

S.Y.B.A.

ENGLISH PAPER III

AMERICAN LITERATURE

**Syllabus for SY BA American Literature Paper V and Paper VI
(to be implemented from 2012-2013 onwards)**

Objectives of the Course

- 1) To acquaint the learners of literature with the various genres and literary terms of twentieth century American Literature
- 2) To sensitize them to the themes and styles of American Literature
- 3) To introduce them to the socio-cultural milieu of twentieth century America through literary texts
- 4) To enhance their understanding of American, African American and Multicultural sensibilities by introducing them to the literary works representing them
- 5) To facilitate cross-cultural perspectives and discussions on American Literature

Semester One: American Literature– Paper V (Short Story and Novel)

Course code-UAENG302 3Credits

Lectures: 45

Unit 1:

Terms: Naturalism, Realism, Lost Generation, African American Fiction and Jewish American Fiction (15 Lectures)

Unit 2:

Novel: Gloria Naylor: *Women of Brewster Place* (only “Mattie Micheal,” “Etta MaeJohnson,” and “Kiswana Browne” to be taught)

Or

John Steinbeck: *Pearl* (15 Lectures)

Unit 3:

Short Stories (15 Lectures)

Ernest Hemingway – “Hills Like White Elephants” 4

William Carlos Williams – “The Use of Force”

Bernard Malamud – “The Jew Bird”

Jamaica Kincaid – “Girl”

Evaluation

A) Internal Assessment – 40% 40 Marks

Sr.No. Particulars Marks

1 One class test to be conducted in the given semester 10 Marks

2 One assignment based on curriculum to be assessed by the teacher concerned 20 Marks

3 Active participation in routine class instructional deliveries 05 Marks

4 Overall conduct as a responsible student, manners and articulation and exhibition of leadership qualities in organizing related academic activities

05 Marks

Following methods can be used for the tests and assignment (30 Marks)

Reviews of Twentieth Century American Stories and Fiction followed by viva-voce

Quiz (Oral or Written)

Critical Appreciation of American Short Stories

Presentation on Reading (Short Stories or Novels)

Author Study (hand-written)

B) Semester End Examination Pattern 60 Marks

Question 1: Short notes on terms (3 out of 5, in about 150 words each) : 15 Marks

Question 2: Essay on the novel (one out of two) : 15 Marks

Question 3: Essay on short stories (one out of two) : 15 Marks

Question 4: Two short notes, one from the novel and one from the short stories,

out of four options : 15 Marks

Semester Two: American Literature – Paper VI (Poetry and Drama)

Course code-UAENG402 3Credits

Lectures: 45

Unit 1:

Terms: Imagism in American Poetry, Beat Poetry, Confessional Poetry, Expressionism in American Drama and Harlem Renaissance

(15 Lectures)

Unit 2:

Play: Tennessee Williams: *Cat on a Hot tin Roof* or Eugene O'Neill: *Emperor Jones*

(15 Lectures)

Unit 3:

Poems

(15 Lectures)

Langston Hughes: "Negro Speaks of Rivers"

"Weary Blues"

"I, Too, Sing America"

Robert Frost: "Mending Wall"

"Design"

"Birches"

Evaluation

A) Internal Assessment – 40% 40 Marks

Sr.No.

Particulars

Marks

1. One class tests to be conducted in the given semester 10 Marks
2. One assignment based on curriculum to be assessed by the

teacher concerned	20
Marks	
3. Active participation in routine class instructional deliveries	05
Marks	
4. Overall conduct as a responsible student, manners and articulation	and
exhibition of leadership qualities in organizing related academic activities	05
Marks	

Following Methods can be used for tests and assignment (30 marks)

Critical appreciation of unseen American poems

Play Reviews

Poetry Recitation (American Poems)

Assignments on Poets and Playwrights (American)

Quiz

Dialogue Writing or Script Writing (adaptations from American short stories)

B) Semester End Examination Pattern 60 Marks

Question 1: Short notes on terms (3 out of 5, in about 150 words each) : 15 Marks

Question 2: Essay on the play (one out of two) : 15 Marks

Question 3: Essay on poems (One out of two) : 15 Marks

Question 4: two short notes, one from the play and one from the poem out of four: 15 marks

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LOST GENERATION, REALISM AND NATURALISM

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Lost Generation
- 1.3 Realism
- 1.4 Naturalism
- 1.5 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit will enable you to understand the concepts of:

- Lost Generation;
- Realism;
- Naturalism.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the study of literature, it is necessary to have a fair knowledge about various literary movements, literary terms and concepts and also different schools of thoughts. Therefore, in this unit we are going to learn the concepts of Lost Generation, Realism and Naturalism with an emphasis on their characteristic features and how they have reflected in the literary works of the period.

1.2 LOST GENERATION

Lost Generation is the generation that refers specifically to a group of American writers who came of age during the World War I and gained popularity in American Literature. The term also refers to the artists who rose to prominence between the end of World War I and the beginning of the Great Depression. However, in Britain, surprisingly, the term referred to those upper-class people who lost their lives during the World War I or who returned

home with permanent physical disabilities. Such a huge loss, Britain believed, paralyzed the country for many years to come.

The term “lost generation” is coined by Gertrude Stein. It is said that she heard this term in France with reference to her auto-mechanic, who was referred as a member belonging to “une generation perdue”. This refers to the young workers’ poor auto-mechanic repair skills. Gertrude Stein uses this phrase to describe the people of the 1920’s. The people reject American post World War I values. The generation was “lost” in the sense that its inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world and because of its spiritual alienation from America, the place that seemed to the people to be hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren.

The period that followed World War I is known for its protest against the traditional ethical and moral values, social and cultural conventions, and aesthetic rules and regulations of the past. Decadence, disinterest and purposelessness are the distinguishing features of the literature produced during this period. There was the dominance of conservatism, Puritanism, and Prohibition. Artists belonging to different arts attempted to establish new values through their works. However, it doesn’t mean that there was a complete shift from the old to the new. There were some writers like Conrad Aiken and Elinor Wylie who preferred to stick to the old and traditional in their works. Among the artists of this period, there came a vogue of shifting to the places like Greenwich Village, Chicago, and San Francisco. Some of them even moved to Europe and continued to create their works.

The three best known writers of ‘The Lost Generation’ are F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway and John Dos Passos. Others among the list are: Sherwood Anderson, Kay Boyle, Hart Crane, Ford Maddox Ford and Zelda Fitzgerald. Initially, Gertrude Stein used this term in one of her remarks to Ernest Hemingway, “You are all a lost generation.” Hemingway used it as an epigraph to *The Sun Also Rises* (1926).

Thus the “Lost Generation” defines a sense of moral loss or aimlessness apparent in literary figures during the 1920s. World War I destroyed the earlier ideas of morality. People now did not believe that virtuous act brings good things to the life. Many good, young men went to war and died, or returned home either physically or mentally disabled. Naturally, they had lost their faith

in the moral and ethical aspects of life. This loss of faith marked them as 'lost'.

In general, 'the Lost Generation is a group of the post-World War I U.S. writers who specifically wrote during the war and established their literary reputations in the 1920s. The generation is said to be "lost" as it was not relevant in the post-war world in the sense that it inherited earlier moral values. The generation also represents its spiritual alienation from the U.S. After the War the then American President Warren G. Harding declared the policy "back to normalcy". This seems to its members hopelessly provincial, materialistic, and emotionally barren. The term 'lost generation' embraces Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, E.E. Cummings, Archibald MacLeish, Hart Crane, and many other writers. These writers had made Paris the centre of their literary activities in the '20s. Actually, theirs was not a specific literary school. In the 1930s, these writers turned in different directions. Their works lost the distinctive stamp of the post-war period. The last representative works of the era are Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934) and Dos Passos' *The Big Money* (1936).

The study of the works of this period shows these literary figures criticizing American culture. The choice of the themes like self-exile, indulgence, spiritual alienation and moral degradation throws ample light on the tendency of these writers. For example, Fitzgerald has nicely exhibited how the young generation of the time tried to cover up the overall sense of the depression and frustration by feigning to have lost in Jazz in his work, *This Side of Paradise*. The similar theme of illusory presence of happiness in the lives of his characters is depicted by Fitzgerald in his masterpiece, *The Great Gatsby*. Another writer of this generation, Hemingway, is known for his introducing the technique of omission. He believed that omission of some information can sometimes strengthen the plot of the novel. This technique is imitated by many writers afterwards. Even Hemingway replaced the florid prose of the Victorian era with a lean, clear prose based on action.

Thus the literary works created by the members of the 'Lost Generation' focus upon the current lifestyles of the American people. Such kind of treatment of the men and their manners was quite a new phenomenon in the literature of the time. Naturally, it had a long-lasting influence on the future generations of the writers and their works.

REALISM:

The modern American Realism has the historical background of the Nineteenth Century U.S. Civil War (1861-1865). This Civil War, which was fought between the industrial North and the agricultural, slave-owning South, had tremendous effects on the psyche of the nation. In fact, the War had its toll upon the innocent optimism of the young democratic nation. It led to the streamlining the concept of idealism which Americans had cherished before the War. The study of the evolution of America as a democratic nation shows that there was a group of thinkers and activists who strongly advocated human rights in the country that was marred by the presence of inhuman practice of slavery. The idealists strongly opposed slavery and voted in favour of its abolition. However, this purpose was defeated by the advent of Civil War. It resulted in increased emphasis on individuality and material progress.

The American Civil War led to the unprecedented progress of the industrial sector. American land, which was rich in natural resources like oil, iron, coal and gold, gave momentum to the development of the industry. American economy prospered leading to the rise of new millionaires' class of industrialists who got prominence in political affairs of the country. This was the era of Darwin and his theory of the survival of the fittest. Such an emphasis on evolution theory gave rise to certain unethical practices in all walks of life including industry and politics.

The rapid industrialization led to its own problems. As most of the industries were located in the urban area, a large number of people migrated from villages to the cities. By 1920s, almost half of the American population was living in the twelve big industrial cities giving birth to the problems of poverty, housing, sanitation, poor working conditions and low salary. The governmental policy of promoting the industry had given free-hand to the industrialists. The laws were passed which were favourable to the industry. It resulted in the over-all dissatisfaction and displeasure among the working classes. The workers got united under the banner of Labour unions. The number of strikes increased attracting the attention of the nation towards the problems of the workers.

These social aspects are reflected in the literary works of the time. For example; The novels like Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* and Jack London's *Martin Eden* realistically depict the severe effects of industrialization on the poor sections of the society. There is a marked difference in the treatment of the characters of these novels from the characters depicted in traditional novels. These writers have given distinct individuality to

their characters which is the effect of industrialization as it has broken the familial and social ties.

Even the World War I had its effects on the American society and the literature created in it. It is observed that the sensitive authors were greatly shocked by the material and psychological damages of the War on the common people. The drab realities of the war-infected society made these writers come out of the Romantic and illusionary vision of literature, thereby forcing them towards modernism. The literature of the post-war period has true reflection of the 19th Century realism and naturalism. Modernism with its emphasis on the depiction of the aftermaths of the War is effectively penned down by these writers in their works. The writers of this period have depicted all the problems and issues of the modern society through their works. All the social classes of the American society and their manners are minutely described in realistic style by the authors of this period. It seems that presenting the colourful panorama of American life without any distortion has been the motto of the authors. And they followed it without fail thereby making their works the true mirror of the society in which it was created.

The rapid industrialization of the nation had made the writers of the time to think that such a pace of industrialization will destroy the traditional American culture. Due to the industrialization, there had been certain changes and transitions in American culture. It was feared that the modernisation of the country will damage the regional cultural beauty and variety of the nation. Naturally, there came a vogue of writing about the regional aspects like the folklore, social and religious traditions and various local beliefs and disbeliefs. The writers set their stories against the local background. The characters depicted in these stories clearly exhibited the local traditions of the region from which they were taken. Even these works sometimes depicted the conflict between the traditional values and the values that were being propagated by the modern industrialized social structure. The depiction of the 'poor' and his plight had become one of the most recurrent themes in the literary works created during this period. The truthful description of the lives of the common American people required the use of the dialectical variety of the language. American writers used these dialects effectively which further added to the authenticity of their works. Such kind of literature certainly attracted the readers towards it as they felt it closer to their actual lives.

In brief, it can be said that realism in American literature was a movement that faithfully chronicled the minute details of

every possible aspect of ordinary American life. Such kind of faithfulness on the part of the writers made their works immensely popular among the readers whose lives they depicted. The readers of this period are seen believing in the realistic representation of the actual lives. They seemed to think that whatever imaginary was in fact illusory and had no value whatsoever. Consequently, the authors of the time considered the realism to be “nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material”.

Such kind of the attitude of both the readers and the writers gave impetus to the realistic movement. It further moved to the investigative journalism as it brought to the people the so-called truth which only they believed. This transition was followed by the camera and its realistic capturing the events as they actually happened leading to the rising fascination of the people for the cinema.

In brief, the main characteristic features of this movement are as follows:

1. In this literature character is given more importance than the action and plot.
2. The characters are shown to be in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, and also to their own past.
3. The characters are usually seen controlling their destinies
4. There is a minute description of reality.
5. It is observed that the events described in realistic novels are usually plausible. There is no scope for the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances in realistic novels.
6. The middle class has been the main interest of these novels.
7. The realistic novel is seen exploring the relations between people and the society in which they lived.
8. The reading of the realistic novel shows that there is definite purpose behind writing such a novel. It tends to instruct and to entertain the readers.
9. The choice of language for these works is as per the social standing of the characters depicted in them. They are written in the natural vernacular of the people.
10. The images are greater in number than the symbols as the realists believed in telling their stories in straightforward manner than disguising them behind the symbols.
11. These novels follow the principle of objectivity as they wanted to make the readers believe in their stories.

1.4 NATURALISM

In literature, naturalism was a movement that took place from the 1880s to 1940s. Naturalism believes that social conditions, heredity, and environment play an important role in shaping human character. It seeks to imitate the everyday reality and present it as it is. In fact, naturalism is the outgrowth of the realistic movement that flourished in literature during the 19th century. Naturalistic writers are seen to have influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. These writers strongly believed that human beings and their personalities are determined by the social conditions, heredity and environment in which they are born and brought up. It means naturalism tries to give scientific explanation of the behavioral patterns of their characters. Naturally, the works of naturalistic writers tend to be coarser as they depict the sordid realities of the lives of their characters without trying to make them look 'beautiful'. Consequently, the naturalistic writers are usually criticized for describing only the negative aspects of human life like sexual behaviour, poverty, racism, violence, prejudice, disease, corruption and prostitution.

In fact, naturalism is essentially a literary expression of determinism. It gives expression to the dark sides of lower-class life. Determinism does not consider religion as a motivating force in the world and instead perceives the universe as a machine like the 18th century Enlightenment thinkers. However, according to these Enlightenment thinkers this machine is perfect as it is invented by God for the progress and betterment of human beings. On the contrary, the naturalists imagined society to be a blind machine and hence, uncontrollable. The naturalistic movement find its ample expression in the novels written during this period.

The origin of naturalism can be traced in 19th century France. The main exponent of this movement is Balzac. It is a French literary movement associated with Gustav Flaubert, Edmond and Jules Goncourt, Émile Zola, and Guy de Maupassant. The works of these writers treat variety of themes directly related the dark aspects of the society like divorce, marital

and extra-marital sex, poverty, crime, and the evils of unemployment.

As a literary movement, Naturalism came to America from France and flourished due to the presence of ample thematic material for its disposal. The major naturalistic writers are Edith Wharton, Jack London, Frank Norris, Abraham Cahan, Emile Zola, Stephen Crane, Theodore Dreiser, and Ellen Glasgow.

As it was believed that heredity and social conditions were unavoidable determinants in one's life, naturalists went on writing their works picking the subjects from the contemporary life. Naturalists do not believe in the notion of free will and its capacity to enact real change in life's circumstances. They believed that heredity and social conditions are the factors that determined the destiny of the human beings. The man has to unconditionally submit himself to his environment. It means the naturalists went on describing the things as they were without commenting on them. They were objective observers of the events; therefore, they preferred to speak neither in favour nor against them. The events around them can be either good or evil; the naturalists simply narrated them to their readers without interfering with the reality.

With the rapid growth of industrial sector, most of the Americans were forced to migrate to large towns thereby leading to the uncontrolled urbanization. Their arrival in cities made them aware of the importance of large economic and social forces. Even the agricultural sector was under the influence of the business. Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* can be regarded as the first naturalistic American novel. Before venturing this novel, Crane gathered much of his material from his personal visits to Manhattan. These visits helped him greatly to collect authentic data about the lives of the people living there. He minutely imitated all the details of this life including the vulgar dialect used by the inhabitants of lower Manhattan. Though *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* failed to attract huge number of readers, it certainly had the signs of a talented artist. This novel was followed by *The Red Badge of Courage*, perhaps Crane's masterpiece. It was set during the Civil War and narrated the story of a young soldier. Though Crane had no firsthand experiences of war, he tried to make his story authentic by borrowing his material largely from the magazines that reported the War.

After Stephen Crane, the novelist who followed Crane's footsteps is Edith Wharton. Her novels unmistakably and objectively describe the upper class of the society with its peculiarities. Through her works, Edith showed the unforgiving nature of life at the top of the class structure. A close study of her characters shows that they often fall from grace through their own mistakes, miscalculation, and sometimes for no apparent reason at all. Her profession of a designer had gifted her an eye for details. This gift she exploited to the fullest to give picturesque description of the life and manners of her characters. Wharton was not just a story-teller, she was also a sympathizer of her characters. It can be seen from her treatment of them. Yet, as a naturalist, she can't escape from sense of determinism, according to which no one can have his or her free will.

Another practitioner of naturalism in America is Frank Norris. He was greatly influenced by Darwin and his theory of evolution. Following this theory, Norris tried to show how civilized man overcame the brute, animal nature that still lived inside of him. Through his works, which were utmost scientific, he puts forth eternal conflicts of the forces for their survival. It is for his too much emphasis on scientific details and lack of sympathy that Norris is sometimes criticized by the critics. His novels tell the stories of the poor and lonely who are caught in the trap of their evil environment. His novel, *McTeague*, presents a dentist who fails in his life due to his over ambitiousness and unaccounted greed.

A close analysis of the naturalistic novels brings forth the fact that though they are unending pessimistic accounts of the poor and destitute, these novelists were sincerely desired to improve the pathetic conditions of the victims of poverty. Apart from penning down the sufferings of the poor, the novelists like Frank Norris and Stephen Crane sincerely worked for improving the conditions of the poor by making the world aware of their miseries. Of course, there are some critics who criticized the naturalistic writers for their seemingly detached attitude towards the problems of the poor. However, it has to be taken into consideration that the social conditions of the time were so severe that these writers cannot be blamed for the sufferings of the poor. As the sensitive members of the society, they faithfully depicted the life as it was for which they cannot be blamed.

The main characteristic features of literary naturalism are:

1. Pessimism.
2. Detachment from the story.
3. Surprising twist at the end of the story.

4. There tends to be a strong sense that nature is indifferent to human struggle.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is 'Lost Generation'? Discuss the contribution of the members of 'Lost Generation' to the development of American literature.
2. Define the term 'Realism' and discuss its characteristic features.
3. Bring out the importance of Naturalism in American literature.
4. In what respect does Naturalism differ from Realism? Discuss their relative merits and demerits as the literary movements.

AFRICAN AMERICAN FICTION AND JEWISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

CONTENTS

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 African American Fiction
- 2.3 Jewish-American Literature
- 2.4 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit will enable you to understand the concepts of:

- African American Fiction
- Jewish-American Fiction

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Though literature of all ages places has similar characteristic features, it is seen that there have been some region, time, language and culture specific variation in the themes and forms of literature belonging to different places and ages. It is so perhaps because the people and their specific culture all over the world are not considered equal to each other. It leads to the creation of various types of literature. African American literature and Jewish-American literature are the literatures which emerged in America during the last couple of centuries and are being considered as the literary expression of the African American and Jew communities of their experiences in racist social structure of America.

2.2 AFRICAN AMERICAN FICTION

African American literature is 'the body of literature written by Americans of African descent.' African American literature began in the latter half of the 18th century with some of the members of this community expressed their ideas and feelings in literary form. The history of African American literature can even be looked at as the history of African American people in America as it gave a faithful depiction of the many ups and downs in the personal, social, cultural and political lives of these people. Though it was only after 1970s that this literature was

widely acclaimed for its richness, it was there for more than two centuries, attempting to come on the surface of American mainstream literature.

History of African Americans in America shows that they were enslaved since their arrival in America. These slaves were regarded as subhuman and incapable of mastering the arts and sciences. It is shocking to the civilized readers like us to read the words of great philosophers like Immanuel Kant and Hume who considered 'negroes . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites' with no 'ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences'. Naturally the aim of the African American writers was first to prove their skills in writing their works following the norms of White literature. They were sure that unless until they demonstrated their mastery of the norms of the White literature, the Whites will not consider Blacks to be human and equal to them. That is why, the writers of the first generation toiled to master the literary skills of the Whites. Actually, it was not an easy task for them as they were not even considered to be the full and equal members of society. Naturally, it was a Herculean task for the African American writers to get recognized as writers in the American society. It can be seen from the ordeal Phillis Wheatley, the first African American poet, had to undergo to be recognized as a poet. She was forced to approach to the court of law to prove that she was the author of her poems collected in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). Even though the court verified her authorship, it did not help her much. Finally, she had to get her poems published in London. In these poems, Wheatley has exhibited remarkable mastery of the various poetic forms practiced by the mainstream American writers.

As the socio-political conditions of the time were unfavourable for the existence of the Black people, they had to fight for every single necessity of their life. Their lives were full of sufferings and atrocities. Naturally, these writers expressed their personal emotions along with the agonies of their community. Their attempts were directed to establish their self-identity as an individual as well as the identity of the African American community. With the hard efforts of these writers, they succeeded in demonstrating their intellectual capabilities.

Though the declaration of American independence brought equality to all, African Americans were not treated as such by the racist Whites. It led to the Civil War and the authorities were forced to announce the abolition of slavery. Yet, the mindset of the Whites did not change much and there was not improvement in social and economic conditions of the African Americans. Though African Americans had continued to contribute much to the progress of the United States, in return they could only get disappointment, discrimination, and danger. Yet the African Americans bravely continued their battle against the injustice of their life and emerged victorious, forcing their enemy to accept them on equal terms.

Even though African Americans did not get equal opportunities and were discriminated in every walk of life, they continued to march

towards excellence with their hard labour. Their achievement in the field of literature is one of the most remarkable aspects of the post-Civil War period. African American writers like Booker T. Washington, James Weldon Johnson, and others tried their hands at almost every literary genre; principal amongst them were poetry and autobiographies.

The early 19th century African American literature emphasized the urgent need of abolition of slavery. The writers of this period focused upon the inhuman conditions in the lives of Black people and tried to attract the attention of the world towards the problem of slavery in America. To fulfill their purpose these writers tried their hands at the writing of essays, poetry, fiction, and journalism. For example, through his *Appeal, in Four Articles; Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, David Walker made it very clear that if the inhuman system of slavery is not abolished, there was the danger of racial violence in the country. David Walker was immediately followed by like-minded writers and activists like Maria W. Stewart, Jarena Lee and others.

Towards the end of the first half of the 19th century, there started the tradition of writing slave narratives. This movement had got impetus from the antislavery movement of the South. The slave narratives dominated the literary output of the country in terms of both quality and enormous interest of the native as well as foreign readers. Frederick Douglass became the well-known figure after the publication of his *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself*. In this life-story, Douglass narrated his efforts to get education and buy his freedom. This work portrayed him as a self-made man. Douglass was soon followed by Harriet Jacobs who wrote her life-story, entitled *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In her autobiography, Harriet depicted the incidents from the life of African American slave woman who was sexually exploited by her master.

After the end of the Civil War, though Blacks were declared equal, in reality, there were many complex issues that needed urgent attention. Though there were large scale efforts establish a stronger and better country, the African Americans faced many impediments in their path of progress. The passing of the Reconstruction Act in 1867 was an effort to protect freed slaves from the racist Whites. The law also helped to establish many schools for the African Americans. Even some legal measures were taken to make slavery illegal. However, there were certain loopholes to the law which allowed the states to pass their own laws regarding slavery. It worsened the condition of the Negroes. It gave rise to the violence and many Negroes were lynched in the South. Though the conditions of the Negroes had worsened, many of them continued writing and get it published in magazines and newspapers. The literature of this period was marked by stories in which the writers spoke about their difficulties in publishing their works. During this period there came to existence the National Baptist Publishing Company, a Black

enterprise that published songs, poems, fiction, and autobiographies of many Black writers.

With the arrival of the 20th century, there came Harlem Renaissance. It celebrated blackness of the skin as well as blackness of the art. Many African American literary and artistic forms were imitated. The Black literature could not keep itself detached from the politics. Richard Wright's *Native Son* set the tone of this period. This work changed American culture and African American writing. Richard Wright was effectively followed by the writers like William Attaway and Chester Himes.

The study of Black writing of this period shows that it was proletarian in nature and attempted to raise social consciousness. It was the period of Great Depression and many writers had started writing on nonracial subjects. For example, Zora Neale Hurston's novel, *Seraph on the Suwanee* was called as 'non-Negro' novel because it tells the story of White characters. In his *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison is seen influenced not only by the Black writers but equally so by the White writers for which he was harshly criticized by other African American writers.

By the close of the 20th century, African American fiction immensely represented the Black culture. It had become a force in itself. Toni Morrison had won Nobel Prize for literature. Other outstanding African American authors include Charles Johnson, John Edgar Wideman, and Alice Walker. Through their works, these writers acknowledged the multiplicity of African American identities and renewed interest in history. As writers, they successfully imagined the psychological and spiritual lives of African Americans during slavery and segregation.

2.3 JEWISH-AMERICAN FICTION

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

The course of Jewish-American writing took a huge turn with the arrival of 1881. It was the year when the Russian Czar, Alexander II, was assassinated. His son Alexander III took over the reins of the country in his hands resulting in Russian government's policy of persecution of the Jews. The atrocities at home forced millions of Jews to migrate to America. As these Jews spoke Yiddish, naturally, they also wrote their literary works in their own language. The main writers of this period are Morris Winshefsky and Morris Rosenfeld. Yiddish literature is radical and secular in its approach. These writers, since the inception of their literature, had been propagating their radical ideas through their literary works. These ideas can be seen exhibited in the poetry, novels, theatre and journalistic writings of Saul Bellow, J. D. Salinger, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Chaim Potok, and Philip Roth. However, before gaining its foothold in other forms of literature, Jewish literature in America started with memoirs and petitions of the immigrants who had come to the American shore as early as the 17th century. The main thematic concern of the Jewish-American writing was the dilemma of identity. Being the outsiders, the Jews in America were usually treated as outsiders and hence were discriminated by the European Whites on the basis of their religion and culture. Consequently, the Jewish community felt alienated from the American mainstream social structure. They tried to establish their own individual Jewish identity which was very tough task given the social circumstances in which they were forced to live. After the initial efforts at establishing their identity, it is seen that the Jewish community tried to get assimilated with the American mainstream. These efforts are effectively reflected in the latter works of Jewish-American writers.

Leon Uris is one of the very outstanding Jewish-American writers who is known for his brilliantly written novel *Exodus*. This work narrates the story of the struggle to create the modern state of Israel. Isaac Bashevis Singer and Saul Bellow are the Jewish-American writers who have won the Nobel Prize for their works. Jewish-American writing reached to a huge number of readers with its translation in various languages including Russian. This literature usually contains Jewish characters which enables the writers to address the issues close to the lives of their people.

Perhaps the most important Yiddish writer of the early twentieth century was Abraham Cahan. He is known for his brilliantly written novel, *The Rise of David Levinsky*. This is a story of a Jew, named Levinsky, who gives up his Jewish heritage and becomes a secularist. It leads him to be a successful millionaire in the American society. Through this novel, Cahan shows the emptiness of Levinsky's life despite his material success. The other writers who stepped upon the footsteps of their predecessors are Anzela Yeziarska, Sidney Nyburg, Samuel Ornitz and James Oppenheim. These writers have also exhibited their ideology of life through their works according to which secularism is the most important aspect in human life which helps to address and effectively solve many of

the problems of human life. These writers rejected the narrow concept of Jewishness and almost discarded the Jewish tradition. They were more interested to present themselves as secular rather than Jewish. Even there were some Jewish-American writers like Nelson Algren, Isadore Schneider and Albert Halper who considered socialism to be the more effective answer to the problems of the Jewish community all over the world. During the second half of the 20th century the writers like Tillie Olson, Cynthia Ozick, Herbert Gold, Stanley Elkin, Joseph Heller, E.L. Doctorow, Saul Bellow, Grace Paley, Bernard Malamud, Hugh Nissensen Elie Wiesel, and Phillip Roth dealt with various problems of the Jews through their works.

During the 1950s, Jewish American literature became a part of the mainstream American culture. Saul Bellow's *The Adventures of Augie March* with its famous opening lines 'I am an American, Chicago born,' announced that Jews should be looked upon as an integral part of the American society. At the same time, *Gimpel the Fool* by Isaac Bashevis Singer came up with its very different approach which 'remembered, celebrated, and romanticized the old world of Judaism. These two approaches – one that of complete assimilation of the Jews with the America and the other that of celebration of Judaism – have been there for quite some time now.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. Define 'African American fiction' and discuss its various characteristic features.
2. Do you consider African American fiction as an expression of the specific life circumstances in which they were forced to live by the racist Whites? Elaborate your answer giving examples from the literary works you have read.
3. "Jewish-American literature is a distinct type of literature that speaks about the experiences of Jew community in America." Do you agree with this statement? Illustrate your answer.
4. Bring out the similarities and differences between African American literature and Jewish-American literature

HARLEM RENAISSANCE, BEAT POETRY AND CONFESSIONAL POETRY

CONTENTS

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Harlem Renaissance
- 3.3 Beat Poetry
- 3.4 Confessional Poetry
- 3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The study of this unit will enable you to understand the concepts of:

- Harlem Renaissance
- Beat Poetry
- Confessional Poetry

3.1 INTRODUCTION

African American literature is one of the most acclaimed literary phenomena in the 20th century. It is a body of literature written by African American writers which deals with the experiences of African Americans. Though there have been the presence of this literature since 18th century, it was only after the Harlem Renaissance that a large number of writers began to pen down their experiences in various literary forms. Harlem Renaissance gave impetus to the collective efforts of African American intellectuals to make their people aware of the richness of their own culture and art forms. This movement led to the emergence of many African American artists on the literary horizon of America.

3.2 HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Harlem Renaissance is 'a blossoming of African American culture, particularly in the creative arts, and the most influential

movement in African American literary history. The followers of this movement attempted to redefine the Negro who until now was looked at only from the White perspective. Through their experiments in the fields of literature, music, theatre, and visual arts, these artists tried to break away from the White racist traditions and embraced the 'Black' mores and manners as they were the aspects of African heritage in which they had started to take pride. Though there was not any particular school of thought that dominated this movement, it succeeded to influence the future works of African American writers.

Harlem Renaissance is the name given to the period that started with the end of World War I and ran through the middle of the 1930s Depression. This was the period which took African American literature considerably forward from the writing of life-stories and similar autobiographical pieces and entered into the realm of other literary genres like poetry, fiction, drama, and essay. African American writers of this period have very skillfully handled all these genres of literature and proved themselves to be far superior to their White counterparts.

The Harlem Renaissance movement even went as long as the civil rights movement of the late 1940s and early 1950s. This movement had its solid foundation in the Harlem as it has become the center of all literary, social, political and cultural activities of the Negroes. Harlem Renaissance movement was the culmination of various socio-politico-cultural activities that were taking place in America. These activities included 'the Great Migration of African Americans from rural to urban spaces and from South to North; dramatically rising levels of literacy; the creation of national organizations dedicated to pressing African American civil rights, "uplifting" the race, and opening socioeconomic opportunities; and developing race pride, including pan-African sensibilities and programs.'

This period was very important in the history of Negroes in America as they had realized the greatness of their art and culture and started to express themselves in whatever form they liked. However, this was also a period of transition for them as they suffered from the agonies of split identity. On the one hand, they were Americans, living in the country for centuries and on the other, they were 'Negroes' who were not allowed to be one with the national identity. W.E.B. Du Bois introduced this notion of 'twoness', a divided awareness of one's identity. He writes, "One ever feels his two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two

unreconciled stirrings: two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”

The strain of twoness was too much for the sensitive Negroes who tried to express it through their arts. In their attempts to express their sufferings and agonies, these writers explored various techniques. Their works dealt with certain common themes like alienation, marginality, the use of folk material, the use of the blues tradition, and the problems of writing for an elite audience. The selection of such a variety of themes by these writers shows that Harlem Renaissance was not merely a literary movement. It had other issues that were closely related to the Negroes and their arts. These issues included racial consciousness, ‘the back to Africa’ movement, racial integration, the explosion of music, painting, and dramatic revues.

Until now African Americans and their works were treated as substandard and so were looked down upon by the mainstream White writers. However, the Harlem Renaissance gave the Black experience its distinct identity and permanently reserved its place in the history of American literature. With a vogue of migration of Negroes from the rural to the urban areas and from South to the North brought many positive changes in their lives thereby leading to the change of their traditional image as an illiterate, ignorant and hence secondary human being. The Black realtors had acquired a sizable chunk of real estate in the heart of Manhattan which allowed a large number of Blacks to come and get settled there. It created opportunities for the Black intellectuals to have regular fruitful interactions and expand their contacts internationally.

One of the most important features of Harlem Renaissance was that it had deep roots in history and culture, though there were also attempts to move away from the old and create a new. It was strongly believed that art and literature are the agents of change and they will lead to the betterment of America herself. However, this idea was shaken with the sudden arrival of Great Depression. The faith in democratic reform changed into horrors of disbelief. Those who strongly believed that these reforms would bring them positive results were completely disappointed by the way things took the turn. The intellectuals naively believed that culture is at the centre of every human activity and it cannot be affected by the economic and social realities. But these assumptions were turned into frustrations. They were taken aback by the cruel repercussions of the Great Depression.

However, it doesn't mean that the Harlem Renaissance had lost its significance. On the contrary, this renaissance became a 'symbol and a point of reference for everyone to recall.' It was the name 'Harlem' that became 'synonymous with new vitality, Black urbanity, and Black militancy. It became a racial focal point for Blacks the world over; it remained for a time a race capital. It stood for urban pluralism.' In this connection Alain Locke has rightly remarked that "The peasant, the student, the businessman, the professional man, artist, poet, musician, adventurer and worker, preacher and criminal, exploiter and social outcast, each group has come with its own special motives ... but their greatest experience has been the finding of one another." The living together in the urban area Harlem of a large number of Negroes who had come there from different places and backgrounds with their peculiar experiences allowed the Black artists to understand the real complexities of the lives of the people. This urban setting helped them to share each other's experiences which led to the birth of much needed race consciousness amongst them.

A close study of this movement shows that the legacy of Harlem Renaissance is 'limited by the character of the Renaissance.' There has been "an encouragement to the new appreciation of folk roots and culture. Peasant folk materials and spirituals provided a rich source for racial imagination and it freed the Blacks from the establishment of past condition. Harlem Renaissance was imprisoned by its innocence. The Harlem intellectuals, while proclaiming a new race consciousness, became mimics of Whites, wearing clothes and using manners of sophisticated Whites, earning the epithet "dirty niggers" from the very people they were supposed to be championing."

Unfortunately the movement of Harlem Renaissance failed to 'overcome the overwhelming White presence in commerce which defined art and culture.' The followers of this movement could not realize that there was a need to reject White values; "they had to see Whites, without awe of love or awe of hate, and themselves truly, without myth or fantasy, in order that they could be themselves in life and art."

But it can be said that Harlem Renaissance undoubtedly 'created an ethnic provincialism and its biggest gift could be a lesson from its failures.' It is observed that this movement tried to separate the Blacks from American culture. However, the fact was most of the Blacks were native Americans. It led to the "negative implications as the Blacks, unlike other immigrants, had no immediate past and history and culture to celebrate. But the positive implications of American nativity have never been fully appreciated by them. It seems too simple: the Afro-American's

history and culture is American, more completely so than most others in the country.”

It seems that the 1920s was too early a period for Blacks “to have felt the certainty about native culture that would have freed them from crippling self-doubt. ... that is why the art of the Renaissance was so problematic, feckless, not fresh, not real. The lesson it leaves us is that the true Black Renaissance awaits Afro-Americans' claiming their *patria*, their nativity.”

3.3 BEAT POETRY

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

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

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

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

Some Beat writers were openly gay or bisexual, including two of the most prominent (Ginsberg and Burroughs). Some met each other through gay connections, including David Kammerer's interest in Lucien Carr.

One of the contentious features of Ginsberg's poem *Howl* for authorities were lines about homosexual sex. William Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* contains content dealing with same-sex relations and pedophilia. Both works were unsuccessfully prosecuted for obscenity. Victory by the publishers helped to curtail literary censorship in the United States.

Considered racy at the time, Kerouac's writings are now considered mild. *On the Road* mentions Neal Cassady's bisexuality without comment, while *Visions of Cody* confronts it. However, the first novel does show Cassady as frankly promiscuous. Kerouac's novels feature an interracial love affair (*The Subterraneans*), and group sex (*The Dharma Bums*). The relationships among men in Kerouac's novels are predominantly homosexual.

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

Allen Ginsberg's first book, *Howl and Other Poems*, is often considered representative of the Beat poets. In 1956 Lawrence Ferlinghetti's press City Lights published *Howl* and Ferlinghetti was brought to trial the next year on charges of obscenity. In a hugely publicized case, the judge ruled that *Howl* was not obscene and brought national attention to Ginsberg and the Beat poets.

Besides publishing the Pocket Poets Series, Ferlinghetti also founded the legendary San Francisco bookstore City Lights. Still in operation today, City Lights is an important landmark of Beat generation history. Several of the surrounding streets have been renamed after Beat poets as well, commemorating their important contribution to the cultural landscape of San Francisco.

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

While many authors claim to be directly influenced by the Beats, the Beat Generation phenomenon itself has had a pervasive influence on Western culture more broadly. In 1982, Ginsberg

published a summary of "the essential effects" of the Beat Generation.

These are:

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

3.4 CONFSSIONAL POETRY

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

The content of confessional poems is autobiographical and marked by its exploration of subject matter that was considered

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

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

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

Another confessional poet of this generation was John Berryman. His major work was *The Dream Songs*, which consists of 385 poems about a character named Henry and his friend Mr. Bones. Many of the poems contain elements of Berryman's own life and traumas, such as his father's suicide. The confessional poets of the 1950s and 1960s pioneered a type of writing that forever changed the landscape of American poetry. The tradition of confessional poetry has been a major influence on generations of writers and continues to this day; Marie Howe and Sharon Olds are two contemporary poets whose writing largely draws upon their personal experience.

The post-confessional poetry of the seventies and eighties continued to extrapolate on the themes that the confessional movement pioneered. Examples of post confessional poems include Robert Pinsky's collection *History of My Heart* (1984), Bill

Knott's poem "The Closet"(1983), and Donald Hall's *Kicking the Leaves* (1978).

The content that the Confessional Poets explored laid the groundwork for much of the poetry that is being created in M.F.A. programs all over the country. The poets of this movement wrote unflinchingly about difficult topics. In contemporary poetry many poets are adopting the same mindset. These poets include Marie Howe, Sharon Olds, Judith Harris, and Jon Pineda. Popular confessional writing of today includes Post Secret, a project that asks individuals to submit an anonymous confessional postcard. The image below is posted on their website as one of their Sunday Secrets.

The influence of confessional poetry has had a spillover effect. Now it has become popular to write memoirs about overcoming traumatic experiences and mental illnesses. Tobias Wolff's *This Boy's Life* (1989), Elizabeth Wurtzel's *Prozac Nation* (1994) and Dave Peltzer's *A Child Called It* (1995) are examples of contemporary confessional prose. However, while works like this are "celebrated for their extraordinary candour," others, such as Dave Eggers' *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) and Russell Brand's *My Booky Wook* (2009), are also "criticized for their perceived exhibitionist egotism," and critic Bran Nicol compares this genre to reality tv.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Bring out the importance of Harlem Renaissance in the development of African American literature.
2. Discuss in brief the characteristic features of Harlem Renaissance.
3. Define the term 'Beat Poetry' and evaluate its merits and demerits as a literary movement.
4. Discuss the autobiographical elements in Confessional Poetry.
5. American literature is rich in confessional poetry". Elaborate this statement with reference to the poems you have read.

IMAGISM IN AMERICAN POETRY AND EXPRESSIONISM IN AMERICAN DRAMA

CONTENTS

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Imagism in American Poetry
- 4.3 Expressionism in American drama
- 4.4 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to enable you to understand the following important movements in the development of American literature:

- 1) Imagism in American poetry
- 2) Expressionism in American drama

4.1 INTRODUCTION

History of any literature of the world shows that it has evolved through many different movements. American literature is also not exception to this. During the various stages of its history, there have been many theories and principles of writing a work of literature. Imagism and expressionism are two such movements which have contributed to the richness and variety of American literature thereby making it one of the important literatures in the body of world literature. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to study these movements, namely imagism in American poetry and expressionism in American drama. The study of these movements will help you to understand their relative merits and demerits and also to appreciate the American literature in better manner.

4.2 IMAGISM IN AMERICAN POETRY

Imagism is one of the most significant movements in the history of American literature. Imagism as a literary movement took place in American poetry during the early decades of the 20th

century. The followers of this movement gave emphasis on the use of precise imagery and clear, sharp language. Due to its merits, this movement was considered as 'the most influential movement in English poetry since the activity of the Pre-Raphaelites.' A close study of imagist poetry shows that it has gone away from the traditional poetry as the imagists 'rejected the sentiment and discursiveness', the typical aspects of Romantic and Victorian poetry. This was in contrast to their contemporaries, the Georgian poets, who were by and large content to work within that tradition. Group publication of work under the Imagist name appearing between 1914 and 1917 featured writing by many of the most significant figures in modernist poetry in English, as well as a number of other modernist figures prominent in fields other than poetry.

The Imagist movement was based in London with its practitioners coming from Great Britain, Ireland and America. The significant aspect of this movement is that for the first time in the history of any literary movement here the major practitioners of were women writers. Another significant feature of this movement is that it was the 'first organized Modernist English language literary movement or group.' In this respect, T. S. Eliot, one of the major practitioners of this movement rightly said that: "The *point de repère* usually and conveniently taken as the starting-point of modern poetry is the group denominated 'imagists' in London about 1910."

Before the advent of Imagist movement, the lovers of poetry valued the poetry for its moralizing tone. The great poets like Longfellow and Tennyson were considered to be the epitomes of poetry as their poetry sometimes displayed the moralizing tone. On the contrary, the practitioners of Imagist poetry "called for a return to what were seen as more Classical values, such as directness of presentation and economy of language, as well as a willingness to experiment with non-traditional verse forms." It is seen that these poets focused on the "thing" as "thing" in their attempt at isolating a single image to reveal its essence. This approach is also evident in the contemporary developments in modern art forms including Cubism. Although Imagist poets attempted to isolate objects through the use of 'luminous details', "Pound's Ideogrammic Method of juxtaposing concrete instances to express an abstraction is similar to Cubism's manner of synthesizing multiple perspectives into a single image."

During the Victorian period, the all-time great poets like Alfred Lord Tennyson were producing the poetry of great merit. However, after Tennyson, the poets of the Edwardian era, namely the poet laureate Alfred Austin, Stephen Phillips, and William Watson were producing weak imitations of the poetry of Victorian

period. They were trying to imitate Tennyson's style of writing without any major innovative change either in their choice of themes or the form. In these attempts, they could not succeed much resulting in the creation of poor quality literary works. With the turn of the century, new poets with their new approach emerged on the scene and changed the course of writing poetry.

Most of the scholars generally agree upon the fact that Imagism originated in T.E. Hulme's poems, *Autumn* and *A City Sunset*. Hulme was soon followed by the other like-minded poets like Gilbert, Sullivan, F.V. Dickins, and Sadakichi Hartmann. These poets started to work on similar principles. As Ezra Pound realized that his ideas are akin to those of the imagists, he soon joined the group and started to write as per the principles of Imagist writing.

While working with the Imagists, Ezra Pound attempted to trace the origin of the movement to W.B. Yeats, Arthur Symons and even to Mallarme. It is evident from Pound's introduction to the book of poetry by Lionel Johnson. Here Ezra Pound made the position of the Imagists clear by saying that treating the 'thing' directly, avoiding the use of any superfluous word, and composing in sequence of the musical phrase are the essential attributes of Imagist poetry. At the beginning of his discussion, Pound defined the term 'image' by saying that image is "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" and further added that that "It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works". By expressing his views on what should and should not be done while writing poetry, Pound tried to make the imagist poetry to follow certain principles which will enable it to be appreciated by the readers. However, he never claimed that his principles should be followed as the rigid rules. While making their stand clear in this respect, F.S. Flint, Pound's companion and one of the followers of Imagism, said that "we have never claimed to have invented the moon. We do not pretend that our ideas are original". These words clearly show that Pound, Flint and other Imagists followed the same old method of presenting their subjects only with the difference in the manner of their presentation.

Thus, Imagism gained momentum in the early decades of 20th century and went on to influence the poetic movements like 'the Beat generation, the Black Mountain poets, and the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance. Thus, as a literary movement, Imagism was followed by many well-known poets who immensely contributed to the body of Imagist poetry.

4.3 EXPRESSIONISM IN AMERICAN DRAMA

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

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

However it has to be taken into consideration that Expressionism was just one more technique of writing a play and any attempt to take extremist position would be worthless. A comparative study of Realism and Expressionism as the techniques of drama writing shows that there was every possibility of stretching both of them to the extremes. The best known examples of these extremes are Ibsen and Brecht. Here it has to be taken into consideration that “great drama could be produced either way or by combining both modes, as Tennessee Williams was to do with brilliant success in *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Arthur Miller in *The Death of a Salesman*.”

The works of the practitioners of Expressionism were being published in *Der Sturm* and *Die Aktion*, two reputed journals of the

time. The regular contributors of *Der Sturm* were Richard Dehmel, Alfred Döblin, Max Brod, Knut Hamsun, René Schickele, Arno Holz, Karl Kraus, Selma Lagerlöf, Adolf Loos, Heinrich Mann, Paul Scheerbarth, and Peter Altenberg. These writers published their poems and prose works in this journal. *Der Sturm* also spared space for “the writings, drawings, and prints from Kokoschka, Kandinsky, and members of *Der blaue Reiter*.”

Oskar Kokoschka wrote his playlet, *Murderer, The Hope of Women* in 1909 which is generally considered to be the first expressionist play. In this play, Oskar Kokoschka presents the story of “an unnamed man and woman struggle for dominance. The man brands the woman; she stabs and imprisons him. He frees himself and she falls dead at his touch.” The spectators are shocked to witness the man slaughtering everybody around him at the end of the play. This play exhibited many of the features of Expressionist play. These features are “the extreme simplification of characters to mythic types, choral effects, declamatory dialogue and heightened intensity.”

Expressionism dominated the German theatre of the early 20th-century. The main dramatists of this period were Georg Kaiser and Ernst Toller. They were followed by other dramatists like Walter Hasenclever, Hans Henny Jahnn, Arnolt Bronnen and Reinhard Sorge. In America, Expressionism had its followers in Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice and Sophie Treadwell. Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*, *The Emperor Jones* and *The Great God Brown*, Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* and Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* are some of the brilliant plays written in Expressionist tradition.

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

It is observed that the speech in Expressionist drama is “either expansive and rhapsodic, or clipped and telegraphic.”

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

4.4 QUESTIONS

1. What is 'imagism'? Discuss the characteristic features of imagism.
2. How is imagism reflected in American poetry?
3. Define the term 'expressionism'.
4. What are the aspects of expressionism that have reflected in American drama?

5

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE

CONTENTS

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2. The Author
- 5.3. Authors Major works
- 5.4 Plot Summary
- 5.5 Character Analysis
- 5.6. History Context
- 5.7 The Women of Brewster Place: A Critical Overview
- 5.8. Naylor as a Revolutionary Artist
- 5.9 Narrative Structure
- 5.10 Themes, Motifs and Symbols
- 5.11 Let us conclude
- 5.12 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce Gloria Naylor as an African-American writer.
- To make the students understand Naylor's contribution to African-American literature and as a spokesperson of her community.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit the attention is on Gloria Naylor as a voice of African-American community with regard to her most appreciated novel ***The Women of Brewster Place***. The summary of the novel highlights the main theme followed by the plot which gives us idea about the plight of the African-American women and the hardship they have to undergo for their survival. The interactions of the characters and the similar struggles they live through connect the stories, as do the recurring themes and motifs. Each character of the story provides a realistic vision of black urban women's lives and inspires readers with the courage and spirit of black women in America.

5.2 THE AUTHOR

Naylor, Gloria novelist, essayist, screenplay writer, columnist, and educator. Gloria Naylor was born in New York City on 25 January 1950 to Roosevelt and Alberta McAlpin Naylor. Having worked as cotton sharecroppers in Mississippi, her father became a transit worker for the New York City subway system and her mother a telephone operator. Naylor's parents taught her self-validation, independence, and self-confidence. Naylor's personality resembles her mother's--timid, quiet, and shy. She also shares her mother's love of reading and libraries. Naylor, who was a very shy child, grew up in New York City. In 1963 Naylor and her family moved to Queens, a more middle-class borough, which increased Naylor's awareness of racism. Also in the same year, Naylor's mother joined the Jehovah's Witnesses and in 1968 Naylor followed in her footsteps. The Jehovah's Witnesses brought her out of her shyness and gave her a cause, community and opportunity for travel.

From shortly after her graduation until 1975, Naylor worked as a missionary for the Jehovah's Witnesses in New York, North Carolina, and Florida. Eventually deciding that missionary life and the Jehovah's Witnesses were not for her, Naylor returned to New York City and attended college while working as a telephone operator in several different hotels. Although she studied nursing for a short time at Medgar Evers College, she soon decided to pursue a BA in English at Brooklyn College, from which she graduated in 1981. Next Naylor entered Yale University on a fellowship and received an MA in Afro-American studies there in 1983. Having published her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, in 1982, she wrote for her master's thesis at Yale what would become her second novel, *Linden Hills* (published 1985). Naylor calls herself a wordsmith, a storyteller. Her novels contain pieces of her personal life and familial past in the form of names, places and even stories. Her novels are "linked" together. She refers to characters and places in one text that becomes significant in the next text. Naylor also draws extensively on the Bible, which is influenced by her involvement with the Jehovah's Witnesses. She has an affinity, as do the Jehovah's Witnesses, for apocalyptic images and events and uses them in her novels. Her work reflects a moral and spiritual sensibility. She creates corrupt fictional worlds in which characters must find some sort of sanctuary to be safe.

5.3 AUTHOR'S MAJOR WORKS

Naylor's first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, is a celebration of the riches and diversities of the black female experience. She focuses on seven women who commit a victory by

simply managing to survive in an impoverished and threatening neighborhood by bonding with each other and finding refuge. Mattie Michael, the matriarch of the group, is a source of comfort and strength for the other women. Etta Mae Johnson is a free spirit who repeatedly gets involved with men who disappoint her. Kiswana Browne embraces racial pride and eventually accepts her mother's middle-class values. Lorraine and Theresa are lovers; when Lorraine is gang-raped, she is deeply troubled by the attack and murders Ben, who is one of her few supporters and the janitor of Brewster Place. Cora Lee loves her babies, while Ciel is on a path of self-destruction, having suffered a series of personal disasters. The novel received strong reviews, won many awards and was made into a television movie.

Linden Hills, Naylor's second novel, is a story of resistance and rebirth. It portrays a world in which black Americans have achieved status and some measure of power, but in the process they have forfeited their hearts and souls. It follows Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* by employing Dante's moral geography, adapting his narrative strategy as the journey through hell as her main organizing principle and offering an allegory intended to warn and instruct her intended audience--black Americans. Naylor masterfully captures the emotional complexity of each of her characters, which represent the different personality types within the black bourgeoisie. The juxtaposition of poor blacks with rich blacks is constructed in such a way that it forces the reader to examine his/her motives and aspirations in life. Like the residents of Linden Hills, many people are motivated by the Western concept of success: a lot of money and flashy possessions that scream to the world you are indeed well off. Throughout the novel, the dominant question Gloria Naylor asks her readers is how much of our inner selves are we willing to sacrifice for a dream created by someone else?

Naylor's third novel, *Mama Day*, marks a signal change in her development. She uses alternating narrators which both reflects and reinforces the novel's thematic concerns with reality and truth. The novel is concerned with examining, deconstructing and redefining the past. Its strongest elements are the bonds shared within the female community and between the generations of women. It is "about the fact that the real basic magic is the unfolding of the human potential and that if we reach inside ourselves we can create miracles," according to Naylor. Throughout *Mama Day*, Naylor presents three different narrators. Much of the novel involves Cocoa and George speaking in passages that occur after his death and within their separate and shared consciousness. Naylor narrates other parts of the novel in the omniscient voice of the island—with special emphasis on Mama Day, whose musings involve her premonitions and attempts to

“listen” to the messages of her heritage. At the very end of the work Naylor’s all-knowing narrator looks forward to Cocoa assuming the matriarchal role after Mama Day passes on.

Bailey’s Cafe, Naylor’s fourth novel, is the story of a magical place and of the lost souls who have their found, if not redemption, at least a safe haven. It explores female sexuality, female sexual identity and male sexual identity. “The core of the work is indeed the way in which the word ‘whore’ has been used against women or to manipulate female sexual identity,” says Naylor. She also intends to employ the blues and jazz into the novel’s structure by using lyrical language. The characters tell their own stories and sing their own songs which empower them to generate the hope for necessary living. **Bailey’s Cafe** doesn’t have a conventional plot, moving instead from tale to tale just as you might hear them if you were sitting in the cafe. Each voice rings separate and distinct, from Miss Maple’s erudite, educated tones to Jesse Bell’s tough-girl colloquialisms. The novel’s least successful section deals with the horror of clitoridectomy, the same surgery that scars the protagonist of Alice Walker’s recent *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. The young Mariam has suffered this brutal operation and become pregnant afterwards. The birth of her child offers the faintest hope of redemption for the denizens of Bailey’s. Unfortunately, Mariam remains a symbol, never becoming as vivid as the other habitués.

Naylor’s fifth novel, Saphhira Wade is encoded by the text as the goddess who has generated not only the folk of Willow Springs, but their cultures with its rituals. Naylor’s focus of the Goddess in the centre signifies the focus of women’s lives. Naylor’s explorations of Goddess-centered theology, rejects the hierarchy implicit in the first solution for a concept of the self as communal and fused.

Gloria Naylor’s *The “Men of Brewster Place”* is a profound work that explores the other side of the gender issue. It is a continuation of Naylor’s “*The Women of Brewster Place*” and depicts the men who played only minor roles in that book.

Returning to the same dim block of city tenement housing, Naylor focuses on the black men of the struggling community with a spirited sensitivity tempered by her penchant for sociological realism. Each chapter highlights the life of one man, and all are introduced with lengthy quotes from *The Women* to set context and tone. Naylor’s positive depiction shows them as men struggling to correct their faults, or as individuals trying to make sense of their lives.

5.4 PLOT SUMMARY

The Women of Brewster Place is a novel told in seven stories. Of the seven stories, six are centered on individual characters, while the final story is about the entire community. Each woman has an individual story to tell. Their stories include the trials and tribulations they endured to end up at Brewster Place; Brewster Place is a dead end street that is cut off from the rest of the town. The primary characters and the title characters of each chapter are all women and residents of Brewster Place.

The life history of Brewster Place comes to resemble the history of the country as the community changes with each new historical shift. Following the Civil Rights Era, Brewster Place inherits its last inhabitants, African-Americans, many of whom are migrants from the southern half of the United States. The stories within the novel are the stories of these residents.

The first and longest narrative within the novel is Mattie Michael's. Mattie, along with several other characters, arrives in Brewster Place from her parents' home in the South. As a young woman, Mattie becomes pregnant by a notorious womanizer, Butch Fuller. When her father discovers her pregnancy, he beats her resulting in Mattie leaving her house. Mattie decides to move to the North at approximately the same time in history as the Great Migration. Mattie eventually has a son, Basil; Mattie and Basil live in an old run-down apartment, until Basil is bitten by a rat. Mattie decides she can no longer raise her son in these conditions, and she leaves. She is taken in by an old, kind, light-skinned African-American woman, Eva Turner and refuses to charge her rent. Eva is raising her grandchild, Lucielia, and the two young children grow up together. After Ms. Eva dies, Mattie purchases the house and remains there to raise her son, Basil. Basil turns out to be a spoiled young boy, and grows into a selfish man. He murders a man and goes to jail. Mattie uses her house for collateral, which Basil forfeits once he disappears. Mattie, after thirty years, is forced to give up her home and move to Brewster Place. Once she arrives at Brewster Place, Mattie is like the matriarchal figure.

The second story focuses on Etta Mae Johnson, Mattie's childhood friend. Etta Mae is a woman who likes to live freely. She is constantly moving around from place to place and from man to man. Etta arrives at Brewster Place to stay with Mattie with a hope to find some stability. Though Etta is not really religious, Mattie convinces her to attend church where she meets the preacher, Reverend Woods. Despite her past experiences, She is taken by his looks, wealth, and status, but after sleeping with him, she realizes it was all just a fantasy and that he wanted only sex. Etta

leaves feeling broken, but her spirit is restored once she finds out that Mattie has stayed up all night waiting for her and she cares for her.

The third chapter tells the story of Kiswana Browne. Kiswana is one of the few people who have actually chosen to live on Brewster Place voluntarily. Raised in the affluent community, Linden Hills, Kiswana has had a privileged life; she has grown up in a wealthy household with many opportunities. During her college years, Kiswana became interested in African-American pride. Kiswana dropped out of college to live in Brewster Place, where she believes she can effect real social change in the black community. Kiswana's mother comes to visit her in her new home at Brewster Place, and it is clear that she does not really approve of her daughter's new life. The two women have several short arguments that culminate in Kiswana calling her mother a "white-man's nigger." Mrs. Browne eventually explains that she too is proud of her African heritage, and she only wants what is best for her daughter. At the end both mother and daughter have a better understanding of each other.

The fourth chapter focuses on Lucielia Turner, also known as Ciel, is the granddaughter of Ms. Eva. After Eva's death, Lucielia was returned to her parents, and she has grown up since her days with her grandmother. Lucielia is now married to a worthless man Eugene, yet she loves him desperately. Lucielia has a daughter, Serena. Lucielia aborts their second child because Eugene does not want it. Eugene eventually decides to leave Lucielia and Serena for a new job opportunity. While Lucielia is begging him to stay, Serena sticks a fork in an electrical socket and dies leaving Lucielia nearly lifeless with grief. Following the funeral, Mattie is the one who begins to release Lucielia's enormous grief by rocking and bathing her until she falls asleep crying.

Cora Lee's story is told in the fifth chapter. As a young girl, Cora Lee was obsessed with baby dolls and this obsession continues when she is an adult. Once Cora Lee discovers how babies are made, she wants to become pregnant and have one of her own. She has one child after another, almost all with different men. She lives in a filthy apartment, and her children are terribly neglected, since she can only care for them while they're infants. Kiswana visits Cora Lee's home, and invites her to a production of Shakespeare's play. At the play, the children and Cora Lee are all touched by the performance. By the end, Cora Lee begins to imagine a better future for her children. She kisses them all goodnight. She is loving and kind to her children that night, yet after they are all asleep, she sleeps with another nameless man.

The sixth chapter combines the story of two women, Theresa and Lorraine. Theresa and Lorraine is the only lesbian couple who have recently moved to Brewster Place. Originally they are well-liked by the community, but when the local gossip convinces the rest of the town that they are lesbians, Theresa and Lorraine become shunned. Lorraine and Theresa are almost complete opposites in personality; Lorraine wants to be accepted by the community, while Theresa is portrayed as a tough girl who does not care what other people think. Lorraine feels lonely and misunderstood, until she befriends Ben, the local, harmless drunk. Ben helps her become braver and more confident with herself. Theresa and Lorraine's conflicting personalities cause them to have a fight, and Lorraine leaves to go to a party. As she is returning, she is cornered by a group of men. The men are cruel, and they want to show Lorraine what being with a real man is like. The group brutally rapes Lorraine and leaves her bloody and beaten in the alley. Ben finds Lorraine in the morning, and Lorraine, in her confusion, murders Ben by bashing his head in with a brick.

Following Ben's death, Mattie has a dream that the rain that has drenched Brewster Place since Ben's murder has suddenly stopped in time for the block party planned by the tenants' association. The rain eventually returns during the party, and everyone except the women run for shelter. The women believe that the wall in front of which Ben died still has blood on it, so they begin to frantically tear it apart, brick by brick. Mattie wakes to a beautiful sunny day. In the end, all of the residents of Brewster Place are forced out, and the block is condemned. Brewster Place, abandoned, lives on only in the hopes and memories of the women who once lived there.

The final chapter of the *Women of Brewster Place* is the block party. Kiswana plans the block party to help promote changes in Brewster Place. She hopes the landlord will see their party, and will make some positive changes to Brewster Place. During the block party, Mattie Michael has an intense dream. At first she dreams of the party; despite the recent tragedy of Lorraine and Ben, everyone seems to be having a decent time. The dream quickly turns bad, however, when it begins to rain; everybody runs for shelter except the women. The women discover a splatter of blood on the wall where Ben was killed. They quickly begin to demolish the brick wall, by removing brick after brick. When Mattie finally awakens, the sun is shining. The story ends with the closing of Brewster Place. All the residents are evicted, and Brewster Place remains alone, with only the memories of the women who lived there to sustain it.

5.5 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

(Though the novel contains seven stories only three has been prescribed in the syllabus. They are- “Mattie Michael”, “Etta Mae Johnson”, “Kiswana Browne”)

Mattie Michael

Mattie Michael is the most consistent and prominent character in *The Women of Brewster Place*. She is the main character of the story as well as the first one the reader is introduced to. As an older woman who has already raised and lost a child, she is a surrogate mother figure to several of the other women. She has endured her share of hardships—losing a child, fleeing her parents’ home, and losing her own home—yet she continues to persevere. Initially, the story starts off with a flashback of Mattie's younger years; which helps show how she came to Brewster Place. Her journey to Brewster Place began in the backwoods of Tennessee. In the very beginning of the story, Mattie is depicted as an average woman with common emotions for a girl her age (late teens). She has a softspot inside for a local man, Butch Fuller, who her father simply hates. Her constant strength is a source of support for women such as Etta Mae Johnson and Lucielia Turner. As with many females, forbidden fruit tastes the sweetest, and Mattie gives in to her temptations one day in the canefield when she has intercourse with Butch. Mattie is impregnated by Butch and is happy that she will now always have someone that loves her. Mattie knows that she cannot tell her father who the child's father is because she knows he will beat her until he is sure the baby of Butch Fuller is dead. So, Mattie refuses to tell her father, her father beats her up brutally anyway, and Mattie flees. Her generous heart and deep faith represent the best elements not only of Brewster Place but also of African-American women in general. In many ways, Mattie is the bedrock of the Brewster Place community. When she arrives, she does so knowing that it may very well be the last place she ever lives. However, she is determined not to be broken by that knowledge. She pities her plants, who are bound to die from lack of sunlight on her little window sill, instead of pitying herself. This shows her enduring strength. She continues to live her life the best way she knows how, and, in doing so, she is able to add a measure of comfort to almost everyone she encounters.

Etta Mae Johnson:

Etta Mae Johnson is the next woman who comes to Brewster Place and into the story. Etta Mae is a childhood friend of

Mattie's. Etta spends the bulk of her life after fleeing the South searching to fulfill some unnamed desire, a mixture of a desire for love, stability, and someone with whom to share her life. Everyone thinks she is eccentric and flamboyant but really all Etta wants is to have a great love and a happy and perfect family life. She moves from one man to the next, hoping to find in each of them at least a part of what she's seeking. Like the old blues songs she carries in her head, Etta sees herself as a tragic and lonely figure. Her name, in fact, could even be taken as an invocation of Etta James, the famous jazz singer whose mournful songs have clearly played an important role in defining Etta's identity. After a long life of disappointments, Etta settles into Brewster Place, hoping that perhaps she can find that long-sought-after security. Instead, she finds more disappointment and failure. Etta grew into an intimidating and bold woman because her childhood life allowed for no superiority when it came to women. Etta is a very strong woman because of her childhood. More than anything she wants to be an important woman of society, which back then was normally accomplished by marrying an important man. So, Etta sets her sights on Reverend Woods. This man would seem to be of better intentions but the Reverend tries to get Etta to have a onenight stand. Etta's reputation is ruined. Only at the end of her chapter in the novel does Etta realize that she has already found in Mattie at least some of what she's searching for. Etta is Mattie's childhood friend, and she is, in almost every regard, Mattie's exact opposite. While Etta is sexually adventurous and bold with no true religious devotion, Mattie is solitary and devout. In Mattie she finds a true friend, someone who can help make her life matter.

Kiswana Browne:

Kiswana, an outsider on **Brewster Place**, is constantly dreaming of ways in which she can organize the residents and enact social reform. Kiswana grew up in Linden Hills, a "rich" neighborhood not far from Brewster Place. She leaves her middle-class family, turning her back on an upbringing that, she feels, ignored her heritage. Light-skinned, with smooth hair, Kiswana wants desperately to feel a part of the black community and to help her fellow African Americans better their lives. She wants the community to be socially and modernly reformed. Kiswana is a bright-eyed product of the '60s who received the dictum "black is beautiful" as political ideology. Even as she looks out her window at the wall that separates **Brewster Place** from the heart of the city, she is daydreaming: "she placed her dreams on the back of the bird and fantasized that it would glide forever in transparent silver circles until it ascended to the center of the universe and was swallowed up." But just as the pigeon she watches fails to ascend gracefully and instead lands on a fire escape "with awkward, frantic movements," so Kiswana's dreams of a revolution will be frustrated

by the grim realities of **BrewsterPlace** and the awkward, frantic movements of people who are busy merely trying to survive. She becomes friends with Cora Lee and succeeds, for one night, in showing her a different life. In an ironic turn, Kiswana believes that her mother denies her heritage; during a confrontation, she is surprised when she learns that the two share a great deal.

5.6 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel spans the period of thirty years that is the time of Basil's birth till Ben's death. This covers the period from the early 1940s to the mid 1970s, a time of significant political and social change for African Americans. It was a period of post World War II witnessing the Second Great Migration, the first followed by World War I. It was during this period there was a mass movement of African Americans from the rural South to the urban North with the hope of employment and gaining economic benefits. Unfortunately Blacks were disheartened by the squalid conditions found in the North. In the North they were not accepted by the whites. Even if they could afford better circumstances, they were denied access. Or as blacks moved into certain areas, whites soon moved elsewhere, and these abandoned neighborhoods, without a substantial tax base because jobs and economic prosperity followed the whites to suburbia, soon deteriorated to slums. When the Supreme Court rendered its decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the modern Civil Rights Movement was ushered in, but years would pass before any significant inroads toward social equality would be made. Even after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the passage of the Voting Rights Bill of 1965, poor African Americans, in both the North and the South, found their conditions largely unchanged.

It is within this social context that Gloria Naylor writes *The Women of Brewster Place*, the place full of bastard child. Brewster Place originated, soon after World War I, as a locus for the oppression of already oppressed people. The buildings constructed at this place were in depleted condition. Mismanagement and neglect completes the task of dehumanization. Naylor reminds the reader of this economic reality when she describes the wall that blocks off Brewster Place from a major thoroughfare. Naylor thus succeeds to highlight the conditions of the inhabitants who are left to lead lonely life and die. Most die, if not physically, then emotionally, because the coping skills they have cultivated were designed for a more agrarian existence with its emphasis on open spaces, nature, and the solace offered in extended families. Many of the characters hail from the South. For Ben, Mattie, Etta Mae, and Ciel, Tennessee is their place of origin; for Theresa, Georgia. And though each of them has come to the North for different reasons, each has come to escape some perceived ill suffered in

the south. The irony, of course, rests in the fact that their present conditions have brought new ills in their life.

As a means of counteracting some of these problems, Naylor advances the philosophy of certain characters, and in so doing, nods to a significant literary development: the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s. Coalescing in 1965, soon after the assassination of Malcolm X, it insisted upon “social engagement” (the sustained and pointed critique of the white establishment) as a prerequisite of its aesthetic function. This movement disregarded white literary forms and perceived white sensibility. In short, the Movement challenged white mainstream notions of good, normal, and standard, much like Equiano does in his slave narrative. Black power (if necessary, armed self-defense) and pride in black identity were staples of the organization. Kiswana Browne, though somewhat misguided in her zeal, emerges as the representative of this movement. Arguing with her mother that the family (her mother, father, and brother) has acquiesced willingly to white notions of superiority, Kiswana espouses a revolutionary agenda, even though Mrs. Browne reminds Kiswana that all of her former college “revolution” friends are now a part of the establishment. Naylor, however, uses Kiswana to voice some important concepts, radical though they may be, about black racial pride, lest they be forgotten. Kiswana’s boyfriend, Abshu, maintaining only a minor role, also embodies the best of revolutionary ideals at work. Instead of merely protesting and ridiculing social norms, he is involved in reshaping the community and advancing the intellectual and artistic capacity of the residents. It is his Afrocentric (using African-inspired costumes, language, and humor) rendition of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that Kiswana takes Cora Lee’s children to see. As a result of his efforts, children in the community are exposed to art forms they otherwise might never see. And he imbues these productions with black identity so that the children can relate to the art.

Perhaps Naylor’s most radical use of the often radical Black Arts Movement is evident in Lorraine and Theresa, and ironically so. Frequently criticized as homophobic and chauvinistic, the Black Arts Movement often relegated women to an inferior status and either ignored the contributions of gays or denigrated them for being emasculated, willingly, by a sexually perverse white establishment. Naylor, however, invokes the spirit of the Movement in her development of these two lesbian characters, and in so doing, makes them mouthpieces for the Movement. Each woman argues from a different perspective, but each is quite radical in her assessment. Lorraine, initially shy and unassuming, wants to be accepted for who she is, insisting that the larger community see her as being no different from other women/people there. After all, she

maintains, she is no different today than she was on the day before she realized she was/is a lesbian. On the other hand, argues Theresa, the world, homophobic and heterosexist as it is, is ruled (in sheer numbers) by persons who despise gays and lesbians. And while Theresa could not care less what others think, she realizes that she must function in a world controlled by others. Each woman is quite passionate in her appraisal, and with this passion, each woman plants the novel firmly in the tradition of Black Arts radicalism.

5.7 THE WOMEN OF BREWSTER PLACE: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* won the American Book Award in 1983. The success of her novel lies in her rendering, in rich, sensuous, rhythmic language, a sense of reality of Afro-American women's lives while including serious examination of racial and sexual politics. Naylor manages to make the reader understand how the economic and social situation of black lives becomes one with personal lives, with the relationships between men and women, women and women, and parents and children, without diminishing the humanity of the individuals involved. The novel exposes the special bond that exists between women characters, including women of different generations. In this novel, a community of women emerges-sustaining, enabling, and enriching the lives of each other. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor indicates the women's sense of isolation, their mistreatment by men and their search for identity through shared experiences. *The Women of Brewster Place* is almost entirely about women. In this "novel in seven stories", Naylor focuses on a number of black women who share the common experience of living on a dead end street called Brewster Place. Brewster Place is largely a community of women; men are mostly absent or itinerant, drifting in and out of their women's lives, leaving behind the pregnancies and unpaid bills. The women who live in Brewster Place are drawn together because they live on the same dead end street and also because they share a common fate. The dreams of Brewster's inhabitants are what keep them alive. The dreams unite them and provide a context of sharing and connection.

FRIENDSHIP:

In Brewster Place, a friendship based on the shared experience of black womanhood exists, occasionally in the form of the mother-daughter relationship. Mattie Michael, the protagonist in *The Women of Brewster Place*, suffers at the hands of her father, Samuel. Early in the novel, we find Mattie as a young virgin adored by her father. She had expected an explosion when her mother told

Samuel that Mattie was pregnant; instead, he didn't speak for two days but then he was unable to express his anger and disappointment at her pregnancy, except through violence because he was unaccustomed to using language or logic. He brutally attacked his daughter and began to beat her trying to force her to tell who the father was, but Mattie refused to say. At the same time, there was no expectation that Butch shows responsibility for Mattie or their baby. As a young, single mother, Mattie places all of her dreams on her son. She leaves her boarding house room after a rat bites him because she cannot stay "another night in that **place** without nightmares about things that would creep out of the walls to attack her child." She continues to protect him from harm and nightmares until he jumps bail and abandons her to her own nightmare. After her ejection from home, Miss Eva, with whom she later shares a household and whom she regards as a surrogate mother, helps her but finds Mattie's excessive mothering unnatural. When Mattie sleeps with her son Basil and channels all her needs into mothering him; in fact, she renders him irresponsible and also dependent on herself. When she puts her house up for Basil's bail and he skips bail, she loses her home, faces a tragic awakening and ends up in Brewster Place.

Etta Mae Johnson's relationship with Mattie is mentioned as another story of the novel. After many negative experiences that Etta had in her relations with men, now she longs for lasting love; when she meets Reverend Moreland Woods she convinces herself that she has finally found someone to settle down with. After the sex act, Reverend Woods leaves Etta; he has no intention of establishing a stable relationship. Then Etta returns again to Mattie, as to a center. When she reaches the stoop, there is a light under the shade at Mattie's window: "Etta laughed softly to herself as she climbed the steps toward the light and the love and the comfort that awaited her" (74). Etta yet has the deep friendship, support and even moral judgment of Mattie in warding off loneliness and despair. In this community, Mattie is concerned about improving Brewster Place; she becomes a survivor and giver of advice only after she is befriended by Miss Eva. Mattie becomes the backbone of Brewster Place, she counsels the women on the street. In an interview with Carabi (1992), Gloria Naylor notes that, "what is extraordinary about Mattie is that, in spite of having many problems, she is generous and calm—almost magic yet very human. She allows people to feel free in her presence. Like an earth mother, I guess." Etta Mae, like the indomitable, classic blues singer she epitomizes, is, with Mattie's assistance, able to transcend the near-tragic night world of **Brewster Place**.

Another story of the novel Kiswana Browne shows mother daughter relationship. The story is that of Kiswana Browne who is healed in her conflict with her mother by coming to identify herself

with her mother as a woman. Kiswana rejects the bourgeois upbringing of her parents and embraces the political ideology of the '60's. She changes her name, shifts from Linden Hills to the ghetto, in Brewster Place. When her mother tells her she lives in a world of fantasy, Kiswana says that she is proud of her heritage and accuses her mother of being "a white man's nigger who's ashamed of being black" (85). Mrs. Browne gives her daughter a short history lesson of her family's proud heritage. The clinching moment for Kiswana comes only when she notices for the first time her mother's bright red toenail polish, like her own. Mrs. Browne relates to Kiswana a personal testimony of a mother's love.

5.8 NAYLOR AS A REVOLUTIONARY ARTIST

Naylor is a revolutionary artist who feels that only a revolution in consciousness can save the black community from imminent disaster. If the choice is between the soul and success she wants the black community to select the soul. She wants her people to struggle to keep their dreams from going sour or getting polluted. She would like her community to suffer to keep their pride. Thus, within the context of Brewster Place, these seven women tell stories of their passions, disappointments, frustration and their struggles, tragedies and triumphs with a pride.

The Women of Brewster Place is an experimental novel that functions as a rare, incisive work of social criticism. Gloria Naylor's clever choice of Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem" as an epigraph directs the reader's focus of attention to the lives of those for whom the American dream, whether it entails socioeconomic advancement or stability and fulfillment in the nuclear family, is all too often indefinitely deferred. No doubt the community of **Brewster Place** is a microcosm for black America, and it is comprised of marginal people who are excluded from the social, economic, and political mainstream. Each quest for linear progress ultimately fails on the community's rather foreboding dead-end street. That a series of reversals precede the eventual condemnation of the community comes as no surprise, given its questionable origins and the assembly of residents who are forced to live there.

Significantly, however, with the creation of the fictive world that is **Brewster Place**, Naylor not only documents the failure of the American dream, but she challenges its validity in terms that point to the formation of an intensely private reality suspended above time and space in which dreams are fulfilled.

BLACK SISTERHOOD:

The Women of Brewster Place is a tribute to the African-American female experience, where she focuses almost entirely on **women**. Brewster Place is an impoverished and threatening neighborhood. Each woman, in her own way, plays an integral part in the making of Brewster Place. The women are forced to rely on each other when the world seems to shut them out. Despite their differences, the women of Brewster Place are bound by a sense of community and sisterhood that enables them to deal with the everyday pressures they face in the male-dominated society in which they live. This is best exemplified in the relationship between Cora Lee and Kiswana and the relationship between Mattie and Ciel. Mattie enjoys everyone's respect and love by virtue of her helping and motherly love for others. She is the source of comfort to Ciel after her daughter is electrocuted. She is the person to whom Etta Mae turns after she has her most recent sexual fling. Mattie gives up living her own life in order to help other people live theirs.

In the prologue ("Dawn"), she presents the female residents of the tenement as a vibrant community. At the end of this "novel in seven stories," despite numerous conflicts, she unites the **women** in Mattie's dream of the block party (which may come true). They join in an act of protest against the power of men over **women** (the gang-rape of the lesbian Lorraine) and, more broadly, against the barriers of racist and class oppression (the bloodstained wall) that distort relations between the sexes. Even after **Brewster Place** has been condemned and abandoned in the epilogue ("Dusk"), the **women** carry on:

But the colored daughters of **Brewster**, spread over the canvas of time, still wake up with their dreams misted on the edge of a yawn. They get up and pin those dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry, they're diapered around babies. They ebb and flow, ebb and flow, but never disappear. p. 192)

The **women** are a collective repository of dreams, a resilient source of strength for continuing survival if not yet conquest.

5.9 NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

Naylor's reluctance to adopt a linear structure in this first novel anticipates what will become a recurring technique in her other novels. The author enjoys testing the boundaries of reality while exploring various possibilities for the imagination. A more fluid structure allows her latitude to present all these possibilities. While

each story in *The Women of Brewster Place* is captivating in its own right, and each story is only tangentially connected to any other story, Naylor still provides an overall unity that sustains the novel.

The Women of Brewster Place shows in poignant detail the detrimental effects of men's emotional and physical violence on women, and in more subtle detail the ill effects of racism on black lives. Nevertheless, these potential victims are determined to survive despite their inhuman treatment in a world that would rather see them demonized and defeated. The women's repeated attempts at resilience culminate in a final chapter of communal resolve when they decide to demolish the wall at the end of the block in a symbolic move to reject the machinations of men and whites to keep them caged, both metaphorically and in actuality.

Each story/chapter is presented by a third-person omniscient narrator. An omniscient narrator, in addition to providing details about the action in a story, knows the thoughts and feelings of the characters and reveals this information to the reader. As stated above, the novel does not tell one specific story; rather it tells several distinct stories. Nonetheless, Naylor still manages to craft a cohesive work that moves toward a recognizable resolution. The unity is maintained with the recurring appearances of key characters in various stories. Because the novel opens with the Mattie Michael story, the reader automatically embraces Mattie as the protagonist. Capitalizing on this response, while still creating enough narrative space for other characters, Naylor uses Mattie in the other stories as a unifying thread.

The chapters are also connected thematically. Issues discussed in one chapter are presented in later chapters, though in altered forms. For example, the "Mattie Michael" chapter, in addition to other issues presented, focuses in part on dysfunctional parent-child relationships. Later, in the "Cora Lee" chapter, this topic is rendered more perversely. Cora Lee reproduces incessantly, only to ignore the children once they pass infancy. Her obsession is with newborns, and once she can no longer nourish them directly from her body, she abandons them emotionally, and they are left to fend for themselves.

5.10 THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

Themes:

The Search for a Home:

Search for home is the main theme of the residents of Brewster Place, both as a literal place to live and as a metaphorical state of mind. For Mattie, her search for a home other than the one

in which she was raised takes her from a rundown apartment in the city to a wonderful home in which she raises her child, and finally, to Brewster Place. The journey from one home to another is repeated with every character in the novel. The search for physical location plays an important role as it is related with the security and comfort attached to the idea of home. Brewster Place, though it's falling apart, offers Etta a form of security and comfort she has long lived without. It offers Kiswana the opportunity to live out her ideals, and it offers Mattie the opportunity to become a surrogate mother to a host of women. In every story the concept of search for a home, ultimately leads to the idea of "home". Home doesn't mean the walls but in fact it relates to the strength of the relationships within those walls.

The Hopefulness of Migration:

The residents of Brewster Place have migrated to Brewster Place from their parents' home in the South, from the Mediterranean, from the middle-class suburbs ringing the city, or from more secure lives and homes. Whatever the reason might be they have ended up at Brewster Place willingly, or have been forced, to call it home. Migration, in addition to being a central theme of the novel, is also a central theme in African-American history. From the slave migration to the North prior to the Civil War, to the Great Migration of millions of African-Americans following the post-World War II industrial boom, the idea of escaping to the North has always held hope and promise of a better future. Thus the concept of migration is best revealed by Naylor in the novel.

For most of the residents of Brewster Place, however, migration isn't the fulfillment of a dream but the culmination of a long, frustrating life. Mattie loses her home and ends up in Brewster Place, while Etta arrives after a series of failed relationships. Ben comes to Brewster Place after being abandoned by his wife and daughter, while Lorraine and Theresa are forced out of their more comfortable middle-class existence because of their sexuality. Despite the frustrations and difficulties of life in Brewster Place, it brings all of its residents hope. Finally a light of hope is seen after a late-night conversation which brings comfort and meaning in their life.

The Power of Personal Connections:

Throughout the novel, characters reach out to one another across generational, cultural, and gender lines. This helps them to lead their life comfortably and is able to ease the loneliness. They are even successful in carrying out the hardship that surrounds their lives. One example of a powerful personal connection is Mattie's relationship with Eva. The women are separated by class,

skin tone, and age, yet they find each other and make each other's lives more bearable. Similar benefits arise from other connections, including Mattie's relationship with Etta, Mattie's relationship with Lucielia, Kiswana's relationship with Cora, and Ben's relationship with Lorraine. Each relationship shows how personal connections can sustain and offer hope in even the direst circumstances. This relationship serves as a necessary counterweight to the abandonment, prejudice, and brutality that comprise much of the novel.

Motifs

Illegitimate Births:

In Brewster Place, births are nearly always illegitimate. Every child we come across has a missing father in their life. From Mattie's son to all of Cora's children they face the same problem. These children are missing half their identities, and their fates seem dire—just as the fate of Brewster Place itself seems dire. Brewster Place's conception is even referred to as a bastard birth. From the moment of Brewster Place's creation, its fate is sealed, the buildings and their inhabitants destined to live in ever-worsening conditions.

Flight:

The men in *The Women of Brewster Place* are masters at disappearing. Faced with any hardship or difficulty, men such as Basil, Eugene, and Butch run from every responsibility. Their flight is in direct response to any perceived threat to their freedom. Basil disappears when faced with the remote possibility of going to jail. Eugene disappears once his responsibilities as a father and husband become too demanding, and Butch Fuller lives a philosophy dedicated to living in the moment and enjoying without realising the consequences of it. While the men in the novel are constantly running away, the women are constantly returning home to one another trying to support each other by Black sisterhood or Black Friendship.

Blending of Lives:

In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor portrays a broad spectrum of women to show the similarities and differences between the experiences of each generation. In every encounter between an older and younger woman, past and present blend together, and the connection between generations adds perspective and historical depth to the experiences of each. For example, despite Kiswana's dramatic differences of opinion with her mother, she comes to recognize that her life, in fact, is not so different after all. She is merely living her own slightly altered

version of the life her mother lived. That realization restores the connection that had previously been threatened when Kiswana insulted her mother.

Symbols:

Brewster Place's Wall:

The wall separating Brewster Place from the main avenues of the city serves several important purposes. Following its initial creation, the wall comes to symbolize the indifference with which Brewster Place is treated by the men responsible for its creation. The women willingly or forcefully are made to accept Brewster Place as their home. Because of the wall, Brewster Place is economically and culturally isolated from the rest of the city. The wall has forced Brewster Place to fend for itself. For the residents of Brewster Place, the wall symbolizes the end of the road which symbolically means the end of their desires and the hope in their lives. The wall, for them, represents the wall that has been built around their lives, either by failed opportunities or by a series of misfortunes. The true disastrousness of the wall becomes evident at the end of the novel. Along this wall, Lorraine drags her nearly lifeless body after she is gang raped, and it is from this wall that she grabs the brick she uses to kill Ben.

Sugar Cane:

Butch Fuller uses sugar cane not only to lure Mattie into the fields with him but also to espouse a whole philosophy on life. From the start of Mattie and Butch's trip to the sugar cane field, there is an ominous overtone cast by the large machetes that each of them wields. There is something dangerous about Butch, and that danger is encapsulated perfectly in his attitude toward the world. When preparing to eat the sugar cane, Butch tells Mattie to spit it out while it's still sweet. In telling her this, he not only reveals something about his perspective toward life but also prepares her for what's about to come. Following their brief encounter, Mattie winds up pregnant while Butch becomes nothing more than a ghost. He stays just long enough to enjoy the pleasures of Mattie's body, while refusing to stay around to experience any of the complications or hardships that come about as a result.

Color:

Brewster Place is full of color, from the clothes the children wear on a summer afternoon to the color of its residents. Naylor describes the color of nearly every character that appears in the novel. Characters are described as caramel, honey, light-skinned, dark-skinned, and blue-eyed. In describing characters this way, Naylor shows the spectrum of shades and experiences that have defined African-American culture. There is a diversity of

experiences, evident not only in the lives of the characters but in the characters' very skin. In addition, the color of the residents also occasionally serves as a contrast to the drab colors that otherwise characterize Brewster Place. The sky may be gray and the walls "ashen," but the residents of Brewster Place, full of life, are vibrant and rich.

5.11 LET US CONCLUDE

Thus the unit sees the development of the women characters in the Brewster Place. Naylor with the help of narrative technique depicts the women as a collective repository of dreams, a resilient source of strength for continuing survival if not yet conquest. The women share the common experience that is neglect in their life. The characters are bonded with each other by the concept of Black Sisterhood and try to add meaning in each other's lives. The men in the novel are projected as irresponsible and are responsible for the ill fate in the lives of women characters. The novel portrays the courage, the fear, and the anguish of some of the women who hold their families together, trying to make a home. Through the seven stories Naylor has suitably tied the courage of the African-American women to survive in America with all the odds in their lives. At the novel's end the women angrily demolish the wall that separates them from the rest of the city.

5.12 QUESTIONS

1. How did Brewster Place come into existence? Of what significance is the wall, literally and symbolically?
2. In what ways are the black residents of Brewster Place different from all previous inhabitants? Why is Brewster Place "especially fond of its colored daughters"?
3. Why doesn't Mattie's father like Butch? If Mattie is aware that "everything about Butch was like puffed air and cotton candy," why is she so attracted to him?
4. What angers Mattie's father the most about her pregnancy? How does Mattie's mother react?
5. How does Miss Eva help Mattie? What does Mattie learn about life from Miss Eva? What is Eva's ultimate gift?
6. Why does Basil turn out to be such a rotten kid? In what way has Mattie been responsible for his behavior?
6. There have been three significant men in Mattie's life. How have each of them treated her? What kind of impression must they have left on Mattie?

7. In the chapter about Mattie, Etta had left home for New York to find a man to take care of her. Why is she now coming to Brewster Place? Has she learned anything during her separation from Mattie?
8. What kind of game does Etta play with Reverend Woods? Why does she think she will be successful? Why isn't she?
9. How is Etta different at the end of this chapter? What help does Mattie provide?
10. What are the major differences between Kiswana and her mother? How does Kiswana view her mother's wealth? In what ways is Kiswana like her mother?
11. In the end, what does Kiswana come to realize about her mother and herself?
12. Explain the significance of themes, motifs and symbols in the novel *The Women of Brewster Place*.
13. Explain the importance of the historical context related to *The Women of Brewster Place*.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF STUDY OF JOHN STEINBECK'S *PEARL*

CONTENTS

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Life of Steinbeck
- 6.2 Characters in the Pearl
- 6.3 Summary of the Pearl
- 6.4 Themes and Issues in the Novella
- 6.5 Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVES

To introduce author to the students

To make the familiar with the characters of the novella, *The Pearl*

To make them aware of the story and the summary of the text

To help them study the thematic concerns of the novella

6.1 LIFE OF STEINBECK

In 1940, John Steinbeck on a sailing trip to the Sea of Cortez heard a legend about the misfortunes of a poor fisher boy who had found a great pearl. Taking the ideas from this legend, Steinbeck wrote *The Pearl* for a magazine in 1945. The story was so popular that it was published as a book and adapted as a motion picture.

Steinbeck changed the young fisher boy of the legend into a man with a family. But the main idea remained the same—that a beautiful, valuable pearl brings only trouble and sadness, not peace or happiness, to a fisherman and his loved ones.

Steinbeck was an acute observer of human nature. He wrote about people he knew and about towns he had lived in. Prior to writing about these people, he would often live with them for a while and get to know their way of life. Most of his characters are down and out, isolated and oppressed. They give voice to the “struggle” which is the central theme of his novels—the

struggle between the poor and the wealthy, the weak and the strong, and between different types of civilization.

His family was not rich. His father was a miller and his mother was a teacher who encouraged him to read widely. Thus he developed taste for Literature. It became his passion. During his school days his ideal writers included Jack London, Gustave Flaubert, and Thomas Hardy.

During summer, Steinbeck worked as a hired hand on local ranches which brought him into contact with Mexican-Americans and migrant workers, who earned little but worked long hours in the hot California sun. He discovered the harsh reality about the survival of workers, and he also learned that these workers were often treated poorly and without respect. Moreover they had little means of defending themselves. This has reflected in most of his novels especially *Grapes of the Wrath* and *The Pearl*.

As student, Steinbeck wrote for the school newspaper and enjoyed sports. He majored himself in English at the university, wanting to be a writer. Before long he was publishing poetry and short stories in the Stanford literary magazine.

After five years of his graduation in 1925, he left California for a literary career in New York. He disliked this city because he had financial problems there. Leaving the writing career for time being, he got engaged in working as a cement mixer. Thereafter, during the roaring twenties, he became a journalist with the *New York American*, a daily newspaper. While other writers took interest in writing on the luxury cruises, Steinbeck was writing about the city's tenement dwellers and immigrants.

Later, Steinbeck secluded himself in the mountains of California, writing and supporting himself with odd jobs. Finally, in 1929, his first novel, *Cup of Gold*, was published. Two months later, however, the stock market crashed and the country soon fell into the devastating Great Depression. For his two years' work, he received a mere \$250 advance from the publisher, and only about 1,500 copies were sold. Since he wanted his novels to reflect an accurate portrait of life, he learned as much as he could about science from his new friend. In the process, he pushed on with his writing and developed what he called a spoken rather than a written style. Since he was most at ease writing about familiar people and places, he set his next two novels, *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932) and *To a God Unknown* (1933), in California's Salinas Valley which was also his childhood home.

Up to the early 1950s, Steinbeck wrote and published his major works. His first major success came in 1933 when the

monthly magazine North American Review published The Red Pony and three other short stories. After the success of the novel Tortilla Flat in 1935, Steinbeck's financial worries were over, and his fame as a writer was clinched in 1937 when Of Mice and Men appeared. The critics welcomed him as one of America's leading writers. The Pearl is set against the oppressive conditions in which Mexican Indians lived. He joined a migrating group of Oklamoans who came from drought or who suffered of Great Depression. They hoped to live a better life in California which is reflected in The Grapes of Wrath (1939), a powerful Pulitzer Prize winning novel in 1940. Soon after, he sailed with Ed Ricketts on an expedition to study the marine life in the Gulf of California. During this trip, he happened to hear the legend of the fisher boy who had found a pearl. Despite of being criticized, finally he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. Thereafter he did not publish a novel again and died in New York in 1968.

6.2 CHARACTERS IN THE PEARL

6.2.1 KINO:

Kino is an honest, and diligent to support his family. He is a simple and believes in the traditional values in the village. He is an ambitious and conscious of his poverty and believes that the money has power to buy anything one needs. It is therefore, he hopes to find a pearl that will guarantee him future peace.

Kino depends on nature for his income. When the waters are rough, he cannot go diving. When the sun sets, his workday ends. Kino's life is completely changed by the discovery of a great pearl. The man who usually hears the Song of the Family begins to hear the voice of suspicion, and the sounds of danger. This song is really a powerful internal voice that alerts him about the dangers to come.

Again, Kino's intelligence helps him realize that the rich and powerful people are exploiting the Indians including Kino. At first, instinctively, he senses the danger with the doctor and pearl buyers though he realizes it after his encounter with the trackers. He comes to realize that human beings will kill in order to gain money and power.

As Kino moves away from his natural habitat, he becomes isolated. With the pearl in hand, he marches toward the city in the belief that he can deal with civilized people. He lays claim to the benefits of civilization but soon realizes that he is a victim of the very society in which he hopes to earn a profit. Some readers believe that Kino brings about his own downfall by going against

the forces of nature. Few see Kino as the symbol of an honest, hard-working man destroyed by greed. And others see him as a man unable to escape his fate.

6.2.2 JUANA:

Juana is Kino's wife who is a loving and devoted wife. Her character functions like the stabilizing force in Kino's life. She is subservient, and has a great inner strength and determination.

Juana has a strong survival instinct and more pragmatic. For instance when the doctor refuses to treat the baby, Kino responds by ineffectually punching the gate; Juana puts a seaweed poultice on the baby's shoulder. She responds with the same kind of direct action when she decides that the pearl is a threat to her family. She tries to throw it back in the sea.

Kino appears to be a romantic and Juana appears to be in tune with nature and more realistic. She is well aware of what will save her family. Unlike Kino, who dreams of a new life, Juana does not believe in pursuing the unattainable and impossible goals.

6.2.3 COYOTITO:

Coyotito, the infant son of Kino and Juana, is a character whose purpose is to show nature in its most undeveloped form. In the struggle between nature and civilization and between good and evil Coyotito becomes the innocent victim of powers greater than himself.

6.2.4 THE DOCTOR:

The village doctor seems to be the perfect villain. He is someone to blame and hate, especially when he refuses to treat Coyotito and later even makes him ill. In the doctor's system of priorities, money counts more than human life or professional pride. The doctor also represents the biased behavior of persons of Spanish descent toward the Indians of Mexico. And, on a more general level, he symbolizes the arrogance of the powerful in all societies toward the powerless.

Despite this portrait of evil, however, Steinbeck adds another dimension when he describes the doctor's memories of life in Paris. He remembers the "hard-faced" woman he lived with as being "beautiful and kind," even though she was neither.

6.2.5 JUAN TOMAS:

Juan Tomas is Kino's older and wiser brother. The brothers share a simple, unaffected love that sustains Kino in some of his most difficult times. Juan Tomas is a storehouse of knowledge about the ways of the world and methods of survival, and seems to be a symbol of the collective wisdom of the Indian past. He gathers items for Kino's journey to the capital, including the knife Kino uses to kill the first tracker. He also covers for Kino in order to confuse anyone who might be tempted to pursue his brother.

6.2.6 THE PRIEST:

The priest is an undeveloped character. Like the doctor, he appears only briefly in order to make a claim to part of the pearl. He is not a source of comfort or religious strength. The priest patronizes the Indians, yet he will take their money. He seems to stand for the general role of the Catholic Church in the conquest of Mexico and the subjugation of the Indians.

6.2.7 THE TRACKERS:

The trackers, or pursuers, symbolize human greed at its worst. They want Kino's pearl and will kill in order to get it. Steinbeck uses them to show both the greed in humans and the irony of a social system that oppresses the Indians further by making them hunt each other. Two of the trackers are Indians like Kino.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE PEARL

Kino is a poor Indian fisherman who lives on the Gulf of California. Other members of his family are his wife Juana and infant son Coyotito. They live in a simple hut which is made of brush. The couple sleeps on mats thrown on the dirt floor, while Coyotito sleeps in a hanging box. All the poor people in their village including Kino's family depend on nature for survival. Though Kino is poor, he is happy, honest, and diligent.

As the novella begins, dawn is breaking. Kino watches the sun rise and listens to the sounds of the morning. In his mind, Kino hears the Song of the Family. This song of the family is an internal message that suggests all is well.

But very soon, a dangerous situation occurs when a poisonous scorpion stings Coyotito. His screams draw people from all over the village. Juana insists to call the doctor, but he does not treat the Indians because he is of Spanish descent and considers himself above treating poor Indians. This is therefore Juana

announces that if the doctor will not come to their village, they will go to the doctor's house. Her decision and spirit of independence amazes the villagers who accompany them to the wealthy doctor's home. But the doctor refuses to treat Coyotito because Kino is too poor. Kino is so angry that he smashes his fist against the doctor's gate.

Later that day while Kino with his wife is fishing in the Gulf, he finds an enormous pearl. He believes that the pearl will make him rich and ensure the security for his family. Everything turns against his wish and the pearl stirs envy in the villagers. Consequently, on the same night Kino is attacked in his hut by a thief. Out of fear of losing the pearl, on the following day, he tries to sell the pearl to buyers in town, but the buyers offer a small sum of money for it. The buyers know the pearl is worth a fortune but want to buy it cheaply so that they may earn a lot out of it.

In his anger, Kino announces that he will sell it in the city where he will get a fair price. This amazes the villagers because Kino has never traveled so far. After dark that evening, Kino is attacked again. Juana is sure that it is the pearl that is evil. She is afraid that it may destroy the family. During the night, she quietly removes it from the hidden spot and tries to throw it back into the ocean. He stops her before she succeeds and beats her for it. As he returns to the hut, Kino is attacked again by two men. He kills one, and the other succeeds to escape. Because of the murder he has committed, Kino knows that he will be hunted as a murderer. As a result, he and Juana must leave the village immediately. Before they can escape, however, their canoe is destroyed and their hut is burned. They hide until the next night in the hut of Kino's brother, Juan Tomas. The following evening, Kino and Juana begin their flight to the capital. Soon they realize they are being pursued by three people. Therefore they flee up the mountain and hide in a small cave. Their pursuers pitch camp in a clearing just below the cave. Kino decides the only way to survive is for him to kill the person on guard, take his rifle, and kill the other two, who are sleeping.

Kino goes to the pursuers' camp and is about to attack them when his infant son Coyotito cries out. Kino knows that he must spring immediately at his enemies, but he is a moment too late and one of them shoots toward the cave. There is a struggle and Kino kills all three of his enemies. The earlier shot has, however, killed Coyotito.

The following afternoon the villagers witness the return of Kino and Juana, carrying the rifle and their dead child. Silently, they walk through the village to the shore. Kino lays down the rifle, takes out the pearl, and throws it into the water.

6.5 THEMES AND ISSUES IN THE NOVELLA

6.5.1 Greed as a destructive force:

John Steinbeck is the exponent of 20th century life that revolts around capital or profit. The desire to possess, to grow reach, to earn more profit at any cost are the basic instincts that have destroyed the peace of mind man. (On ward 1914-Europeans). Desiring to become rich is not a crime. Everybody should desire and work to grow in life. But the writer in this novella proposes that there should be a limit or a watch on the desire. Growth should not happen at the cost of the murder of the soul. Kino, the protagonist of the story kills the robber and hides himself from the possible arrest. To realize a simple thing that economic growth doesn't come alone and it has its side effects. Kino has to lose his only son Coyotito. When the child is murdered in the attempt to save the pearl, Kino realized that the Pearl has no importance for him at all. Therefore he hurls the pearl into the sea to get rid of it.

Pearl is a natural stone that is found at the bottom of the sea. It is expensive because people wear it for greater luck. Ironically it works as a bad omen. Since the day it is found, Kino's family finds itself in trouble. "The Pearl" is just the symbol of richness, greed, materialism and capital. Kino dreams of becoming rich by selling the pearl. The pearl generates feeling of greed in the hearts of the characters that who come across it.

Kino and other fisherman, the priest and the Doctor, The pearl dealers in town and the robbers, all of them wish to possess the pearl. It shows how everyone wishes to be rich by possessing the pearl. Greed is one of deadly sins spoken about in Christianity.

St. Augustine also must have spoken much about greed as the city. Juana and Juan both suspect that Kino is wrong to expect more for the pearl than the elders offer. Kino's wife Juana tries to discard the pearl believing it to be a source of the family's trouble. Scientifically the pearl is one of the purest stones, but ironically it stands for destruction, greed, corruption and bad luck in this novella.

6.5.2 The use of symbols/ symbolism:

Symbol is an object, character, figure, color or thing used to represent abstract ideas or concept. Symbols are popularly used in

every art. In the Novella 'The pearl', there is the strong indication of symbolism. With the help of the symbols, Steinbeck has successfully emphasised and communicated the message in a story. In this novella, the stone pearl itself is a parable or the symbol. Though the pearl stands for purity, good luck and richness, in the present story it symbolizes the opposite. At the very outset of the story it stands for divine providence. Kino's friends have a prophecy of the well being which the pearl was to bring for him. Once he finds the pearl it destroys the peace of mind of Kino's family.

In other word, riches can destroy peace of mind of every one. The pearl is an object of nature beauty and goodness that draws out the evil inherent in man mind.

The scorpion that stings Coyotito symbolizes the evil power that disturbs health and peace of family. A scorpion enters the story as the curse of the fall. The Biblical reference of the scorpion denotes destruction of innocence. When the scorpion bites Coyotito his father, Kino is also bitten by the pearl. The pearl and the scorpion simultaneously enter Kino's family.

Kino canoe is the symbol of Kino's earning source, his hard work and his faith in it. The canoe is a small boat which moves with help of ores. And one can reach where one has to reach sitting inside the canoe. There is another inference of the canoe if the sea stands for the material world. The canoe stands for the source of salvation. It is possible to cross the sea with the help of the canoe. The boatman can trust the canoe and can go across the sea. Kino cannot exist without his canoe. It is a part and parcel of his life and living.

The sea in the novella symbolizes the practical world around which is a larger existence. Man is a very small in front of it. It has number of probabilities, treasures riches and mysteries. The unfathomable sea is a beyond the reach of common man like Kino.

The pearl has different interpretations. It has many inferences, and therefore, it appeal to every reader.

The pearl as a symbol:

The title of the novella by john Steinbeck is 'The Pearl'. The whole story revolves around the pearl. In that sense, the pearl is also called as one of the major characters in the story. It plays a vital role that if we remove it from the story, there will be nothing worth reading in it.

The pearl is a precious stone which is rarely found at the bottom of the sea. Since it is a natural stone, it is priceless. In

astrology it stands for good luck and it causes peace of mind in the one who wears it.

Every reader can interpret the symbolic meaning of the stone differently for Kino and Juana. The pearl is a source of fulfillment of their dreams. They also hope for better future of their son Coyotito. They also dream for freedom from colonial oppression. Thus, the discovery of the pearl seems to be a happy accident. It stands against the tragic accident of Coyotito being stung by the scorpion.

But apart from Kino, the neighbors, the doctor, the priest, the robbers, trackers and the merchants of pearl in the city were all thrilled to possess the lucky stone. They call it the pearl of the world. The more they phrased the pearl, the more Kino accepted from it. At the result of this, it does not accept the price offered by the down merchants. Now he wanted more for it. On the other hand Juana and Juan Tomas view the pearl as a threat rather than blessing. By the end of the story Kino turns into a greedy man by not parting from it. In this way the pearl plays an evil force in the life of Kino instead of bringing about his luck.

6.5.3 The end of the novella ‘The Pearl’:

In the end of the story, Kino, Juana and Coyotito begin their Journey back to their town. They walked all right and make camp in a road side shelter. Juana and Kino debate on the possibilities which may take place with them. They recall the attackers and the robbers. Kino interprets it as a proof of the great price of the pearl. He thinks that if the pearl was not worth it, they wouldn't have attacked them. When they find that the attackers are following them, they start hiding themselves. Juana carries Coyotito in her arms and Kino is carrying their belongings. Anyhow, Kino deceives their trackers by creating a false trail. But to their bad luck the trackers finally trace them. A serious encounter takes place between them, and Coyotito gets shot dead. The aim was meant for Kino, but Coyotito dies on the spot.

At the end of the novella Juana carries the child's corpse on her shoulder, and they approach the seashore. They reached the place where Kino had found the pearl. He removes the pearl from his pocket. They looked at it blankly. Then Kino flings it into the ocean. Kino and Juana watched the pearl splashing the surface, as the sunsets in the west. Why did Kino separate himself from the pearl in the end is the question hotly discussed amongst the critics.

6.6 QUESTIONS

1. Bring out the central themes of the novella, *The Pearl*.

2. Comment on the symbols used in *The Pearl*.
3. *The Pearl* is a novella dealing with the greed as the destructive force that brings out the tragedy in one's life. Substantiate this statement based on your reading of the novella.
4. Comment on the ending of *The Pearl*.
5. Sketch the characters of Kino and Juana.
6. Sketch the characters of the doctor and the Trackers.
7. Write a note on the importance of Coyotito in the story.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE PRESCRIBED SHORT STORIES PART I

CONTENTS

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction to Ernest Hemingway
- 7.2 Summary of the story 'Hills Like White Elephants'
- 7.3 Themes in the story
- 7.4 Analysis of major Characters
- 7.5 Introduction to William Carlos Williams
- 7.6 Summary of the Story 'The Use of Force'
- 7.7 Themes in the story 'The use of Force'
- 7.8 Analysis of Characters
- 7.9 Questions

7.0 OBJECTIVES

- To help students understand the style and technique of authors like Ernest Hemingway and William Carlos Williams.
- To make them acquainted with the critical summary of the stories prescribed in the syllabus.
- To make them study the themes and characters in these stories.

7.1 INTRODUCTION TO ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Ernest Hemingway, American author and journalist had a distinctive writing style which was characterized by economy and understatement. He greatly influenced 20th century fiction. He wrote mostly between 1925 to 1955. Many of his works are regarded as classics in American literature. He is a Nobel Laureate (1954).

Hemingway's technique is uncomplicated, with plain Grammar and easily accessible language. He has a clean style that avoids adjectives and uses short rhythmic sentences that concentrate on action rather than reflection. Many critics believe that his style was influenced by his days as a cub reporter where he had to rely on short sentences and energetic English.

Hemingway is also considered as a master of dialogue. The way his characters speak is more important than what they say or leave unsaid. Thus Hemingway captures the complexity of human interaction through subtly and implication as well as direct discourse.

The writers of Hemingway's generation are of then termed Modernist as they moved towards a more existential world view.

Apart from several volumes of short stories Hemingway wrote novels like 'A Farewell to Arms', 'For Whom the Bell Tolls', 'The Old Man and the Sea' (Pulitzer prize).

7.2 SUMMARY OF THE STORY 'HILLS LIKE WHITE ELEPHANTS'

The story is set in a valley in Spain, in a train station surrounded by hills, fields and trees. A man simply called the American, and his girlfriend sit at a table outside the station waiting for a train to Madrid.

The man orders two beers. It is hot. The girl remarks that the nearly hills look like white elephants. The man responds that he has never seen one. They order more drinks and begin to complain about the taste of the alcohol. The American chastises her and says that they should try to enjoy themselves. The girl replies that she is merely having fun. She retracts her former comment by saying that the hills don't actually look like white elephants to her anymore. They order more drinks. The American says that he wants the girl, whom he calls 'Jig' to have an operation but he never specifies the kind of operation. He seems agitated and tries to downplay the seriousness of the operation. He defends saying that the operation would be simple, and in fact the procedure really isn't even an operation at all.

The girl says nothing for a while, but then she asks what will happen after she has had the operation. The man answers that things will be fine afterwards, just like they were before and it will fix their problems. He says that he has known many people who have had the operation and were happy later. The girl reluctantly agrees with him. The American claims that he will not force her to undergo

the operation though it may be the best course of action. She says that she will have the operation as long as he will still love her and they will be able to live happily afterward.

The main reiterates how much he cares for her but she claims not to care about what happens to her. The American weakly says that she shouldn't have the operation if she is scared. The girl then walks over to the end of the station, looks at the scenery and wonders aloud whether they really could be happy if she has the operation. They argue for a while, then the girl gets exhausted and makes the American promises to stop talking.

The Spanish bartender brings two more beers and tells them that the train is coming in five minutes. The girl smiles at the bartender but has to ask the American what the bartender said because the girl doesn't speak Spanish. After finishing their drinks the American carries their bags to the platform and then walks back to the bar. There are several others waiting for the train. He asks the girl whether she feels better. She replies that she is fine and there is nothing wrong with her.

7.3 THEMES IN THE STORY

Lack of communication though the story primarily deals with a conversation between an American man and his girlfriend, neither of the speakers actually communicates. This highlights the rift between the two. They talk without understanding each other's point of view. The American man is frustrated and placating. He says anything and everything to convince the girl to have the operation though not specified is understood to be an abortion. He tells her that he will set everything right and everything between them will go back the way it used to be. The girl is indecisive even agreeing to undergo the operation just to shut him up. The man still persists and she begs him to stop talking. The girl's nickname Jig subtly indicates that the two characters merely dance around each other and the issue at hand without saying anything meaningful. The girl's inability to speak Spanish indicates her dependence upon the American but also the difficulty she has expressing herself to others.

[This section can also be used to explain the significance of the title]

Symbols in the Story:

Of the many symbols from the story the main three are the hills, white elephants and the rail road station. Hemingway uses this element to develop the theme of the story.

The hills symbolize big obstacles but not enormous or impossible. This represents the fact that the girl's baby is a major obstacle in her life but she will make through.

Hills also are view points to look out from but also block the view for those who dwell in the valley. This represents how in the story Jig looks at the hill and finds opportunity where as the man look at the hills and sees nothing-his vision of happy future is blocked by the enormous obstacle of the child.

Hills are beautiful, natural and completely stationery in other words, they have always been in the same place and they will always be that way. This shows how settling down would be a necessity with a baby. It also shows that being pregnant is no small thing. Regardless of the girl's decision, it is not something that the girl will ever be able to forget.

At one point of the story Jig looks at the scenery and says "And we could have all this". Perhaps for her hills represent challenge, a new lease of life and possibility Jig sees opportunity and is considering the possibility of a new life, a new born child in her life.

The element of white elephants is symbolic of the baby. It is a liability, a useless gift to the recipient. This is the stark reality with Jig. For her a child at this stage of her life is useless, an unexpected and unwanted gift.

The white elephant is also a symbol. The fact that the man has never seen a white elephant before implies he is absolutely not open to considering the possibility of keeping the child and wants it aborted.

The rail road is symbolic of the crossroads of life or a crisis. The American and the girl cannot be at the station forever, they cannot be static. A change is band to happen. A decision need to be taken. All this is symbolic of the decision may prove costly especially for their relationship.

7.4 ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

a) The American:

Throughout the story, the American behaves according to Hemingway's rigid conception of masculinity. Hemingway describes the American as a rugged man-mature, knowledgeable, practical and always in control of himself and the situation at hand. He always maintains his cool and pretends to be

indifferent as when he tells the girl he doesn't care whether she has the operation. Initially though avoiding any confrontation, he avoids all discussion but when under pressure he takes his problem head on by oversimplifying. The operation and relentlessly persuading her to have it. He patronizes the girl but fails to provide any real sympathy and understanding she needs during the crisis. He is not really able to identify with the girl any more than the passengers waiting at the station.

The girl:

As compared to the American, the girl is low on confidence, less assertive. All through she appears vulnerable, helpless, confused and indecisive. She keeps changing her mind about the attractiveness of the surrounding hills. At other time she claims to care only for the American. But she certainly is unsure about having the abortion. She has to rely upon the man's ability to even order drinks. Ironically their relationship has ended despite her desire to make him happy. She knows that her relationship can never return to its prior state.

7.5 INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS

William Carlos Williams, author and physician was closely associated with modernism and imagism. He worked harder at being a writer than a physician.

Although he was a doctor, Williams had a full literary carrier. His work consists of short stories, poems, plays, novels, critical essays, an autobiography translations and correspondence. He became involved in the imagist movement but soon he began to develop opinions that differed from his peers Ezra Pound and T.S Eliot.

The story 'The use of Force' can be read in a literature and medicine context illustrating William's insistence on incorporating occult knowledge into his diagnostics. This story was published in a collection of stories and poems by Williams concerning physician experiences in a book 'The Doctor stories' compiled and introduced by Robert Coles.

7.6 SUMMARY OF THE STORY 'THE USE OF FORCE'

The use of force depicts the story of two characters in confrontation. The narrative implies the severity of a situation when social roles and personal impulses intertwine. A physician is summoned to make a house call on a family with whom he has had no prior contact. He quickly sizes up the situation the household is

poor but clean; the patient is a female child whose parents are nervously concerned, dependent on, yet distrustful of the doctor. The child's beauty and penetrating stare make an immediate impression on him.

The doctor is concerned that diphtheria may be the cause of illness. He uses his customary professional manner to determine whether or not the child has a sore throat. But the child would have none of it and claws instinctively for the eyes. The attempt at an examination rapidly escalates into a physical battle as the physician, convinced that it is crucial to see the child's throat and feeling that he 'must get a diagnosis now or never', becomes ever more enraged and forceful while the girl continues to resist with all her strength, and the parents are in a state of fear for her health and embarrassment over her behavior.

At a different level, this is no longer a professional encounter. The doctor admits at the beginning of the struggle to having fallen in love with the savage brat and recognizes his own irrational behavior. The closing sequence can be compared to a rape without the contextual reference to a throat examination.

The story evokes with great immediacy a number of important issues about medical examination: the predicament of having quickly to access a medical/social situation in an unfamiliar, even hostile environment; the doctor's impressive powers of observation; his concern to do the right thing medically; the anxiety of the sick child's parents, the power that the doctor wields; the dark side of the human nature which may allow such power to surface in unsavory ways and which the professional, like any rational person has under most circumstances learned to control.

7.7 THEMES IN THE STORY 'THE USE OF FORCE'

The short story, the use of force captures a family in distress from their young daughter, Mathilda's sickness. Her worried parents thought it would be reasonable to call in a doctor to examine their daughter. Although the young daughters fight back with rage when the doctor tries to check for a deathly disease. The doctor begins to bring out his forms of fury as well. It is this theme of fury which brings out the true idea.

Another theme that fits the story and stands out as important is that the desire to help may be met with resistance. The theme is important because when doctors have to help someone they must use force to keep the patient down and do whatever necessary to help save a life.

The second theme is that children are capable of stubborn fury. The girl struggles and even claws at the doctor to prevent him from examining her throat sometimes children can be more stubborn than an adult.

Another theme is how the user of the force loses his humanity in the minds of others. Not everyone's means can justify their ends. The story reflects a social issue on whether force is an applicable method to attain one's goal or to appear the majority. Both the characters involved, the doctor and the girl patient try to win the fight with a conduct that isn't regulated by social norms. The story indicates a lack of obedience from the girl and self discipline from the doctor. The story shows how social roles and personal impulses get incorrectly mixed creating a disruptive working environment. The doctor should especially show sensitivity and compassion, but here we see a lack of any such quality.

7.8 ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS

The girl:

The character of the young girl shows conflict between her personality and role as a patient. She is the reason for the turmoil and instability in the story as she is not willing to cooperate. This is revealed by the fact that she is rebellious. Since her parents hold no strong restraints, it increases the girl's vulnerability to behave badly. Her stubbornness only encourages the doctor to show more frustration. Her beauty is an unconscious weapon to tempt the medic while her ignorance shields her from the truth. The girl's mentality is prevailed by her thinking of what she doesn't know can't hurt her, and the man uses this opportunity to express a great sense of joy in defeating the restless patient. Both characters try to win this fight with a conduct that isn't regulated by social norms. The story indicates a lack of obedience from the girl and lack of self discipline from the doctor.

The doctor:

An analysis of the doctor's characters evokes a number of issues about doctoring: the predicament of having quickly to access a medical/social situation is an unfamiliar, even hostile environment; the doctor's impressive powers of observation; his concern to do the right thing medically; the anxiety of the sick child's parents; the power that the doctor wields; the dark side of human nature which may allow such power to surface in unsavory ways and which the professional like any rational person has under most circumstances learned to control.

The doctor is called to the home of a poor immigrant family where a beautiful little girl is quite ill. The doctor attempts to examine her throat. The girl, however, won't open her mouth. She fights him off and all attempts to cajole her in to compliance fails. Yet, the doctor is resolved to see that throat. He forces the girl's father to hold her down while he manages to wrest open her mouth after a long battle.

In this story, the doctor seems initially to be compassionate although blunt and prejudiced. He is an acute observer of human nature. He knows what he has to do to achieve the goal. When he is frustrated by the patient he becomes angry and reveals an odd but perhaps necessary attraction to violence. In a sense, he enjoys forcing and injuring the girl. He did the right thing and perhaps his actions were beneficial to the patient but raise questions whether they were ethical or perverted.

7.9 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the main conflict in the story 'Hills like White Elephant'.
2. Evaluate the character of the doctor and the girl patient in the story 'The use of Force'.
3. Comment on the character of the man and the girl through their conversation.
4. Write character sketch of the following
 - a) The American
 - b) The girl in Hill's like White Elephants
 - c) The Doctor
 - d) The parents of the girl patient

A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE PRESCRIBED SHORT STORIES PART II

CONTENTS

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction to Bernard Malamud
- 8.2 Summary of the story 'The Jew bird'
- 8.3 Themes in the Jew bird
- 8.4 Characterization in the Jew bird
- 8.5 Introduction to Jamaica Kincaid
- 8.6 Summary of Kincaid's The Girl
- 8.7 'Themes in the Girl'
- 8.8 Character Analysis
- 8.9 Questions

8.0 OBJECTIVES

- To help students understand the style and technique of author like Bernard Malamud and Jamaica Kincaid.
- To make them acquainted with the critical summary of the stories prescribed in the syllabus.
- To make them study the themes and characters in these stories.

8.1 INTRODUCTION TO BERNARD MALAMUD

Born in Brooklyn Malamud has made his living as a teacher and writer. The magic barrel (1958) his first collection of short stories won a National Book Award; his novel, The Fixer (1966) gained him another. He has also won the Pulitzer Prize.

Malamud uses regionalism as a kind of idiom with which to convey the ultra parochial. For the most part his is a limited world of poor city Jews. They suffer, they aspire, they are skeptical and all are seen with an unsentimental tenderness that are the gap separating an enclave from the mainstream culture. Whatever our original, we resonate without difficulty to the vibrations set up by

Malamud's funny-sad, often magical sense of the life he knows. "All men are Jews", he once wrote.

The Jew bird is about anti-Semitism or rather Jewish anti-Semitism. The protagonist is a crow named Schwartz who identifies himself as a Jew bird. Fleeing persecution by anti-Semitic birds Schwartz tries to find a home with a New York City Jewish family. Despite being generous and respectful to the family, the father first persecutes and then attempts to kill Schwartz. The story has been interpreted as an allegory about Jewish self hatred.

The Jew bird was first published in the reporter on April 11, 1963 and collected in *Idiot's First* (1963). It also appeared in a Malamud reader (1967), the stories of Bernard Malamud (1983), and two *Fables* (1978). The story was adapted for the stage at the Israeli Geshen Theatre along with other tales, under the title *Schwartz and other animals*.

8.2 SUMMARY OF THE STORY 'THE JEW BIRD'

Bernard Malamud's Jew bird is a witty. Sassy yet tragic short story that enunciates in an unconventional way, the disastrous consequences of anti-Semitism. The tale is written with a lot of style and subtle humor yet it contains a disturbing side to it.

A strange, bedraggled bird flies into the kitchen of a lower East-side apartment. This apartment belongs to a frozen food salesman by the name Harry Cohen who lives there with his wife Edie, and their son Maurice. They quickly discover that the bird can talk and that his name is Schwartz. What is even more remarkable is that Schwartz is a Jew bird. He can even pray without a book or tallith as he demonstrates to them. Schwartz declares that he is flying away, away from the Anti-Semites. Schwartz is loaded with personality but his appearance is homely. His wings are ragged, his beak is long and his eyes cross. Edie suggests that Schwartz could be an old Jew that someone turned into a bird, Schwartz reply is "Who Knows, does God tell us everything?"

Schwartz endears himself to Edie and Maurice with his sense of humor but Harry is a hard nut to crack. Although he is amused by Schwartz at first, he soon tries of him. Edie and Maurice want Schwartz to stay but Harry has given Schwartz a deadline. He wants Schwartz to migrate soon. Meanwhile in order to make himself useful, Schwartz helps Maurice, who is a poor student with his homework and violin lessons. Maurice's grades soon improve. Schwartz even reads comic books to Maurice when he is sick, although Schwartz doesn't like them much.

Harry distrusts Schwartz, although Schwartz does not give him any reason and Harry's attitude towards him becomes antagonistic. When Schwartz asks Harry why he hates him, Harry's answer is that he considers Schwartz to be a trouble-maker and a freeloader. The weather becomes cooler and Harry forces Schwartz to line up outside in a bird house instead of the warm apartment. The cold weather causes the old bird to become stiff in his joints.

One day, when Edie is out and Maurice is taking a shower, Harry starts an argument with Schwartz. When Schwartz responds to Harry's verbal abuse, Harry tries to throttle Schwartz. Luckily, Maurice comes out of the bathroom and interrupts the struggle. However, Harry's manner towards Schwartz becomes more and more aggressive and he begins a crusade against the bird to force him to leave. He mixes cat food with Schwartz's food to cause him to become sick. He blows up and pops large paper bags outside the bird house to frighten Schwartz at night. He even buys Maurice a cat to terrorize the bird. Schwartz is afraid but he has no place to go. He is old and frail and cannot fly very far.

Weeks go by and one day, Harry's mother, who is sick and elderly, dies. Maurice's report card is a bad one. Harry is fed up and he takes out his frustration on Schwartz. Enraged, he goes to the bird house, grabs Schwartz by his scrawny legs and flings him to the ground, and it crashes. Harry waits for Schwartz to return but he does not.

Time goes on. Maurice forgets about Schwartz because of his pet cat. Edie does think about him from time to time. Harry is just plain happy that he is gone.

One spring day, when the snow is melting, Maurice remembers Schwartz and goes looking for him in the neighborhood. He finds a dead black bird in a small clearing by the river. The bird's wings have been broken, its neck twisted and its eyes have been plucked out. It is Schwartz. When Maurice tearfully asks his mother why would anyone do such a thing to a poor old bird, his mother replies: It's the anti-Semites.

Malamud creates Harry as the embodiment of hate, Anti-Semitism and murderous mischief and worse still, he is a Jew. Simultaneously, Schwartz becomes Malamud's representation of a traditional Jewish person, maybe even a rabbi of sorts. He is funny, intelligent. Schwartz's fate is a powerful and disturbing ending to the story with the chilling effects of hate so clearly illustrated. Malamud's, the Jew bird is a critique of Anti-Semitism.

8.3 THEMES IN THE JEW BIRD

In the Jew bird, the author confronts the idea that one of the most substantial forces in human life is the desire for control. Conversely if control is lost, people often turn hostile to carry out their wishes. Throughout Malamud's stories, the notion of control is defined as the ability to dictate the outcome of any given situation according to personal desire. In the Jew bird, Harry Cohen is the model of this behavior, as the arrival of Schwartz, a talking Jew bird causes him to lose control over his family and temper. The Jew bird insinuates that lack of control leads to a type of primal desperation, hinting that it is the nature of mankind to commit desperate acts in the quest for control.

Malamud highlights the various attitudes to Jewish heritage in the short story 'The Jew bird' like acknowledgement, indifference, or denial. These varying contrasting attitudes to Jewishness often contribute to a clash between two characters one character's initial indifference to Jewishness evolves towards an implicit or explicit acknowledgement of this heritage.

The Jew bird is an allegory demonstrating that a homeland for Jews was a humanitarian necessity. Israel must continue to exist as a safe haven for those who need one and for those who choose to make Israel their nation.

The main theme of the story is racism. Schwartz the Jew bird is strongly discriminated against by Cohen. Schwartz was helpful and did all he could to help Maurice with his studies. He respected the household and did what he was told so he could continue staying with the Cohen family. Cohen hated Schwartz for no obvious reason. The only reason Cohen didn't get rid of Schwartz was that Maurice was attached to him. Cohen left Schwartz outside during winter. He treated Schwartz like a slave, sabotaged his meals and kept him awake at night by popping paper bags in front of his little birdhouse. One day when Maurice and Edie were out for violin lessons Cohen decided to get rid of Schwartz by trying to kill him. Schwartz narrowly escaped when Maurice found him dead near a river all Cohen said was 'Antisemists'.

8.4 CHARACTERIZATION IN THE JEW BIRD

Harry:

Harry is Jewish by heritage. He represents the immigrants that have assimilated in some way the American culture. 'This ain't a restaurant' doesn't sound Jewish because charity is a Jewish characteristic. Harry is a frozen-foods salesman. Something that hints at his cold behavior. He is particularly irritated as his mother is dying in her flat at Bronz.

Schwartz:

Schwartz is a crow like talking bird that can speak Yiddish and English. He is torn between his Jewish heritage and assimilative ambitions.

Schwartz takes on the moral task of being Maurice's tutor. Playing the role of the traditional Jewish uncle and ostensibly helping to improve the boy's grades.

Edie Cohen:

She is Harry's wife. She is a courageous woman but not brave enough to protect Schwartz from her husband.

Maurice Cohen:

He is Harry and Edie's ten year old son. He is named after her father but they call him Maurie. He is a kind hearted kid especially towards Schwartz but not overly bright. According to Schwartz, he is a kind of boy who can never be a scholar but may be a good mechanic.

8.5 INTRODUCTION TO JAMAICA KINCAID

Jamaica Kincaid was born Elaine potter Richardson. She has written ten books, including Annie John, A small place, Annie, Gwen, Lilly, Pam and Tulip, Lucy, At the bottom of the river, The autobiography of My Mother, My Brother, Talk stories, My Garden, Mr. Potter.

Much of Kincaid's work deals with ramifications of Antigna's history as a colony of Great Britain. When she visited her homeland in 1985, the rampant poverty there shocked her so much that she felt compelled to write about it, describing the conditions in a nonfiction book called 'A small place' (1988) in her work. She also sought to combat the negative effect of discrimination, detrimental environmental policies.

The New Yorker published Kincaid's short story "Girl" in 1978, her first piece of fiction. The story has since appeared in Kincaid's short story anthology 'At the Bottom of the River' and numerous other anthologies. The story is so popular in part because it speaks to so many audiences, including young people, African Americans and women.

The 'Girl' deals with the experience of being young and female in a poor country Kincaid's complicated relationship with her

mother comes out in the mother daughter dynamic in the story. She describes her mother as a literate woman who struggled against her poor circumstances, eventually feeling bitterness towards her children, because of all her problems. In her book 'Autobiography of My Mother', she says that her mother's anger towards her seemed to get worse when Kincaid became a teenager, just as the voice of the mother in the Girl resents and worries about her daughter becoming a woman.

8.6 SUMMARY OF KINCAID'S THE GIRL

The setting of Kincaid's story 'Girl' is most likely the Caribbean island of Antigua. The story focuses on a mother-daughter relationship. The mother here is a dominant figure in the young girl's upbringing. Throughout the story, the mother informs the young girl of various duties associated with being female.

The girl's duties as a female involve responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning as well as instructions on proper social behavior. For example the young girl is instructed "don't sing benna (popular music) on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school". Interestingly, Kincaid emphasizes that the young girl is not only responsible for learning and maintaining a domestic ritual in general, but the young girl must also cater to the needs of men. For example the girl is taught iron her father's clothes but it can be inferred that no one other than herself is responsible for ironing the girl's clothes. In fact men appear only outside of their home throughout the story which implies that home is only the space for women.

Continuing on that theme, the girl is taught that the length of time she spends with men and how she behaves around men will affect how others perceive her. For example, the girl is instructed "you must not speak to wharf rat boys not even to give directions" and "don't squat down to play marbles-you are not a boy".

However towards the end of the story it appears that the girl not only learns from what she is told but also from what she sees. For example, she is not told but learns that "this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you..." This is significant because throughout the story it appears that the mother is bullying the young girl, this shift allows the reader to realize that the mother is part of a larger system and the mother herself is bullied at times; therefore, the mother character can be viewed as both a perpetrator and one affected by social gendering.

At the end of the story, the mother teaches the young girl that she should always squeeze the bread to make sure its fresh

“The girl responds” but what if the baker won’t let me feel the bread?” the mother, in disbelief after all her lecturing, asks “you mean to say that after all you are the woman the baker won’t let near the bread?” while this conversation adds a touch of humor to the story, the scene illustrates the way that the mother expects the girl to define her own identity within the gender system. Ultimately, it is up to the girl to determine what sort of woman she will be and whether or not she will be worthy to ‘feel the bread’.

8.7 THEMES IN ‘THE GIRL’

The Peril of Being a Female:

Even before the daughter has yet reached adolescence, the mother is immensely concerned, both about her present and her future. The mother is worried about her current behavior which she feels if continued might lead to a life of promiscuity. The mother’s firm belief that a woman should maintain her reputation and respectability which determines the quality of her life in the community. Sexuality should strictly be kept under wraps. Consequently the mother refers to many tangential objects and tasks to the taboo topic of sexuality such as squeezing bread before buying it. She scolds her daughter for the way she walks, the way she plays marbles and how she relates to other people. The mother’s constant emphasis on this theme shows how much she wants her daughter to realize that she is ‘not a boy’ and that she needs to act in a way that will win her respect from the community.

Domesticity:

The mother believes that domestic knowledge will not only save her daughter from a life of promiscuity and ruin but also empower her as the head of her household and a productive member of the community. For the mother women are either of the respectable kind or ‘sluts’ domestic work keeps the women busy and also away from temptation. The readers recognize the reverence the mother has for the power of domesticity as is clear from the list of instructions given by her like how to cook pumpkin fritters, sweep, grow okra, buy bread and wash clothes. Sewing up a dress hem becomes more than an act of maintenance because it saves a woman’s sexual reputation within the community.

8.8 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The Daughter:

The girl says very little in the story. She is a silent narrator. The readers perceive the mother's words through her ears. The daughter narrates "Girl" as if recalling the memory of her mother from a distant future place. Girl is not a word-for-word transcript but a compilation of a device the daughter remembers of her mother. She remembers, for example, how her mother constantly accused her of promiscuity and impropriety, an accusation that has haunted her for years. Her mother's shadow looms large upon her.

The Mother:

The Mother perceives herself as the only person who can save her daughter from a life of disrespect and promiscuity. She imparts her domestic knowledge to keep her respectable. In some ways, the mother is wise not only does she know how to cook, clean and keep a household but she also has a keen sense of social etiquette and decorum, knowing how to act around different types of people. For her, domestic knowledge and knowing how to interact with people bring happiness along with respect from family and the larger community. Her instruction suggests that social standing within the community bears a great deal of weight.

Yet at the same time, there is bitterness in the mother's voice and she takes her anger and frustration out on her daughter. She fears that the girl is already destined for a life of ill repute. The fact that she knows how to make abortion inducing elixirs may throw light on her own less than secure life. Perhaps her fears about her daughter may stem from her own life experiences.

8.9 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the theme of Jewishness in the story 'the Jew bird'.
2. Discuss the character of Harry in the Jew bird.
3. How does the mother suppress the daughter's sexuality in 'The Girl'?
4. Compare and contrast the character of the Mother and the daughter in 'The Girl'.
5. What themes are explored by Kincaid in 'the Girl'.
6. Discuss the plots of the following.
 - a) The girl.
 - b) The Jew bird.

9

A CRITICAL STUDY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAM'S CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF PART- I

CONTENTS

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction to Tennessee Williams
- 9.2 Brief Summary of 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'
- 9.3 Act wise Summary
- 9.4 Questions

9.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce Tennessee Williams and her contribution to American literature
- To make them understand the play 'A Cat on a Hot Tin Roof' through its summary.
- To understand the plot in detail through Act wise Summary

9.1 INTRODUCTION TO TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Playwright Tennessee Williams was born Thomas Lanier Williams on March 26, 1911 in Mississippi. Many of his characters were based on his own family and life. His mother became the model for the foolish but strong Amanda wing field in The Glass Menagerie while his father represented the aggressive driving Big Daddy in 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof'. His first real success was the play 'The Glass Menagerie' in 1944. His next work 'A street Car Named Desire' won him a Pulitzer Prize Williams also wrote short stories, novels, poetry, essays and screenplays. His professional career lasted from the mid 1930s until his death in 1983. Williams adapted much of the best known work for the cinema.

Between 1948 and 1959 seven of his plays were performed at Broad way: Summer and Smoke (1948), The Rose Tattoo (1951), Camino Real (1953), Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (1955), Orpheus Descending (1957), Garden District (1958) and Sweet Bird of Youth (1959). By 1959 he had earned some prominent

award: two Pulitzer Prizes, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards, three Donaldson Awards and a Tony Awards. His works reached worldwide audiences when *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Street Car Named Desire* were made into motion pictures. Later plays adapted for the screen include 'Cat on a Hot Tin Roof', *The Rose Tattoo*, *Orpheus Descending*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Sweet Bird of Youth* and *Summer and Smoke*.

9.2 BRIEF SUMMARY OF 'CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF'

The play begins on a summer morning. The Politt family has come together to celebrate the birthday of the patriarch Big Daddy.

The previous evening Big Daddy's son Brick broke his leg while participating in hurdles at the school track. His wife Margaret chides him for this as well as his drinking habits. Actually she is trying to seduce him. Brick has refused to sleep with Maggie ever since his friend Skipper's death. Maggie is desperate to sleep with Brick both to satisfy her physical urges as well as to get pregnant.

Maggie feels that it is as urgent need to produce an heir because Big Daddy is dying. Moreover he has not declared it and he does not have a will. Maggie is terribly afraid of being poor, so she wants to make sure she and Brick have a secure place in Big Daddy's will. But she has to contend with Brick's brother Gooper and his wife's significant brood of children.

On the other hand, Brick is too numb with liquor to care about anything. He makes clear that he is disgusted by Maggie and completely uninterested in anything she has to say. He is emotionally affected whenever the topic of Skipper comes up. Actually Brick and Skipper were best of friends but Maggie always thought that their relationship was a bit more than this. She had called Skipper out to talk about his attraction to Brick and to prove her wrong Skipper slept with her. Both Maggie and Skipper however were making love to one another fantasizing about Brick shortly after, Skipper began to self destruct and soon died. At this point Brick turned to liquor as well.

Meanwhile, they are interrupted by the arrival of more family members. Everyone but Big Mama and Big Daddy knows that Big Daddy is dying. They had been told by the doctor that he just had a spastic colon. That night, the sons will tell their mother the truth. After a round of happy birthday, the older couple is left alone Big Daddy is cruel to Big Mama, who insists that she loves him even though he doesn't believe her. He is frustrated that she has taken charge of the estate since he became sick but now that he thinks

that his days are no longer numbered he is going to take all back and return. Big Mama to her place.

Big Mama leaves and Big Daddy summons Brick. He tries to be a little frank but Brick doesn't open up.

Big Daddy persists in making an effort at communication telling stories about travels in Europe and about poverty. He even talks of taking on a mistress.

Then he tries to coerce his son into admitting why he drinks. Eventually he steals his crutch and knocks him down with some more efforts Big Daddy zeroes in on the truth and it all comes back to Brick's friend Skipper. That night when Skipper and Maggie slept together, Skipper called Brick and tries to make an admission. Brick hung up on him, because he was entirely incapable of even allowing the possibility of homosexuality into his outlook. It is the disgust with himself and with the world that drove Brick to the Bottle.

In a fit of anger after being confronted with the truth of his relationship with Skipper, Brick tells Big Daddy that he has cancer. Big Daddy leaves in despair. The rest of the family enters with difficulty, Big Mama is told that Big Daddy has cancer although she refuses to believe it at first. She tells Maggie that Brick has to get his act together, so that he can take care of the estate when Big Daddy is gone.

Mae and Gooper pounce on this and they produce legal papers that would establish a will favourable to their interests. They try to convince Big Mama that this is the best option, especially due to Brick's alcoholism and Maggie's childlessness. Maggie takes this as her cue and announces grandly that she is with child. Though, Mae and Gooper do not believe her, Big Mama rejoices and leaves to tell Big Daddy. Maggie and Brick are left alone. Brick says that Maggie was too bold to make that lie. Maggie however intends to turn the lie into truth. She takes away Brick's liquor and says that she won't allow him to drink unless he consents to sleep with her. Meanwhile Big Mama comes searching for the morphine that the doctor has left for Big Daddy. The pain has set in – she leaves. As the play ends Maggie tells Brick that she loves him. Brick wonders "wouldn't it be funny if that were true?"

9.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY

Act I:

The play takes place entirely in the bed/sitting room of the politt plantation home in the Mississippi Delta. The plantation once

belonged to a pair of bachelors and Big Daddy had worked for them as an overseer. Now Big Daddy owns it and most of the land for miles around and has built it into a dynastic empire. It is Big Daddy's sixty fifth birthdays. He is in a celebratory mood because he has just received the results of exploratory surgery saying that the pains in the stomach are not due to cancer but merely a spastic colon. However, Big Daddy and his wife, Big Mama have not been told the truth. The rest of the family knows that he has terminal cancer.

The action takes place in the upstairs bed-sitting room because Big Daddy's younger son 'Brick' broke his ankle the night before while attempting to jump hurdles on the high school athletic track following a drunken bout.

Brick and his wife are getting ready for Big Daddy's birthday party when the first Act opens. It is clearly seen that Maggie resents the presence downstairs of her brother and sister-in-laws brood of five 'no-neck monsters' whose very existence are a reproach to Maggie, who has not produced any child with Brick. She wants and needs this proof of their readiness to take over the plantation. But, Brick, who suffers from a disinterest in the plantation and apparently life itself, refuses to sleep with her. His behavior stems from his unresolved relationship with Skipper, his best friend from college who died from drug and alcohol abuse.

Maggie recounts Skipper's downfall. He began drinking after Brick and he established their own pro football team. A spinal injury kept Brick home for a few away games, which Maggie attended with Skipper. After drinking together, Maggie accuses Skipper of being in love with her husband. In response, Skipper attempts to prove his manhood to her. However he is unable to perform and assumes that her accusation is right. Skipper abandons his career and succumbs to the world of drugs and alcohol which kills him. She recounts this to Brick who in his drunken reverie attempts to hit her and misses. Maggie reminds him that unlike Skipper, she is alive.

They are interrupted by Dixie, one of Gooper and Mae's children-Dixie blurts out that Maggie is jealous because she doesn't have children. The Act does with Maggie's declaration that the party guests have arrived.

Act II:

Act II begins with the arrival of Big Daddy, Reverent Tooker, Gooper, and Mae. Big Daddy expresses his lack of enthusiasm for the celebration in a single word 'Crap'. The overweight Big Mama very good naturedly jokes at her expense. Gooper and Mae ostentatiously draw attention to Brick's drinking. Brick ignores it. Big

Daddy is not impressed by the insincere birthday wishes, but Big Mama leads an outburst of emotions that Big Daddy does not have cancer. Big daddy is relieved too. He then interrogates Brick about the broken ankle, demanding to know whether he broke it 'laying a woman'.

After the guests depart leaving Big Daddy and Brick alone. Brick drinks till he experiences oblivion. But Big Daddy wants to have a frank talk with his son. Big Daddy boast fullness of his sexual appetite and ease with the world of lies and it will only disgust Brick, who tries to end the conversation. Big Daddy pursues the issue ranking up the topic of the relationship between Skipper and Brick. Brick goes on the defensive and refuses to talk.

Big Daddy then shocks Brick by announcing that it was Brick's rejection of Skipper that killed him. Skipper had called Brick to tell him about his episode with Maggie but Brick had hung up on his friend. The revelation of this truth leads Brick to retaliate- he declares that Big Daddy does have cancer and everyone assembled there knows it. The scene ends with Big Daddy's rage, condemning his family and everyone as liars.

Act III:

Everyone inquires where Big Daddy has gone. Big Mama presumes that he has gone to bed. After some prattling about the old man's resilience and Brick's drinking the younger people get down to business. Gooper, Mae and Maggie want to tell Big Mama about Big Daddy's cancer and elicit her support about Big daddy's cancer and garner her support in their competing plans to take over the plantation. They come to verbal bloms as each sarcastically attempts to reveal the covetous designs of the other. Throughout the scene Brick blandly looks at the moon.

Big Mama desperately appeals to Brick saying that he should have a child then Big Daddy would leave the plantation to him. Brick fails to respond but Maggie announces that she is pregnant. Mae and Gooper do not trust her but Big Mama rushes to break the news to Big Daddy. The scene ends with Brick and Maggie alone. She has locked up his liquor with the intention of giving it back only after he sleeps with her. The curtain falls as she turns out the light.

9.4 QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the contribution of Tennessee Williams to American Drama.
- 2) Attempt a plot synopsis of the play Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.
- 3) Write short notes on the following

- a) Significance of Act I
- b) Conclusion of the play

10

A CRITICAL STUDY OF TENNESSEE WILLIAM'S A CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF PART – II

Contents

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Characters
- 10.2 Themes
- 10.3 Questions

10.0 OBJECTIVES

To explain the play A Cat On A Hot Tin Roof, its plot , characterization, technique, themes ,motifs and symbols

10.1 CHARACTERS

Brick:

A taciturn and stony-faced drunk, Brick is too numb to feel much of anything anymore. His good looks and cool aloofness have won him admirers his whole life, from his own parents to his wife Maggie, despite his inability to reciprocate their affections. Since the death of his friend Skipper, Brick has retreated into a drunken shell, and the only emotions that he can express are disgust and boredom. A rise can still be coaxed out of Brick, however, when he is goaded about Skipper.

The favorite son and mourned lover, Brick possesses the charm of those who have given up and assumed a pose of indifference before the world. Brick embodies an almost archetypal masculinity, that of the self-possessed, self-contained, untouchable, and phallically intact man. Before this indifferent block, characters find themselves in the throes of desire (Maggie, Mama) or state of aggression (Daddy).

At the same time, Brick is an obviously broken man. Turning from his homosexual desire for his dead friend Skipper, Brick has depressively withdrawn from the world behind a screen of liquor.

He is reduced to the daily, mechanical search for his click that gives him peace. Thus he would locate himself on the far side of the family drama.

Brick's brokenness is materialized in his injury, a broken ankle incurred while jumping hurdles on the high school athletic field. In a sense, it is an injury incurred out of nostalgia for the early days of his friendship with Skipper, the time of what Maggie describes as their Greek legend. This injury, a wound in his otherwise intact masculinity, is also a figure for his castration, the unmaning implied in homosexual desire.

Brick is brought to judgment on his desire twice in the place: first by Maggie in Act I and then by Daddy in Act II. When Daddy approaches what has been tenuously repressed, Brick desperately attempts to dodge him, emptying his words of all significance. As he tells Daddy, their talks never materialize: nothing is said. When Daddy presses him, Brick reveals why he yearns for "solid quiet," why he would deny that their talks take place anywhere or refer to anything: they are painful. As Williams notes, Brick's horror at the thought of being identified with the litany of epithets that he recites ("Fairies") marks the extent of his internalization of the lie of conventional morality, the lie to which Mama pathetically clings and on which Maggie places her bets at the end of the play.

Maggie:

The play's cat, Maggie, is a hysterical, dissatisfied woman left prostrate before a brick of a man, Brick. Maggie's loneliness lies in Brick's refusal to recognize her desire. His refusal to make her his desire has made her hard, nervous, and bitter.

Imagined here as the woman constantly posing in the mirror, Maggie is perhaps the most fascinating character of the play. As Williams indicates, she holds the audiences transfixed. The exhilaration of the play lies in the force of the audience's identification with its gorgeous heroine, a woman desperate in her sense of lack, masochistically bound to a man who do not want her, and made all the more beautiful in her envy, longing, and dispossession.

Against the indifferent Brick, the frantic Maggie literally begins to fall to pieces. Throughout Act I, Maggie appears changing her clothes, posing before the mirror, preparing for the party. She appears at her most seductive and most vulnerable, utterly unable to lure her husband's desire. Indeed his gaze of disgust, freezing her in the mirror, precipitates her "hideous transformation" into "Maggie the Cat." Maggie's dispossession also lies in her childlessness. Her childlessness calls her status as wife and

woman into question. As a childless woman she is a woman who lacks. Without a child, moreover, her and Brick's place in Big Daddy's household is not assured.

Maggie is figured through a number of tropes of virginity. Earlier she sarcastically refers to herself as "Saint Maggie"; at one point Mae enters toting her Diana trophy; at the close of the play, Mae will joke that the only way she could have conceived of a child is immaculately. The desperate Maggie is subject to a miserable second virginity, a virginity that stands, in the logic of the play, against the grotesqueness of fertility. At the risk of being glib, we should note also that Maggie's trophy symbolizes her status as a "trophy wife."

To sum up Maggie is a vivacious and attractive woman whose curse is a love for a husband who does not love her. Her one driving goal is to get Brick to sleep with her – both to satisfy her own needs, and to allow her to conceive a baby, which would cement her claim to the Pollitt family's fortune. She is deathly afraid of abandonment, both by Brick and by the comfortable lifestyle to which she has grown accustomed. Despite her self-focused interests, she is also kind and warm-hearted.

Big Daddy:

"Like father, like son," is the rule of the Pollitt family. Big Daddy, like Brick, is the sort of man who inspires admiration and adoration without doing much of anything to deserve it. He worked hard for economic success, and now he wants to enjoy it. He is uninterested in his wife and treats her cruelly, belittling her love and that of his other son, Gooper. He sees himself in Brick, however, and therefore Brick is the only person for whom he feels love.

Big Mama:

She is an older version of Maggie – more hysterical, sloppier, needier, having let herself go, but still like Maggie. She loves her husband unconditionally despite his cruelty and indifference. She loves both her sons but she cannot help but prefer Brick, who is so much like his father. Her outbursts are a willful effort to avoid the truth about Big Daddy's health – she is a bit cleverer than she lets on, though not much.

Gooper:

The elder of the Pollitt children by eight years has languished in Brick's shadow since the day his brother was born. While Brick got the attention with looks and football, Gooper married into society and became a successful lawyer. But the

continued focus on his ne'er-do-well brother has turned Gooper bitter and mean as well as paranoid, and so it is out of both greed and spite that he actively campaigns for control of Big Daddy's estate.

Mae:

Gooper's wife has picked up his bitterness and greed, without any of his justifying history. She taunts Maggie's barrenness by parading her own substantial brood around the house, and considers herself to be Maggie's superior both socially and within the context of the Pollitt family. She is indiscreet and petty, and brings out the worst in her husband.

Dr. Baugh:

The family doctor shows sensitivity and discreetness, allowing the brothers to make their own decision about when and whether to tell Big Mama and Big Daddy about the patriarch's terminal condition (or, perhaps, shirking that responsibility himself).

Reverend Tooker:

The clergyman indelicately makes frequent reference to parish donations and needed repairs while hovering around the Pollitt estate, campaigning for a mention in Big Daddy's will. He displays a particular lack of taste and tact.

10.2 THEMES

Mendacity:

Brick claims he drinks to escape mendacity and lies, but there is no escape from falsehood in the Pollitt family. Brick is lying to himself about the nature of his relationship with Skipper and his culpability in Skipper's self-destruction and death. Maggie lies to the family about the quality of her relationship with Brick, and everyone lies to Big Daddy about his health. These lies permeate the characters, so that we see clearly how a lie forces a person to split into two or three different individuals, depending who is present.

Unrequited love:

The Pollitt men have a tendency to inspire love that cannot be required, including love that dare not speak its name. Maggie and Big Mama both love their husbands passionately and fruitlessly, as they are incapable of returning their affections.

Skipper's love for Brick was unrequited as well, by necessity, as Brick was incapable of allowing himself to consider the possibility of a romantic attachment to his friend. Even between the Pollitt men, Big Daddy loves Brick but Brick is too soggy with liquor to reciprocate.

Rivalry:

There are several intense rivalries in the Pollitt family, as individuals and couples clamor for the attention and love of the aloof Pollitt men. Gooper and Brick's sibling rivalry is largely one-sided, as Brick has no need to engage in the fight - Gooper lost the contest for his parents' affection the day Brick was born. Instead, the brothers vie for a place in their father's will, if not his heart. This rivalry is then foisted on to their wives, who compete mercilessly to see who is the better and worthier daughter-in-law.

Ads by CouponDropDown:

Poison:

Both Big Daddy's cancer and Brick's alcoholism are characterized not merely as illnesses, but as poisons - something that spreads and contaminates from the inside. The cancer eats away at Big Daddy's body while the alcohol eats away at Brick's soul. The poison theme is addressed explicitly but less literally by Maggie, when she speaks of "venomous thoughts and words in hearts and minds" as the poison devouring the entire Pollitt family.

Proxies

An emotional proxy is an important tool for a playwright - a correlative object allows an emotion or struggle to be represented visually and theatrically. Williams takes this a step further in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by making his characters conscious of their proxies - in particular, Maggie and Skipper each sleeps with the other as a proxy for Brick. Brick, meanwhile, adopts liquor as a proxy for feeling and remembering, and Maggie transparently uses the excuse of a "ticking biological clock" to justify her need for financial security and sexual gratification.

Difficulty of communication:

Big Daddy complains frequently about how difficult it is to speak plainly about hard subjects. He is not alone in this frustration - Maggie also struggles to get through to her noncommunicative husband, who is desperately trying to repress the memory of the friend whose communication attempt he rejected. The click in Brick's head when he has drunk enough symbolizes his peace of mind - that is, the moment that he is able to fully detach from the

world, and at which communication with him becomes truly impossible.

Blackmail:

A popular manipulation technique in the Pollitt family is blackmail and emotional ransom. In particular, everyone tries to control Brick through holding ransom the two things he most requires in order to function - his crutch, and his liquor. Big Daddy knocks Brick to the ground and holds his crutch ransom until he admits why he drinks. Maggie flushes Brick's liquor down the toilet, and won't provide more until he consents to sleep with her. And the control of the Pollitt estate is also effectively held ransom until Maggie can produce an heir.

Manliness and Homosexuality:

Like many of Williams's works, *Cat* concerns itself with the elaboration of a certain fantasy of broken manliness, in this case a manliness left crippled by the homosexual desire it must keep in abeyance.

Brick is *Cat*'s broken man. The favorite son and longed-for lover of a wealthy plantation family, he possesses the charm of those who have given up and assumed a pose of indifference before the world. Brick—a “brick” of a man—embodies an almost archetypal masculinity. Brick's “enviable coolness,” however, is the coolness of repression, a repression that keeps his desires at bay. Brick is an alcoholic who cannot avow the desire in his relationship with his dead friend Skipper. Turning from his desire, he has depressively distanced himself from the world with a screen of liquor. He is reduced to the daily, mechanical search for his click that gives him peace.

Brick mourns his love for Skipper, a love imagined in almost mythic dimensions. For Brick, it is the only true and good thing in his life. His mourning is made all the more difficult by the desire he cannot avow. As Maggie notes, theirs is a love that dare not speak its name, a love that could not be satisfied or discussed. Thus Daddy, assuming the position of judge, will force Brick to confront this love. Brick's attempts at dodging him are crucial to the way the play imagines manliness. As Daddy approaches what has been tenuously repressed, Brick empties his words of all significance. As he tells Daddy, their talks never “materialize” and nothing is really said. When Daddy presses him, Brick reveals why he yearns for “solid quiet.”

Ultimately the revelation of the desire in his friendship with Skipper cracks Brick's cool. His horror at the thought of being

identified with the litany of epithets that he recites (“Fairies”), his disgust at the gossipmongers about him, only points to a fear that they might be true.

The Lie:

As Brick pronounces to Big Daddy, mendacity is the system in which men live. Mendacity here refers to the mores that keep what Williams’s dubs the “inadmissible thing” that is repressed at all costs. The two primary objects of repression in *Cat* are Brick’s homosexual desires and Daddy’s imminent death. After the men are forced to confront these secrets, Mama will desperately invest all her future hopes in the dream of Brick becoming a family man. The responsibilities of fatherhood would somehow stop his drinking, the estate could go to the rightful heir, and the perpetuation of the family line through Brick is Daddy’s immortality. The idyllic fantasy of the family restored, however, is yet another of the play’s lies or Maggie’s invention of a coming child.

The Cat on a Hot Tin Roof:

The cat refers to a particular fantasy of femininity and feminine desire. The play’s primary cat is Maggie, a typically hysterical, dissatisfied Williams heroine who prostrates herself before Brick. Maggie’s loneliness has made her a “cat,” hard, anxious, and bitter. The exhilaration of Williams’s dramaturgy lies in the force of the audience’s identification with this heroine, a woman desperate in her sense of lack, masochistically bound to man who does not want her, and made all the more beautiful in her envy, longing, and dispossession.

Maggie’s dispossession also rests in her childlessness. Certainly her childlessness calls her status as “normal” wife and woman into question. Without a child, moreover, her and Brick’s place in Big Daddy’s household is not assured. The child functions entirely here to assure their bid as Daddy’s rightful heirs.

The Father and Son:

In *Cat*, the father and son appear in a decidedly narcissistic relation. Daddy’s narcissistic love for Brick is clear. As Williams notes, Brick bears the charmingly masculine indifference Daddy must have in his youth. As Mama will note at the close of the play, Daddy wants above all that Brick provide him a grandson who is as much like his son as Brick is like himself. Brick is his rightful heir, his means of immortality.

The mirror relation between the men becomes especially clear Brick and Daddy will “show-down” over their respective secrets. Both Daddy’s sojourn in “death’s country” and Brick’s being

“almost not alive” in his drunkenness make them “accidentally truthful.” Thus, unlike the characters about them, they present themselves as the only ones who have never lied to each other. Both stand on polar limits of the system of mendacity that is life, Brick being the drunkard and Daddy the dead man.

Father and son will come to double each other in their roles as revealer and recipient of the other’s “inadmissible thing.” Thus Daddy will force Brick to confront the desire in his friendship with Skipper and receive his death sentence in return. In matching the revelation of his repressed desire with that of Daddy’s death, Brick turns things “upside down.” Daddy comes to stand in the place he just occupied. The revelation is a violent act, robbing Daddy of his second life. As Brick the duality of the exchange that has just ensued: “You told me! I told you!”

Brick and Daddy’s final struggle marks the reverse side of the narcissistic love between them, the aggressive logic of “either you go or I go” between those who mirror each other too closely.

The Children:

Against the beautiful, childless couple, the image of the family, and the mother in particular, will appear hilariously grotesque. Mae and Gooper have spawned a litter of “no-necked monsters” fit for the county fair; Mae, the cotton carnival queen besmirched by proxy, is a “monster of fertility”; and the sounds of the screeching children continually invade the scene. This side of the family will continually stage burlesques of familial love and devotion, such as Daddy’s birthday party in Act II.

The Off-Stage Telephone:

Cat makes great use of off-stage sound, marking the presence of spies in the household. The telephone recurs a number of times. Initially Mama and Maggie’s conversations rehearse the lie that keeps Big Daddy and Mama ignorant of the machinations afoot, the lie that Daddy will live. The telephone will then return at Brick and Big Daddy’s showdown to provoke the revelation of what has remained inadmissible until then. Here a phone call, as if a call from the dead, evokes Skipper’s final confession to his friend. Upon Brick’s revelation of Daddy’s cancer, the telephone communicates Daddy’s unspoken protest: “no, no, you got it all wrong! Upside down! Are you crazy?”

The Exotic Lands:

Before confronting Brick on Skipper, Daddy takes a rather strange detour through his travels with Big Mama to Europe and

North Africa. Daddy's memories of his travels introduce a motif familiar to Williams's readers: the Mediterranean/North Africa as a primal space, a space savagery, lawlessness, and sexual excess, all things that civilization would repress. These exotic locales and their inhabitants become ciphers for the desires that remain repressed at the home. It is not for nothing that later Brick tells of a fraternity pledge who flees to North Africa when the brothers discover that he is a sodomite.

Symbols:

We should note the following symbolic objects in *Cat*. First, Brick and Maggie's bed—the place where, as Big Mama will subsequently observe, the rocks in their marriage lie—belongs to the plantation's original owners, Jack Straw and Peter Ochello. As Williams writes, the ghost of the men's love haunts the stage.

Second a gloriously grotesque console, combining a radio-phonograph, television, and liquor cabinet, towers over the room. As Williams notes, it serves as shrine to the "comforts and illusions" behind which we hide from the things the characters face. Notice the moments when Brick will turn on the radio, refresh his drink, thereby raising a screen between him and the household.

Finally we should note Brick's phallic crutch. Its removal at the hands of Maggie and Big Daddy symbolize Brick's castration, a castration concomitant with the revelation of his unmanly homosexual desires. This crippling of the most masculine of men is crucial to Brick's "sexiness." The crutch's continuous restoration and removal—in a sort of game of "now he has it, now he doesn't"—appeals to the fetishistic one.

10.3 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of the play's title?
2. Explicate Maggie's role in the triangle she shares with Brick and Skipper
3. Why does Williams cripple his hero? How does Brick's injury function in the play? Consider his recount of the event and how various characters make use of it.
4. Characterize the relationship between the Pollitt brothers.
5. Maggie thinks that announcing her pregnancy will solve all her problems. Is she right?
6. Compare and contrast Big Daddy and Brick.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF EUGENE O' NEILL'S EMPEROR JONES

Contents

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Eugene O'Neill
- 11.2 The Emperor Jones
- 11.3 Characters of the play
- 11.4 Summary of the Play
- 11.5 Themes of the Play
- 11.6 Questions

11.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce the writer Eugene O'Neil to the students,
- To make them aware of the summary and the story line of the text *The Emperor Jones*,
- To introduce the characters of the play to the students,
- To make them aware of different themes of the play- *The Emperor Jones*,
- To introduce sub-plots and characters in detail to the students.

11.1 EUGENE O'NEILL

Apparently destined for a life in the theatre, Eugene O'Neill was not only born the son of an extremely popular American stage actor, James O'Neill (1846-1920); he was also literally born on Broadway— October 16, 1888—in the since demolished Barrett House family hotel on Broadway and Forty-third Street (the area presently called Times Square), while James O'Neill was touring in his most famous role as the Count of Monte Cristo. O'Neill's childhood and adolescence were mostly unhappy because of his unstable family life, and many of his plays, especially his most famous play, *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956), focused on disturbed, dysfunctional families.

O'Neill's formal schooling culminated in very brief stints at both Princeton and Harvard. His short stay at Princeton included a

two-week suspension in 1907 for an act of drunken vandalism. After a short and unsuccessful first marriage, O'Neill's next few years included a mining expedition, till he took writing as his full time career. Eugene O'Neil died as the most famous playwright of America.

11.2 THE EMPEROR JONES

The Emperor Jones is a 1920 play by American dramatist Eugene O'Neill which tells the tale of Brutus Jones, an African-American man who kills a man, goes to prison, escapes to a Caribbean island, and sets himself up as emperor. The play recounts his story in flashbacks as Brutus makes his way through the forest in an attempt to escape former subjects who have rebelled against him.

The play displays an uneasy mix of expressionism and realism, which is also characteristic of several other O'Neill plays, including *The Hairy Ape*. It was O'Neill's first play to receive great critical acclaim and box-office success, and the one that launched his career.

The play is divided into eight scenes. Scenes 2 to 7 are from the point of view of Jones, and no other character speaks. The first and last scenes feature a character named Smithers, a white trader who appears to be part of illegal activities. In the first scene, Smithers is told about the rebellion by an old woman, and then has a lengthy conversation with Jones. In the last scene, Smithers converses with Lem, the leader of the rebellion. Smithers has mixed feelings about Jones, though he generally has more respect for Jones than for the rebels. During this scene, Jones is killed by a silver bullet, which was the only way that the rebels believed Jones could be killed, and the way in which Jones planned to kill himself if he was captured.

The place of the action is an island in the West Indies. There is no formal native government on the island therefore there is the empire of Brutus Jones.

11.3 CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

1) Brutus Jones- the emperor:

An American Negro who escaped from imprisonment and took over the power of an island of West Indies. He declared himself as the emperor.

2) Henry Smithers- he is a (area) white Cockney trader who has first time observed that Jones's political power is rising.

3) An old native women

4) Lem- a native chief who convinces and leads the natives against Brutus Jones.

5) Soldier's -they are of Lem

Minor characters:

1) Jeff –Negro

2) The prison guard

3) Planters

4) Auctino

5) Slaves

6) The Congo witch Doctor is the most primitive image that appears before Jones.

7) The crocodile God

11.4 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Emperor Jones begins with the introspections of Brutus Jones. From his loud thing thinking we realize that he has declared himself as the emperor of an island in the West Indies. He has created a myth for himself which says that nobody kills him and he is, thus, immortal. Then he announces himself as the emperor of the island and starts cheating the natives and snatches wealth from them. At the very outset of the drama, he is given to understand that the natives of the island are revolting against him and marching on him with drums and weapons. We hear the sounds of the distant drum beats. And thus begins Jones' planning of escape from the forthcoming catastrophe. He realizes that his end is nearing, but he does not accept that his end is really approaching. He, on the other hand, makes arrangements for hiding himself. He leaves his palace for a secure place, and feels confident. He has always spread the news that he cannot be killed by any bullet but a silver one. The silver bullet actually is a myth he has created.

The second part of the play begins with Jones' entry in the great forest through which he plans to travel and escape from the danger of the natives. He runs to his life, without food, without water and without any measure weapons for his safety. Actually, he is frightened at the heart of his heart but he tries to convince himself and also encourages himself. In the course of his self expressions he seems to have become frantic. This typical style of expression is called expressionist way of writing, or in other words it

is named as expressionism in which the character incessantly expresses his heart. Here, Emperor Jones is speaking to himself, or to the elements around him. No one else except Brutus Jones is in the forest. He searches for some nameless people or creatures and expresses his fear for some formless creatures. He thinks that something or somebody will creep out of the forest and murder him. He has a pistol for his safety. Then he shoots off his six bullets to clear away his fear. Then he comes across Jeff the Negro whom he had already murdered in a crap game. This is nothing but his hallucination, but he does not know that it is his mind that is seeing Jeff. He shoots at the image of Jeff. After that he meets a chain gang and recognizes the guard whom also he had murdered while escaping from the prison. But now he has to kill him again for which he shoots another bullet on the guard. The moment the gun is shot, they apparitions disappear from his sight.

The third part of the play begins with his decision to halt for a moment and rest. He notices that a group of planters dressed up in the popular fashion during the nineteenth century. Then he comes across the auction block where he shoots twice to kill the auctioneer and the planter. Finally, he sees himself as one of the Negro slaves in the bottom of a slave ship. He also feels that he is caught in the deepest jungle where witch doctor is trying to offer him as sacrificial victim. Jones then shoots at the witch doctor with his last bullet—a silver bullet. When he has shot all the bullets uselessly, he is left with no bullets anymore. Finally, the natives reach him with lot of weapons and shoot him with silver bullet only which they had with them.

Emperor Jones wanted to escape to another state where he could have saved himself by the law of the other state. The impact of the beating of the drums affects and influences Jones' thinking and causes all the hallucination. The drums thus perform the background music and confuse Jones throughout the play. The final scene thus ends in an ironic fashion though he had created the myth for himself. The end of the drama seems to be tragic but it also was necessary. It was O'Neil's daring way of writing a play with a villainous protagonist in 1920s.

11.5 THEMES OF THE PLAY

11.5.1. *The Emperor Jones* and expressionism:

Expressionism refers to the unique style of expression in drama. In this style, the character expresses or speaks his or her heart out by using many poetic and dramatic devices. Exaggeration is mostly practiced in the expressionist drama. In America Eugene O'Neil wrote this drama in 1920, that started a controversy ever

since. Many critics criticized it because of the difficulty they found while analyzing this drama. The play has been describe as a racist piece of work. On psychological level the drama takes place on psychological grounds more than on stage.

The dialogues in the drama are written in the local dialect of Haiti Island. Almost all of the dialogues are written in the native languages that hardly follows any grammatical canon. Many of the critics regard this drama as a first American expressionist play. According to them, this drama has made the theater an individualist and psychologist more than the traditional one. But the first and the last scenes of the drama are naturalistic because they deal with reality and the matter of fact incidents in the drama. Others scenes of the play follow the expressionist style.

The expressionism in the drama focuses on-

- 1) The exaggerated use of space in drama on stage.
- 2) The time shifts back and forth.
- 3) The language is mostly in native dialects.
- 4) Characters speak more of mental things than physical once.

This expressionist style focuses on the above mentioned factors to make a story telling more interesting and simple. But in fact, expressionism complicates the process of understanding.

So it is better to look at the play as a fusion (mixture) of psychology and reality.

11.5.2 *The Emperor Jones* as a tragedy OR The life story of Mr. Jones the Emperor:

The emperor Jones is written by Eugene O'Neil in 1920 when Europe and America were living amongst the tensions of world war as well as excessive materialism. Eugene O'Neil claimed that in *The Emperor Jones* he was not exploring the problems of the Negroes of the west, though it was serious during 2nd & 3rd decades of 20th century. But when we read the Drama, the language and the story line seem to explore the racist problem & issues in and around the Congo. It also reflects the problem of imperial operation. The Black Africans are commonly called as Niggers in this drama. In fact "Nigger" is an insulting and abusive language. In other word "Eugene O'Neil" presents the racist problem very mildly though the language seems to be rough. During the days when it was written in America, it was the age of Harlem Renaissance in which the black Americans were singing & glorifying their painful past. In the present drama the character of Smither's represents the white man and the hatred for the Blacks. Though Smither's is the officer of the emperor, at the heart of his

hearts, he hates Jones. Even Jones hates Smithers because he is a white man.

Emperor Jones is the emperor of one of the Islands at Haithi and he is a dictator. The commoner's of the Island are revolting against Jones .Smithers's helps him out to escape from the revolting people. He escapes in to the Jungle and runs towards another island. He has to cross a river beyond which begins the empire of another king. He can escape if he successfully crosses the river. There he can withdraw his money from the bank and can began his life anew. The revolutionaries are chasing him with shrill drums and with the "Tom Tom" of other instruments. He faces much dangerous hallucination (illusion). Finally he is killed at the hands of his subject (citizens).

This drama, though based on a political incident, it is a trust worthy document on the racist problem between the white and the blacks.

11.5.3 The use of darkness and fear in the play:

The Emperor Jones is a play written in 8 scenes. The first scene begins at late afternoon and continues throughout the night. In the end of the play, the whole action takes place in the darkness. The darkness in this drama stands for fear or terror. The Anarchy and chaos and also causes hallucinations of Emperor Jones. The darkness in the play also symbolises

The ignorance of Emperor Jones about his future and the ignorance of common masses about their rights. During the flight (escape) of Jones, he faces his angry citizens, some strange animals who try to attack him and also some terrifying hallucination had shook him within. He keeps on running towards the river beyond which he will be safe. The river symbolises life, survival and success. He knows that he will reach the river till the morning. In other words his danger lasts till the morning and once he is across the river and once it is morning he will be safe. But to his dismay, he falls victim to the beholding people and this short days. With his death, all anarchy darkness and restlessness come to an end.

11.5.4 The end of the play or the death of Emperor Jones or the last scene of the play:

Ans - Actually, the End of the play begins with the scene number 6. It is 3'o clock in the morning and Jones left with no bullets Jones is already on the verge of the end. By the time scene 7 began it is 5 o' clock in the morning when emperor Jones repents feeling "sorry" for his scenes he needs witch doctor. The witch doctor leads in to

the end. Emperor Jones believes that his death has already near. He cries in repentance –Mercy, oh Lawd! Mercy on his sinner;

The witch doctor symbolizes the sinful end of the emperor and thus Jones dies by the end the scene, 7. In the last scene only “Smither” and “Lem” appear on the stage when Emperor Jones is already dead.

Smither and Lem are happy to see the dead of Jones and smither is hopefully looking for his future.

11.5.5 The character sketch of emperor Jones:

Ans –Brutus Jones is the emperor of an Island in “Haithi’s”. Sam had taken over the presidency of Haithi in 1915, and he ruled tyrannically. He claimed himself that he could not be killed unless it were by a silver bullet. But finally Sam was killed by his subjects (citizens).

The story of Emperor Jones his nature, his language & his age were all inspired from the life story of emperor “Sam”. There is a simple episode of “chess” in this drama. His subjects are chasing him to kill him because they have revolted against him. He escapes from his palace and runs towards to the “Congo” (river) his money and all the richest are deposited in a bank. He wants to with draw up his money live happily. He runs a cross the jungle during the dark night & falls victim to the vengeance (revenge) of his subject. Thus, we a tragic end the drama ends with his death when it is already the morning.

11.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *Emperor Jones* as an Expressionist Play.
2. Write an essay on *Emperor Jones* as a tragedy.
3. How does O’Neil use darkness and fear in the play?
4. Comment on the end of the play.
5. Narrate the character of Brutus Jones.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF LANGSTON HUGHES' POEMS

CONTENTS

- 12.0 Objective
- 12.1 About the Poet
- 12.2 Harlem Renaissance
- 12.3 The Negro Speaks of Rivers
- 12.4 The Weary Blues
- 12.5 I, Too, Sing America
- 12.6 Questions

12.0 OBJECTIVE

1. To familiarize students with the poet
2. To acquaint students with the Harlem Renaissance
3. To introduce students how Negroes are disgraced by the whites
4. To explicate how Langston Hughes portrays his revolution against the whites through his poetic expressions.

12.1 ABOUT THE POET

Langston Hughes was born on 1st February, 1902 in Joplin. He was the second child. His mother was a school teacher, Carrie Mercer Langston and father was James Nathaniel Hughes. Hughes father left his family and later on divorced and went to Cuba and Mexico in order to keep himself away from racism in the United States. After the separation of his parents, while his mother traveled seeking employment, young Langston Hughes was raised mainly by his maternal grandmother, Mary Patterson Langston, in Lawrence, Kansas. Through the black American oral tradition and drawing from the activist experiences of her generation, Mary Langston instilled in her grandson a lasting sense of racial pride. He spent most of his childhood in Lawrence, Kansas. After the death of his grandmother, he went to live with family friends, James and Mary Reed, for two years. Later, Hughes lived again with his mother Carrie in Lincoln, Illinois. She had remarried when he was still an adolescent, and eventually they lived in Cleveland, Ohio, where he attended high school.

While in grammar school in Lincoln, Hughes was elected class poet. Hughes stated that in retrospect he thought it was because of the stereotype that African Americans have rhythm. During high school in Cleveland, he wrote for the school newspaper, edited the yearbook, and began to write his first short stories, poetry, and dramatic plays. His first piece of jazz poetry, "When Sue Wears Red", was written while he was in high school. It was during this time that he discovered his love of books.

Relationship with father:

Hughes was not in good terms with his father. He lived with him in Mexico for a brief span in 1919. Hughes started living with his father thinking that he would support financially to attend Columbia University. But his father did not do so. Hughes realized that his father instead of supporting the blacks had disliking for their own people. This ideological difference between them kept them away for most of the time.

Initially, his father hoped that Hughes would attend a university abroad, and would become an engineer. On these grounds, he was willing to provide financial assistance to his son. But Hughes preferred to be a writer which did suit to his father's desire. Consequently he did not support him financially. Ily, Hughes and his father came to a compromise: Hughes would study

engineering, so long as he could attend Columbia. His tuition provided; Hughes left his father after more than a year. While at Columbia in 1921, Hughes managed to maintain a B+ grade average. He left in 1922 because of racial prejudice, and his interests revolved more around the neighborhood of Harlem than his studies, though he continued writing poetry.

12.2 HARLEM RENAISSANCE

It was a cultural movement that spanned the 1920s. At the time, it was known as the "New Negro Movement", named after the 1925 anthology by Alain Locke. Though it was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City, many French-speaking black writers from African and Caribbean colonies, who lived in Paris were also influenced by the Harlem Renaissance. The Harlem Renaissance is generally considered to have spanned from about 1919 until the early or mid-1930s. Many of its ideas lived on much longer. The zenith of this "flowering of Negro literature", as James Weldon Johnson preferred to call the Harlem Renaissance, was placed between 1924 (the year that *Opportunity: A Journal of Negro Life* hosted a party for black writers where many white publishers were in attendance) and 1929 (the year of the stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression).

Harlem Renaissance was a blossoming (c. 1918–37) of African American culture, particularly in the creative arts, and the most influential movement in African American literary Harlem. Embracing literary, musical, theatrical, and visual arts, participants sought to reconceptualize "the Negro" apart from the white stereotypes that had influenced black peoples' relationship to their heritage and to each other. They also sought to break free of Victorian moral values and bourgeois shame about aspects of their lives that might, as seen by whites, reinforce racist beliefs. Never dominated by a particular school of thought but rather characterized by intense debate, the movement laid the groundwork for all later African American literature and had an enormous impact on subsequent black literature and consciousness worldwide. While the renaissance was not confined to the Harlem district of New York City, Harlem attracted a remarkable concentration of intellect and talent and served as the symbolic capital of this cultural awakening.

The New Negro in America had no thought of assimilating African culture and literature. But he desired recognition on account of his own merits by the whites and desired that American democracy would offer him social, political and economic equality with Americans.

Hughes visited Harlem in 1921 and was pleased to know that Negro intellectuals were inspired by a sense of confidence about their victory. The policy to suppress the Negro riots during the First World War discouraged the Negro but their spirit was revived with encouragement hope given by the intellectuals. To revive their decline temper, Hughes brought out his first Volume of poems called *The Weary Blues* in 1926.

Let us now critically evaluate the poems which are prescribed for the syllabus such as, *Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *Weary Blues* and *I, too, Sing of America*.

12.3 THE NEGRO SPEAKS OF RIVERS

'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' is the heritage of Negro spirituals which is recalled by the poem's majestic imagery and sonorous repetitions. Written when Hughes was only seventeen as he travelled by train across the Mississippi, 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers' is a beautiful statement of strength in the history of black people, which Hughes imagines stretching as far back as ancient Egypt and further into Africa and the cradle of civilization. The poem returns at the end to America in a moment of optimistic alchemy when he sees the "muddy bosom" of the Mississippi "turn all golden in the sunset".

In the poem, the speaker speaks about his knowledge of rivers which have been the source of life and light for people from ancient times. The great civilizations of world have developed along the back of the rivers. Rivers in the poem are portrayed of having eternal flow of water which is channelized into canal for irrigation to sustain a happy and health existence of people. Similarly blood flows in our body through veins, which keeps us alive and vibrant for the accomplishment of our assignments. The textual details of the poem invoke strong imagery related to veins, rivers, and the roots of trees and give the reader a sense of the timelessness of these objects.

In the short first stanza, the speaker in the poem by Langston Hughes states that he has "known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins." From this early point in the poem, images of the canals of veins that

run throughout the human body as well as similar images of rivers that wind around and are shaped like veins form our understanding that this poem is about more than blood or water, it is about roots and circuits. Like veins or rivers, roots run deep and twist irregularly through the medium in which they are planted. The ancient rivers the speaker talks of are like the blood in veins or the roots under trees because they provide sustenance and can give and support life.

It is important to point out that after the first stanza there is a sentence that stands by itself for emphasis that simply states in one of the more important lines in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” by Langston Hughes, “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.” It means the rivers are similar to the soul. Here the poet tends to say that his campaign for the quest of identity will continue endlessly. As rivers in due course of time become deep and have more power of sustainability and strength, similarity with advancing time he will muster strength, courage and empowerment to prove his status as equal with his white counterparts who consider him rootless in America.

The third section of The Negro Speaks of Rivers changes the tone of the poem since it reverts to the first-person perspective. Although the reader knows it is impossible for one person to have lived in so many places and time periods at once. It is understood that the “I” being used is meant to represent hundreds of thousands of voices from the past to the present. The speaker has given a long list of rivers like Euphrates, Congo, Nile, Mississippi and New Orleans where he has lived bathed, sang and raised pyramids.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
 I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
 I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
 I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
 went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
 bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

He further sets to elaborate his deep knowledge about rivers when in remote past they emerged as dusky and shadowy and no fixed banks and clear water, as they are having today. But gradually they established themselves as the famous rivers with death and crystal clear water and now they acquire dignified status

as rivers across the world. This shows the eternal growth of the rivers. Similarly, the poet will be gaining ground and will succeed as champion who has been striving hard to rehabilitate the blacks as respected citizens of America. It is the sense of urgency and depth of commitment on the part of the speaker which renders it as a unique poem.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

12.4 THE WEARY BLUES

"The Weary Blues" takes place at an old Harlem bar on Lenox Avenue. There is a piano player playing the blues. As he plays, the speaker observes his body movement and the tone of his voice. Throughout the poem, several literary devices are used to guide the reader through the mixture of emotions the blues player is feeling. The vivid imagery and use of language gives the reader a more personal glimpse into the life of the man playing the blues.

The imagery of the poem is also significant. Words like "drowsy," "rocking," "pale dull pallor," "lazy sway," "rickety stool," and "raggy tune" suggest the feelings of melancholy. The mood is somber and depressing. Even the smallest elements of the poem and the setting are incompetent. The language is broken and improper. The piano is referred to as old and poor and the stool, which could be interpreted as the musician's foundation, is "rickety," unstable, and inadequate.

The repetition of several words and phrases emphasizes the mood and the seriousness of the musician's lyrics, thoughts, and actions. His sway is repetitive. The "lazy sway" and "rocking back and forth" implies continual movement, as if the musician is uneasy, uncomfortable in his current position. The repeated phrases, "I ain't got nobody" and "can't be satisfied" reveal the true feelings of the musician. In this most humbled position, he shares his pain and relinquishes his deepest feelings. The piano is personified twice throughout the poem; "he made that poor piano moan." The idea of a piano moaning implies that the music is so powerful that it has a direct influence on the instrument. The musician's burdens and pain literally affect the piano.

"The Weary Blues" is known as one of Hughes' most famous poems. Critics have claimed that "The Weary Blues" is a combination of blues and jazz with personal experiences. It

embodies blues as a metaphor and form. It has also been coined as one of the first works of blues performance in literature. Throughout the poem, music is not only seen as a form of art and entertainment, but also as a way of life; people living the blues. Hughes' ability to incorporate poetry with music and history with art has given him the reputation as one of the leading black artists of the twentieth century. "The Weary Blues" allows the reader to seek to unlock the mystery of the blues, for both the musician and themselves.

The title of the poem Weary Blues gives an insight into the theme of the poem. The Blues is a kind of musical presentation done by the blacks, which carries the melancholic note of suffering and despondency of the Blacks caused by the Whites who consider themselves superior. The singer who is also black is trying to outpour his saga of sufferings in accompaniment with old piano. He feels that sorrows they suffer will find better expression though their own poetic form. If he tries other form he will fail to express the intensity of emotional feelings and thus purpose for which he is singing will be defeated.

The poem begins with a speaker telling someone about a piano player he heard a couple nights ago. This musician was playing a slow blues song with all his body and soul. The speaker starts to really get into the sad music. This musician is singing about how, even though he's miserable, he's going to put his worries aside. The second verse is more of a bummer: nothing can cure his blues, and he wishes he was dead. The musician plays on late into the night; and when he finally goes to bed, he sleeps like a dead person or something else that can't think. His rendering of the music is termed as 'droning'. The term 'droning' may refer to the fact how he labouredly delivered music for a living. Since drones thrive in communities, the music may signify the collective consciousness of the blacks. This is why probably the music is 'syncopated'. 'Syncopated' means stressing a normally weak beat. The aspect of the blacks-the Harlem Renaissance is for grounded with the stressing of this weak beat. The musician oscillated to the music that mellowed to a sentimental humming (croon).

The poet has penned the phrase "down on Lenox Avenue" instead on "up on Lenox Avenue" as blacks inhabited the Northern part of Harlem. The word "down" may also signify the architecture of Harlem colonies, with the multi-storied apartments. The lower apartments were reserved for business purposes. The African Americans were responsible for the birth of the jazz and blues music that was born out of "irresistible impulse of blacks to create boldly expressive art of a high quality as a primary response to their social conditions, as an affirmation of their dignity and humanity in the face of poverty and racism.

The singer in the poem is rocking his body backward and forward to show his mental anxiety and is trying to create melody out of his old piano which gives melancholic and sad notes. However the melody is appealing as it is not superficial but coming spontaneously from the depth of soul. Some times in utter disappointment he feels that there no one in the world to support him he is alone in this wild world.

"Ain't got nobody in all this world,
Ain't got nobody but ma self.
I's gwine to quit ma frownin'
And put ma troubles on the shelf."

With these feelings he pounds his feet strongly to express his anger and vibrancy to face any unfavorable situations in his life. The use of word Thump repeatedly creates an echo of sound which is an essential element in any performing art. Though the blacks are disgraced and disregarded by the whites, they (blacks) have tremendous sense of music and melody of their own and they need not borrow any art form from others as they themselves are blessed with their own way of expression. The poet tells that the blacks have internalized the Blues and assimilated them as part of their lives and after nicely performing the artist sleeps soundly as if he is enjoying sound sleep forever.

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

The poem brings out the fact that the blacks are self sufficient people and try to prove that on their own music, melody and mental faculty, they can establish themselves on par with the whites. They have no grudge against the whites: they only disapprove their mental block which does not let them accept the blacks as their respectable brothers and true inhabitants of America.

12.5 I, TOO, SING AMERICA

'I, Too' written just before his return to the States from Europe and after he'd been denied passage on a ship because of his color, has a contemporary feel in contrast to the mythical dimension of 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'. It is no less powerful however, in its expression of social injustice. The calm clear statements of the 'I' have an unstoppable force like the progress the poem envisages. Hughes's dignified introductions to these poems and his beautiful speaking voice render them all the more moving.

Langston wrote the poem "I, Too, Sing America" (1932), to register his protest against the whites who treated the blacks disgracefully. Blacks were discriminated against, killed violently, separated from using the same facilities and being in the same place as whites, just to name a few. The division between whites and blacks was clearly prevalent, with whites faring on the better side of the spectrum. Essentially, the United States of America was a racially discriminatory society reinforced by its racist laws.

This is reason that Langston took the initiative to speak his mind via poetry, and this piece shows that.

The first line of the poem, "I, too, sing America," clearly signifies one thing: Just because his skin color is different from whites, he argues that he also sings the National Anthem/Star Spangle Banner the same as whites do. More important, the voice of the poem, the servant, argues that he too is American. The poet argues that the Blacks too have same devotion and allegiance to America as their native land and always devote themselves to sing the praise of country with the sense of commitment. There is then no justification in treating them as if they do not belong to the rich culture of America.

The poet says that they are treated disgracefully simply because of the fact they are dark in color and due to this color they are always sent to kitchen to work as servant. This mostly happens when the company of white people comes; they send us to kitchen as they fell insulted to tell that the Blacks are their darker brothers. But this gives them good opportunity to eat well to become physically strong. They also feel foolishness of their attitude and laugh at them that once they become physically fit by feeding themselves with nutritious food; they will not tolerate this kind of derogatory gestures of the whites and will retaliate them to teach a lesson.

I am the darker brother. / They send me to eat in kitchen

When company comes/ But I laugh

And eat well, / And grow strong

In the following stanza, the poet is very optimistic about the future the Blacks. He tells once they become acquainted with the kitchen culture and become powerful; the whites will have no courage to order them to go back in kitchen to prepare and serve food as servant and follow their commands. These Blacks will not be constrained to obey them; rather they will come on the table and enjoy the delicacy of food along with their white brothers without any fear. They then cannot order them to eat in the kitchen separately and wash the vessels. This will bring them victory and they will restore their lost glory which was contaminated by their white counterparts. Then they will proudly say that they being the indispensable part of America will sing the glory of America authoritatively as true citizens of the land.

Tomorrow, / I'll be at the table
when company comes. / Nobody'll dare
Say to me, "Eat in the kitchen,"

The poet is sure that final stage will be very encouraging for the Blacks when they (Whites) will realize that the Blacks are really handsome and capable, and then they will be ashamed of their cruel, unethical and inhuman treatment against the Blacks forever. This feeling among the Whites will give the Blacks freedom from the callous and unfortunate life of exploitation, disgrace and penury.

They'll see how beautiful I am/And be ashamed--
I, too, am America.

The heart of the poem demonstrates the strength of a black slave who stands up for what is right and says enough is enough: What an amazing poem by Langston Hughes. It is very deep and says a mouthful. The poem "I, Too" shouts for equality and freedom. Hughes depicts a slave who receives horrible treatment from his master, because he is sent away to eat alone in the kitchen when visitors come. This disrespect precipitates strength from the servant who boldly decides to take control and plans to not eat in the kitchen when ordered to do so.

The message of the poem is obvious: Blacks ought to have the same freedom as whites, and take a stand when need be.

Hughes expresses his feelings by saying that blacks have equal rights too, like every white person in the world. The last line, "I, too, am America," is a perfect closure to an excellent poem.

12.6 QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the theme of 'The Negro Speaks of Rivers'.
2. Discuss the imagery in The Weary Blues.
3. Critically appreciate I Too Sing of America.
4. Critically discuss Langston Hughes as a prominent of Harlem Renaissance with the help of these poems.

A CRITICAL STUDY OF ROBERT FROST'S POEMS

CONTENTS

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Poet
- 13.3 Mending Wall
- 13.4 Birches
- 13.5 Design
- 13.6 Conclusion
- 13.7 Questions

13.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this Unit is to introduce the readers to one of the most popular and critically appreciated American poets of his generation, Robert Frost, and his highly delightful emphatic poetry. The messages of his poems are appealing – he doesn't usually say anything directly but through the use of figurative language he gets his ideas across. Frost's poems should be read with the understanding that he inhaled meaning into even the most fundamental characteristics of a work, from the number of 'feet' in a line to the exact sound of a syllable. As a result, his poems have incessant potentialities in terms of connotation and interpretation.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The Unit introduces the readers to the three very famous poems of Robert Frost – *Mending Wall*, *Birches* and *Design*. The surface meaning of *Mending Wall*, for instance, is 'Good fences make good neighbours'. But symbolically the poem states one of the solemn problems of contemporary times – should boundaries be made stronger for our security, or should be removed because they confine our progress towards international brotherhood? *Birches* is an emblematic confirmation of a delicately reasonable approach between realistic acceptance of life as it is on earth and on aspiration towards something higher through the impossible. In

Design Frost has used an obvious contrast between the declarative and the interrogative.

13.2 THE POET

Born in San Francisco in 1874, he moved to New England at the age of eleven and gradually became interested in reading and writing poetry. He was enrolled at Dartmouth College in 1892, and later at Harvard, but he never earned a formal degree. After leaving school, he drifted through a string of occupations including teacher, cobbler and editor. In 1895, Frost married Elinor Miriam White, who became one of the major inspirations of his poetry until her death in 1938. The couple had moved to England in 1912 where Frost met and was influenced by many contemporary British poets like Rupert Brooke, Edward Thamas, Robert Graves and Ezra Pound. By the time he returned to United States in 1915, he had already two publications and had established his reputation as well. By nineteen twenties he was considered one of the most celebrated poets in America and with the publication of every new book – *New Hampshire* (1923), *A Further Range* (1936), *Steeple Bush* (1947), *In the Clearing* (1962) – his reputation and respect, including the four Pulitzer Prizes, augmented. For many years Frost lived and taught in Massachusetts and Vermont, and died in Boston on January 29, 1963.

Although Frost's work is predominantly connected with the life and setting of New England, he was a poet who vehemently used traditional verse forms and metrics in his poetry. The probing author who often dealt with dark meditations on universal themes, he can be considered as one of the modern poets with relevance to language, psychological complexity of his portraits and his use of vagueness and irony.

13.3 MENDING WALL

Mending Wall is the opening poem of Frost's second volume, *North of Boston*. The poem circles around a stone wall that separates the speaker's property from his neighbour's. During the springtime the two meet by the wall and jointly make repairs. The speaker does not see any reason to keep the wall – there are no cows to be restricted, only apple and pine trees around. The speaker does not believe in maintaining a wall just for the sake of it. He requests his neighbour to do away with the wall, but his neighbour resorts to an old proverb which says 'good fences make good neighbours'. But the axiom does not change the thinking capacity of the speaker and he remains unimpressed and even humorously presses the neighbour to look beyond the old fashioned idiocy of such insensitive interpretation. But his neighbour is not persuaded at all. The conflict develops as the

speaker reveals more and more of himself while portraying the native Yankee and responding to the regional spirit he represents. He visualizes his neighbour as a deferred citizen from a rightly outdated epoch, an existing instance of dark-age mindset. But the neighbour would not yield to the speaker's justifications and held on to his maxim.

Throughout the first half of the poem the speaker contemplates the weakening and mending of walls, reinforcing the awareness of his two cultural traits – his capricious imagination and his fine understanding of detail. He diverges to portray those hunters who enthusiastically split walls apart in search of rabbits and then he returns to his own concern in a more mystifying, unobserved, and disparaging power. Once the conflict between the farmer and the observer is made obvious, the last section of the poem gradually develops and further clarifies the differences between the two characters and reveals how little cooperation is there between them. At the final stage of the poem the address of the observer is quite striking – ‘an old-stone savage’ and naturally the term ‘neighbour’ seems increasingly ironic. He is not regarded as any associate or a co-worker, but as a complete alien who is observed and criticised by the speaker, maintaining distance and detachment.

The image built in the poem is very catchy – two men meeting on terms of courtesy and only because they are neighbours and they need to mend the barrier that stands in between them. They carry out their work out of habit – mending the wall now and then which again collapses because of some investable forces of nature. Thus the poem revolves around three central ideas – barrier-building that indicates separation, the condemned nature of work that generates a sense of despise and the persistent activity regardless of any kind of restraint indicating a loathsome monotonous life.

Though Frost's poem directly divides the two sets – one who obstinately persists on building superfluous walls and the other who would not like to adhere to such a practise – the question is – are the two sets separable? The speaker is critical of his neighbour's wall building and might even watch this activity with amusing detachment; but why is it that he goes to the wall every time to mend the damage done by the hunters? Like many of Frost's poems, *Mending Wall* can also be labelled as a poem absorbed in the creative process – the positive act of creation involving the mending of a wall. This mending can only take place when there is an act of destruction. Thus it is very obvious that the requirement of a creative activity happens only after devastation. It is the mending of the wall that brings the neighbours in each others' company and it is actually the wall in between that helps in maintaining good

relations, justifying the assertion of the neighbour that ‘good fences make good neighbours’.

This is another of Frost’s pastoral poems; full of trees, animals and colloquialisms. He again uses an easy reading rhythm – the iambic pentameter fits perfectly with the rise and flow of human voice. And he also uses again the otherwise ordinary activity to contemplate a greater idea, the questions related to walls – are they good, are they bad, what are their purpose? Though the speaker sees no sense or need for the wall that he has to rebuild it year after year, but he does it anyway. The relationships of community continue to play a large role in many of Frost’s works, and *Mending Wall* is one of them. The style of writing is also is also different as there is a dramatic dialogue that runs in the poem.

13.4 BIRCHES

In *Birches* Frost begins to explore the command of his redemptive imagination as it shifts from its mischievous segment towards the verge of dangerous transcendence. It is the movement of a fundamental imaginative freedom where all possibilities of commitment with the ordinary realities of experience are liquefied. *Birches* commences by inducing its central reflection against the backdrop of an enigmatically forested setting. The flexible, supple feature of the birch tree arrests the attention of the poet and he completely loses his contemplation. When he sees the bent birch trees, he insists on imagining that they are bent because boys have been ‘swinging’ on them, though his realistic self knows that the ultimate shape of the mature birch trees is not by human activity but the work of objective natural force like the ice storms. Yet he prefers his apparition of a boy climbing a tree cautiously and then swinging at the tree’s crest to the earth. He crosses all boundaries of imagination as he is subject to this kind of connection himself and dreams of going back to those days of happiness and glory. His constricted self is released as he links the swinging of the birches to ‘getting away from the earth awhile’ and then coming back to reality.

The poem moves to and fro between two visual perceptions – birch trees as bent by the boys’ playful swinging and by the severe ice storms. It is the theme of imagination contradicting the darker realities that the speaker expresses through the bent birch trees. Almost a third of the poem illustrates how ice storms bend these trees permanently, unlike the action of the boys – this mingles images of magnificence and distortion, of imagination and realism. Ice shells suggest radiating glow and kindle, and the trees curved to the level of the bracken imply suffering, which is instantly lightened by the strange representation of girls inclining their hair

towards the sun as if in contented compliance. The boy's fancied liveliness substitutes for unavailable company as he seeks his solicitous commune with nature which helps to teach him wisdom and confidence. Although it is the ice storms that damage the birches permanently and the boy's injure is a temporary one, according to the speaker it is the boy who suppresses and surmounts the tree. It is his swinging that makes him practice for sustaining life's complicated and uncertain equilibrium.

The third part of the poem is in a more personal and philosophical tone when the speaker claims to have been a youthful swinger of birches himself. He can reach those prime days of his life only through his dream. The birch trees, bent probably by both the swinging of the boy and the ice-storms, might stand for that parameter and power that is missing from the regular occurrences of life. The 'considerations' that he is 'weary' of are inconsistent assertions that leave him confused and hurt. The wish to 'get away from earth awhile' shows a longing for the ultimate or it can be just as momentary as the imaginative isolation of the birch swinger. The speaker's exclamation 'I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree ...toward heaven' suggests his desperate desire to leave earth. But he controls himself immediately and reveals with his quick apologetic claim that he actually doesn't mean anything like that at all. He wants to come down again towards earth and thus his main quest seems to be a persistent balance between realism and idealism at its best. The last few lines are very contemplative lines of Frost and so this becomes his most sarcastic writing. He ponders upon a moment when the soul may become absolutely absorbed into unification with the divine; but he is earthbound and frightened. No sooner does he wish to get away from earth than he starts thinking of 'fate' rather than God. And sarcastically what might have been a mystical experience turns out into a fear of death – the fear that he would be snatched away and never allowed to 'return'. Immediately he rejects the unknown, the love of God, because he does not know and he feels safe to cling on to the finite –'Earth's the right place for love.'

Although the title of the poem is *Birches*, the main theme is on the '*swinging of the birches*'. The strength behind it comes from contrary pulls – reality and imagination, ground and paradise, organizing and desertion, physical and the spirit, departure and arrival. It is about the motion the two poles – the movement that takes an imaginary leap and then settles back to reality. The whole thrust of the poem is upwards, towards imagination and escape, but the pull is downwards, towards actuality and attachment.

This poem is written in blank verse and while writing this poem, Frost was inspired by his childhood experience with swinging on birches, which was a popular game for children in rural areas of New England during the time. In the poem, the act of

swinging on birches is presented as a way to escape the hard rationality or 'Truth' of the adult world, even if it is only for a moment. As the boy climbs up the tree, he is climbing toward 'heaven' and a place where his imagination can be free. But a swinger is still grounded in the earth through the roots of the tree as he climbs, but he is able to reach beyond his normal life on the earth and reach for a higher plane of existence. Frost highlights the narrator's regret that he can no longer find this peace of mind from swinging on birches; as he is an adult, he is unable to leave his responsibilities behind and climb toward heaven until he can start fresh on the earth. Notably, the narrator's yearning to escape from the rational world is indecisive. He wants to escape as a boy climbing towards heaven, but he also wants to return to the earth: both 'going and coming back.' The freedom of imagination is appealing and astounding, but the narrator still cannot avoid returning to 'Truth' and his responsibilities on the earth – the escape is only a momentary one.

13.5 DESIGN

In the sonnet *Design* the author describes a very simple scene from nature – a spider on a flower, holding a moth that it has captured as its prey. It's a white flower known as 'heal-all' and there is a kind of Gothic imagery in Frost's description, including the truth that all the three elements – the spider, the flower and the moth – are white. 'White' is the symbol of compassion and purity, but strangely enough the poet here has related the colour with death. An unemotional and horrifying atmosphere is created while explaining how the moth unknowingly makes its way to the death trap created by the spider on the white flower. This example is set to make everyone realize that nature has made greater designs which are as heartless and malicious as this one. The questions that the poet raises in the second stanza very clearly justifies that nature has designs on living things and so it sets up designs to facilitate killing and death – 'what brought the kindred spider to that height.../ what but design of darkness to appal?' – It is the design of nature that has forced the moth to come so high at night to fall a prey into the spider's net.

Design persistently appeals to, and yet simultaneously questions, the entire American literary tradition which approves the method of symbol reading. It is a clear model of the 'American emblem poem' as it is obvious from the techniques used in it – its movement 'from sight to insight' reflected in the conventional separation of the sonnet into octave and sestet. It is understood from the expression of the poem that the poet is out wandering alone in nature, and the time is early morning. Though many of Frost's darkest insights of the natural aspects takes place when

night descends, *Design* is an exception where the poet has used what Thoreau calls ‘the most memorable season of the day, the awakening hour’. The ironical design that Frost uses is very apparent – a wildflower which would usually be blue, a spider which would probably be dark in shade and a moth which might be almost any color: all these are of the same color. And the colour that Frost uses is ‘white’ – the colour of purity and innocence. Such reversed innocence through such a small and even delicate scene, serves only to deliver the message that Frost compels the readers to understand is and it is all the more disappointing – ‘design of darkness to appall.’ The created whiteness of a small emblem finally turns out not the whiteness of any normal design but the intricate ‘design of darkness’ and the effect it generates is to ‘appall’ the observer, to make him turn pale with horror at such ‘dark whiteness’.

The final verse, however, creates a threatening call by focusing not just on the apparent example of natural darkness, but the entire epistemological origin of evolution and the design that plays within. The line – ‘If design govern in a thing so small’ – very clearly questions the technique and the final outcome of something so crucial and elementary in life. The actual question that arises in the last line is: whose design is it after all? Is it the design of God or nature or fate or is it the design created by the observer? What is the design and who actually is the designer? The ‘design of darkness’ or that of nature or of God is the design made by the perceiver, and here the observer is the poet. Nature or God might have made some design but it could never be perceived unless an observer like the poet visualises it. It is the human eye that can find out any kind of design that is set in the world of nature. The narrator exposes his role in the poem – ‘I found’; and this very clearly indicates that whatever design has been crafted by nature, it is revealed through a human eye.

The obvious contrast in *Design* is between declarative and interrogative. Initially there is a kind of assertion when the poet talks about what had happened to the moth when it had reached the white flower and had got entangled in the web of the spider and has thus become its prey. Then gradually the tone becomes questioning as the poet wants to know the design of nature – the moth was doomed to come to the spider’s web; it was already planned by the supernatural forces of nature.

13.6 CONCLUSION

Robert Frost writes about everyday occurrences, but he also saw metaphorical extensions in the everyday things he encountered. His experiences are the main topics in his poems

along with nature, seasons, weather and times of the day. Frost had two beliefs – first, that the subjects of poetry should be ‘common in experience’ or that it should speak of familiar things that everyone recognizes but is ‘uncommon in expression’; and second, is that the style of a poet is the way a poet carries himself towards his ideas and deeds. Frost used nature to demonstrate the human psychological day-to-day feelings. While reading his poems one can very well tell that there are issues that he struggles with but he never condemns God for his predicaments.

13.7 QUESTIONS

1. What are the relationships between humanity and nature explored in Frost’s poems?
2. What American ideals are examined in the poems of Robert Frost?
3. Robert Frost describes writing poetry as ‘an act of clarification’. What do you think he means by this and what do you think he clarifies in *Mending Wall*?
4. If you wanted to be a part of the poem, *Mending Wall*, would you prefer to be the speaker or the neighbour? Why?
5. Why do you think the speaker rebels against the wall?
6. What does the poem suggest about the function of the wall in *Mending Wall*?
7. In line 41 of *Mending Wall*, Robert Frost says that his neighbour ‘moves in darkness as it seems to me’. Is this darkness physical or metaphorical? Why?
8. Why does the speaker in *Birches* prefer to see branches bent by boys rather than by ice?
9. Locate the similes used in the poem *Birches* and explain the comparisons made by the poet.
10. What is the significance of Robert Frost’s poem *Design*?
11. What features of the scene are unusual in *Design*? What do the spider, moth, and flower symbolize? What is the poet questioning at the end of the poem?
