CHAPTER-1

HISTORY OF AFRO-AMERICAN LITERATURE

A study of literature inevitably involves the study of history; due to the fact that historical past is an aspect that is intricately woven into the fabric of any social setup, irrespective of its geographical location. Hence, the approach of new historicists is quite commendable, as they fully grasp the importance of historical events that in some way, or the other have an impact on the development of literature. The term ‘New Historicism’ was coined by Stephen Greenblatt in his seminal work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: from More to Shakespeare* (1980). According to Peter Barry, “A simple definition of the new historicism is that it is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical period” (166). New historicism considers history and literature as co-texts, which means that it does not favour the literary text over non-literary texts. Louis Montrose, an American critic, also contributed to the study of New Historicism. Montrose comprehended new historicism as, “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of text and the textuality of history” (Abrams 191). Thus, the endeavour to trace the history of Afro-American literature since its inception is a task that involves a detailed study of some historical events that had an impact on the people and the literary production of that era.

John Henrik Clarke in his scholarly article, “The Origin and Growth of Afro-American Literature” focuses on the fact that Africans before being forcefully exported to America were culturally diverse and had a flourishing academic life. He asserts that, “. . . the Black Race did not come to the United States culturally empty-handed” (1). After studying the work of Felix DuBois titled *Timbuktu the Mysterious*, Clarke examined how university life prospered throughout the African continent specifically at Timbuktu, the educational capital of Sudan. He
excavated the life of Ahmed Baba, who was the last Chancellor of the University of Sankore. Ahmed Baba had authored numerous books with varying thematic concerns, and had maintained a massive library of books that were unfortunately lost during the Moroccan invasion in 1592. As an aftermath of this invasion the civilized life of people in Africa was disrupted and slave trade was officially inaugurated. Slave traders and Westerners in Africa captured the native Africans for slave trade and imposed on them the tag of inferiority and inherent belligerence. It seemed to be the white population’s crusade to domesticate the black people and harness them with repressive measures. This form of ‘cultural imperialism’ was in vogue in America till slavery was formally abolished in 1862.

The corpus of Afro-American literature is gigantic, and it can be genuinely studied and investigated as the chronicle of human suffering in America. The blacks who were forced into the inhuman slave trade were not actually beasts, but victims of white colonization and hunger for territorial expansion. They had a rich cultural heritage behind them that the world remained alien to, until they were granted their rights and were legally emancipated. However, if seen optimistically, it was this corrupt and mercenary institution of slavery that inspired the slaves to create an opportunity for themselves to narrate tales and folklores in quest of attaining some solace and spiritual healing. The slave narratives were later written by some freed slaves to verbalize their agony. In this connection, Maryemma Graham rightly observes that:

The common part of America lies in the experience of slavery, an experience that has much to teach us when treated narratively. As the only indigenous form of American writing, the slave narrative “belongs” to African American novelists as no other literary form does. (5)
Though the Afro-Americans were victims of white skepticism, they relentlessly struggled to write about their true misery. The merit of these writers was always questioned by the white authority governing the then literary coterie. During this phase the writings of Phillis Wheatley marked the beginning of Afro-American writing in America. Her work *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, was allowed to be published in 1773, only after intense interrogative sessions and verification of facts. It was beyond the imagination of whites to come to terms with the fact of black writing. Hence, the authorship of many Afro-American writings was declared years after the original writing had come into existence. In this regard Christopher Mulvey in “Freeing the voice, creating the self: the novel and slavery” contends that, “*Our Nig* was not identified as an African American novel until 1982; *The Bondwoman’s Narrative* was not discovered to be an African American fiction until 2001” (17). The first published work of Jupiter Hammon, a religious poet, was *An Evening Thought* (1760). Hammon along with Wheatley produced literature that consoled the battered souls of Afro-Americans. Another prominent figure was that of Gustavus Vassa, born in 1745, who purchased his freedom and became actively involved in British anti-slavery movement. According to Mulvey, the greatest slave narrative of the eighteenth-century was, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). William L. Andrews in his essay, “How to Read a Slave Narrative” studies, “. . . Equiano’s career from West African boyhood, through the dreadful transatlantic Middle Passage, to eventual freedom and economic success as a British citizen” (Andrews). Till the abolition of slavery in 1862, with the thirteenth amendment to the constitution there was an increased production of fugitive slave narratives. These narratives threw ample light on the issue of slavery in order to accentuate the physical and psychological abuse suffered by the slaves at the hands of inhuman slaveholders and plantation owners.
Whenever the past of Afro-American fiction is explored, the importance of folklores and oral tradition of Afro-Americans is re-enforced. As aptly observed by Bernard W. Bell, “the unique blend of a significant number of African survivals with elements of white American culture, are embedded in the Old South, especially the Georgia Sea Islands and the Mississippi Delta” (17). Thus, oral tradition became an important tool and a storehouse of information at the hands of Afro-Americans. Bell further points out that, “In addition to their pedagogical, anthropological, psychological, and political functions, African oral narratives provided the fertile soil and roots for a written indigenous literature” (16). Oral tradition was often sermonic in nature, so as to provide solace to the slaves whose lives were full of physical and psychological suffering. The contemporary Afro-American writers revived sermonic literature to remember the plight of those who had suffered as slaves under white despotism. The prayer meetings and sermonic sessions were held in seclusion away from the knowledge of the slave-masters who were against any such gathering of blacks.

With the passing of the second Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, by the American Congress, it was made compulsory for the fugitive slaves to be returned to their masters. A slave hunt ensued thereafter to catch and enslave the runaway slaves by use of brutal measures and force. These atrocities added to the problems of blacks who were already suffering. The literature of this period was the only hope for blacks to curb slavery and get the governmental machinery into action. Thus, the slave narratives were being written as a means of opposing all inhuman laws and measures. In this context, William L. Andrews rightly remarks:

In the late 1840s well-known fugitive slaves such as William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb, James W. C. Pennington, and William and Ellen Craft reinforced the rhetorical self-consciousness of the slave narrative by incorporating into their
stories trickster motifs from African American folk culture, extensive literary and biblical allusion, and a picaresque perspective on the meaning of the slave’s flight from bondage to freedom. (Andrews)


Another crucial literary genre of this period was the genre of abolitionist literature. The authors garnered enough courage to write novels demanding the abolition of slavery. The chief advocate of this literary genre was Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), brimmed with strong anti-slavery sentiments. Bernard W. Bell observes regarding abolitionist literature that:

> The formal diction, rhythmic cadences, balanced syntax, stark metaphors, and elevated tone of works like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) provided the stylistic blend of matter-of-factness and sentimentality necessary for their initial moral and political appeals primarily to white readers. By their adaptation of the conventions of abolitionist literature, William W. Brown, Martin Delany, James Howard, Frances E. W. Harper, and others exploited the opportunity to strike a blow at American racism while simultaneously demonstrating their adjustment to Euro-American culture. (27-28)

Soon after the publication of abolitionist literature there was an advent of another literary genre called the anti-Tom literature, or plantation literature in the Southern states of America, “... it was a popular genre that depicted slavery as a benevolent and idyllic institution of patriarchal
whites looking after dependent, childlike blacks” (Bodenner 4). The two most renowned novels of this literary genre are William Gilmore Simms’s *The Sword and the Distaff* (1852), and Caroline Lee Hentz’s *The Planter’s Northern Bride* (1854).

The American Civil War stretched between the years 1861 and 1865. However, it was only due to the excruciating efforts of Afro-Americans that the Emancipation Proclamation was declared in 1862, and slavery was legally abolished in the states fighting the Civil War. In 1868, the Civil Rights Act guaranteed citizenship to all Americans. However, the voting rights were granted to the black male population in 1870, by the fifteenth amendment to the constitution. It was during this period that reconstruction of the lives of black Americans was launched in full swing. On the other front the writers and social activists were concerned over the issue of double consciousness of the Afro-Americans. They feared that Afro-American literary corpus would never be able to exorcise itself of the impact of double consciousness or dual identity. The issue of double consciousness bothered W. E. B. Du Bois and other writers and in this respect he observes that:

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (8)

Contradictory to this, Maryemma Graham was of the view that the curse of double consciousness would be valuable for Afro-American fiction in the long run. These writers had mastered the art of creating compatibility between their woeful past and their contemporary
status as independent American citizens. This double consciousness, according to Graham, had “. . . expanded their vision and enriched their creative imagination” (7).

Bernard W. Bell discussed the development of early Afro-American literature by dividing the growth of Afro-American novel into three phases: the first phase being the, “Antebellum Novels (1853-65)”, the second phase being the “Postbellum Novels (1865-1902)”, and the third phase being the “Pre-World War I Novels of the Old Guard (1902-17)” (Bell 37). There was a marked shift in the thematic concerns of the literary works being written during these periods. As Bell indicates, the theme of slavery was greatly replaced by race and colour issues. Rural setting was replaced by urban setting and a significant quest for naturalism was observed. Though there have been numerous antebellum writers, yet some of them need to be discussed in detail because of their astounding literary prowess. William Wells Brown was an eminent novelist, historian, playwright and poet. With the publication of Clotel; or, the President’s Daughter (1853), Brown established his genius as the “first African American to publish a novel” (Bader 39). In 1847, he shifted to Boston and published his first book Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave, Written by Himself. He had delivered a lecture on abolition of slavery that was rampant in England, while on his visit to Paris. In 1860’s, he wrote some crucial volumes of history titled The Black Man: His Antecedents, His Genius, and His Achievements (1863), and The Negro in the American Rebellion (1867). In 1880, he published his last work My Southern Home and died in November 1884. Another author of remarkable talent was Harriet E. Wilson, who gained popularity with the rediscovery and republication of her novel Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free black, in a Two-story White House, North in 1983. She had written this text in 1859, but the question of authorship of this novel remained doubtful and delayed its publication. Her literary mastery was lying in oblivion until
Henry Louis Gates, Jr., found her novel and wrote an introduction of his own. Frank J. Webb wrote, “The Garies and Their Friends” (1857) and two novelettes, “Two Wolves and a Lamb,” (1870) and “Marvin Hayle” (1870) (Andrews 425). His novel, “The Garies and Their Friends” was the first novel to describe the lives of free African Americans in the North, to address interracial marriage and the problem of the color line, and the first to make passing a major theme” (425). In those days ‘passing’ was an important thematic concern for the Afro-American writers. It was, however, a literary effort to bridge the gap between races. Martin R. Delany was a, “political activist, early Afrocentric ideologue, explorer, lecturer, newspaper editor and correspondent, U. S. Army major, and author of several tracts and a novel” (102). His first book was published in 1852, titled, The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered. He wrote a famous newspaper article, “The International Policies of the World towards the African Race” in 1867.

The postbellum period was also a period of great literary activity in America. Sutton Elbert Griggs was a celebrated novelist, essayist and biographer of this era. His best known works include, Imperium in Imperio (1899) Overshadowed (1901), Unfettered (1902), The Hindered Hand (1905), and Pointing the Way (1909). Griggs was a versatile author who wrote many, “. . . social and political works addressing issues of race and religion” (Bader 127). Some works with such themes include The Story of My Struggles (1914), and The Reconstruction of a Race (1917). Charles Waddell Chesnutt was a short story writer, novelist, biographer and essayist. He was often given the credit of being the “father of the modern African-American novel” (48). His literary works “. . . provided realistic depictions of African-American life during the antebellum and postbellum eras and were free of the racial stereotypes so frequently reinforced by white writers of those periods” (48). His first novel was The House Behind the
Cedars (1900), and his second novel *The Marrow of Tradition* was published in 1901. In this particular novel Chesnutt focused on the Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot that took place in 1898. Chesnutt greatly enriched the Afro-American literature by giving “intertextual references”, “romanticized portrayals of the segregated South” (Fabi 45), and also bitter realism, exposing the true distress of African Americans. Paul Laurence Dunbar established his reputation as a great poet and fiction writer. His famous poems include *We Wear the Mask* (1896) and *Sympathy* (1899). He wrote a collection of short stories titled *Folks from Dixie* (1898). Some of his famous novels include *The Uncalled* (1898), *The Strength of Gideon, and Other Stories* (1900), *The Love of Landry* (1900), *The Fanatics* (1901), and *The Sports of the Gods* (1902). Dunbar greatly contributed to Afro-American literature by popularizing black folklore and cultural heritage.

Another writer who earned fame during this phase was Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, who published numerous poetry collections, including *Autumn Leaves* (1845), *Poems on Miscellaneous Subjects* (1854), *Sketches of Southern Life* (1872), *Poems* (1894), *The Sparrow’s Fall and Other Poems* (1894), and *Atlanta Offering* (1895). Harper was a writer who experimented with various themes in her literary works. In her famous novel *Iola Leroy* (1892) or *Shadows Uplifted* she deals with the themes of passing, interracial marriage and other racial issues.

The Pre-World War I Afro-American literature saw an inclination towards themes of romance, realism and naturalism. One of the central figures of this literary period was William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who was not only a remarkable writer but also an enthusiastic civil rights activist. He was a leader who nurtured the roots of the Harlem Renaissance. His most famous literary work was *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) which was a “… series of 14 related essays tracing the social, political, and racial history of African Americans in the United States”
(Bader 87). His concept of ‘double consciousness’ received great critical attention as it was directly related to the identity of blacks in America. He supported the cause of the Niagara Movement which was later transformed into the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He published three autobiographies, *Dark Water: Voices Within the Veil* (1920), *Dusk of Dawn: An Autobiography of a Race Concept* (1940), and *The Autobiography of W. E. B. DuBois: A Soliloquy of Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of its First Century* (1968). He wrote novels such as *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* (1911) and *Dark Princess: A Romance* (1928). *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899) was the first detailed scientific study of urban blacks. Du Bois published the *Black Flame Trilogy* that included his novels *The Ordeal Of Mansart* (1857), *Mansart Builds a School* (1959), and *Worlds of Color* (1961).

Another noted civil rights leader and author was James Welden Johnson, whose most celebrated novel is, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, published anonymously in 1912. He also wrote some volumes of poetry including *Fifty Years and Other Poems* (1917), *God’s Trombones: Seven Negro Sermons in Verse* (1927), and *Black Manhattan* (1930). In these works he focused on Afro-American folktales, and celebrated black culture so as to encourage his readers to take pride in their cultural heritage.

After a detailed study of all the three phases in the development of early Afro-American literature, it may rightly be concluded that the Afro-American writers were ferociously working for creating a literary launch pad to help the budding writers. The raison d’être of these Afro-Americans was their yearning to write and express themselves. With a blending of different literary genres the Afro-American writers aimed at writing literature which had a universal appeal, power to inspire the readers and also the quality of being reader-friendly. Very often the mulatto and black characters were depicted in their works. The themes of miscegenation, or
interracial marriage and sexual relations, both illicit and legitimate, were handled with skill. Some novels like Harper’s, *Iola Leroy* also focused on the themes of temperance, which meant a complete prohibition of the use of liquor. The plight of black women was also an important thematic concern for the “exponents of the Black woman’s Era” (Fabi 42). Some such Afro-American women authors include Amelia E. Johnson, Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins, and Katherine Davis Chapman Tillman. M. Giulia Fabi contends that according to Claudia Tate’s argument:

> . . . these domestic novels foreground female-centered environments, marginalizing and subverting patriarchal power relations, and centering on new models of more independent women who are able to reconcile familial duties with a satisfying professional career. . . . (42)

With the commencement of World War I, there were countless political, economic and social modifications in America. The Great Migration of Afro-Americans from the Southern region of America to the Northern cities was a historic event. As suggested by Chris Bodenner:

> The chief catalyst for the Great Migration, and subsequently for the Harlem Renaissance, was World War I. . . . The pull of economic opportunity in the North was combined with the push of widespread racism in the South. . . . racial oppression reached new heights in the 1910s. Much of that increase was attributed to the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. . . . (5)

On account of a hike in demand for cheap labour the industries in North America began to recruit the Afro-American population. They also served in the U. S. military during the World War I. They were, however, “. . . segregated into all-black units commanded by white officers and assigned mostly noncombat duties . . .” (5). Due to the Great Migration to the Northern cities this
social and political environment became extremely charged. The Afro-American population for
the first time populated the cities that were originally inhabited by the white majority. As Afro-
Americans gathered in the Harlem district of New York City, it became a hub of great artistic
activity. During this phase Alain Locke proclaimed that, “The pulse of the Negro world has
begun to beat in Harlem” (164). The Harlem Renaissance or The New Negro Renaissance
provided the Afro-Americans with immense opportunities to encourage their aesthetic genius and
creative aspirations. Artists of all sorts gathered and thronged the streets of Harlem to
enthusiastically participate in this literary carnival. The passion and devotion for creating a
literary stage of their own caused the Afro-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance to
passionately celebrate their new-found freedom of expression. Keeping this mood of enthusiasm
in mind, Langston Hughes rightly affirmed in “The Negro and the Racial Mountain”, a short
essay written in 1962 that:

We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-
skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If
they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too. The tom-
tom cries and the tom-tom laughs. If colored people are pleased we are glad. If
they are not, their displeasure doesn’t matter either. (n. pag.)

The Harlem writers promoted the blossoming of their literary brilliance with the help and
monetary support of their mentors and sponsors. It was only with the help of some wealthy
white patrons and mentors, that the Afro-American writers could earn for themselves some
literary space during those days.

According to Arna Bontemps, the Harlem Renaissance can be divided into two phases:
phase I and phase II, and, “chronologically it denotes the period of Primary Black Propaganda
(1921-24) to the eventual additional impetus of white society (1924-31)” (Hudlin 8). The Harlem artist basked in the glory of the Harlem Renaissance, and felt thrilled by its phantasmagoric charm. Though there were many promising writers, yet it is very important to study in detail some greatly acclaimed authors of this period. Jessie Redmon Fauset was a teacher, editor, and also a famous author. As an editor of The Crisis (1919-1926) she aided and assisted many other Afro-American writers of the Harlem Renaissance in their literary endeavours. This is the reason why Langston Hughes remarked that she was the “literary “midwife” of the “Negro” Renaissance” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 138). She published four novels including There Is Confusion (1924), Plum Bun (1929), The Chinaberry Tree (1931), and Comedy: American style (1933). In her fiction, “She revises conventional literary forms and themes by using the figure of the mulatto as metaphor to explore identity and difference as they concern blacks generally and black women, specifically” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 138). Thus, it can be rightly concluded that Fauset was not only concerned about the question of black men, but also dealt with the question of black women very seriously. Jean Toomer was a poet, dramatist, novelist, prose writer, and philosopher. The most notable work of Toomer was Cane, published in 1923. It was this work that earned him great recognition during the Harlem Renaissance. It was a “three-part collection of sketches, poetry, and drama that established a standard for the writers of the New Negro movement and that conveyed the profound search for meaning at the core of American modernism” (397). In 1931, he wrote Essentials: Definitions and Aphorisms. His epic poem, The Blue Meridian, was published in 1936. It was the writing of Toomer that gave new life to the Harlem Renaissance literature. As suggested by George Hutchinson:

Toomer’s creation of a hybrid literary form consonant with new types of popular cultures suggested exciting possibilities for black literary experimentation and
implied the need to improvise new idioms and new formal and technical strategies for an adequate expression of African American responses to human experience.

(52)

Walter Francis White, an active member of NAACP, often risked his life collecting evidence regarding the illegal activities and institutions running in America during those days. He devoted his life in creating general public awareness. His first novel, The Fire in the Flint (1924) was, according to George Hutchinson, ‘a message novel’, and he also pointed out that this novel of White, “. . . informs white readers about the existence of a distinguished black professional class held back by irrational prejudice, and castigate the nation for its racial barbarism” (Graham 52). His second novel was titled Flight (1926). White’s non-fictional work, Rope and Faggot: An Interview with Judge Lynch (1929), was a book that intended a thorough study of lynching, a major feature of racial oppression in America. Some of his other works include The American Negro and His Problem (1927), The Negro’s Contribution to American Culture (1928), and How Far the Promised Land? (1955).

Nella Larsen was a literary icon of the Harlem Renaissance. She particularly dealt with the theme of ‘marginality’ in her fiction. Her other acclaimed works include Quicksand (1928), and Passing (1929). According to some critics, these works were autobiographical in nature and, “The central theme of both works is the intersection of race and gender” (Wilfred 309). However, Larsen’s life took an unfortunate turn when she was accused of plagiarism for her short story “Sanctuary”. She retired to the profession of nursing in order to gain some emotional solace. She was found dead in 1964 in her apartment in New York City. Carl Von Vechten has earned great recognition as a white patron who supported black writing in America during the Harlem Renaissance. Some of his novels include Peter Whiffle (1922), The Blind Bow Boy
(1923), *The Tattooed Countess* (1924), *Firecrackers: A Realistic Novel* (1925), *Excavations* (1926), *Spider Boy* (1928), and *Parties* (1930). His most acclaimed novel was *Nigger Heaven* (1926), which was, “. . . a highly controversial though sympathetic and candid account of the burgeoning New Negro Renaissance” (521). The novel was also criticized on account of its title that employed the racist slang ‘Nigger’. The novel had sensationalized the life of blacks in America and portrayed it in an offensive manner. Rudolph Fisher was another eminent Harlem writer. His writings enriched the already existing body of the Harlem literature. His first short story, “The City of Refuge” was published in *Atlantic Monthly*, in 1925. Some other famous stories of Fisher include “The South Lingers On”, “Ring Tail”, and “High Yaller”, which were published in 1925. His famous works include *The Walls Of Jericho* (1928), and *The Conjure-Man Dies: A Mystery Tail of Dark Harlem* (1932), *The Conjure-Man Dies* is also regarded as one of the inaugural novels of Afro-American detective fiction. Zora Neale Hurston was a controversial literary figure of the Harlem Renaissance. Though peerless, yet her literary skill was not acknowledged during those days. Soon after her death in 1960, she was forgotten and many of her achievements were overlooked. She wrote novels like *Jonah’s Gourd Vine* (1933), and a collection of folktales called *Mules and Men* (1935). In her seminal work *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) she, “. . . shows the complete fusion of the competing strains (of voice, narrative strategy, and point of view)” (Hutchinson 60). This was an extremely controversial novel because it disregarded the conventions often followed in black stories. Her experiences in Jamaica and Haiti appear in her second collection of folktales titled, *Tell My Horse* (1938), and in *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939) was a combination of biblical allusions and folk myths and legends, as pointed by Harold Bloom in his critical study focusing on Zora Neale Hurston.
Wallace Thurman in his brief life-span made great literary achievement by experimenting with various genres. He wrote a play, *Harlem: A Melodrama of Negro Life*, staged in 1929. Later, he also wrote a number of novels including *The Blacker the Berry* (1929), *Infants of the Spring* (1932), and *The Interne* (1934). He also influenced a number of his contemporaries like Dorothy West, Langston Hughes and Bruce Nugent. George Samuel Schuyler who was an eminent journalist of his days wrote a very famous essay entitled, “The Negro-Art Hokum” (1926), and a novel *Black No More* (1931). He was an active member of NAACP, but later his reputation, as pointed out by critics, suffered greatly. “His articles criticizing Martin Luther King, Jr., and MALCOLM X earned him a reputation . . . as a race traitor” (Wilfred 451). Later Langston Hughes criticized Schuyler’s writings in his famous artistic manifesto titled, “The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926). It was due to the pro-white views of Schuyler and his writings which aimed at pleasing the white readership that he was criticized by many of his contemporaries. Arnaud Wendell Bontemps was an accomplished novelist of the Harlem Renaissance. His first novel, *Chariot in the Cloud* (1929), was a bildungsroman with a Southern Californian setting. He wrote a novel *God Sends Sunday* (1931), and also a slave narrative in 1932, called *Black Thunder: Gabriel’s Revolt: Virginia 1800*, which was finally published in 1936. He contributed to the cause of poetry during the Harlem Renaissance by compiling poems written by both black and white writers in *Hold Fast to Dreams: Poems Old and New Selected by Arna Bontemps* (1969). George Wylie Henderson earned great fame for his novel *Ollie Miss* published in 1935. This work was “applauded for its authentic portrayal of rural black life through setting and characterization” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 196). Later, he also wrote a sequel to this novel *Jule* (1946). Claude McKay was a poet, novelist and journalist of the Harlem Renaissance. He was an ardent poet, and his first two volumes of poetry include *Songs of*
Jamaica (1912), and Constab Ballads (1912). His first novel Home to Harlem was published in 1929, his second novel titled Banjo in 1929, and his third collection of short stories Gingertown in 1932. His final novel Banana Bottom was published in 1933. His autobiography, A Long Way From Home, was published in 1937. In 1940, he published Harlem: Negro Metropolis, that was an “anti-communist treatise” (283).

The Harlem Renaissance writers not only promoted fiction, but also focused on encouraging Afro-American poetry. In 1921, issue of The Crisis, Langston Hughes’s work, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” was published. His reputation was now established as the true poet of the black Americans. Hughes was born as James Mercer Langston Hughes in Joplin, Missouri, America. He was a poet of great repute, and as pointed out by Mark A. Sanders:

Hughes’ approach to folk culture, most often in an urban context, validated under-class blacks as legitimate poetic subject matter, and more generally celebrated a fuller range of black representation, one that would include the uglier or seamier sides of black life. (107)

He wrote enigmatic poetry with his thorough understanding of the intricacies of black life in America. Some of his notable poetic collections include The Weary Blues (1926), Fine Clothes to the Jew (1927), and The Dream Keeper (1932). These volumes of poetry became unforgettable with the jazz like rhythm they produced and, “marked a defining shift in New Negro poetics and the larger artistic stance relative to the vernacular and folk culture” (107).

Hughes contributed to the black poetic tradition by focusing on jazz and blues music as a part of folk tradition and poetic form reflecting black culture. Hughes’s narrator in The Weary Blues gives a vivid description of the life of a Blues musician in Harlem and the doleful music that emits from his instrument. Another very fascinating aspect of Hughes’s poetry is his perception
of blacks and whites in America as people with similarities and shared national pride. He published his first novel, *Not Without Laughter* in 1930, which was a semi autobiographical novel. His first work of fiction for children, *Popo and Fifina: Children of Haiti* (1932) was written in collaboration with Arna Bontemps. He also wrote a collection of short stories, *The Negro Mother and Other Dramatic Recitations* (1931). As pointed by critics, “Although Hughes’s reputation as an author and poet flourished, he was often criticized for his use of African-American dialect and his incorporation of jazz and blues musical idioms in his poetry” (Bader 157). Thus, it can be rightly asserted that Hughes was in spirit a true representative of Afro-American cultural legacy. He also worked for the promotion of community theaters in New York, Cleveland and Chicago. However, it was in 1940 that he published his autobiography, *The Big Sea*. He was indeed a great literary hero of the Harlem Renaissance.

Some other literary works of the Harlem Renaissance include Sterling Brown’s collection of poetry *Southern Road* (1932) and *The Last Ride of Wild Bill* (1975). Brown was greatly influenced by the traditional blues and jazz music along with follores and spirituals. Countee Cullen’s collection of poems titled *Color* (1925), *Copper Son* (1927), and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl* (1927), were quite popular among the Harlem readers along with other collections such as, *Harlem Wine* (1926), *Any Human to Another* (1934), and *The Medea and Some Other Poems* (1935). Richard Bruce Nugent was a Harlem poet who was often disregarded for his unconventional attitude. He wrote “Shadows” that was found and published by Hughes in Countee Cullen’s *Caroling Dusk* in 1927. A literary quarterly was inaugurated by Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Aaron Douglas, Wallace Thurman and Nugent in 1926, titled *Fire!!* It was in this Quarterly that Nugent’s prose contribution titled, “Smoke, Lilies and Jade,”
was first published. He candidly delineated with the theme of homoerotic, or the same-sex desire in this work.

The Harlem Renaissance or The New Negro Renaissance like any other movement came to an end with the Wall Street crash in 1929. The literary scenario altered abruptly and hampered the spirit of Renaissance. The financial support and sponsorship of the white patrons diminished. The enthusiasm of the black writers trembled with these unfortunate happenings. The middle class that had played an important role in strengthening the roots of the Harlem Renaissance too suffered enormously with the fall of national economy. Thus, the critics concluded that this eventful period of literary revival called the Harlem Renaissance concluded formally with the beginning of the period of Great Depression of 1929, in America. Another important factor was the shift in the interest of the pro-black organizations, NAACP and Urban League to the other social and economic issues. Arna Bontemps, an important literary figure of the Harlem Renaissance had remarked that the race riots of 1935 and 1943, added to the downfall of the Renaissance enthusiasm, and very soon Harlem turned into a ghetto where poverty, unemployment, population expansion and racism began to breed.

With the end of the Harlem Renaissance a new trend in Afro-American literature surfaced. The literature of the 1940s focused primarily on the issues of the then social milieu. The writing of this decade was much more urban-centred focusing less on the aspects of lynching, slavery, racial segregation and the brutality suffered by blacks living in Southern region of America. There was an inclination towards the literature of social protest, and the cities like New York, Chicago and Boston were depicted in these works. According to critics, the literature of this period was proletarian in nature. The organizations like, NAACP, National Urban League, Universal Negro Improvement League and Works Progress Association shifted
their focus towards more recent issues, other than the issues of race and colour. There were organizations that worked for the progress and economic independence of the Afro-American writers. Bernard W. Bell justifies this by stating that, “The New Deal agency that was most beneficial to unemployed black writers was the Federal Writers’ Project (FWP). Established in 1935 as a subdivision of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and a distinct agency within the Federal Arts Project (FAP)” (Bell 154). Thus, it can be rightly concluded that such organizations were a blessing in disguise for the black writers whose hopes and aspirations had abated with the fading away of the Harlem Renaissance. Many writers writing actively during this era chose to discuss non-racial issues and transported literature to a higher level. The influence of modernism was evident in both fiction and poetry being written during this phase. The quest for literary excellence had convinced the writers to adopt new and innovative literary strategies for improving their literary production and also for creating cosmopolitan literature.

Richard Nathaniel Wright was a prominent figure of Afro-American literary society. His insight and knowledge of the Afro-American way of life was very much a consequence of his background as a Southern American. His book, *Uncle Tom’s Children* published in 1938, was a collection of short stories. *Black Boy* (1945), and *American Hunger* (1977), are his semi-autobiographical works that were published posthumously. However, Wright’s most famous work was *Native Son* published in 1940. While living in France, he published a number of novels including *The Outsider* (1953), *Savage Holiday* (1954), and *The Long Dream* (1958). His collection of short stories called *Eight Men* was published posthumously in 1961. Another posthumously published novella was *Rite of Passage* (1994). He won enormous fame as a writer of ‘Haiku’ poems. However, these poems were published posthumously in the year 2000. Wright’s understanding of Haiku poetry was indeed remarkable. He wrote Haiku poems,
“ignoring the Western versions of haiku such as Ezra Pound had written” (Wilfred 567). He also has to his literary credit some interesting travelogues such as, *Black Power* (1954), *The Color Curtain* (1956), *Pagan Spain* (1957), and *White Man, Listen!* (1957). As aptly remarked by scholars, “Richard Wright’s influence on American literature is nearly inestimable. He demonstrated for the first time that an African American could indeed be a major writer of international fame and stature” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 449). Thus, Wright’s literary efforts were aimed at exposing the true nature of racism in America. He challenged the white majority with his writings and instilled pride in Afro-American population regarding their culture.

William Attaway was another important literary figure, who had emerged during the 1940s in the post Harlem Renaissance period. He was, “... heralded as one of the finest chroniclers of the Great Migration ...” (Bader 7). He published such classic novels as *Let Me Breathe Thunder* (1939) and *Blood on the Forge* (1941), and a short story titled, “Death of a Rag Doll” in 1947. He also wrote books on music such as *The Calypso Songbook* (1957), and *I Hear America Sing* (1967). Chester Bomar Himes was a prolific author of novels like, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), *Lonely Crusade* (1947), *Cast the First Stone* (1952), and *The Primitive* (1955). While in prison, he wrote his first story titled, “To What Red Hell?”, that was finally published in 1934. However, after his release from prison he joined the Federal Writer’s Project (FWP), and began his companionship with Langston Hughes. Chester also wrote a two-volume autobiography titled *The Quality of Hurt* (1972), and *My Life of Absurdity* (1977). His works were provocative in nature and in accordance with the literary trends of that era. Ann Petry was an outstanding female author of this decade. Her first novel *The Street* published in 1946 was indeed a grand success. This novel sold enormously and established her as a celebrated black woman author. Her second novel was *Country Place* published in 1947, and *The Narrows*, that was published in
1953. Petry’s contribution to literature for children includes *The Drugstore Cat* (1949), *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (1955), and *Tituba of Salem Village* (1964). Her writings did not conform to any specific genre because she wrote with ease for both adults and children. She lectured at various places, and was awarded doctoral degrees by many reputed institutions. This in itself was evident of the fact that Afro-American women writers could write with the same expertise as their white female counterparts.

William Gardner Smith published his first novel titled *Last of the Conquerors* in 1947. In this novel he focused on interracial love. He followed the trend of writing black ‘protest novels’. He published his second novel *Anger and Innocence* in 1950. His novel *South Street* published in 1954, was the first black militant campaign novel focusing on the life of black population living in south Philadelphia. His bestseller was *The Stone Face* (1963), which gave a sincere account of the Paris Massacre that took place in 1961. Smith lived as an expatriate in France, earning livelihood by working as a news journalist in Paris. He contributed to Afro-American writing by understanding the racial issues sincerely. Melvin Beaulorus Tolson was a noted playwright, poet and novelist. His first poem, “Dark Symphony” was published in 1939, and his first collection of verse titled *Rendezvous with America* in 1944. Tolson was named the ‘poet laureate of Liberia’. He published *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* in 1953. It is an epic poem and a great contribution to modernist poetry. A collection of his poems, *Harlem Gallery and Other Poems of Melvin B. Tolson*, was posthumously published in 1999. He was an expert in merging the modernist trends with the Afro-American perspective. He contributed greatly in expanding the literary canon of Afro-American literature. Robert Hayden was another prolific writer who established his stature as an eminent poet. Critics have affirmed this by honoring Hayden:
Robert Hayden looms as one of the most technically gifted and conceptually expansive poets in American and African American letters. Attending to the specificities of race and culture, Hayden’s poetry takes up the sobering concerns of African American social and political plight; yet his poetry posits race as a means through which one contemplates the expansive possibilities of language, and the transformational power of art. (Andrews, Foster and Harris 193)

Though Hayden’s poetry was complex in style, yet he won massive international fame. His first complete collection of poems *Heart-Shape in Dust* was published in 1940. His other poetry collections include *The Lion and the Archer* (1948), and *Figure of Time: Poems* (1955). His magnum opus “Middle Passage” was a poem where he transformed the epic convention by creating a sort of anti-epic. The poem depicts the journey of enslaved Africans from Africa to America. His genius made him an inspirational poet for the next generations.

Gwendolyn Elizabeth Brooks was an eminent writer and poet of her age. She was the first Afro-American woman author to win the Pulitzer Prize in 1950, for her poetry collection *Annie Allen*. In 1945, she published her book of poetry titled *A Street in Bronzeville*, and another book of poetry titled *The Bean Eaters* in 1960. Her other collections of poetry include *In the Mecca* (1968), *Riot* (1969), *Aloneness* (1971), and *Beckonings* (1975). She was named the ‘poet laureate of Illinois’ in 1968, and her autobiography titled *Report from Part One* was published in 1972. In her autobiography she praised Langston Hughes for his literary enthusiasm and his genius. In addition to all these works, she also contributed to children’s literature in *Bronzeville Boys and Girls* (1956), *The Tiger Who Wore White Gloves* (1974), and *Very Young Poets* (1983). Thus, it can be rightly concluded that the writers of this decade were working for the advancement of Afro-American literature from all available avenues. They did not adopt any particular genre as
their favourite, but gave equal importance to all the forms of writing. Willard Francis Motley (1909-1965) was also a prolific writer of this decade. He was known by the pseudonym Bud Biliken. His bestseller was *Knock On Any Door* (1947). His other works include *We Fished All Night* (1951), *Let No Man Write My Epitaph* (1958), and *Let Noon Be Fair* (1966). The contribution of Motley to the post-World War II literature was the way in which he examined and exposed the negative impact and corroding influence of war on civilians, and on the soldiers, who had participated in it. When much of literature was soaked in racism and sexism, the manner and thematic concerns he adopted were of great significance.

The literature of the 1950s in America was though, not very different from that of the previous decade, yet was not all the same. The question of civil rights had now turned into a political agenda of the Afro-Americans. They demanded complete citizenship and desegregation and nothing less than that. As examined by Bernard W. Bell from the year 1952 till the year 1966, there was the existence of two parallel literary movements. On the one hand, the movement drifted away from naturalism and anti-racial themes, and on the other, the movement inclined “. . . towards the rediscovery and revitalization of myth, legend, and ritual as appropriate sign systems for expressing the double-consciousness, socialized ambivalence, and double vision of the modern black experience” (Bell 189). One of the prominent literary figures of this decade was Ralph Waldo Ellison, an acclaimed novelist, critic and scholar whose literary success was inaugurated with the publication of his novel *Invisible Man* in 1952. The novel was but a microcosm of the larger issue of racism in America and the discrimination that had ruined the lives of many Afro-Americans. The narrator in the novel creates for himself an invisible identity, and, as pointed out in the prologue of the novel, his seclusion and invisibility are completely ignored by the society. However, in the end he shatters the yoke of invisibility and pledges to
face the society and make his presence felt. Thus, *Invisible Man* is a protest novel, where Ellison as a writer outpours his anger against the dominating white majority in America. In 1964, Ellison published a collection of essays *Shadow and Act*. His novel *Juneteenth* was posthumously published in 1999. Like Ellison, James Arthur Baldwin was a writer of great repute, who wrote about the trauma of black suffering with the fervor and consciousness that is beyond excellence. His inaugural essay, “The Harlem Ghetto” appeared in 1948. Massive fame was achieved by Baldwin with the publication of his novel, *Go Tell It On The Mountain* (1953). It is a semi-autobiographical novel in the tradition of a bildungsroman. His next play *The Amen Corner* focused on his relationship with his stepfather and the impact of the church on the lives of Afro-Americans. Other plays of Baldwin include *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), and *A Deed from the King of Spain* (1974). His second novel *Giovanni Room* was published in 1956, and his other novels include *Another Country* (1962), *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974), *Just Above My Head* (1979), and *Harlem Quartet* (1987). Baldwin’s most popular collection of essays appeared in 1963 titled, *The Fire Next Time*. Toni Morrison’s eulogy titled, “Life in His Language”, is dedicated to Baldwin. His contribution to Afro-American literature cannot be expressed in words. Many contemporary writers were influenced by his literary genius and celebration of Afro-American culture.

Paule Marshall is an author who has earned immense international fame. Her genius has been confirmed by the critics who remark that Marshall depicts, “African-Caribbean life and communities in the United States and the unique social and racial challenges confronted by individuals throughout the African diaspora” (Bader 203). She published her first novel in 1959, titled *Brown Girl, Brown Stones*, which was a great literary success. The novel dealt with the upheaval in the life of a West Indian immigrant, Selina Boyce. In her other short story collection
**Soul Clap Hands and Sings** (1961), Marshall portrayed the lives of four black men, dwelling in varied environments but facing ubiquitous racism and a sense of alienation from the black cultural roots. Her second novel, *The chosen Place, the Timeless people* (1969), was a novel that focused on issues of race and identity. She won great fame for her novel *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983). In the works of Marshall the themes of “...colonial mentalities and the racially oppressive atmosphere of surrogate homelands, ...” (Bader 204) are often quite persuasive. Her other works include *Daughters* (1991), and *The Fisher King* (2000). In her memoir *Triangular Road* (2008), she describes how the three destinations namely United States, Barbados and Africa influenced her personality and versatility as an Afro-Caribbean author. Many contemporary Afro-American women authors are indebted to Paule Marshall for literary inspiration. Julian Hudson Mayfield was regarded as a skilled actor, writer, journalist and activist of the Black Arts Movement (BAM) during the 1960’s era. His first novel was *The Hit* (1957), while some of his other novels include *The Long Night* (1958), and *The Grand Parade* (1961). Mayfield contributed to Afro-American writing by producing rich literature during the era when opportunities were denied to Afro-Americans and they were marginalized. The only weapon that armed these people was their literary protest. His other plays include *A World Full of Men* (1952), and *Fount of the Nation* (1963). Anna Pauline Murray was also one of the important figures of this decade. She was a civil rights activist, a lawyer and an author. Her first published work was *Proud Shoes: The Story of an American Family* (1956). This work of Anna was focused on slavery endured by her maternal grandfather Robert G. Fitzgerald. In 1970, she published her collection of poetry titled *Dark Testament and Other Poems*. She also contributed to the Afro-American writing by creating social and political awareness and working for the rights of the Afro-Americans.
BAM was formally inaugurated with the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965. One of the most reputed founders of Black Arts Movement was Le Roi Jones (later known as Emamu Amiri Baraka), who relocated from Manhattan to the Harlem district of New York. Harlem was then considered a haven for writers and artists, a sort of literary metropolis for all inspiring talents of America. Baraka laid the foundation of Black Arts Repertory Theater/School (BARTS) in Harlem, to encourage and pump the literary production of Afro-American writing. He came up with the concept of ‘Black Arts’ Movement that had its roots in the literary group called Umbra Workshop. Some of the renowned members of this workshop include, Steve Cannon, Tom Dent, Al Haynes, David Henderson, Calvin C. Hernton, Foe Johnson, Norman Pritchard, Lenox Raphael, Ishmael Reed, Lorenzo Thomas, James Thompson and Archie Shepp. The publication of Umbra Magazine was a giant effort in giving BAM a concrete shape by standing against the challenges posed by the dominating white majority. In 1960, another Black Nationalist literary organization called On Guard for Freedom was founded by Calvin Hicks. The members of this organization were Walter Bowe, Harold Cruse, Tom Dent, Rosa Guy, Le Roi Jones and Sarah Wright. During this period the Harlem Writers Guild was founded by John O. Killens. This guild added to the enthusiasm of the age and promoted the black American writing. The members of this organization also comprised Maya Angelou, Jean Carey Bond, Rosa Guy, Sarah Wright and others. In 1966, the term ‘Black Power’ was coined by Stokely Carmichael. Since then, writers like Larry Neal have defined BAM as the ‘aesthetic and spiritual sister’ of Black Power Movement. During BAM there was an extreme boom of literary activities throughout America, and the movement gave Afro-Americans an opportunity to redefine their identity and polish their true genius:
The Black Arts movement, the cultural wing of the Black Power movement that was started by the poet Amiri Baraka in 1965, was influential in the work and development of many writers. The movement helped to form black publishing houses, theater troupes, and poetry readings. African Americans began to openly celebrate and incorporate into their lives and art the songs, stories, and customs of ancestors in a renewed effort to examine and affirm their connection to Africa and the cultural past. (Sickels 10)

Amiri Baraka retreated to his home in Newark and left Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS). However, his retreat could not suppress the spirit of BAM, and it continued to exist vigorously. The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968 ignited political upheaval in America and massive outbursts of rage and violence across the nation. The two anthologies that appeared in late 1960s that were very important in defining Afro-American literature were, *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (1968), edited by James Emanuel and Theodore Gross and *Back Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing* (1968), edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal. The zeal with which such provocative literature was being written fuelled the demand for civil rights and other opportunities that were denied to the Afro-Americans.

Imamu Amiri Baraka (1934- ), born Everett Le Roi Jones, is an internationally acclaimed author. The versatility of his literary production created for him a seat of literary prowess that not many of his contemporaries could attain. Critics have pointed out that writings of Baraka have reflected various social and political aspects of his age, “... Baraka’s plays, poetry, essays, screenplays, and short fiction convey his outrage at a society that he sees as sanctioning and even encouraging racism” (Bader 18). The earliest collections of his poetry include *Preface to a Twenty-Volume Suicide Note* (1961) and *The Dead Lecturer* (1964). In 1964, the astounding
triumph of his play *Dutchman*, confirmed his literary superiority over his contemporaries.  

*Dutchman* is a historical play focusing on the black power political agenda during the 1960s. The play portrays realistically the scourge of racism in America, and Baraka categorized this play as an early example of the revolutionary theatre. The play revolutionized the genre of black drama in America, to vent the wrath in hearts of Afro-Americans who were often being targeted by the white ruling class. Baraka wrote and produced three other plays including, *The Baptism, The Slave*, and *The Toilet* in 1964.

In 1965, he founded the Black Arts Repertory Theatre/School (BARTS). He also wrote a number of militant anti-white plays including *Jello* (1965), *A Black Mass* (1965), and *Arm Yourself, or Harm Yourself* (1965). He aided in the establishment of Black Community Development and Defense Organization, the Congress of African Peoples and the National Black Political Convention. Baraka published two collections of poetry titled *Black Magic* (1969), and *It’s Nation Time* (1970). His poetry collections were full of nationalist zeal. He insisted on composing poems that ‘kill’. The ‘assassin poems’ of Baraka have such objects in them that actually transform art into a weapon of destruction and termination. However, his nationalist ideology faded with time and was replaced by Marxist/Leninism ideology after the death of Malcolm X. Though his poems such as “Black Dada Nihilismus” and “Somebody Blew Up America”, raised controversies for him, yet they could not suppress his potential to fight against injustice. Baraka also wrote a music criticism titled, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963). This work focuses on his interest in the music of the blacks and his love for jazz. It can be observed that Baraka’s literary œuvre was indeed confrontational and realist in nature. During his literary career he created a strong voice and platform for Afro-Americans.
Larry Neal contributed greatly in establishing and designing BARTS in Harlem along with Imamu Amiri Baraka. Neal believed that the Afro-American writers were skilled in exploring their past and in preserving their cultural heritage by keeping alive their African oral traditions. It was this celebration of blackness that encouraged Afro-American writing during the BAM, “This racial memory, combined with a political activism aligned with the Black Power movement, became a defining element of the new black aesthetic promoted by the Black Arts Movement” (Bader 228). With Baraka, Neal edited an anthology of poems in 1968, titled Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing. His first volume of poetry Black Boogaloo: Notes on Black Liberation was published in 1969. He contributed to Afro-American literature by writing poetry and prose that stressed on the folk themes, blues music and street dialect. John Oliver Killens founded the Harlem Writers Guild (HWG) in 1950, and also inspired writers to focus on the issues of race, equality and justice. His novels include Youngblood (1954), and And Then We Heard Thunder (1962). His work, Sippi, focused on the themes of racism and the movement for demanding voting rights. His prose work, a volume of essays titled Black Man’s Burden (1965), focused on radical measures to end racism in America. He also wrote a manuscript The Great Black Russian: The Life and Times of Alexander Pushkin that was published posthumously in 1989. Killens’s international fame rested on his efforts to experiment with different literary genres. His works have been translated in many languages across the globe establishing his repute as a great Afro-American author. Sam Greenlee wrote great novels like The Spook Who Sat by the Door (1969), and Baghdad Blues (1976). Some other famous works of Greenlee include Blues for an African Princess (1971), and Ammunition: Poetry and Other Raps (1975). These works of Greenlee focus on the themes of racism and unjust official domination. He was well aware of the issues of social equality and freedom of thought. Critics noted
Greenlee’s talent by stating that, “His presentation of African Americans’ duality and paradoxical existence in a racist society is still providing scholars with text to investigate the themes of racism” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 178). Tom Dent actively participated in the BAM and was appointed the editor of the poetry journal *Umbra*. The initial phase of his literary career focused on, “...his concern with escaping from the restrictions of his black middle-class origins and acquiring a clear understanding of the issues of liberation, black nationalism, and cultural identity that occupied African American intellectuals in the late 1950s and early 1960s” (106). According to Dent, Umbra workshop was collectively formed by artists and writers to acknowledge their differences and give voice to their visions in encouraging Afro-American writing in America. He worked for the Free Southern Theater (FST), and it was during this period that he published his famous play *Ritual Murder* (1967). Dent also founded the Congo Square Writers Union in 1973, and co-founded the journals *Nkombo* (1969), and *Callaloo* (1975). In 1976, his first poetry collection titled *Magnolia Street* was published followed by *Blue Lights* and *River Songs* in 1982. He greatly contributed to black literature during the BAM, by tracing the heritage of Afro-Americans and instilling cultural pride in them. He worked on recording oral history about jazz in New Orleans. In this work he studied jazz and its roots, promoting both folk music and folk literature.

Sonia Benita Sanchez who was an active and eminent writer of BAM achieved great fame for, “...combining political activism with personal experience in a distinguished body of work that includes poetry, plays, children’s fiction, short stories, and essays” (Bader 251). She enthusiastically participated in BAM by becoming an active member of Civil Rights Movement and as a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) founded in 1942, in Chicago. An important aspect of her poetry was that it appealed to everyone without any class-restriction.
Political and poetic thoughts were artistically blended by her. In her famous collections of poetry *Homecoming* (1969), and *We a BaddDDD People* (1970), she focused on the themes of physical abuse of blacks due to racism and intraracial violence. She employed unconventional syntax, punctuation, complex rhythms and black idioms. She also dealt with the themes of black women and their role in the changing society of America in her works titled *Love Poems* (1973), *A Blues Book for a Blue Black Magical Woman* (1973), and *I’ve Been a Woman: New and Selected Poems* (1978). She celebrated black cultural heroes in her works *Under a Soprano Sky* (1987), and *Wounded in the House of a Friend* (1995). The poetic genius of Sanchez can be seen in the poetry, where she follows poetic styles such as Haiku and Tanka. The composition of *Morning Haiku* (2010) shows her admiration for such poetic forms. She also experimented with different genres including the genre of children’s literature. Some of her works for children include *It’s a New Day: Poems for Young Brothas and Sistuhs* (1971), *The Adventures of Fat Head, Small Head, Square Head* (1973), and *A Sound Investment and Other Stories* (1979).

Nikki Giovanni was also one of the most outstanding and bold writers who emerged during the BAM. She focused on various issues concerning the blacks, and was ardently dedicated to confronting gender and racial bias by means of her literary aggression. Her poetry collections include *Black Feeling* (1967) and *Black Judgment* (1968), where she unleashed anger towards the misery of people who were victimized on grounds of race and colour. Her writings were full of intensity that inspired the youth to participate in the Black Arts Movement and stand against racism.

Another, important literary figure of the BAM is Askia M Touré. He worked in Harlem and contributed to BAM by writing literature that focused on contemporary issues of his time. His famous collection of poems published in 1990, was titled *From the Pyramids to the Projects: Poems of Genocide and Resistance*. In this collection of poems he particularly examined the
issue of black genocide and various consequences related to it. Ishmael Reed was another noted Afro-American author. He was an active member of the Umbra workshop. His first novel was the *Freelance Pallbearers*, published in 1967. However, his masterpiece was *Mumbo Jumbo* that was published in 1972. His writings were soaked in Afro-American folk tradition and culture. Reed assigned the term Neohoodooism to some of the literary works that he produced. This was the term he assigned, “. . . to his philosophy and aesthetic processes he employs to take care of business on behalf of the maligned and the mishandled” (Andrews, Foster and Harris 345). His study of the workings of neohoodooism can be found in his work of poetry published as a book titled *Conjure* (1972), and in his novels including *Yellow Back Radio Brook-Down* (1969), and *Flight to Canada* (1976). A great contribution of Reed to the literature of his time was to write against the trend and create a literary style of his own for inspiring the black writers. It can be aptly stated that, “From the start, Reed’s iconoclasm has been aimed not only at the Western tradition, which has attempted to monopolize the world at the expense of other versions of experience, but at the black tradition as well” (346).

BAM was a literary movement that spread across the nation and greatly enhanced the scope of Afro-American writing. Even though the movement was full of political and social activities, yet it began to fade in 1970s when certain measures of the government began to impose limitations and target some black political organizations. As pointed out by Kalaamu ya Salaam in his essay, “Historical Overviews of The Black Arts Movement”, the crucial factors and events that contributed in the withering of BAM include:

Key internal events in the disruption were the split between nationalists and Marxists in the African Liberation Support Committee (May 1974), the Sixth Pan African Congress in Tanzania where race-based struggle was
repudiated/denounced by most of the strongest forces in Africa (Aug. 1974), and Baraka’s national organization, the Congress of Afrikan People (CAP), officially changing from a “Pan Afrikan Nationalist” to a “Marxist Leninist” organization (Oct. 1974). (n.pag.)

Even after a series of movements and uprisings the condition of women in America, specifically black women, remained pathetic. Women were not emancipated in the true sense, and the movements were very often brimmed with male chauvinism. Thus, it can be rightly summed up that such movements though helped the male majority to win certain rights but greatly ignored the plight of women whose condition deteriorated perpetually. On the other hand, there was a gradual budding of white women’s feminist movement. These women were usually middle-class housewives who suffered the ‘double jeopardy’ of sexism and classism. However, they considered themselves elite enough to ignore the presence and participation of black women in their feminist struggles. It was degrading for them to cast away their yoke of hypocrisy and represent women, both black and white with equality. Afro-American women were being perpetually ostracized from the mainstream American society. They could not associate with white feminism due to its elitist nature and also because the question of racial discrimination was completely neglected by white feminists. As bell hooks (sic.) rightly alleges in her introduction to Ain’t I A Woman, “America has so had their identity socialized out of existence as have black women. . . . When black people are talked about the focus tends to be on black men; and when women are talked about the focus tends to be on white women” (hooks 7). Black women in America were being accused of matriarchal domination, and that these women enfeebled black men of their community. Critics like Linda La Rue, in her famous article “The Black Movement and Women’s Liberation” condemned such false accusations and stated that black women must
not feel ashamed of their physical strength. Eventually out of sheer anger and disgust black women forged their own terms and ideologies in the form of a Black Feminist movement. Michelle Wallace in her article, “Anger In Isolation: A Black Feminist’s Search For Sisterhood”, focused on the fact that the women’s movement needed the support of black women to exist and be truly successful in obtaining its goals. However, the black women were not ready to participate in the movement of white women who did not comprehend the true nature of their misery and considered them inferior. Majority of black women were against militant or aggressive feminism because it targeted the males ferociously and was against harmony between the two sexes. These women favoured a more subtle kind of feminism, which would improve the relation between men and women and create a better society. They focused on female bonding and sorority on the one hand, and survival of all people, irrespective of colour or race, on the other. It was during this period after BAM, that the literature written by Afro-American women grabbed people’s attention and began to get published and widely circulated. Until this time many black women writers were deprived of their rightful literary voice and status and were excluded from the American literary coterie. As observed by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille K. Taylor:

The few critical examinations of African American literature before 1975 that included African American women writers, e.g. Richard Wright’s 1937 review of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) or Arthur P. Davis’s *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers, 1900-1960* (1974), often minimized or ignored the artistic and literary contributions of African American women writers and often ignored feminist issues or concerns. (2)
With the emergence of Afro-American feminist zeal the condition of black women writers began to transform. The programs of black studies were launched as part of curricula in many universities. Publishing houses and editors supported this revival of black women’s literature. During this phase black women writers were not ready to surrender or conform to any Euro-centric literary traditions. They wanted to device their own literary standards and strategies. Their literary hibernation was about to end, and a period of black woman’s literary renaissance was about to blossom. Madhu Dubey in her essay “Even Some Fiction Might Be Useful: African American Women Novelists” rightly asserts that:

Contemporary black women novelists are writing in a broad array of popular and middle-brow genres, including speculative and science fiction, romances and chick lit, erotica and detective fiction, family sagas and uplift novels. Instead of claiming to speak for and to black women as a whole, these novels deal with discrete segments of black female experience, reflecting the splintered nature of racial identity and community in the post-civil rights era. (165)

Alice Walker established her reputation as a writer who worked ardently for the rehabilitation of the Afro-American women writers who had been long-forgotten and overlooked. These women authors were victimized on grounds of textual politics. Walker rehabilitated the works and biographies of female writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Rebecca Jackson, Buchi Emecheta, and Flannery O’Connor. In her seminal prose work In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens: Womanist Prose (1983), she coined the term ‘womanism’, which was her label for black feminism. Womanism as a trend worked for compatibility between the two sexes and survival for all people. This critical term was examined by many female critics across the globe and was accepted as a more harmonious and subtle form of feminism that was universally
acclaimed and adopted by black and women of colour. As a literary critic Walker made an effort to provide the young Afro-American writers with a rich literary tradition and a past of their own. In her novel *The Color Purple* (1982) she employed the epistolary genre and throughout her novels gave importance to Afro-American oral tradition. She discussed Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), which was considered a taboo theme till then. She penned her strong views regarding the importance of literary traditions and artists by asserting that, “We are a people. A people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children, and, if necessary, bone by bone” (Walker 92). Gloria Naylor also defined her literary genius in her work *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), where she focused on the celebration of the experience of strength possessed by black women. In *Mama Day* (1988), she uses oral tradition as a store house of historical information. Her female characters stand against patriarchal norms and racism. The women in her novels have aspirations, friendships and hopes, and are not mere sex-objects. Her novels are full of feminist zeal that is extremely inspiring for her readers.

Maya Angelou artistically dealt with the themes of feminism, optimism, freedom, and aspects of racism in her novels. Her magnum opus, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), was an autobiographical novel with which she created literary awareness among Afro-American women. Mastery over language is for her an important tool that can be used by Afro-American writers to create a literary platform and encourage black writing. Motherhood, quest for identity, sexual violence and female bonding are important thematic concerns in her novels. Toni Morrison is a distinguished female Afro-America author, who has won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in the year 1993. It is because of her
remarkable literary genius that she has become both an international author and a feminist. In 2012, she received the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In her first novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), she boldly spoke of pedophilia, intra-racial oppression and incestuous relationships. This novel established her reputation as a feminist author who focused on black spirituality, oral traditions, black mythology, female sisterhood and celebration of the past of slavery. Her neo-slave narrative, *Beloved* (1987), was a great literary success that resurrected the past of slavery to improve the present and the future of Afro-Americans. Some of her other novels include *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *A Mercy* (2008), *Home* (2012) and *God Help the Child* (2015). Rita Dove was the first Afro-American poet laureate, who had won the Pulitzer Prize for her collection *Thomas and Beulah* (1986). Her poems were praised for their lyrical quality that helped other writers to use poetic language for influencing the readers. Octavia Butler explored the genre of speculative fiction in her novels where she made use of a variety of genres, such as speculative fiction, fantasy, utopia and dystopia. Her famous novels include *Kindred* (1979) that visit the theme of slavery, The Xenogenesis Trilogy with scientific themes and a dystopia *Parable of the Sower* (1994). Her works have been associated with the genre of Afro-futurism that blends science fiction with other genres to contemplate and scrutinize the issues of blacks both in the past and the present. Nalo Hopkinson also explored science fiction in her novels *Brown Girl in the Ring* (1998), *Midnight Robber* (2000), *The Salt Roads* (2003) and *The Chaos* (2012). She gave new dimensions to the writing of science fiction by creatively using scientific subjects and issues of race, magic realism and fantasy.

critical works include *Teaching Guide to a Company Black Foremothers* (1980), and *Black Feminist Criticism: Perspectives on Black Women Writers* (1985). Kimberle Crenshaw is also a renowned critic who launched the Critical Race Theory Workshop. She studied the issues of race, power-structures and gender, inspiring women to stand against inequality and injustice. She is credited with the coining of the intersectionality theory that focused on margins or intersections where women suffered even when there were movements to help them and protect them. Claudia Tate was a noted critic who gave innovative insights into Afro-American literary criticism and examined Afro-American literature from the perspective of psychoanalytical theories. Her first book was *Black Women Writers at Work* (1983). Hazel Carby, a dedicated black feminist author, examines the real picture of Afro-American experiences and examines the issues of race and gender in her works. Her first book, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1989), was a great critical success. She also received attention for her books *Race Men: The Body and Soul of Race, Nation, and Manhood* (1998), and *Cultures in Babylon: Black Britain and African America* (1999). Hortense Spillers is a well known literary critic and black feminist who is universally renowned for her article, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”, published in 1987. She published essays on black feminism and Afro-American literature in her books, *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* (1991), and *Black, White and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (2003). Toni Cade Bambara in her work *The Salt Eaters* (1980) contributes to the Afro-American women’s writing by creating women characters that take pride in their culture and understand the true meaning of freedom. She wrote *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970), that greatly contributed to black women studies, and also wrote an introduction for a renowned feminist anthology by Women of Colour *This Bridge Called My*
Audré Lorde is another Afro-American writer who has devoted much of her works to the cause of lesbianism, an issue that was ignored and disregarded by the society in those days. It was due to her earnest efforts that black lesbian literature was granted a formal status. In her prose and poetry she accused the white feminists of being sympathetic towards patriarchal domination that in turn oppressed black women at all levels. Ntozake Shange wrote a famous dramatic choreopoem combining dramatic form with poetry and dance titled “From Okara to Greens: A Different Kind of Love Story.” As noted by Dana A. Williams regarding Shange:

> . . . theme of self-love and self-definition runs throughout many of Shange’s major works, . . . we see Shange’s artful escape of boundaries and her exploration and rewriting of form, two features that are among her greatest contributions to black women’s writing. (74)


Valerie Smith in her critical work *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (1998), focused on the issues of black feminism and black literary criticism. Robert J. Patterson in his essay, “African American feminist theories and literary criticism” states that, “. . . Smith emphasized the fact that one must be trained to engage in black feminist analysis, and that the more people involved in implementing its goals, the more likely it is that its goals will be actualized” (Patterson 102). Further, in his essay he speaks against the literary marginalization of black women’s writing. He believed that black feminist literary criticism and black feminist political theory worked together:
to excavate black women’s literary and cultural texts that had not been published, were out of print, or otherwise absent. . . . black women’s writing, from its inception, consciously considered what it meant for African American women to be “raced,” “sexed,” “gendered,” to name three subject positions, in American society. (102)

Afro-American women novelists not only wrote outstanding adult fiction, but also contributed greatly to children’s fiction. Virginia Hamilton wrote a number of books for children, two of them being *The House of Dies Drear* (1968), and *M. C. Higgins, the Great* (1974) that were very famous among children. She combined folk tales with fantasy in her fiction. Mildred Taylor wrote *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* for young children, Jacqueline Woodson focused on teenage issues, interracial couples and homosexuality in her works *The Other Side* (2001), *Our Gracie Aunt* (2002), and *Show Way* (2006). Other noteworthy works include Ann Petry’s *Tituba of Salem Village* (1955), Simi Beford’s *Yoruba Girl Dancing* (1992), Edwidge Danticat’s *Behind the Mountains* (2002), Joyce Carol Thomas’s *When the Nightingale Sings* (1994), and Alice Childress’s book on drug abuse *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ But a Sandwich* (1973).

Contemporary Afro-American literature made extensive use of the genre of neo-slave narratives. The neo-slave narratives provided the writers with an opportunity to excavate their slave past in a more refreshing and modern way. Escapist literature was of no use for these writers who aimed at addressing the horrific realities of slave history and the trauma that was faced by the blacks in those days in an extremely optimistic way. In this respect Ashraf H. A. Rushdy contends that:

The authors of the Neo-slave narratives raise questions concerning the
possibility for subjective knowledge within a predetermined form of writing, especially as regards the construction and dismantling of "racial" identity. They ask questions about and demonstrate the process through which a historical subject constitutes itself by employing or revising a set of ideologically charged textual structures. They develop arguments about how contemporary racial identity after Black Power should be mediated through a reconstruction of the first form in which African American subjectivity was articulated—the slave narrative. They discuss the costs and presumptions involved in a modern author's adopting the voice of a fugitive slave and employing the literary form of the antebellum slave narrative. Most important, they ask what it means for a postmodern author to negotiate and reconstruct what is essentially a premodern form, one in which "race" was both a presupposition of authenticity for the author and yet a necessary absence for the primarily white, northern readership. (7)

Novels written by Afro-American authors that have gained eminence as potent neo-slave narratives include Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice* (1968) that was written while he was imprisoned in California’s Folsom prison. Samuel R. Delany’s *Stars in My Pocket like Grains of Sand* (1984), which was an acclaimed science fiction as well as a neo-slave narrative and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* (1992). Ernest Gaines’s novel *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), “... is a neo-slave narrative, modeling itself after the thousands of oral and written narratives of former slaves but presented in a contemporary fictional form” (Samuels 24). According to Bernard Bell, Margaret Walker’s novel *Jubilee* is “an impressive novel” (287), in which she portrays life on the plantation very realistically and focuses on other aspects of black life during those tumultuous times of the Civil war. Another popular neo-slave narrative was
Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* (1979). This novel constitutes multiple genresso and critics have qualified this novel as a work of science fiction, novel of initiation and also a neo-slave narrative. In this novel Butler explores her quest for identity and the ways followed by her ancestors. In Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* the genre of neo-slave narrative takes the readers to a different level of understanding. The legacy of slavery is utilized by Morrison, along with the urge to investigate black quest for identity and equality of status. The themes of healing and skeptically revisiting the past continue throughout the novel. Lovalerie King suggests regarding *Beloved* that:

> The neo-slave narrative mirrors another primary objective from the earlier tradition by demonstrating how race-based discrimination deforms the human spirit of both the oppressor and the oppressed. . . . Ultimately, Beloved, like its slave narrative predecessors, must be considered representative—as a composite for the many stories that cannot and will not ever be told. (60)

Morrison’s novels *Song of Solomon* and *Paradise* fall within the neo-slave narrative genre. Lucille Clifton’s prose work *Generations: A Memoir* (1976), is also written in tradition of neo-slave narratives. According to Maryemma Graham, the relation between American history and slave narratives is not new. It is because of this intimacy that slave narrative has turned into an extremely potent genre. The slave narrative as “. . . the arbiter of memory, it allows history, autobiography, and folklore to claim space in a single text” (Graham 9).

High modernism increased its dimensions with the publication of works written by literary icons such as, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, Virginia Woolf, Wallace Stevens, James Joyce, and E. M. Forster. Those writing in French and German included Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke. As pointed out by eminent literary scholar Peter
Barry, there are certain distinct features of literary modernism. Impressionism and subjectivity reigned supreme along with extensive use of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

“Omniscient external narration,” generic hybridity, fragmentation of form and “random-seeming collages of disparate materials” (Barry 79), were all engaged writing modernist literature. According to Barry, there was “A tendency towards ‘reflexivity’, so that poems, plays and novels raise issues concerning their own nature, status, and role” (79). Modernism not only expanded, but also impacted the arts movements that spread in the form of “Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Futurism” (78) across France, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. Some crucial thematic concerns of the modernist writers included loss of faith, alienation, lamentation and fragmentation. In T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), and his celebrated poem entitled “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915), Ezra Pound’s “Hugh Selwyn Mauberley” (1920), James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Wallace Stevens’s “Anecdote of the Jar” (1919), and E.M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908), we can locate the strong impact of modernism. It may be concluded in the words of Barry regarding modernism that, “…the modernist laments fragmentation while the postmodernist celebrates it” (81).

In America, however, Euro-American modernism co-existed along with Afro-American modernism. For the Afro-Americans the thematic concerns of modernism were not new. They had an age-long history of alienation, fragmentation and loss of faith. In fact, these concerns only fuelled the already existing Afro-American literary concerns. The modernist dilemma was very much reflected in their works and as asserted by critics:

…black modernists certainly shared the general sense of psychic and social alienation. Their sense of the origins, meaning, and possible responses to the malaise, however, grew directly out of the specific circumstances of African
American history. . . . Uprooted from their geographical, cultural, and linguistic homes, slaves were forced to adapt to a world in which nothing could be trusted. (Werner and Shannon 242-243)

In the writings of blacks the modernist urge to lament over the dying past was clearly visible, along with doubt regarding the birth of a new order. Modernist trend was expressed in Afro-American literature in an all new perspective of double consciousness. This concept was put forth by W. E. B. Du Bois, and was used as a thematic trope by many Afro-American writers. James Weldon Johnson in his work, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Claude McKay in his stories “White Houses” (1922), and Tiger (1922), Countee Cullen in “Yet Do I Marvel” (1925), Langston Hughes in “Dream Variations” (1924), focus on the double consciousness of Afro-Americans. Other works with the theme of double consciousness include *There Is Confusion* (1924), by Jessie Fauset, *Black Boy* (1945) by Richard Wright, *The Blacker the Berry* (1929) by Wallace Thurman, and Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929). The impact of the modernist writers was clearly evident in the writings of Afro-American writers as observed by Werner and Shannon:

. . . Marita Bonner’s play *The Purple Flower* (1928) signifies on the expressionist drama of August Strindberg (1849–1912), Georg Kaiser (1878–1945), and Eugene O’Neill (1888–1953); Bruce Nugent’s *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade* (1926) on impressionist painting; Hughes’s *Feet o’ Jesus* on the imagism of Pound and H. D. (1886–1961); Melvin B. Tolson’s (1898–1966) *Dark Symphony* (1941) on Wyndham Lewis’s (1882–1957) vorticism; the folk plays of Willis Richardson (1889–1977) and Georgia Douglas Johnson on John Millington Synge’s (1861–1909) Irish vernacular drama; Margaret Walker’s (1915–98) *For My People*
(1942) on Carl Sandburg’s (1878–1967) populist modernist epic The People, Yes; Hurston’s Moses, Man of the Mountain (1939) and Wright’s Lawd, Today (written mid-1930s, published 1963) on the mythic approach of Joyce’s Ulysses (1922). (245)

Thus, it can be asserted that the black writers on the one hand adhered to the modernist literary conventions and, on the other, refuted them vigorously. William Faulkner and William Carlos Williams made an extensive use of black oral tradition. Zora Neale Hurston’s Jonah’s Gourd Vine (1934), focused on memories of the rural past. In Langston Hughes’s Not Without Laughter (1930), there were traces of musical modernism, in Jessie Fauset’s Plum Bum (1929), Jean Toomer’s Cane (1923), and Booker T. Washington’s Up from Slavery (1901), there was a spirit of Afro-American modernism.

As the intensity of modernism abated, there was a marked drift towards an era that signaled the end of modernism, and inaugurated an era of post-modernism. According to Hans Bertens, the concept of post-modernity has been problematic from the time of its very inception. It is for him a trend which surfaced during 1950s and 1960s and referred to “anti-modernist artistic strategies…” (3). He also points out that post-modernism drifts away from representation of any sort because it moves towards, “…radical aesthetic autonomy, towards pure formalism” (4). Steven Connor in his analysis of post-modernism has divided the development of post-modernism into various stages such as accumulation, synthesis, autonomy and dissipation. In view of literary critic Terry Eagleton, “The typical postmodernist work of art is arbitrary, eclectic, hybrid, decentred, fluid, discontinuous, pastiche-like ” (201). Post-modernism has emerged as a major cultural, political, and intellectual authority. Definitions of post-modernism are a medley of interpretations. Post-modernism has constantly defied our
perception of unanimity, subjectivity and other established principles. This trend can be understood as a reaction against modernism, an urge for refreshment of existing modernist literature. The term ‘post-modernism’ was first used by an eminent British historian and philosopher Arnold Toynbee in his work *A Study of History*, completed in the year 1961. This work confirmed his scholarship and focused on the rise and downfall of a number of civilizations. Skepticism and defiance of established conventions is an important characteristic of post-modernism. The world-view of post-modernists is often fragmented and de-centred, lack of coherence and order reigns supreme in the post-modernist ideology. Massive publicity of this phantasmagoric trend hints towards the threat of ‘pomophobia’ or perverted form of post-modernism, a phobia that will envelope an entire generation if not tackled prudently. In his work *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?* (2003), Beverley Southgate contends that:

. . . pomophobia is what we get – is what we suffer from – when we just can’t stand the disruption that it seems to threaten. Pomophobia indicates that our emotional balance has finally been lost, and that we can’t cope any longer. It’s what is manifested when we’re no longer able to tolerate the uncertainties, ambiguities and doubts that postmodernism reveals and provokes (or that postmodernity entails). (4)

In literature, post-modernism leads to a fully transformed production of ideas. Novel writing in the post-modernist era has undergone a volte-face. The established literary conventions have been corroded and a new structure has taken their place. Post-modernism has found expression in Afro-American novel too and, as suggested by Maryemma Graham, “Storytelling and orality engender new aesthetic possibilities, new forms of consciousness. If these are endemic to African American literature, so, too, is a postmodern consciousness” (9). A
post-modernist novel differs from a modernist novel in terms of literary autonomy, playfulness of language, hybridity of genres and fragmentation of narrative structure. Fragmentation was often used in modernist narratives, however, the post-modernist fragmentation seems to be more intense, and does not draw any solace or guidance from religious or mythological sources of the past. Fritz Gysin in his essay, “From Modernism to Postmodernism: Black Literature at the Crossroads”, contends that the post-modernist writers, “... invert or subvert hierarchies, emphasize dislocation, antitotalization . . . they mostly valorize the fragments, highlight peripheral phenomena, focusing on the centrifugal rather than the centripetal forces” (142).

Afro-American literature resonated with post-modern narrative techniques including the instability of genres, use of metafiction, intertextuality, pastiche, magic realism, paranoia and carnival. Post-modernism in the Afro-American context gave rise to the writing of neo-slave narratives, jazz novel and the blues novel. Thus, it can be rightly summed up that experimentation, innovation and unconventional writing was a significant outcome of post-modernism. It must be mentioned that post-modernism as a literary theory was promoted by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Jéan Baudrillard. Lyotard in his postmodernist treatise, *The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), expressed his lack of faith towards metanarratives. Tammy Clewell points out that, “Since the publication of this seminal work, we have tended to evaluate modernism as an aestheticization of loss, a literary practice whose nostalgia tethers it to the very discourses, traditions, and beliefs that it describes as lost” (4). Lyotard alleged that the metanarratives were no longer the foundation stones of literary progression. In this regard Hans Bertens believed that Lyotard was well aware of the fictionality of the metanarratives, and this is why he mistrusted them and wanted to do away with them. Jéan Baudrillard on the other hand published his famous work, *Simulacra and Simulations* in 1981.
He focused on the loss of reality and the creation of hyper-reality and simulacrum. He studied signs and their relation to reality and concluded that reality had been completely lost and replaced by hyper-reality. Some celebrated Afro-American post-modernist writers include Ishmael Reed, Charles Johnson, Lean Forrest, Gayl Jones, John Edgar Wideman, Trey Ellis, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor. The evolution of Afro-American fiction in the post-modern scenario is a noteworthy phenomenon. Bernard W. Bell illustrates the essence of Afro-American fictional canon, asserting that:

. . . if there is an Afro-American canonical story, it is the quest, frequently with apocalyptic undertones, for freedom, literacy, and wholeness—personal and communal—grounded in social reality and ritualized in symbolic acts of Afro-American speech, music, and religion. (341-342)