a sense of regret at the "barrels I didn't fill". The "greatest harvest" he wanted so much has exhausted him; he is tired, but is unsure whether he is merely falling asleep or whether it is something deeper than that.
This poem can be compared to Seamus Heaney's 'Blackberry-Picking' - they share themes of disappointment and aging/deterioration, and the obvious metaphor for fruit-picking being something in life. Fortunately, most poets are the worst source for explaining their work. Even if the poet is being honest, which is usually not the case, he/she might be unaware of legitimate interpretations. Much more goes on in a poet's mind than that person is aware of. Frost is especially notorious for misleading the reader, and he is quick to discount any interpretation other than the one on the surface. This is mainly to avoid limiting individual interpretations. "After Apple-Picking" works on many levels, and all are legitimate. In the deepest sense, the poem is about writing poetry. The apples are metaphors that must bridge the gap between the spiritual and physical worlds. If they fall to earth, they are worthless as metaphors. This is consistent with the image of the ladder and the idea that a poet represents the human struggle to achieve beyond the confines of the physical. All of this is, in turn, integral to the Transcendental school, which strives to show reality from a 'super lunar' level, thus overcoming the limitations that our physical forms are subject to. The poem is about a man at the end of his life. He has spent his life accumulating goals, some of which have not yet been accomplished, but realises that he is tired of working towards goals he has no real wish to fulfil. The apples are metaphors for his goals, the ladder his path to death (it's pointing towards heaven), the barrel his potential. Sometimes it is not a good idea to try to analyse a poem too deeply because you may well read into it something that the writer wasn't implying at all. I have seen this done with my own poems and have risen up quickly to point out that my own thoughts within a given poem were not meant to have deep underlying currents but are simply put. For this reason I believe that Robert Frost was simply writing about the joy of picking apples in the autumn, and like many other people, after a day of doing a particular task, you are more likely to be dreaming about this than anything else.

7.7.3 Exercises:

Essay type questions:

1. Consider “---Apple Picking” as an autobiographical poem with appropriate textual references.

2. Make a stylistic analysis of the poem illustrating the new devices the poet has used while composing this poem.
3. “‘Apple Picking’ is a critique on the realities of life, the inconsistencies and the ever long struggle of man to fulfil his dreams, hopes and aspirations against all odds of it.” Discuss.

4. Comment on the images and symbols used in “Apple Picking”.

5. Bring out the theme vanity and emptiness as reflected in ‘Apple Picking.

7.8 Text of the Poem, *Wild Grapes*

Wild Grapes

"What tree may not the fig be gathered from?  
The grape may not be gathered from the birch?  
It's all you know the grape, or know the birch.  
As a girl gathered from the birch myself  
Equally with my weight in grapes, one autumn,  
I ought to know what tree the grape is fruit of.  
I was born, I suppose, like anyone,  
And grew to be a little boyish girl  
My brother could not always leave at home.  
But that beginning was wiped out in fear  
The day I swung suspended with the grapes,  
And was come after like Eurydice  
And brought down safely from the upper regions;  
And the life I live now’s an extra life  
I can waste as I please on whom I please.  
So if you see me celebrate two birthdays,  
And give myself out of two different ages,  
One of them five years younger than I look--  
One day my brother led me to a glade  
Where a white birch he knew of stood alone,  
Wearing a thin head-dress of pointed leaves,  
And heavy on her heavy hair behind,  
Against her neck, an ornament of grapes.  
Grapes, I knew grapes from having seen them last year.  
One bunch of them, and there began to be  
Bunches all round me growing in white birches,
The way they grew round Leif the Lucky's German;
Mostly as much beyond my lifted hands, though,
As the moon used to seem when I was younger,
And only freely to be had for climbing.
My brother did the climbing; and at first
Threw me down grapes to miss and scatter
And have to hunt for in sweet fern and hardhack;
Which gave him some time to himself to eat,
But not so much, perhaps, as a boy needed.
So then, to make me wholly self-supporting,
He climbed still higher and bent the tree to earth
And put it in my hands to pick my own grapes.
"Here, take a tree-top, I'll get down another.
Hold on with all your might when I let go."
I said I had the tree. It wasn't true.
The opposite was true. The tree had me.
The minute it was left with me alone
It caught me up as if I were the fish
And it the fishpole. So I was translated
To loud cries from my brother of "Let go!
Don't you know anything, you girl? Let go!"
But I, with something of the baby grip
Acquired ancestrally in just such trees
When wilder mothers than our wildest now
Hung babies out on branches by the hands
To dry or wash or tan, I don't know which,
(You'll have to ask an evolutionist)--
I held on uncomplainingly for life.
My brother tried to make me laugh to help me.
"What are you doing up there in those grapes?
Don't be afraid. A few of them won't hurt you.
I mean, they won't pick you if you don't them."
Much danger of my picking anything!
By that time I was pretty well reduced
To a philosophy of hang-and-let-hang.
"Now you know how it feels," my brother said,
"To be a bunch of fox-grapes, as they call them,
That when it thinks it has escaped the fox
By growing where it shouldn't--on a birch,
Where a fox wouldn't think to look for it--
And if he looked and found it, couldn't reach it--
Just then come you and I to gather it.
Only you have the advantage of the grapes
In one way: you have one more stem to cling by,
And promise more resistance to the picker."
One by one I lost off my hat and shoes,
And still I clung. I let my head fall back,
And shut my eyes against the sun, my ears
Against my brother's nonsense; "Drop," he said,
"I'll catch you in my arms. It isn't far."
(Stated in lengths of him it might not be.)
"Drop or I'll shake the tree and shake you down."
Grim silence on my part as I sank lower,
My small wrists stretching till they showed the banjo strings.
"Why, if she isn't serious about it!
Hold tight awhile till I think what to do.
I'll bend the tree down and let you down by it."
I don't know much about the letting down;
But once I felt ground with my stocking feet
And the world came revolving back to me,
I know I looked long at my curled-up fingers,
Before I straightened them and brushed the bark off.
My brother said: "Don't you weigh anything?
Try to weigh something next time, so you won't
Be run off with by birch trees into space."
It wasn't my not weighing anything
So much as my not knowing anything--
My brother had been nearer right before.
I had not taken the first step in knowledge;
I had not learned to let go with the hands,
As still I have not learned to with the heart,
And have no wish to with the heart--nor need,
That I can see. The mind--is not the heart.
I may yet live, as I know others live,
To wish in vain to let go with the mind--
Of cares, at night, to sleep; but nothing tells me
That I need learn to let go with the heart.

7.8.1 Summary of the poem:

In “Wild Grapes,” Robert Frost demonstrates the complex thoughts and struggles of a woman who lives her life, wishing that she had gained a knowledge that would have made her life different. At the same time, she hopes to preserve the exhilarating way she lives her life. Through the use of character portrayal, metaphor, symbolism, and diction, Robert Frost suggests to the reader that although people know that they should prepare themselves to walk through life, they still listen to their hearts, which causes them to be unprepared for what lies ahead of them. The poem starts with the woman telling a story from her youth, which is engraved traumatically in her mind.

The story that the woman describes is about an incident that happens when her brother takes her to a glade where there is a grape tree standing alone. Her brother starts to climb the tree while she admires the tree filled with the grapes. Climbing even higher and picking some grapes to eat, he bends the tree to try to let her have some grapes. As she picks up a few grapes, he tells her to hold the top of the tree. So she holds the tree as she was told. The tree, however, aches and suspends her, and it keeps her there for a minute with its grapes. She starts to cry like a baby and does not know what to do. But she clings to the tree, even though her brother is telling her to let go. Trying to bend the tree down, her brother tells her to wait until he leads her down. Finally, against his advice she falls off the tree and feels the ground with her feet. Since the incident happened, the life that she has been living is something different than what she expects or what people expect. She knows she does not want to give up her life in which she lives freely.

7.8.1.1 Critical analysis of the poem

In the introductory paragraph, the woman says, "I was born, I suppose, like anyone, and grew to be a little boyish girl." At the beginning she is thinking that she
is prepared and knows about things like anybody else. Comparing herself with her brother, she characterizes herself as a tomboy who is fond of adventure. However, on the day that she hangs on the tree, she realizes her lack of knowledge, in comparison to her brother, and she shows her fear of facing the reality of life. Frost uses character portrayal to illustrate the differences between their characters. Like Eurydice in Greek mythology, whose husband came back to save her, the little girl is saved by her brother from the tree where she is suspended. Frost captures the idea that she is no longer an adventurer, and that leads the reader to notice that she is facing reality.

Then Frost develops their characters making clear contrasts: the one who always knows about things and makes a decision following the knowledge and the one who is always led by the other, follows his knowledge, and gets confused in the process. Frost describes that the glade where the grape tree stands is the place that her brother already knew, and he leads her to the place. This introduces to the reader that he knows about the thing before he does it while she just follows what he does. Next, Frost describes, "My brother did the climbing; and at first for in sweet feru and hardhack; which gave him some time to himself to eat." This represents that he is knowledgeable, and that makes things go smoothly. Then, what is strongest in his character is that he is the one who always tells her what to do. It can be seen in "Here, take a tree-top, I'll get down another," "Let go!" "Drop, I'll catch you in my arms," and "Hold tight awhile till I think what to do," for example. This shows that he is confident about what he says and does because he always knows what happens next, and he prepares for it. Since the girl is the one who watches his action and follows him, and these are all described from her perspective, she accepts his knowledge and preparedness, which she does not have.

Later, however, she gets confused about what he says. She starts to have feelings against her "brother's nonsense," and she finally falls to the ground. At the very ending she says, "I had not taken the first step in knowledge; I had not learned to let go with hands, as still I have not learned to with the heart, and have no wish to with the heart nor need that I can see. The mind is not the heart." Although she accepts her brother's wisdom, and she might wish to have the wisdom, she knows it's not all that she desires. She would rather follow her heart. From their different characteristics, the reader can feel that her brother's character represents her wish to have knowledge or wisdom, and her character allows the reader to see her heart.
Using character portrayal, Frost demonstrates the process that she takes to find out about her life through her wishes and beliefs.

The other way that Frost merges her complex thoughts is with metaphor and personification. Looking through the poem, the reader notices that the author uses these devices to capture her knowledge about life, her realization that her life is going to be different, and her fear of facing this fact. Frost illustrates the step that she takes to experience these. In the very first sentences of this poem, she states that “What tree may not the fig be gathered from? The grape may not be gathered from the birch? It’s all you know the grape, or know the birch.” This shows that what the girl knows about life is not very much at all, or she thinks she might know a few things; however, she is still not sure if she is right. As a girl, she has not realized that she does not know or even care about what life is like. The day her brother takes her to the glade she sees a white birch “wearing a thin head-dress of pointed leaves, and heavy on her heavy hair behind, against her neck, an ornament of grapes.” The white birch with the grapes represents a life in which she has to go through many experiences. The tree is personified as Frost is trying to capture the idea that life has so many problems. Then, the girl notices that “One bunch of them, and there began to be bunches all round me growing in white birches.” What the author is trying to do here is to make the reader have a feeling that the simple life of a young girl begins to be more complex. Using metaphor in “Mostly as much beyond my lifted heads”, he emphasizes that there may be many things that she is going to have to deal with through her life, and it may not be easy to take care of them. Reality is looming, but the girl has no idea how to prepare for the world.

Other examples of metaphor can be seen in Frost’s clear description the girl and her brother climbing the tree. Her brother has no problem climbing the tree since he knows how to do it. He can climb even higher, picking some grapes and bending the tree. On the other hand, what she is doing is waiting for her brother to throw the grapes down, scared of hanging on the birch, and crying. She has so many problems climbing the tree, and she does not know how to deal with it. The reader clearly gets the author’s idea that she will have to take care of things and survive; however, she might have a hard time with it because of her lack of knowledge. This allows the reader to notice that learning to climb the tree is a metaphor for knowledge or preparedness for life. To describe her clinging to the tree, Frost also uses personification such as “The tree had me.” He illustrates that she is not the one who
controls life, but life is the one that controls her because she does not know how to do it. And she is not even ready for it because she is scared. Although she loses her hat and shoes, she still clings. This represents also that her fear comes from her lack of knowing. She just “held on uncomplainingly for life.”

However, she goes against her brother’s wishes and against what she sees and hears, too, as it can be seen in “shut my eyes against the sun, my ears against my brother’s nonsense.” This represents that she is confused and undergoes a struggle between what seems to be right and what she believes in. Frost is trying to show that her complex thoughts are mixed with her mind and heart. Because these are all from her perception as an adult woman, this story is a reflection of how she sees the way that she lives her life. Through the use of metaphor and personification, Frost demonstrates what she knows about her life and how she got to this point in the way she is. The reader can see the step that she goes through from knowing nothing, realizing, having fear, and to getting into trouble, but still keeping her belief inside.

The last important device that Frost uses is diction. To describe the knowledge for life or preparedness, he uses the words "climb," "gather," "pick," and "weigh." "Bunches," "fruit," and "birch" are used to give a clear image of life. Frost illustrates that the birch reflects her dealing with so many things that she carries in her life. To get the knowledge, she needs to be able to learn, make decisions, look ahead, and have control. Therefore, he describes climbing the grape tree as a journey of life. Frost also uses the word "advantage" to give the idea that she is the only one who can take advantage of life if she has the knowledge and is able to deal with things. However, she is not able to do so. And he writes that the tree has her, not that she has the tree. This represents that she is not the one who controls life, but she is the one who is led by someone since she does not know what to do. Then, he uses "clinging" and "curled-up fingers" to emphasize that she is scared of letting go and doesn't even know how to do it. Therefore, even after she falls off the tree, she still has a fear of facing reality and has no idea what she needs to do. This illustrates that she was depending on someone or something too tightly, and that is why even when she faces the fact and has to stand alone, she can never deal with it because she is unprepared and is scared. And he uses the words "revolving" and "space" to represent the idea about life. However, it is interesting that a life Frost represents here has a different meaning than the earlier one with "bunches," "fruit," and "birch." Frost uses "revolving" and "space" to describe a life that is more complex and has lots of
problems. What he is trying to say is that if she is unprepared, she will have no idea how to handle the realities of life.

Finally, he uses the words "mind" and "heart," and these obviously represent her complex thoughts. She wishes that she had knowledge and wisdom that would make things easier. However, at the same time, she does not want to be restricted in the way she has been living. At the end, the woman says that nothing tells her that she needs to learn to let go with the heart, and therefore she never changes the way she is through her life. The author intends to show that she does not completely want to change. However, even though she cannot or does not want to, she also wishes that she could have a different life than what she has now. Her complex thoughts are presented in "an extra life," "waste," "two birthdays," and "two different ages." Through the use of diction, Frost demonstrates his idea about life and preparedness for life, and he describes the woman's unpreparedness and fear that leads to her struggles that are engraved traumatically in her mind.

Robert Frost amazingly demonstrates the woman's complex thoughts through the use of character portrayal, metaphor, symbolism, and diction. He illustrates his clear idea about how she lives her life, having struggles in her mind. Reflecting her life in the story that she tells, the poem presents a journey to find out how and why she lives the way she lives between her wishes and beliefs. Using those devices effectively, Frost presents his ideas clearly and makes a strong impression on the reader. Through his demonstration of her journey of life, he shows the significance of life and its complexity.

7.8.1.1 Probable questions to be asked on the poem

1. “Wild Grapes” tells us about the complexities of human life and its journey which is really tedious and cumbersome”. Discuss.

2. Make a stylistic analysis of the poem “Wild Grapes” illustrating it with the examples such as metaphor, simile, symbolism etc. the poet has made use of in the diction while composing this poem.

3. “Wild Grapes” is a critique on the realities of life, the inconsistencies and complexities in life one has to face while coming to terms with them.” Discuss.
4. Comment on the central message of the poem, “Wild Grapes” i.e. ‘Knowledge and wisdom are not easily acquired; they come with patience and penance’.

5. Bring out the theme vanity and emptiness as reflected in “Wild Grapes”

7.9 The Text of the Poem, *West Running Brook Robert Frost*

Fred, where is north?

'North? North is there, my love.

The brook runs west.'

'West-running Brook then call it.'

(West-Running Brook men call it to this day.)

'What does it think k's doing running west
When all the other country brooks flow east
To reach the ocean? It must be the brook
Can trust itself to go by contraries
The way I can with you -- and you with me --
Because we're -- we're -- I don't know what we are.

What are we?'

'Young or new?'

'We must be something.
We've said we two. Let's change that to we three.
As you and I are married to each other,
We'll both be married to the brook. We'll build
Our bridge across it, and the bridge shall be
Our arm thrown over it asleep beside it.
Look, look, it's waving to us with a wave
To let us know it hears me.'
' 'Why, my dear, 
That wave's been standing off this jut of shore --'
(The black stream, catching a sunken rock, 
Flung backward on itself in one white wave, 
And the white water rode the black forever, 
Not gaining but not losing, like a bird 
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast 
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool 
Below the point, and were at last driven wrinkled 
In a white scarf against the far shore alders.) 
'That wave's been standing off this jut of shore 
Ever since rivers, I was going to say,'
Were made in heaven. It wasn't waved to us.'
'It wasn't, yet it was. If not to you 
It was to me -- in an annunciation.'
'Oh, if you take it off to lady-land, 
As't were the country of the Amazons 
We men must see you to the confines of 
And leave you there, ourselves forbid to enter,-
It is your brook! I have no more to say.'
'Yes, you have, too. Go on. You thought of something.'
'Speaking of contraries, see how the brook 
In that white wave runs counter to itself. 
It is from that in water we were from 
Long, long before we were from any creature. 
Here we, in our impatience of the steps,
Get back to the beginning of beginnings,
The stream of everything that runs away.

Some say existence like a Pirouot
And Pirouette, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away,
It seriously, sadly, runs away
To fill the abyss' void with emptiness.

It flows beside us in this water brook,
But it flows over us. It flows between us
To separate us for a panic moment.

It flows between us, over us, and with us.
And it is time, strength, tone, light, life and love-
And even substance lapsing unsubstantial;

The universal cataract of death
That spends to nothingness -- and unresisted,
Save by some strange resistance in itself,
Not just a swerving, but a throwing back,
As if regret were in it and were sacred.

It has this throwing backward on itself
So that the fall of most of it is always

Raising a little, sending up a little.

Our life runs down in sending up the clock.
The brook runs down in sending up our life.
The sun runs down in sending up the brook.
And there is something sending up the sun.

It is this backward motion toward the source,
Against the stream, that most we see ourselves in,
   The tribute of the current to the source.
   It is from this in nature we are from.
   It is most us.'
   'To-day will be the day....You said so.'
   'No, to-day will be the day
You said the brook was called West-running Brook.'
   'To-day will be the day of what we both said.'

7.9.1 Summary of the poem:

In *West Running Brook*, Robert Frost utilizes the metaphor of the brook, repetitive syntax, mysterious diction and contrasting imagery to emphasize the importance of effective communication between the sexes, the subordination of a woman by her husband, and the futility of fighting against the natural flow of existence. The conversation between Fred and his wife illustrates the epitome of a typical flaw in marital relationships: the misinterpretation of distinct stated words. Critics affirm that the couple maintains “love and mutual understanding” (364). However, throughout the poem, the husband imposes his ideas of life upon his wife. The majority of the poem is from the male speaker’s perspective, of how life means nothing and there is no point going against the ‘current’ of the brook.

7.9.1 Critical analysis of the poem

Fred, the main speaker in *West Running Brook*, dictates the symbolism of the brook to his wife. The tone of the husband is serious and negative throughout his reflection on life and existence, while the wife maintains an amusing and light tone. The wife tries to tell her husband of her pregnancy, while he talks philosophically about the constant struggles of life. The husband overrules the wife in the conversation, and talks of their place in the universe, while cutting down his wife’s attempts to get him to understand. Main themes raised include the short lifespan of humans, the importance of communicating efficiently, the subordination of women by their own husbands, and that any effort leads to nothing in life. Frost runs the poem as a normal conversation, with free verse structure, repetitive syntax, without any rhyme scheme, and internal rime within stanzas.
The woman speaker uses the vehicle of the brook as a metaphor to get her husband to understand that she is expecting. The woman links herself and Fred together in lines 10-12 through the use of caesura and internal rime: “I can with you—and you with me—” and “Because we’re—we’re— I don't know what we are. / What are we?” Playfully toying with the same words, the wife shows their strength together as a successful couple unified by the fact that they “go by contraries” against the norm of society. She emphasizes the word “we’re” and asks her husband what he thinks of their marriage as a method of getting her husband engaged in the conversation and to listen to the message she attempts to deliver. She stammers, insinuating that her nervous tone considering her insecurity in how her husband will take the news of her pregnancy. The wife starts to drop hints at the fact that she is having a baby. The first clue is in stating “we three” referring to Fred as the role of father, the woman speaker as mother, and the brook as the future child (15).

The wife attempts to unify herself to her husband, and warm him up to the idea of having a child. She remains ambiguous with her wording, but uses nurturing diction to imply that they will make a new structure over the brook, and protect the baby with their arms, yet the husband still does not grasp the point. Her light and comforting tone unfortunately is not forceful or clear enough, thus her husband digresses on the idea with his own interpretation of the brook.

Fred misinterprets his wife’s view as the brook as a metaphor for his future child, and tries to make some sense of the brook in his own way. According to Heuston, Fred “spends much of his time relishing his self appointed role as intellectual explainer of the brook” and views the brook in the circumstance of humanity’s struggle to go against the norm and be original Swennes suggests that Fred views “nature itself [as] a void”. Fred employs contrasting imagery of the colors black and white with the “black stream” symbol as the strong current suppressing mankind from individuality and “white water” symbol as one person going against the ‘current.’ Liebman, a critic of *West Running Brook*, believes that Fred craves chaos or to be the white water going against the dark pool. The chaos in this poem defined as Fred’s “state of mind” “beneath the surface of culturally defined order in which human beings live from day to day”. Fred repeats the chaotic imagery of the black/white contrast in lines 26 through 28:

Like a bird
White feathers from the struggle of whose breast
Flecked the dark stream and flecked the darker pool

Fred’s chaotic and revolutionary state of mind rebels against the norm, he craves originality in a bland and structured world. The negative dark image of the brook greatly contrasts with the positive image that his wife imagines. Through contrasting imagery of a “dark stream” (28) and “white water” (25) Fred reveals the nature of the brook to be stuck in time, in no way moving forward or backward. The black connotes with negativity and no progression, stagnation, however the white connotes with innocence, new and fresh ideas. Fred imagines the brook as a microcosm of the uprising of mankind against ancient thought systems.

Both Fred and his wife use the same metaphor to describe the brook but disagree on what the brook symbolizes. Fred retorts to his optimistic wife’s imaginative view of the brook as “It’s waving to us with a wave” (19). The wife believes that the wave foreshadows their future child, and she optimistically shares her interpretation with her husband. However, he believes that the “It wasn’t waved to us” (33). He continues to negatively compare the brook to the everlasting force oppressed against society, and states the brook was “made in heaven” (33). Therefore he still cannot understand the message his wife conveys because he is “so preoccupied with his own critical discourse that he fails to notice the important event that is happening right in front of him”.

The tension begins to rise between the couple when the wife starts bluntly stating that she is pregnant. The wife retorts to her husband’s “made in heaven” (33) claim by using more religious diction: “It was to me –in an annunciation” (35). The wife mysteriously makes an allusion to the annunciation of the Christian Mary, mother of Jesus, when she learns that she is to conceive. She bluntly states that she will conceive, but the husband takes this statement negatively and twists it. The husband misinterprets this religious allusion, and employs satire against his wife: “if you take it off to lady-land” (36) and “We men must see you to the confines” (38) “of the Amazons” (37). Essentially Fred asserts his masculinity by using the terms “we men” (38) and reveals that she can have the brook (or future baby) for herself. Swennes believes that the male speaker has “discomfort turned to anger” because the speaker does not understand that the ‘brook’ is actually his unborn child and that he
will own the child just as equally as she will. He mocks womankind and generalizes that all men will agree with the stereotype that women should be subordinate to men.

Fred continues on after mocking his wife’s use of imaginative diction and metaphor in a long soliloquy. Ironically, after affirming his masculinity, he uses a feminine metaphor to contrast existence with dance in lines 49 through 51:

Existence is like a Pirouet
And Pirouette, forever in one place,
Stands still and dances, but it runs away

The husband associates existence of mankind to a sort of dance. Fred over exaggerates existence as a perpetual struggle that goes nowhere and reveals his negative view on the emptiness of life. The contrast is reflected in Liebman’s interpretation of West Running Brook: “it is the west running brook that stands still and dances”. He describes the brook as a “universal cataract of death” (60) with a negative tone employing diction of “emptiness” (53), “unsubstantial” (59), and “nothingness” (61) and “abyss” (53). The husband reveals his cynical views on the brook, a symbol for the repression of individual ideas in a lifespan. According to Fred, life is simply a smooth flow to the dark endless depths of death. There is no point in living as all the events that flow together in life end up in the same dark pool, soon to be forgotten.

Fred applies repetitive syntax in describing life as a perpetual cycle. He contrasts the downs and ups of life in lines 68 through 70:

Our life runs down in sending up the clock,
The brook runs down in sending up our life,
And the sun runs down in sending up the brook.

The husband contrasts the down and up of each element of life. As a person gets older, the time he or she spends goes up. “Sending up” (68) refers to souls being sent to up God or back to the source of creation, as a brook goes back to the ocean, as waves falls backwards onto themselves, and as humans go to heaven or to an afterlife. Watts suggests a contrary interpretation: “man has the ability to ‘send up’ something towards his source instead of reflecting, in his moral life, the ‘inevitable’ downward flow of the stream”. He believes that the speaker suggests that mankind
does have the ability to go against nature, and that one should not spend so much time focused on the negative view of the brook (or nature) overriding the speaker’s efforts.

The repetitive syntax at the end of the poem seems to confirm that the wife and husband “draw closer together” according to Swennes, and reach a compromise. Upon a closer reading, the reader may be undetermined as to whether the husband and wife are resolved in the end. The repetition of “today will be the day” by both the Fred and his wife implies that they are both have a “mutual understanding” of the different viewpoints they made. However, Heuston provides a more accurate analysis of the poem, “it is impossible to determine conclusively whether Fred understands his wife and they both know it, or whether he misses her point entirely and she tolerates” him. Although it would seem that they agree at the end, it is impossible to really be sure what Frost intended because the “indeterminacy of tone” causes “indeterminacy of meaning”.

_West Running Brook_ requires the reader to “see and understand himself in the process of seeing and understanding others”. The reader must develop his own standpoint on nature or existence when interpreting the meaning of the poem. Without the linguistic instability of the poem, there would be only one interpretation of the poem, because of the mysterious figurative language; it is impossible to know what the speakers actually think. Readers may interpret the tone of the wife to be amused by the husband’s ignorance as to what she says, frustrated with his subordination of her ideas or both. Although she encourages him to keep speaking after he mocks her, the reader has to interpret the poem for him or herself as to whether she is angry with him, or just ignoring his rude nature towards her. The reader may interpret nature to be the driving force pushing mankind downwards, as Fred does, or nature could be interpreted in the optimistic forming of new life, in taking the viewpoint of the wife. Both speakers employ repetitive syntax, their own metaphor for what the brook stands for, contrasting imagery and mysterious diction to prove their own viewpoint on the meaning of life and nature.

### 7.9.1.1 Exercises:

**Essay Type Questions:**

1. Explain how Frost makes use of the major metaphor of the ‘Running Brook’ to illustrate the ideal relationship between husband and wife.
2. What stylistic devices does the poet exploit in order to explain the importance of effective communication between the sexes in “The West Running Brook”?

3. Explain the poem as a discourse oriented from male’s perspective emphasizing the subordination of Women.

4. Comment on the contrast that clusters around the image of brook, the direction it moves and the motif the poet wants to achieve through it.

5. Bring out the central message of the poem and explain its relevance in the contemporary context.

7.10 Books for further reading:


Unit-8
Wallace Stevens and Anne Sexton

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8.1 Objectives:

After having studied the following poems, you will be able to:

- Explain Wallace Stevens’ unconventional way of writing poetry
- Explain Stevens’ use of imagery
- Understand the unpredictability in Stevens’ poetry
- Explain Anne sexton as a confessional poet
- Explain Anne Sexton’s poetry as the product of her treacherous life

8.2 Introduction:

Friends, in the previous unit, you have been exposed to the poetic accomplishments of one of the most influential poets of the 20th century American literature, Robert Frost. The poems you have studied must have given you an aesthetic pleasure. Robert Frost’s poems have been a rich source of natural beauty, philosophical renderings and mundane affairs of humanity.

8.3 Presentation of the Subject Matter:

Now, this is the time to explore another American poet of rich imaginative impetus, Wallace Stevens. Wallace Stevens has occupied a pride of place in the shelves of libraries of American readership. He was born on 2nd October 1879 in Reading, an important city in the United States, Pennsylvania. He had been provided all the necessary nourishments by his parents, Garret Stevens and Margaretha Stevens. He was the second child in the family. He was admitted to various schools at various stages where he picked up French, German, Latin, Greek, and English languages. Studying in schools, he had won many prizes in the School magazine for his creative enterprises. After his school education, he got admitted to Harvard University. He got nurtured in American values such as importance of action, commitment, self-discipline and self-fulfillment. After leaving Harvard, he went to New York and started his career as a journalist which it no longer satisfied him either aesthetically or economically. After his father’s advice who was a practicing lawyer, he got admitted to New York bar. He had, by the time, decided to be a lawyer just like his father. His stay in Harvard studying law between 1897 and 1900, his father had always been a great source of inspiration. He used to write him letters of wit, guide and philosophy.
One of the important events took in his life when he returned to Reading to spend a few months there. He met a girl named Elsie Moll and he fell in love with her. It was she who nurtured in him a poetic sensibility. He started writing love-poems regularly addressing her. On her 22nd Birthday he presented her a book, a compile of 20 poems. Surely, we can say that this must be his first instance of his poetic enterprise. In 1908, he proposed to her and she accepted the proposal. For her next birthday, he came out with another book comprising 20 poems. All these poems have been published in “Harmonium”, the first published work by his pen in 1923. The book received a very cool attention among the readers which deflated him writing anymore. After a gap, he again regained his sensibility and came out with his poetic work which defined him as a poet of worth and notice.

His Major works:
Harmonium (1923)
Ideas of Order (1936)
The Man with the Blue Guitar and Other poems (1937)
Parts of a World (1942)
Transport to Summer (1947)
The Auroras of Autumn (1950)

Prose: The Necessary Angel, a collection of his lectures delivered at various occasions
Adagia, a collection of his miscellaneous remarks and his views on poetry and other subsidiary subjects

After having been slightly acquainted with the important events and works of Wallace Stevens, let us now turn our attention to the study of his prescribed poems.

8.4 Analysis of Wallace Stevens’ poems:

8.4.1 Anecdote of the Jar

Introduction:
Among all other poets of American poetic tradition, Wallace Stevens can be considered as the most difficult poet. This difficulty does not arise out of his choosing difficult subject matter. Perhaps, it arises out of his treatment of the subject
with the rich imagery and a solid edifice of allegory. Stevens' subjects meditate on
the interplay between imagination and reality, and the relation between
consciousness and the world around. In Stevens, "imagination" is not equivalent to
consciousness or "reality" to the world as it exists outside our minds. Reality is
always in a state of flux because it is constantly changing as we try to discover it
imaginatively; as we perceive the world. Stevens sees the poet as someone always
continuously creating and discarding cognitive perceptions of the world. These
cognitive depictions find their reflections in the best forms of words of poetry.
Stevens also believed that life and poetry are synonymous; the words we choose to
express the world must constantly change.

Analysis:

The present poem is perfect as far as the structure is concerned. It tells us an
absurd story of the jar made by man and placed by him in the wilderness. In the
present poem, he meditates on the relative relationship of art and the natural world.
The theme of the poem is the interaction between the jar and the wilderness, the
effect of the jar on the surroundings, as also the effect of the surroundings on the jar.
Art, which is the product of imagination, can impose order upon a sense of disorder.
A jar which is a product of imagination is placed on the top of a hill in a wilderness
of Tennessee. It seems to impose some sort of order upon the slovenly wilderness.
Art can impose some order on the chaotic conditions of the natural world. Jar
symbolizes the artist's imagination which has a capacity of organizing a wilderness.

The present poem can be read as an allegory. The jar stands for art. It connotes
man, artist, imagination, perception while the wilderness suggests nature, reality and
chaos around. The stately jar is bare, barren and empty; it can simply "take". It took
dominion from everywhere. It does also give something; what it gives is unlike
anything in Tennessee is that bird and bush producing state of nature. The very first
line "I placed the jar" suggests the importance of the speaker's attitude, his focus of
mind in organizing the wilder aspects of nature.

Like other poems, Wallace Stevens plays with the abstractions. He, through his
poetry, concretizes the abstractions- usually imagination and reality with a set of
images. Firecat, jar, candle and moonlight are some of the figures he uses for
imagination; bucks, Tennessee, wind, ocean and the Sun are some of his figures for
reality.
Technically speaking, the poem is perfect. The poet uses unrhymed couplets that lead up to two end-stopped lines, set off by rhyme. He also uses a couple of expressions such as round, ground, surround etc. to emphasize the interacting contraries. The diction of the poem is somewhat lean. But the poem is said to be an abstract definition of poet’s imagination. It opens up many questions in the minds of readers and the poem nowhere seems to answer them. Why Tennessee? Is the jar empty or full? In spite of these arising questions, the present poem is a worth read.

8.4.2 The Snow Man:

The Snow Man brings a new color to the poetic renderings of Wallace Stevens. It was published in 1921 as a companion poem to the poem called Tea at the Palaz of Hoon. The two poems bring two possible responses to stark reality. (i) Reality is nothing, to which the perceiver can only add something; and (ii) reality is just an extension of perceiver’s perception. The two persons in two respective poems simply dramatize the poet’s own unresolved feelings about the nature of reality. It nowhere invites the philosophical debate of the subject.

The main idea that the poet develops in the poem is that the human perception is exclusively subjective. This is to say that the perception of reality is always shaped by the perceiver’s own feelings. If we look at the wintery scene with snow all around us, we are bound to feel the existence of misery in human life (to remind, winter in English poetic convention is the reminder of death). He seems to suggest that in order not to think of human misery in such a situation, one must be a man of snow, and not a man of flesh and blood.

The Snow Man speaks with the controlled posture:

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow,

.................................

Of the January sun;              ( Lines 1-7)

The above lines emphatically suggest that the perceiver should have an accurate perception of the things around. One must have a mind of winter to see all this, unaffected, unmoved and unfelt. The poem argues that one must be a snow man in
order to perceive reality without just thinking of misery in life. The poem also recommends the procedure for seeing the world as it exists and at the same time it does also state that it is very difficult for the perceiver to separate himself from the object of perception. It advocates that we must be snow men to be indifferent to the forces of cold such as the “junipers, shagged with ice,” “the distant glitter of the January sun, and the insistent “sound of the wind”. The poem maintains the balance in affirming the blankness of reality out there—“the nothing that there” as well as the inevitability of human projection: “Nothing that is not there”. The poem appeals us to be “nothing” in order to “behold” stark reality denying the possibility of knowing that reality bare of human projections.

The Snow Man is Steven’s earliest expression of “the elegance of severity”. It is written without any artistic embellishment. The strength of the poem is the one line which rushes forward to shocking end. The entire poem is devoid of any figure except at the end where the snow man is metaphorically presented as the “mind of winter”. The line “Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is” brings out the austerities that have to be fought with. The poem is rich in its description of symphonic effects and the winter expressions and elegance invite our feelings as directly as image can. It involves our minds as an epigram or wit itself and as Stevens says, “naked discourse can imply the images it lacks”.

Stevens was more particular about music and imagery in his poems. He least bothered about the ideological contents in them. He was writing in the era that witnessed the depression of the post-war period which destroyed the sensibility among the people. Even during that period, he was willing to abandon his usual manner or to say, to give little importance to music and imagery; he yet compelled to deal with the realistic themes in his poetry. In The Snow Man, he indicated how the naturalistic attitude differs from romantic. The Wordsworthian romantic approach blends the man’s feelings with nature and the poetry becomes a feast to the mind and to the sprit. Wordsworth beatified Nature and defined the poet as one who takes delight in observing and identifying himself with the nature around. The speaker in The Snow Man is romantic in the sense that he entertains the external nature. He hears misery in the guise of sound of wind. The Snow man’s “mind of winter” cannot establish any relationship with nature as he is all snow and not man. Thus he suffers from limitation and this limitation becomes a virtue in him too. The snow
man is better qualified than the speaker of the poem to record objectively the scene before him, this scene being the “nothing that is not there, and the nothing that is”.

8.4.3 The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate

Introduction:

Among all other poems of Stevens, this poem is the shortest. It is rich in its ideological content. It is very near to the spiritual notions that Indians perceive of life after death. In this poem, Stevens mocks at people’s belief in the immortality of the soul and the existence of heaven after death. It mocks at the people’s belief that they think to lead to heaven if they lead a pious lives. From the poem, we can sense that the poet is not opposed to pious living but he tries to shatter people’s belief in the existence of heaven as well as the immortality of soul.

Analysis:

The present poem is designed in the form of satire. It is a satire on people’s belief in the existence of life-after death. The idea is developed through the imagery of worms inside the graves wherein a corpse lies. The worms are all powerful inside the grave. The dead body is described as Badroulbadour which is a tulip symbol. It suggests the beautiful woman whose dead body is being eaten by the worms. After having eaten the flesh of the dead body, the worms triumphantly declare that they have prepared a corpse for its entry to heaven. They declare themselves that they are chariot that carries the dead man to the heaven. It is convincing to think that they are chariot because the dead body is already in the bellies of the worms.

The poem describes worms’ entire eating out of the dead body. There are eye-lashes, there is eye-lid, there is cheek on which the eye-lid declines; there are the fingers, the hand which is described as the genius of cheek of the dead woman because it was with this hand that she used to apply cosmetics to her face. It was her hand that she used to impart beauty and charms to her cheek; there are lips and the feet of the dead man. Actually, there is nothing visible to be taken to heaven’s gate because everything is in the bellies of worms.

Though the poem is short, it is pregnant with meaning. Through the poem, the poet makes us realize the futility of our religious beliefs. The poet is seen in this poem as agnostic. The poet laughs at our belief that, if we lead pious lives, we are sure to secure our place in heaven. Through the description of the fate of the dead
body, this poem also arouses a sense of pity among us. The poem makes us meditate on the relative life after death. What does death mean? Is there any place to go in after death? Or, is it simply that there is nothing in store beyond the grave? These questions invite attention to our logical mind.

8.4.3 The Load of Sugar-Cane

Introduction:

The poem is the best example of Stevens’ rich poetic talent. Through the metaphor, Stevens creates a flowing, ever-new world of grass, rainbows, and whistling birds and “the red turban of the boatman”.

Analysis:

It is a poem written with pure loveliness. The sensuousness, for which Stevens was early appreciated, is almost crystal-clear here. The poem is decorated with alliteration and assonance such as glade-boat going, going/flowing, and uses the parallel poetic structure of repetition of phrases already seen in his celebrated poem Domination of Black. The images and the rhythms of the poem bring to our mind an acoustic experience of the world of a jungle-overgrown, everglade river.

The poem suffices all the attributes of nature, including man. The natural landscape is presented with vivid details such as jars the lazy mundus of the slow-paced river, over grown with saw-grass. Present compositions are: water, earth (saw-grass), air (wind), and fire (rainbows), also the artifices of man (glade-boat), and man himself (the boatman). The red-turbaned boatman is seen as almost a processional minister of state presiding over the river and its inhabitants: the saw-grass, the birds, and rainbows. Yet he is just a part of the river-world, moving in his own way with proper rhythm, just as the water flows, just as the killdeer whistles and the birds turn. The poem meditates on the four elements: air, water, fire and earth, (and the fifth, ether) that are central to Daoist thought. The daoist five elements are recognized by slightly different names such as fire, earth, metal, water, and wood. The goal of daoist practice is to live in harmony with nature. In most of his poetry, Stevens achieves the perspective of being one with nature..

The poem falls in the Imagist tradition. Through varied imagery, the poem brings to our minds the pictures of the water-flowing, the glado-boat sailing with
pride under the beautifully spread rainbow which are like birds, and the wind whistling as killdeer do when they rise at the red turban of the boatman.

8.4.4 Check Your Progress:

I) Answer the following questions in one word, one phrase or a sentence:

1. What does the jar in The Anecdote of the jar stand for?
2. What is the theme of The Anecdote of the jar?
3. What is the poetic form of The Anecdote of the jar?
4. What does Stevens meditate in The Snow Man?
5. How does Stevens respond to stark reality?
6. What does The Snow Man embody?
7. What does Stevens mock in The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate?
8. What is the poetic form of The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate?
9. How are the hands of the dead body presented in The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate?
10. What does Stevens create in The Load of Sugar-cane?

II) Fill in the blanks in the following:

1. The jar is placed in---------------------
2. ------------ can impose order upon a scene of disorder.
3. It was ------------ which enabled the artist to build the jar.
4. One must have--------------- to see the reality around.
5. The human perception is -----------
6. --------------- meditates Stevens’ unresolved feelings about the nature of reality.
7. The speaker in The Snow Man hears misery in --------------
8. Worms describe themselves as --------------.
9. Worms at the Heaven’s Gate makes us meditate on---------------
10. The wind in The Load of Sugar-cane “--------------- as killdeer do”.

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III) Complete the following sentences from choosing the best alternatives given below each sentence.

1. The beginning of Harmonium contains a set of---------- poems.
   a) 20         b) 15       c) 22        d) 27

2. -------------- inspired Stevens to write poetry.
   a) Elizabeth Molliers  b) Elsie Moll    c) Ezra Pound    d) Elsie Rollings

3. For Stevens, ---------- is more important than money.
   a) leisure       b) character      c) work        d) faith

4. ---------- are all powerful in the grave.
   a) ants          b) cockroaches    c) lizards     d) worms

5. The poetic content of The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate is near to the spiritual legacy of-----------.
   a) India        b) Japan          c) China       d) America

6. Wilderness in The Anecdote of Jar stands for----------
   a) nature       b) artist       c) imagination d) heaven

8.4.5 Answers to the questions:

I) 1. art
   2. Reality imagination complex
   3. Allegory
   4. His unresolved feelings about nature of reality
   5. Reality is nothing to which perceiver can only add himself; reality is a mere extension of the perceiver
   6. “mind of winter”
   7. People’s belief in the immortality of soul
   8. Satire
   9. As the genius of the cheek
   10. Creates a flowing, ever-new world of grass, rainbows and whistling birds
II) 1. A wilderness of Tennessee  
2. Art  
3. An artist’s imagination  
4. A mind of winter  
5. Subjective  
6. The Snow Man  
7. The sound of wind  
8. Chariot  
9. The futility of our religious beliefs  
10. Whistles  

III) 1. 20  
2. Elsie Moll  
3. Work  
4. Worms  
5. India  
6. Nature  

8.4.6 Short answer type questions for study:  
1. Write a note on the kind of imagery which Stevens employs in his poems that you have studied.  
2. Write a critical note on Stevens’ tussle between imagination and reality referring to The Anecdote of Jar.  
4. Write a note on The Worms at the Heaven’s Gate as a satire.  
5. Discuss Wallace Stevens as the celebrated poet of America with reference to the poems you have studied.
8.4.7 Terms to remember:

- **Allegory**: It is a narrative, whether in prose or verse, in which the agents, actions, and sometimes even setting as well are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the “literal”, or primary level of signification and at the same time to communicate a second correlated order of signification. Examples: Dryden’s Absalom and Achitophel, Orwell’s Animal Farm.

- **Satire**: A literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Satire derides laughter, that is, it uses laughter as weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself.

- **Daoism**: I. Daoism Defined Daoism is a Chinese philosophical and religious system, dating from the 6th century B.C. (More of a mystical philosophy than a religion.) A. Daoism begins with Lao Tzu who lived in the 6th century B.C. He was looking for a way to avoid the constant feudal warfare of his day that disrupted society. Lao Tzu allegedly wrote the *Tao Te Ching* (“The Way and Its Power”). It explains essential Daoist beliefs. Daoism started as a combination of philosophy and psychology but evolved into a religious faith around A.D. 440. At this time Lao Tzu became venerated as a deity. Along with Buddhism and Confucianism, Daoism became one of the three great religions of China. With the end of the Ch'ing Dynasty in 1911, state support for Daoism ended.

8.4.8 Further Reading

1) Wallace Stevens : Selected poems; Ramji Lall; Rama Brothers www.google.com

2) A Handbook of Literary Terms, M.H. Abrahms, Cengage Learning

8.5 Anne Sexton (1928 - 1974)

8.5.1 Introduction:

Anne Gray Harvey was born in Newton, Massachusetts, in 1928. She attended Garland Junior College for one year and married Alfred Muller Sexton II at age nineteen. She pursued a modeling course at the Hart Agency and lived in San Francisco and Baltimore. In 1953 she gave birth to a daughter. In 1954 she suffered
from postpartum depression, her first mental breakdown, and was admitted to Westwood Lodge, a neuropsychiatric hospital she would repeatedly return to for help. In 1955, following the birth of her second daughter, Sexton suffered another breakdown and was hospitalized again; her children were sent to live with her husband's parents. That same year, on her birthday, she attempted suicide.

She was encouraged by her doctor to write poetry, the interest which she had developed in high school, and in the fall (Autumn) of 1957, she was enrolled in a poetry workshop at the Boston Center for Adult Education. In her introduction to Anne Sexton's Complete Poems, the very famous poet Maxine Kumin, who was her co-student at the 1957 workshop became her close friend, He describes that it was the writing of poetry that gave Sexton something to work towards and develop and thus enabled her to endure life for as long as she did. In 1967, at the age of 46, she won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry for Live or Die—she lost her battle with mental illness and committed suicide in 1974.

Let us now study some of her prescribed poems.

8.5.2 “Her Kind”

Introduction:

Anne Sexton was a poet par excellence and being a woman, she was a restless soul. She suffered various nervous breakdowns and regularly admitted to a neuropsychiatry hospital. Yet, she was familiar with the staring eyes and the judging minds of the public. She knew that she was labeled as a crazy woman. But Anne Sexton did not let society remain unchallenged in its views. She articulated a different opinion of women through poetry. In Anne Sexton's "Her Kind" the speaker of the poem embraces society's negative stereotype of modern, liberated women and transforms it into a positive image. Two voices i.e. the voice of society and the voice of the speaker tussle with each other on the issue of the stereotype of modern women. Like Anne Sexton, the speaker in this poem is an outcast woman.

Analysis:

Basically, the speaker of "Her Kind" is outcast because she is powerful. Traditionally speaking, society expects women to lead sheltered lives. Women are expected to be obedient subservient, quiet. In the poem, they are viewed as gentle and kind, not "dreaming evil" (Line 3). The modern, liberated woman completely
challenges this tradition by courageously unlocking her mind and living an independent life. She is empowered with education and ride on a stable career path instead of letting herself brood in a domestic life. Since the modern woman does not comply the traditional label, "A woman like that is not a woman quite" (Line 6). Society would view the poem suggest, that this line of the poem as a negative slam on the modern woman and paraphrase it by saying, "She's not quite right in the head; therefore, she does not belong here in civilization."

Society appears to recoil from the idea of a powerful woman. Male dominance is still prevalent in many walks of life, and men are faced with a loss of control. As a result, the male dominant society suppresses the modern woman and tries to squash the change in power. This is achieved through the systematic process by physically removing the liberated woman from the population or by mentally blocking her from acceptance so that she feels isolated and weakened. Down the years, society has actually done both. During the crazy witch trials of the European Inquisition in the late 16th century, heretics [one who dissents from an accepted belief or doctrine] and witches were tortured and killed. Those women who were called witches may have been no more than women who were different from society's expectations. Thus, it is entirely appropriate that the modern woman is stereotyped as a type of witch. Anne Sexton's "Her Kind" employs the persona of a witch to show that modern women are outcast in society.

In the first stanza, the speaker establishes herself as a witch by saying, "I have gone out a possessed witch" (Line 1). By describing herself as 'twelve-fingered" (Line 5), the speaker stresses her disfigurement and label as a witch because twelve fingers are the symbols of sorceresses. Yet, we can understand that she is not actually a witch but the witch is merely the exemplification of the role of women in society. The three verses in "Her Kind" elaborate the persona of the witch. Two different voices deal with this persona throughout the poem's three stanzas. In the poem, one voice that is the voice of society expresses the opinion that witches, or modern women, are evil. But since there is only one speaker in this poem, society's voice is present through the speaker's mimicking of public opinion as though agreeing with it. She says, "I have gone out a possessed witch," (Line 1) but she is only sarcastically repeating how society must have said, "She has gone out a possessed witch." She is the modern woman who is not the timid, obedient female; instead, she is "not a woman, quite" (Line 6), and she is "dreaming evil" (Line 3) and "out of mind" (Line
5). Plus, she is a "lonely thing" (Line 5) because she has been outcast. This idea of society casting out the modern "witch" woman is further developed in the second and third stanzas. When the speaker lives in "warm caves in the woods" (Line 8), she lives as a separated soul from society as though she is an outsider. This distancing shows how she is different from society; perhaps society pushes her away because she is different because she has segregated herself from the typical lifestyle of civilization. Either way, the voice of society chants, "A woman like that is misunderstood" (Line 13). Society must get rid of her because it cannot see her stance in life. Anne Sexton uses stunning imagery to illustrate the pain that the society inflicts on an outcast. The speaker compares herself to a witch who has been carted off to an insane asylum and claims "I have ridden in your cart, driver, I waved my nude arms at villages going by, I learning the last bright routes" (Lines15-17). She vividly describes pain through torture methods practiced on witches during the Inquisition. For example, she feels she has been burned at the stake because society's "flames still bite my thigh" (Line 18). The speaker's "ribs crack where your wheels wind" (Line 19) on another torture device, the wheel. Although the physical tortures are no longer obvious in America, women's success is still lagging behind because of the negative attitude of society. The public supposes that she is "not ashamed to die" (Line 20) because everyone already thinks that she is crazy, timid and she cannot harm her reputation anymore anyway. She is an evil witch and ought to die. Overall, the three stanzas can represent the negative stereotype society has placed on the modern woman. However, in the poem, poet does not completely agree with the voice of society.

Throughout Anne Sexton's poem, the public voice duels with the speaker's personal voice until the speaker's opinion emerges successful and determined to survive in the end. Instead of supporting that witches are evil, Anne Sexton's poem reveals that witches are wonderful. The speaker in the poem welcomes the stereotype of the witch and uses dueling voices to show that the stereotype is actually a positive, strong image for the modern woman and that it does not serve the deteriorating, degrading purpose society meant for it to have. Society must accept change and stop casting out women if they are to live in peace.
8.5.3 Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward

Introduction:

By reading this poem and adhering to her autobiography of Sexton, one is moved by the imagery, the metaphor and pathos of the Unknown girl in the Maternity ward.

Analysis:

The poem begins with the woman in bed with her child. There is already some tension present. The imagery of the poem that is presented in the poem given is one of tightness and stressful line, "You lie, a small knuckle on my white bed; the pictures are vivid and come to the mind but they connote some anxiety between mother and child. Added that the word "lie" is also synonymous with falsehood as well, we comply some trepidation leading into the rest of the poem. She goes on to say that the child's lips are like animals suckling at her breast, when she says "you are fed with love," (Sexton 24) at least we know that there is some motherly influence present.

In the next stanza that motherly feeling becomes stronger and she senses that the child knows she belongs to her, yet she also knows that they will not be together for long. As the poem plays out we find that there is an unwed mother and in the fifties she often meant that she were to give up all the familial chores and adopt service, so she states, 'you do not know me very long." (Sexton 24) The thought of the institution connotes full force presented in the phrase, "The doctors are enamel," (Sexton 24) cold, white unfeeling porcelain that cannot be dented or harmed by outside circumstance. They have no empathy for her circumstances and the entire medical institution is cold to her conclusion. The people only want information and constantly ask for the father's name, which she does not have.

There has been nursing of the baby for six days, "your breath is six days old," (line 24) as she states in the first stanza. By the time there is certainly a bond that has been built up between mother and child. In fact, she can see the early changes in the child as an infant, the wandering blue eyes begin to grow more focused and she wonders what her child might be seeing, "You blink in surprise; I wonder what you see, my funny kin,..." (Sexton 24-25) Then she calls herself a "shelter (Sexton 25);
she is now giving warmth and affection, but realizes she must release her from that protection soon.

There is a sense of parting in this poem that is really its main theme. The parting is represented in the rhythm of the movement in the poem. The carriages that carry the child back to the nursery seem a kind of apathy between the mothers and the nursery, the movement of the girl's consciousness as she vacillates in her motherly emotions that forces her to keep and protect the child from the knowledge that she must let the child go.

As is typical in Sexton's poems, she chooses a variety of images, textures, natural beings; she uses a sophisticated palate to paint her poems. For example, the nature references in the poem: snail, animals, shepherded, unnested, moss, willows, wild bees, owling, flowers, etc. She utilizes a structural alternation of tactile surfaces: knuckle, snail, breast, enamel, air, bone, moss, stones, fragile, bruise. These images play on each other, a tenderness and toughness that are available in nature, and appear in a mother giving birth. In a metaphysical sense, the tough & tender appeal to the moment; a mother hardening in the awareness she has to give up her child. It also appeals to the difficulty a bastard child has in the world; in poem's day an environment existed in which children were taken from their mothers in such situations.

8.5.4 The Double Image

Introduction:

Sexton spent a large portion of her adult life seeking associations that led back into childhood. Much of her poetry demonstrates the painful feelings discovered towards her family. She was also greatly devoted to being a good wife and mother. She eloped at the age of nineteen with husband Kayo and had two daughters, Linda and Joy. Her poem “The Double Image” is addressed to her younger daughter Joy. The poem is a narrative that uses many factual elements from Anne’s life. “It reports that Sexton was hospitalized, attempted suicide, recuperated in her parents’ home; that her mother was diagnosed and treated for breast cancer and blamed Sexton for the illness; that Sexton attempted suicide a second time.
Analysis:

Her mother says that she cannot forgive her suicide. Her mother had her portrait that was hung at home. The mother recalls that she lived like an angry guest like a partly mended thing, an outgrown child. The poet remembers that her mother did her best to let her feel good of life. She took her to Boston and had hair restyled so that she can comply healthy attitude of life. The poet says, looking at her child, that its smile is like her mother's, the artist said. Anne painted her mother and herself as similar images. Then Sexton returns to the question of why she would rather die than love. She says that in north light, her smile is held in place, the shadow marks her bone. She wonders what she could have been dreaming as she sat there, all of her waiting in the eyes, the zone of the smile, the young face, which she considers as the foxes' snare. Her daughter's smile is held in place, her cheeks wilting like a dry orchid; she meditates and feels mocking mirror, her overthrown love, her first image. She is aware that the daughter eyes her from that face, that stony head of death that is lying ahead. We even feel that she is fed up of life when she says that she had outgrown. That double woman who stares at herself, as if she were petrified.

The last lines of the poem Sexton realizes that she is a similar image to her mother in that she is a mother herself. She says that she remembers they named her Joy that connotes happiness. She says that she needed her. She never wanted a boy, but only a girl, a small milky mouse of a girl. She was never quite sure about being a girl, needed another life, another image to remind her about the worst guilt which she is sure of that she could not cure.

8.5.5 The Division of Parts:

Introduction:

The last poem in the book, “The Division of Parts,” is to and about her mother, Mary Gray, ostensibly about dividing up her estate, but really about the ambivalent relationship that Sexton had with her mother. Reading this book and remembering that the year in which it appeared was 1960, one easily recognizes why readers and critics immediately paid attention. No poet had written ever poetry as candid before as Anne.
Analysis:

Anne Sexton closes "To Bedlam and Part Way Back" with an elegy to her mother, which she broke into four sections. The poem has an interesting movement, starting with the arrival of her mother's will and awareness for the things she left behind, and how they tie mother and daughter together. It then moves to when her mother's cancer set in, and discusses how she dealt with the unraveling of her mother. In the last four lines of the poem, where she says "I could pretend people live in places" (lines 78-79). The comment feels like a it means that not only is it difficult to return to a life after such an experience, but the religious currency the poem deals in also seems to introduce an argument that the afterlife was a "pretend" place. It could also suggest that by leaving her mother in the hospital, she imagines that she lives on there, refusing to accept, or not being able to accept her mother's death. Either way, she has a sense of inner turmoil that is addressed in the third section. In the third section she deals with the internal conflict she has with the memory of her mother, with the issues she seems to have with religion: "Sweet witch, you are my worried guide" (line 93). The final section of the poem seems to find equilibrium: while it certainly has to be a difficult task (and is certainly incomplete), Sexton seems to find it: "this is the division of ways" (line 138). There is something comforting about this poem. It seems to say that while there is no parity in life, no final, absolute resolution in the death of a mother, there is the recognition that one has a continuity within. There is no way to completely become like her, or to be completely different from her. Mother and daughter become a division of parts.

8.7.6 Check your Progress:

I) Answer the following questions in one word, one phrase or in a sentence:

1. Which disease did Anne sexton suffer from?
2. Who inspires Anne Sexton to write poetry?
3. Who became her close friend at the Poetry workshop in 1957?
4. When did Anne Win the Pulitzer Prize?
5. How many voices are there in Her Kind?
6. What does the speaker in Her Kind embrace?
7. What is the theme of The Unknown Girl in the maternity Ward?
8. For how many days the baby is nursed in the poem?
9. Who took Anne to Boston?
10. Who become the division of parts?

II) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences:
1. The speaker of Her Kind is --------------
2. Society expects women to be --------------
3. Her Kind employs a persona of a -------------- to show that modern women are outcast.
4. In Her Kind, woman is viewed as----------
5. The unwed mother in The Unknown Girl in the Maternity Ward is in her-----
6. The poet describes the lips of her child as--------------------
7. The Double Image is addressed to----------------
8. ------------------ demonstrates Anne’s painful feelings discovered towards her family.

III) Complete the following sentences choosing the best alternatives given below each sentence:
1. The speaker in Her Kind describes herself as having----------------
   a) three-fingered  b) six-fingered  c) eight-fingered  d) twelve-fingered
2. Her Kind argues that, if women are to live in peace, society must---------------
   a) accept change and stop outcasting them b) reject them
   c) appreciate them
   d) motivate them
3. Anne’s mother was diagnosed for----------------
   a) breast cancer   b) tuberculosis   c) depression   d) malaria
4. Her mother recalls that Anne lived like----------------
   a) an angry girl
   b) an angry guest
   c) an angry soul
   d) an angry daughter
5. The Division of Parts is about Anne’s mother, ---------------
   a) Mary Gray   b) Mary Greves  c) Mary Collins  d) Mary Macdonald

6. The third section of The Division of Parts deals with Anne’s internal conflict she has the memory of her ---------------
   a) father     b) sister     c) daughter     d) mother

8.4.6 Answers to the questions:

I) 1. Postpartum depression
    2. Her doctor
    3. Maxine Kumin
    4. 1967
    5. Two
    6. Embraces society’s negative stereotype of modern liberated women and transforms it into positive image
    7. Parting
    8. 6 days
    9. Her mother
    10. Poet’s mother and herself

II) 1. Outcast
    2. Servient, obedient
    3. Witch
    4. Gentle and kind
    5. 50’s
    6. Animals suckling at her breast
    7. Her child, Joy
    8. The Double Image

III) 1. twelve-fingered
2. accept change and stop outcasting them
3. breast cancer
4. an angry guest
5. Mary Gray
6. mother

8.5.7 Short answer type questions:

1. Write a note on Anne Sexton as a confessional poet referring to the poems you have studied.

2. Write a critical note on the feminine views Anne Sexton expresses in Her Kind.

3. Discuss Anne Sexton as a revolutionary poet in American Literature.

8.5.8 Further Reading

1. www.Google.com
2. www.annesextonpoetry.com