Directorate of Distance Education

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU

JAMMU

STUDY MATERIAL

For

M.A. ENGLISH

(SEMESTER – IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON No. 1-24 Unit-I, II, III, IV, V & VI
AMERICAN LITERATURE - II

2019 ONWARDS

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M.A. ENGLISH - IV SEMESTER

AMERICAN LITERATURE - II

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WELCOME MESSAGE

Dear Distance Learners,

Welcome to PG English Semester IV! This is the last semester so you are earnestly advised to study hard, visit the library, prepare notes to score a good percentage to make up the deficiency of low percentage in the first three semesters. And also those desirous of cracking NET / SET/ SLET need to make an extra effort to read in detail all the prescribed texts and other secondary material.

Wish you grand success!

Prof. Anupama Vohra
P.G. English Coordinator

UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU
DETAILED SYLLABUS OF M.A. ENGLISH SEMESTER-IV

Course Code : ENG-413 **Duration of Examination-3 hrs.**
Title of the Course : American Literature-II **Total Marks : 100**
Credit : 6 **(a) Semester Examination : 80**
(b) Sessional Assessment : 20

Detailed Syllabus for the examinations to be held in May 2020, 2021 & 2022

Objective :

The objective of the course is to acquaint the students with modern American Drama and Novel, especially the various genres and strands like the Jewish American Novel, the Black American Novel and the Novel of the American South. The students will also acquaint themselves with the technical innovations exercised in 20th century American Drama, like expressionism, stage direction, dialogue delivery etc. besides character and scene depiction.

UNIT - I
Tennessee Williams : *The Glass Menagerie*

UNIT - II
Eugene O' Neill : *The Hairy Ape*

UNIT - III
Arthur Miller : *Death of a Salesman*

UNIT - IV
Ralph Ellison : *The Invisible Man*

UNIT - V
John Steinbeck : *The Grapes of Wrath*

UNIT - VI
Bernard Malamud : *The Assistant*

Mode of Examination

The paper will be divided into sections A, B and C **M.M. = 80**

SECTION : A **Multiple Choice Questions**

Q.No. 1 will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted. Each objective will be for one mark. **(10×1=10)**

SECTION : B **Short Answer Questions**

Section B comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks. **(5×2=10)**

SECTION : C **Long Answer Questions**

Section C comprises long answer type questions from the entire syllabus. Six questions one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in about 300-350 words. Each answer will be evaluated for 12 marks.

(5×12=60)

Suggested Readings

Travis Bogard	*Contour in Time : The Plays of Eugene O'Neill.*
C.W.E. Bigsby	*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama Vol I 1900-1740*
C.W.E. Bigsby	*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth Century American Drama Vol. 2*
Allan Downer	*Fifty Years of American Drama*
Doris Flak	*Eugene O'Neill : The Man and the work*
Leo Marx	*The Machine in the Garden*
Joseph Wood Krutch	*American Drama Since 1981*
Malcom, Bradbury	*The Modern American Novel.*
Ron Mott Ram	*Inner Landscapes : The Theatre of Sam Shepard*
Morris Dickstein	*Gates of Eden : Amercian Culture in the Sixties.*
Helen Weinaerg	*Kafka Model Incontemporang American*
Ihab Hassan	*Modernism in the Plural Challenge and Perspectives*
John Campbell	*The Hero with a Thousand Faces*
Orville Prescott	*In my Opinion*

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M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 1
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-I

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AND THE MYTH OF THE SOUTH

STRUCTURE

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to familiarize the learner with the life and works of Tennessee Williams. He is the playwright of the south whose plays not only project the south in its true colours but also provide us with the critique of the myth. The lesson also introduces you with the Myth of the South.

1.2 INTRODUCTION: TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Tennessee Williams is considered the greatest Southern playwright and one of the greatest playwrights in the history of American drama. Before him, O'Neill, Elma More, Thornton Wilder distinguished themselves as playwrights of the Expressionistic

drama. But after World War II, William Inge, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and Edward Albee broke fresh ground in the American dramatic art. Their plays were partly realistic bordering on fantasy and partly symbolic. Tennessee Williams particularly excelled in depicting the old aristocratic culture and its replacement by gross mercantile values. He is one of the few important writers, the south has ever produced. His best plays are those based on his own life, so in order to understand his plays it is important to know about his life.

Tennessee Williams' earlier name was Thomas Lanier Williams. He was born to Cornelius Coffin Williams and Edwine Dakin, nearly three years after the birth of a sister Rose in Columbus, Mississippi, on March 26, 1911. His father was a shoe salesman and an emotionally absent father. His mother was the daughter of a Southern Episcopal Minister and had lived the adolescence and young womanhood as a special southern belle. Both Tom and Rose spent the earlier years of their life in Mississippi Delta area with their grandfather to the crossroads and nearby farms where the sick and lonely awaited them. They always made a lengthy stop at a certain house where Laura Young, a thin woman greeted them with a sad patient smile. Then one day they did not go there, and when he asked why, his grandfather told him Laura was dead. But Tom never forgot the wistful fragile face of Laura. It was she who served an inspiration for the heroine of his first full length play *Battle of Angels,* some twenty five years later.

At the five years of age Tom suffered a severe case of Diphtheria, which left him with weak kidneys and paralyzed legs. For two years his legs remained useless. Just at the time when he was recovering and regaining some strength in his legs, his father received a permanent post, the family had to move to the city to live. The new house was in an uninteresting, treeless part of town neither a poor nor a rich neighbourhood but incredibly dull, completely colourless. This change from a small provincial town to a big city was very difficult for William's mother, both Tom and Laura also did not like the house and St. Louis. Both of them were used to having the run of the towns where their grandfather was the minister and now they were lost in the vast turmoil of a teeming city, where no one knew or cared who they were.

Tom could not even adjust himself in the Eugene Field Public School. He felt terrified and lost in the welter of shouting pupils. The boys teased him because of his

southern accent. He went through most of the eight grades in sheer terror. He was particularly scared of public school boys, public school teachers and public school principal.

The dominant presence of their father also proved a serious problem to Tom and his sister. He had been practically a stranger to them till they moved to St. Louis. Now he was constantly directing their everyday lives, commenting on their manners, tastes and every move they made. Quarrels between Tennessee William's father and mother became almost a daily occurrence.

The constant nagging of her father pushed Rose on the path of madness. She kept aloof from others, passing her time in the company of collection of glass animals of different sizes and shapes. Williams had his sister, Rose, in mind when he depicted the character of Laura Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie.* The dominating presence of their father also proved a serious problem to Tom and his sister. Tom grew up in a southern atmosphere even though the family was much of the time in St. Louis.

In 1929, Williams enrolled in the University of Missouri. After two years he dropped out of School, compelled to do so by his father, and took job in the warehouse of the same company for which his father worked. He was an employee there for ten months, despising the job but working at the warehouse throughout the day and writing late into the night. The strain was too much, and Williams had a nervous breakdown. He recovered at the home of his grandparents and during these years, he continued to write. He recorded his resentment against this horrible period of his life through the angry utterances of Tom Wingfield in *The Glass Menagerie.* Finally in 1938, Williams graduated from the University of Lowa. He then moved to New Orleans, where he changed his name to Tennessee. In New Orleans, he came into close contact with prostitutes, homosexuals and dope addicts who provided him a glimpse of the vast suffering humanity, the people who lived a frenzied existence. This experience also enriched Williams' vision of life that later found expression in his full length plays.

1.3 TENNESSEE WILLIAMS AS A PLAYWRIGHT

Tennessee Williams' career as a playwright began in earnest in 1935, during the summer he spent in Memphis. He had written plays earlier when he was at the University

of Missouri. But the production of *Cairo! Shanghai ! Bombay!* in collaboration with Dorothy Shapiro by a small summer theatre seems to have given him the immediate inspiration to come out with more plays. His second play to be produced was *The Magic Tower,* which was done in 1936. His next plays *Candles to the Sun, Fugitive Kind* and *Not About Nightingales* were performed in 1938.

In 1938, Tennessee Williams ceased to be simply a local playwright. He won a Group Theater Prize for his one act plays which were later published as *American Blues* (1948). His full length play *Battle of Angels* (later rewritten as *Orpheus Descending*) and professionally produced play, failed miserably. It depicted repressed sexuality in a southern community. He continued to struggle and the year 1945 brought a turning point in his life and carrer, he carved out a permanent place for himself in the history of American drama with the long running Broadway Production of *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Street Car Named Desire* (1947). The play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* won him a Pulitzer Prize and the Drama critics Award. The play was a surrealistic emotional tragedy which depicted the frustrations, mental and moral breakdown of its protagonist, a southern belle.

These years were some of Williams most productive years. His plays were a great success in the United States and abroad and he was able to write works that were well received by critics and popular audiences: *Summer and Smoke* (1948) was full of religious and sexual symbols. *The Rose Tatoo* (1951) was a folk comedy which depicted the vitality, loneliness and mental suffering of the people. *Camino Real* (1953) was melancholic allegorical play lacking proper characterization, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), which won, Tennessee Williams a Pulitzer Prize again. His later plays were *Orpheus Descending* (1957) a new version of *Battle of Angels; Suddenly Last Summer* (1957); *Period of Adjustment* (1960); *The Night of Iguana* (1961) and *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore* (1963)

In all Williams' plays, he gave American theatre goers unforgettable characters, and a series of powerful portraits of the human condition. He was deeply interested in what he called '*Poetic Realism',* the use of everyday objects, which, seen repeatedly and in a right context, become imbued with symbolic meaning.

His most memorable characters are women, faded belles such as Amanda

Wingfield, Alina Winemiller and Blanche Dur Bois, whose old fashioned manners and charm suggests a wishful recollection of privileged antebellum life. The current conflict in Williams between animal promiscuity and lady like fastidiousness between the physical and the spiritual needs, overlays the conflict between the painful present and the ideal past. Roger Boxill has described Williams as "an elegiac writer, a poet of Nostalgia, who laments the loss of a past idealized in the memory. As the leading dramatist of the Southern Renaissance in American letters, he draws on the myth of the old south''. South, his family and the writers he grew with became William's primary source of inspirations for his works.

1.4 MYTH OF THE SOUTH

Like Lillian Hellman, in most of William's plays the theme of old versus the New South seems to be dominating one. Tennessee Williams lived at a time when south was still smouldering under the crushing defect suffered during the Civil war and the spreading of modernism added fuel to the crumbled culture. It was the time of disillusionment, the loss of ideals, unemployment and cut-throat competition.

The subject of the Southern myth is the fate of the ruined homeland. By extending the meaning of 'myth' it can be used to refer to any imaginative but serious attempt to account for the things as they are. In short, the myth of the South consists of the justifications imaginatively created by southern after their defeat in the Civil War. They felt to have lost a distinct, superior, patriarchal and gentlemanly culture by the attack of the upstarts. In this myth, the southerns glamorized the culture of big plantations with negro slaves to serve the superior whites and detested the civilization of industrialized North.

South was a rich land with springs, mild winters and summers and fertile land for abundant harvest. The pioneers possessed strength, courage, ambition and a determination to succeed through any means. As the guiding principle of American culture has always been cross materialism, the pioneers grabbed the land from the native innocent Indian inhabitant through unlawful means. This was the first sin they committed. Then slavery became their instrument to make the land flourish. Thus along with the attempt to own the land, the whites committed the second sin of employing slaves to

till it. Slavery, without doubt, is a rejection of brotherhood for petty material gains.

The contradiction at the bottom of the Southern society sprang from the reality of the status of southern farmers and their pretensions. The pioneers who colonized the southern states were capitalists who were bent upon making a fast buck through investments in land, but once having set up the plantations, they thought of themselves as feudal aristocrats in a patriarchal society. The Northern States on the other hand, due to comparative lightness and infertility of the land, were more suitable for industrial developments. Consequently, the interests of the industrialized North diverged from those of the South.

The South being a part and parcel of American culture, suffered from the contradictions between agrarian and industrial policies of the Union. The south was an agrarian society, which was against industrialization. On the other hand, the Northern America was rapidly developing into an industrialized area. The Southern cherished the idea of feudal aristocracy of Europe. But in reality the basis of feudal elations, natural submission to the superiors in the European fashion was lacking. They lacked the serf master relationship which encouraged natural obedience. On the contrary, the Southern imported the negroes from Africa to serve as slaves under inhuman conditions. In other words, They were only interested in increasing their production and profit, unmindful of any human values. But, yet, the Southerns were proud of their culture, which they regarded as gentlemanly, patriarchal and superior to the cross-culture of the North, which was based on cash payments. The modernism of the North, conflicted with traditionalism of the South.

The impact of Industrialization of North was immense, ‘‘In the sphere of agriculture, modern industry has a more revolutionary effect than elsewhere, for the reason, that it annihilates the peasant, that bulwark of the old society, and replaces him by the wage labourer’’. Unfortunately, though the plantations of the South were managed on commercial basis, the idea of wage labourer could not be digested by the southerns. The reason being the slave supplied cheap labour as compared to that of wage labourer. Thus, for profits slaves were exploited. So the difference between the industrial exploitation that the Southern gentlemanly culture opposed and their own presumably agrarian society, was only apparent and not real. The difference between the North and South

on the issue of distribution of federal resources led to a serious conflict between them. The conflict grew over homesteads, tariff, internal improvement and political power in the Union. This conflict culminated in the historic Civil War of 1860-64. The Southerns were provoked into the war that was impossible to win. The North won the war because of its superiority in standing the pressure of the war and the comparatively more efficient organization of economy in industry as compared with agriculture.

The crushing defeat of the South rang the death bell of the culture of the plantations. The reconstruction period released the forces of corruption, which were already present in the South. The carpet beggars swarmed over it and a new era of exploitation came into existence. But the Southern psyche suffered a shock of having been uprooted by the upstarts. They felt to have lost a superior culture. They forgot the inhumanity and exploitations of the lost culture. Instead they devoted their energies to the glorification of the past. The Southern Myth came into being. Yet, subconsciously they were all suffering from a sense of guilt or sin as they had imported negroes from Africa to serve as slaves under inhuman condition.

Thus the Southern writers began to defend and represent the way of life which had become a legend of the community. The Southern Renaissance of the 1920's made the Southern writers look for new grounds and provided them with a culture which reminded them of their past, its imagined glory and inherited heritage. Thus Williams' plays project the south in its true colours. The society which is depicted, is on the brink of a social change marked by the intrusion of the new South.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Tennessee Williams is one of the Southern writers of America. His perception of reality is saturated with the values, the images and the attitudes which constitute the southern myth. He became a name immediately after the extraordinarily enthusiastic reception of *The Glass Manageire* in New York City in March, 1945. He, who was born in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911, spent about his first twelve years there; and he returned on occasion after he had decided to become a writer. He continues the Southern myth in deploring the loss of an old aristocratic culture and its replacement by gross mercantile values. He shows sympathy for the decaying aristocrats whom at times

he places in incredible situations. But Williams not only writes from within the tradition but also provides us with a critique of the myth. As Porter has said, ‘‘Tennessee Williams writes his plays out of the matrix of this tradition. He not only uses the plantation myth as an artistic point of departure,...the attitudes, which shape his drama derive from his background, his education and his temperament.”

1.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Tennessee Williams as a playwright of South.
2. What is the myth of the South? Do you think Tennessee Williams plays are the critique of the myth?

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 2
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-I

The Glass Menagerie : A Critical Study

STRUCTURE

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to introduce the play to you and to give you a detailed summary with critical comments.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

The Glass Menageire is Williams' first successful play, by which, he acquired the status of a dramatist of national stature. The play is largely based on Tennessee Williams' personal experience within his own family constellation experience which was both compassionate and tragic: the events that drove the spirited and lively Rose into a mad and withdrawn girl, playing with her collection of miniature glass animals, and that particular period of life when the young writer spent a dismal and disdainful life under his father at the International Shoe Company, had haunted his mind persistently. The play, however, must not be dubbed as an autobiographical outburst as it would be an injustice to the creative talent of the playwright. Rooted in American life, *The Glass*

Menagerie reconstructs the impoverishment of the Americans, especially the vast middle class, at the time of Great Depression of the 1920's when world wide economic disaster ruined the American economy, effecting the general thinking of the people and different institutions of the nation.

2.3 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Tom Wingfield is both a narrator and a character of the play. He dressed as a merchant sailor, enters from the alley and sets the psychological stage. He gives the social background to the play and introduces all the characters.

The vibrations of the soft music take the audience to the thirties through the memory of Tom. Wingfield apartment is described. Amanda and Laura are seated at a drop leaf table. Amanda calls Tom and asks him to join them at the table. As they begin to eat, their gestures are enacted in a sort of pantomime. Soon Amanda begins to lecture Tom regarding the right method of eating. Tom in sheer disgust at the constant instigating of his mother regarding the right method of eating, withdraws from the table on the pretext of going to get a cigarette, while Amanda goes to bring the dessert bowl. She tells Laura to stay ''fresh and pretty'' for gentlemen callers. But when Laura says that she is not going to receive any, Amanda says that they come when they are least expected and starts narrating an incident in Blue Mountains. Both Tom and Laura know what's coming but are ready to hear it again. Amanda is absorbed in the days of her girlhood. She tells her children that one Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain, she received seventeen gentlemen callers. In those days girls knew how to talk and Amanda was also well versed in the art of conversation. Her gentlemen callers were all gentlemen of the Mississippi Delta - planters and sons of planters. Laura gets up to clear the table but Amanda tells her to study her typewriter chart and shorthand a little. She thinks that it is time for the gentlemen callers to start arriving. But Laura says that they are not going to receive any because she is not popular like her mother was in Blue Mountain. The scene dims out with Glass Menagerie music as Laura says ''Mother's afraid I'm going to be an old maid''.

Critical Comments

The play is a domestic play dramatizing the effect of displacement on a family,

which has been brought up in the tradition of the South. The family consists of Amanda, an erstwhile Southern belle who was the daughter of an aristocratic family of planters and her two children Tom and Laura. Tom is a narrator as well as a character in the action of the domestic play. He takes us back to the period of the depression of the thirties. It was a climacteric period. Williams used it for bringing out the crisis in the lives of the characters of this play.

Scene II

The second scene opens with the image of blue roses lighted on the screen. Laura is seated in the delicate ivory chair at the small claw-foot table. She is washing and polishing her collection of glass, which is the most highly prized treasure of life. She wears a kimono of soft violet material. As the footsteps of Amanda are heard, Laura quickly hides her bowl of glass ornaments and begins to stare blankly at diagram of the type- writer. Amanda enters with a look "that is grim and hopeless and a little absurd". She is in her full dress outfits that she usually wears to the D.A.R. Laura asks her mother how was the D.A.R. meeting. But Amanda tells her that she had not the courage to go to the D.A.R. Then she removes the diagram of the typewriter keyboard and the chart of the Gregg Alphabet and tears them in two pieces one by one. As Laura asks her mother why she did that Amanda tells her that before going to D.A.R. meeting she stopped at Rubicam's Business College to enquire about Laura's progress from her teachers. But the teachers reported that Laura has not been attending school. After one period of extreme nervousness, during which she vomitted publicly, Laura admits that she has been going out everyday as though to school but visiting instead the museums and flower galleries. Amanda is flabbergasted at Laura, thus depriving herself of a future. She cannot imagine what she would do with a grown up daugther who doesn't have any self-confidence to strike out new paths of living. She tried her best to make out of Laura a self-reliant being, but Laura seems to be out of line with everything that her mother could think for her.

Amanda is deeply disappointed that Laura has given up a business career, just, because it gives her "nervous indigestion". Since she cannot learn to be independent, there is nothing but dependency all their lives. Amanda cannot visualize a more humiliating picture of the degradation of a southern lady than eating her bread in humility by dependence

on relatives who are not very cordial. She knew such examples from her own observation in the southern society. The spinsters who don't occupy a position become humiliating dependents of a grudging ''sister's husband or brother's wife''.

Amanda, in sheer desperation asks Laura if she has ever liked a boy. Laura replies that there's a boy she liked once whose name is Jim and whose picture appears in the school "Annual bearing a silver cup that was awarded to him in debating. He used to call Laura Blue Roses", because once when she had an attack of pleurosis, Jim asked her what was the matter with her and she said it was pleurosis, but he thought that she said ''Blue Roses''! Ever since then, he called her that.

The future of Amanda's first initiative regarding her daughter creates frustration in her. But, she the former southern belle has a second aspect to her character. Practical exigencies have taught the southern woman that her true element is the family, where she presides as the mistress of the household. She, therefore, asks Laura whether she had ever cared for any young man and that is the career which now she plans for her daughters' ''girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married to some nice man'', and she decides that that's what Laura will do.

Critical Comments

We find various symbols in this scene. Glass Menagerie is the most important symbol which offers Laura escape into a fragile, unreal world of beauty where there are no leg braces and no business school classes. Typewriter keyboard chart represented to Amanda a hope of a secure future for her daughter. Both the delicate ivory chair and claw foot table where Laura is seated represent her psychic and physical condition. Even her dress of soft violet material shows that the fabric of her life is woven of the softest material. The Jewel Box, a beautiful building in the botanical gardens of St. Louis Forest Park, the little penguins at the zoo, the movies and the topical flowers are symbolically connected with the glass menagerie that Laura has collected, delicate exotic, beautiful.

The D.A.R. is Amanda's last connection with the kind of society that she frequented as a girl, the last reminder to the world at large that she is a lady, no matter to what economic depths she may have sunk.

Scene III

Tom, the narrator then describes how, after the fiasco at Rubicom's Business College, the idea of getting a gentleman caller for Laura possessed Amanda "Like some archetype of the universal unconscious the image of the gentleman caller haunted our small apartment". Amanda being a ''woman of action as well as words'' decided to raise money needed ''to properly feather the nest and plume the bird''. In a brilliant commentary on the vainglorious romanticism of the women of the south, Tom narrates how Amanda roped in subscribers to *The Home-Maker's Companion,* a magazine for matrons of the type that features the serialized sublimations of the ladies of letters. Amanda enters with a telephone, trying to trap a prospective subscriber, using all her quite and readiness of wit. The prospective subscriber is one Ida Scott, whose sinus condition makes her a 'Christian martyr' and as something burns in the kitchens, she leaves the phone snapping the connection.

As there is a dim out, another part of the scene of encounter between Amanda and Tom begins. Tom is working in a Continental Shoemakers at $ 65 a month. He finds himself caught in a trap from which he wishes to escape. Amanda and Tom quarrel over D.H. Lawrence's book, which she took back to the library because she won't allow such filth brought into her house. In this outburst, she reveals the typical attitude of the Southern women to the treatment of sex in fiction. She also tells Tom that she doesn't believe in him when he says that he spends his time at the movies. In a bitter and fanciful speech, he tells her that he really spends his time in opium dens, dens of vice and criminal's hangouts, where he is a hired assassin. He is carrying a tommy gun in a violin case and is called killer Wingfield.

All hidden contempt for his mother now comes to the surface and he explodes with all the fury calling her witch. As he prepares to leave menagerie, Laura cries out his coal strikes Laura's glass. Amanda demands an apology.

Critical Comments

The scene shows that Tom is bitter about having to work in a shoe warehouse to support his mother and sister. He does not want to desert them, but the job is so uninspiring that he thinks it may drive him crazy. Amanda's over protectiveness causes

Tom to lash out blindly, hurting, unintentionally both her and his sister. All these three characters are shown living in three different worlds of theirs, which are not the real world.

Scene IV

At five in the morning Tom enters the house. He tells Laura about a magic show. Then Tom hears his mother saying ‘‘Rise and Shine’’ and he answers that he will rise but not shine. Laura appeals to him not to make Mother nervous and beseeches him to ‘‘make up with her, apologize and speak to her!’’. Amanda calls for Laura and reminds her to do what she had told her namely to bring butter from the market and tell them to charge it. Laura however doesn’t like the attitude and expression of the grocer when he is asked to charge things. But Amanda tells her that the expression on grocer’s face won’t harm her. As Laura hurries to go out, she slips and catches the worried attention of both Tom and Amanda. She says she is all right and goes.

After a severe inner struggle Tom apologizes, Amanda bursts into tears. She says that she has confidence in Tom whom she does not want to fall down or fail. Tom promises to try and Amanda assures him: ‘‘Try and you will succeed’’. She asks him never to be drunkard again and advises him to eat something with coffee, But Tom insists that he only wants black coffee, Amanda tells him that it is not good for him. She is afraid that Tom is taking after his father’s ways. She is unable to understand why Tom is restless and why does he go to the movies so much. Tom tells his mother that he goes to the movies to get adventure which his work does not provide. He prefers instincts but Amanda says that instincts belong to animals and as a Christian adult he should think of superior things-things of mind and the spirit.

Tom wants to leave for his work place but Amanda detains him and tells him to find out some eligible young man at the warehouse, who does not drink, for Laura. Tom leaves in disgust but promises to do something about it.

Critical Comments

Amada’s condemning instinct and urging Tom to prefer mind and spirit characterize her in Christian terms. Tom’s speeches indicate his feeling of confinement

and that he will not stay in the Wingfield's apartment for long.

Scene V

Scene five begins with screen legend ''ANNUNCIATION'', which indicates that there is going to be the announcement of a probable visit by the long awaited gentleman caller. Tom goes out to smoke, Amanda gently tells him that if he didn't smoke, he could save enough to give him ''a night school course in accounting''! But Tom doesn't bother about it and prefers to smoke. Then he assumes the role of narrator and tells the audience about the Paradise Dance Hall across the alley from the Wingfield apartment where people come to dance. He says, ''This was the compensation for lives that passed like mine without any change or adventure''.

Amanda comes out on the fire escape landing and wishes ''Success and Happiness'' for her children seeing the little Silver Slipper of a moon, Tom tells this other that his guess was that she wished for a gentleman caller and then to her great excitement tells her that they are going to have a gentleman caller. He has asked him to dinner and he is coming tomorow. Amanda feels that she is left with little time to make necessary preparations for the big event. Tom does not want her to make a fuss over it. Amanda learns from Tom that the name of the gentleman caller is O'Connor. She wants to make sure that he doesn't drink as she has had a bitter experience with Tom's father. So she doesn't want a drunkard for her daughter.

Tom tells Amanda that James D O'Connor is a shipping clerk at the Warehouse and getting eighty five dollars a month. He also informs her that O'Connor is really going in for self improvement. Amanda is happy. She calls Laura and forces her to wish for happiness and good fortune.

Critical Comments

The name of the dance hall-Paradise has symbolic significance along with that of the glass sphere that reflects rainbow colours. Both are reminders of beautiful ideals and point up the great distance that man has fallen from beauty. The "Little silver slipper'' of a moon, on which Amanda makes wishes, and on which Laura, also, is forced to wish, proves out to be nothing, but an image of their alienated condition.

Scene VI

The gentleman caller whom Tom invites is Jim O'Connor, an Irish young man. He is Tom's colleague whom both Tom and Laura have known since their school days. In High school Jim was a hero. He had tremendous Irish good nature and vitality. He was a star in basket ball, captain of the debating club, who sang the male lead in the annual light operas. Tom remembers that in school he was extremely popular. He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty''. But completely devoted to the fake dream of American success, even six years after he left the high school, he was holding a job that was not much better than Tom's. He further elaborates about him, ''He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality that we were somehow set apart from''.

Down at the warehouse, Jim calls him Shakespeare because of Tom's secret practice of retiring to a cabinet of the washing room to work on poems when business was slack in the warehouse'.

In the apartment Amanda is dressing Laura, who objects to being a trap for young men. Her mother once again reviews the way young men were properly entrapped by eligible girls in the aristocracy of the old south, when she was brought up. When Laura finds that the gentleman caller is Jim O'Connor, she says she cannot possibly appear because he was the same boy she used to like. But at her mother's insistence, she answers the door and admits Jim and Tom. Tom introduces Jim and Laura to each other. Jim finds Laura's hand cold and when she explains that she has been playing the victrola, he tells her: ''Must have been playing classical music on it! You ought to play a hot swing music to warm you up! She begs excuse of him and runs away like a frightened deer.''

Jim tries to persuade Tom to take the course in public speaking, which will fit them for ''executive positions''. Then he tells Tom that Mr. Mandoza of the warehouse had spoken to him about Tom and warned him that if he didn't wake up he was going to be out of job. Tom replies that he himself is planning to change. He tells that he has become a member of the Union of Merchant Seamen and there his inclination lies.

Amanda appears and begins to shower praises on Laura. She also turns to her own past-all vestige of gracious living having departed now! "Well in the South we had so many servants. Gone, gone, gone". Tom brings the information that supper is ready but Laura is not feeling well and will not be able to join them at the table. But on continuous insistence of Amanda she comes to the table but faints. She is taken to the sofa into the living room by Tom. Supper begins with Tom saying grace.

Critical Comments

Jim O'Connor, the gentleman caller, is shown as the exampler, the model of the American Dream, which is made up of the images of success. But his actual position in the warehouse shows that the American dream which is a cluster of images that propagates the greatness, the vigor, and the potential of the American way of life, is not the actual way, in which the Americans live but a commercial advertisement used as a soporific to divert the people from a realization of the miseries of their actual existence.

Scene VII

After the dinner has been finished, the lights go out. Amanda thinking that the fuse has burnt out, asks Jim if he could tell a burnt out switch. He finds that fuses are okay. Amanda realizes that Tom might have not paid the light bill. We as well as Jim know that Tom had paid the amount of light bill to the Union of Merchant Seamen to become a member. Amanda is put in good humour by Jim who says that Shakespeare (Tom) probably has written a poem on that light bill and may be the poem will win a ten dollar prize. Amanda gives Jim a candelabrum and some wine to give Laura and coax is her to drink a little wine.

Jim enters Laura's world. Both Jim and Laura sit together on the floor with the candelabrum between them. The warmth of Jim's lively nature melts her shyness. She asks him if he has kept up with singing. She also reminds him of their school days when he used to call her Blue Roses and gives the whole reason of his saying so. Jim remembers that Laura was a shy girl, having no friend to accompany her. He also senses inferiority complex in her. He knows that he himself has not made much progress but he has not lost hope.

Jim takes interest in Laura's glass menagerie. Laura shows him a unicorn, the

oldest in her collection. He notices that Laura has love for those who are extinct in the modern world. When Jim and Laura start dancing, they bump into the table and the horn of the unicorn is broken. Laura, who is impressed by Jim's outlook of life, is not hurt by the breaking of the horn. Later when Jim discloses that he is engaged to Betty and they are soon going to be married, Laura presents him the unicorn as a souvenir. Laura's dream of love and married life shatters. Not only Laura's but Amanda's dream is also broken.

Tom tries an escape from his surroundings. But this escape doesn't change his fate. After losing his job for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe box, he left St Louis and followed his father's footsteps, ''attempting to find in motion what was lost in space. I travelled around a great deal. The cities swept about me like dead leves''. But the haunting memories of past always pursued him. The family responsibilities come in his way.

Critical Comments

The scene further throws light on the character of Jim, who appears to believe in all the propaganda of the success myth. He tells Tom that he is taking a course in the public speaking and Radio Engineering in the night. The warehouse is not a prison for him, but a rung on the ladder towards success. His knowledge of himself that he is not a successful man shows the irony of the success myth which has not spared him even. But he is sure that his signature will increase in value someday.

Laura's love for a unicorn and her father's worn out phonograph records shows her apathy with all that is new in the modern world. Jim's breaking of the horn of unicorn is symbolically his breaking the uniqueness of Laura's illusionary world. But Laura is not hurt by the breaking of the horn, may be she has made up her mind to live outside her world of illusionary world.

After the departure of Jim, Amanda has perhaps grown after all this experience. She comforts Laura, Tom says, ''Now that we cannot hear the mother's speech, her silliness is gone and she has dignity and tragic beauty''. Tom's lost speech declares the over all failure. ''For now a days the world is lit by lighting. Blow out your candles, Laura and so good bye...(She blows the candles out)''.

Tom's final words suggest not only the fruitlessness of his endeavor for fulfillment but they also convey his realization that he cannot break the family bonds which tie him. These bonds lessen the gravity of his otherwise alienated condition in a world, which is lit by lighting and not candles. We are reminded of Amanda's appeal to Tom, ''In these trying times we live in, all that we have is to cling to each other...''Williams emphasizes the need for understanding among individuals, who are victims of non-recognition and failure in the capitalistic society.

2.4 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the plot of the play The Glass Menagerie.
2. Trace the autobiographical elements in the play *The Glass Menagerie.*

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 3**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-I**

THE CHARACTERS

STRUCTURE

3.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to study all important characters of the play *The Glass Menagerie.*

3.2 AMANDA WINGFIELD

Amanda Wingfield is a middle aged woman, a deserted wife and mother of two children-a son Tom and daughter Laura. She, who once as Southern belle, was the darling of her small town's social scene, is now living in a small apartment in St. Louis. She dreams of her past and of her daughter's future, but seems unwilling to recognize

certain harsh realities of the present. She is a loving mother, but her demands can make life difficult for Laura and unbearable for Tom. As Williams suggested in the description of his characters, Amanda Wingfield is "a little woman of great but confused vitality clinging frantically to another time and place...she is not paranoiac but her life is paranoia. There is much to admire in Amanda, and as much to love and pity as there is to laugh at. Certainly, she has endurance and a kind of heroism, and though her foolishness makes her unwittingly cruel at times, there is tenderness in her slight person."

What makes Amanda grotesque is the stark contrast between her internal and external environment. Though she lives in a poor neighbourhood hardly making her ends meet at the mercy of her son's earning of a pittance, she insists on observing the ritual of the aristocracy, grace must be said properly at the table and her son and daughter must behave as if they were living in their aristocratic mansion. As her daughter Laura offers her help with serving the dessert at the table she says, "No sister, no sister-you be the lady this time and I'll be the darky...Resume your seat, little sister-I want you to stay fresh and pretty for gentlemen callers."

Thus she invokes the life of the aristocratic south. She still imagines herself to be the same southern belle who led a life of culture, refinement and knightly courtesy. She tells her daughter, after they have partaken of a frugal breakfast, about her life in south. She was a southern belle living in a particoed house in a place called Blue Mountains: "One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain your mother received–seventeen! Gentlemen callers! Why sometimes there haven't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the Parish house."

Amanda as a southern belle cannot accept her defeat lightly and she refuses to admit Laura's shyness and her crippled leg. Although she insists that Laura not refer to herself as a cripple, that she speaks only of a little physical defect and distract attention from it by developing charm and vivacity, she is not entirely blind to the situation. When she discovers that her daughter has been playing truant from Rubicams Business School where she had admitted her to enter into a professional career, she knows what can happen to a southern girl without a home of her own. "I've seen such pitiful cases in the South-barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sisters' husband or brother's wife! Stuck away in some little mouse-trap of a room–

encouraged by one in law to visit another–like birdlike women without any nest-eating the crust of humility all their life!"

Amanda, the former southern belle, has a second aspect to her character. Practical exigencies have taught the southern woman that her true element is the family, where she presides as the mistress of the household. She, therefore, asks Tom to look for a gentleman caller for Laura at his workplace. When from his limited acquaintance he invites to dinner a warehouse friend, her hopes skyrocket. Tom tries to make his mother be a little realistic. But refusing to listen, Amanda with grin feminine energy, works to change Laura into a pretty trap. On the ill fated evening she makes Laura so sick that she cannot eat dinner. She also isolates Laura and Jim but only to discover that this young man is already engaged and is going to marry very soon. Then she forgets all her silly lies and sees the humiliating position of herself and Laura for what it is. She accuses Tom of allowing them to make fools of themselves and of his being selfish and thoughtless. While accusing him she lacks the charm she talks so much about.

Amanda tries hard to care for her children and to see that they do the right thing. While her motives are laudable, her responses to them, are unfortunately, overzealous and limited by her own view of what the right thing is. Laura and Tom can never be what Amanda wants them to be, but her stubborn attempts to direct them reveal her great energy and her strong will. She is a heroic woman. She does not give up trying to find happiness and genuine sincerity for her family in the face of perhaps greater obstacles than she ought to have face.

Amanda is too much a prisoner of her fantasies to sense reality inherent in a particular situation. Though fully aware of the circumstances that surround her, she does not stop her efforts to bring back the glorious days of her past. Tischler finds that, "Amanda represents the ideals of the old south, the Puritan tradition and a kind of meaningless conformity that destroys the individual without the consequence of enriching the world."

3.3 TOM WINGFIELD

Tom Wingfield is the son of Amanda and the narrator of the play. The whole play is seen through the mind of Tom. He is a young man caught in a trap from which

he wishes to escape. He is poet with a job in warehouse which he does not like and so is desperately unhappy.

Tom represents some of the most important characteristics of the southern hero. The qualities of the southern myth that impinged, accordingly to Cash are, "romanticism, a penchant for violence, an uneasy balance of Puritanism and hedonism."

It has been suggested that Tom represents Tennessee Williams himself. It is said that the predicament of Tom is similar to that of the dramatist when he was of that age. The shoe factory job, the poetry writing, the cramped living quarters and the very close relationship with the sister are all echoes of Williams' own experience. Like his creator he is an itinerant dreamer.

Tom has no love for his job. The office of the Continental shoemakers, with its "celotax interior and fluorescent tubes" suffocates him. That is why he is restless and so he goes to the movies so much. Since his own work does not provide any adventure, he goes to the movies to get a sense of it. His love of adventure is highlighted by the screen image of 'sailing vessel with Jolly Roger."

Tom has a strong sense of responsibility to the family, but it is constantly struggling with his sense of responsibility to himself. He knows that he is the only bread winner of the family and understands Laura's condition but can not offer any genuine help to his mother and sister. The conflict between his feelings of responsibility to his family and to himself troubles him throughout the play. He suffers through the petty annoyances at home, the boredom of his job, and the frustration which bound him in both places until he can take no more from either and leaves.

Tom is caught in the web of his family and is fully aware of his plight. He knows that his job in the shoe company will stifle him and the anguish he feels in the presence of his mother will soon tear him apart. He knows that one day he will have to commit the cruelest act of his life, abandoning mother and sister. Jim tries to persuade him to take the course in public speaking and radio engineering which will fit them for executive positions. But Tom has something else in his mind to do. He tells Jim that he is planning to change his job and wants to have a future which does not include the warehouse and the night course in public speaking and radio engineering. He has become a member

of the Union of Merchant Seamen and his inclination lies there. He believes that by joining the Union of Merchant Seamen, he will experience change and adventure and escape the painful views and pretensions of others.

Tom, in the role of a Narrator, speaks a good deal about truth and illusion and reality and dreams, but Tom the protagonist in the story, possesses the romantic soul of a dreamer. Despite the perception, it shows as Narrator he has as much trouble facing his situation as does his mother. Though he loves and sympathizes with his mother and sister, he cannot accept their future. The world will not accept them and he has to make his stand. He is disgusted with his mother for her poses and apparent refusal to cope with reality, and yet, he too, escapes daily from the oppression of his life by seeing the narcotism of the cinema. Finally, he tries an escape from his surrounding by leaving Saint Louis and following his father's footsteps when he lost his job for writing a poem on the lid of a shoe box.

But his escape from a trap, a situation which is plainly unendurable does not bring him anything challenging, positive and heroic. He is a part of the dilemma of his family and he cannot break completely free. Wherever he may go and whatever he may do, he will always be more faithful than he intended to be. His final words suggest not only fruitlessness of his endeavour for fulfillment, but they also convey his realization that he cannot break the family bonds which tie him. These bonds lessen the gravity of his otherwise alienated condition in a world which is lit by lighting and not candles.

3.4 LAURA WINGFIELD

Laura Wingfield is the daughter of Amanda and sister of Tom. She is shy, withdrawn, delicate and as fragile as the little glass ornaments and phonograph records which are her escape. At the opening of the play, the author describes her that "an illness in childhood has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other, and held in a brace. This defect need not be more than suggested on the stage. Stemming from this, Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."

Of all the characters in the play, Laura is the farthest removed from the real world, the world of practicality and fact. Although her physical deformity is slight, she

has grown accustomed to her abnormality since childhood. She is so conscious of it that she used to feel as if the whole world is looking at her and this made her retreat into herself. This is the source of her painful self consciousness.

Laura has withdrawn so far that she is actually unable to cope with the world that lies beyond the phonograph and her collection of glass animals. She is unable to adapt herself to the modern scene of electro-dynamics, she lives in a world of candlelight and fantasy. Amanda has admitted her to Rubicam's Business School to learn short hand and typing so that she can enter into a professional career. But Amanda discovers that her daughter has been playing truant and instead visiting the art museum and bird houses at the zoo, penguins and Jewel box with tropical flowers. These were the avenues that provided Laura with refreshing diversions from the monotony and horror of learning short hand and typing. She couldn't effect a compromise with the shallow dreams of a business culture. She sought to identify herself with some higher sports in human culture.

Laura is kind hearted and she is sensitive both to her mother's strengths and weaknesses, and to Tom's hopes and frustration. She tries to lessen the sense of frustration that Tom feels when he thinks of staying home and taking care of the family. She tries to stop Tom from embarrassing the mother when Amanda retells the already familiar stories of good times in Blue Mountains. She also advises Tom to apologise after the quarrel between Amanda and Tom when Amanda vows not to speak to him till he apologizes.

Laura, when is asked by her mother whether she had ever cared for any youngman, replies that there's a boy she liked once. His name is Jim, a high school hero, who used to call Laura "Blue Roses." She is identified with blue roses, which are not found in nature and like these flowers Laura cannot exist in a real world. Tom invites a colleague of his to dinner on the instigation of Amanda to find a gentleman caller for Laura. He is the same Jim who is Laura's is ideal since her school days. Jim finds Laura's hands very cold and that she is a shy girl, he suggests her to always play hot swing music because they can warm her hands, which are cold because of playing the victrola.

Jim enters Laura's life and a faint glimmer of hope appears for her in her scene with Jim but it is snuffed out abruptly. Jim senses inferiority complex in Laura. He urges

her to forget her crippled leg and the brace she wears. He tells her that no one ever noticed it. Her imagination has magnified her trouble when she ought to forget it and think of herself as superior in some way.

Laura responds to the encouragement, and shows him her precious glass collection. She shows him a unicorn the oldest in her collection. He noticed Laura's love for those, who are extinct in the modern world. Her love for the unicorn and her father's worn out phonograph records shows her apathy with all that is new in the modern world. But when Jim and Laura start dancing, they suddenly bump into the table and the horn of the unicorn is broken. Symbolically, Jim has broken the uniqueness of Laura's illusionary world. But Laura, who is impressed by Jim's outlook of life is not hurt by the breaking up of the horn. May be Laura has made up her mind to live outside her world of illusions which consists of unicorn and other glass animals. But her dream of love and married life shatters when Jim tells her that he is engaged to Betty, and they are soon going to be married. Laura, who has lived a whole life time of romance with her dream-lover, is shocked. She presents him the unicorn as a souvenir.

Through her timidity, her suffering from the friction between Tom and Amanda, and her retreat into the world of dreams, Laura evokes genuine sympathy. She is the appealing one of those who must be cared for, loved and understood. She suffers from a painful sense of loneliness, from the first scene to the last, her mother makes her feel her lack of popularity with men and her inability to cope with any kind of social life.

3.5 JIM O'CONNOR

Jim O'Connor is an Irish Youngman who has tremendous Irish good nature and vitality. He is Tom's colleague whom both Tom and Laura have known since their school days. In high school, he was a hero. He was a star in basket ball, captain of the debating club, who sang the male lead in the annual light operas. Tom remembers that in the school he was extremely popular. He was shooting with such velocity through his adolescence that you would logically expect him to arrive at nothing short of the White House by the time he was thirty". But completely devoted to the fake dream of American success, even six years after he left the high school, he was holding a job that was not much better than Tom's. Williams in the dramatic personae of the play describes

Jim as “a nice, ordinary young man”. He further elaborates about him, “He is the most realistic character in the play, being an emissary from a world of reality” from which the other characters are somehow separated.

Jim is optimistic and thoroughly committed to a belief in “progress”. But he is nagged by self doubts, that are hidden beneath the self confidence he exudes. He displays his liveliness in the remarks he makes. He suggests Laura to always play hot swing music, because that can warm her hands which are cold because of playing the victorola. Jim goes to night school for self improvement. There he learns radio-engineering and public speaking. He wants Tom to take a course in public speaking which takes one to executive positions. Tom, who is a poet, seeking adventure and experience but trapped by circumstances into an unexciting and experience where only alcohol and the movies offer excitement, Jim O’Connor is dull and unimaginative. Tom rejects the values, which Jim religiously cherishes.

The sensitive creatures like Laura and Tom notice the corruption that lies on earth and their understanding of this corruption limits them to their individual worlds. But for Jim the world is a wonderful place to live in. Jim is awed by the future made in chewing gum. The warehouse is not a prison for him, but a rung on the ladder toward success. He lectures on the future material progress of America: “....all that remains is for steam...knowledge-zzzp! Money-zzzp! Power! That is the cycle democracy is built on!”

Jim tells Laura that she is suffering from inferiority complex and suggests her to think to herself as superior in some way. He knows that, he himself though being progressive young man, has not made much progress. But for him, however, problems exist simply to be overcome. He has the supreme confidence that nothing can be thrown in his way that he cannot surmount and he does not realize that all people are not made the way he is and that all people cannot look at things the way he does. He is sure that his signature will increase in value someday. His optimistic approach towards life is really appreciable. He says “I am disappointed but I am not discouraged.”

Jim represented everything that Amanda longed for. Although he gives the impression of great self confidence, he is in fact rather deeply disturbed that he has not

accomplished what he thinks he should have by this time.

Jim enters Laura's world and even dances with her and clumsily caused the horn to break off Laura's prized unicorn-the one thing that made the animal unique. But Laura is not hurt by the breaking of horn which symbolically represents her desire to enter the normal world like an ordinary person. He kisses her and then realizes that Laura is falling in love with him. This he cannot face because Laura has made him aware of his own insecurity. He tells her that he is engaged and that he will not call again Laura who has been holding the glass unicorn in her hand, gives it to him for a souvenir. This shows that finally she retreats to her own world of illusions. Jim cannot preserve his illusions about his being gifted and have Laura too. He needs a relationship in which his self-confidence can be secure which is not possible with Laura.

To conclude, we can say that Jim is not really so much different from the Wingfields. Like them, he must be protected by illusion from a harsh world that prevents individual fulfillment. He is simpler than they are, however, and his illusions represent bourgeois values.

3.6 CONTRAST BETWEEN JIM AND TOM

Jim O'Connor and Tom Wingfield are working in the warehouse. The contrast between the two is evident whereas the writer describes Jim O'Connor as an emissary from a world of reality, Tom is a poet and possesses the romantic soul of a dreamer. He is extremely bitter about having to work in a shoe warehouse to support his mother and sister. To him, the job is so uninspiring that he thinks it may drive him crazy. He is conscious of the fact that this job is not the one he ultimately wants and that he is wasting his life in that "celotax interior with fluorescent tubes." His writing poems represents his desire to escape from a very tiring life. He daily escapes from the oppression of his life by seeking the narcotism of the cinema. Since his own work does not provide any adventure, he goes to the movies to get a sense of it. But towards the end of the play he tells Jim that he is now tired of movies also because the movies and the glamorous people in them just deceive people. He also tells Jim that he has become the member of the union of merchant seamen because he yearns for a life of purpose and meaning, which is unluckily impossible in this society.

Unlike Tom, Jim is an extrovert who is very much a part of the world around him. He is completely devoted to the fake dream of American success. He was holding a job in the warehouse that was not much better than Tom's. The warehouse is not a prison for him, but a rung on the ladder towards success. To him, the world is a wonderful place to live in. He is awed by the future made in chewing gum and lectures on the future material progress of America. He goes to night school for self-improvement where he learns radio engineering and public speaking. He knows that, though being a progressive young man, hasn't made much progress. But he is not discouraged. He is optimistic and is sure that his signature will increase in value someday.

Jim, the optimistic American extrovert tries to convert the poetic introvert Tom to his way of thinking. But to Tom, Jim O'Connor is dull and unimaginative and he rejects the values which Jim religiously cherishes. Tom knows that Jim's goal is financial and social success which he cannot accept it for himself. Jim does not even know what Tom's goal is and would not recognize it as valid even if he knew it.

Thus we find that whereas Jim O'Connor is described as the most realistic character in the play, Tom is a poet and a dreamer, who yearns for a life of purpose and money.

3.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. "Amanda is the only character in the play who tries to make a compromise between illusion and reality". Discuss.
2. "Tom is a sensitive young man trapped by unpleasant circumstances that stifle him". Discuss.
3. Discuss Jim O'Connor as "an emissary from a world of reality."
4. Laura Wingfield, according to the author, is like "a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf". Discuss the character of Laura Wingfield in the light of above statement.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 4
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-I

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE PLAY

STRUCTURE

4.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to analyze the various aspects of the play *The Glass Menagerie.* It is also an attempt to aware you how to analyze the given passages critically and attempt short answer questions.

4.2 *The Glass Menagerie* AS A MEMORY PLAY

Tennessee Williams matured as an artist during the time when drama itself was in transition. For almost a century, the picture frame stage had dominated the American theatre and realistic or naturalistic sets were treated as actual rooms with only one wall removed so that the audience can see in. However, in 1930 the American theatre began to do what other literary genres had already done that is to enter into the field of

abstractions, impressionism and expressionism.

When Williams sought to write *The Glass Menagerie,* he neglected the idea of casting it in a realistic mould. Since he wished to present the play as memory (and many of its autobiographical elements do make it a part of writer's memory) he wrote suggestively rather than literary. Since incidents are altogether omitted, some are minimized and some others are exaggerated. There is no stern logical sequence since the events are narrated as they are remembered and not necessarily as they occur. The entire play is presented as a memory of Tom, the son and the narrator.

In the beginning of the play Tom says: "The play is memory. Being a memory, it is dimly lighted, it is sentimental, it is not realistic. In memory everything seems to happen to music."

Even in his "Production Notes" Tennessee Williams says that, "Being a memory play, *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom of conventions. Because of its considerably delicate and tenuous material, atmospheric touches and subtleties of direction play an important part. Expressionism and other unconventional technique in drama have only one valid aim; that is a closer approach to truth." This is in accordance with William Faulkner's assertion that a work may contain the "truth of heart". Writing a memory play, William does not shy away from his responsibility to present the truth. He says, "Every reader should know now a days the unimportance of the photographic in art; that truth, life and reality is an organize thing which poetic imagination can present in essence only through transformation." He employs a host of devices like screen, plastic theatre, dim lighting, music and expressionism to render *The Glass Menagerie* as a memory play.

In writing this play, Williams borrowed heavily from the German expressionists like Piscator and Brecht especially the 'epic' form of Bretch. Like him, he favoured the use of screen as a symbol of consciousness. He says that "in every scene there is a point (or reversal) which is structurally the most important and a phrase or legend flashes across the screen would serve to heighten it." It heightens the effect of "what is merely allusion in the writing". Besides its structural appeal, it also serves to heighten the intensity of the emotions. He has successfully used this device in this play. For example, in the scene in which Jim meets Laura and remembers her as a girl whom he nicknamed

blue roses when she was suffering from pleurosis, the phrase 'Blue Roses' is flashed across the screen and audience along with Laura became aware of the fact that though blue is beautiful, it is the wrong colour for the roses. Also the stage setting is plastic and transparent and when lighted from the back appears opaque.

In keeping with the atmosphere of a memory or dream the stage is dimly lit. Shafts of focused light are used on the characters sometimes in contradictions to what apparently appears the center of attraction. For example, in the quarrel scene in which Laura plays no part, the clearest pool of light is on her. Similarly in the supper scene, the light is focused upon her when she sits separately on sofa. The light on Laura has a peculiar pristine clarity as is seen in the portraits of religious saints or Madonnas. They resemble the paintings of El Greco. In keeping with their atmosphere, the character is lighted against a relatively dusky background.

In memory everything seems to happen to music. A single recurring tune, "The Glass Menagerie" is used to intensify the emotional appeal of the play. Since it is primarily Laura's music, it is the clearest when she is in focus. Regarding the music of the play, the writer says that it appears like circus music not when you are on ground or in the immediate vicinity of the parade, but when you are at some distance and most probably thinking of something else and the music seems to continue interminably and seems of weave in and out of your preoccupied thoughts. This music is the most delicate, most beautiful and perhaps the "saddest". Williams says that "when you look at a piece of delicately spun glass, you think of two things: how beautiful it is and how easily it can be broken". Both of these ideas should be woven into the recurring time, which dips in and out of the play" maintaining a mood of emotions and nostalgia, so essential for a memory play.

Williams, in this play followed the dicta of expressionism which heightened the effect of the play as a memory play. He describes the Wingfield apartment as "one of the vast hive like conglomerations of cellular living units which flower as warty growth in the over crowded urban centers of lower middle class population." "They", says the writer, "are symptomatic of the impulse of this largest and fundamentally enslave section of American society to resist fluidity and differentiation and to exist as one of interfused mass of automatism," of all the characters only Tom seems to be aware of this grotesque

uniformity and since the entire play is taking place in his memory, he is apt to exaggerate. Even the fire escape is symbolic with a touch of 'poetic truth' for all these huge buildings seem to be always burning with slow implacable fires of human desperation. The alley, the Paradise dance hall etc. all are symbolic of something or other in Tom's memory.

The plot, the characterization, the setting all serve to form a static drama–a device or technique used by Williams, in his other plays too including the rewrite of *The Battle of Angles*. Every dramatic device in this play contributes to rendering it as a memory play–a technique used by the Swedish dramatist, August Strindberg who wrote in a preface to one of his plays. "Time and Space do not exist...A single consciousness holds sway over the audience... that of a dreamer."

4.3 SYMBOLS USED IN *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*

Tennessee Williams in the "Production Notes" has called *The Glass Menagerie* a 'memory' play and regarded expressionism and other unconventional dramatic devices used in the play as the closer approach to truth. He thought that the photographic representation of reality in art is least significant and wanted it to be replaced by the 'plastic art,' if theatre was to revive as a part of contemporary social culture. Williams was of the opinion that a great drama is one which, with the help of imagination, transforms reality into the poetic truth as felt and experienced by the characters themselves. This dramatic objective has been achieved with greater emphasis on images and symbols.

The symbols play a significant role in underlining the play's meaning and Williams uses various symbols quite effectively. Tom is the narrator of the play and also a character in it. He is a poet and the whole play is seen through his memory. He has a poet's weakness for symbols and uses some characters as symbols.

In the beginning of the play, Laura Wingfield is shown preoccupied with the glass animals which gives the title of the play. Williams himself describes the glass as very beautiful but which can easily be broken. So the glass must be protected from harshness of reality. Laura's, childhood illness has left her crippled, one leg slightly shorter than the other. Stemming from this defect, Laura's separation increases till she is like a piece of her own glass collection too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf.

She is shown seated in the "delicate ivory chair" at the small "claw-foot table" wearing a kimono of soft violet material, washing and polishing her collection of glass." All these things, the chair, the table, the dress material and the glass animals are used symbolically to depict the fragile character of Laura. The "delicate ivory chair" represents the fragile foothold that Laura has on the soft structure of her life, the "claw-foot table" represents her physical handicap and the dress material shows that the fabric of her life is woven of the softest material. She like her glass menagerie is sweet, brittle and dream like who is unable to face the harsh world reality.

Jim used to call Laura "Blue Roses" because once after many day's absence from the school, Jim had asked her the reason of her absence. She told him that she had pleurosis. But Jim thought that she said "Blue Roses". Unconsciously, perhaps, Jim had given Laura a name that suited her completely. Blue Roses are not appealing to ordinary people. Laura, too, a sensitive soul, is 'awkward' for others.

At the outset of the play we are introduced immediately to the heart of the dramatic situation when Amanda tells her children about her life in the south. She was a southern belle living in a place called Blue Mountains, where on one Sunday afternoon she received seventeen gentlemen callers. The Blue Mountains is Amanda's illusion, the gentle, beautiful life she led as a girl. It represents gentility, culture and all the value that she cherishes. It is her retreat the only source of beauty in her otherwise drab present life.

Amanda, who mentally lives in large planter's mansion in the south, is at present living in an apartment house in a slum area in a city. The dramatist describes the Wingfield apartment in the beginning of the play as "one of those vast hive-like conglomerations of cellular living-units that flower as warty growths in over crowded urban centers of lower middle-class population." The apartment is entered by "a fire-escape, a structure, whose name is a touch of accidental poetic truth-for all these huge buildings are always burning with the slow and implacable fires of human desperation." Their only escape is the fire escape which serves as an exit from the apartment. It is in ironic contrast to the particoed house of Amanda's youth since it is narrow and ugly.

Tom as a narrator introduces all the characters of the play to the audience. He says that fifth character of the play does not appear except in the larger than life size photograph over the mantel. This is his father Mr. Wingfield who represents to Amanda

her tragic mistake, her marriage to him, who was handsome and charming but irresponsible. To Tom, he represents the adventure that he misses in his own life. Mr. Wingfield left the family and went away to see the world and Tom is determined to do the same.

Jim, the fourth character of the play, is also used as a symbol. Tom says that since he has a poet's weakness for symbols he is using Jim's character as a symbol of someone, who is long delayed but always expected something that we live for.

Tom is working in a shoe company in warehouse at 65 dollars a month, the job he does not like but has to do to support him and his family. To him the warehouse represents the grinding drabness of corporate indifference. The movies and liquor are Tom's only escape from the otherwise mundane life that he must lead. He identifies with heroes of the movies he sees and it is through their exploits that he has the only adventure that he experiences vicariously. He becomes the member of the Union of Merchant Seamen to escape from the drab existence at the warehouse and the Wingfield apartment. But in the end of the play, we find that even the Merchant Marine offered no escape from his responsibility to his family, especially his responsibility to Laura-the memory haunts him wherever he goes.

Laura is admitted in the Rubicam's Business College to learn short hand and typing. But she stops going there, instead she goes to the art museum, bird houses at the zoo and the jewel box with the tropical flower. The college represents the modern age of electrodynamics whereas the places, which she visits represent some higher spots in human culture.

In her glass menagerie there is a unicorn, which is a mythological animal, which does not exist in the real world. It represents Laura herself because of its uniqueness. But accidentally Jim breaks its horn, which is symbolically breaking the uniqueness of Laura's illusionary world. Laura's not feeling upset symbolizes her attempt to put aside her fantasy world for the real one. But when she finds that Jim is engaged, she gives him the unicorn as a souvenir, which symbolizes her retreat into her own fragile world.

Thus every link with the dream-like life is shattered. The illusive or allusive images used in abundance by Williams, vanish one by one. The "Little silver slipper" of

a moon, on which Amanda makes wishes, and on which Laura, also, is forced to wish, proves out to be nothing, but an image of their alienated condition. There is much of Christian symbolism, which has been used in the play to describe various situations. Amanda is often characterized in Christian terms. He tells Jim that as a girl, she could cook only angel food cake. She uses Christian terms very often in the play. She condemns instinct and urges Tom to prefer mind and spirit.

In the "Annunciation scene", on knowing that the gentleman caller's name is O'Connor she says "that of course means fish, tomorrow is Friday !" Fish is considered to be the traditional symbol of Christ. Actually Amanda wants Jim to be a Christ like saviour in their lives. Laura is certainly, in Jim's company, lit inwardly with alter candles. But very soon when Jim tells her of his love with Betty, we are informed that the "holy candles in the alter of Laura's face have been sniffed out". After dinner, when the lights go off, Amanda jokes, "where was Moses when the lights went off." Then she answers herself, "in the dark". And after Jim's departure, Amanda and Laura are in the dark. After all this experience Amanda has perhaps grown wiser. Tom's last speech declares the over-all failure.

4.4 ANNOTATIONS

(a) One Sunday afternoon in Blue Mountain your mother received-seventeen! gentlemen callers! Why, sometimes there weren't chairs enough to accommodate them all. We had to send the nigger over to bring in folding chairs from the Parish house.

These lines are spoken by Amanda in the beginning of the play *The Glass Menegerie* Amanda, the mother of Tom and Laura, and former southern belle is living in an apartment house in a slum area in a city. But she mentally lives in large planter's mansion in the south and repeatedly tells her children the story of her gentlemen callers in Blue Mountains. This story tells us about Amanda, that once as southern belle, she was the darling of her small town's social scene, but is now an abandoned wife and single mother living in a small apartment in St. Louis. She dreams of her past and ignores the present reality. She imposes the role of the

potential southern belle on Laura and brings out all the fear and panic in Laura's psyche. These lines show that Amanda is a woman of dreams. Blue Mountain and gentlemen callers help her escape the ugliness of her present environment.

(b) A well-cooked meal has lots of delicate flavours that have to be held in the mouth for appreciation.

Amanda and Laura are seated at a drop leaf table. Amanda calls Tom and asks him to join them at the table. As they eat, Amanda begins to lecture Tom regarding the right method of eating. She tells him to eat food leisurely and enjoy it because the cooked meal has lots of delicate flavours and to appreciate these, one has to chew it properly. By chewing one not only will enjoy the flavour of food but also give salivary glands a chance to function. But Tom in sheer disgust at the sickening reference to salivary glands, mastication and animals secretion, withdraws from the table on the pretext of going to get a cigarette.

This line throws light on the character of Amanda. Though she lives in poor neighborhood hardly making her ends meet at the mercy of her son's earning of a pittance, she insists on observing the ritual of the aristocracy, grace must be said properly at the table and her son and daughter must behave as if they were living in their aristocratic mansion. In this way, she invokes the life of the aristocratic south. She still imagines herself to be the same southern belle who led a life of culture, refinement and knightly courtesy.

(c) I'm planning to change. I'm right at the point of committing myself to a future that doesn't include the warehouse and Mr. Mendoza or even a night school course in public speaking.

These lines are spoken by Tom to Jim O'Connor, who goes to night school for self-improvement. There he learns radio engineering and public speaking. Jim tries to persuade Tom to take a course in public speaking, which takes one to executive positions. He also tells Tom that Mr. Mendoza of the warehouse had spoken to him about Tom and warned

him that if he didn't wake up he was going to be out of job. Tom replies that he himself is planning to change. His future place does not include warehouse, Mr. Mendoza or a course in public speaking. He has already become a member of the Union of Merchant Seamen and his inclination lies there.

These lines show that Tom is a sensitive creature, who yearns for a life of purpose and meaning, which is unluckily impossible in his society.

4.5 SHORT-ANSWER QUESTIONS

i. Significance of the title *The Glass Menagerie*

Laura's preoccupation with the glass animals gives the title of the play. The character of Laura is based on Tennessee Williams' sister Rose who never liked St. Louis, the uninteresting treeless town where she shifted along with her parents and brother from the village of her grandfather. Both the writer and Rose were lost in vast turmoil of the teeming city when she reached adolescence, she left for bike rides and making fames but kept up one childhood interest of her collection of glass animals of different sizes, some miniature, some not very small, which she had begun in Mississippi. When her father objected loudly to everything she did, she used to shut herself up in her room to mope fingering the glass animals for comfort.

Laura has also a collection of glass animals. Whereas, her mother wants her to learn short hand and typing, Laura is shown washing and polishing these animals. These animals are used as the dominant symbol in the play. Tennessee Williams in the production notes says that glass is something which is beautiful but is broken easily. Like it Laura is also beautiful but very fragile. According to the author, Laura "is like a piece of her own glass collection, too exquisitely fragile to move from the shelf."

Laura is very sensitive and does not like the modern world of electra-dynamics. She lives in a world of candlelight and fantasy. A faint glimmer

of hope appears for Laura in her scene with Jim that she will meet the real world and enter the mainstream of life but it sniffed out abruptly. By the end of the play, it is sensed that Laura will continue to live in a world of her own, world of her glass menagerie.

ii. Why is Laura called "Blue Roses".

Laura in the second scene of the play tells her mother that in high school there was a boy, whose name was Jim and who was a hero and who won silver cup in debating. She liked him. He used to call Laura "Blue Roses" because once when she had an attack of pleurosis, Jim asked her what was the matter with her and she, said that she was suffering from 'pleurosis'. Jim thought that she said "Blue Roses". Ever since then he called her that unconsciously, perhaps, Jim had given Laura a name that suited her completely. Blue Roses are not appealing to ordinary people. Laura, too a sensitive soul, is 'awkward' for other. Moreover, blue roses are not found in nature. Like them, Laura cannot exist in a real world.

iii. Importance of Unicorn in the play.

Laura has a collection of glass animals and she lives in her own world with glass figures and phonograph records because she is shy, over delicate and fragile. In her collection of animals there is a unicorn, which is mythological animal. Like the blue roses, the unicorn does not exist in the real world. Because it is unique, it has enjoyed a special place among the animals in Laura's glass Menagerie. Her love for the unicorn shows her apathy with all that is new in the modern world. Its horn is broken by Jim. Symbolically, it represents Jim's breaking of the uniqueness of Laura's illusionary world. But Laura is not hurt by the breaking of the horn. Because she is impressed by Jim's outlook of life. Her calmness symbolizes her attempt to put aside her fantasy world for the real one. When she finds out that Jim is engaged, she gives him the unicorn for a souvenir which symbolizes her retreat into her own fragile world. Since the unicorn is no longer "special, it does not hold the special place among her animals that it once did and so she gives it to Jim.

4.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *The Glass Menagerie* as a memory play.
2. What role do symbols play in the play *The Glass Menagerie.*
3. The play *The Menagerie* reflects how difficult it is for culture to flourish in modern America. Discuss.
4. Write a short note on Amanda as a southern belle.
5. "Jim embodies in himself the philosophy of the American success myth". Discuss.
6. Critically comment on the ending of the play.
7. Discuss briefly the scene when Laura meets her hero of school days.

4.7 SUGGESTED READING

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M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON No. 5**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-II**

THE HAIRY APE

Development of American Drama and Eugene O'Neill

STRUCTURE

5.1 OBJECTIVES

This lesson proposes the development of the American drama from its beginning to the emergence of modern American drama in the 1920s. This lesson is designed to equip the learner to approach the 20th century American drama with perspective of dramatic history, art and ideas.

5.2. DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICAN DRAMA

Drama is a gift, which is not granted to all cultures and in all times. Ancient Greece, Elizabethan England, remote India, Japan and perhaps Egypt are the civilizations,

where drama has developed at various times. But it appears that in the twentieth century, America too has been included in those civilizations where the dramatic art has grown and flourished.

Up to the first world war, the playhouses of United States, although active and yielding profit had failed to produce any theatrical literature of importance. However, it was noticed in the period before the war that a premonition of something notable was coming up.

The American drama of the nineteenth century was a bastard art form but its popular manifestation had a good deal of vitality. The negro ministrel show, for example, had developed by 1850 into a formalized three part amusement that retained its verve for a generation or so. The burlesque performance that emerged a little later was likewise loosely organized in three parts, each with its characteristic routines and vulgarities. The legitimate theatre, however, produced very few plays of permanent interest. It was an age when the actor and the producer counted for more than the playwright. The big names were those of men like Edwin Forrest or the Anglo American Booths, Jeffersons, Southerns and Barrymores, or the actor-manager play-doctor, David Belasco. But the play itself was not the thing. Often it was imported from Europe. It seems typical that *Our American Cousin,* the play at which Abraham Lincoln, was assassinated in 1865 had been written by an Englishman, Tom Taylor. Often a successful play was an adaptation of a novel-*Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Gilded Age* are instances - and so not written in terms of the stage, where an author like W.D. Howells wrote directly for the theatre, he brought no startling novelty to the medium. The public demanded melodrama lavishly staged. It liked large casts, romantic plots and spectacular effects. Though it applauded patriotic sentiments, it did not insist on seeing American plays. The absence before 1891 of an adequate international copy right put native playwrights at an added disadvantage. From 1890 to 1914 love of surface reaction is evident in American theatre. David Belasco becomes the grand master of authentic surface realism. Thus in 1881, the year of Ibsen's *Ghosts,* the American theatre as represented by the *La Belle Russe*, a play concocted by Belasco out of the two written by other authors. Though Belascoism became rapidly outmoded, it forms one of the foundation stones of the modern American theatre.

In 1900 or thereabouts, there was little indication that the United States would make important contribution to world theatre. There were some signs of life in the early years of the twentieth century. The opening of the New Theatre at Chicago in 1906 and of similarly named venture three years later in New York marked a welcome though abortive attempt to encourage experimental drama. In 1905, George Pierce Baker was able to start the course in play writing that later grew into the famous 47 workshop at Harvard. The poet dramatist William Vaughan Moody was beginning *The Great Divide* (1906) and *The Faith Healer* (1909) to feel his way toward adult theatre. Though he died in 1910, something of his sensitive and intelligent approach was evident in two plays of that year. One, by his former pupil, Tosephine Peabody, was *The Piper*, a verse drama on the theme of the *Pied Piper of Hamlin.* The other, by Moody's friend Percy Mackaye, was *The Scarecrow,* a dramatization of Hawthorne's fantastic story *Feathertop*.

But the awakening of the American theatre was not accomplished through poetic drama or through adaptations like Mackayes. It was not enough merely to emphasize the role of the playwright; there had to be a decisive break with the theatrical conventions of the commercial theatre. By the start of World War-I, the necessary conditions for such a break were present. The Little Theatre Movement had got underway; throughout America small groups of amateurs were eager to try out new plays. In 1915, a number of artists and writers who made up a summer colony at Provincetown, Massachusetts, banded together to amuse themselves under the name of the Provincetown Players. Their first stage was the porch of a building. Next summer the young playwright Eugene O'Neill came to Provincetown and was soon one of the leaders of the group.

Allardyce Nicoll in *The World Drama* says "without a doubt among the dramatists who first arouse during these decades, the author who most impresses upon us with a sense of power and dramatic genius is Eugene O'Neill and in his writings we have a kind of vast symbol of the power of the American stage".

O'Neill was the son of James O'Neill, a great successful actor of the old school. His father had been for years holding audience spell bound with portrayal of the hero in *The Count of Monte Cristo.* This was one of the reigns of sensationalism and melodrama which had become the fashion of genuine drama. The first necessity was to

establish an Ibsen like realism, in place of the theatrical conventions that dominated the American theatre.

Eugene O'Neill filled the bill of all these requirements. In the winter of 1913-14, he wrote five plays under the title of 'Thirst'. He had earlier dropped out from Provinceton University and done a lot of tramping, beach combing and sailoring during which he had come in contact with all varieties of persons and types of characters. The result was that when the Provincetown players whom he joined in 1915 presented his play in off Broadway production, he introduced a new theme with an authentic Rhythm of colloquial American speech. The play itself announced the discovery of long expected American dramatist. Instead of the elaborate drawing room scenes the set is located on the forecastle of a ship. The characters were not romantic and melodramatic heroes but ordinary seamen speaking the language, which the audience heard around them.

The Provincetown players were able to keep their existence during 1917-18 in spite the war. By 1920, they were sufficiently developed and presented many of O' Neill's plays. By 1925, they had produced not less than 47 plays by 47 different authors almost all Americans. In addition to this, there were the theatre Guilds who by 1925 had built their own Guilt theatre and had presented many experimental plays including O'Neill's *Marco Millions* (1928), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (1931) and *Ah wilderness* (1933).

The variety of techniques and theatrical devices introduced by O' Neill is really astounding. Along with Ibsen - like realism of plays such as *Bound East for Cardiff* (1916) and *The Moon of the Caribbeas* (1918), *Desire Under the Elms* and *Anne Christe* (1921), he introduced expressionistic devices in plays like *Hairy Ape* and *Marco Millions*. Though *Beyond the Horizon* and *Desire Under the Elms* were realistic and naturalistic plays but *The Emperor Jones* (1920) produced in the same year brought Brecht into the picture along with Ibsen and this although when he wrote it, O' Neill says that he had never heard of expressionism. Tomtom beat in the background almost throughout the play; there are several sets intended not to be life but to create a mood, and at the end of one scene the walls of the forest fold in, the cast includes a group of little formless Fears as well as number of shadowy Negro figures. In the *Great God Brown,* O' Neill introduces masks a device taken from Greek dramas. In *Lazarus Laughed* there are choruses, masked to represent seven stages of

life and seven different types of person, each type clad in a distinctive colour, so that there are forty nine combinations of period and type. In *Strange Interludes,* there is the use of aside to reveal the inner thoughts of characters simultaneously with the conversation that goes on between the characters. But the most ambitious creation of O' Neill was the trilogy under American circumstances. The three parts of trilogy are *Home Coming, Hunted and Haunted* corresponding to the three plays in the Greek myth.

From 1934 onwards, O' Neill retired to his study till the *Iceman Cometh* was performed 12 years later. A year later, he wrote *A Moon for the Misbegotten* but by then O' Neill was faced with serious illness culminated by death in 1953.

As America's foremost playwright, he did a great deal to establish the modes of the modern theatre in the United States. His work illustrates, therefore some of the main trends in modern American drama. One of its most striking features is the combination of deliberately drab prose, realism and of boldly inventive expressionist technique. It is as though Henry Ibsen and Bertold Brecht had come together in the same person. Yet with all his strength O' Neill had certain shortcomings. The most glaring one is his lack of adequately grand and impressive language. At the climax of the scene of his tragical plays like *Mourning Becomes Electra,* he has to substitute signs of explanation instead of redolent and sonorous language. His characters splutter in insignificant colloquialism so he cannot be compared with the greatest in the world drama like Shakespeare, Sophocles etc.

There were a large number of dramatists in the 20's who took forward O' Neill's work, but hardly anyone of them added any new note. There were, however, one whom we should notice. Elmer Rice's The *Adding Machine* impresses us with its expressionistic. Its principal character is a dull little accountant known as Mr. Zero. Some other characters are known by numbers only. Executed for the murder of his employer, he finds himself working on adding machine in the Elysian Fields only to be returned to earth again at the end of the play, to undergo another miserable cycle of existence, and then another to another, until he will eventually become the completely soulless slave of his machine.

The Great depression of the 1930s made a tremendous impact on the American

dramas. In a moment, the priorities underwent cataclysmic change. The American society seemed to be undergoing a sea churning. New themes and new perspectives came up and new forms of drama like Agitprop and the living newspaper were created.

The federal theatre was established to help the unemployed dramatists and technicians of the American theatre. The American establishment now denies any merit in the products of the 1930s because the dramatic productions were frankly hostile to American capitalism. However, one great writer emerged from this experimentation. Clifford Odets was a dramatist in his own right who appeals even today, particularly with his plays *Waiting For Lefty* and *Awake and Singh* both produced in 1935.

Two of the most prominent playwrights in the American theatre, since the war is Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams. Both of them developed two different types of drama and yet noted by Porter they have much in common.

5.3 EUGENE O' NEILL

Eugene Gladstone O' Neill was born on October 16, 1988 in a hotel room in the very heart of New York theatrical district applauded and derided as "Broadway". He was the son of the matinee idol and successful actor-manager James O' Neill, who amassed a fortune touring in a melodrama based on Alexander Dumas' famous romantic novel "The Count of Monte Cristo." The playwright, who took so many successful liberties with dramatic form was entirely at home in the theatre and later also acted in his father's theatrical company. But it earlier became distressingly evident to his parent that the young O' Neill was a rebel, who would be more inclined to revolt against the romantic tradition than to preserve it. O' Neill was born into a tragically disturbed family (his mother suffered from drug addiction and his elder brother was a confirmed alcoholic) and had an unstable childhood, touring the United States with his parents and receiving an irregular education in a different private boarding schools. Encouraged by his irresponsible actor brother James, he was undirected into Bohemian life of the theatrical world at a tender age.

Having spent his early educational years in Catholic schools, O' Neill studied for four years at the Betts Academy at Stamford from 1902 to 1906. From there, he went to Princeton and joined the University to study law to take his B. Lilt. After a year

at Princeton University, he was suspended in 1907 for a student pranks. In 1909, he entered into a secret marriage which later dissolved that same year he went prospecting for gold in Hondures, Central America, with a mining engineer. Having contracted expedition, he returned to his parents and joined his father's company as an actor and assistant manager for a brief period.

Growing restless again, he shipped to Buenos Aires on a Norwegian Vessel and found employment for a time with American Companies located in the area—an electric company, a packing plant, the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Tired of clerical employment, he took a job on a cattle boat, tending mules while voyaging from Buenos Aires to South Africa. Living at Jummy The Priest's, a disreputable tavern he picked up occassional jobs and then sailed to Southampton as an able seaman on an American ship.

After joining his father's company again and playing a small part in Monte Cristo, followed by several months of intemperate living, he went to New London in Connecticut, where the family had its summer home, and joined the staff of the local newspaper, the New London Telegraph as a reporter. He had begun to publish humorous poetry in a column of that newspaper when his journalistic career was abruptly terminated by a blow, O' Neill could only consider ironic fate. In 1912, his health undermined by his profligate mode of life, he succumbed to tuberculosis and had to be hospitalized. A term of six months in a senatoriam, however, proved to be doubly beneficial, it arrested the disease and made an avid reader and introspective artist of O' Neill. He read widely during his convalescence falling under the influence of the Greek tragic poets and Strindberg. He began to write plays in 1913 and in 1914 enrolled in a course in playwriting given at Harvard University by the famous professor George Pierce Baker.

The next year he moved to Greenwich Village, then regarded as the progressive "Left Bank" of New York, and in 1916 joined an avant garde group of writers and artists who had established an amateur theatrical company. Their first season in the summer of 1915 had been presented on an abandoned wharf in the artist's colony of Provincetown, on cape cod, Massachusetts, and they came to call themselves the provincetown players. O' Neill began to write short plays for them and soon became

their foremost playwright as one of their directors when they moved to a small theatre in Greenwich village on Maedougal Street, where theatrical experiments continued to be unfolded long after the dissolution of this company. O' Neill and his associated also ran a second enterprise, the Greenwich village theatre from 1913 to 1927.

O' Neill was awarded Pulitzer Prizes for *Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie, Strange Interlude* and *Long Day's Journey into Night.* He received the highest international recognition in the award of the Nobel Prize for Literature.

5.4 MAJOR PLAYS OF EUGENE O' NEILL

O' Neill, the dramatist, particularly the modern dramatist, emerges, partly in his restlessness with the theatre, and partly in his feverish desire to use the medium of drama to understand himself. Though sufficiently well educated in Catholic boarding schools, and at Princeton and Harvard Universities for brief periods, O' Neill taught himself more than he has ever taught. His convalescence at a Connecticut sanatorium in 1913 for tuberculosis was a crucial period in his life and career. Illness and an attempt at suicide, drove him into a life of solitude and deep learning. It is during this period, O' Neill reads avidly August Strindberg, Henry Ibsen, Frederick Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, a reading that shaped his thought and dramatic art. In fact, O' Neill's early plays like *Servitude* (1914), *The Web* (1914), *Before the Breakfast* (1916), *The Moon of the Caribbees* (1918) presenting atmospheric realism.

O' Neill is a voluminous writer who has left behind him a large body of One-Act Plays, as well as large number of full length plays. Of his larger plays *Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie, The Emperor Jones, The Hairy Ape, Desire Under the Elms, The Great God Brown, Lazarus Laughed, Strange Interlude, Mourning Becomes Electra, The Iceman Cometh and Long Day's Journey into Night,* are the greatest.

5.5 O' NEILL AS A DRAMATIST

Eugene O' Neill is one of the greatest dramatists of America. His first dramas were about the experiences of sailors or the lives of sailors which he had himself

experienced. He started with slice-of-life dramas, dealing with the miseries, delusions and obsessions of men adrift in the world. His early short plays, collected under the title of S.S. Glencairn, were about the sea-faring life. In this S.S. Glencairn cycle of sea pieces are *Bound East for Cardiff, In the Zone The Long Voyage Home* and *The Moon of the Caribbees.* These are realistic type of plays, which present slices of life and deal with the actual experiences as O' Neill has undergone as a sailor. These plays are strongly Marxist in orientation and show the lives of the poorer section of society i.e. sailors and inhabitants of those islands where the uncivilized tribes live. These also show that how this poorer section is exploited by the capitalists of American society as represented by the ship owners and the captains of the ships.

O' Neill's reputation is enhanced by with a number of independent pieces like *Ile, The Rope, Where the Cross is Made,* which exemplified O' Neill's taste for tragic irony, his characteristic concern with destructive obsessiveness and his fascination with the sea as a mystery and a seduction, as a symbol of the malignity of fate.

The same interests soon appeared in a richer and more complicated context when O' Neill began to write his early full length plays. He gave his sense of tragic irony full scope in the first of these *Beyond the Horizon, Anna Christie* and *Desire Under the Elms* are the saturnine dreams of fate and frustration.

The plays that followed *Desire Under the Elms* represents O' Neill's strivings to enrich the American drama with styles radically different from the naturalistic– namely the romantic, the symbolist and the expressionistic. *The Emperor Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* are expressionistic plays, but O' Neill's expressionism is based on reality. The plays do not have the complete formlessness of the expressionistic plays of the contemporary German and Scandinavian dramatists. There is no total decay of plot and character. There is realism in the delineation both of setting and character.

In *All God's Chillum Got Wings,* O' Neill introduces the theme of Negro-white relationship with a contrasted street scene. A Congo mask on the wall of a room has a special relevance and the walls keep closing to heighten the oppressive emotions of the couple who live within them. In *The Great God Brown,* the principal characters wear masks, which are removed from time to time and even transferred from one

person to another. In *Lazarus Laughed* there are choruses, masked to represent seven stages of life and seven different types of person, each clad in a distribution colour, so that there are forty nine combinations of period and type.

O' Neill, in the trilogy *Mourning Becomes Electra,* seeks an extra dimension of significance by retelling the Greek legend in American circumstances. The end of the civil war is equated with the downfall of Troy. Agamemnon is recognizable as Brigadier Ezra Mammon, Clytemnestra as Mammon's wife, their son Orin as Orestes, their daughter Lavinia as Electra, and so no. Their particoed New England house in an appropriately classical setting and the local transfolk serve as a chorus.

Thus we find that O' Neill was a tireless experimenter who experimented with a variety of dramatic forms and modes. Even when he succeeded in one form or style, he moved on to another one and this experimentation continued from the beginning of his career upto the very end when he has working in his father's company and doing some part in *The Count of Monte Creisto,* he found this story of Alexander Dumas novel as romantic and unrealistic. So he was dissatisfied with the nature of romantic drama and experimented various dramatic techniques like naturalism, realism, expressionism, symbolism, use of masks etc.

O' Neill, the great dramatist of twentieth century American theatre is a serious and generally sincere artist in drama. He has never compromised with box office demands but has won his success tempering with his artistic conscience. He has greatly widened the range of American theatre.

5.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Trace out the growth of modern American Drama with special reference to O' Neill, Miller and Tennessee Williams.
2. Discuss O' Neill as a dramatist.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON No. 6**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-II**

THE HAIRY APE

The Story and a Critical Analysis of the Play

STRUCTURE

6.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the genesis of the play and to provide the summary of the play with critical comments.

6.2 THE GENESIS OF THE PLAY *The Hairy Ape*

The germinal idea of the play *The Hairy Ape* was suggested to O' Neill by an actual event in his life which left a deep impression on his mind. Before he started writing *The Hairy Ape,* O' Neill wrote a short story. Then later on he based this play on that story. This short story, from which, *The Hairy Ape* developed was drawn from an experience which provided background for some of his later plays also. As a young seaman (1911), O' Neill lived for a period at Jimmy the Priest's a dilapidated flophouse–saloon on the New York waterfront, where he met an

Irishman Driscoll.

The play was an attempt to account for the unexplained suicide of Driscoll, a man proud of his animal superiority, a man, who was in complete accord with the world, and content in his understanding of life. In his note to *The Hairy Ape* in the Wilderness edition, O' Neill describes the genesis of the play :

It was at Jimmy the Priest's that I knew Driscoll, a Liverpool Irishman who was a stoker on a transatlantic liner. Shortly afterwards I learnt that he committed suicide by jumping overboard in mid-ocean. Why?

The search for an explanation of why Driscoll, proud of his animal superiority and in complete harmony with his limited conception of the universe, should kill himself provided the germ of the idea first for the short story and then for the play *The Hairy Ape.*

O Neill himself experienced the hardships of ordinary seamen and stokers on a luxury liner, the S.S. New York of the American line in 1908. He later projected his resentment onto 'Yank', the burly stoker of *The Hairy Ape,* whose self pride starts to crumble after the society heiress calls him a filthy beast.

6.3 SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

The Hairy Ape was written in 1921 and first produced by the Provincetown players on March 9, 1922 in New York. The action of the play moves forward rapidly through eight, short, abrupt scenes. Its central figure Yank is a stoker on a transatlantic liner.

Scene I

The scene is laid in the fireman's forecastle of a ship, which sails across the Atlantic. The ship sailed from New York only an hour ago. There is a crowd of stokers in a small room. The men are nearly drunk. They shout, curse, laugh and sing and produce a loud incoherent noise, like the roar of defiance of a wild beast in a cage. The ceiling is low, and so they cannot stand upright. Tiers of narrow street bunks bring out the traits of modern industrialized society. O' Neill's stage setting directions are explicit. He emphasizes that the treatment of this scene or of any other scene in the play should

by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of a ship imprisoned by white steel.

The men in the Stockhole resemble the pictures of Neanderthal man. The Neanderthal man signifies the middle stage in the development of a human being from an ape. The men represent all the civilized white races and though there is slight differentiation in colour of hair, skin, eyes, they are all alike. They are all hairy chested, with long arms of tremendous power, and low receding brows above their small, fierce, resentful eyes. Yank, the central figure of the play, is seated in the foreground. He is broader, fiercer, more true, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest.

They are drinking, singing, talking and jesting. There is only an incoherent noise Yank orders them angrily not to make that hideous noise and asks for a drink. Several bottles are offered to him, which shows that all other men respect his superior physical strength.

They, then turn to an Irishman, Paddy by name, with a wizened monkey-like face and ask him to sing a whiskey song. Paddy sings drunkenly, which irritates Yank and he angrily orders them to stop all noise because he is trying to think. The others repeat the word with amused mockery and burst into loud laughter. They are pleased that think rhymes with drink an sing out in a chorus!

"Drink, don't think
Drink, don't think!"

Paddy again starts singing a romantic chanty but Yank stops him by saying that Home is hell, and he ran away from his house when he was a kid. Long, very drunk stoker, agrees with Yank that ship is their home, but that home of theirs is a hell. They condemned and suffer in it all their lives. He blames the hardships of the stoker's life on the greediness of the capitalist class which has forgotten the Biblical injunctions regarding the equality of all human beings. Yank rejects Long's idea on the basis that it is the one that suits the weak and the timid.

Paddy is a devotee of the sea, chanties, with a romantic nostalgic for the bygone days of old clippers with tall masts floating on imaginary golden sea. He represents the

romantic escapist who evades the present with a desire to go back to an imaginary feudal, patriarchal past in which man was in harmony with nature and his labour. He is extremely dissatisfied with the present industrial age where men are reduced to the status of automatons, flesh and blood wheel of the engines. Man losing harmony with nature is caged by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the zoo.

Yank can feel no sympathy for Paddy, as according to him, the later sticks to an illusion that is dead. As depicted by O' Neill Yank is a twentieth century proletarian Everyman. From the very first scene of the play he appears to be dominant figure, a symbol of a worker's illusion that he can identify with his work in the capitalist society. He cherishes the illusion of belonging and being at the center of things. He is intensely alive in the present and discards Paddy's desire of going back to a past age of feudal relations. He identifies the strength of the steel with his own brutal strength.

Critical Comments

O' Neill uses a blend of realism and symbolic representation from the outside of the play. An important symbol in the first scene is the ship, which has, since times immemorial, been a symbol of man's sojourn in the universe. The ship may, therefore, be taken as microcosm, i.e. a small universe that symbolically represents the larger one the macrocosm. The forecastle in the ship is sharply divided from the quarter deck. The former is the place, where the common sailors live, while the latter are the preserver of the higher powers, i.e. the officers. O. Neill emphasizes that the treatment of this scene should by no means be naturalistic. The effect sought after is cramped space in the bowels of a ship imprisoned by white steel. The expressionistic technique helps in creating the impression of men imprisoned by steel as if in cage.

The workers are all physically strong but mentally retarded. Their low, receding brows show their lack of intellect. Their reduction to the beastly order is further emphasized by the fact that thinking has become an act alien to them in their normal condition of work. This has sociological implication because the division of society into the class of exploiters and the exploited resulted in the separation of thought from work.

The ceiling crushes down upon the men's heads which accentuates the natural stooping posture resulting in the over development of their back and shoulder muscles.

This condition is symbolic of man in the modern capitalist society, which does not allow human personality and individuality to grow unhampered.

Scene Two

The scene takes place two days after the opening scene. O' Neill takes us to the deck of the ship and introduces us to Mildred and her aunt, who represent the capitalist class of American society. Mildred is a young lady of twenty. She has a pale, pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority. She is conscious of her weaknesses. She lacks vitality and integrity. Her aunt is a fat old lady, pompous and proud. From the very beginning, it is clear that there is not much love and affection between the two and Mildred likes to cross and tease her aunt.

Mildred wants to make a sociological study of the condition of poorer section of American society. She has already studied their living conditions in the East End of New York and now she is voyaging to make her, "slumming inter-national." She wants to help the other half of the world but does not know how. She feels that all her vitality was burnt out in the stock, before she was born. She herself says that she is a waste product in Bessemer process- the process of making steel or the process of dehumanization ushered in by the industrial growth of America. She inherits wealth but not energy.

On the ship also, she wants to study the conditions of the poor stokers and so is determined to go down to the stokehold. She is waiting for the engineer of the ship to escort her there. Her aunt warns her that the heat and dirt would be frightful but she is determined to go. She has already obtained the permission of the captain of the ship for the visit by simply informing her that her father, the chairman of the Board of Directors of the Nazareth Steel Co. had told her that there would be no difficulty about the visit.

Second Engineer comes there and warns her that it would be terribly hot and dark with oil and coal dust and tells her to change the white dress. But Mildred does not mind spoiling her pure white dress. When Fourth Engineer comes, she is ready to go. She insults her aunt who is wrathful but helpless before her more ready-witted niece.

Critical Comments

After dramatizing the social consciousness of the workers, O' Neill introduces us to Mildred and her aunt who represent the American upper class society. Mildred's weakness is the weakness of her whole class. They have turned into money making machines and lack all vitality and strength. Mildred's wish to see how the other half lives is purely leisure activity of the aristocratic class and the specimen of its humanitarian emotionalism. The scene also brings out the artificiality and emptiness of the American upper class society.

Scene Three

The scene is set in the stoke-hole. Before Mildred descends in the Stokehole to satisfy her curiosity, the atmosphere there is heightened by fusing several scenic means of expression: lightening, noises and collective action. As the curtain rises we see a line of men, stripped to the waist, before the furnace doors. They use the shovels to throw open the furnace. They work for sometime and then the furnace doors are shut as the men rest for a moment. The engineer's whistle sounds from time to time reminding them that they must continue to feed the fire. Yank who loves his work, who has a feeling of belonging to it encourages the stokers to put in hard work. However, when the whistle keeps sounding incessantly, he brandishes his shovel over his head and pounds his chest with one hand "gorilla like". He also loses his temper and bursts out angrily.

It is just at this moment that Mildred enters the stokehole. On seeking the stokers, she shivers with fright in spite of the blazing heat. Seeing her before them, other stokers are dumb founded. But Yank, who has not seen her, goes on with his cursing, shouting and brandishing. When he turns his face towards her, he glares into her eyes and she is terrified by his "abysmal brutality". As she looks at his gorilla face, as his eyes bore into hers, she utters a low, choking cry and shirks away from him, putting both hands up before her eyes to shut out the sight of his face, to protect her own. This startles Yank to a reaction Mildred calls him "the filthy beast" and the engineer takes her quickly out of the door when she faints.

Yank feels insulted in the very pride. He roars 'God damn Yuh! And hurls his shovel at the door which has just closed.

Critical Comments

The most significant event in the play is Yank's confrontation with Mildred. In this scene, two different worlds clash. The description of the stokers in rows compares them with (i) Galley slaves (ii) chained gorillas, and (iii) machines. Mildred is dressed in white which is in dramatic contrast to the smoky surrounding. Yank infuriates on hearing the whistling sound because in a world ruled by the dogma of individuality, his ego is hurt by extraneous interference and regulation by a force whose nature he fails to comprehend.

The violence and brutality, which is the outcome of Yank's confrontation with Mildred is an inevitable result of the class conflict. Mildred owns steel and is protected by it because when Yank tries to hit her with his shovel, the door is closed behind her, imprisoning Yank, as it were, in his cage. His throwing of shovel depicts as protest against the capitalist class.

Scene Four

The scene is the same as the one, with which the play opened, but Yank is now a changed man while the others still drink, joke, laugh and talk as before, Yank sits in the attitude of Rodin's *The Thinker.* Yank, who possesses tremendous physical strength, starts becoming conscious of his alienation which rises out of the material conditions of society. The crux of Yank's problem in the play is, previously, he believed that he belonged to steel, but after being insulted by Mildred, he becomes furiously bewildred. He wants to take personal revenge on Mildred. As he tries to think, his fellow stokers mock him because thinking appears to them to be something unusual. Long tells Yank that they cannot bear this insult and suggests that they should go to law or to government. But Yank contemptuously condemns his view of seeking help from these institutions. Paddy says that Yank has fallen in love with Mildred. Others, however, mock the idea of love because love is not meant for the workers in the capitalistic society. Workers are denied all cultural benefits.

Yank takes the insult in a purely personal way. His idea of himself as a man who belongs does not immediately give rise to class consciousness and awareness of conflict between the different classes in American society. He is possessed by an ungovernable

rage against Mildred as he feels that she has insulted him in a very special place. Therefore, he seeks to take revenge on her but finds himself impotent as she is protected by the strength of the very steel that he considered his own special virtue.

Critical Comments :

The scene depicts the affect on Yank of the encounter with Mildred in scene III. Yank is suggested to take help from the institution like law or government which he condemns. All the bodies like law, governments and democracy are controlled by the capitalist class and they pay no heed to the poor people. Here O' Neill makes a bitter satire on the American political institutions. Yank also rejects the idea of joining the salvation Army. Infact, the motive of the people behind such organizations is not to help the workers but to divert their attention from the idea of revolution.

Scene Five

The scene takes place three weeks later on a fine Sunday morning on the Fifth Avenue, the locality where the rich people live. Yank, with the help of shipmate Long, reaches Fifth Avenue in order to seek revenge on Mildred but here, he confronts a world that breathes materialism, artificiality and aimlessness. The street is neat and clean and the shops well stocked. The jeweller's shop and the furrier's shop are specially mentioned as reflecting wealth, pomp and glitter of the commercialized America. The general effect is of a background of magnificence cheapened and made grotesque by commercialism, a background in tawdry disharmony with the clear light and sunshine, on the street itself.

Yank is eager to find out Mildred. Long tells him that there is a whole mob like Mildred and that being a Sunday they have gone to church. Yank recalls his own early life that as a child he used to go to church because his parents asked him to go though they themselves never went. They also used to punish him. So he ran away from his home and became a stoker.

While waiting for the church goers to come, both Yank and Long look at the shops of jewellery and furs. They see the tags of prices attached to the items displayed in the show cases. They pay with their blood for all the costly stuff that they see in the shops there. Yet they do not belong to that place, they are the proletarians and so they

are regarded as trespassers. The monkey fur is sold for two thousand dollars. Long says bitterly that the capitalists would not pay so much for a hairy ape's skin, not even for the whole living ape. This manifests that capitalism develops relations of men with things rather than with men.

Long warns Yank to keep his temper in control as they have to impress their demands through peaceful means i.e. votes. But Yank says that ''vote is a joke''. He still feels that he is the embodiment of force and calls Long as coward.

In the meanwhile, the crowd of well-dressed men and women comes out of the church. Yank lurches into some of them. Long warns him to be careful but when Yank refuses to listen to his advice, he leaves him telling him not to blame him if he is involved in trouble.

Yank tries to attract the attention of these people but they are completely indifferent to Yank. He tries to insult some ladies by passing vicious remarks but nobody pays attention to him. They all answer with mechanical, affected politeness, ''I beg your pardon'', and move on. At last, he is arrested by the police when he makes a person lose his bus. He tries to fight, but is clubbed to the pavement, arrested and taken away.

Critical Comments

The scene provides criticism of contemporary society. Yank telling Long that he ran away from his home when he was a kid expressed the idea of the debunking of American family. Home has become a hell for the people of working class. The mechanical, artificial nature of the life of the rich is also satirized. O' Neill gives us the impression of everything changing into machine in the growing capitalism. Capitalists have passion for possessiveness and mercenary nature. They retaliate only when somebody interferes with their property. In the capitalistic ethics, time is money and so loss of time becomes an attack on property. Once property is attacked, the whole repressive machinery of the state comes into notion.

Scene Six

Scene six is laid in prison. There are rows and rows of cells stretching from one end to the other. Yank is seen in one of the cells sitting in the attitude of Rodin's *The Thiner.*

He is vaguely conscious of his condition in the capitalistic society. Previously, he nourished the illusion that he belonged to steel but now steel has become a prison for him. He thinks himself to be an animal in a cage at the zoo. His thought also converges on the idea that he is a hairy ape.

Yank's fellow prisoners want to know what has landed him in jail. But Yank says that nobody can understand him except he himself. Even judge required thirty days to think it over. Yank recollects the moments of his encounter with Mildred and reiterates his wish to take revenge on her. At this point, one of the prisoner advised him to join the I.W.W. meaning ''Industrial Workers of the World'', which is a body of tough men. To support his view, he reads a portion of Senator Queen's speech published in the newspaper. The fellow prisoner reads out the Senator's view on IWW. ''They plot with fire on one hand and dynamite in the other. They stop not before muder to gain their ends.'' Yank is delighted. He will join IWW. With its help, he would wreck the vengeance on Douglas, the father of Mildred who insulted him, and whose steel now keeps him in a cage, like a hairy ape.

Critical Comments:

The beginning of the scene is a satire on the legal system of American society. People who are honest and maladjusted are kept in prison whether they have committed any crime or not. Yank is not a criminal but he is kept in prison for a full month.

The speech of Senator Queen is a satire on democracy, on American way of living and on American dream. The American constitution promises to give Honour, Liberty, Justice and happiness to all the citizens but in actual life, workingmen do not get even one of these things. There is no equality and freedom. Yank and Mildred both are human beings but they are not equal.

The slow growth of consciousness in Yank's mind is symbolically depicted by O'Neill by showing his hero sitting in the posture of Rodin's ''The Thinker''. Now for the first time, Yank starts realizing that he is shattered and he feels alienated from his work. He realizes that the power, which he thought was his own, was not his, but Mildred's Father's. Previously, steel has represented steamers, engines, buildings. Now

face to face with reality, he sees what steel actually is-cages, cells, locks, bolts and bars. It is Mildred's father who has made this steel cage of prison for him. This manifests that the instruments of men's liberty have become man's fetters.

Scene Seven

About a month later, we find Yank in the office of IWW. The secretary is in his seat and eight or ten men, iron workers, and the like are grouped about the table playing checkers. Yank enters continuously but is taken aback by the commonplace of the room and men in it. The secretary is glad to know that Yank wants to join the organization and the workers of the liner are also rising.

Taking the required membership fee from Yank, the secretary tells him that he should collect some pamphlets lying in the office and distribute them among other working men. But Yank is waiting for something else. He thinks I.W.W. to be an underground organization of anarchists as Senator Queen has spoken about it. He tells the secretary that he would be of great use to the society for he can shoot folk, if so required. He would blow things up for them. he would use dynamite and blow the steelworks, the steel trust of Dougals and others like him who keep them in cages and exploit them and thrive on their labour.

This arouses the suspicion of the Secretary. He fears that some detective agency must have sent Yank to spy on I.W.W. or he may be an agent provocateur. He also calls Yank a brainless ape. Yank is aroused by the word but is thrown out of the office by the Secretary and his men. He lands sprawling in the middle of the narrow cobbled street.

Critical Comments

Yank has now realized that he does not belong in this society dominated by the capitalists. His feeling of alienation has deepened. He is infuriated but does not know to whom his anger should be directed. His rejection by I.W.W. completes the process of his alienation. His consciousness has not developed to the extent of realizing that the working class movement has reached a stage where individual terrorist acts are not sufficient. His rejection from I.W.W. is due to the fact that his consciousness has not reached the level where he can understand the meaning and uses of an organized struggle.

Scene Eight

In the final scene of the play, we find Yank in the monkey house at the zoo. One spot of clear light falls on the front of one cage so that the interior can be seen. On this cage, there is a sign from which the word 'gorilla' stands out prominently. The gigantic animal himself is seen squatting on his haunches on a bench in much the same attitude as Rodin's ''The Thinker''. Yank enters from the left.

On seeing the gorilla, Yank laughs bitterly and says, ''welcome to your city, huh? Hail, Hail de gang's all here''. The animal force which he sought in I.W.W. men is made captive here. He is happy to meet the creature who can challenge the whole world. On seeing the gorilla caged in the zoo, he is reminded of Paddys' view that once when man lived in close communion with nature, be belonged. At this stage, thinking becomes hard for him. The gorilla and his kind may still dream of their past jungle life and in this way they belong but men do not. Yank feels he has neither past to remember nor future to dream, it is only present in which he is condemned to live.

To Yank, it appears that the gorilla is better than him also in the sense that the animal has not the faculty of thinking. Yank opens the cage door with an iron file and asks the gorilla to step out and shake hands. He also says that he will take the animal for a walk down Fifth Avenue where they will knock down the band of Mildred. The gorilla scrambles gingerly in his cage, goes to Yank and stands looking at him. With a spring, he wraps his huge arms around Yank in a murderous hug. There is a cracking snap of crushed ribs, a gasping cry, still knocking from Yank. The gorilla lets the crushed body slip to the floor, he stands over it uncertainly, then picks it up, throws it in the cage, shuts the door and shuffles off menacingly in the darkness. After a while Yank moves, groaning opening his eyes and there is silence. He mutters painfully that even the gorilla did not think that the former belonged. Bewildred and in deep agony he asks, ''Christ, where do I get off at? Where do I fit in?'' As he dies in the cage, O'Neill comments that now, perhaps, ''The Hairy Ape at last belongs.''

Critical Comments

The scene is long monologue of Yank. Here Yank reaches the nadir of his despair. Man cannot live alone. He needs his past and his future, however, delusory, for he is otherwise incurably lonely. The peculiar quality of *The Hairy Ape* is that in this

play the author traces man's loneliness in modern society to his social milieu. O'Neill said that Yank in *The Hairy Ape* was not a stoker but an every man who fails from innocent certainty to complex incertitude, or as the play puts it, "to not belonging", the ultimate human frustration and humiliation and the essence of loneliness".

6.4 GLOSSARY

Genesis	-	Origin, mode of formation
Dilapidated	-	in ruin
Neanderthal Man		A stage of development between the Ape and homosapiens according to the theory of evolution
Chanty	-	A song formerly sung by sailors in time to their work on a sailing ship.

6.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

a) Write a brief note on the genesis of the play *The Hairy Ape.*

b) Discuss the plot of *The Hairy Ape.*

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 7**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-II**

IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE PLAY

STRUCTURE

7.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to study the important aspects of the play *The Hairy Ape.* The lesson examines the problem of identity and analyses the problem in terms of the limitations of the human situation and also in terms of the human inability to accept the limitations of his situation.

7.2 ALIENATION AND QUEST FOR IDENTITY

The theme of the play *The Hairy Ape* is the fore-runner of much that is significant in O'Neill's later plays, and in fact, in the American literature of the twentieth century, particularly drama i.e. the predicament of man in the modern capitalistic society. O'Neill in the play delineates the human condition which is blessed with an endless creativity by virtue of which he creates structures : God, religion, society, capitalism and

socialism etc. but none of them can subsume him totally. Greater the structures of creativity, as in the civilization in the 20th century, greater is the alienation of man from his fellow beings, from the very accomplishments of his civilization, and also from himself. More than anything else, self-alienation characterizes the human situation of the 20th century. O'Neill, envisaging *The Hairy Ape* as a modern counterpart of Greek tragedy, writes about the play :

> The subject here is the same ancient one that always was and always will be the one subject for drama, and that is man and his struggle with his own fate. The struggle used to be with Gods, but is now with himself, his own past his attempt to "belong".

Alienation or loss of identity is the basic theme of most of O'Neill's major plays. Alienated from their immediate environment, feeling lonely and isolated and unhappy, his character constantly search for identity, for belongingness, and disintegrate and decay, when they fail to achieve such identity.

In *The Hairy Ape,* in the figure of Yank, O'Neill shows how the best worker in the modern American society finds himself inexorably cut off from his community and degrades himself to the condition of beast. Yank, in the beginning of the play, is shown quite confident and proud of his superior strength. He is depicted as a symbol of a worker's illusion that he can identify with his work in the capitalistic society. He cherishes the illusion of belonging and being at the centre of the things. He identifies the strength of the steel with his own brutal strength. He is in perfect harmony with his work, and proud of the fact that he can eat smoke and coal and make the ship run at twenty-five knots an hour. He does not seek any escape into a romantic past of Paddy's dream or Long's dream of bringing equality through constitutional means.

But Yank's sense of security, his sense of belongingness is soon shattered as he is confronted with Mildred Doughals who looks at him as if he were a hairy ape and who calls him a filthy beast. Yank, who possesses tremendous physical strength starts becoming conscious of his alienation which arises out of the material conditions of society. According to Marxism "It is man's nature to realize himself in work, but the possibility of doing so is denied to him by the economic system. Thus the key problem

is alienated labour under capitalism; workers have little control over the working process; the product of labour is expropriated by others to be used against the worker; and the worker himself becomes a commodity in the labour market." The same view is expressed by Christopher Caudwell in his book *Illusion and Reality,* where he says : "The characteristic of capitalist economy is that it apparently sweeps away all directly coercive relations between men - and seems to substitute for them the coercive relation of men to a thing - the state upheld right to property."

This is the crux of Yank's problem in the play. Previously, he believed that he belonged to steel but after being insulted by Mildred he began to wonder about his identity. Mildred's insulting remark makes him unsure of himself. Paddy also reminds him that Mildred looked at him as if he were a "hairy ape escaped from the zoo" which raises an agonizing doubt about himself.

Though Yank swears revenge on her, he is fearfully aware that there is another world, another set of values defining him and the world of ships, engines and steel where he is pre-eminent and his set of values, of strength, hard work and productivity may mean nothing. Even when Paddy tells him that he is foolish in paying so much attention to Mildred, who is trifling, Yank is painfully aware, not so much of Mildred but of what she has done to him and what has happened to him through her.

Even after three weeks, when Long brings him to the Fifth Avenue, Yank's obsession with what Mildred had done to him not only remains but becomes acute. Long wants peaceful action against the capitalist class but Yank chooses beastly action. He bumps into a gentleman, accosts a lady and stops a fat man from getting into the bus. The policeman is called and Yank is arrested.

In the prison, O'Neill presents Yank's increasing self-depredation not only of himself as an individual but of all the values of much cherished identity of the new industrial culture. The steel bars of the prison cell represent Mildred, her father and their attempts to degrade him. So his next step upon release from prison, is vengeance upon her father's steel mills and social structure they represent. He joins industrial workers of the world (IWW) in the hope that they are industrial wreckers of the world, as they were accused of. He is promptly thrown out as a fool or spy.

Yank's rejection by I.W.W. completes the process of his alienation. His consciousness has not developed to the extent of realizing that the working class movement has reached a stage, where individual terrorist acts are not sufficient. He, therefore, determines to exclude himself from society altogether. His consciousness has made him aware that man is nothing but beast. He, therefore, tries to seek fellowship with the gorilla.

In the zoo, Yank reaches the nadir of his despair. Man cannot live alone. He needs his past and his future, however, delusory, for he is otherwise incurably lonely. The peculiar quality of the play *The Hairy Ape* is that in this play, the author traces man's loneliness in modern society to his social milieu. O'Neill said that Yank in *The Hairy Ape* was not a stoker but an every man who falls from innocent certainty to complex incertitude, or as the play puts it, "to not belonging", the ultimate human frustration and humiliation and the essence of loneliness.

Search for identity becomes an obsession with him and ultimately, it takes Yank to the zoo. There he stands face to face with gorilla in its cage, talks to it as to a brother because he thinks that they both belong to the same club, the "club of the hairy apes". He shakes hands with it and sets it free. But the gorilla crushes him to death. And perhaps, the Hairy Ape, O'Neill says, at last "belongs".

No doubt, in the modern capitalistic society, the people of the working class have been reduced to an animal like existence. And sometimes they want to go to the past, to an earlier stage than human. Present civilization may have destroyed humanity, but this problem cannot be solved by going back. That is why Yank in his attempt to belong in the past, is killed by the gorilla.

The play dramatizes that there is no personal slavery in the capitalistic system but there is slavery to things. As Christopher Caudwell says that the very condition of bourgeois economy demand that social relations be veiled by the free market and by the forms of the commodity production, so that relations between men are disguised to relations between things. Free competition leads to more and more slavery. The labourer, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class.

Inspired by the social problems inherent in an industrial revolution, Yank (the Hairy Ape) tries to 'think', tries to assert himself, tries finally to regain, as O'Neill puts it, 'the harmony which he used to have as an animal', and finds that he does not belong. He does not 'fit in' any where.

7.3 TITLE OF THE PLAY "The Hairy Ape"

The play 'The Hairy Ape' was written for the stage in 1921. But in 1917, a short story with the same title was written concerning the stoker who finally joins the I.W.W. O'Neill submitted the short story for publication, but it was rejected and he later destroyed it. This short story was O'Neill's attempt to account for the unexplained suicide of an Irishman, Driscoll who was in complete harmony with his limited conception of the universe. He did so by making it the inevitable outcome of a hopeless search for self, the theme of *The Hairy Ape,* unfolding in virtually every line of dialogue and every turn of action.

The title *The Hairy Ape* refers to Yank, the central figure in the play, and his quest for identity or "belongingness". An ape is the very embodiment of physical strength and primitive simplicity. It has little brains but very strong muscles. It is incapable of thought and knows only the use of physical force by which it can cause great destruction. O'Neill in the very beginning of the play portrays Yank having all the qualities of an ape. He is hairy chested with long arms of tremendous power. He is broader, fiercer and more powerful than the other stokers. All the stokers in the stokehole resemble the pictures of Neanderthal man. The Neanderthal man signifies the middle stage in the development of a human being from an ape. So the position of Yank and other stokers is in between the beast and the human. Their low receding brows show their lack of intellect. Yank has great capacity for work for long hours unfatigued, and can inhale smoke and coal unaffected and like the hairy ape he has immense physical strength.

From the very first scene of the play, Yank is depicted as a highly developed individual who cherishes the illusion of belonging and being at the centre of the things. However, his confident sense of belongings is soon shattered. Mildred comes down into the forecastle at a time when Yank is murderously flourishing his shovel above his head, hurling abusive words at the owner of the whistle and pounding his chest with the other

hand, “gorilla like”. The impact of his “abysmal brutality, naked and shameless” is so much to her that she puts her both hands before her eyes to escape the sight of Yank and calls him “a filthy beast.”

Paddy reminds him that Mildred looked at him as if he were “a hairy ape escaped from the zoo” and throughout the play Yank broods over these words “hairy ape” used for him. It raises an agonizing doubt about himself. He takes the insult in a purely personal way. He does not shave or clean himself afterwards and comes to look like the hairy ape. He also starts behaving like an hairy ape.

His desire for revenge carries him to the Fifth Avenue. Both Yank and Long look at the shops of jewellery and furs and the tags of prices attached to the items displaced in the show cases. Yank is filled with queer excitement that the monkey’s fur is sold for two thousand dollars. Long says bitterly that the capitalists would not pay so much for a hairy ape’s skin, not even for the whole living ape. Yank becomes furious and thinks that Long means to insult him. He starts behaving senselessly and thoughtlessly like a hairy ape and does not listen to Long’s advice that they should use the constitutional means. He starts striking the men and women to provoke them to a fight but is caught by the police and is sent to jail.

In the prison, he imagines that he is hairy ape imprisoned in the cage. Here he comes to know about IWW and wants to come out of prison. He in order to escape uses his muscle power to bend the bars of the cell, thus behaving like an ape.

Yank joins the IWW in the hope that they are industrial wreckers of the world and his purpose in joining IWW is to blow up the factories. The secretary calls him a ‘brainless ape’ and throws him out of the office.

From IWW, Yank lands himself in a zoo. He, the hairy ape, is rejected by civilized society. He has been rapidly disintegrating. So he thinks that he, as an Hairy ape, naturally belongs to the brotherhood of the apes. He goes to the cage in which gorilla is made captive. Thinking that the gorilla can challenge the whole world Yank opens the cage. He says that he will take the animal for a walk down Fifth Avenue where they will knock down the band of Mildred. But the gorilla wraps his arms around him and crushes him to death. It throws the body into the cage and shuffles off meaningly

in the darkness. Then with passionate despair Yank says, "Ladies and gents, step forward and take a slant at de one and only-(his voice weakening)- one and original-Hairy Ape from the wilds of" - He slips in a heap on the floor and dies. And perhaps, the Hairy Ape, O'Neil says, at last belongs."

O' Neil has given the play *The Hairy Ape* the sub title "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern life." Yank represents the Everyman of modern capitalistic society. He is the modern hairy ape whereas gorilla is the ancient biological ancestor of man. Yank psychologically retraces the stages of men's evolution till he seems himself as a hairy ape. When modern hairy ape tries to go back to the past, to an earlier stage than human so that he can belong in the past, he is killed by the gorilla.

In short, we can say that both the title *The Hairy Ape* and the sub-title "A Comedy of Ancient and Modern life" are apt because they suggest the theme of the play.

7.4 EXPRESSIONISM IN *The Hairy Ape*

Basically, expressionism is a revolt against the dehumanization of man by man and society. It believes in expressiveness of the cognitive and emotive process. It presents the essentials of things instead of things themselves. Normal consciousness is dissolved and the dense core of one's passion is climaxed. All naturalistic details and logical transitions between things are eliminated. The expressionistic perception concretizes itself in the formation of certain images and these images just stop at expressing the intensity of the perception or emotion, and never evolve themselves symbolically.

In drama and theatre, expressionism involves an emotive concentration in words, dialogues, scenes and other individual parts eroding the structural unity and ethos of the plays. It was anti-literary in that it tried to destroy the elaborate structure of Latin Grammar of the European languages to facilitate the thrust of human urges through a sort of telegraphic style of writing one peak of emotion with another. As dramatic art, expressionism aims at freeing drama of the Aristotelian absolutes of plot, language and character. As theoretical art, expressionism attempted to destroy representational stage reality and theatrical illusion. Initially, expressionism arose in post war Germany-George Kaiser's *Morn to Midnight* (1920), Earnest Toller's *Man and the Masses* (1920)

attempted a revolution to free man from slavery to the established system of values.

Extreme expressionism was a product of post war Germany, with its broken social order, with its unrest and militant humanism, the roots of the style, closely associated with a new view of the world, were in Wedekind and Strindberg. Elsewhere, the movement gained some foothold in the Soviet Union, in France, Italy and America, practically none in England. As a result, there are several schools of nationally modified expressionism even called by different names. Consequently, most definitions of expressionism are presented without excessive self confidence. Infact expressionism is usually defined in negative terms, as a departure from realism, as anti-naturalism. A key word is 'distortion' and a key figure is Strindberg; the two plays taken as models in a great many countries are *Elt dromspel* (A Drama Play) and Till Damaskus (To Damascus). Louis Broussard writes when introducing expression in his *American Drama :*

> Strindberg abandoned the photography of realism, the dramatic sequence events, for a stream of consciousness in terms of stage symbols whereby the surface of life becomes disjoined, scattered, as in a dream, to suggest the inner reality which lies beneath that surface. Not concerned with externals, the dramatist explores the idea; the source of conduct; until reality becomes a sub consciousness and character mere abstractions. Scenes are often brief; they sometimes succeed one another without time sequence; they have neither order nor unity and they suggest, as they alternate between reality and fantasy, between objective action and analysis, the disorderly, disconnected features of a psychoanalysis.

The passage has certain overtones which make it appropriate as a definition of the American version of expressionism rather than of this style in total. It is phrased more in terms of the individual than in terms of society; infact, Broussard goes on to say on the same page that Hauptmann, Kaiser, Toller, and Capek added to this basic Strindbergian expressionism "social and economic issues."

Eugene O' Neill's two plays *The Emperior Jones* and *The Hairy Ape* are

expressionistic and there are expressionistic elements in a group of others most notably in *Welded, All God's Chillun Got Wings* and *The Great God Brown.* O' Neill confessed Strindberg's influence but denied having received any stimuli from the Germans : "The point is that *The Hairy Ape* is a direct descendant of *Jones*, written long before I had ever heard of expressionism, and its form needs no explanation but this."

Yet in an interview O' Neill made a remark, which could lead to a different conclusion : "the real contribution of the expressionist has been in the dynamic qualities of his plays-They express something in modern life better than did the old plays. I have something of this method in *The Hairy Ape."* In the same interview, O' Neill marks an important distinction :

> Expressionism denies the value of characterization....I personally do not believe that an idea can be readily put over to an audience except through characters....the real contribution of the expressionist has been in the dynamic qualities of his lays. They express something in modern life better than did the old plays. I have something of this method in *The Hairy Ape.* But the character Yank remains a man and everyone recognizes him as such.

The Hairy Ape is developed in the direction of expressionism, yet never reached full fledged German style. To O'Neill, the play seemed to run "the whole gamut from extreme naturalism to extreme expressionism - with more of the latter than the former".

The Hairy Ape lacks the long realistic opening scene of *The Emperor Jones.* Through twenty nine short lines, mostly ejaculations of a word or two, assigned to "voices", O'Neill gives us a picture of three typical elements in the life of stokers : drinking, telling stories about women, and fighting, collective stage action is present, by way of implication, in these barren sentences. Then the focus is transferred from the chorus to the individual, to Yank, who seems "broader, fiercer, more turbulent, more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest."

With this description, O' Neill connects himself with expressionism : his hero is a representative of group of people. He also says that the "treatment of this scene, or any other scene in the play, should by no means be naturalistic." The character of this

group as an unspecified mass is preserved throughout the play, by letting the speeches remain assigned only to "voices". The roles are later inherited by groups of churchgoers, of prisoners and at long last, of apes. There are no red herrings in *The Hairy Ape,* the focus is on a girl and three stokers. The rest of actors are not granted an opportunity to create three - dimensional character portraits - not at least by O' Neill.

Until scene-V, Yank is presented in naturalistic strength, not withstanding Long and Paddy's critical comments on his individualism, while the first scene and the other stokers are rendered totally expressionistic in their dehumanized existence. The scene presents images of a cage or a prison and Yank's self-confidence is the only liberating image. Scene III further reinforces this image through 'dim lighting', tumult of noise and the gorilla appearance of the blackened faces of the stokers. In scene V, the crowd is hurt by Mildred's remark. He is furious yet controlled. On the Fifth Avenue, Yank's controlled fury explodes expressionistically in revolt against people on the avenue. The violence is not against the people as such but against the image forced on him. The sight of the monkey fur in the furriers aggravates his rage as if the skin in the window is a personal insult. Intensely raging with anger, Yank bounces back against Mildred. Here, Yank is in total flight from himself, a state of characterlessness. In scene VI, in the prison in Blackwell island, Yank dissolves his character into a revolt against the world of steel which once represented him but now appears to represent Mildred and her father. In the next scene, Yank seeks an expressionistic destruction of the world of steel through I.W.W. Frustrated, Yank chooses to accept, expressionistically, the identity of gorilla and in a similar expressionistic gesture embraces gorilla to his death. But this frustrating death that does not give him a sense of belonging, either to the world of steel or to the world of gorilla, Yank admits the naturalistic impossibility of a human identity in the world. In recognizing this fact and also in recognizing the inescapability of the tragic expressionistic revolt, he re-emerges as a human character, a mature and a thoughtful one that he was not at the beginning of the play. As a play *The Hairy Ape* structures a continual human revolt against a fixative situation.

O' Neill's early plays are realistic, in the plays of his middle period, he uses expressionistic methods without completely abandoning his earlier realism. Though he has used the speed technique of the German expressionists, "he has not telescoped time

and place." The action does not move backward and forward in time, nor does it range far and wide in space but follows a continuous forward movement, each scene being a well defined stage in the psychological retracing in Yank's consciousness of the various stages in human evolution. O' Neill has skillfully avoided the extremes of expressionism and maintained the coherence and integrity characteristic of a realistic play.

7.5 LET US SUM UP

O' Neill's *The Hairy Ape* may be taken as a paradigm of the patterns that is recurrent in his whole work as a dramatist. The theme of the play is the fore runner of much that is significant in O' Neill's later plays, and in fact, in the American literature of the twentieth century, particularly drama - i.e. the predicament of man in the modern capitalistic society. The play enacts the plight of a man who finds himself alienated from his social connections that give meaning to existence. It depicts the process whereby a man is alienated from his society. In the figure of Yank, the hairy ape of the play O'Neill shows how the best worker in the modern American society finds himself inexorably cut off from his community and degrades himself to the condition of a beast.

7.6 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Illustrate the title of the play *The Hairy Ape : A Comedy of Ancient* and *Modern Life.*
2. Critically comment on O' Neill's use of expressionism in *The Hairy Ape.*
3. Discuss the theme of alienation and quest for identity in the play *The Hairy Ape.*

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 8**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-II**

THE CHARACTERS AND ANNOTATIONS

STRUCTURE

8.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to study all the important characters in the play. The lesson will also acquaint you with some short answer questions and annotated passages.

8.2 YANK

Yank is the central character in the play *The Hairy Ape.* He is a stoker in a ship of transatlantic liner. He is a highly accentuated human being compared to the rest of stokers. He seems "broader, fiercer, more turbulent more powerful, more sure of himself than the rest." He "represents to them a self expression, the very last word in what they are, that most highly developed individual."

Yank, as depicted by O' Neill, is a twentieth century proletarian everyman. From the very first scene of the play, he appears to be a dominant figure, a symbol of a worker's illusion that he can identify with his work in the capitalistic society. He cherishes the illusion of belonging and being at the centre of the things. He is intensely alive in the present and discards Paddy's desire of going back to a past age of feudal relations. "I'm living", he says, "I'm part of de-engines...Dey' re speed...twenty five knots a hour... dat belongs!" he identifies the strength of steel with his own brutal strength. He says, "I'm smoke and express trains and steamers...And I'm what makes iron into steel; steel, dat stands for de whole ting! I'm steel-steel-steel".

Yank's position is given definition and context by the attitudes of two of his companions- Long and Paddy. Yank has a sense of belonging to the ship. Ship is house for him. For others, it is a sinking ship, a hell. They are not born into it, but, Long would say, are dragged into it by the capitalist class. Yank rejects Long's Marxist division into the exploiters and the exploited. He considers the people on the upper deck, the upper strata of society, as just a "baggage'. They don't belong to the stockehole whereas the stokers belong. Long is sarcastic about their belonging to the ship. Paddy joins Long's sarcasm. For him, belonging was a thing of the past when they were sailors and belonged to the sea.

Yank is quite content and at ease, quite happy and self-confident because he has a sense of belongingness a sense of identity. But this sense of security, this sense of belongingness, is soon shattered by Mildred, the daughter of the president of Nazareth Steel and Chairman of Board of Directors, who comes down to the stokehole to look down upon the stokers as on wild beast in a zoo. She calls Yank a 'filthy beast' and looks upon him as if he were an hairy ape. Yank feels insulted in the very heart of his

pride; his sense of belonging is gone. He takes the insult in a purely personal way.

In the fifth avenue, Yank confronts a world that breathes materialism, artificiality and aimlessness–though Yank is not provoked by the affluence and the reckless spending of the affluent class at the expense of the starving poor, yet he is insulted by the expensive monkey fur on display in a shop's window. The animal skin on display, at once, objectifies Mildred's charge of his being a beast.

In the prison, he realizes that he is not steel and steam, which make the ship go, but the slave of those, who own ship. Previously steel has represented steamers, engines, buildings, now face to face with reality, he sees what steel actually is-cages, cells, locks, bolts and bars. Steel that was once home for Yank, becomes an enemy.

Yank has tremendous strength so he wants to choose the beastly action. He lacks the brain and so his consciousness has not developed to the extent of realizing that the working class movement has reached a stage where individual terrorist acts are not sufficient. By using his physical power, he wants to be fire and melt steel. That's why he comes to join I.W.W. but is rejected by it because his consciousness has not reached the level where he can understand the meaning and uses of an organized struggle.

Finally, he determines to exclude himself from society altogether. His consciousness has made him aware that man is nothing but a beast. He, therefore, tries to seek fellowship with the gorilla in the zoo but is killed by it. His death is a frightful symbol of the decay and disintegration of spiritual values in a mechanized materialized age.

To conclude we can say that Yank is Everyman, for what happens to Yank in the play is happening to millions in the modern world. Yank is typical of the isolated proletariat in an unvarnished and industrialized civilization found all the world over. He is both an individual and type, who continue to be brutalized by machinery and industry. He has not only become a machine, he has also lost faith in himself. Thus, there is gradual regression in his personality.

8.3 LONG

Long is a fellow stoker of Yank, who preaches a sort of Christian socialism. He blames the hardships of the stoker's life and greediness of the capitalist class, which has

forgotten the Biblical injunctions regarding the equality of all human beings. He agrees with Yank that the ship is their home, but that home of theirs is a hell. They are condemned to live and suffer in it all their lives. And it is all doing of the rich passengers who travel first class and stay in the best cabins on the upper deck of the ship. He exclaims fiercely, "They dragged us down till we're only wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship, sweating, burning 'up eatin' coal-dust! Hit's them's ter blame–the damned capitalist class." For him the structure of society is rotten and the cause of this rottenness is the economic system. Since the basic evil is capitalism, the workers, according to Long, must be educated to a knowledge of the economic structure of society. As he tells Yank, "I want to awaken yer bloody class consciously. Then yer'll see it 's 'er class yer've got to fight, nor'er alone". Long wants to fight with legal means strictly. He tells Yank, "Remember force defects itself. It ain't our weapon-we must impress our demands through peaceful means the votes of the on marching proletarians of the bloody world".

Thus Long is a radical, a revolutionary, and through him O'Neill has portrayed the class–antagonism in American social life.

8.4 PADDY

Paddy, another fellow stoker of Yank, is an old wizened Irishman. He is devotee of the sea-chanties, with a romantic nostalgia for the by gone days of old clippers with tall masts floating on imaginary golden seas. He represents the romantic escapist who evades the present with a desire to go back to an imaginary feudal, patriarchal past in which man was in harmony with nature and his labour. He says :

> Oh, to be back in the fine days of my youth ochone! Oh, there was fine beautiful ships them days– Clipper with tall masts touching the sky-fine strong men in them-men that was sons of the sea as if 't was the mother that bore them... 'T was them days men belonged to ships, not now. Twas them days a ship was the part of the sea, and a man was part of a ship, and the sea joined all together and made it one.

Paddy is extremely dissatisfied with the present industrial age, where men are reduced to the status of automatons "flesh and blood wheel of the engines". Man losing

harmony with nature is “cages by steel from a sight of the sky like bloody apes in the zoo.” This remark of Paddy throws light on the significance of the title.

Thus, through Paddy, O’Neill has voiced his own condemnation of the ugliness and soulness of contemporary civilization.

8.5 MILDRED DOUGLAS

Mildred Douglas is a young girl of twenty. She is the only daughter of the president of Nazareth Steel and Chairman of Board of Directors. She is pretty but her face is marred by a “self-conscious air of superiority.” She seems exhausted and anaemic and there is a look of artificiality about her. She is conscious of her weaknesses. She lacks vitality and integrity. She bemoans her female inanities. She herself says that she is a waste product in the Bessemer process, the process of making steel or the process of dehumanization-ushered in by the industrial growth of America. She inherits wealth but not energy. She wants to make a sociological study of the condition of poor section of American society. However, she knows that she does not have the energy that her grandfather as a puddler had, which down the generations get burnt away in the affluence they had come to possess. Even her earnest desire to see the world of vitality and integrity, she is aware, sounds ridiculous like a leopard complaining of its spots.

Mildred is accompanied by her aunt, who is a fat old lady, pompous and proud. From their talk, it becomes clear that there is not much love and affection between the two and Mildred likes to cross and tease her aunt. She not only insults her aunt but also slaps her insultingly across her face.

Mildred represents the capitalist class of American society. This American upper class society is artificial and empty. Industrialism has not only degraded the best worker to the condition of beast but also dehumanized and reduced the upper class people to the status of robots who act mechanically. Mildred has no regard for her aunt which shows that she is dehumanized and has lost all connection with life.

8.6 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

8.6.1 Significance of Yank’s Confrontation with Mildred Douglas.

The most significant event in the play *The Hairy Ape* is Yank’s confrontation

with Mildred. Two totally different worlds clash in the stokehole. Before Mildred descends in the stokehole to satisfy her curiosity, the atmosphere there is heightened by fusing several scenic means of expression : lightening, noises and collective action. The description of the stokers in rows compares them with (i) Galley slaves (ii) Chained gorillas and (iii) machines. As Mildred enters the stokehole, even before her encounter with Yank, she "turns paler" and "shivers with fright in spite of blazing heat." The engineer's whistle sounds, which irritates the stokers and makes Yank lose his temper. He bursts out angrily by brandishing his shovel over his head and pounding his chest with one hand "gorilla" like. Seeing this, Mildred is terrified. She puts her hands before her eyes to shut out the sight of his face. She calls Yank 'filthy beast" and faints. She is taken out by the two engineers but Yank, who is insulted in a very unknown fashion, hurls his shovel at the door, which has just closed. The violence and brutality, which is the outcome of Yank's confrontation with Mildred, is an inevitable result of the class-conflict. Mildred owns steel and is protected by it because when Yank tries to hit her with his shovel, the door is closed behind her, imprisoning Yank, as it were, in his cage. This confrontation is dramatically very significant because here the seeds of tragedy and catastrophe are sown: the moment marks the beginning of Yank's undoing.

8.6.2 USE OF INTERIOR MONOLOGUE IN THE PLAY

O'Neill has exploited the technique of the, "interior monologue", to lay bare the suffering, anguished soul of Yank. The last scene of the play is a long monologue of Yank. He is thrown out of the I.W.W. office and from there he lands himself in a zoo as if he were driven into it by the world of capitalists and socialists. In this long monologue of Yank, the gorilla in the cage is the only interlocutor. It is an admirable study of Yank's thought processes and it fully brings out the disintegration of Yank's personality. Carried away by his obsession, Yank sees himself as a hairy ape. He addresses the gorilla as a 'brother' and thinks that they both belong to the same club - the club of 'the Hairy Apes'. Obsessed with idea of revenge he is no longer capable of any reasoning or rational thought. He feels that the gorilla at least belongs to nature, but he does not belong even to that beautiful world. He belongs to the world of man, but he has been rejected and thrown out by that world. He would like to have his revenge on that rejecting world. He lets the gorilla out of the cage, shakes hand with

it, intending to take him to the Fifth Avenue and with his help have his revenge on the class to which Mildred belonged. But the gorilla crushes him to death, and as he dies he mutters in deep anguish, "Even him did not think I belonged. Christ, where do I get off at ? Where do I fit in." Alienation and isolation is the common lot of man in the modern industrialized and urbanized society. This monologue expresses the horror of the predicament of contemporary man.

8.7 ANNOTATIONS

i) They dragged us down till we're only wage slaves in the bowels of a bloody ship, sweating', burning up eatin' coal-dust! Hit's them's ter blame-the damned capitalist class".

These lines are spoken by Long, a stoker, in the first scene of the play *The Hairy Ape* - Yank, the protagonist, is presented as a dominant figure, a symbol of a worker's illusion that he can identify with his work in the capitalistic society. He feels that ship is his home. At this Long agrees that the ship is their home, but that home of theirs is hell. They are forced to live and suffer in it all their lives. According to him it is the capitalistic class, who travels in the first cabin, which is to be blamed for the condition of the working class. These lines represent Long as a social thinker whose doctrine is a patchwork of sentimental socialism and the Christian creed of charity.

ii) But I'm afraid I have neither the vitality nor integrity. All that was burnt out in our stock before I was born.

These lines are spoken by Mildred Douglas in the second scene of the play *The Hairy Ape*. She is the only daughter of the president of Nazareth Steel and Chairman of Board of Directors. She has a pale, pretty face marred by a self-conscious expression of disdainful superiority. She is conscious of her weaknesses and knows that she lacks vitality and integrity. She inherits wealth but not energy and so is a waste product of the process of making steel. She feels that all the energy was used by her father and grandfather in making steel i.e. wealth before she was born. That is why she is anaemic and lacks energy. These words of Mildred show that the industrial growth of America, results in producing wealth and in the process results in dehumanization. The weaknesses of Mildred is the weaknesses of her whole class. They have turned into money making

machine and lack all vitality and strength.

iii. Dis is man's job.get me? It belongs. It runs dis tub.

Yank speaks these lines in the first scene of the play *The Hairy Ape.* His two fellow stokers, Long and Paddy dislike the job of stokers and feel that they are living in hell. Whereas Paddy is a romantic escapist, Long preaches a sort of Christian socialism. Yank rejects both on the ground that they are weak and timid. He himself is proud of being the worker on whom the modern civilization depends. These lines of Yank depict him as a dominant figure, a symbol of a worker's illusion that he identifies with his work in the capitalistic society. According to him, the stokers are better than the first class passengers because the stokers are strong people doing man's job and making the ship move. Thus Yank cherishes the illusion of belonging and being at the center of the things.

iv) Votes, hell! Vote is a Joke, see Votes for women! Let dem do it.

These lines are spoken by Yank to Long in the fifth scene by the play *The Hairy Ape.* After his confrontation with Mildred, Yank takes the insult in a purely personal way and wants to take personal revenge on Mildred. Long takes him to the fifth avenue. He tells Yank that they cannot bear this insult and suggests to him that they should go to law or to government. He advises him to use only peaceful, lawful means such as capturing power through their votes. But Yank contemptuously condemns his view of seeking help from these institutions and calls such ideas fit only for women. He also says that vote is a joke. Through these lines, O'Neill makes a bitter satire on the American political institutions. Law, governments and democracy all these bodies are controlled by the capitalist class and they pay no heed to the poor people. Yank, thus, rejects the basic trait of the American way of life.

vi) You mean change of unequal conditions of society by legitimate direct action or with dynamite.

The secretary of I.W.W. says this to Yank. Yank, in the beginning, is shown happy and confident in his existence and proud of his physical strength. But his self-respect is shattered after his encounter with Mildred Douglas. Her insulting remark makes him unsure of himself and so he swears revenge on her. He joins I.W.W. thinking

it to be an underground organization of anarchists as Senator Queen has spoken about it. He has come to join so that he may blow up the artifacts of capitalism. He tells the secretary that his specific purpose is to blow up Douglas' factory where steel is manufactured. The secretary fears that some detective agency have sent Yank to spy on I.W.W. So he tells Yank that they have no use for a dynamite. They do not want to blow up anything. They want to change the conditions of society by entirely legitimate means. Yank is a 'brainless ape' and is thrown out of the office of I.W.W. Yank's rejection by I.W.W. completes the process of his alienation. His consciousness has not developed to the extent of realizing that the working class movement has reached a stage where individual terrorist acts are not sufficient.

viii) He got me, aw sight I am tron. Even him didn't tink I belonged.

These lines present the tragic denouement. From I.W.W., Yank lands himself in a zoo. His consciousness has made him aware that man is nothing but a beast. He, therefore, tries to seek fellowship with the gorilla but the latter crushes him to death. Before his death, he mutters painfully that even the gorilla did not think that the former belonged to his group. Here Yank reaches the nadir of his despair. Man cannot live alone. He needs his past and his future, however, delusory, for he is otherwise incurably lonely. No doubt, in the modern capitalistic society the people of the working class have been reduced to an animal-like existence. And sometimes they want to go to the past, to an earlier stage than human. Present civilization may have destroyed humanity but this problem cannot be solved by going back. That is why Yank, in his attempt to belong to the past, is killed by the gorilla.

8.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss O'Neill's use of the technique of "interior monologue" in the play *The Hairy Ape.*
2. Discuss Yank as a tragic hero.
3. Write a short note on Long as a preacher of Christian socialism.
4. Critically comment on the following :

   a) I'm waste product in the Bessember process-like the millions or rather,

I inherit the acquired trait of the by-product, wealth, but none of the energy, none of the strength of the steel made it.

b) Hell, sure, dat's my fav'rite climate. I at it up'. I git fat on it! It's me makes it hot! It's me makes it roar !

c) Pardon me for my outburst. When a leopard complains of it spots, it must sound rather grostesuque.

d) We lives in 'ell, comrades- and right enough we'll die in it. And who's ter blame, I asks yer?

e) I'm what makes iron into steel! Steel that stands for de whole ring! And I'm steel-steel-steel!

8.9 SUGGESTED READING

Cargill, Oscar *O'Neill and His Plays : Four decades of Criticism.* New York, New York University Press 1961 : Survey of O'Neill's criticism.

Gassner, John. *O'Neill : A Collection of Critical Essays* New Jersey : Prentice Hall 1964.

_____*Eugene O' Neill.* University of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers.

Tiusanen, Timo, *O'Neill's scenic images* New Jersey Princeton University Press.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 9**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-III**

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

STRUCTURE

9.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to explore the life and works of Arthur Miller and to acquaint the learner with various influences on Miller's dramatic themes and style.

9.2 ARTHUR MILLER–LIFE AND WORKS

Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915 in Manhattan (New York). He attended high school in suburb of Brooklyn (New York). His parents, Isadore and Augusta Barnett Miller, belonged to the middle-class community in the busy industrial borough of New York. It was the sprawling size of the metropolis that had given rise (those days) to the term "the melting pot". Miller's father was a hardworking businessman, a manufacturer of women's coats. He tried to give his family such advantages as he as a child in Austria–Hungary was deprived of. Miller's mother, Augusta, was born in America. She had few interests outside her home and children. She led the life of an average Brooklyn housewife. Although she had always longed to go to college, she made a career of looking after her husband's needs and looking after their three children. Miller had an older brother who joined business, and a sister who adopted career on the stage.

Arthur Miller, from his early years, was a thin wiry boy. His hazel eyes looked out thoughtfully from his rather thin and pointed face. He was more inclined to sports than to studies. Right from childhood, he was an avid football fan. By the time he reached school, he had shaped as a tall, angry teen-ager. He soon became a football star, graduating from school in 1933 as the "hero". He was keen on joining the university of Michigan for the reason that they had there football team of national fame. All through his high-school he had been following the fortunes of this team. Being a businessman, his father, however, declined to support him. He had been hit by the depression of the 1930's and perhaps was not in a position to afford college education for his son, especially, at an out of home-town. Therefore, for two and a half years, Miller had to work as a loader and shipping clerk in an automoblie warehouse, saving for his further education. During this work-period a certain change also took place in his character and personality.

Arthur Miller underwent a profound change during this shaping period of his life; it sharply changed his plans for future as well as his outlook on life. Since it was a mechanical job he was doing at the warehouse, it also became rather boring. Its routine gave him enough time to think. Also, every day he had to go a long distance from home to the warehouse. To kill time, he took to reading books during the journey. He had a number of books he had been wanting to read since his school days, as the busy school schedule and his football sport had not allowed him time for reading them. Once he was set on reading, there was no stopping. He read straight through even such long books as *War and Peace* while hanging on to a subway strap. During his lunch hour, he often went to the library to hunt for books. Even though not much to his liking, these two and a half years of work proved useful for Miller. He delighted himself in reading that expressed the truths of life—partly in poetry, more in novels, but mainly in plays. Like most New Yorkers, he had always enjoyed the theatre, going to Broadway shows. All this accumulated into a desire for writing plays, in which he could embody his impressions of life.

One of the books Miller read during this period was *Write That Play!* by Kenneth E. Rowe, of the University of Michigan Drama Department. In place of football, the urge to meet the author of this book and to study in his department called

him to go to Ann Arboor, the seat of the University of Michigan. When he found that he had saved enough to pay for his tuition at the university, he discovered that his marks in high school were not good enough to qualify him for the entrance examination. So he wrote to Clarence Cook Little, the progressive president at Michigan, asking for permission to enter on the grounds that he would prove his merit in the first year of his study. In case he did not do more than passing well, if he did not show true distinction as promising playwright, he would drop out. The magnanimous president granted him the opportunity. So he went off to Ann Arbor with the blessings of his family. Soon as he settled in the new place he set down to writing plays as if he was sent to do that very job.

His hopes were not belied. He found in Kenneth Rowe the kind of understanding critic and teacher he needed to make him "write the play," following it with another, and another. Not only that he did not have to drop out after completing one year, he succeeded in winning the Avery Hopwood Award for two years, which was offered annually at Michigan for the best original play. He quickly acquired a thorough knowledge of the theatre, about writing as well as producing a play. Another opportunity became available to him there. In 1929, the Lydia Mendelsohnn Repertory Theatre had opened in the newly built Women's League, which offered a workshop for new as well as seasoned productions. Miller attended rehearsals, performances, sessions in lighting, set designing, etc. He seemed to be set on the big job. Ideas, dialogues, words flowed voluntarily, spontaneously, effortlessly. During one of his vacations, he visited Chicago, where he watched a performance of *Awake and Sing,* a play by Clifford Odets, an American dramatist of the period. The play's overt message, "Life should have some dignity", made a deep and lasting impact on his mind. A key sentence from the play, "Go out and flight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills," seemed to epitomize the attitude of the decade of the thirties towards the false ideals of the decade of the twenties. He gave a serious thought to the case of his own family, which had been a victim of the depression. He thought of others, who had suffered similar fate. His mind went into the reasons that caused the collapse at the Wall Street. He thought of those suicides that had taken place owing to financial failures.

All this thinking led Miller to formulate concepts of moral responsibility within the family, which were to furnish the main themes of his plays, especially the relation between father and son. Making family a model for society, he extended those concepts to the society at large. He related the individual to society, individual's responsibility towards welfare of the people. Going through all these ideas, he reached the conclusion that it was immoral for any individual to amass wealth, for it is done at the cost of others. This further led him to an assessment of the social injustices, of the sins individuals commit in the name of "free enterprise". The American fascination for success and the tendency to accept all means, including the immoral and criminal, so long as one succeeds, the mindless worship of the success god, became repugnant to him. He came to comprehend these values as false, socially irresponsible, and morally unpardonable. He wrote plays later to expose these false values and to show their pernicious effects on individuals as well as society. Once clear about his ideas and values he set to conceiving appropriate plots and suitable characters for the plays he would use as an instrument of social awakening and social reform.

Miller's hard work, professional preparation, clarity of thought, and sincerity of social concern brought results almost instantly. In 1937, one of his Hopwood-award winning plays fetched a substantial prize of $ 1250 from the Bureau of New Plays, set up by the Theatre Guild under the directorship of Theresa Helburn. Although not a large sum even by the standards of his time, the fact that his early plays could make a mark among the professional judges of drama was quite an encouragement to Miller as a budding dramatist. It was also an occasion to celebrate for his friends, his department, and all others associated, directly or indirectly, with his ambition as a theatre artist. After this signal event, romance of love also came his way. One of his classmates, Mary Grace Slattery, fell for him, and the affair flowered. With his rising fame as a prize winner dramatist he had no difficulty landing a post on the Federal Theatre Project, writing plays for a payment of $ 22.77 a week. He was to report for duty at the Project office every day, leaving the night for himself to continue writing plays on his own.

The first drama he completed those days was a poetic play, which he named *Montezuma,* concerning the conquest of Mexico. Apparently, the play seems removed

from contemporary life, it is actually related to the international struggle of the decade of depression in an indirect manner. As a matter of fact, it adumbrates the technique Miller later uses in *The Crucible.* Hoping that it would do well, he sent copies to all the possible interested parties, including the Theater Guild, the Group, The New Theatre League. But nobody favourably responded to the play. Perhaps the play's historical theme, suggested by its title, prevented favourable considerations. One such recipient of the play, Harold Clurman, Managing Director of the Group, later confessed that he found the play's copy in his file lying unread. Although disappointed, Miller was not really discouraged by the unfair treatment meted out to his manuscript. He soon took up writing of radio scripts, which he was able to do with some success. This experiment helped him out of job. The Theatre Project was abandoned in 1940, throwing him out of job. The radio script writing came handy in a time of dire necessity. He was able to earn a living in a medium to which he had never given a serious thought. He was able to establish himself a little later, which led to his marriage with Mary Slattery.

After the marriage, the couple settled down to a semi-suburban life in Patchogue, Long Island. Although living there, they were never able to join the suburbia community, reason being Miller's all-consuming interest in the theatre for which there was no company at that place. Within a few years of marriage, the couple was blessed with a daughter, and in next three years by a son. During these years, their subsistence depended upon Miller's radio scripts, which he regularly wrote. Simultaneously, he also tried to write plays and get them produced. When the World War II came along, he also did some scripts for a documentary film, *The Story of G.I. Joe,* which was based on Ernie Pyle's columns of the war. Miller took keen interest in war. He went to numerous camps, maintained a diary as his research, which he later published in book form, under the title *Situation Normal.* During the same period he had also been working on a novel, which was his protest against an openly Fascist organization, but thinly disguised by the name Christian Front. In his book called *Focus,* Miller exposed the anti-Semitism of such organizations, pointing out the dangers of religious fanaticism. The book received notable coverage in the press, provoking conflicting opinions and discussions of its contemporary relevance.

Luck really favoured him in 1945 when he found a producer for his ninth play's script, *The Man Who Had All The Luck.* It dramatized a rather contrived story of a man whose continuous good luck becomes a source of dismay and insecurity to him until he suffers a serious setback, when he feels assured that he will drive forward of his own volition. Except for the fact that it was produced, the play itself did not have much luck in presentation, which lasted only four performances. Nevertheless, his name came into limelight, and so did his work. No one now doubted his status as a serious dramatist of his time. He felt satisfied with this recognition. Although not many reviews were favourable, one Burton Rascoe was perceptive enough to point out Miller's potential as a challenging, forceful playwright of the contemporary theatre. Even more important for him was the immediate reward he received in the form of requests for his next play from several top producers, among them Harold Clurman. The course seemed set for his goal just ahead. Just about this time he had started writing a realistic play, to be called *All My Sons,* dramatizing his key concept of moral responsibility in the family, linking it to the inner struggle of men in authority during the war.

With the end of the World War II in 1945, public questions came to be raised, seeking to fix responsibility for the guilt where it belonged: not on the enemy alone, but on every individual, who had in any manner shown complicity in the international slaughter. To convey his message, Miller presented a hypothetical case in which an executive allows defective warplane motors to be shipped to the Army rather than ruin this company's business by losing contract. He seeks to show the consequences of the man's dereliction of his moral duty. The play's protagonist Joe Keller does, however, come to realize by the end of the play that the pilots, who flew, those planes were, as he says, "all my sons." The fact that for the makers of the planes war is only a business does not exonerate him of his sin. Keller's son, Chris, gets disillusioned with his father, who had revered him all his life. When he comes to know of what his father had done, he cries out, "I know you're no worse than other men, but I thought you were better. I never saw you as a man; I saw you as my father." This denunciation from Keller's son is scathing enough, and also heart-breaking, for it is his declaration of the loss of regard and reverence for a father.

The play, of course, is not flawless. One cannot fail to notice certain artificialities

of plot, which include the device that Bentley call "the time-honoured prop of melodrama", the last-minute discovery of a lost letter in which "all is revealed." On the whole, however, the play was a sincere, moving, at times, gripping drama of ideas. Harold Clurman showed preparedness to produce it instantly. Waster Fried and Elia Kazan also joined him, who directed the play. As the play opened on 29 January 1947, it became a box office success. It also won Miller the Drama Critics' Award as the best play of the season. The play won its author a permanent place on Broadway. Miller's contribution to the American theatre was that he raised the commercial theatre above the level of the "commodity play." His next attempt took him to the pinnacle of his career as dramatist.

Two years after the production of *All My Sons,* Miller was ready with what proved to be the best play of his career. The play was *Death of a Salesman*. This time Miller got two awards for his play for the year 1949–the Pulitzer and the Drama Critics' awards. Here, the same concept of moral responsibility Miller had experimented with in *All My Sons,* was carried a step further and to its logical conclusion. Here, Miller not only put on trial the moral values of his protagonist, Willy Loman, the salesman, but the whole society, which throws its individuals into the arena of competition only to achieve material success at the cost of moral values and human dignity. Willy Loman, the play's hero, might have been an efficient employee, he is forced out of job by the demands of mechanization. He is made to run pantingly in search of the will-o-the-wisp, financial wealth. He has no choice but to accept the vapid, superficial life of the salesman. It is a life of false heartiness, the emptiness, the loneliness, covered up by colossal bluff, the fleeting pleasure of a sportive fling, and the anodyne of alcohol.

In *Death of a Salesman,* the irony of Willy's tragedy is that his goal of life remains the mirage of material life. He miserably fails as father, unable to fulfil his filial duties towards his sons. He also fails in his goal of amassing wealth. The play's message is that even if he had succeeded in his pursuit of lucree, he would not have earned happiness. He is unable to achieve even the Philistine satisfaction of wealth. By the end of the play, we find him in ruin both morally as well as financially. Left with not many options, he can only think of taking his life in order that his son, Biff, can at last have

the benefit of his insurance policy. The play's indictment of the economic order in America, which pushes into such a tight corner an average individual like Willy who finally finds himself forced to sell the last thing left with him—their own body. Salesmen are the patsies of the industrial ring-masters whose products they parade. Only one out of a thousand rises to become a star, succeeding in changing his status in the world. The rest remain on the run in the pursuit of the mirage shown to them, ending at end of the day, exhausted and extinguished. In the figure of Willy Loman, Miller has created an unforgettable character, who represents a large segment of the American population. Despite all his drawbacks, however, he does not become a detestable character. He retains the readers' or the theatre-goers' love and sympathy. Willy's wife is very like Kelly's wife in *All My Sons.* She is loyal to her husband and sons to the last. She arouses our pity as an innocent victim of the economic order. But our pity is not unmixed with annoyance of her insistence in sticking to the hypocrisies of convention, the chimeras of society.

The play was praised as a thought-provoking work, full of psychological and sociological insights. Eric Bentley, who had attacked *All My Sons,* calling it "serious in intent only," described *Death of a Salesman* as a "signal event" in the theatre. Most critics agreed that it imparted true dramatic intensity to the theatre of ideas. They recognized Miller as a writer with strong convictions, acknowledging that he was not merely a skillful playwright but also a moralist. Some went to the extent of calling him a radical writer, underlining his emphasis on social inequalities. During the days of the McCarthy era (1950's), when the reactionary House un-American Activities Committee began to suppress the voices of social progress, to persecute as revolutionaries all those, who had supported the much-needed reforms of the 1930's and early 40's, Miller was among those who spearheaded the protest against the modern witchhunt of McCarthyism. It was in this very climate that between 1952 and 1953 he composed his most controversial play, *The Crucible.* Set in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692, the play presents the famous (or notorious) witch-hunt that took place in the New England village. The play draws an apparent parallel between the events of those days and the events of Miller's own time. As Miller wrote in his "Introduction" to the *Collected Plays,* "It was not only the rise of McCarthyism that moved me, but something which was much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective, knowledgeable campaign from

the far Right was capable of creating not only a terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually assuming even a holy resonance. That so inferior and subjective an emotion could have been so manifestly created from without was a marvel to me. It underlies every word in *The Crucible*..... "I saw forming a kind of interior mechanism of confession and forgiveness of sins, which until now had not rightly been categorized as sins. New sins were being created monthly. It was very odd how quickly these were accepted into the new orthodoxy, quite as though they had been there since the beginning of time...Above all, above all horrors, I saw accepted the notion that conscience was no longer a private matter, but one of state administration. I saw men handing conscience to other men and thanking other men for the opportunity of doing so."

Feeling strongly against such a climate in his own country, Miller went on to show how reprehensible the conduct of the Committee was in the eyes of all those like him who still believed in the freedom of thought and freedom of expression. Going back into the national past, he dug up the records of the Salem witchcraft trials, and created his own characters based on the few facts of "known behaviour" of the persons involved. It resulted in a powerful dramatic indictment of mass hysteria and savage fury born of terror and superstition. However, when the play was produced the first time in January 1953, it received a mixed response. They saw the analogy clearly enough, and made no mistake about that; the preachment came out powerfully well. But the play was found heavy-handed, lacking in the warmth or passion necessary for successful drama. Miller felt deeply distressed by the unenthusiastic response of the audience. On his part, he still saw power in his play, and purpose which should move people. He decided to keep his work before the people, to keep his message alive. So he staged it himself, adding a single scene between Proctor and Abigail (leader of the accusers) in order that the passions of the people could be heightened, and the motivation was strengthened. Miller also made some changes in the spectacle part of the play. He did away with the scenery altogether. Instead, he used drapes as a backdrop to the action as well as effectively-lit cyclorama, which gave more flexibility and fluency to his interpretation of history. This gave a vision of the timelessness of the tragic situation in the play, the implication that, regardless of the period in which it occurs, "the sin of the public terror is that it divests man of conscience, of himself".

In the new production of his play, his own, which came six months after the first, Miller succeeded in evoking the response he had anticipated. This time, the play had a long run in the Martin Beck Theatre before going on a national tour. Now, Miller found the audience deeply moved. The critics also agreed that the revised version of the play had greater dramatic power and artistic merit than the original. His drama may not have attained the tragic heights, it did elevate the level of the social drama possessing "broad social awareness." Miller's reply to the critics about the lack of warmth in his play was that in such dramatic works emotion and private feeling has to be subdued. In the second production, however, the checkrein was not so much in evidence. As a result, the play proved far more effective than the first production. Now his name as a playwright became associated with "moralist". He, too, continued to tirade against the betrayal of free speech being perpetrated in the country by the McCarthy Committee. He also continues to probe more deeply into the psychology of the informer.

Following the strain of *The Crucible* production, in an interlude of repose, Miller recalled with a touch of nostalgia the days of the depression, when, for all his hours at the warehouse, he used to read and study with a serene mind, uncomplicated by the problems of ethical considerations. As an expression of his feeling, he wrote *A Memory of Two Mondays,* a one-act play, which recaptured the scene in the warehouse as he recalled it. John Gassner called the play "a sensitive and admirably uncontrived genre-piece." It actually served as a curtain raiser to another one-act play, *A View from the Bridge.* This latter play, much longer in length, pushed the former into background. The longer play is an intense and impassioned drama of enquiry into the soul of the betrayer. Miller succeeds in this play in probing the deeper motives lurking behind the surface reasons an informer might claim as justification for his acts of treachery. The subject of the play is the smuggling of illegal immigrants into the Brooklyn waterfront from Sicily by the Mafia through friends and relatives-familiarly called "submarines". The play presents the case of Eddie Carbone, who, in a fit of jealousy, informs on his wife's relatives. There are two newly arrived "submarines" who have been staying at the Carbone home. The younger one of the two falls in love with the niece of Eddie's wife, an orphan who has grown in their house. As an overly protective guardian, Eddie is unconsciously in love with the girl. His dark and deep unacknowledged feeling hurts him into a jealous fury the moment he comes to know that the girl and the younger "submarine"

are set on getting married. Much against his own conscience as well as against legal advise he turns the two "submarines" from an impoverished land over to the Immigration office. Eddie thereafter is killed by Marco, the older man, who comes to claim vengeance paid in full. One gets the impression of some muddle in the play's meaning, as Alfieri the lawyer-narrator concludes: "Most of the time now we settle for half, and I like it better. But the truth is holy, and even as I know how wrong he was, and his death useless,. I tremble..." The impression made by the play is that perhaps Miller himself was not clear in his mind in what measure the informer should be condemned. Perhaps in those times he was not alone in his bewilderment, his alarm at the number of people who apparently had hardly any compunction in revealing names to the McCarthy Committee.

Miller's *A View from the Bridge,* when presented on September 29, 1955, on a double programme with *A Memory of Two Mondays,* proved so powerful and moving that it demanded single billing. He had to shelve the little memory play with great reluctance and expand *A View from the Bridge* into two acts for a production scheduled for London. The new expanded version of *A View from the Bridge* benefited from expansion, with more details added and realistic staging given it by Peter Brock in London, although it lost certain elements of poetry and classical allusion. The revision also resulted in the deletion of a verse prologue and epilogue spoken by Alfieri in the original play. The play was a great success in London. It kept the audience spellbound. The complex emotions brought out in the play in the lives of outwardly simple, hardworking people, the longshoremen the play was not viewed as moralistic. The moral truths were perhaps overlooked. It become tremendously popular in England. The revised version came off equally well in America also, where it continued for almost a decade. At times too much theatrically in a play obliterated its serious import. Some such thing had happened with this play. The audiences tended to ignore, or failed to grasp, its serious meaning. Miller was deeply disturbed by this facile audience response. He had always intended serious moral purpose in his plays. This neglect of his serious intents had started with *The Crucible,* to the great uneasiness of the author.

In an interview in 1964, Miller made a comment on his problem, saying. "The production of *A view from the Bridge* clinched the growing feeling that the work I was

doing was regarded as unimportant. I felt I was a kind of entertainer, succeeding in drawing a tear or a laugh, but it seemed to me that what was behind my plays remained a secret." Well, the fact that the audience shed a tear or share a laugh shows that the dramatist has succeeded in carrying the audience with him, and hence communicated his message successfully. The effect of a play should not be expected to be the same as that of a debate or discussion. Great works of literature have always influenced their readers through tears and laughters, not through ideas and arguments. I do not understand why Miller should feel dismayed on the success of his plays, taking it as a measure of a "popular" artist, and hence, in his view, a mere "entertainer". He could have recalled the status of Shakespeare in his age. He, too, was popular with the Elizabethan audience, and was considered, above all, an entertainer. But that is not how Miller understood his position. He felt "fed up", as he said, with the profession itself. He decided not to go on with the writing of plays.

It was not that his creative resources had been exhausted, but that the flood-tide of events which had changed the course of his life, plunging him into the vortex of public existence and attention, prevented him from having a clear view of himself or world, necessary for writing a play that he considered worth the presentation. One of the significant things that happened to him at this time was his attracting attention for opposing the McCarthy Committee. For this, he was among the front-runners who were targetted for attack. He became a suspect, whether guilty or not. He was astounded by the methods of the Committee: "Astounded, I watched men pass me without a nod whom I had known rather well for years." He recounted it again in his "Introduction" to the *Collected Plays:* "and again, the astonishment was produced by my knowledge, which I could not give up, that the terror in these people was being knowingly planned and consciously engineered, and yet that they all knew it was terror."

Miller was called to appear before the McCarthy Committee a number of times. Finally, in 1956, he was convicted of contempt of Congress for refusing to give the name of people he had recognized at a certain meeting years before. Around the same time, another event of significance took place : in 1956 itself, he and his wife Marry Slattery parted company by divorcing their marriage. Keeping in view his strong faith in family as the "symbolic cell" of the social structure, the

decision to part must have been followed by a deep conflict. But he soon fell into the hands of another woman, the screen fairy, the sex symbol of the twentieth century–Marilyn Monroe. He must have done it in a huff, for such a step could not be called wise for a man of Miller's background and commitment. It had to end and end speedily, and so it did. Miller dramatized the affair in his screenplay rightly called *The Misfits.* He himself later admitted that their marriage was "marred by too many cross purposes." Marilyn Monroe acted in this film, and died the next year (the film was released in 1961).

The first two years of his second marriage were spent in Miller's protesting his indictment in court. He forcefully defended his case legally. Besides, he also wrote articles and made speeches in defence of the human rights under fire in the 1950's, called the McCarthy era. When his trial had reached its height, he also spoke before a large audience at the first National Assembly of the Authors' League, in May, 1957, on the subject of the censorship of the press. He strongly admonished the writers to hold on to the right of free speech. At last, he was absolved of the charges against him by the United States Court of Appeals in 1958. When this one worry was over, the other followed. It was at this very point of time that his troubles with Marilyn Monroe reached the flash point ending in separation. To get over it all he went overseas for a while, where he met Miss Ingeborg Morath, a photographer of Austrian birth, with whom he concluded his third marriage in 1962.

Despite all these turbulent events, and with all the disgust he had developed with the theatre, Miller had been engaged in doing his writing work. Or, may be he was involved in his writing work to heal his wounds, for after all, an occupation of one's own liking does help dissolve the tensions that are caused by happenings contrary to one's interests. No wonder that Miller completed during this period five scripts, although none to his own satisfaction. His problem was partly technical partly ideational. He was not able to resolve the tangle of making clear to his audience the play's "secret" significance. One answer to it could be : well, if the audience cannot grasp your "secret" message, disclose the "secret". Whether he lacked courage to speak out straight or was unable to create an art that would convey his ideas is a matter of debate. But one thing is certain that this problem spoiled many of his dramatic attempts. In the five plays he wrote but did not, or could, put them to stage he seemed to be attempting to develop

a viewpoint towards the world and himself. Although the plays were, no doubt, searching, they did not reach any dramatic conclusion that could gratify him. It led him to conceive the idea, in 1959, of writing a play that presented the search itself. Gradually, the concept developed. He began giving it more body and contour. By the time he was married the third time in 1962, a new work had taken shape. The play was named *After the Fall,* an emotionally personal drama of self.

Miller's new play, so to say, opened the much heralded Repertory Theatre of Lincoln Centre. The play, however, was received with a storm of controversy, or, in his own words, with "a nimbus of myth and hysteria". Miller was once again dismayed that his audiences were still overlooking the "message" and were content with the theatricality of the subject-matter. The play was decidedly the most introspective he had ever written, and the first that made such an elaborate treatment to the marital relationship. When the play's protagonist, Quentin, cries out, "I can't bear to be a separate person!", he is only reechoing Miller's all-time theme that "no man is an island unto himself". But the play is not without a realization that man has also to be a "separate person" – an individual in his own right – though not detached from the mass of mankind. The play, through an individual life, touches upon the major political events of its time – the Nazi massacres, the McCarthy inquisitions, the economic depression. This individual, Quentin, also reflects a good deal of Miller also. He is on the verge of marrying for the third time. He talks to a Listener, the audience, or, perhaps, the analyst – the impartial ear outside himself. He recalls different people who influenced his life, which includes his parents, his second wife, his colleagues caught up in the web of McCarthyism. These figures appear, and disappear, and then reappear in varied sequences before the spectator. However, from this saleidoscopic succession of scenes, the single pattern of truth emerges : the aspect of universality in human nature may yet be his salvation. It is like an eternal well, from which love springs and hope rises after one has fallen into despair. Quentin, the play's hero, is not absolved, but he accepts and understands his "guilt". He can now go forward to greet his love.

One pertinent aspect of Miller's dramatic art that emerges from his career is that a playwright can be misrepresented by the stage. No wonder Aristotle placed spectacle at the bottom of his list of six elements of drama. As also reinforced by several subsequent critics, a play speaks better in reading than in acting. On the stage, the

work is at the mercy of the directors, the actors, even costume designers and make-up men, who generally distort, at times, even destroy, the more sensitive aspects of art. In the case of a writer like Miller the problem gets compounded by conscious or unconscious, search for the author's personal life. In the present case also, as Miller observed, "there was more speculation as to whether the play was really about Marilyn Monroe than there was discussion about its intrinsic, artistic merits." In the twentieth century, drama was highly disadvantaged by the advent of cinema. Most theatre-goers habitually look for all that they so often see in a movie. Only a handful of serious students of literature can appreciate great works of drama in this age of cinema, and now (worse) TV serials.

Being socially-oriented from the start, Miller always wrote on themes of larger social significance. Also, politics being the most powerful force in social life, he always reacted and responded to the political events of his time, never failing to give a dramatic treatment to every such happening. While in Europe on a tour, for instance, Miller attended the trials of Nazi murderers in Frankfurt, provoking an immediate reaction to write a play on the subject. Since composing of a dramatic work cannot be a matter of a day or two, he first expressed his reaction in an article "re-instating in the public mind an understanding of the dynamics of Fascism." He named the play *Incident at Vicky*. Once again his theme became that of guilt and responsibility. Miller approached the theme with a viewpoint sharpened by the trials he had witnessed at Frankfurt. Although the action takes place in a detention room in Vicky, 1942, recounting the brutal tactics of the Nazis and the sacrifice made by an Austrian prince who hands over his papers to the Jewish doctor after he has become aware of his unconscious share in the Nazi invasion, the play is also "about today". As the author insisted, "It concerns the question of insight, of seeing in oneself the capacity for collaboration with the evil one condemns. It is a question that exists for all of us – what is the responsibility of each of us, for example, that the slums of Harlem exist?" Keeping Miller's emphasis in view, one can legitimately call him a dramatic historian of his age; for his plays do embody the essential history of the post-war period in America.

Miller himself was highly satisfied with *Incident at Vicky :* "I'm satisfied that the play exists. It has a shape, a form, a truth". The "ordinary" response notwithstanding,

the play was a great success. Miller also made a significant remark about the interrelationship of his various plays : “Any body of work is voyage with parts of call. Each of my plays has carried through some element of an earlier play.” It can be said, without much exaggeration, that more than any other contemporary dramatist, Miller assumed the mantle of Robert Sherwood as the public conscience of America. In articles like “The Playwright and the Atomic Age” (1961), he revealed an international viewpoint and a serious concern for the presentation of world peace. He still remained popular as a dramatist because there is in his plays the touch of common speech mingled with democratic idealism, poetic expression, and an acute capacity for feeling the anguish of the soul.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 10
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-III

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

STRUCTURE

10.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of the lesson is to explore Arthur Miller's theory of Drama and how he justifies that playwriting in the modern times does not limit itself to the sake of amusement but poses realistic, social and personal issues through visionistic display or staging.

10.2 MILLER'S THEORY OF DRAMA

Miller's ideas on drama are most adequately expressed in his "Introduction" to the *Collected Plays* he brought out in 1957. Of course, he wrote more plays after 1957, but he did not, in any way, modify his position as dramatist. Whatever views he had expressed in the "Introduction" have a certain finality about them. In fact, this is perhaps the only critical piece in which Miller makes an attempt to theorize about drama as he perceived it. Being an important document, it deserves serious critical attention. To begin with, Miller remarks that the very fact that drama has a history of about three thousand years establishes its social significance; he considers its "human function" as its "fundamental nature". In his considered opinion, "the drama and its production must represent a well-defined expression of profound social needs, needs which transcend any particular form of society or any particular historic moment."

Miller argues that drama must be separated from what in modern times is termed literature. As he puts it, "A drama ought not be looked at first and foremost from literary perspectives merely because it uses words, verbal rhythm, and poetic image. These can be its most memorable parts, it is true, but they are not its inevitable accompaniments." He, however, declines to go into the "vivisection" of "dramatic form or the technique of playwriting." Instead, he wishes "to speak for" himself as to his "own aims", "simply to talk in workaday language about the problem of how to write." He then goes into the various assumptions, which, as dramatist, he takes to be basic. One of these assumptions is that his plays "were written on the assumption that they would be acted before audiences." Another assumption is that actors on the stage are like persons who, when you meet them first time, raise in your mind all sorts of questions and curiosities. Which of these questions "a play chooses to answer, and how they are answered, are the ruling and highly consequential imperatives which create the style of the play, and control what are later called the stylistic levels of its writing." In Miller's view, the actors' mask or disguise itself will indicate the nature of the play we are going to witness : "In a word, the actor's appearance on the stage in normal human guise leads us to expect a realistic treatment. The play will either be intent upon rounding out the characters by virtue of its complete answers to the common questions, or will substitute answers to a more limited group of questions, which, instead of being "human", are thematic and are designed to form a symbol of meaning rather than an apparancy of the "real". It is the nature of the questions asked and answered, rather than the language used - whether verse, ordinary slang, or colorless prose - that determines whether the style is realistic or non-realistic." Thus, in his view, there is an "organic" connection between the style and substance of a play, and there are no temperamental choices involved here. On the basis of this distinction, he characterizes Shakespeare's tragedies as "species of realism, and those of Aeschylus and Sophocles" as non-realistic. Miller's contention is that "when the career of a person rather than the detail of his motives stands at the forefront of the play, we move closer to non-realistic styles, and vice versa. "Coming to his own plays, he considers his early plays - *All My Sons,* and *Death of a Salesman* - as realistic, because they "were written and performed with the intention of answering as many of the common questions as was possible." As for his later plays - *The Crucible, A Memory of Two Mondays,* and *A View from the Bridge,* they were not designed to answer all questions, "and to this extent they are a departure from realism."

Miller also attaches great importance to the concept of time in a play. He takes it as one of the decisive influences upon style. His distinction, again, is based on the premise of realism : "Broadly speaking, where it is conceived and used so as to convey a natural passage of hours, days, or months, the style it enforces is pressed toward realism. Where action is quite openly freed so that things mature in a moment, for instance, which would take a year in life, a free licence for non-realistic styles in thereby won." In a non-realistic play, the compacting of time destroys the realistic style to create a symbolic dimension. To some extent, every play collapses time, otherwise we shall have to sit in the theatre for days, or months together. "But where the play does pretend to give us details of hours, months and years which are not clearly and avowedly germane to the symbolic meaning, we come closer and closer to what is called a realistic style." At this stage, Miller makes an illuminating comment on the vital relationship between the concept of time and the dramatist's (and the society's) interest in the story (or the character). As he observes, "the Greek 'unity' of time imposed on the drama was not arbitrary but a concomitant of the preponderant Greek interest in the fate and career of the hero rather than his private characteristics, or, to put it another way, his social and symbolic side rather than his family role.

In Miller's theory of drama, the third, and most important, element of the play that influences its style is "not only to depict why a man does what he does, or why he nearly didn't do it, but why he cannot simply walk away and say to hell with it.... To ask this question is immediately to impose on oneself not, perhaps, a style of writing but at least a kind of dramatic construction... I take it that if one could know enough about a human being one could discover some conflict, some value, some challenge, however minor or major, which he cannot find it in himself to walk away from or turn his back on." It is ability, or disability, of a character to walk away from a conflict which, in Miller's view, determines whether or not he or she has the potential to be tragic. He thinks, "the less capable a man is of walking away from the central conflict of the play, the closer he approaches a tragic existence. In turn, this implies that the closer a man approaches tragedy the more intense in his concentration of emotion upon the fixed point of his commitment, which is to say the closer he approaches what in life we call fanaticism." Here one can see Miller' justification for modern man as a tragic hero, for what is essential to be tragic is, not status or rank, but his ability to make a commitment and remain emotionally attached to it.

Talking of drama, Miller does not think in conventional terms of plot, character, thought, etc., certainly not in that order. His order of preference, very obviously, is different from that of Aristotle. Since Aristotle gave primacy to form, he considered plot as the soul of tragedy; for it is plot that shapes nature into art. But since for Miller the moral or message of a play is more important than its artistic form, he gives greater importance to "idea" than to plot or character. In Aristotle's order of preference, "thought" (or idea) comes at number three (after plot and character). Miller has already made out the difference between the Greek drama of destiny and the modern social drama (of which he himself is also a practitioner). He begins the argument by claiming that the "assumption - or presumption" - behind his plays is that "life has meaning." He brings in Plato also to support his contention. His plea is that "Plato, by banning artists from citizenship in his ideal republic, expressed at least a partial truth; the intention behind a work of art and its effects upon the public are not always the same." He firmly believes that "every play means something - even the play which denies all meaning to existence." In his view, "the 'idea' of a play is its measure of value and importance and beauty, and that a play, which appears merely to exist to one side of 'ideas' is an aesthetic nullity." Hence Miller insists that "idea is very important to me as a dramatist."

However, Miller is aware of the fact that his statement can be misunderstood or misinterpreted. As a caveat, therefore, he adds "that playwrights, including the greatest, have not been noted for the new ideas they have broached in their plays.... Surely there is no known philosophy, which was fist announced through a play, nor any ethical idea.... As a matter of fact, it is highly unlikely that a new idea could be successfully launched through a play at all, and this for several good reasons." His contention is very sound. "..... no dramatic structure can bear the brunt of the incredulity with which any really new idea is greeted, the play form would collapse under the burdens of having to deliver up the mountain of proof required for a new idea to be believed." In his view, any new idea, not only requires heaving proofing to be acceptable, which the play's form cannot afford, but is also a "humiliation for the majority of the people.... It offends against the things they worship, whether God, or science or money." Hence drama and new idea are antithetical, and there cannot be any resolution of the conflict.

Carrying the argument a step further, Miller contends that plays may not broach new ideas, but they do enunciate "not-yet-popular ideas, which are already in the air,

ideas for which there has already been a preparation by non-dramatic media." How an idea becomes the substance of drama is beautifully explained by Miller :

> .....once an idea is "in the air" it is no longer an idea but a feeling, a sensation, an emotion, and with these the drama can deal. For one thing, where no doubt exists in the hearts of the people, a play cannot create doubt; where no desire to believe exists, a play cannot create a belief. And again, this springs from the nature of dramatic form and its inevitable dynamism; it must communicate as it proceeds and it literally has no existence if it must wait until the audience goes home to think before it can be appreciated. It is the art of the present tense par excellence.

Following this belief, Miller argues that a dramatist only holds a sort of mirror to his contemporaries, to make them aware of things about themselves with which they live, but often without being fully conscious of what they are doing. As he insists, "These plays, in one sense are my response to what was in the air; they are one man's way of saying to his fellow men, 'this is what you see every day, or think or feel; now I will show you what you really know but have not had the time, or disinterestedness, or the insight, or the information to understand consciously." This contention is not very different from Pope's definition of poetry as "what often was thought but not so well expressed."

Taking up the question of meaning or message in drama, Miller does not agree with those of his contemporaries who would not like a play, which would yield a "distinct meaning reducible to a sentence." He is against their preference for so-called "poetic" drama, "whose ultimate thought or meaning is elusive, a drama which, appears not to have been composed or constructed, but which somehow comes to life on a stage and then flickers away." In his view, the critics, demand that a play be praised for its "high seriousness" and their demand at the same time that a "play be praised for not trying to teach" are highly contradictory, betraying only a confusion of their principles. Miller is very clear in his mind. To him, there is no such thing as complete detachment, and there is no such thing as a "meaningless" play. As he puts it, "The very conception of a dramatic theme inevitable means that certain aspects of life are selected and others left out, and to imagine that a play can be written disinterestedly is to believe that one can make love disinterestedly."

Here Miller rejects Keatsean kind of aestheticism, of art for art's sake, where there is a basic quarrel admitted between literature and philosophy. In his view, there is no such quarrel. The only thing is that the philosophic or social meaning must be embodied in art form. Also, that a literary work's merit is to be judged, not on the basis of its message (social or philosophical), but on the quality of its art. As he puts it, "The debatable question is never whether a play ought to teach but whether it is art, and in this connection the basic criterion - purely technical consideration to one side - is the passion with which the teaching is made. I hasten to add the obvious - that a work cannot be judged by the validity of its teaching. But it is entirely misleading to state that there is some profound conflict between art and the philosophically or socially meaningful theme." Miller's argument seems very sound. In his view, art, by nature, has to say something. It has to end the story, and the story has to end in a climax. Now, to arrange a climax, the artist, here dramatist, has to act arbitrarily, for in life all stories at least do not reach dramatic culminations. "Thus, all dramas are to that extent arbitrary - in comparison with life itself - and embody a viewpoint if not an obsession on the author's part." And this "viewpoint" or "obsession" is the social or philosophic meaning of the play.

It is very important for Miller that drama speaks to the common man. If it fails with the commonsense people, it is defeat for the dramatist. As he puts it, "A play, I think ought to make sense to commonsense people. I know what it is to have been rejected by them, even unfairly so, but the only challenge worth the effort is the widest one and the tallest one, which is the people themselves." To Miller, the conservatism of the people is both a check as well as a challenge for the dramatist. They are a check because too much of experimentation (of technique as well as subject) will not work with them. And they are a challenge because the dramatist must break the barrier of conventionalism. As he insists, "It is their innate conservatism which, I think, is and ought to be the barrier to excess in experiment and the exploitation of the bizarre, even as it is the proper aim of drama to break down the limits of conventional unawareness and acceptance of outmoded and banal forms." Miller's test is always public, not private; social, not scholarly; artistic, not technical. As he emphatically puts it, "By whatever means it is accomplished, the prime business of a play is to arouse the passions of its audience so that by the route of passion may be opened up new relationships between a man and men, and between men and man. Drama is akin to

the other inventions of man in that it ought to help us to know more, and not merely to spend our feelings."

In a way, Miller is anti-Platonic. For Plato had precisely objected to the "route of passion" that the arts use for working upon the people. Miller advocates the use of same route for working upon the people, for awakening them to new awareness, for moving them into impassioned will to act. The success or failure of a dramatist is to be measured, for him, in terms of the effect his plays show on its audiences. The New Critics will hold Miller guilty of "Affective Fallacy." Their contention is to consider art out of its social context. Miller would not care for such an accusation. On the contrary, he would accuse the New Critics of Artistic Fallacy, which ignores the social aspect of art. Miller's firm belief is : "The Ultimate justification for a new form is the new and heightened consciousness of causation in the light of known but hitherto inexplicable effects." In his strong adherence to realism he is unshakeable. He does not fully accept the modern theories about the nature and destiny of man, his duties towards his self and society, much less the post-realism techniques that look for escape routes from realism. As he puts it, "Not only in the drama, but in sociology, psychology, psychiatry, and religion, the past half-century (early twentieth century) has created an almost overwhelming documentation of man as a nearly passive creation of environment and family-created psychological drives. If only from the dramatic point of view, this dictum cannot be accepted as final and "realistic" any more than man's ultimate position can be accepted as his efficient use by state or corporate apparatus. It is no more "real", however, for drama to "liberate" itself from this vise by the route of romance and the spectacle of free will and a new heroic formula than it is "real" now to represent man's defeat as the ultimate implication of an overwhelming determinism."

Thus, Miller rejects both the extremist views of social determinism as well as romantic free will. He feels that the reality or truth lies somewhere between the two. Without being swayed by the intellectual fashions of his day, or the dramatic, he sticks to his commonsense approach to life and theatre, based on his experience of life and the stage, rather than any theory of life or drama. He relates the novelty of the theatre, not to the newness of the spectacle on the stage, but to the changed realities of his time. He rejects the mere innovativeness of the externals, and addresses the essentials in the

experience of modern man, using externals only as means to that end - the end of putting across the modern man's experience. As he remarks, "Realism, heightened or conventional, is neither more nor less an artifice, a species of poetic symbolization, than any other form. It is merely more familiar in this age. If it is used as a covering of safety against the evaluation of life, it must be overthrown, and for that reason above all the rest. But neither poetry nor liberation can come merely from a rearrangement of the lights or from leaving the skeletons of the flats exposed instead of covered by painted clothes; nor can it come merely from verse, or from the expunging of common details of life's apparencies. A new poem on the stage is a new concept of relationships between the one and the many and the many and history, and to create it requires greater attention, not less, to the inexorable, common, pervasive conditions of existence in this time and this hour. Otherwise, a new self-indulgence is created, and it will be left behind, however, poetic its surface."

Miller firmly believes in the two-fold character of drama : one, that it must be worthy of its time, addressing the problems of the age; two, that it must know and recognize its valuable traditions "and where it has departed from them." He thinks that "determinism" in any form, sociological, economic, or psychological, is a theory forming "a closed circle." He takes it as something essentially opposed to the very spirit of drama. To take one example, he says, the very concept of hero is defeated by the "concept of unbreakable trap," being utterly "incompatible with a drama whose bounds are set in advance by the theory. His argument is : "The history of man is a ceaseless process of overthrowing one determinism to make way for another more faithful to life's changing relationships. And it is a process inconceivable without the will of man. His will is as much a fact as his defeat. Any determinism, even the most scientific, is only that stasis, that seemingly endless pause, before the application of man's will administering a new insight into causation." Thus, Miller rejects all philosophic and psychological theories that deny man his will. He also rejects all dramatics techniques that are derived from such concepts or theories.

Hence Miller is wedded to realism only in its commonsense form. The moment it becomes a determinism, he distances himself from it. He is not prepared to accept man as only a manipulable material. Whatever deterministic forces may work to condition man's conduct, there always remains in the soul of man a residue which defies all

theories and systems. He would like to believe, being convinced by the long history of mankind, that man has a will, that, at last, moves individual life and shapes collective history. As he expresses his firm belief, "The idea of realism has become wedded to the idea that man is at best the sum of forces working upon him and of given psychological forces within him. Yet an innate value, an innate will, does in fact posit itself as real, not alone because it is devoutly to be wished, but because, however, closely he is measured and systematically accounted for, he is more than the sum of his stimuli and is unpredictable beyond a certain point. A drama, like a history, which stop at this point, the point of conditioning, is not reflecting reality. What is wanted, therefore, is not a poetry of escape from process and determinism, like that mood play which stops where feeling ends or that inverted romanticism which would mirror all the world in the sado-masochistic relationship. Not will the heightening of the intensity of language alone yield the prize. A new poem will appear because a new balance has been struck which embraces both determinism and the paradox of will. If there is one unseen goal toward which every play in this book strives, it is that very discovery and its proof, - that we are made any yet, are more than what made us."

Thus, is concluded Miller's theory (if it can be so called) of drama, which as a matter of fact is not so much a theory as a set of views on drama, man, and life, refusing to form a system. As is clear from the entire critical piece called "Introduction", he is wedded, as dramatist, to reality, not to realism. He is against formulating any theory or system about man and life, drama and literature. His only demand is that drama must be as dynamic as life is, as rich as human nature is, defying all traditions and theories, but not unrelated to the traditions nor totally stranger to theory. Since it has to address the ever-changing life around, it cannot be fixed in the framework of any theory or system of determinism. It must belong to the tradition, but it must also depart from tradition.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 11
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-III

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

STRUCTURE

11.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the *Death of a Salesman* as a tragedy, exploring whether it falls well within the defined Greek Tragedy or has projected itself as a distinct modern tragedy. The lesson also discusses the central tragic figure Willy Loman as a true representation or epitome of Modern man struggling hard to come in terms with the growing demands of family and society.

11.2 *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* AS A TRAGEDY

As we saw in the case of structure or form of *Death of a Salesman,* that it is unAristotelian in its conception, so in the case of its generic character, the play challenges or modifies some of the essentials of tragedy. Miller refutes the "charge" that he attempts to write, in the story of Willy Loman, a tragedy. His clear contention is that he did not set out to "write a tragedy" in this play, but only to "show the truth as I saw it." However, he was not impressed by the arguments of those who chose to characterize his play as "pseudo-tragedy." In his view, these arguments contained "ideas so misleading, and in some cases so laughable that it might be in place to deal with a few of them."

Miller amusingly states that "Aristotle having spoken of a fall from the heights, it goes without saying that someone of the common mold cannot be a fit tragic hero." This said, he proceeds to answer the question implied in the critiques of those who called his play a "pseudo-tragedy." It is now many centuries, he reminds his detractors, that Aristotle lived. In Miller's view, there is no more reason "for falling down in a faint before his *Poetics* than before Euclid's geometry, which has been amended numerous times by men with new insights." Making an implied fun of the blind followers of the traditional concept of tragedy, he remarks, "nor, for that matter, would I choose to have my illnesses diagnosed by Hippocrates rather than the most ordinary graduate of an American medical schools, despite the Greek's genius." Miller rightly insists that things do change, and that "even a genius is limited by his times and the nature of his society."

After bringing his argument to rest on a convincing premise, Miller proceeds to challenge some of the assumptions that lie behind the concepts Aristotle put forth in his *Poetics.* He again makes a clever move by reminding us that Aristotle "lived in a slave society." On grounds of simple logic, therefore, he says he would deny this one of Aristotle's contentions (that tragedy takes place in a fall from the heights) on that very ground that he lived in a slave society. His argument is that "when a vast number of people are divested of alternatives, as slaves are, it is rather inevitable that one will not be able to imagine drama, let alone tragedy, as being possible for any but the higher ranks of society." In his view, there is involved here a legitimate question of stature, but none of rank, which is so often confused with it. Carrying the argument a step further, he remarks that "so long as the hero may be said to have had alternatives of a magnitude to have materially changed the course of his life, it seems to me that in this respect at least, he cannot be debarred from the heroic role." He rightly insists that the question of rank had significance only to the extent it reflects the question of the social application of the hero's career. Miller gives an illustration to make clear his point, which may be cited in full :

> There is no doubt that if a character is shown on the stage who goes through the most ordinary actions, and is suddenly revealed to be the President of the United States, his actions immediately assume a much greater magnitude, and pose the possibilities of much greater meaning, than if he is the corner grocer. But at the

> same time, his stature as a hero is not so utterly dependent upon his rank that the corner grocer cannot outdistance him as a tragic figure — provided, of course, that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God — the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground or a fog in which disembodied spirits pass each other in an endless twilight.

We must recall here Aristotle's definition of the tragic hero who, he says, has to be superior to the average man, by which he means moral superiority to the average man. Of course, in his tribal times, the social and moral statuses were almost synonymous with each other. Hence Miller's contention that in a slave society, it was inconceivable to imagine a slave having any superiority to those of the higher classes. At the same time, it is important to remember that Aristotle lays emphasis not so much on the social rank as on the moral superiority of the hero.

Miller proceeds further to build up a case for *Death of a Salesman* as a tragedy, but not yet making any direct assertion. He begins by making cautious statements, such as the following : "In this respect *Death of a Salesman* is a slippery play to categorize because nobody in it stops to make a speech objectively stating the great issues which I believe it embodies. If it were a worse play, less closely articulating its meanings with its actions, I think it would have more quickly satisfied a certain kind of criticism. But it was meant to be less a play than a fact; it refused admission to its author's opinions and opened itself to a revelation of process and the operations of an ethic, of social laws of action no less powerful in their effects upon individuals than any tribal law administered by gods with names." Thus, slowly, and step by step, Miller builds up a case for his modern man's tragedy, trying to dispel from our minds the ghost of the ancient concept that has been seated like a deity unchallenged and unchallengeable for centuries. Gods and ghosts are not easy to dislodge. But it is also not easy to ignore the force of argument that Miller puts forth in favour of a modern tragic story like that of Willy Loman. Carrying it another step forward, he says, "I need not claim that this play is a genuine solid gold tragedy for my opinions on tragedy to be held valid. My purpose here is simply to point out a historical fact which must be taken into account

in any consideration of tragedy, and it is the sharp alteration in the meaning of rank in society between the present time and the distant past. More important to me is the fact that this particular kind of argument obscures much more relevant considerations."

Successfully creating consciousness in our mind the historical difference (of ethics and values) between the immediate present and the distant past, showing how life is a process of continuous change, and therefore the necessity to continuously keep changing our perspective of reality, Miller, comes to the most crucial aspect of tragedy — "the question of intensity." His strongest argument appears at this stage, which runs as under :

> It matters not at all whether a modern play concerns itself with a grocer or a president if the intensity of the hero's commitment to his course is less than the maximum possible. It matters not at all whether the hero falls from a great height or a small one, whether his pride brings the fall or an unseen pattern written behind clouds; if the intensity, the human passion to surpass his given bounds, the fanatic insistence upon his self-conceived role — if these are not present there can only be an outline of tragedy but no living thing. I believe, for myself, that the lasting appeal of tragedy is due to our need to face the fact of death in order to strengthen ourselves for life, and that over and above this function of the tragic viewpoint there are and will be a great number of formal variations which no single definition will ever embrace.

Here, we need to recall once more Aristotle's definition of tragedy, which says that in tragedy the action moves from happiness to suffering (and death), not from a high position to a lower, although that may also take place along with the fall from the position of happiness to that of suffering. Viewed from "humanist", rather than sociological or ethical position, which decidedly is the plane at which Aristotle's theory works, we need not have many definitions of tragedy. A definition that is free from the surface layers of our social or cultural life is not affected by historical changes, and as such can hold good through ages. Aristotle's definition of tragedy relates to a plane far beyond the social or cultural — the reason why it has held the

ground through the ages.

Miller next takes up for consideration the issue of what he terms the "so-called tragic victory, a question closely related to the consciousness of the hero." In his view, one makes a "nonsense" of this if "victory" is taken to mean that we feel happy if the hero sacrifices himself for a cause, and sad if he dies without one. For Miller, "a man's death is and ought to be an essentially terrifying thing and ought to make nobody happy." As for "victory" in tragedy, it makes sense for him only if it is taken to mean "an assertion of bravery" in the face of death. In his view, it is in this sense that separates the death of man from the death of animals. In fact for Miller, "in a great variety of ways even death the ultimate negative, can be, and appear to be, an assertion of bravery." It is this distinction between man's death as an assertion of bravery and the death of animals "which underlies any conception of a victory in death." Working out a difference between the hero's death in a religious society and his death in a secular society, Miller elaborates, "For a society of faith, the nature of the death can prove the existence of the spirit, and posit its immortality. For a secular society, it is perhaps more difficult for such a victory to document itself and to make itself felt, but, conversely, the need to offer greater proofs of the humanity of man can make that victory more real. It goes without saying that in a society where there is basic disagreement as to the right way to live, there can hardly be agreement as to the right way to die, and both life and death must be heavily weighted with meaningless futility."

11.3 WILLY LOMAN AS TRAGIC HERO

The question whether *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy largely hinges on whether Willy is a tragic hero. While the author argues for Willy's tragic heroism in his death, the audiences as well as the reviewers felt otherwise. After having known rather adverse reaction to the play as tragedy, Miller was pressed hard to make out a case for Willy as a tragic hero, although he says he had "no need to be Willy's advocate before the jury which decides who is and who is not a tragic hero." He does, however, proceed at once to advocate Willy's case. In his typical manner of pleading while pretending not to plead, Miller offers a detailed defence for Willy as a tragic hero. His strategy for making his point is, as usual, to first attack the tradition which comes in the way of granting Willy the status of a tragic hero. Miller's argument runs as under :

> It was not out of any deference to a tragic definition that Willy Loman is filled with joy, however broken-hearted, as he approaches his end, but simply that my sense of his character dictated his joy, and even what I felt was an exultation. In terms of his character, he has achieved a very powerful piece of knowledge, which is that he is loved by his son and has been embraced by him and forgiven. In this he is given his existence, so to speak - his fatherhood, for which he has always striven and which until now he could not achieve. That he is unable to take his victory thoroughly to his heart, that it closes the circle for him and propels him to his death, is the wage of his sin, which was to have committed himself so completely to the counterfeits of dignity and the false coinage embodied in his idea of success that he can prove his existence only by bestowing "power" on his posterity, a power deriving from the sale of his last asset, himself, for the price of his insurance policy.

Miller as writer expresses his "intentions" in creating the character of Willy. However, there remains a problem about the play - that the audiences and critics did not appreciate what the author had intended. Here is the perennial problem of art : should we or should we not look for, and accept, the intention of the author ? Besides, there can be, as happened in this case, a dichotomy between what an author intends and what the reader perceives. *Death of a Salesman,* intended as a modern tragedy, was perceived by critics as a pathetic suicide, a passive suffering, which is not a fit subject for tragedy (in the view of Arnold and Yeats), said the critics.

Painfully aware of the difference between what he had intended and what the audiences and reviewers had perceived, Miller offered an explanatory comment, saying, "I must confess here to a miscalculation, however, I did not realize while writing the play that so may people in the world do not see as clearly, or would not admit, as I thought they must, how futile most lives are ; so there could be no hope of consoling the audience for the death of this man. I did not realize either how few would be impressed by the fact this man is actually a brave spirit who cannot settle for half but must pursue his dream of himself to the end. Finally, I thought it must be clear, even obvious, that

this was no dumb brute heading mindlessly to his catastrophe." Miller, it seems, did miscalculate on more than one thing here. For one thing, his expectation that the audience will take Willy as their representative in the realization of life as futile and would admit to this fact is decidedly a miscalculation, for all the people cannot be expected to carry that feeling or having that realization, much less to "admit" it. For sure, no one goes to the theatre to make a confession, even if one recognized the hero to be representing his own life. No doubt, every tragic (or comic) hero, including Willy, reflects something of our own nature - the reason why we like to watch or read a tragedy - but no tragic hero can be viewed a representative of each audience, at least no audience does. Willy, even though he represents a good deal of what an average American experiences in the given conditions, cannot be taken as an archetype of the American people. If Miller thought that this would be the case, he was seriously miscalculating.

As for the death of Willy being tragic because he cannot settle on less than the whole, Miller again seems to be miscalculating. For one thing, there is a basic contradiction between making or creating a "tragic" character and making or creating him a representative of the average or common American, for the average or the common is not tragic or heroic. When we say this, we are not endorsing any social or literary hierarchy; we are only stating that those who are tragic are so because they show an uncommon bravery in undergoing the sufferings of life, in taking suffering bravely, not breaking down under the pressure, much less to commit suicide. The audience do not experience the tragic feelings of pity and fear by recognizing their own weaknesses in the hero, much less by experiencing a sense of futility. On the contrary, they experience the tragic feelings by watching someone showing greater bravery or courage than they themselves possess in facing the odds of life, by seeing the exceptional man going down in life suffering, but never surrendering to the odds. In other words, the tragic hero is not a pathetic figure, nor a victim of circumstances. He does not invite only the feeling of pity; there is always a feeling of awe and admiration also. Even the murderers among them - a Macbeth or a Brutus - have something exceptional in them that we admire. Their essential humanity, especially awakened by the tragic events, showing a humane response, makes them tragic. Willy seems to fall short of it all somewhere along the line. Only Miller knows why. The

reader or viewer can only say what he feels on reading or watching. Miller also tells us here what he intended. And the wide gap remains between the two - between the author's intention and the reader's response.

Miller's defence of Willy as a tragic hero is as long as his character's case is weak - the two are in direct proportion to each other. Here follows the opening paragraph of that long defence :

> I have no need to be Willy's advocate before the jury which decides who is and who is not a tragic hero. I am merely noting that the lingering ponderousness of so many ancient definitions has blinded students and critics to the facts before them, and not only in regard to this play. Had Willy been unaware of his separation from values that endure he would have died contentedly while polishing his car, probably on a Sunday afternoon with the ball game coming over the radio. But he was agonized by his awareness of being in a false position, so constantly haunted by the hollowness of all he has placed his faith in, so aware, in short, that he must somehow be filled in his spirit or fly apart, that he staked his very life on the ultimate assertion. That he had not the intellectual fluency to verbalize his situation is not the same thing as saying that he lacked awareness, even an overly intensified consciousness that the life he had made was without form and inner meaning.

Well, if the students and critics, as Miller says, are blinded, by the preponderousness of ancient definitions, "to the facts before them", he himself is no less; for else why must he insist upon the tragic status of his hero and on the play being a tragedy? No one denies greatness to *Death of a Salesman;* it remains one of the classics of modern literature. But if we call it a classic, placing it in the company of *The Sound and The Fury, The Waste Land, Ulysses,* etc., we do not mean to say that it is a "tragedy". It need not be a tragedy to be a great work of art. None of the works mentioned here is a tragedy, nor any of them was so intended. They, including Miller's own, are great because they are able to express effectively the modern condition. It is widely recognized both by writers and critics

in our time that the great works of modern literature including Miller's are essentially ironic, and that they are neither tragedies nor comedies in the conventional sense. Miller owed no explanation to students or critics; no writer does. He should not have unnecessarily taken it upon himself to prove or disprove what his work is like. It has served no purpose, much less his own cause as a dramatist. If anything, it spoils his case.

Miller, as said earlier, makes too long a case for Willy Loman to be taken the way the author "intended" him to be taken. No one has any quarrel on what the author intended, but we do have quarrel on what the author expects of us. If we grant him freedom to "intend", he has to grant us freedom to feel the way we do on viewing or reading an expression or illustration of his intention. Whether he "miscalculated", as he says he did, or the readers and audiences misjudged, as he alleges they did, is a pointless contronery raised by Miller. No writer need to raise such a quarrel. But Miller does. He goes on with his long explanation of what Willy was meant to be, what Willy comes out on the stage, etc. Here is the longest paragraph of his long argument that he offers in defence of Willy :

> To be sure, had he been able to know that he was as much the victim of his beliefs as their defeated exemplar, had he known how much of guilt he ought to bear and how much to shed from his soul, he would be more conscious. But it seems to me that there is of necessity a severe limitation of self-awareness in any character, even the most knowing, which serves to define him as a character, and more, that this very limit serves to complete the tragedy and, indeed, to make it at all possible. Complete consciousness is possible only in a play about forces, like *Prometheus,* but not in a play about people. I think that the point is whether there is a sufficient awareness in the hero's career to make the audience supply the rest. Had Oedipus, for instance, been more conscious and more aware of the forces at work upon him he must surely have said that he was not really to blame for having cohabited with his mother since neither he nor anyone else knew his mother. He must surely decide to divorce her, provide for their children, firmly resolve to

investigate the family background of his next wife, and thus deprive us of a very fine play and the name for a famous neurosis. But he is conscious only upto a point at which guilt begins. Now he is inconsolable and must tear out his eyes. What is tragic about this ? Why is it not even ridiculous ? How can we respect a man who goes to such extremities over something he could in no way help or prevent? The answer, I think, is not that we respect the man, but that we respect the Law which he has so completely broken, wittingly or not, for it is that Law which, we believe, defines us as men. The confusion of some critics viewing *Death of a Salesman* in this regard is that they do not see that Willy Loman has broken a law without whose protection life is insupportable if not incomprehensive to him and to may others; it is the law which says that a failure in society and in business has no right to live. Unlike the law against incest, the law of success is not administered by statute or church, but it is very nearly as powerful in its grip over men. The confusion increases because, while it is a law, it is by no means a wholly agreeable one even as it is slavishly obeyed, for to fail is no longer to belong to society, in his estimate. Therefore, the path is opened for those who wish to call Willy merely a foolish man even as they themselves are living in obedience to the same law that killed him. Equally, the fact that Willy's law - the belief, in other words, which administers guilt to him - is not a civilizing statute whose destruction menaces us all; it is, rather, a deeply believed and deeply suspect "good" which, when questioned as to its value, as it is in this play, serves more to raise our anxieties than to reassure us of the existence of an unseen but humane metaphysical system in the world. My attempt in the play was to counter this anxiety with an opposing system which, so to speak, is in a race for Willy's faith, and it is the system of love which is the opposite of the law of success. It is embodied in Biff Loman, but by the time Willy can perceive his love it can serve only as an ironic comment upon the life he sacrificed for power

and for success and its tokens.

Miller's analysis of "the law of success" as a sort of modern equivalent of the ancient, "unwritten laws" of Greek tragedy is, for sure, a brilliant one. His intention, as he explains, was to create a conflict between this law and its opposite in "the law of love" is also understandable. The conflict could create a real tragic intensity in the hero's life. But, somehow, it does not actually take place. The play falls short of that intensity. As far as I can see, the "law of success" works very well in the character of Willy. The drive acts as a real social and psychological force to give real life to both Willy's character and to Willy's play. But something remains amiss with the "law of love". It does not seem to work as powerfully. It falls short of the required measure of tragic intensity. Both Biff and Willy seem to show it in much less measure than required by the tragic conflict. One recalls here the Greek play *Antigone.* There, the conflict between duty and love, between political order and the emotional order clash at the most intense level, and the conflict assumes a real tragic character. Antigone is a convincing embodiment of the "law of love", so is Creon of the "law of duty". Here, Biff as well Willy do not convince us to be committed enough, not at the level of tragic intensity. However hard Miller may try to explain his intention in making these two the embodiments of these conflicting forces, they do not, as a matter of fact, convince us by their characters. Their commitment remains rather tentative, too weak to acquire tragic intensity. We do not doubt Miller's intention, but we do not see it realized on the stage. The problem is not with the play as such. It is a very great work of art, as asserted earlier, but it is not a great tragedy as Miller is trying so hard to make us believe. He need not justify the play for what it is not.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 12
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-III

DEATH OF A SALESMAN AS AN INDICTMENT OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

STRUCTURE

12.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the play *Death of a Salesman* as an indictment of American Society. The lesson also tries to familiarise the learner about the author's representation of middle class family life in America and how it ironically refutes the idea of 'American Dream' both socially and economically.

12.2 *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* AS AN INDICTMENT OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

In a certain quarter of the critical world, any literary work touching upon social or economic aspect of contemporary society is easily characterized as a political work, and is equally easily condemned on that very ground, fixing on it the ideological lable of their liking or disliking. Miller rightly objects to this sort of critical activity. As he puts it,

> A play cannot be equated with a political philosophy, at least not in the way a smaller number, by simple multiplication, can be assimilated into a larger. I do not believe that any work of

> art can help but be diminished by its adherence at any cost to a political program, including its author's, and not for any other reason than that there is no political program - any more than there is a theory of tragedy - which can encompass the complexities of real life. Doubtless an author' politics must be one element, and even an important one, in the germination of his art, but if it is art he has created it must be definition bend itself to his observation rather than to his opinions or even his hopes. If I have shown a preference for plays which seek causation not only in psychology but in society, I may also believe in the autonomy of art, and I believe this because my experience with *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* forces the belief upon me. If the earlier play was Marxist, it was a Marxism of a strange hue. Joe Keller is arraigned by his son for a wilfully unethical use of his economic position; and this, as the Russians said when they removed the play from their stages, bespeaks an assumption that the norm of the capitalist behaviour is ethical or at least can be an assumption no Marxist can hold. Nor does Chris propose to liquidate the business built in part on soldiers' blood; he will run it himself, but cleanly.

Miller offers here a sound argument that while a writer's political awareness gives his work a solid social fibre, he has to keep it free from his political opinions in the interest of art, which, for sure, would destroy its artistic fibre. His contention is that it is the writer's "observation", rather than his opinions, which should structure the play's vision, its form. If a writer submits his observation to his opinions or programme, his work becomes a piece of propaganda, rather than a piece of art. He is again irked by the labelling of *All My Sons* as a Marxist play, and tries hard to convince us that it is not. His answer to the political charge is quite convincing in the realm of art. None of his plays is a piece of political propaganda, but each of his plays is an evocation as well as an indictment of a way of life which erodes individual humanity and destroys social solidarity. He greatly succeeds in evoking as well as indicting the American way of life inspired by the ideal of success.

Continuing his discussion of the relation between art and politics in the context of his own work, he takes up the case of *Death of Salesman.* His contention is that there are no political theories implied in his plays, they are meant to stay as near the truth as possible. He tries to explain how characters are not political, even social, types, and that they are more life-like than allegorical figures. Here is his comment on the play :

> The most decent man in *Death of a Salesman* is a capitalist (Charley) whose aims are not different from Willy Loman's. The great difference between them is that Charley is not a fanatic. Equally, however, he has learned how to live without that frenzy, that ecstasy of spirit which Willy chases to his end. And even as Willy's sons are unhappy men, Charley's boy, Bernard, works hard, attends to his studies, and attains a worthwhile objective. These people are all of the same class, the same background, the same neighbourhood. What theory lies behind this double view ? None whatever. It is simply that I knew and know that I feel better when my work is reflecting a balance of the truth as it exists. A muffled debate arose with the success of *Death of a Salesman* in which attempts were made to justify or dismiss the play as a Left-Wing piece, or as a Right-Wing manifestation of decadence. The presumption underlying both views is that a work of art is the sum of its author's political outlook, real or alleged, and more, that its political implications are valid elements in its aesthetic evaluation. I do not believe this, either for my own or other writer's works.

Miller's emphatic denial here for having carried, in *Death of a Salesman,* a political agenda is well argued and is quite convincing. The comments to which he makes reference only show how vitiated the critical climate in his country had become in the age of McCarthism. The cold-war effects on the world of letters was, obviously, no less than on the life in America in general. In such an atmosphere, undoubtedly, truth is the first casualty. The vision of society gets coloured by the feelings of fears and suspicions. They get hardened into irrational prejudices. Even small suspicions get enlarged and exaggerated, and things assume gothic and supernatural dimensions. In such a climate, no wonder, *Death of a Salesman* would also appear in red or yellow, not in white.

To drive home his point, Miller gives example of a well-known play with political theme, and shows how a play by even an avowed socialist like Shaw cannot be dubbed in mere political terms. He decries simplistic conclusions about works of art, and counsels balanced artistic approach, rather than make polemical impositions on literary texts. Here is the case he uses for illustration :

> The most radical play I ever saw was not *Waiting for Lefty* but *The Madwoman of Chaillot.* I know nothing of Giradoux's political alignment, and it is of no moment to me; I am able to read this play, which is the most open indictment of private exploitation of the earth I know about. By the evidence of his plays Shaw, the socialist, was in love not in not with the working class, whose characters he would only caricature, but with the middle of the economic aristocracy, those men who, in his estimate, lived without social or economic illusions. There is a strain of mystic fatalism in Ibsen so powerful as to throw all his scientific tenets into doubt, and a good measure besides of contempt - in this radical - for the men who are usually called the public. The list is long and the contradictions are embarrassing until one concedes a perfectly simple proposition. It is merely that a writer of any worth creates out of his total perception, the vaster part of which is subjective and not within his intellectual control. For myself, it has never been possible to generate the energy to write and complete a play if I know in advance everything it signifies and all it will contain. *The very impulse to write, I think, springs from an inner chaos crying for order, for meaning, and that meaning must be discovered in the process of writing or the work lies dead as it is finished.* To speak, therefore, of a play as though it were the objective work of propagandist is an almost biological kind of nonsense, provided, of course, that it is a play, which is to say a work of art.

Here, in this part of his argument, Miller comes out most convincing. He affirms his artistic creed in the social relevance of art, especially the dramatic art. He explains how in *Death of a Salesman,* he addresses one of the key problems

of modern American society, its tragedy in having opted for the law of success in life, ignoring the more important spiritual needs of individuals who constitute that society. The system that the law of success has evolved at the larger level driving the American society involves a continuous devaluation of human values and a simultaneous degeneration of each individual. The dreams that such a society generates drives one like a machine in an onward march, irrespective of what it crushes on the way, and what it eliminates and ignores on both sides of its road to success.

At the same time, Miller feels irritated by those who cannot take any social emphasis in art, and must, by the force of their political prejudice, see red in such an attempt, labelling it as Marxist, socialist, or communist. Here, he makes a fine distinction between art and propaganda. Like a romantic writer, he insists that art is fundamentally exploratory and experiencial, since nothing is readymade or predecided, and that there is only an urge to express the compelling feeling or emotion which clamours for order. And it is only through the experience of writing itself that the artist discovers the meaning, and imposes an order on the chaotic urge demanding expression. As against such an artistic attempt and the resulting artistic work, there is a piece of propaganda, written after a well laid-out plan, executing a scheme of ideas to be put across for a definite purpose of persuading the audience to a definite ideology or viewpoint. Such a piece of composition for Miller will be a dead work, having no claim to the objective perspective of art. He hates to follow the mechanics of a propagandist writing, and would not admit such a writing in the domain of art.

Miller's test of success as dramatist is based on the response of the common reader or audience who, having no notion of an ideology, instinctively and naturally respond to a play, feeling as if what they see on the stage is the story of their own life. It is only this response of the common, inarticulate humanity that confirms the social bearing of a play as the writer's success in making an artistic execution of his social concern. Miller's comment on this ''common'' response to *Death of a Salesman* is highly useful for a proper appreciation of his play:

In the writing of *Death of a Salesman* I tried, of course, to achieve a maximum power of effect. But when I saw the devastating force with which it struck its audience, something within me was shocked and put off. I had thought

of myself as rather an optimistic man. I looked at what I had wrought and was forced to wonder whether I knew myself at all in this play, which I had written half in laughter and joy, was as morose and as utterly sad as its audience found it. Either I was much rougher than they, and could stare at calamity with fewer terrors, or I was harboring within myself another man who was only tangentially connected with what I would have called my rather bright veiwpoint about mankind. As I watched and saw tears in the eyes of the audience I felt a certain embarrassment at having as I thought convinced so many people that life was not worth living-for so the play was widely interpreted. I hasten to add now that I ought not have been embarrassed, and that I am convinced the play is not a document of pessimism, a philosophy in which I do not believe.

Here, Miller feels satisfied, by the audience's response to the play, by the mere fact that it moved so may Americans to shed tears on the sad story of Willy Loman. At the same time, he feels embarrassed that it should have an effect other then the desired. As he tells us, he had conceived the play half in joy and laughter. Well, he should not forget that it was only "half", and not full, joy and laughter in which he had conceived it. The other half was pity and terror that the plight of Loman evokes. And it is this other half that stayed deeper and lasting with audience. Well, it always does: while the laughter and joy are for a moment, pain and suffering stay deep in the heart.

Miller, as usual, while discussing one aspect of his play, must always touch upon another, although the two are never quite unrelated. Here, discussing the social theme of *Death of a Salesman,* he touches upon the mood of the play, wondering, once again, how it sounded with the audience a pessimistic note which he had never intended. Miller need to be reminded here of his own earlier assertion that a play is an exploration and an experience for a writer, and it is only while undergoing that experience that he discovers what it really means. He might have begun in the mood of half joy and laughter, but it turns serious along the way and ends in tragedy. Also, Miller had earlier insisted upon the tragic intensity of Willy's pursuit of his dream, comparing it with that of the Greek tragic hero, considering Willy as the modern counterpart of the ancient Greek. He should not forget now that it is the same tragic intensity of Willy's experience, with whom the average American instinctively identified, that sent them to tears. It was only natural that they should feel that way watching an almost a repeat of their own

individual experience in the society which they shared with Willy's.

As discussed earlier, this gap between what the author intends and what the audience perceive is always there. For while the intention is an idea, an emphasis, an effect, the play's experience, meant to embody and illustrate that intention, is not an idea, but an experience. The writer as audience of that very experience of his embodied or illustrated intention, I am sure, would discover the difference between what he had intended and what he has accomplished. The experience does not work on the mind. It works upon his heart, upon one's emotions. As such, the effect of an experience will always be different from the effect of an idea. No doubt, the writer's rhetorical articulation conditions in part the reader or audience response. But it is only partly. Partly, it is also conditioned by his own mental and emotional constitution. After all, the reader or audience are also conditioned, composed, by social forces as well as individual destiny, and even when all, including the writer, may have shared a common social milieu or environment, each gets shaped in his own way, different from others. Although there remains considerable space of shared experience, there also remains at the same time some private space for individual experience. Hence, the author's intention and the reader's response can never be identical, nor the vaious responses of different readers - the reason why we come upon so many, and so very different, interpretations of one and the same text. All these differences notwithstanding, however, the validity of Miller's assertion remains, that a ''play cannot be equated with a political philosophy.'' Thus, it can be safely summed up that while *Death of a Salesman* is a period piece, a social document, it is not a piece of political propaganda.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 13
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-III

EXPRESSIONISTIC ELEMENTS IN *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

STRUCTURE

13.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to appraise the learner about the expressionistic elements in *Death of a Salesman* while exploring Expressionism as an Art movement and its effect on Literature.

13.2 EXPRESSIONISTIC ELEMENTS IN *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

The term was probably first used by Vauxcelles after a series of paintings by Julien-Auguste Herve' in 1901 under the title *Expressionismes.* Thus, its origin is German, and it was used initially for a style of painting. As such, it refers to a movement in Germany very early in the twentieth century (in 1905) in which a number of painters sought to avoid the representation of external reality. Instead, they tried to project themselves and a highly personal vision of the world. The term came to be applied to dramatic literature, as some of the dramatists in Europe and America moved away from Ibsenian realism and employed certain devices to focus on inner reality of life. The

technique especially helped in projecting the inner life of their characters. Briefly summarized, the main principle involved is that expression, not representation, determines form of a literary work. Consequently, it also determines imagery, syntax, punctuation, and so forth. Indeed, any of the formal rules and elements of writing can be bent or disjointed to suit the purpose.

After painting, the movement had its greatest impact on the theatre. The theories of expressionism found greatest favour in Germany and Scandinavia. In fact, expressionism dominated the theatre for a time in the 1920's in Europe. In its special mutation in drama, it became a reaction against realism. It aimed to show inner psychological realities. The origins of this are probably to be found in Strindberg's *The Dream Play* (1907) and *The Ghost Sonata* (1907). Wedekind's plays during the same period were also highly expressionistic. He wrote violent anti-bourgeois plays, three of which are chiefly considered expressionistic: *Spring Awakening* (1891), *Lulu* (1895), and *Pandora's Box* (1902). The first drama of German expressionism came from a nineteen year old dramatist, Reinhard Sorge, under the title *Der Bettler* (1912). About the same time, a rival dramatist named Carl Sternbeim produced his expressionistic plays with the titles *Die Hose* (1910) and *Der Snob* (1914).

After these beginnings came the chief spokesman of German expressionism, namely Ernst Toller, and became the representative dramatist of the movement. He was decidedly a revolutionary in dramatic style, almost an extremist. His first major play in this style was *Die Wandlung* (1920), which, presented in thirteen tableux, depicted the horrors of war as he himself had experienced them. This was followed by *Masse Mensch* (1920) and *Massenschlacht* (1921). Another dramatist who made a great impression at the time was Fritz von Unruh. He produced popular plays like *Offiziere* (1911), *Prinz Louis Ferdinand von Preussen* (1913), and *Ein Geschlecht* (1917). He continued writing expressionistic plays later in the 1920's also. The most prolific of the German dramatists, however, was George Kaiser, who gave tremendous momentum to the new dramatic style by producing as many as seventy plays. Among the major of these plays are considered *Von Morgens Bis Mitternachts* (1916) and his triology comprising *Die Koralle* (1917), *Gas I* (1918), *Gas II* (1920). Another dramatist in the movement was Walter Hasenclever, who, too, made an impact with his *Der Sohn* (1914) and *Antigone* (1917). Most of these dramatists later influenced

the best known dramatist today, Bertolt Brecht. In some of the plays of these writers, we can see the making of the epic theatre whose representative became Brecht.

The movement did not take long to cross the Atlantic. It reached America in 1920's, although by the mid-20's it was almost over in Germany, and did not catch on in France and other European countries. While England and France remained almost unaware, or unaffected, by the movement of expressionism, it found quite a few enthusiasts in America. The leading dramatists of the period, such as Eugene O'Neill, Elmer Rice, Thornton Wilder, embraced the movement whole-heartedly. Compared to these, their British counterparts in Eliot, Auden, and Isherwood accepted it in terms which are almost negligible.

The movement of expressionism as such was never a very well-defined one. What can be safely said about it, however, is that it was a revolt against the artistic literary, and dramatic tradition of realism, both in subject matter and in style. The artists of the movement, painters as well as dramatists, undertook to express a personal vision, both of human life as well as of human society. They did this by exaggerating and distorting what, according to the norms of artistic realism, are objective features of the world. They also did it by embodying violent extremes of mood and feeling. Quite often, their works implied that what was depicted or dramatized represented the experience of an individual, standing alone and afraid in an industrial, technological and urban society which, they felt, was disintegrating into pieces, even chaos. Those radical among the expressionists, especially in politics, also projected utopian views of a future community in a regenerate world.

Although painters and poets introduced symbolic characters and nightmarish events, and departed from standard metre, syntax and poetic structure, it were the dramatists who made the most noticeable impact. Drama, more than poetry and novel, became the most prominent and widely influential form of expressionist writing. Dramatists invariably tended to represent anonymous human types instead of individualized characters. They also replaced plot by episodic renderings of intense and rapidly oscillating emotional states. They quite often fragmented the dialogue into exclamatory and seemingly incoherent sentences or phrases. Besides, it was very common with them to employ masks. The stage in expressionistic drama turned into rather abstract, lopsided, and sprawling sets. The new revolving stage and special

effects in light and sound were also introduced.

The greatest influence of this German movement among the American dramatists was on Eugene O'Neill. His play *The Emperor Jones* (1920) projected, in a sequence of symbolic episodes, the individual and racial memories of a terrified African-American protagonist. Similarly, in Elmer Rice's *The Adding Machine* (1923), non-realistic devices were used to dramatize a mechanical, sterile, and frightening world as experienced by Mr. Zero. Here, too, the protagonist is a tiny and helpless cog in the severe system of big business. When the Nazis suppressed expressionism in Germany during the 30's, it remained somewhat subdued in Europe also. But it cropped up in America again after the war ended in 1945. Its direct or indirect influence has always been recognized on the writing and staging of such plays as Thornton wilder's *The Sking of Our Teeth* and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman.* It suited both these playwrights, since both wanted to give expression to their highly individualistic vision of American society. The themes they had decided to write about and the protagonists they had picked up for the purpose could not have found more appropriate expression than through the style of expressionism.

Arthur Miller himself admits as to the conscious use of the various devices of expressionism in *Death of a Salesman.* As he puts it,

> Perhaps I can indicate its basic elements by saying the *Salesman* moves with its arms open wide, sweeping into itself by means of a subjective process of thought-connection a multitude of observations, feelings, suggestions, and shadings much as the mind does in its ordinary daily functionings. Its author chose its path, of course, but, once chosen, that path could meander as it pleased through a world that was well recognized by the audience. From the theatrical viewpoint that play desired that audience to forget it was in a theatre even as it broke the bounds, I believe, of a long convention of realism. Its expressionistic elements were consciously used as such, but since the approach to Willy Loman's characterization was consistently and rigorously subjective, the audience would not ever be aware - if I could help it - that they were witnessing the use of a technique which had until then created only coldness, objectivity, and a highly styled sort of play, I had willingly

> employed expressionism but always to create a subjective truth, and this play, which was so manifestly "written", seemed as though nobody had written it at all but that it had simply "happened". I had always been attracted and repelled by the brilliance of German expressionism after World War I, and one aim in *Salesman* was to employ its quite marvellous shorthand for humane, "felt" characterizations rather than for purposes of demonstrations for which the Germans had used it.

Thus, we can see how *Death of a Salesman* was consciously constructed as an expressionistic play. Miller chose to express his individual vision of an American society. He makes the necessary exaggerations. He creates violent scenes in which Willy and his sons participate. He also creates hysterical and obsessive scenes. The "low-man" Willy is an anonymous American, who feels crushed by the crushing social system, which heavily relies on "making it" at all costs. Those less human may succeed, but others like Willy, who have not yet fully been mechanized and dehumanized by the system, are bound to fail and become drop-outs of the system. And if they persist on not getting dropped, they get crushed as Willy does at the end. Quite foolishly, he was trying to stay on within the system even though the system had found him "unusable".

Willy's anonymity and his smallness or lowness in comparison to the mighty system, in which he wants to remain fitted as a cog, are effectively brought out through stage-setting right at the start of the play. The authorial directions, with which the play opens, clearly convey the expressionistic message. The light and sound, the setting of the house's location and its interior structure, are all designed in accordance with the well-known practices of expressionist dramatists of the 1920's in Germany. Miller makes wonderful use of those conventions. The dramatic effectiveness of all these devices made the play a powerful tragedy, making the play-goers highly sensitive to what is wrong with the society in which Willy is, like so many, an anonymous individual. Note how the play opens with the seemingly simple setting, which actually turns out to be symbolic, hiding under its simplicity the terror of an individual person falling apart, indicating at the same time the falling to pieces of a society, which has sold its soul, so to say, to the devil of material success.

A melody is heard, played upon a flute. It is small and fine, telling of grass and trees and the horizon. The curtain rises.

Before us is the Salesman's house. We are aware of towering, angular shapes behind it, surrounding it on all sides, Only the blue light of the sky falls upon the house and the forestage. As more light appears, we see a solid vault of apartment houses around the small, fragile-seeming home. An air of dream clings to the place, a dream rising out of reality....

The entire setting is wholly or, in some places, partially transparent. The roof-line of the house is one-dimensional; under and over it we see the apartment buildings. Before the house lies an apron, curving beyond the forestage into the orchestra... Whenever the action is in the present the actors observe the imaginary wall-lines, entering the house only through its door at the left. But in the scenes of the past these boundaries are broken, and characters enter or leave a room by stepping "through" a wall onto the forestage.

We can see from the opening authorial stage-directions, produced in part here, how unrealistic, and highly symbolic the whole stage-setting is. The various effects of spectacle produced here - those of light and sound, of structural repression, of the broken wall of time - are meant to project the dark and obscure facts of life about an individual in a society. Obviously, the attempt is to bring out in visual terms the inner psychological and spiritual condition of this individual as well as the society which has shaped him. Unlike the setting in a realistic play, where it is a dead piece of physical scenery meant to create an illusion of reality, Miller has made it highly functional, by making it symbolic of inner spiritual life.

In the conventions of expressionism, Miller has intensified every element of drama, by making each tense and obsessive, hysterical and nerve-breaking, for that is what modern industrial-society's life is, and that is what is being dramatized in *Death of a Salesman.* The dialogue, an important element of drama, too, is not in the tradition of realism, as plain and simple conversation we come across in real life. Here, it is made unreal by making it tense, broken, repetitive, indicating obsession and hysteria of the

characters involved. Note how in the very opening of the play we see the functionality of the dialogue at work:

LINDA, *hearing Willy outside the bedroom, calls with some trepidations: Willy!*

WILLY : It's all right. I came back.

LINDA : Why? What happened *Slight pause.* Did something happen, Willy?

Willy : No, nothing happened.

LINDA : You didn't smash the car, did your?

WILLY, *with casual irritation :* I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?

LINDA : Don't you feel well?

WILLY : I'm tired to the Death. *The flute has faded away. He sits on the bed beside her, a little dumb.* I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda.

LINDA, *very carefully, delicately:* Where were you all day? You look terrible.

WILLY : I got as far as a little above Yonkers. I stopped for a cup of coffee. Maybe it was the coffee.

LINDA : What?

WILLY, *after a pause* : I suddenly couldn't drive any more. The car kept going off onto the shoulder, y'know?

LINDA, *helpfully* : Oh. May be it was the steering again. I don't think Angelo knows the Studebaker.

WILLY : No, it's me, it's me. Suddenly I realize I'm going sixty miles an hour and I don't remember the last five minutes. I'm – I can't seem to-keep my mind to it.

LINDA : Maybe it's your glasses. You never went for your new glasses.

It can be seen how the conversation proceeds unfolding in an utter oblique manner the horror that haunts Willy's life, the automatic distraction that unconsciously drives him off the road (of life). Linda speaks on the plane of realism, asking usual questions about her husband's unusual condition, and the more she persists on that

plane, the greater is the expressionistic effect of Willy's pauses, hints, and suggestions, that lift the lid off his inner chaos. The dialogue does it all, and does it so effectively that we fear the presence of something dreadful at hand. This feeling gets greatly intensified as we go along the conversation, which finally brings out the horror that surrounds the individual life in a society which wears attractive appearances but which conceals behind those appearances a frightful emptiness, a void of nothingness.

The second Act of *Death of a Salesman* intensifies the dramatization of this horror by showing more of Willy's cracked mind, how, losing sense of time and place, it freely moves back and forth, leading to nowhere, getting only more and more hysterical in the orbit of his shattered dream, still in sight, and he still purshing it unstoppably. See how it goes at this stage :

LINDA : Biff was very changed this morning. His whole attitude seemed to be hopeful. He couldn't wait to get downtown to see Oliver.

WILLY : He's heading for a change. There's no question, there simply are some men that take longer to get – slidified. How did he dress?

LINDA : His blue suit. He's so handsome in that suit. He could be a - anything in that suit !

Willy gets up from the table. Linda holds his jacket for him.

LINDA : There's no question, no question at all. Gee, on the way home tonight I'd like to buy some seeds.

LINDA, *laughing* : That'd be wonderful. But not enough sun gets back there. Nothing'll grow any more.

WILLY : You wait, kid, before it's all over we're gonna get a little place out in the country, and I'll raise some vegetables, a couple of chickens... LINDA : You'll do it yet, dear.

Willy walks out of his jacket, Linda follows him.

WILLY : And they'll get married, and for a weekend. I'd build a little guest house. 'Cause I got so may fine tools, all I'd need be a little lumber and some peace of

mind.

LINDA, *joyfully :* I sewed the lining....

WILLY : I could build two guest houses, so they'd both come. Did he decide how much he's going to ask Oliver for ?

LINDA, *getting him into the jacket :* He didn't mention it, but I imagine ten or fifteen thousand. You going to talk to Howard today ?.....

We can see how the shattered Willy is shown fallen apart through his conversation with his wife. Linda, always trying to put his jacket on him, keeping him within the conscious frame of mind, containing him within the limits of life here and now. But Willy always walks out of his jacket. The very mention of Biff and Happy, his two sons, sets him on to dreaming about them. And once he gets going, there is no stopping his mind. He walks through the walls of time, of boundaries of space, and gets so seized by his dream, which is the American Dream, that nothing can hold him back on the ground. Also, the more he walks away from reality, the more horror comes upon us, the audience, watching him walk through the walls, pursuing the inevitable disaster at hand.

Miller makes it clear in his "Introduction" to his *Collected Plays,* how, unlike *All My Sons, Death of a Salesman* was meant to be an expressionistic play, focussed wholly on what goes on inside Willy's mind, which is brought out through the subtle devices of the new technique of unrealistic drama. As he explains, "The first image that occurred to me, which was to result in *Death of a Salesman,* was of an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch, which would appear and then open up and we would see the inside of a man's head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title.... The image was in direct opposition to the method of *All My Sons* - a method one might call linear or eventual in that one fact or incident creates the necessity for the next. The *Salesman* image was from the beginning absorbed with the concept that nothing in life comes "next" but that everything exists together and at the same time within us; that there is no past to be "brought forward" in a human being, but that he is his past at every moment and that the present is merely that which his past is capable of noticing and smelling and reacting to." All the assumptions, stated by the dramatist here, are a direct opposition to those that lie behind the

creation of a realistic play. In fact, almost every element of realistic drama is totally reversed here to create a psycho-spiritual spectacle of inner life of an anonymous individual, who represents the life of every anonymous individual in American society. All the expressionistic devices used in *Death of a Salesman* combine to create an effect of a searchlight which is focussed on whatever otherwise would remain hidden from our naked eyes.

Miller's expressionistic intention is more than clear in all the aspects of drama. He modulates, modifies, and manipulates those aspects in order to make them serviceable to his definite goal, which is Willy's character, the inside of it. As he explains, "I wished to create a form which, in itself as a form, would literally be the process of Willy Loman's way of mind... I wished to speak of the salesman most precisely as I felt about him, to give no part of that feeling away for the sake of any effect or any dramatic necessity. What was wanted now was not a mounting line of tension, nor a gradually narrowing cone of intensifying suspense, but a bloc, a single chord presented as such at the outset, within which all the strains and melodies would already be contained.... As I look at the play now its form seems the form of a confession, for that is how it is told, now speaking of what happened yesterday, then suddenly following some convention to a time twenty years ago, then leaping even further back and then returning to the present and even speculating about the future." Thus, the dramatist succeeds in creating a form which expresses and projects, not depicts and represents, inner, not outer, reality. The symbolic setting with light and sound effects, the motive-driven character, the stylized dialogue, the simultaneous time continuum, all work to project, as if on a screen, the inside of Willy's mind. Miller has made the most memorable play by harmonising form with character, style with substance, dialogue with design, all blending into an icon of artistic excellence, unmatched by any other artistic product of its time.

13.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write, in 300 words, a note on the post-war American drama, with special reference to Arthur Miller.
2. Discuss Arthur Miller as a "modern" dramatist.

3. Examine *Death of a Salesman* as the picture of post-war America.
4. *Death of a Salesman* as an expressionistic play.
5. Examine the case of *Death of a Salesman* as a modern tragedy.
6. Discuss Willy Loman as a Tragic hero.
7. Write a note on the dramaturgy of *Death of a Salesman.*

13.4 SUGGESTED READING

1. Eric Bentley. *The Dramatic Event.* New York : Horizon Press, 1954.
2. John Gassner, *Masters of the Drama.* New York : Dover Publications Inc., 1945.
3. John Gassner. *The Theatre in Our Times.* New York : Crown Publications, Inc., 1954.
4. Joseph Wood Crutch. *The American Drama Since 1918.* New York: Random House, Inc., 1939.
5. Burns Mantle. *Contemporary American Playwrights.* New York : Dodd, Mead & Co., 1939.
6. Gerald Weales. *American Drama Since World War II.* New York : Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962.
7. Elmer Rice. *The Living Theatre.* New York : Harper and Row, 1959.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-412 **LESSON NO. 14**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-IV**

THE INVISIBLE MAN - RALPH ELLISON

STRUCTURE

14.1. INTRODUCTION

Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* is one of the most important book written about the reality of racism and the problem of black identity in the United States. Through this work, Ellison urges the Blacks to forego the political struggle for equality in favour of hard work. He asserts that with hard work, blacks can gain the trust and support of the Whites in power, who will in exchange give them political equality. In the context of the times of Ralph Ellison, the novel is steeped in the Blacks' experience in America and the human struggle for individuality. No wonder that *Invisible Man* spent 16 weeks on the best-seller list and won the National Book Award in 1953.

14.2. OBJECTIVES

The lesson aims to introduce the learner to African-American literature through the detailed reading and discussion of Ralph Ellison's novel *The Invisible Man.* The objective is to provide elaborate analysis of the novel to enable the learner to answer questions based on different aspects of the novel.

14.3. THE TIMES OF RALPH ELLISON

The first major movement of African-American literature, beginning around 1923 and flourishing until the depression, was Harlem Renaissance, which provided a stimulus that lasted through the 1940s. The renaissance mainly involved a group of writers and intellectuals associated (often loosely) with Harlem, the district of Manhattan that, during the migration of African Americans from the rural South, became the major centre for urbanized Blacks. Harlem was described by Alain Locke (1886-1954) as "not merely the largest Negro community in the world, but the first concentration in history of so many diverse elements of Negro life." The renaissance was associated with the New Negro Movement, so called because of the anthology *The New Negro* (1925) edited by Locke, whose introductory essay "The New Negro" is the closest to a manifesto or statement of ideals that the Harlem Renaissance has. In it he writes of the Negro who is no longer apologetic for blackness but who takes a new pride in a racial identity and heritage, of the "renewed self-respect and self-dependence" felt in the contemporary Black community, which is "about to enter a new phase." Elsewhere Locke urged writers to examine the meaning of an African past and to utilize this in their art. This urging coincided with a growing interest among the Whites at the time in primitivism, evident for example in Eugene O'Neill's plays "The Emperor Jones" (1920) and "All God's Chillun Got Wings" (1924). The Harlem Renaissance was partly fostered by the existence of this interest, and by the concurrent development of American modernism and the readiness to accept experimentation and to expand the breadth of artistic expression.

One characteristic of the Harlem Renaissance was a move toward so-called "high art" in Black writing, rather than the use of folk idioms, comic writing, and vernacular that had often been considered the special realm of African-American writing up to that time. In some respects this shift mirrors the change from rural to urban life for many

blacks in this period. However, several of the Harlem writers made powerful use of folk idioms such as the blues, particularly Langston Hughes (1902-67). The Harlem writers also engaged in an intense debate regarding the place of the African American in American life, and on the role and identity of the African-American artist.

Prominent Harlem Renaissance writers include James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938), Jessie Redmon Fauset (1882-1961), the Jamaican born Claude McKay (1889-1948), *Zora Neale Hurston*, Nella Larsen (1893-1964), Jean Toomer (1894-1967), Arna Bontemps (1902-73), Gwendolyn Bennett (1902-81), and Helene Johnson (1907-95).

The times of Ralph Ellison is referred to as the Civil Rights Movement era (1954-1968). A large migration of African Americans began during World War I, hitting its high point during World War II. During this Great Migration, Black people left the racism and lack of opportunities in the American South and settled in northern cities like Chicago, where they found work in factories and other sectors of the economy. This migration produced a new sense of independence in the Black community and contributed to the vibrant Black urban culture seen during the Harlem Renaissance. The migration also empowered the growing American Civil Rights Movement, which made a powerful impression on Black writers during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. Just as Black activists were pushing to end segregation and racism and create a new sense of Black nationalism, so too were Black authors attempting to address these issues with their writings.

One of the first writers to do so was James Baldwin, whose work addressed issues of race and sexuality. Baldwin, who is best known for his novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain***,** wrote deeply personal stories and essays while examining what it was like to be both Black and homosexual at a time when neither of these identities was accepted by American culture. In all, Baldwin wrote nearly 20 books, including such classics as *Another Country* and *The Fire Next Time.*

Baldwin's idol and friend was author Richard Wright, whom Baldwin called "the greatest Black writer in the world for me". Wright is best known for his novel ***Native Son*** (1940), which tells the story of Bigger Thomas, a Black man struggling for acceptance in Chicago. Baldwin was so impressed by the novel that he titled a collection of his own essays *Notes of a Native Son* in reference to Wright's novel. However, their friendship

fell apart due to one of the book's essays, "Everybody's Protest Novel", which criticized *Native Son* for lacking credible characters and psychological complexity.

Ralph Ellison entered the league of great novelists of this period with the publication of his novel *Invisible Man* (1952). Even though he did not complete another novel during his lifetime, *Invisible Man* was so influential that it secured his place in literary history.

The Civil Rights time period also saw the rise of female Black poets, most notably Gwendolyn Brooks, who became the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize when it was awarded for her 1949 book of poetry, *Annie Allen.* Along with Brooks, other female poets who became well known during the 1950s and 1960s are Nikki Giovanni and Sonia Sanchez. During this time, a number of playwrights also came to national attention, notably Lorraine Hansberry, whose play *A Raisin in the Sun* focuses on a poor Black family living in Chicago. The play won the 1959 New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Another playwright who gained attention was Amiri Baraka, who wrote controversial off-Broadway plays. In more recent years, Baraka has become known for his poetry and music criticism. It is also worth noting that a number of important essays and books about human rights were written by the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. One of the leading examples of these is Martin Luther King, Jr's "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

14.4. RALPH ELLISON: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The grandson of slaves, Ralph Ellison was born in 1914 in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and was raised largely in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His father was a construction worker, and his mother was a domestic servant who also volunteered for the local Socialist Party. From his birth, Ellison's parents knew he was bound for prosperity. His father even named him for the great writer Ralph Waldo Emerson in an effort to ensure such success. As Ellison himself says in reference to his parents, "no matter what their lives had been, their children's lives would be lives of possibility." Mrs. Ellison, a maid, would bring home books, magazines, and record albums that had been discarded in the homes she cleaned. Ralph and his brother, Herbert, were supplied with chemistry sets, toy typewriters, and a rolltop desk so that they would have the tools to succeed. When he was a teenager, Ellison and his friends daydreamed of being "Renaissance Men".

Therefore, they studied the values and attitudes of Native Americans and Whites, as well as Blacks.

As a young man, Ellison developed an abiding interest in jazz music; he befriended a group of musicians who played in a regional band called Walter Page's Blue Devils, many of whom later played with Count Basie's legendary big band in the late 1930s. Ellison himself studied the cornet and trumpet, and planned a career as a jazz musician. Ellison revered and admired the musicians of his area. At Douglas High School, Ellison followed his inclination toward music. From there, in 1933, he left Oklahoma and went to Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama on a scholarship and dreamed of writing a symphony. The Institute, which is now called Tuskegee University, was founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington, one of the foremost Black educators in American history, and became one of the nation's most important Black colleges. It later served as the model for the Black college attended by the narrator in *Invisible Man.*

After there was a mix-up with his scholarship, Ellison chose to leave the Tuskegee Institute in 1936 and go north in order to save money for tuition. Arriving in New York, Ellison found it difficult to find work and even harder to find work as a musician. The result was a succession of odd jobs at Harlem's YMCA with a psychiatrist. There, Ellison acted as a file clerk and a receptionist, and held various other jobs around town. During this time, Ellison met writer Richard Wright, who encouraged him to be a writer rather than a musician. As an employee of the Federal Writers' Project, Ellison also befriended many important African-American writers of the era, including Langston Hughes. Ellison also befriended the eminent jazz writer and sociologist Albert Murray, with whom he carried on a lengthy and important literary correspondence, later collected in the book *Trading Twelves.* After a year editing the Negro Quarterly, Ellison left for the Merchant Marines, in which he served during World War II. After the war, Ellison won a Rosenwald Fellowship, which he used to write *Invisible Man*. The first chapter appeared in America in the 1948 volume of *Magazine of the Year*, and the novel was published in its entirety in 1952.

Employing a shifting, improvisational style directly based on Ellison's experience of jazz performance, *Invisible Man* ranges in tone from realism to extreme surrealism, from tragedy to vicious satire to near-slapstick comedy. Rich in symbolism and metaphor, virtuosic in its use of multiple styles and tones, and achieving one of the most sensational

debuts of any novel in American history, *Invisible Man* was hailed by writers such as Saul Bellow and critics such as Irving Howe as a landmark publication; some critics claimed that it was the most important American novel to appear after World War II.

Invisible Man was heavily influenced by the work of a number of twentieth-century French writers known as the existentialists. Existentialism, whose foremost proponents included Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre, explored the question of individuality and the nature of meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe. Ellison adapted the existentialists' universal themes to the Black experience of oppression and prejudice in America. He also engaged powerfully with the tradition of African-American social debate. In the character of Dr. Bledsoe, the novel offers a vehement rejection of the philosophy of Booker T. Washington, which advocated that blacks should work toward economic success as a means of achieving racial equality. It also critiques, through the character of Ras the Exhorter, Marcus Garvey's philosophy of Black nationalism.

Despite or possibly because of the overwhelming success of *Invisible Man*, Ellison never published another novel in his lifetime. Though he published two books of essays-*Shadow Act* in the 1960s and *Going to the Territory* in the 1980s. Ellison spent his later decades laboring on a vast novel, which he never finished. Upon his death in 1994 (April 16), Ellison left behind more than 2,000 pages of unedited, incomplete manuscript. In heavily abridged and edited form, this manuscript was published five years after his death under the title *Juneteenth,* to generally unfavorable reviews. In 1996, *Flying Home: And Other Stories* was published after being discovered in his home.

Ellison is often criticized for not using his writing as a propaganda tool to elevate the "black man in society." For instance, critic Richard Corliss writes, "The unfashionable fact is that Ellison's writing was too refined, elaborate, to be spray painted on a tenement wall. He was a celebrator as much a denouncer of the nation that bred him". Ellison defended himself by saying, "I wasn't and am not concerned with injustice but with art."

14.5 FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. _____ was the movement of African-American literature that began around 1923.

2. Ralph Ellison was born in _____

3. _____ was the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize.

4. Ellison's manuscript entitled _____ was published after his death.

5. The times of Ralph Ellison is referred to as the _____.

14.6 SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note on Harlem Renaissance.
2. Briefly discuss the times of Ralph Ellison
3. Briefly sketch the biography of Ralph Ellison

14.7 ANSWER KEY

1.Harlem Renaissance, 2. Oklahoma City, 3. Gwendolyn Brooks, 4. Juneteenth, 5. Civil Rights Movement era

SHORT ANSWERS:

A brief biographical sketch of Ralph Ellison: Ralph Waldo Ellison was an African American novelist who was named after the celebrated poet Ralph Waldo Emerson, by his father who wanted his son to become a poet. Ellison was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma on 1st March 1914. He was born to Ida Millsap and Lewis Alfred Ellison and had a brother Herbert Millsap Ellison. In his initial years Ellison and his family had to deal with difficult times. Ralph lost his father. Lewis Alfred in the year 1917 in an accident when Ralph was at the tender age of 3. In his young years, he was encouraged to read. He went to study music in Alabama's Tuskegee Institute in 1933 on a scholarship. Ellison left Tuskegee and moved to New York City in 1936 after his third year as a result of financial issues, planning to complete his education in due time. While at New York, Ellison studied photography in addition to sculpture. Ellison thoroughly enjoyed New York's vibrancy and liveliness. However, the major turning point for Ellison in New York was meeting with Richard Wright. It was Richard Wright who pointed Ellison in the direction of writing and motivated Ellison to write for him. Ellison's

work appeared in various publications including Antioch Review, New Challenge and New Masses. He would write short stories, reviews and essays. *Invisible Man* was published in 1952 by Random House. Afterwards, Ellison published more of his works. Ellison began to teach both American and Russian literature at Bard College. He taught at New York University from 1970 to 1979. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969. In 1994, Ralph Ellison died of pancreatic cancer.

14.8 LET US SUM UP

Through this lesson, the Distance Learners are introduced to African American writer Ralph Ellison. The lesson offers a biographical sketch about the author and also gives a preview of the times that Ralph Ellison lived in. Students will be equipped with background information which will help them understand Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man.*

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 15
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-IV

THE INVISIBLE MAN - RALPH ELLISON

STRUCTURE

15.1. INTRODUCTION

The lesson presents summary of each chapter of the novel. The major instances of each chapter are touched upon and presented in a simple language.

15.2. OBJECTIVES

The lesson provides chapter-wise summary of the novel to facilitate better appreciation of the text. Lucid yet explanatory, the lesson will help students get a gist of each chapter and he or she can trace the development of novel step by step.

15.3. CHAPTERS : SUMMARIES

CHAPTER 1

The narrator, a man in his forties, opens the novel pondering over his past. He

speaks of his grandparents, who were freed slaves and after the Civil War had believed that they were separate from but equal to the Whites despite the segregation. The narrator's grandfather lived a humble and quiet life after being freed. The narrator, while relating an anecdote about his grandfather says that he spoke bitterly to his father when on his deathbed. He shocked everybody by telling them that he was a traitor and a spy (to his race), while comparing the lives of Black Americans to warfare. Now the narrator too lives meekly; he too receives praise from the White members of his town. But his grandfather's words haunt him, for the old man deemed such meekness to be treachery.

Then the narrator recollects his high school graduation speech where he had emphasized meekness and submission as key to the advancement of Black Americans. His audience comprised the leading White citizens of the town. He is supposed to take part in a "royal battle"-a blindfolded boxing match-that is part of entertainment package for the evening. Along with some other Black boys, the narrator is forced to look at a naked blonde White who has American tattooed on her stomach. Furthermore, they are lunge for coins on a rug that has an electric current running through it and are forced to fall face forward onto the rug. After all the humiliation, the narrator gives his speech. The White men all laugh and ignore him but he finally gets his award: a calfskin briefcase with a scholarship to the state college for Black youth.

That night, the narrator has a dream of going to a circus with his grandfather, who refuses to laugh at the clowns. His grandfather instructs him to open the briefcase. Inside the narrator finds an official envelope with a state seal. He opens it only to find another envelope, itself containing another envelope. The last one contains an engraved document reading: "To Whom It May Concern . . . Keep This Nigger-Boy Running." The narrator wakes with his grandfather's laughter ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER 2

As the chapter opens, the narrator is a student at the black college to which he received a scholarship. He remembers with particular fascination the college's bronze statue of its Founder, a Black man. He describes the statue as cold and paternal, its eyes empty. As he struggles towards acceptance of his identity, he takes a job driving Mr. Norton, the college's White millionaire trustee, around the campus. In an attempt

to show the old gentleman the countryside near the campus, the narrator accidentally drives Norton to an area of ramshackle cabins which once served as slave quarters but now house poor Black sharecroppers. Though Norton finds the cabins intriguing. The narrator tells him about Jim Trueblood who lives there but is regarded with hatred and distrust because he has impregnated his own daughter. Norton is horrified but insists on speaking with Trueblood.

Trueblood explains that he had a strange dream and woke to find himself having sex with his daughter. Trueblood expresses wonder at the fact that white people have showered him with more money and help than before he committed the unspeakable taboo of incest. Norton, shocked at the story, hands Trueblood a one hundred dollar bill to buy toys for his children. He gets back into the car in a daze and requests some whiskey to calm his nerves.

CHAPTER 3

The narrator, fearing that Norton might die from shock, drives to the Golden Day, which is disreputable tavern and serves Black people. Big Halley, the bartender, refuses to let the narrator take a drink outside to Norton. Inside, Norton is propositioned by a prostitute, insulted by a veteran, and overwhelmed by the "inmates" - institutionalized war veterans who fill the bar.

After the narrator and Norton witness the chaotic events at the Golden Day, including the brutal beating of the veteran's attendant, Supercargo, the narrator finally manages to get a distraught Norton - collapsed under the strain of being in a situation where he has no control - back into the car, and the two head back to the college campus.

CHAPTER 4

Mr. Norton asks to be taken to his room and requests a personal visit from Dr. Bledsoe, the president of the college. Bledsoe becomes furious when the narrator informs him of the afternoon's events, scolding him that he should have known to show powerful White trustees only what the college wants them to see. When Bledsoe arrives at Norton's room, he orders the narrator to leave and instructs him to attend the chapel service that evening. In his room later that afternoon, the narrator receives a message

that Bledsoe wants to speak with him in Norton's room. He arrives to find only Mr. Norton, however, who informs him that Bledsoe had to leave suddenly but that the narrator can find him in his office after the evening service. Norton says that he explained to Bledsoe that the narrator was not responsible for what happened and adds that he thinks that Bledsoe understands.

CHAPTER 5

Attending chapel, the narrator hears Reverend Homer A. Barbee, an African American blind preacher from Chicago, deliver a powerful sermon about the Founder and his vision for the college. He tells the story of the Founder, who was born into slavery and poverty but possessed a precocious intelligence. The Founder was almost killed as a child when a cousin splashed him with lye, rendering him impotent. After nine days in a coma, he woke, as if resurrected. He taught himself how to read and later escaped slavery. He went north and pursued further education. After many years, he returned to the South and founded the college to which he devoted the rest of his life's work. The sermon deeply moves the narrator. Barbee stumbles on the way back to his chair, and his glasses fall from his face. The narrator catches a glimpse of Barbee's sightless eyes and realizes that Barbee is blind.

CHAPTER 6

After the service, the narrator meets with Bledsoe, who is angry that the narrator took Norton to the old slave quarters, Jim Trueblood's cabin, and the Golden Day. Though the narrator explains that Norton ordered him to stop at the cabin, Bledsoe replies that he should know how to lie his way out of such situations. Bledsoe says that he will have to investigate the veteran who mocked Norton. He picks up a slave's leg shackle and informs the narrator that he must be disciplined. The narrator threatens to tell everyone that Bledsoe broke his promise to Norton not to punish him. Bledsoe responds angrily that he has worked hard to achieve his position of power and that he doesn't plan to lose it. Rather than expel the narrator outright, Bledsoe tells him to go to New York for the summer and work to earn his year's tuition. Bledsoe hints that if he does well he will earn the right to return to school. He offers to send letters of recommendation to some of the trustees to ensure that the narrator gets work. The next day, the narrator retrieves seven sealed letters and assures Bledsoe that he doesn't

resent his punishment. Bledsoe praises his attitude, but the narrator remains haunted by his grandfather's prophetic dying words.

CHAPTER 7

On the bus to New York, the narrator encounters the veteran who mocked Mr. Norton and the college. Dr. Bledsoe has arranged to have the man transferred to a psychiatric facility in Washington, D.C. He also tells the narrator that he hoped for a transfer to Washington, D.C., for a long time but wonders what brought it about so suddenly. The narrator cannot believe that Bledsoe could have anything to do with the transfer, but the veteran winks and tells him to learn to see under the surface of things. Crenshaw, the veteran's attendant, tells him that he talks too much. The veteran replies that he verbalizes things that most men only feel. Before switching to another bus, the veteran advises the narrator to serve as his own father. Arriving in New York, the narrator takes the subway to Harlem, where he is amazed to see so many black people. He also sees a gathering on a sidewalk in Harlem, in which a man with a West Indian accent (whom he later learns is Ras the Exhorter) gives a speech about "chasing them [the whites] out." The narrator feels as though a riot might erupt at any minute. He quickly finds a place called the Men's House and takes a room.

CHAPTER 8

The narrator, over the next few days, delivers all of the letters of recommendation he was carrying except with him except for one, which is addressed to a Mr. Emerson. A week passes, but he receives no response. He tries to telephone the addressees, all trustees of the college, only to receive polite but firm refusals from their secretaries. His money is running out, and he begins to entertain vague doubts about Bledsoe's motives.

CHAPTER 9

The narrator sets out to deliver his last letter and meets a man named Peter Wheatstraw, who speaks in a Black dialectical banter and recognizes the narrator's Southern roots. Wheatstraw describes Harlem as a bear's den, which reminds the narrator of the folk stories of Jack the Rabbit and Jack the Bear. The narrator stops for breakfast at a deli. The waiter says he looks like he would enjoy the special: pork chops, grits, eggs, hot biscuits, and coffee. Insulted by the waiter's stereotyping, the

narrator orders orange juice, toast, and coffee.

The narrator arrives at Mr. Emerson's office. He meets Emerson's son, a nervous little man. The son takes the letter and goes off to read it, only to return with a vaguely disturbed expression, chattering about his analyst and about injustice. Finally, the son allows the narrator to read the letter: Bledsoe has told each of the addressees that the narrator has earned permanent expulsion and that Bledsoe had to send him away under false pretenses in order to protect the college; Bledsoe requests that the narrator be allowed to "continue undisturbed in [his] vain hopes [of returning to college] while remaining as far as possible from our midst." Emerson says that his father is a strict, unforgiving man and that he will not help the narrator, but he offers to secure the narrator a job at the Liberty Paints plant. The narrator leaves the office full of anger and a desire for revenge. He imagines Bledsoe requesting that Emerson "hope the bearer of this letter to death and keep him running." He calls the plant and is told to report to work the next morning.

CHAPTER 10

The narrator arrives at the Liberty Paints plant and is greeted by a sign that reads "keep America pure with liberty paints." The narrator learns that the factory makes paint for the government and that he is one of six "colored college boys" hired to replace union workers out on strike. Mr. Kimbro is the narrator's supervisor and he leads him to a long room filled with buckets of paint. Kimbro shows him how to do the job: he opens buckets filled with a foul milky brown substance and drips ten drops of another black chemical into them; then he stirs the buckets vigorously until the paint becomes glossy white; last he applies the paint to small rectangular wooden boards and waits for them to dry. If they dry brilliant white then the job has been done correctly. Kimbro boasts that the Optic White of Liberty Paints is the purest white that can be found anywhere and that it can cover up almost anything.

Kimbro asks the narrator to go to the tank room to get more black chemical when only a bit is left. In the room, the narrator is confused on seeing seven tanks marked by codes that he does not understand. He chooses one by scent and continues to mix and paint the tiles, but the tiles turn out sticky and gray instead of being hard and having a shine. When Kimbro checks it, he is furious at the narrator for putting

concentrated remover into the paint and thereby ruining some seventy-five buckets of paint. Kimbro fills the dropper with the correct chemical and leaves the narrator to his job. The paint samples still dry with a vague gray tinge, but Kimbro doesn't seem to notice.

Later, the narrator is sent to the furnace room to assist the engineer, Lucius Brockway. Brockway instructs the narrator to watch the pressure gauges on the boiler. Brockway is proud of his role as the maker of Optic White paint, the trademark color of the company, since he alone can mix the base for the paint correctly. The slogan for the colour is, "If It's Optic White, It's the Right White." The slogan reminds the narrator of an old Southern saying: "If you're White, you're right."

Lunchtime arrives, and the narrator returns to the locker room to retrieve his lunch, interrupting a union meeting. He is accused of being an informer by some members when they hear that he is Brockway's assistant. The men resolve to investigate the narrator and then allow him to retrieve his lunch. When Brockway finds out about the union meeting, he is angry with the narrator assuming that he too is a member of the union. He threatens to kill the narrator if he doesn't leave the plant. Following the narrator denial to the accusation, the two get into a physical fight in which Brockway has his teeth broken. The narrator notices the boilers hissing, and Brockway shouts for him to turn the valve in order to lower the pressure. The narrator doesn't have the strength to do so, however, and the boiler explodes. The narrator falls unconscious.

CHAPTER 11

When the narrator wakes up, he finds himself in the hospital. He sees a man-a doctor-with what appears to be a bright third eye glowing in the centre of his forehead. The narrator realizes that he is wearing a white pair of overalls. He loses consciousness again after the doctor gives him something to swallow. Later, he wakes on a cot to see the third eye burning into his own eye. The doctor asks him for his name, but the narrator can only think about his pain. The "pink-faced" doctors begin using electrical shock treatment on him. The narrator cannot remember how he came to be in the hospital. The doctors argue about how to proceed with the narrator: one wants to continue with the electrical shocks, while another believes that such means are rather primitive and argues that they wouldn't use electrical shocks on someone with a Harvard

or New England background. Someone even suggests castration, but the doctor in charge chooses to continue with the electric shocks. As the shocks hit the narrator, someone muses that he is dancing, noting that "they [Black people] really do have rhythm."

The narrator is unable to make sense of what the doctor is saying or asking him. They write their question down on a card: what is your name? The narrator realizes that he doesn't remember his name. The doctors bombard him with other written questions relating to his identity, but the narrator only stares back. The narrator learns that he is in the factory hospital. The doctors tell him that he is cured and should dress and sign some papers in order to receive his compensation check. The *director* of the hospital urges him to find a quieter, easier job, since he is not ready for the difficulties of factory work. The narrator asks whether the director knows Mr. Norton or Dr. Bledsoe, joking that they are old friends of his.

The narrator leaves the hospital feeling like an alien. Roaming around in state of inertia, he realizes that he no longer fears men like the trustees and Bledsoe. He wanders into the subway and sees a platinum blonde woman biting a red apple as the train heads for Harlem.

CHAPTER 12

The narrator exits the subway and collapses on the street. He is carried to the home of a kind Black woman named Mary. When he wakes, Mary asks him the reason for coming to New York City from the South. He replies that he wanted to be an educator. She cautions against the city's corrupting influence, She, too, came from the South and says, "I'm in New York, but New York ain't in me." When the narrator is about to go, Mary tells him that he should come back if he ever wants to rent a room somewhere besides the Men's House, adding that she offers a fair rent.

The narrator's white overalls draw hostile stares at the Men's House. He knows that he can no longer live there. As he is about to take an elevator, he takes note of a laughing man and mistakes him to be Dr. Bledsoe. He promptly empties a spittoon on the man's head but realizes that the man is a notable Baptist preacher. He escapes before anyone could catch him. He later persuades an amused porter to retrieve his belongings from inside the building and learns that the Men's House has banned him for

ninety-nine years and a day. The narrator takes a room at Mary's apartment but is irritated by her for she hopes that he will take up some leadership role in the Black community. The narrator begins to feel the desire for activism anyhow; within himself he feels a "spot of black anger." His old urge to give speeches returns as winter settles over New York.

CHAPTER 13

When the narrator comes across a street vendor selling baked yams, he becomes nostalgic and remembers the South. As he eats them, he feels totally free. As he imagines his classmates' being taken aback on seeing him with these emblems of Southern culture, he also derides them for moving away from all of the things that they in fact like: yams, chitterlings, and boiled hog's maws. He comes upon a crowd of people gathered to watch as an eviction takes place. The crowd regards this act of dispossession as a common happening. As White men drag household furnishings out of the house and drag a chair out with an old Black woman still sitting in it, the narrator can relate to the occurrence and identifies with the couple. In the spur of the moment, out of rage, he delivers an inciting speech that provokes the crowd to resist the eviction. People then carry the couple's belongings back into the building.

The police arrive, and the narrator flees. Later, he encounters a White man who compliments the narrator of his speech on the street and claims to be his friend. He takes the narrator to a coffeehouse and tries to persuade him to become a paid spokesperson for his political organization's Harlem branch. The narrator turns him down; the man tells him that his name is Brother Jack and gives him a phone number to call should he change his mind.

CHAPTER 14

When the narrator returns to Mary's home, he realizes that she has been keeping him and also feeding him for free since his compensation check from the factory ran out weeks earlier and it was now time to repay. So, he changes his mind and calls the number that Jack gave him and agrees to meet him on Lenox Avenue. He has then driven to a hotel called the Chthonian, where a cocktail party seems to be taking place. Jack introduces the narrator to his mistress, Emma, who whispers loud enough to Jack, "But don't you think he should be a little blacker?"

Jack explains that his organization, called the Brotherhood, focuses on social activism, banding together to fight for people who have been "dispossessed of their heritage". He says that the narrator will get some documents to read which will help him decide whether he wishes to join the organization.

The narrator accepts the position, and Jack informs him that he must change his name, move to an apartment provided by the organization, and be cut off from his past. In fact, Jack writes down the narrator's new name on a slip of paper and gives it to him, saying: "This is your new identity." He also gives the narrator money to pay his due rent and says that he will now get sixty dollars a week. The narrator returns to Mary's apartment late that night.

CHAPTER 15

The next morning, the narrator notices for the first time an object standing next to his door: a cast-iron coin bank in the form of a Black man with bright red lips. When one places a coin into the statue's hand and presses a lever on the back, the coin flips into the grinning mouth. The narrator breaks the statue in anger. Later, he cleans up the pieces, along with the coins that scatter on the floor. Embarrassed and reluctant to inform Mary about what he has done, he collects the pieces in an old newspaper and hides the package in his coat pocket. He pays his debt and leaves Mary's house without telling her that he will not return.

When the narrator throws the package into a garbage can outside, an old woman demands that he take his trash out of her can. He then leaves the package in the snow at an intersection, but a man, thinking that the narrator has left the package behind accidentally, follows him across the street and gives it back to him. The narrator finally drops the package into his briefcase and gets onto the subway. He notices people reading newspapers that declare in bold headlines: "Violent Protest Over Harlem Eviction." He is asked by Jack to go to his new apartment on the Upper East Side and read the literature left there for him. He is expected to give a speech at a Harlem rally scheduled for that evening.

CHAPTER 16

The narrator is taken to a rally, which is taking place in a former boxing ring, and is told to hold off his speech until the crowd be frantic and overexcited. The narrator

notices a torn photograph of a former prizefight champion who lost his vision during a rigged fight and later died in a home for the blind. As the narrator climbs the ramp to the stage, the spotlight blinds him temporarily. The crowd is shouting slogans: "No more dispossessing of the dispossessed!" As the narrator stands in front of the microphone, he is unable to see the audience due to the glare of the light falling on him. In his nervousness, he forgets all of the catchphrases that he had read in the literature of the Brotherhood and decides to improvise.

The narrator's speech plays on an extended metaphor of blindness and aligns itself along a dichotomy of "they" and "we." In his oratory, the narrator says that "they" have dispossessed each one of "us" of an eye. "We" walk down the sidewalks, he says, blind on one side, while an oily scoundrel in the middle of the street throws stones at "us." The narrator calls to the crowd to regain "our" sight and band together so that "we" might see both sides of the street. The audience applauds thunderously when he finishes. He steps blindly from the platform, stumbling into the arms of his admirers.

Afterward, some of the Brothers criticize his speech for its inflammatory, unscientific style. They decide to send the narrator to Brother Hambro to nurture his natural talent for speaking but infuse it with the rhetoric of the Brotherhood. The narrator returns home feeling like a new person, radically different from the boy expelled from college. Yet, in his moment of pride and triumph, memories of his grandfather fleetingly haunt him.

CHAPTER 17

After the narrator has studied the Brotherhood's ideology intensely for months, the committee votes to appoint him as chief spokesperson for the Harlem district. The narrator receives his own office and meets Tod Clifton, a black member of the executive committee, who informs him that Ras the Exhorter, a militant Black nationalist, remains the chief opponent of the Brotherhood in Harlem.

One day, the Brotherhood holds a rally in protest of what it deems to be racist eviction policies in Harlem. Ras and his followers disrupt the rally, and a brawl ensues. In the darkness of the night, the narrator has difficulty distinguishing his followers from those of Ras. He finds Clifton and Ras locked in an intense fight. Ras pulls a knife but decides to spare Clifton, citing their common skin color. He asks Clifton why he works

with the Brotherhood, in which black members constitute the minority, and accuses him of turning his back on his heritage. He insinuates that the Brotherhood lured Clifton with the promise of White women and warns that the White members of the Brotherhood will eventually betray the Black members.

The narrator begins calling Harlem community leaders for support in the Brotherhood's fight against unfair eviction. These leaders all fall in line behind the Brotherhood on the issue. The narrator's new name becomes well known in the community. He throws himself into his work, organizing marches and rallies. Yet he still has nightmares about Dr. Bledsoe, Lucius Brockway, and his grandfather, and he feels a profound split between his public and private selves.

CHAPTER 18

The narrator gets an unsigned and unstamped letter cautioning him not to "go too fast" and to remember that he is a Black man in a White world. He asks Brother Tarp, another Black member, if he is disliked by anyone. Tarp assures him that he is supported by all and asks the narrator if he comes from the South. Brother Tarp tells the narrator about his imprisonment for more than 19 years because he dared to say "No" to a White man, and he gives the narrator a link from the chain he was forced to wear as an inmate. Another Black member of the group, Brother Wrestrum, glimpses the link of the iron chain on the narrator's desk and suggests that he put it away because it "dramatizes" the racial differences in the Brotherhood. Wrestrum suggests that some members of the Brotherhood hold racist attitudes, but the narrator pays no attention to him. Wrestrum then suggests Brotherhood members could wear an emblem so that the Brothers can recognize their own members and narrates an incident where Tod Clifton beat up a White Brother during a street brawl after mistaking him to be one of the ruffians at the rally.

Then, a magazine editor calls the office to request an interview with the narrator. The narrator tries to convince the editor to interview Clifton instead, but the editor mentions the narrator's favourable public image. Though the narrator emphasizes how every Brother is a cog in the machine, each sacrificing personal ambitions for the benefit of the whole organization, he is encouraged by Wrestrum. Partly to spite Brother Wrestrum, he agrees to give the interview. About two weeks later, the narrator is shocked to learn that Brother Wrestrum has filed charges against him, accusing him of

being an opportunist. The disciplinary committee revokes the narrator's leadership role as spokesman for the Harlem District and puts him in charge of the *Woman Question.* Angry and humiliated, the narrator leaves Harlem without saying goodbye to anyone. Although disappointed, the narrator decides to dedicate himself fully to his new assignment. He packs his papers into his briefcase and leaves.

CHAPTER 19

After the narrator's first lecture as a women's rights activist, a White woman invites him into her home to discuss the Brotherhood's ideology. But she, being a neglected wife, seduces him and the two end up in bed together. Later in the night, the woman's husband comes home but only bothers to say goodnight to his wife, who sleeps in a separate bedroom. The narrator, horrified, dresses and rushes from the building, unsure of whether he dreamed the husband, and incredulous that the husband seemed not to notice him. He vows never to get himself into such a situation again.The Brotherhood summons the narrator to an emergency meeting. He is told that he will be transferred back to Harlem and that Clifton has disappeared.

CHAPTER 20

Back in Harlem, the narrator visits his old haunts, a bar. When he recognizes two men who have attended some of his speeches and addresses them as "brother", he gets a hostile reaction. He learns that many of the jobs that the Brotherhood procured for Harlem residents have disappeared and that these men too have left the organization. When he returns to his old office to look for Brother Tarp, he is unable to find anyone in the building. He discovers that Harlem membership in the Brotherhood has declined due to a change in the Brotherhood's emphasis from local issues to national and international concerns.

The narrator then waits to be called to the strategy meeting that Brother Jack mentioned, but never gets a call. When he reaches the headquarters, the meeting already in progress. The narrator realizes that he was intentionally not included. Furious, he leaves the building and goes to shop for shoes. He spots Clifton peddling "Sambo" dolls in the street. (The American stereotype of "Sambo" dates back to the time of slavery, denoting a docile but irresponsible, loyal but lazy, slave.) Clifton sings out a jingle while the dolls dance in a loose-limbed motion. The narrator feels betrayed. Then, some

police officers coming toward Clifton and sweeps up his Sambo dolls, and runs around the corner. The narrator spots one of the dolls left behind and seeing one of the policemen nearby, he keeps it in his briefcase. As he is walking away, he sees a huge crowd gathered at another corner. Clifton stands in the midst of it, flanked by policemen. The narrator then sees Clifton strike one of the officers, and the officer draws his gun and shoots Clifton dead.

CHAPTER 21

In a state of shock, the narrator comes back to Harlem. The memory of Clifton's death and of the black doll continues to haunt him. Once he reaches his office, he tries to make the doll dance. AT that moment, young Brotherhood members come to him asking about Clifton's death. The narrator corroborates the story. Having received no message from the headquarters, he gathers the members to stage a funeral march for Clifton and sends some women to claim the body from the morgue. He informs the community church of the funeral and publicizes Clifton's untimely, unnecessary death. The community, at the time of the march, is stirred to anger. Hundreds of former members of the Brotherhood show up to for the march and the narrator delivers a sobering speech. He hopes that members of the Brotherhood will make the most of this tension in the crowd to regain their standing and influence in the Harlem community.

CHAPTER 22

When the narrator returns to his office, Brother Jack and the other committee members are waiting for him. They are annoyed and furious about the narrator associating the Brotherhood with the protest of Clifton's death without the committee's approval. Jack tells the narrator that he was hired not to think but only to talk and say what the Brotherhood tells him to say. The Brotherhood officially regards Clifton as a traitor to the organization's ideals and would never have endorsed the eulogy that the narrator gave.

The narrator replies that the Black community has accused the Brotherhood itself of betrayal. But Jack says that the Brotherhood tells the community what to think. The narrator accuses Jack of trying to be the "great white father". Just then, one of Jack's eyes-a false one-pops out of his head into a drinking glass on the narrator's desk. He tells the narrator that he lost the eye while doing his duty, stating that his personal sacrifice proves

his loyalty to the Brotherhood and its ideals. Further, Jack instructs the narrator to see Brother Hambro (a White member of the organization) to learn the Brotherhood's new programme.

CHAPTER 23

The Harlem community's outrage over Clifton's death continues to build. The narrator passes Ras while he is giving a speech against the Brotherhood. Two of Ras's followers have a brawl with the narrator, but the narrator escapes. In an attempt to disguise himself and protect himself from further physical attack, the narrator purchases a pair of sunglasses with dark green lenses. But he is now addressed as "Rinehart." As he makes his way back to Ras's meeting, several people, including a woman, a prostitute, and those waiting for a "spiritual technologist", address him as "Rinehart" again. The narrator finally reaches the apartment of Brother Hambro, who informs him that the Brotherhood intends to sacrifice its influence in the Harlem community to pursue other, wider political goals. The narrator exits in anger and decides to follow his grandfather's advice: he will "yes, agree, and grin the Brotherhood to death". He plans to assure the Brotherhood's members that the community stands in full agreement with their new policy and to fill out false membership cards to inflate the Brotherhood's Harlem membership. He also plans to discover the committee's real goals by cultivating a relationship with a woman close to one of the Brotherhood's important leaders. He thinks that perhaps he should try Emma, Jack's mistress.

CHAPTER 24

At a slight goading, people gather in Harlem and turn violent, smashing windows and clashing with others. Ras further agitates the pointless violence. The narrator sends out Brotherhood members to disrupt the violence and even condemns the press for exaggerating minor incidents. He reports at the Brotherhood headquarters that the Harlem branch has initiated a clean-up campaign to distract the people from Tod Clifton's death. He also lies to them that Harlem has begun to quiet down and hands them a false list of new members. The Brotherhood fails to detect the narrator's deception.

The narrator decides to use Sybil, a neglected wife of one of the Brotherhood members, who had once shown interest in him, to find out more about the goals of the

Brotherhood. But he is not successful. Suddenly, the narrator receives a panicky call from the Brotherhood in Harlem, asking him to come immediately. A riot erupts in Harlem and when the narrator encounters a group of looters, he is given contradicting stories about what caused the initial outbreak.

CHAPTER 25

The narrator finds out that Ras is provoking the violence and destruction. He also realizes that the Brotherhood had planned the race riots all along, deliberately ceding power to Ras and allowing Harlem to fall into mass chaos. He is caught up in one rioter's plans to burn down a tenement building and as he flees from the burning building, he realizes that he has left his briefcase inside. He dives back into the flames to find his briefcase. Continuing his run through the chaos, he reaches a looted building where mannequins are hanging. He finds Ras, dressed in the costume of an Abyssinian chieftain and riding a black horse, calling for his followers to attack the narrator and kill him for being a traitor. The narrator escapes from there but encounters two police officers in the street, who ask to see the contents of his briefcase. He runs and falls through an open manhole into a coal cellar. The police mock him and put the manhole cover back in place, trapping him underground.

In order to provide himself with light, the narrator burns the items in his briefcase one by one. These include his high school diploma and Clifton's doll. He finds the slip of paper on which Jack had written his new Brotherhood name and also comes across the anonymous threatening letter. As the papers burn to ashes, he realizes that the handwriting on both is identical. He sleeps and dreams of Jack, Emerson, Bledsoe, Norton, and Ras. The men mock him, castrate him, and declare that they have stripped him of his illusions. He wakes with their cries of anguish and fury ringing in his ears. He decides to stay underground and affirms, "The end was in the beginning."

EPILOGUE

The narrator concludes his story by saying that he has narrated all of the important parts. "I'm an invisible man and it placed me in a hole-or showed me the hole I was in, if you will-and I reluctantly accepted the fact." He doesn't know if his decision to stay underground has pushed him at the back of social activism or in the avant-garde. He decides to leave that question to people such as Jack while attempting to study the

lessons of his own life.

He feels that that he was hated the most when he was very honest and was loved when he endorsed the misguided beliefs of others. So now he plans to escape the dilemma by becoming invisible. He has found a secret room in a closed-off section of a basement. He, however, keeps thinking of his grandfather's advice to "agree 'em to death," noting that his attempt to say "yes" to the Brotherhood ended only in a farce. The narrator then begins to reconsider the meaning of his grandfather's words, wondering if his grandfather's "yes" was meant as an affirmation of the principles on which the country was built rather than of the men who corrupted its name. Perhaps by saying "yes," his grandfather meant to take responsibility for society's evils and thus transcend them. Then, the narrator declares the end of his hibernation: he must shake off his old skin and come up for breath. Even the disembodied voice of an invisible man, he asserts, has social responsibility.

15.4. FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The narrator spots Clifton peddling _____ dolls in the street.
2. The narrator is addressed as_____ when he disguises himself to escape Ras.
3. The narrator is offered to become a paid spokesperson for a political organization called _____
4 Rather than expel the narrator outright, Bledsoe tells him to go to _____ for the summer and work to earn his year's tuition.
5. It is at _____ that narrator finally finds a job after coming to the North.
6. The white paint produced by the plant where the narrator works is named as _____
7. _____ was the game in which the narrator and his mates participate after their graduation speech.

15.5. SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Write a short note on the metaphor of blindness as presented in the novel.
2. Compare and contrast Tod Clifton and the narrator.
3. Is the mood at the end of the novel hopeful or defeated? Explain your answer.
4. Do you think the title of the novel is justified?

15.6. ANSWER KEY

Fill in the Blanks: Sombo, Rinehart, Brotherhood, New York, Liberty Paints Plant, Optic White, royal battle

Short Answer Questions: The metaphor of blindness: The novel, as the highest exponent of the Afro American movement, made society aware of the necessity to eradicate racism. Presenting the concepts of blindness and invisibility, these authors face the reader to the complex nature of this problem and its subjacent factors. Blindness is not only a matter of whites and invisibility a matter of blacks, blacks and whites can be mutually blind and invisible. While whites are blind because they conceive blacks as a mass rather than as individuals, blacks are blind for submitting to their inferiority and for not conceiving any white exception as an individual being. During the speech in *Invisible Man,* the narrator and the audience also manifest these conditions. Another point is that they portray blindness as a matter of self-perception, of how people regard their actions. Moreover, the blindfolded boys from the Battle Royal are blind for not recognizing their humiliation. In *Invisible Man* blindness and invisibility are often represented by metaphors and symbols. The passage of the Battle Royal when the whites blindfold the boys resembles this idea in a very clear way.

15.7. LET US SUM UP

Having gone through the chapter summaries, *Invisible Man* is the story of a young, college educated black man struggling to survive and succeed in a racially divided society that refuses to see him as a human being. Told in the form of a first-person narrative, *Invisible Man* traces the nameless narrator's physical and psychological

journey from blind ignorance to enlightened awareness or, according to the author, "from Purpose to Passion to Perception" through a series of flashbacks in the forms of dreams and memories. Set in the US during the pre-Civil Rights era when segregation laws barred the Black Americans from enjoying the same basic human rights as their White counterparts, the novel opens in the South (Greenwood, South Carolina), although the majority of the action takes place in the North (Harlem, New York).

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 16
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-IV

THE INVISIBLE MAN - RALPH ELLISON

STRUCTURE

16.1. INTRODUCTION

The Invisible Man is unique not only in the literary world for its improvisational jazz-inspired style, but also in the political world for adding a new voice to the discussion about Blacks in America. However, the novel's *rejection* of an absolute ideology in general is a central theme, which explains why *Invisible Man* wasn't exactly a hit among influential Black thinkers in 1960s during the Civil Rights Movement.

16.2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to discuss the novel extensively but in a comprehensive manner. Through a deeper reading of the novel, the lesson underscores several ideologies in the novel that Ellison has depicted and explains the themes as the plot develops

through the chapters.

16.3. DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

An element of ambiguity, both emotional and moral, is added by the confession of the grandfather. The narrator goes deeper into the realm of self-doubt and gets further entangled in the web of identity crisis. However, the reader never discovers whom the grandfather feels he has betrayed: himself, his family, his ancestors, future generations, or perhaps his race as a whole. The grandfather advises the family to maintain two identities: on the outside they should embody the stereotypical good slaves, behaving just as their former masters wish; on the inside, however, they should retain their bitterness and resentment against this imposed false identity. By following this model, the grandfather's descendants can refuse internally to accept second-class status, protect their own self-respect, and avoid betraying themselves or each other.

The use of masks or role-playing as a method of subterfuge becomes increasingly important later in the novel. As others aggressively attack the individual's sense of self, the mask becomes a form of defense. Initially, obedience to the Whites wins him admiration but, at the same time, the Whites take advantage of his docility, degrading him and humiliating him from time to time. The royal battle underscores the tension between obedience and rebellion and stretches the motifs of blindness and masks. The boys' literal blindfolding in the ring parallels the men's metaphorical blindness as they watch the fight, and also as they believe and try to fit into the stereotypes. The blindfolds also represent the boys' own metaphorical blindness-their inability to see through the false masks of goodwill that barely conceal the men's racist motives as they force the boys to conform to the racial stereotype of the black man as a violent, savage, oversexed beast.

Ellison questions the accepted beliefs through the narrator's speech, that of nineteenth-century Black educator and writer Booker T. Washington. Although the narrator never actually names Washington directly, his speech contains long quotations from the great reformer's Atlanta Exposition Address of 1895. Washington's programme for the advancement of Black Americans stressed upon industrial education. It was believed that the Blacks, rather than shouting for political and civil rights, should channelize their energy toward achieving economic success, which would thereby ensure equality. However,

successful Black businessman, after all, proved as vulnerable to racial prejudice as the poor, uneducated sharecropper. This is brought out in the novel through the White men's reaction to the narrator's slip in substituting "social equality" for "social responsibility".

As the narrator ages and matures, however, he develops new conceptions of race relations and come to new understandings of how to assert his own identity within and against these relations. In portraying this evolution, *Invisible Man* enters into the genre of the bildungsroman (a German word meaning "novel of formation"), where the fiction portrays a young person's education and early experience and shows the moral and intellectual growth that transforms him or her into an adult. One might best consider it a kind of existential bildungsroman, combining the story of a young man's progress in the world with an anguished and far-reaching exploration of race, society, and identity.

With the character of Mr. Norton, the novel introduces another instance of the White's arrogance and snobbery and self-glorification being posed as generosity and philanthropy. Norton's interest in the college stems more from self-interest than more a genuine desire to improve the lives of the Back Americans. Earlier, in the car, he tells the narrator, "You are my fate" (Chapter 2). Norton never concedes to the narrator the right to claim his fate as his own; instead, their fates become one, with Norton claiming ownership over both. Norton's influence over the lives of the black students remains an insidious one; he exerts power over them while appearing to empower them. This element of deception and illusion reintroduces Ellison's motif of invisibility and blindness.

Meanwhile, Dr. Bledsoe proves to have mastered the game of masquerading. Domineering and forceful towards the narrator, he becomes appeasing and submissive with Mr. Norton. When the narrator tried to clarify that he drove Norton to the old slave quarters because he was ordered to do so, Bledsoe retorts: "Damn what he wants. We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see." The narrator learns, to his shock, that the surface appearance of humble servility in fact constitutes a mere mask under which Bledsoe manipulates and deceives powerful White donors to his advantage.

It is essential for Bledsoe to ensure that the mask over the White people is not removed and hence gets rid of him by sending him off to New York. Moreover, the proposition to get the narrator hired in New York soon becomes clear and constitutes an

act of deception in itself. Though Bledsoe has no intention of helping the narrator, the narrator continues to trust in Bledsoe, illustrating that he has still not fully learned to look underneath the surface and takes things at face value.

While reprimanding the narrator for his recklessness with Norton, Bledsoe toys with an antique slave shackle, noting that it symbolizes African-American progress. By the end of these chapters, however, Bledsoe's shackle becomes a symbol of continuing enslavement to multiple forms of blindness. The narrator, on the other hand, seeks to break free from the power structure that exists in American society, hence his journey to the North. New York immediately presents itself as a world vastly different from that of the South and at times making it impossible for the narrator to escape from the reminders of the South that continue to haunt him just as the prejudices continue to cross his path.

The narrator's encounter with Ras the Exhorter, whose inflammatory call for the Black Harlem residents to drive out the Whites later gets him lynched in the South, becomes yet another source of enlightenment for him. Ras's ideology of the Black nationalism and of complete distrust of white people is wholly new to the naïve narrator. Bledsoe's betrayal of the narrator seems initially to put Ras's philosophy of complete distrust for the Whites into question, as it overlooks the fact that the Blacks can betray the Blacks.

The narrator's experiences at the Liberty Paints Plant give Ellison the chance to deflate a social and historical myth prevalent since before the Civil War-that of the North as the land of freedom for the Black Americans. Seemingly, the North propagates its own racist social structure, which the narrator discovers in the second half of the novel. The Liberty Paints Plant serves as an extended metaphor for racial prejudice in America. The factory's authorities, with their slogans emphasizing concepts of whiteness and purity, infer the moral superiority of their whiteness. The inclusion of "Liberty" in the factory's name stresses upon the widely held notions supposedly founded on "liberty" and equality but in fact, ironically, advocating more freedom for the individuals it deems worthiest-who are not Blacks. Ellison also criticizes the racial inequality perpetuated by the social and political structures that operate within American companies and thus within American capitalism.

In the hospital, the narrator's experiences mark an important transition in the novel. Having forgotten his past, even his name, the narrator is metaphorically being born again. With no father or mother, he is left to fend for himself, a hard reality of the world, in fact. Moreover, he is free to create and define his own identity instead of adorning the one imposed on him from the outside. It begins a new phase of his life.

Even in the hospital, the doctors exhibit their racist attitude when they suggest of castrating the narrator. Symbolically, to castrate someone is to strip him of his power, to strip him of his ability to leave a genetic legacy; a systematic castration of all the Black males would be tantamount to genocide. The idea of castration echoes the accidental sterilization of the Founder, another nameless Black man who has been transformed into a stereotype.

Later, in joining the Brotherhood the narrator stands poised to abandon his heritage once again. By granting the narrator membership in a social and political movement, the Brotherhood temptingly revives his dreams of living a life of social significance. Additionally, the narrator's position within the organization provides him with the opportunity to do what he loves most impassioned public speaking. However, it soon becomes clear that the Brotherhood is using the narrator as a means toward its own ends. But here again he is confined to being the race's symbol-he should be "blacker"-and an object to be showcased for a cause. The Brotherhood calls on the narrator to assume a new identity and to break with his past, and he does so without resistance. That the hotel where the meeting takes place is named the Chthonian, a term that refers to the gods of the Greek underworld, symbolizes the sinister nature of the Brotherhood's intentions.

Then, the episode with the coin bank, coming immediately after the narrator's decision to join the Brotherhood, seems to foreshadow a troubling relationship between the narrator and the Brotherhood.

In his speech at the rally later the narrator uses an extended metaphor of blindness to elucidate oppression. Blindness seems to have been the dividing line even among the oppressed people: the college's faculty and students disowned Jim Trueblood because of their blind allegiance to an ideology; Bledsoe betrays the narrator for the same reason. Brockway betrays the union due to his fear of losing his job and his naïve faith in the

ability of White power structures to help him maintain his position. Meanwhile, the union refuses to allow the narrator to speak for himself, and does so out of its own utter distrust of the black Brockway. The narrator urges the people to end the blindness that leads to interracial divisions but his own speech becomes ironic when the reader discovers that he cannot even see his audience; he becomes a blind leader of a blind audience.

The narrator believes that his joining the Brotherhood is in the interest of Black Americans but he is disowned by the former members of the Harlem branch when he attempts to strike up a friendly conversation. They see his continued membership in the Brotherhood as a betrayal of the Black community. On the other hand, the narrator himself feels betrayed, first when he discovers Clifton selling the Sambo dolls and later when he learns that the Brotherhood has deliberately excluded him from their strategy meeting. Towards the end, the narrator begins to understand that he cannot fight the White power structure by working within it. He will have to step out and then assert his identity. It is Rinehart that comes across as the strangest and most ambiguous figures in *Invisible Man;* though he never appears in the flesh, he serves as a powerful symbol of the idea of a protean or shape-shifting sense of identity, against which the narrator's own fragile sense of identity can be compared. Rinehart is all things to all people, and those individuals whom the narrator encounters while he wears his sunglasses impose a variety of identities upon him. This fluidity of character plays a major role in the narrator's crucial realization that he is invisible-that he has never had a self because he has always adopted a self given to him by others. He vows that, though he may remain invisible to others, he will from that moment forward be visible to himself.

Although the narrator has sensed that the Brotherhood kept secrets from him, he now recognizes that he has fallen victim to a hugely tragic deception. He realizes that his allegiance to the Brotherhood has rendered him a traitor twice: not only did he betray his heritage by working for a racist group, but he also played an active role in the group's plan to destroy New York's Black community. The narrator has been used as an abstract symbol by the Brotherhood. The narrator's encounter with Ras in the end testifies to the influence of the French existentialists on *Invisible Man.* Faced with the prospect of death, the narrator decides in a climactic moment that he would rather live out his own "absurdity" than die for someone else's. The narrator's realization of the world's absurdity prepares him to write his memoirs and eventually cast off his invisibility at the end of the Epilogue.

At the end of the novel, the narrator's story has come full circle: the novel begins and ends with his underground life. The story's cyclical nature, along with the narrator's claim that his time of hibernation is over, implies that the narrator stands poised for a kind of rebirth. During his period of hibernation, the narrator has studied his experiences and has sought to define the meaning of experience for himself, to define his own identity without interference from others. He rejects the idea that a single ideology can constitute an entire way of being; a perfect society created according to a single ideology would necessary limit the complexity of each individual, for each individual constitutes a multitude of various strands, and a society of individuals must necessarily mirror this diversity. As the novel draws to a close, the narrator remains bewildered regarding his own identity but determined to honor his individual complexity and his obligations to society as an individual.

16.4. FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. The protagonist is invisible because _____

2. He is not ashamed that his grandparents were _____

3. A sea of faces stood around and a magnificent blond was _____

4. His oration on graduation said that what was the secret? _____

16.5. SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Explore the significance of the tokens the narrator collects throughout the novel (the diploma, the Brotherhood membership, the anonymous letter, the broken bank, and the paper doll puppet). Trace the growth of the narrator using these mementos.

2. When does the narrator begin to see the weaknesses of the Brotherhood, and why?

3. To what extent is the narrator's sense of self bound to a racial identity?

16.6. ANSWER KEY

Blanks: people can't see him; slaves; naked; Calculus

Short Answer: 3) Identity in *Invisible Man* is a conflict between self-perception and the projection of others, as seen through one man's story: the nameless narrator. His true identity, he realizes, is in fact invisible to those around him. Only by intentionally isolating himself from society can he grapple with and come to understand himself. Most of the narrator's difficulties throughout the novel are associated with his race. *The Invisible Man* is a novel aimed at transcending race and all the other ways humanity has used to categorize people. For a long time, the narrator's identity is defined by his race, leading to his invisibility. Though several forms of black politics are depicted in the novel, including conservative progress, Black nationalism and communism, but *The Invisible Man* rejects all forms of ideology, arguing that ideology misses the trees for the forest, so to speak. In other words, the idea that ideology focuses too much on the collective at the expense of the individual. It promotes a political philosophy of appealing to the emotional individual.

16.7. LET US SUM UP

The narrator, also called the Invisible Man, is the protagonist and central figure of the book. The antagonist is racism in the United States. At times the racism is embodied by different characters in the novel, some overtly and others subtly. Also, the racism is symbolized by organizations and institutions which claim to have the interests of black people at their center. The novel reaches its climax when the narrator loses all his illusions about life and success in the world. This disillusionment is most easily traced in his relationship with the Brotherhood, an organization that he gradually comes to realize has used and betrayed him. This climax is actually a series of small disillusionments that culminate in a final catastrophic scene of understanding that takes place underground in a manhole. Here, the narrator sees for the first time all the things that have been holding him back and causing him to fail.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 17
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-IV

THE INVISIBLE MAN - RALPH ELLISON

STRUCTURE

17.1. INTRODUCTION

The major theme of *The Invisible Man* is the necessity to construct a personal identity in a divided society. Ellison builds this theme on the assumption that in a racist country, blacks are granted no true identity; instead, they are merely the receptors of the projections of the white man's fantasies and fears. The novel demonstrates the process by which the narrator came to the realization that he and other blacks are invisible and as such cannot ever succeed by playing according to white rules. The task of the narrator upon realizing he is invisible is to figure out how to proceed from that realization responsibly. He does not want to withdraw altogether from the world. He

also does not want to engage with it on the false basis that he has in the past, when he was blind to his invisibility.

17.2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to bring out various themes in the novel and to highlight some of the hardest questions that the novel raises about racism in the United States through the long-honored tradition of skepticism and unflinching rationality.

17.3. THEMES

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

RACISM AND INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

The narrator of *The Invisible Man*, throughout the novel, is struggling hard to attain a sense of unified identity. The crisis of identity is complicated by the fact that he is a Black man living in a racist American society. As the narrator passes through a series of communities, from the Liberty Paints plant to the Brotherhood, the reader finds how each microcosm endorses a different idea of how Blacks should behave in society. While the narrator is attempting to find a definition for himself through the values and expectations imposed on him, he realizes that social roles are already prescribed which confines his individuality and compels him to be inauthentic.

Having come to New York, the narrator steps into a new world, that of the Liberty Paints Plant, which offers him financial support by subverting blackness in the service of a brighter White. During that period, the narrator realizes that the White depends heavily on the Black-both in terms of the mixing of the paint tones and in terms of the racial make-up of the workforce. Yet, the factory denies this dependence in the final presentation of its product, and the narrator, as a Black man, ends up feeling muffled and throttled. Later, when the narrator joins the organization called Brotherhood, he begins to believe that he can fight for racial equality by working within the ideology of the organization, but he then realizes that the Brotherhood seeks to use him as a token Black man in its abstract project.

Finally, the narrator feels that the racial prejudice of others causes them to see

him only as they want to see him, and their limited of vision in turn places limitations on his ability to act. He concludes that he is invisible, in the sense that the world is filled with blind people who cannot or will not see his real nature. Correspondingly, he remains unable to act according to his own personality and fails to be himself literally. Initially, the narrator surrenders and accepts his invisibility-when he falls into a manhole. He feels that it is only by being invisible can he counter and break the stereotypes. However, in the end he seems to acknowledge that being passive is not the solution. He decides to come out from his underground "hibernation," and contribute in his own way to society as a complex individual. He will once again make an effort to exercise his power upon the world outside of society's system of prescribed roles. He will make others acknowledge his existence, and accept his beliefs and behaviours, even if they do not match the expectations of the masses.

IDEOLOGY AND THE STEREOTYPES

Over the course of the happenings in the novel, the narrator is acquainted with his complex inner self and realizes that his individuality is confined to not just the concept of racism held by the people but also other ideologies that have created stereotypes within which a person is defined and judged. He discovers that the social institutions propagate ideologies that prove to be too simplistic and linear and, therefore, cannot suffice to define a concept as complicated and multidimensional as a human identity. The novel contains many examples of ideology, from the tamer, ingratiating ideology of Booker T. Washington subscribed to at the narrator's college to the more violent, separatist ideology voiced by Ras the Exhorter. But the narrative marks its point most strongly in its presentation of the Brotherhood. As part of the Brotherhood, the narrator finds an ideology that promises to save "the people", though, in reality, it consistently limits and betrays the freedom of the very individual it sets out to liberate from the shackles of society's stereotypes. The novel implies that life is too rich, too various, and too unpredictable to be bound up neatly in any single ideology. *Life has its moments of improvisation and surprise.*

The narrator is not the only African American in the novel to have felt the limitations of racist stereotyping. While he tries to escape the grip of prejudice on an individual level, he encounters other Blacks who attempt to prescribe a defense strategy

for all African Americans. Each presents a theory of the supposed right way to be a Black in America and tries to outline how Blacks should act in accordance with this theory. The Brotherhood believed that anyone who contradicts its prescribed ways and counters its ways is betraying the whole race. The narrator realizes that one stereotype is countered by another stereotype.

Early in the novel, the narrator's grandfather explains his belief that in order to challenge and ridicule racism, Blacks should exaggerate their servility to Whites. The narrator's college, represented by Dr. Bledsoe, thinks that Blacks can best achieve success by working industriously and adopting the manners and speech of the Whites. Ras the Exhorter thinks that Blacks should rise up and take their freedom by destroying the Whites. Although all of these conceptions arise from within the Black community itself, the novel implies that they ultimately prove as dangerous as White people's racist stereotypes. By seeking to define their identity within a race in too limited a way, Black figures such as Bledsoe and Ras aim to empower themselves but ultimately undermine their own race. Instead of exploring their own identities, as the narrator struggles to do throughout the book, Bledsoe and Ras consign themselves and their people to formulaic roles. These men consider treacherous anyone who attempts to act outside their formulae of blackness. But as blacks who seek to restrict and choreograph the behavior of the black American community as a whole, it is men like these who most profoundly betray their people.

17.4. SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLISM

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colours used to represent abstract ideas or concepts. Ralph Ellison is a master of poetic devices and incorporates numerous symbols and *archetypes* (universal symbols) into his novel, each providing a different perspective on the narrative and yet supplementing the dominant themes of invisibility and identity.

THE SAMBO DOLL AND THE COIN BANK

The coin bank in the shape of the grinning Black man and Tod Clifton's dancing Sambo doll serve similar objectives in the novel, each representing the degrading Black stereotypes and the damaging power of prejudice. The coin bank, which portrays a

grinning slave who eats coins, embodies the idea of a Black slave who flatters the White men for petty monetary returns. This stereotype literally follows the narrator, for even after he has smashed the figure, he is unable to discard the debris, as various characters return to him the packet in which the pieces are wrapped. Moreover, the statue's quick swallow of coins is suggestive of the behaviour of the Black youths in the "battle royal", as they scramble to collect the coins on the electrified rug, reinforcing the White stereotype of the Blacks as toadying slaves, greedy for money.

The Sambo doll is made in the image of the Sambo slave, who, according to the White's stereotype, acts lazy yet obsequious. Moreover, as a dancing doll, it represents the negative stereotype of the black entertainer who laughs and sings for the Whites. While the coin bank illustrates the power of stereotype to follow a person in his or her every movement, the Sambo doll illustrates stereotype's power to control a person's movements altogether. Stereotype and prejudice, like the invisible strings by which the doll is made to move, often determine and manipulate the range of action of which a person is capable.

THE LIBERTY PAINTS PLANT

The Liberty Paints plant serves as a complex metaphor for American society as far as racism is concerned. Like America, it defines itself with notions of liberty and freedom but incorporates a deeply ingrained racism in its most central operations. Ellison makes his statements about colour literal through the portrayal of a factory that produces paint. Thus, when the factory authorities boast of the superiority of their white paint, their statements appear as parodies of arguments about white supremacy. With the plant's claim that its trademark "Optic White" can cover up any tint or stain, Ellison points out American society's intentions to paint the Black identity with the culture of the Whites, to cover up the difference that exists between the two races and cultures, and to treat darker-skinned individuals as "stains" upon white "purity."

Optic White is made through a process that involves the mixture of a number of dark-coloured chemicals, one of which is coded as "dead black". But through the right mixing, the dark colours disappear into the churning, and the paint emerges a gleaming white, showing no trace of its true components. Similarly, the labour relations within the plant manifest a similar pattern: the Blacks perform all of the crucial labour,

while the White people sell the paint and make the highest wages, never acknowledging their reliance upon their darker-skinned counterparts. This dynamic, too, seems to mirror a larger one at work within America as a whole.

DREAMS

Dreams and visions hint at the power of the subconscious mind. In the novel, numerous dreams and visions symbolize the narrator's retreat from reality, seeking solace in memories of his childhood or days at the college, often occurring as he escapes into his music. Ellison merges dreams and reality to underscore the surrealistic nature of the narrator's experience and to highlight the gross disparities between the realities of the Black's life and the myth of the American Dream.

MACHINE SYMBOLISM

Through frequent references to "the man in the machine" (the first occurs in Chapter 2, where Trueblood dreams that he is trapped inside the clock), Ellison emphasizes the stark contrasts between the agricultural South, with its farms and plantations, and the industrial North, with its factories and steel structures. This image is particularly powerful in Chapters 11 and 12, which focus on the Liberty Paint Factory and the factory hospital. The narrator is trapped inside the glass and metal box. In the final dream sequence, the bridge (the "machine") becomes a man and walks away. Machine symbolism emphasizes the destruction of the individual by industry and technology, highlighting the lack of empathy and emotion in a society where people are indifferent to the needs of others.

17.5. MOTIFS

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

BLINDNESS

Probably the most important motif in *The Invisible Man* is that of blindness, which recurs throughout the novel and generally represents how people willfully avoid seeing and confronting the truth. The narrator repeatedly notes that people's inability to see what they wish not to see ‘their inability to see that which their prejudice doesn't

allow them to see' has forced him into a life of effective invisibility. But prejudice against others is not the only kind of blindness in the book. Many figures also refuse to acknowledge truths about themselves or their communities, and this refusal emerges consistently in the imagery of blindness. Thus, the boys who fight in the "battle royal" wear blindfolds, symbolizing their powerlessness to recognize their exploitation at the hands of the white men. The Founder's statue at the college has empty eyes, signifying his ideology's stubborn neglect of racist realities. Blindness also afflicts Reverend Homer A. Barbee, who romanticizes the Founder, and Brother Jack, who is revealed to lack an eye-a lack that he has dissimulated by wearing a glass eye. The narrator himself experiences moments of blindness, such as in Chapter 16 when he addresses the black community under enormous, blinding lights. In each case, failure of sight corresponds to a lack of insight.

INVISIBILITY

Because he has decided that the world is full of blind men and sleepwalkers who cannot see him for what he is, the narrator describes himself as an "invisible man." The motif of invisibility pervades the novel, often manifesting itself hand in hand with the motif of blindness-one person becomes invisible because another is blind. While the novel almost always portrays blindness in a negative light, it treats invisibility much more ambiguously. Invisibility can bring disempowerment, but it can also bring freedom and mobility. Indeed, it is the freedom the narrator derives from his anonymity that enables him to tell his story. Moreover, both the veteran at the Golden Day and the narrator's grandfather seem to endorse invisibility as a position from which one may safely exert power over others, or at least undermine others' power, without being caught. The narrator demonstrates this power in the Prologue, when he literally draws upon electrical power from his hiding place underground; the electric company is aware of its losses but cannot locate their source. At the end of the novel, however, the narrator has decided that while invisibility may bring safety, actions undertaken in secrecy cannot ultimately have any meaningful impact. One may undermine one's enemies from a position of invisibility, but one cannot make significant changes to the world. Accordingly, in the Epilogue the narrator decides to emerge from his hibernation, resolved to face society and make a visible difference.

17.6. FILL IN THE BLANKS

1. Reverend Barbee praises the founder who is _____
2. Brother Jack has a false _____
3. Clifton controls _____ through string
4. The narrator receives _____ as a naive kid
5. The narrator lives _____

17.7. SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What is "the principle"? How does the narrator's understanding of his grandfather's words change over time?
2. Is the ending optimistic or pessimistic?
3. Write a brief note on the character of Brother Jack.

17.8. ANSWER KEY

Blanks: blind; left eye; dolls; briefcase; underground

Character sketch of Brother Jack: Brother Jack, our main contact with the Brotherhood is a pretty mysterious character. A white male, he easily enters the narrator's life and offers him a ton of opportunities off the bat: money, a job, and the chance to represent his community. However, there are many, many strings attached to the benefits that the narrator accrues through working for the Brotherhood. Brother Jack demands that the narrator renounce his past, focus on the collective, and use abstract jargon and ideology in his speeches. Although he professes to be in favor of racial equality, when the Brotherhood shifts its aims, Brother Jack willingly sacrifices the Harlem community without batting an eyelid. Speaking of eyes, Brother Jack lacks one. His literal blindness is a metaphor for the flawed nature of his vision.

17.9. LET US SUM UP

Ellison moves his protagonist narrator from the illusion that he can make it as an individual by dedicated hard work to the realization that he must consider the plight of his entire ethnic group as an oppressed people. This realization brings his own

liberation. As racial tensions in Harlem continue to build, the narrator gets caught up in a riot that drives him to a manhole. In the darkness and solitude of the manhole, he begins to understand himself his invisibility and his identity. He decides to write his story down (the body of the novel) and when he is finished, he vows to enter the world again.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 18
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-IV

THE INVISIBLE MAN - RALPH ELLISON

STRUCTURE

18.1. INTRODUCTION

The lesson provides important excerpts of the novel and takes up a few questions on theme and characters. *The Invisible Man* makes an effort to transcend the confines of racial labeling and this is further highlighted through various questions picked in this lesson.

18.2. OBJECTIVES

The aim of the lesson is to facilitate better and deeper understanding of the novel and to help learner tackle various types of questions.

18.3. IMPORTANT EXCERPTS

1. "I's big and black and I say 'Yes, suh' as loudly as any burrhead when it's

convenient, but I'm still the king down here. . . . The only ones I even pretend to please are big white folk, and even those I control more than they control me. . . . That's my life, telling white folk how to think about the things I know about. . . . It's a nasty deal and I don't always like it myself. . . . But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am."

These words are spoken by Dr. Bledsoe to the narrator in Chapter 6 while reprimanding him for taking Mr. Norton to the parts of campus that are disrepute and rather not preferred locations. Bledsoe goes on to say that it has been through subservience to the powerful White men that he has managed to attain a position and also maintain it. As a result of flattering the Whites, he is able to exert his authority in college. He derisively slips into the dialect of uneducated Southern Blacks, saying "I's" instead of "I am." It is apparent that Bledsoe is no threat to the Whites for he has presented and proved himself as an "ignorant" Black man. Bledsoe claims that by telling the White men what they want to hear, he is able to control what they think and thereby control them entirely. His unsettling rather scary final statement that he would rather see every Black man in America mobbed and lynched instead of jeopardizing his position of authority shows that he is completely devoted to and concerned about himself and his own power.

These lines, in a way, accentuate the central theme of the novel and contribute to its larger development. Reading these words it is clear that Bledsoe's motivation for expelling and betraying the narrator was that the narrator had upset Bledsoe's strategy of keeping the pretence up and concealing what is a real picture from the Whites when he takes Norton to the areas that were left out from the White man's view till this time. More important, this speech marks the first of the narrator's many moments of sudden disenchantment in the novel. As a loyal, naïve adherent of the college's philosophy, the narrator has always considered Bledsoe an admirable advocate of the Black's advancement; his sudden recognition of Bledsoe's power-hungry, cynical hypocrisy comes as a devastating blow. This disillusionment constitutes the first of many that the narrator suffers as the novel progresses, perhaps most notably at the hands of the Brotherhood.

2. **"**Our white is so white you can paint a chunka coal and you'd have to crack it open with a sledge hammer to prove it wasn't white clear through."

Lucius Brockway brags about the White's whiteness through these words in Chapter 10. The narrator finds a job at the Liberty Paints Plant and is then quite categorically told about the properties of the "Optic White" paint whose production he supervises. Ellison uses Liberty Paints Plant as a metaphor in the novel to bring out the dynamics of racism in America. Whether it is the description of the paint-mixing process or the relation between the Blacks and the Whites in the company, Ellison aims to underscore the fact that stereotypes are reiterated with the socio-cultural frameworks. The exceptional property of Optic White, as Brockway puts it, is its ability to cover up blackness, any kind of blackness. It can even whiten charcoal, which is often used to make black marks upon-to spoil, in a sense-white paper. This is indirectly suggestive of the power of the Whites; for, like the white paint that camouflages the other colours, the Whites and their ways subvert and smother Black identity. On the other hand, out of prejudice, the Black men and women assimilate into the White culture, and mask their true thoughts and feelings in an effort to gain acceptance and tolerance.

3. The cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro . . . stared up at me from the floor, his face an enormous grin, his single large black hand held palm up before his chest. It was a bank, a piece of early Americana, the kind of bank which, if a coin is placed in the hand and a lever pressed upon the back, will raise its arm and flip the coin into the grinning mouth.

This passage, from Chapter15, describes the coin bank that the narrator finds at Mary's home just before he leaves to join the Brotherhood. The coin bank starkly symbolizes the essentialized racial stereotypes that the narrator has been trying to free himself from. The figure represents the submissive, toadying and groveling slave, eager to provide meek and self-effacing amusement to the White people, performing pet-like tricks for them. Furthermore, through this bank figure, the Black man is objectified, he merely becomes a petty toy to play with, a chattel that could be thrown here and there, for the Whites. After the narrator moves out of Mary's home, he finds himself frustratingly unable to get rid of this insulting coin bank, even the debris keeps coming back to him. The bank thus illustrates another aspect of stereotype-its stubborn permanence, its horrible tendency to follow a person throughout his or her life.

4. I looked at Ras on his horse and at their handful of guns and recognized the absurdity of the whole night and of the simple yet confoundingly complex arrangement

of hope and desire, fear and hate, that had brought me here still running, and knowing now who I was and where I was and knowing too that I had no longer to run for or from the Jacks and the Emersons and the Bledsoes and Nortons, but only from their confusion, impatience, and refusal to recognize the beautiful absurdity of their American identity and mine. . . . And I knew that it was better to live out one's own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras's or Jack's.

It is at this moment of confrontation with Ras that self-realization finally dawns upon the narrator. The scene in Chapter 25 helps in clearing the narrator's existential doubts, as he realizes that it is his own identity that is instrumental in offering a meaning in his life. It is futile to attempt to fit into a framework that is based on stereotypes and meet other people's expectations, for it will only lead to the destruction of the self. When Ras threatens to kill the narrator, it is the meaninglessness of the world that strikes the narrator. Ellison, in fact, uses the term "absurd"- (a term that the French existentialists used to characterize the universe, insisting on the idea that the meaning is to be understood as what is invested in one's life) to describe the American life. Thus, the narrator must look for meaning in his own life that affirms his existence and identity. The action of hurling Ras's spear back at him demonstrates the narrator's refusal to be subject any longer to others' visions and demands-he finally commits himself fully to an attempt to assert his true identity in his own terms.

5. And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone's way but my own. I have also been called one thing and then another while no one really wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. I am an invisible man.

In these lines from the Epilogue, the narrator quite precisely and tidily summarizes the main reason for his troubles that he went through in life, as spelled out in the twenty-five chapters of the novel. The source of his miserable life has been the fact that rather than living his own life, following his own heart and mind, the narrator has been struggling to meet the expectations of others, proving true the prejudices others and fitting into the prescribed social framework. He has followed the ideology of the college and the ideology of the Brotherhood without trusting or developing his own identity. Now, however, he has realized that his own identity, both in its flexibility and authenticity, is the key to freedom.

Rinehart, a master of many identities, first suggests to the narrator the limitless capacity for variation within oneself. However, Rinehart ultimately proves an unsatisfactory model for the narrator because Rinehart's life lacks authenticity. The meaning of the narrator's assertion that he is "an invisible man" has changed slightly since he made the same claim at the beginning of the novel: whereas at the outset he means to call attention to the fact that others cannot not see him, he now means to call attention to the fact that his identity, his inner self, is real, even if others cannot see it.

18.4. SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the ideologies of the Brotherhood and the college. How does each ideology breed blindness and invisibility? What conflicts do they cause for the narrator?

The college's ideology is based on the ideas of Booker T. Washington, who is represented by the figure of the Founder; through a near-religious devotion to the legend of the Founder's life, students at the college are taught to work hard and seek economic advancement while not clamoring for equal rights or equal treatment from whites. The college encourages students to reject black culture to the extent that it seems ignorant and rural, and to pattern their behavior on the white middle class. The Brotherhood adheres to an ideology based on that of American communist groups in the 1930s, a sort of authoritarian socialism that relies on a Marxist theory of history-which holds that those of lower social status must submit themselves to the unavoidable class struggles on the path to equality. The Brotherhood thus prizes clinical, scientific exposition over the sort of emotional appeal on behalf of the individual that the narrator makes after Tod Clifton's death.

The ideology of the college limits the narrator's identity in that it forces him to reject the black culture that shaped his early identity and forces him to accept a position of inherent inferiority to whites. The ideology of the Brotherhood limits the narrator's identity in that it requires blind adherence to the collective attitude of the organization and allows no room for individual thought, expression, or action-the very things that the narrator craves. By limiting the narrator's identity, these ideologies effectively render him invisible, as they force him to bury his real self beneath the roles that those around him require him to play.

2. Write a note on who is Rinehart and what does he represent?

Rinehart is a mystery and a source of deep ambiguity in *Invisible Man.* He never appears in the novel, and the narrator only learns of his existence when other people mistake him for Rinehart while he is in disguise. Rinehart seems to be all things to all people-pimp, bookie, and preacher, among other things. Ultimately, Rinehart is an extremely surreal figure of Ellison's creation, designed not to be realistic or believable but rather unsettling and confusing. Rinehart represents a protean conception of identity-the idea that a person's identity can change completely depending on where one is and with whom one interacts, an extreme version of the narrator's conundrum throughout the novel. At first, the narrator feels that Rinehart's adaptability enables a kind of freedom, but he quickly realizes that Rinehart's formlessness also represents a complete loss of individual selfhood. In the end, the liquidity of Rinehart's identity is one of the forces that compel the narrator to discover his own more solid identity.

3. What is the role of treachery in the novel? Who betrays whom? How does treachery relate to the motifs of blindness and invisibility?

The two major betrayals in the novel are the narrator's betrayals at the hands of the college (in the figure of Dr. Bledsoe) and the Brotherhood (in the figure of Brother Jack). Bledsoe poses as a figure representing the advancement of black Americans through education. In reality, however, he deliberately subordinates himself to whites and says that he would see every black man in America lynched before giving up his power. That he sends the narrator away with letters of supposed recommendation that, in reality, explicitly criticize the narrator demonstrates his objectionable desire to suppress black identity. The members of the Brotherhood betray the narrator in a number of insidious ways, ranging from curtailing his individuality to turning their backs on the plight of the poor blacks in Harlem. Jack, specifically, betrays the narrator by posing as a compassionate and helpful friend while secretly harboring racist prejudice against him and using him as a tool for the advancement of the Brotherhood's ends.

This sort of treachery generally contributes to the novel's creation of a bewildering, malevolent world in which an unexpected blow can come at any time, reinforcing the novel's characterization of the social effects of racial prejudice. Treachery also reinforces the ideas of blindness and invisibility, because any betrayal is essentially a sign that the

betrayer willfully refuses to see his victim. Additionally, the novel's betrayals function through deceit and secrecy-for the most part, they are invisible, and the narrator is blind to them until it is too late.

18.5. EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How does the division between how the narrator perceives himself and how others perceive him relate to the motifs of blindness and invisibility? Consider the role of racial stereotypes in the novel.

2. How does the narrator's briefcase encapsulate his history? Consider the contents of the briefcase. Consider also the dream that he has about the briefcase after the "battle royal." How does the briefcase relate to the narrator's position as a fugitive? What might the briefcase tell us about the narrator's identity?

3. What does the extended metaphor of dolls (the Sambo doll, for example) mean? What do they say about the power of racial stereotypes?

4. What does the veteran mean when he tells the narrator, "Be your own father"? What is the role of fathers or father figures in the novel? Think about the narrator's accusation that Jack wants to be the "great white father" and the description of the Founder's statue.

5. How does Ellison use irony to underline the difference between surface appearances and what lies beneath them? Consider Ellison's literary treatment of Reverend Barbee as one example. What are other examples?

6. What is the relationship between individual identity and community identity? Is it possible to remain true to both? Must the two always conflict? How does the narrator fail or succeed to assert his individuality amid communities such as the college, the Brotherhood, and Harlem?

18.6. CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. At the beginning of the novel, where does the narrator live?

Ans. _____

2. Brother Tarp gives the narrator a link of chain and what?

Ans. _____

3. In the Prologue, the narrator admires the music of whom?

Ans. _____

4. What do they make at the factory where the narrator takes a job?

Ans. _____

5. What is a 'battle royal'?

Ans. _____

6. What is the narrator surprised to see upon his arrival in Harlem?

Ans. _____

7. Which characters appear in the narrators castration dream?

Ans. _____

8. Why is the narrator expelled from college?

Ans. _____

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M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 19
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-V

THE GRAPES OF WRATH

STRUCTURE

19.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to provide a comprehensive detail of early life and works of John Steinbeck discussing how it has been influenced by his intellectual milieu. It also discusses in detail his outstanding canonical work, *The Grapes of Wrath* through summary, character sketch and different critical perspectives.

19.2 EARLY LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN STEINBECK

John Steinbeck was arguably one of the best American writers of the 20th century. A winner of the Noble Prize for Literature in 1962, he is best known for his novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and his Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), both of which examine the lives of the working class and the migrant worker during the Great Depression.

Steinbeck wrote in the naturalist style, portraying people as the centre of his stories. His people and his stories were taken from real life struggles in the first half of the 20th century. His body of work reflects his wide range of interests, including marine biology, jazz, politics, philosophy, history and myth.

The life of John Steinbeck is fascinating . Steinbeck was born in 1902 in the town of Salinas, California and the most significant biographical link between Steinbeck and his writing is his birth and growth to maturity in Salinas valley, where he lived most of his first forty years. Steinbeck's father worked in county government as the treasurer for the City of Salinas, and Steinbeck's mother, Olive, was a teacher. At that time the Salinas valley was a series of small farms devoted to cattle raising and growing of fruits and vegetables. In the small towns of the valley the farmers used to bring their produce to market. Young Steinbeck worked during summer vacations for the neighboring farmers and ranchers.

In addition to living close to nature as a youth, Steinbeck was a voracious reader, probably through the influence of his school teacher mother. His fictional characters indicate a wide range of his reading interests which reflect the works of WaIter Scott, Stevenson, Jack London, Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Hardy's *The Return of Native.*

The period of Steinbeck's young adulthood was intermixed with many experiences in the laboring world. He attended Stanford University between 1920 and 1926. Steinbeck did not graduate from Stanford, but instead chose to support himself through manual labour while writing. His experiences among the working classes in California lent authenticity to his depiction of the lives of the workers, who remain the central characters of his most important novels.

His first three novels - *Cup of Gold* (1929), *The Pastures of Heaven* (1932), and *To a God Unknown* (1933) were unsuccessful, but he achieved popularity with *Tortilla Flat* (1935; film, 1942), an affectionately told story of Mexican - Americans. *Dubious Battle* (1936) is a classic account of a strike by farm workers. The novella *Of Mice and Men* (1937; films 1939, 1999) is a tragic story about the strange, complex bond between two migrant labourers. Another notable achievement of this period was *The Red Pony* (1937; film, 1949). *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939, Pulitzer Prize; film, 1940), the story of the migration of a dispossessed family from the Oklahoma Dust Bowl to California and their subsequent exploitation by a ruthless system of agriculture economics, earned him international fame. It was the last of his naturalistic novels of the 1930s with proletarian themes.

After the best - selling success of *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck went on an expedition to the Gulf of California with his friend Ed Ricketts, the marine Biologist. Their friendship lasted from 1930 to Ricketts' death in 1948. Ricketts elicited and guided Steinbeck's interest in marine biology and the two men collaborated on *Sea of Cortez* (1941), a study of fauna of the Gulf of California. During World War II, Steinbeck wrote some effective pieces of government propaganda, among them *The Moon Is Down* (1942), a novel about Norwegians under the Nazis. He also served a war correspondent. With the end of World War II and the move from the Great Depression to economic prosperity Steinbeck's work softened somewhat. While still containing the elements of social criticism that marked his earlier work, the three novels Steinbeck published immediately following the war, *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Pearl,* and *The Bus* (both 1947) were more sentimental and relaxed. Steinbeck also contributed to several screenplays. He wrote the original stories for several films, including *Lifeboat* (1944), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, and *A Medal for Benny,* and wrote the screenplay for Elia Kazan's *Viva Zapata!,* a biographical film about Emiliano Zapata, the Mexican peasant who rose to the presidency.

Steinbeck married Carol Henning in 1930 and lived with her in Pacific Grove, California. He spent much of his time in Monterey with his friend, Ricketts, at his Cannery Row laboratory, an experience which inspired his popular 1945 novel, *Cannery Row*. In 1943, Steinbeck married his second wife, Gwyndolyn Conger, with whom he had two children. 1948 was a particularly bad year for Steinbeck: Ricketts died, and Gwyndolyn

left him. However, he found happiness in his (1950) marriage to Elaine Scott, with whom he lived in New York City. Two year later, he published the highly controversial *East of Eden,* the novel he called "the big one," set in the "California Salinas Valley.

Steinbeck's later writings were comparatively slight works, but he did make several notable attempts to reassert his stature as a major novelist: *Burning Bright* (1950), *East of Eden* (1952), and *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961). However, none of these works equalled the critical reputation of his earlier novels. Steinbeck's reputation is dependent primarily on the naturalistic, proletarian-themed novels that he wrote during the Depression. It is in these works that Steinbeck is most effective at building rich, symbolic structures and conveying the archetypal qualities of his characters, Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1962, and died in New York City in 1968.

19.3 STEINBECK'S SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Social consciousness represents a basic element in the writings of Steinbeck's long residence in the Salinas valley covered years of both regional and national unrest. The economic structure of the Salinas Valley altered, as small farms were replaced by larger ones and the financial picture enlarged to include corporation, large investments and amassing fortunes. As the gap lengthened between the little man working for the big man, discontent also increased, with unemployment and threatened strikes. It was all part of the generalized national situation which culminated in the stock market crash of 1929 followed by the period of depression. His first novels which received serious critical attention were socially-oriented. In *Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) were post-depression novels and dealt with proletarian matter.

In Dubious Battle (1936) was a strike novel set in the California apple country. The strike of nine hundred migratory workers is led by Jin Nolan, devoted to his cause, who confesses before his death: "I never had time to look at things. Mac, never. I never looked how leaves come out. I never looked at the way things happen". One the characters, Doc Burton, a detached observer, Steinbeck partly derived from his friend Ed Ricketts. Later Steinbeck developed his observer's personality with changes in such works as *Cannery Row* (1945), which returned to the world of *Tortilla Flat*. The novel was an account of the adventures and misadventures of workers in a California cannery and their friends. Its sequel, *Sweet Thursday* appeared in 1954.

Of Mice and Men (1937), a story of shattered dreams, became Steinbeck's first big success. Steinbeck adapted it also into a three-act play, which was produced in 1937. George Milton and Lennie Small, two itinerant ranchmen, dream of one day owning a small farm. George acts as a father figure to Lennie, who is large and simple minded. Lennie loves all that is soft, but his immense physical strength is a source of troubles and George is needed to clam him. The two friends find work and start saving money for their future. Annoyed by the bullying foreman of the ranch, Lenny breaks the foreman's arm, but also wakes the interest of the ranch owner's flirtatious daughter-in-law. Lenny accidentally kills her and escapes into the hiding place, that he and George have agreed to use, if they get into difficulties. George hurries after Lenny and shoots him before he is captured by vengeful mob but at the same time he loses his own hopes and dreams of better future. Before he dies, Lennie says: "Let's do it now. Let's get that place now".

The Grapes of Wrath is Steinbeck's epic masterpiece of social consciousness in which he pictures the helpless people crushed by drought and depression. Like his other works, here also Steinbeck's focus is upon man; the nature of man and his success and failures, rather than upon the mere detached picture of an indifferent society.

19.4 BIOLOGICAL THEORY OF MAN

Steinbeck's biological theory of man developed out of his friendship with Edward Ricketts. The marine biologist's views on the interdependence of all life deeply influenced Steinbeck's thinking. Steinbeck relates human beings : his fictional characters- to plants and animals: he seems to see analogies of man in nature. He emphasizes on the natural over the supernatural; but nature is phenomena and cycles offer even more than simple analogy, Steinbeck seems to suggest. It offers an almost spiritual comfort, and encourages earth-founded optimism.

19.5 DREAM AND REALITY, A FANTASY WORLD

Steinbeck's fiction belongs more to a fantasy or dream world than it does to the real everyday world. Sometimes this element is found in the author's choice of protagonists from among the castoffs, dregs of society and the antisocial. Several critics have accused him of "glorifying idiocy" and of "deifying the drunk". For example, in *Of Mice and Men*, the halfwit Lennie, Steinbeck stated that he intended to represent

the "inarticulate and powerful yearning of all men... the dreams and pleasures of everyone in the world." Similarly, Danny and his friends (in *Tortilla Flat*) live, what by ordinary standards is an unreal existence, surviving more through chance than by planning, and "experiencing" life in a most random way. Similar objectives outside realistic narrative, along the lines of allegorical symbolic meanings are there in *The Wayward Bus,* which Steinbeck concludes with an epigraphic quoting from a well known medieval morality play called *Everyman*, a drama, which chronicled the cycle of everyman's life from birth to death.

19.6 *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*-A REPRESENTATIVE NOVEL OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF 1930'S.

Steinbeck derived the title of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* from *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* by Julia Ward Howe:

"Mine eyes have seen the glory. of the coming of the Lord: He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored: He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on. "

When *The Grapes of Wrath* was published on March 14, 1939, it created a national sensation for its depiction of the devastating effects of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The 1930's comprised a decade of crises, moral as well as economic, in which the initial financial panic was followed first by depression and then by paralysis. Of all the social novels that came out of the great depression, very few have condemned man's inhumanity to man with the persistence, and vividness as has been portrayed by Steinbeck in *The Grapes of Wrath.*

John Steinbeck was shocked by the tremendous response to his novel. Almost overnight, he was transformed from a respected, struggling writer into a public sensation. Yet *The Grapes of Wrath* was bound to cause controversy in a country experiencing a decade of major social upheaval during the Depression. With the novel's publication, Steinbeck found himself immersed in a great national debate over the migrant labour problem. Many people were shocked by the poverty and hopelessness of the story, and others denied that such circumstances could happen in America.

The Grapes of Wrath is a novel of protest as it exposes the desperate

conditions under which one group of American workers, the migratory farm families, were forced to live during the 1930' s. These were the people, who, in the depths of the greatest economic depression the United States has known to abandon their homes and their livelihoods. They were uprooted because tractors were rapidly industrializing the Southern cotton fields and erosion and drought were creating Dust bowl in wide areas of Kansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Texas and Okhlahoma.

Many of these uprooted families migrated to California, Steinbeck's home, where their presence caused acute social stress and their poverty and means to sustain their lives led to their exploitation. The land proprietors took advantages of their eagerness to work and hired them at starvation wages. These people were contemptuously referred to as "Okies", were treated with great brutality and were denied even the most elementary human and civil rights. In addition to this, the landowners tried to suppress all their attempts to form a union for self-protection. Such were the sociological conditions, which formed the basis of Steinbeck's famous novel, and he reported them accurately, realistically and sympathetically.

Amidst the national crises, American novelists saw only hunger and unemployment, desperate struggle and brutal expression, and it appeared to him an ugly world in which the individual, especially the victim of the depression, was at the mercy of force, both social and economic, he could neither understand nor control. In response to the nation crises, American novelists returned, by and large, to naturalism as the mode of literary composition. The philosophy of naturalism had its origin in the nineteenth century scientific thought, particularly in the theories of Charles Darwin. The most notably placed literary exponent of this philosophy, from the American viewpoint, was Emile Zola. Zola, who often placed his characters in certain environments, as if they were undergoing a controlled scientific experiment, in order to study their responses and behaviour, and his scientific fiction had a strong influence upon the novels of Californian writers like Frank Norris, Jack London and Steinbeck. In 1930's, the emphasis of naturalism shifted form the individual to the group. The naturalistic novel of the 1930's described the struggles of various minority groups : the Irish, Negroes, workers and Okies.

Like the naturalists, who often saw the bestial I.... man breaking through his veneer

of civilized behaviour, especially at moments of tension and excitement, Steinbeck emphasizes the close relationship between animal and human nature and shows a great interest in what critics have called the biology of human affairs. Steinbeck portrays the oppression and degeneration of the unfortunates but does not permit his characters to succumb completely or to become mere pawns of their environment and their fate. Despite all the sufferings, the Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath,* exhibit a deep, instinctive will to survive with dignity.

19.7 SUMMARY OF *THE GRAPES OF WRATH*

Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* tells the specific story of the Joad family in order to illustrate the hardship and oppression suffered by migrant labourers during the Great Depression. The novel begins with the description of the conditions in Dust Bowl Oklahoma that ruined the crops and instigated massive foreclosures on farmland. No specific characters emerge initially, a technique that Steinbeck will return to several times in the book, just exposing descriptions of events in a larger social context with those more specific to the Joad family.

Tom Joad, a man not yet thirty, approaches a dinner dressed in spotless, somewhat formal clothing. He hitches a ride with a truck driver at the dinner, who presses Tom for information until Tom finally reveals that he was just released from McAlester prison, where he served four years for murdering a man during a fight. Steinbeck follows this with an interlude describing a turtle crossing the road, which he uses as a metaphor for the struggles of the working class.

On his travel back home, Tom meets his former preacher, Jim Casy, a talkative man gripped by doubts over religious teachings and the presence of sin. He gave up the ministry after realizing that he found little wrong with the sexual liaisons he had with women in his congregation. Casy espouses the view that what is holy in human nature comes not from a distant God, but from the people themselves. Steinbeck contrasts Tom's return with the arrival of bank representatives to evict the tenant fallers and the tractors to farm the land. He raises the possibility of a working class insurrection, but cannot find an effective target for collective action.

When Tom and Casy reach the Joad's house, it has been deserted. Muley Graves, a local elderly man who may not be sane, tells them that the Joads have been evicted, and

now stay with Uncle John. Muley's own family has left to find work in California, but Muley decided to stay himself. That night, since they are trespassing on the property now owned by the bank, the three are forced to hide from the police who might arrest them.

Steinbeck follows this with a description of the tactics that car dealers use to exploit impoverished customers. They find that they can make a greater profit by selling damaged jalopies than by selling dependable new cars.

Tom Joad finds the rest of his family staying with Uncle John, a morose man prone to depression after the death of his wife several years before. His mother is a strong, sturdy woman who is the moral centre of family life. His brother, Noah, 'may have been brain damaged during childbirth, while his sister, Rose of Sharon (called Rosasharn by the family) is recently married and pregnant. Her husband, Connie Rivers, has dreams of studying radios. Tom's younger brother, AI, is only sixteen and has the concerns belittling that age. This is followed by a more general description the sale of items by impoverished families who intend to leave Oklahoma for California, as the Joads expect to do.

The Joads plan to go to California based on flyers they found advertising work in the fields there. These flyers, as Steinbeck will soon reveal, are fraudulent advertisements meant to draw more workers than necessary and drive down wages Jim Casy asks to accompany the Joads to California so that he can work with people in the fields rather than to preach them. Before the family leaves, Granpa Joad refuses to go but the family gives him medicine that knocks him unconscious and takes him with them. The subsequent chapters describes the vacant houses that remain after the Oklahoma farmers leave for work elsewhere, as well as the conditions on Route 66, the highway that stretches from Oklahoma to Bakersfield, California.

Almost immediately into the journey, the Joad family loses two members. The first victim is the family dog, which is run over during the first stop. The second is Granpa Joad, who dies of a stroke. The Wilson family helps the Joads when Granpa dies, and the two families decide to make the journey to California together.

Steinbeck follows this with larger statement about the growing of a collective consciousness among the working class, who shift their perceptions from "I" to "we."

The Wilson's car soon breaks down, and Tom and Casy consider separating from the rest of the family temporarily to fix the car, but Ma Joad refuses to let the family break apart even temporarily. Tom and AI find the necessary part to fix the car at junkyard, where the one-eyed ID who watches over the junkyard complains about his boss and threatens to murder him. Before the Joads set out on their journey again, they find man returning from California who tells them that there is no work there and the promises of work in the flyers are a fraud.

The Joads and Wilsons reach California, where they are immediatly subjected to intimidation by police officers who derisively call them other migrant labourers "Okies." At the first camp where they stay, Granpa becomes quite ill, but receives some comfort from proselytizing Jehov who merely annoy Ma Joad. The police force them out of the camp, but Wilsons choose the possibility of arrest instead, since Sairy Wilson is sick to continue. The next time that the police stop the Joads on their travels, Ma Joad forces them to let them pass without inspection. She does this to hide from the police the fact that Granma has died.

Steinbeck follows this with a description of the history of California which he frames as one marked by oppression and slavery, however, predicts an imminent revolution, for the people there have been deprived such a great degree that they must take what they need in order to survive.

At the next camp where the Joads stay on their search for work they learn about Weedpatch, a government camp where the residents do not face harassment by police officers and have access to amenities including bath and toilets. When more police officers attempt to stall a fight with Tom and several other migrant workers, Tom trips him and knocks him unconscious. To prevent Tom from taking the blame, for he would be sent back to jail for violating his parole, Casy accepts responsibility for the crime and is taken away to jail. The rest of the family begins to break apart as well. Uncle John leaves to get drunk, Noah decides to leave society altogether and live alone in the woodlands, and Connie abandons his pregnant wife. Before they must move on, Tom does retrieve Uncle John, who is still consumed with guilt over his wife's death. They head north toward the government camp.

At the government camp, the Joads are shocked to find how well the other residents treat them and how efficiently this society in which the camp leaders are elected by the residents' functions. Tom even finds work the next day, but the contractor, Mr. Thomas, warns him that there will be trouble at the dance at Weedpatch that weekend. Since the police can only enter the camp if there is trouble, they intend to plant intruders there who will instigate violence.

The Joads settle into a comfortable existence at the government camp, and during the dance that Saturday, Tom and several other residents defuse the situation, preventing the police from taking control of the camp, to nurse him back to health. Nevertheless, after a month in Weedpatch none of the Joads have found steady work and realize that they must continue on their journey. They arrive at Hooper Ranch, where the entire family picks peaches. The wages they receive are higher than normal, for they are breaking a strike. Tom finds out that the leader of the labour force that is organizing the strike is Jim Casy. After his time in prison, Casy realized that he must fight for collective action by the working class against the wealthy ruling class. Tom, Casy and the other strike leaders get into a fight with strike breakers, and one of them murders Casy with a pick handle. Tom struggles with the man and wrests away the weapon. He, in turn, kills the man who murdered Casy, and barely escapes capture by the police.

Although Tom wishes to leave the family to spare them from taking responsibility for him, the Joads nevertheless decide to leave Hooper Ranch for a location where Tom can be safe. They reach cotton fields up north, where Tom hides in the woods while the family stays in a boxcar. Although the family attempts to keep Tom's identity and location a secret, young Ruthie Winfield reveals it during a fight with another child. When Ma tells Tom about this, he decides to leave the family and go off alone, determined to fight for the cause for which Casy died, and vows to return to his family one day.

The raining season arrived almost immediately after Tom left the family, causing massive flooding. The Joads are caught in a dangerous situation: they cannot escape the flooding because Rose of Sharon suddenly goes into labor. While other families evacuate the camp near the rapidly rising creek, the Joads remain and attempt to stop the flood waters. Without the aid of others, the Joads are unsuccessful, and they seek refuge on the

top of their car. Rose of Sharon delivers a stillborn child that Uncle John sends in a box down the creek. The family, eventually, reaches higher ground and finds a ban for shelter.

Inside the barn is a starving man and his young son. In the final act of the book, Rose of Sharon commits the most selfless and beautiful act to be found throughout: she breast feeds a starving and dying man, laying all her social inhibitions aside to save a life. This final act illustrates the depravity the'Okies' were forced to submit to but also, the endurance of humanity.

19.8 CHARACTER SKETCHES

Jim Casy

Jim Casy accompanies the Joad family on their journey from Oklahoma to California. He is a former preacher who has given up both Christian fundamentalism and sexuality, and is ready for a new life dedicated to helping people like the Joads. He is honest, compassionate, and courageous. Casy's new "religion" is based on love and a belief in each person's soul as well as the "Holy Spirit" of humanity. As critics have noted, these non-secular views of humanity can be traced to the transcendentalist philosophy of WaIt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Casy is a new convert to this transcendentalism.

After his period of meditation in the wilderness, Casy abandons his beliefs in the personal conversion aspect of Christianity with its emphasis on the intermediary roles of Christ and the Spirit and opts rather for a half evolved Emersonian doctrine of the Oversoul. In his view, man's soul is but a part of a greater, more universal soul, or Oversoul, to which it will be reunited in the after-life. From this insight Casy proceeds to reason that if all men have souls which are parts of the one great soul, then all men are good, since they come from the same good source and will return there. And, Casy argues, if all men are good then their actions must be good eating, drinking, talking, fornicating and all things are holy, because they are done by man and man himself is holy.

Casy's initials (J. C.) have been cited as evidence that his character is a symbol of Jesus Christ. Moreover, his words and actions in the novel parallel those of Jesus Christ. For instance, he takes the blame for the deputy's beating at the Hooven'ille, and is taken to jail instead of Tom and, finally, goes to his death with the stinging rebuke which sums up

the whole human tragedy: "You fell as don't know what you are doing. You are helping to starve kids."

Tom Joad

Tom Joad is the protagonist of the novel, who undergoes a painful process of searching for his own identity and gradually becomes a combined embodiment of his mother's sympathy and of Casy's thought. Towards the end of the novel, we feel that Tom is ready to go forth and put his love of mankind and his socio-political philosophy into action.

Before reaching the pinnacle of development, however, Tom must endure a hard series of trials, which literally transform his personality from that of a hot-tempered, cruelly tough, egocentric to the one approaching the humanitarian serenity of his saint-like mother. When Tom comes out from prison, we see he is interested mainly in his own personal comforts and needs. He does not feel the least bit guilty about having killed a man, believing himself to be fully justified in pleading self-defence.

Having grown accustomed to the relatively comfortable prison life with its showers, clean sheets and regular meals, Tom is annoyed as well as disappointed when he finds his home half destroyed and his people gone. Still proud, he refuses to sleep in a cave on his own family's land. Later, in California, after killing the deputy who slew Casy, Tom is only too happy to find a cave-like hideaway. Such ironic little twists of fate pursue him continually.

While Tom remains hardened against any representatives of the law and prone to sudden fits of violence, he is still fascinated by Casy's philosophical notions which appeal to his better nature. For, in spite of his somewhat callous exterior, Tom possesses a deep tenderness, which he reserves, at first, for members of his own family. Ma is fully aware of her favorite son's potentialities for good, and she is afraid that something may have happened to him in prison to make him "mean -mad" like "PUlly Boy Floyd". She is continually trying to restrain his natural violence which, she knows, can erupt any minute. When stopped by a mob near Bakersfield, Ma whispers conciliatory words to Tom and then praises him for not trying to light the authorities. After Tom has killed Casy's murderer, Ma tries to hide him and keep him fed.

Tom's stay in the cave marks a very significant change in his personality, symbolized in his smashed and hence altered face. The symbolic return-to-the womb results in a very real psychological rebirth. Mulling over Casy's words and thinking of the example of the government camp at Weedpatch, Tom begins to grasp the value and necessity for concerted action. Up until this point he has relied almost entirely upon his own strength and native abilities in an attempt fight for a decent living, but he has met with nothing but abuse and mortification at the hands of landowners and the deputies. Now he realizes that man cannot live alone, that man must join together with other men because there is strength in unity. He knows that he must move away from his own personal family and accept the whole world as his family. He is ready to carry on the work begun by Jim Casy.

Ma Joad

Ma is an embodiment of strong women of proverbs. Her control and kindness are mirrored in her face, and her eyes have that serene look of one who has somehow passed beyond suffering and pain. Nothing disturbs Ma, at least outwardly, because she knows that the whole family looks to her for guidance and stability.

In many ways, Ma embodies the philosophy of Jim Casy. She treats all creatures with respect due to them. While always putting the needs of her own family first, she willingly helps others people when she can. She comforts the Wilsons, shares food with the starving Hooverville children, and finds works for the Wainwrights.

Ma holds the family together as long as humanly possible. She suffers greatly when she sees Granpa die, then Noah leave, then Granma die, and then Tom forced to hide and finally go away. But she hides her grief knowing well that Pa and the children could know hurt and fear only if she acknowledged hurt and fear.

Ma understands the individual needs of each number of the family will collapse. So, at times, she goads Pa into near frenzy, knowing that his anger will make him stronger by strengthening his resolve. She knows how Rose of Sharon is troubled by her pregnancy, and she threatens to slap her at times when she begins to feel too sorry for herself, but she is always ready to control the poor girl when the need arises. She knows she can rely on Tom, but not on Al who lacks Tom's sense of responsibility.

As long as the family or some part of family is together, Ma will see to it that they

survive. She feels instinctively that they are the people, that they are the ones who will endure and populate the world. Though she speaks rarely, she expresses one of the most comprehensive morals of the novel: "If you're in trouble or HL111 or need-go to the poor people. They're the only ones that will help - the only ones".

19.9 THE GRAPES OF WRATH AS A NOVEL OF JOURNEY

As a major literary figure since the 1930s, Steinbeck displays in his writing a characteristic respect for the poor and oppressed. In many of his novels, his characters show signs of a quiet dignity and courage for which Steinbeck has a great admiration. For instance, in *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck describes the unrelenting struggle of the people who depend on the soil for their livelihood. Steinbeck has the ability to bind two ideas into one story: the never ending struggle to survive and primacy of the family. The journey of the Joads serves as a suitable vehicle for the delivery of Steinbeck's message and theme. In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck shows the Joads' endurance by his use of extended metaphors in intercalary chapters.

Steinbeck uses intercalary chapters to provide background for the various themes in the novel. This effectively foreshadows upcoming events by telling of the general state of the local population in the intercalary chapters and then narrowing it down to how it affects the main characters of the novel, the Joads. Setting the tone of the novel in the readers' mind is another function of Steinbeck's intercalary chapters.

In chapter three, Steinbeck immaculately describes the long tedious journey of a land turtle across a desolate highway. From the onset of his journey, the turtle encounters many set backs. All along the way he is hindered by ants, hills, and oak seeds under his shell. The turtle's determination to reach his destination is most apparent when a truck driven by a young man swerves to hit the turtle. The turtle's shell was clipped and he went flying off the highway. He struggled back to his belly and kept driving toward his goal, just as the Joads kept diving toward their goal.

Much like the turtle from chapter three, the Joads had to face many great hardships in their travels. The planes of Oklahoma, with their harsh summer weather, were the Joads' desolate highway. They were driven by great motivating powers, poverty and hunger. Just as the turtle searched for food, the Joads were searching for paradise, "the garden of Eden."

The Joads' journey is second to none in terms of adversity and length. The Joads'

incredible ability to overcome all odds and keep going is epitomized in intercalary chapter three. Steinbeck uses his rendition of facts, the "turtle" chapter, to parallel the Joads' struggle to reach the promised land. Just as the turtle endured, so the Joads never digressing from their strait and narrow path to California.

19.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *The Grapes of Wrath* as a representative novel of the great depression of 1930's.
2. Enumerate the themes of Steinbeck's works with particular references to *The Grapes of Wrath.*
3. Draw a character sketch of Tom Joad.
4. Draw a character sketch of Ma Joad and Jim Casy.
5. Discuss *The Grapes of Wrath* as a novel of journey.

19.11 SUGGESTED READING

1. French, Warren, ed. A companion to The Grapes of Wrath. New York: The Viking Press, 1963.
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4. Moore, Harry T. The Novels of John Steinbeck : A First Critical Study. Chicago: Normandie House, 1939. reprinted Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1968.
5. Watt, F.W. John Steinbeck, Evergreen Pilot Books, New York ,: Grove Press, 1962.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 20**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-VI**

MALAMUD'S LIFE AND WORKS

STRUCTURE

20.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the life and works of Bernard Malamud. The lesson briefly discusses Malamud's few important works which are his important writing, recognizing him as one of the most important writer of modern American Literature.

20.2 BERNARD MALAMUD—LIFE AND WORKS

Bernard Malamud was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1914. He studied at the City College and Columbia University in New York. After his university education Malamud joined as teacher at the Erasmus Hall Evening High School in Brooklyn. It the same school where he had studied as a boy. Just as he started his teaching

career, about the same time he had also started his writing career. His first attempt was at writing short stories, which were published in the school magazine. He was never quite happy in the city of New York. For a long time, at least since 1947 he had been planning to move out of it, however, before his desired escape of New York city where African American live. It was only in 1949 that his escape could become possible, he also taught night classes at Harlen, a sector from New York became possible. He joined Oregon State College where he remained member of the English Faculty till 1961. After leaving Oregon, Malamud remained as the Bennington College Faculty, with two years spent at Harvard.

As a professional writer of fiction, Malamud made a beginning with the publication of his short-story, entitled "The Cost of Living" in 1949. He got recognition and fame as writer with the publication of his second novel *The Assistant in* 1957. The novel won him the Rosenthal Award the same Year. It was followed by more awards and laurels. A Partisan Review Fellowship and Rockfeller grant enabled him to spend an year in Rome, with his wife and two children. While in Rome Malamud wrote his next work, named *The Magic Barrel,* which won him The National Book Award for the year 1967. Thereafter, Malamud became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. By the end of the 1960's he had established himself as one of the most distinguished of American Jewish novelists.

Other notable novels that Malamud wrote include *The Natural* (1952), *A New Life* (1961), *The Fixer* (1966), *Pictures of Fidleman : An Exhibition* (1969), *The Tenants* (1971) and *Dubim's Lives* (1979). Alongside of these novels he also produced three collections of short stories, namely *The Magic Barrel* (1959), *Idiots First* (1963) and *Rembrandt's Hat* (1973). Except for Roy Hobbs, the protagonist of Malamud's first novel, all his heroes (or anti-heroes) are Jewish characters striving to find a foothold in the flux of life they are destined to live in the post-war period. It is through the persistent search of these protagonists for a qualitatively 'new life' that the novelist prefects his moral vision. Their struggle includes the perennial problem of their relationship with the non-Jewish American society.

20.3 THE NATURAL

In his first novel, *The Natural,* Malamud presents the hero, Roy Hobbs, aspiring to become a baseball champion. His sole and most intense passion is to

become, in his own words, "the greatest there ever was" in the game. He is the type of person whose consciousness would not aspire for "something over and above earthly things." When he finds that Walter (the whammer) Wambold, a leading American leaguer, makes fun of him, Roy makes it a point to defeat him in an impromptu wayside contest. The novel's hero soon becomes an indispensable player for the Knights whose leading hitter, Bump Bailing, participates in the game for self-glorification only and never for the team as such. After the unfortunate death of Bailey, Roy remains the only hope for the Knights, so much so that his magical hat, Wonderboy, comes to be looked upon by both the other players of the team as well as the spectators a sort of wonder in the history of the game. When the Knights reach close to the victory, the press applauds Roy as the most valuable Player of the game. Just at that crucial movement of the team when it is very close to the final victory, Roy accepts Memo Paris's invitation to a party where he makes the mistake of eating rather gluttonously. As a result of that indiscretion he has to be hospitalized, since he has developed serious discomfort in the stomach.

Roy's tragedy is that while he has the vigour and appetite of a "natural", he lacks the perception and insight of an individuated person. His wants of wisdom and insight make him an easy prey for the vicious trio of Judge Bammer, Memo Paris and Gus Sands. His only saving grace is his female friend, Iris Lemon, who alone sustains him in crucial moments of acute depression and ignominy. He does have two more female friends, Harriet and Memo, but they are both rather predatory (like the animals that prey on others). Only Iris is found capable of love and compassion, which sustain the hero through the trying periods of his career as a player. Whenever Roy feels broken inside, he looks upto her for help. And she never fails him in the hour of need. It is she, and she alone, who explains to him the value of the experience of suffering. She confidently tells him : "We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us towards happiness." She goes on to add that the normative centre of suffering lies in teaching man "to want the right things."

When Roy finally comes out in an outburst against the vicious trio, it is obvious that he has acquired consciousness of a different realm of values. Significantly, the novel ends at this very point, showing a moral growth in the character of the

hero. It is, in a way, a sort of transformation that Roy undergoes as a consequence of his intense exposure to a trying experience of life. When we look back from this vantage point of the narrative, we can see how, in the beginning, any "talk about his inner self" was to him "like ploughing up a graveyard." However, we find that at the end of the novel he becomes conscious of the fact that he "has to suffer again". The significance of Malamud's first novel is that it is these themes of (i) the growth of inwardness, and (ii) the value of suffering, which he develops further in his later novels.

20.4 THE MAGIC BARREL

Malamud's next novel, *The Assistant,* our concern for detailed study, we leave out of the present discussion. Its detailed analysis, examining the various aspects of theme, plot, style, etc., will be taken up later. We, therefore, take up here the work that follows this novel, that is *The Magic Barrel,* which is a collection of short stories. Although just a short collection of thirteen stories only, it won its author the first National Book Award. The citation for the Award read as under : "Compassionate and profound in its wry humour, it captures the poetry of human relationships at the point where imagination and reality meet." Most of the stories in the collection relate to the life of Jews and Gentiles living in New York. Only a few relate to Italian situations. More important, however, than their ethnic colour is the resonance of life these stories evoke. Certain situations in these stories are reminiscent of similar happenings in the two novels that had appeared before *The Magic Barrel.* Others foresee the novel to follow, for some of the stories and situations are dilated into larger plots in the later novels. Splitting the stories into different groups would rather only hinder the orchestration of a complex response to the variety of experience they embody in their collective body. It is, in fact, on the basis of this varied experience of life itself that, irrespective of its ethnic diversities, the book as a whole tends to be ''an affirmation of man's ability to realize himself, even in the face of deprivation and disaster.'' While, on one hand, Malamud presents the anguish of the disinherited and the injured bakers, shoemakers, tailors, grocers, and matchmakers, he also presents, on the other, the feeble voice of human relatedness, connecting man to man with compassion and sympathy.

The theme of injustice, as usual in Malamud, is central to these stories in *The Magic Barrel.* We find that most characters are fugitives, attempting evasion of tyranny and injustice. Sitting hunchbacked behind sale counters they only dream of better days ahead. At the same time, they are not unmindful of their grim awareness that the price of aspiration is invariably suffering. And yet they do not consider the bargain unprofitable for it is only this that they consider as evidence of being a Feld, a Kessler, a Lieh, and a Panessa. The value of personal integrity is heightened in the utterances of Isabella. George's quiet resolve to gain responsibility, too, is directed towards the same goal. Similarly, Henry Levin, by disowning his past and describing it expendable, fails to grasp the purpose of life, which Rosen is able to affirm through his large-heartedness. In the perspective of these stories in *The Magic Barrel,* love of mankind seems a prerequisite to love of God, as Leo Finkle realizes it after his training in the Yeshiva. In short what *Malamud* seems to suggest through these stories is that man is capable of subordinating self-interest to transfer human concerns.

20.5 A NEW LIFE

Malamud's next book is his third novel, *A New Life,* which at first does not seem to have any direct thematic link with his two earlier novels. However, on a closer reading we come to see that this novel is only an attempt to extend and recreate those moral concerns that do seem to constitute the core of his earlier novels. In *A New Life,* we see that S. Levin, a New Yorker, comes to Cascadia in the Western America as an instructor in English at Eastchester Community College. Levin finds that in a metropolitan city like New York democracy seems to have become inoperative. He feels that democracy would be found in its purest form in his small college campus, away from New York. However, when he gets into the small world of the college, he discovers to his dismay and disillusion that instead of democracy, it is faculty intrigues and factional politics that dominate the functioning of the college. There is no democratic functioning even among the various faculties and departments. His own liberal arts have to live in subordination to the faculties of agriculture and forestry. Just as he joins the college, he is warned against having affairs with girl students and faculty wives. But human nature being what it is, such prescriptive pieces of advice seldom work. Levin, during his one year stay in the

college, does nothing but what he had been advised against. And when he leaves the college after one year, he does so with his Composition Director's wife, Pauline, promising never to return to the business of teaching.

Considered as an academic novel, *A New Life* comes out with an incisive commentary on the petty-mindedness and infantile interests of the learned educators at the college. We are shown how at formal faculty get-togethers, Professor Fairchild, the Department Chairman, pontificates on the virtues of research and the pursuit of higher research. However, his rhetoric for achieving academic excellence ends just as the meeting ends. While in private he confides to Levin that his priorities are as under : "We need forestry, farmers, engineers, agronomists, fish-and-game people, and every sort of extension agent ..... You can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain, or build a dam with poetry." These priorities come as a sort of bedrock on which Levin's ideals shatter. In sharp contrast to the Chairman's priorities, Levin's ideals include acquainting his students with deeper moral concerns. For effecting these ideals he wants courses in philosophy to be introduced. In his view, literature must constitute the core of the college curriculum. These courses, he thinks educate his students about the dangers to democracy. Levin's considered view is that "the human, the good and innocent" need to be protected against the menace of McCarthyism, the Cold War, Loyalty Oaths and the Korean War. He looks upon the people on his college campus as representatives of the American public, a sort of mini America. As such, couples at the Cascadia College, like the Fairchilds, the Gilleys, and the Bullocks epitimize the national crisis of leadership and bankruptcy of ideas. Consequently, Levin's urge to begin a new life is intensified by his college experience. His commitment to human relationship is stronger than his activity of teaching. He does not hesitate to quit teaching, when it comes to making a sacrifice for the greater cause of strengthening human bonds. Hence we find at the end of the novel that Levin renunciates academic career.

Malamud's *A New Life* was followed by another collection of short stories under the title *Idiots First,* which shows the author's further explorations into newer experiences of human life. A central theme of these stories seems to be the inhumanity of man. Another, equally central to this collection, is the theme of racial prejudices between the two leading minority communities in America, the Blacks and the Jews.

The emphasis behind it all remains on the "sanctity of human life." The book offers an impressive account of destitution on one hand, and of commitment to the value of love, on the other. The stories come out with a 'scathing expose' of hypocrisy as well as a fervent concept of human responsibility. An animating contact between art and life can be seen delineated in the Fidelman stories. The author very clearly seems to suggest that unless related to life, art remains an empty exercise in technocracy. In the story called "Suppose a Wedding", we are shown Maurice explaining the value of tragedy in reminding people "that they are human". Then, in the stories of "the German Refugee" and "The Jewbird" we are shown the horrors of anti-Semitism. Implied in these stories exposing social ills and human failures is the author's alternative attitude of sanity, which identifies a corresponding humanity in others. The accent of "the anxious humanist" in Malamud is always found to inform his stories, long or short. That is precisely what the present collection, too, demonstrates.

20.6 FIXER

The next novel that came from Malamud's pen, The *Fixer,* is focused on an incident of anti-Semitism which takes place in Zarist Russia. The novel articulates once again the author's abiding allegiance to the ethics of humanism, to a meta-Jewish secular ideal of life. The novel's story is located in a Jewish village falling in the Russian Pale (marking the restricted territory for Jews).

The novel's protagonist, named Yakov Boc, is a Jew by birth. The story's dramatic interest springs from the Jewish history of the Passover. The central impulse in the novel, however, transcends the Jewish framework, the purely ethnic interests, penetrating to the universal human core that resides in every human heart. The narrative opens with the protagonist going on the familiar quest for a "new life", which involves a clear and conscious decision to discard the past and a serious search for a promising future. He would be able to improve his prospects in life. However, as the irony of life would have it, he soon finds himself implicated in a false murder charge. The organization of bigoted Russians, called the Black Hundreds, prepares false evidence in order to consign him to a solitary confinement. There in the prison every possible instrument of torture is used to compel him to make a confession. However, Yakov remains undaunted by the brutal treatment meted out to him, and refuses to make a confession. After remaining in prison for two and a half years, he

receives the indictment. When the novel comes to an end, we see Yakov escorted in a closed carriage to court for trial.

The Russian authorities claim to have discovered correspondence between Yakov and Mendel Bellis, whom the government had earlier arrested in 1913 on a similar charge of ritual murder. Since the novel was meant primarily to be an indictment of injustice, it did not intend to become a "factual reportage" on an historical happening. As Malamud himself said, he did not ''want it to be tied to the Bellis case. In his discussion of Spinoza with Bibikov, Yakov sums up the teachings of the Dutch philosopher in a pithy sentence, ''life could be better than it is.'' It is owing to his commitment to reason that Yakov shuns the rhetoric of the synagogue and decides to become a free thinker. Malamud's view of different races or ethnic groups is not simplistic or prejudiced. For instance, not all the Jewish characters in the novel are honest and above board, nor all the Christians racists and reprehensible. His perspective clearly demonstrates that the book's intention is not to defend or justify Judaism, nor to disparage or undermine Christianity. The issue of injustice located at the centre of the novel is non-racist and non-ethnic. The novelist treats the subject in secular terms, making his hero's struggle against injustice, showing the tremendous human capacity for suffering and endurance. As has been aptly observed, ''it is the seeking after living that is affirmed, and is Malamud's theme, one undeniable characteristic of human living is human suffering.''

20.7 PICTURE OF FIDELMAN

In his next novel, *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition,* Malamud uses an altogether new narrative technique. While the novel apparently seems to offer a set of disparate episodes, presenting six separate pictures, it actually demands the reader to reconstruct the events to form a linear and logical movement into a coherent story about the life of Arthur Fidelman in Italy. Despite this experimental attempt, however, Malamud is not one of those ''disruptionists'' who fragment the narrative to embody their postmodernist view of life. In this view, life is unstable and unrelated, having no logicality or wholeness. Malamud remains, one might say, one of those ''old timers'' for whom life is not yet meaningless and can be lived meaningfully, relating individual to society, and society to the whole of humanity, assimilating all individuals and societies into a grand universal unity. Here, in the present novel, the unity of the

narrative is achieved through the thread of the hero's consciousness, which is continuously growing, having a beginning, middle, and end. It is through the growth of Malamud's rather ''unheroic'' heroes that we discover the thematic kinship among his various novels. Here, the growth in the hero's character is depicted in psychological terms. As we move through the narrative, we notice a continuous shaping of certain mental attitudes in the character of the central figure of Arthur Fidelman. We see how, after his utopian quest into the realm of art, he finally returns to, what he had always viewed, the imperfect world. In this graph of his life-journey Fidelman shows his clear kinship with the earlier heroes of Malamud's novels, such as Roy Hobbs, Frank Alpine, and S. Levin.

Taking a backward look on all these novels we have discussed, we can notice a significant consistency in the entire corpus of Malamud's work. The pattern emerges from the growth of his protagonists, which his novels so effectively dramatize. Here, in the case of Fidelman, he eventually realizes during the progess of his journey that since he cannot ''invent'' art, he must ''invent'' life through love. In his genuine acceptance of his failings lies his redemption. His return from Europe to America acquires a symbolic significance, suggesting a shift in his stance from pretence to reality. The novel's comic tone may put a question mark in the reader's mind about the status of the hero and the significance of his symbolic change. But we cannot, at the same time, afford to miss that in Malamud, here as well as elsewhere, comedy remains a means of survival for his central characters in the face of severe despair of life. Moreover, comedy confirms the author's allegiance to the imperfect world. In fact, Malamud seems to endorse Mark Twain's comment that, sorrow being an indistinguishable component of comedy, no humour is possible in heaven. Hence the return of his hero into the unheavenly world of imperfect life.

20.8 THE TENANTS

Malamud's next novel, *The Tenants,* returns to his familiar theme of racial or ethnic relationships. In the present novel, it is the case of the Jews and the Blacks in America as to how the two minority communities manage to cope with each other and with the majority community of the Anglo-Saxon Americans. Malamud had prominently dealt with the American blacks in two short stories, namely, ''Angel Levixe'' and ''Black is My Favourite Color,'' where he brought out the complexity of responses

between the blacks and the Jews. Here, in *The Tenants,* he once again takes up the theme on a larger scale of the novel and gives it greater treatment than was possible on the limited canvas of the short story. The novel presents one Harry Lesser, a Jewish writer and one Willie Spearmint, a black writer, both of whom make attempt to establish themselves as writers. However, before they are able to produce their masterpieces, they bitterly fall out. Although the novel's conclusion is blandly realistic, its intention comes through in the Rabbi's sermon in which the possibilities of mutual understanding are heightened : "Some day God will bring together Ishmael and Israel to live as one people. It won't be the first miracle." However, placed against the background of the novel's events, including Willie's destruction of Harry's manuscript and Harry's hacking of Willie's typewriter, the sermon sounds highly sentimental, even highly unrealistic. The novel ending with the two writers killing each other, in fact, belies the vision embodied in the sermon. We have to look at the novel, just as we look at a tragedy : not taking the events as a model to be followed, but as a warning to avoid such events. Here, too, we are invited by the author to take the example of these two writers as a case of ethnic fanaticism, serving as a warning against the bitter consequences of ethnic or racial prejudices. As Malamud himself put it, the novel "is a sort of prophetic warning against fanaticism."

Malamud's last significant work comes under the title *Rembrandt's Hat,* which is a collection of eight short stories. As usual, the narratives are neither wholly cheerful nor wholly depressing. The stories deal with the familiar aspects of modern living in America, addressing some of the most sordid and brutal aspects of life in that society. The book seems to seek a resolution to Howell's "riddle on the painful earth" through a candid stocktaking of their limitations and an enduring respect for the sanctity of being. The author's imagination engages itself "in the service of how men should live so as not to cause pain, so as to be the best they can be. And in the no-man's land between that hope and the small achievements it gives rise to Malamud weaves his fables," says Herbert Leibowitz. In these stories, once again, we encounter men and women who are confronted with the perennial problem of life – to accept retirement as well as rejection, despair as well as despondence, as a part of life. Confronted with such situations, Malamud's characters are compelled to reconcile to the harsh reality of life. They are also made to see the two polarities of humanist approach to life, of freedom and necessity, as to how the two are inevitably interlinked

and neither can wish away the other. The overriding issue that always arises in Malamud writings arises here as well, the issue of regulating one's life in order to reconcile to the realities therein. Most fail to regulate and reconcile and hence undergo pain and suffering; but some are able to regulate and reconcile, and hence acquire poise and balance. It is this familiar pattern that permeates all through the novels and stories, we have scanned here in this brief discussion.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 21
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-VI

THE ASSISTANT

STRUCTURE

21.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to provide a detail study of Jewish Literature in America and focussing on Fiction as a mainstream representation of Self-Identification and relocation within literature of Post Nazi Holocaust and Second World War.

21.2 BERNARD MALAMUD AND JEWISH LITERATURE IN AMERICA

Since Bernard Malamud is a Jewish novelist in America, it is necessary that we acquaint ourselves with the growth of Jewish literature in America. It becomes necessary to know this because a writer is properly understood and appreciated only in his cultural context, which, of course, includes his national as well as sub-national ethnic environment. Not that a writer has no universal meaning and message to communicate in his book. Every writer worth the name would have the universal course in his work, which lies beneath and beyond the surface coverings of cultural, national and ethnic meanings. The universal core in the ethnic work, call it residual, if you like, lies at its heart just as the human soul lies in the physical body. And it is

for this universal meaning that we read literary works written in different countries and in different periods of history. However, to have a comprehensive view of a literary work we do need to take into account all of its aspects, including the historical and cultural, biographical and psychological, as well as universal and lexical, anthropological and sociological, rather than pick up just one of, these and argue to prove the case of a part for the whole. Unfortunately, that has been the problem with most (in fact, all) theoretical approaches that have been brought to the fore in the history of literary criticism. All of these theories have been based each on just one aspect of the literary work, carrying the whole truth about literature. We have to stand apart from such a folly and adopt the eclectic approach of using all aids that help understand and appreciate a literary work. Each work will require a set of these aids to unfold itself to the readers. The reader's (or critic's) job is to keep an open mind and see what aids seems helpful in getting into the world of the work to get its feel and measure its meaning.

It is in the light of such an approach to writers and their work that we have to take up the case of Malamud and his novel *The Assistant.* And to do that justly and fairly we must begin with the beginning; that is, with the origin and development of the Jewish literature in America, which over the years has acquired its own individual and separate identity, separate from the Anglo-Saxon American identity, which until recently had been passing for the monolithic identity of American nation and narration. In the present era of post-modernist and post-structuralist emphases, the hitherto minority groups or sub-nationalists have asserted their individual voices and have demanded separate spaces in the global (or even national) spectrum of literary discourses. Let us therefore begin with the advent and development of the Jewish literature in America and try to place Malamud in that growth-chart wherever he belongs.

There has been a wide critical assertion to the effect that the Yiddish concept of *menschlikeit* is what qualitatively distinguishes the Jewish American literature. In Yiddish (the language the Jews speak), a *mensch* connotes that man is not just a man, the literal meaning of *mensch,* but a man is as a man should be. Also, not necessarily a smarter man, he may even be a bit of a *schlemiehl,* that is a fool, or a *schlimazel,* that is magnet attracting bad luck. The usual distinction is that when the

schlemiehl drops his bowl of soup it lands in the lap of schlimazel, though it is not uncommon to find a schlemiehl who is also a schlimazel. Thus, to be a *mensch* (man) it is essential only that he be a man of heart and ethical responsibility, that he pursue ideals but never beyond human limits. In that sense, a *mensch* is neither a creature reduced to its material needs nor a divinity able to alter a world to its heart's desire. On the contrary, a *mensch* must fulfil his obligations in the world as it is, though sometimes making attempts to improve it, frequently with somewhat ludicrous results. We can see how there are problems with the concept. One of the oblivious of these problems is that by definition it leaves out women. Another problem is that the concept has a certain reactive quality, which is that the cultural function of the European Yiddish version of the *schlemiehl* was to dramatize the persistence of faith in the most adverse circumstances, whereas the Jewish American *schlemiehl* is

> an expression of heart, of intensive passionate feeling, in surroundings that stamp out individuality and equate emotion with reason. The *schlemiehl* is used as a cultural reaction to the prevailing Anglo-Saxon model of restraints in action, thought, and speech ..... The American *schlemiehl* declares his humanity by loving and suffering in defiance of the forces of depersonalization and the ethic of enlightened stoicism.

It is no wonder, then, that the decade of the 1950's was the Jewish decade since the heart was in, responsibility was in, and Jews were specialists in both, emotionally expressive but ethically restrained. As has been noted by Irving Hope, one man's sentimentality can be another man's *menschlikeit.* As he puts it, ''in Yiddish culture there is a greater emotional permissibility, a greater readiness to welcome tears or laughter, than in American culture. The desperate reliance upon blandness and composure, the cult of understatement, the assumption that it is good to feel but bad to show one's feelings - these attitudes are quite alien to the Jewish ethos.''

The construction of the 1950's was, that though the South might be the heart's true home, the Jew was its natural spokesman, an interrelation (between the South and the Jews) was argued as late as 1972 by a Southern writer: ''In so far

as the twentieth-century novel in this country has consisted of the South and the Jews .... it has been the product of two profoundly similar cultures - God and family centred ... gifted with unashamed feelings and eloquence, supported by ancient traditions of sorrow and the promise of justice, a comic vision of ultimate triumph.'' Whether or not it is actually the case, it seems quite significant that a number of Southern and Jewish writers think it to be. Also, there seems to be an approximate equivalence in the critical fortunes of the two literatures. In any case, the theme of *menschlikeit* has helped the critics to have a way of resolving the recurrent dispute over who is to be considered a Jewish American writer. As has been aptly put forth by Robert Alter, ''It is by no means clear what sense is to be made of the Jewishnes of a writer who neither uses a uniquely Jewish language, nor describes a distinctly Jewish milieu, nor draws upon literary traditions that are recognizably Jewish.'' What complicates the issue is the explicit refusal of the three important Jewish writers - Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, and Philip Roth that they can be labelled ''Jewish writers,'' although it is these three who have been known in America as ''the Hart Schaffiner and Mark of our trade.'' They have been considered all along the prototypes of the Jewish writer. The refusal to accept the label puts the whole concept in jeopardy. At the same time it cannot be denied that each of these three great American Jewish writers has invested in the theme of *menschlikeit,* though Roth satirizes it in a postmodernist fashion. Closer to Malamud and Bellow is Cynthia Ozick, who uses postmodernist techniques *against* the *postmodernist* ethos in a wry (dry mocking) defence of American identity as problematic, but it does remain a prominent issue in much of their fiction.

Then there are other writers who are in one way or another Jewish but who do not use Jewish protagonist or centre on Jewish themes and so are treated rather differently. These writers are Norman Mailer, J.D.Salinger, and Joseph Heller. These writers are considered more American than Jewish. Hence, just because one is born of a Jewish family one cannot be brought under the label of the Jewish writer. This question of origin in terms of nationality or ethnicity is rather ticklish. In one sense, it undermines the postmodernist attempt to pin down writers in terms of their cultural identity, ethnic origin, or national affiliation. The writers will be better understood and justly appreciated if they are discussed in terms of what they write about and what perspective they bring to bear upon that material. Since there are several writers in

America who have hailed from the Jewish families and have written about the problems of the Jews in the American milieu, they have to be labelled as Jewish writers and have to be understood and appreciated as such, whatever their discomfort in being so labelled. The basis for their refusal to be so labelled seems to be their fear that it would limit their status as writers to only that of a sectional writers and deny them the status of being Americans writer or great writers.

21.3 JEWISH AMERICAN FICTION

There is no denying the fact that the Jewish American fiction becomes a major critical category in the 1950's, ''the Jewish decade'' as it has been often described. And it is rightly so described because there came in that decade an emergence of highly talented and original writers matched by an equally talented and original support group of critics. These critics were centred in New York, of whom Irving Howe and Alfred Kazin have remained the most enduring. In the 1950's it almost seemed that if a critic was not from the South then he must be of Jewish origin. Irving Hope, like Reynolds Price, drew the parallels :

> In both instances, a subculture finds its voice and its passion at exactly the moment it approaches disintegration. This is a moment of high self-consciousness, and to its writers it offers a number of advantages . It offers the emotional strength that comes from traditional modes of conduct - honor for the South, 'choseness' for the Jews - which the writers struggle to regain, escape, overcome, while finding through this struggle their gift of tongue ... And it offers a heritage of words, a wonderful richness of language, for the Southern writers every-thing from Ciceronian courtroom rhetoric to the corrupt vividness of redneck speech, and for the Jewish writers everything from the high gravity of Yiddish declamation to the gutter sparklings of the street.

In the case of the South, the development of the writers was ahead of the critics. The reason why there came a belated recognition of William Faulkner, the greatest writer the South has produced so far. The Jewish American critics,

on the other hand, arrived just in time for the Jewish writers. It was for this very reason that the Jewish writers received rapid recognition, and reaped the harvest of institutional rewards. Saul Bellow's National Book Award of 1953, Malamud's same award in 1958, and Philip Roth's in 1559, came in quick succession, which projected them as the major American novelists of the post-war period.

The climate for the Jewish writers was fully ripe. The need for a major expansion of college faculties to serve the enrolment boom fuelled by the GI Bill shattered the old barriers against hiring Jews in the English departments. The casual, sometimes vicious anti-Semitism of the 1920s reflected in the works of Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Eliot, Pound, and Cummings, conceded ground to a post-holocaust "Philo-Semitism." A wonderful example in this context is of Elizabeth Hardwick, a Kentucky woman, who had gone to New York to become a literary critic. She boldly opted against identification with the New Critics of the South to become a volunteer secular Jew. This can be taken as a remarkable turn in cultural history. Her announcement at the moment is pertinent : "I do not consider myself a Southern writer. Even when I was in college 'down home,' I'm afraid my aim was ... to be a New York Jewish intellectual." Thus, by the 1950's, readers were in a position to decide whether to be Southern or Jewish as a matter of individual choice, quite as voluntarily as they would choose where and what to wear or eat. In other words, both than Jewish. Hence, just because one is born of a Jewish family one cannot be brought under the label of the Jewish writer. This question of origin in terms of nationality or ethnicity is rather ticklish. In one sense, it undermines the postmodernist attempt to pin down writers in terms of their cultural identity, ethnic origin, or national affiliation. The writers will be better understood and justly appreciated if they are discussed in terms of what they write about and what perspective they bring to bear upon that material. Since there are several writers in America who have hailed from the Jewish families and have written about the problems of the Jews in the American milieu, they have to be labelled as Jewish writers and have to be understood and appreciated as such, whatever their discomfort in being so labelled. The basis for their refusal to be so labelled seems to be their fear that it would limit their status as writers to only that of a sectional writers and deny them the status of being

Americans writer or great writers.

In universal terms, the Jew came to be redefined as a response, to a large degree, to the Nazi denial of humanity to the Jews. It may be a delayed reaction, but there emerged in America a wish, in reaction against the pre-war prejudices and against the 1945 photographs and accounts of the death camps, to do away with racial and cultural differences. As an influential 1950's book of photography put it, the differences got dissolved into ''The Family of Man.'' And just as the Jew came to be known, mostly through Jewish writing, as a 'specialist in alienation,'' it added to the perception of universality, since in the post-war era of Camus's *The Stranger* and Riesman's ''lonely crowd,'' alienation seemed representative of every man's situation in the post-war world. Even the Jewish-type character of the *luft mensch,* the man who lives by words, unattached to tradition or community, as light as air, seemed to reflect the circumstances of a growing sector of the American middle class. This said middle-class consisted of specialists in self-presentation and the persuasive language of advertising, promotion, political imagery. As a Malamud character chooses to put it, ''Believe me there are Jews everywhere.''

It may be true that the Jewish American identity as well as Jewish American literature became a victim of its own success. We can recall here how the universalization of Jewish identity in the concept of *menschlikeit* led to various complications. One of these is : if suffering is intrinsically Jewish, is everyone who suffers a Jew? In metaphoric terms, the conclusion is, of course, logical. No one, on that premise can contest its validity in modern world. It is true, no doubt, that Frank Alpine supplements suffering with circumcision. But since the 1930's most American stand circumcised, thus removing another ground of distinction between the American and the Jew. However, there are other problems raised about the universalization of Jewish suffering. For instance, questions have been asked as to the psychology of this suffering. One of the questions raised is : is the Jewish embrace of suffering rather perverse, open to the suspicion of masochism? We have the great example of Bellow's novels, which do an elegant toe-dance around this question. For example, how would one take Tommy Wilhelm's suffering heart

is quite a dilemma in Bellow's *Seize the Day.* In the case of *The Adventures of Augie March,* the hero emerges more of an American Adam, who evades the pain almost gratuitously shouldered by Tommy Wilhelm and several of Malamud's characters. At the same time it is pain that makes Augie Jewish, primarily Bellow's Yiddish-inflected patter.

The danger is that if even this identity marker (suffering) goes the way of the fast-disappearing Southern accent, then what will be left to distinguish a specific Jewish quality to American fiction? No doubt, there will always remain a number Jewish American writers, and some of them would surely be able to write notable fiction. But suppose the books were kept anonymous, shall we be able to see the marked Jewish stamp on those books? Already, we have quite a few examples of the kind before us. For instance, could we really tell about Salinger, Mailer, or Heller from their books alone that they are Jewish writers? Heller did, of course, write a novel, *Good as Gold*, which is about a Jewish American diplomat, but the hero of the novel seems no more than Updike's Bech. Moreover, besides the problems of a dubious essentialism and an overextended universalism ikn grounding Jewish identity in *menschlikeit,* there is at the same time a limiting factor as well - the now embarrassing gender specificity of it. Cynthia Ozick, being a feminine and feminist writer, supplies the lack in her comic and judicious version of it in *Putter Messer*. However, Putter Messer's wish for civility, however ardent, does not seem adequate as an ethnic differentiating mark.

Looking at all these aspects of the problem of Jewish identity, the question is still left open to the poststructuralist deconstructions of Philip Roth, who is sceptical about any form of integral identity. Moreover, most American Jews have become so culturally assimilated as to disappear into the American melting pot. Leslie Fiedler claims to have parlayed his identity as "literary Fiedler on the roof of academe," to an assimilative success that threatens to cancel out its origins. It is quite possible that the Jewish American literary identity will continue to find a motive simply in trying to prove it exists. Also, there are signs of a renewed interest in their Judaic heritage among the younger generation of Jewish Americans. However, in the apparent absence of an emergent figure with the force of Malamud, Bellow, or Ozick, the question seems to remain open.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 **LESSON NO. 22**
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II **UNIT-VI**

THE ASSISTANT : A CRITICAL SUMMARY

STRUCTURE

22.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to provide a comprehensive critical analysis of the novel *The Assistant* discussing the major characters of the novel.

22.2 THE ASSISTANT : A CRITICAL STUDY

The Assistant is generally considered the most popular of Malamud's novels. Written in the 1950s it was published in 1959. Although one of the early novels of Malamud (it is only the second), it has been considered by critics perhaps his most representative. Although the novel's hero, named Frank Alpine, is an Italian and initially a Jew-hater, he gradually comes to discover an affinity between a Jew and a Christian. It is rather unusual with Malamud, as well as with most of the American Jewish writers, to have a non-Jew as the hero of his novel. The novel, nonetheless, is as jewish in its spirit as any other novel of Malamud. In fact, to make a Christian recognize affinity with a Jew works all the more effectively to promote the Jewish cause. Of course, *The Assistant* is not the first, nor the only, novel of Malamud to have a non-Jewish protagonist. His very first novel, *The Natural,* too, has in Roy Hobbs a non-Jewish hero. In fact, in the first novel, the protagonist is not even concerned with the problem of religion in the first instance; it is only later that he

realizes the typical Jewish realization of seeing in suffering the true value of life. This realization comes partly through experience but also when Iris Lemon explains to him that suffering has an instructive role, for it ‘‘teaches us to want the right things.’’

The Assistant, like many of Malamud’s stories and novels, focuses on the theme of suffering. Before we go into an elaborate analysis of the novel, we may recall what Malamud himself has to say about it. After all, the author’s intention cannot be completely ignored, whatever be the force in the postmodernist declaration of the death of the author. In our own times, there are critics like E.D. Hirsch also who equally strongly insist that a literary work means only what its author intended. Between these two positions we can also quietly depose that a literary work is as much shaped by the author’s intention as by the cultural context of the author. Considering, therefore, the author’s intention as one of the relevant factors in the interpretation of a literary work, let us take note of what Malamud has to say about his novel, *The Assistant.* His disclosure about his work is that

> After completing my first novel, *The Natural,* in essence mystic, I wanted to do a more serious, deeper, perhaps, realistic piece of work. The apprentice character interested me, as he has in much of my fiction, the man who, as much as he can in the modern world, is in the process of changing his fate, his life. This sort of person, not at all complicated, appears for the first time in my writing in the short story, ‘The First Year’ ... and thought I would like to develop the possibilities of his type.

As intended, Malamud develops in Frank Alpine an apprentice character, the ‘‘assistant’’ to one Maurice Bober, a poor Russian Jew who is struggling to run a grocery store. One night Maurice gets a call from one Julius Karp, who owns in Maurice's neighbourhood a flourishing liquor shop that he feared a possible hold up, and that just in case it does happen, then Maurice should ring up the police for help. However, it so happens that the robbers reach Maurice’s store rather than of Julius. The two robbers, named Ward Minogue and Frank Alpine, rob Maurice of fifteen

dollars - all that he had at the moment. Ward views his act of robbery as a measure of anti-Semitism. But for Frank it is a heinous deed, for which he is repentant. He wishes to expiate the sinful act through free service at the store of the man (Maurice) whom he robbed.

Thus, begins Frank's ''assistantship'' with Maurice. He works free of cost (without salary) in the store owned by Maurice. During his days at Maurice's, he gets to know Maurice's twenty-three years old daughter named Helen and falls in love with her. Helen herself is working in a garment store to help out the family with her earnings. Helen's mother, Ida, becomes suspicious of Frank's designs, more so because he is a goy, a non-Jew. During his assistantship, working for Maurice, Frank has been regularly stealing money from the store where he works. Being a ''gentle thief'', he has been putting back part of his stolen money whenever the business went bad at the store. One day, when he is stealing in the store, he is caught red-handed by the owner, and hence dismissed from his ''assistantship''. As the chance would have it, Frank saves the same night Maurice's daughter Helen from being raped by Ward. Soon after the event, however, Frank himself almost rapes Helen, leaving her rather in a state of hysteria caused by her discovery that he was an ''uncircumcised dog.'' A sort of love-hate, helpful-hateful relationship continues between Frank and the family of Maurices. He may not be very desirable, but he has also become almost indispensable for the family. In the course of time, he has become the mainstay of the Bober family. When their fortunes go down, he keeps the store open, takes up a night job to raise enough money for Helen's admission to college, hoping that in due course he would be able to win back her trust and love. His involvement with the family of Maurice effects an internal transformation in Frank. He goes all out to become acceptable to Helen and her family. He even gets himself circumcised after the Passover.

Looking into the significance stressed in the story, one of the things Malamud seems to suggest, is that people have to move beyond their orthodox heritage, for you can not keep living by the attitudes that have become outmoded, irrelevant, even pernicious. The novel clearly explores the grounds of conflict between orthodox

Judaism and Christianity. In the development of Frank's character from Jew-hater to Jewishness and in Maurice's forbearance, we are shown that the value of suffering is of crucial significance. In a way, Maurice emerges the moral centre of the novel, for it is he, who embodies in his life style the essential spirit of Jewishness and of humanity. It is important to note here that Frank's being an ''assistant'' to Maurice gains an added meaning in the context of this central theme of the novel. In this respect, while Maurice plays the role of the tutor, Frank does that of the tyro. The tyro-tutor relationship clearly points to the growth that Frank experiences from an unethical position to an ethical one. What Frank aspires to achieve, first through self-purgation and then through conversion, is what it means to be human in a society dominated by dogma and doctrine.

Of all the Jewish characters in the novel, it is Maurice alone who remains a tutor-like figure, not for Frank alone, but also for the other Jewish brothers in America. Others easily seem to forget or neglect the primary role of being a Jew in a competitive social order that America has come to establish. Even the other Jews in Maurice's neighbourhood do not come to his rescue. These other Jews are notably the Karps and the Pearls. In fact, they are more of detractors than friends of Maurice : ''The Karps, Pearls and Bobers, representing attached houses and stores, but otherwise detachment, made up the small Jewish segment of this gentile community.'' Morris opens his store early every morning, so that he can supply a three-cent roll to the Polish lady, who is invariably his first customer. If a buyer ever forgets his/her money on the counter, Morris runs after him/her to hand that over. He becomes, thus, a representative honest, hard working and suffering Jew. As Malamud, the author of *The Assistant,* describes,

> He labored long hours, was the soul of honesty - he could not escape his honesty, it was bedrock; to cheat would cause an explosion in him, yet he trusted cheaters - coveted nobody's nothing and always got poorer. The harder he worked - his toil was a sort of time devouring time- the less he seemed to have. He was Morris Bober and could be nobody more fortunate. With that name you had no sure sense of property, as if it were in your blood and history not to possess, or if by some miracle to own something, to

do so on the verge of loss. At the end you were sixty and had less than a thirty.

Morris is one of those, who would be called luckless. Malamud relishes such characters. He specializes in them. They are his representative characters, those who work hard and yet fail, those who go down and yet never despair, those, who never succumb to cynicism.

Malamud once explained that a Malamud character is ‘‘someone who fears his fate, is caught up in it, yet manages to outrun it. He’s the subject and object of laughter and pity.’’ In other words, his typical characters are great survivors; they outlive the dragons of destruction. As for Morris, a typical Malamud character, he seems to relish what Emily Dickinson (an American poetess of later nineteenth century) has called ‘‘banquet of abstemiousness.’’ However, he retains at the same time his belief that morally he is superior to one-dimensional Jewish go-getters who flourish in business but know not ‘‘the tragic quality of life.’’ We have in Sam Pearl such a one-dimensional Jew who, with all his prosperous candy store can only discuss race horses. Morris finds it difficult to strike any conversational chord with such characters. Whenever he sees Sam or his like, his favourite expression is, *‘‘Der oilem ir a goilem,’’* which in English would translate as ‘‘people are stupid and the world is an idiot.’’ The other side of Morris’s personality is that he shows infinite sympathy and compassion for the poor who suffer like him. For instance, he always offers a glass of tea to Brietbart, who is a destitute pedlar selling light-bulbs. Once feeling deeply moved by Brietbart’s plight Morris reflects, ‘‘The world suffers. He felt every schmertz.’’ Similarly, he is truly distressed to know that Helen has to supplement her family income by taking up a job, abandoning her studies at the college.

Morris’s wife Ida, Helen’s mother, though a minor character in status, is also a memorable character. She displays some interesting qualities of character. She is a loving woman, but a nagging wife. She is quite efficient as assistant to Frank, but also queer of temperament. Unlike her husband, she is keenly conscious of the competition offered to their own store by the neighbouring flourishing ones. Constantly tossed about she might be (with her husband) in hope and despair, she does not, unlike her husband, easily lose hope in life. Her love for her daughter is a source of

strength for the young girl. Helen knows it is there, and that makes life meaningful for her.

One of the features of Malamud's fiction is that he always attempts to bring out the recurring aspirations of even his most dubious characters to become better human beings. They may or may not succeed in their aspirations; mostly, they do not. But the author's emphasis is that most humans do have those aspirations, and it is only an abnormal minority that remains incorrigibly irremediable. What Malamud seems to suggest about the development of character is that it is not simply a matter of change of direction on the highway, but often a tangle of advances and retreats. For instance, when Frank Alpine hangs around Sam's joint after the holdup, he is seen closely examining St. Frank's of Assisi's picture in a magazine. When Sam enquires about Frank's engagement with the picture, the latter replies that he is a great admirer of the saint :

> The picture was of thin-faced, dark-bearded monk in a coarse brown garment, standing barefooted on a sunny country road. His skinny, hairy arms were raised to a flock of birds that dipped over his head. In the background was a grove of leafy trees; and in the far distance a church in sunlight.

As Frank explains to Sam, the picture shows St. Francis preaching to the birds. When Sam wants to know why the saint was great, Frank's reply is, ''he gave everything away that he owned, every cent, all his clothes off his back. He enjoyed to be poor. He said poverty was a queen and he loved her like she was a beautiful woman.'' And it was on account of being poor that he ''took a fresh view of things.''

In Malamud's novel, *The Assistant,* the author seems to offer a "fresh view of things" emanating from the poor like Morris and Frank. The two come to acquire a certain nobility of character which makes them saintly in their approach to life. Here, poverty seems an ennobling influence at least on these two characters. It raises their soul as if, makes them purified of whatever grossness there was in their characters. Thus, the novel offers a fresh look on the relationship between Jews and Catholics, as also between Jews and Anglo-Saxon Protestants. A good deal of emphasis is laid in the novel's narrative on the value of fellowship between man and man, faith and

faith, between men of different races and faiths. His novels always, as here in *The Assistant,* search for common grounds between different cultures and nationalities, faiths and ethnicities. Malamud, himself married to an Italian, is reported to have remarked in one of his interviews that "Italians and Jews are closely related in their consciousness of the importance of personality, in their emphasis on the richness of life, in their tremendous sense of past and traditions." Here, one may question the correctness of this observation in historical and sociological terms. However, that seems beside the point. For what Malamud is trying to do here is to seek similarities between them, to bring them together, and to minimize the differences between them, to obliterate those differences, to dissolve them into reconciliation. Thus, it is not the authenticity of what is discovered that matters here, but the intention behind the effort. Malamud's novels are to be appreciated, therefore, for this very vision of union and reconciliation between and among various ethnic, racial, and religious groups in the American society. In the pursuit of his vision, he may at times contrive his plot or sentimentalise a character—minor artistic faults–but he never falters on the consistency and coherence of his vision. It is in such a context that Malamud refers to the different religious background of his wife, adding, "Through her family opened Italian life to me. Her background is richly Italo-American. When we lived in Rome, I fell into Italian family life there." In other words, every happening of his life becomes an opportunity for another exploration of the human ties behind cultural or ethnic appearances. Malamud's search is unending. *The Assistant* amply bears it out.

The point being hammered here is that in the author's perspective in *The Assistant,* as well as the other novels, the immateriality of being a member of this or that religious or racial group is that Malamud's secular and humanistic vision of life stubbornly refuses to deflect in the face of ethnic or racial tensions and conflicts. We see in the novel how both Frank and Morris have an equal share of reversals and setbacks. We see that Morris ''waits'' for a buyer of the store or a customer to show up. Similarly, Frank ''waits'' for a change in the dismal pattern of happenings, for "he moves into a place with nothing and moves out with nothing.'' Helen, too, ''waits'' to be educated, although in the end she gets ''tired of anticipation, of ''waiting'' for nothing.'' Circumstances so conspire in each of these cases that all their aspirations are thwarted, frustrating their attempts to fight want and depression.

The choice of setting and character in *The Assistant* seems to have been influenced by the Depression and the leitmotif of Yiddish literature. Some of the sources for the central character in the novel seem to be Michael Gold's ''Jews without money'', Edward Dalberg's ''bottom dogs'' and ''the dispossessed'', Jack Conroy's ''the disinherited.'' All of these writers of the decade of the 1930's (The Decade of Depression) had projected disenchantment with American capitalism by adopting a polemical tone. Malamud did not, of course, share their economico-political philosophy, but he did draw inspiration from them for creating certain character types in his fiction. The common theme between them is the human misery, especially of the Jews and other unprivileged people in the American society. He never becomes polemical in his literary presentation, and he is seldom propagandistic. For example, in *The Assistant,* his compassionate presentation of Morris and his fellow sufferers is not at all determined by any ideology, much less by any propaganda, political or racial. However, he clearly shows his consciousness of the characteristic themes of Yiddish literature, especially the works concerned with the poor in Jewish folklore. Note, for instance, the following : ''The virtue of powerlessness, the power of helplessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and the injured - these, finally, are the great themes of Yiddish literature.'' Irving Howe sums up here the central concern of Malamud's fiction as well, especially *The Assistant.*

In *The Assistant*, the protagonist, Frank Alpine, presents a dismal picture of poverty. He does not realize that even the disinherited can maintain an inner composure through an understanding of the erratic functioning of destiny. He is, therefore, not able to appreciate the human bond between Morris and himself. When he succeeds in overcoming his initial impulse against the Jews, he starts sharing his experiences with Morris. He also reveals to him his rather inglorious past. Disclosing bits and pieces of his earlier life, he once tells Morris, ''I could've been a college graduate by now, but when the time came to start going, I missed out because something else turned up that I took instead. With me one wrong thing leads to another and it ends in a trap. I want the moon so all I get is cheese.'' Going on with his biographical details, he further discloses to Morris that he did hit some nice good spots in between, but they were rather few and far, and that usually he ended up just as he had started out, with nothing. The gap between

Frank's aspirations and achievements does bring him closer to centre of the novel, where there already occupies even more dignified position his own master, Morris. Frank's confessions are meant to purge his past which has been rather shady. Here is one such confession :

> What I mean to say is that when I need it most something is missing in me, in me or on account of me. I always have this dream where I want to tell somebody something on the telephone so bad it hurts, but then when I am in the booth, instead of a phone being there, a bunch of bananas hanging on a hook.

It is such thoughts that make Morris identify in Frank a search identical with his own, which is for a decent footing in life. Although Frank is much younger than Morris (only twenty five), the latter feels that the young man talks like him (a man of sixty). He listens to Frank with keen interest when Frank continues : ''All my life I wanted to accomplish something worthwhile - a thing people will say took a little doing, but I don't ... I don't do what I have to - that's what I man.''

We need to recall at this stage some Jewish stereotypes like *schlemiel* and *schlimazel,* Yiddish terms for those unfortunate people who fail despite all their efforts to succeed. Prone to misfortune, a *schlemiel* is recognizably inept or simple-minded. The popular impression goes that when a *schlemiel* kills a chicken, it walks. Another impression is that when he winds a clock, it stops. Still another is that when he falls on his back, he breaks his nose. It is reminiscent of the traditional distincition between a Jew and Gentile: ''When a Goy has much thirst, he drinks a few pints of beer. When a Jew has much thirst, he goes to the doctor to be examined for diabetes.'' We may see in certain Malamud characters some of these Jewish stereotypes, but it will be inappropriate to dub any of his characters as stereotypes. For his characters are always distinguished more prominently by their human traits and less prominently by their ethnic or racial traits. He himself was never happy with the delineation of such stereotypes in Jewish fiction. As he put it, ''I dislike the *schlemiel* characterization as a taxonomical device. I said somewhat that it reduces to stereotypes people of complex motivations and fates. One can often behave like a *schlemiel* without being one.''

If we keep in view the series of attempts that Frank makes to atone for his crime, and his drama of conscience, it would not be possible to dub him as a *schlemiel,* as a sort of an innocent soup-spiller, as a sort of witless football for the gods to play with. Frank's response (or reaction) to Morris and the Jews in general inducts a good deal of complication in the novel's plot structure. After listening to Morris's account of his escape from the Russian army, expecting to find freedom and prosperity in America, Frank sympathises with Morris's helpless existence in the confinement of his store, ''like a fish fried in deep fat.'' Morris is so much sick of his store-keeping that he advises Frank not to become a grocer, but to do something which would allow him a life of open air. ''It frustrated him hopelessly that every move he made seemed to turn into an inevitable thing.'' However, even though his trials and setbacks may make him like a *schlemiel,* Morris's self-awareness reveals a complexity which remains beyond the reach of a *schlemiel.*

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 23
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-VI

NOVEL AS QUEST

STRUCTURE

23.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this lesson is to discuss the novel *The Assistant* as a form of Quest.

23.2 *THE ASSISTANT* – NOVEL AS QUEST

Very much like their counterparts in the novels of Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, characters in the novels of Bernard Malamud are very eager to begin a new life. However, like so many American protagonists of contemporary fiction, they soon find themselves involved in a compromised environment, which shows in store for them a wide variety of frustration to their specific aspirations. All the same, Malamud's protagonists (heroes, if you like) are always keen to begin some form of, what their creator has called, "new life". No doubt, they meet with frustration, they undergo lot of suffering in search of new life but they never abandon their search. And it is this search that gives Malamud's novels the form of quest. One of the effects of their sufferings they undergo on way to their quested goal is to make them redefine the form and content of that national new life. On first reading, Malamud might seem to be a novelist, writing on common contemporary life, relying on historical contingencies or actualities. For instance, his very first novel, *The Natural* (1952), which is founded on the story of a baseball hero, who

succumbs to corrupting influences at the height of his fame, sets up the parameters of the quest form of his novels. The stories of his protagonists may end in frustration and death, but the narrative is always patterned by the dynamics of the quest each individual hero undertakes.

Malamud's next two novels, *The Assistant* (1957) and *A New Life (1963),* follow the same pattern. In the former of these two, a man takes over a failing grocery store; in the latter, a college teacher takes the wife of a failing colleague. These two are followed by another. *The Fixer* (1966), where a poor Jew gets caught up in the virtulent anti-Semitism, which was on the rise in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century. The next novel, *Pictures of Fidelman : An Exhibition* (1969), is about an American who is a "self-confessed failure as a painter." He goes on a quest to Italy only to continue painting and failing. All of these novels appear, on first encounter, studies in socialism, registering the power of historical actualities. They seem to demonstrate an obdurate sociality of the given world, with mordant clarity. But in point of fact Malamud's novels are far from being documents of social realism. Philip Roth, a fellow tough writer in America, speaking of the Jewish characters in Malamud's work, has made a pertinent observation. In his view, these characters are not the Jews of Chicago or New York City, as they are in Saul Bellow. As a matter of fact, he says,

> They are a kind of invention, a metaphor to stand for certain human possibilities and certain promises .... Malamud, as writer of fiction, has not shown specific interest in the anxieties and dilemmas and corruptions of the modern American Jew .... rather, his people live in a timeless depression and a placeless Lower East Side; their society is not affluent, their predicament not cultural.

Roth's point in the cited statement is that Malamud only dramatizes his moral concerns, separated from "the contemporary scene". In this sense, to Roth, Malamud is yet another example of the American writer who does not seem to draw his fictional material from contemporary American society.

Roth's observation is, of course, not without significance. But it is not without fault either. It is not quite correct to say, for example, that Malamud does not depict

contemporary American society, its historical actualities. He decidedly does that. The only thing is that he also puts up resistance to history with his inventions. As Tony Tanner remarks, "The pain experienced in time and place is eased by the timelessness and placelessness conferred by his own style." What Roth sees as limitation Tanner views as distinctive achievement. Even though Malamud's novels seem apparently dissimilar, each embodying very different story from the other, they are not without a common pattern informing them all. It is this common pattern which, in fact, links them closely together and reveals a profound consistency. In other words, while the facts change from novel to novel, the pattern remains unchanged and endures. As Tony Tanner points out, "All his novels are fables or parables of the painful process from immaturity to maturity—maturity of attitudes, not of years. This is unusual in American literature, which tends to see initiation into manhood as a trauma, a disillusioning shock, a suffocating curtailment of personal potential." Tanner cites the example of Harry Angrtrom in Updike's *Rabbit, Run,* as a representative voice when he utters the following: ''If you're telling me I'm not mature, that's one thing I don't cry over since as far as I can make out it's the same thing as being dead.'' Tanner rightly points out that Malamud's characters, on the contrary, ''discover that it is only by this 'dying' into maturity that they can find the 'new life' for which, in their various ways, they long.''

If one looked at the entire spectrum of Malamud's fiction, it comes out clearly that there is a continuity of this vision in his work, which is amply evidenced by the involvement of his main characters in a quest. Each one of his novels is sharply focused on the searching and travelling of the central figure. Significantly, every Malamud protagonist is seen on a journey or just has completed one. For example, *The Natural* (1952), Malamud's first novel, begins with an account of Roy Hobbs's train ride bringing him from the Pacific Coast to Chicago where he hopes to break into big-time baseball. We find that this journey is narrated in such a manner that it echoes the whole process of birth. Roy Hobbs, we are told, is travelling to America with high hopes and big demands, ''I feel that I have got it in me - that I am due for something very big.'' Similarly in *The Assistant* (1957), Frank Alpine, the protagonist, ''had lately come from the West,'' we are told, ''looking for a better opportunity.'' In Malamud's next novel, *A New Life* (1963),

Sam Levin makes one more exhausting trans-continental trip from New York to the West Coast searching for a ‘‘new life’’. In the same way, the protagonist of *The Fixer (1966),* Yakov Bok, is moved by very much the same yearnings and expectations when he leaves the *Shtell* and sets out for Kiev, ‘‘The truth of it is I’m a man full of wants I’ll never satisfy, at least not here. It’s time to get out and take a chance. Change your place, change your luck, people say.’’

It is very important to note here that for all of these quests mentioned above, the change of luck in material terms is usually for the worse. After a short period of fame Roy Hobbs succumbs to sickness and corruption. Frank Alpine ends up running a sinking little grocery shop. Significantly, the grocery store in the novel is always mentioned as a prison. Sam Levin soon finds himself involved in marital tangle which ends his dearly cherished hopes of an academic career. Yakov Bok lands into a real prison where he is subjected to all sorts of humiliations and indignities. Thus, this Malamudian quest for better (or new) life always terminates in some sort of prison. It must also be recognized here that, despite the sad termination of the quest, Malamud does not show any sign of pessimism in his outlook on life. All he seems to stress in his novels is that, for one thing, how a man may help to imprison himself; for another, how an imprisoned man can resurrect a new self in his reaction to, or revolt against, the forces that imprison him. In Malamud’s world, the bad luck, which nearly breaks a man, may also make the same man. We find that while these heroes of Malamud get ruined by bad luck and undergo severe suffering, they also emerge out of suffering to discover ‘‘new life’’. Of course, the logic of the quest requires that you cannot retreat into past.

It needs to be noted that like other Malamud questers and travellers Roy Hobbs in *The Natural* suddenly wishes to retrace his steps; he wishes to get back to a time before time. But, as has been stated earlier, you can’t go home again. A related discovery, in a similar image, is made by Yakov Bok in *The Fixer:* ‘‘Once you leave you’re out in the open; it rains and snows. It shows history, which means what happens to somebody starts in a web of events outside the personal.’’ It need to be underlined that the snow is a root metaphor for Malamud. In *The Assistant,* the last act of Morris Bober is the attempt to shovel away the ever-falling snow outside his failing shop. It is in no way different in *A New Life :* When Levin falls

in love with a colleague's wife and finds shattered his well-protected self-sufficiency, we are told, ''It snowed heavily.'' We read a similar thing about the protagonist of a story in *The Magic Barrel that "*the world had snowed on him'' and so on. In a way, in Malamudian world, snow means everything that falls on you when you leave the room, or womb, and are left out in the open, exposed, unprotected.

In the world of Malamud's fiction, if a character fails to face up to the act of snowing, he fails also to came into possession of the meaning of his life; fails, that is, to turn a new leaf, to discover a new life. On the other hand, Iris Levin is shown ''tied to time''. Although she undergoes suffering, here suffering has a significance which lies in her devotion to her children. She is also the one who gives to Roy Hobbs the most important teaching of his life. Like so many of Malamud's characters, when Roy complains of his unlucky fate, she tells him :

'We have two lives, Roy, the life we learns with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us toward happiness.'

'I had it up to here.' He ran a finger across his windpipe.

'Had what?'

'What I suffered - and I don't want any more.'

'It teaches us to want the right things.'

'All it taught me is to stay away from it. I am sick of all I have suffered.'

She shrank away a little.

We can see that Roy is far from evil. He is repentant of the corrupt deal he had made with the gamblers, but it is too late to mend matters, which have gone out of his control. He no longer possesses the potency he once had. His bat, too, has split into half. He not only repents his deal with the devil, so to say, he turns rather violent. Rejecting the dirty money to be paid to him for throwing the match, he beats up the dark conspirators. The concluding message of the book springs from the sentiments he shows while leaving his last baseball game in a mood of intense ''self-hatred.'' ''He thought, I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again.'' George Santayana's insight seems to have a pertinent relevance here,

that those who ignore past history will have to live it through again. The only hope for man is to learn from his suffering, otherwise - 'I have to suffer again.' Roy Hobbs does learn at least that much.

Malamud's major work, *The Assistant,* has for its main preoccupation just what a man can learn from his experience of suffering, and what are the possibilities available to him for a second (or new) life. This preoccupation, in fact, continues in his subsequent novels also. In the present novel, Malamud seems to have moved closer to the style of realism. The novel records with great accuracy the economic facts about Morris Bober's fading attempts to keep running his little grocery store. The facts are depressing enough to leave the reader rather sad. Morris is a poor Jew. His luck is as consistently bad as his conduct is good. Much of history has happened to him. Much of snow has fallen upon him. Even his newspaper is ''yersterday's'' - he is shown continuously floundering and sinking in time. He remains posted in his store quite like an unmoving statue, as if he were ''entombed'' in the shop. This store is, in fact, an effective symbol in Malamud's fiction. It is just one of the many dark and constricted spaces in which so many of his character have to live out their suffering. Malamud's characteristic style of writing is that even the realistic facts of his characters must acquire the nature of a fable or a parable. He must narrate them in such a manner that they gain larger, or representative, character, becoming a part of everyone's life. Here, again, Malamud comes close to the style of Hemingway, in whose fiction also the narrative remains specific and solid and yet acquires the edges of a parable or a fable.

In his typical style, the story of Morris Bober's family (not excluding Frank who does become a member of it), though real enough, quite effortlessly moves towards the territory of the fable or parable. First, Morris loses his only son. Then he himself is decline rapidly, fast moving towards his end. Although Frank stumbles into Morris's life rather strangely, he ends up by replacing the grocer's son for all practical purposes. Frank comes to the grocer's store the first time as member of a squalid hold-up, in which Morris is literally felled. It is a sort of ritual killing of Morris that is enacted in the novel. And it is not long after that the grocer actually dies. Partly out of remorse and partly for the love of Helen, Frank has returned to the store only to gradually take over all the responsibilities of the work at the store. In view of the

failing health of Morris, Frank has come to become an indispensable assistant to the old man. After the old man's death, Frank takes over the responsibilities of not only the old man's store as the sole manager but also of his family. It is significant to note that when the old man is being buried, Frank accidentally slips into the grave, thus inadvertently dancing (so to say) on the coffin of the dead father. From now on Frank assumes the role and responsibilities of the head of the family. Like the father who is no more, he becomes the provider protector, living for all members of the family. The assumed role sharply contrast to Frank's earlier role (before he came in contact with Morris) as a self-centred individual caring very little for others.

We need to note here carefully that Frank's transformation from the one living for himself to the one living for others has not been a matter of an easy transition. Like Roy Hobbs, he begins as a man having a lot of selfish hungers in him. But he also shows, and quite early in life, an aspect of moral aspiration revealed by his growing desire "to change his life before the smell of it suffocated him." As an indication of this aspect, note the following : "He stared at the window, thinking thoughts about his past, and wanting a new life. Would he ever get what he wanted?" We do become curious as to the nature of new life he is looking for. After all, what kind of "new life" does he want? Is it to help himself to more of the goods of life, as he helps himself to the cash register even while working for the store, and as, in a moment of desperate frustration, he helps himself to the daughter of his master—Morris's daughter Helen? But by no can extension of the that be called ''a new life''. It would only be an extention of the old, for sure. For a real new life requires a radical change of attitude towards your own self as well as towards other people. The actual drama of the book, it can be legitimately concluded, is the painful emergence of selflessness from selfishness in the person of Frank Alpine.

We come to know early in the novel that Frank Alpine has always been feeling attracted to St. Francis of Assisi, ever since he had heard about him in the orphanage where he had been brought up. The attraction for the saint could not have been for no reason. Frank must have some positive quality which would make him feel attracted towards the saint, and such a quality cannot be any other but saintly in some way. This quality gets reflected in certain activities which he has instinctively liked to undertake from early childhood. For instance, he has always liked to feed

birds. He has also shown a talent for carving wooden flowers. These inclinations are quite positive and can be called, without hesitation, saintly in their own right. And it is these very inclinations in him which finally prove stronger than his worldly appetites. One of the radical changes that takes place in his character, after his positive or saintly inclinations start asserting themselves, is the change in his attitude towards the Jews. To begin with we find him often disgusted with Morris's Jewish attitude of resignation: ''What kind of man did you have to be born to shut yourself up in an overgrown coffin? .... The answer wasn't hard to say - you had to be a Jew. They were born prisoners.'' Such prejudiced views about the Jews are quite common in the early part of the novel, which Frank keeps dropping every now and then. His racial prejudice is not his alone. It has larger representation in it. It is typical of the common gentile to carry that prejudiced view as a matter of habit. In the Anglo-American literature, this sort of representation of the Jews right from Chaucer has been persistently present. Even the greatest of writers like Shakespeare and Eliot are not free from such a prejudice.

But there is, at the same time, another side of Frank's personality. He is also increasingly drawn towards something in the Jewish way of life. He asks Morris as to the definition of a Jew. Rejecting the orthodox stuff about Jews, Morris says that the only important thing for a Jew is that he believes in ''the Law''. ''This means to do what is right, to be honest, to be good.'' When Frank complains that the Jews are given to ''suffering more than they have to,'' Morris replies, ''If you live, you suffer. Some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don't suffer for that Law, he will suffer for nothing.'' Further, when Frank asks him what he suffers for, Morris answers, ''I suffer for you.'' This confuses Frank, who asks for further clarification. Morris then adds, ''I mean you suffer for me.'' On the face of it, it sounds quite a simple lesson - people suffer for one another. However, for the characters in Malamud's novels, especially *The Assistant,* it is learned the hard way; they learn only through pain and suffering. They also learn this lesson much resistance to commitments and responsibilities which ultimately do override the acute appetites of self. As the rabbi proclaims at his funeral, Morris Bober is a Jew because ''he lived in the Jewish experience ..... He followed the Law .. He suffered, he endured, but with hope .. He asked for himself little - nothing.''

If we look into the nature of change that comes about in the character of Frank Alpine, we shall see that he becomes the kind of Jew the rabbi has described above. It is paradoxical that he finds the ‘‘better life’’ he was searching (questing) for only by identifying himself with the same Jews whom he earlier called figures of imprisonment. It is only by undergoing their kind of suffering that he finds this ‘‘new life’’. Helen is the first to notice this change in Frank. She discovers that he works all night to feed her family and to support her at school. He is no longer the same hungry man who once raped her. ‘‘It came to her that he had changed. It’s true, he’s not the same man, she said to herself ... It was a strange thing about people - they could look the same but be different. He had been one thing, low, dirty, but because of something in himself ... he had changed into somebody else, no longer what he had been’’. As is clear from the narrative, the novel’s main emphasis is not on the economic hardship of the family of Morris Bober, but rather on the moral transformation of Frank Alpine. In taking on the shop after the death of Morris, replacing (symbolically) the father, and becoming a Jew (essentially), Frank has really come up as a matured man, who has decidedly, and finally, put away his immature things. While in earlier life he made others suffer for him, now he suffers for others. And in this sense, he becomes the ‘‘new man’’ he has been wanting to become. He has finally come to learn what Roy Hobbs had failed to learn. He has earned now his ‘‘new life’’. Thus, realism becomes parable in Malamud’s fiction, just as it does in Hemingway’s, without losing its concreteness and specificity.

M.A. ENGLISH (SEMESTER-IV)

COURSE CODE : ENG-413 LESSON NO. 24
AMERICAN LITERATURE-II UNIT-VI

THEME OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

STRUCTURE

24.1 OBJECTIVES

The lesson discusses the major themes of love and compassion in the novel *The Assistant*.

24.2 THEME OF LOVE AND COMPASSION

If there is one theme that runs through the entire corpus of Malamud's literary works, it is that of love and compassion. From his first novel to the last, as well as from his first collection of short stories to the last, this central preoccupation of his creative activity is always at the core of his fictional constructs, short or long. Decidedly, its value for the author is immense. He puts the highest premium on it as a sort of religion of man, a secular faith, so to say. In Malamud's moral perspective or vision, life loses its significance if the writers continuously depict the stories of uprooted and alienated characters who always speak in terms of 'no' and 'nothingness'. More than many a times, Malamud clarifies his position in opposition to popular creative and critical (even philosophic) fads. In a letter to Herbert Gold, for instance, he indicates

the value of art which lends meaning to the bewildering flux of life, and which presages, indirectly, the author's own crucial response in all his creative endeavours. When asked how he would react to the problem of art in a world that was, in the nineteen fifties, involved in a tormenting Cold War, his reply was : ''Although the fifties have a Cold War character, I would say that the problem of writing fiction in this decade is basically no different from writing in the past. One struggles alone to achieve art. The age makes no special demands except as it tends to devalue man; that being so, I work on the assumption that the opposite is true.'' At another time, Malamud adopts a similar stance of an affirmative set of assumptions, although his analysis of the economic and social maladies of his time remains highly realistic. When Malamud was honoured with the National Book Award for his collection of short stories, *The Magic Barrel* (1957), his speech on the occasion is revealing :

> I am quite tired of the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation; that life is cheap amid a prevalence of wars; or because we are drugged by totalitarian successes into a sneaking belief in their dehumanizing processes; or tricked beyond self-respect by the values of the creators of our own thing-ridden society .... or because, having invented the means of his extinction, man values himself less for it and lives in daily dread that he will in a fit of passion, or pique or absent-mindedness, achieve his end. Whatever the reason, his fall from grace in his eyes is betrayed in the words he has invented to describe himself as he is now; fragmented, abbreviated, other-directed, organizational, anonymous man, a victim, in the words that are used to describe him, of a kind of syndechdochic irony, the part for the whole. The devaluation exists because he accepts it without protest.

Not being very happy with the popular thrusts in the American fiction, Malamud continued with the conventional emphasis on the essential goodness of man, his need for love, individual as well as societal (including the familial). We find his characters beginning with petty activities of doing small jobs, stooping down even to stealing or hold-up. But as the narrative progresses, the surface layers begin to peel

off, and gradually we are shown the very bottom of the heart of his characters. And at bottom most, if not all, are found to be good. They are owners of sound humanity. Only the contingent conditions or social circumstances drive them to desperate deeds. But the "falling down" does not go on for long before their essential humanity starts making its assertion. And it is with this assertion that their regeneration begins. They start rising, stop doing mean and petty deals, and finally take to doing good and noble things. Frank Alpine can be considered as the case in point. We know how he is involved in stealing and hold-ups in the beginning of the novel. But we also see him later rising and doing good and noble things. The secret of his regeneration is his love for Helen. It is to win her that he starts transforming himself. Love pulls him out of the bad world and puts him on the path of noble deeds. He rises above his self-interests, his self-satisfactions, and starts caring for others, serving others, and finally loving others. His love for Helen makes him almost a saintly person. His transformation is almost total.

No less powerful an agent in effecting transformation in human character is the feeling of compassion. A symbol of this sentiment in *The Assistant* is Morris, the grocery store owner and the father of Helen, with whom Frank Alpine gets a job as his assistant. Despite the fact that Frank is not a Jew, and that he is not a good man, Morris treats him compassionately. He trusts Frank as he trusts every one else. Also, even when Frank is discovered as a thief and as one involved in the hold-up, he still forgives him and gives him fresh opportunity to work and reconstruct his life. Morris's compassion also, like Helen's love, acts as an ennobling influence on Frank. He starts feeling the slow but steady power of Morris's compassion. He starts looking up to Morris as his model. Silently but firmly Frank finds himself determined not to deceive Morris any longer. He finds himself eager to reveal his entire past to Morris, to lay himself bare before him. Finally, he does succeed in showing himself to Morris.

Gradually, the gulf between the two starts narrowing down - both in terms of their weakening ethnic identities as well as in terms of their growing human ties. The difference between the Jewish Morris and Gentile Frank gets finally eliminated. The gap between the good and honest Morris and the bad and dishonest Frank also starts narrowing, and finally gets almost obliterated. After Morris dies, Frank fully occupies his senior's position; not only in running the store but also in practicing human compassion.

His taking over from Morris, his replacement of his boss, is like the son stepping into the shoes of his father. The replacement is both literal as well as symbolic. Here, again, it is love and compassion between man and man, irrespective of their ethnic, racial, or religious identities, that have effected a feling of community, of human brotherhood, among them. The two represent the larger community of men and women.

Irony and Humour

Malamud's books are rescued from being described as ''novels of protest'' because of his ironic perception of life that he brings to bear upon his narratives. As has been aptly suggested by an interviewer, ironic humour in his novels is a sort of Malamud's ''mother tongue''. He does, of course, make an artistic use of irony, which is employed to unfold the gap between expectation and fulfillment. As we see in Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus,* Malamud's characters struggle (like Sisyphus) to roll the boulder which inevitably slips back, rolling them down with it. In this phenomenon of rolling down, their fantasies about being the ''chosen ones'' leaven the bread of deprivation. The base of their humour is fashioned by a fine blend of pain and comedy; or, as Bellow surmises, ''laughter and trembling are so curiously mingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two.'' Continuing his analysis of this particular kind of humour, Bellow enumerates. ''At times the laughter seems simply to restore the equilibrium of sanity; at times the figures of the story, or parable, appear to invite or encourage trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter.'' The blend of laughter and trembling tends to suggest, in *The Assistant*, that the Jew, though a chosen one, is chosen also to receive more suffering than the others. As Sheldom Norman Grebstein has asserted, ''Consequently, Jewish humour mocks sneers at human foibles and pretentions, and delivers ironic observations about itself and its practitioners, the chosen people.''

We can recall here, for instance, Morris's struggle, in *The Assistant* with adversity, which is adumberated through a subtle operation of ironic ''camera eye'', unfolding to the reader sharply realistic images. The news of another store opening in the neighbourhood comes to Morris ''like a rock dropped on his skull'', and his ''troubles grew bananas in bunches.'' The result is ''that if he ever found a rotten egg

in the street, it was already cracked and leaking''. It is through such a fusion of moral sensibility and ironic perception that despite Malamud's sympathy for Morris, his store is presented as a ''long dark tunnel'' or ''an open tomb''. Malamud, despite his sympathy for a character, always avoids sentimentality. Instead, he prefers to paint even grim situations in light colours, which makes an intense impact on the reader. More L. Ratner calls it essentially a ''poetic technique'', because Malamud prefers to unfold the narrative with the ''directness and simplicity of the folk story-teller'', and also because ''his expression is contingent on his ironic view of reality.'' Elaborating his view of Malamud's use of irony, Ratner adds : ''The irony is often by juxtaposing realistic description with fantastic incidents, or poetic imagery with ordinary occurrences.'' Related to this moral-ironic perception is the role of seasons in the novel, which starts in early November and ends in mid-April. While Morris is depicted as a passionate dreamer of Spring and all that it promises, he is also shown suffering a long winter of destitution. Helen, too, is shown realizing in the park that the month of February can offer the illusion of Spring. As Jonathan Baumbach has observed, the seasons in the novel play a symbolic role, as ''they mirror the inner condition of the central characters.''

The irony of situation in the novel is, in fact, the irony of life, showing how human beings come close to each other only in adversity, and how prosperity separates them into rivals and competitors, even adversaries and enemies. Malamud's focus on suffering is a part of his presenting an ironic vision of life. It occupies a central place in his perspective on life. Suffering in Malamud is invariably presented as a redemptive force, perhaps the only means to define the basis of humanity: ''If you live, you suffer.'' When Morris tells Frank that they necessarily suffer for each other, the implication has a dynamic thrust. It seems to acknowledge the reciprocal responsibility of man towards his fellow-beings, irrespective of their racial or religious identities. In Malamud's view, if a man does not suffer, he fails to grow, and without growth he can neither comprehend life nor discover relationships between man and man. In fact, suffering and sensitivity to life are so interrelated that the intenser the suffering, the greater is the possibility of regeneration. In his novels, including *The Assistant,* suffering shows the way to happy life, while search for happiness leads to suffering. It is an ironic cycle of life, the wheel of fortune on which humans seem to be bound.

In the present novel, both Frank and Helen suffer while deeply and frantically seeking happiness in life. However, as they go through the process of purgation through suffering, they emerge ennobled, and take to the life of love and compassion.

All the leading characters in the novel - Morris, Frank and Helen - get their revelations about the value of love and compassion, of human ties, through the trying experience of suffering. They come to attain ultimately - an irony of life- the consciousness of "planetary perspective" as a fruit of that experience. Norman Cousins, a Malamud critic, regards the consciousness as the real education the Malamud characters finally receive through their life-experience. As Cousins puts it, this education would reveal that "the simplest reality of all was that the human community was one-greater than any of its parts, greater than the separateness imposed by the nations, greater than the divergent faiths and allegiances, or the depth and colour of varying cultures." We need to remember, however, that Malamud convey, this message, in the first place, through a narrated experience; we only infer it all from the specific story of a set of characters who of their own do not do any kind of surmonising or pontification, nor does the narrator adopt any of these rhetorical modes. Secondly, Malamud also places his specific story of a set of characters in a serio-comic mode, central to which is his ironic perspective, causing humour and pathos appropriate to individual situations and different characters. The immediate benefit of the serio-comic mode is that it keeps the tone and tenor of the narrative to the level of the common way of life his characters belong to. The mode is highly appropriate to the status of these characters as well as to the author's perspective on life - one that can see the comedy of common life and yet can see as well the potential in it for higher possibilities.

24.3 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss Bernard Malamud as an American Jewish novelist.
2. Discuss Malamud as a contemporary or post-war writer.
3. Examine the theme of "New Life" in Malamud's *The Assistant.*
4. Write a long note on the character of the Malamud hero, with special reference to *The Assistant.*
5. Examine the "form" of *The Assistant* in terms of the journey motif and the

quest theme.

6. Is Morris Bober or Frank Alpine the hero of *The Assistant?* Substantiate your argument with documentation from the text of the novel.
7. Compare the characters of Frank Alpine and Morris Bober.
8. Write a note on the women characters in *The Assistant.*
9. What are the salient features of Malamud's prose style in *The Assistant.*
10. Discuss the significance of the title of the novel *The Assistant*.

24.4 SUGGESTED READING

1. Leslie Fiedler and Joyce Field (eds.). *Bernard Malamud and the Critics*. New York: New York University Press, 1970.
2. Sheldon Norman Grebstein. *Contemporary American Jewish Literature.* Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1973.
3. Allen Guttmann. *The Jewish Writer in America : Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity.* New York : New York University Press, 1971.
4. Ihab Hassan. *Radical Innocence : Studies in the Contemporary American Novel.* Princeton, New Jeresey : Princeton University Press, 1961.
5. Marcus Klein. *After Alienation: American Novels in Mid-Century.* Cleveland : World Publishing Company, 1962.
6. Philip Rahv. ‘‘Introduction,’’ *A Malamud Reader.* New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967.
7. Sidney Richman. *Bernard Malamud.* New York : Twayne Publishers, 1963.
