

Block

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BLOCK 3: EIGHTEENTH AND THE NINETEENTH CENTURY-II

In this block we will discuss:

- Trends and movements in 18th century and 19th century American literature;
- A detailed analysis of Edgar lee masters' America;
- A detailed analysis of Carl Sandburg's accomplished facts; and
- A discussion of frost's home burial and after apple picking.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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UNIT 10: BACKGROUND

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Acquire an understanding of the historical background of the eighteenth century and nineteenth century American poetry;
- Understand the socio-cultural ethos of the period;
- Contextualise the poems prescribed in your syllabus.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall try to offer you some idea about the background of both the eighteenth century and the nineteenth century American poetry in particular and American literature in general. This is rather a long period in which sweeping changes took place in political, social, and cultural fields. This unit will help you in contextualizing the poems you will read in the Block. Literary works of a particular period are in a sense, the product of those of the earlier one, and they also prepare the ground for new trends in the succeeding period/s. A kind of affirmation-opposition dialectic is evident in the cultural products of each age. We will see this process in the present instance as well. Although we divide, rather artificially, literary works into specific time periods, in each literary period we hear the echoes of the literary practices of the earlier ones. In the trajectory of movements of literary traditions, we thus come across points of both intersections and deviances. Hence it is really difficult for us to accept the corpus of literary products into some water-tight compartments which create artificial boundaries around particular segments. We usually push creative works into historically divided periods for the purpose of understanding how the historical period impacts upon the literary works. A literary corpus, as we realise, is largely the product of a particular historical and socio-

cultural background but is produced in reaction to the trends of the earlier age. In this unit we shall try to understand the socio-cultural and historical factors that shaped the content and forms of the poems produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly the latter half of the nineteenth century.

If you consider the prescribed texts in the Block, for which this introductory unit is written, you will realize that there is an admixture of many literary, cultural and 'nationalist' elements in them. You will find literary trends changing, yielding place to newer ones. Some of the poets in this unit, such as Edgar Lee Master, Carl Sanders and Robert Frost, are usually considered to be 'transitory' poets, representing more than one dominant literary-cultural tradition such as transcendentalism and modernism.

The poems we are to read in this Block are Harriet Monroe's (1860-1936) "Little Old Maid," Edgar Lee Masters' (1868-1950) "America," Carl Sandburg's (1878-1967) "Accomplished Facts," and Robert Frost's (1874-1963) "Home Burial" as well as "After Apple Picking." These poets belong mainly to nineteenth century but some of their works flow into the twentieth century as well. Their works also move through various historical phases as well as literary traditions. This entire period witnessed romantic trends as well as reactions against them, the rise of local colour, regionalism, realism, naturalism and of course the beginnings of modernist traditions. If you take both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (which figure in the title of this unit) and also the poems of the earlier unit, you will come across works written against a long, multi-faceted background. In reading the poems in this unit, you – dear learners – should not confine yourself to the prescribed texts only – you should also read some other poems written by these poets and those of their contemporaries. This will help you having a better grasp over the prescribed texts. You should also try to relate the poems included in this unit to those in the earlier unit which includes Philip Freneau's "The Wild Honey Suckle," Phillis Wheatley's "On Being Brought from Africa to America," Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Brahma", Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself," and Emily Dickinson's "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" and "She Sweeps with Many Colored Brooms." You should also try to think whether the period under review (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) contributed in any way to the making of the modern/modernist poets which include T. S. Eliot (*Ash Wednesday*), Ezra Pound ("The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter"), William Carlos Williams ("A Good Night"), Countee Cullen's ("Lines to My Father") and Langston Hughes ("Let America Be America Again"). These poets mentioned are included in the next Block.

10.2 AMERICAN REVOLUTION (1775-1783) : EMERGING IMAGES OF THE NATION

Although the American Revolution (1775-1783) took place in the late eighteenth century, we need to discuss it briefly as it generated certain idealistic principles which are unique in nature and which continued to influence American literature even in the succeeding centuries. These foundational ideals shaped what we know as the 'American mind.' American Revolution not only ended British colonialism in America but also led to the formation of a composite nation and creation of a new identity.

The Revolution was the result of a long-endured frustration and simmering anger of the people against the British colonial policies in America. In retaliation to the imposition of different taxes– for example, the Sugar Act (1764), the Stamp Act (1765) and Townshend Acts (1767) –the people in America began to boycott agricultural and other products such as sugar, paint and linen. Moreover, the Boston Massacre of 1770 in which five persons were killed angered them greatly. In 1773 the ‘patriots’ boarded the British ships in Boston and threw down tea chests into the sea. This event came to be known as the Boston Tea Party. The discontent and the revolutionary fervour grew and fights broke out. This situation ultimately led to the independence of the colonies. The colonies proclaimed their independence officially in 1776. The Declaration of Independence was adopted on 4th of July, 1776. The first President of the United States of America was George Washington.

A prominent concept of the American nation emerged from the American Revolution. The new nation was based on certain emancipatory principles which impacted on the generations of creative artists and informed their works. Some of these ideals find eloquent expression in the following words written by Jefferson (1743-1826):

We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.... (663)

In the above extract we find articulations of both individualism and the principle of democratic governance. It introduces some liberatory ideals to be achieved by the ‘governing authorities’ who would be guided by the will of the people. Writing the American Constitution represents a momentous event – it paves the way for the creation of a government based on the ideal of equality and personal happiness. It laid the true foundations of democracy as the power of the state was sought to be invested in people’s hands. An interesting point in the above extract is that in addition to rights of life and liberty, the right of the individual to happiness was also recognised and given prominence. The document also fostered the spirit of independence and quest for the dream of success and self-fulfillment. These ideals are embedded in the term ‘American Dream.’ America as a unique nation with a vast, vacant space for movement of people and characterised by a unique stock of flora and fauna provided space for the adventurers and the restless souls. Soon poems on America as a unique nation began to be written. Many of Whitman’s poems (e.g., “I Hear America Singing”) embody this spirit of uniqueness. Edgar Lee Masters’ poem entitled “America, “it may be mentioned, is included in this Block. The poets who came later (such as Langston Hughes) also wrote on the theme of the American nation from different perspectives. So, America becomes a metaphor of refuge, liberty, fraternity, multiculturalism and similar other positive ideals as well as of struggle against all kinds of adversities (such as race conflicts).

It may be mentioned, however, that although the triumph against Britain helped creating a strong foundation for the American nation, the nation had

to wait for several decades for the emergence of creative writers of truly American spirit. Poems and other writings mostly looked to the British writers as models. Early writings were basically derivative in nature. Philip Freneau (1752-1832) was one of the few exceptions— his works embodied the spirit of the American Revolution to a great extent although stirrings of European Romanticism can also be traced in his works.

10.3 FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LATE ARRIVAL OF LITERARY WORKS

One of the reasons why new literary works took time to flourish can be traced in the refusal of the American reading public to encourage local works. Most of the early American readers waited eagerly for the arrival of fictions and poetry volumes from England. To complicate the situation further, the copyright law of 1790 allowed pirated versions of the British works to flourish in America. This hindered the process of the publication of the works of American authors who felt discouraged. The establishment of printing presses did not help much in view of the apathy on the part of the local readers. As a result, not many literary works of significance emerged immediately after the Revolution. It took quite some time to produce writers of admirable quality. Richard Gray points out that “[o]ne of the first writers to take advantage of the greater opportunities for publication that were opening up, and in the process become one of the first American writers to achieve international fame, was Washington Irving (1783–1859)” (47). His famous short story “Rip Van Winkle” enunciates the changes after the Revolution. Other contemporary writers of repute include James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82), Henry David Thoreau (1817-62), Herman Melville(1819-91), Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-64), Edgar Allan Poe (1809-49), Walt Whitman (1819-92), and Emily Dickinson (1830-86).

Check Your Progress:

1. Consult relevant texts and try to figure out what the phrase ‘American mind’ means.
2. What does the phrase ‘composite nation’ mean? How is it related to the American Revolution and the American nation?
3. Mention some of the taxes the colonial government imposed on the American people.
4. Consult some relevant articles/books and write a short note on the Boston Massacre of 1770.
5. What do you know about ‘Boston Tea Party’?
6. Who was the first President of the United States of America?
7. Write a short note on the Declaration of Independence.
8. Define the term ‘American Dream.’
9. Write a short note on why creative writings took time to flourish in America.

10.4 THE AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

In order to understand the poetry of the works of the transitional poets such as Edgar Lee Masters and others we also need to have some idea about the American Enlightenment of the 18th century which fostered the spirit of rationality and scientific enquiry on which the American nation was to be properly founded. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Thomas Paine (1737-1809) were two important figures in this respect. They contributed directly to the foundation of the nation. Benjamin Franklin, along with George Washington, John Adams, and Jefferson prepared the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union which is regarded as a 'forerunner' of the American Constitution itself. A self-made man, Franklin believed in hard labour and 'humane rationality.' Hector St. John Crevecoeur (1735-1813) similarly advocated the advantages of hard labour, tolerance, and prosperity. Interestingly, he attempted a definition of the 'American,' the identity of the new man who appeared in the new world:

What then is the American, this new man? He is either a European, or the descendent of a European, hence this strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations.... Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause changes in the world. (qtd. in Dutta 115)

We find here first formulation of the 'melting pot' theory which will be developed later and will be ultimately replaced by the 'salad bowl' theory. The latter speaks of the spirit of the coexistence of different ethnic groups, including non-white groups. This also led to the evolution of the theory and practice of multiculturalism in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) was another embodiment of the spirit of freedom and equality. His pamphlet, *Common Sense*, enjoyed wide popularity. "In the stirring lines with which Paine introduced the pamphlet, we begin to hear already the seeds of the concerns that would make America determine the course of life for its citizens, Natives, immigrants and slaves and then make it globally interventionist in the twentieth century" (Dutta 125). Dutta in this context refers to Philip Freneau's representation of this new America in his poem "On Mr. Paine's Rights of Man." The following lines from the poem may be quoted:

So shall our new nation, formed on Virtue's plan,
Remain the guardian of the Rights of Man,
A vast republic, famed through every clime,
Without a king, to see the end of time." (qtd. in Dutta 130)

At different moments in American history this notion of the American 'nation' and the identity of its people would be asserted and problematised in fiction, poetry, and non-fictional works.

The American Enlightenment is important for understanding poetry of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries in two main ways: first, it emphasised

the idea of America – its history, its geography, its varied natural resources and so on – by reinforcing the concepts of the nation based on democratic ideals of justice, liberty, and equality; and secondly, by providing a rational, humane basis to America as a unique state where people from many parts of the world congregated.

10.5 TRANSCENDENTALISM

The Transcendentalist Movement may be seen as a reaction against rationalism propagated by the eighteenth-century American Enlightenment. It was an influential movement that found eloquent expression in multiple authors and poets. Instead of finding refuge in rationality and the urban space, it found solace in the rural space which is in proximity to Nature. It also emphasized self-reliance and ethical code of behaviour. The spirit of rebellion against all forms of injustice including that by the State authorities was advocated. The writings of Emerson and Thoreau are the finest examples of the above. Transcendentalism propagated simple life and high thinking and believed in the unity of the material and the spiritual worlds. It spoke of the ‘Oversoul’ and spiritual realization of the individual self. “An original relation to the universe, one founded on self-reliance and self-respect, is the key to the thought and work of Emerson. It also inspired a number of other writers at the time who saw the liberation of the self as the American imperative. For Emerson, everything served to confirm a belief in the supreme importance of the individual, the superiority of intuition to intellect (or, as he was to put it, of “Reason” to “Understanding”), and the presence of a spiritual power in both nature and the individual human being” (Gray 59). Some of Emerson’s inspiring essays are “Self-Reliance” (1841), “Divinity School Address”(1838) and “The Over-Soul” (1841). In the last essay mentioned above Emerson refused to accept ‘institutional forms of religion.’ He believed that “God incarnates himself in man.” His emphasis on individuality is closely allied to the equality of all men and the democratic spirit in the society at large.

Concord, a small village in New England, became the centre of this movement. Gray observes:

He [Emerson] settled in Concord, Massachusetts in 1835, where he became intimate friends with other writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott, and Margaret Fuller. It was here that the movement known as Transcendentalism, gathered around his ideas, took shape; and it was here also, at Emerson’s home, and elsewhere that meetings of the Transcendental Club were to be held during the seven or eight years following 1836 – a group, known among its own members as the Symposium or the Hedge Club, that met together occasionally and informally to discuss philosophy, theology, and literature. Emerson himself was to become involved in the publication of the Transcendentalist quarterly magazine, *The Dial*, in 1840, assuming the post of editor in 1842... (Gray 59-60).

Thoreau’s contribution to the Transcendentalist Movement is widely acknowledged. He preferred to have a lonely life, and built up a hut in Walden, experimented with how to be self-reliant, and tried to experience how it felt to be in the midst of, or in proximity with, Nature. He used to

keep a journal, noting the details of his everyday life, and on the basis of this he wrote his immortal book *Walden*(1854). The following remark may be useful for you to understand the importance of the book:

Robert Frost was to call *Walden* his “favourite poem.” Many other descriptions or generic titles have been applied to it: it has been called, among other things, an autobiography, a philosophical narrative, an ecological journal, a spiritual diary. It is, in a way, *sui generis*; it creates its own genre; it is unique. It is also typically American in its intense focus on the first person singular, the “I” of the narrator and author (and, in fact, its elision of narrator and author); its blend of fact and fiction, personal experience and broader reflection; and its intimacy and immediacy, the sense of a confessional raised to the level of art. *Walden*, in short, is one of the many great American books to which Walt Whitman’s remark, “Who touches this book, touches a man,” could act as an epigraph: because, like them, it is the utterly unrepeatable expression of the author, in a particular place and at a particular point in time.(Gray 64)

No wonder, therefore, that a poet like Robert Frost should be influenced by the book.

Check Your Progress:

1. Mention some of the major figures of American Enlightenment.
2. Who prepared the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union?
3. Consult relevant materials and explain the terms ‘melting pot’ and ‘multiculturalism.’
4. Who wrote the poem “On Mr. Paine’s Rights of Man”? What do you know about the poem?
5. Explain why Transcendentalism is perceived as a reaction against rationalism propagated by American Enlightenment.
6. Consult relevant sources and explain the concept of the ‘Oversoul.’
7. Who are the major figures of Transcendentalism?
8. Why is Concord famous?
9. Write a short note on Thoreau’s book *Walden*?

10.6 AMERICAN CIVIL WAR (1861-1865)

The ideal of America as a nation received a rude jolt when the fissures within the nation came to the forefront. “The Civil War was the bloodiest conflict in American history, with over 360,000 Union soldiers and 260,000 Confederates lost on the battlefield or in military hospitals” (Gray115). The war broke out between the industrial North and the agricultural South. It mainly evolved around the issue of slavery. The landowners in the South needed slavery for sustaining their agricultural base, while the North was also in need of supply of free labourers for its factories. There was an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. Moreover, the Abolitionists, motivated by the ideas of freedom and equality, put pressure on the South. Lincoln’s words articulated in the “Gettysburg Address” (1863) had a profound impact on the common people: “That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the

people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth” (web). The concept of the ‘people’ now began to grow beyond the white inhabitants to embrace larger groups of ethnic people including the Blacks.

The war was fought between the Confederation of eleven southern states against the Union comprising the northern states. The confederates lost after a long-drawn battle. The impact of the win of the Union led to the abolition of slavery and boosted the cause of a more inclusive nation. The gory details of the war and the sufferings caused by it are represented in many of the writings of Whitman who experienced the war from close quarters. The theme of slavery resonated through the century and even had profound impact on the later writers. Transcendentalist writers also supported the Abolitionist Movement. Margaret Fuller, for instance, drew a parallel between slavery and women’s condition and felt that emancipation of women might be compared with the emancipation of slaves. Emerson and Thoreau also supported the movement. “Those who spoke out most powerfully against slavery, however, and the violation of self hood it involved, were the slaves themselves. Frederick Douglass (1817–1895) was born into slavery on a plantation in Maryland.” (Gray 66). Gray refers to Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897) who ‘wrote at the confluence of cultures, but for her those cultures were different. “I was born a slave,” Jacobs announces at the beginning of her own book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself* (1861)’ (Gray 69). The American idealism, although a bit hurt, continued to assert itself in different forms. It was from this moment that the nation turned towards a more inclusive nationhood and became “even more of a mosaic of different cultures, colliding interests, and conflicting voices” (Gray 71).

10.7 POST-CIVIL WAR PERIOD

The period between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century witnessed several momentous developments which impacted upon the ideas and opinions of the Americans. The Western frontier, which offered scope and incentive for internal movements in America, was declared officially closed by 1890. With the development of science and technology, communication system improved. First Transcontinental Railroad which was inaugurated in 1869 was soon completed, and transcontinental telegraph became a reality in 1861. Movement of people and goods became faster. Urbanization and industrialization received a boost. All these not only transformed the landscape but also brought a change in the worldview of the people. It was during this period that a large number of new immigrants from Europe and Asia gave a boost to the new economy and changed the demography of America. “Over 23 million foreigners – German, Scandinavian, and Irish in the early years, and increasingly Central and Southern Europeans thereafter – flowed into the United States between 1860 and 1910. Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino contract labourers were imported by Hawaiian plantation owners, railroad companies, and other American business interests on the West Coast” (Spanckeren 47). Despite elements of conflicts and tensions among the ethnic groups, the definitions of America and Americans began to be more inclusive. With the transformation of the economy and socio-

cultural scenario, the rise of the middle class was quite evident. Both women and Black Americans were becoming vociferous about their demands.

All these developments naturally had an impact on literary representations, particularly on fictional narratives. Berke et al. observes, “Within this heady mix of political, economic, social, and cultural change, American writers began to look more to contemporary society and social issues for their writing material, rather than to the distant or fictional past” (53). Naturally, literary works moved away from romanticism to a great extent and embraced realism. William Dean Howells, Mark Twain, and Henry James, for instance, created characters and plot in the realist tradition. Two major modes of representation that emerged are Local Color (1865-1885), Regionalism (1875-95) and Naturalism.

‘Local Color’ writing “involves a detailed setting forth of the characteristics of a particular locality, enabling the reader to ‘see’ the setting. The writer typically is concerned with habits, customs, religious practices, dress, fashion, favorite foods, language, dialect, common expressions, peculiarities, and surrounding flora and fauna of a particular locale” (Berke et al. 54). Usually, the events are presented from the point of view of a stranger who gets tricked by a ‘country bumpkin,’ thereby introducing elements of humour. “Local Color writing can be seen as a transitional type of writing that took American literature away from the Romantic style and more firmly into the Realistic style” (Berke et al. 55).

The other form was Regionalism (1875-95). According to Berke et al., “Regionalism can be seen as a more sophisticated form of Local Color, with the author using one main character (the protagonist) to offer a specific point of view in the story” (55). They observe that a regionalist writer usually dispenses with a ‘formulaic’ plot, initiates ‘a convincing surface of a particular time and place’ and probes into the psychological details of a character ‘from a more universal perspective’ (55).

Naturalism was also on the rise. Stephen Crane, Jack London, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser were concerned with the workings of human instincts in characters. They were influenced by Darwinian ideas and the theory of determinism. “Naturalism is essentially a literary expression of determinism. Associated with bleak, realistic depictions of lower-class life, determinism denies religion as a motivating force in the world and instead perceives the universe as a machine” (Spanckeren 53). Unlike the eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers who imagined the universe as a ‘perfect machine’ invented by God, the naturalists perceived it instead as ‘godless and out of control’ (Spanckeren 53). Naturalism found in the new urbanised and industrialized American space a fertile ground to flourish.

African American tradition of writing autobiography which started with the works of Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was carried forward by authors like Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois more or less during this period.

10.8 TOWARDS MODERNISM

Berke et al. underscore the relationship between the new technology and the literary practice of modernism in following way:

New technologies were changing the face of modern life. The Brooklyn Bridge, completed in 1883, was a giant suspension bridge which connected Brooklyn with Manhattan. Although it pre-dates Modernism, it was seen as one of America's greatest technological achievements and was the subject of Hart Crane's famous Modernist poem *The Bridge*. (363)

Modern technology was not only transforming the landscape but also the ways of looking at things. The historical, socio-cultural and technological background during the later half of the nineteenth century thus led to the reshaping of human sensibilities and goaded them on to experiment with literary style. Modernism that we saw gradually emerging during the second half of the twentieth century had its roots in the historical period under our purview. We have already seen in earlier sections how American poetry was slowly moving away from romantic-transcendental aesthetics towards an urbane and modernist style, both in content and style. The emphasis on 'perfect correspondence' between matter and spirit which Transcendentalism emphasised was now challenged by the gradually aggressive industrial spirit in the twentieth century American society. "With poets like Edwin Arlington Robinson (1865–1935), Robert Frost (1874–1963), and Robinson Jeffers (1887–1962), in particular, the reader is confronted with work that negotiates its way between the solidity and the subversion of the moral self and poetic structure, the pursuit of form, discipline and the impulse towards fragmentation, doubt. Their work, with its intense seriousness of moral purpose, and its questioning rather than collapsing of traditional measures, shades into the old modes of writing as much as into the new" (Gray 171). About Frost's modernism, Gray observes that a "simpler way of describing the circuitous, serpentine character of Frost's work is to say that he is the supreme example of the skeptic in modern American poetry: the person who mistrusts categorical answers, utopian solutions, and who, for reasons he thoroughly articulates, cannot or will not make up his mind" (Gray 174).

Harriet Monroe, born in the cusp between two centuries (born in 1860s and started writing poetry in 1912), played a leading role in the spread of the new poetic sentiments. She edited the journal *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* which published poems of many upcoming poets who ushered in a new poetic taste. Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) represents the changing tone of the time. He introduced a 'graveyard realism' which captured the death of the old lifestyle ushered in by industrialism: "the dead confront the living; the mute past speaks to the vocal present" (Chandran 212). Chandran observes about the anthology: "The poet invokes the dead of Spoon River to record the soundings of a revolt long since drowned in the tumult of America's material progress. It is the country's revolt against the city, against the incursions of the machine into the semi-idyllic landscape of an isolated small town" (Chandran 212). Carl Sandburg, born in 1878, came to the limelight in 1914 while his group of poems appeared in the nationally circulated *Poetry magazine*. Two years later his book *Chicago Poems* was published which provided him an international reputation. Sandburg was inspired by Walt Whitman whose poems drew his attention to the common people. He speaks for the common people and seeks to elicit their rubble-rousing voices which were buried deep into the wheels of industry. His semantic potentiality, reflected in his poems such as 'Crimson Rambler,' 'A

Coin,' 'In a Black Alley', 'Repetition' and so on, is indicative of modernism. His ballads are also outstanding which indicate his proficiency in rendering voices to the deprived section like the Black Americans. During Harlem Renaissance, many African Americans were inspired by Sandburg who helped them form jazz music. Such music conveys their emotions of joy and agony. Thus, he brings modernity in terms of his treatment of the subject-matter and poetic credo. T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound took forward the modernist movement farther. But that will be taken up for discussion in a subsequent chapter.

Check Your Progress:

1. Prepare a list of scientific and technological inventions and innovations that took place during the nineteenth century.
2. What do you mean by 'Local Color' writers? Name some of the authors who belong to this group and cite examples of their works.
3. Who are the 'Regionalist' writers? How are they different from 'Local Colour' writers? Mention some authors who followed this tradition.
4. This section on Post-Civil War Period draws much information from the book *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present* written by Amy Berke, Robert R. Bleil, Jordon Cofer, and Doug Devis. Consult Chapter 2 (Realism) of the book. Jot down notes on what you learn from it.
5. When did the Western frontier close? What are its implications?
6. Consult some relevant sources to identify some American authors who followed the 'Local Colour' tradition.
7. Identify some Regionalist fiction writers.

10.9 SUMMING UP

Gray effectively sums up the changes that took place in America during the period we are surveying:

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States was transformed from an infant republic into a large, self-confident nation, albeit a nation divided and eventually torn apart, as Thomas Jefferson had feared, by the burning issue of slavery. The population more than trebled, from nine to thirty-one million. The rapid expansion of the railroad and manufacturing industry began shifting the national economic basis and the population from country to town. The United States itself expanded from its eastern seaboard base of sixteen states to assume continental dimensions. As the nation grew, so did the opportunities for writers. The lecture circuit generated huge audiences across the country. Newspapers and magazines proliferated. (47)

By this time, you must have perceived that it is difficult to pigeonhole the poets of the late eighteenth century and of the entire nineteenth century into a single poetic tradition. They indeed participated in multiple poetic traditions and wrote on multiple themes. You can trace in them a love for freedom, a strong nationalistic sentiment, enlightenment ideas, reaction against rationalism, emphasis on romanticism and spiritualism, and influence

of modernism. The poets included in our Block – Harriet Monroe, Edgar Lee Masters, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost – may be regarded as transitional poets who participated in both romantic traditions and modernist ones. For instance, Robert Frost, despite being considered predominantly as a romantic poet is often bracketed with modernist poets. It will be worthwhile for us to examine in the following units how multiple political and socio-cultural influences find their way into their poetry.

10.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS: POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. ‘A prominent concept of the American nation emerged from the American Revolution.’ Explain the statement.

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2. Examine the phenomenon known as the American Enlightenment and analyse its effect on intellectual and creative activities in America.

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3. Explain critically Hector St. John Crevecoeur’s definition of the term ‘American.’

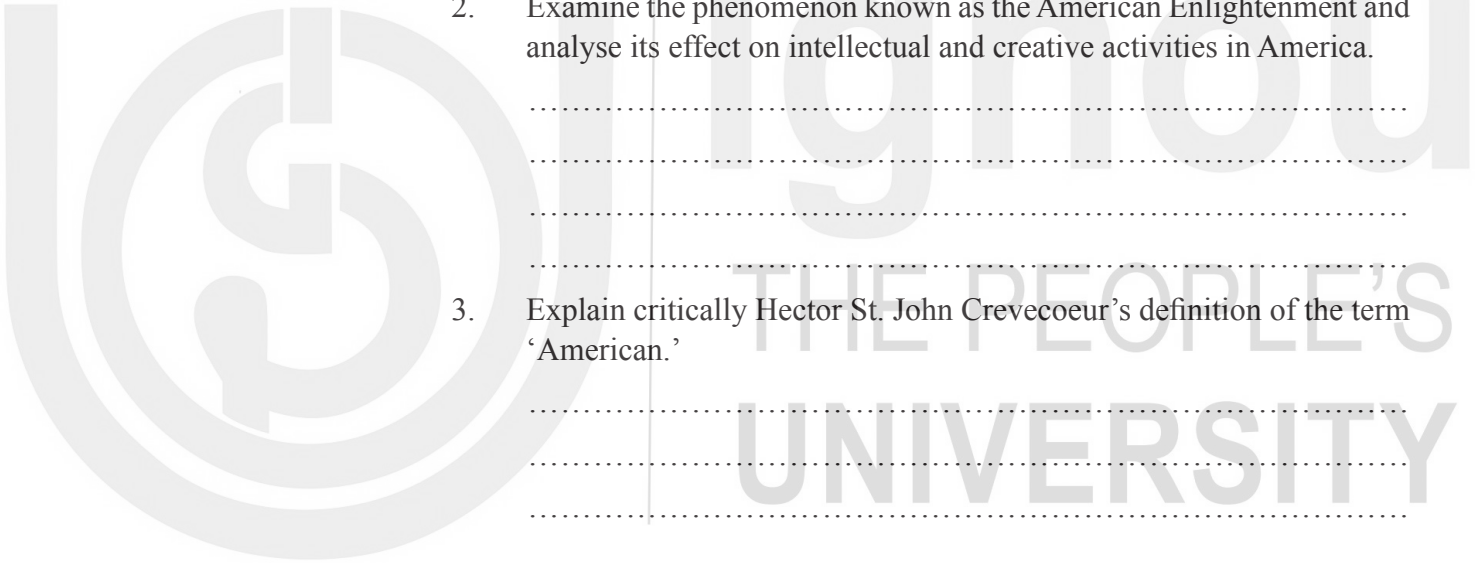
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4. Write a critical note on Transcendentalist movement in America and trace its impact on American poetry.

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5. Write a critical note on the American Civil War.

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6. “The period between the Civil War and the end of the nineteenth century witnessed several momentous developments which impacted upon the ideas and opinions of the Americans.” Elucidate.

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7. Write critical notes on the following:

- (a) ‘Local Color’ writers; (b) Regionalist writers; (c) Naturalist writers

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10.11 SELECT READING LIST

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UNIT 11: EDGAR LEE MASTERS’ “AMERICA”

Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Edgar Lee Masters’ literary career
- 11.3 Text of “America”
- 11.4 Word Meanings and Allusions
- 11.5 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis
- 11.6 Summing Up
- 11.7 Comprehension Exercises
- 11.8 Suggested Reading

11.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the poetic commitments of Edgar Lee Masters and contextualise the poem in your syllabus;
- Acquire an understanding of the poem “America” and demonstrate your analysis of it;
- Critically think of American poets after the American Civil War.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall try to analyze Edgar Lee Masters’ poem “America” and will try to contextualize it with our knowledge of the history of contemporary American literature acquired from the previous units. This unit comes as a complementary reading of other poems in the course, and although we try to read each literary work individually, we will find that the poems included in the Block are related either thematically or stylistically. For instance, Edgar Lee Masters’ poem “America” is connected with Carl Sandburg’s poem “Accomplished Facts” even though they apparently seem to be poles apart. The present unit also builds upon the fact that any literary corpus usually builds upon the socio-political and historical-cultural background of a region and a milieu. On that note, in this unit we shall try to understand Edgar Lee Masters’ preoccupation with his homeland at a particular juncture of post-Civil War America.

11.2 EDGAR LEE MASTERS’ LITERARY CAREER

Edgar Lee Masters is an early twentieth century American poet, who is sometimes considered to be one of America’s most cited poets. He is also known for his prose, though he is primarily acclaimed for his poetry

anthology *Spoon River Anthology (SRA)*, first published in serial form in 1914. He wrote over fifty books in a variety of genres, but is mostly looked upon as a one-book poet for the massive popularity of this anthology.

Masters was born on August 23, 1868 in Garnett, Kansas to Hardin and Emma Masters. His father was a lawyer who came to Kansas for a change of scenery, but soon returned to his hometown of Petersburg, Illinois on the Sagemon River, which became the abode for the family for the next eleven years. In 1880 the family moved to Lewiston, Illinois on the Spoon River. Lewiston and Petersburg, each located on a river, would serve in Masters' mind as models for his literary village of Spoon River. Petersburg represented the rural Southern culture and the happy memories of his father's family; Lewiston represented the New England village culture which Masters associated with his mother's judgmental attitude (Wrenn, 6-7).

After graduating from high school, Edgar attended Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois but due to financial restrictions his father convinced him to leave that, and to begin his studies in law in his father's office. Later he was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1891. The decision of changing his major was to have a very negative impact on Masters' later literary career, because many critics find him lacking of critical training in the liberal arts, for which he was unable to distinguish his good writing from his bad (Russell, 29).

Using a variety of pseudonyms to avoid possible damage to his law practice, Masters began to publish poetry in magazines. He had prepared a collection of poems called *A Book of Verses* that he had been writing since his youth. Their subject matter was very traditional – love, mythical heroes, and the seasons. In 1905 Masters' second volume of poetry, *The Blood of the Prophets*, in which the poem "America" was included, was issued under the pseudonym of Dexter Wallace. The poems are largely concerned with Populist political issues and are written from the viewpoint of a fervent supporter of the young William Jennings Bryan. The volume attracted little critical or popular attention. By 1915 he had published four books of poetry, seven plays, and a collection of essays, but none of them had received much critical attention. Then, following the advice of the publisher of *Reedy's Mirror*, William Marion Reedy, Masters began to experiment with poetic form, bringing to life the sort of people he had known in his boyhood. The result was *Spoon River Anthology*, which mixed classical forms with innovative ones.

Critical reaction to *SRA* was varied. William Dean Howells referred to Masters' prosody as "shredded prose" (634-635). While British critic John Cowper Powys called Masters a really great poet and the natural child of Walt Whitman (*New York Times*, 7, 9). Carl Sandburg praised the realism of Masters' work: "The people whose faces look out from the pages of the book are the people of life itself" (43). Writing in 1924 Percy Boynton called the book "the most read and talked of volume of poetry that has ever been written in America" (50-62). The book also prompted increased attention to the works of other writers of Illinois and the Midwest such as Carl Sandburg, Vachel Lindsey, and Sherwood Anderson. This flourishing of literary activity would come to be known as the Chicago Renaissance, as Masters spent his thirty years in that city.

Masters also wrote a number of novels during the 1920s. He released in quick succession three related novels of boyhood and growing up: *Mitch Miller* (1920), *Skeeter Kirby* (1923) and *Kit O'Brien* (1927). *Mitch Miller*, the best of these volumes, is based on memories of Masters' own boyhood in Petersburg and focuses on the sadness connected with losing the illusions of youth.

From time to time throughout his career, Masters also attempted to write plays. Some of them include *Maximilian: A Play in Five Acts, Althea* (1907), *The Trifler* (1908), *The Leaves of the Tree* (1909), *Gettysburg, Manila, Acoma* (1930) and *Dramatic Duologues: Four Short Plays in Verse* (1934). None, however, except for one part of the *Dramatic Duologues*, was ever produced. It ran for three nights at the University of Chicago in December of 1934 (Russell, 298).

In the 1930's Masters turned his attention to biography, writing a number of volumes about American literary and historical figures. These include *Lincoln: The Man* (1931); *Vachel Lindsay, A Poet of America* (1935); *Walt Whitman* (1937); *Mark Twain, A Portrait* (1938); and *The Living Thoughts of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (1940). Masters grew up in the same area of central Illinois that Lincoln came from, and he tried used his local sources to correct a few erroneous public impressions about Lincoln. His biography of Lindsay, who as a fellow Illinois poet Masters knew quite well, was recognized for decades as a valuable source about the tragic poet. Finally, in 1937, Masters attempted an autobiography with his *Across Spoon River*. The work covers his life from its beginnings to his writing of *SRA*.

In the last decade of his life, Masters was publicly acknowledged for his literary achievements. In 1942 he was recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1944 he received the Shelly Memorial Award and in 1946 he received an Academy of American Poets Fellowship. Master died the night of March 5, 1950 and is buried in the cemetery at Petersburg, Illinois among those whose lives he recorded in *Spoon River Anthology* (Russell, 357-359). Although Masters never reached the sale level of literary reputation as his more illustrious contemporaries, his famous book *Spoon River Anthology* lives on.

"America" was published in 1905 in *Blood of the Prophets*, and most poems of the volume are concerned with political issues. Masters was supporting the political agenda of William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), a dominant leader in the Democratic Party who ran three times as the party's nominee for President of the United States in the 1896, 1900, and 1908 elections. He also served in the United States House of Representatives and as the United States Secretary of State under Woodrow Wilson. Because of his faith in the wisdom of the common people, he was often called "The Great Commoner". It is understandable that in the poem we will discuss here, Masters refers to America as a land of peace and freedom. Post-Civil War America was suffering from all kinds of corruption and unpleasantness. As Masters was a politically motivated writer that is evidenced in his entire literary career, a poem like "America" from his pen comes naturally. A great follower of Walt Whitman, he wrote the poem in free verse in an oratorical vein in which he issued forth a clarion call for humanity. He used to draw on his readings of English Romantic poets, including Wordsworth, Keats,

Shelley, and Browning, as well as the American Ralph Waldo Emerson. In the poem one finds the influence of romantic allusions in several lines.

Edgar Lee Master's *America*

Let us read the text and try to analyse the poem from our perspective.

11.3 TEXT OF “AMERICA”

“America”

Glorious daughter of time! Thou of the mild blue eye —
 Thou of the virginal forehead —pallid, unfurrowed of tears—
Thou of the strong white hands with fingers dipped in the dye
 Of the blood that quickened the fathers of thee, in the ancient years,
Leave thou the path of the beasts. Return thou again to the hills,
 Forsake thou the deserts of death, where ever the burning thirst,
Flames in the throat for blood, for the vile desire that kills,
 Where the treacherous sands by the rebel cerastes are cursed,
And the wastes are strewn with the bones of folly and hate.
 Return! where the sunlight gladdens the places of green,
Where the stars comes forth, the heralds of faith and fate,
 And the winds of eternity breathe from a day unseen.
Thou! what hast thou to do with a time burnt out and done?
 With the old Serbonian bog— the marshes where nations were lost?
Where wailings are heard of the dead, of the slaughtered Roman and Hun,
 And phosphorent lights arise in the hands of a stricken ghost,
Dreaming of splendors of battle that glanced from a million shields,
 When the Cæsars pillaged for lust of gold and hunger of power;
And the giants of Gothland festered and stank on the stretching fields,
 And the gods of the living were cursed, too weak to reveal the hour,
When they should triumph and others should writhe in a dread defeat,
 In the day of thy grace, O fair and false to thy fathers and time,
O thou whom the snares of kings already encompass thy feet,
 With thy singing robes besprent with the old Egyptian slime.
But thou hast harkened to guile, to the cunning words of shame,
 To the tempter with pieces of gold and the praise of the drunken throng.
Scornfully push from their hands the crown of a common fame,
 Not made for thy peaceful brows, for thou wert not born for wrong.
Thou art the fruit of the groaning cycles of hope and love,
 Told of by maddened prophets who never beheld thy face,
Who drew from the teeming earth and the fetterless sky above,
 That man was made to be free, and to stamp under foot the mace.
How should thy innocent eyes ever leer with a reddened look?
 Or thy hair be scented save of the measureless sea?

Or thy feet know the ways of deceit, wrote out in the murderous book,
By monarchs who shrank from the scourging and doom of thy strength
and thee?

Beloved of time and of fate, cherished of justice and truth,
Yet thou art free to do, to choose the ill and to die;
To squander thy beauty for hire, to waste thy eternal youth —
For thou art eternal, if thou heedst them not, but pass by,
Pass and return to the mountains of freedom and peace,
Where heavenward flame the fires, where the torches may be relumed,
To girdle the world with the light that was kindled in olden Greece;
Or that the sparks may be scattered wherever injustice has doomed,
Darkness to be the portion of those who famish for light.
Be thou the great rock's shadow cast in a weary land,
Be thou a star of guidance true in a wintry night,
Be thou thyself, and thyself alone, as heaven hath planned.

11.4 WORD MEANINGS AND ALLUSIONS

Pallid- lacking vigour/ intensity, insipid; unfurrowed- Unplowed, untrenched; dipped- immersed; dye- a soluble or insoluble coloring matter; quickened - enlivened, made alive; Forsake- to renounce or turn away from entirely; vile- morally despicable or abhorrent; treacherous- likely to betray trust, unreliable; cerastes - a venomous viper of North Africa and the Middle East having a horny process over each eye; wastes- a sparsely settled or barren region; strewn - spread by scattering; Serbonian bog- relates to Lake Serbonis (Sirbonis or Serbon) in Egypt, as described by Herodotus; marshes- tracts of soft wet land usually characterized by monocotyledons, such as grasses or cattails; wailings- loud cry; phosphorent- misspelling of phosphorescent; splendors - great brightness or luster; Cæsars- a title used by Roman emperors, especially those from Augustus to Hadrian; pillaged- robbed using violence, especially in wartime; Gothland- one of three lands of Sweden and comprises ten provinces. Geographically it is in the south of Sweden, bounded to the north by Svealand, with the deep woods of Tiveden, Tylöskog and Kolmården marking the border; festered- (of food or rubbish) become rotten and offensive to the senses; writhe- make twisting, squirming movements, or contortions of the body, respond with great emotional or physical discomfort to (an intense or unpleasant feeling or thought; snares- A snare is a trap for catching birds or small animals. It consists of a loop of wire or rope which pulls tight around the animal; besprent- Sprinkled over; slime- an unpleasantly thick and slippery liquid substance; harkened- hearkened, to listen to something; guile- sly or cunning intelligence; tempter- a person or thing that tempts; groaning- denoting a deep inarticulate sound conveying pain, despair, pleasure; teeming- abounding, abundant; fetterless- having no fetters, free, unbound; mace- an aromatic spice consisting of the dried external fibrous covering of a nutmeg, a club used as a weapon; leer- to cast a sidelong glance; scourging- to punish severely with an instrument of punishment or criticism; squander- to spend

extravagantly or foolishly; heedst- heed, pay attention to, take notice of; relumed- relighted or rekindled; girdle- a belt or cord worn round the waist; famish- be extremely hungry, reduce (someone) to extreme hunger.

11.5 PARAPHRASE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The poet addresses America as a “Glorious daughter of time” that refers to the contemporary sociopolitical scenario in America. The glory of America established as a democratic state after the long drawn Atlantic Slave Trade that existed till the 1870s and the bloody Civil War that took thousands of lives. The poet means to be prophetic with visions of the future and hence calls for awareness. Then when he calls America “Thou of the mild blue eye”, followed by “Thou of the strong white hands”, the postcolonial Indian reader is certainly reminded of the white man’s legacy of pride in white skin and blue eyes that makes us uneasy and thoughtful. However, the poet perhaps means to refer to the undiluted purity of the soil for which he needed the white man’s reference. Thus, when he writes that the white hand is dipped in the blood of forefathers, the pride turns into self-approbation. The poet asks the country or the countrymen to leave their animalistic instincts and calls for peace. Leaving the path of killing the countrymen should take refuge in the natural beauty of their holy land, and hills here represent the nature. The wastes, marshes and deserts are cursed and venomous serpents live there. The poet uses the symbol of cerastes, a kind of serpent with horns that are typically found in North America. When he uses the word ‘rebel’ with cerastes, it becomes a political allusion. The readers may think that he is calling the supporters of the opposition as rebels, as the Democratic Party was in power at that time in America. He again calls everyone to the natural elements like the sun and stars, “the heralds of faith and fate” that is written in a transcendental note. He refers to “the winds of eternity” that finalises his statement, binding the worldly peace with the work of providence.

In the next stanza the poet becomes argumentative. He asks for an explanation of America’s preoccupation with its dark past. Here again, the poet’s orientalist view is disturbing. When he refers to “the old Serbonian bog” that is placed in Africa, the dark continent in the eyes of the white colonisers, but perhaps he wants America to be free of its colonial past. He refers to several other clashes of civilisations, i.e, the Romans and Huns that refer geo-politically to the continents of Europe and Asia, where only cries of the dying people could be heard; it becomes clear that he takes pride in his Americanness, and wants to slacken all ties with the forefathers who were bloodthirsty. He refers to the Germans and Swedes too, who killed for power and wealth, and consequently destroyed lives. The rotten smell of the dead overpowered the lands. He says, the living also lost their conviction as the gods could not foretell their future. He asks America not to be trapped in the fake victory that is earned in the defeat of others. His allusions to the past are complete when he refers to “Egyptian slime” that sprinkles its curse on the singing robes of the victorious.

The following stanza is written in a manner of sheer frustration. America has surrendered to the temptations of wealth and fame. America has listened to the shameful cunning words of the tempter. Right after that the poet returns to his didactic tone and asks America to leave the cheap fame and the crown

that does not suit the “virgin forehead” mentioned in the first stanza. Rather, his reference to the “peaceful brows” builds upon an image of America as a great democracy that should ideally stand for peaceful coexistence of her citizens who are from a diverse stock, and also espouse the cause of global peace. America is thus envisaged as the hope for the people with wisdom and free mind, here represented by the prophets whose abode was both the earth and heaven, and who believed in freedom of man. The poet wonders if it is ever possible for America to be cruel or murderous, as America is deemed vast and broad. The poet uses the image of the “measureless sea” here to express the broadmindedness of America. He asks if America can be deceitful and deadly as those defeated kings who was always feared the strength and destructive power of America.

Finally the poet comes back to the sweet invoking mood of the first few lines, and calls America “Beloved” of time and fate that is cherished of justice and truth. Yet, he keeps the bitter possibility for America to beguile in the wrong calls and to choose the path of death. He beseeches America to avoid the calls of the wrong people, and return to the mountains of freedom and peace, that will keep America youthful and enlightened. He refers to old Greece, to refer to the richness of Greek civilisation, and emphasizes on the same spread of light throughout the length and breadth of the American civilization. The poet becomes prophetic at the end, and believes that America was planned to be the guiding star for the world’s dark corners. America must take its true path of enlightenment and become the epitome of truth, and guide the ones who are in search of light. This light, needless to say, comes to mean very wide limits of metaphorical connotations.

11.6 SUMMING UP

Truly of didactic nature, the poem has patriotic undertone. It is written in the vein of poems with same title by several other poets of America. For example, Whitman writes of America in a similar manner in “I Hear America Singing” or “One Song, America, Before I Go” in which he is more joyous and firmer; unhesitatingly trusting in the positivity of American people. Thematically, Masters has followed his fellow American poets of the time who upheld their pride and faith in America as a democratic nation, and wanted it to lead the world. He has certain apprehensions as temptations of wealth and power lurk in abundance and he has certain knowledge of history when America beguiled in such temptations. He remembers the past and strongly negates the idea of returning to such times with reference from historical events. The resonance of such poetry written in the American spirit is seen in several poets of the subsequent times. One of the most illustrious may be “Let America be America Again” in which Langston Hughes (1902-1967) expresses the same wish for America to be the America dreamt by the Americans and designed by fate. Stylistically Masters has followed Whitman’s use of free verse; Free verse is an open form of poetry that does not use consistent meter patterns, rhyme, or any musical pattern. It thus tends to follow the rhythm of natural speech. As the poem is written in free verse it is easy for the readers to understand the direct speech of the poet clearly.

11.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. How would you relate the life of Edgar Lee Masters to his poetic output, specifically with reference to the poem "America"?

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2. What kind of formative influences do you find in the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters? Answer with specific reference to the poem "America".

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3. How in your opinion does Edgar Lee Master's poem "America" stand out from other poems written on the same theme by other American poets?

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4. Based on your reading of the poem "America". What Romantic influences do you find in Edgar Lee Masters?

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5. Bring out the evolution of poetic thought in Edgar Lee Masters' poem "America".

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Century-II**

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THE PEOPLE'S
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UNIT 12: CARL SANDBURG'S *ACCOMPLISHED FACTS*

Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Carl Sandburg's literary career
- 12.3 Text of "Accomplished Facts"
- 12.4 Word Meanings and Allusions
- 12.5 Paraphrase and Critical Analysis
- 12.6 Summing Up
- 12.7 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions
- 12.8 Suggested Reading

12.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this Unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the poetic commitments of Carl Sandburg and contextualise the poem in your syllabus;
- Acquire an understanding of the poem "Accomplished Facts" and demonstrate your analysis of it;
- Critically think of American poets after the American Civil War.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we shall try to read Carl Sandburg's poem "Accomplished Facts", and will try to contextualize it with the knowledge of American poetry post World War I that you have surely acquired from the unit on American history. This unit, like the previous one, complements our understanding of poems written in a tragic and melancholic atmosphere of a post war America. The poem "Accomplished Facts" is rather heavily rooted in Sandburg's contemporary American history as it alludes to specific episodes of history, and therefore it requires you to refresh your knowledge in this area. Without referring to the specific developments of those episodic developments of America as a democratic state, it will be quite difficult to grasp the poem. The political connotations of the text come with famous names referred to in it, but a prevailing philosophical undertone is strongly predominant here. Let us attempt our reading of the poem in the light of Sandburg's lifelong preoccupation with American politics that was amalgamated with his poetic career.

12.2 CARL SANDBURG'S LITERARY CAREER

Carl Sandburg, a twentieth-century American poet, was more popular for his biography of American president Abraham Lincoln. However, he would often be compared with his more renowned contemporary Robert Frost

as one of the two “quintessentially American poets” of the mid-century, because both were very popular and rough, and were able to represent ordinary Americans.

Sandburg was born in the small town of Galesburg, Illinois, in a Swedish immigrant family. His parents had Sandberg as their last name, which he later changed into Sandburg to sound more American. He also adopted the name Charles, but he decided to retain Carl later for some personal reason. He left school at the age of fourteen, and took odd jobs like delivering newspapers and milk, shining shoes, and sweeping out offices. He spent some years of his youth in complete arbitrariness, because he was not quite sure what path to pursue. In 1898 he enlisted to fight in the Spanish-American War and served briefly in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Returning home as a veteran, he enrolled in Lombard College in Galesburg. There a professor named Philip Green Wright became his lifelong mentor. He introduced him to socialist ideas and encouraged Sandburg’s writing. Wright also published Sandburg’s poetry collection (*In Reckless Ecstasy*, 1904), a collection of essays (*Incidentals*, 1907), and a parable on socialism (*The Plaint of a Rose*, 1908) privately.

However, Sandburg had to leave the college without a degree, and travelled to New York City and New Jersey, where he took the job of a travelling salesman selling stereoscopic pictures. Afterwards, like Edgar Lee Masters he was also drawn to Chicago, and tried to get a journalist’s job there. He worked for a while for the magazine *To-Morrow*, doing editing and proofreading, and also publishing articles and poems. He also worked for other small publications in Chicago. At Lombard he had studied oratory and he also began to take part in the lecture circuit, giving talks on the nineteenth-century poet Walt Whitman, who influenced him immensely, as his other contemporaries. Whitman’s democratic politics and use of free verse attracted him. His mentor Wright’s influence on him was still fresh and he went to Wisconsin to work for the Social-Democratic Party. He recruited members for the Party, wrote for its publications, and made speeches on its behalf. Focusing on politics in this period, Sandburg had little time for poetry. Critics of his poetry find that when he had some time for poetry around this time, his politics crept into it. His style also changed, as he became more and more a follower of Whitman’s style of free verse, abandoning traditional metre and rhyme, and also aiming for clear, direct, simple diction. The 1910s became an extremely productive time for Sandburg poetically. The poems that first appeared in *Poetry*, along with others, were gathered in the 1916 collection *Chicago Poems*, which focused on portraits of the city and its people. Two years later Sandburg published *Cornhuskers*, a collection with a more rural focus, exemplified by the lead poem, “Prairie,” evoking the landscapes of his youth, still with a populist energy, but tinged with melancholy, not quite the brash and vibrant, quasi-revolutionary fervour of the first collection. Some of his poems under *Smoke Nights* were published in *Poetry* edited by Harriet Stowe in the February 1920 issue, of which “Accomplished Facts” was one. These reappeared in the poetry collection *Smoke and Steel* (1920). Another collection quickly followed: *Slabs of the Sunburnt West* (1922), after which Sandburg’s attention shifted away from

poetry. He published another collection much later in 1928 (*Good Morning, America*) and then an epic 107-section poem, *The People, Yes*, in 1936.

The outbreak of World War I affected both Sandburg's politics and his poetry. In the early years of the war, he produced anti-war verse attacking the horrors of the conflict, but, after America's entry into the war, he declared himself a supporter of the fight against the German Kaiser, seeing that as the route to democracy, while still evoking war's horrors. His most memorable war poem ("Grass") strikes an ironic note, contrasting the transience of human activities with the continuing presence of Nature:

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo. Shovel them under and let me work –I am the grass; I cover all.

This poem appeared first in the *International Socialist Review*, a radical publication that Sandburg contributed to through the war years after he left the Social-Democratic Party. Sandburg seems to have become more radical in these years, writing sympathetically about industrial sabotage and the radical Industrial Workers of the World.

As early as 1917, in response to Amy Lowell, who said it was unfortunate that Sandburg mixed propaganda with his poetry, he told her that he agreed with her and that he was moving away from such things. Later however, he was to say that he was just portraying reality and that if he had put too much of that in his poetry, perhaps she had not put in enough. In later years Sandburg's politics seemed to moderate. He remained a strong supporter of the People, the poor, the working class, but also emphasized his attachment to America and the American Dream, and became a supporter of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal liberalism in the 1930s.

From 1919 to 1932, while writing poetry and engaging in other creative work, Sandburg supported himself by working as a journalist for the *Chicago Daily News*. For much of the time he was the paper's film critic, but his most notable work for the paper was a series of investigative pieces on racial conflicts, which were published as a book called *The Chicago Race Riots* (1919).

This period also saw Sandburg begin his long involvement with Abraham Lincoln, and he spent years researching on Lincoln's life. This culminated in two massive works on Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (1926) and *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (1939). Sandburg himself became a beloved celebrity in his later years, especially for his folksy demeanour when performing in public – reciting his poems, singing old folk songs to the accompaniment of a guitar, and telling stories – as for his literary productions. The critics' views about his work are varied. Rebecca West compared him to Robert Burns for being the poet of his people, but he was criticized for repetitiousness, formlessness, and a tendency to incorporate lists and catalogues into his work. He usually avoided writing in traditional verse forms, and his free verse differed from the work of the other poets as his was a clear and simple diction. He depicted the people's struggles in accessible language and was a truly people's poet like Whitman whom he so admired. When Ernest Hemingway won the Nobel Prize in 1954, he said if it had been up to him he would have given it to Sandburg. Sandburg received two Pulitzer Prizes, the first for his massive work on Abraham

Lincoln *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (1939), and the second for his *Complete Poems* (1950). At his death in 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson observed that “Carl Sandburg was more than the voice of America, more than the poet of its strength and genius. He was America” (Callahan 233).

Sandburg is still remembered for poems like “Fog” and “Chicago” and for some others (“Prairie” and “Grass”) and as well for his monument to Lincoln, but Sheldon Goldfarb writes that with his craggy folksy persona no longer present, he has faded from both popular and critical memory. Let us read the poem “Accomplished Facts” to understand how he perceived American civilisation and human life after the World War I.

12.3 TEXT OF “ACCOMPLISHED FACTS”

“Accomplished Facts”

Every year Emily Dickinson sent one friend
The first arbutus bud in her garden.

In a last will and testament Andrew Jackson
Remembered a friend with the gift of George
Washington’s pocket spy-glass.

Napoleon too, in a last testament, mentioned a silver
Watch taken from the bedroom of Frederick the Great,
And passed along this trophy to a particular friend.

O. Henry took a blood carnation from his coat lapel
And handed it to a country girl starting work in a
Bean bazaar, and scribbled: “Peach blossoms may or
May not stay pink in city dust.”

So it goes. Some things we buy, some not.
Tom Jefferson was proud of his radishes, and Abe
Lincoln blacked his own boots, and Bismarck called
Berlin a wilderness of brick and newspapers.

So it goes. There are accomplished facts.
Ride, ride, ride on in the great new blimps-
Cross unheard-of oceans, circle the planet.
When you come back we may sit by five hollyhocks.
We might listen to boys fighting for marbles.
The grasshopper will look good to us.

So it goes...

12.4 WORD MEANINGS AND ALLUSIONS

Emily Dickinson – Emily Dickinson (1830 - 1886) is an important American poet famous for writing short poems, and on death; arbutus – Arbutus is a genus of flowering plants in the family Ericaceae, native to

North America and some other regions of the world. These are usually small trees or shrubs with red flaking bark and edible red berries; testament – a will or will that someone makes, saying what should be done with their money and property after they die; Andrew Jackson – Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) was an American lawyer, soldier, and statesman who served as the seventh president of the United States from 1829 to 1837 ; George Washington – A political leader, military general, statesman, and Founding Father who served as the first president of the United States from 1789 to 1797; spy-glass – a small telescope.; Napoleon- Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821) was a French military and political leader. He rose to prominence during the French Revolution and led several successful campaigns during the Revolutionary Wars. As Napoleon I, he was Emperor of the French from 1804 until 1814, and again in 1815; Frederick the Great – Frederick II (1712-1786) was a Prussian king and military leader who ruled the Kingdom of Prussia from 1740 until 1786, at 46 years the longest reign of any Hohenzollern king ; trophy- a cup or other decorative object awarded as a prize for a victory or success./ (in ancient Greece or Rome) the weapons of a defeated army set up as a memorial of victory; O. Henry – Pen name of William Sydney Porter (1862 –1910), who was an American short story writer ; blood carnation – A red coloured flower, a variation of *Dianthus caryophyllus*, commonly known as the carnation or clove pink. It was one of the flowers used in Greek and Roman ceremonial crowns ; lapel – the fold of the front of a coat that is usually a continuation of the collar, and usually flowers are to it ; scribble – A piece of writing or a picture produced carelessly or hurriedly/ write or draw (something) carelessly or hurriedly ; Tom Jefferson – Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was an American statesman, diplomat, lawyer, architect, philosopher, and Founding Father who served as the third president of the United States from 1801 to 1809 ; Abe Lincoln – Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was an American statesman and lawyer who served as the 16th president of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. ; blacked – (Past form) to have made (something) black; blacken. ; Bismarck – Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898) was a conservative German statesman who masterminded the unification of Germany in 1871 and served as its first chancellor until 1890, in which capacity he dominated European affairs for two decades; Berlin – Berlin is the capital and largest city of Germany by both area and population; blimps – A blimp, or non-rigid airship, is an airship (dirigible) without an internal structural framework or a keel/ perhaps meaning a pompous person with out-of-date or ultraconservative views in the poem ; hollyhocks– Common name of *Alcea* that is a genus of about 60 species of flowering plants in the mallow family *Malvaceae*, native to Asia and Europe, but these are not common in the Americas; perhaps it refers to the streambank wild hollyhock, belongs to a different genus.

12.5 PARAPHRASE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The poem has an overall philosophical undertone, not necessarily religious but signifying in almost the metaphysical way that we come across in G M Hopkins' poem "God's Grandeur". In the poem Hopkins writes –

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

In a similar manner the speaker of the poem refers to some great people and their activities, but at the end of all those activities, one must be looking for repose, and then one has to come back to nature. The poem alludes to a long list of renowned people, not necessarily American; but people who are known for positive contribution to the world, and whose services are carried forward by their successors in the world. The speaker begins with the famous American poet Emily Dickinson, perhaps to emphasize the reality of death. Dickinson was popular for gardening and the arbutus flower is mentioned to reflect on that. Scholar Judith Farr notes that Dickinson, during her lifetime, was known more widely as a gardener than as a poet. Some of Dickinson's historians also record that she would often send her friends bunches of flowers with verses attached. In this poem, the arbutus is a sharp contrast to death that has erased Dickinson's physical existence from this world. Sandburg may have the notion that the tradition of sending the first flowers of one's garden to a dear friend has not stopped. This must have been carried forward by Dickinson from someone and someone else must have done the same after her demise. Thus, the tradition of gifting flowers continued. Flower is symbolically meaning life and friendship, that goes on.

The speaker then brings the example of Andrew Jackson, the seventh President of America, who had a small telescope of George Washington in his possession, and who gave it away to a friend in his last will. The telescope represents the office and duty of the US president, that signifies duty to democracy and people. When the friend is gifted with it, it is the legacy that he carries forward.

Then the speaker refers to Napoleon Bonaparte, the famous French military and political leader, who became the symbol of victory in early nineteenth century. As we know, he led the French Revolution and became the Emperor of France for some years. There is a reference to a ransacked silver watch from the Prussian king Frederick's palace, perhaps during the Napoleonic Wars, which came into Napoleon's possession. Historical document to this, however, is lacking. The silver watch refers to time, to victory and defeat that come to any leader's life in turn, and the possession of one great ruler goes to another. This is how human civilization evolves. Napoleon gave away the trophy to a friend, which carries forward the idea of legacy and tradition.

The speaker continues with the reference of O. Henry, the famous American writer, who brings in a closer connection with the common man. O. Henry gifted a red carnation flower that decorated his coat lapel to a country girl, and expected that she would remain as fresh in the hustle bustle of the city life. 'Peach blossoms' here has a metaphoric use, both as a flower

and as a young girl from the countryside. Then the speaker comments philosophically for the first time, referring to the way such tradition is carried forward. "So it goes" is repeated later in the poem, at the beginnings of the following stanza, and also finally at the end. The figure of speech is a kind of anaphora that serves the purpose of delivering an artistic effect to a stanza. It is used to appeal to the emotions of the reader in order to persuade, inspire, motivate and encourage them, as we know. Then the speaker says that some traditions we carry forward, some we do not. To refer to this, the speaker alludes to three eminent political leaders who had uncommon habits. Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln and Otto von Bismarck are referred to here for their unusual speech and action. Bismarck used to call the city of Berlin a wilderness of brick and newspapers, which all men may not hold as a view. Berlin might be a city of joyous life, not of mechanical tittle-tattle as Bismarck viewed it.

In the following stanza the speaker calls these accomplished or completed or accepted facts, that have become universal. The poet also used lexical repetitions to emphasize a significant image: "Ride, ride, ride", to show the futility or ordinariness of these activities before finally coming to idea of repose. Man must ultimately come back to childhood in the lap of nature and enjoy simplicity of life. Five hollyhocks, boys fighting for marbles and grasshopper are representative of this simple living that becomes a man's final refuge.

12.6 SUMMING UP

The mood of the speaker is purely philosophical, though not sarcastic, when the word "accomplished" is used for the facts he/she referred to. The fact that human efforts are to end up somewhere and man come back to childhood to complete the life's journey, which seems to be a circular one in this poem. The examples are used only to show that big names in the world are for creating traditions, and we carry the legacy only as their followers. Our ultimate happiness depends on our simplicity and ability to enjoy natural elements. The poet uses a varied set of punctuation marks in the poem, neither of which predominates, and that gives a matter-of-fact tone to the whole idea of men's adventures.

12.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS : POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of the title of this poem? Show how the content transcends the apparently prosaic nature of the title.
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2. To what effect does Sandburg use the many names of eminent people from different walks of life in this poem?
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3. How does the poem ‘Accomplished Facts’ blend the poet’s philosophical perception with his analysis of historical facts?

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.....

12.8 SUGGESTED READING

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THE PEOPLE’S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 13: ROBERT FROST'S '*HOME BURIAL*' AND AFTER APPLE PICKING'

Structure:

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
 - 13.1.1 The Writer's Bio-brief
 - 13.1.2 Summary of *Home Burial*
- 13.2 Analysis
- 13.3 Significance of the Title
- 13.4 Exploring Different Responses To Tragedy In "Home Burial"
- 13.5 "After Apple Picking" by Robert Frost
- 13.6 Summing Up
- 13.7 Check Your Progress: Possible Questions
- 13.8 Select Reading List

13.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- know about the works of Robert Frost
- comprehend "Home Burial" as distinctly different from his other works
- understand human tragedy in the context of this text
- locate social forces as determining the discourse of the couple's life, hence the pragmatics of individual emotions pitted against or getting shaped by dominant social mores
- comprehend a picture of a couple who have lost their child.
 - know about the works of Robert Frost
 - comprehend "After Apple Picking" as distinctly different from his other works
 - understand the ritual of apple picking broadly in the context of this text
 - locate social forces as determining the discourse of an apple picker's life, hence the pragmatics of individual aspirations pitted against or getting shaped by dominant social mores
 - comprehend a picture of a society in England.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

13.1.1 The Writer's Bio-brief:

Robert Frost was born on March 26th, 1874. Considered one of the most celebrated poets in America, Robert Frost was an author of searching and

often dark meditations on universal themes. A quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken. Robert Frost's work was highly associated to rural life in New England. The poet often uses the New England setting to explore intricate philosophical and social themes. As a well-known and often-quoted poet, Robert Frost was highly honored during his life-time, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes. As a city boy, Frost grew up perceptive of so many things in life and had his first poem published in Lawrence, Massachusetts. In 1892, he attended Dartmouth College for just less than a semester. In 1912 Frost went to Glasgow with his family and later lived in Beaconsfield. Subsequently, Frost published his first book titled *A Boy's Will* in 1913. In England, Robert Frost made important contacts including T. E. Hulme, Edward Thomas, and Ezra Pound. They were the first Americans to write a favorable review on Robert Frost's work. Some of the first pieces of his poetic works were written while living in England.

In 1915, Frost launched a career in writing, lecturing and teaching. From 1916-1938 he became an English professor at Amherst College. While a professor at Amherst College, he advised his writing students to always bring the notion of the human voices to their craft. From 1921 onwards and the next forty-two years of his life, he had three great expectations. Over the course of his career, he became popular for poems involving interplay of voices such as *Death of the Hired Man* or dramas. Frost's work was highly popular and it remained so. Among Frost popular shorter poems are "Mending Wall", "Directive", "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening", "The Road Not Taken", "Nothing Gold Can Stay", "Fire and Ice", "After Apple Picking".

13.1.2 Summary of Home Burial:

The poem presents a few moments of emotional discourse in a strained relationship between a rural husband and wife who have lost a child. The woman is distressed after catching sight of the child's grave through the window. She breaks down when her husband does not recognize the cause of her distress. She tries to go away the house; for she feels there is nothing more in their relationship, however he importunes her to stay, and share her grief with him—to give him a chance. He fails to understand what it is he does that offends her or why she should grieve for so long. She resents him deeply for his self-possession, what she sees as his hard-heartedness. She becomes hysterical and vents some of her anger and frustration, and he receives it, but the detachment between them remains. She opens the door to leave, as he calls after her.

13.2 ANALYSIS

In terms of form, this poem is a dramatic or pastoral lyric poem, using free-form dialogue rather than strict rhythmic schemes. Frost generally uses five stressed syllables in each line and divides stanzas in terms of lines of speech.

The poem describes two tragedies: first, the death of a young child, and second, the death of a marital relationship. As such, the title "Home Burial," can be read as a tragic binary entendre. Although the death of the child is the mechanism of the couple's tribulations, the larger conflict that destroys

the marriage is the couple's incapability to commune with one another. Both characters are angst at the loss of the child, but neither of them, is able to comprehend the way that their cohort chooses to express their sorrow.

The setting of the poem is unique – a staircase with a door at the bottom and a window at the top – mechanically sets up the relationship between the characters. The wife stands at the top of the stairs, directly in front of the window overlooking the burial ground, while the husband stands at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at her. While the couple shares the tragedy of their child's death, they are at odd position in terms of dealing with their sorrow.

With her position adjoining to the window, the wife is clearly still fraught with her grief over the loss of her child. Unable to move on at this point in her life, the wife defines her individuality in terms of the loss and would rather grieve for the rest of her life than grieve as a sort of facade. The husband has dealt with his sorrow more effectively, as evidenced by his location at the bottom of the staircase, close to the door and the outside world. As a farmer, the husband is more compliant of the natural cycle of life and death in general, but also chooses to grieve in a more physical manner: by digging the grave for his child. Ironically, the husband's expression of his sorrow is utterly misunderstood by the wife; she views his behavior as a sign of his insensitive indifference.

13.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE

The title "Home Burial" denotes the death of the child, which antecedes the poem, and connotes the death of the relationship between the couple which the poem foreshadows. It utilizes the figure of speech called adianoeta, or double entendre. In this narrative poem, Frost describes a tense exchange between a rural couple whose child has recently died. The poem opens, in a dramatic manner, the wife is standing at the top of a staircase looking at her child's grave through the window. Her husband, at the bottom of the stairs, does not understand what she is looking at or why she has suddenly become so distraught. The wife resents her husband's indifference and attempts to leave the house. The husband begs her to stay and talk to him about her grief; he does not understand why she is upset with him for expressing his sorrow in a different way. Devastated, the wife lashes out at him, convinced of his lack of concern toward their dead child. The husband placidly accepts her resentment, but the fissure between them remains. She leaves the house as he angrily threatens to drag her back by force. Hence the significance of the title.

13.4 EXPLORING DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO TRAGEDY IN "HOME BURIAL"

"Home Burial" is about grief and grieving, but most of all it seems to be about the collapse and confines of communication. The husband and the wife represent two very diverse ways of grieving. The wife's sorrow infuses every part of her and does not diminish with time. She has been compared to a female character in Frost's *A Masque of Mercy*, of whom another character says, "She's had some loss she can't accept from God." The wife comments

that most people make only deceit of following a loved one to the grave, when in truth their minds are “making the best of their way back to life / And living people, and things they understand.” She, however, will not accept this kind of sorrow; will not turn from the grave back to the world of living, for to do so is to accept the death. Instead she proclaims that “the world’s evil.”

On the other hand, the husband has accepted the death. Time has passed, and he in a more judicious manner can now say, “That’s the way of the world,” than, “The world’s evil.” He too lost his child, but the external expressions of his grief were entirely different from those of his wife. He threw himself into the awful task of digging his own child’s grave—into physical work. This action further acquaintances the father with a “way-of-the-world” mentality, with the natural cycles that make up the farmer’s life, with an organic view of life and death. The father did not leave the task of burial to someone else, instead, he physically dug into the earth and planted his child’s body in the soil.

Frost had himself experienced the loss of his own children and could deeply feel the misery associated with the same. Therefore, there is a personal touch to the response of the man “Can’t a man speak of his own child he’s lost?” People are taught only to experience the loss and not to vent it out as it would be conceived as brutal. Frost here voices his own views on the same as he claims that it would not depersonalize the person or fact in question. The mother is of the opinion that a man must sometimes abstain from the aspects of being a man when he is with a woman. For a man, by principle, to indulge in emotions has been stereotyped by societal norms as ‘effeminacy.’ However, the man in the “Home Burial” does move toward her in an act of not only to coming close to her emotionally, but also listens to her resentments. He further promises not to mention anything that would offend her, that would add more to her sorrow. He entreats with her that if he could not communicate in a manner according to her dictates, at least he be taught to do so. He frantically implores with her for an opportunity to work their strained relationship.

The reasons for the wife to be wan into a cocooned life are not limited to the present circumstances alone. She still harbors in her mind the figure of the man digging the grave of his child with his own hands. While he chose to express his love in a realistic manner, she chose to live it psychologically and sensitively. The very act of digging the grave comes across as coldblooded and callous to her, and is portrayed like the functioning of a robot.

“You can’t because you don’t know how to speak.

If you had any feelings, you that dug

With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;

I saw you from that very window there,

Making the gravel leap in air,

Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly

And roll back down the mound beside the hole.

I thought, Who is that man? I didn’t know you.

And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs

To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice”

The scene of the woman leaving the house and shutting the door behind her at the end of the poem is evocative of the last scene in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. The wife in "Home Burial", like Nora, feels claustrophobic. The door is their outlet to liberty. When the man says: "Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs," it connotes more than it denotes. He assures her that he will not revert to his earlier bearing. Though he attempts to be in line with his wife's wishes, the patriarch in him eventually does assert itself as he declares:

"Where do you mean to go? First tell me that.
I'll follow and bring you back by force. I *will*—"

13.5 "AFTER APPLE- PICKING" BY ROBERT FROST

1. Summary of *After Apple Picking*

This poem is in the first person, and the narrator is a hardworking apple picker, a simple man who has been picking apples in an apple orchard all day long, and is now overcome with exhaustion, not only because of the work, but also because of his immense experience of picking apples. It is winter, and the fast-approaching night is making him drowsy. He knows he still has a lot of apples to pick, but does not want to work anymore. He feels the depth of his experience is going to make him dream vividly about apple-picking even while he is asleep. He tries to shake the drowsiness off him, and tries to concentrate on picking apples because he has to take great care and not let any apple fall to the ground, as then it will be considered worthless. The narrator thinks about how tired he is, and how he wants to let sleep wash away his fatigue, and wonders if it will be a normal 'human' sleep, or a deep, hibernating sleep like the woodchuck.

2. Analysis

**My long two-pointed ladder's sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,**

The narrator, who is the apple-picker, has a long ladder which he uses to pick apples. There is a biblical allusion to the mention of the ladder standing upright, it reminds one of Jacob's dreams of a ladder that reached Heaven.

**And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.**

The apple picker has been picking apples all day, and still there are some the apples on that tree. He still has one more barrel to fill with picked apples, but he is extremely tired and exhausted. He knows he

should finish picking all the apples, but he somehow cannot continue with apple picking.

**Essence of winter sleep is on the night,
The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.**

These lines tell us that it is the onset of winter and night is fast approaching. To put it differently the narrator has spent all day picking apples, and is exhausted by the work. He then compares sleep to an 'essence' in the winter air, and feels this essence smells like apples, which again tells us about the effect of hard work on him. He is feeling too sleepy, and feels like as if he is going to fall asleep there on the ladder itself.

**Cannot rub the strangeness from my sight
I got from looking through a pane of glass
I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough
And held against the world of hoary grass.
It melted, and I let it fall and break.**

The narrator then mentions of a 'strangeness' in his sight, which is ascribed to an incident he had experienced earlier that day. The narrator had found a thin sheet of glass on his water trough (water container) when he went to get a drink of water early in the morning. As he held the sheet of ice in his hands and looked through it everything appeared strange and distorted. When the ice began to melt in his hand, he let the sheet fall to the ground and break, but this did not change the strangeness in his sight, which is causing him to look at the world in a total, different way. This incident has left an indelible imprint in his mind.

**But I was well
Upon my way to sleep before it fell,
And I could tell
What form my dreaming was about to take.**

Though he dropped the sheet of ice in real life, the incident leaves him shaken and causes a whirlpool in his mind before he goes off to sleep. He ruminates about the entire day's activities. He is about to get ready to sleep, and tries to predict the nature of his dreams.

**Magnified apples appear and disappear,
Stem end and blossom end,
And every fleck of russet showing clear.**

The narrator does dream about apples—picking them and tossing them into the chosen barrels. In his dream, the apples are 'magnified', and look very different than in real life. Even in his dream he can almost visualize the russet-colored spot (reddish-brown fleck) on the apples. His dream has become apple-laden.

**My instep arch not only keeps the ache,
It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.
I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend.**

He has a practical dream. He can even feel the pressure of standing on the ladder on his feet, and even in his sleep feel how his feet ache by standing on the ladder through out the day. He still can feel himself standing on the ladder, and also feel the ladder moving against the apple tree's branches.

And I keep hearing from the cellar bin

The rumbling sound

Of load on load of apples coming in.

The speaker is almost living a realistic dream. He can clearly hear the sound of the apples being offloaded into the bins where they will be sorted. Even in his dream he dreams only of apples, the ache on his feet, the loading process of the apples, the sorting etc.

For I have had too much

Of apple-picking: I am overtired

Of the great harvest I myself desired.

The apple picker is worn-out of doing the same work for years. He has picked countless apples all through his life and remembers how he always looked forward to the harvest season. That is when he becomes most busy. However, he is now a changed man. He no longer feels excited about the apple-picking season.

There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,

Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.

For all

That struck the earth,

No matter if not bruised or spiked with stubble,

Went surely to the cider-apple heap

As of no worth.

The narrator then goes on to describe his work as an apple-picker, and the utmost care that all the apple pickers have to take when picking apples. He excitedly talks about 'ten thousand sand' fruit, (exaggeration) which had to be very carefully unloaded into the barrels. Even if one apple fell down, and touched the ground, and remained unspoiled, it was thrown into the cider heap. Interestingly the apples in the cider heap are usually considered useless.

One can see what will trouble

This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is.

Were he not gone,

The woodchuck could say whether it's like his

Long sleep, as I describe its coming on,

Or just some human sleep.

The apple picker is now sure that he is going to have visions of picking apples, in his dream, dropping them, and standing on the ladder on his aching feet. He is uncertain about what kind of sleep he is going to get—the normal 'human' kind, or the kind a woodchuck

(students read: a groundhog) gets to experience in the winter. It is already winter, and the woodchuck has gone into hibernation. What The narrator is extremely worn-out, and needs some well-deserved rest. Metaphorically, this also means that the narrator is wondering whether he will even wake up to life the next morning, or not.

a. **Significance of the title:**

Thoughts about falling ice and falling apples lead to suggestions of lost innocence and worldly corruption. Throughout the poem, both rhyme and line-length are manipulated and varied with subtlety. Frost here plays with the mystery of the rhymes—when will they come and how abruptly—keeps words and sounds active and hovering over several lines. We also find the greatest separation between rhyming end-words at the end of the poem. Let us analyse deeply. *Sleep* comes seven lines after its partner, *heap*, and in the interim, *sleep* has surfaced thrice in the middle of lines. Sleep is, in fact, all over the poem; this particular word appears six times. But the way Frost has delivered here, the last rhyme shows his craftsmanship. An in-depth study shows that the word *heap* first rhymes internally with *sleep*, then again internally with *sleep*, and then again, and only pairs up with the end-word *sleep* again in the last line of the poem. After a point of time, we nearly forgot the word *heap*. *Sleep* seems to rhyme with itself, with its repetition, like a sleepy mantra or a sleep-inducing counting of sheep. The poet arrives at ultimate *sleep* not through a wham-bang rhyming couplet but more “sleepily.”

In an essay for *The Atlantic Monthly*, “After Apple-Picking”, writes Robert Frost (1946), “is about picking apples, but with its ladders pointing “[t]oward heaven still,” with its great weariness, and with its rumination on the harvest, the coming of winter, and inhuman sleep, the reader feels certain that the poem harbours some “ulteriority.” “Final sleep” is certainly one interpretation of the “long sleep” that the poet contrasts with human sleep. The sleep of the woodchuck is the sleep of winter, and winter, in the metaphoric language of seasons, has brawny associations with death. There are abundant hints of winter: The scent of apples is “the essence of winter sleep”; the water in the trough froze into a “pane of glass”; the grass is “hoary” (i.e., frosty, or Frosty). One ponders is the impending death destructive or creative? The harvest of apples can be interpreted as a harvest of any human effort—and the poem looks at the end of the harvest.

The sequence and tenses of the poem are a bit confusing and lead the readers to wonder what is dreamed, what is real, and where the sleep begins. The readers can comprehend that the speaker should be exhausted at the end of a day’s apple picking. But the poem says that the speaker was well on his way to sleep before he dropped the sheet of ice, and this presumably occurred in the morning. The speaker has tried and failed to “rub the strangeness” from his sight. Many questions arise in our mind. One wonders as to whether this a strangeness induced by exhaustion or indicative of the fact that he is dreaming already? Has he, in fact, been dreaming as he looked through the “pane of glass” and entered a through-the-looking-glass world

of “magnified apples” and the “rumbling sound / Of load on load of apples coming in”? The readers also wonder whether the sheet of ice is simply a dizzying lens which has an enduring effect on the mind of the narrator. To put it differently, the speaker was well on his way to sleep in the morning, thus this lends a greater, more ominous weight to the long sleep “coming on” at end of the poem.

The title thus throws light on the entire poem. It is a metaphor for the changes in life that are experienced by every person. Frost’s poem focuses mainly on sleep—be it the end of a hectic day, or the end of life. It could also be that the apple-picking is symbolic for all the hardships one has to face in life, before embracing death, before falling asleep forever.

13.6 SUMMING UP

To return to the beginning and sum up this Unit in the light of the ‘Objectives’ we had set as the preamble, you should, after reading this, be able to:

- Locate where the uniqueness of *Home Burial* lies in the light of Frost’s other works
- Identify the importance of peace as a way of the lives of common people
- Situate man in society, as being both in conformity with and in opposition to social forces – the incumbent results of such positions
- To understand the workings of change in a couple’s life that stands at some remove from the mainstream husband-wife relationship, and is yet affected by winds of lack of communication
- And finally, to study human emotional factors in the light of all this

To return to the beginning and sum up this Unit in the light of the ‘Objectives’ we had set as the preamble, you should, after reading this, be able to:

- Locate where the uniqueness of *After Apple Picking* lies in the light of Frost’s other works
- Identify the importance of sleep and rest as a way of the lives of common people
- Situate an ordinary man like an apple picker in society, as being both in conformity with and in opposition to social forces – the incumbent results of such positions
- To understand the workings of an apple-picker and what he feels about his life
- And finally, to study human emotional factors in the light of all this

13.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (QUESTIONS)

(Possible questions of “Home Burial”)

1. What do you think happens to the couple after the end of the poem, and why?

2. Which character in this poem do you identify with more, and why?
3. Do you agree with what the woman says in lines 101-109, that no matter what people pretend, everyone dies alone? Why, or why not?
4. Which character do you think has the most power in this relationship? Does the power shift as the poem progresses? How so?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the woman's disgust at the man's manner of digging their son's grave (lines 75-92)? What's your reasoning?
6. What's the effect of having most of the poem in dialogue? Would you have rather come at it from the wife's perspective? Or the husband's?

(Possible questions of "After Apple Picking") :

- 1) Comment on Frost's use of metaphors and imagery in *After Apple Picking*.
- 2) What is the speaker's state of mind in Robert Frost's poem *After Apple Picking*?
- 3) What is the main theme of Robert Frost's *After Apple Picking*?

13.8 SELECT READING LIST

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