Introduction

Module 3

American Poetry (1819-2000)

Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens and Allen Ginsberg

Introduction to American Poetry

Poetry over the last couple of centuries in America has moved in several directions, from finding a voice and establishing a native tradition, to reclaiming its European roots before returning to an emphatically vernacular viewpoint and idiom. American poetry of the past two centuries ranges from the expansive Emersonian Romanticism of Whitman, as he sang of self and country in his bardic breath to the condensed lines of the reclusive Emily Dickinson. It extends the native line of explorations through the poetic ground broken by Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams and Wallace Stevens, appropriates the influences of European Modernism in the output of Pound and Eliot before diverging significantly to the resounding rhythms of the Beat generation.

Influences and resistances, divergences and convergences, iconization and interrogation, inevitably tangle in the experience of a nation as it went through the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the two World Wars, all the while trying to delineate an identity and shape an aesthetics. Whitman, Frost, and Dickinson, despite their individual differences as poets may be traced back to Emerson in the dialectical sweep of their inquiries, which consistently admitted of new vision, and also in the intrinsically spiritual roots of their discourses.

Whitman's use of anaphora links his poetry to the oratorical tradition of 19th century New England, which along with other rhetorical strategies helped his verse to take on important aspects of the contemporary public discourse. In complete opposition to this tendency, Dickinson, who also lived in an age of public speeches and sermons, tended to be generally distrustful of language and its ability to communicate. In fact, in the poetry of their generation, Dickinson's literalism was an obverse of Whitman's rhetoric.

Wallace Stevens carried the native Emersonian tradition through French symbolism and American pragmatism into the epistemological revolution of the mid-twentieth

century. Frost and Stevens were two of the several explorers who pointed the direction of mainstream poetry in the early decades of the twentieth century. If Frost was dialectical in his approach, exploring viewpoints, substituting one idea with another, Dickinson too tended to argue and question. In this sense both Frost and Dickinson were epistemological poets, at times consciously and sometimes unconsciously advancing a theory of knowledge.

Though Stevens absorbed European influences such as the French poetry of Verlaine and Laforgue, and often set his poems against a Mexican background, he remained at core an American poet, deeply concerned about contemporary issues and the nature of poetry. Like Stevens, Ginsberg too had assimilated the influences of European Modernism, particularly those of Kafka, Yeats, Rimbaud and Celine. Yet his basic poetic sensibility was uncompromisingly American. His literary roots ran deep in the soil of his predecessors, so much so, that Ruland and Bradbury are forced to observe that, "his high visibility and popularity among the young seem to measure the decline of Eliot's authority and the waning of Europe's influence on post-war American writing" (Ruland and Bradbury, ***A History of American Literature,*** Penguin, New York, 1001, p 397)

Yet comparisons of American poets with their European predecessors and counterparts is inevitable. Stevens's philosophical engagement with the nature of reality, art and the imagination "made him the one natively American poet among his generation who-as a thinker about, and a thinker in poetry-can seem genuinely comparable to Yeats, Eliot or Valery," (Ruland and Bradbury, p 291). In this regard, he was akin to Dickinson, who was similarly preoccupied with aesthetic speculation, especially its originary dimension, her images sometimes functioning as metapoetic tropes.

If Stevens sought to make his poem "the cry of its occasion," Dickinson wished to tell all but "tell it slant". The abiding attempt on the part of both poets to divine and express in their poetry the complex relationship between meditation and mediation remains an essential component of their poetics. In a sense, this urge to capture the poetry making process, harks back to Whitman's need to apprehend the self as a felt presence within him, and consequently try and become aware of the unconscious mind in its creative endeavour.

The dialogue between American poets across eras extends to structure and style as well. An aspect of such affinity may be located in the correspondences between Whitman's style and Ginsberg's. Whitman's cumulative technique resulting in, what Allen calls an 'enumerative style' finds an echo in Ginsberg's poem 'Howl' where his lines, like Whitman's, are begun and held together by the same word and usually

the same grammatical construction. Both Whitman and Ginsberg go back to the Hebraic roots of this, tradition of accumulation and parallelism, a tradition that Allen has shown to hinge upon a rhythm of thought, "repeating and balancing ideas and sentences (or independent clauses) instead of syllables or accents".

Ginsberg has acknowledged his debt to the older poet by recognizing the latter's contribution to "early XX century organization of new speech-rhythm prosody to build up large organic structures". His best tribute to the earlier poet however, lies in his own poetic use of the Whitmanian equation of the unit of sense with the measure of the line. It is interesting to observe how Dickinson veers from this standard. In her case, the functional unit is not the poetic line, nor the word but the syllable, "a primary unit of sound that becomes a unit of sense as well". (M.K. Biasing, Yale Univ Press, N. Haven & London, 1987, p 178).

While Stevens is said to have Whitmanized Modernism, Ginsberg in his own way claimed the national bard as his mentor. In his poem, ***'Supermarket in California*** Ginsberg imagines Walt Whitman in the alien milieu of metropolitan America. "I saw you Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber/...Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love/past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage? / Ah. dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher..." This tribute from one American poet to another is an eloquent comment on the native links within the chain of influences that characterize the American tradition in poetry.

Unit 1 ❑ Walt Whitman (1819-1892)—'Song of Myself'—'Passage to India'

Structure

1.0 Introduction

Born on May 3, 1819 at West Hills, Long Island, Whitman was a product of those decades just before the Civil War. In the period between 1820 and 1860 American national life, poised as it was on the cusp of crisis and consolidation, came to be associated with a search for novelty, a sense of adventure, and a breadth of vision that understandably, grew out of a climate of exploration and enlightenment.

Transfer and travel characterized the early life of Whitman as his family moved to Brooklyn and shifted from house to house within the district. Since the time he left school in 1830 till 1836, Whitman worked at sundry jobs in and around Brooklyn and New York. In 1836, he returned to rural Long Island where he taught school for a while. On his re-arrival in New York in 1841, Whitman worked as reporter and editor with various journals, lending his voice to the critical colloquia of the age, and helping to forge a new sensibility and aesthetics.

Democrat, poet, pioneer and prophet Whitman came to symbolize the spirit of his age. His poetic genius, Whitman predicted would be "self-liberated like leaves of grass, slowly, painfully, and in due time, after its long dormancy". ***Leaves of Grass,***

published in 1855 represented the germination of a new kind of poetry bearing out Whitman's resolve to write a poem on the "infinite and omnigenous self', redolent with images fresh from the subliminal mind.

1.1 Textual Explication ('Song of Myself')

'Song of Myself' is a long, loosely organized poem on Whitman's experience of a mystical state of being. Untitled when it appeared in the first edition of ***Leaves of Grass*** in 1955, it was called 'Poem of Walt Whitman, an American' in the 1856 edition, and acquired its present title in the 1881 edition. In Sections 1-5, the poet records his preparation for, and entry into mystical consciousness. In Sections 6-49, he likewise records the emotional, moral and spiritual significances that accrue to him while he is in this state of heightened awareness; and in Sections 50-52, he recounts his emergence from the mystical condition.

'Song of Myself' is not about the poet but about each object in creation. It expresses Whitman's belief in cosmic individualism, the notion that every atom in nature, every human being necessarily partakes of cosmic processes, being intrinsically linked to the larger whole of creation. In this context, each blade of grass, the minutest detail in nature and the human world, becomes and remains inscribed with divine meanings.

Section I of the poem being prescribed in the syllabus, the focus of the discussion will be on the opening segment containing several stanzas and ending with the line "You shall listen to all sides and shall filter them from yourself'. The poet begins with a celebration of self, which is in effect, a celebration of the universe, since the self is intimately and indissolubly linked to the cosmic soul. "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you." In a passive and receptive frame of mind the poet observes a "spear of summer grass" and issues an invitation to his soul: "I loafe and invite my soul."

Next, he evokes the image of "houses and rooms" which are full of fragrances, the seductive scents of the world he likes and inhales, from whose intoxicating influence he wills himself apart. "The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it." When he affirms, "the atmosphere is not a perfume" he reminds one of the rarefied air the refined essence that he seeks to imbibe. For such a communion to take place, the surroundings have to be congenial. The rhetoric of renunciation is evident in the line, "I will go to bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked"- There has to be the divestment of garb and vesture, of the clothes and perfumes of the world before the soul can receive the 'original energy" of nature.

A reversion to pristine innocence is suggested, by the use of words such as "undisguised" and 'naked' which emphasize an essentialist ethic. The self in its most fundamental or essential aspect, uncamouflaged by accoutrements and acquisitions may go "to the bank by the wood" in order to consummate the communion between the self and nature. The "bank by the wood" as a lineament of landscape assumes a mythical dimension as it develops into a metaphor for a sacred grove, a consecrated spot in the great outdoors sought by pilgrims bent on spiritual regeneration.

The importance of each sense to the anticipated mystical experience is acknowledged by the poet in the catalogue of sensory perceptions provided in the section between lines 17 to 33. The "smoke of my own breath" pertains to taste while "echoes, ripples and buzzed whispers" to sound, the "the sniff of green leaves and dry leaves" to smell, "a few kisses, a few embraces" to touch, and "the play of shine and shade on the trees" to sight.

The poet speaks of his apprehension of natural things, of physiological processes such as the intake and expulsion of breath, and of his delight in simple, elemental phenomena. The phrases and expressions, the scattered images throughout this section gain a measure of completion in the climactic gesture of the poet "rising from bed and meeting the sun".

The beginning of the quest lies in the question. And that is precisely where Whitman locates his search in line 21. A cascade of questions demonstrates his interrogative urgency. The search for knowledge leads one to nature, the land, and the earth. Learning to unravel the mysteries of nature is a .long and laborious process. "Have you practised so long to read?" aptly sums up the rigorous application of faculties needed to decipher the divine hieroglyphic encoded in nature. Nature, feels Whitman, equips one with knowledge, which helps to elucidate the "meaning of poems".

The poet invites the reader to "stop this day and night" with him that he may proceed to the core of all poems. The truth of poetry laboriously sought and diligently discovered, will link the reader to the cosmic good of "the earth and the sun". The poetic voice almost attains a pitch of prophecy in its prescient pronouncement: "You shall no longer take things at second or third hand."

The poet goes on to elaborate, how the reader through a process of elimination, may gradually sift the truth from the surrounding impurities. Not the past, "the eyes of the dead", not the mechanical, inert knowledge in books, "spectres in books", not the poet's perspective, nor even the reader's own perceptions, is singly advocated. The injunction is to consider "all sides" and "filter them" from one's own self.

1.1.1 Analysis

'Song of Myself' has been described as Whitman's "utopian version of the American pastoral myth" ***(Walt Whitman Reconsidered,*** Richard Chase, W. Sloane Associates Inc, N Yk, 1955 p 76). American literature through the fiction of Cooper, Melville, Twain and Hawthorne has sought to present a movement away from society toward seclusion with their protagonist seeking a respite from reality in the wilderness, river or sea.

The first section of "Song of Myself' is to a large extent expressive of delight in the senses. James E. Miller perceptively points out, "Whereas normally the mystical state is achieved only through a mortification of, or escape from, the senses, the poet of 'Song of Myself' asserts that it is *through* the transfigured senses that he reaches mystical consciousness". ***(A Critical Guide to Leaves of Grass,*** Univ. of Chicago Press, p 10)

'Song of Myself' strives to present the self in all its dimensions and potentialities. Becoming aware of one's unconscious mind in its creative moments is one way of apprehending the soul. The preoccupation with the 'self' found in the poem was prompted by several factors. In America, the ideals of democracy and freedom had bred a national outlook that favoured the principle of individualism with its accent on the self. The speculative tendency of the age, moreover, with its emphasis on Transcendentalism had exalted the self into a Godlike power imbuing it with special attributes.

At a personal level, Whitman was acutely conscious of a division in his self and tended to see himself as "two"—"my soul and I". In his notebook Whitman had written as early as 1847, "I cannot understand the mystery, but I am always conscious of myself as two". The "I" for its part, has a gendered split, the lonely, vulnerable and 'feminine' voice along with the weathered, 'masculine', rough voice. (Chase, p 50) Whitman, true to his ideological orientation was taken up with the relationship between the self and the world. W.R. Johnson in his essay. *The Idea of Lyric Modes in Ancient and Modern Poetry,* p 29 corroborates the idea: "The organic dynamism and diversity are made possible through a mutual modification between the part and the whole."

The tone prevailing throughout the poem and noticeable from the outset is one of sacramental communion. As the poet commences to celebrate aspects of the natural, elemental, physical and sensory world, prior to his entry into a trance-like state, his language assumes an almost incantatory quality, the observations following, one after

the other, in close succession. The poet is both observer and absorber. He is creator and communicant, partaking of and ritualistically sharing with his readers, the stages of his mystical experience.

1.1.2 Structure and Style

Whitman, following Emerson, believed in the metaphorical origin and spiritual essence of all words. Such a philosophy of language, held by the poet himself naturally prompts the reader to search for motifs and meanings in his poetry that are far in excess of the literal configurations. Whitman, who believed that colloquial words best unite the natural and the spiritual, is at his ease with words such as "lean", "loafe", "mad", "sniff', "belched" and "wag". At the same time he has a feeling for more elegant or erudite expressions such as "fragrance", "distillation" and "intoxicate". Thus, it is with reason that R. Chase has called him "both semanticist and bard," "...a kind of primitive I. A. Richards and a sophisticated Orpheus" ***(Walt Whitman Reconsidered,*** p 92).

The poem begins with the image of "a spear of summer grass". The leaf of grass is Whitman's image of the mundane and the momentous. It is his metaphorical means of celebrating the transcendent in the immanent. This imagery is intermittently reinforced and reaches a culmination in Section 31 where the poet affirms: "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars." Most of the images in Section I have to do with the natural, elemental order. There are references to leaves, green and dry, to shore and sea rocks, hay in the barn, supple boughs and to fields and hillsides. The images foster associations of the rural and the agricultural world, and help in promoting an awareness of openness and expansiveness.

The overall impact of Whitman's verse is one of rhythmic flow, what Helen Vendler has described as "contagious cadence" and sought to explain in terms of "Hebraic parallelism" ***(Voices and Visions.*** The Poet in America, ed Helen Vendler, Tata McGraw Hill, N Delhi, 1987, p 9). The words, which seem to flow effortlessly from the poet's brain, are caught in a momentum that is steadily fuelled by a train of observations, descriptions and associations. The poet seems to delight in briefly registering his impressions and imaginings without dwelling on the details, thus, at once demonstrating and corroborating his interest in poetic hieroglyphics, that is, using words in their mythical and symbolic capacities.

Vendler's contention, shared by other critics On Whitman is that the Bible had considerably influenced the poet in the articulation of his grand choral Song. It helped him toward amplitude, toward rhythm, rhetoric and reverberation, and toward anaphora and polysyndeton.

Having titled the poem a 'song', the lyrical, celebratory and hymnal nature of the work is as expected as it is unmistakable. The flood of observations and descriptions, selected and sequenced by the poet, rising and falling with the rhythm of the thought yields a tempo of tonalities that is sustained throughout the poem. There are moments when the confessional element in the lyric becomes pronounced, as in stanza 4 of Section I, where the poet vows: "I will go to the bank...with me."

'Song of Myself is imbued with generic and rhetorical multiplicity. Lyric, confessional, hymn, it is at the same time dramatic in its orientation. The poet addresses the reader introducing a lively dramatic element, talking, explaining, describing and recording his impressions of the world around him. The subjective "I", already fraught with a division between the self and the soul expands to accommodate the reader along with the natural organic orders.

1.1.3 Questions

1. What is Whitman's understanding of the 'self' in Section I of 'Song of Myself'?
2. What does Whitman feel about nature's contribution to the "meaning of poems"?
3. Consider the epistemological dimension of the first Section of 'Song of Myself'.
4. Comment on the celebratory quality of the first Section of 'Song' and suggest the sources, which may have stylistically influenced the same.
5. "For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you". Examine this statement in the light of Whitman's personal and political beliefs.

1.2 Introduction 'Passage to India'

'Passage to India' is a poem on Whitman's meditations on time, space and death. The first 3 Sections deal with space and man's material achievements therein. Sections 4-6 have to do with time, namely history, while the last 3 Sections seek to go beyond space and time to achieve an imaginative union with God. The poet lauds the ingenious marvels of modem engineering. He specifically mentions the Suez Canal, the transcontinental railroad ("mighty railroad" in line 6), and the Atlantic cable, ("the sea inlaid with eloquent gentle wire" in line 7). These achievements have helped man to span the globe, and bring together worlds till then separated. The Suez Canal linked Asia with Europe; the Atlantic cable connected Europe to the New World; the transcontinental railroad united the New World with Asia.

It is a poem in which the heroic vision of Whitman, dwelling with pride on the advances in modem technology, evokes the echoes of the journeyings of Columbus

referring thereby to a mythopoeia of voyagings and discovery that was embedded in the national consciousness. Spatial zones are overlaid with temporal allusions and associations. Asia, being the cradle of civilization, is identified with the past. Europe evokes the echoes of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, recognizable eras in the development of thought and culture in Western history. The New World, is likewise, a spatial metaphor for the epochs, which mark the colonization of the Americas.

The emphasis is on the interpenetration of space and time, along with that on "spanning", uniting or interconnecting areas of the globe which had been not only geographically, but culturally and psychologically disparate and alien. There is a need to go beyond a simplistic assessment of time zones and arrive at a problematized version of the same. While Asia represents the world's past, the ancient springs of human civilization, Europe is another instance or version of the old. Though younger than Asia by any reckoning, it is nevertheless, regarded as the old, the traditional, and the decadent when compared to the New World.

1.2.1 Textual Explication

It is possible to perceive a cyclical thrust in the interconnections mentioned in the opening stanza, which enables each geographical area mentioned to reach out to and establish links with the other. Asia reaches out to Europe through the Suez Canal. Europe, in turn, is attached to the New World through the Atlantic cable, while the New World, for its part, completes the circle by negotiating through the "mighty railroad", a path to Asia.

While the pattern of connectivity in terms of space is circular, in temporal terms it is that of linear progression. Ancient Asia forges links with Renaissance and Enlightenment Europe, and Europe herself looks ahead to the New World of the 19th and 20th centuries. It appears to be a linear movement through the ages, older epochs reaching out to and relating with newer ones in the ongoing dialectic of history.

The mastery of space celebrated by Whitman in Section I is, at the same time, a temporal and spiritual victory. Engineering feats, by making it possible for humankind to reach out to the farthest limits of the globe, have ensured for the species a return to the past as well. Man, in his return to the race's spatial origin in Asia, attains the culmination of his spiritual search as well. The last two lines of the first stanza: "Yet the Past!" with its repetition arid exclamations are expressive of Whitman's ardent desire to realize the true meaning of his travels. The cycle of movement is completed by the return to the past.

The bridging of geographical spaces by modem technological marvels and the spatial compactness consequently wrought is thought to have achieved a similar

condensation in terms of time, with past and present having been closely connected. Whitman describes this interconnection in Section V thus: "All these separations and gaps shall be taken up and hook'd and linked together."

The first 3 lines of the second stanza are taken up with a meditation on the past. Enthusiastically hailed as "the dark unfathom'd retrospect" the shadowy, mysterious nature of the past is eloquently averred. The second line of the stanza conceives of the past as a "teeming gulf' which separates the eras and the generations. The "sleepers" and the "shadows" refer to the bygone generations and the oblivion into which they have slipped. The third line is an emphatic, hymnic recapitulation of the greatness of the past, 'The past, the infinite greatness of the past". The fourth line, couched in the reasonable rhetoric of interrogation, "For what is the present after all but a growth out of the past?" again testifies to the invincible superiority of the past as a source, which yields the present. Growing organically out of the past, the present is seen as a successor to or an offspring of the parenting past which shapes what it yields or begets.

The fourth line, in fact, facilitates understanding of the last two lines of the stanza: "As a projectile form'd, impell'd, passing a certain line, still keeps on/So the present, utterly form'd, impell'd by the past". The impact of this figure renders the categories of past, present and future artificial and quite redundant. Since the present is forever being "impelled", it stands to reason that it bears elements of the past, and will change into the future, and the process is likely to be repeated and infinitum. Thus, arid constructions and conjectures of clock and calendar time are cast aside in favour of a view that sees time as the impulse of a movement. The objectification of time as a projectile continually moving forward combines the notions of space, time and movement within the scope of a single image, and thereby affirms a compaction, that is one of the ideological imperatives of the poem.

1.2.2 Analysis

One of the major thematic preoccupations of the poem 'Passage to India' is movement in its various forms. Singing a paean to the miracles of modem engineering Whitman begins the poem with the notion of circumnavigation. The traffic around the globe, inspired and made possible by the Railroad, the Cable and the Canal, institutes connections and compactions in space and time, linking disparate landmasses and eras and achieving teleological triumphs. The movement is not only around or across the globe, and in terms of time but also one from the material to the spiritual, to the "deep diving bibles and legends of India".

Related to the theme of movement, therefore, is that of connection, a theoretical

premise that has been consistently developed in the poem. While the "marriage of continents" has been carried out with the linkage of Asia, Europe and the New World, the different ages in history have been effectively spanned through the image of the projectile. Paradoxically, the benefits of human science, normally regarded a& futuristic, have enabled the human race access to eastern mysticism and made possible a return to and a union with the past.

l.2.3 Structure and Style

Whitman begins 'Passage to India' on a note of euphoric admiration for the "great achievements of the present". His is the bardic voice of 19th century America extolling the accomplishments of his age. The repetition of a single idea and similar words in the first 3 lines makes for a hypnotic flow of cadences along the lines of a musical composition and brings to mind the "Hebraic parallelism", mentioned earlier.

The verbal repetitions, exclamations and dashes combine to express a note of exultation that is consonant with the bardic mission of the poet. Deeply motivated and spiritually elevated, the poet seeks to communicate his discovery of the organic dynamism present in time and place through lyric intensity and rhetorical urgency. Striving to metrically replicate the phenomenological continuity of the engineering feats spanning the world. Whitman develops his powerful choral rhythms. Observes W. R. Johnson, "Laid end to end, Whitman's long lines would form their own virtual transcontinental railroad" ***(The Idea of Lyric,*** p 22).

The first section is noted for its vivid and arresting images, which advance the themes of the poem. Words and phrases such as "projectile", "impelled" and "still keeps on" heighten the notion of dynamism that is at the core of the poem, and suggest that time is simply an ontological onrush, the inveterate impulse to move on, impelled as it is with what has gone by. The "eloquent gentle wires", a metaphor for the Atlantic Cable linking Europe with the New World develops into the defining symbol of the interconnections that too are integral to the poem. The subtle circuitry between past, present and future is suggested through the image of the "wires", while the adjective "eloquent" tells of the dialogue or communication between the continents and ages that was made possible by the same.

The past, spatially apprehended as "the dark unfathom'd retrospect", acquires the lineaments of a landscape, a vista that one looks back on. In the very next line when the same past is called "a teeming gulf", the image changes in its geographical orientation from land to sea. Both images testify to the spatialization of time that has been undertaken and achieved by the poet.

1.2.4 Questions

1. Which "modern wonders" described by Whitman in the first section of 'Passage to India' have successfully linked the world according to the poet?
2. How does Whitman describe the past? Why does he conceive of it as a "dynamic and inclusive category"?
3. How, according to Whitman, do the means of geographical linkage help to unite the ages?
4. Do you think the style of the poem is suited to the expression of its theme? Give reasons for your answer.

Suggested Reading

The works, which have been cited by way of reference, should be useful sources of criticism.

Unit 2 ❑ Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

Structure

2.0 Introduction

Emily Dickinson was born on December 10, 1830 in Amherst, a quiet village in the Connecticut valley of Massachusetts. Though unpublished in her lifetime and unknown at her death, Dickinson attained a posthumous recognition that established her as one of the more important poetic voices in America. Occupying a pivotal position between the Puritans and the modems, Dickinson was a creative conduit in whom 19"' century Romanticism is seen to give way to the ambiguities and subtleties of 20th century Modernism.

Dickinson, who did not marry, lived in the parental home enjoying the affection of her brother and sisters, tending her garden and corresponding copiously with friends. She spent two years at Amherst Academy and one at Holyoke Seminary. Inspired by a Philadelphia clergyman Charles Wadsworth, Dickinson strove to locate answers to the many questions plaguing her at the time. She began to write seriously from the year 1846 and in 1862 sent four of her poems to her mentor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson for his comment on her work.

Though outwardly content within the circle of family and friends, the poet was not without tensions, ideological and emotional, within the patriarchal set-up which

sanctioned considerably more recognition to the male both in terms of domestic and professional power. In the larger world of Massachusetts, Calvinism was gradually giving way to Unitarianism, engendering in the process changes in the theological climate of the region. While intense political disturbances such as the Civil War did not directly enter Dickinson's themes, they remained an oblique presence in the background, investing her poetry with a residue of pain, horror and futility.

As time went on, Dickinson gradually became a recluse. She withdrew from society and preferred to spend her time tending her garden. She became obsessed with death around this time. After Dickinson's death in 1886, her sister Lavinia, who discovered her poems, sent them to Mabel Loomis Todd, the brilliant young wife of an Amherst professor. With the help of T.W. Higginson, Mabel Todd completed the deciphering and typing of the manuscripts, and finally had them ready for posterity.

Only seven of Dickinson's poems had been published in her lifetime, and the rest, close to 18,000 poems were published in 1890. In the Preface to this edition. T.W. Higginson commented that Dickinson's utterances were "like poetry torn up by the roots, with rain and dew and earth still clinging to them". She won recognition posthumously in the 1920s, before the definitive edition brought out by Ò.Í. Johnson in 1955 established her credentials as a truly remarkable voice in the rich and varied accents of the nation.

2.1 Textual Explication ('Because I Could Not Stop for Death')

The Dickinson girls often went on carriage rides with their father or brother. The idea for the poem may have originated from a personal experience etched in the poet's consciousness. A distant cousin, Olivia Coleman who had moved from Princeton to Amherst a year earlier, and who was suffering from consumption had died while on a carriage drive in the afternoon of September 28, 1847.

The speaker narrates her experience of a journey, an early evening ride during which Death boarded her carriage. Chaperoned by the comforting presence of Immortality, she rode on through familiar countryside, past the school and fields of grain till they "passed the Setting Sun". The idea of a frontier crossing is introduced only to be contradicted by the observation: "He passed Us." The desertion by the sun brought forth a coldness for which the speaker was not prepared in terms of attire. They paused before a House that turned out to be a grave, "a House that seemed / A Swelling of the Ground. Complexities, both thematic and temporal surface at the end of the poem with the speaker's posthumous apprehension of time, space and

direction, and the mention of Horses' Heads that the speaker had originally thought to have been facing toward eternity.

The deceptively conversational tone of the opening is almost Metaphysical in its capacity to shock the reader with its dramatic content. The logical and explicatory nature of the conjunction "because" that launches the reflective movement of the poem along with the adverb "kindly" assigned to death, serves to enforce a ritual of civility that one does not associate with a mortal intervention. The next two lines of the first stanza similarly corroborate a theme that is quite at variance with the tone. 'The carriage held but just Ourselves/ And Immortality." In 'Because' mortality is presented as a suitor who stops the speaker's carriage in order to board it, and accompany her through the various scenes and stages of life. There is almost a sense of coziness within the carriage, if one overlooks the allegorical aspects of the speaker's companions. Death and Immortality.

The second stanza extends the relaxed conversational tone, the ominous overtones notwithstanding, "We slowly drove- He knew no haste". Biographical parallels provide ballast to the several searches for meaning in this highly symbolic poem. The Dickinson girls often went on carriage rides with their male relatives and friends. The journey recalled in the poem is a leisured one, there having been no need for hurry. V. R. Pollak observes with an irony perhaps not intended. "She has all the time in the world and in other worlds besides". (***Dickinson-The Anxiety of Gender,*** Vivian R. Pollak, Cornell Univ. Press, Ithaca and London, 1984 p, 191). The encounter between the speaker and death approaches the formality of a social exercise when the former observes in all reasonableness, "And 1 had put away / My labor and my leisure too, / For His Civility".

The third stanza throws up the images of time and space passed by the occupants of the carriage during their leisurely journey. The "school" is not only the local school where "Children strove/at Recess", but is one of the archetypal associations of childhood across nations and ages. The fields of grain symbolize experience and maturity, fertility and fruition, the harvests of knowledge gathered in schools through the seasons of search. Childhood and maturity are inevitably followed by the end of life, a scenario suggested by the last line of the third stanza, which mentioned the speaker's journey beyond the setting sun.

The fourth stanza sets out to contradict this cosmological assumption by clarifying "Or rather- He passed Us"-which is quite a different thing from them passing the sun. The opening line of the stanza sets the tone for a change in the atmosphere, in the meteorological conditions surrounding the carriage. "The Dews drew quivering and chill". The speaker is not suitably clad for the damp and chill that have invaded the

air, as she notably laments "For only Gossamer, my Gown-/ My Tippet- only Tulle". The speaker's gown made of gossamer, a soft, sheer, gauzy fabric, and "tippet" or stole made of tulle, are scarce protection against the cold weather. The sharpness of the atmosphere made the speaker aware of the inadequacy of her clothing (which might have been the costume of a bride) for the inhospitable weather. Helen McNeil ***(Emily Dickinson,*** Pantheon Books. Virago. London, 1986, p 131) sees in the imagery of morbid courtship the speaker's "sexual humiliation" when the latter becomes aware of her transparent clothing. Pollak observes, that the feminine imagery of gown and tippet serve to draw attention to the "fragility of (the speaker's) body, her ego and her psychic defenses" ***(Anxiety of Gender,*** p 191).

It is only in the fifth stanza that the carriage draws to a halt. Movement, slow but continuous, had been the driving force in the four preceding stanzas. Ironies proliferate at this point when one realizes that the sense of culmination suggested by the word "house", a sought after destination reached after a long ride is replaced by a sense of termination enforced through the image of the grave. What ought to have been a refuge or shelter for the living turns out to be a resting-place for the dead. The barely visible roof and the sunken cornice of the house suggest its closeness to the soil, to ruins and remains, and reminds one powerfully of the levelling and reduction of most things to the earth.

The evening ride takes the reader through familiar scenes to the buried home, or the grave where the outward action stops. The last stanza of the poem contains the denouement of the poem. Elizabeth Phillip, tracing literary influences on Dickinson, links the denouement to several expressions celebrated in the Romantic and Victorian canons of England. She refers to the stanza's close affinity with the notion of the "instant made eternity" in Browning's The Last Ride Together'. Though not quite the same in spirit or philosophy, Dickinson's imaginative transformation of time (centuries which seem shorter than a day) approaches the Victorian poet's dictum in its bid to expand the range of time through psychological intensity. Phillip points out Dickinson's indebtedness to Elizabeth Barrett Browning's account of the "enforced journey" to corruption undertaken by Marian Erie in Book VI of Aurora Leigh, and to the tone and mood of Keats' romantic necromancy expressed in his avowal that he was "half in love with easeful death".

The introduction of realistic doubt in the last two lines of the poem, "I first surmised the Horses Heads/Were toward Eternity" lends elements of surprise and piquancy, and adds to the discourse of perception that runs through the poem. A circular thrust to the imagery is-provided by the mention of the carriage, which returns one to the beginning of the poem, and establishes the horse-drawn vehicle as

an image of significance. Distance, direction, and angles of vision come into play at this point with the Horses' Heads not only obstructing the speaker's vision in a practical sense, but actually generating doubt about the direction they face, thus complicating the poetic discourse with competing meanings and perspectives.

2.1.1 Analysis

Writing her own obituary in 'Because I Could Not Stop For Death' Dickinson subverts conventional temporal verities and problematizes attitudes to death and dying. She is unable to imagine the end of the journey because she is unable to imagine the end of death, not having encountered the experience herself. Another view is that the speaker is always aware of death, which lurks in her memory but which cannot guarantee her a passage to eternity since the death is not her own.

Parini and Miller ***(The Columbia History of American Poetry,*** ed. Jay Parini and Brett C. Miller. New York: Columbia UP, 1993) notice the commingling of the conventional promise of Christianity with Gothic tonalities and link the suitor to both the lover of Poe's configuration and the 'Bridegroom' mentioned in the Bible.

2.1.2 Structure and Style

A unique feature of Dickinson's individuality is that she does not give her poems titles, possibly fearing that the latter would limit interpretation by imposing a measure of authorial jurisdiction. The brevity of Dickinson's poetry is compensated by the semantic and symbolic intensification of meaning wrought through her use of words and figures. The carriage doubles up for a hearse, while the gossamer gown and tulle tippet suggest bridal attire and its stark inappropriateness in the funereal context. Such transvaluation is seen in the grave image later in the poem, which is ironically, introduced as a 'house', a construct traditionally associated with security and comfort. The 'Horses Heads' being a synecdoche, not only represents the whole, but potentially subsumes the whole in its alteration and redefinition of vision.

Dickinson favours the hymn stanza, yet she often undercuts its formal norms with her unorthodox punctuation and syntactical disruptions. The colloquial tone employed at the beginning belies the seriousness of theme and sets up a contrast that is sustained in various ways throughout the poem. The rise and fall of the iambic rhythm seems to echo the sound of the carriage wheels as they move over the countryside.

Elizabeth Phillips ***(Emily Dickinson, Personae and Performance,*** Penn State U Press, London, 1991, p 86) sees the mingling of generic forms in the convergence of 'speech', 'soliloquy' and 'narrative' in 'Because'. Beginning with a formal, explanatory, reasonable account of the journey undertaken by the speaker, and

understandably delving into her personal responses to the overture of the morbid suitor, the poet goes on to provide a description of the passing sights. From the third stanza however, the narrative slips into a more interiorized recapitulation of the subsequent experiences, bringing it closer to the soliloquy.

2.1.3 Questions

1. Assess 'Because I Could Not Stop For Death' as a 'posthumous speech' which is effectively sustained as a soliloquy.
2. Analyze the biographical and intertextual echoes in 'Because I Could Not Stop for Death'.
3. Show how Dickinson manipulates rhetorical figures and strategies to achieve intensification of meaning and effect.
4. Discuss 'Because' as a multivalent reflection on death.
5. "I first surmised the Horses' Heads/Were toward eternity". Assess the relevance of this statement in the context of the poem as a whole.

2.2 Introduction 'Flowers'

Flowers occupied a special place in Dickinson's heart. The Dickinson family gardener MacGregor Jenkins describes a memorable encounter with the poet, which centred on the subject of flowers. He reminisces: "She talked to me of her flowers, of those she loved best; of her fear should the bad weather harm them; then, cutting a few choice buds, she bade me take them, with her love to my mother." Dickinson, in fact, spent considerable time in her garden tending to her blooms, personally cherishing the individual characteristics of the flowers she so carefully nurtured.

Though apparently different in theme and tone from the poem discussed earlier, it is linked to the longer poem in an elliptical way. Dickinson looked at death as a counterpart of life, and learnt to accept the former as an adventure recognizing its unfathomable quality. In the process she evolved a response to mortality that Emory Elliott in the Columbia Literary History of the US perceives as the creation of "a cosmology centred on nurturance and generativity" (p 623). The garden, according to this view, appears as the metaphor of a creative cosmos that is seen to counter the threat of destruction and darkness.

2.3 Textual Explication

Poem 137 expresses Dickinson's love for flowers. The beginning of the poem,

conversational in its syntactical and idiomatic cast, lays down a condition at the outset, challenging one to define the joy that flowers can bring to the human being, and promises a reward in the case of success. Having posed the challenge in the first four lines, Dickinson elaborates on the theme in the next (and last) four lines of the stanza. She maintains that if anybody succeeds in finding the source of the inspiration which occasions the "ecstasy", "transport" or the "fountain" of delight evoked by the perfection of flowers, she will gift him "all the Daisies on the hillside"

That the flowers Dickinson so passionately invokes, personally overwhelm her is evident from the first two lines of the second stanza. A surplus of sympathy manifests itself in the confession, that flowers move her more deeply than she cares to document. Butterflies, in themselves, a delicate and fragile embodiment of beauty combine with the image of the flowers to present a paradigm of perfection unsurpassed by the poet's art. The last two lines of the poem which claim that the butterflies sailing over the line of purple flowers "Have a system of aesthetics-/ Far superior to mine", appear to confirm Wolff's contention regarding the metapoetic nature of the flower imagery.

2.3.1 Analysis

C. G. Wolff refers to Dickinson's flowers as one of her "metapoetic tropes", arguing that the poet referred to her poetry as a "veil", "flowers" or "snow" ***(Fictions of Form in American Poetry,*** Stephen Cushman, Princeton Univ. Press, N Jersey, 1993, p 42). Read in this context, the poem can quite clearly be seen to be tending towards a culminating correlationship between the standards of natural and poetic perfection in which flowers are but a metaphor for the poetic blooms yielded by the imagination. The "ecstasy" is the bliss that attends the birth of art. and the "fountain" with all its pagan associations is a source of creative inspiration. The use of the word "line" in the third-last line of the poem, evocative of design and symmetry, brings to mind not only the lines of a poem but also the lines delineating a work of art or craft.

The garden or bower as an extension of the home operates as a domestic space or female sphere with its emphasis on ministration and nurturance. Dickinson affirms the superiority of the values of love and friendship over the so-called male preoccupations of business and politics. According to Helen McNeil, Dickinson did not subscribe to the literary imperialism of the day, which saw the North American continent as a wilderness to be conquered and subjugated. Even when Dickinson evokes her own garden, her patch of her father's estate, she does not possess it. She regards it as a domain of natural beauty and creativity, an aesthetic medium through which she could express herself.

2.3.2 Structure and Style

A variation of the sonnet structure, 'Flowers' is informed with a busy, tripping movement in its conditional proposition as it draws in object and subject in its formulation of a challenge. The epigrammatic precision of Dickinson's language is complicated by her metrical variations and disrupted syntax, which together constitute her counter-poetic of lexical liberties and synaesthetic surprises meant to subvert the utilitarian values of conventional patriarchy.

It has been suggested that Dickinson's poetry is based on the phrase and not the traditional foot. The dashes used so liberally by Dickinson convey a sense of urgent immediacy, and in some cases, the effect of "expressive suspension".

2.3.3 Suggested Reading

In addition to the critical works already referred to. one may look up the following:

The Emily Dickinson Handbook (ed Gudrun Grabher, R Hagenbuchle, C. Miller, Univ. of Mass Press, Amherst, 1998)

American Women Poets: Pioneers of Modern Poetry by Jean Gould, (Dodd, Medd and Co, New York, 1980)

Columbia Literary History of the United States, (ed, Emory Elliott, Gen Ed, Columbia Univ. Press. 1988)

2.3.4 Questions

1. Comment on Dickinson's use of 'flowers' as a metapoetic trope.
2. "The brevity of Dickinson's poems sensitizes us to the minutest literal details of her language". Discuss.
3. What is the tone affected by the speaker in this poem, and what does it reveal about her attitude to her art?

Unit 3 ❑ Robert Lee Frost (1874-1963)

Structure

3.0 Introduction

Robert Frost was born in 1874 to a New England family in San Francisco. As a boy Frost moved to the farm and mill country north of Boston, the backdrop of many of his poems. He went to Dartmouth and Harvard for his education following which he tried his hand at various jobs. He worked as a millhand, taught school for a while, and served as a newspaper editor. Frost spent several years farming before he moved to England where he received literary encouragement. His first book, ***A Boy's Will*** was published in 1913 while ***North of Boston*** which established him as a poet came out the following year. The poetic and the pastoral claimed Frost's attention equally and he returned to a country calling in his native land, settling in a New Hampshire farm.

'Mending Wall' and 'After Apple-Picking' are two of the dramatic lyrics included in Frost's volume of poems, ***North of Boston.*** This volume, containing lyrics, dialogues, dramatic monologues and narratives, is Frost's poetic study of rural New England. Most of the lyrics in this volume are centred around specific incidents that engage the speaker in dramatic conflicts and lead him to what Robert Langbaum has described as "extraordinary perspectives" ***(The Poetry of Experience,*** 1957, rpt N

Yk, W.W. Norton, 1963 p 47). While 'Mending Wall' is situated at the beginning of the volume, 'After Apple-Picking' is found just over halfway through the book.

3.1 Textual Explication ("Mending Wall")

'Mending Wall' is a dramatic narrative involving a country ritual that provokes a conflict of values between the speaker and a second character. Regional incident, local character and rustic imagery combine to create a poem that is ultimately universal in its appeal and scope of meaning. Intimations of conflict inform the poem from the very beginning. There is the opposition between the ground-swell and the wall. The mutinous upsurge of the ground-swell causes portions of the wall to weaken and gradually become dislodged from the main structure.

The speaker is both observant and imaginative. He takes note of the degeneration that has affected the wall, at the same time imagining the nature and power of the force or forces that may have contributed to its condition. The combination of the indefinite pronoun "something" with the loose construction "there is" suggests a speculative vagueness that establishes the informal, almost casual tone of the poem. The three active verbs "sends", "spills", and "makes" that impel the second, third and fourth lines achieve a conjunction of intent and meaning by attaining their culmination in specific objects. It is the "subterranean dynamics of the frost" which sends the frozen groundswell, "spills" the boulders and "makes" the gaps in the wall.

Lines 5-9 are anecdotal and digressive in nature giving an account of the vandalism that is indulged in by hunters who actually tear apart walls in the countryside in search of rabbits. This description gives the poem the relaxed rhythm of a casual conversation and enhances the discursive drift of the narrative.

The manner in which the speaker returns to his original theme, that is the ruin and subsequent rebuilding of the wall, in a single locutory loop : "The gaps I mean..." shows Frost's mastery over the conversational style, with its tendency to dwell on aspects of a particular topic, and recurrent patterns of thought.

Line 10 "No one has seen them made or heard them made" sheds light on the speaker's perception of the situation, and his tendency to regard the same as the outcome of an invisible and mysterious process. The next line, "But at spring mending-time we find them there", reinforces the idea with its emphasis on discovery. If the wall is a man-made boundary, the "hill" is a natural topographical barrier, the demarcation separating the speaker from the neighbour "beyond the hill".

Lines 12 to 15 constitute a unit in terms of order and progression with regard to both the subject referred to, and the syntax used by the narrator. Line 12 makes a

simple declarative statement, that of the speaker informing the neighbour of the state of the wall. The very following line provides a record of the next logical step that of both neighbours meeting on an agreed date to walk the length of their common wall. Line 14 with its regular beat of drumming iambs enforces not only the masonic rhythm of repairing and rebuilding a structure, it subtly conveys through its metrical rhythms, the need for neat, perhaps symmetrical boundaries between estates and in relationships.

Line 15 is resonant with the notion of separation with its insistence on "keeping" "the wall between us as we go". It seems to suggest that wall repairing or barrier-construction is an ongoing process, distancing persons, perhaps communities and cultures as people strive to fashion fences and demarcate their personal and public spaces. The distribution of boulders, depending on the side on which they have fallen, along with the rather professional division of labour, succinctly encapsulated in line 16, "to each the boulders that have fallen to each" further emphasizes the notion of neighbours separated by a line, a wall, a division of responsibilities. The verbs "let", "meet", "set" and "keep" in the successive lines retain the narrative inexorably in the present.

The earnestness of the rustic preoccupation evoked through concrete and sensory details leaves us unprepared for the "deprecatory offhandedness" of expressions such as, "Just another kind" and "comes to little more" Wall building as a rural ritual affirming boundaries dates back to ancient times, an outdoor "game" unceremoniously defined as one of the many kinds of games played in the countryside. There is the sense of a summary appraisal in the half-line: 'It comes to little more'. The game-reference brings with it echoes of rivalry and tension and contributes to the deeper scheme of oppositions and conflicts which informs the poem. If the wall-repairers are engaged in a game by themselves they are also at the same time, pitted against the wall-destroyers, the hunters who wantonly bring it down to serve their own ends.

In a different kind of opposition line 23 puts forth a sentiment which goes against the mentality calling for a wall, "There where it is we do not need the wall". The speaker appears to suggest that there is a vegetative and generic division wrought by nature which, if human beings so deem, may suffice as a boundary. "He is all pine and I am all apple orchard". The speaker maintains that his apples, which are edible, are unlikely to devour the farmer's pinecones, which are not.

Lines 23-26 give us the speaker's viewpoint vis-à-vis walls, his attitude to the school of thought, which believes in the necessity for fences. The argument is worked backwards from line 23 which, in a way begins with the conclusion, "There where...wall", a bald, perhaps slightly belligerent declaration, not calculated to irk,

but conscious of the rightness of the speaker's personal judgement. In the next line he advances the reason why a man- made wall is not an imperative in the vegetable contexts of their respective farms, "He is all pine and I am apple orchard". Acidity of pine needles would prevent apple seeds from taking root and a demarcation would naturally come into being without there being a need for a wall. The next two lines constitute patient explanation of the obvious. These lines may be interpreted as jocular evidence of the speaker's good humour-making light of an onerous activity; or they may be seen to be continuing a residue of ridicule for the farmer who is too obtuse to recognize the irrelevancy of the wall.

Line 27, the only line to be uttered by the farmer is a brisk rejoinder to the speaker's ideological position. A terse aphorism of five words, the line condenses and communicates the Yankee farmer's response to the situation, and by extension, his general outlook on life. The conflict gathers momentum as the speaker mentally contests the farmer's opinion, thereby extending and intensifying the conflicts of opinion, attitude, response and situation that are presented in the poem. Taking a logical stance, he wonders whimsically if he may plant a question in his neighbour's mind as to why walls are supposed to breed good neighbours. Having moved from description to speculation, from the factual to the fanciful, from irony to earnestness, the speaker grows diffident about his own perceptions toward the end of the poem.

He goes on to presume that in a bucolic landscape in which cattle are liable to wander beyond their allotted spaces, fences may serve a practical purpose but in a high-altitude, hilly terrain characterized by pine forests and apple orchards walls may prove to be artificial constructs. The half line, "But here there are no cows" is a mixture of lament and puzzlement, and entirely realistic in its tonal quality. Continuing in the logical strain the speaker opines, "Before I built a wall I'd ask to know/What I was walling in or walling out", The notion of enclosure, and simultaneous expulsion, is linked to the politics of inclusion and exclusion, of integration and segregation. The reasonableness of tone and the discursive mode of the argument trace the words to a thoughtful mind given to pursuing whimsical lines of speculation.

Line 35 "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" is a return to the opening of the poem. It has the quality of a refrain, and refers the poem to a repetitive process that is consonant with the turnings and returnings of the discursive mode. The setting out on a fresh track of investigation from the middle of line 36, "I could say 'Elves' to him" suggests a quirky, meditative bent of mind which leads to these abrupt, frequently fanciful transitions in thought. The mention of 'elves' further accentuates the whimsical, almost idiosyncratic humour of the speaker. It links this part of the poem to the notion of 'spell' mentioned in line 18, thereby evoking elements of the

occult or the supernatural which are historically and temperamentally far removed from the world of the Yankee farmer.

Lines 38 to 45 present the speaker's physical perception of the farmer.

"I see him there.

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an Old Stone Age savage armed."

It is a climactic vision that transposes the farmer to the distant past, allying him with the image of a primitive man about to resort to brute force at the slightest hint of danger. Though full of immediacy, these lines yet posit a vision of the far-off past. The temporal tension complicates the vision of the neighbour adducing the Yankee archetype with another archetype- that of the Stone Age savage. The physical perception of the farmer held by the speaker gives way to psychological insight into the man in the next three lines.

"He moves in darkness as it seems to me.

Not of woods only and the shade of trees

He will not go behind his father's saying..."

These lines afford a sense of the deepening perception of the speaker as he places the farmer, first in a far-removed, then in a shadowy jungle habitat, before proceeding to a vision of his cramped credulities. The farmers appear trapped in parental precepts and prejudices, the narrow confines of what he has been taught to believe and conditioned to think.

3.1.1 Analysis

Rural walls of the type described in 'Mending Wall' are largely the remnants of the piles of boulders made by generations of pioneers and yeomen who had to perforce dig out the stones before the New England soil could be made cultivable. There is no purpose in preserving these relics and Frost exploits the conflictual connotations of the image to make a point in his apparently meandering conversational way. Conflict, varying in nature and degree, seems to be one of the identifiable themes of the poem. The frozen ground swell, gradually increasing in volume, surreptitiously pushes against the wall and succeeds in dislodging many of its boulders. The proundswell represents the resistance of nature to manmade structures.

The activity of hunters brings to mind other types of conflict. The destruction wrought by hunters in the countryside is pitted against the organic, creative and regenerative forces in nature. The reference to rabbits and "yelping dogs" enforces

the notion of a clash between the hunter and the hunted, the predator and the prey. Line 12, which introduces the "neighbour beyond the hill", at once establishes the "otherness" of the farmer. His physical domain is so close to that of the speaker, yet his world is so far removed.

The playful attitude of the speaker to the wall repair, seen in lines 18 and 19, and again in lines 21 and 22, curiously enclose an opposing viewpoint to the work in line 20, which quietly recognizes the hard physical labour entailed in the same activity: "We wear our fingers rough with handling them."

From line 23 onwards appears the temperamental and psychological tension between the speaker and the farmer, the attitudinal animosities, which give the poem its ideological and tonal complexities. The contrast in the landscape and vegetation of the respective farms of the two men is but an emblem of their orientations and dispositions. The speaker, reflective, and apparently reasonable, seems willing to explore words, ideas and feelings. The neighbour, on the other hand, appears taciturn, unwilling to verbally commit himself beyond a single sentence, to grow beyond adages and aphorisms, not relying on individual perceptions.

The oppositions do not end here, and indeed, permeate to a deeper level of the text, and like the 'frozen ground-swell', tend to dislodge some of the assumptions that we have formed on our initial reading of the poem. While the speaker complains about the unfriendliness of his neighbour, it is he who initiated the wall-mending exercise, and was quick to assume the worst about his neighbour. Kemp points out "the failure of communication in the poem is mutual. And in truth Frost's persona is the less communicative and the more hostile of the two" (***Robert Frost and New England : The Poet as Regionalist,*** John C. Kemp, Princeton Univ. Press, N Jersey, 1979 p). The speaker's own reliance on subjective judgement ironically takes away from the reasonable and tolerant image of himself that he Strives to portray. Given to digressions, equivocation, suppositions and questions, the speaker is ultimately unable to challenge the Yankee farmer's confident assertion.

"Mending Wall' on one level is a parable on parochialism. The closing of gaps in the wall signifies the sealing of the points where the neighbours could have perhaps met. As Frost's persona dwells on the necessity of building a wall between neighbours, he vests his neighbour with attitudes which are at variance with his (as he believes) his own enlightened tolerance. Ironically, his ruminations give away his ingrained prejudices about people and their beliefs and habits. Kemp maintains that "it is less about neighbourliness than it is about modes of thought, about language, perhaps even about poetry itself' ***(Robert Frost and New England : The Poet as Regionalist,*** P 24).

3.1.2 Structure and Style

A dramatic narrative, 'Mending Wall' shapes itself around some of the traits of the rural New England character and achieves an authenticity of effect, both personal and regional, through a brilliant approximation of tone and voice. This voice, at once generic and eccentric, is central to Frost's greatest regional work. It guides the reader in a particular direction through images and observations even as it introduces ambivalences in the form of tonal attitudes such as diffidence, uncertainty and the fantasizing urge. William H. Pritchand observes, "This voice has not a particular back-country identity, nor is it obsessed or limited in its point of view; it seems rather to be exploring nature, other people, ideas, ways of saying things, for the sheer entertainment they can provide". ***(Frost : A Literary Life Reconsidered,*** (OUP, 1984).

The language, as it traces the thought patterns of a ruminating mind, appears entirely natural in its digressions, suppositions, hesitations, questions and capricious constructions. The dialectical refutation of one idea by another as the poem moves toward its climax, expressed by the natural twists and turns in thought, and the corresponding sinuosities of speech attests to an easy naturalness of effect most difficult to attain in poetry. That Frost was deeply concerned about the veracity of voice in his poetry is evident from his references to what he calls the 'vocal imagination' and 'the images of the voice speaking,' in his essay, 'The Constant Symbol'.

Irony with its concomitants of dialectic and paradox is the governing trope in this poem by Frost. Frost's persona in speculating not altogether charitably about his neighbour has not quite succeeded in presenting the latter in a negative light. Rather, he has engendered several perspectives involving both speaker and farmer which together fracture and complicate meaning, rather than encourage a simplistic assessment of character and situation.

The colloquial language and the quotation imagery occasionally carry within their scope images of startling prescience. The description of the Yankee farmer as an "old stone age savage" with "a stone grasped firmly by the top/in each hand" as he moves in the darkness of a primitive age and adage illustrates Frost's mastery of analogous figures. Frost himself spelt it out when he said, "There are things you can't convey except in similitudes. That's the way we get from one thing to another, by similitudes, of course." (***Bread Loaf School,*** Aug 2, 1954).

English Frost balances matter and metre, the varied blank verse cadence imbuing the poem with a flexibility and a mixture of restraint and freedom that is integrated to the theme. Walter Beacham illumines the point in his essay, 'Technique and the

Sense of Play' ***(Frost; Centennial Essays,*** ed Jac Thorpe, Univ. Press of Miss, Jackson, 1976, p 261) where he argues, "Meter is used to render emotions which we would like to feel, and which are superficially suggested by the subject matter, thereby creating a difference between comfort and insecurity."

3.1.3 Questions

1. Would you agree that conflict, in its various manifestations is a major thematic preoccupation in 'Mending Wall'?
2. Examine 'Mending Wall' as a parable on parochialism.
3. Analyze 'Mending Wall' as a poem of regional character and incident.
4. "While attacking his neighbour's lack of open-minded amiability, the speaker is the one who exhibits anti-social tendencies". Comment.
5. Assess the effectiveness of 'Mending Wall' as a dramatic narrative.

3.2 Introduction 'After Apple-Picking'

The situation presented in the poem is the culmination of the harvest, and the preparation of the apple-picker for the long rest of winter. The speaker, who is physically fatigued and emotionally fulfilled after his prolonged labour of picking apples, is able to evoke both the senses of decline and satisfaction associated with the season of autumn. While the first half of the collection presents a relatively carefree figure rambling about the countryside, in 'After Apple-Picking' he is found to be "drowsing off'. Though weary after his labour and reflective in his repose, the speaker does not abandon the exploratory mode of the earlier poems in the collection, and he moves from meditation to a revelation, carrying his readers with him.

3.3 Textual Explication

The poem beginning with colloquial but vivid references to little tasks left unfinished–the ladder still pointing skyward, the unfilled barrel, a few apples yet on the bough-serves to accentuate the exhaustion and repletion experienced by the apple-picker. Line 6, "But I am done with apple-picking now" has a confident ring of finality to it, and also the sense of a well-earned repose and weariness that comes after a task well done. The apple- picker's tiredness renders him especially sensitive to the touch of winter on the autumnal night.

His utterance. "I am drowsing off' inevitably invites a comparison with Keats'

'To Autumn'. Just as the fume of poppies has an intoxicating effect on the reaper in Keats' poem, so also the scent of apples almost overpowers the speaker's senses, inducing in him the somnolent effects of a well-deserved rest. A sense of release, relief and redemption simultaneously affect the speaker, influencing the rhythms and tonalities of his account.

Lines 9-12 present the striking image of a sheet of ice, the "pane of glass" skimmed from the surface of the drinking trough and used as a min or by the speaker. It is an instance of the "extraordinary perspective" mentioned by Langbaum. According to Langbaum. this is a device "to keep the poem located—to keep the dramatic situation from turning into a rhetorical device and the landscape from turning into a metaphor for an'abstract idea". ***(.Poetry of Experience,*** p 47 Kemp attempts to explain the strangeness of the perspective by observing that looking through a thin sheet of ice leads to chimerical dreams and recollections of the harvest effort.

The persona captures the moment of his crossing over into the magic realm of the imagination in unmistakably Keatsian terms "I am drowsing off'. The following line. "I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight", though in a subdued key, yields effects ot hidden excitement, the promise of a new perspective. Interestingly, a homely sheet of ice becomes his magic lens, affording him wondrous visions of a different order of experience.

The melting of the ice, its falling and breaking, coincide beautifully with the speaker's drift into sleep, with his gradual surrender to the rhythms of rest. Lines 14-17 serve as a prescient prelude to the speaker's later imaginings. Though on the verge of sleep his faculties had been curiously enhanced, and he could intuit what 'form' his "dreaming was about to take". Marie Borroff observes (in ***Frost : Centennial Essays II*** ed Jac Thorpe. Univ. Press of Miss, Jackson, 1976, p 27), "Despite the preternatural vividness of the imagined apples, this is not a contemplative vision of essence in the Platonic sense, but something more mundane". Preferring to place emphasis on the psychological rather than the philosophical orientation of the vision she further explains, "It is an anxiety dream of the occupational sort. What has tired out the speaker is not the picking but the "cherishing' of each apple-handled with love."

Lines 18-26, described as a "brilliantly assonant and echoic passage", contain an illusory quality that is intensified through the interplay of perception and perspective. The apples which "appear and disappear" are "magnified". It is the transformed perspective of dream, vision and fancy, which necessarily interferes with the apprehension of natural physical proportion of objects, at times, enlarging or shrinking

them from their everyday dimensions. A striving toward inclusivity of perspective and detail, however, counters the notion of a subverted scale of vision in lines 19 and 20.

"Stem end and blossom end

And every fleck of russet showing clear"

Lines 21-22 record not only the physical response of the picker, the "ache" of his sensitive sole resting on the round of the ladder, it invokes that sense of balance which lies at the core of Frost's conception of happiness. The feet bearing the body's weight press down, while the ladder-round resists the downward pressure. Says Marie Borroff, "In Frost's poetry, as in life itself - happiness in the performance of a task depends on a balance between effort and resistance, a "poise" ***(Centennial Essays,*** p 29).

Line 23 "I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend"

may be understood as a naturalistic description of the swaying movement of the ladder against the bending branches. It may, at the same time, be construed as the speaker's movement away from the phenomenal world into that of the unknown, the tentatively broached domain of a dream.

The next 3 lines :

"And I keep hearing from the cellar bin

The rumbling sound

Of load of load of apples coming in."

have to do with the auditory perception of the speaker, as the 'rumbling sound" of loads of apples being brought into the cellar assails his ears. The speaker's exposure to the closing cadences of the harvest encourages the sense of a passive surrender on his part, as he cannot help but hear the sounds of transport and storage that inevitably accompany the end of a harvest.

The explanatory conjunction introducing line 27 "for" sets in motion the tonality of tiredness which is picked up and augmented by the hypnotic rise and fall of its rhythm, capturing the speaker's drift into drowsiness. He goes on to express the extent of his fatigue through the adjective "overtired". The deep satisfaction derived from working close to the soil is compounded by a weariness born not only of the physical labour of "picking" but also of the emotional involvement of "cherishing" each apple. Line 31 sets forth the sequence of care bestowed on each apple:

"Cherish in hand, lift down, and not left fall."

The musing tone of the speaker in the next 5 lines carries a note of lament and

inevitability which, dwells on the fate of those apples which fall to the ground. An apple which, falls to the ground, irrespective of any blemish it may acquire or not, is consigned to the cider-apple heap.

The reflective tone is continued in the next few lines, which constitute the conclusion of the poem. The themes of drowsiness, dream and hibernation, developed in the poem, are given a further dimension in the speaker's attempt to distinguish, at the end of the poem between kinds of sleep. Seeking to accurately describe the nature of the sleep that is about to overtake him, the speaker resorts to a comparison to express his point of view. The speaker distinguishes between human and animal sleep, the human variety being "troubled" with the weight of memories and cares, and the latter being the "dreamless oblivion" of animal hibernation. Elucidating the difference between the two kinds of sleep Richard Reed maintains, "The woodchuck is simply a part of nature from which man is set apart. Man toils, dreams and is troubled and the trouble is what makes man human and superior to the woodchuck," ***(Centennial Essays,*** p 167). The stress on sleep, the tendency to see it as the culmination of a process of activity encourages one to see an analogy between the end of a day, of a particular harvest season, and also the tasks of a person's life.

3.3.1 Analysis

'After Apple-Picking' is concerned with the mysteries of sleep and dream, death and spiritual transcendence. Sleep and death, in their suggestion of the culmination of a process represent an end. The poem explores several understandings of the notion of 'end'. It presents 'end' both as a conclusion of things and as a cessation of being. The decline of autumn apprehending the "long sleep" of winter: the end of the day with its accent on the winding up of tasks; and of course, the gathering in of the harvest, equally enforce the sense of a logical or expected conclusion to activities, processes and temporal cycles. (16; 24-26).

The culmination of activity is practically synchronous with the advent of a great sleep, the oblivion wrought of extreme tiredness. "I am drowsing off' in line 8 is followed in lines 14-15 with the-reiteration, "But I was well/Upon my way to sleep...". In much the same strain, are the lines: "I am overtired/Of the great harvest I myself desired". The last reference to sleep in the poem extends and complicates the theme by going into its nature "One can see what will trouble/This sleep of mine, whatever sleep it is".

The verbal insistence on "fall," evident in line 13 "It melted and I let it fall and break"; in line 15: "I was well/Upon my way to sleep before it fell"; and again, in line 31 "Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall", combines with the religious

connotations of the apple imagery, to suggest another kind of end–the end of innocence resulting in the fall of man.

The sense of an end, along with the notions of decline and death, so persistently addressed in the poem yet admit of another state of being, that is the dimension of dream, a transcendent experience beyond the border of sleep. The additional burden of meaning accruing from this expansion of frontier complicates a simple pastoral reading of the poem with subtler shades of meaning.

Being centrally concerned with the polarities of labour and rest, beginnings and ends, the poem derives its thematic balance from the notion of transition. Autumn is a season of both abundance and emptiness when the barns are filled even as the fields are shorn of growth. It is associated with culmination even as it ushers in a spell of hibernation.

While there is no evidence of actual sleep, the speaker is overwhelmingly at the threshold of drowsiness. Lines 14 and 15 speak of an almost involuntary affiliation to an influence beyond his control. Line 23 "I feel the ladder sway as the boughs bend" symbolically reinforces his movement away from the known world. The verbs "sway" and "bend" suggest accommodation and admittance into realms beyond the naturalistic documented one. Lines 37 and 38 present the approach of sleep, with the speaker professing uncertainty about its nature. The penultimate line in the poem: "Long sleep, as I describe its coming on" again shows the imminent advent or "coming on" of sleep, bringing in its wake an obfuscation of the senses.

3.3.2 Structure and Style

In "After Apple-Picking' Frost succeeds in maintaining a balance between sensuous, visionary Romanticism and pragmatic New England values. Beginning with a quotidian detail colloquially expressed, "long two-pointed laddersticking through a tree" the poem moves through ruminative rhythms before giving in to the incantatory cadence of a line such as, "But I am done with apple-picking now". This anticipates the musicality of the lines 14 to 20. Numerous concrete images such as ladder, barrel, drinking-trough and cellar-bin testify to the earthy nature of the activity described in the poem even as the language with its contractions (there's, didn't) preserves the flavour of conversational casualness. Refer to the previous poem for a discussion on 'voice' in Frost's poetry.

3.3.3 Suggested Reading

In addition to the works already cited one may usefully refer to the following : ***Robert Frost. A Living Voice,*** Reginald Cook, Univ of Mass Press, Amherst, 1974); ***American Poetry 1915-1945*** (Chelsea House Pubs, N Yk, New Haven, Philadelphia, 1987).

For a particularly illuminating discussion on Frost's technique in both the poems, turn to the essay 'Technique and the Sense of Play' by Walter Beacham in ***Frost : Centennial Essays***

3.3.4 Questions

1. Would you agree with the view that 'After Apple Picking' is a poem that, is principally concerned with the mysteries of sleep and death? Discuss.
2. Examine the notion of balance as it is presented in the poem.
3. Critically examine the sensuous, imaginative and musical aspects of the poem.
4. Evaluate the details of language and imagery, which make the poem a memorable one.
5. Discuss 'After Apple-Picking' as a dramatic lyric.

Unit 4 ❑ Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Structure

4.0 Introduction

Wallace Stevens was born in 1879 in Reading, Pennsylvania. After his school education at Reading Boys' High School, Stevens spent three years at Harvard. His stint at the university over, Stevens worked as a journalist for a year before being admitted to the New York State Bar. For the next twelve years or so, Stevens practiced law in New York. In 1916, he moved to Connecticut where he worked for the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company till his death in 1955.

Engaged in a quest for what has been called the supreme fiction in a post-religious world, Stevens went through the stages of ironic affectation and European filiation to a native pronouncement. Choosing for his themes the secular concerns of the day and the potentialities of the imagination, Stevens was a modern Romantic who was drawn into the intricacies of speculation as he wrestled metaphysically with profound abstractions.

4.1 Textual Explication 'The Emperor of Ice cream'

'The Emperor of Ice cream' is a poem that resisted explication for a long while probably because of the generic and rhetorical difficulties posed by it. The implications of the poem are tantalizingly embedded in the interstices of forms, in the gaps between story and plot, in the elisions and ellipses between ideas and expressions.

The poem sets out to tell the story of a person who has gone to the house of a neighbour who has just died. The person is to help lay out the corpse while other neighbours are sending over homegrown flowers or are preparing food for the wake.

The basic narrative has been fractured into two plots, each with its respective personae and setting, spread over the two stanzas. The first stanza presents the wake preparations as they unfold in the kitchen. The muscular cigar-roller is on the point of being called in to lend a hand with the ice cream making, while the women "dawdling" in the clothes of their choice blend easily into the background. It is a social occasion, a community exercise where ritual and routine dominate the scene.

In the second stanza the scene shifts to the bedroom and the focus comes to rest on the dresser from where the shroud is to be taken out. The item of furniture that commands attention, however, is the bed bearing the body. The inadequacy of art in hiding the stark dimensions of reality is clearly evident in the limitations of the embroidered bedspread, which is too short to cover the body fully. It will suffice for either the upper or lower portion of the body. In case the face is covered, the "horny feet" will project out; bringing home to the viewers, the harsh reality of the moment.

The narrative, plotted into two simultaneously unfolding scenes in contiguous settings, and set forth sequentially according to the dictates of formal linearity embodies a tension that is rhetorically complemented by the tonal textures of the imperatives that mark the style. The structure conforms to a series of commands issued by an invisible master of ceremonies, or stage director whose business-like orders: "call", "let", "bring", "take", "spread" introduce the actions which in their combined focus yield the scenes that together constitute the poem.

The tone of the speaker, entrusted with discharging part of the meaning, is a curious mixture of the imperious and the intimate. While the colloquial words, for their part, express a sense of familiarity, details such as "last month's newspapers" or the deal dresser with its five missing knobs convey a homely immediacy. Above all, the image of "that" sheet with the embroidered fantails intimates the nuances of a shared history, even as it indicates the detached efficiency of an objective agency simply ascertaining that the funeral is decorously conducted.

The last lines of both stanzas which are identical in their refrain-like quality appear to clinch resoundingly the ongoing dialectic of action with the didacticism of formulated insight: "The only emperor is the emperor of ice cream." One rules in whatever senses as long as one lives, and in order to live has to necessarily derive sustenance from food. Hence, ice cream in its synecdochic capacity comes to stand for all that nourishes the life force.

The penultimate lines in both stanzas, in their different ways address the poem's preoccupation with the notion of appearance and reality, a theme that is persistently probed by Stevens. In the first stanza, the speaker ascribes importance to "be" over

"seem"thereby recognizing the validity of reality over illusion; "Let be finale of seem." In the second instance, "Let the lamp affix its beam", the lamp in addition to the associations of the mortuary brings to mind the theatrical lights and their suggestion of worlds-real and unreal.

4.1.1 Analysis

'The Emperor of Ice cream is a short and stylized poem, which depends for its effect on the exhortatory tone of the speaker and the visual evocation of the scenes, which together constitute the dramatic moment. The poet Elizabeth Bishop has conjectured that the cigar rollers seem to have reference to the Cuban workers who worked at the cigar rolling machines in factories, while ice cream was traditionally consumed at Black funerals. This seems to locate the poem in ethnic details which; contribute not only to the atmosphere of the particular household in which the death has taken place,' but also to the larger climate of race and class as they intersect in the mesh of social relations.

4.1.2 Structure and Style

The first stanza with its images of "big cigars", "concupiscent curds" and dawdling wenches makes a life affirming statement, despite the intrusion of the image of the flowers in "last month's newspapers" and its associations of staleness. The contrast between life and death subtly developed through the images reaches a resolution in the penultimate line of the first stanza, "Let be the finale of seem." The resounding refrain: "The only emperor is the Emperor of Ice-cream" serves both as a rationale for the choice consciously exercised, and a reiteration of the mood and message that has conditioned the confident assertion.

The second stanza is qualitatively different from the preceding one in its quiet enumeration of furniture and linen. The dresser made of pinewood with its three missing glass knobs tells its story of lives lived within the walls of the house. The sheet with the "embroidered fantails," once probably a labour of love painstakingly undertaken now assumes the lineaments of a shroud, and an inadequate one at that. Fantails, a variety of domestic pigeon with a particularly showy, round tail, when combined with the fact of embroidery enforces the notions of flight and minute embellishment. The "embroidered fantails", a metaesthetic trope for the intricacies of the imagination, in its inability to fully cover the dead body suggest the growing realization of the speaker that despite the preponderance of vital images and aesthetic prevarication death, after all, cannot be camouflaged or covered.

The coldness and dumbness of death are as inescapable as the protruding "horny

feet" of the corpse. The lamp with its artificial lighting and manipulation of effects is invoked to "affix its beam". In the modulated glow from an artificial source of light the grotesquerie may be toned down, and the stage set so as to soften the harsh contours of reality and accommodate the gaze which may be otherwise struck by the stark nature of death in all its unpleasantness. The speaker registers his choice of life over death in the face of the latter's ubiquity and inevitability repeating his belief that: "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream." Ice cream, or the tawdry, concupiscent pleasures it represents, is the only pleasure that is real.

The poem derives its piquancy from the overlap of genres that is discernible in the poem. A story is being told even as scenes are enacted and visual details are imagistically interposed. The hectoring tone of a monologue, possibly an affectation on the part of the speaker sets up rhetorical and psychological tensions, which contribute to the tonal complexities evident in the poem. Also, the formula of commands expresses a culture of orality and effects a sense of distance in terms of an observing and ordering intelligence which directs the actions as well as the responses of readers.

4.1.3 Suggested Reading

The Columbia History of American Poetry. Ed. Jay Parini and Brett C. Miller. New York : Columbia UP, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by Columbia UP.

4.1.4 Questions

1. Examine the symbolic resonances of the poem's title.
2. Comment on the narrative and dramatic elements in the poem.
3. To what extent does the poem illustrate Stevens' interest in "the comic irony of the quotidian and a glance at the grotesque"?
4. Comment on the imagery of the poem and suggest how it affects the theme.

Unit 5 ❑ Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)

Structure

5.0 Introduction

Born on 3 June, 1926, in Newark, New Jersey to a Russian émigré mother and a poet cum teacher father, Ginsberg spent his formative years in New Jersey, attending Paterson High School till he left it to attend Columbia University at the age of 17. After being dismissed from Columbia in 1943, Ginsberg trained with the Merchant Marine Academy at Brooklyn and went out on voyages. He graduated with a BA degree from Columbia, after being readmitted to the same.

Having become involved in criminal activities in 1948, Ginsberg had to undergo psychiatric counselling at Rockland State Hospital, after which he returned to live with his father for a while. His peripatetic urges took him to Cuba and Yucatan. The publication of *Howl and Other Poems* in 1956 led to an obscenity charge against Ginsberg for which he was subsequently tried but was declared innocent, upon which he once again set out on travels. This time his journeys took him to the Arctic, Tangier, Venice, Amsterdam, Paris, London and Oxford.

In the years that followed Ginsberg remained busy with his poetry readings at universities, his writing, and a couple of appearances in films. In 1961; he went to the Far East, a trip that engendered in him a desire to understand more deeply the nature of eastern mysticism. In 1972 began Ginsberg's long association with Chogyam Trungpa, a teacher of Buddhist meditational practices. In 1974; the poet co-founded the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics as part of the Naropa Institute at Boulder, Colorado.

In 1975, Ginsberg performed a number of spontaneously composed blues songs as 'poet-percussionist' with Bob Dylan on a musical show. In 1979, Ginsberg was

honoured with the National Arts Club Gold Medal. In the next few years Ginsberg published several volumes of poems.

5.1 Textual Explication ('Howl')

The poem 'Howl' being too long to be included in its entirety portions of the text have been selected for inclusion. The extracted portion of Part I is the beginning of the poem ending with the line "and the Staten Island ferry also wailed." The entire second part has been included, while the two concluding stanzas of the third part have been quoted for the sake of continuity and coherence.

The post-war decades in America were characterized in some of its cultural quarters by a strident rejection of all received values. The social, cultural and political atmosphere of protest found a poetic outlet in the expressions of the Beat poets who broke free of social, sexual and aesthetic taboos to mint a new idiom of protest and search. Allen Ginsberg was the high priest of the Beat cult and sought to mediate the reality of that situation in an idiom at once vibrant and trenchant.

The word 'beat' resonates with several meanings. The poets bearing this label represented the 'beaten' or subjugated segments of the population; the poetry typically sought an alliance with the beat or rhythm of jazz, the marginalized music of the less understood. Also beat, with its link to beatitude seemed to hold out hope for the pilgrims looking for salvation. According to Parini and Miller; *(Columbia History of American Literature)',* 'beatness' to Ginsberg was "looking at society from the underside, beyond society's conception of good and evil".

The genesis of the poem is interesting. 'Howl' was "typed out madly in one afternoon," Ginsberg notes, "a tragic custard-pie comedy of wild phrasing, meaningless images..." *(Notes on Howl* p 28). The poem comes across as a catalogue of random references and arbitrary allusions, dazzling descriptions and radical reflections intended, as Ginsberg explained in 1969, to dig "the humor of exhibitionism". Explaining his creative motivation and method Ginsberg continues, "You're free to say any damn thing you want; but people are so scared of hearing you say what's unconsciously universal that its comical. So I wrote with an element of comedy-partly intended to soften the blow." (In an interview to Playboy, 90).

Exploiting precisely this freedom the poem sought to purge the self of fears, reservations and inhibitions, which operate as a socially conditioned form of restraint, naturally affecting the creative process and militating against a genuinely spontaneous expression. "I thought I wouldn't write a poem", Ginsberg explains, "but just write what I wanted to without fear, let my imagination go, open secrecy and scribble

magic lines from my real mind-sum up my life-something I wouldn't be able to show anybody, write for my own soul's ear and a few other golden ears."

For a poem of 'Howl's' length to be composed in the course of a single afternoon, it calls for a sustained spell of inspiration which Ginsberg evidently experienced in a concentrated form. Such an exercise also demands a charged momentum and organicity, that is to some extent achieved by the first words which introduce the lines of the respective parts with an almost manic monotony and rhythmic regularity of expression.

Part I of the poem deals with the atrocities allegedly perpetrated on Ginsberg's friends and contemporaries by an unfeeling establishment. The opening lines present the poet as an observer who saw "the best minds" of his generation "destroyed by madness". Madness presumably is the attitude of society that was antithetical to the feelings and aspirations of the non-conformist members of Ginsberg's generation. Madness, perceived from the conventional angle, is also the condition of the creative thinkers who refused to submit to the reductive and categorizing processes that threatened to annul individuality. The reference to madness reappears in the poet's mention of the same people "who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy". Autobiographical offshoots of the theme may be traced to Ginsberg's own stay in an asylum, and to the mental illness of Carl Solomon who underwent treatment at Rockland State Hospital.

The poem is an animal cry of anguish at what Ginsberg sees happening around him. He tries to mediate a world in which the creative, sensitive and idealistic members of his generation are shown wandering through the city like damned souls. They become the "hipsters", the substance abusers, the hallucinators, the seekers of "jazz or sex or soup", the "scribblers" of "lofty incantations", the suicides, the sentence-creators and the sentence- servers.

The opening line of the poem dwells on the ruthless reduction of "the best minds" to "starving hysterical naked beings". Society, according to the poet, with its codes and prescriptions has wrought the destruction of the most gifted thinkers and seekers who find themselves without food, shelter, clothes and coherent speech. These artists and poets of potential and promise find themselves drifting through the "negro streets" (the haunt of other marginalized people as well) searching for their "fix"

The third line of the poem describing the same people as "angelheaded hipsters" shows them abjuring all material considerations and striving to derive their inspiration directly from a spiritual or supernatural source. The next line juxtaposes actual and hallucinated images of places in its projection of penurious but passionate pursuers

of dreams who sat smoking in their unheated flats and "floated across the tops of cities". The notion of liberation thus introduced leads in the following line, to an explosion of chemical induced ecstasy.

Ginsberg identified the hipsters, beatniks and scholars who negotiated their way through academia with Blakian visionary fervour as those expelled from universities for their obscene writings, who cowered on the verge of nervous breakdowns, burnt their money in bizarre acts of demonstration and desperation, and often surrendered to their fears. These are the people who experimented with alcohol, paint and turpentine, who tried to flagellate and purge themselves of impurities with dreams, drugs, alcohol and sex.

From the "negro streets" at dawn they move through the "blind streets" of endocrinal energy in the brain, "leaping towards poles of Canada and Paterson", entering new spatial realms and time-zones, powered by the "peyote" which propels them on to a succession of images. In a poetic transcription of the stream of consciousness mode, the poet posits a series of images, vibrant in themselves but lacking an apparent link: "Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light..."

There is a rapid evocation of place names, which conjures up the congested cosmos of New York: Battery, Bronx, Brooklyn Bridge, and Empire State. The civic map changes when its boundaries are exchanged for the forgotten frontiers of the East-Tangier and China—before returning to America with the resounding references to the West and the Midwest: Kansas. Idaho, Baltimore, Oklahoma and Houston.

Journeying down the New York subway drugged on Benzedrine till the surrounding cacophony brings them back to consciousness, "battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance" the beatniks intermittently awoke into new points of awareness. The "lost battalion of platonic conversationalists" who drifted through the pubs and bars of metropolitan and small-town America tried out the leap from mundane reality to heightened consciousness, or the ones to suicidal self-annihilation. The ones who survived recovered by therapeutically throwing up their memories of "hospitals and jails and wars", the remnants of institutional America.

What follows is an intense recapitulation of pathological peregrinations of the beat generation from midnight meanderings in the railway yard to racketing in boxcars in desolate places, through the streets of Idaho, Baltimore, Oklahoma and Houston. There is a reference to the volcanoes of Mexico consuming the beatniks and their creativity consequently erupting in the poetic ash of the hearths of Chicago. Some of these restless rebels reappeared in the West Coast protesting against war and

capitalism, advocating extreme Communism in demonstrations where the wail of the different sirens merged into the latent lament, the echo of the Wailing Wall of Jerusalem.

Part II of the poem contains the deafening diatribe against Moloch written while Ginsberg was under the influence of peyote. The "sphinx of cement and aluminium" is the modem metropolis, eternally mystifying yet mundanely mechanical, the hedonistic habitat of Moloch. This part of the poem presents the thrust of Ginsberg's attack on materialism and capitalism with their "Robot apartments", "blind capitals", "demonic industries", "invisible madhouses" and "monstrous bombs" combining to present a picture of unrelieved chaos and terror.

Here the protagonist "who" has been replaced by the antagonist "Moloch" whose soul is "electricity and banks", mind is "pure machinery" and whose blood is "running money". Every line of this part begins thunderously with the name 'Moloch' ritualistically adumbrating an ethos of cruelty, corruption and meaninglessness. The beatniks who "saw it all" took their leave of this mindless worship of a god, who they believed stood so manifestly opposed to their cause. 'They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof!"

The end of the second part, rife with intimations of Biblical echoes and the sense of a mystic ecstasy, closes with a reference to the holy vision of the poets. The vocabulary fraught with words such as "river", "flood", "visions", "miracles", "adorations" and "epiphanies" among others bear out the religious overtones of the experience referred to.

This part in which the element of spontaneity fostered through rapid association is forsaken by Ginsberg in favour of striking imagery leads Merrill to contend that Ginsberg's "Hebraic lamentations on Moloch" become tedious in the absence of the surprise element which had earlier sustained the poem.

Part III shows the figure of the poet-victim ascending through a series of affirmations to the world of Carl Solomon who interestingly, has developed into a symbol through the accretionary aesthetics of the poem. The part ends with the following two stanzas:

"I'm with you in Rockland

Where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes roaring/ over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself/ imaginary walls collapse. O skinny legions run outside. O starry spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here. O victory forget your underwear we're free

I'm with you in Rockland

In my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night."

Ginsberg's own comment on the overall pattern of *Howl* presents a rationale behind the development of the three parts: "Part I, a lament for the Lamb in America with instances of remarkable lamblike youths; Part II names the monster of mental consciousness that preys on the Lamb; Part III a litany of affirmation of the Lamb in its glory: O starry spangled shock of Mercy."

5.1.1 Analysis

Movement, anguished and compulsive, expressed through journeys and the jumbled litanies of place names suggests the poet's need for action, to simply take off, to get away, most importantly, escape from the intolerable reality of his situation. To effect the latter, several options are randomly explored-mental release through drugs, physical distancings through actual journeys, jumping off high-rises, seeking the nirvana of esoteric pursuits. Believing they could not change society, as the change had to come from within, the Beat poets chose not to fight but to register their protest through various forms of escapism.

The journeys in 'Howl' reiterated with ritualistic fervour are more than escapist exercises emphatically envisioned. These forays, both in their centripetal and centrifugal thrusts are meant to take the subject beyond time. The hipsters "threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of time". The image of the journey is linked to the theme of liberation so ardently and compulsively sought by the beatniks.

Also evident in the journey motif are the Christian echoes. The sufferings endured by the early followers of Christ in Roman catacombs are echoed in the plight of the wandering truth-seekers, who in Part II "lit their cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward lonesome farms in the grandfather night". The persecution faced by the early Christian martyrs is again reflected in the fate of those "who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits in Madison Avenue". Ultimate martyrdom, however, is reserved for Carl Solomon, rebel, hipster, mental hospital inmate and the mentor to whom Ginsberg's poem has been addressed.

5.1.2 Structure and Style

"Everything I write", Ginsberg was quoted in The New York Times, 11 July, 1965, section 6, 90, "is in one way or another autobiographical or present consciousness at the time of writing." The aesthetics at the core of 'Howl' defies a logical analysis

of the poem. As Thomas F Merrill points out, the poem follows "a grammar of emotion", (p 58). Explaining the technique of composition that he used for 'Howl' Ginsberg states "I wasn't really working with a classical unit, I was working with my own neural impulses and writing impulses". He goes on to describe himself as "someone working with physiological movements and arriving at a pattern...but arriving at it organically rather than synthetically" (Thomas Clark, 'The Art of Poetry' VIII, Paris Review, 37, Spring 1966, pp 15-16).

The influence of Whitman's rhythmic reiteration on Ginsberg's style has been observed and both modes have been traced to a measure of Hebraic parallelism. Gay Wilson Allen commenting on Whitman's repetitive mode in his book, **Walt Whitman: The Search for a Democratic Structure,** sheds light on the aesthetics that shaped the Hebraic syntactical and rhetorical formulations. He maintains, "the Hebraic poet developed a rhythm of thought, repeating and balancing ideas and sentences (or independent clauses) instead of syllables or accents." Ginsberg whose work is noted for its cumulative, accretionary and enumerative thrust admits how he followed "by romantic inspiration- Hebraic Melvillian bardic breath".

In **'Notes Written on Finally Recording Howl'** Ginsberg provides the following revelation, which provides an insight into his methods of composition: "By 1955 I wrote poetry adapted from prose seeds, journals, scratchings, arranged by phrasing or breath groups into little short line patterns according to ideas of measure of American speech I'd picked up from W.C. Williams' imagist preoccupations."

Such a poetics necessarily depends for its effects on a deft handling of both matter and metre. Ginsberg, influenced by Cezanne's methods, sought to incorporate a variation of one of the optic devices known as *petites sensations* favoured by the latter. In Cezanne *petites sensations* are two-dimensional surfaces that expand into three-dimensional space objects wrought through the juxtaposition of geometric masses. Images such as 'negro streets,' 'angry fix,' 'blind streets,' 'peyote solidities" are some of the poetic equivalents of this painterly device. Ginsberg realized that the artist's attention is not outward toward the object but inward toward the impression made by the object on the consciousness.

The holding together of heterogeneous elements, the achievement of "pantheistic unity," is to a large extent, obtained by the use of the words which introduce the respective parts. The word "who" Ginsberg has explained was used in 'Howl' to "keep the beat, a base to keep measure, return to and take off from again onto another streak of invention". (Notes on Howl, p 28). In the second part the word "who" has been replaced by the name "Moloch" while in the third part the metrical base is the word "where".

5.1.3 Suggested Reading

A major source of critical exegesis is *Allen Ginsberg* by Thomas F. Merill, Univ of Delaware. Twayne Publishers. 1988.

Another source likely to yield fruitful insights is of course, Ginsberg's own comments found in his *Notes on 'Howl',* and various interviews.

5.1.4 Questions

1. Assess 'Howl' as the representative work of a Beat poet.
2. Comment on the sources from which Ginsberg drew for the techniques and devices that he used in the poem.
3. Write a note on the major image patterns in the poem.
4. Which features do you think make 'Howl' an iconoclastic and iconic poem at the same time?
5. Would you agree with the view that the poem 'Howl' is merely "the aggressive irresponsibility of unrestrained whimsy"?

Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997)

Howl

For Carl Solomon

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked,

dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,

angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,

who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,

who passed through universities with radiant eyes hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,

who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene odes on the windows of the skull,

who cowered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,

who got busted in their public beards returning through Laredo with a belt of marijuana for New York,

who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death, or purgatoried their torsos night after night

with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and endless balls,

incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the mind leaping towards poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating all the motionless world of Time between,

Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan

rantings and kind king light of mind, who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children brought them down shuddering mouth- wracked and battered bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo.

who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat through the state beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox,

who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,

a lost batallion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon

yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and wars,

whose intellects disgorged in total recall for seven days and nights with brilliant eyes, meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement,

who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall,

suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines of China under junk- withdrawal in Newark's bleak furnished room,

who wandered around and around at midnight in the railway yard wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,

who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,

who studied Plotinus Poe St John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah because the universe instinctively vibrated at their feet in Kansas,

who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary Indian angels who were visionary indian angels,

who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural ecstasy,

who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the impulse of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain,

who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about America and Eternity, a hopeless

task, and so took ship to Africa, who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving nothing behind but the shadow of dungarees and the larva and ash of poetry scattered in fireplace Chicago,

who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the FBI in beards and shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out incomprehensible leaflets,

who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism, who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping and undressing while the sirens of Los Alamos wailed them down, and wailed down Wall, and the Staten Island ferry also wailed,

who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the machinery of other skeletons,

who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and intoxication,

who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof waving genitals and manuscripts,

who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and screamed with joy.

who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses of Atlantic and Caribbean love,

who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to whomever come who may,

who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind a partition in a Turkish Bath when the blond & naked angel came to pierce them with a sword,

who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman's loom,

who copulated ecstatic and insatiate and fell off the bed, and continued along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym of consciousness,

who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but were prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked in the lake,

who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars, N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of Denver-joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms of johns, & hometown alleys too,

who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in dreams, woke on a sudden Manhattan, and picked themselves up out of basements hungover with heartless Tokay and horrors of Third Avenue iron dreams & stumbled to unemployment offices,

who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open full of steamheat and opium,

who created great suicidal dramas on the appartment cliff-banks of the Hudson under the wartime blue floodlight of the moon & their heads shall be crowned with laurel in oblivion,

who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of the Bowery,

who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions and bad music,

who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts, who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology,

who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,

who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom,

who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,

who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for an Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade,

who cut their wrists three times successfully unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried,

who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister

intelligent editors, or were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,

who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks, not even one free beer, who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of the subway window, jumped in the filthy Passaic, leaped on negroes, cried all over the street, danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph records of nostalgic European 1930s German jazz finished the whiskey and threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans in their ears and the blast of colossal steamwhistles.

who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other's hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude watch Birmingham jazz incarnation,

who drove crosscountry seventy-two hours to find out if 1 had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity,

who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver & waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes,

who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second,

who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet blues to Alcatraz,

who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender Buddha or Tangiers to boys or Southern Pacific to the black locomotive or Harvard to Narcissus to Woodiawn to the daisychain or grave,

who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury,

who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with the shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,

and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy pingpong & amnesia,

who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table, resting briefly in catatonia,

returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns of the East,

Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare, bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon.

with mother finally *****, and the last fantastic book flung out of the tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow paper rose twisted on a wire hanger on the closet, and even that imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination -

ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in the total animal soup of time -

and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipse the catalog the meter & the vibrating plane.

who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2 visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of Pater Omnipotens Aetema Deus

to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought in his naked and endless head.

the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down here what might be left to say in time come after death,

and rose incarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhom shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio

with the absolute heart of the poem butchered out of their own bodies good to eat a thousand years.

II

What sphinx of cement and aluminium bashed open their skulls and ate up their brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch! Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose buildings are judgement! Moloch the vast stone of war! Moloch the stunned governments!

Moloch whose mind is pure machienry! Moloch whose blood is running money! Moloch whose fingers are ten armies! Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!

Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers stand in the long streets like endless Jehovas! Moloch whose factories dream and choke in the fog! Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!

Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and banks! • Moloch whose poverty is the specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch whose name is the Mind!

Moloch in whom I sit lonely! Moloch in whom I dream angles! Crazy in Moloch! Cocksucker in Moloch! Lacklove and manless in Moloch!

Moloch who entered my soul early! Moloch in whom I am a consciousness without a body! Moloch who frightened me out of my natural ecstasy! Moloch whom I abandon! Wake up in Moloch! Light streaming out of the sky!

Moloch! Moloch! Robot apartments! invisable suburbs! skeleton treasuries! blind capitals! demonic industries! spectral nations! invincible madhouses! granite cocks! monstrous bombs!

They broke their backs lifting Moloch to Heaven! Pavements, trees, radios, tons! lifting the city to Heaven which exists and is everywhere about us!

Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstacies! gone down the American river!

Dreams! adorations! illuminations! religious! the whole boatload of sensitive bullshit!

Breakthroughs! over the river! flips and crucifixions! gone down the flood! Highs! Epiphanies! Despairs! Ten years' animal screams and suicides! Minds! New loves! Mad generation! down on the rocks of Time!

Real holy laughter in the river! They saw it all! the wild eyes! the holy yells! They bade farewell! They jumped off the roof! to solitude! waving! carrying flowers! Down to the river! into the street!

Ill

Carl Solomon! I'm with you in Rockland

where you're madder than I am

I'm with you in Rockland

where you must feel strange

I'm with you in Rockland

where you imitate the shade of my mother

I'm with you in Rockland

where you've murdered your twelve secretaries

I'm with you in Rockland

where you laugh at this invisible humour

I'm with you in Rockland

where we are great writers on the same dreadful typewriter

I'm with you in Rockland

where your condition has become serious and is reported on the radio

I'm with you in Rockland

where the faculties of the skull no longer admit the worms of the senses

I'm with you in Rockland

where you drink the tea of the breasts of the spinsters of Utica

I'm with you in Rockland

where you pun on the bodies of your nurses the harpies of the Bronx

I'm with you in Rockland

where you scream in a straightjacket that you're losing the game of actual pingpong of the abyss

I'm with you in Rockland

where you bank on the catatonic piano the soul is innocent and immortal it should never die ungodly in an armed madhouse

I'm with you in Rockland

where fifty more shocks will never return your soul to its body again from its pilgrimage to a cross in the void

I'm with you in Rockland

where you accuse your doctors of insanity and plot the Hebrew socialist revolution against the fascist national Golgotha

I'm with you in Rockland

where you will split the heavens of Long Island and resurrect your living human Jesus from the superhuman tomb

I'm with you in Rockland

where there are twentyfive thousand mad comrades all together singing the final stanzas of the Internationale

I'm with you in Rockland

where we hug and kiss the United States under our bedsheets the United States that coughs all night and won't let us sleep

I'm with you in Rockland

where we wake up electrified out of the coma by our own souls' airplanes roaring over the roof they've come to drop angelic bombs the hospital illuminates itself imaginary walls collapse O skinny legions run outside O starry-spangled shock of mercy the eternal war is here O victory forget your underwear we're free

I'm with you in Rockland

in my dreams you walk dripping from a sea-journey on the highway across America in tears to the door of my cottage in the Western night