

Block

1

AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POETRY: THEMES AND ISSUES

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**Contextualizing American Poetry:
Colonial Period**

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BLOCK 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POETRY:

In this block we will discuss:

- The history of American poetry;
- The movements in the colonial period;
- The signature poets in American poetry scenario; and
- Contextualize American poetry in world literatures.

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UNIT 1: CONTEXTUALIZING AMERICAN POETRY: COLONIAL PERIOD

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to :

- Acquire a better understanding of History of Colonialism in America;
- Grasp the importance of Poetry within the Colonial Period;
- Understand the significant poetic movements of the era;
- Recognize the key poets and their contribution to American Poetry;
and
- Strengthen critical thinking and gain insightful grasping of the poems.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 Colonialism in the United States of America: An Overview

The story of “Colonial America,” unearths the reality of the English colonies along the Eastern seaboard. Englishmen had begun to establish colonies in great zeal; there were plenty of French, Spanish, Dutch and even Russian colonial outposts on the American continent, but the story of those 13 colonies such as New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia is significant in understanding the American colonial history. Later, these colonies came together to form the United States.

Originally inhabited by the Arawacks, the Native Americans, who were commonly known as Amerindians (named proffered by Christopher Columbus after he realised that he had mistakenly sailed closer to the America) witnessed the arrival of the white man as the destined apocalypse. One of the Chiefs, an Iroquois Chief known as Handsome Lake rightly put it in the late 18th century, that the “white men came swarming into the country bringing with them cards, money, fiddles, whiskey, and blood corruption.” (Gray 1). Colonialism in the USA was traced right from the white entry unto the land already civilized by the ‘true’ Americans, the Native Americans. America, being a settler colony, was a massive land conquered, plundered and adopted by the Europeans namely Spanish, Dutch, French and English immigrants.

In the early days of the colonial period, the settlers did not know how to live in the wilderness, and they faced many hardships. The Pilgrims were on a contractual agreement with the Virginia Company to settle near the Hudson River. However, the rough waters and harsh storms were hurdles on their way and they could not reach their target destination. They reached, after 66 days, to Cape Cod, anchoring at the site of Provincetown on November 21. Prior to their anchoring and docking at Plymouth Rock, on the western side of Cape Cod Bay, on the 18th of December, the Pilgrims sent an exploratory party to the land. Plymouth, the first permanent English settlement in the New World was named after the explorer, John Smith, who just left Jamestown. The settlers decided the name was appropriate, as the *Mayflower* had set sail from the port of Plymouth in England.

In Massachusetts, the Plymouth settlers spent most of their first winter (1620–21) on board the *Mayflower*. The next winter, the Pilgrims lived on the land but in wigwams (a Native American lodge frequently having an oval shape and covered with bark or hides) and sailcloth tents. Many fell sick and were hungry. Nearly one-quarter of them died before a ship from England brought fresh supplies. With the passage of time, the colonists learned how to live in the wilderness — through trial and error and the help of some of the more friendly Native American tribes. By 1700s, small cities and towns were well established. The colonists gradually developed their own customs, practices and lifestyles. Eventually, they began to feel that this new land was now their true home. They ultimately adopted the American soil as ‘home’ away from Home (European homelands).

Soon, many other ships bringing in a swarming number of Europeanized colonizers followed the *Mayflower* which initially brought the human cargo to America. Colonial settlers landed in the Americas for multiple reasons. While some came to seek religious freedom, others were driven by the mercantile mind, that is, to make money. On the one hand, many came to conquer lands; on the other hand, others were amateur explorers and seafarers to discover the world. They settled into 13 colonies, geographically the states known as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Roanoke today known as North Carolina, South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maryland, Georgia, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and Delaware. There were other scattered colonies like St. Augustine today known as Florida.

1.1.2 Colonial Territorial Occupation: Natives' Displacement

Spanish: Florida

English: Jamestown, Manhattan Island

French: St Lawrence River

Dutch: Hudson River

Swedes: Delaware River

German & Scots-Irish: New York, Pennsylvania

Africa: Slavery – all colonies

1.1.3 The Colonial Timeline in America

1565: St. Augustine is founded by the Spanish.

1607: Jamestown, the first permanent English colony in North America, is established in Virginia.

1620: Pilgrims reach Plymouth, Massachusetts, aboard the *Mayflower*; “*Mayflower Compact*” adopted.

1626: Manhattan Island sold by Indians to New Amsterdam colony.

1638: Swedish settlers establish colony of New Sweden in Delaware.

1681: William Penn receives charter for colony that becomes Pennsylvania.

1692: Salem, Massachusetts, trials sentence 20 “witches” to death.

1718: New Orleans founded by French.

1733: Georgia, last of original 13 colonies, founded by James Oglethorpe.

1.2 ENGLISH COLONIAL EXPANSION

Sixteenth-century England witnessed a rather tumultuous phase because they could make more money from selling wool than food. Many of the nation's landowners were converting farmers' fields into pastures for sheep. This led to a food shortage; simultaneously, many agricultural workers found themselves jobless overnight. They had to face radical hardships to survive in England. The 16th century was equally known as the ‘age of mercantilism’, an extremely cutthroat fiscal psyche that spurred European countries to conquer and acquire as many colonies as they could. Territorial conquest became a fiercer competition than what it was prior to this age. Subsequently, for the most part, the English colonies in North America were business ventures. They were driven purely by the economic and wealth-

making drives. They provided an outlet for England's surplus population and (for few cases) more religious freedom than England did. Nevertheless, their main purpose was to make money for their sponsors. This 16th entrepreneurship had primarily two agendas: wealth and religious freedom.

1.2.1 The Tobacco Colonies

In 1606, King James I divided the Atlantic seaboard into two, leaguings the southern half to the London Company (later the Virginia Company) and the northern half to the Plymouth Company. The first English settlement in North America had actually been established some 20 years earlier, in 1587, when a group of colonists comprising of 91 men, 17 women and 9 children led by Sir Walter Raleigh settled on the island of Roanoke, today known as North Carolina. By 1590, the Roanoke colony had mysteriously eclipsed entirely, leaving no trace or clue behind their disappearance. It still remains an enigma to historians who to this date do not know what became of its community. Within the same year (1606), soon after the James I's charter was declared, the London Company sent 144 men to Virginia on three ships: the *Godspeed*, the *Discovery* and the *Susan Constant*, which accosted the Chesapeake Bay in the spring of 1607. They sailed about 60 miles up the James River to construct their settlement which they named Jamestown. The Jamestown colonists faced dire moments. Greedily engrossed in plundering gold and any other exportable resources, they paid no heed to feeding themselves or stocking their provisions. Approximately 10 years later, by 1616, the settlers in Virginia developed the agricultural flair to cultivate tobacco. It ensured the colony's survival. Virginia encountered its first slave trade in 1619.

The English monarchs, in 1632, levied a grant of 12 million acres of land at the top of the Chesapeake Bay to Cecilius Calvert, the Second Lord Baltimore. Named after the Queen, the colony, Maryland, shared several common grounds with Virginia. Similarly to the Virginia's settlers, the landowners of Maryland were a consequential producer of tobacco as they possessed immense plantations. However, the latter heavily rely on the labour of indentured servants. Later, they were joined by the slaves from Africa who were imported and transacted through the 'Middle Passage' or 'Transatlantic Trade'. Unlike the founders of Virginia, Lord Baltimore was a Catholic. Maryland turned into a religious policy and agenda for him as he hoped that his thriving colony would be an immediate asylum or refuge for his persecuted co-religionists.

1.2.2 The New England Colonies

The *Fortune* (1621), the *Anne* (1623) and the *Little James* (1623) carried the "Old Comers" (name given to the passengers on board the 4 ships including the *Mayflower*) of Plymouth Colony. They later enjoyed special care and stature in Plymouth's colonial enterprise. The later to be New England colonies welcomed their first English emigrants who were a small congregation of Puritan separatists. They landed at Plymouth Rock, where the pilgrims formed the first permanent settlement of Europeans in New England. They were later renamed as the patrons of the Plymouth Colony in 1620. A decade later, the Massachusetts Bay Company, an affluent syndicate (as association of companies sharing a similar purpose) sent a

much larger convoy of essentially liberal Puritans in the purview to found a new Massachusetts based settlement. The colonists shortly learned and assimilated the necessary know-how expertise and knowledge to start farming, fishing and hunting, with the immediate assistance of the local natives. Massachusetts soon became a prosperously thriving settlement.

The expansion of the Massachusetts colonies generated new settlements in New England. On the one hand, colonies of Connecticut and New Haven, both merging as one in 1665, were set up by those Puritans who shared the thought that Massachusetts was not sufficiently pious; on the other hand, Puritans who deemed Massachusetts as far too restrictive and limiting in scope went to establish the Rhode Island Colony, with the belief that all inclusive of the Jewish community would enjoy “liberty in religious concerns” (n.p) at its fullest. Further to the north of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, a small group of adventurous settlers formed the colony of New Hampshire.

1.2.3 The Middle Colonies

In 1664, King Charles II handed over the area between New England and Virginia, a significant section, already occupied by the Dutch ‘patroons’ (Dutch traders and landowners) to James, the Duke of York, his brother. The English settlers speedily overtook and laid their hands on the Dutch New Netherland, rechristened as New York. Nevertheless, alongside the Dutch settlers, the Belgian Flemings and Walloons, French Huguenots, Scandinavians and Germans equally sharing the same living milieu were not out housed. This cohabitation of the European settlers contributed to New York, being one of the most multicultural and successful colonies in the ‘New World’.

45,000 square miles of land, from the west of the Delaware River were transferred to a Quaker who owned large swaths (strips) of land in Ireland, William Penn, in 1680. Pennsylvania, therefore, or the “Penn’s Woods” was founded in the North American assets or estates of William Penn. European migration started as people believed and were enticed by the promise of religious tolerance and the arable soil as Penn reassured. It was interesting to know that these new migrants from all over Europe were rich enough to settle themselves comfortable in Pennsylvania, New England, similarly to the Puritans. They were unlike the indentured serfs who arrived out of misfortunes and poverty to work. Likewise, Pennsylvania rapidly prospered and turned into a comparatively ‘egalitarian’ space, whereby equality was prevalent among the habitants.

1.2.4 The Southern Colonies

The Carolina Colony is juxtaposed to the previously mentioned colonies. It is a territorial belt which expanded from south of Virginia to Florida as well as the west to the Pacific Ocean. It was much less urbane and sophisticated. While the ‘hardscrabble farmers’ struggled to maintain their day-to-day living in its northern half, planters owned and controlled immense estates producing “corn, lumber, beef and pork” in the southern half. The cultivation of rice began in the 1690s. The Carolinians and the English Planter Colony shared a strong harmonious bond on the Barbados Island, in the Caribbean. It excessively depended on the slaves to accomplish the

task on the plantations. Many of the white masters or masters were actively indulged in the Slave Trade commissioning, deracinating, auctioning and exploiting the African people. Consequently, the inhuman phenomenon of Slavery and slave trade stood as the founding layers of the Carolina Colony's development. Later, in 1729, it became North Carolina and South Carolina respectively. James Oglethorpe prompted by the urge to construct a citadel between South Carolina and the Spanish settlements in Florida, in 1732, setup the Georgia Colony. It is stated that the Georgian progress and expansion were mirrors to the flourishing of South Carolina.

1.2.5 The Revolutionary War and the Treaty of Paris

By 1700, the northern part of America witnessed about 250,000 European and African settlers in 13 English-based colonies. On the eve of the Revolution, in 1775, a number of approximately 2.5 million settlers were surveyed. Although they did not share much in common, given their cultural, linguistic, culinary and social differences, they successfully united themselves as one to fight for their independence. Sparked after American colonists antagonised over issues like taxation without representation, epitomised by laws like The Stamp Act and The Townshend Acts, the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) was declared. On April 19, 1775, when the "shot heard round the world" was fired during the Battles of Lexington and Concord, there were rising tensions and chaos. It was not without warning; the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770 and the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773 showed the colonists' increasing dissatisfaction with British rule in the colonies. Issued on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence listed the various reasons, the Founding Fathers felt obliged to break and depart from the rule of King George III and parliament to start a new nation. In September of that same year, the Continental Congress declared the "United Colonies" of America to be the "United States of America."

In 1778, France allied with the colonists assisting the Continental Army conquered the British at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. The Treaty of Paris put an end to the American Revolution and granting the 13 original colonies independence was signed on September 3, 1783.

1.3 OVERVIEW: POETRY IN COLONIAL AMERICA

William Carlos Williams stated that "it is very easy to talk about American poetry because there isn't any such thing" (qtd. in Dolan, 31). Habited mostly by European immigrants, the New World saw its poetic emergence. While poetry written and produced by the Native Americans were mostly seen as 'indigenous' in nature to the white American settlers and in their constructed mainstream, they believed that the "land of the Native Indians betrays every attribute of the concept of 'America'". In reality, the concept and birth of 'America' as a new country was founded on the displacement and killing of the indigenous natives - the real Americans. Nevertheless, their oral customs and traditions which include hymns, songs, myths, legends, tales and war chants did not have only much influence but rather integrated the American writings unlike the popular beliefs. Furthermore, their "pantheistic inflections were expressed through haiku-style imagery on

a wide-ranging plethora of themes (Early American and Colonial Period)” (Kalra 1). In spite of the heavy influence and inclusion of the native poetic lyric on “what is considered to be conventional” (Kalra 1) ‘American’ poetry realm, the native lyric “is placed outside the realm of American poetry” (Kalra 1). The post *factum* imperial impacts of the British culture and cultural norms offered America the means to define its personalised cultural identity and existence. America redefined and established itself primarily through its politics, literature, music, cuisine and soon, all spawning from, or in opposition to their respective colonial origins. Subsequently, Siddhant Kalra writes, an “‘America’ is the embodiment of this process of mitosis and of the republican values espoused by the founding fathers of the American republic” (1). William Stanley Merwin rightly stated that:

I certainly do not think of the tradition of American poetry as simply a homogenized addition to the English tradition. I feel that we are lucky to inherit it with a particular closeness, but that we also inherit the whole tradition of poetry in the language. I don’t think there is much to be gained by self conscious efforts to write some kind of genuine American poetry. If American poets write poems they will be that” (qtd in Kalra 1)

He effortlessly commented on the non-homogeneity of the American poetry.

1.3.1 The American Spirit

It is sad but true that the colonial era in the United States of America did not witness a strong congregation of poets of significant aptitudes or achievements until the arrival of Philip Freneau from the middle Atlantic states and Edgar Allan Poe from the southern states on the American poetic scene. The pioneering writers in the Americas from the first half of the 17th century hailed from the Puritan colonies who which were technically British. Also known as Protestants (Protestant Christianity), particularly Puritanism had the upper hand over the early American’s socio-cultural formation. With no doubt, the first American poets were British Protestants like Anne Bradstreet (c. 1612-1672), Edward Taylor (1642–1729) and Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705). In his “The Preface”, Edward Taylor (c.1642-1729) attempted to encapsulate the essence of Americanism:

Infinity, when all things it beheld
In Nothing, and of Nothing all did build,
Upon what Base was fixt the Lath wherein
He turn’d this Globe, and riggalld it so trim?
Who blew the Bellows of His Furnace Vast?
Or held the Mould wherein the world was Cast?
Who laid its Corner Stone? Or whose Command?
Where stand the Pillars upon which it stands?

The Preface, Edward Taylor

Among the immigrants, the English Puritans asserted their proselytizing gaze on the American culture. They came, mostly; assail the Mayflower to William Bradford’s Plymouth colony and the Arabella to John Winthrop’s Massachusetts Bay Colony in the first half of the 17th century (Reuben).

1.3.2 Puritan Spirit

In New England, however, the intensity of Calvinist piety prompted a number of well-read Puritans to write poetry. Puritan theological ideologies and the restrictive lifestyle were no encouraging force between poetry writing and production. While, the Puritans willingly yielded to the effectiveness and versatility of history of the kind Bradford wrote of sermons and rhetorical stratagems of the sort Winthrop favoured, they were often less enthusiastic about poetry. “Be not so set upon poetry, as to be always poring on the passionate and measure pages,” the New England cleric Cotton Mather warned to “beware of a boundless and sickly appetite for the reading of ... poems ... and let not the Circean cup intoxicate you” (Gray 8). Of the verse that survives from this period, however, most of the finest and most popular among contemporaries inclines to the theological. The most popular is represented by *The Day of Doom* (1662), a resounding epic about Judgment Day written by Michael Wigglesworth (1631–1705), *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640), and *The New England Primer* (1683?). *The Bay Psalm Book* which is the translated biblical texts into a plain style band was brought out in 1640, was the first book printed in English in the New World. It was the first book of verse printed in the British American colonies; They did not strive for a more poetic translation because “God’s altar needs not our polishings.”

The Day of Doom (1662) was the bestseller poem in colonial America. In 224 stanzas in ballad meter, Wigglesworth presents the prime Puritan beliefs, mostly through a debate between sinners and Christ. A effortless diction, driving rhythms, and unvarying insignificant references to biblical sources are all part of Wigglesworth’s didactic purpose. This is poetry intended to drive home its message, to convert some and to reinstate the religious fervor of others. Many Puritan readers committed portions of the poem to memory; still more read it aloud to 8 The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods their families. The absolute simplicity and fervor of its message made it a perfect instrument for communicating and confirming faith. So it is, perhaps, hardly unexpected that Cotton Mather could put aside his distrust of poetry when it came to a work like *The Day of Doom* (1662). At Wigglesworth’s death, in fact, Mather confessed his high regard for the poet: who, Mather said, had written for “the Edification of such Readers, as are for Truth’s dressed up in Plaine Meeter” (Gray 9).

Nevertheless, *The Bay Psalm Book* (1640) and *The New England Primer* (1683) gained more popularity than *The Day of Doom*; after the Bible which was the most widely owned and read book in Colonial America. *The Bay Psalm Book* was the first project of the Massachusetts Bay Colony provided the psalms of David translated into “idiomatic English” and adapted to the basic “hymn stanza form” of four lines with eight beats in each line and regular rhymes (Gray 9). Produced by twelve “New England divines”, it was a collaborative compilation. Among the contributors, was John Cotton who concisely explained in the Preface what they really had in mind was. He stated that: “Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry.” “We have ... done our endeavour to make a plain and familiar translation” (qtd. in Gray 9). Cotton continued, “if therefore the verses are not always so smoothe and elegant as some may desire ..., let them consider that God’s

Altar need not our polishings” (qtd. in Gray 9). Cotton insisted that, what was required was, “a plain translation” (Ibid). Intended to be sung in the church and at home, the psalms were dutifully used in both. *The Bay Psalm Book* was purposefully used to popularize and promote faith which it did. Printed in England and Scotland and the colonies; it underwent through more than 50 editions over the century, post its first appearance. It perfectly illustrated the Puritan belief in an “indelible, divinely ordained connection between the mundane and the miraculous”, the language and habits of everyday and the apprehension of eternity (Ibid). Additionally, it enabled a huge number of people, as Cotton put it, to “sing the Lord’s songs ... in our English tongue” (Ibid).

The New England Primer had a similar purpose and success. The aim was to give every child “and apprentice” the chance to read the catechism and digest improving moral precepts. With the help of an illustrated alphabet, poems, moral statements, and a formal catechism, the young reader was to learn how to read and how to live according to the tenets of Puritan faith. Clearly, the Primer sprang from a belief in the value of widespread literacy as a means of achieving public order and personal salvation. As time passed and the Primer went through numerous revisions, the revised versions reflected altering priorities. The 1758 revision, for instance, declared a preference for “more grand noble Words” rather than “diminutive Terms”; a 1770 version described literacy as more a means of advancement than a route to salvation; and an 1800 edition opts for milder versified illustrations of the alphabet (“A was an apple pie”). But this tendency to change in response to changing times was a reason for the durability and immense popularity of the Primer: between 1683 and 1830, in fact, it sold over five million copies. And, at its inception, it was further testament to the Puritan belief that man’s word, even in verse, could be used as a vehicle for God’s truth (Gray 2011). That belief was not contested by the two finest poets of the colonial period, Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672) and Edward Taylor (1642–1729). It was, however, set in tension with other impulses and needs that helped to make their poetry exceptionally vivid and dramatic.

It was strongly believed that the poetry of the Colonial Period was predominantly mimetic in nature. Therefore,

... the question of literary nationalism—i.e., of whether American poetry was or ought to be original or derivative, part of the European (and particularly the English) tradition or a native development with the power of its rudeness—did not become urgent until the professionalization of literature in the second quarter of the 19th century. (Brogan 24-5).

Among the Puritans, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor were the two poets of abiding importance. There are other poets who made their poetic contribution to the Colonial American Poetry.

Louis Untermeyer states: “Here is the poetry of early America, revealing the spirit, the scenes, and the turbulence of the period, and setting forth the works of over forty accomplished poets, many of whom are forgotten to all but the literary historian. This collection is devoted to the expanding spirit as well as the formative genius of America.”

1.3.3 Key American Poets During The Colonial America

1.3.4 Anne Bradstreet (C. 1612-1672)

Anne Bradstreet (March 20, 1612 – September 16, 1672) was the most prominent of early English poets of North America and first writer in England's North American colonies to be published. Anne was born in Northampton, England, 1612. She grew up in cultured circumstances and was a well educated woman tutored in history, several languages and literature. She was the first Puritan figure in American Literature and notable for her large corpus of poetry, as well as personal writings published posthumously. Historically, metaphorically and even biologically mother of American poetry, Anne Bradstreet lived at a time that precluded any sort of literary "career"; yet she used her pen as an instrument of surprisingly durable power. At the age of sixteen, she married Simon Bradstreet. In 1650, Rev. John Woodbridge published Anne's *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung up in America*, making Anne the first female poet ever published in both England and New World.

Deliverance from Another Sore Fit (published 1924), *Upon a Fit of Sickness, Anno 1632 Aetatis Suae, 19* (1632), *A Dialogue between Old England and New* (1642), *Contemplations* (poem) (1650), *The Prologue* (1650), *Upon My Son Samuel His Going For England, November 6, 1657* (1657), *In Reference to her Children, 23 June 1659* (1659), *Verses upon the Burning of our House* (1666), *Before the Birth of One of Her Children* (1678), *The Author to Her Book* (1678), *To Her Father with Some Verses* (1678) and *To My Dear and Loving Husband* (1678) were Anne Bradstreet's best known poems.

Bradstreet's Poetic collection are: *A Letter to Her Husband, Absent upon Public Employment*, *Another*, *Another (II)*, *For Deliverance From A Fever*, *In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth*, *The Flesh and the Spirit*, *The Four Ages of Man (quaternion)*, *Four Seasons of the Year (quaternion)*, *Four Elements (quaternion)*, *Of the Four Ages of Man (quaternion)*, *The Four Monarchies (quaternion)* and *Upon some Distemper of Body*.

1.3.5 Edward Taylor (1642-1729)

Edward Taylor was born in Leicestershire, England. He emigrated to New England in 1668, graduated from Harvard University, became a minister in the frontier village of Westfield, Massachusetts, and applied his powers of oratory to his pastoral duties. His poems remained unknown until the scholar Thomas H. Johnson discovered them in a bound manuscript book at the Yale University Library and published a selection in 1937. Taylor was a "Puritan minister in the 1680s on the remotest American frontier writing an often ecstatic poetry in a style strongly reminiscent of George Herbert but verging on a continental, Roman Catholic baroque, a minister who also, it should be added, was the author of a number of virulently anti Papist works" (Robert Hass). When Taylor died, the only book of English verse in his library was by Anne Bradstreet.

A similar sense of intimacy and engagement is one of the secrets of the work of Edward Taylor, which was virtually unpublished during his lifetime – a collected edition, *The Poetical Works of Edward Taylor*, did not appear

until 1939. Like Bradstreet, Taylor was born in England; he then left to join the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1668. After studying at Harvard, he settled into the profession of minister for the rest of his life. Marrying twice, he fathered fourteen children, many of whom died in infancy. He began writing poetry even before he joined his small, frontier congregation in Westfield, but his earliest work tended towards the public and conventional. Experimenting with different forms and styles, he started over the next eight or nine years to write in a more personal and memorable vein: love poems to his wife-to-be (*Were but my Muse an Huswife Good*), spiritual meditations on natural events or as Taylor called them “occurants” (*The Ebb & Flow*), and emblematic, allegorical accounts of the smaller creatures of nature and domestic objects (*Huswifery*). These poems manifest some of Taylor’s characteristic poetic habits. *Upon a Spider Catching a Fly* written around 1680–1682, begins with the kind of minute particularization of nature that was to become typical of later New England poets like Emily Dickinson and Robert Frost:

Thou Sorrow, venom elfe
Is this thy ploy,
To spin a web out of thy selfe
To catch a Fly?
For Why?

Gradually, the intimate tone of address was switched to God, who asked to “break the Cord” with which “Hells Spider,” the Devil, would “tangle Adams race.” Taylor amalgamated both the material facts of the spider and the spiritual truth: symbolic meaning was not developed at the expense of concrete event. Taylor used an elaborate conceit and intricate stanzaic form as both a discipline to his meditations and a means of channeling, then relaxing emotion. So, in the final stanza, the poet anticipated eventually singing to the glory of God, “when perch’d on high” – “And thankfully,” he concluded, “For joy.” The short last line, “For why?” acts as a counterpoint to the conclusion of the first stanza and Taylor ended his poem on a moment of pure, spiritual elation. The experience of faith was central to Taylor’s life and his works. He began writing metrical paraphrases of the Psalms in 1647. Taylor’s distinctively meditative voice started to reflect from the *Bay Psalm Book*.

Taylor also began to bring together his vision of the history of salvation to produce his first major work, *Gods Determinations touching his Elect*—A collection of thirty-five poems, this traces the “Glorious Handywork” of creation, dramatizes a debate between Justice and Mercy over the fate of mankind, then describes the combat between Christ and Satan for human souls. After *The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods Determinations* (1682), Taylor turned to his finest longer work, *Preparatory Meditations before My Approach to the Lords Supper*. Usually composed after he had prepared a sermon or preaching notes, the 217 poems comprising this sequence were personal meditations “Chiefly upon the Doctrine preached upon the Day of administration.” Taylor tried to learn lessons gathered from the Sacrament day’s biblical text, which was also the poem’s title. They were at once a form of spiritual discipline, with the poet subjecting himself to rigorous

self-examination; petitions to God to prepare him for the immediate task of preaching and administering the Lord's Supper; and a private diary or confession of faith. As in so many of his poems, Taylor used an intricate verse form, elaborate word-play and imagery to organize his meditations and release his emotions. Taylor belonged to a great tradition of meditative writing, one that includes the English poets George Herbert and John Donne, and an equally great tradition of New England writing: one in which the imaginative anticipation of dying becomes a means of understanding how to live. So it is perhaps not surprising that, after suffering a severe illness in 1720, he wrote three versions of *A Valediction to all the World preparatory for Death 3d of the 11th 1720* and two versions of *A Fig for thee Oh! Death*. What perhaps is surprising, and moving, is how these poems acknowledge the loveliness of the world while bidding it farewell. The strength of his feeling for the things of the earth, and even more for family and vocation, becomes a measure of the strength of his faith. It is only faith, evidently, and the firm conviction that (as he puts it in one of the Preparatory Meditations) his heart "loaded with love" will "ascend/Up to ... its bridegroom, bright, & Friend" that makes him content to give up all that he has not only come to know but also to cherish.

In Taylor's poems, we find not so much conflict as continuity; not tension but a resolution founded on tough reasoning and vigorous emotion, patient attention to the ordinary and passionate meditation on the mysterious – above all, on a firmly grounded, fervently sustained faith. He loved the world, in short, but he loved God more. His poetical work has been defined as Metaphysical, although others have preferred to particularize it as "American Baroque". Major poems by Taylor comprise of: *Meditation III* (Canticles 1:3: Thy Good Ointment) (c. 1682), *Meditation VI* (Canticles 11:1:1 am ... the lily of the valleys.) (c. 1682), *The Preface to God's Determinations* (c. 1685), *Upon a Spider Catching a Fly* (1939), *Huswifery* (1939).

1.3.6 Phillip Freneau (1752-1832)

Another significant poet of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was Philip Freneau. While at Princeton, Freneau wrote *The Power of Fancy* and coauthored *The Rising Glory of America* which exhibited early the combination of pre-romantic feeling and patriotic fervour which characterised his work. Freneau enthusiastically supported the Revolution and edited newspapers attacking the 58 Federalists and advocating Jefferson's republicanism. "In the heady excitement of the new republic, Freneau had high hopes for American literature and for himself as the first American poet of stature" (Borgan 24). Although this did not happen, yet Freneau did achieve public acclaim as the Poet of the Revolution.

Philip Freneau, the "Poet of the American Revolution," was also (in F. O. Matthiessen's words) "the first American to think of himself as a professional poet." Freneau roomed with James Madison at Princeton University and would later bring his silver tongue to bear on the side of Madison and Thomas Jefferson in their ideological disputes with Alexander Hamilton. The poet fought in the Revolutionary War, and in 1780, he was captured by the British, held for six weeks, and treated brutally. Freneau wrote much satirical journalism, under the pseudonym Robert Slender, edited an anti-Federalist newspaper that rankled President, and served more than once

as a ship's captain. His Poems written and Published during the American Revolutionary War appeared in two volumes in 1809. On his way home on foot from a tavern, he lost his way in a snowstorm and died on 18 December 1832.

1.4 OTHER CONTRIBUTING POETS

1.4.1 Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705)

Michael Wigglesworth was a puritan minister, doctor and poet. He graduated from Harvard in 1651 and taught there as a tutor until 1654. He was ordained minister of the church in Malden, Massachusetts. Modest, suave and highly esteemed in his social circle, he presented his skills in his lucid and dynamic exposition and knowledge of the scriptures. When his lung disease disqualified him as a preacher, he strived, "... with his pen to render truth attractive by investing her with the garb of poesy" (Kettell n.p). This Harvard graduate and Puritan preacher published in 1662, a poem setting forth some of the tenets of "Calvinistic Theology". This poem, entitled *The Day of Doom*, or a *Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment* had the largest circulation of any colonial poem.

You sinners are, and such a share
as sinners may expect;
Such you shall have, for I do save
none but mine own Elect.
Yet to compare your sin with their
who liv'd a longer time,
I do confess yours is much less,
though every sin's a crime.
A crime it is, therefore in bliss
you may not hope to dwell;
But unto you I shall allow
the easiest room in Hell.

Despite the fierce denunciations of the sinners and the terrible images of damnation in *The Day of Doom*, its author was known as a "genial philanthropist". Dr. Peabody called him "a man of beautitudes", ministering not only the spiritual but to the physical needs of his flock. *The Day of Doom* underwent six editions in the US, and was republished in London. It comprises a version, after the manner of Sternhold and Hopkins, of all the scripture texts related to the final judgment of man, and contains two hundred and twenty-four stanzas of eight lines each.

Wigglesworth died on June 10, 1705. The epitaph on his grave in Bell Rock Cemetry has been attributed to Cotton Mather. The epitaph bears the words: *The excellent Wigglesworth remembered by some good tokens.*

His pen did once meat from the eater fetch;
And now he's gone beyond the eater's reach.
His body once so thin, was next to none;

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From hence, he's to unbodied spirits flown.
Once his rare skill did all diseases heal;
And he does nothing now uneasy feel.
He to his paradise is joyful come;
And waits with joy to see his Day of Doom.

1.4.2 Cotton Mather (1663-1728)

Cotton Mather American Congregational minister and author, supporter of the old order of the ruling clergy, who became the most celebrated of all New England Puritans. He combined a mystical strain (he believed in the existence of witchcraft) with a modern scientific interest. Cotton Mather, grandson of the Reverend John Cotton, scholar, acclaimed orthodox Puritan clergyman, and author was the oldest son of Increase Mather, one of the leading figures in the Puritan theocracy in Massachusetts. Enrolled in Harvard College at 12, he graduated at 15 years old. At 18, he received his M.A degree. Unfit for preaching, due to his stammering, he opted to study medicine. Years later, he overcame his speech disorder to become the apprentice to his father at the Second Church, Boston. Ordained in 1685, he remained in the service of the Second Church for the rest of his life. His life was seeped into the radical practices of Puritanism. Engaged into writing, his published works (around 400) include sermons, essays and books.

Despite being a well-known Puritan clergyman of Colonial New England, Mather was disillusioned with predominantly two of his failures: to become president of Harvard and to bring New England back in religious matters to the first halcyon days of the colony.

Mather witnessed the decline of Puritan theocracy, whereby his 'fantastic' religious truth did not help him. He devoted his life for praying, preaching, writing and publishing and still followed his main purpose in life of doing good. Cotton published more than 400 works. An apostle of altruism, he wrote "Essays to do Good" (1710), a powerful influence on the life of Benjamin Franklin instructs others in humanitarian acts, some ideas being far ahead of his time; the schoolmaster to reward instead of punishment and the physician to study the state of mind of the patient as a cause of illness. His magnum opus, *The Magnalia*, published in 1702, 2 years after Dryden's demise, is "prose epic of New England Puritanism," and considered to be the most famous of Mather's multiple grand works. It is a 'large folio volume' entitled *Magnalia Christi Americana: or the Ecclesiastical History of New England*. His *Manuductio ad Ministerium* was a handbook of advice for young graduates to the ministry: on doing good, college love affairs, on poetry and music and on style.

Mather's interest in Science particularly in various American phenomena urged him to publish *Curiosa Americana*. Mather's interest in science and particularly in various American phenomena—published in his *Curiosa Americana* (1712–24)—won him membership in the Royal Society of London. His *Christian Philosopher* (1721) recognizes God in the wonders of the earth and the universe beyond; it is both philosophical and scientific and, ironically, anticipates 18th-century Deism, despite his clinging to the old order.

1.4.3 Nathaniel Ward (C.1578-1652)

Nathaniel Ward was a puritan clergyman and a pamphleteer in England in Massachusetts. English-born Congregational clergy man, emigrated to Massachusetts (1634) where he served as minister (1634–36) at Aggawam (now Ipswich). Nathaniel Ward drafted the first Law Code of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, entitled “The Body of Liberties” (1641), which is a pioneering Law Code in the American constitutional history as well as ‘a milestone in the American tradition of liberty’. Ward depended on the English common law, the Magna Carta, and the Bible to draft this first code. It contained nearly one hundred sections and was based on Cotton’s earlier draft.

Ward’s well-acclaimed work is *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam* (1647), in America “willing,” as the sub-title continues, “to help mend his native country, lamentably tattered, both in the upper leather and sole, with all the honest stitches he can take”, is a “crotchety and amusing satirical blast against religious toleration” and other matters of annoyance to him. Ward also wrote commendatory verse prefixed to the poems of Anne Bradstreet, and published in his own book. “Satan is now in his passions, he feels his passion approaching, he loves to fish in roiled waters. Though that dragon cannot sting the vitals of the elect mortally, yet that Beelzebub can fly-blow their intellectuals miserably.” Ward is often a bitter satirist, a “colonial Carlyle”, as this attack on woman shows:

I honour the woman that can honour herself with her attire; a good text always deserves a fair margent; I am not much offended if I see a trim far trimmer than she that wears it. In a word, whatever Christianity or civility will allow, I can afford with London measure: but when I hear a nugiperous gentle dame inquire what dress the Queen is in this week: what the nudiustertian fashion of the Court; I mean the very newest; with egg to be in it in all haste, whatever it be; I look at her as the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of a quarter of a cipher, the epitome of nothing, fitter to be kicked, if she were of a kickable substance, than either honoured or humoured.

In criticism, Ward deserves to be remembered for these two lines: “Poetry’s a gift wherein but few excel;/ He doth very ill that doth not passing well.”

1.4.4 Samuel Sewall (1652-1730)

Born in 1652 at Bishopstoke, Hampshire, England, Samuel Sewall was only a boy when he sailed for New England at nine years old. Later he became America’s greatest “colonial diarist”. Samuel Sewall graduated from Harvard in 1671 to become the chief justice of Massachusetts. His Diary runs with some breaks from 1673 to 1729, the year before his death. Samuel Sewall’s Diary became a ‘mine of wealth to the future writers of American literature, to dramatists, novelists, poets, as well as to historians. The “early chronicles and stories on which Shakespeare founded many of his plays were no more serviceable to him than this Diary” may prove to a coming American writer with a genius like Hawthorne’s.

In Sewall’s Diary, one at once feel that one is close to life. The following entry brings one face to face with the children in a Puritan household:

Nov. 6, 1692. Joseph threw a knop of brass and hit his sister Betty on the forehead so as to make it bleed and swell; upon which, and for his playing at Prayer-time, and eating when we return thanks, I whipped him pretty smartly. When I first went in (called by his Grandmother) he sought to shadow and hide himself from me behind the head of the cradle: which gave me the sorrowful remembrance of Adam's carriage.

Sewall's Diary is best known for its faithful chronicle of his courtship of Mrs. Catharine Winthrop. No record of any other Puritan courtship so unique as this has been given to the world. He began his formal courtship of Mrs. Winthrop, October 1, 1720. His Diary contains records of each visit, of what they said to each other, of the Sermons, cake, and gingerbread that he gave her, of the health that he drank to her, the lump of sugar that she gave him, of how they "went into the best room, and clos'd the shutters."

The major sections of his Diary contain only the "raw materials of literature", yet some of "it is real literature, and it ranks among the great diaries of the world". Sewall records the early anti slavery events and history in his writings.

1.4.5 Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards, (who ranks among the world's greatest theologians and metaphysicians), was born in 1703 in East Windsor, Connecticut. Similarly as Cotton Mather, Edwards was "precocious, entering Yale before he was thirteen". At the age of 12, he wrote a research paper on spiders "showing careful scientific observation and argument". His paper was claimed as "one of the rarest specimens of precocious scientific genius on record." At fourteen, he was proficient with Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, receiving from it, he says, higher pleasure "than the most greedy miser finds when gathering up handfuls of silver and gold from some newly discovered treasure." Before he was seventeen, he had graduated from Yale, and at 21, he was already a teacher.

Like Dante, he had his Beatrice. Thinking of her, he wrote this *Prose Hymn of a Maiden's Love for the Divine Power*:

They say there is a young lady in New Haven who is beloved of that great Being who made and rules the world, and there are certain seasons in which this great Being, in some way or other invisible, comes to her and fills her mind with exceeding sweet delight, and that she hardly cares for anything except to meditate on Him, that she expects after a while to be received up where He is, to be raised up out of the world and caught up into heaven, being assured that He loves her too well to let her remain at a distance from Him always. She will sometimes go about from place to place singing sweetly, and seems to be always full of joy and pleasure, and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have some one invisible always conversing with her."

Jonathan Edwards was mesmerised by Sarah Pierrepont, the New England Puritan maiden. To understand the striking similarity of thought between the Old Puritan England and the New, it is important to understand the maiden in Milton's *Comus*:

"A thousand liveried angels lackey her,

Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
Till all be made immortal."

Unlike Dante, Edwards married his Beatrice at the age of seventeen and in 1727, became pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts. With his wife, he inaugurated the greatest "religious revival of the century", known as the "Great Awakening," which spread to other colonial churches, crossed the ocean, and stimulated Wesley to call sinners to repentance.

As a writer, Jonathan Edwards won fame in three fields. He is (1) America's greatest metaphysician, (2) her greatest theologian, and (3) a unique poetic interpreter of the universe as a manifestation of the divine love. He is best known for *The Freedom of the Will* (1754). His Treatise concerning the Religious Affections, his account of the Great Awakening, called Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God, and Thoughts on the Revival, as well as his more distinctly technical theological works, show his ability in this field. He was a theological idealist, believing that all the varied phenomena of the universe are "constantly proceeding from God, as light from the sun." Such statements suggest Shelley's lines, which tell how "... the one Spirit's plastic stress/ Sweeps through the dull dense world compelling there/ All new successions to the forms they wear."

Dr. Allen, Edwards's biographer and critic, and a careful student of his unpublished, as well as of his published, writings, says, "He was at his best and greatest, most original and creative, when he described the divine love." Such passages as the following show this quality: "When we behold the fragrant rose and lily, we see His love and purity./ So the green trees and fields and singing of birds are the emanations of/ His infinite joy and benignity. The easiness and naturalness of trees and/ vines are shadows of His beauty and loveliness." His favorite text was "I am the Rose of Sharon and the Lily of the valleys," and his favorite words were "sweet and bright." He died on 1758.

1.5 LET'S SUM UP

Early America poetic writing began as a "literary art during the colonial era". It is neither surprising nor shocking to understand that the early American poetry took birth in the colonies in the then Puritan New England. The Colonial American Poetry is unflinchingly influenced by the British models and Puritanism reflected in the poetic structure, diction and thematic development. Subsequently, given the heavy impact of British poetic writing on New England's Poetry, the latter undeniably reflects the systematic progress in the colonies. The early poetry is dominated by the need to preserve the integrity of the Puritan ideals that created the settlements.

As the colonists grew in confidence, the poetry they wrote increasingly reflected their drive towards independence. This writing flair can be seen as “a product of the physical remove at which American poets operated from the centre of English-language poetic developments in London”.

American Poetry was valiantly a reproduction of the mostly the Puritan clergy who wrote within the orthodoxy of the practice. Touching upon various subjects like love, religion, God, puritan values among others, it reflected the Puritan psyche which got imprinted in the poetic nerve. The New England colonists sailed and settled in America because of “religious feeling”. The greatest lesson taught by colonial literature, by men and women like Edward Taylor, Philip Freneau and Anne Bradstreet, among many other contributing poets within the colonial America, and the New England clergy in general, is “moral heroism, the determination to follow the shining path of the Eternal over the wave and through the forest to a new temple of human liberty”. Their aspiration, endeavor, suffering, accomplishment, should strengthen our faith in the worth of those spiritual realities which are not quoted in the markets of the world, but which alone possess imperishable value.

1.6 GLOSSARY

Quaternion: a poetry style in which the theme is divided into four parts.

Puritanism: the beliefs or principles of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship.

Metaphysician: an expert in or student of the branch of philosophy that deals with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being and knowing.

Clergy: the body of all people ordained for religious duties, especially in the Christian Church.

Post factum: occurring after the fact.

Anti Papist: a religious orientation opposed to Catholicism.

Iroquois: A member of a Native American confederacy, known as the Iroquois League or the Iroquois Confederacy, inhabiting New York State and originally composed of the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca peoples, known as the Five Nations. After 1722 the confederacy was joined by the Tuscaroras to form the Six Nations.

1.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What is colonial timeline in America?

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2. Write short note on the importance of poetry in the colonial era.

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3. Name the key American poets in the colonial America.

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4. Trace the history of colonialism in America.

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5. Write in detail about colonialism in America.

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6. Write about the significant movements of the era.

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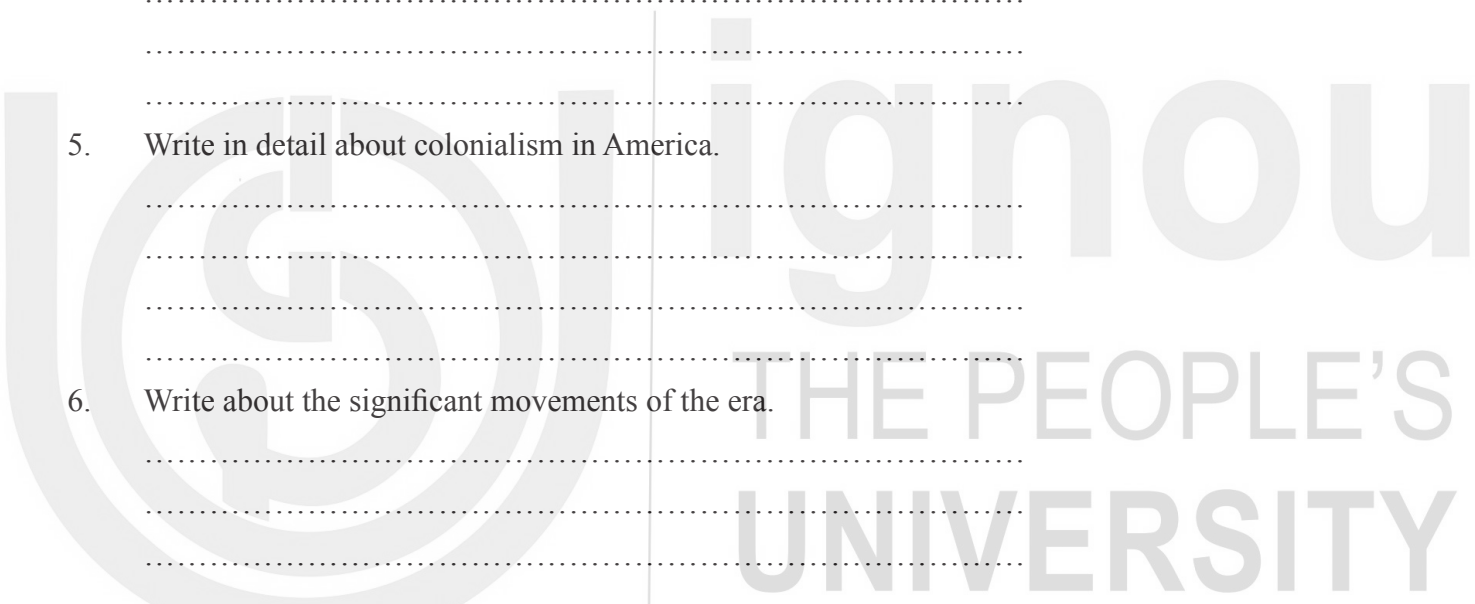
7. Enumerate briefly on the Revolutionary war and the Treaty of paris.

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8. Write short notes on:

- a. American spirit
- b. Puritan spirit

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9. Write in detail about English colonial expansion.

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10. Write short notes on:

- a. Anne Bradstreet
- b. Philip Freneau
- c. Samuel Sewall
- d. Jonathan Edwards

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1.8 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2: CONTEXTUALIZING AMERICAN POETRY: POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.1.1 American Literature
 - 2.1.2 American Poetry
- 2.2 History of American Poetry down the Ages
 - 2.2.1 Colonial period
 - 2.2.2 Post-colonial Period
 - 2.2.3 Modernist Period
 - 2.2.4 Post-war Period
- 2.3 What is Post-colonialism?
 - 2.3.1 Post-colonialism
 - 2.3.2 Post-colonial theory
 - 2.3.3 Post-colonial poetry
 - 2.3.4 Main characteristics of post-colonial poetry
- 2.4 American Poetry in the Post-colonial Period
 - 2.4.1 Notable American Poets of the Post-colonial Period
- 2.5 Let us sum up
- 2.6 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions
- 2.7 Suggestions for further reading

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to

- recognize what is meant by American literature in terms of its history
- realize the important role of American poetry as a means to trace the key features of the American continent
- understand the important political events and its impact on American literature
- comprehend the diverse stages of development of American poetry
- gain insights into the poetry of notable American poets in the post-colonial period.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 American Literature

American literature comprises the body of written works produced in the English language in the United States. The history of American literature begins with the arrival of English-speaking Europeans in the “new land”.

At first American literature was naturally a colonial literature, by authors who were Englishmen and who thought and wrote as such. Hence, early American writings were in the manner of British writings of the same period. However lately, unique American characteristics and the breadth of its production have led to a distinctive path and tradition, referred as American Literature.

Like other national literatures, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it. For almost a century and a half, America was merely a group of colonies scattered along the eastern seaboard of the North American continent. After a successful rebellion against the motherland, America became the United States, a nation. By the end of the nineteenth century, this nation extended southward to the Gulf of Mexico, northward to the forty-ninth parallel, and westward to the Pacific. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had also taken its place among the powers of the world – its fortunes so interrelated with those of other nations that inevitably it became involved in two world wars and, following these conflicts, with the problems of Europe and East Asia. Meanwhile, the rise of science and industry, as well as changes in ways of thinking and feeling, wrought many modifications in people's lives. All these factors in the development of the United States moulded the literature of the country.

2.1.2 American Poetry

American poetry, the poetry of the United States, arose first as efforts by colonists to add their voices to English poetry in the seventeenth century, well before the constitutional unification of the thirteen colonies. Unsurprisingly, most of the early colonists' work relied on contemporary British models for poetic form, diction, and theme. However, in the nineteenth century, a distinctive American idiom began to emerge. By the later part of that century, when Walt Whitman was winning an enthusiastic audience abroad, poets from the United States had begun to take their place at the forefront of the English-language *avant-garde* [*avant-garde* are people or works that are experimental, radical, or unorthodox with respect to art, culture, or society]. According to *The Princeton Handbook of Multicultural Poetries*, "The often-idiosyncratic strength, boldness, and ambition of American poetry derive from two interrelated factors: its problematic and often marginalised relation to American society, and the lack of a defined and established literary class, culture, and audience" (Brogan 23).

The history of American poetry can be traced back to the colonial times. There was no written literature among the more than five hundred different Indian languages and tribal cultures that existed in North America before the first Europeans arrived. Much of the American poetry published between 1910 and 1945 remains lost in the pages of small circulation political periodicals, and later destroyed by librarians during the 1950s McCarthy era. The received narrative of Modernism proposes that Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot were perhaps the most influential modernist English-language poets in the period during World War I. But this narrative leaves out African American and women poets who were published and read widely in the first half of the twentieth century. By the 1960s, the young poets of the British Poetry Revival looked to their American contemporaries and predecessors

as models for the kind of poetry they wanted to write. Toward the end of the millennium, consideration of American poetry had diversified, as scholars placed an increased emphasis on poetry by women, African Americans, Hispanics, Chicanos and other cultural groupings.

2.2 HISTORY OF AMERICAN POETRY DOWN THE AGES

American poetry, as per general critical consensus, can be studied under four distinct phases, namely, the Colonial Period, Post-colonial Period, Modernist Poetry (1900-1945) and the Post-War Period.

2.2.1 Colonial Period

The Colonial Period did not see very many poets of significant ability or accomplishment. Most of the writing in early colonial America was prose. It consisted of sermons, spiritual journals, treatises, accounts of voyages, tracts and letters in the seventeenth century. As England's contact with the Americans increased after the 1490s, explorers sometimes included verse with their descriptions of the "New World" up through 1650. There were few achievements in drama or fiction, since there was a widespread prejudice against these forms. With regard to the themes discussed, there were conflicting ideas among writers. Some writers of the period acknowledged British allegiance, but others stressed the differences of opinion that spurred the colonists to leave their homeland.

The poetry of the Colonial Period was, expectedly enough, imitative. The eighteenth century saw an increasing emphasis on America itself as fit subject matter for its poets. "The question of literary nationalism – i.e., of whether American poetry was or ought to be original or derivative, part of the European (and particularly the English) tradition or a native development with the power of its rudeness—did not become urgent until the professionalization of literature in the second quarter of the 19th century" (Brogan 24-5). The early poetry is dominated by the need to preserve the integrity of the Puritan ideals that created the settlement in the first place. As the colonists grew in confidence, the poetry they wrote increasingly reflected their drive towards independence. This shift in subject matter can be seen as a product of the physical remove at which American poets operated from the centre of English-language poetic developments in London.

2.2.2 Post-colonial Period

After the American Revolution, and increasingly after the War of 1812, American writers were exhorted to produce a literature that was truly native. As if in response, four authors of very respectable stature appeared. William Cullen Bryant, Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Edgar Allan Poe initiated a great half century of literary development. Bryant, a New Englander by birth, attracted attention when the first version of his poem *Thanatopsis* (1817) appeared. This, as well as some later poems, was written under the influence of English eighteenth-century poets. Still later, however, under the influence of Wordsworth and other Romantics, he wrote nature lyrics that vividly represented the New England scene.

Other notable poets to emerge in the early and middle nineteenth century include Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894), Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), James Russell Lowell (1819-1891), Sidney Lanier (1842-1881), and James Whitcomb Riley (1849-1916). As might be expected, the works of these writers are united by a common search for a distinctive American voice to distinguish them from their British counterparts. To this end, they explored the landscape and traditions of their native country as materials for their poetry.

The most significant example of this tendency may be *The Song of Hiawatha* by Longfellow. This poem uses Native American tales collected by Henry Rowe Schoolcraft, who was superintendent of Indian affairs for Michigan from 1836 to 1841. Longfellow also imitated the meter of the Finnish epic poem *Kalevala*, possibly to avoid British models. The resulting poem, while a popular success, did not provide a model for future U.S. poets. Oliver Holmes, in occasional poems and his “Breakfast Table” series (1858-91), brought touches of urbanity to a perhaps over sober polite literature. Lowell, in poems descriptive of the out-of-doors in America, put much of his homeland into verse. His odes – particularly the *Harvard Commemoration Ode* (1865) – gave fine expression to noble sentiments.

Greenleaf Whittier’s simple but emotional poems on behalf of abolition were collected in such volumes as *Poems Written during the Progress of the Abolition Question* (1837), *Voices of Freedom* (1846), and *Songs of Labour and Other Poems* (1850). Edgar Allan Poe was probably the most recognized American poet during this period. Diverse authors in France, Sweden and Russia were heavily influenced by his works. His poem *The Raven* swept across Europe, and was translated into many languages. In the twentieth century, the American poet William Carlos Williams said of Poe that he is the only solid ground on which American poetry is anchored.

The influence of transcendentalism was another factor that distinguished the American poets from their British contemporaries. Transcendentalism was the distinctly American strain of English Romanticism that began with William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Emerson, one of the founders of transcendentalism, had visited England as a young man to meet these two English poets, as well as Thomas Carlyle. While Romanticism transitioned into Victorianism in post-reform England, it grew more energetic in America from the 1830s through to the Civil War.

Emerson’s *Essays* (1841-44), *Representative Men* (1850), and *English Traits* (1856) were thoughtful and poetic explanations of his beliefs; and his rough-hewn lyrics, packed with thought and feeling were as close to seventeenth-century metaphysical poems as any produced in his own time. An associate of Emerson with a salty personality of his own and an individual way of thinking, Henry David Thoreau was closer to the earthy and the practical than even Emerson was. His *Walden* was a record of his experiences and ponderings during the time he lived in a hut by Walden Pond – a defense of his belief that modern man should simplify his demands if need be to “suck out all the marrow of life.”

Inspired by the Romantic concept of a poet as prophet and also by the transcendental philosophy of Emerson, Whitman in 1855 published the first edition of *Leaves of Grass*. This autobiography in verse was intended to show the ideas, beliefs, emotions and experiences of the common man in a great period of American individualism. Whitman had a hard time winning a following because he was frank and unconventional in his Transcendental thinking, because he used free verse rather than rhymed or regularly metred verse and because, his poems were not conventionally organized. Nevertheless, he steadily gained the approval of critics and in time came to be recognized as one of the great poets of America.

The later nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century were a poor period for American poetry; yet two poets of distinction wrote songs that survived long after scores of minor poets had been forgotten. One was Southern-born Sidney Lanier, a talented musician who utilized the rhythms of music and the thematic developments of symphonies in such fine songs as *Corn* (1875), *The Symphony* (1875), and *The Marshes of Glynn* (1878). Distressed, like many of his contemporaries, by changes in American life, he wove his doubts, fears, and suggestions into his richest poems.

The other poet was a New Englander, Emily Dickinson. A shy, playful and an odd personality, she allowed practically none of her writings to be published during her lifetime. Not until 1890, four years after her death, was the first book of her poems published, to be followed at intervals by other collections. Later poets were to be influenced by her individual techniques – use of imperfect rhymes, avoidance of regular rhythms, and a tendency to pack brief stanzas with cryptic meanings. Like Lanier, she rediscovered the value of conceits for setting forth her thoughts and feelings. Such poems as *The Snake*, *I Like to See It Lap the Miles*, *The Chariot*, *Farther in Summer than the Birds*, and *There's a Certain Slant of Light* represented her unusual talent at its best.

2.2.3 Modernist Poetry

Important movements in drama, poetry, fiction, and criticism took shape in the years before, during, and after World War I. The eventful period that followed the war left its imprint upon books of all kinds. Literary forms of the period were extraordinarily varied, and in drama, poetry and fiction the leading authors tended toward radical technical experiments.

The Modernist period in American poetry rightly begins with three major pre-modernists – Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost and John Crowe Ransom. Like their modernist contemporaries, they felt the increasing gravity and precariousness of the human predicament. The human vulnerability was caused and further compounded by a number of factors – the decline of religious belief and metaphysical certitude, the subversion of Enlightenment rationalism and the disappearance of romantic intuition. All this left the unprotected individual at risk in an indifferent universe and an increasingly violent social world. “But the strongly regional conservatism of these three poets made them resist breaking the old forms and reject the formal experimentation that impelled modernism internationally” (Brogan 30). Modernist poetry, thus ranged between traditional types of verse and

experimental writing that departed radically from the established forms of the nineteenth century.

2.2.4 Post – War Period

The literary historian Malcolm Cowley described the years between the two world wars as a “second flowering” of American writing. Certainly, American literature attained a new maturity and a rich diversity in the 1920s and 1930s, and significant works by several major figures from those decades were published after 1945. Faulkner, Hemingway, Steinbeck and Katherine Anne Porter wrote memorable fiction, though not up to their pre-war standard; and Frost, Eliot, Wallace Stevens, Marianne Moore, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, and Gwendolyn Brooks published important poetry. Impressive new novelists, poets and playwrights emerged after the war. There was, in fact, a gradual changing of the guard. Not only did a new generation come out of the war, but its ethnic, regional and social character was quite different from that of the preceding one.

The post-World War II years produced an abundance of strong poetry but no individual poet as dominant and accomplished as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Wallace Stevens, Robert Frost, or William Carlos Williams, whose long careers were coming to an end. The major poetry from 1945 to 1960 was Modernist in its ironic texture yet formal in its insistence on regular rhyme and metre. Beginning in the late 1950s, however, there were a variety of poets and schools, who rebelled against these constraints and experimented with more-open forms and more-colloquial styles.

2.3 WHAT IS POSTCOLONIALISM?

2.3.1 Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism is the historical period or state of affairs representing the aftermath of Western colonialism; the term can also be used to describe the concurrent project to reclaim and rethink the history and agency of people subordinated under various forms of imperialism. Postcolonial literature is the literature by people from formerly colonized countries. It exists in all continents except Antarctica. Postcolonial literature addresses the problems and promises of decolonization, the process of non-western countries in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean becoming independent from western control. It is the literature of people trying to reclaim their freedom and their new identities after struggling for independence.

Some of the themes of postcolonial literature include re-asserting the identity of the indigenous culture, revisiting and revising colonial history, and providing fuller descriptions of the people created by colonialism and the way in which their lives reflect both cultures. Many postcolonial authors also use hybrid dialects to reflect the intertwining of western and non-western languages.

2.3.2 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory is a theoretical approach to analyze the literature produced in countries that were once colonies, especially of European powers such as Britain, France, and Spain. Postcolonial theory also looks

at the broader interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized by dealing with issues such as identity (including gender, race, and class), language, representation and history. Because native languages and culture were replaced or superseded by European traditions in colonial societies, part of the post colonialist project is reclamation. Acknowledging the effect of colonialism's aftermath—its language, discourse and cultural institutions—has led to an emphasis on hybridity, or the mingling of cultural signs and practices between colonizer and colonized. The Palestinian American cultural critic Edward Said was a major figure of postcolonial thought, and his book *Orientalism* is often credited as its founding text. Other important postcolonial critics include Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Frantz Fanon.

Postcolonial theorists and historians have been concerned with investigating the various trajectories of modernity as understood and experienced from a range of philosophical, cultural and historical perspectives. Typically, the proponents of the theory examine the ways in which writers from colonized countries attempt to articulate and even celebrate their cultural identities and reclaim them from the colonizers. They also examine the ways in which the literature of the colonial powers is used to justify colonialism through the perpetuation of images of the colonized as inferior. However, attempts are coming up with a single definition of postcolonial theory have proved controversial, and some writers have strongly critiqued the whole concept.

2.3.3 Post-colonial Poetry

'Postcolonial poetry' means poetry written by non-European people in the shadow of colonialism, both after independence and in the immediate period leading up to it, particularly works that engage, however obliquely, issues of living in the interstices between Western colonialism and non-European cultures.

Decolonization has been a primary paradigm for conceptualizing postcolonial poetry, as made possible by critical works such as Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Chinweizu, Onwuchekwu Jemie and Ihechukwu Madibuike's *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (1980), Kamau Brathwaite's *History of the Voice* (1984), and Robert Young's *Postcolonialism* (2001). Decolonization movements swept across much of Asia, Africa, Oceania, the Caribbean and elsewhere, particularly from the time of Indian and Pakistani independence in 1947 through the 1970s, the period when British, French, Belgian, Portuguese, Italian, Spanish and other modern European colonial powers relinquished control over most of the earth's surface.

2.3.4 Main characteristics of Post-colonial Poetry

- Appropriation of Colonial Languages
- Use of metanarratives
- Interacting with the traditional colonial discourse
- Critical look at imperialism and its legacy
- Reclaiming the past
- Rewriting history

- Decolonization struggles
- Nationhood and nationalism
- Searching for cultural and personal identity
- Challenging stereotypes
- Counter-discourse
- Self-reflection
- Style often ironic
- Approach eclectic(free), political and egalitarian (equal)

2.4 AMERICAN POETRY IN THE POST-COLONIAL PERIOD

The emphasis on an authentically American literature entered the socio-cultural consciousness of the nation in the first few decades of the 1800's. While Romanticism had displaced Classicism in England and had become the dominant tradition, American Romanticism began somewhere in the 1820's (Romantic Period). At first sight, it might seem like American poetry had betrayed its intention towards originality but their brand of Romanticism was born with the spirit of a newly-independent nation. The group of poets from Concord in New England that emerged as the embodiment of Romanticism in America called themselves the Transcendentalists. It was this group of poets that took it upon themselves to define American poetry.

2.4.1 Notable American Poets of the Post-Colonial Period

William Cullen Bryant

While scanning the inflow and development of the Nineteenth-Century Romanticism in American poetry, it is undeniable that William Cullen Bryant brought the first stirrings of romanticism to American poetry. "The transition from his grandfather's Federalist Calvinism to his father's Unitarianism to his own career as a nature poet and a liberal reformer sums up the declension of New England intellectual and religious life" (Brogan 25). Bryant wrote a poem entitled *Thanatopsis*— a stoic meditation on human mortality in the round of nature — at the age of 17. Despite his intense involvement in the worlds of journalism and public activism, he continued to publish poetry. It is noteworthy that Bryant became known as the "American Wordsworth". For him, however, the various aspects of nature were not exactly the manifestation of the Power that rolls through all things as a soothing, healing haven from the stresses of secular, urban living. Seen more objectively, Bryant was more of an eighteenth-century meditative precursor to the American Romantics than being a visionary poet in his own right.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson marks the real watershed of American poetry and went on to become the prophet of Transcendentalism. After resigning from his Unitarian pulpit in Boston, Emerson immersed himself in English and German Romanticism and brought forth his manifesto *Nature* in 1836. "The 'Sage of Concord' assimilated Neoplatonism, German idealism,

and Oriental mysticism into a Yankee conviction that individuals who trusted their powers of intuitive insight (which he called transcendental Reason) would discover in their own experience, rather than in doctrines or institutions, their harmony with nature and with the Oversoul immanent in nature” (Brogan 25).

In just one phrase — philosopher as poet, poet as seer and seer as sayer — Emerson enunciated such a powerful American poetics that both contemporaries and succeeding generations have had to contend with it either by affirmation, qualification or denial. The axioms which Emerson laid down in *Nature* postulated an intrinsic correspondence among words, things and absolute truth. As per these axioms, words are the signs of natural facts. Particular natural facts are symbols of particular spiritual facts and nature is symbol of Spirit. Indeed, there is a clear line of continuity from the Puritan theologian Jonathan Edwards’ declaration that the material and natural world is typical of the moral and spiritual world on to Emerson’s axioms.

For Emerson, a poet is the receptive and expressive medium of the Spirit in nature who has the power to receive and impart his typological experience. “But Emerson’s unchurched experience of types rested not on the certitude of Scripture and doctrine but on the instabilities of subjective experience” (Brogan 26). In Emerson’s view, the individual is his/her world. It is significant to note that Emerson did not keep any strict distinction between types and tropes; in fact, he used the two terms almost interchangeably. Thus, that individualizing and psychologizing of experience, which is the essence of romanticism, and which was itself a result of the general decline of theological and philosophical assurance in the West and of Puritanism in the U.S., served to undermine the distinction between types and tropes. (Brogan 26)

What got Emerson the maximum response from the public was his call to believe in the infinitude of the private man and his affirmation of the power of imagination to realize its perceptions. He also had immense faith in America’s natural sublimity as the source of a new poetry capable of idealizing American materialism and building a new society. At the same time, Emerson laid a great deal of emphasis on ‘aesthetic of organicism’. He believed that form did not proceed from the technique of following conventional rules and patterns but rather flowed from the impulse of the insight. Thus, in Emerson’s view, “the shape of the poem ought to be the extension of the generative experience into words” (Brogan 26).

Emerson placed forth his Transcendentalism in a large number of poems. He himself acknowledged that his poems did not sufficiently illustrate the ideals he had proposed and admitted that his best poetry was in his prose. Nevertheless, his verbal directness, rhythmic roughness, irregularity and freshness anticipate the revolution in form and expression which Whitman, Dickinson and other poets propelled and fuelled later.

Henry David Thoreau

Surprisingly, Emerson drew many disciples. Foremost among them was his Concord neighbour, Henry David Thoreau, a naturalist, thinker and a student of literature. Thoreau took Emerson’s teaching to heart and lived

by it. He is known for his fresh, vigorous prose. He gave an account of his two-year sojourn at Walden Pond in his masterpiece entitled *Walden or Life in the Woods*, published in 1854. Thoreau also converted Emersonian self-reliance into a workable formula for opposing the power of government in his well-known essay “Civil Disobedience”.

Edgar Allan Poe

A contemporary of Emerson’s but fiercely opposed to his Transcendentalism was Edgar Allan Poe. A Southerner by defiant choice and a poet by aspiration, Poe struggled to support himself through journalism, writing short stories and the voluminous reviews which have made him the first American critic of stature. “A Southern strain of Calvinism not only disposed Poe to the Gothic but disabused him of the Transcendentalists’ claims” (Brogan 26). In his “The Philosophy of Composition” Poe explicated his own poem *The Raven* as a rational construction from an irrational narrative. In fact, “The Philosophy of Composition” mounted a withering attack on the presupposition of ecstatic inspiration in the poetry of the Transcendentalists. Through another essay called “The Poetic Principle”, Poe dismissed didacticism and its heretical beliefs and defined poetry as the rhythmical creation of beauty. He concluded this essay by claiming that a poem is a poem and nothing more and it is written solely for the poem’s sake.

Walt Whitman

Among the stalwarts of nineteenth-century American Romanticism, Walt Whitman was undoubtedly at the forefront. Whitman brought forth an immensely far-reaching revolution in American poetry, both in content and form. As a poet, he sublimated his anxieties into an ideal of a joyous soul in a robust body. He acknowledged to a friend that he had steeped himself in Emerson. He reminisced that he had been simmering for a long while and finally Emerson brought him to the boil. Expectedly, the poems that surged up were radical in technique and content. “Out of Emerson’s call for organic form, Whitman distilled, from translations of the Old Testament and Homer and operatic arias and recitativo, a revolution in verse technique that came to be called free verse: lines irregular in length and stresses, patterned not by metre or rhyme but by repetition of phrase and rhythm” (Brogan 27). Partly inspired by Emerson’s call for an American seer-prophet, Whitman devised the persona whose colloquial, expansive and often exclamatory voice struck a different relative attitude towards God and the objective universe. The persona, by virtue of reflection, confession and assumption, exhibited a changed attitude of the ego towards himself and his fellow human beings. It is often rightly claimed about Whitman that he was large and sought to contain multitudes — the city, countryside, the people and places of America — in himself. The very opening lines of *Song of Myself*— Whitman’s epic of a democratic individual’s consciousness — strike this expansive note right from its beginning.

Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* appeared in a large book designed and printed by the poet in 1855. It contained 12 untitled poems wherein the first and the longest poem, of 43 pages occupying half the book, was *Song of Myself*. The Preface to this work identified the author as the American bard that Emerson had anticipated. Expectedly enough, Emerson responded immediately with

rhapsodic praise and, with this, Whitman's vocation as a poet got confirmed. In the very next year, Whitman brought out the second edition of *Leaves of Grass* containing 56 poems including the famous *Crossing Brooklyn Ferry*.

Whitman continued to emphasise the body as much as the soul and identified the life-force with sexual urge. Maintaining his self-reliance and independence, he devoted his life to the organic expansion of *Leaves of Grass* through a succession of editions. He revised the old poems as he added the new ones, simultaneously reordering the sequence and groupings. By 1867 or so, the best poetry of Whitman had already been written. However, he wrote voluminously in verse and prose with frequent flashes of his old power and compassion. Despite his admirers and disciples, Whitman failed to gain the wide audience and recognition that he had hoped for as the American bard. Nevertheless, the final Preface entitled *A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads* to the 1888 edition reaffirmed the goals and achievements that he knew had already transformed American poetry.

Emily Dickinson

Although Emily Dickinson hardly ever commented on the poetry of Whitman – her worthy contemporary – the two represent complementary aspects of the American poet emerging from Emerson. While Whitman stood for the democratic projection of the self into nature and the city, Dickinson admirably exemplified the hermetic absorption of the world into the private self. The religion of the Connecticut River Valley where Dickinson grew up was neither Unitarian nor Transcendentalist but still Congregational. She was, however, the only member of the family who did not join the local church. Instead, she committed herself, partly inspired by Emerson, to a different vocation — that of “recording with unwavering attention the interior drama of consciousness” (Brogan 28).

“Adapting the quatrain of the hymnal (and perhaps the sigla of elocution manuals) to her own purposes, Dickinson lines out, not sentence by sentence but word by word, single moments of perception and emotion” (Brogan 28). Each taut, spare poem brings out, with unblinking fidelity, the truth of its moment. The accumulation of her poems charts out the extremes of her experience, namely, love as fulfilment or renunciation, God as present or absent and nature as harmonious or alien.

One of her poems beginning with the line “The loss of something ever felt I” puts forth the first act of consciousness as an experience of radical bereavement. Later, many other poems capture how the individual consciousness seeks completion through its relation to the other – nature, lover, God. Or else, the consciousness focusses on its own integration. It is noteworthy that Dickinson found relation to nature, God or lover rather contingent and less assuredly typological than Emerson.

Most often, the contrasting stanzas in her poems present the alternatives in typically Dickinsonian style – marked by compactness, gnomic phrasing, uncommon rhythms, highly unusual capitalisation and punctuation. The “He” in her love poems seems to be Jesus or a human lover (although the biographical evidence is not conclusive) or the masculine aspect of herself. At times, this “He” subsumes all of these. Dickinson's word “for the ecstatic fulfilment of consciousness in triumphant selfhood was Immortality,

sometimes expressed as a marriage, often one deferred to the next life.” (Brogan 28.) Despite renunciations and reclusive lifestyle, Dickinson experienced momentary intimations of Immortality in the upstairs bedroom which often nourished her with images of her secluded consciousness. The publication of her collected *Poems*, numbering above 1800, in 1955 and her *Letters* in 1958 assured Dickinson an extremely important place as the stellar woman poet among the great American Romantic poets.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Notable among the Massachusetts poets was a small group of Harvard professors known as the Boston Brahmins. Extremely popular among the Boston Brahmins was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow whose popularity rivalled that of Tennyson’s on both sides of the Atlantic. As a Harvard professor, he introduced German literature to American students and translated Dante. His most famous narrative poems are *Evangeline* and *The Song of Hiawatha* — an epic rendering of American Indian legends in tetrameters. Another well-known poem *The Psalm of Life* seeks to tackle human mortality through work ethics. Longfellow’s chief poetic interest lies in lyrics such as *The Jewish Cemetery at Newport* and *The Cross of Snow*.

James Russell Lowell

James Russell Lowell, an equally famous Boston Brahmin, was Longfellow’s successor at Harvard. He was the first editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* and became a very powerful liberal voice in American journalism. In 1848, Lowell published *A Fable for Critics* — “a spoof of contemporary American writers in Popean couplets and outrageous rhymes” (Brogan 29). 1848 also saw the first series of Lowell’s *The Biglow Papers*, “written in a rollicking version of Yankee dialect for a down-home satire on such political issues as slavery and the Mexican War” (Brogan 29). “The Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration” for those who laid down their lives in the American Civil War is indeed the noblest poem of Lowell’s.

John Greenleaf Whittier

The only exception to the Boston Brahmins, among the Household Poets, was John Greenleaf Whittier — who turned his Quaker piety and Abolitionist opposition to slavery into poetry. His *Snow-Bound*, published in 1866, remains a movingly nostalgic idyll of rural New England life. Undeniably, the reputation of the Household Poets, including that of the Boston Brahmins, has diminished with time. Some of them are now regarded as more Victorian than Romantic, prone to moralising sentiment and preferring conventional forms to experimentation.

Sidney Lanier

The extreme musicality of Lanier’s language and the metaphorical straining for a diffuse effect indicate his admiration for Poe. Lanier used his knowledge of music theory and his experience as a symphony flautist to codify Poe’s correlation of music and poetry into strict rules. He based these rules “on the assumption that the metrical foot, like the musical bar, was governed not just by pattern of stress but by syllabic duration” (Brogan 29). His poems entitled *The Marshes of Glynn* and *Sunrise* express the last gasp of romantic

typology, celebrating the dying of the individual back into the sublimity of nature and nature's God.

Other poets

“The contrast between Sidney Lanier and Stephen Crane illustrates the exhaustion of romanticism in American poetry” (Brogan 29). In contradiction to Lanier's poetry, Crane's terse, irregular verse extends the anti-romantic naturalism of his fiction. Besides, Crane wrote his poems in response to the angularity of Dickinson's newly-published poems at that time.

To round off the description of Post-colonial American poetry, a few poets from the end of the century deserve to be mentioned. Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Bayard Taylor were the genteel New York bohemians who were in search of the Ideal. The Harvard Aesthetes included George Santayana, Trumbull Stickney and William Vaughn Moody. James Whitcomb Riley was the Hoosier Poet of sentimental dialect poems. Paul Laurence Dunbar, son of Kentucky slaves, wrote conventional lyrics as well as dialect poems of plantation life. Lizette Woodworth Reese, the Baltimore school teacher, wrote poems on nature and death in clean, direct lines that marked quite a departure from the overly sentimental poetry of Lydia Sigoumey and her sisters. Joaquin Miller's *Songs of the Sierras* published in 1871 earned him the epithet of being the swaggering bard of the Far West.

The above-mentioned poets are, however, decidedly minor figures. “The romantic ideology which had made for the energy and experimentation of the middle years of the century had played itself out. American culture needed the jolt of a new ideology — modernism — to galvanize a generation of poets whose achievement rivals that of the English Renaissance” (Brogan 29).

2.5 LET'S SUM UP

American poetry witnessed a shift from a generic optimistic tone during the time of the Puritans and Whitman, to a dystopian dismissal in the modernist period that has persisted ever since. This shift coincided with the shift of America from an agricultural land to an industrialised pioneer of Capitalism. This generic shift also alludes to the constant engagement of the American poet with his surroundings and with social commentary. Apart from this, the most fundamental commonality is the perennial self-reflection and self-modification of American poetry, generation after generation. Whitman, Pound, Eliot, Williams, and Frost are all trying to break-away from what are 'traditional' modes for their generations, but innovative modes for their ancestors. The question of whether or not they succeeded is irrelevant, for there remains the simple commonality of 'breaking away'. From the beginning, the American identity was synthesised in opposition to the British, and American poetry pays testament to that facticity. What is worth noting in particular is the conscious attempt to break away; the conscious rigour of self-creation. The exceptions to this tendency like Plath, Dickinson and Sexton developed their own forms emanating from the person within and in that sense, were least susceptible to mimicry through conscious opposition. The American tradition of poetry has also, at all times, seen the mentorship of one poet or another, protracting the newfound

ideas of his generation onto the next. Whitman, Pound, Stein, Williams and Robert Lowell are prime examples. Through the active engagement of these poets, the American poetic tradition has acquired a continuity that it would otherwise be bereft of.

2.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Name some notable poets of the early and middle nineteenth century.

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2. Write short note on modernist poetry.

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3. What is Transcendentalism?

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4. Write about poetry in the post-war period II.

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5. What is post-colonialism?

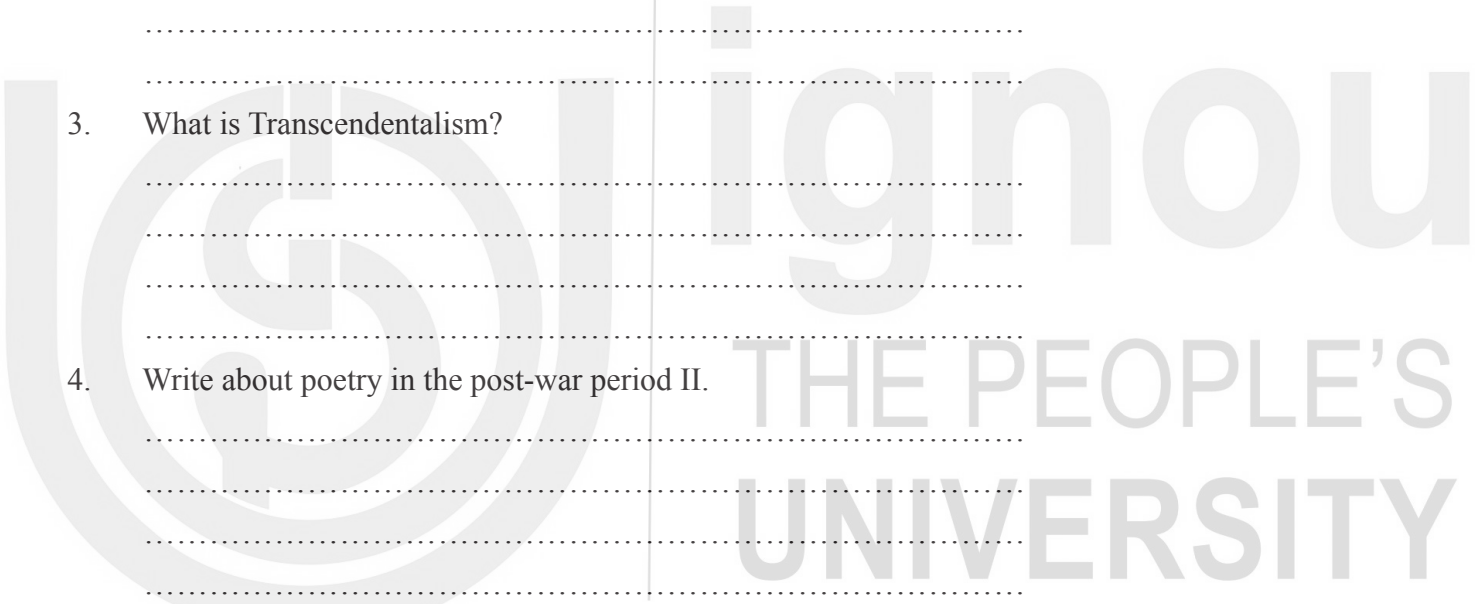
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6. Write note on postcolonial theory.

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7. What are the characteristics of postcolonial poetry?

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8. Name some prominent poets in the postcolonial period.

9. Enumerate in detail about American poetry in the postcolonial era.

10. Write briefly on:

- a. Emerson
- b. Whitman
- c. Emily Dickinson
- d. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

2.7 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3: CONTEXTUALIZING AMERICAN POETRY: MODERN PERIOD

Structure

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The Beginning of Modern Literature in America

3.1.2 A General Overview

3.2 Modern American Poetry

3.2.1 Characteristics

3.2.2 American Poetry: A New Age

3.2.3 The Genteel Tradition

3.3 Key Modern American Poets

3.3.1 Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935)

3.3.2 Robert Frost (1874–1963)

3.3.3 Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

3.3.4 Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)

3.3.5 William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)

3.3.6 Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

3.4 Let's Sum Up

3.5 Check your Progress: Possible Questions

3.6 Suggestions for Further Reading

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Grasp the historical and social concepts of modern American Poetry
- Understand the key and contributing poetic texts of the American poets to the canon
- Comprehend the characteristics of American poetry in the Modern Era
- Gain insights into the tradition of Genteel Poets

3.1 INTRODUCTION

3.1.1 The Beginning of Modern Literature in America

American Literature entered into a phase, “The Beginnings of Modern Literature”, between 1914 and 1939. Like the British counterparts, the American Modernists experimented with subject matter, form and style and accomplished themselves in all literary genres. Some well-known American Modernist Poets include Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Edna St. Vincent Millay and E.E. Cumming. Edith Wharton, Sinclair Lewis and Willa Cather are some American Modernist Prose Writers. The American

Modernist Period bear witness to the writers who are considered to be writers of Modernist Period Subclasses. For example, F. Scott Fitzgerald is considered a writer of The Jazz Age, Langston Hughes, and W.E. B. DuBois writers of The Harlem Renaissance, and Gertrud Stein, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Ernest Hemingway as writers of The Lost Generation. The Great Depression marked the end of the American Modernist Period, and writers such as William Faulkner, John Steinbeck, and Eugene O'Neill dealt with the social and political issues of the time in their literary works. 1939 marked the beginning of the Contemporary Period of American Literature. This period includes important American literary figures spanning from World War II into the New Millennium. These writers include, but are not limited to, Eudora Welty, John Updike, Kurt Vonnegut, Sylvia Plath, Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Ralph Ellison, Gwendolyn Brooks, Zora Neal Hurston, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Maya Angelou. During the 1950s, a vigorous anti-establishment and anti-traditional literary movement emerged. The main writers of this movement, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac are called Beat Writers. Much writing of the 1960s and 1970s, referred to as Counterculture Writing, continued the literary ideals of the Beat Movement, but in a more extreme and fevered manner. Currently, the contemporary American literary scene is crowded and varied.

3.1.2 A General Overview

The story of American poetry in the twentieth century began with the dominance of one region and the legacy of one tradition – New England and English Romantic verse. One of the major characteristics of American poetry was its geographical diversity with a wide range of its traditions reflecting the diverse cultural origins of its writers, and their complementary sense of heritage. The scope and richness of twentieth century American poetry rose beyond any selection of authors, texts, or thematic essays that try to encompass it. Claude McKay from Jamaica became an important early figure in the Harlem Renaissance. The London avant-garde poetry scene just before the First World War was virtually taken over by Americans with Ezra Pound, H.D., and T. S. Eliot, who were actively involved in publishing and editorial work, work that stretched across the Atlantic to find an audience in the pages of the little magazines that sprang up in Chicago and New York. Eliot remained in London for most of his career as the dominant poet of his own and arguably the next generation, and wielding an important influence as the editor at the publishing house of Faber & Faber.

In later generations, W. H. Auden, Denise Levertov, and Thom Gunn began their careers in England and took up residence in the United States. A number of critics had pointed to the impact of the famous 1913 Armory Show, which opened in New York, on American poetry – a show that was the first major introduction of modernist painting to the United States. Meanwhile, in London Pound found affinities for a while with such vorticist painters as Wyndham Lewis, while in Paris Gertrude Stein's famous salon was the forerunner of the interest that 1920s writers – and not just expatriates – would have in the work of Picasso, Braque, Matisse, and others. In the 1930s and 1940s surrealism interested a number of American poets, while in the 1950s such writers as John Ashbery and Frank O'Hara were art critics as well as poets, although they were particularly associated with a home-grown avant-

garde movement, abstract expressionism. Some later poets were very much concerned with the visual material that accompanies their poems, or the graphic design of a volume itself. The role of other arts, including drama, the novel, and music, as well as the visual arts, was taken up in the extended essay on “Twentieth-Century American Poetry and the Other Arts”.

The relationship of American poetry to other traditions and cultures, and the increasingly global reach of the United States economically and politically were also the issues that were part of two other extended essays on the long poem and war poetry. American poets had been among the great innovators of the long poem in the century. Long poems of Williams, Pound, H.D., Crane, Hughes, Olson, Ginsberg, Lowell, Merrill and Rich displayed a remarkable range of inventiveness. With such experiment, challenges were raised about whatever principles might be holding such a poem together, and whether their role was to suggest an underlying unity that the more dispersive poem was acting to undermine, or a unity to which the poet and poem sought some kind of return – perhaps a cultural or historical loss, or one associated more specifically with identity. Other long poems, however, might stress the arbitrariness of any such unifying principles, fragmented or not. Such tensions were acted out in various ways in various texts, the net result by the end of the century being a challenge to the assumed characteristics of the whole genre itself.

3.2 MODERN AMERICAN POETRY

3.2.1 Characteristics

- a) Emergence of free verse
- b) Untraditional forms
- c) Disillusionment and the preoccupation with perception, and how to cope with a fragmented reality
- d) Individualistic voice- establishment of a distinctive American Voice
- e) Spirit of non-conformity
- f) New narrative techniques
- g) Polyphonic themes - no monolithic meaning

3.2.1 American Poetry: A New Age

An era in American poetry came to a close with the death of Walt Whitman and John Greenleaf Whittier in 1892. Practically, the entire generation which defined American poetry in the latter half of the nineteenth century, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and James Russell Lowell had passed away in the preceding decade. Though the major American poets of the nineteenth century had departed, the first important generation of twentieth-century poets was still far from its maturity. Edwin Arlington Robinson was an undergraduate student at Harvard, four years away from publishing his first book of verse; Robert Frost was two years away from his first published poem and over two decades from his first volume; and Wallace Stevens was a thirteen-year-old schoolboy, three decades from the publication of his first book.

A dark age for American poetry began in 1880 and continued till 1910. When the novels of Mark Twain, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Theodore Dreiser, Stephen Crane, and Edith Wharton established the undeniable importance of American fiction, poetry was pushed to the margins of the literary world. The modern poets, unable to compete with novelists in terms of popularity, and not willing to risk moving beyond the familiar models of nineteenth-century verse, settled for an uncontroversial mediocrity of idea, form and rhetoric. Ezra Pound harshly critiqued the era as a time of “pseudo-artists” working under a stultifying system of control by the major publishers. The prevailing poetic style progressed little between 1870s and the early 1910s under the editorial reign of the large-circulation magazines *Harper's*, *The Century*, and *The Atlantic* that published poetry. There was no room in America for a poet who sought to become, in Pound's terms, a “serious artist.”

To embark on a modern poetic career, poets like Frost, Pound and T. S. Eliot would be obliged to go abroad. To a great extent, as David Perkins suggested, it was still London and not New York or Boston that served as the cultural capital of the United States: it was the poems of the London avant-garde and not those of the American magazines that “commanded the attention of American literary undergraduates.” Still more provocative for young Americans was the literature of France, including the fiction of Gustave Flaubert and Emile Zola, the essays of Theophile Gautier, and the poems of Charles Baudelaire, Paul Verlaine, Arthur Rimbaud, and Stephane Mallarme. However, the number of American poets of the period who looked to the contemporary literature of London or Paris for inspiration was still relatively small. On the whole, younger poets embraced the dominant poetic mode of the American “genteel tradition.”

3.1.2 The Genteel Tradition

The genteel poets whom E. A. Robinson called the “little sonnet men” and Whitman derided as the “tea-pot poets” wrote sonnets, odes and dramatic monologues in imitation of English Victorian poetry expressing what Pound characterized as “nice domestic sentiments inoffensively versified.” According to Henry Adams, one of the more astute cultural commentators of his day, poetry had become so artificial and removed from social reality that it no longer served as a “natural expression of society itself.” Instead, poetry now functioned both as a refuge from contemporary society with its growing cities, massive immigration, capitalist greed and political corruption - and as a reaction against the realist and naturalist fiction that attempted to depict that society.

The most prominent of the genteel poets were those of the so-called “Harvard School,” which included George Santayana, William Vaughan Moody, Trumbull Stickney and George Cabot Lodge. The Harvard poets were an extremely cultivated and erudite group: Santayana was a Harvard professor and one of the most prominent American philosophers of his day; Moody taught literature at both Harvard and the University of Chicago; Stickney was the first American ever to earn a doctorate in letters from the Sorbonne in Paris; Lodge, the son of the prominent United States senator Henry Cabot Lodge, studied Schopenhauer in Berlin as well as classics

and Romance languages in Paris. Cultivated as they were, however, these poets displayed little true originality; they were, as Larzer Ziff suggests, a school of poets “held in suspension,” still tied to past models and unable to articulate a viable American poetics for the next century. Though they were skilled versifiers, the Harvard poets had nothing new to say: as a result, their poems quickly fell into a relative obscurity.

The Harvard poets were dedicated to what they considered a “balanced” attitude in art and literature and to an avoidance of all extremes. While they respected Whitman, they did not attempt to imitate the power of his style. Instead, they emulated the dominant style of Victorian poetry: earnest, traditional, elegiac, formally crafted, and often highly sentimental. Santayana’s most famous poem, the sonnet *O World, thou Chooses not the Better Part* concluded with the following lines:

Our knowledge is a torch of smoky pine
That lights the pathway but one step ahead
Across a void of mystery and dread.
Bid, then, the tender light of faith to shine
By which alone the mortal heart is led
Unto the thinking of the thought divine.

The metaphor of human or worldly knowledge as a smoky torch unable to light the way through life was quite effective, but the overall power of the image was weakened by the sentimental language and the artificial syntax of the subsequent lines. Constructions such as “void of mystery and dread,” “the tender light of faith,” and “the thinking of the thought divine” expressed what relatively hackneyed ideas were by the end of the nineteenth century.

3.3 KEY MODERN AMERICAN POETS

3.3.1 Edwin Arlington Robinson (1869–1935)

Edwin Arlington Robinson had a claim to be the most important immediate forerunner of modernist American poetry, although he appeared to have influenced few later poets, and much of the later work in his 20 published volumes was probably more respected than it was read. He remained throughout his career committed to formal qualities of verse, but the sometimes bleak, always questioning direction of his poetry marked his work as modern, and he brought some novelist devices into American poetry through his narratives and a bold, sympathetic characterization which had some similarities to the portraits by Edgar Lee Masters in *Spoon River Anthology* (1915). His work was a marked break from the genteel tradition and newspaper verse of the late 1890s and early part of the century, verse which tended towards bland uplift or familiar stereotypes. Robinson’s verse reflected to varying degrees a balance between the evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer and the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson. The questioning, open-ended issues in his verse moved away from the sentimental escapist pieties of such genteel poets such as Trumbull Stickney (1874–1904) and William Vaughn Moody (1869–1910), or the romantic, political, or rural generalities of Bliss Carman (1861–1929), Edwin

Markham (1852–1940) and James Whitcomb Riley (1849–1916). He was some years ahead of Robert Frost in linking the stories and characters of his poems to a particular region, although Robinson's adhering to more formal qualities of verse meant that he never demonstrated Frost's interest in adapting regional, colloquial speech to his meters. For a period in the early 1920s Robinson was one of the country's best-selling poets, although that popularity came through sentimentality in his later work that had contributed to its receiving less critical attention. In general, there had been relatively little recent critical work on this important poet.

Robinson was born in Head Tide, a small village in Maine, although soon afterwards his family moved the short distance to the equally rural Gardiner – the “Tilbury Town” of many of his poems. Robinson attended Harvard as a special student for two years, leaving when his father died in 1892. He published his first book, at his own expense (\$52), in 1896, titled *The Torrent and the Night Before*. Neither this nor the books that followed, *The Children of the Night* (1897) and *Captain Craig* (1902), gained him much notice. Around the time of his first 33 book, Robinson moved to New York, where he often lived in poverty, and took a succession of jobs including work on the city's subway. But in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote a notice praising his work, and found him a sinecure in the New York Custom House for the next five years. From 1911 onwards, Robinson began to spend his summers at the MacDowell Writers' Colony in New Hampshire, where he did most of his writing.

During the 1910s and 1920s Robinson published the books that established his reputation, including *The Man Against the Sky* (1916) and his *Collected Poems* (1921) – the latter bringing him the first of his three Pulitzer prizes (the others were for *The Man Who Died Twice* in 1925 and *Tristram* in 1928). *Tristram* was the third of an Arthurian trilogy of long poems that Robinson began in 1917 with *Merlin* and continued with *Lancelot* (1920). In the second half of his career, Robinson published more than a dozen book-length narrative poems in blank verse. In his final months, he worked on his last poem, *King Jasper*, while in hospital suffering from cancer. When published, the book carried a preface by Robert Frost.

Robinson was best known for his shorter poems, especially such character studies as the frequently anthologized *Mr. Flood's Party*, *Miniver Cheevy*, *Ruben Bright*, *Bewick Finzer*, and *Richard Cory*. The early *Luke Havergal* was representative of Robinson's dense, suggestive symbolic lyrics, while *Eros Turannos* demonstrated his ability to condense into an unsentimental representative portrait of a woman trapped in a failed marriage. His frequent themes of inexorable fate reinforced by a desperate psychological need, the final unknown ability of others and the need for a kind of stoic endurance by both the subjects and the narrator in the face of such inevitability and exposure were reflected in his poems.

We'll have no kindly veil between
Her visions and those we have seen, –
As if we guessed what hers have been,
Or what they are or would be.

This need for a stoic attitude towards endurance is the final position of *The Man Against the Sky*, which Robinson once said came “as near as anything to representing my poetic vision.” The dramatic situation in the poem presents a figure moving ahead of the narrator, towards “the sunset / ... his last desire,” upon whose life, character, attitude and final fate, the narrator speculated as a way to try to understand his own coming journey. The man might have been courageous, might had an easy life where all comforts fell into place, might equally well have been a gloomy, bitter man, or a man whose faith was lost through adversity, or again he might have been. Robinson as a scientist saw “with his mechanic eyes / A world without a meaning.” The second half of the poem examined the human condition in more general terms. Where “this man against the sky” was going “You know not, nor do I.” Typically for Robinson the poem deals in questions not answers: “If there be nothing after Now, / And we be nothing anyhow, / And we know that, – why live?” The abstractions, especially in the second half of the poem, revealed the side of Robinson that would drive the long narrative poems of his later career and that were now of less interest than his treatment of such issues in the poems centered upon the lonely inhabitants of his *Tilbury Town*.

Robinson did not use the idea of “fate” as any kind of pat resolution to the issues that his poems raised. Where “fate” was invoked by a character in one of his poems *Miniver Cheevy* for example “coughed, and called it fate” that he was born after his time, his beloved medieval period, the attitude was gently mocked as self-indulgent, a self-indulgence that accompanied Miniver’s alcoholism. This gentle ridicule, reinforced by the short lines and heavy rhyme was accompanied by a genuine sympathy for a man unable to live in what his life had made of his personal present, and this range of perspective was part of what gave such short character poems, their continuing power. In this case, the perspective extended to some of Robinson’s own tendencies, for he too had his bouts of drinking to excess, and, as his Arthurian trilogy indicated, could share Miniver’s fascination with Camelot although in Robinson’s case as a way to treat the contemporary world rather than an escape from it.

A similar sympathy was extended in *Richard Cory*. A habit of viewing some others in terms of a finally meaningless romantic awe formed the basis of the town people’s fascination with Cory who, only a set of imposed associations to others, isolated and self-isolating, “one calm summer night, / Went home and put a bullet through his head.” In *Mr. Flood’s Party*, the isolation of age and having outlived his “many friends” was what confronts “Old Eben Flood” in his “hermitage” outside of town. In this poem, drinking and an imagination that allowed a dialogue with an invented other was what allowed Mr. Flood “amid the silver loneliness / Of night” to lift up his voice and sing, and thus to mitigate his isolation for some moments under a moon that became “two moons listening.” Such a poem demonstrates what Robinson at his best can do with what, another poet of his generation would have been a general lament of the poet as outcast, adrift in an uncaring modern world.

3.3.2 Robert Frost (1874–1963)

Writing in a preface to Edwin Arlington Robinson's posthumously published last work, the long poem *King Jasper*, in 1935, Frost praised Robinson's commitment to "the old fashioned way to be new," although privately he had some years earlier called Robinson's later poems "Arthurian twaddle". The two views mark something of Frost's similarities with and differences from Robinson. Like Robinson, Frost was determined to adhere to the formal qualities of poetry against the more iconoclastic strategies of the imagists and the complex, highly allusive poetry of Pound and Eliot. But far more than was the case with Robinson he wanted to get away from the bookish and literary in his poetry, to root his subject matter and diction in contemporary life, albeit largely the self-restricted range of New England rural life. And this interest in getting away from the literary gave a flexibility to his verse, as he played off speech rhythms against meter, and sound against sense, that Robinson rarely attained. Frost's poetry was "new" in its questioning of central Romantic assumptions, questions often more embedded in the poem than in Robinson's work, and often taking the direction of undermining a statement offered in a pithy tone of certitude earlier in the poem. Frost produced a body of work that won him most of the major literary prizes of his day.

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco. Later, at the age of 11, he moved with his mother to his father's native New England after the death of his teacher and journalist father. After attending Dartmouth College for a semester in fall 1892 and Harvard as a special student in 1897–99 (where Wallace Stevens was a fellow student) Frost began poultry farming, purchasing with his grandfather's assistance a farm in Derry, New Hampshire, in 1900. Frost wrote many of his poems here. Initially, he taught at Pinkerton Academy and it was here, he began to publish poems in local and regional magazines.

Frost sold the Derry farm in 1911 and with the proceeds, and an annuity from his grandfather's will, at the age of 38, he sailed with his family to England the following summer, determined to make his mark as a poet. Frost's difficulty in getting his poetry published outside of minor periodicals in the United States illustrates the conservative nature of poetry readers and publishers at the time, the same conservatism that had driven Ezra Pound, H.D., and later T. S. Eliot to London. Settling in a cottage in Beaconsfield, just outside London, Frost soon met Pound, Yeats, and other central figures of the bustling London poetry scene, and was able to get his first book, *A Boy's Will* published in 1913, and a second, *North of Boston*, the following year. The first poem, *Into My Own* carries the commentary: "The youth is persuaded that he will be rather more than less himself for having forsworn the world," while the best-known of these poems, *The Tuft of Flowers*, is more briefly "about fellowship." *North of Boston*, which contains blank verse dramatic poems, and was "more objective" than the first volume includes a number of famous poems including *Mending Wall*, *The Death of the Hired Man*, *Home Burial*, and *The Wood-Pile*. Because of his long apprenticeship, Frost's books appeared on the poetry scene with his matured style close to being fully developed.

Frost was in fact much more comfortable in the company of Georgian poets as Wilfred Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, W. H. Davies, and especially Edward Thomas, with whom he became particularly close and who reviewed *North of Boston* three times. Though Frost's work was generally much more accomplished than the work of these poets, they shared an interest in a reflective poetry centered upon familiar or at least recognizable sights and happenings, accurate and detailed presentation of the usually rural scene, and a direct and colloquial speaking voice. Frost purchased a farm in Franconia, New Hampshire, upon his return, and also began his long association with Amherst College. The next ten years saw a steady increase in his reputation, augmented by a third book, *Mountain Interval*, in 1916, and a fourth that brought him his first Pulitzer Prize (1924). By the mid-1920s, Frost's reputation was established, although for most critics the work in subsequent volumes *West Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Steeple Bush* (1947) and *In the Clearing* (1962) was marked by a gradual hardening of attitude and a more didactic tone than the rich, suggestive possibilities of the earlier work.

In the 1930s, Frost came under increasing criticism from liberal and left-leaning literary journals for his opposition to President Roosevelt's New Deal, and his literary and political conservatism generally, but he remained committed to his own principles. This decade also saw a series of personal tragedies for the poet: the death following childbirth of his favourite daughter in 1934, the death of his wife in 1938, and the suicide by gunshot of his son Carol in 1940. By 1950, Frost became a revered American institution, his occasional teaching and his public appearances taking over from his now intermittent writing of poetry. This comfortable image was disturbed by an influential three-volume biography of the poet by Lawrance Thompson, which appeared between 1966 and 1976, and which portrayed Frost as quarrelsome, sometimes ruthlessly ambitious, manipulative of his family and of his public image and at times consumed by self-doubt and guilt. A number of biographies since have taken positions on the fairness or otherwise of Thompson's picture. The tendency to read Frost as mainly the producer of such comfortable pieties as "good fences make good neighbours" was complicated most notably by Randall Jarrell in 1953, and again by Lionel Trilling in 1959, both of whom pointed out the tentative, questioning direction of many of the poems, and the ways that any final statements remained suspended rather than being asserted. This issue too has continued to generate critical debate.

Frost was never comfortable writing public prose, and left behind relatively few statements beyond a rich correspondence about his poetry. In the most important of these statements, "The Figure a Poem Makes" from 1938 and included for many years as an introduction to his *Collected Poems*, he argued for an organic theory of poetry, and for a qualified, although necessary, role for verse:

... it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. It has denouement. It has an outcome that though

unforeseen was predestined from the first image of the original mood – and indeed from the very mood.

This “confusion” is often very close to the surface of a Frost poem, and was examined in poems which explored the human relationship to nature, and definitions of home, marriage, community, and even sanity, often illustrating a quiet desperation in the attempt to impose order upon a finally alien world capable of sudden and unpredictable actions. In the well-known *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, the threat of annihilation in the pull of the “lovely, dark, and deep” woods was set against the superficiality of real-estate contracts and the limitations of human domestication of nature. Against this the woods threaten to expose and dissolve all such attempts to measure nature in merely human terms. “And miles to go before I sleep,” is repeated at the poem’s end as assertive reiteration of such human measure, as if the experience of glancing outside such measure had raised disturbing questions about its efficacy and status. In this poem, as in many others, Frost used the formal qualities of the poem itself, the closure provided by sound and sense and rhyme scheme, to reinforce the role of the poem as a way to order the world in human terms, “a momentary stay.” This role for poetry is sometimes made explicit, as in “The Silken Tent” (1942), on one level a poem in praise of its own sonnet form, and even more explicitly in the “verse” of the famous *The Need of Being Versed in Country Things* which closes the *New Hampshire* volume.

3.3.3 Carl Sandburg (1878–1967)

Carl Sandburg’s poetry came out of the literary movement centered in Chicago around the time of the First World War that sought a direct, usually celebratory, often urban realism in contrast to the genteel sentimentalities of much late Romantic magazine poetry. Out of this movement came the prose of Sherwood Anderson, Edgar Lee Masters’s *Spoon River Anthology*, and *Poetry* magazine. Among these Sandburg’s poetry was most quintessentially the poetry of the city and the people. He lived most of his life in Chicago. Sandburg was born in Galesburg, Illinois, to Swedish immigrant parents and left school at 13 to pursue a variety of jobs and an itinerant life, including serving as a private in the Spanish–American War. He then attended Lombard College, but left in 1902 without a degree. The following years saw him holding various journalist positions, and working for the socialist causes that would remain an important part of his work. In 1914, Harriet Monroe published a group of Sandburg’s poems in *Poetry*, and their aggressive Whitmanesque celebrations of the city caught the attention of many readers. His first book, *Chicago Poems*, appeared in 1916, and was followed by *Cornhuskers* in 1918, which took the prairie as its general theme. In the best of these poems of direct or evocative celebration, whether of the city or the prairie or in tender, generalized portraits of their inhabitants, the broad sweep of the lyrical free verse is set against a degree of particularized detail. His most frequently anthologized poem, *Chicago*, begins:

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation’s Freight Handler;

Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders:

They tell me you are wicked and I believe them, for I have seen
your painted women under the gas lamps luring the farm boys.

Such verse had claims to be contemporary for its directness, its rooting of poetry in the modern industrial landscape, its breaking of traditional meter, and generally its affinities to the iconoclasm of Whitman. The poetry's lack of serious intellectual challenge, and Sandburg's platform skills in performing his work helped to make the poet a popular figure. But despite more than half a dozen subsequent volumes over a long career, his poetry did not develop a great deal beyond these early books. Sandburg also collected and published two admired volumes of folk songs. But as far as poetry was concerned, he became a marginal figure, by 1968 one of the six examples of the fleetingness of poetic fame in Hyatt Waggoner's *American Poets from the Puritans to the Present*. However, a measure of Sandburg's personal stature, a stature enhanced by his six-volume prose biography of Abraham Lincoln published between 1926 and 1939, that his *Complete Poems* won him a second Pulitzer Prize in 1951. The long, chanting lines of a poem like *Chicago* has affinities with some Beat poetry of the 1950s, for example Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*, and Sandburg is listed in Ginsberg's *Kaddish* as one of the figures inspiring dreams in the poet of being an "honest revolutionary labor lawyer . . . President, or Senator." In his old age as much of an icon as Frost, three years before his death, Sandburg received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon Johnson.

3.3.4 Wallace Stevens (1879–1955)

Wallace Stevens book of essays, *The Necessary Angel*, subtitled as "Essays on Reality and the Imagination," sums up the two central concerns of his poetry throughout his career. His poetry explores the role that imagination plays in our engagement with, understanding of and interpretation of the world outside of the self, and conversely the role of the "facts" in that world. "The poet," Stevens wrote in his essay "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," "gives to life the supreme fictions without which we are unable to conceive of it." In his poem *The Plain Sense of Things* Stevens asserted: "Yet the absence of the imagination had / Itself to be imagined." And in *The World as Meditation*, centered upon Penelope's long wait for the absent Ulysses to return, she sensed that he might be "moving // On the horizon." Yet the question: "But was it Ulysses? Or was it only the warmth of the sun / On her pillow? The thought kept beating in her like her heart. / The two kept beating together" was answered characteristically: "It was only day / It was Ulysses and it was not. Yet they had met . . ." again insisting upon the role of "imagination" in shaping "reality."

Stevens took no firm position on the final relationship of the two; his poems, instead explore propositions and suppositions about the balance, more playfully in his earlier work, and more meditatively in the poems of his last 15 years. Sometimes two poems taken together explore the extremes of the spectrum, almost as companion pieces. *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* and *Cortège for Rosenbloom*, poems about funeral rituals, is one such pairing; *The Snow Man* and *Tea at the Palaz of Hoon* is another. The

pairing of the physical and the imaginative are illustrated in the title and narrative of *Peter Quince at the Clavier*. Stevens' poems recorded the mind searching, weighing, and balancing, a meditation upon degrees of attention, order, and projection, as well as upon the making of metaphor. This search, for Stevens, was necessary because the past systems of belief no longer provided an adequate framework for understanding and interpreting our world. Stevens wrote in his essay "Imagination as Value": "... the great poems of heaven and hell have been written and the great poem of the earth remains to be written." "Why should she give her bounty to the dead?" asked the narrator of the woman in *Sunday Morning*, who was pulled away from the present by "The holy hush of ancient sacrifice. / ... Over the seas, to silent Palestine." For Stevens, the poet should to invent a "supreme fiction" for the age, or at any rate to describe that fiction's characteristics, acknowledging among them the relative nature of its truths, and thus the need for them to be discarded at some future date when they too had served their use. As Stevens avers it in *Of Modern Poetry*:

The poem of the mind in the act of finding
What will suffice. It has not always had
To find: the scene was set; it repeated
what was in the script.
Then the theater was changed
To something else. Its past was a souvenir.

Characteristically, the claim for the end result was an understated one, "what will suffice." Equally characteristically, the theme was set in terms of performance, the "script" and "theater" now replaced by the performance of the mind upon the stage of the poem. Often in Stevens' poems, the issues were distanced from the poet himself, in this case through the performance metaphor and by the emphasis upon the act of thinking and writing rather than upon the particular writer of the poem.

This distance and emotional restraint in the poems had often been coupled in discussion of Stevens with his two apparently disparate careers, as poet and as a vice-president of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company. Stevens' interest in poetry was displayed in his years as a special student at Harvard (1897–1900), where, like T. S. Eliot a few years later, he was associated with and published in *The Harvard Advocate*. After a short career as a journalist in New York, Stevens attended New York Law School and was admitted to the New York bar in 1904. He began his career as an insurance lawyer in 1908, married Elsie Kachel in 1909, joined the Hartford company in 1916, and moved to Hartford, where he lived for the rest of his life.

Stevens remained close to a number of his Harvard friends in his New York years, and with them published some poems in the journal *The Trend* and some subsequent short-lived magazines that reflected the group's interest in turn-of-the-century exoticism and dandyism, and also in such modern iconoclastic movements as Dada. His association with avant-garde literary and artistic circles grew to incorporate members of the *Others* group, which included Alfred Kreyborg, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos

Williams. This group of writers, loosely centered around the artists' colony of Grantwood in New Jersey and the apartment of Walter Arensberg in New York saw themselves and their sporadic journal *Others* as an alternative to the sometimes conservative pages of Chicago's *Poetry*. The group's association with Alfred Stieglitz and the artists connected to his gallery and the journal illustrated their closer ties to the European avant-garde.

From 1915 to 1923, Stevens wrote the poems that make up his 1923 volume *Harmonium*. The themes of reality and imagination were displayed through an exuberant, sometimes comic, playfulness of language and through shifting points of view. *Le Monocle de Mon Oncle* captured these elements in the dandified rhetoric and fastidiousness of its narrator, who was concerned about the possible crisis of turning 40, in his turn-of-the-century eyepiece, and in the title itself being a French schoolchildren's handwriting exercise. A playful poem about language, a way of life, and appearance, and its subtext concerns aging, insecurity and fears of impotence. *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird* displays Stevens' awareness of the experiments of imagism as well as the analytical cubism of Picasso and Braque. While this poem displayed what the onlooker brings to an understanding of the object, *The Snow Man* argued that without this human-centered framework of interpretation we would see only "Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." And while *Sunday Morning* in its final stanza echoed Keats's celebration of change in his *Ode To Autumn*, Stevens' rewriting foregrounds the inevitable coming of "darkness" that is the consequence of the imagination's freedom to inventively engage the earth's ever-changing present.

Harmonium was little noticed, when it appeared in 1923. Stevens, then, apparently wrote little for the next few years, offering as an excuse to editors who asked for poems that he was focused for the moment on career and family. But, the book garnered more attention when reissued in 1931 with the addition of poems, and Stevens began to write and publish volumes regularly for the rest of his life, beginning with *Ideas of Order* (1935). The poems of the 1930s addressed their philosophical issues more directly than the more exuberant poems of *Harmonium*, and in a barer style, although their concerns were similar. In *The Idea of Order at Key West* echoes Wordsworth's *Stepping Westward* and *The Solitary Reaper*. The idea of order witnessed the singing of a girl by the sea was more temporary than the sound carried away by Wordsworth's narrator. For Stevens, it was an idea of order rather than order itself, but it could be a communal force, one between observers as well as between nature and man.

For she was the maker of the song she sang
The ever-hooded, tragic-gestured sea
Was merely a place by which she walked to sing.
Whose spirit is this? we said, because we knew
It was the spirit that we sought and knew
That we should ask this often as she sang.

Stevens' response to criticism in the 1930s that his poetry was remote and more concerned with abstractions than the real world of the Depression

and political debate led to his volume *Owl's Clover* (1936), which dealt with the social responsibility of art. Returning to the themes more congenial to him, Stevens went on to a series of volumes such as *Parts of a World* (1942), *Transport to Summer* (1947), and *The Auroras of Autumn* (1950) consolidated his reputation as a major poet. He was elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1946, awarded the Bollingen Prize in 1950, and his *Collected Poems* (1954) won him his second National Book Award in Poetry as well as a Pulitzer Prize.

3.3.5 William Carlos Williams (1883–1963)

William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens were members of the *Others* group centered around New York City at the time of the First World War. Recognition and awards began to crown Stevens' from the 1940s and Williams had to wait until the 1950s for similar attention. But in that decade, with some of his books, he became a major influence upon younger poets looking for alternatives to the tenets of formalist verse and New Criticism. The central ideas of imagism had a major impact upon Williams's poetry around 1914, and for the next five decades, his works explored the implications of its principles in the ways that had not interested Pound or its other original practitioners. This interest marks another major contrast with Stevens. Stevens was interested in the role of the mind and of the codes of language in the interpretation and articulation of the world beyond the self; for Williams such pre-existing constructs only obscured what should be the poet's attempt at a direct encounter with the world of objects. Thus a frequent metaphor in Williams' work was that of the body rather than the mind, and such terms as "contact" and "rooted" are central. The call for "No ideas but in things," as he put it in his long poem *Paterson*, had its roots in the imagists' "direct treatment of the thing." But, Williams' poetry was far more than the pictorial vignettes by which he was too often represented in anthologies, or the anti-intellectual gesture that "no ideas but in things" might imply. As Denise Levertov felt the need to point out more than once in writing of Williams, the phrase did not mean "no ideas."

The poet who demanded that poetry record the "local" as a necessary first step to present the "universal" was born, lived his life in, and died in Rutherford. Williams' father had left his native England at the age of 5, but on his commercial travels in Central and South America kept "a British passport / always in his pocket," as Williams opined it in *Adam*, a poem about his father. Williams' mother was born in Puerto Rico, and Williams raised this English/Spanish division to a mythic level in his work. Although the pattern was complicated in various ways, males, English heritage and formalism together represented to Williams what America was, to fulfill its literary and cultural promise; while women, Latin and Native American heritage, and a freedom was often portrayed as sexual license represented liberation and possible fulfillment of that potential.

During his under graduation at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Medicine from 1902 to 1906, Williams met and formed lifelong friendships with Ezra Pound, Hilda Doolittle, and the American modernist painter Charles Demuth. Williams' poems at this time were largely watery imitations of Keats and Whitman, while his first book, the self-financed

Poems of 1909 contains verse modelled on the genteel Romanticism of such writers as Bliss Carman and Arthur Davison Ficke. Williams never reprinted these poems in his collected volumes. Pound, now in London, as was H.D., responded to the book's derivative poems frankly, and sent the "out of touch" Williams the first of what would over the years be many reading lists. Williams, sometimes exasperated with them, reproduced an example in *Paterson*. Williams visited Pound in London in 1910, following six months of studying pediatrics in Leipzig, and Pound continued to keep Williams informed about the latest movements and journals in London. This international source, coupled with Williams' associations with Poetry and *The Little Review* in Chicago and the *Others* group in New York, meant that Williams, now established as a doctor in a provincial town could keep abreast of the central movements in modernist poetry and art. In 1912, Williams married Florence Herman, the "Flossie" of a number of his poems, whose childhood figures centrally in his 1937 novel *White Mule*. Williams' publications in addition to poetry include not only four novels, but also short stories, essays, improvisatory prose, plays and even an opera libretto.

Williams' poems *Hic Jacet* and *The Tempers* prefigure his poetry's later use of his medical experience and concrete observation in detail. Williams' mature style was more evident in his *Al Que Quiere!* (1917) and was fully developed in *Sour Grapes* (1921). *Spring and All* (1923) was considered his finest work. Between these volumes of poetry, Williams published his *Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (1920) with a prologue that declared his separation from the international modernist style developed by Pound and the now London based Eliot. In this essay, central to an understanding of Williams' poetry, he took issue with Eliot, Pound, H.D., and Wallace Stevens, arguing that American poetry needed to get back to beginnings, for which Williams meant a pictorial emphasis, fragmented and loosely associated verse forms and local subject matter. They illustrated for Williams the "more flexible, jagged" patterns of form and syntax that could counter the habitual associations of thought, hindering the promise of a nativist poetics, and stopping Americans from seeing the unique landscape in front of their eyes.

Williams' sense of embattled isolation was reinforced by the exodus of The European artists to Paris following the end of the war, followed by many American writers and artists. Williams, with Robert McAlmon edited the journal *Contact* following the demise of *Others*. However, Williams' hostility to Europe and the expatriate movement was not a one-dimensional response. His 1928 *A Voyage to Pagany*, based upon his 1924 trip to Paris, Rome and Vienna, revealed the challenge and fascination that Europe held for him. He was obliged to rely upon expatriate publication for his poetry volumes in the 1920s. Among these, *Spring and All* contains many of his most frequently anthologized poems, although in the original volume they were surrounded by pages of thematically related, manifesto-like prose. In the early 1930s, Williams was associated with the objectivist movement, which also included Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff. Objectivism was in effect a development of imagism's insistence upon precision and concrete presentation, but with more emphasis upon the formal construction of the poem. Williams had no regular publisher in this period, and his books came out in small, special editions, until James

Laughlin founded *New Directions* at the end of the decade and committed the press to publishing the work of both Williams and Pound. At the same time Williams began to struggle with the formal problems of his long poem *Paterson*, and an initial experiment, his manuscript “Detail & Parody for the poem *Paterson*,” although unpublished as a whole, was the source of many of his published poems in these years.

Williams finally settled on a collage-like form for *Paterson* that included, along with the poetry, such prose documents such as extracts from histories, letters from friends and readers of the poem, including letters from Pound and the then unknown Allen Ginsberg, leaflets, transcribed speech, and extracts from newspapers. Sometimes these items were reproduced verbatim, sometimes they were edited by Williams, and occasionally he made them up. Williams originally conceived of the poem as having four books, and they appeared separately from 1946 to 1951, but a fifth book appeared in 1958, while fragments of a sixth were found among his papers at his death. The New Jersey city that was the poem’s focus had a long and rich history, from its early settlement, to its heyday as a silk and manufacturing center in the second half of the nineteenth century, to its economic decline following a pivotal textile workers’ strike in 1913, all of which Williams brought into the work. The poem also incorporated episodes from the history of the famous Paterson Falls that provided the water power driving the industry, and that was itself a well-known tourist attraction. The Falls served as an example of the single-minded exploitation of landscape that the poem decries, and the roar of its crashing waters becomes the foundation of the poem’s attempt to discover and articulate a language rooted in the native landscape.

With the publication of the first four books of *Paterson*, Williams’ poetry began to receive more attention, including a National Book Award in 1950. Between 1949 and 1951 Williams’ publications included two volumes of *Paterson*, his *Selected Poems*, two volumes of collected poetry, his *Autobiography*, and a book of short stories. The poems in his next two volumes, *The Desert Music* and *Journey to Love* were poems of memory and reflection, written in a long triadic line that Williams argued in a number of essays. These poems were at once more conventional and more accessible than Williams’ earlier style and contributed to his widening readership. After *Paterson V*, Williams’ final volume of poems *Pictures from Brueghel* appeared in 1962. A measure of his late recognition as a major poet was the posthumous award for this volume in 1963 of his first, and only, Pulitzer Prize.

3.36 Ezra Pound (1885–1972)

Ezra Pound was at the center of the modernist avant-garde in London, Paris, and in New York. He recognized the major talents in others, including Henry James, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, H.D., and T. S. Eliot, and a selfless entrepreneur on their behalf in such journals as *Poetry* and *The Little Review*, and a remarkable editor. His critical principles continue to be influential, and the triumphs and tragedies of his life are still debated, in addition to the range and achievement of his own poetry. Pound was born in Hailey, Idaho, but at the age of 2 moved east with his family, eventually to the suburbs of Philadelphia. He first attended the University of Pennsylvania,

where he met Williams and Hilda Doolittle before transferring to Hamilton College. He returned to the University of Pennsylvania with a fellowship for graduate work in Romance languages and literature, receiving an MA in 1906. His fellowship was not renewed for the following year, and from September 1907 to February 1908, he taught Romance Languages at Wabash College, Indiana. With his father's financial help, Pound traveled first to Venice in 1908, where he published his first book, *A Lume Spento*, at his own expense.

A Lume Spento and the next four books that appeared over as many years, *A Quinzaine* for this *Yule*, *Personae*, *Exultations*, and *Canzoni*, exhibited Pound's interest in the medieval and Renaissance poets of the Romance cultures he had been studying since his college years. These included the troubadour poets of Provence, and early Tuscan poetry, and in particular Dante, Guido Cavalcanti, Arnaut Daniel, Rabelais, and Villon. His *The Spirit of Romance* (1910) was a prose study of the medieval poets of southern Europe. Pound's interest in the values of a culture were reflected in its dominant figures, its literature, and its treatment of its major artists and a theme central to his *Cantos*. But for Pound, this was not merely a nostalgic return to the past, although these were poets that Pound felt any serious reader and writer should know. His concern was with the present state of poetry in particular, which far behind the novel, music, and painting in modernizing itself. For Pound, writers of the present and the wider culture within which they wrote could learn from the significant achievements of the past.

Pound's poems not only reflect the style of the particular historical poet, but present the poet as speaking the lines, brought the poem closer to the poet's state of mind and to the quality of his time. This mode also reveals Pound's admiration for Browning, although he had little time for most other Victorian poets. In the poems, as in his criticism, Pound emphasizes the difficult craft of poetry, against Romantic ideas of "inspiration," and also the importance of writer and reader being informed about work in languages other than English. Pound's use of the past can be illustrated in his version of the AngloSaxon *The Seafarer*. Pound's poem parallels the original's alliterative line, thus opening with "May I for my own self song's truth reckon." But his interest was not in a literal rendering of the original, but in capturing something of the poet's voice and the reading experience of the original poem for the present-day reader. Thus, he renders the Anglo-Saxon *wreca* as "reckon," it being closer in sound to the original than the literal "to make or compose." The *Seafarer* is one of the first known poems in English, and it marks a return to one set of beginnings Pound begins Canto I with alliterative lines, perhaps an allusion to this poem and to his version of it. The subject matter is an anonymous poet who chooses exile over compromising with the mercenary values of his "lord," just as Pound felt he had been driven into exile by the commercial values of American publishers and readers. *The Return* (1912) dramatizes the tentative and weakened return of a force, once powerful, associated as in Pound's later poetry with a rediscovery of latent powers in "Gods" too long displaced by the Christian tradition.

Pound threw himself into the Edwardian literary scene, but as he met some of the figures, such as Yeats, T. E. Hulme, and Ford Madox Ford, who advocated alternatives to it, his attitude became less reverential and more critical. He worked as Yeats' secretary for three years, became the foreign correspondent of *Poetry*, the poetry editor of *The Egoist*, later was associated with *The Little Review*, and worked tirelessly to promote himself and the writers whom he believed in through the pages of these and any other journals open to modern work. His passionate interests included music, painting, sculpture, and philosophy, and these all contributed, aided in particular by Hulme's theories on "images," "accuracy," and their relationship to language, to his development around 1912, along with Richard Aldington, H.D., and F. S. Flint, of the ideas of imagism. The principles stressed compression, complexity, concrete presentation, economy of language and variety of rhythm. The two-line poem *In a Station of the Metro* was the example most often printed. This pictorial style dovetailed with Pound's work on the manuscripts that the widow of orientalist scholar Ernest Fenollosa gave him in 1913, and which resulted in the translations of *Cathay* in 1915.

In both the oriental translations and the imagist poems, economy of language worked with a pictorial focus, a lack of explicit connectives, and juxtaposition to produce a heightened moment of emotional intensity. Meanwhile, through his interest in the vorticist movement, particularly the writing and painting of Wyndham Lewis, Pound was associated with the two issues of the aggressively iconoclastic journal *Blast*. Vorticism stressed dynamic force rather than the pictorial state of imagism. The poetry of Yeats and the theories, and writing of Ford Madox Ford continued to be major interests of Pound's, and he met T. S. Eliot for the first time in September 1914. Out of this mix of developments came *Lustra* (1916), a volume of free verse poems which also included the poems of *Cathay*. But with the coming of war, opportunities to promote a revolution in the arts dried up. A particular blow to Pound was his close friend vorticist sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska being killed in France in June 1915. Pound moved towards what would become a career-long interest in alternatives to the contemporary economic and political systems that he saw on both sides of the conflict as stifling the arts, and producing the needless and self-serving destruction of the war. "There died a myriad, / And of the best, among them," he wrote in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, "For an old bitch gone in the teeth, / For a botched civilization."

Pound left London permanently in 1920 for France, settled in Paris in 1921. *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* marked steps towards what would after 1920 become Pound's life's work, *The Cantos*. Both the *Homage* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* found a way to bring together in a longer sequence contemporary concerns and recent and distant history, using irony and shifting styles, attitudes and responses to represent the poem's full temporal and historical reach. The method of the *Cantos* is a development of this discovery, while the structure of Eliot's *The Waste Land* is also indebted to their achievement. *Homage to Sextus Propertius* is Pound's version of the *Elegies* of the first-century Roman poets. In 1931, he wrote in *Selected Letters*, that it "presents certain emotions as vital to me in 1917, faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the British

Empire, as they were to Propertius some centuries earlier, when faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the Roman Empire". These shared concerns picture Pound as a writer trying to remain with integrity in a time of war and under pressure to write what amounted to imperialist propaganda. The poem was also another of Pound's blasts at the academic establishment, this time for its neglect as he saw it of Propertius.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley foregrounds more contemporary cultural and political history, tracing its theme of present philistine decadence back to what Pound saw as the influence and decline of Christianity. "Christ follows Dionysus // . . . Even the Christian beauty / Defects – after Samothrace." Although it is not reducible to easy parallels with Pound's life, it is often read as reflecting two aspects of his interests and career up to that point. "E.P.," the persona of the first half, is presented as a writer of good intentions, "born / In a half savage country, out of date", who tried to bring the best of the past's literary achievements into contemporary writing and culture. He finds only a philistine audience preferring to settle for something much less demanding. Pound's failure to find a wider readership or to extend his work beyond sophisticated pastiche of past masters is put into the context of the failure of the Pre-Raphaelite painters and writers, the failure of the poets of the 1890s such as Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, and the inevitable drift into war. Mauberley's second half is an imagist who fades into oblivion on the stream of his heightened and finally irrelevant intensities, a small master of a minor art. But although the poem displays the limitations of these two sides of Pound's career, the poem itself helped him give an answer. It showed a way for the *Cantos* to use juxtaposition within a sentence, stanza, or section, or between cantos, to present multiple levels of time, different cultures, and the central figures that Pound saw representing them, all within a framework in which connections accumulated suggestion, rather than becoming reductively definitive. The poem could demand full attention from a reader required to fill out and connect the allusions sketched by a phrase or word.

When *A Draft of XVI Cantos* appeared in 1925, Pound and his wife moved from Paris to Rapallo, Italy. In Paris, his circuit included Joyce and Ford Madox Ford, as well as many of the American expatriates, including Hemingway. In 1921, Eliot left with him the draft of *The Waste Land* for suggestions, and the poem was published the following year much as Pound had left it after cutting it down considerably in length, and eliminating many surface continuities. As a mark of gratitude, Eliot dedicated the landmark poem to him. Pound's interests in the late 1920s and the 1930s increasingly focused on economics, particularly the social credit theories of Major C. H. Douglas, and on politics, although his root concern was always, the impact upon writing and a culture's treatment of its writers. In his tendency to view an age as summed up in the actions of a single figure, he came to see Mussolini's policies as representing the kind of social and monetary reform that he was advocating. This attraction to fascism, combined with an increasing tendency on Pound's part to equate what he condemned as the parasitical effects of usury with world Jewry, led to his sometimes virulent anti-semitism. Such views came into the *Cantos*, for this "poem including history" was to include also the history of its maker. Pound began

broadcasting his literary and political views over Rome radio in 1941 and was arrested by the US army on charges of treason at the war's end and imprisoned near Pisa.

The *Cantos* started with a series of beginnings: the descent to the underworld of book XI of the *Odyssey*, a ritual blood-drinking with prophet Tiresias, a voyage and a search. The general themes of the poem take up the first seven cantos. *Cantos VIII–XI* explore the career and impact of the fifteenth century Venetian soldier and art patron Sigismundo Malatesta, and, after a passage through the modern hell of London and in *Canto XVII* medieval Venice serves as a vision of paradise. The middle cantos, XXXI–LXXI, explore the policies of some early US presidents (Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, and John Adams), and the history of ancient China, which Pound saw as at its most prosperous and peaceful when governed by Confucian ethics. *Cantos LXXIV–LXXXIV*, the Pisan Cantos were written under the extreme conditions of Pound's arrest and confinement. He was initially held in a cage, and later housed in a tent, with the loan of a typewriter for a few hours in the evening and just a handful of books to consult. For many readers these are the finest cantos. The destruction of the poet's personal life (he faced execution) and of his literary and social hopes are at the center of a remarkable sequence that blends sharp observation of the camp and its surroundings, memories of friendships, plans and achievements in worlds now irrevocably past, and a sometimes humble, sometimes defiant personal reflection. The sequence was published in 1948 and the following year, he was awarded the first Bollingen Prize for Poetry. Pound was housed in St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC declared as insane and thus not fit for trial. The resulting political controversy over Pound winning the prize resulted in its future management being taken away from the control of the Library of Congress and given to Yale University.

Pound continued his reading and translations in St. Elizabeths, received many visitors, and increasingly became a figure whose work was looked to by those seeking an alternative to the tenets of formalism. He also continued *The Cantos*. Section: *Rock-Drill LXXXV–XCV* (1955), and *Thrones XCVI–CIX* (1959), the year after he was released from St. Elizabeths and the charges of treason dropped. Pound spent most of his last years in Venice, where he died and is buried. He outlived all of the major modernist peers upon whom his life and work had such an impact.

Other significant contributing poets to modern American Poetry are Hilda Doolittle (1886–1961), Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962), Marianne Moore (1887–1972), T. S. Eliot (1888–1965), John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974), Claude McKay (1890–1948), Hart Crane (1899–1932), E.E Cummings ((1894–1962), Langston Hughes (1902–1967), Louis Zukofsky (1904–1978), and Robert Penn Warren (1905–1989) to name a few. They all added to the essence of modern American poetic aesthetics in their own way.

3.4 LET'S SUM UP

The reconceptualization of America in terms of transnationalism and globalization not only challenges earlier assumptions of origination and periodization in literary studies but also raises questions about what

counts as ‘American’ literature. It tries in local and translocal contexts to demonstrate the simultaneous existence of multilingual and multiethnic poetic practices effective in any given historical period. The innovative potential of American poetry has resulted in an extremely fluid canon, setting aside normative principles used to classify American poetry according to strict formal principles, nationalist premises or rigid period concepts. To capture the dynamic field of American poetry, poetry embodies the diversity of the American democratic experience in multiple ways. In light of the multiple ethnic voices that have helped to constitute American poetry, this unit attempts to present diachronic readings of representative poetic texts and authors to the modern perspective as well as the contribution of the American poets to the development of the poetic canon of modern American poetry .

3.5 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Write short note on the social and historical concepts of modern poetry.

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2. Name the key and contributing texts of the American poetry to the canon.

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3. Write briefly on the tradition of Genteel poets.

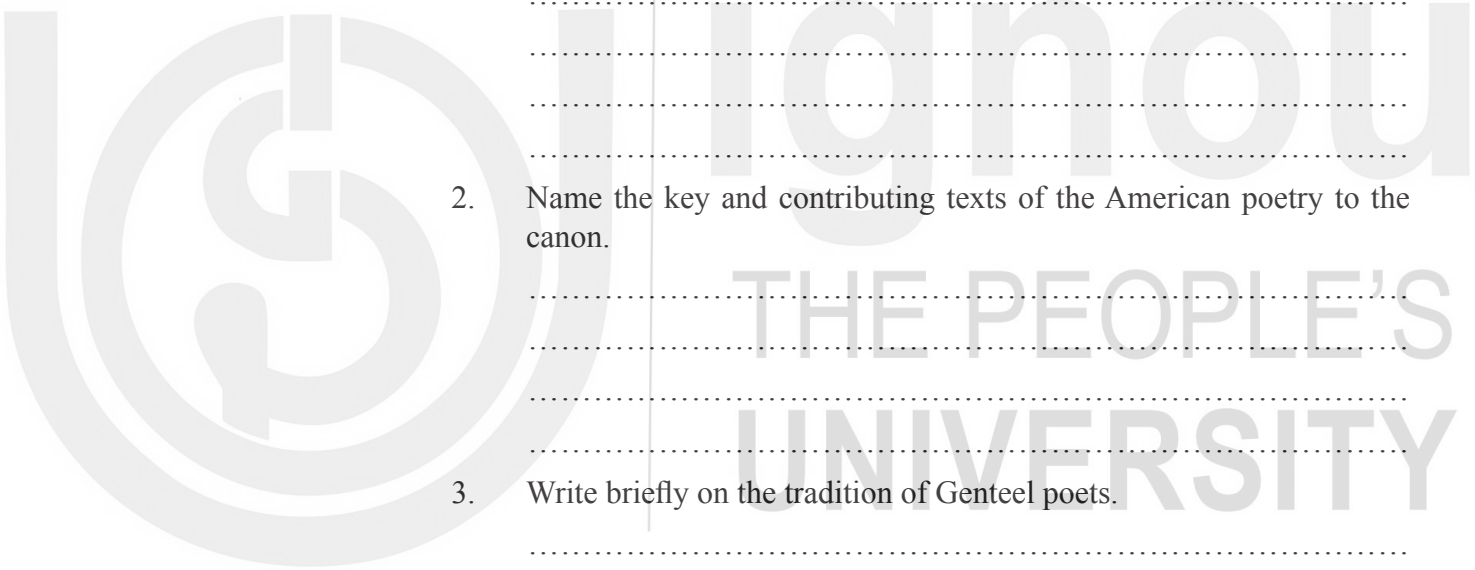
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4. Characteristics of American poetry in the modern era.

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5. Role of magazines in promoting poetry in the modern period.

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6. Write about the dark age of American poetry.

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7. Sketch about the beginning of Modern Literature in America.

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8. Write note on – American poetry, a new age.

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9. Name the genteel poets of “Harvard School”.

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10. Write brief notes:

- a. Robinson
- b. Robert Frost
- c. Carl Sandburg
- d. Ezra Pound

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3.6 SUGGESTED FOR FURTHER READINGS

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