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By: Subhash G. Deo, B.A. (Hons) M.A., B. Journalism



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MRP ₹ 450/-

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

AMERICAN NOVEL

M.E.G.-11

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Attempt any **one** question from Section-A and **four** questions from Section-B. Attempt **five** questions in all. All questions carry **equal** marks.

SECTION-A

Q. 1. Discuss the distinctive features of the nineteenth century American novel.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 5, Q. No. 5.

Q. 2. What are the major thematic concerns of the post-Second World War American novelists? Discuss with reference to any two of the novels prescribed in your syllabus.

Ans. The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two World Wars as a “second flowering” of American writing. Certainly American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction, though not up to their prewar standard; and Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Eugene O’Neill’s most distinguished play, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, appeared posthumously in 1956. Before and after World War II, Robert Penn Warren published influential fiction, poetry and criticism. His *All the King’s Men*, one of the best American political novels, won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. Mary McCarthy became a widely read social satirist and essayist. When it first appeared in the United States in the 1960s, Henry Miller’s fiction was influential primarily because of its frank exploration of sexuality. But its loose, picaresque, quasi-autobiographical form also meshed well with post-1960s fiction. Impressive new novelists, poets and playwrights emerged after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard.

Not only did a new generation come out of the war, but its ethnic, regional and social character was quite different from that of the preceding one. Among the younger writers were children of immigrants, many of them Jews; African Americans, only a few generations away from slavery; and, eventually, women, who, with the rise of feminism, were to speak in a new voice. Though the social climate of the postwar years was conservative, even conformist, some of the most discussed writers were homosexuals or bisexuals, including Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, Paul Bowles, Gore Vidal, and James Baldwin, whose dark themes and experimental methods cleared a path for Beat writers such as Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs and Jack Kerouac.

The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a “second flowering” of American writing. Certainly American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and '30s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck, and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction, though not up to their prewar standard; and Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Eugene O’Neill’s most distinguished play, *Long Day’s Journey into Night*, appeared posthumously in 1956. Before and after World War II, Robert Penn Warren published influential fiction, poetry, and criticism. His *All the King’s Men*, one of the best American political novels, won the 1947 Pulitzer Prize. Mary McCarthy became a widely read social satirist and essayist. When it first appeared in

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Other influential portraits of outsider figures included the Beat characters in Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), *The Dharma Bums* (1958), *Desolation Angels* (1965) and *Visions of Cody* (1972); the young Rabbit Angstrom in John Updike's *Rabbit, Run* (1960) and *Rabbit Redux* (1971); Holden Caulfield in J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951); and the troubling madman in Richard Yates's powerful novel of suburban life, *Revolutionary Road* (1961).

SECTION-B

Q. 3. Comment on the significance of the landscape in *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 36, Q. No. 4.

Q. 4. Discuss Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* as a 'city novel'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 61, Q. No. 3.

Q. 5. In what way does the novel *The Great Gatsby* make a comment on the American social structure of the 1920s? Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 95, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 2.

Q. 6. "The search for identity is a major thematic concern in Scott Homaday's *House Made of Dawn*." Elaborate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-38, Page No. 250, Q. No. 3.

Q. 7. Discuss Holden Caulfield's vision of childhood and adulthood in *The Catcher in the Rye*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-29, Page No. 199, Q. No. 9.

Q. 8. "William Faulkner's *Light in August* portrays Joe Christmas' constant struggle for identity." Comment.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 115, 'Sad Life of Joe Christmas'.

Q. 9. How does Alice Walker foreground the concept of motherhood and mothering in *The Color Purple*? Explain.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-45, Page No. 311, Q. No. 4.

Q. 10. Comment on the metaphor of the 'show boat' in *The Floating Opera*.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-32, Page No. 222, Q. No. 9.

Q. 11. Discuss the significance of the title "Black Spring".

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 149, Q. No. 4.

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Novel - 1: THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS: JAMES F. COOPER

THE BEGINNINGS

1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will take a close look at the nineteenth century American novel in its moral, religious, philosophical and cultural conditions, and how they shaped the American novel of that time. The emerging adolescent American character became the energetic faith in the American experiment in approving and achieving individual liberty, in these very early days of American democracy.

AMERICAN CHARACTER OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Q. 1. Discuss the qualities of the American character of 19th century.

Ans. According to Taine, a literary text is created out of the union of the “race, mofen and milieu.” This is indeed true in a new nation in search of newer forms of creative expression. Here literature seeks to represent a reality which never believes in realising itself into a settled monolith. It tries to fulfil its own promise of a New World of hope for human beings. Its creative expression seeks a distinct identity and spirit. It wants to be independent but not isolated. It aspires to be a path-finder, to define the perfect ways of society, politics and governance, culture and philosophy.

American literature started its long, unending journey from Puritanical moorings. The journey has been so far purposefully unsettled. It derives its continuous energy out of a restless quest for being innovative and leading the world by its ideals. Commanger correctly describes the American character as “always the product of an interplay of inheritance and environment”. The complex and inalienable relationship of American inheritance form the British and European, going back to the roots of the ancient Greece and Rome, is the shaping (not petrifying) influence on American psyche. While America opted for its basic institutions of State, Church and Family, the influence of the environment was decisive. It is a

fact that America’s rich social, geographical diversity in a synthesis with its vast sense of space, invitation to mobility, the atmosphere of independence and encouragement to opportunity and optinities has created new ways of thinking and redefining man’s genius. The almost eternal source of nature’s wealth and will to venture, define the fundamental trait of the American character namely, the optimism, as a way of thinking and feeling and living and achieving together.

This enterprising sense of optimism gave rise to the American idea of progress. Progress was not abstraction in itself, it was a common and continuous experience to the American he saw daily in the transformation of wideness into a farm land, in the growth of villages into cities, in the steady rise of community and nation to wealth and power. He planned ambitiously with a doubtless spirit of endeavour, and passionately believed that nothing was beyond his power. He always aimed and managed to achieve desired goals. For him, like the Europeans past was history, what mattered most was living in the present and endeavouring in the future. Such a constructive optimism was possible with vast reserves of energy, with spacious trees, rivers and a continental space. His folklore itself was on a large-scale, with many such as Paul Bunyans and Mike Finks empire builders closely approximated to folklore. It is, infact, easy to confuse the real and legendary characters, such as Danel Boone (on whom Cooper might have modelled his Natty Bumppo), David Crockett and Sam Houston. They belong to mythology and history, alike. The American’s imagination was constantly challenged by the realities of geography and history, and that is why he was receptive to large plans and heroic speculations.

The American endeavour was entirely practical, and so his culture, too, was material. He took competition for granted and preached the gospel of hard work. He considered rootlessness to any particular place

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not a vice. He liked wealth, without being ostentatious. Everything that promised to increase wealth was thought as good and so he became tolerant of the exploitation of natural resources and rising cult of industrialism. The American's striving for achieving greater material worth also made him intensely practical in all other matters. He was ingenious and resourceful and was always willing to improve tools or techniques to handle new urgencies. An innovator to the core, he borrowed ideas without hesitation from the Red Indians or immigrants and naturalized people. He improved instinctively and constantly attempt further improvements, without any respect for custom. He became the happiest when he devised a mechanical solution to any problem bothering him.

Mere theories and speculations disturbed the American of 19th century and by choice he stayed away from abstruse philosophies of government. No philosophy not grounded in practical wisdom and common sense appealed to him. If any, "instrumentalism" was one philosophy that always native to his instinct.

(a) The Moral, Religious and Philosophical Aspects

Q. 2. What are the moral and religious ideas defining the American mind of 19th century?

Ans. The 19th century American man's religion with its Calvinistic roots was practical. He was religious, without being devout. Instead of a faith in the doctrine of salvation by grace, he believed in the doctrine of salvation by work. He had no belief in the Devil. The most significant aspects of two most original American religions – Mormonism and Christian Science were practical ones. In politics, too, he profoundly mistrusted the abstract and doctrinaire. Without resorting to exactions of any political philosophy, he formed his own mature and unflinching political judgement using common sense. His cultural attitudes were also naturally inclined towards their practical compulsion and useful value.

To the American, in the 19th century wilderness was the true paradise. He proclaimed his moral superiority through it. This assertion of superiority was due to a sense of destiny and mission. Pioneering in spirit and adventurous in action, with unmatched will and zeal to succeed, American character showed endless inclination to experiments in all forms of human endeavour. America itself was an experiment in the history of man's civilization, and thus he was a self-reliant man who continuously "shaped" the American mind.

All these inherent qualities of the American character were sufficiently formed and enriched during the literature, thinking and culture of the nineteenth century. The four most important qualities of all these are: 1. faith in progress; 2. validity of democracy; 3. equality to all, everywhere in all aspects and walks of life, and 4. the ultimate triumph of right over wrong.

During the nineteenth century, the sense of equality permeated American's life and thought, his conduct and work and play, his language and literature, his religion and politics. In fact, it conditioned and defined all aspects of his life. Equality was all pervasive, in politics, society, cultural and psychological life. There was a quest for economic equality with the absence of class distinctions. Men and women met on the basis of equality. Leadership was dictated by the situation and not by antecedent social position. Education reflected the social values, and public school became a great leveller. The sense of ingenuity and physical prowess were the distinct qualities of success. Feeling of equality of all introduced an ease and sincerity into social relationships. Love as a form of companionship broke the class barriers. Talent also brought many opportunities for individual performance. The poor did not sense the burden of inequality. Few outward signs of rank were tolerated. The sense of equality became also manifested in the American manners. Americans behaved themselves pretty much as their kindly and genuine instincts dictated. Their manners were flexible and not rigid or punctilious. In politics the spirit of equality, not simply as a democratic principle, but a sort of collective sharing of power and responsibility was prominent. Not much significance was given to the role and might of the military in society, except in times of war.

The American was seemingly careless about his work and his trade, preferring to have machines work for him. He regarded with equanimity, the decline of the inherited traditions of craftsmanship. He was careless also of class, rank and prerogatives of others as well as of his own. He hardly took any pride in a finished job, and prized versatility above thoroughness. He was world's most successful farmer, and yet his cultivation was not intensive. The American had two schools of thought, namely transcendentalism and pragmatism. He rarely stayed at a single place. With abundant faith in the next generation, an American never left behind anything for the future. In those days, it was easier to cultivate in the new soil and explore

new investments than continue with the old traditions and practices.

The American attitude towards authority, rules and regulations was arbitrary. The paradox was when he had no great respect for rules, he, nevertheless, praised his Constitution and government for their greatness. He knew that America was founded in dissent. Individualism, a prime quality of the American character, also was based on non-conformity. Nature, too, conspired with history to justify heterodoxy. In the nineteenth century, non-conformity was indulged out of good nature rather than respect for the principle. His sense of discipline resulted due to circumstances than by the State.

However, for all his individualism, the American was much interested to cooperative undertakings. The Americans discovered that men could come together and make a church and their churches were voluntary organizations. They found that men could come together and make a state and the constitutional convention was their most original political contribution. Though he did not always observe the morals of the Puritans, he accepted without question the moral standards of the Puritans. White women were safe anywhere. Chastity was taken for granted before and fidelity after marriage. This is shown in the portrayal of Alice and Cora in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The social position of women was elevated. They were treated with honour and given many opportunities in their intellectual development. In all matters of the church and the school, women took the lead. They not only controlled education and religion, they largely dictated the standards of literature and art. The American's sentimentalism was deep and spontaneous and he was closer to the French man than to that of the German. He was sentimental about Nature in her grander aspects and liked rhetoric in his orators (as in Natty Bumppo). He thought the whole history of USA was romantic and heroic. Instead of revelling in the anachronistic history of the past European feudal castles and knights, he romanticized his own history of the Pilgrim and the Puritan, the Indian, whom he fought, he cowboy, the miner and the trapper. As he was always victorious, he variously mythicised in sentiment and romance all the vanquished. Imagination and enthusiasm, combined with sentiment characterized his sentiment. Humour, which was as pervasive as unfailing optimism, was a national trait. It existed universally in the American mind, and its practitioner

brought rare delight and unique character to the American imagination. Humour thus, in its myriad manifestations, such as that of the yankees, Negroes and cowboys all had their special dialects. From Benjamin Franklin to Mark Twain, it was basically outrageous. It celebrated the grotesque and the ludicrous with unruffled gravity. In a way, Nature in American humour displaced Society in the British sort of humour.

(b) American Philosophy in the 19th Century

Q. 3. Discuss American thought and philosophy in 19th century.

Ans. American philosophy of the 19th century was like the American character, "an amalgam of inheritance and experience". Puritanism, rationalism and idealism, were the three major sources of American philosophy. Each was naturalized, without the sectarian denominations and Puritanism permeated the secular thought. The enlightenment, too, unlike in Europe could perform the task of illumination without war or revolution. In America, because the opposites could fuse themselves, "its alchemy was tranquil and pervasive".

The American found felicity in the New World, and, therefore, his philosophy had a genial view of Providence and Nature. He had a romantic concept of man and a healthy interpretation of history. He cultivated a spirit of individualism, and was all for experimentation and creative use of his free will. He was practical, and so his philosophy, also served utilitarian goals. His imagination arose from his free will. Philosophy was an active instrument, a provocation and also a rationalization and a rule. He accepted ideas without rigorous inquiry into their validity by innovatively synthesizing the philosophical ideas of the past from the English, French, German and even Indian sources. He could and did evolve his own system, most suited to his pragmatic needs, based on his common sense. Yet, in spite of the disinterest in formal philosophy or indulge in metaphysical speculation, the Americans formulated with enough conviction and unanimity, a common view of the cosmic processes and their significance to man. With a belief in the binding force a moral law, they formed their institutions.

American thought was based on an unfailing sense of optimism with the sense of spacious universe with confidence in the infinite possibilities of human development and with reverence for a righteous God and a just moral code. They believed in immutable laws governing the universe. And yet claimed enough space for the operation of free will. They were confident that

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their reason was able to comprehend these laws and their will was strong enough to observe them. They believed secular law to be just a transcription of the Law of Nature and Nature's God and gave it appropriate respect. The Americans completely accepted the supremacy and sovereign efficacy of the Higher Law, and held human institutions valid only when in conformity to it. They worshipped a God, who was just but also benevolent and who "delighted in the happiness of man here and his greater happiness hereafter". They revelled in a nature that was exacting but beneficent and found its generosity a sure sign of providential sanction of grace.

It is significant that the Americans did not acquiesce in the doctrine of man's original depravity and man's insignificance in spite of their fundamental faith in the supremacy and power of God. On the other hand they continued their faith in man's capacity for qualities of divinity in his action and capability for infinite moral improvement, and that he was destined, in the end, for perfection. Although Christian ideas of sin and Devil appeared in confessions of faith, both were banished from the popular consciousness. The American held all the men to be equal in God's sanction of grace. He combined the political idea of democracy and the moral and religious aspect of brotherhood of man, and thereby practised the values of liberty in all their social order and law and commonwealth. They passionately believed and practised freedom of each individual. Had no pride in their individual excellence, but showed sense of gratitude to God. Self-reliance was the impelling drive behind all their thoughts and actions. Thus, individualism became Americanism. To this extent, the rich and spacious contained dazzled but not confounded their imagination. Their conquest of it inspired in them a sense of limitless power. These ideals of Nature and religion form the central tenets of the behaviour of Cooper's Leatherstocking hero, Natty Bumppo, the man "without a cross". Like the true American, he recognized the sovereignty of the conscience. Temperate and democratic, Natto Bumppo accepted the majority verdict.

Q. 4. The 19th century was for the Americans a century of 'Arcadian simplicity', Nature and Pristine Purity. Discuss.

Ans. In the literary imagination of 19th century Americans, a spirit of liberty and quest for individual perfection, morally and materially, defined the consciousness of their heroes and heroines. All of them

were rural heroes, because their imagination was formed by country living. The American's poetry, and mythology were formed by country living. No novel of city life caught the imagination of the writers of these days. As in Cooper's pastoral images, the country folk eulogised the felicities of the farm and considered the farmer the beloved of God. Cooper's hero Natty Bumppo declares to Harward, "Lord, Major, I should be but a poor scholar for one who had studied so long in the wilderness, did not I know how to set forth the movements and nature' of such a beast."

The Americans read books and psalms in the wild nature. Poets and composers of songs at that time delighted themselves in the simple and inostensible objects of nature, the meditative joy of the countryside and the love of the past. Their qualities of primieval innocence and pristine purity were reflected in the childhood or adolescent dreams and boyhood was glorified as an important form of exploring human consciousness. No other literature has exploited the myths and dreams of the adolescent psyche as the 19th century American literature. Natty Bumppo's pristine purity and innocence, even Uncas pure mind and David's and Alice's and Cora's sentiments – all carry the authentic spontaneity of the childhood feelings. Everywhere, such characters lived in the pastoral or rural ambience. As opposed to this, the urban milieu provided the set of values of a corrupt mind. Everybody, like Uncas, had a high sense of honour. He was brave and stood up for himself, fought for his rights and fought fairly, himself. Throughout the whole of the trying moments in the narrative, Uncas alone preserved his serenity. He looked on the preparations with a steady eye, and when the tomentors came to seize him, he met them with a firm and upright attitude. He was gregarious, loyal to his companions and rarely cherished enmities. He was chivalrous toward women and respected the grown-ups. He was thoughtless rather than unkind. He had a lively imagination and lived in a world (like Natty Bumppo) of the Indians, cowboys and pirates. Like Natty Bumppo, he was superstitious but not religious. He was fair in his dealings with others and scorned every form of meanness. He was simple and democratic, without knowing the distinctions of class or colour and resented snobbery. He made friends readily with the poor and the shiftless and he was uncomfortable with wealth. Every one about him worked hard and he took upon himself a heavy burden of chores and did them with varying desires of