



COURSE CODE: ENG 822

COURSE TITLE: AMERICAN LITERATURE

CREDIT UNIT: 3

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course primarily focuses on the development of written literature in the United State of America. It explores the various literary trends, forms and movements that emerged therefrom. There will be an emphasis on a selection of imaginative, historical, and political writing from the colonial times to the present. The course also explores the political and historical forces that influenced this national literature. Selected works will cut across periods, genres, and genders. Some writers to be considered here include, but are not limited to Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Frederick Douglass, Emily Dickinson, Arthur Miller, Allen Ginsberg, Edward Albee, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison

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INTRODUCTION

American Literature is a 3 credit, one semester postgraduate course. This course builds on your undergraduate knowledge of literature of the United States of America, loosely called American literature. The course guide thus provides you with a more encompassing study of this national literature. It provides you also with the necessary requirements for the course. The course consists of 18 units. Each unit examines a specific developmental landmark in the development of American Literature.

American Literature as a course at the Master's level primarily focuses on the development of literature in America and the various literary trends, forms and movements that emerged in that geographical space from the colonial period up till contemporary times of the 20th century. You will study a selection of imaginative, historical, and political writings across genres and genders and explore the different forces that influenced this literature.

COURSE AIMS

The aims of this course are to:

- foreground the historical connection of American Literature to English literature;
- identify key trends and movements across the development of American Literature;
- explore perspectives or attitudes found in the literature of different periods in American Literature;
- study representative authors and works that have significant historical or cultural implications on the characteristics and growth of American Literature; and,

- e. enhance student's ability to analyse American texts within the context of their author's literary oeuvre and the socio-political contexts of their production.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The aims stated above are to ensure that you are able to achieve a number of broadly stated objectives. Each unit in this course guide has stated objectives tailored to the specific contents of that unit to help you in your study. Ensure that you study them before and after each unit. This will help you confirm that you have the requisite knowledge before moving on to the next task. These present objectives are broad and cover all expectations at the end of the course in its entirety. Therefore, at the end of this course, you should be able to:

- discuss critically American Literature as a national literature;
- identify the roots of American Literature that go beyond the geographical reach of the country;
- explain the major socio-political developments that have implicated upon the body of literature, shaping it and influencing the emergence of forms and characteristics;
- demonstrate mastery of the various forms of American literary works;
- discuss succinctly the major trends of American literature;
- demonstrate familiarity with important authors and the periods in which they emerged;
- explicate American texts both in discussion and in writing;
- identify defining characteristics in relation to movements, and periods; and,
- compare works written by different authors and in different periods.

WORKING THROUGH THE COURSE

This course requires you to study the units contained in this course guide and other materials that will be recommended. You should start by studying this course guide to understand what is expected of you. You are advised to pay attention to the objectives stated at the beginning of each unit. This will inform you if you have or have not achieved the target set for each unit. Read all recommended texts and related materials to ensure that your understanding of the course is holistic. A self-assessment exercise is at the end of each unit. Attempt them as a way to assess your knowledge of the course.

COURSE MATERIALS

The required materials you will need for this course are:

1. This course guide
2. The study units
3. Literary texts, textbooks, and journal articles
4. Assignment file
5. Presentation schedule

STUDY UNITS

This course has 5 modules with eighteen study units. The modules and units are as follows:

Module 1 American Literature during the Colonial Period (17th century to 1830)

Unit 1 History America in the Colonial period

Unit 2 Literature of the Colonial Period

Unit 3 Survey of Writings during the Colonial Period

Module 2 American Renaissance: The Literature of Reason and Revolution

Unit 1 The Age of Reason

Unit 2 Introduction to American Romanticism

Unit 3 American Renaissance

Unit 4 Transcendentalism and the American Literary Renaissance

Module 3 The Development of American Literature from the Mid Nineteenth Century

Unit 1 The American Civil War Literature

Unit 2 The Development of Realist Fiction

Unit 3 Naturalism in American Literature

Module 4 Modern Literature (1900 to 1945)

Unit 1 Modern American Prose

Unit 2 Modern American Drama

Unit 3 Modern American Poetry

Unit 4 Early African-American and Women Writings

Module 5: Contemporary American Literature (1945 to present)

Unit 1 Postmodern American Literature

Unit 2 The Beat Generation

Unit 3 the Theater of the Absurd

Unit 4 African American Women Writers: Alice Walker and Toni Morrison

Each module is preceded by a miniature table of contents, including introduction, objectives, the main content, Self-Assessment Exercise (SAE), as well as Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA) which you are required to answer and submit for grading.

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

There are recommended books for this course. You will find the list at the end of every unit. The materials listed will help you to understand the course. You are thus advised to read the materials. These lists are by no means exhaustive. As a research student at the Master's level, you should develop the skill of consulting books and materials that will broaden your perspective. You should therefore consult as many materials as possible.

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

The presentation schedule contains important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. These dates will be communicated to you. Note that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

There is a file which contains the details of all the assignments you are expected to do and submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will form part of the final mark you obtain in this course.

ASSESSMENT

There are two types of assessments for this course. You are expected to attempt the two of them. The first is the Self-Assessment Exercises (SAEs). These are exercises you should answer but not submit for marking. The second is Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs). These are exercises you should do and submit for marking in an assignment file. Tutor-Marked Assignments are part of the requirements for the completion of this course. There are Tutor-Marked Assignments at the end of each unit and they account for 30% of your total score for the course.

FINAL EXAMINATION AND GRADING

The final examination for ENG 822 will be for duration of three hours. The examination will take into account all what the course materials cover. This implies that you should study all materials provided and recommended for this course. The final examination accounts for 70% of the total course grade. The examination questions will include questions that reflect self-assessment exercises and the tutor-marked assignments. You should read the entire course units and review all the Self-Assessment Exercises and Tutor-Marked Assessments for the final examination.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

The table below indicates how the course marking scheme is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Tutor-Marked Assessments	30%
Final Examination	70%
Total	100%

Table 1: Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

The table below gives you an overview of the units, duration of study, and number of weeks that you should take to complete each unit. It also includes the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	End of unit Assessment
	Course Guide		
Module 1	American Literature During the Colonial Period		
Unit 1	History of Colonial America	Week 1	
Unit 2	Popular Literature of the Colonial Period	Week 2	
Unit 3	Survey of Writings during the Colonial Period	Week 3 and 4	TMA 1

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	End of unit Assessment
	Course Guide		
Module 2 American Renaissance: The Literature of Reason and Revolution			
Unit 1	The Age of Reason	Week 5	
Unit 2	Introduction to American Romanticism	Week 6	
Unit 3	American Renaissance	Week 8	
Unit 4	Transcendentalism and the American Literary	Week 9	TMA 2

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	End of unit Assessment
	Course Guide		
Module 3 The Development of American Literature from the Mid Nineteenth Century			
Unit 1	The American Civil War Literature	Week 9 and 10	
Unit 2	The Development of Realist Fiction	Week 11	
Unit 3	Naturalism in American Literature	Week 12	TMA 3

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	End of unit Assessment
	Course Guide		
Module 4 Modern Literature (1900 to 1945)			
Unit 1	Modern American Prose	Week 13	
Unit 2	Modern American Drama	Week 14	
Unit 3	Modern American Poetry	Week 15	
Unit 4	Early African-American and Women Writings	Week 16	TMA 4

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activities	End of unit Assessment
	Course Guide		
Module 5 Contemporary American Literature (1945 to present)			
Unit 1	Postmodern American Literature	Week 17	
Unit 2	The Beat Generation	Week 18	
Unit 3	The Theater of the Absurd	Week 19	
Unit 4	African American Women Writers: Alice Walker and Toni Morrison	Week 20	TMA 5

How to get the Most from this Course

In distance learning the study units replace the university lecturer. This is one of the advantages of distance learning; it allows you to read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace and at a time and place that suits you the most. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same

way that a lecturer might give you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points. Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is

a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. It is important that you do so. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make it a habit to do so, you will significantly improve your chances of passing the course. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your set books or from your course guides. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course. If you run into trouble, telephone your tutor. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it. Follow the following advice carefully:

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly, it is your first assignment.
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you chose to use, you should decide on and write down dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to Unit 1 and read the Introduction and the Objectives for the Unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the 'Overview' at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each unit to determine that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.

10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the Course Objectives (listed in the Course Guide).

11. Keep in touch with your study centre. Up-to-date course information will be continuously available there. Also ensure that you check your e-mail, SMS, and the University website for constant updates and information on your programme in general.

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible. Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary. Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings,
- You have difficulty with the self-tests exercises,
- You have a question or problem with assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Nonetheless, it needs to be mentioned that the policy of the University now is that there must be a minimum of 50 students for there to be any face-to-face facilitation. The major means of interacting with students presently is through the online facilitation platform. You should explore this forum to the full.

Summary

This course guide gives you an overview of what to expect in the course of this study. **ENG 822 American Literature** focuses on the literary productions, trends and characteristics of the United States of America. It is a course that emphasises all the major genres of literature that emerged from the United States of America.

Module 1 Colonial Literature: 17th century to 1830

Unit 1: History of American in the Colonial Period

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 The Establishment of America

3.2.1 The Pilgrims and Puritans

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the beginnings of America and its Literature. This will cover the colonial period. You will discover those factors that influenced the emergence of the country. You will encounter in this unit the influence of religion especially in the way the country and its literature was established. Equally, you will identify those factors that led to what is today popularly called American literature. More so, you will discover the influence of England on early American literature.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Discuss the factors that led to the establishment of America
2. Explain the factors that shaped the American country
3. Explain the contributions of the Christian religion to the establishment of America

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The literature that is popularly referred to as American Literature is that which is produced in that part of the American continent known as the United States. This implies that what can be called American literature is determined by the national space called America. It is that literature which in terms of author and content explores issues of the American people, their ideology, beliefs, and cultures. American literature is interwoven with American history. There is an inextricable relationship between the history and cultural values of that country and the literature produced therein. American literature like the country itself has root in colonial England. What is today the United States of America was established by settlers from England who came for diverse reasons. These include religious controversy; the need for expansion of empires; the quest for adventure; and the need to ship off populations

that were filling up English cities in disillusionment for lack of employment and poverty and those convicted of crimes such as theft, murder, and delinquency. The early settlers in America were colonial Englishmen who brought the English language, books, culture and literature across the Atlantic. English literature formed the bedrock of the writings that later emerged from that space. The early settlers did not even see themselves as anything but Englishmen. The colonies that were to become the United States were inherently English in culture and law. It was during the process of creating a national identity during the American Revolution in the 1760s that the people began to regularly call themselves American. The country itself gained independence in 1776.

3.2 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AMERICA

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

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

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

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

Explain the influence of explorer's account in the expansion of migration to the New World.

3.2.1 The Pilgrims and Puritans

Among the first English settlers who made it to the New World were Pilgrims and Puritans. They were a people who sought a land where they could practice their brand of religion. They needed a place away from the Old World of England and the practice of the Church of England. The Pilgrims from Holland settled in Plymouth in 1620 while the Puritans took the great migration to the Massachusetts Bay Colony between 1628 and 1643. The Pilgrims and the Puritans were results of the Renaissance and Reformation sweeping Europe. The Renaissance was a time that brought an end to the Middle Ages, the rebirth of classical learning, and the beginnings of civilization. The Reformation was a period of Protestant separation from the Roman Catholic Church. The reformers protested against many doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. They questioned the authority of the Pope whose justification was not found in the Bible. They believed that the Roman Catholic Church had deviated from the true path of worship. The Church was accused of being worldly, corrupt, and extravagant. The reformers, as they were called, rebelled against the priests and leaders of the Catholic Church for their corruption. Because of their protestations, these reformers were dubbed Protestants.

The wave of reformatory protests that engulfed Europe broke the single uniting religion. There was no longer to be a single Church uniting all of Europe. The result of these protestations in England was the breaking away of the English Church from the Catholic Church in Rome in 1534 and the installation of King Henry VIII as its Supreme Head.

The Church of England was later to give rise to a radical group of individuals who also rebelled against its principles. This group believed that the Protestant Church of England had not fully broken away from the Roman Catholic Church. They were disillusioned by remnants of practices of the Catholic Church. They were against the elaborate church rituals and the forms of prayers that were similar to the catholic faith. They rebelled against the worshiping of images and symbols as part of their worship. The ornamental church decorations were believed to take attention away from church service. The group also saw little difference in the authority of the catholic priests and the Protestant Priests. The way the Church was headed by the King and priests were not justifiable in the Bible. All these led to the same feelings of dissatisfaction that were popular against the Roman Catholic Church.

The radical group who were dubbed Puritans was very conservative. They saw themselves as a chosen people who would do God's will. They strove to purify church worship from anything that alluded to Roman Catholicism. The Church of England did not sufficiently achieve this as many elements of the Roman Catholic Church were still in place. The Bible was their handbook and anything not contained therein was

expunged from their lives. The Bible was their guide to everything they did. This staunch adherence to the Bible and craving to be pure led to their naming as Puritans. They had the reputation of being solemn and gloom. They were known to be against entertainment and beauty.

The Puritans were a persecuted people who suffered for their beliefs. Their refusal to obey the doctrines of the Church of England led to their persecution. They were seen as insubordinate to the headship of the Church of England: the King. They were thus persecuted and many of them fled to Holland in the early 17th century. The poverty and fear of loss of identity under the overriding Dutch influence spurred their later pilgrimage to America. Puritans who made the pilgrimage from Holland to America established the Plymouth Plantation and were to be called the Pilgrims.

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

Aside from the Bible, the Puritans doctrines were influenced by two theologians; Martin Luther and John Calvin. Both theologians emphasized the Bible as the word of God deserving to be read and studied. From Luther, they derived the philosophy that priests were not holier or better than other believers. Even if they understood the Bible more and explained it to other Christians, they were not higher in status than any other person. Calvin's doctrines called Calvinism spoke of the importance of the individual. It emphasized life as being in continuous moral struggle. This struggle could get each soul into heaven or hell for all eternity. From Calvin were the following five principles dubbed Calvinism:

- i. Total depravity: this cast all human kind as corrupt as a result of Adam's original sin and were inclined to evil;
- ii. Limited atonement: only a few with exceedingly pure acts would receive the God's forgiveness and atonement of sins from Jesus' sacrifice;
- iii. Irresistible grace: only God grants salvation and it is not earned;
- iv. Saint perseverance: God's chosen will be in a state of grace till the end of time when they will be transported to heaven; and,
- v. Predestination: everything has been fated to happen.

In maintaining their religious stance, the Puritans instituted a tradition of independent congregation. That is, they started the culture of freedom to determine their own doctrines. By rejecting the authority of priests and kings, they became free to choose who led them. These led to traditions of independence and freedom of choice that are enduring hallmarks of the American nation. The prominence of sermons during this period is another enduring legacy. Preachers used sermons to galvanize their

congregations to action. This is very much visible in both written literatures and in the spoken texts. Also, for reasons of religion, sermons became the most prominent literary forms. They became a source of information also before the advent of printing and newspaper.

There was also an emphasis on education. This was to promote the study of the Bible and to promote the composition of sermons. It was also to ensure that there was proper understanding of sermons by the congregation. As such, the Massachusetts Bay Colony became a cultural center of sorts. It also became a center of learning. The first University in America, Harvard University, was established in 1636 in Cambridge as evidence of the wide quest for knowledge. Two years after the establishment of the institution, the first colonial press was also established in 1638. This facilitated the publication of the first American book, *The Bay Psalm Book* in 1640. There was also the establishment of *The Boston News-Letter* in 1704. This year marked the beginning of active journalism in the colonies.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.2

Discuss the factors that contributed to the Puritans and the Pilgrims migration to America.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The colonial period of America was marked by an explosion in the number of settlers. These settlers were Puritans and Pilgrims. They swelled the population of the earliest settler in Virginia. They concentrated in the Massachusetts Bay area and the Plymouth Plantation. Their contributions to the establishment of the American country are significant. They were leading the colonial government in their colonies. The puritans were also conditioning the many cultures that have become enduring legacies in the country. Their quest for education brought the first institution and printing press to the country. The impact of these religious individuals is therefore foundational to the understanding of what is today known as the United States of America.

5.0 SUMMARY

From studying this unit, you should be aware that England and its culture was the bedrock of American literature. The expansion of England into the New World of America led to the extension of the English culture to that continent. The reports of explorers and settlers were significant in increasing the number of migrants who made the treacherous journey across the Atlantic to America. A significant group that migrated to the New World was the Pilgrims and Puritans. They were in search of religious freedom in order to practice a form of Christianity that was unlike that of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. These religious migrants impacted greatly on the culture and literature of America. In the next unit, you will study the development of literature during the colonial period. You will study also the

factors that contributed to the emergence of American literature during this period and the major writers.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSESSMENT

Based on your understanding of this unit, answer the following questions:

1. Explain the factors that lead to reformers protesting against the Roman Catholic Church.
2. Discuss the legacies of the Puritans to American culture.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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MODULE 1

UNIT 2: LITERATURE OF THE COLONIAL PERIOD

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 Popular Literary Forms of the Colonial Period

3.2.1 Exploration and colonization reports

3.2.2 Settlement Reports

3.2.3 Diaries, letters, biographies, memoirs

3.2.4 Sermons

3.2.5 Theological and political treatises

3.2.6 Verses

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the forms of writing prevalent during the early colonial period in America. Emphasis will be on the literature of the earliest explorers and adventurers who settled in America. You will equally explore colonial period literatures. These are literatures which were produced by the Puritans. You will identify those factors that generated the works. You will equally explore how these early writings evolved from genres that are not wholly literary. You will identify how these forms continue to influence writings beyond the colonial period.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Identify forms of writings during the colonial period of America;
- ii. Identify major writers of this period;
- iii. Discuss the major factors that lead to the emergence of the prominent forms of writing;
- iv. Explain the influence of these forms of writing on later writings.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

American literature began with the works of English adventurers and colonists who wrote for the benefit of readers in the mother land; England. Many of the works were written as reports of explorers and adventurers which were sent to England. Many of these reports painted glorious pictures of the New World. The works were also to encourage migration to America. Some of these early works included those by Captain John Smith and the historical narratives of William Bradford and John Winthrop. The significant number of Pilgrims and Puritans who moved to the New World from England made it that the Colonial period was dominated by Puritan beliefs. This is not to say that there were no writings devoid of the Puritan influence. There were accounts and reports by adventurers about their voyage to America. They recorded their experiences when they got to the New World and some of these works will be studied in the next unit. Major writings which emerged from the colonial period were however significantly influenced by the strong Calvinist beliefs of that time. The number and far-reaching impact of these works in later literature make them a dominant corpus during this period of America's literary history.

The English settlers were not the only immigrants in America. They were also not the first. There were Frenchmen, Dutch, Germans, and Spaniards who also migrated to America. In fact, Christopher Columbus, the Italian navigator is credited as the first European to discover the "New World". All these immigrants met American Indians who had established societies and cultures centuries before the invasion of European immigrants. The American Indians were the earliest to arrive. They came from Asia at about 30,000 B.C. Their culture was oral. They did not develop the writing of their languages until early in the nineteenth century. The literature of these peoples was transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth. These include stories, myths, legends, poems and orations which documented their beliefs and guides to life. However, the large and very diverse number of communities of American Indians and the absence of written literature ensured that they had little or no influence on the English culture that was transported to America.

3.2 POPULAR LITERARY FORMS OF THE COLONIAL PERIOD

Imaginative literature was uncommon during the colonial period in America. Due to the Puritan sensibilities, creative works were considered immoral. The Bible was the most popular book for the Puritans and Pilgrims. It was their chosen guide to the Promised Land. They considered the saving of the soul as the most important task. Entertainment and leisure were not things they engaged with. Basically, things that did not directly advance the attainment of paradise were thought to be activities of the devil. They believed such activities took the soul's attention away from the Bible. The *Bible* thus took the central place in their reading.

Prior to the exodus of Puritans to America, the writings of the corps of sailors, adventurers, and explorers who were among the first to establish settlements in the New World were reports. Their writings were accounts of the voyage and descriptions of what they found in the New World.

3.2.1 Exploration and colonization reports

These are reports by the discoverers and the earliest settlers in America. England's expansion into America was as early as 1497 when King Henry VII of England commissioned John Cabot to go in search of heathen peoples and lands. England's expansion into America was as early as 1497 when King Henry VII of England commissioned John Cabot to go in search of heathen peoples and lands. The exploration of England's discovery of North America through John Cabot did not begin until 1584 and 1585. This was when Sir Walter Raleigh was commissioned and set sail for America in two expeditions to establish the settlement of Virginia.

But before this time however, other European countries had sent explorers too to North America. These European exploration activities were to achieve two things. They were to search of heathen peoples and lands for evangelism purpose and to discover areas that could help bring economic ease to the countries. Christopher Columbus, the Italian navigator and adventurer, is said to be the first European to discover America. He wrote accounts and reports that have been translated into English language. Columbus at the time of his discovery was on the authority and commission of the King and Queen of Spain.

Later accounts by English explorers contain details of their exploration activities into the land that was to become the United States of America. They are works that capture the efforts to adventurers sent to establish colonies for England in the New World.

Such books written were descriptions of the country and narratives of the challenges of the new settlements. These works were printed in England and the information was meant for the English public. The earliest and most noteworthy among books of this kind were the writings of Captain John Smith. *True Relation* was printed at London in 1608. Among Smith's other books is *General History of Virginia* also printed in London in 1624), *Powhatan's Discourse of Peace and War*, and *A Description of New England*.

Other writings in the early exploration and colonization category are Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) *Columbus's Letter Describing His First Voyage*, *The Diary of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America*; and Francis Higgins *New England's Plantation* (1630).

3.2.2 Settlement Reports

Settlement Reports are related forms of writing to the exploration and colonization reports. However, settlement reports are records of migrants whose intentions were to be settlers in North America. The reports account for the processes of migrating and settling in North America. Such works take into account the challenges they faced in the process. They also take into account efforts to organize settlers and establish colonial administration in America. Original sources of the history of the settlement of New England include the journals of William Bradford who was first governor of Plymouth. Also, John Winthrop, the second governor of Massachusetts wrote *The Journal of John Winthrop*. These works are considered more trustworthy in their account than the writings of Captain John Smith in the Virginia colony. Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* covers the period from 1620 to 1646. Winthrop's Journal, *History of New England*, covers 1630 to 1649. Both Bradford's and Winthrop's works are important. They provide insights into the establishments of the two colonies of Massachusetts Bay and Plymouth Plantation.

3.2.2 Diaries, letters, biographies, memoirs

English settlers in North America were wont to keep personal diaries of daily happenings. Partly to keep boredom at bay, they also wrote letters to friends and families in England. Others took up writing their autobiographies which have become documents for which the lives, thoughts, beliefs, experiences, and perception of these earliest Americans lived. Prominent among this genre of writing are Samuel Sewell's *The Diary of Samuel Sewell*, a diary kept from 1673 to 1729 and Mary Rowlandson's *The Narratives of Mrs Mary Rowlandson*. In the case of Mary Rowlandson's diary, it records her kidnap by American Indians. It tells of the hostilities between the Native Indians and the European Settlers.

3.2.3 Sermons

A significant number of works from this period were collections of sermons. This is expectedly so given the prominence of the Puritan faith on the colonial establishments and the number of Puritans in the colonies. They were thus the most popular form of writing. The influence of sermons on the literature of the country was significant. Michael Colacurcio affirms in *Godly Letters* (2006) that the principles of the Puritan faith did not only provide the religious, philosophical and political infrastructure of the country but also influenced the literature of subsequent generations.

The writing of sermons was shorn of all embellishments. Writers focused on moral lessons and spiritual diets in the place of flowery and creative language. The writings were historical, religious, and didactic. Common genres were sermons, tracts, journals, and narratives. Journals written during this period contained record of events.

It revealed Puritan attitudes toward the world. Puritanism was essentially, a significant force in the creation of American literature. By the 1700s, the influence of the Puritan belief began to wane. However, the impact of the religious belief on literature was significant.

3.2.5 Theological and political treatises

Theologians were the dominant group in the public square of Colonial America. They maintained the dual roles of the state and the Church that was the tradition in Old England. This overriding influence of religion in state affairs led to the production of theological and political treatises. There was no separation between theology and politics. There were at this time writings which explore different aspects of the Puritan relationship with politics. Prominent among these works are the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin. Another is Roger Williams, an impetuous man who was an advocate of the modern doctrine of the separation of the Church from the State. Williams was driven away from the Massachusetts colony and he and his followers settled in a plantation on Rhode Island. Williams was a prolific writer on theological subjects. His most important writing is the *Bloody Tenent of Persecution* printed in 1644. *The Bloody Tenent Washed and made White in the Blood of the Lamb* was written as a reply to the work of Mr. John Cotton who criticised his call for the freedom of worship.

3.2.6 Verse

Verse began with the Puritans. Puritan verse was offered to the service of God. It was written with the aim of promoting Puritan values and the piety expected of people. Beers (2007: 128) points out that “Of poetry, indeed, or, in fact, of pure literature, in the narrower sense—that is, of the imaginative representation of life—there was little or none in the colonial period... There was verse of a certain kind, but the most generous stretch of the term would hardly allow it to be called poetry).

Many of the early divines (as the Puritan church leaders were called) wrote verses in the intervals of writing sermons. Elegies and eulogistic verses in the style of “metaphysical poets were the prominent verses they wrote. This was because the metaphysics were in fashion when the Puritans left England. Michael Wigglesworth *Day of Doom* (1662) was uncompromisingly theological and Anne Bradstreet's poems, issued as *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (1650), were reflective of her own piety.

Self-Assessment Exercise 3.1

Explain the influence of religion in the writings of the colonial period.

4.0 Conclusion

It should be noted that what is now American literature developed slowly. There are two reasons for this slowness in the emergence of a distinct national body of writing.

First, the struggle to establish communities and livelihoods in the wilderness was not conducive for literature to develop and thrive. Second was the fact that the settlers in America did not begin to see themselves as distinctly Americans and not New Englanders until the American Revolution in the 1760s. Early migrants did not consider themselves of a different nationality to that of England. Their earliest works also showed remarkable similarities to those produced in England. As such, they did not begin to consciously ascribe their writings as distinct works separate from those of Old England. Many of their works were even written for the people in England. These restricted the growth of any tradition that would have been vastly different from that of Old England. For these reasons, early American literature could not compete with that produced in England during the same period.

4.0 SUMMARY

Writings that can liberally be referred to as literature did emerge from Colonial America. The works are traceable to the very early 17th century when the first English explorers arrived at the New World. The writings were more about documenting the migration and settlement efforts of the migrants than creative works. Explorers' accounts and Colonizers' reports recorded efforts of the earliest arrivals in North America. Settlers' reports on the other hand document the challenges of the groups of settlers who migrated from England for diverse reasons. Diaries and journals recorded the daily activities of the people. Sermons were in large supply as they reflected the religious temperament of the Puritans. Political and religious treatises also were in abundance. They reflected the religious and political views of the colonial leaders who were also religious leaders of the time. Verses rather than poetry emerged during this period. The form was used in furtherance of the Puritan life style which encouraged piety. The style of versification resembled that of the metaphysical poets of England. This is one strong indication of the influence of England on the writing tradition that emerged from America during the colonial period.

5.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

1. Identify and discuss two popular forms of writing during the Colonial period in America
2. Discuss the factors that militated against the growth of literature in the earliest years of the establishment of America.

6.0 References/ Further Reading

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MODULE 1

UNIT 3: A SURVEY OF WRITERS DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Major writers and their works

3.1.1 John Winthrop 1588-1649

3.1.2 Roger Williams 1603-1683

3.1.3 Anne Bradstreet

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study selected writers and writings of the colonial period. The selected works are representations of the larger body of writing that emerged during the period. You will explore the fundamental issues the selected writers engage. You will also examine the form their writings took. In this unit, you will study works that cut across gender and form. The selected writers are also notable. They were key drivers of the colonial period and also important writers of the time.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. List prominent writers and their works during the colonial period of America;
2. Discuss the forms of writing that were prominent;
3. Explain the prominent themes that writers of the period engaged in;
4. Discuss the works of the colonial period.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Major writers and their works

A significant number of writers emerged during the Colonial period in America. They wrote for different reasons. Some of which was to document their experiences in the voyage across the sea from England to North America. Others were to record their daily lives. Yet more wrote religious and political treatises for the exposition of their religious and political views. *The Bay Psalm Book*, a metrical translation of the complete Book of Psalms, was the first book to be printed in 1640. It was a version of

the Psalms that church goers could sing to during service. But up till the twentieth century, the literary style of Europe overshadowed the writings that emerged from America. The autobiographical form was also to emerge. This form was popularized by Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790). In his *Autobiography*, Franklin presents his life as exemplary and proof that anyone can make it, especially in America, as long as they apply themselves to useful toil. To study the influence of the puritans, you shall study a variety of colonial period writings in this unit.

3.1.1 JOHN WINTHROP 1588-1649

John Winthrop was an Englishman who migrated to the “New England” as America was referred to in 1630. His migration took place at the beginning of the exodus of Puritans from England. He was the leader of a fleet of ships carrying two thousand migrants who were making the great journey to America. He served as governor of the colony of Puritans in Boston, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, for many years. He kept a journal from the year he made the great migration up till the year he died in 1649. This journal revealed how the Puritans saw the world and their need for divine justification for their actions.

A sermon he prepared for his companions on board the *Arabella* on the great migration was titled “A Model of Christian Charity”. Winthrop depicts the Puritan principle which was to form the bedrock of the life the migrants would establish when they arrived in the New World. This was especially needful as the migrants were from different regions and did not know each other before the voyage. Winthrop advocated strong bonds of community among the settlers. He preached love, charity and mercy to each other as the bedrock of the community they were to form in America. Winthrop acknowledged the disparity in wealth among the community. He thus preached charity and charitable lending between the wealthy and the poor. He advanced that should a debtor be unable to pay back a debt, the lender should simply forgive the debt.

The section that has remained seminal in the sermon is the final section. There Winthrop describes Massachusetts Bay Colony as “a city upon a hill”. He made it out to be a city that has risen above the surrounding area. He implied that the success of the colony and its settlers would be a model to be emulated. Their failure too would bring disgrace to all Christians. Winthrop depicted the colony in a way that captured the essence of uniqueness. It was to be an example of a successful Christian settlement or an enterprise to be ashamed. This final section is usually cited in rhetoric about American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism speaks to the uniqueness of the American country. It has been used to distinguish the country from others. The unique factors for its creation and development are the commonly engaged to hold the country to higher standards. It has also been used to justify subjugating actions against other peoples and countries.

For instance, it has been used to justify the ways lands belonging to American Indians were appropriated. Because Winthrop suggested that the colony would be used as an example, many public speakers have appropriated the notion to a larger context. They have advanced that the United States was a leading example to all other country in the world.

Plot summary

Winthrop opens the sermon with a proclamation of the inequality in human societies. He foregrounds the economic inequality that was inevitable in human societies. He gives reasons why God made such inequality to exist in human societies in three points:

- a. To ensure there is conformity with differences that exist in the rest of the natural world. This, he avers, is to make humans care for themselves. God provides for the wealthy so that they can in turn care for the poor. By being charitable to the poor, the rich is demonstrating how God provides for people.
- b. Where inequality exists, people have the opportunity to exhibit God's graces. The wealthy do this when they show love, mercy and gentleness to the poor. The poor in turn show God's Grace when they exhibit patience in their trials, have faith in God and remain obedient to God's laws in spite of their status.
- c. The inequality among people ensures that people continue to need one another, "and from hence they might be knit more nearly together in the bonds of brotherly affection".

These points buttress the call for everyone to help one another. This could be through giving, lending, and the forgiving of debts. However, charitable giving must be within the givers most basic needs. Winthrop was firm in stressing that at no point should any Christian give up all of his wealth to help the poor as the Apostles did in the time of Christ. He also advocated that people who are charitable will be taken care of by God. All the people such individual was of assistance to would stand in witness in his favor on the Day of Judgment. This was to dissuade saving extra wealth for fear of tragedy or the unknown: "If thy brother be in want and thou canst help him, thou needst not make doubt of what thou shouldst do: if thou lovest God thou must help him".

Winthrop further advanced that the Christian community was a single body. Members of the community are to be united toward a common goal. This was to serve God. They were also to work and support each other against any difficulty they might face. This was especially necessary given that many were unknown to each other. This ensured that the needs of the community took precedence over that of the individual:

We must love brotherly without dissimulation, we must love one another with a pure heart fervently. We must bear one another's burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren.

According to Winthrop, they must follow the doctrines of their Puritan religion as the start a new community in a new land. He added that it was not only God who would assess their successes or failures but all humankind. As such, he described their new colony as “a city upon a hill”, visible to all to see either their success or failure.

Themes

American Exceptionalism

One prominent and enduring theme that emerges from his writing is that of the exceptional nature of the American society. This is a concept that advances the United States as unique and different from other countries. Winthrop asserts that his group of settlers was divinely chosen by God to fulfill a special mission. That mission puts them under the scrutiny of God and the world. This idea pits the United States as divinely constituted. Also that it was a standard, especially in its successes, to other countries of the world. During the American Revolution, the concept Winthrop advocates in his sermon becomes an assertion for the viability of the independent country. Thomas Paine in his pamphlet titled *Common Sense* asserts that “Should an independency be brought about... we have every opportunity and every encouragement before us, to form the noblest, purest constitution on the face of the earth”.

The exceptional position the country is believed to occupy granted it impunity to do a number of things. For instance, native Americans who had been the first occupiers of the North American region were deprived of their land in the conquest of the region. The colonizers saw their presence on the North American continent as a divine mandate to claim and populate the continent. This was taken as superior and superseding any previous claim to ownership of territory. This mindset was dubbed Manifest destiny. It refers to the belief that they have been destined to own the continent. There was also the practice of slavery and segregation of blacks. There was the claim by southern plantation owners who argued at the turn of the entrenchment of human rights principles that the plantation system was not feasible without slave labor. They therefore asked that the plantation system and the south be exceptions to the principles which would grant blacks freedom.

Charity

The importance Winthrop attached to charity is evidenced in the title which emphasized the idea of charity. He describes it as a way to serve God. It is also the very basis for the success of the colony. The communal perception that each person was the others keeper ensured that no individual was abandoned. He averred that the inequality inherent in humankind could only be balanced by a culture of charity by the rich to the poor. He also identified three ways by which charity could be shown. The first consisted of providing money and material good to those in need. Such items were considered prone to decay and should not be stored for any considerable time. The second he said was the forgiving of debt owed. While to lend another was not considered an act of charity, to forgive a debt owed was. The third way was the offering of love without expecting anything in return.

Communalism

Central to Winthrop's treatise is the promotion of communal living among the new settlers in their new location. Winthrop was emphatic in his advocacy of the interest of the community taking precedence over those of the individual: "We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities". This implies that resources and responsibilities were shared among all. No section of the community was absolved from duties. He emphasized the preservation and good of all. This has become another enduring trait in the American culture. Communism according to Winthrop stemmed from love rather than fairness.

Unity

This theme is discernable in the unification of intent in the two thousand migrants that Winthrop was governor over. They were as diverse as they could be. They were united in their opposition to the Church of England. They were also united in their quest to migrate to a place where they would be able to worship without persecution. These unifying parameters ensured that Winthrop could advocate an extension to the colony they established in Massachusetts Bay.

3.2 ROGER WILLIAMS 1603-1683

Roger Williams was a radical Puritan Englishman who immigrated to Massachusetts in 1630. His radicalism even in Massachusetts was borne out of his belief that the Puritans in Boston were still members of the Church of England. He was a vocal critic of the way the Puritan colony took land from Indians. He also questioned the merging of the state and the church. Williams' criticism led to the Puritan authorities charging him for subverting their authority. He was an advocate of democratic principles in the affairs of the Puritan church. He called for the separation of the church from the state. In 1635, Williams was banished as a heretic. He took refuge with friendly Indians and was to later establish in Rhode Island, the Providence Plantation.

His writings criticized the Puritanical ideal of religious conformity which denied people the freedom to make choices or have opinions contrary to those in the Bible. In *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience*, Williams argued against the call for the persecution of people who expressed personal opinion. In the preface to the treatise, Williams also called for freedom of religion. These he espoused in twelve principles as follows:

- i. That the blood of those killed during the Protestant and Papist wars were not required nor accepted by Jesus;
- ii. Arguments in the scriptures negate the call for the persecution for reason of conscience or having differing opinions;

- iii. Ministers would also be guilty of having and giving opinions because they proffered answers to scriptural questions which were not explained in the Bible;
- iv. The lack of individual reasoning and opinion formulation which was encouraged by the Puritans was responsible for the deaths arising from religious wars;
- v. There should be a distinct separation of the church and the state;
- vi. God gave the command to give all humans the freedom to worship regardless of nation;
- vii. Israel should not be upheld as a model for any society or group;
- viii. God did not command that uniformity of religion be enforced in any state as it would breed hypocrisy, civil wars, mass killings, and the persecution of God's true worshipers;
- ix. Should uniformity of religion be enforced in any civil state, there should be no hope held of Jews converting to Christianity;
- x. Enforcing religious uniformity promotes the conflation of state and church. This reduced the impact of Christ's message and symbol;
- xi. Tolerating other religions and thinking promotes the entrenchment of peace amongst the people; and
- xii. Christianity can flourish alongside religious tolerance and diversity.

These doctrines showed how radical Williams was. It also showed him to be an advocate of religious tolerance. This much reflected in his writings. Verses in his *A Key into the Language of America* contrasted the vaulted English honor and supremacy against the virtues of Indians with whom he lived when he was banished from the Puritan community in Boston. In "Of Their Persons and Parts of Body", Williams unequivocally calls to question racial superiority. He criticizes the English for arrogating to themselves some higher status than the Indian who was generally thought of as heathen and uncivilized. He says "Boast not proud English, of their birth and blood/Thy brother Indian is by birth as good." So critical was William of racial superiority that he warned of a denial of heaven to those who discriminated racially: "Make sure thy second birth, else thou shalt see/Heaven ope to Indians wild, but shut to thee".

His writings celebrated the wild Indians in spite of their presumed savagery especially when compared to English civilization. In "On Eating and Entertainment", his introduction was that "It is a strange truth that a man shall generally find more free entertainment and refreshing amongst these barbarians than amongst thousands that call themselves Christians." This theme also exists in "Of Salutation" where Williams lauds the civility of Indian. This is a trait he finds wanting in the character of the English.

Prominent themes that emerge from his verses include the glorification of certain features in the cultures of the Indians. This theme comes to the fore when he compares the English ways of life to those of the Indians. In spite of Williams' persistent

recourse to the general depiction of the Indians as “wild”, “pagan”, “barbarians”, and “ravens”, he consistently portrays them as of a better disposition than the Englishman.

Despite his ignominy in the opinion and thoughts of a majority of Puritans during the colonial period, Williams became recognized, contemporarily, as a symbol of American liberty. His criticisms and refusal to tow the stringent principles of Puritanism made him a symbol of advocate for liberty. He is also seen as a forerunner of the fight against racial discrimination.

3.3.3 ANNE BRADSTREET 1612-1672

Anne Bradstreet was brought up as a Puritan child in England. Her father was a steward and ensured that she had formal education beyond the usual domestic training given to women of her generation. She was a high spirited individual who migrated in 1630 with a staunch Puritan, Simon Bradstreet, and two years after their marriage. Her migration was with her parent and they sailed Massachusetts Bay Colony. Her father was to succeed John Winthrop as Governor while she and her husband settled in a frontier village. She was also to tame her high spirit in such a laid back community in New England with the Puritan conviction that she was living the way of God. Anne Bradstreet had eight children and still found time to compose verse despite the unpopular nature of the vocation, especially for women at that time. Her compositions were made public when her brother took copies of her works to England. They were published in 1650 without her knowledge. *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* was the first volume of poetry that would be published by a settler in America. She was to later revise some of the poems contained in that volume and compose more verses. She was especially mortified of errors and the undeveloped form of her work as she expressed in “The Author to Her Book” published in the second edition of *The Tenth Muse* in 1678 in Boston.

Bradstreet’s style reflected those of English poets. Her works show prominently, concerns about her life. Many focus on her experiences as a woman, mother, and wife in a settler’s colony. They also show the influence of the Bible and her Puritanical beliefs.

In “The Author to Her Book”, Bradstreet expresses her chagrin at her perceived immature composition in the first edition of the collection. Though she describes her first publication as “ill-formed offspring of my feeble brain”, she identifies that it was “snatched from thence by friends, less wise than true”. This is an indication of her unawareness of the move to publicize the poems. Her Puritanical demeanor emerges in the ways she describes the first edition, the errors in it, and the fact that they were not composed for public consumption. She says the verses were “exposed to public view/made thee in rags” and “unfit for light”. These exemplify the fact that Bradstreet was not keen on publicizing her works. They also show the puritan reticence for show off. Especially, Bradstreet says the work caused her to blush. This is an outward and physical display of embarrassment.

That the edition had errors was not totally her doing. She expresses this when the verses were taken “to th’ press to trudge,/Where errors were not lessened”. This was an indictment of the editorial quality of the press house.

In many of Bradstreet’s writings, her femininity and puritanical beliefs emerge. This is especially so in her subject matter and imagery deployed. This must be because her writings reflect her personal life and beliefs. For instance, in “The Author to her Book”, Bradstreet compares the emergence of her first book to that of birthing a child and similar imagery associated with motherhood and childbirth. She describes the book as an ‘offspring’ and her ‘rambling brat. Other images of mothering emerge in her description of the process through which the publication made its way into public consumption. For instance, she compares her inability to make the work better with an economically challenged mother’s inability to properly dress her offspring. Also in “In Reference to Her Children, 23 June, 1659”, there is the prominent depiction of the image of motherhood. In this poem, Bradstreet describes each of her eight children. She expresses the concerns of a mother over her children in the world where she cannot oversee their activities:

Let others know what are my fears
Lest my brood some harm should catch,
And be surprised for want of watch,
Whilst pecking corm and void of care,
They fall un’ware in fowler’s snare,
Or whilst on trees they sit and sing,
Some untoward boy at them do fling,
Or whilst allured with bell and glass,
The net be spread, and caught alas.
Or lest by lime-twigs they be foiled.

(“In Reference to Her Children, 23 June, 1659”,)

Of similar feminine concern do we find in many of her verses. In “To My Dear and Loving Husband” and “A Letter to her Husband Absent upon Public Employment”, Bradstreet depicts the acceptable feminine comportment of that time. She depicts wifehood as a station wherein a woman enjoys the love and affection of her spouse. This affection is occasioned by the piety, love and devotion of the wife. Her unequivocal depiction of the love of a wife for her husband is prominently visible in these poems. For instance, in “To My Dear and Loving Husband”, Bradstreet compares her love for her husband to “...all the riches that the East doth hold./ My love is such that rivers cannot quench”. For this, she attributes her husband’s reciprocal affection as “Thy love is such I can no way repay”. Similarly in “A Letter to her Husband Absent upon Public Employment”, Bradstreet laments the distance between them. She mourns for the return of her husband. She presents images of loneliness and melancholy in her lines that deal with her husband’s absence; “I, like the Earth this season, mourn in black,/ My sun is gone so far in’s Zodiac”.

Puritans believe spousal devotion was proof of piety. Thus her affection for her husband was in tune with God's plan. However, her love was not to overshadow her commitment to God. With her husband being the governor, his duties were time consuming. Puritan belief saw marriage as a partnership for producing young Christians.

In all her femininity, her Christian beliefs are undeniable. There are images and biblical allusions in her poems which point to her strong Puritanical perspective. For example, in "A Letter to her Husband Absent upon Public Employment", Bradstreet alludes to the biblical story of Eve being the flesh and bone of Adam in Genesis 2 verse 23 to foreground her affection and conviction of their love for each other; "Flesh of thy flesh, bone of thy bone,/ I here, thou there, yet both but one."

Bradstreet's Puritan beliefs and concerns radiate from her works. She was as identified earlier, the first settler to have a collection published. Her works give great insight into the life and beliefs of the Puritan settlers in America.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The origin of American literature is inseparable from the history of England. Earliest American literature was neither American nor really literature. It was not American because it was the work of immigrants from England who did not even consider themselves American when writing the works. The style of the texts was also significantly influenced by English masters of literary composition. This made it so much difficult to distinguish writings from New England as anything but English writings. The writings were not quite literary in the distinct forms that exist as poetry, drama and prose. They were colonial travel accounts which are records of the perils and frustrations that challenged the courage of America's first settlers who arrived in 1620. They were a mixture of travel accounts and religious writings. In spite of these, Puritan beliefs dictated significantly, the content and form earliest American works took.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you explored selected writings from the colonial period of America. The works are John Winthrop's *A Model of Christian Charity*, Roger William's and a selection of verses from Anne Bradstreet's works. From these selections of colonial writings, the overarching influence of the Puritan belief is visible. While Winthrop was concerned with the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, William was concerned with separating the state from the church and condemning the appropriation of Native Indian lands. Bradstreet on the other hand showed female concerns during this time.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

1. Discuss how John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" shaped the way America is considered unique.
2. How has Roger Williams' radicalism influenced later American awareness?
3. Explain the way Anne Bradstreet's verses reveal Puritan belief.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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Module 2

AMERICAN RENAISSANCE: THE LITERATURE OF REASON AND REVOLUTION

Unit 1: The Age of Reason

8.0 Introduction

9.0 Objectives

10.0 Main Content

10.1 General Overview

10.2 The Making of the American Nation

10.2.1 Thomas Paine (1737-1809)

10.2.2 Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826)

10.2.3 Orators

3.3 Influence of the Age on Literature

11.0 Conclusion

12.0 Summary

13.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

14.0 References/ Further Reading

8.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the dominating ideas of the 18th century. This is known as the Age of Reason, the Neo-Classical Age, and the Age of Enlightenment. You will explore how this age influenced literature in America. You will explore the making of the American nation especially the dominant ideology that led to its creation. You will also study the dominant literary traditions that emerged therefrom.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

4. Discuss the factors that led to the emergence of the Age of Reason
5. List and explain the factors that contributed to the emergence of America
6. Discuss the influence of these factors on the literary forms that emerged
7. List and explain the efforts of writers who contributed to the English Colonist's war against England.

9.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The eighteenth century in America is known for the dominating ideas of the Age of Reason, the Age of Neo-classism and the Age of Enlightenment. This was an Age that

started in Seventeenth century England. It spread to other parts of Europe and the English colonies in America in the eighteenth century. The beginnings of the Age can be found in the rejection of medieval authoritarianism. The founding of the Royal Society of London in 1662 for the improvement of natural knowledge also promoted the exploration of knowledge beyond religion. The Age of Reason brought great discoveries which changed the ways many things were thought of. Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) was one of the major change factors during this Age. The book made revolutionary revelations. Primarily, Newton affirmed that the universe is not a mystery in the hands of a God. He said the universe was operated as a mechanism that can be reasoned and understood by any intelligent person. Newton provided a single mathematical law which accounted for the movements of the earth and the stars. This marked the start of modern science. It began to weaken people's faith in religion, in holy books and especially in miracles and the divinity of kings and priests. Science became a thing that would dominate the world for a long time. The focus religion had in the previous century was now devoted to science. The study of astronomy, botany, biology, physiology and other sciences took precedence. Tom Paine challenged Christianity. In his book titled *The Age of Reason*, Paine argued that miracles were explainable. He also challenged the divinity of Jesus arguing that the proof of the existence of God was not in the Bible. He said the proof lay in nature. The earlier emphasis on religiosity took a mild tone. The concept of hell also disappeared from popular public discourse. Humanity became the central concept as against the worship of God. This influenced even governance. As humanitarianism took central stage, treaties that would deemphasize the role and status of God in governance emerged. For instance, John Locke's *The Treatise of Civil Governance* (1690) challenged the hitherto assumption that governance and leadership were divinely ordained. He maintained that leadership roles were not assigned by God through Kings to humans. He argued that a government was formed and gained authority when men agreed to give authority to some people. Through social contracts, the generality of the people surrendered a portion of their authority and freedom to the selected leader. Such surrender was not total as poor governance could be disrupted at any time. Treatise like Locke's saw the evolution of governance, radically different from that established in colonial America for instance.

Many other prominent and established Puritan beliefs were challenged in this age. The cardinal philosophies of Calvinism came under severe attack. Predestination and total depravity were disputed as false. Locke in another publication- *Essay Concerning human Understanding* (1690) affirmed that every human at birth had minds that were in a state of *tabula rasa*. This refers to a blank state of cognition. This implied therefore that no one was predestined to be good or evil.

3.2 THE MAKING OF THE AMERICAN NATION

The war English colonies fought against the French and the Indians in 1754 brought the English colonists together as a united people. At this time most of them were living on the sea coast from Georgia to Maine, and had not yet even crossed the great Appalachian range of mountains. The leaders of one colony knew little of the leaders

in the other colonies. This war decided whether France or England was to be supreme in America. The collaborative effort of the English colonies ensured that they won. The treaty of Paris which was signed in 1763 made England the possessor of Canada and the land east of the Mississippi River. At the close of this defining war, the colonists learned that there should be synergy between them in the face of aggression from France and the Indians. This synergy was not to seek independence from England but make them formidable against external aggression.

The rule of King George III however changed the course of things. George III came to the throne in 1760 and his actions set in motion the most defining move that led to the secession of English colonies in North America from England. George was an authoritarian ruler who controlled the Parliament by bribery. He moved also that the American colonies should feel the weight of his authority. In 1763, some trade measures were taken to restrict trade between the colonies and other European countries. The move was to ensure that England made all the profit in foreign trade. He also imposed tax on the colonists and to station British troops in the colonies. The colonies saw the measures as another form of aggression. It moved them into armed resistance and led to the Revolutionary War, which began in 1775. Many colonists did not however support call for separation from England. The efforts of writers in the advancement of the nationalist move were noteworthy.

3.2.1 Thomas Paine (1737–1809)

One of the greatest nationalist writers was Thomas Paine. He was an Englishman who came to America in 1774 and soon made himself an important codifier of colonial thought and feeling. He published a pamphlet in 1776 titled *Common Sense*. The pamphlet advocated complete political independence from England. Many of his writings contributed to the *Declaration of Independence*.

Sixteen of his works appeared during the progress of the struggle for liberty. These writings inspired hope and enthusiasm in the colonists for the drive towards independence.

3.2.2 THOMAS JEFFERSON (1743–1826)

Thomas Jefferson was another influential nationalist. His writings are so significant in number and quantity that they have been gathered into volumes. The most significant is the *Declaration of Independence*. Even he knew the significance of this document to his works. He left instructions that on his monument, the words, “Author of the Declaration of American Independence,” should immediately follow his name. The *Declaration of Independence* has become one of the most influential works in history. It continues to influence the world and modify the opinions of nations. His influence would later culminate into his becoming the third President of the United States.

3.2.3 ORATORS

Apart from writers penning treatises to motivate the independence cause, there were also orators who used oratory prowess to cajole and sustain the sometimes dwindling morale of the Americans. These orators persuaded, aroused, and encouraged colonists

who were either disinclined towards independence of those who became demoralized as the war progressed slowly. The slow progress of the independence caused severe monetary loss and induced suffering to the revolutionists. Those appointed Orators helped to encourage the continuation of the war. Beyond this, they were important in the task of giving the country constitutional government. Some of the notable orators are James Otis (1725–1783), Patrick Henry (1736–1799), and Samuel Adams (1722–1803). Of note however is that the orators of this time stood out because they had great interest in the independence of America from England. They were also very knowledgeable in the affairs of the English colonies and the politics involved in being colonies. These men were personable characters who chose to engage in public speaking on an issue that was of concern to everyone in the colonies. They were however not clergymen. The influence of religion on politics was declining at the time. Rather, the legal profession was rising. Most of the orators of the time were lawyers.

3.3 INFLUENCE OF THE AGE ON LITERATURE

The widely accepted postulations of philosophers on the centrality of human beings as inherently good deemphasized the previous rigid code of living. With the de-emphasis of religion came writers renewed focus in classical thoughts. Writers were now interested in creating an America that had little to do with Christianity but a lot to do with Athens and Rome. Their interest in classical writings and thoughts gave name to the period. Dubbed 'Neoclassicism, literary activities began to revisit and draw from literary models from the classical period. The influence of classicism on literature reflected in the avoidance of ornamental and extravagant language. Prose was written in plain cultivated speech. Poetry had the measured cadence characteristic of the heroic couplet. Drama engaged in the three unities of time, place and action. Major writers of this period were to be found in England. John Dryden and Alexander Pope were the forerunners in the poetic tradition.

However, at the turn of eighteenth century, there was a reaction against the neoclassical form of writing. A different style of writing emerged which upturned the artistic formality and restraint inherent in neoclassical style of writing. The challengers argued against the mechanical way of composition. They advocated for freer modes of writing beyond the traditional modes of expression which seemed rigid and forced. The cadences, the metrical forms, the heroic couplets were condemned as restrictive. The alternative form that emerged gave greater value to human emotions and spontaneity. Writers abandoned the classical form with its rigid structures and focus. They embraced instead a style that celebrated emotions. They glorified the mundane that could elicit emotions. Focus changed to rural life, the wilderness, nature, the picaresque, and the virtues of innocence. Writers craved for a style that could elicit profound emotions in readers. The legacy of erudition bequeathed by Puritanism in America fueled the search for intellectual understanding.

The burgeoning print culture also facilitated the spread of intellectualism. Books and especially magazines were in constant supply given the increasing number of publishing houses. This in no small measure aided the ideological separation of America from England at the height of the nationalist move. In spite of all these, American writers followed the writing style of English writers. Novelists and poets still mimicked the style of the reigning masters in England. The earliest American novels for instance, were imitative of the didactic prose style that was prominent in England at that time. There was also an increasing number of reading audience whose appetites were satiated with the importation of English books. These did little to create a tradition of works that will be wholly American.

The dramatic genre took off much later than poetry and prose. The sentiments in the American colonies were not very keen to encourage dramatic forms. In fact, a law was promulgated in 1700 in Pennsylvania which banned all stage plays. They were thought of as riotous sport. The American colonies considered them to be corrupting. It was not until 1767 that the first American play was staged. Thomas Godfrey's *The Prince of Parthia* was the pioneer play that would be staged in America. The plays that also emerged from the American colonies did not also differ from the ones produced in England. Up until the nineteenth century, American literary output was an off shoot of England. However, it was only imaginative works that were imitative of English works. The nationalist ambitions of the times were generating political and revolutionary treatises that would redefine all the strata of the American world. Jefferson's *The Declaration of Independence*, Paine's *the Federalist* and *The Crisis* are some of the politically motivated works that have continued to define the essence of America.

a. CONCLUSION

The Age of Reason that swept the English colonies in America did more than influence the ways of life and thinking. This was an Age that started in Seventeenth century England. It spread to other parts of Europe and the English colonies in America in the eighteenth century. The beginnings of the Age can be found in the rejection of medieval authoritarianism. This influenced the dominant culture. The impact of Christianity was reduced. Emphasis shifted to human beings. This started the development and inventions of machines and technologies that would define the way the world developed over the years. This was also the Age when the nationalist call towards the founding of the American nation started.

5.0 SUMMARY

The Age of Reason brought great discoveries which changed the ways many things were thought. Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) was one of the major change factors during this Age. The book made revolutionary revelations. Primarily, Newton affirmed that the universe is not a mystery in the hands of a God. He said the universe was operated as a mechanism that can be reasoned and

understood by any intelligent person. Newton provided a single mathematical law which accounted for the movements of the earth and the stars. This marked the start of modern science. It began to weaken people's faith in religion, in holy books and especially in miracles and the divinity of kings and priests. Science became a thing that would dominate the world for a long time. The focus religion had in the previous century was now devoted to science. The study of astronomy, botany, biology, physiology and other sciences took precedence. In literature, there was a shift to classical knowledge and tradition. This influenced the way literature was written. Political treatises and imaginative works surfaced. The most defining being Thomas Jefferson's *The Declaration of Independence*. It is a work that captures the essence of the American society. These are in the fundamental areas of freedoms and humanity.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENTS

1. What are the essential ways the Age of Reason differed from the preceding century?

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Module 2: Unit 2

Introduction to American Romanticism

- 15.0 Introduction
- 16.0 Objectives
- 17.0 Main Content
 - 17.1 General Overview
 - 17.2 American Romanticism
 - 17.3 Characteristics of Romanticism
 - 17.3.1 Imagination
 - 17.3.2 Nature
 - 17.3.3 Symbolism and Myth
 - 17.3.4 Emotion, Lyric Poetry, and the Self
 - 3.3 Neo-classism versus Romanticism
- 18.0 Conclusion
- 19.0 Summary
- 20.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the emergence of other ideas that characterized the later part of the 18th century up to the nineteenth century of American writing. Known variously as the Romantic period, the Romantic era, or Romanticism, writings of this period countered the Renaissance style which privileged reason, strict format, and advanced human superiority.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Discuss the origin of romantic period
- ii. Identify the defining features of Romantic writings
- iii. Explain the influence of the period on American literature
- iv. Highlight major writers of the period
- v. Examine their influence on the body of literature

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

The Romantic period was a time when particular thoughts and ideologies permeated different cultures and societies. It influenced different fields such as music, art and, especially literature. The strongholds of the Romantic Movement were England and Germany. It is from the historians of English and German literature that a convenient

set of terminal dates for the period can be identified. The period is given as beginning in 1798, the year of the first edition of William Wordsworth's and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* and of the composition of *Hymns to the Night* by Novalis. It is also said to have ended in 1832, the year which marked the deaths of both Sir Walter Scott and Goethe. In America, the movement started much later. This period coincides with what is often called the "age of revolutions". This includes the American revolution of (1776) and the French revolution of (1789). This was an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions. It was the age which witnessed the initial transformations of the Industrial Revolution.

In literature, the Romantic period movement placed intuition and imagination over reason. Known variously as the Romantic era, romanticism or the Romantic period, it was a movement that reached several aspects of society and came as a change and revolution against all that was real and scientific to focus on feelings and emotions.

De Marr (01) describes the period as having been in existence even before the height of the era; "there have been times when the frame of the world rested not on facts, but on wonders". Towards the end of the eighteenth century, there was a revolution against aristocracy, against social and political norms of the age of enlightenment which started to appear. This revolution gave prominence to the soul, instincts and emotions. These were against the principles of the era of Reason which "advocated a cool, detached scientific approach to most human endeavors and dilemmas" (Smith 2011). The romantic period saw the emergence of new artistic, literary and intellectual wave in literature and the arts. It encouraged a rejection of many of the values of the Renaissance movement such as the scientific revolution held as seminal.

It was an escape from the strict rules of society in favour of a spiritual world. Nature became the new object of love and emotions. Romanticism defined an artistic and philosophical movement that influenced the fundamental ways in which people thought about themselves and about their world. The era started as a reaction to the classical way of life that people used to live. The respect for authority, the love of order and the following of rules, were overturned in favor of strangeness and novelty. It placed a new emphasis on emotions and beauty of the language.

Writers and artist during the romantic era saw themselves as revolting against the "Age of Reason" or "Enlightenment" period which was at its peak between 1700 and 1770 (Harvey 1). There was the celebration of imagination and intuition as against reason. Spontaneity was encouraged instead of control. Subjectivity and metaphysical musing trumped objective fact. Romanticism was the wave that replaced all the old traditions, physics and reason that were buried in people's mind with a more spiritual and modern way of thinking.

3.2 American Romanticism

The new revolutionary Romantic generation appeared in the modern ideas of Thomas Paine. This was inspired by the ideals of Rousseau. Paine established a set of ideas that would unleash the American Revolution. That was reflected in literary works in

which authors and readers countered the pragmatic and scientific standards popular at that time. They sought freedom in literature through imagination, spirituality and the purity of nature. They advocated a rejection of civilization and rational constraints that had limited their freedom for ages. In fact, the first half of the nineteenth century was when the New Englanders engaged in a systematic attempt at establishing a distinct culture. Many New Englanders set aside some money for purchasing books before anything else. In 1800 there were few foreign books in Boston, but the interest in them developed to such an extent that a foreign bookstore and reading room were in place. There was a rapid recovery from emotional and aesthetic starvation caused by the stringent rules of the Puritan system. Poets and prose writers produced a literature in which beauty, power, and knowledge were often combined, a style hitherto discouraged by the Puritan authorities.

The Romantic era in America lasted from about 1830 to 1870. It represented what was buried in the human soul. This was especially so since Americans were suffering from capitalism, industry crisis and many other problems that made it hard for them to live (Ashworth 1995). It represented nature as a source of instruction, delight, and nourishment for the soul. Novels, short stories and poems transmitted the suffering of individuals, wilderness and savageness whether implicitly or explicitly. It was a time when America witnessed the industrial revolution, a period of a great and huge development and expansion in all fields of life. The American society at the time of Romanticism was experiencing the industrial revolution. People were living in a time of great progress. Migration to cities was widespread. As the country continued to develop, cities started to be dirtier and congested. Authors were affected by these negative consequences of the industrial revolution as was everyone. Escapism became a popular motif in writings in which authors would literally escape their unsatisfying reality into a better world. Characters in the American Romantic literature escaped the civilization and modern life and went to nature looking for freedom and purity. "Rip Van Winkle" by Washington Irving (1783–1859) can be considered as one of the best examples of the use of imagination and escapism by authors. The main character in this short story escapes civilization and responsibility and goes to the woods in which he falls asleep for a long time. When he wakes up and goes back to his old life, he discovers the death of his wife and the change in society.

The anxiety to be free from the European values aided the American adoption of individualism. The will to create a nation of their own influenced their way of thinking and writing. They asserted the importance of the individual and put a lot of interest in his relationship with nature. The Romantics focused also on the importance of following one's own intuition and emotion far away from the parents' beliefs (Smith 2011). Even with religious topics, authors wrote about different themes from the Bible, but in a way that was not limited to the dictates of the government or church.

Romanticism thus became a movement wherein authors, artists and writers reacted to the constraints of Neoclassicism. They moved towards the individual by focusing on

them as unique. Truth could be achieved only through the experience of that individual.

3.3 Characteristics of Romanticism

Romanticism was a shift from faith and belief in science and reason to advocacy for emotions, feelings and nature. Its aims were captured in Rousseau's writings that placed belief in the goodness in humanity and the return to nature leaving the reason of corruption behind. Writers at that time were inspired by this new way of thinking and imagining. This was reflected in their literary works and novels. Eventually the themes of these literary works changed and started to be more pure and romantic by dealing with imaginary subjects such as terror, horror and awe. The Romantic writers also placed a great emphasis on individuality which made it hard to separate the novel from its writer. By following their own feelings and emotions, it was this novel that describes its author and "the result was a literature that continually explored the inward experiences of the self" (Ladd, Phillips and Meyers 05). The Romantic era affected more than the people's way of thinking. It influenced also their faith in God. Prior to this time, God was the supreme power that governed the universe. However, this belief changed when Romantics saw God as a part of the universe and not separated from it (Wayne 2006).

The major characteristics of Romanticism were :

- the glorification and celebration of the individual
- a belief in the goodness and perfectibility of mankind
- a celebration of nature, harmonious and benevolent, which is seen as the main inspiration for society and the arts
- an emphasis on emotions, feelings and intuition which are both the sources and the subjects of artistic expression
- an emphasis on imagination, which is described as a creative force much stronger than education or reason
- an optimistic belief in a social and political system that is conceived both as protections and as stimulations for the development of the individual

Self-Assessment Exercise

Highlight the characteristics of romanticism

3.2.1. Imagination

The romantics' focus was on imagination as a door that helped the writers as well as readers to escape from their reality. Imagination was elevated to a position as the supreme faculty of the mind. This contrasted distinctly with the traditional arguments for the supremacy of reason. The Romantics tended to define and to present the imagination as our ultimate "shaping" or creative power, the approximate human equivalent of the creative powers of nature or even deity. It is dynamic, an active,

rather than passive power, with many functions. Imagination is the primary faculty for creating all art. It was what helped humans to constitute reality.

3.2.2 Nature

Nature was an integral feature of the Romantic Movement and it meant many things to the Romantics. It was often presented as a work of art, constructed by a divine imagination. Romanticism displaced the rationalist view of the universe as a machine. At the same time, Romantics gave greater attention both to describing natural phenomena accurately and to capturing "sensuous nuance". Accuracy of observation, however, was not sought for its own sake. Romantic nature poetry is essentially a poetry of meditation.

3.2.3 Symbolism and Myth

Symbolism and myth were given great prominence in the Romantic conception. In the Romantic view, symbols were the human aesthetic correlatives of nature's emblematic language. They were valued too because they could simultaneously suggest many things, and were thus thought superior to the one-to-one communications of allegory. Partly, it may have been the desire to express the "inexpressible"--the infinite--through the available resources of language that led to symbol at one level and myth (as symbolic narrative) at another.

3.3.4 Emotion, Lyric Poetry, and the Self

Other aspects of Romanticism were intertwined with the above three concepts. Emphasis on the activity of the imagination was accompanied by greater emphasis on the importance of intuition, instincts, and feelings. Romantics prominently called for greater attention to the emotions as a necessary supplement to purely logical reason. Wordsworth's definition of good poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" marks a turning point in literary history. By locating the ultimate source of poetry in the individual artist, the tradition, stretching back to the ancients, of valuing art primarily for its ability to imitate human life (that is, for its mimetic qualities) was reversed. In Romantic theory, art was valuable not so much as a mirror of the external world, but as a source of illumination of the world within. Among other things, this led to a prominence for first-person lyric poetry never accorded it in any previous period. The "poetic speaker" became less a persona and more the direct person of the poet.

3.3 Neo-classism versus Romanticism

As a reaction against Neo-classism, the Romantics challenged the tenets of the age of reason in the following areas. They declared their freedom from the mechanical "rules" —classical age. There was also the replacement of reason by the imagination in human faculties. Romantics shifted from a mimetic to an expressive orientation for poetry, and indeed all literature. In addition, neoclassicism had prescribed for art the idea that the general or universal characteristics of human behavior were more suitable subject matter than the peculiarly individual manifestations of human activity. This view was challenged by Romantic writers.

The Romantics also asserted the importance of the individual. Consequently they opposed the character stereotypes of neoclassical drama. This way, Romanticism created its own literary types. There was the hero-artist; heaven-storming types from Prometheus to Captain Ahab, outcasts from Cain to the Ancient Mariner and even Hester Prynne, and there was Faust, who wins salvation in Goethe's great drama for the very reasons. In style, the Romantics preferred boldness over the preceding age's desire for restraint. There was maximum suggestiveness over the neoclassical ideal of clarity. Interest in religion and in the powers of faith was prominent during the Romantic period. However, the Romantics generally rejected absolute systems, whether of philosophy or religion. Instead, they favored the idea that each person (and humankind collectively) must create the system by which to live.

4.0 Conclusion

The shift in literature from reason to the emphasis on the senses, feelings, and escapism of imagination characterized the eighteenth century. Just like the previous movements, Romanticism manifested itself in poetry and drama, in music and paintings, in novels and short stories. Although the influence of English literature on American writing began to wane during the latter part of the eighteenth century, it still exerted enough influence by reflecting on genres that characterized the period.

In America, the movement coincides with what is often called the "age of revolutions". This includes the American revolution of (1776) and the French revolution of (1789). This was an age of upheavals in political, economic, and social traditions. It was the age which witnessed the initial transformations of the Industrial Revolution.

5.0 Summary

Romanticism was a shift from faith and belief in science and reason to advocacy for emotions, feelings and nature. Writers at that time were inspired by this new way of thinking and imagining. This was reflected in their literary works and novels. Eventually the themes of these literary works changed and started to be more pure and romantic by dealing with imaginary subjects such as terror, horror and awe. The romantic period saw the emergence of new artistic, literary and intellectual wave in literature and the arts. It encouraged a rejection of many of the values of the Renaissance movement such as the scientific revolution held as seminal. It was an escape from the strict rules of society in favour of a spiritual world. Nature became the new object of love and emotions. Romanticism defined an artistic and philosophical movement that influenced the fundamental ways in which people thought about themselves and about their world. The era started as a reaction to the classical way of life that people used to live. The respect for authority, the love of order and the following of rules, were overturned in favor of strangeness and novelty. It placed a new emphasis on emotions and beauty of the language.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Discuss the characteristics of Romanticism.
2. How did the age influence writings?

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Module 2: Unit 3

American Renaissance

- 2.0 Introduction
- 3.0 Objectives
- 4.0 Main Content
 - 4.1 General Overview
- 3.2 The Fireside and Transcendental Poets
- 3.3 Transcendental Poets
 - 3.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)
 - 3.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)
 - 3.3.3 Robert Frost
- 3.4 The Gothic American Literature
- 5.0 Conclusion
- 6.0 Summary
- 7.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 8.0 References/ Further Reading

10.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study about American Renaissance. You will begin by studying the emergence of groups of poets with distinct ideologies which culminated into what is known as the Renaissance in America. You will encounter the Fireside poets and the Transcendentalist poets. You will study the background of Transcendental poets. You will also explore the dominant subject matters, themes and styles employed by the poets.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- 8. Discuss the concept behind Fireside poetry
- 9. Explain the ideology behind transcendentalism
- 10. Discuss prominent American Transcendental writers
- 11. Discuss prominent themes that emerge from such works
- 12. Discuss the dominant style of writing of the period

11.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

Poetry was to the Romantics the highest embodiment of human imagination. They tended to compare poetry with science. Romantics considered science capable of destroying the very truth it claimed to seek. Edgar Allan Poe, for example, called science a “vulture” preying on the hearts of poets. As a reaction against rationalism that characterized the Age of Reason, the impact of the Industrial Revolution was a crude awakening. Dirty cities and terrible working conditions compelled some people to realize the limits of the Age of Reason. The Romantics thus came to believe that the imagination was able to apprehend truths that the rational mind could not reach. These truths were usually accompanied by powerful emotion and associated with natural, unspoiled beauty. To the Romantic sensibility, the imagination, spontaneity, individual feelings, and wild nature were of greater value than reason, logic, planning, and civilization. Edgar Allan Poe, William Cullen Bryant (1794–1878), and the Fireside Poets; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–1882), John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809–1894), and James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) are some notable American romantic poets. From the Romantic Movement appeared an offshoot known as Transcendentalism. It came as a “crisis of faith”. It was a reaction against biblical rules and sought to replace “belief in the God of the bible with belief in the divinity of humanity” (Wayne vii). One of the most famous influential transcendentalists was Ralph Waldo Emerson who explained in his 1838 Divinity School Address “to go alone...to be a divine man”. Transcendentalists consider the individual as “the spiritual and moral center of the universe” (Ibid viii). In other words, there was a certain relation between the individual and the universe. It was as though each person carried the universe within him/herself. As feelings were the center of Romanticism, intuition was the center of transcendentalism in which they believed that only through the intuitive experiences the person can be able to know things.

Transcendentalists go beyond the Unitarian beliefs and focus on what is spiritual and emotional rather than what is physical. They believe that there is divinity within humankind and within nature. They reject common ideas, practices and organized religion. In literature, the impact of transcendentalism can be seen in their way of dealing with different themes such as: slavery, social classes and gender inequality.

3.2 The Fireside and Transcendental Poets

The Fireside Poets were, in their own time and for many decades afterward, the most popular poets America had ever produced. They were before the era of mass media which changed American family life. Referred to as the Boston writers they were also called were known as the Fireside Poets because their poems were often read aloud at the fireside as family entertainment. Through them, a new American literature emerged. This was a literature that relied heavily on the literature of the past. The Fireside Poets wrote on subject matter that was comforting rather than challenging to their audience. They advanced the growth of American poetry by introducing uniquely American subject matter in their choices of topics. These include American folk

themes, descriptions of the American landscapes, American Indian culture, and celebrations of American people, places, and events. These also included love, patriotism, nature, family, God, and religion. They were essentially limited by conservatism. They were unable to recognize the poetry of the future. Whittier's response in 1855 to reading Walt Whitman's first volume was to throw the book into the fire. In their attempt to justify the emergence of a sophisticated literary culture, American poets wrote within the established style of England. Instead of developing a unique American literary tradition, they employed English themes, meter, and imagery.

It is however from a group of poets from Concord in New England that an embodiment of a distinct American poetic tradition can be said to have emerged. They called themselves the Transcendentalists. This group of poets took it upon themselves to define American poetry. Their efforts were so significant that the period of Transcendental poetry is often termed the American Renaissance. The Transcendentalists had loosely collected themselves at around 1836 in Concord. They established their magazine, *The Dial*. In line with their Romantic inclination, the transcendentalists saw the individual as a microcosm in itself. The individual was considered one with nature. It is from this notion that the idea of the 'self' got a new connotation. This connotation was divested from its previously 'selfish' sense.

Transcendentalists endeavored to transcend, to pass beyond the range of human senses and experiences. The Puritan values of New England where Transcendentalism was born and the American drive for a national identity both retroactively reflect in the Transcendental pursuit. For them, art was the aesthetic dimension of nature, and thus, was only natural to an individual. Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the forerunners of the Transcendentalist mode "In *The Poet (1841-1843)*" calls for a distinct American style which he dubbed "American Milton". This style of poetry was to reflect the ways of America. Transcendentalism became a general term for:

- (1) those who preferred to rely on their own intuitions rather than on the authority of any one;
- (2) those who exalted individuality;
- (3) those who frowned on imitation and repetition;
- (4) those who broke with the past;
- (5) those who believed that a new social and spiritual renaissance was necessary and forthcoming;
- (6) those who insisted on the importance of culture, on "plain living and high thinking," and
- (7) those who loved isolation and solitude.

Emerson's call for a distinct style thus paved the way for an authentic American poet to be born. This was done through the jettisoning of the iambic pentameter that was so essential to English poetry. The iambic pentameter was considered undemocratic. The transcendentalists sought to break free from the convention and opened up to the possibility of free verse. Walt Whitman acknowledges Emerson as the prompt for his creation of the free verse. In *Leaves of Grass (1855)*, Whitman says: "I was

simmering, simmering, simmering and it was Emerson who brought me to a boil” (Walt Whitman qtd. in Dolan, 35) Ralph Waldo Emerson’s claim to an American poetry; “a poetry of the new lands, new men, new thoughts that were America” (Emerson qtd. in Dolan, 34), marks the American’s self-reflexive claim to his poetry as his national poetry. The spirit of American writing from this period revealed an implicit nationalism.

Scholars actually posit that Transcendentalism inaugurated the American Renaissance, giving it both a necessary impulse as well as its foundations. It gave birth to many texts which are essentially philosophical essays. These works analyzed the intellectual, moral, social, religious and political situation of the USA in the 1830s. They advocated a resolutely independent spirit. In spite of the fact that Transcendentalists were essentially philosophers and thinkers, novelists and poets felt profoundly indebted towards Transcendentalism which deeply influenced them in many different ways.

Self-Assessment Test

Discuss the essential focus of Transcendentalism.

3.3 TRANSCENDENTAL POETS

3.3.1 Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882)

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

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

self was a dominant idea in Emerson's whole work. With this, Emerson chose Nature as his new religion.

In *Nature*, Emerson also advocated the necessity for a new way of looking at the World. Man was to learn to open his eyes. He was to learn to look at the world differently, getting rid of his preconceptions and of his moral or educational influences.

The following year of **1837**, Emerson delivered a lecture, entitled "The American Scholar". This has been described as the "American intellectual Declaration of Independence". In this address, he urges his fellowmen and women to reject tradition, imitation and foreign influences. Emerson argued for a national culture, a typically American culture that would not be linked to European cultures.

He also added the notion of the "self", that he had already introduced in *Nature*.

He maintained that a writer who wants to discover new forms and write a truly national literature must be true to his own self. He must first discover his self in order to listen to it, and trust it without yielding to exterior influences.

3.3.2 Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

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

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

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

weather, the light, and the cycle of seasons. He took long walks, getting to know the surroundings of his hut with great accuracy.

Thoreau did not however spend his time living like a savage, away from society. On the contrary, the distance he had put between society and himself allowed him to better reflect on social matters. He therefore devoted a lot of time to thinking. He meditated on various subjects such as the dangers of religion or of material success. He pondered on the development of civilization that threatened nature. He thought of the importance of the individual who must be the true reformer of society and not wait for improbable reforms coming from the system. Little by little, he realized that being away from the tumult of society helped him to distinguish between what was necessary and what was futile. He realized that he has a much better vision of the USA from his natural shelter in Walden Pond. He believed he had a better understanding of how man should live in the modern world. By considering the principles on which the US rest, he discovered which ones he should accept as his, and which ones he should reject as incompatible with the life he wanted for himself. During the two years he spent in Walden Pond, Thoreau wrote his Journal regularly. He finally published the narrative of his experience in 1854, in a book simply called *Walden*. The book is an autobiographical account of two years in the life of a man. It also sounds as a philosophical, or sociological essay.

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

3.3.3 Robert Frost

Robert Lee Frost was born in San Francisco, on March 26, 1874. He was the first son of William Prescott Frost, Jr. and Isabelle Moodie. Frost's father had been born in Kingston, New Hampshire, the only son of an old New England farming family. His mother had been born in Scotland. Frost was named after Robert E. Lee, the Confederate general, because his father had run away as a teenager during the Civil War and joined the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under Lee before he was sent home. Robert Frost attended Harvard University and was graduated Phi Beta Kappa. He married Belle Moodie in 1873 and for a while they were both school teachers in Lewiston, Pennsylvania, before moving to San Francisco. There he became city editor of the San Francisco *Daily Evening Post*, edited by the social reformer Henry George. Frost is a large figure in the landscape of twentieth century American poets. He enjoyed an unrivalled popularity with a general readership. At the same time, at least for a long period, Frost had the respect of his peers and of critics as one of the great artists of his era.

He had the modernist preoccupation with refreshing language which purged his works of early Victorian literariness. Frost often talked about poetry and poetic practices in terms of the new and the casting off of the old. In this respect, he sounds not only American but Emersonian in his advocacy of discarding the influences of the European fathers. Frost wrote of his connection to Emerson and alluded to being a sort of late descendant of Emerson: "I owe more to Emerson than anyone else for the troubled thoughts about freedom." The transcendental influence on Frost manifested in centralizing Nature. He also depicts the spiritual and supernatural in his works. Although Frost celebrates nature in many of his poems, his influence by Transcendentalism becomes clear in the last stanza of "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening". There he talks about how the woods are lovely, dark and deep. He however adds that he has promises to keep and a long way to go before he sleeps, meaning before he dies. This signifies the relationship that Frost establishes between nature and death and the life here after. This goes along the same lines as Emerson's school of thought represented specifically by the beliefs held by those who follow the Transcendentalist movement (Van Doren, 1923).

Frost centralizes nature in many of his poems. It becomes a spiritual vehicle through which he can reach a higher and more elevated level of religion and spirituality. His view of nature seems to be influenced by the Bible and Biblical teachings (Irwin, 1963). This relates it directly to the church and to the Transcendentalist school pioneered by Ralf Waldo Emerson during the first half of the 19th century.

3.4 The Gothic American Literature

During the eighteenth century, American literature witnessed yet another wave. Gothic literature or anti-transcendentalist movement concentrated on subjectivity and imagination. The literary output was prompted by the historical and social conditions of that time. Works of this genre focused on the dark, the scary, the gloomy and the mysterious. Its development is traceable to the mid and late eighteenth century Britain. It was a reaction to the ideology of enlightenment that extolled the virtues of rationality and human reason. Gothic literature creates feelings of mystery, fear, gloom and suspense. It generally deals with a variety of themes related to fiction and supernatural world and creatures. In most cases, this genre is filled with death, mystery and terror. It shows the dark side of humans and nature. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelly's *Frankenstein* and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Haunted Palace" and "The Tell- Tale House" are examples.

4.0 Conclusion

The American Renaissance started in 1836 with the publication of R. W. Emerson's essay, *Nature*, in 1836. This text had a tremendous influence on many thinkers of the time, and was considered as the manifesto of a new movement, that was soon called "Transcendentalism". Transcendentalism inaugurated the American Renaissance, giving it both a necessary impulse as well as its foundations. The influence of Emerson's book, *Nature*, lasted for several decades, until the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861, which made the USA enter another period. During the period of the American Renaissance, several genres emerged. There were novels, but also poems, short-stories, essays and what was called lectures or addresses. These were texts that

were written to be delivered to an audience, and which later on were published. Intellectual life, indeed, was intense in that period. And all this took place essentially in New England, and more precisely in and around Boston, which became the center of cultural life at the time. In fact, Boston was such a lively and attractive center that writers who came from other areas joined New England at some point in their lives, feeling the curiosity or necessity to experience the intense intellectual life that developed there.

5.0 Summary

The activities of a group of poets from Concord in New England engineered a distinct American tradition can be said to be the first of its kind in America. They called themselves the Transcendentalists. This group of writers took it upon themselves to define American poetry and writing. Their efforts were so significant that the period of Transcendentalism is often termed the American Renaissance. The Transcendentalists had loosely collected themselves at around 1836 in Concord. In line with the dominant Romantic inclination, the transcendentalists saw the individual as a microcosm in itself. The individual was considered one with nature. It is from this notion that the idea of the 'self' got a new connotation. This connotation was divested from its previously 'selfish' sense. Transcendentalists endeavored to transcend, to pass beyond the range of human senses and experiences. The Puritan values of New England where Transcendentalism was born and the American drive for a national identity both retroactively reflect in the Transcendental pursuit. For them, art was the aesthetic dimension of nature, and thus, was only natural to an individual. Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the forerunners of the Transcendentalist mode "In *The Poet (1841-1843)*" led the call for a distinct American style which he dubbed "American Milton". This style of poetry was to reflect the ways of America. Transcendentalism became a general term for:

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

1. Discuss the significance of Transcendentalism in the emergence of a distinct American culture.

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Module 2: Unit 4

Transcendentalism and the American Literary Renaissance

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 The Short Fiction

3.3 Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Development of Romance Novels

3.3.1 Plot Summary of *The Scarlet Letter*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will focus on the writings and genres of the American Renaissance. Emphasis will be on poetry, the short fiction, and the novel. You will study the themes and dominant style of this groundbreaking period in American writing. You will also study selected works of this period.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Identify the major break in the literary tradition of America from Great Britain
2. Discuss the influence of Transcendentalism on the emergence of America's renaissance
3. Explain the short fiction form
4. Discuss Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* as a romance
5. Explore the beginnings of women writings in American literature

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

During the Romantic period, the dominant question about American literature was would American writers continue to imitate the English and European models, or

would they finally develop a distinctive literature of their own? America provided a sense of limitless frontiers that Europe, so long settled, simply did not possess. The development of American writings, especially the novel coincided with westward expansion. The growth of a nationalist spirit and the rapid spread of cities reinforced the idealization of frontier life. Many Europeans had an image of the American as an unsophisticated and uncivilized location. But James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851) and other Romantic novelists who followed him challenged this presumption. Virtue, they implied, was in American innocence, not in European sophistication. Eternal truths were waiting to be discovered not in dusty libraries or crowded cities or glittering court life, but in the American wilderness that was unknown and unavailable to Europeans.

After writing two early novels based on British models, Cooper finally broke free of European constraints in his third novel. The novel titled *The Pioneers* (1823) explores uniquely American settings and characters. These were frontier communities, American Indians, backwoodsmen, and the wilderness of western New York and Pennsylvania. Most of all, he created the first American heroic figure: Natty Bumppo (also known variously as Hawkeye, Deerslayer, and Leatherstocking), a virtuous, skilful frontiersman whose simple morality and almost superhuman resourcefulness mark him as a true Romantic hero.

3.2 The Short Fiction

A new form of fiction evolved in the nineteenth century. It was exemplified across Europe and the United States. Anton Chekov in Russia, Guy de Maupassant in France, George Elliot and Thomas Hardy in Great Britain, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary Wilkins Freeman in America were forerunners of this genre. The short fiction featured both realistic and non-realistic stories. The realistic mode focused on scenes and events of everyday life. Ordinary men, women and children were the characters in such stories. Characters were developed more fully instead of representing one trait. The characters exhibited the complexities and contradictions of real people. Plots were structured to reflect the workings of characters' minds and souls and to depict their external actions. Settings were more detailed. Time and places were described in details. Although the themes of the stories suggested certain values, they were crafted in ways that encouraged readers to find meaning for their selves. Importantly also, the stories moved away from teaching one moral lesson in a direct and obvious way.

The non-realistic short fiction introduced supernatural beings, strange settings, or plot events that were unexplainable by the traditional laws of nature. The non-realistic short fiction incorporated virtually all the features of the realistic mode in terms of characters, setting, and plot. It also presented themes that encouraged the reader to speculate and question rather than accept a directly stated lesson. Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" are examples. In Poe's fiction, the narrator tells the story of demonic compulsion. It is a murderer's confession of how a black cat impinges upon the narrator's psychology and leads him to a total character change. A change that leads to the narrator to

‘accidentally’ kill his wife in an attempt to kill the black cat which had become a witch in disguise.

3.3 Nathaniel Hawthorne and The Development of Romance Novels

Nathaniel Hawthorne was born on July 4, 1804 in Salem, Massachusetts. His paternal ancestors were prominent personalities in the Puritan community. His great grandfather was involved in the witch trials of 1692. Hawthorne’s writings draw on the history of colonial New England and his native Salem in Massachusetts in the time of his early American forebears. He would grow to learn and see remnants of the Puritan tradition. He was also to experience the transcendental thought prominent in his region and time. He was skeptical of the traditions and scrutinized the moral and psychological implications in his novels. He is best known for his short stories and two widely read novels *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and *The Green House of Seven Gables* published in 1851. Puritan history provided him with the background for many of his later fictional works. They include “The Gentle Boy” (1832), “Alice Doane’s Appeal” (1835), “Young Goodman Brown” (1835), “The May-Pole of Merry Mount” (1836), “The Man of Adamant” (1837), “Endicott and the Red Cross” (1838), and of course *The Scarlet Letter* which was actually set in Boston during the 1640s.

Drawing from the American culture and colonial history, Hawthorne explores the Puritan culture in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) and in his short story titled “Young Goodman Brown” (1835). In depicting some of the cultures of the time, Hawthorne passes salient criticisms of practices and believes that were inherent at the time. For instance, puritan punishment for dissention was quite harsh. Exile, public ridicule, imprisonment, flogging, drowning, hanging, and even crushing under stones were some of the punishment meted out to sinners.

In 1692, there were the Salem witch trials. People with odd behaviors were accused of witchcraft. About twenty people were executed on conviction of being witches. Many more were imprisoned and tortured. Nathaniel Hawthorne's great-great grandfather, John Hathorne, was an investigator and judge in some of the witch trials of the time. His complicity in the trials would later embarrass Nathaniel Hawthorne. The writer’s concern and rejection of the practice are expressed in his novel, *The Scarlet Letter* and short story titled “Young Goodman Brown”. The works focus on the issues of sin, punishment, and redemption in the Puritan age.

Self-Assessment Test

What is the influence of the Transcendentalist philosophy on the emergence of an American renaissance?

3.3.1 Plot Summary of *The Scarlet Letter*

The Scarlet Letter is set in Boston, a Village in Puritan Massachusetts in 17th century America. Hester Prynne, the protagonist came to the New World to await the arrival of her husband who had business to conclude in Europe. Her husband is however captured by Indians upon his arrival in New England. This prevents him from joining

Hester in Boston expected. After some years of living alone in Boston, Hester comes to believe her husband is dead. She falls in love, commits adultery and becomes pregnant. She is imprisoned for her sin and made to wear a scarlet letter “A” on her dress. The highly skilled Hester embroiders the scarlet letter with gold thread. Before her release from prison, she is also forced to stand on the public scaffold where all the villagers could see her. This is to serve as public humiliation. It is also to serve as deterrent. The story actually opens here. This is also where an old man who is new to the village is seen asking members of the crowd about the person being humiliated. The old man is Roger Chillingworth, Hester’s long lost husband. Chillingworth conceals his identity from the village though he presents himself before Hester while she is in prison. Hester refuses to name her lover in spite of all efforts the religious leaders and magistrates exert. Chillingworth becomes obsessed with finding the identity of the man who lay with his wife. Then he learns that the man in question is Arthur Dimmesdale. Dimmesdale is a saintly young minister who is the leader of those asking Hester to name the child’s father. Chillingworth then proceeds to torment Dimmesdale. Stricken by guilt, Dimmesdale becomes increasingly ill. Hester herself is revealed to be a self-reliant heroine. She is never truly repentant for committing adultery with the minister. She believes that the act that resulted in her child was made divine by their deep love for each other. Although she is initially scorned, over time her compassion and dignity silence many of her critics.

In the end, Chillingworth is morally degraded by his pursuit of revenge. Dimmesdale is broken by his own sense of guilt, and he publicly confesses his adultery before dying in Hester’s arms. Only Hester can face the future bravely, as she prepares to begin a new life with her daughter, Pearl, in Europe. Years later Hester returns to New England, where she continues to wear the scarlet letter. After her death she is buried next to Dimmesdale, and their joint tombstone is inscribed with “ON A FIELD, SABLE, THE LETTER A, GULES.”

The genre of *The Scarlet Letter* is romance. Hawthorne himself qualified his work at the time he was writing it. Romances are concerned with internal truths, or “truths of the human heart,” as Hawthorne says in the Preface to *The House of the Seven Gables*. Romances allowed the author to deviate from reality in favor of imagination. Thus *The Scarlet Letter* is not an historical novel about Puritan Boston, but a romance set 200 years before Hawthorne’s time. He tells a story that may have occurred given some historical facts and many insights into human nature. Writing a romance about the past gave Hawthorne the freedom to present several versions of what might have happened. This is why after the death of Arthur Dimmesdale, several theories are submitted as to how the scarlet “A” came to be imprinted on his breast. The insignia could have been self-inflicted, or caused by Chillingworth’s magic, or a manifestation of Dimmesdale’s remorseful spirit. Hawthorne presents all three theories in a non-judgemental way. He is less concerned with how the scarlet letter gets there than the fact that it confirms the truth about Dimmesdale’s adulterous heart.

3.2.4 NATURE IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

A complex view of nature is presented in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. The nature in the Puritan society where the novel is set is luxuriant and alluring. The author writes that the sunshine which Pearl, Hester's daughter chases is filled with "splendor" (184). The moss in the forest is "luxuriant," (186) Hawthorne depicts Pearl as worthy to have been brought forth in Eden. She relishes the beauty and vitality of the natural universe. She finds pure joy in the warmth of the sunshine and the caresses of the breeze. The animals in the forest accept her as a kindred spirit, and she personifies the idyllic innocence of nature before the fall. The great black forest becomes the playmate of the lonely infant (204). In addition to the beauty and innocence of nature, Hawthorne finds comfort in nature's deep sympathy for mankind. The physical universe seems to provide solace and support to a Hawthorne character. The wild rose bush outside the prison door, persists and blooms in a hostile society "in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind" (48). This sympathy of nature is in sharp contrast to the harsh and unforgiving attitude of the Puritan society which provided punishment to any offenders without the softening effects of understanding. The forest also provides a haven of relief and new hope to Hester and Dimmesdale, away from the scrutiny of society. There, nature rejoices with the two lovers over their new freedom and recaptured love. Such use of the pathetic fallacy especially where Nature is concerned are numerous in *The Scarlet Letter*. It suggests the author's delight in the deep sympathy of nature with man's emotional being. For Hester and Dimmesdale the brook sings mournfully of human sorrow and the trees were melancholy "while one solemn old tree groaned dolefully to another, as if telling the sad story of the pair that sat beneath" (195). Nature was able to mirror this gloomy hour for the lovers, and they find comfort in the forest. When their despair turns to joy and hope, nature also reacts with a flood of sunshine. "Such was the sympathy of Nature" (203). Nature provides man not only with sympathy and understanding but also, and more importantly, with strength and life. Hawthorne is in awe of nature's vitality and power. He joyously recounts in his *Notebooks* the "infinite generosity and exhaustless bounty in our Mother Nature" (*Notebooks*, 162). It nurtures and supports mankind, providing an unending supply of shelter, water, and food. Even the warmth of the sunshine provides strength, and thus Hawthorne portrays his characters as dependent on nature for these essential gifts.

Indeed, sunshine especially has a deep significance to Hawthorne. Hawthorne's *Notebooks* suggest that it might have an even deeper significance. In 1843 he even considered it as the subject for a future short story. The streak of sunshine journeying through the prisoner's cell may be considered as something sent from heaven to keep the soul alive and glad within him. "God does not just live anywhere or anyhow on earth, without placing something of heaven close at hand (*Notebooks*, 97-98). The flowers and even weeds of nature are sources of much needed medicines for both the body and the soul. The energy and vitality of Pearl, a true child of nature, are two of her most outstanding attributes. Pearl, in *The Scarlet Letter*, is a true child of nature and is much akin to a streak of bright sunshine. The writings of Emerson argues that "moral law lies at the center of nature" and not in society (Emerson, P. 13). In order to discover that moral law, a man "needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society" (Emerson, p. 2). Emerson urges man to realize that his relationship to nature

is more beneficial than his relationship with society. He states that in the wilderness, "I find something more dear and connate than in streets or villages" (Emerson, p. 3). Nature, he believes, benefits both the senses and the soul. Emerson's goal is to have mankind enjoy a harmony with the physical universe. He argues that by developing a close communion with nature, man will be able, intuitively, to recognize philosophical and moral truths. He will recapture his sense of individuality and self-reliance. To the Transcendentalists, then, the physical universe has a beneficial, moral, and joyous influence on mankind. Surrounded by the optimism of Emersonian Transcendentalism, Hawthorne was well aware of nature's benevolence. He, like many of his Concord compatriots, was anxious to praise the beauty, purity, vitality, and fecundity of nature. He enthusiastically endorsed the idea of sympathy between man and nature. However, unlike other thinkers of his time, he could not embrace the overriding optimism of an entirely benevolent physical universe. He had complete knowledge of the world around him for that. In fact Hawthorne satirizes transcendentalism's eagerness to create a utopia by placing man in a pure environment without finding some means to "purify the heart of man" (Waggoner, 175).

Hawthorne does not consider man to be entirely pure, nor does he view the natural universe as completely benevolent. Consequently, *The Scarlet Letter* gives its reader a clear understanding of nature's beneficence. It also presents, at the same time, a portrayal of nature's mysterious double edgedness. Hawthorne recognizes that nature is capable of presenting mankind with beauty and ugliness, goodness and wickedness, purity and evil, sympathy and cruelty, all at the same time. Hester, too, was amazed at the idea that Chillingworth could find medicinal herbs and roots in the ground. She imagined that the same plot of earth would produce, after his footstep, "deadly nightshade, dogwood, henbane, and whatever else of vegetable wickedness the climate could produce, all flourishing with hideous luxuriance" (176). This duality is especially apparent in the forest. Though Pearl innocently and idyllically plays there, it is also the home, in *The Scarlet Letter*, of the malevolent Black Man who lurks there in anticipation of human prey. Pearl describes him by saying that he haunts this forest, and carries a book with him,--a big, heavy book with iron clasps; and ...this ugly Black Man offers his book ...to everybody that meets him, here among the trees; and they are to write their names with their own blood. And then he sets his mark on their bosoms! (184-185). The forest which can be a haven of beauty and inspiration is also portrayed by Hawthorne as "black and dense" (p. 183). It is a "dismal" place of mystery which leads to "intense seclusion" (187-188).

3.3.3 WITCHCRAFT IN *THE SCARLET LETTER*

In the novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, the issue of witchcraft plays a prominent role. The major character is depicted as having traits of a witch. Hester is characterized as a strong and defiant woman. She is thus treated as an outsider by the townspeople. However, unlike a true witch, Hester is not in league with the devil. Other than her instance of adultery, she is a righteousness woman. The characters of Mistress Hibbins and Roger Chillingworth are more associated with witchcraft as they practice evil.

Mistress Hibbins is a known witch in Boston. At one point, she attempts to lure Hester into signing the Black Man's book located in the forest. Hawthorne depicts in the novel that she will be executed for witchcraft years later. Mistress Hibbins is the only character in the novel expressly named a witch. Nevertheless, Chillingworth is associated with witches. This is because he does the devil's work. He learns the skill of healing from heathens whom the villagers think must have drawn him to witchcraft.

3.4 WOMEN'S WRITING

3.4.1 MARGARET FULLER (1810–1850))

One of the greatest women transcendentalists is Margaret Fuller. She was born in 1810 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was a distinguished early advocate for equal rights for her sex. For this, she is considered America's first feminist. Fuller believed that when it was fashionable for women to bring to the home "food and fire for the mind as well as for the body," an ecstatic "harmony of the spheres would ensue." Her father, Timothy Fuller, wanted a boy when she was born. He then educated her as one. She was home schooled until she was fourteen. This education was cut short when the family moved to a farm. Margaret Fuller had a sharp intellect and the stop in her education did not end her curious mind. She continued to learn on her own and returned to school when she could. Margaret Fuller and Emerson were among the founders of *The Dial*, a magazine devoted to transcendental views. She was a contributor to the magazine and an editor. She was a frontline transcendentalist who advocated for social reforms such as the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and the equal treatment of both sexes. She was an advocate for women education and rights to employment.

Her 1840 book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, centralized the notion of equality of men and women. She suggested that women and slaves had more in common given their marginalization. She wrote that while women may seem free, they were very much under the control of men. Women could not vote nor own property. Fuller opined that women must be given the opportunity to be more than appendixes to their husbands. She wanted women to achieve spiritual, economic, emotional and intellectual self-actualization.

Fuller also wrote poetry. Her prose were however much more than her poetry. Her transcendental views emerge as much in her poetry as in her prose. Prominent among her poems are "The Passion Flower", "Meditations", "A Maiden Sat Beneath A Tree", "The Highlands", and "Flaxman". Nature was central to her poetry. The search for self, a central focus of transcendentalism was also present. For instance, in "Flaxman", she writes; "We deemed the secret lost, the spirit gone,/ ... Absorbed in the creations of thy mind,/ Forgetting daily self, my truest self I find".

On an early May day she wrote that:

The trees were still bare, but the little birds care not for that; they revel and carol and wildly tell their hopes, while the gentle voluble south wind plays with the dry leaves, and the pine trees sigh with their soul-like sounds for June. It was beauteous; and care and routine fled away, and I was as if they had never been.

3.4.2 EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

Emily Dickinson was the daughter of Edward and Emily Norcross Dickinson, a prominent Amherst Massachusetts family. Her grandfather was a founder of Amherst College. Her father was a respected lawyer who later became a member of Congress. Emily Dickinson grew up in a household where her mother bowed to the wishes of her autocratic husband. Edward Dickinson also exercised strong control over his children. Neither Emily nor her sister Lavinia married. Austin, their brother defied their father and married Susan, a New Yorker whom their father thought was too sophisticated. Emily and Susan were to become fast friends and confidants. Their reclusive live style encouraged Emily's writing. She wrote many poems, six of which were published in her lifetime. When she died in 1886, over a thousand poems were found in a box. Her sister, Lavinia and her confidant and sister-in-law, Susan saved the manuscripts and published a selection of them.

Emily's poems confront questions of faith, mortality, love, and friendship. Her images reflect a connection to the mythical, transcendent dimension of life. While some of her poems reflect the opinions of the poet herself, they reflected her understanding of the concept of literary persona. Her works spoke of the 'self' as a 'supposed person'. In "If I can Stop One Heart from Breaking", Dickinson presents a persona in the quest for painless loving. Her works also showed innovative punctuation, capitalization and line breaks. In "Heaven" she writes of the goals unattained: ""Heaven" – is what I cannot reach!/The Apple on the Tree –/Provided it do hopeless – hang – /That – "Heaven" is - to Me!..."

Emily Dickinson was a writer ahead of her times. She was visionary and had keen understanding of the intricacies of the human heart, mind and soul. In "The Brain – is wider than the Sky", she writes about the capacity of the human brain as greater than the width of the sky, the depth of the sea, and only comparable to the weight of God.

4.0 Conclusion

Great achievements were recorded in the period of the Transcendental movement in America. This was caused by the development of alternative thought about the concept of self and the discovery of self. The focused drive to see the emergence of a distinct literary culture saw the birth of American literature which was a clear separation from the earlier writings that emerged from the new country. Genres and themes emerged. Women writers were recognized and their influence continued to impact writings till date. Radical thoughts such as gender equality and the abolition of slavery took root and influenced policies in America. All these culminated in the laying of a foundation for a literary culture that would blossom in the centuries that followed.

5.0 Summary

The development of American literature, especially the novel and the short fiction coincided with westward expansion. The growth of a nationalist spirit and the rapid

spread of cities reinforced the idealization of frontier life. Many Europeans had an image of the American as an unsophisticated and uncivilized location. This began to change when American, through the Transcendentalist mind set, forged a renaissance in their literary endeavors. With the development of a movement that was wholly American and genres that showed the American in his/her true form, the place of America was established in the literary world.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

1. Describe the influence of Transcendentalist views on the emergence of a distinct American literary culture.
2. What were the contributions of Margaret Fuller to the gender discourse that would later become topical globally?

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Module 3 The Development of American Literature from the Mid Nineteenth Century

Unit 1 The American Civil War Literature

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 The American Civil War and Literary Development
 - 3.3 The Prose of The American Civil War
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments
- 7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

In this unit you will learn the defining developments in America's literature in the latter half of the nineteenth century. You will learn how the American civil war influenced fictional and non-fictional writings. You will explore the ways writers used their works to define the war. Importantly, you will encounter how the post-war reconstruction led to the emergence of a realist literary tradition in America.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this course, you should be able to

- i. Describe the influence of the Civil War on American literature
- ii. Highlight the popular genres of the period
- iii. Discuss the role writing played in the process of the civil war
- iv. Explore the impact of the post-war reconstruction on the emergence of a new literary tradition
- v. Identify works crucial in the civil war period.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

One of the defining historical developments in America during the latter part of the nineteenth century was the Civil War. The war took place between 1861 and 1865 between the North and South of the new country. The cause was the controversy over the enslavement of black people. The southern part of America formed a Confederacy and advocated for secession. They wanted the perpetuation of the enslavement of black people. Secessionist forces struck in April of 1861 shortly after the inauguration

of Abraham Lincoln as President. It was the bloodiest conflict in American history. Over 360,000 American Union soldiers and 260,000 Confederates lost their lives on the battlefield or in military hospitals. Within a few decades after the war, however, the United States was assuming a new prosperity and developing into an industrial giant. Towns and cities sprang up from a massive industrial investment. An emergent ideology of success emerged. It celebrated the growth of American power and wealth. There was the spread of education and literacy. There was increasing technology which encouraged mass production. There was also access to market which was created by the railways.

3.2 The American Civil War and Literary Development

America experienced significant change after the Civil War and toward the end of the nineteenth century. There was increasing urbanization and industrialization. There was the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad and the advent of new communication technologies such as the telegraph. America began to emerge as a more unified nation as it moved into the Industrial Age. Immigration from both Europe and Asia increased and provided cheap labor to rising urban centers during the last half of the nineteenth century. There was a subsequent rise in the middle class for the first time in America. The economic, social and political landscape began to change. Women became more vocal. They argued for the right to vote, to own property, and to earn their own living. African-Americans too began to rise to social and political prominence. They called for social equality and the right to vote as well. Workers in factories and businesses began to lobby for better working conditions. There was the organization of workers into trade unions. Free public schools opened throughout the nation. By the turn of the century, the majority of children in the United States attended school.

The war produced considerable historical writing but no great fictional works. The Civil War was the largest crisis the nation had faced. It marked the fracturing of its unity. Yet none of the major writers of its generation participated actively. No great works emerged. What was produced was another kind of literary expression. Speeches, sermons, reportage, soldiers' songs and popular battle hymns and verses like "John Brown's Body," Julia Ward Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and Daniel Decatur Emmette's "Dixie," which tallied the combatants in the conflict. Many of these pieces of war writing have been lost to posterity. Some of the best prose written about the war was produced immediately following upon the war in the form of **realist prose fiction**. These included novels such as John William De Forest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (1867), Albion Tourgee's *A Fool's Errand* (1879) and works by Thomas Nelson Page and George Washington Cable. The greatest novel about the immediacy of the battle-field did not appear for thirty years. It came from a writer born six years after the conflict ended and who said he reconstructed the event from the football-field. This was Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895).

Within all these, American writers began to consider contemporary society and social issues for their writing material. They sought to create a new American literature that reflected American life and values they strove for a literary tradition which did not mimic British literary customs. They reacted against the Romantic style of writing which favored the ideal over the real representation of life in fiction. William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James wrote prolifically about the Realistic method, where writers created characters and plot based on average people experiencing the common concerns of everyday life, and they also produced their own literary masterpieces using this style. All writers in the Realistic mode shared a commitment to referential narrative. Their readers expected to meet characters that resembled ordinary people, often of the middle class. They depicted characters living in ordinary circumstances. Their characters experienced real-life struggles and, as in life, were unable to find resolution to their conflicts. Realists developed these characters by using ordinary speech that was commensurate to the character's social class. The character often drove the plot of the story. Characters in Realistic fiction were three-dimensional, and their inner lives were often revealed through an objective, omniscient narrator. Realists set their fiction in places that actually existed. They were interested in recent or contemporary life, not in history or legend. Setting in Realistic fiction was important but was not limited to a particular place or region. Realists believed in the accuracy of detail, and, for them, accuracy helped build the "truth" conveyed in the work. The implied assumption for these writers is that "reality" is verifiable. It is separate from human perception of it, and can be agreed upon collectively. Realistic writers believed that the function of the author is to show and not simply tell. Authorial intrusion was limited if not expunged. Realistic writers attempted to avoid sentimentality or emotional appeal. The three most prominent theorists and practitioners of American Literary Realism are Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, and Henry James.

Self-Assessment Test

Describe the significant change that took place after the American civil war Civil War. How did these changes influence literary productions?

3.3 The Prose of the American Civil War

As no significant literature was produced during the war, some works however emerged prior to the outbreak of the civil strife and after the war. These works contributed to the war discourse; they provided readers with some meaning to the violence in the country. They in some way influenced the interpretation of the war and directed the way(s) people thought of the fighting.

For many people, the Civil War ended slavery. However, the North did not enter the war with the goal of freeing the slaves. Rather, it was to preserve the Union of the country. The South on the other hand wanted to secede in order to protect the institution of slavery. In the North, the literature on slavery and emancipation played an essential role among the populace. It helped to promote the cause of abolition of slavery and to help Northerners understand the significance of emancipation when it

did arrive. Such works were tagged the **literature of emancipation**. They were integral to the literature of the war itself.

Harriet Beecher Stowe was one of the authors whose works is a literature of emancipation. Her fiction was significant enough to create international feeling on the issue of slavery. She was one of the many women writers who largely dominated American popular literature. The daughter of a famed Northern Congregationalist preacher, Lyman Beecher, and the wife and sister of many more preachers, she felt all the moral force of the abolition issue. She had never lived in the South and did not know slave life at first hand. When she lived in Cincinnati, she had contact with many fugitive slaves fleeing to the North. She turned her sentimental mode of writing to the moral subject of slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which first appeared as a serial in an antislavery weekly from 1815 to 1852. It increased in length as interest grew, and then came out as a book in 1852. It had extraordinary impact. It sold more than 300,000 copies in the United States and a million and a half worldwide, making it one of the greatest international best-sellers ever. Stowe followed it with the fictionalized account of a slave rebellion; *Dred: A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1854). It was an equally interesting, if less well-known, novel. She also published, *The Key to "Uncle Tom's Cabin"* (1853) to show that she had drawn extensively on abolitionist materials and slave "narratives" for the "truth of her story."

But like all books that change the world, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was problematic. The book unquestionably established black life from a white version of it. It provoked innumerable counter-versions from slave-owners who put out versions of contented slave life. These appeared in fiction in the next three years. For black writers, it had more complex and longer-lasting impact, as it depicted motifs, representations of black speech and black character, and stereotypes of black life. This was to shape future fiction and popular culture. The independent representation of the black in fiction would not emerge until the turn of the century.

4.0 Conclusion

America experienced significant change after the Civil War and toward the end of the nineteenth century. America began to emerge as a more unified nation as it moved into the Industrial Age. There was a subsequent rise in the middle class for the first time in America. The economic, social and political landscape began to change. Women became more vocal. They argued for the right to vote, to own property, and to earn their own living. African-Americans too began to rise to social and political prominence. The war produced considerable historical writing but no great fictional work. None of the major writers of its generation participated actively. Rather, what was produced was another kind of literary expression. Non-fictional works such as speeches, sermons, reportage, soldiers' songs and popular battle hymns were common. Works such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* however were seminal in understanding the call for the abolition of slavery. Slavery was a crucial issue that led to the war.

5.0 Summary

In this Unit, we have focused on fiction during and around the American Civil War period. Also discussed in this Unit is one of the key texts emanating out of the slavery issue and the Civil War. This is Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It is a significant work of prose-fiction that highlighted the fundamental issue behind the war. It also swayed the popular perception about slavery and pushed the ideology for the abolition of slavery. The post war scenario invariably led to the emergence of a realist tradition which will be the focus of the subsequent unit.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

1. Discuss the influence of the civil war in relation to the emergence of a realist literary tradition in America.

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Module 3

Unit 2 Development of Realist Fiction

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 Development of the Realist Novel

3.3 Characteristics of Realist Writings

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

In this unit you will learn about the realist fiction in American literature. You will explore how this mode grew out of a disenchantment with the romance. You will also learn about the early realist writers and some of their writings.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to

- i. Discuss the emergence of realist writing in American literature
- ii. Explain the reason for its growth
- iii. Identify key writers of this mode
- iv. Discuss the characteristics of realist writings

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

Classic American realism of the period between 1865-1900 did not come into existence as a violent break with tradition. It was also not a movement guided by a well worked out theory of realism. It equally was not supported by writers who were intent on writing novels that would stand as successful illustration of their own realist program. What stood at the beginning were rather interventions into the literary world of the romance. These interventions however had their cultural purpose. They served as literary devices to establish a cultural vision that evolved out of an advanced stage of American Victorianism. Briefly speaking, attempts in the mode of writing that later came to be called realism can be seen as symbolic strategies to influence the definition of American society after the Civil War. Reflecting the crucial role which the idea of civilization played for the self-definition, events in the 19th century such as the Civil War was regarded as a watershed in American history. The divided nation was

reunited; slavery, its last moral blemish, had finally been abolished. In the first example of American realism, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion*, John William DeForest suggests that the union between North and South holds the promise of a new America which now seems ready to enter a stage in the development of human civilization never before attained. This new stage, however, was still a promise; it had yet to become a reality. Outworn cultural conventions and a widespread persistence of foolish romantic notions prevented American society from realizing its full potential. It was here that literature was called upon to play a most important role as moral and intellectual stimulus that would convert readers to a full perception of the potential of American civilization. This would be achieved through realistic depictions of society. However, in what way could the novel generate a reading that would correspond to realism's theory of gaining knowledge? At first, the American realists seem to have assumed that it would be sufficient to expose the idle lies about human nature and the social fabric on which the romance based its effects. The potential of American civilization would then become self-evident. Common sense and common vision would prevail. Such a strategy explains, for example, the predominance of domestic romance such as courtship and marriage in the realist novel.

Broadly defined as "the faithful representation of reality" or "verisimilitude," realism is a literary technique practiced by many schools of writing. Although strictly speaking, realism is a technique, it also denotes a particular kind of subject matter, especially the representation of middle-class life. A reaction against romanticism, an interest in scientific method, the systematizing of the study of documentary history, and the influence of rational philosophy all affected the rise of realism. As Donald Pizer notes in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to American Realism and Naturalism: Howells to London*, the term "realism" is difficult to define, in part because it is used differently in European contexts than in American literature. Pizer suggests that "whatever was being produced in fiction during the 1870s and 1880s that was new, interesting, and roughly similar in a number of ways can be designated as *realism*. An equally new, interesting, and roughly similar body of writing produced at the turn of the century can be designated as *naturalism*" (5).

In American literature, the term "realism" encompasses the period of time from the Civil War to the turn of the century during which William Dean Howells, Rebecca Harding Davis, Henry James, Mark Twain, and others wrote fiction devoted to accurate representation and an exploration of American lives in various contexts. As the United States grew rapidly after the Civil War, the increasing rates of democracy and literacy, the rapid growth in industrialism and urbanization, an expanding population base due to immigration, and a relative rise in middle-class affluence provided a fertile literary environment for readers interested in understanding these rapid shifts in culture. In drawing attention to this connection, Amy Kaplan has called realism a "strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (*Social Construction of American Realism* ix). Realism was a movement that encompassed the entire country, or at least the Midwest and South, although many of the writers and critics associated with realism (notably W. D. Howells) were based in New England.

Among the Midwestern writers considered realists would be Joseph Kirkland, E. W. Howe, and Hamlin Garland; the Southern writer John W. DeForest's *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* is often considered a realist novel, too.

3.2 Development of the Realist Novel

The realistic novel began to find its way to the reading public in America by opening up new areas of subject matter that belonged to the lower and middle class people. The fictions of Mark Twain and William Dean Howells, who were perhaps the most well-read story writers in that mode, provoked often a humorous social criticism of the 19th-century American life. Henry James dealt with the realism of the human consciousness in a most subtle and eccentric way. After the civil-war, the writers with their critics and audiences started to feel interested in an exclusively American culture which would show the ways of life and thought that were native entities rather than imported products. They craved for specifically American civilization. One that addressed American thought and feeling. William Dean Howells earned distinction as a highly influential literary critic, championing the realist writing of American authors such as Henry James, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane (Galens, 2002, p. 248).

In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain takes use of the advantages of, among other things, the vernacular, point of view, setting, satire, irony, and innocence portraiture. He produces the tale of a young boy whose disrespect to overwhelming conventions helps the reader to envision a world where there is not only no inequality between humans but also no ignorance, greed, and cruelty. However, this story does not move from plot to character, for the author creates a picaresque story that is based on a series of extraordinary incidents undertaken mainly by Huck Finn whom the story exposes to various social worlds. The fact that the viewpoint of this young boy is the central perspective from which the reader has to look implies a decrease in the role of any kind of authorial omniscience. The reader has an occasion to look at the thoughts of Huck who writes his story in the first-person point of view. As well as a successful search for freedom, reading this novel is a process of interpreting the consciousness of a main character who has started to see the world in his own way. As Huck and Jim voyage down the Mississippi river, the reader can see them in moral conflict with the received values of their society.

Also, presenting the life of innocence in human society marks out Twain's realism (Kolb, 1969, p. 73). Integral to the mission of the main character is his escape from the overwhelming conventions of society and his attachment to the natural rhythms of life. The main character is an unsophisticated fourteen-year-old boy who is quite innocent and has no experience about the decadent life of the adults who believe that slavery is just. His "freedom ride" is for the eradication of whatever segregates man from man and puts one man in a socially privileged position over another.

3.3 Characteristics of Realist Writing

1. Renders reality closely and in comprehensive detail. Selective presentation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot
2. Character is more important than action and plot; complex ethical choices are often the subject.
3. Characters appear in their real complexity of temperament and motive; they are in explicable relation to nature, to each other, to their social class, to their own past.
4. Class is important; the novel has traditionally served the interests and aspirations of an insurgent middle class.
5. Events will usually be plausible. Realistic novels avoid the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.
6. Diction is natural vernacular, not heightened or poetic; tone may be comic, satiric, or matter-of-fact.
7. Objectivity in presentation becomes increasingly important: overt authorial comments or intrusions diminished as the century progressed.

4.0 Conclusion

Realism is so strongly associated with the late nineteenth century that it tends to represent the age. It has become a literary symbol of industrial economics and has been labeled by many critics as a middle-class institution. It is important to remember that any literary form is always working either in tandem with or against alternative forms of discourse. The socially conscious aim of realist writing does allow a comparison to other types of discourse with a shared ethical mission. These include sermonistic discourse and educational discourse. When critics evaluate realism solely as a narrative style or a mode of representation, they limit the possibilities for understanding it in relation to a larger cultural context such as competing claims to cultural authority. This limitation may be an inherent flaw in the history of literary criticism that ignores alternative discourses against which realist writers styled their texts. More precisely, it has proven to be nearly impossible to offer a consistent paradigmatic description of realism. The reason for this is that other important expressions of literary and cultural authority are overlooked in the attempt.

5.0 Summary

Realist writers of the nineteenth century grappled with a method of writing that purported to be both new and more truthful than previous modes of literary representation. This is a paradoxical classification because it assumes there are degrees of realness or truthfulness. These are categories that should be absolute. Realist writings are assumed to be superior literature which comes closest to representing the tangible world. Closely connected to the belief in the relative superiority of realist literature is the aesthetic implication that literature has a transformative capacity in relation to social behavior and ethical practices. Realists assert such literary authority by suggesting that the writer functions as a social scientist looking for truisms in culture. This is really an attempt to narrow the

conditions of certainty regarding that which is knowable. Such a claim shifts the philosophical focus of the pursuit of truth and knowledge from an intuitive grasp of the ideal realm to the immediate physical world and the experience of interacting with the world of objects and things. For example, when comparing the observational skills of the writer to the expertise required of the natural scientist, William Dean Howells writes: "But let fiction cease to lie about life; let it portray men and women as they are, actuated by the motives and the passions we all know; let it leave off painting dolls and working them by springs and wires" (Criticism and Fiction 104). In other words, realist writers began to base their literary authority on the assumption that what they produced was more real, more truthful, and more authoritative than the work of their predecessors, and they tried to develop literary paradigms that reinforced this ideology.

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

1. Discuss the development of the realist mode in American literature
2. List five American realist novelists and their works

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MODULE 3

UNIT 3 Naturalism in American Literature

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 Characteristics of Naturalism

3.2.1 Determinism

3.2.2 Objectivism

3.2.3 Pessimism

3.2.4 Surprising Twist at the end of the Story

3.3 Influence of Naturalism on American Literature

3.3.1 Jack London *The Call of the Wild*

3.3.2 Theodore Dreiser *Sister Carrie*

3.3.3 Ernest Hemingway

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

7.0 Reference/ Further Reading

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

Naturalism was first proposed and formulated by French novelist Emile Zola, the French writer and theorist who is known as the founder of literary naturalism. Naturalism is a literary movement that took place from 1865 to 1900. It used an advanced form of realism to discuss how social conditions, heredity and environment shape human character. Writers of the Naturalist mode are influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. They believed that a person's heredity and social environment determine his/her character. They also believe that heredity and social environment influence the actions of people. Naturalism was introduced to America by American novelist Frank Norris. It is a more extreme form of realism. It is a theory in literature that emphasizes scientific observation of life without idealism or the avoidance of the ugly. American literature naturalists dismissed comforting moral truths. They attempted to achieve extreme objectivity and frankness. They presented characters of low social and economic classes who were dominated by their environment and heredity. The ideas of naturalism pervaded the works of such writers

as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, Henry Adams, Theodore Dreiser, and Ernest Hemingway.

3.2 Characteristics of Naturalism

Naturalism is a harsher form of realism. The term Naturalism came from Emile Zola. It is believed that he sought a new idea to convince the reading public of something new and more modern in his fiction. He argued that his innovation in fiction-writing was the creation of characters and plots based on the scientific method. Skinnerian principles of learning through conditioning and the Darwinian hierarchy of the survival of the fittest are the underlying themes involved in shaping the human character. There are many defining characteristics of literary naturalism. They include:

3.2.1 Determinism

Determinism is the opposite of the idea that there is free will. In determinism, individual characters do not have a direct influence on the course of their lives. Rather, it is supplanted by a focus on nature or fate. As human beings live in natural environment, they can react toward the exterior and interior forces but are helpless before these forces (Lin Xianghua, 1989, p.528). Often, a naturalist author will lead the reader to believe that a character's fate has been pre-determined, usually by heredity and environmental factors. Such writer also depicts that the destiny of humanity is misery in life and oblivion in death and that he/she can do nothing about it.

3.2.2 Objectivism

Naturalist authors often try to maintain a tone that will be experienced as 'objective.' The author presents himself or herself as an objective observer, similar to a scientist taking note of what he or she sees. Of course, no human being can ever be truly objective. However, by detaching the narrator from the story he or she tells, an author can achieve objectivity. Also, an author will sometimes achieve detachment by creating nameless characters. This is more common among modernists such as Ernest Hemingway). This puts the focus more on the plot and what happens to the character, rather than the characters themselves.

3.2.3 Pessimism

Very often, one or more characters will continue to repeat one line or phrase that tends to have a pessimistic connotation. They sometimes emphasize the inevitability of death. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter. For example, Emile Zola's works showed frankness about sexuality along with a pervasive pessimism. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, sex, prejudice, disease, prostitution, and filth. The naturalistic novel offers clinical, panoramic, slice of life drama that is often a chronicle of despair.

3.2.4 Surprising Twist at the End of the Story

In naturalist novels and stories, there tends to be a strong sense that nature is indifferent to human struggle. Characters are frequently but not invariably ill-educated or lower class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion. Their attempts at exercising free will or choice are hamstrung by forces beyond their control.

Self-Assessment Test

1. Discuss any two characteristic of Naturalist writing.
2. Who is the father of literary naturalism?
3. Who popularized Naturalism in America?

3.3 Influence of Naturalism on American Literature

Influenced by European naturalists, especially by Emile Zola, at the end of the nineteenth century, a generation of writers arose in America. Their ideas of the workings of the universe and the perception of society's disorders led them to naturalism. This was a new and harsher realism.

3.3.1 Jack London *The Call of the Wild*

Jack London (1876-1916) was one of the most popular American writers of his time and regarded as one of the greatest naturalist novelists of America. He has been in the forefront of the move toward naturalistic fiction and realism in America. He has been deeply influenced by Darwin's ideas of constant struggle in nature and "the survival of the fittest. He shows his philosophy of naturalism completely in *The Call of the Wild*.

The Call of the Wild is a novel that is concerned about a previously domesticated and somewhat pampered dog named Buck, whose primordial instincts return after a series of events. One day he was kidnapped and taken to the north, where he served as a sled dog in the treacherous, frigid Yukon. The bad weather, the terrible Husky dogs, the fights, his dead friend and many things made Buck know he was surrounded by savages. There was no fair play. Only fight and war could help him. Finally, he began to master his new surroundings. His ability to rule and his great intelligence and good judgment were wonders to everyone. Then, Buck was sold once more. It was John Thornton who rescued him and became his new owner. But life was hard for Buck. When they lived in a forest, the Yeehats, an Indian tribe killed all the people, include John. Buck was very angry, and he killed most of the Yeehats. After John's death, Buck's last tie with people was broken. Finally, he was ready to answer the call of the wild. He ran with wolves, side by side with his wild brothers, shouting as he ran. He sounded the call of the wild. More and more cruelties made Buck realize there is no goodness and kindness in this world. There is only one rule: eat or be eaten off.

The environment plays a very important part in *The Call of the Wild*. The novel shows how the environment controls one's (here dog's and wolf's) life. Zola said: "I still hold my view that the environment plays a very important part," "When we research a family or a group of people, I think the environment has a chief importance (Zola,

1988, p. 476).” Jack London has a deep understanding about environment, so we can clearly see many expressions of Naturalism in *The Call of the Wild*. As an animal, Buck’s behaviors represent “the survival of the fittest. He made himself accustom to the new environment, so he won the right of survival. At the same time, Buck ensured himself the safety with his courage and wisdom in the severe north. As a symbol of human nature, Buck's behaviors indicated the extremely cruel and unfair humanity in misery and the hunger. He was struggling for his life. Facing trouble, to survive is the most important thing. From portraying the dog’s images to revealing the formation and development of the dog’s character, the novel embodies obviously genetic determinism and environmental determinism advocated by Zola. Darwin's theory of “the big fish eat up the small, the fittest survive is fully expressed through Buck's image.

3.3.2 Theodore Dreiser *Sister Carrie*

Theodore Dreiser was one of the outstanding American writers of naturalism. He was the leading figure in a national literary movement that replaced Victorian notions of propriety with the unflinching presentation of real-life subject matter. Among other themes, his novels explore the new social problems that had arisen in a rapidly industrializing America. Sinclair Lewis said in his Nobel Prize Lecture of 1930, that Dreiser's great first novel, *Sister Carrie*, came to housebound and airless America like a great free Western wind, and to our stuffy domesticity gave us the first fresh air since Mark Twain and Whitman.

Sister Carrie tells the story of a pretty small-town girl who comes to the big city filled with vague ambitions. She is used by men and she too uses them in turn to become a successful Broadway actress. The married man who runs away with her, George Hurstwood, loses his grip on life and becomes a beggar. In despair, he commits suicide by gassing himself in his hotel room one night. Meanwhile, Carrie achieves stardom, but finds that money and fame do not satisfy her longings or bring her happiness. *Sister Carrie* is a work of importance in American literature despite its inauspicious launching. It became a beacon to subsequent American writers whose allegiance was to the realistic treatment of any and all subject matter. With the publication of *Sister Carrie* in 1900, Dreiser committed his literary force to opening the new ground of American naturalism. His heroes and heroines, his settings, his frank discussion, celebration, and humanization of sex, his clear dissection of the mechanistic brutality of American society, all were new and shocking to a reading public reared on genteel romances and adventure narratives. Dreiser received a reputation as a naturalist. He cleared the trail from Victorian timidity and gentility in American fiction to honesty and boldness and passion of life. *Sister Carrie* was the first masterpiece of the American naturalistic movement with factual presentation of the vagaries of urban life. It depicted an ingenuous heroine, who goes unpunished for her transgressions against conventional sexual morality. Dreiser does not forget the basic principles of naturalism. On the one hand, the author says that "the world only moves forward because of the services of the exceptional individual". But on the other hand, Hurstwood is also a "chessman" of fate. Like Carrie, her success is mostly the

result of chance. Indeed, though turn-of-the-century readers found Dreiser's point of view crude and immoral, his influence on the fiction of the first quarter of the century is perhaps greater than any other writer's.

3.3.3 Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway (1899-1961) was one of the outstanding American writers with naturalistic tendency. His works have sometimes been read as an essentially negative commentary on a modern world filled with sterility, inevitable failure and death, which is just the view of naturalism. His primary concern was an individual's "moment of truth," and his fascination with the threat of physical, emotional, or psychic death is reflected in his lifelong preoccupation with stories of war in *A Farewell to Arms*, and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway's stature as a writer was confirmed with the publication of *A Farewell to Arms*, which portrayed a farewell both to war and to love. Hemingway had rejected the romantic ideal of the ultimate unity of lovers, suggesting instead that all relationship must end in death. *The Old Man and the Sea* centered upon Santiago, an aging Cuban fisherman who struggled with a giant marlin and sharks far out in the Gulf Stream. He ended up with a defeat that the sharks ate the giant marlin which he pulled onto his skiff's side and stabbed with all his strength. From portraying Santiago's images, the novel embodies obviously environmental determinism. Human beings can react toward the exterior but they are helpless before these forces, men and women are overwhelmed by the force of nature. Yet to Hemingway, man's great achievement is to show grace under pressure. The inside of Hemingway's books, is the spirit of the whole nation. He has great influence on his fellow authors, such as J. D. Salinger, Hunter S. Thompson, and Elmore Leonard.

4.0 Conclusion

Naturalist fiction in the United States often concentrated on the non-Anglo, ethnically marked inhabitants of the growing American cities, many of them immigrants and most belonging to a class-spectrum ranging from the destitute to the lower middle-class. Writers were skeptical towards, or downright hostile to, the notions of bourgeois individualism that characterized realist novels about middle-class life. Most naturalists demonstrated a concern with the animal or the irrational motivations for human behavior, sometimes manifested in connection with sexuality and violence. In America, naturalism had been shaped by the war, by the social upheavals that undermined the comforting faith of an earlier age, and by the disturbing teachings of Charles Darwin. Darwinism seemed to stress the animality of man, to suggest that he was dominated by the irresistible forces of evolution (Wu Weiren, 1990, p.8) The pessimism and deterministic ideas of naturalism pervaded the works of such writers as Frank Norris, Jack London, Theodore Dreiser and Hemingway. Their detailed descriptions of the lives of the down-trodden and the abnormal, their frank treatment of human passion and sexuality and their portrayal of men and women overwhelmed by the blind forces of nature still exert a powerful influence on modern writer.

5.0 Summary

Naturalism is an innovation in fiction-writing. It brought the creation of characters and plots based on the scientific method. Birthed at the end of the nineteenth century by Emile Zola, naturalism saw the emergence of a generation of writers in America whose ideas of the workings of the universe and the perception of society's disorders led them to naturalism. Naturalism was a new and harsher realism that took form from Skinnerian principles of learning through conditioning and the Darwinian hierarchy of the survival of the fittest as underlying themes involved in shaping the human character.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

1. Discuss the defining features of Naturalism
2. In what way(s) is Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution connected to Naturalist writing?

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MODULE 4

MODERN AMERICAN LITERATURE 1900-1950

UNIT 1: Modern American Prose

8.0 Introduction

9.0 Objectives

10.0 Main Content

10.1 General Overview

10.2 Samuel Langhorne Clemens

10.3 Earnest Hemingway

10.4 William Dean Howells

11.0 Conclusion

12.0 Summary

13.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

14.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

This unit explores the fundamental features of the American novel between 1910 and 1950. It explores the literary forces that led to the emergence and development of literary modernism. It also examines such ground breaking modernist writings. The unit equally highlights some notable modern American writers.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Discuss the major themes and preoccupations of the modernist era
- ii. Explain how the disillusionment caused by World War I and the modern industrial order facilitated the emergence and development of modernism.
- iii. Show understanding of the stylistic developments of modernism
- iv. List some modern writers and their works

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The socially and culturally emancipating years between World War I and World War II inspired ground breaking developments in American literature generally. For the

American fiction, it had suffered a slow and difficult start. The novel in the formal sense began at the end of the 18th century. It is perhaps natural that it should have been preceded by the chronicles of adventure, the sermons, the diary, history, the essay and verse. It is certain that when the first formal efforts at novel writing appeared in the century, it was at a dull moment in the history of the British novel. The first novel of full length written by an American was *The Power of Sympathy*, published anonymously in 1780. It has been attributed to Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton. The novel may have been written by William Hill Brown, a playwright and the known author of a posthumously printed novel *Ira and Isabella* but the evidence is not conclusive. *The Power of Sympathy* publicized the embarrassing account of the love affair between prominent Bostonian Perez Morton and his wife's sister. Such books served only to reinforce the moralist's judgments against fiction.

By the middle of the 19th century, American novelists began to turn from heroic depictions to the material of familiar life. There was a transition from an idealistic to a realistic presentation of life. Characters drawn from the humbler walks of life began to take their place as central figures. The tragedies of economic oppression were portrayed. At the same time, there was still the interest in romance and fantasy. This form often made use of realistic methods but its distinguishing quality lay in the unusual plots, powerful imagination and fantasy and the greatest names in the early fiction of fantasy were those of Mark Twain (Samuel Langhorne Clemens). Writing about The Great American Novel, Edith Wharton said that the scene may be laid in an American small town or in a European capital. It could deal with the present or the past, with great events or trivial happenings and it could be related to something greater.

Speaking of the American modern novel, the year 1900 is an important year as this was the year in which many changes happened and a new world was born. Great technological advancement changed the attitude of the people and transformed the whole society. Americans felt that the twentieth century was the American century and therefore they felt a responsibility for it. The early years of the century experienced naturalism as the dominant form while some hints of expressionism were also traceable. The second decade of the twentieth century experienced radical changes. World War I made many people and writers believe in decline of civilization. The American mind was under the influence of cultural disorientation and disorder. These reflected in works of notable writers as is highlighted in the next subsection.

3.2 Samuel Langhorne Clemens *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

Well known by his pen name Mark Twain, Samuel Langhorne Clemens was a great humorist. His novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been called "The Great American Novel". *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is another noted novel of Mark Twain. He was popular for his wit and incisive satire and was lauded as the greatest

American humorist of his age. He won a worldwide audience for his stories of youthful adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. *In Green Hills of Africa*, *Prince and the Pauper*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* are some of his famous novels.

Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is an adventure in understanding changes in America itself. The book is at the center of American geography and consciousness. It re-examines definitions of "civilization" and freedom, right and wrong, social responsibility and inhumanity. Published in 1885, the novel recounts those pre-civil war days when the controversy over slavery, with designated slave and Free states, disfigured the face of America and its view of itself as a land of the free. Both geographically and otherwise, the story is an examination of life at the center: the center of America's premiere river, the Mississippi in the middle of the geographical United States, with slave states below, free states above. This is the route toward freedom and escape for Huck and Jim. It is also the center of one of the foremost conflicts on American soil, slavery, which soon results in a civil war. It is the center of the coming of age of both a young man and a nation that struggle to understand redefinitions of nationhood and freedom, right and wrong; and the center of a shift from Romanticism to Realism in art and letters that would provide for a new way for Americans to express themselves.

The novel offers an excellent example of American picaresque fiction and meaningful use of dialect. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a profoundly important work in American letters. As Shelley Fishkin suggests in "Teaching Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*," "Mark Twain's consciousness and awareness is larger than that of any of the characters of the novel... Huck is too innocent and ignorant to understand what's wrong with his society and what's right about his own transgressive behavior. Twain, on the other hand, knows the score." The novel has stirred controversy since 1885, both as a commentary on American race relations, class divisions, and violence, and as an examination of humanity's social responsibility attendant in its pursuit of freedom. It brings to the fore discussions of race, conformity, slavery, freedom, autonomy and authority, and so much more.

This novel requires an understanding of the pre-Civil War slavery controversy, free and slave states, and the Mississippi River's division of East from West and North from South. The river was a primary conduit for people and goods. It will benefit you to read slave narratives, especially of those who escaped slavery via waterways. Examples are Frederick Douglass, Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs, and Olaudah Equiano. These oral histories offer a basis on which to consider the portrayal of Jim, a slave in Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, as well as the attitudes and life styles that surrounded slavery.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born on November 30, 1835 in Florida, Missouri. When he was four, the Clemens family moved to Hannibal, Missouri. This home would be the site of considerable tragedies for the family which would serve Twain in his future writings. These include the deaths of a younger sister and brother, and his father's death from pneumonia when Clemens was twelve years old. In Hannibal, he would also witness the ill treatment of slaves. There was also the violent behavior of

both civilized and uncivilized people, the economic disparity among these frontier settlers, and the religious zeal and hypocrisy coexisting in communities. Although Twain moved frequently and ranged widely in the world, it was his upbringing on the Mississippi River that played perhaps the most important role in developing his understanding about the power of imagination and of friendship in harsh circumstances.

After his father's death, Sam joined his brother Orion at the *Hannibal Journal* newspaper, where he honed his writing skills and learned typesetting. These skills led to his move to St. Louis and a job as typesetter at the *St. Louis Evening News*. From there, he moved East to New York City and Philadelphia. Although he traveled widely in America and Europe, he returned at the age of 24 to the Mississippi. This was where he received his pilot's license as a river boat pilot. This profession he incorporated into his novels and into his pen name, Mark Twain. He first used the pen name as a writer for the *Nevada Territorial Enterprise*. Although he enjoyed a fortunate life with his wife Olivia Langdon and his family, the early deaths of his four children would later lead to depression and anxiety. He died in Connecticut at the age of 75. In his works are the characteristic humor, realistic dialect, local color, satire, and humanitarian themes.

3.1.4 Earnest Hemingway (1899-1961) *A Farewell to Arms*

Earnest Hemingway was one of the most important and influential writers of the 20th Century. His fiction, especially his early work was dominated by two types of characters. The first type includes people affected by World War I, people who had become detached and cynical, yet emotionally strong. The second type includes simple, plain-speaking individuals of direct emotions. Death and violence were constant themes in Hemingway's life and writing. Hemingway received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *To Have and Have Not* are some of the famous novels of Hemingway. Hemingway's novels brought a great change in the art of storytelling and gave a new dimension to fiction. Hemingway belonged to the American Adamic tradition, with its commitment to the primacy of the individual, the supreme importance of the single, separate self. Consistently, for Hemingway, as for many earlier American writers, the essential condition of life is solitary, and the interesting, only really serious business, is the management of that solitude.

Hemingway is one of the many American writers who lived during World War I. He wrote a number of well-known war novels and the most famous of them is the war novel titled *A Farewell to Arms* which he wrote in 1929. It focuses on the effects of the war as a blow to human civilization. It calls to question the civilization human kind claims. The novel is based on the themes of war and love. He engaged irony to show contrast between the ideal and the real of the world of war. The war severely affected Hemingway and he became disillusioned and depressed. The novel is based on Hemingway's own experience as a participant in World War I. He enlisted in the war as an ambulance driver in the Italian army. He joined the army purposely for his own romantic notions about war. This novel remarkably reflects his attitudes towards war as the novel shows how he saw the war with all its ugliness, violence, insanity,

and irrationality. Besides giving an accurate account of the war, Hemingway gives an insightful description of the psychology of the soldiers. Tired with war and its irrationality, the soldiers begin to search for peace. He was initially enthusiastic before enlisting for war but he became depressed and pessimistic by the time he returned from the war. He was seriously wounded in 1918 at the Italian front when a large number of Austrian mortar shell fell nearby. One of his comrades died instantaneously and another one lost his legs. Hemingway lost consciousness as a result of the shock. After regaining his consciousness, he tried to rescue one of his injured comrades by carrying him to a nearby first aid dugout. During this course, he was shot in his leg by a machine gun fire. The effect of all these is captured in his introduction to the book *Men at War*: "when you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people got killed; not you. Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion."

Like many Americans in the pre-war period, Hemingway took World War One as an adventure and therefore; participated in it with great zeal. During the war, he saw the difference between the ideal world and the real world of war. The novel has Frederic Henry as its central character through whom Hemingway expresses his disillusionment with the war. As an American enlisted in the Italian Army, Henry goes through the horrifying experience of war. Observing the irrationality and absurdity of the war, Henry tries to escape from it in order to find what he calls 'separate peace' alone with Catherine Barkley, a nurse he falls in love with. He receives the worst blow when Catherine dies in childbirth leaving Henry alone in the world. Through the plight of Henry, Hemingway has tried to convey that an escape is not always possible in life. Peace can't be achieved in isolation from others. Hemingway advocates for endurance because he feels that life is essentially tragic. The theme of war in this novel is woven with the theme of love. War contrasts sharply with the noble emotion of love. In fact the novel can be called a tragic love story of Henry and Catherine set the First World War.

3.4 William Dean Howells

For Howells, realism was the appropriate response to the drastic changes taking place in America in the late nineteenth century. He believed that the writer who could achieve that realism could also be described as the creator of a truly democratic, essentially American art that captured the importance and the meaning of the commonplace. Howells was eventually to occupy a position at the center of literary life in America. Howells had pieces published in various national magazines. The first of his forty or so novels, *Their Wedding Journey* (1872) and *A Chance Acquaintance* (1873), made use of his travels abroad. These were followed by two fictions dealing with the contrast between Americans and Europeans, *A Foregone Conclusion* (1874) and *A Lady of Aroostook* (1879). With his first major novel, *A Modern Instance* (1882), Howells moved beyond explorations of manners to detailed and serious consideration of wider social issues. The novel is structured around the twin themes of divorce and journalism. Howells was the first novelist to focus on journalism, and developed the theme of divorce after attending a performance of a Greek tragedy. It is

a book on what would happen to a couple whose marriage gradually deteriorates. What is remarkable about it is the way that, in a strategy characteristic of literary realism, it links the personal and the political, the emotional and the social.

Howell's 1885 novel, *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, also demonstrates what he called the "fidelity to experience and probability of motive" that he felt was an imperative for the American storyteller. It also invites the reader to what he called "the appreciation of the common."

4.0 Conclusion

The social and cultural implications of World War I and World War II inspired ground breaking developments in American literature generally. The novel in the formal sense began at the end of the 18th century. By this century, American novelists focused on the material of familiar life. There was a transition from an idealistic to a realistic presentation of life. Characters drawn from the humbler walks of life began to take their place as central figures. The tragedies of economic oppression were portrayed. At the same time, there was still the interest in romance and fantasy. This form often made use of realistic methods but its distinguishing quality lay in the unusual plots, powerful imagination and fantasy and the greatest names in the early fiction of fantasy. Writing about The Great American Novel, Edith Wharton said that the scene may be laid in an American small town or in a European capital. It could deal with the present or the past, with great events or trivial happenings and it could be related to something greater.

5.0 Summary

The year 1900 is an important year for the American modern novel. This was the year in which many changes happened and a new world was born. Great technological advancement changed the attitude of the people and transformed the whole society. Americans felt that the twentieth century was the American century and therefore they felt a responsibility for it. The early years of the century experienced naturalism as the dominant form while some hints of expressionism were also traceable. The second decade of the twentieth century experienced radical changes. World War I made many people and writers believe in decline of civilization. The American mind was under the influence of cultural disorientation and disorder.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Discuss the influence of World war one on Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.

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Module 4

Unit 2 Modern American Poetry

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 The Inventions of Modernism: Imagism and Objectivism

3.3 The Poetry of Ezra Pound

3.4 The Poetry of Robert Frost

3.5

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1.0 Introduction

This unit is targeted at the development of poetry in America in the early years of the twentieth century. As the period when American poetry took off to push the bounds of English poetry, this unit examines the forms, trends, and major forerunners of the poetic modern tradition that took center stage at the turn of the 20th century. You will learn the major features of this age, encounter the distinguishing features that stood the poetic tradition of the age out and also study the works of two distinct voices of the age.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, students are expected to be able to

- i. Explain the growth and development of modernist poetry in America
- ii. Discuss the prevailing features of the movement
- iii. Identify leading poets of the age
- iv. Discuss the poetry of the leading poets of the age

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

American poets of the twentieth century pushed the limits of poetic composition hitherto restricted by other literary and social concerns. They began to ask fundamental questions about what poetry was and how it should be written. Was poetry the product of an interaction between the real world and the artistic imagination? Or was it a self-contained artistic object with little relevance to the world outside its borders? Was poetry an intimate speech act that linked the poet and reader in a private encounter? Or could poetry contribute to new forms of social and political awareness? The start of the Twentieth century saw the overshadowing of poetry by the novel. During the period from the end of the Civil War until World War I, the United

States experienced explosive population growth and a powerfully expanding economy. The nation was focused on matters that absorbed its immediate attention. It thus had little energy to devote to the cultivation of poetry, which was often relegated to the status of a “genteel” pastime with little relevance to modern-day life. The “Age of Realism” (1870–1910) was a high point in the development of the American novel. American poetry, on the other hand, lingered in the late nineteenth century, unable to enter the modern world or break with the conventional formulas and sentimental diction of earlier decades. This Modern poets have built upon and reacted to the profound legacy of Romanticism (both British and American)—its theories of the imagination, its conception of the poet's role in art and society, its complicated struggle with the question of how the mind, world and language interact, and its exploration of the status of art, especially textual art, in the world. Twentieth-century poets have grappled with how to “make it new,” as Pound declared modern poets must. The redefined how to reinvent poetic forms in an American way, how to write original, authentic American and modern poetry.

It is important to note that American poetry has had a relatively short history. Though poetry has been written in North America for over 350 years – since Anne Bradstreet first penned her verses about life in Puritan New England – it was not until the almost simultaneous appearance of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson in the mid-nineteenth century that American poetry began to rival European national poetries in originality and literary significance. Until Whitman and Dickinson, American poets were generally paler imitations of their English counterparts, and few of them thought of seeking an original language or form in which to express themselves until the turn of the 20th century.

The first generation of American poets to respond to this modern trend included Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings, and Marianne Moore. It was with this generation – all of whom published their first books between 1908 and 1923 – that the artistic achievement of American poetic writing was clearly established. Among these poets, Pound was perhaps the most strident voice for a poetry that would serve as a central expression of the new “modernist” aesthetic. In a 1912 essay, Pound declared the imminence of an American renaissance that would lift the country out of its “Dark Ages” and propel it into contemporary civilization. Such a renaissance was indeed to take place, largely as a result of the discovery of European culture by American poets. Those responding to American provinciality and cultural isolationism by leaving America for sojourns in Paris or London included Gertrude Stein, Pound, Eliot, Frost, Cummings, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Langston Hughes. While Stein, Pound, Eliot, and H. D. became permanent expatriates, the others returned to the United States, bringing with them an enlarged sense of European culture. American poets found a more receptive audience for their works in Europe than in the United States: the first books of Pound, Frost, and Moore were all published abroad, where the public was more pre-pared for writing that did not conform to conventional nineteenth-century norms.

The experience of World War I, which brought many Americans into contact with Europe for the first time, further bridged the gap between American

and European culture, and it prepared the ground for an international modernism in which Americans would play a crucial part. The war was traumatic not only for the soldiers in the trenches but also for artists and writers whose sensitivity to the effects of warfare made them, as Pound put it, the “antennae of the race.” In T. S. Eliot’s epoch-marking poem *The Waste Land*, he evoked a post war world in which traditional systems of belief and established social structures had been radically altered. The changed understanding of human society and human nature brought about by the war contributed to the large-scale literary and artistic movement known as “modernism.” As James Longenbach suggests, the war “presented a generation of judiciously limited lyric poets with an epic subject.”

3.2 The Inventions of Modernism: Imagism and Objectivism

The beginnings of Imagism can be traced to the feeling, common among young American writers in the first few years of the twentieth century. Poets were playing for safety and sentimentality. They committed to the belief that poetic ideas are best expressed by the rendering of concrete objects. They were joined, in April 1909, by the young expatriate Ezra Pound, whose own ideas about poetry had been outlined in a letter to William Carlos Williams six months earlier. They were:

1. To Paint the thing as I see it
2. Beauty
3. Freedom from didacticism
4. It is only good manners if you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly.

The 20th century imagists felt that the most important aspect in poetry was to present powerful images. These were what would immediately appeal to the senses of the hearer or listener. They were devoted to finding strong images and presenting them in the clearest language possible. Not every poem is an Imagist poem, but presenting images is something that nearly every poem does and every good poet wants to present. Imagists wrote in reaction to the perceived excesses of Victorian poetry. They criticized the haughty school which then pervaded and sought to bring poetry to the layman. The modern poet rejected the highly metaphorical and artificial poetic style in favour of a language which resembles closely the language of everyday life. Realistic by nature, modern poetry is characterized by the use of colloquial diction, speech, rhythms and prosaic words. Clarity of expression through the use of hard, accurate and definite images to convey their intellectual and emotional complexes is the aim of imagists.

Imagists advocated the writing style of free verse and sought out to free poetry from the domination of the conventional meter. Ezra Pound’s Imagist Manifesto was the most significant document which enabled readers to comprehend this modernist movement. The Imagist movement had a great effect over the conventional trend in poetry and brought about a change in the totality of poetics. The movement had been a joint effort of the British and the American, hence affecting the poetry of both the nations.

Among the poems included in the first Imagist anthology, published in 1915, was “O read” by Hilda Doolittle also known as H.D. (1886–1961). Ezra Pound describes H.D.’s poem as the supreme example of an Imagist poem. Imagism presupposes superimposing images on one another like a stack of photographic negatives. One image or perception leads into another and the reader’s imagination is actively engaged helping to make connections.

Instead of a story, in which events occur in time, or a process of logical argument, there is a juxtaposing of different images or impressions; and their interaction, the energy that passes between them, constitutes the “argument” of the poem. H.D.’s work suggests that Imagism could lead off in a number of different directions. One of these was Objectivism, associated in particular with William Carlos Williams, George Oppen (1908–1984), and Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978). The main differences between Imagism and Objectivism were a greater emphasis on the formal structure of the poem, its physical contours, and a more intense interest in its musical properties, the aural dimension as compared with the visual.

Objectivism grew dialectically out of Imagism – not in opposition to it but in fruitful tension with it (Hamilton, Ian, Noel- Tod, Jeremy (ed): 2013. 695). Both movements shared the core modernist beliefs of precision, exactitude, experience rendered rather than stated, the imperatives of organic rhythm and form. Objectivism was in some ways an extension of Imagism, though it sought greater complexity of thought and emotion than Imagism had provided (Beach, Christopher (ed): 2003.108). In his introduction to the Objectivist issue of Poetry in 1931 Louis Zukofsky claimed that their aim of writing poetry is “the detail, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody.” “The connection between Objectivism and Imagism was perhaps best articulated by American poet Jack Spicer in his Letters to Lorca (1957): “I would like to make poems out of real objects I would like to point out the real, disclose it, to make a poem that had no sound in it but the pointing of a finger.”

3.3 The Poetry of Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

Of all the writers of this period associated with Imagism and Objectivism, none revealed fuller commitment to poetic experiment – a greater belief in the need, as he put it, to “make it new” – than Ezra Pound. Pound’s commitment to poetry was total: to poetry as a craft, as a moral and spiritual resource, and eventually as a means of salvaging culture, redeeming history. Pound advocated that any linguistic form that may distract the reader from the image was unnecessary. As such, he did away with artificial poetic diction, superfluous verbiage, rhetoric, and transitional fillers. He called for the language in composing a poem to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. Any unnecessary word represented a loss of precision and a moral and artistic defect. The precise word should be used to convey the exact meaning. His criterion of poetry was that:

Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity (i.e. economy). There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions. It must be as simple as De Maupassant’s best prose, and as hard as Stendhal’s. (Herbert, 1969, p.36)

This showed that poetry should be clear, never blurred or indefinite, that concentration is the very essence of poetry, and that there must be no clichés, set phrases, or stereotyped journalese. The language should be of economy, precision, concision, and be characterized by absence of pretension, abstraction or didacticism. It should be of the right words in the right place and at a minimum of rhetoric. Consequently, Pound’s compressed words hinder some readers from full understanding. In his famous “In a Station of the Metro,” Pound excellently puts the theory into practice. Pound recorded how he came to write this poem. On a visit to Paris, in the metro he “saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then other and another, and then

another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion” (Kenner, 1971, p.184). Pound’s poetry left out all redundant words and used the fewest possible words to convey two accurate images, showing his insistence on the economy of words. His poem “The Encounter” serves as another example of concision of words:

All the white they were talking the new morality
Her eyes explored me.
And when I arose to go
Her fingers were like the tissue
Of a Japanese paper napkin. (Chang, 2003, p. 201)

As the pioneer of imagist movement, Pound abandoned the traditional poetic forms of the meter and rhyme. He argued that rhyme prevents a poet from depicting the image. This was to ensure that no necessary words may be included in order to make a meter, and a poem should be composed with the phrasing of music. This principle concerns a breaking from conventional prosody and the interrelationship between music and verse. For Pound, an elementary tool in the handicraft of the poet is the mastery of both the natural melody and the cadence of language. He wrote in “Vers Libre and Arnold Dolmetsch”:

Poetry is a composition of words set to music...The proportion of quality of the music may, and does, vary; but poetry withers and “dries out” when it leaves music, or at least imagined music, too far behind it...Poets who will not study music are, or become , bad poets...Poets who will not study music are defective. (Lander, 1971, p.16)

In fact, Pound’s natural bent has always been poetry should be sung rather than spoken. The music that Pound had in mind is real sounds in sequence, an actual melody. In order to achieve the effect of the musical quality of speech, Pound adopts the free verse, which is a form of poetry that refrains from rigid metrical patterns. For Pound, free verse is a poetic mode closely allied to the music. Practically speaking, this principle can be figured out from the poem titled “A Pact”:

I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman-
I have detested you long enough.
I come to you as a grown child
Who has had a pig-headed father;
I am old enough now to make friends.
It was you that broke the new wood,
Now is a time for carving.
We have one sap and one root
Let there be commerce between us. (Hu, 2003, p.312)

This poem does not consider either traditional meter or rhyme yet it attains a strong musical effect. One of Pound’s most prominent poetic feature is the focus on the image. To him, image is the dominant factor of poetry. Like many intellectuals of his generation, Pound endeavored to get away from the heavy logic of the 19th century and to find a new way to voice his emotions and ideas. He brought forward his theory of direct treatment of “the thing,” whether subjective or objective (Chang, 2003, p.159). He argued that the expression should resemble the “object” as closely as an art can make it. “Direct” means no fuss, frill, or

ornament. Without rhetorical description and logical explanation, Pound conveyed his ideas and feelings by making use of the juxtaposition of images. In “In a Station of the Metro,” Pound combines a sharp visual image of two juxtaposed images “Petals on a wet, black bough” with an implied meaning. Superficially, the poem is a description of a moment of sudden emotion at seeing beautiful faces in a metro. He saw the faces, turning variously toward light and darkness, like flower petals that are half absorbed by, half resisting the wet, dark texture of a bough. Yet, it is just by juxtaposing the two images that abstruse meanings are implied. Therefore, contrary to the traditional way of logical argument, which goes like following a thread, Pound adopts the technique of the parallel of two images to uncover his concern.

3.4 The Poetry of Robert Frost

Perhaps no American poets of the 20th century have received higher honors than Frost did. In 1957, he was awarded two especially coveted honors from Oxford and Cambridge. He has received the Pulitzer Prize for poetry four times. Along with Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wallace Stevens, Frost is now firmly regarded as one of the undisputed masters of modern American poetry (Layman, 1989, p.71).

As the contemporary of modernist forerunners, Frost kept himself away from the innovation going round at the time. He was very much influenced by the romantic predecessors. Frost’s work is characterized by plain and colloquial words. He asserted in *North of Boston* that “I am as sure that the colloquial is the root of every good poem as I am that the national is the root of all thought and art...” As such, Frost used vernacular, plain, and daily speeches. His poems enjoy more popularity with people of all walks, while Pound’s poems are more embraced by intellectuals. Due to his adherence to traditional meter and rhyme, Frost’s words are not totally of concision. In order to stick to the metrical pattern and rhyme scheme, now and then extra words need to be added. As a result, the effect of compression cannot be achieved as perfectly as Pound did. Frost adopted the free verse.

Robert Frost was drawn towards traditional forms. He wrote in free verse and the traditional meters were a necessary discipline. For instance in his well-known poem “The Road Not Taken”, Frost used a philosophical theme with the spoken words running through the whole poem.

He once said that writing without meter was like playing tennis without a net. Therefore, his employment of traditional verse forms—sonnet, rhyming couplets, and blank verse instead of free verse, was much typical of the 20th century. His greatest difference from other poets is this adherence to traditional poetic meter and rhyme, and that the perfect harmony existing between meter and rhyme inspires readers to think and imagine. In his famous poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” Frost clearly illustrates his opinion on poetic forms.

The poem consists of four almost identically constructed stanzas. Each line is iambic, with four stressed syllables. Within the four lines of each stanza, the first, second, and fourth lines rhyme. The third line does not,

but it sets up the rhymes for the next stanza. Besides, in the poem “Acquainted with the Night,” Frost also adopts the traditional poetic forms:

I have been one acquainted with the night.
I have walked out in rain-and back in rain.
I have outwalked the further city light.

I have looked down the saddled city lane.
I have passed by the watchman on his beat,
And dropped my eyes, unwilling to explain. (Frost,
1961, p.
324)

This rhyme scheme is: aba, bcb, cdc, ded. And each line is of iambic pentameter. Besides, “The Road Not Taken” consists of four stanzas of iambic tetrameter with the rhyme scheme abaab, which echoes with the traditional poetic form. These three poems, with the harmonious balance and unity between poetic meter and rhyme, give the reader a sense of rhythm and progress and illustrate Frost’s prosody. It can be inferred from the poems that Frost’s poetic forms are contrary to the modern poems, which stress the absence of poetic meter and rhyme.

4.0 Conclusion

The experience of World War I helped to bridge the gap between American and European cultures. It prepared the ground for an international modernism in which Americans would play a crucial part. The war was traumatic not only for the soldiers in the trenches but also for artists and writers whose sensitivity to the effects of warfare was affected. Traditional systems of belief and established social structures had been radically altered. The changed understanding of human society and human nature brought about by the war contributed to the large-scale literary and artistic movement known as “modernism.”

5.0 Summary

Poetry, as a conventional and an effective vehicle for people to express their feelings, has been occupying a dominant position in literature. With the advent of the 20th century, poetic innovation and development entered into a new stage. Many poets protested against the traditions of the preceding poetry and try to launch poetic reforms to express the temper of the age. Abandoning tradition became a fashion. The imagists, led by Ezra Pound, challenged the conventional poetic aesthetics and managed to find a new way for English poetry by shedding away the shackles of metrical form. Pound initiated the Imagist Movement and brought forward three main formulas for poetry composition. These are in the aspects of poetic language, poetic forms and thematic expressions; ie the rendering of images as the core of a poem.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assessment

1. Compare the poetry of Ezra Pound and Robert Frost in the three areas of language, poetic form and expression of themes.

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Module 4

Unit 2 Modern American Drama

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 Development of Modern American Drama

3.3 Expressionism on the American Stage

3.4 The American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

This unit examines the genre of drama in the early 20th century in America. It explores the features and trends that marked the development of the genre. You will learn about the major precursors of drama in the modern age. You will also learn about the major themes that dominated the dramatic works of the time. You will equally explore the dominant issue of the American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, students are expected to be able to

- i. Discuss the development of modern American drama
- ii. Identify the defining features of the period
- iii. Explain the factors that contributed to its emergence
- iv. List major playwrights of the age
- v. Discuss major themes of the age

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The 20th century is that century when American theatre knew a brilliant and a new start. It ceased to be a show, a spectacle and became an art. In the preceding eras of the 18th and 19th centuries, American theatre had not been well integrated in the national life as it had been the case for the essay and other narrative arts. The decline of the dramatic art could be partly explained by the situation of the New World. America was discovering its lands, renewing its frontiers and exploring its dreamland. The whole country was in the process of building a new nation. Consequently, the art of entertainment had little place as compared to more urgent tasks. Besides, the

Puritan mood with its mores and taboos had been undoubtedly representing a difficult obstacle to the flourishing of the most social of dramatic arts. By the second decade of this century, the growing prosperity of industry and commerce, and a substantial rise of the standards of living in little towns of agricultural states prompted new forms of entertainment for a certain parts of the population. By 1912, what was to be known as the “little theatres” emerged. These small theatrical groups were made up of amateurs who were inclined to stage and try out new kinds of plays, the shorter and simpler the better. Some of these groups are the Washington Square Players (1914) and the Provincetown Players (1915). The Provincetown Players performed Eugene O’Neill’s *Bound East for Cardiff* in 1916. This, indeed, marked the beginning of a remarkable era in the theatre of this country. There was the development of new themes taken from the field of social problems and psychoanalysis. This also gave birth to styles related to expressionism and radical realism. Another factor that affected the theatre of this period and even the succeeding periods was the opening of Dramatic Arts Departments in American Universities at about 1913. Such Departments produced actors, critics and even authors. They prepared technicians in laboratories, where decorators, stagehands, sound and lighting agents could learn their arts. Other actors and agents preferred to learn them inside troupes and amateurs groups.

Eugene O’Neill was the first representative of the American theatre. He did a great deal to establish the modes of theatre for the succeeding generations in the United States. His work illustrates one of the main trends in modern American drama. One of the major features of his work is what Marcus Cunliffe calls “the combination of drab prose realism and of boldly inventive expressionist technique.” This clearly accounts for the psychological depth which marks characterization in all his plays. On the whole, the American theatre – in these two decades – was still relying on the long-established conventions of the dramatic art. Slowly, however, it echoed the new trends of the European Continent and responded to the influence of such dramatists as Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptman, and Shaw. But things began to change on a quicker scale in the next decade.

Caught between the First War and the Economic Depression, years after the 1920s have been considered as the beginning of the “modern era”. This was when the consumer mind set and mass culture in America emerged. The United States was also due for a renaissance of the art and culture given the economic situation. Two of the artistic cultural manifestations are Jazz music and the theatre. The First War highly contributed to liberate the American stage from its regionalism and opened it to the European forms of theatre and drama. This partly explains why the 1920s were, on the literary level, marked and affected by Chekhov’s naturalism, Strindberg’s Expressionism and Ibsen’s realism. American playwrights wanted to establish an Ibsen-like psychological and visual realism, instead of the spectacle theatricality that dominated the American theatre so far. But they also wanted to show that they could create a homemade theatre, using American materials such as language, situations, settings, characters and issues. The Great Depression significantly acted as a cataclysm which shook most of the American playwrights. The harsh realities of the war conditioned them to have no time for comedy. There was no time for mere artistic

experiment with symbolism and expressionism. They could not also condone Freudian speculation about the individual and his neuroses.

The 1930s became a time of social protest, and for the young playwrights it was a time of commitment. Theatre began responding to the difficult economic and social situation by tackling social problems and trying to give the American society remedies of hope and pride. Thus, almost all intellectuals and playwrights were deeply committed to this cause, in a way or another. The others were either silent or living in an ivory tower. Many playwrights opted for more or less communist or leftist solutions. Some of them imported not only social and revolutionary ideas from Russia, but even a new method of acting. These included the Stanislavski System. This is the professional training of an actor which was highly praised and widely practiced on the American stage. This was literally and actually conquered by a host of actors and a galaxy of groups. Apart from Broadway, which had always been the home of musical comedies – a very American form – the other groups were mainly ‘agit-prop’ or left-wing ones.

3.2 Development of Modern American Drama

The term Modern American Drama is a title used to define some of America’s most influential dramatic work throughout the 20th Century. The sweeping economic, political, social and cultural changes that occurred in America began during this era of writing and influenced authors such as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and Eugene O’Neill to write some of the most influential plays that are still widely known today. These plays have distinct ‘features’ such as language, themes, style, characters and structure of similarity to each other, that allow them to be placed under the title ‘*Modern American Drama*’. It is these ‘features’ that heighten each author’s critical comments on American Society at the time of writing. Modern American Drama could be seen as works that comments on the authors view of the ever changing country and ‘American Dream’ using particular trends. Some of the widely known playwrights are Eugene O’Neill, Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Their plays like Miller’s *A View from the Bridge* and *Death of a Salesman*, Williams’ *Streetcar...* and ‘*Glass Menagerie*, and O’Neill’s *Long Days Journey into Night* and Albee’s *Zoo Story*, display many of the common features that can be classed as ‘trends’ of American Drama. Their plays also present through these ‘features’ many of the social and cultural changes of America.

American drama can also be known for its experimentalism in dramatic forms. American Drama would not be known as it is now for its different styles, characters and sets, without this shifting, setting it apart from the last decades of the 19th century American theatre; which had been largely given over to melodramas with naturalistic acting styles. Early Modern American Playwrights drew their influences from European constructs, such as those of Chekov; intent on representing life within drama in a more realistic style. Known as *Modern Realism*, it represented everyday reality in a style that would seem familiar to the audiences that came to see these new

plays. This style was carried throughout the Canon, and particularly became more popular during increasing social and cultural changes such as the escalation of immigration and poverty, women's rights, the Depression, Crisis in religion, the 'machinal' development of America and the continual strive towards the 'American Dream'. Realism had an influence on the American stage in this period, but mainly in terms of elaborately realistic sets. This realism is obvious in Arthur Miller's plays, particularly in *A View from a Bridge*. The set of the play shows all the realistic styles of a realist drama. For the social issues that Miller and other playwrights commented on within the period, such as family relationships and the American dream, a realist approach is best suited. As realism took a hold on American Drama, expressionism became another major part of the experimentalism happening during this movement.

3.3 Expressionism on the American Stage

This represents a critical phase in the development of American dramatic modernism. Expressionism was a style in which many playwrights such as Susan Treadwell, and Edward Albee used to portray the changing society of which they wrote. It allowed the expressing of the oppressions and troubles this new emerging society created, allowing the audience to look at it critically. Even Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller used aspects of the form, and, in doing so, they not only invented a new dramatic form, but re-defined playwriting from a theatrical craft to a literary art form. For instance, Miller's stage directions for his earlier play *Death of a Salesman* describe an expressionist set - a 'shell-like' and transparent family home with no walls. When the action is set in the present, the characters behave as though they are in rooms with walls. When the action is set in the past, they walk through the empty space into another space on the stage, giving the impression that the events on stage are like a dream. While *A View from a Bridge* had been essentially realist in its structure and language, *Salesman* avoids the naturalism that had gripped the American stage up to that point instead adopting the expressionist use of stage set as a symbol for the dream-like nature of Willy's life and everyday American life in general.

Williams's work followed the theory and practice of Brechtian theatre; also known as "Epic Theatre". This is another modern aspect of American Drama. One of Brecht's main theories was that the theatre's main concern was to educate, that "It is the noblest function that we have found for 'theatre.'" (Bertolt Brecht). From this he created the theory that a play should not allow its audience to emotionally identify with the action, but should allow them to self-reflect and make their own critique of the actions the play puts forth. Brecht ultimately wanted his audiences to use this critical perspective to identify social ills at work in the world and be moved to go forth from the theatre and effect change. Techniques to achieve this included the direct address by actors to the audience, which can be seen in Tom at the beginning who narrates. This can also be seen of Alfieri in *A View from the Bridge*. This theory, in terms of the expectation that the audience should want to make changes after watching the drama can be used to explain the aims of Modern American Drama. The social ills that are

represented in all of the plays published in this cannon, are ills of which most playwrights wanted to change. The illusion of the American Dream which only ever creates misery and the discrimination of women are some of the challenges the playwrights sought to address. This theme of the illusion of the American Dream is present within many works in the Cannon of American Drama. '*Reality versus Illusion*', it could be suggested, is an almost direct outcome from each characters constant struggle to achieve the 'American dream'. This theme shall be explored using Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*.

3.4 The American Dream in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*

J. T. Adams in the '*Epic of America*', (1931) describes the American Dream as "the dream of a land in which life should be better, richer, and fuller for every man with opportunities for each according to his abilities and achievement." Through America's financial and social difficulties during the 20th century, this concept was the dream or 'Illusion' for most. Within American Drama this dream is used almost as a warning to its audience suggesting that striving for it may get you nothing but heartache and depression. As David Mamet once stated, the American Dream "was basically about raping and pillage....we are finally reaching a point where there is nothing left to exploit...the dream has nowhere to go so it has to turn on itself." This destruction of the American Dream is seen within much of the plays written in the cannon. In Miller's *Death of a salesman* the character of Willy is at the bottom of the totem pole in a capitalistic world, he has and makes nothing. Willy built his life around dreams. However, to live by his ideals it means building or telling many lies, and these illusions replace reality in Willy's mind. Here the illusion is represented through the life of Willy – trying to live the American dream but he doesn't succeed so he begins to believe his own lies and through him so does his son Happy. The illusion wins over reality for Willy.

However through the character Biff, Willy's other son, Miller presents reality. It is Biff who finally breaks this reality to himself, his family and the audience. After discovering his father's affair, Biff "realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been," and begins to perceive his father as a fake. He awakens the audience and the characters to the destruction of believing in illusions, through his eyes. Of how the American dream, how illusion, cannot be achieved without sorrow. In a way the death of Willy Loman, could symbolize the death of this dream. Finally reality takes control, with the family and the audience seeing how Willy was not as 'liked' as he made out to be.

Various secondary characters achieve the Dream in different ways. Ben goes off into the wilderness of Alaska and Africa and lucks into wealth by discovering a diamond mine. Willy's boss and the son of Frank Wagner, Howard Wagner inherits his success without building anything himself. Bernard who seemed a studious bore as a child, becomes a successful lawyer through hard work. Willy's version of the Dream, which has been influenced by his brother Ben's success, is that any man who is manly, good

looking, charismatic, and well-liked deserves success and will naturally achieve it. Over the course of his lifetime, Willy and his sons fall short of the impossible standards of this dream. The real tragedy of the play is not that Willy fails to achieve the financial success promised in his American dream. What is a tragedy is that he buys into the dream so thoroughly that he ignores the tangible things around him. These include the love of his family while pursuing the success he hopes will bring his family security. By sacrificing himself at the end of the play in order to get his family the money from his life insurance policy, Willy literally kills himself for money. In the process, he demonstrates that the American dream, while a powerful vehicle of aspiration, can also turn a human being into a product or commodity whose sole value is his financial worth.

4.0 Conclusion

Modern American Drama can be described as a period in which America's writers began to flourish in their work, producing new and 'modern' dramatic pieces. However in exploring this period, it is observable that it is a compilation of experimentations in such forms as expressionism and realism. It also explores themes such as Reality versus Illusion, language that reflects the society of which they were writing of, and an exploration of social and cultural changes. One can state also, that the aim of Modern American Drama was to speak to a world in which the individual had been increasingly cut loose from the traditional anchors of religion, socio/political alignments, family relationships, and a defined self-image. Modern American Drama was a Canon of extremely emotional and compelling work which paved the way for generations to come. It is a crucial part of literary study into a world that was beginning to change and its collection of drama's help us to establish this.

5.0 Summary

The term Modern American Drama is a title used to define some of America's most influential dramatic work throughout the 20th Century. The sweeping economic, political, social and cultural changes that occurred in America began during this era of writing and influenced authors such as Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee and Eugene O'Neill to write some of the most influential plays that are still widely known today. These plays have distinct 'features' such as language, themes, style, characters and structure of similarity to each other, that allow them to be placed under the title '*Modern American Drama*'. It is these 'features' that heighten each author's critical comments on American Society at the time of writing. Modern American Drama could be seen as works that comments on the authors view of the ever changing country and 'American Dream' using particular trends. Some of the widely known playwrights are Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Their plays like Miller's *A View from the Bridge* and *Death of a Salesman*, Williams' *Streetcar...* and '*Glass Menagerie*', and O'Neill's *Long Days*

Journey into Night and Albee's *Zoo Story*, display many of the common features that can be classed as 'trends' of American Drama. Their plays also present through these 'features' many of the social and cultural changes of America.

6.0 TUTOR BASED ASSESSMENT

1. Use Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* to explicate American dramatists' disillusionment with the American Dream.
2. List five dramatists of the age.

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MODULE 4

UNIT 4: Early African American and Women Writings

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 African American Narratives

3.2.1 Harlem Renaissance

3.2.2 African American Poetics

3.3 Women Writers

3.3.1 Edith Wharton

3.3.2 Ellen Glasgow

3.3.3 Willa Cather

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

This unit focuses on literary works produced in the early twentieth century. It examines specifically literature of the United States produced by African Americans and Women writers. It explores how the economic depression facilitated the growth of African American and women writings.

2.0 Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Identify early African American and women writers in the national literature of America
- ii. Discuss the early writings of African Americans
- iii. Highlight major themes and preoccupations of the writers
- iv. List some important women writers of this period

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The Nineteen thirties which coincided with the Age of Depression was the age of unemployment, urban despair and rural deprivation. America's attention was drawn away from the world to the American himself. By the nineteen forties, America, the

victor in World war II was putting behind the Age of Depression and starting a new age in literature. Novelists tried to find new forms and cope with the requirements of the age. One of the prevailing notes in the fiction of the twentieth century was the assertion of the freedom of will. It was a freedom intensified by the lack of a society capable of restraining individual action with its forms. It was a rebellion against the restriction of personal freedom. It was concerned not so much with economic conditions as it was with the limitations imposed by traditional barriers of convention. Works at this period were not merely focused on the reflection of American life. They were also not for their sociological or economic or political associations, nor were they for rendering history that we read in literary works. Rather, they stood out for their imaginative re- creations of human beings in the art of living within a society. Each novel is justified in its own way and that justification is literary.

3.2 African American Narratives

The period of the Great Depression was a time of crisis. Among those who were hardest hit by the economic crisis were African Americans. Many of these African Americans had migrated northwards during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Even before that, many Americans saw race as the most pressing problem they faced. Certainly, this was true of those African American writers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, and James Weldon Johnson.

Washington was born in Virginia. He was the son of a slave mother and a white father. He saw “the agitations of questions of social equality” as extreme folly. Progress would come for African Americans through hard work, diligence, and thrift. He pointed out, because he had been “determined to succeed.” Washington’s explanation of how to achieve success and progress as an African American in allusion to his personal growth was a demonstration of that gospel and is reflected in *Up From Slavery* (1903). *Up From Slavery* is a slave narrative of a kind, at the beginning. But it more clearly resembles the Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, as it describes the rise of its hero from humble beginnings to fame and fortune – and prescribes the same route for other men and women like him. The narrative was an enormous success, becoming the most famous book by an African American for half a century after its publication. It formulated a myth of black effort and achievement that slotted neatly into the prevailing white myths of the time. It was a book that white readers could find appealing, because it was unthreatening, even eager to please. It was also one that many black readers could find attractive because it offered a measure of hope, however limited.

However, W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) offered a comprehensive criticism of Washington’s modest stance on black disenfranchisement as well as his emphasis on vocational instruction. In the first stages of his career, Du Bois devoted himself to the scholarly study of the status and condition of black people in the United States. His books during this period included *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America* (1896) and *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899). But Du Bois wanted to reach a wider audience. For him, racial prejudice was a national issue and an intensely urgent one. As he put it,

“the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of race.” And he wanted to make as many people as he could, black and white, aware of it. So he began to experiment with different forms. These included general studies of black people in the United States, such as *The Negro* (1915), *The Gift of Black Folk* (1935), and *Black Reconstruction* (1935). They included essays, poems, short stories, plays, and sketches, many of which were published in two magazines he edited, *The Moon* and *The Horizon*. They included a novel, *Dark Princess* (1928), and an autobiographical work, *Dusk of Dawn* (1945), which Du Bois described as “the autobiography of a concept of race.” DuBois’s activism led him to help found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, and to edit its magazine, *The Crisis*, from 1910 until 1934. But his most influential work was the one in which he launched his attack on Booker T. Washington, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois’s makes a provocative seminal account of the “double consciousness” of “the Negro.” This is a condition in which he, like all others of his race have been “born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world”: a world that yields them “no true self-consciousness,” but only lets them see themselves “through the revelation of the other world.” “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness,” Du Bois confides, “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others.” The African American “ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.” The African American thus longs “to merge his double self into a better and truer self,” a merging in which “he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost.” That, however, still remains mainly a longing because despite the end of slavery, the shadow still falls across every black man and woman in America.

Du Bois’s postulation on double consciousness was to exercise a profound influence on later writing. The notion of the “double-consciousness” of the African American found an immediate echo in the work of James Weldon Johnson. In his first novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), the protagonist suggests that “every colored man” in the United States has, “in proportion to his intellectuality, a sort of dual personality.” “He is forced to take his outlook on things, not from the viewpoint of a citizen, or a man,” he explains, “but from the viewpoint of a colored man.” This gives the African American a certain insight, what Du Bois had termed “the gift of second sight”.

The most powerful prose realization and his most influential work, was *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. The book was reissued in 1927 at the height of what was known as the Harlem Renaissance. It was to become a model for later novelists ranging from Zora Neale Hurston to Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison.

3.2.1 The Harlem Renaissance

The Harlem Renaissance was the first major burgeoning of visual, literary, and performing arts by African Americans concerned with African-American life, art, culture, and politics. Harlem Renaissance was an African American cultural movement of the 1920s and early 1930s that was centered in the Harlem neighborhood of New York City. This was a cultural and political movement of a time from the end of World War I and through the middle of

the 1930s depression. It was also known as the “New Negro Movement”. This name came from after an anthology, titled *The New Negro*. It was a collection of important African Americans works, published by Alain Locke in 1925. The movement was birthed by a group of writers and individuals in the district of Manhattan called Harlem during the height of the migration of African Americans from the southern parts of America to the north. This cultural movement marked the first time in American history that the white population took notice of the literature of African Americans. It became the period in which a group of talented black writers produced an extensive recognizable body of literature in the three outstanding categories of essay, poetry, and art.

The Harlem Renaissance or the New Negro Movement was inspired primarily by Marcus Garvey, the founder of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA); Alan Locke, the author of “New Negro”; and, W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of *The Crisis* magazine. The movement was used to express the pride in blacks which motivated many African Americans to celebrate their culture through literature and art. The Renaissance helped shape American culture, while adding its own elements to the American’s tradition. It offered new ways of seeing and understanding what it meant to be Black at this crucial time in history. The movement led to new styles of literature and new philosophical ideas regarding the issues that African Americans faced in the early twentieth century America. It captured political writings and jazz poetry and is synonymous with poets such as Countee Cullen, James Weldon Johnson, and Claude McKay. Langston Hughes was perhaps the best-known Harlem Renaissance poet. The *Crisis* magazine and *Negro World*, the newspaper of Marcus Garvey helped in publishing African American writing.

The Harlem Renaissance was also a time when poetry changed the lot of African-Americans. Langston Hughes was one of the leading black writers in that time period, and wrote many different types of literature. He wrote, and created a new literary art form called jazz poetry. For instance, his poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” centers on unity of the African American history. His poetry covered the issues faced by African-Americans with a combination of music, cheerfulness, and culture. He wrote in his essay “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926) that black artists should be able to express themselves freely as individuals. He advocated that an artist’s work should be looked at by the meaning and the quality of the work, not by what color of the skin of the artist.

Another writer African American poet who was a leading figure in the Harlem Renaissance is Countee Cullen (1903-1946). He also dealt powerfully with racial themes in poems like “Black Christ,” the story of a lynching victim who returns to life to speak of his ordeal. Through his poetry and books, he promoted equality, condemned racism and injustice, and celebrated African American culture and spirituality.

Although, the “New Negro Movement” has been over since, but the effects of the authors and words written are still generally known today. African American artists engaged culture to work for goals of civil rights and equality.

While African Americans literature has a foundation in Harlem Renaissance, some critics still felt that the Renaissance did not redefine African- American expression. For instance, Nathan Irvin Huggins, an American historian, author and educator, opined that Harlem Renaissance was a failure as both a cultural movement and even as a literary aspect. Huggins in his 1971 book *Harlem Renaissance* stated that “Writers tried to ford a distinctively Negro voice...the more artificial they became finding English or African forms and rhythms that surrogates for the styles of their own America experience.”[191] He also

questioned the exclusiveness of the movement to the nation's black population and postulated that black and white Americans "have been so long and so intimately a part of one another's experience that, will it or not, they cannot be understood independently." He argued further that the creation of Harlem "as a place of exotic culture" was as important to whites as it was to blacks and that African Americans had to be presented in a better light, in a way the majority of whites could not accept. He said "Even the best of the poems of the Harlem Renaissance carried the burden of self-consciousness of oppression and black limitation..." [192]. The basis of all criticism of the Harlem Renaissance is that it contains a certain aspect of deceitfulness because it tried to create a separate image that was based on common beliefs set up by philosophical and artistic leaders from a white society. Regardless of the criticisms, the Harlem Renaissance was a rebirth of African American culture in New York City. Literature from the Harlem Renaissance inspired many modern writers such as Alice Walker, Amiri Baraka, Maya Angelou, and Toni Morrison. It also provided a very important advancement in African American Art and Literature. In fact, the influence of the Harlem Renaissance remained strong for the remainder of the 20th century.

3.2.2 AFRICAN AMERICAN POETICS

Prominent aesthetics of African American writings reflect the culture of struggle, racial struggle. Imamu Amiri Baraka, one of the most radical of the Harlem writers defines the aesthetic of Black America in the poem titled "Black Art". Here he pursues the idea that African American writing must be tied to the liberation of the black people. Referring specifically to the poetic genre, Baraka opines that African American poetry must be that which is designed to kill. Such poetry should be tagged 'assassin poems', that is poems that shoot guns, 'that which wrestles cops into alleys and takes their weapons leaving them dead'. For Baraka, a society that is bereft of love does not deserve poetry of love but that of hate. The implication of Baraka's sketch of African American aesthetics is that such writers must be self-conscious, racially aware and must be able to investigate his origin, identity, and define himself within the white world.

Another important writer of the Harlem renaissance is Claude McKay whose poetic productions are tailored towards the radical aesthetic tradition of Baraka's 'Black Art'. The predominant focus of McKay's poetry is anger against the white world. In most of his sonnets, the focus in terms of theme and tone is on black-white conflict and the traffic of hate and anger. In the poem 'If We must Die', McKay stands as the voice of the American blacks with full determination to struggle for liberation and be relieved from alienation. The poem is a direct address in a militant form to black youths to take action against their oppressors. The "In the White House", the poet's description of the persona reveals part of the anger and tension of the poem. This is aside from the outright expressions of anger and passion for revenge which the poem captures. It opens with the imagery of exclusion as the persona states that 'your door is shut against my tightened face'. The contrasting imagery in the sixth line is reflective of his feelings of alienation: a savage on a decent street. Perhaps the most significant poem in terms of investigating the conditions of blacks is the poem 'Enslaved'. Slavery is addressed here both historically and contemporarily. The sonnet refers to the enslavement of the black population ensured through the most dastardly of acts ever recorded in human history -the traffic of men, women and children across the

Atlantic with a middle passage in the Caribbean. In a contemporary sense, the poem alludes to the continuation of slavery in terms of the sheer exploitation of black labor in the 20th century, the alienation of this set of people in a white dominated world, and the crushing of the psyche of blacks in a nation that proclaims itself as Christian. On another level, the poem reveals the exploitation of Africa and Africans through colonialism. This phenomenon of colonialism comes after the tragedy of slavery. It follows therefore that slavery and colonialism are linked as two forms of historical tragedy that crossed the African landscape. Africa is therefore depicted here as a place of dislocation, depopulation and plunder. McKay's attack on the white world is not only in content but in form. He brilliantly reverses the thematic focus and the tone of the sonnet genre from love, reflection, meditation, and calmness and substitutes them with hate and its accompanying tone. He reconstructs both Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnet forms retaining only their formal features.

Recent work in African American history and cultural studies has shown the connections between place and African American culture and an exploration of new ways to resolve place-oriented dichotomies like home/homelessness, rootedness/rootlessness, and community/isolation. Hughes is popular, particularly in his early years, for trying was to try to build a new and stronger type of African American community by reconstructing the connections between African American culture and place. This informs the prominent use of landscapes in his poems. The landscapes Hughes imagines, whether they are nourishing rivers that connect and strengthen communities of colour or mountaintops that black artists must ascend in order to be heard, work to unite the African American community. In "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" which is his first published poem and still one of his best known works, the river comes to stand for the common history and common experiences connecting people of colour in spite of distances of time and geography. A theory of racial community, a connectedness of all blacks irrespective of place or circumstances emerges in this poem. He describes the river as both deep and "ancient as the world". This may be seen as a symbol of rootedness especially as rivers are a part of the earth. The flow of the river which Hughes describes in the poem connects the ancient cultures of Egypt (the Euphrates) and Africa (The Congo and the Nile), with a post-emancipated African America (Mississippi). But while the movement of the river might seem the opposite of rootedness, Hughes brings the two characteristics together, that of movement and rootedness to create a picture of black culture that is both steeped in tradition (rooted) and vibrantly able to reinvent itself when necessary (Movement). Note that Hughes is not ignoring the historical reality of forced uprooting and separation that characterized African American experience (slavery). Rather, he emphasizes the solidarity and strength of communities of color across space and time, by emphasizing the global connections and cultural continuities between people of color. Hughes constructions of place in his poetry would be complete without an examination of Harlem and his poem of that name. Harlem is undoubtedly the cultural site with which he is most frequently associated. In 1921, at the age of nineteen, he arrived in New York City for the first time to attend Columbia University. But Harlem made a stronger impression on him than did the university

did. In his autobiography *The Big Sea*, he describes the sense of wonder he felt upon emerging for the first time from the 135th street subway station:

I came out onto the platform with two heavy bags and looked around. It was still early morning and people were going to work. Hundreds of colored people! I wanted to shake hands with them, speak to them. I hadn't seen any colored people for so long-that is, any Negro colored people. (*Big Sea* 81)

In this early experience, Hughes seems awed by Harlem, taken in by the idea of a genuinely African American city. Hughes and Harlem became strongly linked during the twenties as the place and the writer helped shape each other. From early in his career, Hughes's work was intimately connected to Harlem. As a young African American writer in the 1920s, he inevitably became associated with the increasing notoriety of Harlem, and his work, despite his own frequent traveling, came to be seen as representative of the neighborhood.

In "Dream Variation," Hughes writes:

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the bright day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes gently
Dark like me.

The night, so often associated with danger and fear, becomes in this poem a symbol of gentleness, of comfort. The "darkness" of the night reassures the dark-skinned narrator. By inverting prevailing myths about darkness, Hughes dreams of a place that welcomes and nurtures people of color. This place resonates with Harlem. Hughes constructs the neighbourhood as a promised land for African Americans. Harlem was that place that was not exclusive or set in its ways; rather, it is poised to become stronger and more robust for the diverse community that sought it out.

3.3 Women Writers

At the same time that African American writers like Washington, Du Bois, and Johnson were carving out new territory in black literature, a number of women writers were also establishing their presence in the prose form of the 20th century. Three major novelists: Edith Wharton (1862–1937), Ellen Glasgow (1873–1945), and Willa Cather (1873–1947) stand out. Each dedicated herself to the imaginative exploration of one or two particular areas of the United States. For Wharton, this was New York, for Glasgow the South, and for Cather it was the West and Southwest. They were preoccupied with the social and moral transformations they saw occurring in their particular corner of the nation. They focused on the clash between old customs and the new, that those transformations engendered.

3.3.1 Edith Wharton

The themes of frustrated love and unhappy marriage are common themes in Wharton's fiction. This may have been a result of her personal experience. She was

born Edith Jones into a wealthy New York family. In 1885 she married Edward Wharton, a man considerably older than her from her family's circle of acquaintances. The marriage was not a happy one and ended in divorce. She was in love for some time with another man, Walter Berry, an expatriate. Berry, however, made it clear that he did not want marriage, and she never married again.

Her first book, a non-fiction work, *The Decoration of Houses* (1897) indicated some of the interests and strategies of her later novels to the extent that it explored status and snobbery in old New York, and furnishings in particular and taste in general as a window to character. Her first full-length novel, *The Valley of Decision* (1902), was set in eighteenth-century Italy but which followed subjects closer to home. As a wife and hostess at this time, Wharton belonged to New York society. As a novelist, however, she analyzed its customs with irony. Her New York novels, which are her best work, present a changing society and an internecine conflict between an old, patrician upper-middle class rather like her own and a newly rich upper-middle class for whom traditional ideas of culture were losing their sanctity. They also consider, in particular, the position of women in New York society: torn as Lily Bart, the heroine of her first major novel, *The House of Mirth* (1905), is between personal desire and social law – the need to fulfill the requirements of the imagination and the need to make a good marriage. *The House of Mirth* was a popular success, but it shocked many contemporary readers because of its inwardness, realism, and inclination towards tragedy: in the end, Lily Bart dies from an overdose of a sedative.

In 1911 Wharton turned from a New York setting to explore the themes of thwarted love and failed marriage in a rural New England setting, in *Ethan Frome* (1911). But in both *The Reef* (1912) and the moral satirical novel, *The Custom of the Country* (1913), she returned to her fictional investigation of the habits and hypocrisies of the New York social world. Wharton's closest examination of old New York, however, and her finest novel, is *The Age of Innocence* (1920), set in 1870. *The Age of Innocence* tells the story of Newland Archer, a lawyer, and his involvement with two women: May Welland, who becomes his wife, and her cousin Ellen Olenska, the wife of a Polish count.

3.3.2 Ellen Glasgow

A Southern writer, Ellen Glasgow bridged the gap between the hopefulness of the Reconstruction era and the traditionalism of what became known as the Southern renaissance. As a woman writer, she divided her attention between affectionately satirical accounts of the Southern cult of white womanhood, in novels like *Virginia* (1913), and heroic portraits of women redeeming themselves through stoical endurance of suffering and stubborn labor in the soil, in such books as *Barren Ground* (1925) and *Vein of Iron* (1935). The stance from which Glasgow started her career was a simple one. This was to work from the premise that the old feudal order was decaying, in the South and elsewhere, and that the "plain man" was "building the structure of the future" that would replace it. From that premise, she developed two fictional strategies to explain its implications. One was the strategy of comedy: a

satirical inventory of the weaknesses of the “aristocratical” person, to show how “stationary and antiquated” he was. The other was more in the heroic line. It required Glasgow to concentrate her attention on the poorer white and the qualities, latent in his character, that appeared to guarantee eventual success – and this as a prelude to the presentation of his success story. The result was to create two different types of novel. Glasgow herself liked to refer to them as “novels of history” or “of the town,” on the one hand, and “novels of the country” on the other. Among the books in the first mode, along with Virginia, were *Life and Gabriella* (1913), *The Romantic Comedians* (1926), and *The Sheltered Life* (1932). Among those in the second, together with *Barren Ground* and *Vein of Iron*, were *The Voice of the People* (1900), *The Romance of a Plain Man* (1909), and *One Man in His Time* (1922). For all the differences between the two veins of writing, though, the same optimism managed to shine through them both and betray their common authorship; satire and heroic tale were equally shaped by the conviction that the small farm was about to secure the state.

At every stage of her career, in fact, Glasgow was very much as a writer of her times: someone writing of social alterations that affected her, especially, because she had been brought up when the terms “writing,” “career,” and “woman” were just about mutually exclusive.

3.3.3 Willa Cather

Willa Cather was born in Virginia. Only her last novel, *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940), is set there, however. And in 1883, when she was only ten, she moved with her family to Nebraska. Webster County, where they settled, was still on the frontier and there her father farmed for a year. But then, to Cather’s regret, the family moved into the small town of Red Cloud. Cather was an unconventional child, a tomboy inclined to dress in boy’s clothes, and she found the small town atmosphere stifling. To escape it, she went to Lincoln, to the University of Nebraska, and then to Pittsburgh where she worked as a journalist and then a teacher. She also found the time to write: a book of poems was published 1903 and then a collection of short stories, *The Troll Garden*, appeared two years later, showing the influence of Henry James.

Derivative though they were, they earned her a job on a magazine in New York City. She moved to New York in 1908 and stayed there for the rest of her life. Then, in 1908, she met Sarah Orne Jewett, who offered her the example of someone writing about their own home place: an example Cather followed in her second novel, *O Pioneers!* (1913). Cather had found her subject: the West, its life and landscape, its place in American history, the American character and imagination. She had also found, again with the help of Jewett, a way of writing, a narrative structure that was right for her. The novel, she decided, should be without obvious artifice, free from the clutter of well-made, highly wrought fiction. The writer’s best material, Cather felt, was there in the novelist, already molded. Although based in New York, she often returned to her imaginative home site to stimulate her imagination. *O Pioneers!* was written after a trip to the Southwest; and, after visiting the Southwest again in 1915,

she produced *The Song of the Lark* (1915), which is partly set in the ancient cliff-dwellings of Arizona.

Then, in 1916, on a trip back to Red Cloud, Cather visited a Bohemian woman, Anna Pavelka, whom she had known and admired in her youth. She found Anna serene and happy, and surrounded by children; it seemed to Cather that Anna's story ran close to the central stream of life in Nebraska and the West; and she decided to write about her. The result was her masterpiece, *My Antonia* (1918). A complex pastoral, *My Antonia* mixes its meditations on the past, American history and myth with a telling exploration of gender. This is a book in which a woman writes about a man writing about a woman.

4.0 Conclusion

The early 20th century was the age of economic upheaval in the world. This saw the rise in unemployment, urban despair and rural deprivation. As America's attention was becoming self-focusing, starting a new age in literature. New forms were emerging as literature blossomed in quarters that were hitherto unexplored. The assertion of the freedom of will as the society became increasingly unable to restrain individual action. It was a rebellion against the restriction of personal freedom. There were revolts against limitations imposed by traditional barriers of convention. Works at this period were not merely focused on the reflection of American life. They were also not for their sociological or economic or political associations, nor were they for rendering history that we read in literary works. Rather, they stood out for their imaginative re- creations of human beings in the art of living within a society. This saw the emergence of a distinct African American body of literary art which continue to influence writers till date.

5.0 Summary

Literary works from African Americans and women writers in America got a firm boost from the events of the 20th century. The rapidly changing socio-economic and cultural landscape was the primary motivator. The economic depression called into question the culture of limiting. The increasingly liberal society allowed the emergence of voices and art works which gave prominence to African Americans. Works of Langston Hughes among others could reflect unapologetically the heritage of blacks in America. There were the emergence of forms that were distinct to the people and these laid the foundation for vibrant literary art from African Americans.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

Discuss the contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois to the emergence of a distinct African American literature.

7.0 References/Further Reading

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Module 5 Unit 1

Unit 1: Postmodern Literature

- 15.0 Introduction
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the postmodern trend that became popular after the two World Wars. You will learn the origins and development of Postmodernism as the dominating idea of the latter half of the Nineteenth Century. You will also explore how this trend reflected in literature in America. You will study the defining characteristics of postmodernism.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Explain the concept of postmodernism;
2. Discuss the factors that led to the emergence of postmodernism in the latter half of the nineteenth century;
3. List and explain the characteristics of postmodern literature.
4. Discuss how indeterminacy influences postmodern literary works.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The term post-modern or postmodernism refers to cultures that come after Modernism. It refers specifically to works of art created in the decades following the 1950s. Postmodern literature is a form of literature which is marked both stylistically

and ideologically. There is a reliance on literary conventions and a rejection of the boundaries between high and low forms of art and literature. The term postmodernism was used in Latin-American literary criticism and in Anglo-American literary debates in the 1930s and 1940s. However, the main analysis of postmodernism got force mainly in the 1970s (Preda , 2001).

3.2. Understanding Postmodernism

Postmodernism is topical in a wide variety of disciplines such as art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology. The term does not have a clear-cut definition of its connotation and extension because concepts in social science and humanities are relative. The signified of a concept in social science and humanities is usually an idea that is scarcely definable. Secondly, since there are differences in their comprehension of the same concept, people constantly revise or redefine the concept only to enlarge its connotation rather than making it clearer and more exact. Of all the definitions available, some scholars believe that postmodernism refers to a movement. For example, Sarup (1993, p.131) describes it as “a movement in advanced capitalist culture, particularly in the arts”. Murfin (2003, p. 297) takes it as “certain radically experimental works of literature and art”. Postmodernism can be broadly taken to be a cultural phenomenon embodied in areas such as art and literature, which is becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society.

Although scholars disagree as to who originally coined the term, there is a general consensus that postmodernism likely first appeared sometime in the 1930s. It was used to refer to a major historical transition already under way and as the designation for certain developments in the arts. But postmodernism did not gain widespread attention until the 1970s. This was when the postmodern challenge to modernism infiltrated into mainstream culture. As the name suggests, postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launches under the conditions of modernism. Hence, to understand postmodern thinking, we have to view it in the context of the modern world that gave birth to it and against which it is reacting. (Grenz, 1996)

Modernism, as defined in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*, is a revolutionary movement including all of the creative arts that are rooted in the 1890s. This was a transitional period during which artists and writers sought to liberate themselves from the constraints and polite conventions associated with Victorianism (Murfin, 2003). Modernists endeavor to break away from traditions and conventions through experimentation with new forms, devices, and styles, and modern works reflect the pervasive sense of loss, disillusionment, and even despair in the wake of the First World War. With the affix “post-”, postmodernism suggests a time after modernism, or the future of modernism. It is a successor to modernism.

Modernism creates the conditions from which postmodernism grows. Postmodernism arose partly as a continuation of some modern ideas such as challenging cultural

forms and pushing back the limits of how people represent the world. Postmodern literature for instance preserves some writing techniques, the spirit and even some of the themes of modern literature such as the alienation of humanity, historical discontinuity and so on. In this aspect, modernism and postmodernism are intertwined and there is no strict boundary that distinguishes them. On the other hand however, postmodernism resists the modernist doctrine of the supremacy of reason, the notion of truth, and the belief in the perfectibility of man. Although scholars disagree among themselves as to what explicitly postmodernism involves, they have reached a consensus on one point: this phenomenon marks the end of a single, universal worldview. Postmodernism abandons the quest for a unified grasp of objective reality, and it asserts that the world has no center, only differing viewpoints and perspectives. The postmodern ethos resists unified and universally valid explanations advocated by modernism. It replaces them with a respect for difference and a celebration of the local and particular at the expense of the universal. Postmodernism also entails a rejection of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method, which has provided the intellectual foundation for the modern attempt to construct a better world. As its foundation, then, the postmodern outlook is anti-modern.

3.3 Origin and Development of Postmodern Fiction

Postmodern fiction became an influential literary trend in around the 1950s and the 1960s in Britain and the U.S. After reaching its peak in the 1970s and the 1980s it faded in the 1990s. Postmodern fiction was born and developed under certain historical and cultural background. A comparatively general understanding is that it is the direct result of the western turbulent social life after the Second World War. People were so shocked by the fascists' appalling ferocity during WWII that they started to doubt the social moral standard and values they had been holding all along. After the war, as the intrinsic problems in capitalistic society became more conflicting, people were more and more confused with the increase of social upheavals and they lost faith and loyalty, and became indifferent to others. The disorder in society corresponded with the rapid development of science and technology. This turned society into an accurate machine on which each person served a trivial part. Mass media and convenient transportation broaden the public knowledge and people started to realize that the existence of knowledge and objects depended on themselves and the relation between them, rather than certain eternal nature.

The development of technology brought about mechanical and digital copies of works in large scale. Reality and original texts began to disappear and the possibilities of imitations grew. While modern societies are constructed on the basis that signifiers point to signified, postmodernism only advocated that there are only signifiers. The idea of any stable or permanent reality disappeared. Compared with modern fiction, postmodern fiction challenges and disintegrates the form of fiction. Modern fiction emphasizes skills, structure and language, while postmodern works blur literary genres and break conventional narration. In contrast to the absurd meanings in modern fiction, postmodern fiction is meaningless with language games. Unlike the modern

writing skills such as interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness, postmodern skills include irony, pastiche and collage etc.

Postmodern fiction cannot be easily confined to a concrete definition; however, most postmodern works share some common features, such as plurality, centerlessness, language experiment and language game. These features generally fall into the principal character of indeterminacy. British postmodernist David Lodge (1986) believes that postmodernism exceeds and sublates modernism with its negative sense, and that postmodernism attacks the pursuit of determinacy of rationalism, holding indeterminacy as its intrinsic feature. Postmodern novelists think that there is no apriority or objectivity in meaning since everything is uncertain, centerless and incoherent. Indeterminacy as the essence of postmodernism is not only a mode to appreciate the essence of postmodern life, but also a writing technique. This indeterminacy reflects in the way writers abandon themes in their literary creation, because there is no meaning, center, or essence in postmodern works. Everything in postmodern fiction is on the same level so that no theme or subheading or even a topic is needed, and writers' attention is paid to the randomness during the creative process of postmodern production.

After Nietzsche announced God's death in the late 1880s, French theorist Roland Barthes followed suit and published his article "The Death of the Author" in 1967. This placed great emphasis on importance of readers' participation and cooperation in novel creation. Previous literary creations stress the author's dominance in the production so a novel is completed as soon as it is composed by its writer and readers will have to passively accept it. As postmodern fictionists believe, the work created by a writer is half done, and the other half is to be finished through reading and imagination of the readers. Therefore, closed texts are opened by postmodern novelists and the previously advocated explicit works are indeterminate with postmodernism. Themes designed by authors thus "die" with them, and the meaning of fiction depends on the understanding of each reader.

Furthermore, since postmodernists believe in the death of subject and author, characters in literary works naturally die with them. Therefore in postmodern literary works characters are vague figures or even images. This is captured in the novelle "Sindbad" in *Forty Stories* (1987) by the American postmodern novelist Donald Barthelme. Characters depicted by postmodernists are usually images or symbols that lack determinacy despite their human characteristics. In their works, postmodern authors either profess or imply that characters are artificiality constructed by letters. Characters in postmodern novels do not actually exist, but appear as ideas, so they are unknowable to readers. In contrast to characters in realistic novels that can stay vividly in readers' mind, postmodern characters are vague and indeterminate. In another typical postmodern fiction *V* (1963) by Thomas Pynchon, the disordered narration fragments confuse readers in terms of what on earth the letter "V" stands for. The "V" being searched for by Stencil is indeterminate of its identity. "V's" entity is even vague to the author himself as he states in the fiction that "There is more behind and inside V than any of us had suspected. Not who, but what: what is she" (p.53). It

seems that “V” refers to a female, but is she a real figure in the protagonist’s life or is she simply his fantasy? The answer cannot be traced in this postmodern novel, and readers have to depend on their own intelligence and endow the characters with some real meanings.

This indeterminacy reflects also in the plot. Postmodern fictionists oppose logic, coherence, and closeness in plot arrangement and they believe that close structure that has coherent meaning, characters’ logical movements and integrated plot is merely writers’ own wishful thinking, instead of something based on real life. So such a close structure should be broken and replaced by an open framework, and postmodern writers abandon logic and coherence during the process of novel creation only to permute historical time, present time and future time. With past, present and future randomly reversed and space constantly divided and severed, there arise various infinite possibilities in plot of postmodern literary works. Donald Barthelme’s short story “The Explanation” in *Forty Sotries* (1987) is structured with an open plot and the skill of juxtaposing multi-closures. At the beginning, four hollow panes introduce a series of questions and answers that develop into closures of all sorts. Bounds of time or space are thoroughly broken since there is no evidence in the fiction that hint the time when or place where the dialogues take place. The conversations between the unknown speakers are themeless and the topics involving various aspects of postmodern life range from literature to arts, love, trees, books, narrative strategies or to travel, football matches etc. Traditional story mode of outset, complex, climax and denouement is abandoned in this novel and its plot is arranged randomly as a postmodern uncertainty.

In language use also, postmodernists aim at dispelling reality and creating a new world with the sole tool of language. They do not take up the responsibility of reflecting a real world; instead, they regard novel creation itself as reality and construct a disordered world with words. In the postmodern classic *V* mentioned previously, the language game reaches its peak through the use of the mysterious letter “V”. It may stand for the female character Victoria, or any of the other characters in the fiction whose names start with the letter “V”. It may also refer to the series of “V”-started appellations including a country, a street, an article and so on. Pynchon is playing language game with readers, so the world of “V”, as well as the language in this fiction, becomes indeterminate.

Self-Assessment Exercise

How does indeterminacy influence postmodern writings?

3.4 Characteristics of Postmodern Writings

a. Postmodern writers play with the material that their works are made of. Postmodernist writers freely use all the challenging experimental literary techniques developed by the modernists earlier in the twentieth century as well as new, even more experimental techniques of their own invention. In fiction, many postmodernist authors adopt the self-referential style termed “**metafiction**”. This is a story that is

written in the process of telling a story (narrative) as it is about describing characters and events (descriptive).

b. The stories that make up history itself are often a playground for postmodernist authors. They take material found in history books and weave it into new tales that reveal secret histories and dimly perceived conspiracies.

c. Postmodern writers often play with popular sub-genres such as the detective story, horror, and science fiction. For example, in her poem “Diving into the Wreck,” Adrienne Rich evokes both the detective story and science fiction as she imagines a futuristic diver visiting a deep sea wreck in order to solve the mystery of why literature and history have been mostly about men and not women.

d. Not all works of postmodern literature are stylistically experimental or playful. Rather, their authors explore the meaning and value of postmodernity as a cultural condition. Several philosophers and literary critics have helped in understanding what the postmodern condition may be. “Poststructuralist” philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard have argued that words and texts do not reflect the world but instead exist as their own self-referential systems, containing and even creating the world they describe. When we perceive the world, Derrida’s philosophy of “deconstruction” claims, we see not things but “signs” that can be understood only through their relation to other signs. “There is no outside the text,” Derrida famously claimed in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967). In this way, words and books and texts are powerful things, for in them our world itself is created—an insight that many postmodernist creative writers share. Baudrillard, in turn, argues in his book, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), that the real world has been filled up with and even replaced by simulations that we now treat as reality: simulacra.

e. Postmodernism encourages skepticism towards the universal claims or narratives that have been called unifying. These have organized culture since the time of the Enlightenment. History thus becomes a field of competing perspectives. The self also becomes a hybrid concept that has multiple identities. This much Jean Francois Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). There he argues that the world is now perceived through smaller micro-narratives that don’t all fit together into a greater coherent whole. These smaller micro-narratives are what account for the diverse perspectives and insights in feminist and multicultural American literature of this era. The writers of this era write from their subjective points of view rather than presuming to represent the sum total of all American experiences. Their works show that American history contains dissimilar experiences for all Americans. For example, both Sylvia Plath and Theodore Roethke poems about their fathers reflect

their appreciation of their respective fathers which is shaped by both their genders and their own personal histories. While Roethke feels a kinship with his father, Plath however sees her father as an enemy. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, in their stories, explore the hybrid nature of African-American identity itself, showing us the tensions that arise when one's identity is both American and black.

f. Postmodernism, as an experimental literature, presents readers not with many ways to know the world. Rather, it allows the creation of many worlds created in many different works. As Modernist authors strove to devise new techniques with which to accurately represent the world, Postmodernist authors, are concerned with creating many literary worlds that represent a diversity of experiences.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Indeterminacy has always been a typical and significant feature of postmodern writing. It brings each and every existence into skepticism that permeates through actions and thinking in the ways the world is constructed. Overthrowing authorial authoritative legacy, indeterminacy in postmodern literature advocates a revolt to traditional writing styles, such as a definite theme or meaning, integrated plot of a story and so on. Postmodern novelists think that there is no apriority or objectivity in meaning since everything is uncertain, centerless and incoherent. Indeterminacy as the essence of postmodernism is not only a mode to appreciate the essence of postmodern life, but also a writing technique. This indeterminacy reflects in the way writers abandon themes in their literary creation, because there is no meaning, center, or essence in postmodern works. Everything in postmodern fiction is on the same level so that no theme or subheading or even a topic is needed, and writers' attention is paid to the randomness during the creative process of postmodern production.

5.0 Summary

Postmodernism can be broadly taken to be a cultural phenomenon embodied in areas such as art and literature, which is becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society after the World Wars. Postmodernism signifies the quest to move beyond modernism. Specifically, it involves a rejection of the modern mind-set, but launches under the conditions of modernism. Most postmodern works share some common features, such as plurality, centerlessness, language experiment and language game. These features generally fall into the principal character of indeterminacy. Postmodern novelists think that there is no apriority or objectivity in meaning since everything is uncertain, centerless and incoherent. Indeterminacy as the essence of postmodernism is not only a mode to appreciate the essence of postmodern life, but also a writing technique. This indeterminacy reflects in the way writers abandon themes in their literary creation, because there is no meaning, center, or essence in postmodern works.

Everything in postmodern fiction is on the same level so that no theme or subheading or even a topic is needed, and writers' attention is paid to the randomness during the creative process of postmodern production. Importantly too, the work created by a writer is half done, and the other half is to be finished through reading and imagination of the readers. Themes designed by authors thus "die" with them, and the meaning of fiction depends on the understanding of each reader.

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

1. Discuss how indeterminacy influences postmodern literary writings.
2. Explain the major characteristic of postmodern writings

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Module 5

Unit 2: The Beat Generation

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 The Beat Generation

3.3 Beat Influence on Literary Tradition

3.3.1 Allen Ginsberg (1926-1970)

3.3.2 Gregory Corso

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

7.0 References/ Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study the dominating literary development of the 1950s which corresponds with the post-World War. You will read broadly about the Beat Generation and their influence on American Literature. You will also learn how they resisted cultural conformity and experimented with writing strategies. You will equally study some of the leading Beat poets such as Allen Ginsberg and Gregory Corso.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Discuss postmodern experimental American literature written during the post-1945 period and up through the 1960s in terms of genres, authors, styles, and concerns;

- ii. List major contributors to the emergence of the Beat literary tradition;
- iii. Explain the influence of the Beat generation of American literature
- iv. Discuss some Beat poems

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 General Overview

3.2 The Beat Generation

During the 1950s a group of experimental American writers living in New York City (and later San Francisco) began to publish literary works. These works depicted an underground of alienated restless characters who celebrated freedom of expression, wanderlust, and the search for euphoria of body and mind in stream-of consciousness narration. They challenged all the traditional values and became a most important force in questioning and denying traditional cultural values after World War II. This Beat literary 'school' would expand into a cultural movement that was predecessor to the counter-culture hippies of the Sixties and punks of the Seventies, not to mention the developing civil and equal rights movements, among others. The Beat movement was spearheaded by three men in particular: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs. These three writers all wrote works that challenged the term "literature" in mid-20th century America. Kerouac's *On the Road* sent a thousand teenagers hitchhiking across America in search of the "IT" that is the soul of America. Ginsberg's *Howl* is considered "the poem that changed America" (Shinder 3) through its confessional tribute to his friends whom he considered the "best minds of my generation" (Ginsberg, *Poems* 57). William S. Burroughs' *Naked Lunch* is considered the "novel that destroyed the novel" (R. Johnson Interview) by giving a brutal look at a junkie's world and offering a scathing criticism of America at the same time. In fact, both *Howl* in 1956 and *Naked Lunch* in 1965 faced obscenity charges and were put on trial to determine if they were actually "literature." In the end, two different state courts did not consider these texts obscene and the barrier between obscenity and literature was forever blurred. This verdict led to a wave of publications that challenged America's view of drugs, sexuality, and social consciousness.

Largely perceived as a 'fraternity' of male voices, the Beat movement did include many women writers and participants whose involvement was not fully documented until the women's movement introduced revisionist histories. The phrase "Beat Generation" was invented by Jack Kerouac in 1948. The phrase was introduced to the public in 1952 when Kerouac's friend John Clellon Holmes wrote an article "This is the Beat Generation" for the New York Times Magazine. The word "beat" refers in part to beatific and beautiful. Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg, along with the writer

William Burroughs, formed the center of the movement launched by this Generation. The Beat Generation broke the cycles of conformity and led an uprising of spiritual awareness. They opened the eyes of the world to the unconventional, and, by doing so, made its mark as one of the most significant literary movements of the century.

3.3 Beat Influence on Literary Tradition

- A. One of the major achievements of the Beat Generation was its ability to break through literary barriers and bring literature to the streets. They did this in a number of ways. They held poetry readings where the poems could be heard and appreciated in coffeehouses and art galleries around the world, by disregarding the academic models for writing poetry and literature, and by practicing a more lyrical prose that mixed in musical rhythms as well as the common speech of the times.
- B. Hustlers, drug dealers, and misanthropes became the archetypes for the Beat protagonist and the plots became the lives of these characters. Because of this attention to an America that was not being portrayed in much of the literature and poetry of the times, the Beats became an underground phenomenon and a part of the mainstream consciousness as symbols of the changing face of America and the world in the mid-20th Century.
- C. The Beat Generation is credited with writing the books that would kick start a worldwide phenomenon, which included the Beatniks, the Hippies, the drug and LSD culture, and the sexual revolution, along with popularizing the spiritual movement of Buddhism in America.
- D. Beat writers, in post-modern fashion, encouraged the blurring of the lines between fiction and autobiography.
- E. The Beat Generation authors proclaimed themselves to be tired with conformity in established literature. They condemned traditional forms of poetry. They liberated the American verse, make it understandable and leaving the message for the upcoming generations that something was wrong with the America in the 1950s.
- F. The Beat Generation was inclusiveness. Everyone could be Beat. Black, white, Jewish, Buddhist, man, woman, rich or poor, all were allowed.
- G. The women who would become associated with the Beat movement felt very much like the men. The feeling of betrayal by the American Dream was prevalent. They wanted to break out of their roles as housewives and secretaries and be artists. They found refuge with these intelligent creative

outsiders who wanted to find a better way. These women faced obstacles unlike those of the men of their time. Women during this time faced many dangers that the men of the time could not possibly conceive of, such as being committed to insane asylums by their families and a society that wanted women kept in “their place.”

- H. Throughout the '40s and '50s, there were a good number of women who would socialize with these writers and were part of their lives as lovers and companions. Many of these women became poets and writers in their own right and are now garnering more attention. In the beginning, the women were viewed more as muses than actual active participants, but as the sixties approached, more women began to break from tradition and began to write and live as writers and poets. Because of these women’s continuing efforts to break through gender barriers and challenge society’s assumptions about the roles of women as writers, poets, and organizers, the Beat Movement continues.
- I. The role of women of color is also important to the Beat Generation and the Beat Movement. Perhaps one of the most important women of color was Alene Lee who was an African American woman integral to the Beat Generation in the 1950s until her death in 1993. Her participation challenged the view of the Beats as a “white” man’s movement. Alene Lee was first thrust into the spotlight when Jack Kerouac made her the protagonist of his 1953 novel, *The Subterraneans* and made their relationship the plot of the novel. Several years after an African American woman was showcased in a Beat novel, several women of color continue to participate in the Beat Movement.

The commonly told story of the Beat Generation is that it is a static literary and social movement that occurred from 1944 to roughly 1961 and included mostly “white” men who decided to write about the underclasses of America, while promoting the music they enjoyed: jazz. The Beat Generation would then dissolve into the Hippies and other counterculture movements and that would be the end of the movement.

Self-assessment Exercise

Discuss four influences of the Beat Generation of literature.

3.3.1 Allen Ginsberg (1926-1970)

Allen Ginsberg was born on June 3, 1926, in Newark, New Jersey. He grew up in the city of Paterson. His mother Naomi had emigrated from Russia to the United States while his father Louis was a poet and teacher. The young Ginsberg, who kept a journal from his pre-teen years and took to the poetry of Walt Whitman in high school, went on to attend Columbia University. While there he met former Columbia student Jack Kerouac and William S. Burroughs who would all become literary icons

of the Beat cultural movement. Ginsberg started to focus on his writing during the mid-1940s while also exploring his attraction to men. He became one of the founding fathers of the Beat Generation with his revolutionary poem "Howl." Ginsberg was a prolific writer who also championed gay rights and anti-war movements, protesting the Vietnam War and coining the phrase "Flower Power." Even with his countercultural background, he became recognized as one of American's foremost writers and artistic icons. He died on April 5, 1997, at age 70.

His *Howl* is often referred to as a revolutionary poem. It appeared during a quite tumultuous time in America—right after World War II, at the beginning of the Cold War and in the midst of the “Bomb-hype”. The Korean War also took place around this time. There was widespread fear of the infiltration of foreign ideologies (mainly Communism, of course). The result of which was unwarranted persecution by the authorities. A great divide appeared between those who considered themselves patriotic in the sense that American values must be protected by any means, and those who felt that truth was being compromised and that the USA was becoming a totalitarian police state through the military-industrial-nationalist complex (Ginsberg *Howl 50th Anniversary Ed.* xii). Many writers at the time were being prosecuted which led to even stronger protests by, among others, the literary society. For instance, Arthur Miller’s play *The Crucible*, that was published in 1953, is an allegory that likens the Salem witch trials of 1692 to the business of the House Un-American Activities Committee in the 1950’s. Criticism was also directed towards the material culture of business that was emerging. Sloan Wilson’s *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* and also Miller’s *Death of a Salesman* portray the tragic lives of people who thought they would find happiness in the world of business. By the time these works were being published and were receiving recognition in the country, Allen Ginsberg had been working for a while on the draft that he eventually referred to as *Howl*. Between 1943 and 1948 he attended Columbia University twice but rebelled against the society that Columbia tried to impose on him and his fellow Undergraduates. He did not like the curriculum and blamed the teachers for being old fashioned, so he read books that were not encouraged. Simultaneously, he found friends who shared his views in different ways. The writer and former football student Jack Kerouac, heroin and morphine addict William Burroughs, Lucien Carr who, after Ginsberg and Burroughs failed to report the murder of David Kammerer, was convicted of manslaughter, and thief and drug addict Herbert Huncke, became those who Ginsberg spent most time with. These are surely a few of the people he had in mind when he wrote the opening line of *Howl*: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed...” (9).

Hanging out in the suburban areas of New York, under bridges, on rooftops and in windowless apartments shaped the way he thought of the city. In *Howl* it appears like a very dark, smoke-stacked and ungodly arena for the machine-like corporate society.

It was also during this time that he read Arthur Rimbaud and tried hard to convey his greatness to his teachers, who were unfamiliar with his work. Rimbaud's poetry resembles *Howl* in its darkness and self-destruction. Madness is a recurring theme in both writers' poetry. Ginsberg also developed a liking for Walt Whitman, who, to some extent, reminded him of himself. Like Whitman, he did not adhere to established rules of language and he was concerned with the state of America. The first reading of *Howl* at the Six Gallery proved that a new kind of poetry was emerging and gaining popularity. The structure of the poem resembles a rambling style of speech.

“America” (1956) by Allen Ginsberg

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twentyseven cents January
17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb.
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.

In the poem “America”, he uses very strong and fierce language, which has on the one hand remarks of suffering and exhaustion, but on the other hand seems to be kind of appealing. Angry with status quo, Ginsberg leaves a timeframe (1956) in line 3 to indicate happenings going on during that period in the United States. He's one of the most outspoken, complaining and asking lots of questions. The poem “America” aptly captures Ginsberg's feelings towards the American society. America is portrayed as an evil, responsible for leading wars, superficial and mean towards the rest of the world – “I'm sick of your insane demands.”

Self-assessment Test

Discuss the influence of Ginsberg's poem *Howl* on the emergence of Beat Poetry.

3.3.2 Gregory Corso

Gregory Corso is youngest of the Beats who contributed most with red-hot description of the social and political change that transformed the United States in the 1960s. His voice is mostly affective, showing irreverence towards almost everything:

“The Whole Mess... Almost” by Gregory Corso

I ran up six flights of stairs
to my small furnished room
opened the window
and began throwing out
those things most important in life
First to go, Truth, squealing like a fink:
"Don't! I'll tell awful things about you!"
"Oh yeah? Well, I've nothing to hide... OUT!"
Then went God, glowering & whimpering in amazement:
"It's not my fault! I'm not the cause of it all!" "OUT!"
Then Love, cooing bribes: "You'll never know impotency!
All the girls on Vogue covers, all yours!"
I pushed her fat ass out and screamed:
"You always end up a bum!"
Went back up those six flights
went to the money
there was no money to throw out.

The tone of the poem above is evidence of passionate youth and anger many youths shared. They viewed society as too cold and narrow-minded to live in. In the tenth line God “whimpers” that is not his fault. Author pointed out that things such as truth, love or beauty are worthless or had stopped be appreciated in the world around him, while money represents the value he is not familiar with. That is the reason why all these things are “thrown out of the window”.

The predominant subject of matter of Beat writings is America and all the aspects of living in it, callings for the radical changes in the society. In Ginsberg’s case even political ones. In brief it means that the poets wanted to show that something is wrong with the society. Secondly, the poets share confessional, freedom-loving, antisocial, self-centered and apocalyptic mystique which is omnipresent within the works of The Beats. Tired of conformity, American sense for responsibility and materialism, they urged for the freedom of the individual soul to experience all the ecstasies life offers, included beauty, love, alcohol, drugs etc. Besides that, there is a remark of refusing the traditional forms of poetry, especially meters, as authors mostly used free verse to express feelings in a spontaneous way. Gill points out that “to write a poem is to

create a voice, and to create a voice is to create a self. Whenever a poet writes as *I*, a self is created, a person who thinks, feels, and responds to the world through the senses.” 63. To a large degree, self comes from the author’s personal experience. Since the Romantic era (1780-1830), individuality and value of subjective experience reached a matter of importance in literature.

Personal experience is reflected significantly in the works of the Beat poets. Allen Ginsberg had a disturbed life, especially childhood, when his mother’s periodic bouts of schizophrenia intensified. She was often walking around the house naked crying out that her mother-in-law was insistently trying to kill her. At the age of nine, Allen was an eyewitness of her suicide attempt and later, in 1956, he signed the consent for her to be lobotomized. Afterwards, he dedicated to her a whole poem titled “Kaddish” but this horrible experience may have helped to develop Ginsberg’s general tone or represent the basis of the dialogic discourse seen in *America*.

Corso experienced turbulent periods as well. Gregory Corso spent part of his childhood in the orphanage as his mother abandoned him right after his birth. At the age of sixteen he and his two friends devised the complex plan of shop robbery in New York. The three were arrested and Corso, as a master planner, sentenced to spend three years in jail, where he was often beaten up and abused. The life was from the beginning very hostile to him and the only way how to stand it was to escape to the world of fantasy and imagination.

4.0 Conclusion

Postmodern American literature encouraged skepticism towards the universal claims or narratives that have been called unifying. These have organized culture since the time of the Enlightenment. History thus becomes a field of competing perspectives. The self also becomes a hybrid concept that has multiple identities. Micro-narratives have emerged to account for the diverse perspectives and insights in feminist and multicultural American literature of this era. The writers of this era write from their subjective points of view rather than presuming to represent the sum total of all American experiences. Their works show that American history contains dissimilar experiences for all Americans. The experimental literature of the age presented readers not with many ways to know the world. Rather, it allows the creation of many worlds created in many different works. One of the experimental writings which revolutionized American literary scene is the Beat Generation. This group of writers introduced a radically divergent tradition that ruptured earlier modes. Their influence exists till date in the ways writers jettison established forms and styles.

5.0 Summary

The end of the World Wars marked a major turning point in American literature. Many Americans were disillusioned by political, social, and economic developments going on. The youths who were hardest hit turned to drugs, sexuality, and other vices as an escape from the disillusionment. From this crop of youths emerged a radical form of writing which would be called Beat generation. This became a movement to challenge existing norms in the American society and has till date, continued to serve as the genesis of the rupturing of conventions in America. The predominant subject matter of Beat writings is America and all the aspects of living in it. They call for radical changes in the society. The poets wanted to show that something is wrong with the society. They were tired of conformity, American sense for responsibility and materialism, they urged for the freedom of the individual soul to experience all the ecstasies life offers, included beauty, love, alcohol, drugs etc. Besides that, there is a remark of refusing the traditional forms of poetry, especially meters, as authors mostly used free verse to express feelings in a spontaneous way.

6.0 Tutor-marked Assessment

1. List the founding fathers of the beat generation.
2. How did they revolutionize the American literary scene?

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Module 5 Unit 3

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

3.2 Development of the Theatre of the Absurd in America

3.3 Albee's *The Zoo Story*

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

7.0 References. Further Reading

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The years between the two World Wars are considered the golden age in American theatre and drama. A large number of significant playwrights emerged for the first time in American history. This was also the period in which Little Theatre movements swept over the country. They introduced American audiences to the dramas, ideas, and techniques of the European avant-garde. As World War II ended, people began reacting to the horror of the war. As always, drama reflected society. The Theatre of the Absurd was born at this time. It first began in France in the post WWII. It promoted the belief that truth is unknowable and that man cannot communicate. Man is lost and all of his actions are senseless, absurd, and useless. Visuals were more important than words in these plays. This movement first attracted world-wide attention with Samuel Beckett's (1906-1989) *Waiting for Godot* (1953). His works are concerned with the nature of human existence. The Absurdist movement had a major effect on drama, helping to break the stranglehold that realism had had on the theatre.

3.2 Development of the Theatre of the Absurd in America

Although the Theatre of the Absurd was a success in Europe, it was not the case in America. The form grew in the United States slowly. The theatre form emerged from the sense of disillusionment Europeans felt following the World War II. The sense of abandonment made a significant impact upon the writers of France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Switzerland and Great Britain. Not only were they looking for a way of expressing themselves but they wanted to rebel against the total idea of man's existence and life itself. Dramatists found their outlet through play writing and developed the Theatre of the Absurd (Esslin 267). At that time, the United States was not feeling a loss of meaning or purpose. Rather, the US was experiencing the

American dream of good life and this did not reflect absurdist views. Yet there was a time that United States patriotism, self-confidence and optimism dropped to a severe low. This was specifically at the assassination of President Kennedy, the rise of racial tension and the Vietnam War. These caused Americans to look at the world differently as well as themselves (Esslin 267). It was at this time that Theatre of the Absurd began to make itself known in America as avant-garde theatre. American avant-garde playwrights derived from the European dramatists of the Absurd. Their plays were written in an absurdist view point and expressed the feeling of those felt in the Theatre of the Absurd. Megan Terry (Esslin 267) was an important avant-garde playwright off Broadway in the 1960's. Her most important play, *Viet Rock* was recognized as the first protest play and first rock musical of America (Banham).

Rochelle Owens (Esslin 267) rose as an avant-garde playwright with her play *Futz!* in 1967. This play explored violence, sexuality and perversity in a self-righteous society (Banham). Other American playwrights prospered in the area of avant-garde, such as Jean-Claude Van Itallie with his play *America Hurrah*, Israel Horowitz and *This Indian Wants the Bronx* (Esslin 267). Arthur Kopit and Edward Albee are perhaps two playwrights who stand out among the rest in avant-garde theatre. Edward Albee is perhaps the most representational of the avant-garde and absurd styles of theatre. His works actually attack the foundation of America's spirit and optimism. Using wit and sensibility, Albee writes about human outcast as in *The Zoo Story*, and scorns national pride and patriotism in *The American Dream*. His most important play, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* presents characters who are afraid to face reality, their fears and their secrets. Other plays like *Tiny Alice* deal with a man's search for truth in a world, which is forever changing. Edward Albee and other playwrights represent avant-garde theatre which was influenced by the European dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd.

The Theatre of the Absurd began as a protest against man's existence and developed into a significant style and form of theatre. As an effort to make man aware of his ultimate conditions and realities of life, dramatists have reflected their anguished vision of the universe. By expressing life as meaningless, unrealistic and illogical, absurdist hope to shock man out of an existence that has become trite. Therefore, the Theatre of the Absurd is intent on making the audience aware of man's precarious position in the universe by forcing the observer to make sense out of what appears to be senseless. The vision of the world then, is to communicate a total sense of being and present a truer picture of reality itself, through dialogue and action. Through the influences of Samuel Beckett and others, Theatre of the Absurd has developed as a style throughout Europe and has successfully continued in America with the help of Edward Albee and others. Theatre of the Absurd was influential in developing an avant-garde style in American Theatre.

Theatre of the Absurd is an expression that needs interpretation. Although commonly used to mean ridiculous, the word absurd is not used in this connotation when referring to it as a style of theatre. Its original meaning, more correctly identifies Theatre of the Absurd as "incongruous, unreasonable, illogical." Inonesco defines the term absurd as being "...devoid of purpose...Cut off from his religious, metaphysical,

and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Esslin 5). Albert Camus, on the other hand, felt that this theatrical style was a form of revolt. He called it a “metaphysical rebellion... the movement by which man protests against his conditions and against the whole creation” (Brustein 30). Robert Brustein furthers this idea of revolt, calling it an existential revolt. Brustein explains that dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd examine the metaphysical life of man through protest. It teaches man to find comfort and happiness or if nothing more, strength and courage (417). The drama of existential revolt is ultimately the cry of anguish over the insufferable state of being human. Existence itself becomes the source of man’s rebellion, explains Brustein (26). Regardless of the different interpretation of the word ‘absurd’, it has lent itself to become a style all of its own which examines human existence. Through action, dialogue and complex characters, dramatists are able to communicate a feeling of deadness and senselessness, which represents the Theatre of the Absurd.

These themes form a pattern of poetic images throughout the action. For example, when two characters wait for Godot in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, they are not necessarily waiting for Godot, but for something to happen. This idea then that nothing happens, represents the image of man’s life. Therefore, nothing happens in man’s existence (Esslin 354). The action is not usually dramatic, nor is it telling a story, communicating a moral or presenting a debate of issues. It is rather, a presentation of a character’s situation than events. It is to present a sense of being. The dialogue is based solely on images, not speech (Esslin 353). Through the dialogue’s images, anguish is heightened by timeless infinity as in *Waiting for Godot* or in the *Bald Soprano* by Eugene Ionesco. The dialogue becomes repetitive and a circular structure is formed. The play concludes as it began. The reality with which the Theatre of the Absurd is concerned is a psychological reality. These are expressed in images that are the outward projection of states of mind, fears, dreams, nightmares and conflicts within the personality of the author. The dramatic tension produced by this kind of play differs fundamentally from the suspense created in a theatre concerned mainly with the revelation of objective characters through the unfolding of a narrative plot. The exposition, conflict and final solution mirrors the themes found in the Theatre of the Absurd and are developed throughout the action and dialogue. The characters represented throughout the Theatre of the Absurd are those with intangible qualities. The nature of the character remains somewhat a mystery to the audience, in that they are unusual. The more mysterious the character, the less human the character becomes, making it more difficult for the audience to understand the world from their view. Therefore, the characters do not receive empathy from the audience, but only laughter (Esslin 361).

The Theatre of the Absurd presents an audience with the challenge of making sense out of a world which appears to have lost its unifying purpose. To do so, the audience must formulate questions, which will stimulate their thought process and bring them closer to reality. What is happening? What does the action of the play represent? What is going to happen next (Esslin 361)? These questions and more must be answered before reaching the end of the play. As the audience’s suspense builds, the action

builds creating poetic images. It will be these images and the audience's questions that will enable them to explore the play's structure, texture and impact. It will be then that at the end of the play the audience will understand the anxiety of the human condition. The then can understand the character's despair through the reality of the situations which have occurred.

3.3 Albee's *The Zoo Story*

Edward Franklin Albee was born on March 12, 1928 in Washington, D.C. He was abandoned by his parents immediately after his birth. He was also adopted two weeks later by an affluent couple, Reed and Frances Albee from Larchmont, New York. Reed Albee was the son and heir of theatrical entrepreneur Edward Albee II, who operated a chain of theaters that he sold to Joseph P. Kennedy's R.K.O. corporation in the early days of the Great Depression. The couple named the infant after his adoptive paternal Grandfather. They raised him in a lifestyle of privilege reflective of the Albee fortune. Reed Albee bred and trained horses. Though the younger Albee's theatrical connection is often mentioned in biographical accounts, the extent of its influence on Albee's childhood was minimal since the Albees were no longer involved in theater. The most positive influence in his youth came from his paternal grandmother with whom he shared an affectionate relationship. Albee was sent to Lawrenceville, a boarding school where it was hoped his errant behavior could be curbed. There at the age of twelve, Albee wrote his first play called *Aliqueen*, a short three act farce. Most of Albee's juvenile writing was in the form of poetry and fiction. He later went to Valley Forge Military Academy and Choate School in Connecticut, an elite prep school where he began to find a niche as a writer. At Choate, Albee was encouraged by sympathetic English teachers and the available forum of the *Choate Literary Magazine* in which his poems and fiction appeared.

In 1946, *Choate Literary Magazine* printed a play *Schism* by the eighteen year old Albee. The play showed the influence of Eugene O'Neill. Albee, even at this very early stage in his career, was concerned with the moral price exacted for inhuman behavior done in the name of love, a theme that runs through his later plays. He moved to Greenwich Village to pursue his writing. In the early 1950's, Greenwich Village was the center of a new burst of creativity which paralleled its heyday in the 1920's when Eugene O'Neill and many other artists lived there. He attended plays as often as he liked, remembering the excitement of seeing many of the latest European playwrights, Camus, Genet, Brecht and Beckett. The Beat writers—William Burroughs, Allen Ginsburg and Jack Kerouac—were beginning to establish their reputations. At about the age of thirty with very little published, Albee wrote a play as a sort of birthday present to himself. This was *The Zoo Story*. It is contemporary one-act drama about the seemingly random Sunday afternoon encounter between two strangers in Central Park. The play opens in Central Park with two benches on either side of the stage facing the audience. The first character is Peter. He is "a man in his early forties, neither fat nor gaunt, neither handsome nor homely. He is sitting on one of the benches reading a book. He stops to clean off his glasses and returns to reading when Jerry, a younger man, approaches. Jerry is "a man in his late thirties. He is not poorly dressed, but carelessly. What was once a trim and lightly muscled body has

begun to go to fat. They both hold a conversation that is neither coherent nor progressive. For instance, Jerry questions Peter about his personal life, his marriage, children, pets and occupation, even his salary. Peter, though rather shocked by the impertinence of the question, answers Jerry. Peter is occasionally puzzled by his sense that there is a level of communication that is not taking place, even though words are being exchanged. For example, when Jerry first asks Peter if he is married and Peter replies affirmatively, the issue appears to be settled, but almost immediately Jerry startles Peter by stating the obvious, "And you have a wife." (15)

The Zoo Story employed that most salient characteristic of absurdism. These include the blurred distinctions between the realistic and the fanciful, the comic and the tragic, the satirical and the grotesque and used both language and action to realize this result.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Identify the salient characteristics of absurdism in Albee's *The Zoo Story*.

4.0 Conclusion

Theatre of the Absurd is an expression of emptiness and searching which flourished in Europe and influenced avant-garde styles in America. Themes reflect man confronting a universe deprived of its purpose in a world lost of explanation. These themes are expressed in Theatre of the Absurd and carry over into American avant-garde theatre. Playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter of the European Theatre of the Absurd, influenced such playwrights as Arthur Kopit, Megan Terry and Edward Albee of the American avant-garde theatre style. Their prolific, risk-taking style of play writing was a significant contribution to the development of style in American Theatre.

5.0 Summary

Certain developments in the socio-political environment of America prompted the adoption of a theatre style that was wholly European. Specifically, the assassination of President Kennedy, the rise of racial tension and the Vietnam War caused Americans to look at the world differently. This was the time that Theatre of the Absurd began to make itself known in America as avant-garde theatre. American avant-garde playwrights borrowed from the European dramatists of the Absurd. Their plays were written in an absurdist view point and expressed the feeling of those felt in the Theatre of the Absurd. Such plays explored violence, sexuality and perversity in a self-righteous society. Edward Albee is perhaps the most representative of the avant-garde and absurd styles of theatre. His works actually attack the foundation of America's spirit and optimism. He presents characters that are afraid to face reality, their fears and their secrets. Edward Albee and other playwrights represent avant-garde theatre which was influenced by the European dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd.

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

1. Highlight the development of the absurd theatre.
2. List four American avant-garde dramatists.

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Module 5 Unit 4

African American Women Writers: Toni Morrison and Alice Walker

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 General Overview
 - 3.2 Understanding African American Women Writings
- 3.3 Recurrent themes in African American Women Literature
- 3.4 Alice Walker *The Color Purple*
- 3.5 Toni Morrison *Sula*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 summary
- 6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment
 - 6.0 References. Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit focuses on African American contemporary female writers. In this unit, you will learn about the development of African American Women and their contributions to American Literature. You will study how the dominating ideas of the latter 20th century influenced their writings. You will explore how as Black female Americans, they evolved to become leading voices in a national literature that was dominated by whites. You will also study two leading authors and their works; Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison's *Sula*.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- i. Discuss the growth of African American Women's writings
- ii. Discuss some major contributions to the body of American literature
- iii. Explain major themes that recur in African American women's writings
- iv. Explain Walker's *The Color Purple* and Toni Morrison's *Sula* as examples of African American Women's writings.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 General Overview

The twentieth century has been a period of intense literary activity for African American women writers. It was a time when for the first time these talented writers started to write and express their creative genius. The century was also an epoch making era for the African American literary tradition generally. Notable African

American women writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Gloria Naylor and many others have rewritten the existing literary traditions by expressing themselves and creating a deep impact on the African American, literary scene. The works of these women writers reverberate with self-expression. They have achieved a canonical status by enriching African American and American literary world. These writers write not only about themselves. They also write about African American women. The twentieth century women writers have explored every possible genre of literature: fiction, nonfiction, formal, informal, poetry, stories, essays, autobiographies and others. They have chartered unknown territories and set a new unprecedented trend. African American women writers have given readers powerful insights into grim issues such as race, gender and class.

To fully underscore the significance of their works, it is important to know about their past. This according to Margaret Walker is; “to give a background of the socio-economics and political forces and the historical context before proceeding to a literary analysis or synthesis. Then we will have the necessary tools with which to examine the strange phenomena found in American and Afro-American literature.” (Tate 202)

3.2 Understanding African American Women Writings

African American women writers have a unique but grim past. The slavery their ancestors were subjected exposed them to a history of torture, brutality, oppression and exploitation. Slavery proved even more brutal for African women. They were robbed of their respect, dignity and identity. They faced violence at the hands of their white masters not only in the form of hard labour and whipping lashes but also as victims of sexual abuse. The slavery system had a devastating effect on the black woman's body as well as her psyche. This system worked through socialization, violence and objectification and in unified effect damaged their self-identity and consciousness (Kulkarni 62). They faced triple oppression of racism, sexism and classicism. Maya Angelou describes the position of African American woman as; “caught in the tripartite crossfire of masculine prejudice, white illogical hate and Black lack of power” (65).

The twentieth century was thus ground breaking era for African American women writers. It is in this era that they finally came out of the shadows of racism and sexism and created works without any inhibitions. They engendered a tradition of African American women's literature. Twentieth century African American women writers did not start writing suddenly. They were enriching a tradition which existed much earlier. Earlier writers had built a secure platform for these twentieth century writers. The roots of the twentieth century African American women writers goes way back to the times when African American women were not free citizens. Phyllis Wheatley, a slave girl, was perhaps the first significant and notable African American literary artist to be recognized and appreciated because of her works. She wrote poetry imitating European literary artists. Sojourner Truth, Harriet Jacobs were yet other important slave writers.

Francis Harper, was one of the most important nineteenth century African American women writers who openly debated the oppression against black women. Harper used

literature as her tool, for championing the cause of African American women. Alice Ruth Dunbar Nelson was an important post bellum writer whose literary works often speak of black women's equal rights.

The contributions of these earlier writers can hardly be denied since they connect antebellum and post bellum African American women's literature while creating a bridge to contemporary writings in the tradition (Foster 26). They created a sound background for future twentieth century African American women writers who would later start a new chapter in African American literature. African American women writers and their literature have constantly tried to debunk existing myths and stereotypes about black women. These include depictions of being greasy, dirty, sex-hungry, or the caricature of the dominating black woman. All these have negatively created a falsified image of black women. African American women writers by offering the real truthful definition of black womanhood, have installed a new pride and identification among African American women writers.

Self-Assessment Exercise

Discuss one major contribution of African American Women writers to American literature.

3.3 Recurrent themes in African American Women Literature

One of the most important themes in the twentieth century African American women's literature is that of growing up black and female. Major women writers have written about this. For example, Toni Morrison in *The Bluest Eyes*, Maya Angelou in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Louise Meri Whether in *Daddy Was a Number Runner*, Paule Marshall in *Brown Girl, Brownstones* and many other works all deal with the experiences of a black girl growing up in a hostile environment. These writers show how African American girls develop a self-resilient spirit in order to cope with adverse external environment.

Color theme is another important issue which can be found in the works of the twentieth century African American women writers. Wishful thinking about white beauty can be found in many major works of these writers. Mary Helen Washington comments:

If the stories of these writers are to be believed then the color/hair problem has cut deep into the psyche of the black woman. It is that particular aspect of oppression that has affected, for the most part, only women. I could not find a single piece of fiction written by a black male in which he feels ugly or rejected because of the shade of his skin or the texture of his hair. In contrast, the color almost always plays at least a peripheral role more often a significant one—in the lives of the women characters created by women writers. (xvii)

By delving deep into the psyche of a black woman as well as out of their own personal experience, these writers have created one of the most poignant characters and stories

in American literature. For example, Pecola in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* wishes for blue eyes as a way to redeem herself. Similarly the character Maryginia Washington in Gwen Brook's *Maud Martha*, emphasizes that black women seem to be offensive with their black color. Maya Angelou in her autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, divulges her childhood fantasy of being a blonde and a white. Thus, the parameters of beauty as defined by white American society have scarred the psyche and souls of black women, which is often reflected in their works.

Antagonistic relationship between African American men and women and failed relationship is another frequently occurring theme in the works of these writers. African American women have often been abandoned by African American males and have raised their family all by themselves. Economic and social disability has marred the relationship between black men and women. This has been investigated by these writers in their works. They have often shown that African Americans have an independent and resilient spirit and can survive all on their own. They are undeterred by abuse and violence by black men. For example, the characters of Sula and Nel in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Celie in Alice Walker's *Color Purple*, Janie in Zora Neale Hurston in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* all triumph against odds and live life on their own terms.

The decades of 1960s and 1970s are another important phase in twentieth century African American women's writing. The rhetoric that Black is beautiful became prominent. Black women writers started to write with a new fervour exploring issues like family violence, poverty, abuse, racism, sexism and coercion. This period witnessed the emergence of writers such as Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Margaret Walker, Sherley Ann Williams, Mari Evans and a host of other talented writers. All these literary artists had their own unique focus, and literary style producing works so rich and diverse in the treatment of themes and also style.

3.4 Alice Walker *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker was born in Eatonton, Georgia. She grew up in rural middle Georgia. Her father was a sharecropper, and her mother was a maid. Although they lived under Jim Crow laws in Georgia, in which African-Americans were discouraged from education, Walker's parents turned her away from working in the fields. Instead, they encouraged her on the importance of education. They enrolled her in school at an early age. Walker describes writing at the age of eight years old, largely as a result of growing up in what was a strong oral culture.

In 1952, Walker injured her eye after her brother accidentally shot her with a BB gun. Since the family did not have a car, it was a week before Walker received medical attention. By this time, she was blind in that eye, with scar tissue forming. As a result, Walker became shy and withdrawn. Years later, after the scar tissue healed, she became more confident and gregarious. She graduated from high school as the

valedictorian. Walker writes about this in her essay, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self." Walker left Eatonton for Atlanta, and attended Spelman College. This is a prestigious Historically Black College for women. She later received a scholarship to Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Walker considers her time in New York as critical for her development. While there, Walker became involved in the Black Arts movement. This was before her work in the Civil Rights movement brought her back to the South. In 1969, Walker took a teaching position as Writer-in-Residence at Jackson State College in Jackson, Mississippi before accepting the same position at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. While there, she published her debut novel, *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* (1970). However, Walker soon returned to New York to join the editorial staff of *Ms.* magazine. Her second novel, *Meridian* (1976), received positive reviews, but her third novel, *The Color Purple* (1982), perhaps best showcases her writing talents. This novel draws on some of Walker's personal experiences as well as demonstrates Walker's own creativity. For it, she won the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. This novel was later adapted as a popular film. In addition to her engagement as an activist in many key issues, Walker has continued to write. She published the famous book of essays, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), as well as several other novels. This include *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992). One theme that emerges in Walker's work is acknowledging the contributions of, often under-appreciated, African-American writers. Such writers include Zora Neale Hurston. Furthermore,

Walker's writing calls attention to the discrepancies in America's treatment of African-Americans, while also acknowledging the importance of all Americans' shared past. In "Everyday Use," we see many of these themes coalesce in the conflict between sisters Dee and Magee. Although they are sisters, these two have very different lives, which leads to the central tension of the story—their argument over the quilt.

Alice Walker in *The Color Purple* presents deep insights into the black community in the United States. It reveals the utility, colorful and vivid nature in the opposition to the fatality of its situation in the world of inequality, segregation, injustice and lack of understanding and communication between whites and blacks. Walker also presents race problems at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, she focuses more upon the relationships between men a women, than white and black. She concentrates on women's personal struggle for freedom in a brutal and violent society where women are looked upon as unimportant and even inferior.

The Color Purple starts with striking words written in italics: "You'd better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy."¹²⁸ These words are articulated by a bully stepfather, with a view to silencing young Celie, because he rapes her. She has nobody to tell about her traumatic experiences, thus she starts writing letters to God. What is more, she confides those traumatic experiences to God, because they are extremely shameful to her. The bully she believes to be her father is raping her. He does it because Celie's mother is too ill to have sex with him. Celie has two children with him, however he gets rid of them very quickly. After some time Celie's father

loses interest in her and begins disturbing her younger sister Nettie. However, Celie attempts to protect her beloved younger sister from misery she suffered from and will never forget. One day, a widower with four children comes to their house to ask for permission to marry Nettie. It is a perfect situation for their father, because he has got a chance to get rid of Celie, and he forces her to marry. Celie's husband is as abusive as her father was and he also rapes her.

Walker is as much concerned about freedom for the spirit as she is about freedom from violence and rape. Some of her women characters are never able to be themselves, because they either live in the world of abusive men or are directly under their control. Their situation sometimes takes them away from their families and friends. They feel abandoned in their cruel reality. However, on the basis of Celie's later transformation, Walker teaches that a woman must find her inner strength, imitating those black women in the past who, even in slavery, would not allow their creativity to be dampened and controlled or their souls and bodies to be violated.

3.5 Toni Morrison *Sula*

Toni Morrison is one of the most important American authors of the twentieth century. She was born in Loraine, Ohio, and earned a Bachelor's degree in English from Howard University and a Master's Degree from Cornell University. Although she began writing creative fiction at Howard, Morrison worked primarily as a college professor in the decade following her graduation from Cornell, teaching at Texas Southern University and then at Howard. In 1964, Morrison divorced the husband she met at Howard, moved to New York, and worked as a senior editor for Random House publishers, where she championed the writing of several notable African-American authors including Angela Davis and Toni Cade Bambara. Morrison continued to write and teach at colleges while working at Random House, publishing her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, in 1970. Since then she has taught at numerous institutions, including schools in the New York state university system, Yale, Bard, and finally Princeton. In addition to working as an editor, novelist, and professor, Morrison is also a prolific essayist and public intellectual. She has published editorials in *The New York Times*. She has also written three children's books with her son, Slade Morrison. She also has a libretto for an opera. It is based on the life of the American slave Margaret Garner, who is also the inspiration for her Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *Beloved* (1987). Morrison describes the postmodernist literary technique she has developed in her novels as that of "enchantment". It is a blending of historical realism with the myths and supernatural tales she learned as a child. "That's the way the world was for me and for the black people I knew," she tells Christina Davis in a 1986 interview in *Conversations with Toni Morrison*. Examples of enchantment abound in Morrison's work. In the eleven exquisitely crafted novels she has published to date, Morrison combines folk and postmodernist storytelling techniques to explore what it means to be both black and a woman in America.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison describes black women's struggle to settle families within which they can have dignity. She portrays a Black family led by a Black woman, Eva Peace. After the desertion of her husband, Boy Boy, Eva becomes the leader of her

family. She must care for her children, her granddaughter, Sula and three other children whom she gives a collective name, "Dewey". Eva shows that women can lead families as well as men. She transmits her household values necessary to face the atrocities of racism. One of these values is courage. She encourages people under her care not to be afraid of racists who exert violence against black communities. Sula, the eponymous character embodies the courage and the power of her grandmother, Eva Peace. One day, on her way back home from school, she is frightened by a group of white boys. Quietly, she removes a knife from her school bag and tears part of her thumb. Seeing the blood running from her finger, the boys run away leaving her alone. They imagine what could happen to them since she is able to hurt herself. Sula's act can be analyzed at two different levels: The first level is that it is an act of self-assertion and dauntlessness. Through her courage, Eva demonstrates that women can also successfully fight against white oppressive system. She emphasizes that the quest for freedom and for the stability of Black families is not a struggle of black men only, but also of black women. These women are a strong link in the constitution and protection of their families since they have a double role to play: woman and mother. As women, they must take part in any fight to overcome male domination and to demand their rights in the American society at large. As mothers, they must feed, educate and protect their children, usually by substituting themselves for their deserted or dead husbands. The second level of Sula's act is that it symbolizes a sacrifice. The blood that flows from her thumb means that she is ready to sacrifice her life for the better of the black community of "Medallion". Her act makes her a heroine who fights for a brighter future of Blacks living in "Medallion".

Through Sula, Morrison depicts that the struggle of Blacks against racism very often ends in death. Sula's death shows how difficult and painful it is for a black female to live and survive in a racist society. Sula challenges the stereotypical representation of black women in fiction. By destroying these stereotypes, Toni Morrison tries to rewrite the lost histories of African American women whose positive images have been eradicated by the white dominant culture.

4.0 Conclusion

The twentieth century African American women writers are very much integral to African American women literature and have enriched American literary tradition with their own unique perspective. These writers have caused a paradigm shift in African American literature. Fighting against white supremacy and their own black men's abuse, they have carved their own niche. Their impact can be felt not only in the field of literature but in every aspect of African American life. They have brought a new change in the way of thinking and feeling in the lives of African American people, especially that of African American women. Most importantly, twentieth century African American women writers have broken new grounds, created new literary canons and paved the way for twenty first century writers. Today young and dynamic writers, who are creating a new upsurge in the literary world, are in one way or the other indebted to these twentieth century African American women writers.

5.0 Summary

African American women writers have a unique heritage. They recognize and promote their being black, female, and having African roots. Their works are contemporary yet they have often used African folkways in their work. They write about the present difficulties black women go through. Claudia Tate comments on this unique cultural heritage of African American writers:

By virtue of their race and gender, black women writers find themselves at two points of intersection one where Western culture cuts across vestiges of African heritage, and one where male female attitudes are either harmoniously parallel, subtly divergent, or in violent collision. Their work addresses what it means to be human, a condition not entirely determined by genetic makeup but is also a comprised of conscious volition. (xvi)

These writers have explored various themes and delved deep into many issues pertaining to African American women. There are certain generic themes and tropes which reoccur in their works giving an insight into a black woman's life.

6.0 Tutor-marked Assignment

1. In what ways have African American women writers contributed to American literature?
2. Discuss three recurring themes that are found in African American women's writings.

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ASSIGNMENT FILE

COURSE CODE: ENG 822

COURSE TITLE: AMERICAN LITERATURE

CREDIT UNIT: 3

Module 1 Unit 1

Based on your understanding of this unit, answer the following questions:

3. Explain the factors that lead to reformers protesting against the Roman Catholic Church.

Answer: The Reformers came to being in a period of protest against the Roman Catholic Church. Some of the factors that prompted this protest include:

- a. The many doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church.
- b. The overarching authority of the Pope whose justification was not found in the Bible.
- c. The belief that the Roman Catholic Church had deviated from the true path of worship. The Church was accused of being worldly, corrupt, and extravagant.
- d. Rebelling against the priests and leaders of the Catholic Church for their corruption.

4. Discuss the legacies of the Puritans to American culture.

Answer: The Puritans were very conservative. They saw themselves as a chosen people who would do God's will. They strove to purify church worship from anything that alluded to Roman Catholicism. The Church of England did not sufficiently achieve this as many elements of the Roman Catholic Church were still in place. The Bible was their handbook and anything not contained therein was expunged from their lives. The Bible was their guide to everything they did. This staunch adherence to the Bible and craving to be pure led to their naming as Puritans. They had the reputation of being solemn and gloom. They were known to be against entertainment and beauty.

Some of the legacies of Puritans on American culture include

- a. The institution of the culture of freedom to determine their own doctrines. This led to a tradition of independence and freedom that is an enduring hallmark of the American nation. By rejecting the authority of priests and kings, they became free to choose who led them. These led to traditions of independence and freedom of choice that are enduring hallmarks of the American nation.
- b. The prominence of sermons during this period is another enduring legacy. Preachers used sermons to galvanize their congregations to action. This is very much visible in both written literatures and in the spoken texts. Also, for reasons of religion, sermons became the most prominent literary forms. They

became a source of information also before the advent of printing and newspaper.

- c. There was also an emphasis on education. This was to promote the study of the Bible and to promote the composition of sermons. It was also to ensure that there was proper understanding of sermons by the congregation. As such, the Massachusetts Bay Colony became a cultural center of sorts. It also became a center of learning. The first University in America, Harvard University, was established in 1636 in Cambridge as evidence of the wide quest for knowledge.
- d. Two years after the establishment of the institution, the first colonial press was also established in 1638. This facilitated the publication of the first American book, *The Bay Psalm Book* in 1640. There was also the establishment of *The Boston News-Letter* in 1704. This year marked the beginning of active journalism in the colonies.

Module 1 Unit 2

- 3. Identify and discuss two popular forms of writing during the Colonial period in America.

Answer: **Sermons**

A significant number of works from this period were collections of sermons. This is expectedly so given the prominence of the Puritan faith on the colonial establishments and the number of Puritans in the colonies. They were thus the most popular form of writing. The influence of sermons on the literature of the country was significant. Michael Colacurcio affirms in *Godly Letters* (2006) that the principles of the Puritan faith did not only provide the religious, philosophical and political infrastructure of the country but also influenced the literature of subsequent generations.

Exploration and colonization reports

These are reports by the discoverers and the earliest settlers in America. Christopher Columbus, the Italian navigator and adventurer, is said to be the first European to discover America. He wrote accounts and reports that have been translated into English language. Columbus at the time of his discovery was on the authority and commission of the King and Queen of Spain. Later accounts by English explorers contain details of their exploration activities into the land that was to become the United States of America. They are works that capture the efforts to adventurers sent to establish colonies for England in the New World. Such books written were descriptions of the country and narratives of the challenges of the new settlements. These works were printed in England and the information was meant for the English public. The earliest and most noteworthy among books of this kind were the writings of Captain John Smith. *True Relation* was printed at London in 1608. Among Smith's other books is *General History of Virginia* also printed in London in 1624), *Powhatan's Discourse of Peace and War*, and *A Description of New England*. Other

writings in the early exploration and colonization category are Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) *Columbus's Letter Describing His First Voyage*, *The Diary of Christopher Columbus's First Voyage to America*; and Francis Higgins *New England's Plantation* (1630).

4. Discuss the factors that militated against the growth of literature in the earliest years of the establishment of America.

Answer: There are two reasons for this slowness in the emergence of a distinct national body of writing. First, the struggle to establish communities and livelihoods in the wilderness was not conducive for literature to develop and thrive. Second was the fact that the settlers in America did not begin to see themselves as distinctly Americans and not New Englanders until the American Revolution in the 1760s.

Module 1 Unit 3

1. Discuss how John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" shaped the way America is considered unique.

Answer: "A Model of Christian Charity" is a sermon Winthrop prepared for his companions on board the *Arabella* on the great migration. In it, Winthrop depicts the Puritan principle which was to form the bedrock of the life the migrants would establish when they arrived in the New World. The section that has remained seminal in the sermon is the final section. There Winthrop describes Massachusetts Bay Colony as "a city upon a hill". He made it out to be a city that has risen above the surrounding area. He implied that the success of the colony and its settlers would be a model to be emulated. Their failure too would bring disgrace to all Christians. Winthrop depicted the colony in a way that captured the essence of uniqueness. It was to be an example of a successful Christian settlement or an enterprise to be ashamed. This final section is usually cited in rhetoric about American exceptionalism.

American exceptionalism speaks to the uniqueness of the American country. It has been used to distinguish the country from others. The unique factors for its creation and development are the commonly engaged to hold the country to higher standards. It has also been used to justify subjugating actions against other peoples and countries.

2. How has Roger Williams' radicalism influenced later American awareness?

Answer: Roger Williams was a vocal critic of the way the Puritan colony took land from Indians. He also questioned the merging of the state and the church. Williams' criticism led to the Puritan authorities charging him for subverting their authority. He was an advocate of democratic principles in the affairs of the Puritan church. He called for the separation of the church from the state. In 1635, Williams was banished as a heretic. He took refuge with friendly Indians and was to later establish in Rhode Island, the Providence Plantation. His writings criticized the Puritanical ideal of

religious conformity which denied people the freedom to make choices or have opinions contrary to those in the Bible. In *The Bloody Tenet of Persecution for the Cause of Conscience*, Williams argued against the call for the persecution of people who expressed personal opinion. In the preface to the treatise, Williams also called for freedom of religion. These he espoused in twelve principles as follows:

- xiii. That the blood of those killed during the Protestant and Papist wars were not required nor accepted by Jesus;
- xiv. Arguments in the scriptures negate the call for the persecution for reason of conscience or having differing opinions;
- xv. Ministers would also be guilty of having and giving opinions because they proffered answers to scriptural questions which were not explained in the Bible;
- xvi. The lack of individual reasoning and opinion formulation which was encouraged by the Puritans was responsible for the deaths arising from religious wars;
- xvii. There should be a distinct separation of the church and the state;
- xviii. God gave the command to give all humans the freedom to worship regardless of nation;
- xix. Israel should not be upheld as a model for any society or group;
- xx. God did not command that uniformity of religion be enforced in any state as it would breed hypocrisy, civil wars, mass killings, and the persecution of God's true worshipers;
- xxi. Should uniformity of religion be enforced in any civil state, there should be no hope held of Jews converting to Christianity;
- xxii. Enforcing religious uniformity promotes the conflation of state and church. This reduced the impact of Christ's message and symbol;
- xxiii. Tolerating other religions and thinking promotes the entrenchment of peace amongst the people; and
- xxiv. Christianity can flourish alongside religious tolerance and diversity.

3. Explain the way Anne Bradstreet's verses reveal Puritan belief.

Answer: Anne Bradstreet's Puritanical demeanor emerges in especially her subject matter and imagery deployed. This must be because her writings reflect her personal life and beliefs. For instance, in "The Author to her Book", Bradstreet compares the emergence of her first book to that of birthing a child and similar imagery associated with motherhood and childbirth. She describes the book as an 'offspring' and her 'rambling brat'. Other images of mothering emerge in her description of the process through which the publication made its way into public consumption. For instance, she compares her inability to make the work better with an economically challenged mother's inability to properly dress her offspring. Also in "In Reference to Her Children, 23 June, 1659", there is the prominent depiction of the image of motherhood. In this poem, Bradstreet describes each of her eight children. She expresses the concerns of a mother over her children in the world where she cannot oversee their activities:

Module 2 Unit 1

2. What are the essential ways the Age of Reason differed from the preceding century?

Answer: The Age of Reason saw the breaking away with preceding neoclassical form of writing. A different style of writing emerged which upturned the artistic formality and restraint inherent in neoclassical style of writing. Writers avoided the mechanical way of composition. They advocated for freer modes of writing beyond the traditional modes of expression which seemed rigid and forced. The cadences, the metrical forms, the heroic couplets were condemned as restrictive. The alternative form that emerged gave greater value to human emotions and spontaneity. Writers abandoned the classical form with its rigid structures and focus. They embraced instead a style that celebrated emotions. They glorified the mundane that could elicit emotions. Focus changed to rural life, the wilderness, nature, the picaresque, and the virtues of innocence. Writers craved for a style that could elicit profound emotions in readers. The legacy of erudition bequeathed by Puritanism in America fueled the search for intellectual understanding.

Module 2 Unit 2

1. Discuss the characteristics of Romanticism.

The major characteristics of Romanticism were:

- the glorification and celebration of the individual
- a belief in the goodness and perfectibility of mankind
- a celebration of nature, harmonious and benevolent, which is seen as the main inspiration for society and the arts
- an emphasis on emotions, feelings and intuition which are both the sources and the subjects of artistic expression
- an emphasis on imagination, which is described as a creative force much stronger than education or reason
- an optimistic belief in a social and political system that is conceived both as protections and as stimulations for the development of the individual

2. How did the age influence writings?

Answer: Romanticism was a shift from faith and belief in science and reason to advocacy for emotions, feelings and nature. Writers at that time were inspired by this new way of thinking and imagining. This was reflected in their literary works and novels. Eventually the themes of these literary works changed and started to be more pure and romantic by dealing with imaginary subjects such as terror, horror and awe. The romantic period saw the emergence of new artistic, literary and intellectual wave in literature and the arts. It encouraged a rejection of many of the values of the

Renaissance movement such as the scientific revolution held as seminal. It was an escape from the strict rules of society in favour of a spiritual world. Nature became the new object of love and emotions. Romanticism defined an artistic and philosophical movement that influenced the fundamental ways in which people thought about themselves and about their world. The era started as a reaction to the classical way of life that people used to live. The respect for authority, the love of order and the following of rules, were overturned in favor of strangeness and novelty. It placed a new emphasis on emotions and beauty of the language.

7.0 Tutor-Marked Assignments

3. Describe the influence of Transcendentalist views on the emergence of a distinct American literary culture.

Answer: Transcendentalists defined American poetry. The transcendentalists saw the individual as a microcosm in itself. The individual was considered one with nature. It is from this notion that the idea of the 'self' got a new connotation. This connotation was divested from its previously 'selfish' sense. Transcendentalists also endeavored to transcend, to pass beyond the range of human senses and experiences. For them, art was the aesthetic dimension of nature, and thus, was only natural to an individual. They call for a distinct American style. This style of poetry was to reflect the ways of America. Transcendentalism became a general term for:

- (1) those who preferred to rely on their own intuitions rather than on the authority of any one;
- (2) those who exalted individuality;
- (3) those who frowned on imitation and repetition;
- (4) those who broke with the past;
- (5) those who believed that a new social and spiritual renaissance was necessary and forthcoming;
- (6) those who insisted on the importance of culture, on "plain living and high thinking," and
- (7) those who loved isolation and solitude.

Module 2 Unit 4

1. What were the contributions of Margaret Fuller to the gender discourse that would later become topical globally?

Answer: Margaret Fuller was a distinguished early advocate for equal rights for Women. For this, she is considered America's first feminist. She was a frontline transcendentalist who advocated for social reforms such as the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and the equal treatment of both sexes. She was an advocate for women education and rights to employment. Her 1840 book, *Woman in the Nineteenth*

Century, centralized the notion of equality of men and women. She suggested that women and slaves had more in common given their marginalization. She wrote that while women may seem free, they were very much under the control of men. Women could not vote nor own property. Fuller opined that women must be given the opportunity to be more than appendixes to their husbands. She wanted women to achieve spiritual, economic, emotional and intellectual self-actualization.

MODULE 3 Unit 1

2. Discuss the influence of the civil war in relation to the emergence of a realist literary tradition in America.

Answer: Writers of the civil war sought to create a new American literature that reflected American life and values. They reacted against the Romantic style of writing which favored the ideal over the real representation of life in fiction. Writers began to create characters and plot based on average people experiencing the common concerns of everyday life. All writers in the Realistic mode shared a commitment to referential narrative. Their readers expected to meet characters that resembled ordinary people, often of the middle class. They depicted characters living in ordinary circumstances. Their characters experienced real-life struggles and, as in life, were unable to find resolution to their conflicts. Realists developed these characters by using ordinary speech that was commensurate to the character's social class. The character often drove the plot of the story. Characters in Realistic fiction were three-dimensional, and their inner lives were often revealed through an objective, omniscient narrator. Realists set their fiction in places that actually existed. They were interested in recent or contemporary life, not in history or legend. Setting in Realistic fiction was important but was not limited to a particular place or region. Realists believed in the accuracy of detail, and, for them, accuracy helped build the "truth" conveyed in the work. The implied assumption for these writers is that "reality" is verifiable. It is separate from human perception of it, and can be agreed upon collectively. Realistic writers believed that the function of the author is to show and not simply tell. Authorial intrusion was limited if not expunged. Realistic writers attempted to avoid sentimentality or emotional appeal.

Module 3 unit 2

1. Discuss the development of the realist mode in American literature

Answer: The realistic novel began to find its way to the reading public in America by opening up new areas of subject matter that belonged to the lower and middle class people. Such works dealt with the realism of the human consciousness in a most subtle and eccentric way. After the civil-war, the writers with their critics and audiences started to feel interested in an exclusively American culture which would show the ways of life and thought that were native entities rather than imported products. They craved for specifically American civilization; a civilization that addressed American thought and feeling.

2. List five American realist novelists and their works

Mark Twain *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

William De Forest *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty*,

Albion Tourgee's *A Fool's Errand*

Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*

Harriet Beecher Stowe *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Module 3 Unit 2

1. Discuss the defining features of Naturalism

Answer: Determinism: this is the opposite of the idea that there is free will. In determinism, individual characters do not have a direct influence on the course of their lives. Rather, it is supplanted by a focus on nature or fate. As human beings live in natural environment, they can react toward the exterior and interior forces but are helpless before these forces. Often, a naturalist author will lead the reader to believe that a character's fate has been pre-determined, usually by heredity and environmental factors. Such writer also depicts that the destiny of humanity is misery in life and oblivion in death and that he/she can do nothing about it.

Objectivism: Naturalist authors often try to maintain a tone that will be experienced as 'objective.' The author presents himself or herself as an objective observer, similar to a scientist taking note of what he or she sees. Of course, no human being can ever be truly objective. However, by detaching the narrator from the story he or she tells, an author can achieve objectivity.

Pessimism: Very often, one or more characters emphasize the inevitability of death. Naturalistic works often include uncouth or sordid subject matter.

Surprising Twist at the End of the Story: In naturalist novels and stories, there tends to be a strong sense that nature is indifferent to human struggle. Characters are frequently but not invariably ill-educated or lower class characters whose lives are governed by the forces of heredity, instinct, and passion. Their attempts at exercising free will or choice are hamstrung by forces beyond their control.

2. In what way(s) is Charles Darwin's theory of Evolution connected to Naturalist writing?

Answer: Darwin's theory of evolution influenced naturalist writings in the belief that a person's heredity and social environment determine his/her character. They also believe that heredity and social environment influence the actions of people.

MODULE 4 UNIT 1

1. Discuss the influence of World war one on Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*.

Answer: Hemingway is one of the many American writers who lived during World War I. He wrote a number of well-known war novels and the most famous of them is the war novel titled *A Farewell to Arms* which he wrote in 1929. It focuses on the effects of the war as a blow to human civilization. It calls to question the civilization human kind claims. The novel is based on the themes of war and love. He engaged irony to show contrast between the ideal and the real of the world of war. The war severely affected Hemingway and he became disillusioned and depressed. The novel is based on Hemingway's own experience as a participant in World War I. He enlisted in the war as an ambulance driver in the Italian army. He joined the army purposely for his own romantic notions about war. This novel remarkably reflects his attitudes towards war as the novel shows how he saw the war with all its ugliness, violence, insanity, and irrationality. Besides giving an accurate account of the war, Hemingway gives an insightful description of the psychology of the soldiers. Tired with war and its irrationality, the soldiers begin to search for peace. He was initially enthusiastic before enlisting for war but he became depressed and pessimistic by the time he returned from the war. He was seriously wounded in 1918 at the Italian front when a large number of Austrian mortar shell fell nearby. One of his comrades died instantaneously and another one lost his legs. Hemingway lost consciousness as a result of the shock. After regaining his consciousness, he tried to rescue one of his injured comrades by carrying him to a nearby first aid dugout. During this course, he was shot in his leg by a machine gun fire. The effect of all these is captured in his introduction the book *Men at War*: "when you go to war as a boy you have a great illusion of immortality. Other people got killed; not you. Then when you are badly wounded the first time you lose that illusion."

Like many Americans in the pre-war period, Hemingway took World War One as an adventure and therefore; participated in it with great zeal. During the war, he saw the difference between the ideal world and the real world of war. The novel has Frederic Henry as its central character through whom Hemingway expresses his disillusionment with the war. As an American enlisted in the Italian Army, Henry goes through the horrifying experience of war. Observing the irrationality and absurdity of the war, Henry tries to escape from it in order to find what he calls 'separate peace' alone with Catherine Barkley, a nurse he falls in love with. He receives the worst blow when Catherine dies in childbirth leaving Henry alone in the world. Through the plight of Henry, Hemingway has tries to convey that an escape is not always possible in life. Peace can't be achieved in isolation from others. Hemingway advocates for endurance because he feels that life is essentially tragic. The theme of war in this novel is woven with the theme of love. War contrasts sharply with the noble emotion of love. In fact the novel can be called a tragic love story of Henry and Catherine set the First World War.

MODULE 4 unit 2

1. Use Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* to explicate American dramatists' disillusionment with the American Dream.

Answer: Miller uses the character of Willy Loman in *Death of a salesman* to espouse the disillusionment with the American Dream. Willy is at the bottom of the totem pole in a capitalistic world. He has and makes nothing. Willy built his life around dreams. However, to live by his ideals it means building or telling many lies, and these illusions replace reality in Willy's mind. Here the illusion is represented through the life of Willy – trying to live the American dream but he doesn't succeed so he begins to believe his own lies and through him so does his son Happy. The illusion wins over reality for Willy. However through the character Biff, Willy's other son, Miller presents reality. It is Biff who finally breaks this reality to himself, his family and the audience. After discovering his father's affair, Biff "realized what a ridiculous lie my whole life has been," and begins to perceive his father as a fake. He awakens the audience and the characters to the destruction of believing in illusions, through his eyes. Of how the American dream, how illusion, cannot be achieved without sorrow. In a way the death of Willy Loman, could symbolize the death of this dream. Finally reality takes control, with the family and the audience seeing how Willy was not as 'liked' as he made out to be.

2. List four dramatists of the age.

Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller

MODULE 4 UNIT 3

1. Discuss the contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois to the emergence of a distinct African American literature.

Answer: W.E.B. Du Bois was instrumental in highlighting how to achieve success and progress as an African American. This is in allusion to his personal growth as a demonstration of that gospel and is reflected in *Up From Slavery* (1903).

Du Bois espoused about racial prejudice as a national issue. This he described as "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of race." DuBois's activism led him to help found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, and to edit its magazine, *The Crisis*, from 1910 until 1934. His most influential work was the one in which he launched his attack on Booker T. Washington, *The Souls of Black Folk*. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois's makes a provocative seminal account of the "double consciousness" of "the Negro." This is a condition in which he, like all others of his race have been "born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world": a world that yields them "no true self-consciousness," but only lets them see themselves "through the revelation of the other world." "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness," Du Bois confides, "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others."

MODULE 5 unit 1

3. Discuss how indeterminacy influences postmodern literary writings.

Answer: Indeterminacy has always been a typical and significant feature of postmodern writing. It brings each and every existence into scepticism. This permeates through actions and thinking in the ways the world is constructed. Indeterminacy in postmodern literature advocates a revolt to traditional writing styles, such as a definite theme or meaning, integrated plot of a story and so on. It overthrows authorial authoritative legacy. Indeterminacy reflects in the way writers abandon themes in their literary creation, because there is no meaning, center, or essence in postmodern works. Everything in postmodern fiction is on the same level so that no theme or subheading or even a topic is needed, and writers' attention is paid to the randomness during the creative process of postmodern production.

4. Explain the major characteristic of postmodern writings

Answer: Postmodern writers play with the material that their works are made of. Postmodernist writers freely use all the challenging experimental literary techniques developed by the modernists earlier in the twentieth century as well as new, even more experimental techniques of their own invention. In fiction, many postmodernist authors adopt the self-referential style termed "**metafiction**". This is a story that is written in the process of telling a story (narrative) as it is about describing characters and events (descriptive).

b. The stories that make up history itself are often a playground for postmodernist authors. They take material found in history books and weave it into new tales that reveal secret histories and dimly perceived conspiracies.

c. Postmodern writers often play with popular sub-genres such as the detective story, horror, and science fiction. For example, in her poem "Diving into the Wreck," Adrienne Rich evokes both the detective story and science fiction as she imagines a futuristic diver visiting a deep sea wreck in order to solve the mystery of why literature and history have been mostly about men and not women.

d. Not all works of postmodern literature are stylistically experimental or playful. Rather, their authors explore the meaning and value of postmodernity as a cultural condition. Several philosophers and literary critics have helped in understanding what the postmodern condition may be. "Poststructuralist" philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Jean Baudrillard have argued that words and texts do not reflect the world but instead exist as their own self-referential systems, containing and even creating the world they describe. When we perceive the world, Derrida's philosophy of "deconstruction" claims, we see not things but "signs" that can be understood only

through their relation to other signs. “There is no outside the text,” Derrida famously claimed in his book *Of Grammatology* (1967). In this way, words and books and texts are powerful things, for in them our world itself is created—an insight that many postmodernist creative writers share. Baudrillard, in turn, argues in his book, *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981), that the real world has been filled up with and even replaced by simulations that we now treat as reality: simulacra.

e. Postmodernism encourages skepticism towards the universal claims or narratives that have been called unifying. These have organized culture since the time of the Enlightenment. History thus becomes a field of competing perspectives. The self also becomes a hybrid concept that has multiple identities. This much Jean Francois Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979). There he argues that the world is now perceived through smaller micro-narratives that don’t all fit together into a greater coherent whole. These smaller micro-narratives are what account for the diverse perspectives and insights in feminist and multicultural American literature of this era. The writers of this era write from their subjective points of view rather than presuming to represent the sum total of all American experiences. Their works show that American history contains dissimilar experiences for all Americans. For example, both Sylvia Plath and Theodore Roethke poems about their fathers reflect their appreciation of their respective fathers which is shaped by both their genders and their own personal histories. While Roethke feels a kinship with his father, Plath however sees her father as an enemy. Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, in their stories, explore the hybrid nature of African-American identity itself, showing us the tensions that arise when one’s identity is both American and black.

f. Postmodernism, as an experimental literature, presents readers not with many ways to know the world. Rather, it allows the creation of many worlds created in many different works. As Modernist authors strove to devise new techniques with which to accurately represent the world, Postmodernist authors, are concerned with creating many literary worlds that represent a diversity of experiences.

MODULE 5 UNIT 2

3. List the founding fathers of the beat generation.

Answer: Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William S. Burroughs

4. How did they revolutionize the American literary scene?

Answer: The Beat Generation revolutionized the American Literary scene in a number of ways. They challenged all the traditional values and became a most important force in questioning and denying traditional cultural values after World War II. They influenced the development of civil and equal rights movements. They wrote works that challenged the term “literature” in mid-20th century America.

MODULE 5 UNIT 3

1. Highlight the development of the absurd theatre.

Answer: Certain developments in the socio-political environment of America prompted the adoption of a theatre style that was wholly European. Specifically, the assassination of President Kennedy, the rise of racial tension and the Vietnam War caused Americans to look at the world differently. This was the time that Theatre of the Absurd began to make itself known in America as avant-garde theatre. American avant-garde playwrights borrowed from the European dramatists of the Absurd. Their plays were written in an absurdist view point and expressed the feeling of those felt in the Theatre of the Absurd. Such plays explored violence, sexuality and perversity in a self-righteous society. Edward Albee is perhaps the most representative of the avant-garde and absurd styles of theatre. His works actually attack the foundation of America's spirit and optimism. He presents characters that are afraid to face reality, their fears and their secrets. Edward Albee and other playwrights represent avant-garde theatre which was influenced by the European dramatists of the Theatre of the Absurd.

2. List four American avant-garde dramatists.

Answer: Arthur Kopit, Megan Terry, Rochelle Owens and Edward Albee

MODULE 5 UNIT 4

3. In what ways have African American women writers contributed to American literature?

Answer: The decades of 1960s and 1970s are another important phase in twentieth century African American women's writing. The rhetoric that Black is beautiful became prominent. Black women writers started to write with a new fervour exploring issues like family violence, poverty, abuse, racism, sexism and coercion. These writers have contributed in many ways. Some of which include debunking myths and stereotypes about African American women. They do this by offering the truthful definition of black womanhood. They have by this installed a new pride and identification among African American women writers.

4. Discuss three recurring themes that are found in African American women's writings.

Answer: Recurring themes in African American Women's writings include the color theme. This reveals in two ways. Some writers depict an overwhelming desire to look Caucasian in color and in feature. Other writers celebrate the darkness of their skin. Another theme is that of growing up as black and female. These are two factors that continue to implicate the ways African American women are perceived in the American society. The third theme is that of antagonistic relationship between African American men and women and failed relationship is another frequently occurring

theme in the works of these writers. African American women have often been abandoned by African American males and have raised their family all by themselves.