

MASTER'S DEGREE IN ENGLISH (MEG-18)
AMERICAN POETRY
ASSIGNMENT

Course Code: MEG-18
Assignment Code: MEG-18/TMA/2024-25
Max. Marks: 100

Attempt any **five** questions. All questions carry equal marks. (20 x 5=100)

1. Trace the history of colonialism in America and its impact on American poetry.
20
2. Write short notes on: (10 x 2 = 20)
 - a) American Spirit and Puritan Spirit
 - b) American poetry today
3. Walt Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself" is a social document engaging American national landscape – discuss. 20
4. How does the choice of words in the poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" help to illustrate the idea of 'self' of the poet? 20
5. Critically appreciate the poems, "Home Burial" and "After apple Picking". 20
6. Discuss Joy Harjo and Leslie Marmon Silko as important Native American poets.
20

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Attempt any five questions. All questions carry equal marks.

1. Trace the history of colonialism in America and its impact on American poetry.

The history of colonialism in America and its impact on American poetry is a complex and multifaceted story that spans centuries and encompasses diverse cultural, social, and political dynamics. To trace this history and its effects on American poetry, we must delve into the early encounters between European settlers and Indigenous peoples, the development of distinct literary voices, and the ongoing dialogues around identity, power, and resistance in poetry.

Colonial Beginnings and Indigenous Voices

Colonialism in America began with European exploration and settlement in the 15th century, leading to the displacement and marginalization of Indigenous populations. This encounter laid the foundation for a deeply unequal power dynamic that would shape American society and culture for centuries to come.

In the early years of colonization, European settlers often depicted Indigenous peoples through a lens of romanticized exoticism or as obstacles to be overcome. This perspective is reflected in early American poetry, which tended to mirror prevailing colonial attitudes and narratives. However, there were also instances where Indigenous voices emerged in poetic form, offering alternative perspectives and critiques of colonialism. For instance, oral traditions and songs of resistance among Native American tribes conveyed complex narratives of cultural survival and resilience.

Colonial Expansion and Cultural Synthesis

As colonialism expanded across North America, the encounters between European settlers, African slaves, and Indigenous peoples led to a rich interplay of cultures and languages. This cultural synthesis found expression in early American poetry, which

began to reflect the diversity and hybridity of colonial society. Poets like Phillis Wheatley, an enslaved African American woman, challenged prevailing notions of race and humanity through her poetic works, demonstrating the complexities of identity in the colonial context.

Romanticism and National Identity

By the 19th century, American poetry was increasingly influenced by Romanticism, which emphasized individualism, nature, and emotion. This period also coincided with the expansion of the United States westward, often through violent conquest and displacement of Indigenous communities. Poets such as Walt Whitman celebrated the vastness of America's landscape and sought to define a uniquely American literary voice. However, this celebration of national identity often overlooked or downplayed the ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous peoples.

Modernism, Identity, and Resistance

The 20th century saw a proliferation of diverse voices in American poetry, reflecting the growing awareness of colonial legacies and the struggles for civil rights and decolonization. Poets like Langston Hughes, Sylvia Plath, and Allen Ginsberg explored themes of identity, trauma, and resistance in their works, challenging dominant narratives and expanding the boundaries of poetic expression.

Contemporary Dialogues

In contemporary American poetry, there is a continued interrogation of colonial histories and their enduring effects on marginalized communities. Poets from Indigenous, African American, Latinx, and other backgrounds engage with themes of displacement, cultural memory, and resilience, reshaping the literary landscape and fostering dialogues around justice and reconciliation.

Impact and Legacy

The impact of colonialism on American poetry is profound, shaping not only the themes and content of poetic works but also the very language and forms through which poets express themselves. Colonialism laid bare the power dynamics inherent in language and representation, leading poets to question and subvert dominant narratives while amplifying marginalized voices.

The impact of colonialism on American poetry is profound, shaping not only the themes and content of poetic works but also the very language and forms through which poets express themselves. Colonialism laid bare the power dynamics inherent in language and representation, leading poets to question and subvert dominant narratives while amplifying marginalized voices.

In conclusion, the history of colonialism in America has left an indelible mark on American poetry, fostering a rich and diverse tradition of literary expression that reflects the complexities of identity, power, and resistance. By tracing this history, we

gain insights into the ongoing dialogues around colonial legacies and their implications for poetry and society as a whole.

2. Write short notes on:

a) American Spirot and Puritan Spirit

The American Spirot and Puritan Spirit are two distinctive but interconnected aspects of American culture and history, each leaving a profound mark on the nation's identity and development. While Spirot embodies the entrepreneurial zeal and innovative drive, the Puritan Spirit reflects the moral and religious values that shaped early American society. Together, they form a dynamic tension that has fueled American progress and shaped its character.

The term "Spirot" encapsulates the American spirit of entrepreneurship, innovation, and relentless pursuit of success. It represents the dynamic energy that propels individuals and businesses to push boundaries, take risks, and strive for excellence. From the earliest days of American history, this Spirot has been evident in the adventurous spirit of explorers, the pioneering efforts of settlers, and the enterprising endeavors of inventors and entrepreneurs.

One of the defining features of Spirot is its adaptability and resilience. Throughout American history, in times of economic upheaval or adversity, the Spirot has inspired individuals to reinvent themselves, innovate new solutions, and create opportunities where others see obstacles. This spirit of resilience has been a driving force behind America's economic growth and technological advancement, from the Industrial Revolution to the digital age.

Moreover, Spirot is deeply ingrained in the American Dream – the belief that through hard work, determination, and ingenuity, anyone can achieve success and upward mobility. This ethos has fueled generations of immigrants who have come to America in search of better opportunities, contributing their talents and ambitions to the nation's collective prosperity.

On the other hand, the Puritan Spirit harkens back to the early religious settlers who arrived in America seeking religious freedom and a new beginning. Rooted in the Protestant work ethic, Puritan values emphasized thrift, discipline, and moral integrity. The Puritans believed in living a righteous life, guided by a strict adherence to biblical principles and a strong sense of community responsibility.

The legacy of the Puritan Spirit can be seen in America's enduring commitment to individual responsibility, self-reliance, and moral righteousness. These values have influenced American society's views on everything from personal finance and business ethics to social justice and political accountability. While the religious fervor of the Puritans may have waned over time, their emphasis on morality and social responsibility continues to shape American culture and institutions.

Despite their seemingly divergent characteristics, the Spirot and Puritan Spirit are deeply intertwined in the American psyche. The entrepreneurial drive of Spirot is often tempered by the ethical considerations and social consciousness derived from the Puritan tradition. This fusion of ambition and morality has led to the development of uniquely American institutions, such as philanthropic organizations and socially responsible businesses, which seek to balance profit with purpose.

Moreover, the tension between Spirot and Puritan values is evident in ongoing debates over issues such as wealth inequality, corporate responsibility, and the role of government in regulating business. While Spirot champions individual freedom and market-driven innovation, the Puritan Spirit emphasizes collective welfare and ethical restraint. Finding a harmonious balance between these competing values is an ongoing challenge for American society.

In conclusion, the American Spirot and Puritan Spirit represent two sides of the same coin – the drive for success and progress, tempered by a commitment to morality and social responsibility. Together, they form the foundation of American identity and influence the nation's cultural, economic, and political landscape. By embracing both the entrepreneurial zeal of Spirot and the moral integrity of the Puritan Spirit, Americans continue to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world while upholding the timeless values that have defined their nation since its inception.

b) American poetry today

American poetry today reflects a diverse and dynamic landscape, shaped by various cultural, social, and literary influences. From spoken word and slam poetry to more traditional forms, contemporary American poets are exploring new themes, styles, and approaches that resonate with modern audiences.

One significant trend in American poetry is the resurgence of spoken word and performance poetry. Poets like Amanda Gorman have gained widespread acclaim for their powerful spoken word performances, blending poetry with activism and addressing pressing social issues such as racial justice and climate change. This form of poetry often engages directly with audiences through live performances, social media platforms, and other digital mediums, reaching a broader and more diverse audience than traditional poetry alone.

Another notable development is the increasing diversity of voices represented in contemporary American poetry. Poets from marginalized communities, including people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, immigrants, and those with diverse cultural backgrounds, are gaining prominence. Their work brings unique perspectives and experiences to the forefront, enriching the literary landscape and challenging traditional notions of what constitutes "American" poetry.

Experimentation with form and structure is also prevalent in contemporary American poetry. Many poets are pushing boundaries by blending genres, incorporating

multimedia elements, or reimagining traditional forms in innovative ways. This experimentation reflects a desire to break free from conventions and explore new modes of expression that resonate with today's fast-paced and interconnected world.

Themes of identity, belonging, and social justice remain central in much of contemporary American poetry. Poets are grappling with questions of personal and collective identity, exploring issues of race, gender, sexuality, and class. They use poetry as a medium for activism, raising awareness about systemic injustices and advocating for change.

Technology has profoundly influenced the dissemination and consumption of poetry in the digital age. Social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter have become popular spaces for poets to share their work and connect with audiences directly. Poetry podcasts, online journals, and digital publishing platforms have also emerged as important avenues for poets to reach wider readerships and foster vibrant literary communities.

Despite these innovations, traditional forms of poetry continue to thrive in contemporary American literature. Many poets still find inspiration in established forms such as sonnets, villanelles, and haikus, infusing them with fresh perspectives and contemporary themes. This blend of tradition and innovation underscores the resilience and adaptability of American poetry in responding to changing cultural dynamics.

Furthermore, the intersection of poetry with other art forms, such as music, visual arts, and performance, has become increasingly prominent. Collaborations between poets and musicians, for example, are yielding exciting interdisciplinary works that transcend traditional boundaries and engage with audiences in new ways.

In conclusion, American poetry today is marked by diversity, innovation, and a commitment to engaging with the complexities of the contemporary world. Poets are exploring new forms, amplifying diverse voices, and using their craft to advocate for social change. Through spoken word, digital media, interdisciplinary collaborations, and traditional forms alike, contemporary American poetry continues to evolve and captivate audiences with its richness and vitality.

3. Walt Whitman's poem, "Song of Myself" is a social document engaging American national landscape – discuss.

Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" stands as a monumental work in American literature, reflecting the poet's deep engagement with the social and national landscape of his time. Published in 1855 as part of his collection "Leaves of Grass," this poem captures Whitman's expansive vision of America and his profound exploration of democratic ideals, individualism, and the interconnectedness of all humanity.

At its core, "Song of Myself" embodies Whitman's celebration of the American experience. The poem is a tapestry of voices, stories, and observations that

collectively depict a diverse and dynamic nation. Whitman portrays America not merely as a geographic entity but as an evolving idea—a place where individuals from all walks of life merge and diverge, bound by a common destiny. The poem opens with the iconic lines, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself, / And what I assume you shall assume," establishing a sense of inclusivity and shared identity that resonates throughout the work.

One of the poem's central themes is Whitman's embrace of democracy and equality. He envisions a society where every individual, regardless of background or status, possesses inherent worth and dignity. Whitman's portrayal of everyday Americans—workers, slaves, Native Americans, women—reflects his belief in the essential unity of the nation. By elevating the voices of the marginalized and the oppressed, he challenges conventional hierarchies and asserts the intrinsic value of each human life. This egalitarian ethos underscores Whitman's vision of America as a vibrant mosaic of experiences and identities.

Moreover, "Song of Myself" serves as a critique of societal norms and conventions. Whitman rejects the constraints of traditional morality and embraces a more liberated, expansive view of existence. His celebration of the body and its desires, his openness to taboo subjects like sexuality and spirituality, and his rejection of established dogmas reflect a broader cultural shift in mid-19th century America. Whitman's poem becomes a manifesto of individual freedom and authenticity, advocating for a society where individuals are encouraged to explore and express their true selves.

The landscape itself plays a vital role in Whitman's poetic vision. Throughout "Song of Myself," nature serves as a metaphor for the vastness and diversity of America. Whitman's evocative descriptions of the land—its forests, rivers, and plains—underscore the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. This communion with nature reflects Whitman's belief in the intrinsic harmony of existence and reinforces his vision of a unified, organic society.

In addition to its thematic richness, "Song of Myself" embodies Whitman's innovative approach to poetic form. Rejecting conventional meter and rhyme, Whitman adopts a free verse style characterized by long, flowing lines. This stylistic departure mirrors his rejection of artistic and intellectual boundaries, signaling a new era in American poetry. Whitman's innovative use of language and rhythm captures the vitality and restlessness of a nation on the brink of transformation.

"Song of Myself" continues to resonate in contemporary America, inspiring readers with its enduring themes of inclusivity, individualism, and social critique. The poem's exploration of identity and belonging speaks to the ongoing quest for self-understanding and community in a diverse society. Moreover, Whitman's celebration of the ordinary and the extraordinary serves as a reminder of the democratic spirit that animates the American experience.

Whitman's "Song of Myself" engages deeply with the American national landscape through its multifaceted exploration of identity, democracy, and the interconnectedness of humanity. The poem's significance extends beyond its time of publication, resonating with contemporary readers due to its enduring themes and innovative style.

One of the key ways in which "Song of Myself" engages with the American national landscape is through its celebration of individualism and democracy. Whitman's poem challenges traditional hierarchies and societal norms by embracing the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. Through his vivid portrayal of diverse characters and experiences—workers, slaves, Native Americans, women—Whitman constructs a vision of America as a mosaic of identities and voices. This inclusive perspective reflects the democratic ideals upon which the nation was founded, emphasizing equality and the right of each person to self-expression.

Moreover, Whitman's poetic vision extends to the physical landscape of America. Throughout "Song of Myself," nature serves as a powerful metaphor for the expansive and diverse nation. Whitman's descriptions of the land—its forests, rivers, and open spaces—underscore the interconnectedness between humanity and the natural world. This communion with nature reflects Whitman's belief in the intrinsic harmony of existence, emphasizing the idea that human life is deeply intertwined with the broader ecological and geographical context.

Another significant aspect of "Song of Myself" is its critique of societal norms and conventions. Whitman challenges the prevailing moral, religious, and cultural attitudes of his time by advocating for individual freedom and authenticity. He celebrates the body and its desires, rejects established dogmas, and embraces a more liberated view of existence.

In conclusion, Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" remains a seminal work in American literature, engaging deeply with the social, cultural, and geographical landscape of the nation. Through its celebration of individualism, democracy, and the interconnectedness of humanity, the poem offers a timeless exploration of what it means to be American. Whitman's innovative style and thematic richness continue to inspire readers, reminding us of the enduring ideals and complexities that shape the American national identity.

4. How does the choice of words in the poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" help to illustrate the idea of 'self' of the poet?

In Emily Dickinson's poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed," the choice of words plays a significant role in illustrating the poet's sense of self. Through a careful selection of language, Dickinson conveys a unique and unconventional experience of transcendence and ecstasy that reflects her own individuality and perception of the world. The poem explores the theme of spiritual intoxication, suggesting that the

poet's experience of nature's beauty is so profound that it surpasses any earthly pleasure, such as the intoxication from liquor.

One way in which Dickinson portrays her sense of self is through the use of vivid and unconventional imagery. For example, she describes the experience of nature's beauty as "a liquor never brewed," suggesting that it is something entirely new and unparalleled. This imagery not only highlights the poet's unique perspective but also suggests a sense of discovery and wonder, indicating her deep connection with the natural world.

Furthermore, Dickinson's use of sensory language helps to convey the intensity of her experience. She describes the sensation of being "drunk" on nature's beauty, using words such as "debauchee" and "inebriate" to suggest a state of euphoria and intoxication. This choice of words not only emphasizes the intensity of the poet's feelings but also suggests a sense of abandon and liberation, indicating her willingness to lose herself in the experience.

Moreover, Dickinson's use of paradoxical language adds depth to her portrayal of self. She describes the experience of nature's beauty as "firmer for adversity," suggesting that it is through challenges and difficulties that one's sense of self is strengthened. This paradoxical statement not only reflects Dickinson's own resilience and determination but also suggests a profound insight into the nature of the self and its relationship to the world.

Additionally, Dickinson's use of rhythm and sound helps to create a sense of musicality and flow in the poem, reflecting the poet's own sense of harmony and connection with the natural world. The poem's short lines and frequent use of dashes create a sense of pause and reflection, suggesting a deep introspection and contemplation on the part of the poet.

Overall, the choice of words in "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" helps to illustrate Emily Dickinson's sense of self by conveying her unique perspective, intense emotions, and profound insights. Through vivid imagery, sensory language, paradoxical statements, and musicality, Dickinson creates a poem that not only captures the essence of her own individuality but also invites readers to contemplate their own sense of self and its relationship to the world.

Furthermore, Dickinson's use of contrast in the poem serves to highlight her sense of self. She contrasts the natural world with human-made experiences, such as the intoxication from liquor, to emphasize the superiority of the former. This contrast suggests a rejection of conventional pleasures in favor of a more profound and meaningful experience of the world, reflecting Dickinson's own unconventional views and sense of self.

Moreover, Dickinson's use of figurative language, such as metaphors and similes, helps to convey the depth of her emotions and the complexity of her experience. For

example, she compares the experience of nature's beauty to "an imperial affliction," suggesting that it is a powerful and overwhelming sensation. This metaphor not only emphasizes the intensity of the poet's feelings but also suggests a sense of reverence and awe, indicating her deep respect for the natural world.

Additionally, Dickinson's use of repetition in the poem helps to reinforce her sense of self. She repeats the phrase "I taste a liquor never brewed" throughout the poem, suggesting a continuous and unending experience of transcendence and ecstasy. This repetition not only emphasizes the poet's persistent and unwavering connection with the natural world but also suggests a sense of eternity and timelessness, indicating her belief in the enduring nature of the self.

In conclusion, the choice of words in Emily Dickinson's poem "I Taste a Liquor Never Brewed" plays a crucial role in illustrating her sense of self. Through vivid imagery, sensory language, paradoxical statements, contrast, figurative language, and repetition, Dickinson creates a poem that not only reflects her unique perspective and intense emotions but also invites readers to contemplate their own sense of self and its relationship to the world.

5. Critically appreciate the poems, “ Home Burial” and “After apple Picking”.

Critical Appreciation of “Home Burial” and “After Apple-Picking”

Both Robert Frost’s “Home Burial” and “After Apple-Picking” are remarkable poems that delve into themes of loss, grief, and the complexities of human emotion. Each poem captures the profound impact of personal experiences on individuals, highlighting how these experiences shape their perspectives and relationships.

“Home Burial”

In “Home Burial,” Frost examines the devastating effects of the death of a child on a married couple. The poem opens with a scene of the wife, still grieving and unable to move past the loss, visiting the grave of her child. Frost skillfully conveys the breakdown in communication between the husband and wife, illustrating the stark contrast in their ways of grieving.

The poem’s structure is particularly noteworthy. Frost utilizes dialogue to reveal the emotional distance between the characters. The wife’s outbursts and the husband’s attempts at consolation underscore their inability to understand each other’s pain. Frost’s use of dashes in the dialogue intensifies the emotional tension, emphasizing the rawness of their interaction.

The imagery in “Home Burial” is vivid and poignant. Frost depicts the wife’s descent down the staircase as symbolic of her emotional isolation and despair. The staircase serves as a physical barrier that underscores the psychological distance between the couple. Moreover, the setting—a rural cemetery—enhances the poem’s themes of loss and finality.

The poem ultimately explores the complexities of grief and the strain it puts on relationships. Frost suggests that grief is not just a solitary experience but one that profoundly affects the dynamics between individuals. “Home Burial” is a profound meditation on the limitations of empathy and the enduring impact of loss.

“After Apple-Picking”

In “After Apple-Picking,” Frost reflects on themes of weariness, mortality, and the passage of time. The poem opens with a speaker who, after a day of harvesting apples, contemplates the nature of his existence. The act of apple-picking becomes a metaphor for life’s laborious tasks and the weariness that comes with them.

The poem’s structure is characterized by its dream-like quality. Frost employs a conversational tone and introspective reflections, inviting readers into the speaker’s contemplative state. The vivid imagery of the apples—both those successfully harvested and those that remain—serves as a reminder of life’s incompleteness and unfulfilled aspirations.

The symbolism in “After Apple-Picking” is rich and multifaceted. The “long, ladders” evoke a sense of ascension and ambition, while the sleep that descends on the speaker suggests a deeper resignation to life’s inevitabilities. The shifting perspectives—from the physical act of apple-picking to the speaker’s dreams—blur the lines between reality and imagination.

The poem’s conclusion is enigmatic yet profound. Frost’s use of ambiguous imagery, such as the “barrel’s gone now,” invites readers to ponder the speaker’s sense of fulfillment and mortality. “After Apple-Picking” encapsulates Frost’s existential musings on the human condition, capturing the tension between ambition and resignation.

Comparative Analysis

While “Home Burial” and “After Apple-Picking” both explore themes of loss and mortality, they do so through different narrative lenses and stylistic choices.

One notable difference between the two poems is their focus on interpersonal relationships. “Home Burial” centers on the breakdown of communication and emotional distance between a husband and wife following the death of their child. Frost vividly portrays the couple’s inability to empathize with each other’s grief, highlighting the isolating effects of loss on intimate relationships. In contrast, “After Apple-Picking” is more introspective, with the speaker reflecting on his own sense of weariness and mortality. The poem is less concerned with interpersonal dynamics and more with existential musings on life’s fleeting nature.

Stylistically, “Home Burial” is characterized by its intense dialogue and emotional tension. Frost employs dashes and fragmented sentences to convey the characters’ conflicting emotions, creating a sense of immediacy and intimacy. The poem’s

setting—a rural cemetery—serves as a stark backdrop to the couple’s grief, emphasizing the finality of death. In contrast, “After Apple-Picking” is more contemplative and dream-like in its imagery and tone. Frost’s use of vivid sensory details and shifting perspectives invites readers into the speaker’s introspective reverie, blurring the lines between reality and imagination.

Despite these differences, both poems share a common thematic thread: the inevitability of loss and the human struggle to find meaning in the face of mortality. Whether through the breakdown of a marriage or the weariness of life’s laborious tasks, Frost captures the universal experiences of grief and existential angst with sensitivity and depth.

In conclusion, “Home Burial” and “After Apple-Picking” are timeless reflections on the complexities of human emotion and the transience of life. Through vivid imagery, rich symbolism, and introspective reflections, Frost invites readers to contemplate the profound impact of loss and mortality on individuals and relationships. These poems stand as enduring testaments to Frost’s poetic genius and his ability to illuminate the human condition with clarity and compassion.