UNIT 31 ROBERT FROST

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31.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to enable you to:

• write about Robert Frost’s life and work
• discuss Frost’s poetry with special reference to:
  i) “After Apple-Picking” and
  ii) “A Boundless Moment”

31.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you learned any poem by Robert Frost during your school days? Perhaps you have studied “The Road Not Taken” or “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” It would be useful and delightful to read one of these poems before you start learning this unit whether you are familiar with these poems or not.

Robert Frost, one of the greatest poets of the twentieth century, has a rare finesse to raise the commonplace to the level of the sublime. His poems have a unique charm. Many of his poems begin by referring to routine experiences of the village life but they always lead us to some profound philosophical truth that helps us to understand life beyond the surface. As the poet himself commented his poems begin in delight and end in wisdom. Frost’s style is often deceptively simple veiling the complexity of his thought. Realistic description frequently leads to a meditative attempt to explore the deeper meanings and complexities of human existence. Read the next section to know more about the poet and his poetry.
31.2 ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)

Robert Frost was born on 26th March 1874 in San Francisco, California. His father William Prescott Frost, Jr. was a journalist and his mother, Isabelle Moodie, a Scottish schoolteacher. The Frosts were originally based in from New England. Frost is often regarded as the greatest exponent of New England life and culture. When Frost was about ten years old his father died, and so the family had to move to Lawrence, Massachusetts and lived there with the support of the poet’s paternal grandfather. Frost began to write poems early and had his first poem published in the student magazine of Lawrence High School. He joined Dartmouth College but left after a few months. Then he tried a hand at various jobs, including delivering newspapers, working in a factory, and editing the local newspaper. In 1895 Frost married Elinor Miriam White, a former schoolmate. In 1897 he entered Harvard but left studies before obtaining a degree. For the next few years he lived in a small farm in New Hampshire. During this period he wrote many of his famous poems. At the same time he led a farmer’s life.

Frost worked as an English teacher at Pinkerton Academy and the New Hampshire Normal School from 1906-1912. In 1912, Frost sold the farm and moved to England with his family. In England Frost became acquainted to poets such as Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, and Ezra Pound. He published his first collection of poems, *A Boy’s Will*, in 1913. But it was *North of Boston*, published in 1914, that assured his status as a great poet. *North of Boston* included many of his famous and widely anthologised poems such as “Mending Wall,” “The Death of the Hired Man,” and “After Apple-Picking.”

The outbreak of World War I compelled Frost to return to America with his family. As a reputed poet he embarked on a career of writing, teaching, and lecturing. He was made a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1916, the year in which his third collection of poems *Mountain Interval* was published. It included poems like “The Road Not Taken” and “Birches.” The same year Frost also began to teach English at Amherst College. In 1921 Frost was given a teaching fellowship at the University of Michigan. Frost’s later publications include *New Hampshire* (1923), *From Snow to Snow* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942) and *Steeple Bush* (1947). His *Collected Poems* appeared in 1951.

Robert Frost is perhaps the most honoured and beloved American poet. He received the Pulitzer Prize four times (1924, 1931, 1937, and 1943) and honorary degrees from a number of universities including the Oxford and Cambridge. He was an honoured guest at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was invited to travel to the Soviet Union as a member of a goodwill group in 1962. Frost died on 20th January 1963.

Frost envisioned poetry as a mode of survival in a world of chaos, “a momentary stay against confusion.” For him the humdrum everyday aspects of life in New England are a staple to come to terms with the philosophical issues that troubled him. It is quite natural that the peasant life is a composite imagery for the poet to discuss the hard realities and baffling complexities of life. The colloquial idiom of Frost’s poems deftly creates a rapport with the reader. It has been said that he “turned the living speech of men and women into poetry.” Many of his poems take the form of monologues or dialogues that lay bare the inner feelings and thoughts of the narrative voice.
In “Education by Poetry” Frost remarks that “Poetry begins in trivial metaphors, pretty metaphors, and goes on to the profoundest thinking that we have. Poetry provides the one permissible way of saying one thing and meaning another.” Nature and human activities associated with nature often become metaphors that evoke deeper realities of life in Frost’s poems. Imagery becomes a vehicle to convey philosophical insights into life. In the process fact and fancy mingle in his poems into a delightful harmony revealing the ultimate truths about human life.

Self-check Exercise I

1) What is Frost’s own comment on his poems?

2) Whom did Frost meet while he stayed in England?

3) Which are the early collections of Frost’s poems?

4) Why did Frost return to America?
### 31.3 AFTER APPLE-PICKING

#### 31.3.1 Introduction

Have you ever been involved in the harvest of any crop? Had it been a long day’s toil that exhausted you? Did the initial enthusiasm of the harvest persisted throughout the day? Or did you long for rest and sleep once you became exhausted? Again, what kinds of thoughts do you usually have before falling asleep? Could you ever predict what you will dream about?

Here is a poem that begins with an almost realistic account of farm life, the process of apple-picking to be specific. But it is much more than a matter-of-fact description of harvest. The poet soon tells you about a dream, inviting you out of the realms of reality. As in a typical poem by Frost everyday reality transforms into the revelation of profound truths about human existence. The routine harvest in the apple orchard becomes a metaphor that prompts the reader to meditate upon the meaning of life beyond the surface.

Now read the poem a few times carefully and make an attempt to answer the questions that follow.

#### 31.3.2 Text

My long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.
I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight

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I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.
But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.
Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.
My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.
And I keep hearing from the cellar bin
The rumbling sound
Of load on load of apples coming in.
For I have had too much
Of apple-picking: I am overtired
Of the great harvest I myself desired.
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.
For all
That struck the earth,
No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,
Went sure to the cider-apple heap
As of no worth.
One can see what will trouble
This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.
Were he not gone,
The woodchuck could say whether it’s like his
Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,
Or just some human sleep.

31.3.3 Glossary

Line 11 *skimmed*: picked up
Line 12 *hoary grass*: white grass covered with snow
Line 18 *Magnified apples*: In the dream apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams.
Line 20 *fleck of russet*: tiny patches of deep reddish brown
Line 21 *instep arch*: The arched middle part of the human foot between the toes and the ankle.
Line 22 *ladder-round*: the rung of the ladder; presumably the rungs of the ladder are rounded in shape
Line 24 *cellar*: basement or vault; a room below ground level in a house, often used for storing wine
cider-apple: apples for making cider, i.e., a fermented alcoholic beverage made from apple juice

woodchuck: A common rodent of North America, having a short-legged, heavy-set body and grizzled brownish fur. It is also called groundhog. It burrows in the ground and hibernates

Long sleep: In case of the woodchuck it refers to its hibernation in winter. With human beings it implies death, the long sleep that puts an end to life.

Self-check Exercise 1

Now see if you can answer the following questions briefly.

1) Has the speaker finished apple-picking?

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2) Is there any hint in the initial lines that suggest that the apple-picking is not finished?

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3) Is this a poem about apple-picking? If yes, why is it entitled ‘After Apple-Picking’?

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4) What experience of the morning does the speaker refer to?

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5) Describe the speaker’s dream?
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6) Why does the speaker feel that he is overtired of the great harvest?
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7) Explain the line: “This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.”
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8) What does the woodchuck’s long sleep imply?
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9) What is the difference between the woodchuck’s long sleep and “some human sleep”?
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Could you answer the questions? The next section provides a critical evaluation of the poem. It would help you to have a better understanding of the poem. After reading it you may go back to the Self-Check Exercise again and modify your answers if necessary.

31.3.4 A Critical Appreciation

Frost sets the poem on a late autumn season. The harvest is almost over and the signs of winter are very much evident. At the end of a long day’s apple picking, the speaker is overcome by fatigue. He is feeling sleepy and seems to have been out of touch with reality since early morning. The trance like state induced by fatigue and sleep is foreshadowed in the morning when he looked at the apple trees through a filmy sheet of ice that he lifted from the drinking trough. From the reality of the farm he gradually slips into the world of dream. But even in his sleep, in the dream, apples are an integral part. In his vision he sees apples grow from blossoms, fall off trees, and pile up in the cellar. As sleep overcomes him, he wonders if it is the normal sleep of a tired man or the deep winter sleep of death.

The opening lines seem to suggest that the speaker is still picking apples, but the title emphasizes that the poet focuses on what happens after apple-picking. However his job is not yet finished. At the foot of the tree a barrel remains half filled and there are apples still on the boughs. Thus he stops harvesting apples half way. The speaker says that his ladder still points ‘toward heaven.’ The ladder pointing toward heaven gives the poem religious overtones. It alludes to Jacob’s ladder in Genesis 28:10-19. Jacob dreams of a ladder up to heaven that angels climb. God stands at the top of the ladder and tells Jacob that he and his descendents will be blessed.

The speaker feels that the essence of winter sleep fills the night air. It is gradually approaching him, and is like the fragrance of apples and is sleep inducing. He feels too drowsy that it is impossible for him now to remain awake. As he slips into the unreal world of sleep and dream he remembers a strange sight of the morning. At the drinking trough the top layer of water was frozen. He picked up a thin sheet of ice and looked through it. He saw the frost-covered, hoary grass, distorted by the vision through the filmy ice which was like a pane of glass. But as the ice began to melt, he let it fall and break thus freeing himself from the unreal vision of the world. But now as he is drowsy he can once again enter the world of dream reigned by unreality. The morning vision through the pane of glassy ice was strange. The speaker has not been able to get rid of this sense of strangeness all day. He tried to rub it from his sight, like rubbing sleep out of your eyes in the morning, but in vain.

The poet introduces what seems to be a delicate time shift. The speaker says that he was upon his “way to sleep” before the sheet of ice fell down and broke. In his drowsy state the speaker associates the image from the morning into his dream. Memory and dream coalesce to confuse our sense of time. After a long day’s toil the speaker seems to be asleep on his bed. And before he sinks into sleep he guesses what he is about to dream. In his dream he partially relives his daytime activity. In the dream apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams. As the apples in his mind’s vision are magnified he can see every speck of reddish brown on them. His dream about apple-picking is realistic as well. In the dream his feet feel the pain of sanding on the ladder for a long time. He can even feel the pressure on his feet as the ladder sways round as
the branches of the apple tree bend under his weight. That is, in the dream he feels he is still upon the ladder picking apples. Frost conveys the dream of the speaker with an immediacy of appeal. The sights and sounds the speaker experiences are also felt by the reader. He hears the other apple pickers unloading barrels of apples in the cellar.

The speaker is tired of picking apples for so long. Now he is sick of the great harvest he wished for. He elaborates why he is tired of harvesting apples. The initial excitement of harvest gives way to the monotony of picking and putting apples into the barrel again and again. Moreover it has to be done very carefully. The apples that fall on the ground would be considered worthless even if they are without bruises or stubble. Such apples would become part of the cider-heap. Frost brings in again the image of falling, suggesting the Fall of Man. The apples would be fine if they remain on the branches, or put into the barrels carefully. Or they may remain in the unreal world of dreams. But they seem to be “of no worth” if they touch the earth.

The poet returns to sleep again. To be more specific the speaker is puzzled about nature of his sleep. He says that he can realise what is going to trouble his sleep. It implies that the images in the dream are haunting him, making him restless even in sleep. The speaker seems to be uncertain about the sort of sleep he is going to have. He wonders if his sleep is the normal everyday sleep of human beings or the long sleep of a hibernating woodchuck. The woodchuck is an expert in hibernation, so it could say whether the speaker is about to go into hibernation. Unfortunately, the woodchuck has already gone to sleep for the winter, so the speaker’s question will remain unanswered.

Frost employs visual, tactile and auditory images to convey the feeling of the harvest and its reflection in the dream. Accordingly, he focuses on the sights, sensation, and sounds. He sees magnified apples in the dream and every spot of reddish hue is clearly visible. The pain and pressure that his feet experienced after standing on the ladder for a long time continue to be felt in the dream. In the dream he can hear the rumbling of apples being unloaded in the cellar. Frost evokes the scent of apples in the air.

Metrically the poem appears rather strange. But there is a curious association between meter and theme. Of the forty-two lines about twenty-five are in iambic pentameter. The intermingling of uneven lines corresponds to the speaker’s consciousness as it journeys in and out of dream, gliding between wakefulness and dream at irregular intervals. Just like the varying meter and rhyme there is a confusion of the tenses in the poem. It is evident when the speaker says that he was “well upon my way to sleep” before the sheet of ice fell from his hands. This heightens the dream-like ambience of the poem.

In a way the poem is simply about apple picking. Even after a hard day of apple picking, the exhausted speaker cannot be out his toil. In his mind he continues picking apples. Apples continue to appear and disappear in his mind’s eye, the pain and pressure of standing on the ladder is still felt on his feet, and he is concerned about the apples that fall upon the ground which are fated to go into the cider press. But the title implies that the poem focuses on what happens after apple picking. On a deeper level, the speaker is exhausted by the hardships of life and longs for a relief from them. He wants to escape from reality and enter into a dream-like world through sleep. For Frost, the routine of picking apples during the harvest becomes a metaphor for dealing with deeper issues – of seasonal change and death. It is evident that it is the fag end of autumn. Signs of winter
are too evident to go unnoticed. The ‘hoary’ grass, the frozen surface of the water trough and the essence of winter sleep that pervades the air bear witness to the onslaught of winter. For the natural world death is approaching. The poet is doubtful if the human world would be renewed in spring like nature.

From another perspective the poem can be seen as the rambling thoughts a man who is about to die. The descriptions and thoughts, and dreams about apple-picking may be his hallucinations. Apple-picking becomes a metaphor for life itself or of human obligations and duties. The speaker has finished his vocation and is “done with apple-picking now.” For a farmer like him harvest season is a time of fulfilment but he is now “overtired / Of the great harvest I myself desired.” As he falls asleep or loses consciousness, he is unable to ascertain if he is dying or merely sleeping. He is not sure if he is falling into the normal everyday sleep or the long sleep from which there is no return unlike the hibernating animals. Sleep is a common metaphor for death that Frost has employed in many poems; cf. “Miles to go before I sleep” (Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening). But as it is beyond human powers to foretell the advent of death it may just be some human sleep and nothing more.

In Robert Frost: The People, Places, and Stories Behind his New English Poetry, Lea Newman comments: “The reference to the woodchuck and his long sleep in the concluding lines of the poem has confused many readers. Frost probably found the idea of comparing humans to woodchucks in Emerson’s essay “Nature,” where readers are told, “let us be men instead of woodchucks.” A discussion of hibernation in another Emerson essay, “Fate,” may have been the source for the term “the long sleep.” In terms of the dream-ridden and exhausted state of the speaker in Frost’s poem, he could be seeking the dreamless sleep of an animal or the month-long sleep of hibernation.”

Apple-picking is employed as a metaphor for life and death. In a hard, tiresome life, things remain undone like the unpicked apples on the branches. The unpicked apples represent the things in the speaker’s life that he has not completed. While crossing the threshold of death many things remain unaccomplished like the barrel that the speaker didn’t fill. But the speaker is overtired and is “done with apple-picking now.” He yearns for sleep or death as a way of escape from the trials and tribulations of life. So “After Apple-Picking,” is not merely a poem about a man longing for rest after a hard day’s work of picking apples though he knows that his sleep will be troubled because his work remains unfinished. In his overtired state the speaker wants a sleep corresponding to the hibernation of a woodchuck rather than a “human sleep.” But his sleep will be human precisely because it will be disturbed by dreams in which reality is magnified and distorted. It differs from animal sleep as it is troubled by memories.

### 31.3.5 Themes/ Questions for Discussion

1) Justify the title of the poem.
2) How does reality transform in the speaker’s dream?
3) The Imagery in the poem
4) The metaphor of sleep
5) Critically evaluate the poem commenting on the interrelations among the metaphorical, metrical and thematic elements.
31.4 A BOUNDLESS MOMENT

31.4.1 Introduction

Have you ever come across a beautiful sight that captivated your attention? How long did you watch it? Did it interrupt your work in any way? Why did you turn your attention from it and resume what you had been engaged in? What if the sight that captured your attention was just an illusion, a creation of your imagination?

Well, here is a poem by Frost which presents such a situation. A sudden distraction created by a sight takes the speaker and his companion into a world of unreality. But they come back to reality soon. What lesson do they learn from an incident that seems not so significant?

Read on this short poem to answer these questions. But more importantly there are a few more questions in the next section which you have to answer after reading the poem a few times.

31.4.2 Text

He halted in the wind, and – what was that
Far in the maples, pale, but not a ghost?
He stood there bringing March against his thought,
And yet too ready to believe the most.

“Oh, that’s the Paradise-in-bloom,” I said;
And truly it was fair enough for flowers
Had we but in us to assume in March
Such white luxuriance of May for ours.

We stood a moment so in a strange world,
Myself as one his own pretense deceives;
And then I said the truth (and we moved on).
A young beech clinging to its last year’s leaves.

Self-check Exercise 2

1) Why does the poet’s companion suddenly halt?

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2) What is the significance of the reference to March?

3) Why does the speaker say that it is the paradise in bloom?

4) What does the strange world refer to?

5) What in truth was the sight that captivated their attention?

Now you may read the next section which is a critical evaluation of the poem. It would help you if you had any difficulty in answering the above questions.

**31.4. 3 An Evaluation of the Poem**

The poem opens rather abruptly. The poet and his companion seem to be taking a leisurely walk. Suddenly something moving faraway among the maple trees arrests their attention. The wind seems to be carrying something pale but it is not a ghost. The poem’s dramatic opening line switches the reader’s attention to the unknown. The reader faces a question (“what was that / Far in the Maples, pale but not a ghost?”), and it disrupts the train of thought. It seems a spring vision of beauty, of flowering trees. But the fact that it is the month of March brings a jarring note. Still he is ready to accept the beautiful vision.
The speaker too, is enamoured by the beautiful distant vision. In his excitement he compares the vision of spring flowers to paradise in bloom. The pale hue in the distance is fair enough to be blooming white flowers. The unexpected delight that the distant sight evokes brings into their mind the luxuriant beauty of spring. The poet and his friend are so captivated by the beautiful vision so that they assume the lush beauty of May much in advance, that is, in March when signs of spring are merely incipient. Human beings long for momentary moods of happiness and sights of beauty in life. Sometimes we immerse ourselves in such fleeting moments of beauty mistaking such moments to be boundless.

Thus the speaker and his companion remain rapt in that strange world of beauty for a moment before reality rushes in. Both of them are deceived by the unreal image of beauty that imagination creates. Then truth dawns in the speaker’s mind. They realise that what captured their attention was only a tree holding last year’s leaves. It was a young beech tree retaining last year’s dry leaves. They accept reality and come out of the momentary vision. Once they accept the truth they move on.

The poem employs the cycle of seasons to hint at the irrevocable cycle of life. Each May the bloom comes out and brings life to the death of winter. The poem is about a single moment when the characters see that life has changed. The phrase “and we moved on” marks the end of the moment that seemed boundless. It also suggests the disappointment in being out of the blissful moment of imagination and the return to everyday reality. There is a tension in the poem between movement and stopping. At the very beginning of the poem the companions stop walking. At the end of the poem, when the truth is revealed they resume their walk. In between they were in a boundless moment when they seek out the meaning of the distant sight. But it lays bare before them a truth about life as well. Captivating illusions and distractions abound in life. They are delightful but the reality of life, though dark and dismal, is something we cannot shun for long.

“A Boundless Moment” begins by referring to a sight that unexpectedly captures attention. But it leads the reader to look into the relation of human beings to nature. It pries into the mysteries of nature, especially the cycle of seasons. Nature’s mood changes enigmatically. Along with it the colours of the fabric of nature transform proclaiming new seasons and hopes. But all the beauty and change in nature underlines the impermanence that is associated with nature and life as well. The poem gives an image of beauty, but this image is nothing more than an illusion. The two men think that they see flowers. But in fact they are only dead leaves clinging to a beech. So what captured their attention was only an illusion. When they realise this truth they turn again to the routine of life. The incident hints at the inherent limitations of human imagination. The ideal visions of imagination cannot persist for long as they are bound to encounter the truth of hard reality. Human desire and imagination can create visions for what seems a “boundless moment.” But the unreal nature of such moments will be soon revealed, and it becomes a ceaseless moment of revelation about the hard realities of life. Such moments of realization are not tragic but they are dignified moments that provide insight into life. The vanishing of a vision of beauty evokes sadness but we are endowed with the truthfulness to accept reality. The speaker’s bold acceptance of truth, even though it is harsh and disappointing, reveals the dauntless human spirit that faces reality.
31.4.4 Themes/Questions for Discussion

1) Describe the strange experience of the speaker and his companion.
2) What revelation does the experience lead to?
3) The Implications of the title ‘A Boundless Moment.’

31.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you read about the life and work of Robert Frost and about the unique features of his poetry, focusing on two of his poems. The discussion of Frost’s concept and vision of poetry would have been helpful to you in understanding the poems. The first poem “After Apple Picking” is based on Frost’s experiences as a New England farmer. Form the routine event of the harvest season the poet takes you to the deeper philosophical realities about human life. The second short lyric “A Boundless Moment” too, takes you to a common experience and gives a deeper insight into life. We hope you enjoyed the poems and will read more of Frost’s poems.

31.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-CHECK EXERCISES

Self-check Exercise 1

1) Frost has remarked that his poems begin in delight and end in wisdom.
2) He met poets like Edward Thomas, Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves and Ezra Pound.
3) A Boy’s Will and North of Boston
4) The outbreak of World War I in 1914 compelled him to return to his native land.
5) Frost received the Pulitzer Prize four times and honorary degrees from a number of universities including the Oxford and Cambridge. He was an honoured guest at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961 and was invited to travel to the Soviet Union as a member of a goodwill group in 1962.
6) For him poetry was a way of survival in the chaotic world. In his poems everyday aspects of life become a tool to discuss philosophical issues and complexities of life. So nature and human activities become metaphors to understand the deeper realities of life.

Self-Check Exercise 1

1) No He has not finished apple-picking.
2) Yes. The barrel of apples at the foot of the tree is only half filled. Unpicked apples are still there on the boughs.
3) The poem is not merely about apple-picking. The title implies that the poem focuses on what happens after apple-picking. The routine of apple-picking during harvest leads to deeper issues of seasonal change, renewal of life and death. Apple-picking become a metaphor for life itself, or for human obligations.
4) In the morning the speaker saw that the top layer of water was frozen in the drinking trough. He picked up a thin sheet of ice and looked through it. He
saw the frost-covered, hoary grass, distorted by the vision through the filmy ice. As the ice began to melt, he let it fall and break thus freeing himself from the unreal vision of the world.

5) In his dream the apples appear larger, an indication that reality gets transformed in dreams. As the apples in his mind’s vision are magnified he can see every speck of reddish brown on them. In the dream his feet feel the pain of sanding on the ladder for a long time. He can even feel the pressure on his feet as the ladder sways round as the branches of the apple tree bend under his weight.

6) For a farmer the harvest season is a time of fulfillment. But the speaker is overtired of the great harvest. He is on the threshold of death and so the harvest of life or human achievements are insignificant.

7) As he falls asleep or loses consciousness, he is unable to determine if he is dying or merely sleeping. He is not sure if he is falling into the normal everyday sleep or the long sleep from which there is no return unlike the hibernating animals. Sleep is a common metaphor for death that Frost has employed in many of his poems. But as it is beyond human powers to foretell the advent of death it may just be some human sleep and nothing more.

8) The woodchuck’s long sleep refers to hibernation in winter. It implies a contrast between the natural and human world.

9) The woodchuck’s long sleep is just hibernation in winter. It is untroubled and assures regaining normal life in spring. With human beings it implies death, the long sleep that puts an end to life.

**Self-Check Exercise 2**

1) The poet’s companion sees something faraway among the maples. It was a captivating sight and so he halts suddenly.

2) It is impossible to see the beauty of spring in the month of March. So the reference to March hints that the beautiful vision that attracted their attention is unreal.

3) The speaker is enamoured by the beautiful distant vision. He thinks it to be spring flowers and compares its exquisite beauty to paradise in bloom.

4) The strange world refers to the world of beauty that is unreal. It is a world that imagination creates but is a source of delight and escape from harsh realities.

5) The sight that captivated their attention was only a beech tree still retaining last year’s dry leaves.