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Lectures in American Literature
Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism
For Second Year Licence (L02)

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General Introduction

This work presents a series of literature lectures designed for second-year undergraduate students in the Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts and Foreign Languages.

These lectures build on the introductory literature module completed during the first year. The second-year program focuses on major movements in American literature, namely Romanticism, Realism, and Naturalism. Students will be introduced to the historical background, defining features, and key figures of each movement.

Through the study of a range of literary texts, particularly short stories and poems, students will acquire the analytical tools necessary for interpreting literature. The aim is to help them become independent readers, capable of engaging with literary works critically and thoughtfully.

In the process, students will strengthen their command of English, both in vocabulary and sentence structure, while also developing critical thinking skills that will enable them to approach any text, literary or non-literary, with depth and insight.

Additionally, extra time will be devoted to reviewing and discussing student assignments. During these sessions, the instructor will provide feedback and guidance to support more effective literary analysis and improved academic performance.

Course In American Romanticism, Realism and Naturalism

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Lecture 01

Introduction Into the Elements of Fiction

Introduction

Equipping students with appropriate knowledge about the components of a work of fiction comes at the basic of literary studies. The idea is to make the learner not take these elements for granted. On the contrary, the way each element is constructed reflects substantially the writer's textual strategies and meanings. Therefore, while reading any literary text, the learners would automatically recall this information and project it while reading.

1. Plot Structure

Plot structure is the arrangement and sequence of events to develop the basic idea of a story or a play. It is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. In contrast to the novel or drama, the short story usually has one plot. There are five essential parts of plot:

- 1) Exposition: It is the introduction of the story where characters, setting and background are revealed.
- 2) Rising Actions: These are events between the introduction and climax. Events in the story become complicated and the conflict is revealed.
- The Conflict is essential to plot. It ties incidents together and moves the plot forward. It is not merely limited to arguments, conflict can be any type of struggle the main character faces.
- Within a short story, there may be only one central struggle, or there may be many minor obstacles within a dominant struggle.

3) Climax: It is the most difficult moment in the story after which the events take a different direction, i.e, a kind of turning point of the story. Readers wonder what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not?

4) Falling actions: the resolution of the main conflict begins; events and complications start to fall into place. These are the events between climax and denouement.

5) Resolution: It is the final outcome of the events in the story¹.

1.1. Writing About Plot Structure

Consider the following ideas when writing about plot structure:

- Read the story at least twice.
- Determine the main phases of the plot.
- Relate each phase of the plot with corresponding events from the story.
- Clarify the connection between one phase and another.
- Relate the overall plot structure to the theme of the story and the author's world view if possible

2. Setting: It is the time and location of a story. For some stories, the setting is very important; while for others, it is not. When examining how setting contributes to a story, there are multiple aspects to consider:

2.1. Place: It can be any geographical location, a garden, a factory, a restaurant, a boat, ..That is where the action of the story is taking place.

¹ <http://www.kirnskomer4teachertalk.com> (2024)

2.2. Time: It can be a historical period, time of day, year, etc; when is the story taking place?

2.2.1. Time-shift: Some narratives contain flashbacks and foreshadows. There is a break in the chronological order of the narrative

2.2.1.1. Flashback: when the author goes back to past events.

2.2.1.2. Foreshadow: when the author puts hints for the reader indicating the future direction of the events.

2.2.1.3. Importance of Time-shift

- Avoids presenting life as one thing/event after another.
- Allows us to make connections of causality and irony between widely separated parts.
- May change our interpretation of something which happened much later in the chronology of the story. (Lodge, 1992).

2.2.1.4. Manifestations of Time-shift

- The operation of memory as in the speech of a character's stream of consciousness. (ibid).
- Weather conditions: Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?
- Social conditions: What is the daily life of the character's like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech dialect, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place. (ibid).

2.3. Writing About the Setting

- We write about the setting when we see that it is revealing, that is, it adds or supports information about character, event or period of time.

➤ The paragraph/essay may include the following points:

- Determine the setting in relation to the story.
- Discuss how it is described? On what does the writer focus?
- Explain what meanings does setting convey in relation to character, events, ...
- Support your ideas with extracts from the story.

Lecture 02

Elements of Fiction (Follow up)

3. Characters

- In fiction, characters refer to the people in the story. People in a work of fiction can be a(n):
- Protagonist: Clearly centers the story; all major events revolve around this character.
- Antagonist: Opposes, conflicts or enemy of the main character.(ibid).

3.1. Character Conflict

- Conflict is the struggle between opposing forces where the central character fights against some force or when he has to make an important decision. This conflict can be:
 - Internal conflict: takes place inside a person's mind. Example: a character is torn between risking his life to save someone else. Or like in James Joyce's *Evelyne* where the main character has to make an important decision.
 - External conflict: takes place when a person or group struggles against another person or group of people, or society or community, or against a non-human force like the example of the storm in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. (ibid).

3.2. Writing About Character

- We mostly write about the main character. The essay or the paragraph may embody the following points:

- Her/his story in the literary work concisely and precisely.
- His/her relation with other characters and his/her most important moments in the story (moments of joy, crisis, transformation,..)
- How does the writer present him/her (i.e, mode of characterization): physical appearance, moral qualities, other characters' view points, type of name,...).
- Discuss the message of the writer through this character: connect the character to the theme of the literary work.
- Relate/support your interpretations/judgments about the character with passages from the text.

4. Point of View

The angle from which the story is told. That is, who is telling the story. There are several variations of POV:

4.1. First Person Narrator: Story told by the protagonist or a character who interacts closely with the protagonist or other characters; speaker uses the pronouns "I", "me", "we". Readers experience the story through this person's eyes and only knows what he/she knows and feels. Like in Edgar Allan Poe's *Eleanora*.

4.2. Second Person Narrator: Story told by a narrator who addresses the reader or some other assumed "you"; speaker uses pronouns "you", "your", and "yours". Ex: *You wake up to discover that you have been granted all of worldly possessions. (ibid).*

4.3. Third Person Narrator: Story told by a narrator who sees all of the actions and thoughts of the characters; speaker uses the pronouns "he", "she", "it", "they", "his", "hers", "its", and "theirs". This person may be a

character in the story or an unknown voice (ibid). There are several Types of third person narrator:

- Limited: The focus or the light is on the actions and thoughts of the main character specifically.
- Omniscient (all knowing): the narrator knows and sees everything, and can move from one character's mind/thought to another. Authors can be omniscient narrators by moving from character to character, event to event, and introducing information at their discretion².

4.4. Important Notes on Point of View

- When the writer chooses a particular point of view, he aims to make the reader focus on a particular perspective in the story in order to get his message through.
- Thus, point of view contributes in conveying the message of the writer.

4.5. Writing About Point of View

The paragraph/essay should discuss the following:

- Identify what type of point of view is in the story.
- Illustrate from the text.
- Discuss the function of this type of point of view in the narrative.
- What if the writer uses another point of view, what will be its function on the story?
- Relate the point of view to the theme of the story.

² <http://www.kirnskomer4teachertalk.com>, (2024)

5. Theme

It is the central message, moral of the story and underlying meaning of a fictional piece; may be the author's thoughts on the topic or view on human nature. The Story's title usually emphasizes or hints to what the author would like to convey. The figures of speech like symbolism, allusion, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, or irony may be utilized to highlight or support the theme³.

Examples of common themes occurring in literature, on television, and in film are:

- Things are not always as they appear to be.
- Believe in yourself.
- People are afraid of change.
- Don't judge a book by its cover⁴.

5.1. Writing About Theme

- Theme is not stated through one word only like: democracy, love, revenge,..
- You have to state what does the writer say about democracy, love or revenge, for example.
- To justify your idea about the theme, as democracy, love, revenge,.., relate it to the story and focus on the main events in the story. (as a short summary).

³ <http://www.kirnskomer4teachertalk.com>, (2024)

⁴ (ibid)

- Clarify how does the writer convey his theme(s), i.e, through his textual strategies, literary devices, characterization, setting,...

Lecture 03

The Literary Movement

1.The Literary Movement

1.1. Definition of Literary Movement

1. A grouping of writers who share similar aims, years of publication, and a base of operations. Knowing to which movement a poem belongs to can help you recognize certain characteristics associated with the writing.

(English Lit & Comp.Literary Movements Overview To Prep for Exam (2024).

2.Literary movements are the division of literature into categories of similar philosophical, topical, or aesthetic features, as opposed to divisions by genre or period. (wikipedia, 2024).

3.When we know about the time period to which the literary work belongs to, our Literary movements provide context for discussing and comparing literary texts. Indeed, in order to have a fully comprehensive view about a literary movement, it is recommended to examine the conditions that created and developed it. Therefore, the understanding and enjoyment of literature is enhanced. (studysmarter, 2024).

4.The literary work is produced in a particular period of time. and each period of time belongs to a particular literary movement.The learner can read the text in the light of the ideas and features of such a movement. Such knowledge would shed its light on the comprehension of the text. (Mega, 2024).

1.2.Literary Movements in British literature (A Chronological Division)

1. Old English Anglo-Saxon Period (450-1066).

2. Middle English Period (1066-1500).

3. The Renaissance (1500- 1660):

3.1. Elizabethan Age (1558-1603).

3.2. The Jacobean Age (1603- 1625).

3.3. The Caroline Age (1625- 1649).

3.4. The Commonwealth Period (1649- 1660).

4. The Neoclassical Period (1600-1785)

4.1. The Restoration (1660- 1700).

4.2. The Augustan Age (1700-1745).

4.3. The Age of Sensibility (1745- 1785).

5. The Romantic Period (1785-1832)

6. The Victorian Period (1832-1901).

7. The Edwardian Period (1901- 1914).

8. The Georgian Period (1910- 1936)

9. The Modern Period (1914- 1920)

10. The Postmodern Period (1945- Present)

2. The Literary Theory

2.1. Definitions of a Literary Theory

1.Literary theory is a set of ideas and principles we use in reading the literary text. (Brewton, 2024).

2.Literary theory is a school of thought that gives readers a means to critique the ideas and principles of literature. (MasterClass, 2021).

3.Literary critical theories inform us of certain ways to approach ideas in the novel. They enable the learner to read a text from a particular standpoint according to the way he sees the message of the writer. To some extent, literary theories prevent from biased readings. In fact, they are principles that guide the learners to pay attention to particular issues and strategies within the text. Thus, knowledge about literary theories and their diversity is indispensable in literary criticism.

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Lecture 04

Literary Criticism

1. Definitions of Literary Criticism

1. Literary criticism is the application of the literary theory in the study and interpretation of literature. In criticism, the work is reproduced again (Castle, 2007).

2. Literary criticism is the comparison, analysis, interpretation, and/or evaluation of works of literature. It is essentially an opinion, supported by evidence, relating to theme, style, setting or historical or political context⁵.

3. The philosophical analysis of literature's goals and methods. Although the two activities are closely related, literary critics are not always, and have not always been, theorists. (ibid).

4. Modern literary criticism is often influenced by literary theory. (ibid).

5. Literary criticism is the interpretation, analysis, and judgment of a text to help a reader better engage with or challenge that writing⁶.

6. Good criticism deepens our understanding of literature and contributes to literature's development over time. It's also a great place to pick up some writing techniques of your own. (ibid).

2. Literary Criticism vs. Literary Theory

⁵ (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_criticism, 2025)

⁶ (<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/writing-techniques/literary-criticism/>, 2025)

- Literary criticism and literary theory are closely related fields, but they deal with literature on different scales. While literary criticism seeks to analyze specific works of literature, literary theory is concerned with literature on a philosophical level. Criticism asks questions like “What did the author intend to do with this book?” while theory asks questions like “What is the goal of literature?”⁷
- Another way to think about this difference is that literary criticism deals with a specific book (or set of books), while literary theory deals with broader concepts *about* books. Notably, the two fields often overlap. Literary theory is used to support literary criticism, and literary criticism can influence literary theory.(ibid)

3. Different Schools of Literary Criticism?

- **Historical-biographical criticism**

Historical-biographical criticism, sometimes referred to as *traditional criticism*, draws on an author’s biography to better understand and analyze a text. All matters of biography, including geography, race, class, gender, historical moment, and so on, can provide relevant information to the critic engaging in this kind of criticism. (ibid)

- **Moral-philosophical criticism**

Moral-philosophical criticism operates under the assumption that literature performs a certain ethical or moral role in society. With this in mind, moral-philosophical criticism analyzes texts based on

⁷ (<https://www.grammarly.com/blog/writing-techniques/literary-criticism/>, 2025)

their ethical merits and is typically written within the framework of a prevailing school of thought.(Ibid)

- **New criticism**

New criticism engages solely with what the author has put on a page. It disregards outside context and emotional response and instead places an emphasis on form, structure, and the words themselves. (ibid)

- **Reader-response criticism**

Reader-response criticism is criticism based on the reader's response to the text. This approach asserts that a reader's initial reaction is valuable information for evaluation. While this approach is the most subjective, the critic is still required to substantiate their reaction using the text itself.

- Criticism can also be anchored in broader fields of study, such as feminism, Marxism, and postcolonialism. Some common forms of literary criticism rooted in theory are:
- **Feminist criticism:** understands a text through the lens of feminism and gender roles.
- **Sociological criticism:** considers the political and social viewpoint of the author or characters within the text.
- **Psychoanalytical criticism:** uses the psychological state of characters to interpret and analyze a text's meaning.
- **Queer theory:** analyzes a text through the angle of gender and sexuality.

- **Critical race theory:** understands a text through the intersectional dimensions of race and culture.
- **Critical disability theory:** understands a text through the lens of disability and analyzes societal structures that uphold ableism (discrimination on the base of handicap) (ibid)

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Lecture 05 :

The Formalist Approach

1.The Focus of the Formalist Approach

Formalism focuses on form. It looks how the work's structure is unified, how do various elements of the work reinforce its meaning. It analyses the text's inherent features as grammar and syntax, its literary devices as metre, tropes, simile, metaphor, symbol, irony, tone,..it's fictional elements as point of view, character, setting, theme,...and how one part of the work relates to other parts and to the whole. In addition, formalism disregards any outside influence as notions of culture, societal influence or authorship. It aims to understand a text through its formal elements only.

The critic can show how the various parts of a work are welded together to make an organic whole. It examines the text as a self-contained object. He demonstrates how its various elements work together to give meaning to the text.

2.Major Principles in Formalism

- A literary text exists independent of any particular reader and in a sense has a fixed meaning.
- The greatest literary texts are 'timeless' and 'universal'.

3.General Questions in Formalism

- How do various elements of the work: point of view, character, symbol,..reinforce its meaning?
- How are the elements related to the whole?

- What is the work's major organizing principle? How is its structure unified?
- What issues does the work raise? How does the work's structure resolve these issues?

4.Point of View in Formalism: Consider the following questions

- How does the author's choice of point of view affect the reader's understanding and feelings about the story?
- Does the point of view in the novel have a particular use?
- What advantages does the author gain by using this point of view?
- What changes in the novel would have to be made if the point of view were to be changed?.
- Does the author's choice of point of view reveal or illuminate his/her theme?

5.Setting in Formalism

A novel may have different times and places, however, each time and place selected by the author may have a particular reason. Consider the following questions :

- Does the setting play an important role in revealing any element of the novel?
- What influences does the setting have on the characters or their actions?
- Does the setting contribute to the novel's theme?

6.Characters in Formalism : Consider the following questions:

- Are the characters physically described? How detailed are these descriptions and who gives them to you? (i.e, a narrator, a character, reliability of the narration,..).
- What is the character's motivation for the decisions and actions he/she/it makes?.
- Are the character's actions believable, given the setting and situations in the novel?
- How do the characters, their actions and motivations contribute to the novel's theme?

7.Style of Language: It is the writer's use of language: word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, literary devices and their function in establishing mood, images and meaning. Consider the following :

- What patterns exist in the author's choice of words?
- What patterns exist in the author's sentence structure?
- Is the author's approach to central idea objective or subjective?
- How does the author's use of language convey meaning?

7.1.Example of a literary Device: Symbol

Most often, symbols reveal characters to us or strongly allude to the theme of a novel..Readers of a novel may not always agree on a particular symbol's interpretation or even if a particular item is a symbol, so you have to offer plenty of supporting evidence and reasoning to back up your selection and interpretation of any symbol.

In Symbol, it is important to consider To what extent does symbol convey meaning and support the theme of the literary work?.

8.Theme: Theme must be logical coming from the text. You can consider the following points :

- What lesson does the author want me to learn from his work?
- What lesson does the author want me to learn about life?

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Lecture 06

The Romantic Literary Movement

1. Definition of Romanticism

An artistic and intellectual movement originating in Europe in the late 18th century and characterized by a heightened interest in nature, emphasis on the individual's expression of emotion and imagination, departure from the attitudes and forms of classicism and rebellion against established social rules and conventions.

2. Characteristics of Romanticism

- Characters and setting are set apart from society.
- Static characters: no development shown.
- Universe is mysterious, irrational and incomprehensible.
- Use of formal language.
- Description provides a feeling of the scene.
- Supernatural foreshadowing (in the form of a dream or vision).
- Plot arranged around crisis moment.
- Nature as a source of instruction, delight and nourishment for the soul; return to nature as a source of inspiration and wisdom.
- Affirmation of the values of democracy and the freedom of the perfectibility of man; spiritual force immanent not only in nature but in the mind of man.
- Sincerity, spontaneity and faith in emotion as markers of truth.
- Highly imaginative and subjective.
- Emotional intensity.
- Escapism.
- Common man as hero.
- Nature as refuge, source of knowledge and/or spirituality.

3. Why Did Romanticism appear ?

To speak of a romantic era is to identify a period in which certain ideas and attitudes arose in most areas of intellectual endeavor where they became the most dominant modes of expression in art, music, poetry, drama, literature and philosophy.

For the most part, these ideas were generated by a sense of inadequacy with the dominant ideas of the enlightenment and of the society that produced them. In fact, they appeared in conflict with the enlightenment ideas. The enlightenment had turned man into a soulless, thinking machine. Meanwhile, the Industrial Revolution, in full swing in England since the 1760's, spread the continent in the 1820's, thus adding entirely new social concerns. For it produced soulless individuals, economic egoism and utilitarianism. Men and women need to build new systems of discipline and order. The era was prolific in innovative ideas and new art forms.

Therefore, the romantics attacked Enlightenment because it blocked the play of emotions and creativity. They clearly opposed it. They were considered as a critique of the inadequacies of what it held to be enlightened thought. It rejected a science based on physics which was inadequate to describe the reality of experience: " O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts" (John Keats 1795-1821).

The romantics sought their soul in the science of life, not the science of mechanics. They moved from planets to plants. They rejected materialism and utilitarianism as types of personal behavior and opted for a life of the heart.

4. The Historical Development of Romanticism

In literature, the adjective 'romantic' first appeared in French language towards the end of the 17th century, and referred to a form of narrative fiction, involving passions rather than reason.

The romantic movement emerged in the 1790's in Germany with the publication of Goethe's "*Sorrows of Young Werther*" and the emergence of various idealist philosophers who believed mental processes are the ultimate reality as opposed to materialists. This new German thinking stressed the creative power of the mind and allowed nature to be seen as a responsive mirror of the soul. The movement then goes to Britain where it emerged independently with William Blake's anti-Enlightenment writings of the 1790's and with the landmark of William Wordsworth's 1800 preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. In a second wave after the Napoleonic wars, Romanticism established itself in France and across Europe by the 1830's.

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Lecture 07

Romanticism in American Literature

1. American Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was intimately connected with Concord, a small New England village, 32 kms west of Boston. Concord was the first rural artist's colony, and the first place to offer a spiritual and cultural alternative to American materialism. It was a place of high minded conversations and simple living. America's power and wealth did not satisfy them. They wanted to explore the inner life. They tried to find truth through feelings and intuition rather than through logic. Although they respected Christ for the wisdom of his teachings, they thought of the works of Shakespeare and the great philosophers as equally important. They found God every where, in man and in nature. In many ways they glorified nature; birds, clouds, trees, and snow which had a special meaning for them.

In 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson founded the "Transcendental Club", its magazine *'The Dial'*. The Transcendentalists were divided into two groups: those interested in social reform (a number of them were abolitionists), and those, like Emerson and Thoreau, who were more interested in the individual.

American Transcendentalists insisted on individual differences. They pushed radical individualism to the extreme. There was an emphasis on the development of the self. The individual had a more duty to reform social inequalities and relieve human suffering. Thus,

new compound words with positive meanings emerged like: self-realization, self-expression or self-reliance. Hence the romantic spirit seemed particularly suited to American democracy which stressed individualism and affirmed the values of the common man.

In poetry, many romantic figures emerged such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Emily Dickinson,.....

1.1.Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803- 1882)

Emerson was an essayist, a lecturer and a poet. Most of his major ideas were expressed in *Nature* (1836), which was considered as the clearest statement of Transcendentalist ideas. In it, he stated that man should not see nature merely as something to be used, that man's relationship with nature transcends the idea of usefulness, the need for a new national vision, the use of personal experience, the notion of the cosmic over soul, and the doctrine of compensation. Furthermore, he developed certain ideas in his book as individuality, freedom, the ability for man to realize almost anything, and the relationship between the soul and the surrounding world. In one of his speeches, he declared the literary independence in the USA and urged Americans to create a writing style all their own and free from Europe. Emerson influenced many Romantic poets like Emily Dickinson, and William James.

1.2. Henry David Thoreau (1817- 1862)

Thoreau was of French and Scottish descent. He was born in Concord (Emerson's hometown). As a young, he had been deeply influenced by reading Emerson's *Nature*, and he remained a pure

transcendentalist all his life. He had the same ideas with Emerson. He was a philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, essayist and a poet.

He believed that the novelist had to depend on his/her own devices.

2. Dark Romanticism

Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorn and Edgar Allan Poe represent another subgenre within Romanticism called dark romanticism. They were influenced by Transcendentalism, but did not entirely embrace its ideas.

The dark romantics are less confident about the notion that perfection is an innate quality in mankind, as believed by Transcendentalists. Subsequently, dark romantics present individuals as prone to sin and self-destruction, not as inherently possessing divinity and wisdom. Secondly, while both groups believe nature is a deeply spiritual force, dark romanticism views it in a much more sinister (i.e, suggesting evil) light than does Transcendentalism, which sees nature as a divine and universal organic mediator. For these dark romantics, the natural world is dark, decaying and mysterious when it does reveal truth to man, its revelations are evil and hellish. Finally whereas Transcendentalists advocate social reforms when appropriate, works of dark romanticism frequently show individuals failing in their attempt to make changes for the better. The dark romanticists examine the psychological effects of guilt and sin, the conflict between good and evil, and people plagued with madness.

They argue that human nature is not necessarily good. They

believe that the Transcendentalists ignore the darker side of humanity, so they seek to show their readers what was otherwise ignored or hidden. They do this through dark tales of obsession, revenge, shame and madness.

2.1.Herman Melville

Melville was born in New York City. His father Allan Melville died when he was 12 years old. His mother Maria Gansevoort Melville was left alone to raise eight children. He left school and was largely autodidact. He got many jobs (bank clerk, a teacher, a cabin boy in a ship). As a result, his sea voyages provided him with the raw material in his novels as *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847) and *Billy Budd* Published in 1924. He was a novelist, a short story writer and a poet.

Critics have noted Melville's exploitation of isolated shipboard settings for the purposes of evoking psychological terror, and unexplicable events to convey the sense of world devoid of the idea that good will ultimately triumph and vanish evil. His themes of madness and mystery which prevail most of his novels make his novels notable examples of the dark romanticism.

4.2.Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

Poe was an American writer, poet, editor and literary critic. He was considered part of the American romantic movement.

Best known for his mystery and macabre tales, Poe was one of the earliest practioners of the short story and the inventor of the detective fiction genre.

Poe further contributed to the emergence of science fiction genre. Some of his important works: *The Black Cat*, and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. His tales of horror are known throughout the world. His method was to put his characters in unusual situations, next he would carefully describe their feelings of terror or guilt as in his short story *The Black Cat*.

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Lecture 08

Introduction to Poetry

1. Definition : Poetry is assumed to be literature written in metrical form approving a quality of beauty, grace and deep feeling. It is striking by its musical quality, its imaginative appeal and its thought provoking power. A poem is organized into lines themselves grouped into stanzas.

Poetry differs from other literary genres in the sense that it says much in a more compressed, patterned, suggestive and memorable way. It demands full concentration from the reader; it requires more than one reading for it to be understood, because it condenses a lot of experience into limited length.

The vivid impressions which a poem makes on us arise from the specific ways in which the poet handles language. These elements of language are grouped into three categories : sound, sense and structural.

2. Elements of Poetry

2.1. Sound Devices : Before the general meaning of a poem is perceived, one is struck by its melodic lines, a quality which imparted (given) by the sound devices.

Alliteration: In alliteration, consonants especially at the beginning of words, or stressed syllables are repeated.

Example : R. S . Thomas' *The Welsh Hill-Country*

Too far for you to see

The fluke and the foot-rot and the fat maggot

Gnawing the skin from the small bones,..

Onomatopoea : The formation and use of words to imitate sounds.

The sound effects the sense. Example : dong, crackle, moo, pop, whizz,...

Consonance : The close repetition of identical consonant sounds before and after the different vowels. Example : Slip-slop ; creak-croak ; black-block..

Assonance : It is the repetition of similar vowel sounds of words that are usually close together to achieve a particular effect. Example

Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters* :

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak

The Lotos blows by every winding creek

All day the wind breathes low with mellower tone...

Rhyme : When two words or lines of poetry rhyme, they end with the same sounds.

Rhyme is pleasing to the ear. It adds the musical sound quality in poetry that can be so important to it. The system of rhyme within a poem is called its rhyme-scheme. This is done by giving each rhyming sound at the end of a line, a letter of the alphabet, and repeating this letter when the sound is repeated.

Example : *On Shakespeare* by John Milton

What needs my Shakespeare for his honoured bones..**a**

The labour of an age in piled stones....**a**

Or that his hallowed relics should be hid....**b**

Under a starry-pointing pyramid....**b**

Dear son of memory, great heir of fame....c

What needst thou such weak witness of thy name ?....c

.....

Therefore, the rhyme-scheme of this poem is : aabbcc.

Rhythm: It is the beat or pulse in a line of poetry. It refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in a verse that is repeated regularly. In verse, the rhythm depends on the metrical pattern chosen by the poet to convey the effect he wishes to create. For a poem to be described as being written in **metre** it has to have a specific rhythm that is repeated and used continually. Metre is the measure or patterned account of poetry line (a count of stresses we feel in a poem's rhythm). The metre chosen will vary with the subject of the poem and with the effects that poet wishes to create on the reader.

So metre is simply a kind of rhythm that has been chosen by the poet and which he repeats and uses consistently (not changing) over the length of a stanza or complete poem.

There are various units of metre available to the poet. Each individual unit or collection of stressed and unstressed syllables is called a foot. When you read a poem to see if it is written in metre, you must first decide which type of foot the author is using.

Foot is a group of syllables forming a unit. Generally, there are four main feet available to the poet :

The Iambic Foot (the most commonly used in English poetry) has the pattern : unstressed/stressed as in : unrest, defeat.

The Trochaic foot has the pattern : stressed/unstressed as in : welcome.

The Anapaestic foot has the pattern of unstressed/unstressed as in :
masquerade.

The Dactylic foot has the pattern : stressed/unstressed/unstressed as
in : willingly.

For example, if a poet wishes to create a solemn (serious) mood, he might use the trochaic pattern or the dactylic pattern, because starting with a heavy stressed syllable can give an air of solemnity to a poem.

If the poet wants to suggest movement and excitement, he might use the anapaestic pattern,...

Free Verse : Poetry which does not have a regular metrical structure.

2.2.Sense Devices

Sense : refers to power of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch by which person is conscious of things.

Simile, metaphor and personification are the most important sense devices. These devices are meant to appeal to our imagination in order to clarify or draw image in the mind of the reader.

Simile : It is an explicit comparison in which one thing is compared to another by the use of the words : like, as, as though, ...

Example : *Flint* by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

An Emerald is as green as grass

A ruby red as blood.

A Saphir shines as the blue heaven ;

A Flint lies in the mud

.....

Metaphor: It is an implicit comparison in which one thing is described

in terms of another, by comparing two dissimilar things. It is a way to describe something. We transfer the aspects of one thing to another.

Example

Tree

I'm a tree deeply rooted

Within these years of soil

My trunk is muted

From harsh wind and toil.

These leaves of beauty dangle

Composing a queen sea

Every tree has an angle

To share a memory.

Personification : It is the attribution of human qualities to inanimate objects.

Example : *Dinnertime Chorus*. By : Sharon Hendrick

The teapots sang as the water boiled

The ice cubes cackled in their glass

The teacups chattered to one another,

While the chairs were passing gas

The groovy gurlled merrily

As the oil danced in a pan.

Oh my dinnertime Chorus

What a lovely, lovely clan !

2.3.Structural Devices

Contrast : It occurs when we find two completely opposed pictures, images, ideas or emotions side by side in order to clarify a scene, or a

theme.

Example : *Recording* by A. R. Ammons

I remember when freezing

Rain bent the yarling

Pine over and stuc kits

Crown to ground ice :

But now it's spring

And the pine stands

Up straight, frisky in the breeze,

Except for memory, a little lean.

Illustration: The poet uses illustration in order to enable the reader better grasp his intention.

Repetition : Poets often repeat single line or whole stanzas at interval to emphasize a particular idea, a definite emotion or to achieve a special musical effect.

Diction : It is the vocabulary. It refers to the writer's or poet's choice of words. It can be archaic (using old fashioned words), colloquial (like everyday speech), formal, refine, elegant, technical,...

Irony : It is saying or writing one thing whilst meaning something else. Irony occurs when a word or phrase has one surface meaning with another deep meaning beneath it.

Lecture 09

Analysis of Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803- 1882) Poem

The Rhodora (1847).

The Rhodora

On Being Asked Whence Is The Flower

*In May, when sea-winds pierced our solitudes,
I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,
To please the desert and sluggish brook.
The purple petals, fallen in the pool,
Made the black water with their beauty gay;
Here might the redbird come his plumes to cool,
And court the flower that cheapens his array.
Rhodora! If the sages ask thee why
This charm is wasted on the earth and sky,
Tell them, dear, that if eyes were made for seeing,
Then beauty is its own excuse for being:
Why thou wert there, O rival of the rose!
I never thought to ask, I never knew:
But, in my simple ignorance, suppose
The self-same Power that brought me there brought you.*

1.Preparatory Questions

- Discuss the point of view
- What are the literary devices that the narrator uses to describe the flower?
- What is the theme ?

2. Analysis of the Poem

2.1. Summary

In the poem, Emerson presents a vivid depiction of the beauty of the rhodora, and its positive influence upon the existence of other things, including the nook, the desert, the brook, the pool, the black water, and the red bird. In this sense, the rhodora represents the natural and spiritual beauty as well.

2.2. Point of View

The poem is written in the first person narrator to make the reader share his feelings and contemplations towards the flower and thus the impact of the imagery is stronger.

2.3. Literary Devices

Imagery : The poet creates vivid visual images in order to transfer the beauty of the flower to the reader.

Example :

- a. *I found the fresh Rhodora in the woods,
Spreading its leafless blooms in a damp nook,*
- b. *The purple petals, fallen in the pool,
Made the black water with their beauty gay;*

Personification

Line 4 : *To please the desert and sluggish brook*

Line 6 : *Made the black water with their beauty gay;*

Tone : reverent having an impact similar to humans.

2.4. Themes

- A connection between nature and Divine power, nature is a path to the Divine.
- Beauty exists for its own sake not for fame.

2.5. Conclusion

“The Rhodora” beautifully expresses Ralph Waldo Emerson’s core belief that nature is a manifestation of the divine, and that beauty needs no justification, it simply *is*. Through the humble, quiet existence of a flower in the woods, Emerson explores spiritual unity, the majesty of nature, and the idea that all things are connected by a higher power.

2.6. Assignment

- Write a short paragraph discussing point of view in the poem.
- Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the tone of the poem.
- Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the theme of the poem.

Lecture 10

Introduction to the short story

1. Definition : The short story is a work of fiction that is usually written in prose. It is shorter than the novel. It is characterized by its concision, central theme and the limit in scope and number of characters. It mostly shares with the novel and drama the same components.

2. Characteristics of the Short Story

- It has a beginning, a middle and end.
- It is less complex than the novel.
- It focuses mainly on one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a small number of characters and covers a short period of time.
- It makes its point quickly, economically and effectively.
- It does not allow the extended treatment of character and incident.
- It contains certain core elements of dramatic structure : exposition (introduction of setting, situation and main character) ; complication (the event that introduces the conflict) ; rising action, crisis (the decisive moment for the protagonist and his commitment to a course of action) ; climax (the point of highest interest in terms of conflict and the point with the most action) ; and moral..
- When the short story intends to convey a specific ethical or moral perspective, it falls into the sub-category called parables.
- As for style, the words and images should all lead to create a unity of effect and impression.
- The short story has two levels of meaning. On one level, it

is about about specific characters and circumstances, on the other level, it is concerned with universal meanings.

3. The Historical Development of the Short Story

The short narratives have always existed as an informal oral tradition for many centuries ago. For example, Scheherazade and Boccaccio's Decameron (1351-1353), often cited as the precursor of the short story form, along with Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the bible, subplots within plays and novels, satires, pamphlets, narrative poems, essays, journalism.

To illustrate, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (late 14th century) is a collection of stories framed within a pilgrimage. A diverse group of pilgrims travel from London to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury, and to pass the time, each agrees to tell tales.

With the emergence of the 19th. century middle class, the magazine and periodical market was invented to service the new reading public's desires and preferences. And it was this medium that revealed to writers their capacity to write short fiction. Readers wanted short stories, and writers suddenly discovered they had a new literary form within their hands. There were no steps, no slow centuries of evolution.

It has been argued that Sir Walter Scott's story *The Two Drovers* published in chronicles of the Canongate in 1827, made a convenient starting point for a modern short fiction. Robin Oig M'Combich, a young Scottish Highland drover, and Harry Wakefield, an English drover, are close friends who travel together driving cattle. Their bond is tested when they quarrel over grazing rights at a fair, and in a moment of anger, Harry publicly insults and strikes Robin. Although they appear to reconcile, Robin, bound by the Highland code of honor, feels compelled to avenge the insult. Later, he fatally stabs Harry in a

confrontation, believing he has restored his honor. However, under English law, his act is treated as murder, and despite sympathy for his motives, Robin is tried, condemned, and executed, highlighting the tragic clash between cultural values and legal justice.

At home Scott influenced George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. In France, Honoré de Balzac ; in Russia, Alexander Sergeyevich Pushkin and Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev, and in America, Fenimore Cooper and Nathaniel Hawthorn. These writers had influence in turn on Gustave Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant, Anton Chechov, Edgar Allen Poe and Hermane Melville.

In Britain, after Scott's start, the short story hardly existed in the mid 19th. century, such was the dominance of the novel. Writers in France, Russia and America seemed to take more immediately to the form and it is not until Robert Louis Stevenson in the 1880's that we can see the modern short story beginning to emerge and flourish in Britain once more, with the line extending on from Stevenson through Wells, Bennett, James and Kipling.

The true beginnings of the modern short story are to be found in America with Nathaniel Hawthorn's *Twice Told Tales* (1837), as a starting point followed by Edgar Allan Poe. The great modern short story possesses a quality of mystery and resonance.

With Herman Melville, who followed Poe, the modern short story comes of age, with remarkable suddenness. His short stories are characterized by that strange power.

Turgenev was also publishing short stories in the 1850's. He can be put with Melville as the first originator of the modern form. His great contribution was to start something that Chekhov finished.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) is described as the greatest short story writer ever. He made his stories lifelike. He represents the first phase of the modern short story. He has massive influence. In the 20th century, the short story becomes almost exclusively Chekhovian. Joyce and Katherine Mansfield are Chekhovians. With Chekhov and by the advent of the 20th century the short story enters its golden age.

Fundamentally, up until the beginning of the 20th century, there are the two great traditions; the event plot, i.e, the traditional story and the Chekhovian story. Chekhov's revolution lies in creating a type of short story in which narrative changed. For him, randomness and inexplicability became the actual form of the short story.

In the modern short story, the essence is to portray the individual moment, scene or person in isolation from the outside world. It focuses on the inward, personal and subjective experience of individuals. The language employed creates a totality of effect and impression, patterning of symbols, multiplicity of voices, indirect language, stream of consciousness which are all techniques used by modern writers.

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Lecture 11

Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Story : *The Oval Portrait*

1. Biography of Edgar Allan Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) was an American writer, poet, editor, and literary critic, best known for his macabre and Gothic tales. A central figure in the American Romantic Movement, Poe is credited with pioneering the short story form, inventing the modern detective story, and significantly shaping the genres of horror and science fiction.

Poe was born in Boston, Massachusetts, to traveling actors David and Elizabeth Poe. Orphaned by the age of three, he was taken in by John and Frances Allan of Richmond, Virginia, though he was never formally adopted. Tensions with his foster father and financial struggles marked his early years.

Poe began his literary career with poetry, publishing *Tamerlane and Other Poems* in 1827. He gained national recognition with his short stories, particularly “*The Fall of the House of Usher*,” “*The Tell-Tale Heart*,” and “*The Masque of the Red Death*.” His most famous poem, “*The Raven*” (1845), brought him instant fame but little financial success.

He worked as an editor and critic for several literary journals, earning a reputation for his sharp, often brutal reviews. His contributions helped shape the emerging American literary identity.

Poe's work is known for its dark themes as death, madness, guilt, and the supernatural. He had a masterful command of atmosphere and psychological depth, influencing writers like H.P. Lovecraft, Arthur

Conan Doyle, and Stephen King.

Poe faced lifelong struggles with poverty, illness, and personal loss. He married his 13-year-old cousin, Virginia Clemm, in 1836, who died of tuberculosis in 1847. Poe's own health declined, worsened by alcohol and depression.

He died under mysterious circumstances in Baltimore at age 40. The exact cause remains unknown, with theories ranging from alcohol poisoning to rabies or even foul play.

2. Preparatory Questions

1. What is the point of view through which the story is told ?
2. Who are the characters of the short story ?
3. How does Poe present the artist and his wife ?
4. Describe the setting ? What does it reveal ?
5. What are the main themes of the story ?

3. Analysis of : *The Oval Portrait*

3.1. Point of View

There are two narrators : a story within a story. The first is told from the first person narrator. The unnamed main character is sharing with the reader his experience in the château ; and thus, identify with him. The second story is told from the third person oniscient narrator. It provides detailed information about the painter and his wife as regards their thoughts and emotions. It enables the reader to make opposition between the two characters, supporting the theme of the story.

3.2. Characters

- The first story : the anonymous narrator who is a wounded man who takes refuge with his valet, Pedro, in an abandoned château in Italy.
- The second story : a famous painter and husband of a beautiful lady who is the woman in the portrait.

The Artist : passionate, studious, austere, wild, moody, fervid, burning pleasure in his painting, loved his art, tremulous, pallid and aghast ; a person so obsessed by his work to the point of overlooking the withering state of his wife that he is painting ; He approximates madness.

The Artist's Wife : a maiden of rarest beauty, full of glee, light, smiles, frolick, loving and cherishing, young, humble, obedient, uncomplaining. However, because of the many weeks her husband passes in drawing her, she turns into : dispirited, weak and flickered. She changes from life into death.

3.3. Setting

- **Place** : An abandoned château in the Apennines in Italy. It has rich decoration yet tattered and antique, walls with tapestry and bedecked with manifold and multiform armorial trophies,...The narrator resembles it to the fancy of Mrs. Radcliff.

Mrs. Anne Radcliff (1764-1823) is an English author of Gothic romance with scenes that often take place in gloomy castles.

Therefore, the narrator is setting a gothic scene, i.e, we are going to read a frightening story that happens in a mysterious old building, and lonely place.

- **Time** : night.

3.4. Themes

Death : a common theme in the works of Poe

Obsession : It is harmful. The artist is so obsessed by capturing the beauty of his wife in his art to the point that he overlooks the degenerating state of his wife.

Blind Submissiveness : Though the wife sees in her husband's art a rival, she is always attracted to him. She remains at his side and completely neglects herself. As the painting matured, her spirit declines leading to her death.

Lecture 12

Realism (1860-1914)

1. Definition: Broadly realism is defined as the faithful representation of reality or verisimilitude. It is a literary technique practiced by many schools of writing that took place mostly in the 19th century and extending to early twentieth century. It dominated France, England and America. It opposed idealism, and sought to show things as they are, focusing on the middle class for subject matter. Gustav Flaubert is credited with coining the term.

2. The Historical Background

The US civil war (1816-1865) between the industrial north and the agricultural slave-owning south was a watershed in American history. Before the war, idealists advocated human rights, especially the abolition of slavery. After the war, Americans increasingly idealized progress and the self-made man. This was the era of the millionaire manufacturer. The economic life changed after the war. The US experienced enormous industrial, economic, social and cultural change. War production had boosted industry in the north. It also gave industrial leaders valuable experience in the management of men and machines. The new industrial continental rail system, the transcontinental telegraph, which began operating in 1861, gave industry access to materials, markets and communications. The constant influx of immigrants provided a seemingly endless supply of inexpensive labor as well which brought prosperity to America.

In 1860, major Americans lived on farms or in small villages, but by 1919 half of the population was concentrated in about 12 cities.

Problems of urbanization and industrialization appeared: eg. poor and overcrowded housings and unsanitary conditions.

Therefore, in short, from 1860 to 1919, the US was transformed from a small, young, agricultural ex-colony to a huge, modern industrial nation.

3. How Did Realism Appear?

By 1875, American writers were moving toward realism in literature. We can see this in the true-to-life descriptions of Bret Harte and Mark Twain works. Meanwhile in France, Realism had become a serious literary movement with Flaubert and Balzac in the 19th century.

George Ellis brought the movement to England, and William Dean Howells introduced it to America. Such French novelists as Zola were changing the relationship between literature and society.

3.1. Bret Harte (1836- 1902)

The trend started with Bret Harte, another leader of "Local Color" realism. He was a New Yorker who had moved to California during the "Gold Rush" days of 1850's. He achieved his first success with his first short story, *The Luck of Roaring Camp* (1868). It is set in a dirty mining camp, filled with gamblers and drunks during the Gold Rush. The Camp and its people are completely changed (or reborn) when a baby is born there. The story combines frontier vulgarity with religious imagery. The reading public loved his stories about the Far West and many other writers followed his lead. In Harte's work, we see all the main characters of the movie western: the pretty New England school teacher, the gambler, the sheriff, the bad man and the bad girl.

3.2. William Dean Howells(1837- 1920)

William created the first theory for American realism. Under him, realism became the mainstream of American literature. In 1891, he became the editor of "*Harper's Monthly*" in New York City. He made Harper's into a weapon against literary Romanticism. He felt that such works created false view about life. As an editor, he was able to help younger novelists like Hamlin Garland and Stephen Crane. He was also a friend and supporter of Mark Twain and Henry James.

Howells put his realist theories into practice in his novels. The theme of *A Modern Instance* (1882), one of his earliest novels, shocked the public. It was about divorce, a subject which was not talked and written about openly. His characters are very complex and unromantic. The author blames society for their troubles. This is a position he took in many of his novels as well.

Like most Americans in the 1880's, Howells realized that business and businessmen were at the centre of society, and he felt that novels should depict them. The good realist should be interested in the common feelings of common place people. For him, the art must serve the poor people of society. From then on, he began attacking the evils of American capitalism. He argued for kindness and the unity of all people in society rather than selfish competition.

Howells prevailed upon contemporary writers to let fiction cease to die about life. Literary society treated realism with scorn. It was seen as common, indecent, and vulgar. Howells response to this sentiment is

that the realist novel is made for the profit of people who have no use of their eyes. Howells like Twain tried to make the wrongs of society obvious through writing rather than outright preach against them. Howells believed in the righteousness of the working class, and it was his mission to show how capitalism enslaved the many for the benefit of the few. Realism was a moral movement as well as a literary one. As editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, Howells used his position to promote the works of writers that agreed with his sensibilities. Among them Henry James, Bret Harte and Mark Twain.

4.Characteristics of Realism in Literature

- Focus on Everyday Life: Realist literature emphasizes the ordinary, mundane experiences of middle- and lower-class people. Events are plausible and grounded in real-world situations.
- Detailed Real Descriptions : Authors use precise, often exhaustive detail to create believable settings, characters, and scenarios. There is a focus on accuracy and authenticity. Objective view to life.
- Complex Characters : Characters are psychologically complex and behave according to realistic motivations. They are neither idealized nor overly heroic; instead, they reflect real human flaws and virtues. They are often related to nature, to each other, to their social class and to their own past. This relation makes the complexity of their temperament and motive.
- Social Critique : Realist writers often explore social issues such as class, gender, poverty, industrialization, and injustice. Literature becomes a mirror to society, highlighting its flaws. It usually values members of middle class.

- Objective Narration : Narrators often take a detached, observational tone. The goal is to present an unbiased view of reality without overt authorial judgment. Events are usually plausible.
- Vernacular Language : Realist writers use everyday speech and regional dialects to reflect characters' social and geographic backgrounds : Diction is natural, not poetic or heightened.
- Rejection of Romanticism : Realism arose as a reaction against the idealism, emotionalism, and escapism of Romantic literature. It avoids exaggerated emotions and fantastical elements.
- Moral Ambiguity : Ethical dilemmas are presented without clear answers, reflecting the complexities of real life. Characters are not simply good or evil.

5. Characteristics of Realism in the American Context

- Focus on the Middle and Lower Classes : American Realists depicted the everyday lives of workers, farmers, women, and marginalized groups, highlighting struggles with poverty, injustice, and changing social structures.
- Regionalism "Local Color" : A distinctive trait in American Realism, regionalism emphasized the customs, dialects, landscapes, and ways of life in specific parts of the U.S., such as the South, the Midwest, or New England. This helped preserve a rapidly changing American identity.
- Moral and Social Critique : Writers used fiction to critique political corruption, racial inequality, gender roles, and the effects of capitalism and industrialization, morality, class, and social justice. Realist works often asked questions without offering easy answers.

- Psychological Realism : There was a strong interest in characters' inner lives and moral dilemmas. Writers like Henry James explored consciousness, motivation, and personal identity.
- Plain, Unembellished Prose : Language became more straightforward and less ornate than in Romantic literature. Writers aimed for clarity and precision in capturing real speech and thought.

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Lecture 13

Follow up with American Realism in Literature

6. Major American Realist Writers

- Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885): A mix of realism and satire, capturing regional dialects and life along the Mississippi River.
- Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881): Focuses on psychological complexity and social expectations.
- William Dean Howells' Known as the "Dean of American Realism," he advocated for literature that portrayed the truthful conditions of life (*The Rise of Silas Lapham*, 1885).
- Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899): Explores gender roles, individual freedom, and social expectations in the postbellum South.
- Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895): A realistic portrayal of war and psychological conflict.
- Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905): Examines high society and the limitations imposed on women.
- In addition to Joseph Kirkland, Hamlin Garland, among others.

7. Short Stories in American Realist Literature

Short stories were a powerful form for Realist writers. These stories often focused on everyday people, moral dilemmas, and realistic settings.

7.1. Notable Realist Short Story Writers:

- Mark Twain's "*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*" (1865). Twain used humor and dialect to reflect regional life, especially in the American West.
- Kate Chopin's "*The Story of an Hour*" (1894) : A woman's brief experience of freedom after hearing of her husband's death. And "*Desiree's Baby*" deals with race, identity, and societal expectations in the South.
- Ambrose Bierce's "*An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*" : A Civil War-era story exploring psychological realism and the nature of time and perception.
- Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's "*The Revolt of 'Mother'*" : Focuses on women's roles in rural New England and challenges to patriarchal authority.
- William Dean Howells' "*Editha*" : A critique of romanticized views of war, contrasting idealism with harsh reality.

8. American Poetry and Realism

8.1. Notable Realist Poets:

- Walt Whitman is considered a transition figure from romanticism to realism. His collection *Leaves of Grass* (1855–1892), though often categorized as romantic, his poetry used plain language, celebrated the common person, and embraced the realities of the body and city life.

- Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915): A collection of poems in the voices of deceased townspeople, revealing the hidden truths and regrets of small-town American life.
- Stephen Crane is known more for prose, but his poems like "*A Man Said to the Universe*" show stark, unembellished reflection on human struggle and existential uncertainty.

In addition to other poets such as Robert Frost, Carl Sandburg Sara Teasdale, among others

9. Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem : *Nothing Gold can Stay* (1923).

9.1. Biography of Robert Frost

Robert Frost (1874-1963) is an American poet who was much admired for his depictions of the rural life of New England, his command of American colloquial speech, and his realistic verse portraying ordinary people in everyday situations. He was the most highly honored American poet of the 20th century, receiving the Pulitzer Prize for poetry four times. Several of his poems yielded lines that became indelible in the American consciousness, among them '*Good fences make good neighbors*', from *Mending Wall*, and 'I took the one less traveled by' from *The Road Not Taken*⁸.

Poem : *Nothing Gold can Stay*

*Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.*

⁸ (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Robert-Frost>, 2025).

*Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.*

*Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,*

*So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay.*

9.2. Exploratory Questions

- What does the poet describe ?
- What elements of nature described in this poem ?. What images is he creating ?
- What is the tone of the poet ? Why ?
- What is the theme in this poem ?

9.2.1. Images

Through the description of the elements of nature, the poet creates images. He compares nature's first green to gold : the word 'green' refers to grass and all what is green in nature ; at the beginning it is so beautiful like gold, but you can never hold it which means it will not last for long; then, he compares the beauty of the leaf to an hour, but this beautiful image will not last also ; the flowers turn again into leaves signalling their ending and causing grief : « *so Eden sank into grief* »; Finally, the early light of the morning gives way to daytime, but unfortunately : « *Nothing gold can stay* », meaning that all this beauty in nature will not last for long.

9.2.2. Tone : The writer conveys a sad tone : «*Her hardest hue to hold* » ; « *But only so an hour* » ; « *So Eden sank to grief* ».

9.2.3. Theme : Through the description of nature, the poet is confronting the transience nature of life. The poem's conclusion reinforces its central message: "*Nothing gold can stay.*" This statement underscores the fleeting nature of beauty and the cyclical pattern of life, death, and renewal. As a conclusion, the poem is a metaphor about life.

10. Assignment

Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the poem *Nothing Gold can Stay*.

Lecture 14

Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem :

Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening (1923)

Robert Frost's famous poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* was first published in 1923 in his poetry collection *New Hampshire*, which went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1924.

*Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.*

*My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.*

*He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.*

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

1. Exploratory Questions

- 1.1. What is the point of view in this poem ? Explain its function ?.
- 1.2. What does the narrator describe the setting ?
- 1.3. Depict the literary devices in the poem and explain them.
- 1.4. Discuss the mood.
- 1.5. What is the theme of this poem ?

1.1. Point of View

The point of view is the first person narrator conveyed through the pronoun 'I'. It depicts the personal experience of the narrator in the woods. It conveys the thoughts and feelings of the narrator about the scene around him.

1.2. Setting

- a. Time : Winter : snow ; evening time
- b. Place : The woods : The elements that are described in the woods are :
 - Woods fill up with snow ; frozen lake ; The darkest evening of the year ; the woods are lovely, dark and deep.

1.3. The Literary Devices

- Personification
 - *My horse must think it queer*
To stop without a farmhouse near.
 - *He gives his harness bell a shake*
To ask if there is some mistake
- Contrast
 - Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year

Contrasts with :

- The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

➤ Imagery

- *To watch his woods fill up with snow ; between the woods and frozen lake ; The darkest evening of the year.*

➤ Metaphor

- *But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

'miles to go' is a metaphor that the narrator has a long way to pass in life ; and the word ' sleep' is a metaphor of death i.e, before he dies.

1.4. Mood

This poem evokes a sense of serenity and isolation as the speaker pauses in a snowy forest. The reader feels peaceful as the narrator, through his simple language, he captures a fleeting moment of contemplation within the woods before he goes back to his daily duties.

1.5. Theme

Isolation within nature, and the human condition. It reflects the stark landscapes and rural experiences of New England in the early 20th century. However, within this nature beauty, man has other duties to accomplish in his life.

2. Assignment

Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the literary techniques the poet uses to convey his theme.

Lecture 15

Analysis of Robert Frost's Poem : *Dust of Snow*

Dust of Snow

*The way a crow
Shook down on me
The dust of snow
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part
Of a day I had rued.*

1.Exploratory questions

- 1.1. Discuss the point of view in this poem.
- 1.2. Discuss the tone.
- 1.3. Discuss the theme.

1.1. Point of View

The point of view is the first person narrator. It allows the reader to be closer to the narrator's feelings towards the dust of snow.

1.2. The Tone

The falling dust of snow caused by the crow has its impact in changing the mood of the narrator into cheered feelings.

1.3. Theme

Little things in life can have big effects on people's feelings. Through the unexpected action of a crow shaking snow from a tree, the speaker

experiences a sudden change in mood, transforming a day previously marked by regret into one with renewed hope.

2. Assignment

Discuss Frost's poem *A Dust of Snow* in a short paragraph highlighting its theme and structural strategies.

Lecture 16

Naturalism in American Literature (1890-1920s).

1. Definition : Naturalism is a literary movement that emerged in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It developed as an extension of Realism, but with a deeper emphasis on scientific determinism, heredity, environment, and social conditions as forces beyond individual control.

Naturalist literature attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity and detachment to its study of human beings. Naturalist writers portrayed life as it is, but often more grimly, focusing on how external forces shaped human destiny, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

American naturalism developed broadly in two directions : one, examining the social and political dynamics of American urban life influenced by Darwin philosophy ; the other, examining the biological aspects of deterministic thought influenced by the thought of Marx.

2. Historical Background

The spread of industrialization created extremes of wealth and poverty, slum areas appeared especially in New York where there were crimes, murder, diseases, violence. Life became a struggle. Farmers were still going westward, but frontiers were about the close. People were loomed to have no more land.

The spread of the Darwin's theory of evolution changed people's ideology 'the theory of the survival by social selection' and ' survival of the fittest'. Living in an indiferent, cold world was no longer free.

People's outlook toward life became pessimistic. Writers responded to poverty, exploitation, and class divides, often influenced by scientific discoveries and social theory.

3. Characteristics of American Naturalism

- **Determinism over Free Will :** Characters are shaped (and often trapped) by forces such as genetics, social class, environment, and economic pressure. Free will is often an illusion in naturalist fiction. The idea that individual character has a direct influence on the course of his/her life is supplanted by a focus on nature or fate. Often a naturalist author will lead the reader to believe a character's fate is pre-determined usually by environmental factors, and that he/she can do nothing about it.
- **Naturalistic writers were influenced by Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.** They believed that one's heredity and environment determine one's character.
- **Human behavior is depicted as the result of survival instincts, not moral choice.**
- **Focus on the Lower Class and Marginalized :** Stories often feature working-class individuals, immigrants, prostitutes, or uneducated people, showing their struggles in a harsh world.
- **Objective, Detached Narration :** The narrator observes characters much like a scientist studying subjects, often without moral judgment. The writer often tries to maintain a tone that will be experienced as objective. Also, detachment can be achieved by creating nameless character. This puts the forces on the plot and what happens to the character, rather than the characters themselves. It is the duty of the writer to present to

the reader the reality without illusion rather than to mislead or plead him.

- Pessimistic Ton : Unlike Realism, which could be neutral or mildly optimistic, Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness, indifference and hostility of life, including poverty, racism, violence, prejudice, disease and corruption.
- Violence and Urban Decay : Many Naturalist works portray crime, poverty, war, violence, prejudice, disease and urban slums as brutal realities of modern life.
- Indifferent Nature : Nature is an indifferent force acting on the lives of human beings.

4. Key Themes of Naturalistic Literature

- Survival : Often survival in brutal nature.
- Determinism
- Violence
- Social taboos
- Man against nature
- Man against himself
- Social determinism; survival of the fittest.

5. Key American Naturalist Writers and Works

- Stephen Crane's *Maggie a Girl of the Streets* (1893) ; *The Red Badge of Courage*, with themes of poverty, war and inner struggle.
- Frank Norris' *McTeague* (1899) ; *The Octopus* (1901), with themes of greed, capitalism and fate.
- Theodor Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) ; *An American Tragedy* (1925), with themes of social ambition, determinism and morality.
- Jack London's *To Build a Fire* ; *The Call of the Wild*, with themes of nature's indifference and survival instincts.

- Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome* (1911), with themes of isolation, environment vs desire.

Lecture 17

Analysis of the Short Story *To Build A Fire* (1908), By Jack London

1. Biography of the Author Jack London

Jack London (1876-1916) is a novelist, short story writer, journalist and social activist. Born into poverty and largely self-educated, London worked various jobs : sailor, laborer, oyster pirate before turning to writing. He traveled to the Yukon in 1897, and the brutal conditions he faced there deeply influenced his most famous stories, including “*To Build a Fire.*”.

London is best known for his adventure stories and vivid portrayals of man versus nature. His most famous works include *The Call of the Wild* (1903) and *White Fang* (1906), both set in the harsh wilderness of the Yukon during the Klondike Gold Rush.

London’s works often reflect naturalist themes, emphasizing survival, instinct, heredity, and the indifference of nature. He was also a socialist and wrote about class struggle, capitalism, and the hardships of working-class life, as in *The People of the Abyss*. London was one of the first American writers to achieve worldwide fame and financial success from his fiction.

2. Plot Summary

The story follows an unnamed man traveling alone through the frozen wilderness of the Yukon, accompanied only by a wolf-dog. He is heading to a mining camp where his friends are located, expecting to arrive by evening.

Despite warnings from experienced locals never travel alone in such extreme cold, the man is confident, even arrogant, and underestimates the harshness of nature.

As the temperature drops further, he begins to feel the consequences of the cold. At one point, he falls through thin ice, wetting his legs and feet. Realizing he must build a fire to dry off and survive, he successfully starts one. But a fatal mistake occurs: he builds it under a snow-covered tree. When snow falls from the branches, it extinguishes the fire.

Frantically, he tries to build another fire but his frozen hands prevent him from doing so. He even considers killing the dog to use its body heat for survival, but he's unable to carry out the plan. He also tries to run to get warm. Eventually, he succumbs to the cold and freezes to death.

The story ends with the dog sensing the man is dead. After a while, it leaves to find shelter and warmth, likely at the camp.

3. Preparatory Questions

- 3.1. Identify the characters in the story.
- 3.2. From which point of view is the story narrated ?
- 3.3. Discuss the setting (place and time).
- 3.4. Discuss the climax moment in the story ?
- 3.5. Discuss the characterization of the unnamed man.
- 3.6. What is the role of the dog in the story ?
- 3.7. What is the function of flashback in the story ?
- 3.8. Discuss the tone.
- 3.9. What themes are conveyed in this short story ?

Answers

3.1.Characters of the Story : the unnamed man, the dog and the old-timer on Sulphur Creek.

3.2. **Point of View** : the third person omniscient narrator. It provides the reader many information about the setting, the thoughts of both the unnamed man and the dog and their actions. It contributes into conveying the theme of the story.

Examples : p. 02, 03, 04, 10 ,...

3.3.Setting

3.3.1.Time : The story takes place during the late 19th or early 20th century (though not specified explicitly), during the Klondike Gold Rush era, when many men ventured into the Yukon in search of fortune. More specifically, it unfolds in the depths of winter, on a day when the temperature reaches 75 degrees below zero (Fahrenheit). The extreme cold and short daylight hours are critical to the story's tension and themes.

3.3.2. Place : the story is set in the Yukon Territory, going through Henderson Creek in northwestern Canada. This is a remote, frozen wilderness, largely uninhabited and extremely harsh. London emphasizes its vastness, isolation, and hostility, highlighting how indifferent nature is to human existence. The landscape is covered in deep snow and ice, with frozen creeks and hidden springs that pose dangers.eg :

« *It was all pure white, rolling in gentle undulations where the ice-jams of the freeze-up formed....* » (p.1-2). Other extracts on pages : 04, 05, 11 ...

1.4. The Climax : when the idea of death starts to come to him, his final option is to run to reach the camp of his companions. So he starts running veinly. The climax starts on page 09 in the last paragraph.

3.4.Assignment

- Write a paragraph in which you discuss point of view in this short story.
- Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the setting in this short story.

Lecture 18

Follow up with the Analysis of London's : *To Build A Fire*

3.5. The Characterization of the Unnamed Man

- He is a new comer in the land lacking the potential to think about a situation and its subsequent consequences: « *The trouble with him was that he was without imagination. He was quick and alert in the things of life, but only in the things, and not in the significances.....* » (p.02).
- All the signs of nature do not make him meditate about his condition.
- He succeeds to build a fire but unfortunately it is under a tree filled with snow that lately extinguishes it.
- He fails to build the second fire because of the frost that haunts all his body.
- He thinks of killing his dog to get some warm but cannot.
- Running is his last chance to survive, but he fails and succumbs to death.
- The writer is presenting an image of a man who lacks knowledge about the secrets of nature in opposition to the cold and indifferent nature.

3.6. The Role of the Dog in the Story

- A big native husky.
- With his instinct, he is more knowledgeable than the man.
He knows that it is not time to travel.
- He also can sense the danger from the man's voice.
- His presence intensifies the limited knowledge of the man.

3.7. Function of Flashbacks : There are many flashbacks in the story :

- P.5, the unnamed man remembers the man from the Sulphur Creek was right when he spoke how cold it got in this country.
 - P.6, he remembers the advice of the man from the Sulphur Creek to build a fire.
 - P.07, he remembers the advice of the man from the Sulphur Creek to have a trail-mate.
- These flashbacks serve to show the mistakes committed by the unnamed man that led to his death.

3.8. Tone : The tone is detached, bleak, and objective, characteristic of Naturalism.

3.9. Themes

- Nature's Indifference: Nature is shown as harsh, powerful, and indifferent to man's suffering. Throughout the story, it only stands as if watching the unnamed man struggling for life.
- Man's Limited Knowledge Versus Animal Instinct: The dog survives because it relies on instinct, while the man dies due to overconfidence and poor judgment.

Lecture 19

Analysis of Stephen Crane's Poem : *War is Kind* (1899)

1. Biography of Stephen Crane: Stephen Crane (1871-1900) Crane was the 14th child in a religious family. He briefly attended college but left to pursue writing full-time. He worked as a freelance journalist, often covering crime, slum life, and later war.

Crane is a novelist, short story writer, poet and journalist (reported on several wars, including the Greco-Turkish War and the Spanish-American War. He is an influential American writer best known for his realistic and psychologically intense portrayals of war and human struggle. Though he died young, he produced some of the most enduring works of American literature, most notably:

- *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) which is considered as a landmark novel about a young soldier's experience in the Civil War.
- *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893) is a powerful Naturalist novella about poverty and despair in urban America.

3. Major Themes and Style

- Human struggle in harsh environments (physical or psychological)
- Psychological realism : Crane delved into characters' inner fears and motivations.
- Determinism : consistent with Naturalist views that environment and fate shape human lives.
- Impressionism : used vivid imagery and fragmented perspectives to portray experience (especially in war scenes).

- Wrote in a direct, vivid style, avoiding romantic language.

Poem : *War is Kind*

Do not weep, maiden, for war is kind.

Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky

And the affrighted steed ran on alone,

Do not weep.

War is kind.

Hoarse, booming drums of the regiment,

Little souls who thirst for fight,

These men were born to drill and die.

The unexplained glory flies above them,

Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom—

A field where a thousand corpses lie.

Do not weep, babe, for war is kind.

Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,

Raged at his breast, gulped and died,

Do not weep.

War is kind.

Swift, blazing flag of the regiment,

Eagle with crest of red and gold,

These men were born to drill and die.

Point for them the virtue of slaughter,

Make plain to them the excellence of killing

And a field where a thousand corpses lie.

Mother whose heart hung humble as a button

On the bright splendid shroud of your son,

Do not weep.

War is kind.

3. Historical Context : The story unfolds during the American Civil War, presenting a realistic depiction of the chaos and unpredictability that accompanies combat. Though the war ended and the poem is written after it, its effects are still lived.

4. Preparatory Questions

- 4.1. To whom is the speaker addressing his speech ?
- 4.2. What is he asking them to do ? why ?
- 4.3. Collect all diction that relate to war.
- 4.4. Depict and interpret the literary devices of the poem.
- 4.5. What theme is conveyed ?

Answers

- 4.1. The speaker is addressing his speech to many people : the maiden, the baby and the mother.
- 4.2. The speaker is asking them not to weep for ironically the war is kind.

4.3. Diction Relating to War : battle, trenches, booming, drums, flag, killing, shroud.

4.4. Literary Devices

- Imagery :Through drawing different images of the war, the poet is conveying the horrors of the war. And thus, through these images, the early mentioned people have every reason to weep.eg.

« *Because your lover threw wild hands toward the sky*

And the affrighted steed ran on alone »

«*Because your father tumbled in the yellow trenches,*

Raged at his breast, gulped and died, »

« *And a field where a thousand corpses lie »*

- **Irony** : Many elements convey irony : the title which contrasts with the content of the poem which contains images of violence and death in addition to the repetition of « *Do not weep* » ;

« *The unexplained glory flies above them,*

Great is the battle-god, great, and his kingdom »

« *Point for them the virtue of slaughter,*

Make plain to them the excellence of killing »

4.5.Theme

The poem is an indictment of the brutality of the war. It is an anti-war statement that uses irony and imagery to critique the glorification of the war.

4. Assignment

In a short paragraph, discuss the theme in '*War is Kind*' and how does Crane convey it ?

Lecture 20

Analysis of Stephen Crane's *Maggie : A Girl of the Streets* (1893)

1. Summary of the Novella

The story begins with Jimmie, a young boy, caught up in a street brawl with kids from another section of New York's poor Bowery district. He is saved by Pete, an older teenager who seems to know him only casually. Afterward, they run into Jimmie's harsh and indifferent father, who takes him back home. There, we meet his shy older sister Maggie, his little brother Tommie, and Mary, their violent, alcoholic mother. The night unfolds in its usual way: the father leaves to drink heavily at the bars, while the mother remains at home, yelling and raging until she also passes out drunk. Meanwhile, the frightened children cling to each other in a corner⁹.

As the years go by, both the father and Tommie pass away. Jimmie grows into a tough, hostile, and cynical young man, eventually finding work as a teamster. Maggie, however, remains curiously untouched by the deep poverty that surrounds her. Beneath the dirt and hardship, she is physically attractive and, more importantly, retains a sense of hope and innocence. When Pete, now employed as a bartender, reappears, he captivates Maggie with his boldness and display of middle-class sophistication. Recognizing her vulnerability, Pete begins courting her.

⁹ <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/maggie/summary/>, (2025)

Maggie is deeply impressed by his confidence and apparent sophistication, seeing in him a potential path to wealth, refinement, and an escape from the bleakness of her upbringing¹⁰.

One evening, the drunken and combative Mary accuses Maggie of falling into sin and bringing shame upon the family. In distress, Maggie turns to Pete, and it becomes clear that the two have become sexually involved. Outraged at what he sees as his sister's "ruin," Jimmie gets drunk with a companion and eventually clashes violently with Pete. Following this, Maggie leaves her home to live with Pete. Meanwhile, Jimmie and Mary feign sorrow and confusion over Maggie's supposed disgrace, even as her actions quickly become the subject of neighborhood gossip. Only weeks after leaving home, Maggie accompanies Pete to a bar where they encounter Nellie, a calculating woman who masks her manipulation with an air of refinement. Nellie easily lures Pete away, leaving Maggie abandoned. Desperate, Maggie attempts to return to her family, but they cruelly turn her away¹¹.

At this point, the straightforward narrative breaks off, giving way to a series of episodic scenes, presented in chronological order but separated by gaps in time. In one interlude, it is revealed that Jimmie, who has loudly condemned Maggie's behavior, has himself seduced and abandoned at least one young woman. In another brief moment, Maggie seeks out Pete at his workplace, only to be coldly dismissed and denied any legitimate claim on him. Months later, the reader is shown a prostitute, presumably Maggie, though unnamed, wandering the streets of New York, degraded and rejected, her fate clearly sealed. A parallel scene depicts Pete, drunk and surrounded by women in a bar, eventually

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid.

collapsing on the floor, where he is in turn mocked and abandoned by the manipulative Nellie. The novel concludes with Jimmie informing Mary that Maggie's body has been discovered. Mary then delivers a display of exaggerated grief over her "ruined" daughter, ending with her bitterly ironic and deeply hypocritical declaration: "I'll forgive her!"¹²

2. Characters

1.2. Maggie Johnson

Maggie Johnson, raised in the poverty and abuse of New York's Bowery, grows into a beautiful young woman who clings to romantic hopes of escape. Crane does give us a few physical descriptions of Maggie, though they are brief compared to the psychological and social emphasis of the novel. He highlights her beauty in contrast to the grim environment around her. For example, early in the text, Crane writes of Maggie as a child that she grew up to be "*a most rare and wonderful production of a tenement district, a pretty girl.*" Later, she is described as having "*a shadow of prettiness*" even amid poverty and squalor. These descriptions mark her as exceptional in her environment and help explain why Pete, and later others, notice her.

Drawn to Pete's apparent sophistication, she is seduced and then abandoned, becoming disgraced in her community and ultimately turning to prostitution. Her death, left ambiguous by Crane, underscores her role as a victim of poverty and social injustice. Rather than being portrayed as a fully individual character, Maggie functions symbolically, illustrating the destructive forces of urban life.

2.2. Jimmie

¹² Ibid.

Jimmie Johnson, introduced at the novel's start in a street fight, grows into a harsh and violent man, devoid of self-reflection or sympathy. Though guilty of exploiting women himself, he condemns Pete for seducing Maggie and blames Maggie for disgracing the family, revealing his hypocrisy. Unlike Maggie, Jimmie possesses the toughness to endure urban poverty, but his survival comes at the cost of cruelty. He outlives his sister, yet he seems destined to perpetuate the same cycle of suffering and brutality inherited from his parents.

2.3. Mary

Mary Johnson, the alcoholic and abusive mother of Maggie and Jimmie, is depicted as almost devil-like in her cruelty. Throughout the novel, she smashes household objects and erupts into violent fits of rage. Even in the Bowery, where drunkenness is common, Mary stands out as a figure of ridicule in the neighborhood. After driving Maggie away from home with her brutality, she hypocritically condemns her daughter's behavior and later stages a hollow display of grief for the child she never truly cared for.

2.4. Father

Mr. Johnson, the father of Maggie, Jimmie, and Tommie, and Mary's husband, appears only briefly in the novel before his early death. In the limited glimpses we get, he shows a casual cruelty toward his children, at one point even taking beer from Jimmie. Like Mary, he is an alcoholic, spending his time in bars to avoid the "living hell" of his own household.

2.5. Tommie

Tommie, the youngest of the Johnson children, grows up surrounded by his parents' constant fighting and violence. He dies at a young age, disappearing early in the novel.

2.6. The Old Woman

An unnamed elderly woman who resides in the same tenement as the Johnson family shows occasional kindness toward the children. She offers Maggie temporary refuge in her apartment after Mary casts her out.

2.7. Nellie

Nellie, described as a “woman of brilliance and audacity,” easily entices Pete away from Maggie by offering the sophistication and excitement he desires, qualities he himself once represented to Maggie. In the novel's penultimate scene, however, it becomes evident that Nellie merely uses Pete for his money and holds him in contempt. Through Nellie, the novel suggests that only shrewd, hardened women like her can withstand the exploitation of men in the harsh world of the Bowery.

3. Point of View

Stephen Crane uses a third-person omniscient point of view, where the narrator has access to all characters' thoughts and feelings but remains a detached observer of the harsh conditions of the New York slums. The narrator isn't limited to one character's perspective, but can shift to reveal the hopes and struggles of different individuals within the story, offering a complete picture of the environment's pervasive hopelessness.

This point of view helps the writer to focus on environmental determinism which allows the narrator to explicitly demonstrate how

Maggie and other characters are products of their environment, unable to escape the poverty and social constraints that define their lives.

4. Literary Devices

4.1. Dramatic Irony

- Mary condemns Maggie for immorality, despite being an abusive alcoholic who drove her away.
- Jimmie vilifies Pete for “ruining” his sister, though he has seduced and abandoned women himself.
- The novel ends with Mary’s bitterly ironic declaration, “*I’ll fergive her!*”

4.2. Imagery

Crane uses harsh, gritty imagery of the Bowery, fights, drunkenness, filth, to create a stark contrast with Maggie’s delicate appearance. His descriptions are often visual and violent, emphasizing the brutality of urban poverty. To illustrate :

« From a careening building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and gutter ... Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles ... » .

This paints a vivid picture of squalor, how overcrowded tenements throw their inhabitants out into the street; objects are strewn everywhere. It evokes visual chaos, poverty, and neglect.

5. Setting

The Bowery is the district where Maggie and her family live.

Infact, in the late 19th century, the Bowery was a neighborhood on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, notorious for overcrowded tenements, poverty, saloons, crime, and prostitution. Stephen Crane sets *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* there to emphasize how environment and social conditions shape his characters' lives.

Maggie's tenement, her family's violence, the saloons where Pete works, and the streets where she ultimately wanders in despair are all part of the Bowery setting. It's more than just a backdrop, it symbolizes entrapment, corruption, and the crushing forces of urban poverty.

Indeed, The Bowery functions also as a symbol of entrapment. It is depicted as crowded, filthy, and violent, a place where dreams are suffocated. Maggie longs to escape its squalor, but every attempt (through Pete, through romance, through returning home) fails, showing the inescapability of her environment.

Furthermore, the Bowery is used by Crane to convey environmental determinism which is at the core of Naturalism. Crane aims to emphasize how environment shapes fate. In this regard, Maggie's downfall seems inevitable because she was born into the Bowery, where poverty, alcoholism, and moral hypocrisy dominate. Thus, the neighborhood itself becomes a force of destruction, not just a backdrop.

6. Colloquial Dialogue

The speech of the Bowery characters is rendered in dialect, full of slang, contractions, and misspellings. For example, Jimmie's and Pete's speech captures the rhythm of working-class New York. This grounds the novel in realism while also underscoring the limitations of the characters' social world.

7. Economy of Style

The novel is short, with sparse description and rapid pacing. Crane avoids elaborate psychological analysis; instead, he shows character through action, gesture, and environment. This minimalism intensifies the sense of inevitability, giving the story a relentless drive toward Maggie's downfall.

8. Themes

- **Determinism and the Power of Environment** : A central theme of literary naturalism: individuals are shaped, even trapped, by their environment. Maggie is born into poverty, violence, and moral hypocrisy; her downfall feels inevitable, not the result of free choice. The slums act almost like a character themselves, noisy, chaotic, and corrupting.
- **Hypocrisy of Morality** : Maggie's family and community condemn her when she turns to prostitution, yet their own lives are steeped in violence, drunkenness, and vice. Her mother, who abuses alcohol and neglects her children, becomes self-righteously outraged at Maggie's "sin." Crane critiques the selective moral judgments of society, which punish women more harshly than men.
- **Gender and Double Standards** : Maggie's tragedy reflects gender inequality: she is socially destroyed for what men (Pete, Jimmie) do without consequence. Maggie is punished for her sexual fall, while Pete simply moves on to another woman, and Jimmie is never condemned for his promiscuity. This theme highlights how patriarchal norms trap women in a cycle of shame and limited opportunity.

- **Illusion vs. Reality :** Maggie craves beauty, refinement, and escape from the Bowery. She idealizes Pete as her ticket to a better life. The theater scenes symbolize her yearning for melodramatic romance and salvation. Yet these illusions clash with grim reality, Pete is shallow, exploitative, and unreliable, and Maggie’s “escape” only accelerates her destruction.
- **Violence and Brutality of Poverty :** Violence pervades the novel ; family fights, street brawls, and constant verbal abuse. This normalized brutality shows how poverty breeds aggression, stifling tenderness or compassion. The environment is a battlefield, where survival demands toughness and emotion is a liability.
- **Isolation and Abandonment :** Maggie is ultimately isolated from family, community, and society. Her mother disowns her, Pete discards her, and Jimmie shows no loyalty. Her death (implied to be suicide or a violent end) underscores her complete abandonment.
- **Futility of Escape :** Maggie’s story embodies the futility of trying to transcend one’s social class. Her dreams of refinement through Pete collapse because the structures of society, poverty, sexism, moral hypocrisy, keep her trapped. The theme reflects the bleakness of naturalism: environment and social forces are stronger than individual desire.

8. Assignment

- Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the point of view in this novella.
- Write a short paragraph in which you discuss the character of Maggie.
- Choose one theme and discuss it in one paragraph.

Lecture 21

Did Naturalism End in American Literature ?

1. Naturalism's Peak

Naturalism in American literature flourished roughly from the 1890s through the 1910s. Writers like Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, and Jack London portrayed human beings as products of heredity and environment, often trapped by poverty, desire, or social forces. Its focus was on determinism, survival, and the darker side of life.

2. Shifts in the 1920s–30s

By the 1920s, the Modernist movement (e.g., Hemingway, Faulkner, Fitzgerald) gained ground. Modernism often emphasized psychological depth, experimental form, and individual consciousness rather than strict environmental determinism. However, some naturalist tendencies lingered, especially in writers who dealt with social realism (e.g., John Steinbeck, Richard Wright).

3. Persistence in Later Literature

Naturalism didn't disappear, its themes and techniques were absorbed into later traditions, like:

- Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939): Naturalist in its attention to environment, class struggle, and determinism.

- Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940): Strong naturalist elements in its portrayal of Bigger Thomas as a product of systemic racism and poverty.
- Even Toni Morrison's early novels contain naturalistic traces in how environment and history shape characters.

4. Decline as a Movement

After WWII, naturalism was no longer seen as the leading literary mode. Postmodernism, metafiction, and more experimental styles dominated mid-to-late 20th century American literature. Naturalism is now often considered a historical phase (part of realism's development), but its influence is still visible in contemporary fiction that examines systemic forces (poverty, race, gender, capitalism).

Conclusion

Naturalism as a distinct movement waned by the 1930s, but it never truly ended. Instead, it evolved and merged into other traditions, especially modernism and social realism, and continues to shape American literature whenever writers portray human lives as constrained by environment, history, or social systems.

Lecture 22

Introduction to the Essay

1. Introduction

- Should capture the attention of the reader (eg. By a startling statement or provocative question).
- Mention the name of the author, title of the work, and the date of publication.
- State the thesis of your essay.
- Present the background of the thesis.

2. Development

- No more than three paragraphs and no less than two paragraphs.
- Each paragraph should develop one idea.
- Each paragraph starts with a topic sentence and should relate the details of the paragraph to thesis statement.
- Each developmental paragraph should contain summaries, explanations, paraphrases, specific details or quotations.
- The explanations of one's ideas should be supported with evidence from the text.

3. Conclusion

- Restate the thesis in different words.
- Synthesize the ideas of the development briefly.
- State the importance of your literary essay and state that you have defended your argument.

4. Assignment

- In a coherent essay, discuss how does Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* reflects the characteristics of American naturalism in both its style and themes.”

4. Correction of the Assignment : Essay Outline

➤ Determining the Thesis Statement

Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* exemplifies American naturalism through its detached narrative style, impressionistic imagery, and stark depiction of the Bowery, while thematically exposing the determinism of environment, the hypocrisy of social morality, and the futility of escape from poverty.

➤ Introduction

- Brief context: late 19th-century naturalism (influence of Zola, focus on determinism).
- Crane's novella as the first naturalist work in American literature.
- Thesis statement.

➤ Development

Stylistic Features of Naturalism

- Detached, Reportorial Narration : Crane's objective tone mirrors naturalist neutrality.
- Colloquial Dialogue : Bowery slang and dialect ground the novel in realism.
- Impressionistic Imagery : Vivid, sensory descriptions of the city's chaos. Symbolism of theater (illusion) and color/light (fragile hope).

Themes of Naturalism

- Determinism and the Power of Environment : Maggie's fate shaped by poverty and family dysfunction.
- Moral Hypocrisy and Double Standards : Mother and Jimmie condemn Maggie while embodying vice.
- Gendered double standards: women punished, men excused.
- Futility of Escape: Maggie's dreams of refinement through Pete collapse. Illusion (theater, romance) vs. reality (abandonment, death)

➤ **Conclusion**

- Restate how *Maggie* illustrates naturalism in style and theme.
- Emphasize its enduring significance as the work that established naturalism in American literature.
