PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Bachelor Degree Programme, the opportunity to pursue Honours course in any Subject introduced by this University is equally available to all learners. Instead of being guided by any presumption about ability level, it would perhaps stand to reason if receptivity of a learner is judged in the course of the learning process. That would be entirely in keeping with the objectives of open education which does not believe in artificial differentiation.

Keeping this in view, study materials of the Honours level in different subjects are being prepared on the basis of a well laid-out syllabus. The course structure combines the best elements in the approved syllabi of Central and State Universities in respective subjects. It has been so designed as to be upgradable with the addition of new information as well as results of fresh thinking and analysis.

The accepted methodology of distance education has been followed in the preparation of these study materials. Cooperation in every form of experienced scholars is indispensable for a work of this kind. We, therefore, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone whose tireless efforts went into the writing, editing and devising of a proper lay-out of the materials. Practically speaking, their role amounts to an involvement in 'invisible teaching'. For, whoever makes use of these study materials would virtually derive the benefit of learning under their collective care without each being seen by the other.

The more a learner would seriously pursue these study materials, the easier it will be for him or her to reach out to larger horizons of a subject. Care has also been taken to make the language lucid and presentation attractive so that they may be rated as quality self-learning materials. If anything remains still obscure or difficult to follow, arrangements are there to come to terms with them through the counselling sessions regularly available at the network of study centres set up by the University.

Needless to add, a great deal of these efforts is still experimental—in fact, pioneering in certain areas. Naturally, there is every possibility of some lapse or deficiency here and there. However, these do admit of rectification and further improvement in due course. On the whole, therefore, these study materials are expected to evoke wider appreciation the more they receive serious attention of all concerned.

Professor (Dr.) Subha Sankar Sarkar
Vice-Chancellor

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BACHELORS DEGREE PROGRAMME: ENGLISH

[BDP: EEG]

New Syllabus effective from July 2015 Session

Paper - 6

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General Editors' Foreword

It has been a rewarding experience coordinating the syllabus revision exercise and the induction of new Self Learning Materials (SLM) for the EEG Programme under the aegis of the newly-ramified School of Humanities of our University. The new syllabus and its attendant study materials are the result of concerted endeavours through workshops, repeated interactions, shared leadership and above all, protracted labour on the part of everyone who has been associated with this project.

The need for a thorough syllabus revision for BDP English was a long standing one, as the existing framework had long stood its time and needed to take a fresh look at the dynamically altered literary scenario. In framing the new syllabus, experts have been guided by the rationale of putting in place a curriculum that would effectively serve as proper foundations for a Graduation level course in English Literature, which by itself has come to be seen as a widely interdisciplinary area. The Learning Objectives envisaged in this syllabus include a periodic knowledge of History of English Literature spread across Papers that will be divided mainly in a chronology – genre pattern; acquaintance with literary texts in a similar sequence and logic; primary knowledge of relevant literary criticism/theory; essentials of History of Language and basics of pronunciation; and an introduction to the basics of Indian Writing in English which is the least that one can think of from the New Literatures arena at this level.

Being a University dedicated to Open and Distance Learning, the creation of SLM's is a corollary to the formulation of a new syllabus. This has traditionally been the mainstay of Student Support Services at NSOU and efforts have been made to produce SLM's that can be as learner friendly as possible. While the print material shall be inducted to begin with, there is in the pipeline a project for introducing multimedia learning aids for relevant portions of the syllabus, to augment SLM's at the earliest possible instant. This could include live audio-video interactions on select topics, on-screen and on-stage footage clips, readings of poetry and prose, recordings from classrooms and the like; all of it for widest possible dissemination among our learners. We would welcome suggestions on this from our BDP counsellors as well. It is hoped that since our Study Centres are now mostly ICT enabled, learners will be able to enjoy their studies with the help of both versions of study tools. While they can look upon NSOU materials thus provided on offline and online modes as primary aids, they will however be expected to equip themselves with thorough reading of texts and references on the lines indicated in the SLM's. After all, we presume that as a student of literature by choice, one has a predilection for literary texts and has taken up this Programme to augment his/her levels of understanding, along with the necessity of acquiring a degree that shall stand in good stead in life.

On behalf of the School of Humanities, Netaji Subhas Open University, we stand to thank the experts on the Syllabus Committee, the content writers and the Paper editors for their constant support and adherence to timelines, the valuable academic inputs they have provided, and the numerous ways in which they have embellished the final print materials, their own engagements notwithstanding. It has, we are sure, been a labour of love for all of you, and we acknowledge your support for enabling us to see through the successful implementation of the entire project.

To all our learners, my dear students, we congratulate you on your choice of NSOU as the preferred institution for enhancing your academic pursuits. Here's hoping and wishing that you will make the most out of our blend of the serious acquiring of knowledge amidst flexible conditions and achieve your cherished goals in life. Let us make learning an enjoyable activity.

Dated: Kolkata
15th November, 2016

Srideep Mukherjee
Assistant Professor in English
School of Humanities

Dr Oindrila Ghosh
Assistant Professor in English
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Paper Editors' Introduction to Paper VI

Dear Learners,

After having traversed the literary centuries through the five books of your Self Learning Materials, by the time you approach Paper VI of your EEG course, you have already travelled across a fairly broad expanse of the rich realm of English literature. We are sure you have loved your reading experience till now and when you first turn the pages of this Self Learning Material too, you will be delighted to recognise a few familiar names from your school English textbooks. This SLM attempts to introduce you to the wide literary output of the Victorian age, named after Queen Victoria the Empress who ruled Britain from 1837-1901, because it was an age which was especially prolific in its production of novels/ fictional prose, non-fictional prose and poetry. You may all have heard of or read one novel at least by Charles Dickens—was it *Oliver Twist* and the painful saga of orphans in Victorian England or *A Tale of Two Cities,* set during the time of the French Revolution? Or maybe you have also had some brief acquaintance with the poetry of Alfred Tennyson from your school syllabi? Our task has been to reconnect you with these familiar authors and introduce you to other select literature of the age. Along with the written word there will be pictures, related to the age and its authors, and learner activities which will encourage you to pause and to think as you read.

Module 1 takes you through the socio-economic, political and historical backdrop of Nineteenth century Britain, which was the setting for the literary pieces that you will be taught to read and appreciate. The Victorian age was an age of transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy, a time of the burgeoning of population and an exodus from rural centres to the city of London. It was thus no wonder then, that the age also witnessed the attendant evils of overpopulation, lack of hygiene, poverty, prostitution and illegitimate children, casting long shadows over the displays of apparent progress and prosperity. Module 1 seeks to give an overview of the changes in society and political legislation attending them, which are integral to an understanding of the age and its literature. It also outlines the major trends in the Poetry and Prose of the period, pointing out the chief writers and their styles. Module 2 takes up the individual poets and their major concerns. The poetry of the age, for instance Arnold's 'Dover Beach', is a testament to the deep clash between religious faith and the newly emerging challenges posed by the inferences of scientific discoveries, while Tennyson's 'Ulysses' at one level holds a mirror to the *zeitgeist* (spirit of the age), of relentless discovery and progress. Module 3 will take the learners into the concerns of novelists—early and Later. The fictional writings of the early Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens probingly bring out the social maladies affecting a society in transition and reveals how literature can act as, a tool

for reform and the author as a social apothecary (doctor). This idea is prevalent in the non-fictional works of socio-political writers such as Carlyle, whose *Hero Worship,* discussed in Unit 3 is a series of lectures which represent Carlyle's idea that all history is the handiwork of great persons, gifted with supreme power of vision or action. According to him, only when persons of heroic temperament step forward to lead the masses can true progress for society occur. The thrusts shift slightly with the later Victorian novelists who bring into the foreground wider issues about individual liberty, protesting the sexual double standards maintained by Victorian society or championing women's rights. One such novelist being Thomas Hardy, whose novels created memorable women characters in an age where patriarchal assumptions rendered them into mere shadows or puppets. You will read one of his early novels *Far From the Madding Crowd* in this module.

The Final module, Module 4, rightly ends with a record of the contribution of the women writers of the nineteenth century. The novels by women writers of the Victorian age bear testimony to their suppressed life which finds vital expression in her literary creations. The pieces in this module have been chosen with this objective, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* bears testimony to this. The love sonnets of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, recording her eventful relationship with her husband the poet Robert Browning reveal the fierce passion of the female heart and the artist, to be intensified in the devotional poetry of Emily Bronte. Christina Rossetti, sister of the famous Pre-Raphaelite poet and painter D G Rossetti, in her 'A Dirge' and 'A Birthday' once again blends mourning with jubilation, voicing the unvoiced through poetry, that was an integral part of women's writing of the age.

Having spoken at length about the elements of your syllabus we now come to the vital part, about its application in the examinations. For both the assignment and term-end questions on this paper, covering all four modules, you will have to answer

2 (out of 4) essay-type questions of 20 marks each
3 (out of 6) mid-length questions of 12 marks each
4 (out of 8) short answer type questions of 6 marks each

Please read the texts carefully, because detailed textual questions will be asked and textual acquaintance will be expected.

So, happy reading!

DISCLAIMER:

All the plates used in this Self Learning Material have been taken with due acknowlegements from Open Sources on the Internet (Google images, Wikipedia) to be used purely for educational purposes.

Kolkata,

3rd January, 2017 Editors

Bachelors Degree Programme : English
[BDP : EEG]

Netaji Subhas Open University

EEG 6 : The Victorians

Module 4 Victorian Women Writers

THE VICTORIAN PERIOD—TIMELINE			
Dates	**Major Historical Events**	**Dates**	**Major Literary Figures And Their Works**
		1830	▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) : *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*
1832	• Passage of the first Reform Bill in the British Parliament • Death of Walter Scott	**1832**	▪ Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832): *Castle Dangerous, Count Robert of Paris* ▪ Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881): *England and France, or a Cure for the Ministerial Gallomania*
1833	• Oxford Movement launched within the Church of England with the preaching of the sermon 'National Apostasy' by John Keble • Abolition of the Slavery Act • Death of Arthur Henry Hallam, Tennyson's friend	**1833**	▪ Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881): serialization of *Sartor Resartus* in *Fraser's Magazine* which continued till 1834 ▪ Robert Browning (1812-1889): *Pauline* ▪ Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881): *Ixion in heaven*
1834	• Poor Law Amendment Act • Formation of the first government by Robert Peel	**1834**	▪ Edward Bulwer Lytton (1803-1873): *The Last Days of Pompeii*
1835		**1835**	▪ Robert Browning: *Paracelsus*
1836		**1836**	▪ Charles Dickens (1812-1870): *Sketches by Boz, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (till 1837) ▪ Benjamin Disraeli: *Henrietta Temple*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1837	• Ascension of Queen Victoria to the throne of England		▪ Charles Dickens:*Oliver Twist* (till 1838) ▪ Robert Browning: *Strafford* ▪ Thomas Carlyle: *French Revolution* ▪ Benjamin Disraeli: Venetia
1838	• Chartism was launched • Anti-Corn Law League founded by Richard Cobden as a movement against the Corn Laws		▪ Charles Dickens: *Nicholas Nickleby*(till 1839)
1839	• Custody of Infants' Act		
1840	• Chimney Sweep Act prohibits the employment of children as chimney sweepers	**1840**	▪ Robert Browning: *Sordello* ▪ Charles Dickens: *The Old Curiosity Shop* ▪ W. Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882): *Guy Fawkes*, *The Tower of London* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863): *Catherine*
1841	• Conservatives take control on the House of Commons in the General Elections, under Robert Peel	**1841**	▪ Thomas Carlyle: *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Barnaby Rudge* ▪ Robert Browning: *Pippa Passes*
1842		**1842**	▪ Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859): *Lays of Ancient Rome* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Poems*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1843	• William Wordsworth becomes the Poet Laureate • *The Economist* daily began to be published	**1843**	▪ Thomas Carlyle: *Past and Present* ▪ John Ruskin (1819-1900): *Modern Painters* ▪ Charles Dickens: *A Christmas Carol, Martin Chuzzlewit* (till 1844) ▪ John Stuart Mill (1806-1873): *A System of Logic*
1844		**1844**	▪ Benjamin Disraeli: *Coningsby*
1845	• Great Famine in Ireland begins. Continues till 1852	**1845**	▪ Thomas Carlyle: *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* ▪ Benjamin Disraeli: *Sibyl, or The Two Nations*
1846	• Repeal of the Corn Laws	**1846**	▪ Brontë sisters' poems: *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*
1847	• The Whig Party under John Russell wins the General Electon	**1847**	▪ Charles Dickens: *Dombey and Son* (till 1848) ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *Vanity Fair* (till 1848) ▪ Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855): *Jane Eyre* ▪ Emily Brontë (1818-1848): *Wuthering Heights* ▪ Anne Brontë (1820-1849): *Agnes Gray* ▪ Lord, Alfred Tennyson: *The Princess: A Medley* ▪ Christina Rossetti(1830-1894): *Verses*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1848	• Great Famine (Ireland) takes a heavy toll on the lives of people	**1848**	▪ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto* ▪ Anne Brontë: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* ▪ Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865): *Mary Barton, a Tale of Manchester Life* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *Pendennis* ▪ Johyn Henry Newman (1801-1890): *Loss and Gain* ▪ John Stuart Mill: *Principles of Political Economy* ▪ Thomas Babington Macaulay: *The History of England from the Accession of James the Second*
1849	• Abolition of the Corn Laws • First Exhibition of Paintings by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood	**1849**	▪ John Ruskin: *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* ▪ Charlotte Brontë: *Shirley*
1850	• Lord Tennyson becomes the Poet Laureate	**1850**	▪ William Wordsworth(1770-1850): *The Prelude* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *In Memoriam* ▪ Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield* ▪ Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-1861): *Sonnets from Portuguese* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *Pendennis* ▪ Charles Kingsley (1819-1875): *Alton Locke*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1851		**1851**	▪ Elizabeth Barrett Browning: *Casa Guidi Windows* ▪ Elizabeth Gaskell: *Cranford* ▪ John Ruskin: *The Stones of Venice*(first volume)
1852	• Trial of John Henry Newman	**1852**	▪ Matthew Arnold (1822-1888): *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *The History of Henry Esmond*
1853		**1853**	▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Maud* ▪ Matthew Arnold*: Poems*(includes 'Sohrab and Rustum' and 'The Scholar Gipsy'), *Tristram and Iseult* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Bleak House* ▪ Charlotte Brontë: *Villette* ▪ Elizabeth Gaskell: *Ruth* ▪ John Ruskin: *The Stones of Venice (*completed) ▪ Charles Reade (1814-1884): *Peg Woffington* ▪ Charles Kingsley: *Hypatia*
1854	• Outbreak of Crimean War • Exhibition of the original version of painting 'The Light of the World' by Holman Hunt • The University Reform Act which opened the University of Oxford to the undergraduates outside the Church of England		▪ Matthew Arnold: *New Poems* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Hard Times*(serialization begins in *The Household Words*) ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *The Charge of the Light Brigade* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *The Rose and the Ring*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1855			▪ Robert Browning: *Men and Women* ▪ Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Little Dorrit* ▪ Charles Kingsley: *Westward Ho!* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *The Newcomes* ▪ Anthony Trollope (1815-1882): *The Warden*
1856	• Crimean War ends with the Treaty of Paris • Birth of George Bernard Shaw	**1856**	▪ Elizabeth Barrett Browning: *Aurora Leigh* ▪ Mrs. Craik (1826-1887): *John Halifax, Gentleman* ▪ Charles Reade*: It is Never too Late to Mend*
1857	• Indian Sepoy Mutiny	**1857**	▪ Charlotte Brontë: *The Professor* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Little Dorrit*(in book form) ▪ George Eliot (1819-1880): *Adam Bede* ▪ Elizabeth Gaskell: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Barchester Towers*
1858		**1858**	▪ Thomas Carlyle: *The History of Fredrick II of Prussia, called Fredrick the Great* (continued in three installments till 1865) ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Doctor Thorne*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1859	• Royal Charter Storm	**1859**	▪ Charles Darwin (1809-1882): *The Origin of Species* ▪ Charles Dickens: *A Tale of Two Cities* ▪ William Makepeace Thackeray: *The Virginians* ▪ George Eliot: *Adam Bede* ▪ Edward Fitzgerald (1809-1883): *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Idylls of the King*
1860		**1860**	▪ Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations* in the magazine *All the Year Around* ▪ Elizabeth Barrett Browning: *Poems before Congress* ▪ Wilkie Collins (1824-1889): *The Woman in White* ▪ George Eliot: *The Mill on the Floss; Silas Marner* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Framley Parsonage* (serialization in The Cornhill Magazine) ▪ Thomas Love Peacock (1785-1866): *Gryll Grange* (serialization begins)
1861	• Outbreak of American Civil War • Criminal Law Consolidation Act	**1861**	▪ Charles Dickens: *Great Expectations* (in book form) ▪ F.T. Palgrave: *Golden Treasury of English Songs and Lyrics* ▪ Charles Reade: *The Cloister and the Hearth* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Orley Farm*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1862		**1862**	▪ John Ruskin: *Unto This Last* (appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*), *Sesame and Lilies, Crown of Wild Olive* ▪ Christina Rossetti: *Goblin Market and Other Poems* ▪ Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915): *Lady Audley's Secret* ▪ George Eliot: *Romola* ▪ Matthew Arnold: *On Translating Homer*
1863		**1863**	▪ Charles Kingsley: *Water Babies* ▪ Margaret Oliphant (1828-1897): *Salem Chapel*
1864		**1864**	▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Enoch Arden* ▪ Charles Dickens: Our Mutual Friend (till 1865) ▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Small House at Allington*
1865	• New Poor Law Act improves conditions in the workhouses • Birth of Edith Cavell, a significant female figure in the World War I	**1865**	▪ George Meredith(1828-1909)*: Rhoda Fleming* ▪ Matthew Arnold: *Essays in Criticism* ▪ Lewis Caroll (1832-1898): *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* ▪ Algernon.Charles. Swinburne (1837-1909): Atlanta *in Calydon* ▪ Charles Dickens: *Our Mutual Friend*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1866		**1866**	▪ Christina Rossetti: *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* ▪ George Eliot: *Felix Holt, the Radical* ▪ Margaret Oliphant: *Mrs. Marjoribanks* ▪ George Meredith: *Vittoria* ▪ A.C. Swinburne: *Poems and Ballads* ▪ Wilkie Collins: *Armadale*
1867	• John Stuart Mill's motion for Women's Suffrage overruled in the House of Commons • National Society for Women's Suffrage formed by Lydia Becker	**1867**	▪ Thomas Carlyle: *Shooting Niagra: And After?*Matthew Arnold: *New Poems* (includes 'Dover Beach')
1868	• Capital Punishment Amendment Act abolishes public hanging • The Press Association founded in London	**1868**	▪ Robert Browning: *The Ring and the Book* ▪ Wilkie Collins: *The Moonstone*
1869		**1869**	▪ Matthew Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy* ▪ John Stuart Mill: *The Subjection of Women* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Phineas Finn*
1870	• Married Women's Property Act	**1870**	▪ Charles Dickens: *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (remained incomplete) ▪ Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882): *Poems*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1871	• Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland	**1871**	▪ Thomas Hardy (1840-1928): *Desperate Remedies* ▪ Edward Bulwer-Lytton: *The Coming Race* ▪ Lewis Caroll: *Through the Looking Glass* ▪ Charles Darwin: *The Descent of Man* ▪ George Eliot: *Middlemarch*(till 1872) ▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Eustace Diamonds* (serialization)
1872	• Women's Suffrage Movement became a National Movement	**1872**	▪ Samuel Butler (1835-1902): *Erewhon* ▪ Thomas Hardy: *Under the Greenwood Tree*
1873		**1873**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *A Pair of Blue Eyes* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *Phineas Redux* (serialization)
1874		**1874**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *Far from the Madding Crowd*
1875		**1875**	▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Way we Live Now* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Queen Mary*
1876	• The Royal Titles Act confers the honorific 'Empress of India' on Queen Victoria	**1876**	▪ George Eliot: *Daniel Doronda* ▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Hand of Ethelberta* ▪ Lewis Caroll: *The Hunting of the Snark* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Prime Minister*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1877		**1877**	▪ Anna Sewell: *Black Beauty* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Harold*
1878	• The University of London becomes the first institute to put equal terms for admission to both women and men	**1878**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Return of the Native* (serialization begins)
1879		**1879**	▪ George Meredith: *The Egoist* ▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Duke's Children*
1880	• The Conservative Party lose the General Elections to Liberal Party and Gladstone succeeds Disraeli as the Prime Minister • First Boer War	**1880**	▪ Benjamin Disraeli: *Endymion* ▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Trumpet Major* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Ballads and Other Poems*
1881	• British Forces defeated in the Battle of Laing's Nek and Battle of Schuinshoogte in the first Boer War • Robert Cecil becomes the Conservative leader following the death of Benjamin Disraeli	**1881**	▪ Henry James (1843-1916): *The Portrait of a Lady* ▪ Dante Gabriel Rossetti: *Ballads and Sonnets* ▪ Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894): *Treasure Island*
1882	• Royal Courts of Justice opened by the Queen	**1882**	▪ Anthony Trollope: *The Fixed Period* ▪ Thomas Hardy: *Two on a Tower*
1883	• Edward Benson enthroned as the Archbishop of Canterbury	**1883**	▪ Robert Louis Stevenson: *Treasure Island*(book form), *The Black Arrow*(serial form)

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1884	• The Fabian Society was founded in London • First fascicle of Oxford English Dictionary published	**1884**	
1885	• Women permitted to be admitted to the University of Oxford • Gladstone's Liberal Government falls, giving way to the formation of new Conservative Power • General Election wherein Gladstone's Party becomes majority, yet Salisbury remains Prime Minister with support of Irish Party	**1885**	▪ George Meredith: *Diana of the Crossways* ▪ Walter Pater (1839-1894): *Marius the Epicurean* ▪ H. Rider Haggard: *King Solomon's Mines* ▪ Richard Burton: *The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (translation of *The Arabian Nights*) ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Tiresias and other Poems*
1886	• Salisbury loses support of the Irish Party and resigns the office of Prime Minister and Gladstone succeeds him	**1886**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* ▪ Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years after* ▪ Mary Corelli: *A Romance of Two Worlds* ▪ Robert Louis Stevenson: *The Kidnapped, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* ▪ Henry James: *The Bostonians*
1887	• Celebration of the Golden Jubilee of the Queen's Reign • Theatre Royal, Exeter burns down	**1887**	▪ Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930): *A Study in Scarlet* (the first Sherlock Holmes novel) ▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Woodlanders*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1888	• Several Whitechapel murders, where London prostitutes become the victims of the attacks of Jack the Ripper	**1888**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *The Wessex Tales* ▪ Henry James: *The Aspern Papers* ▪ Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936): *Plain Tales from the Hills* ▪ Oscar Wilde (1854-1900): *The Happy Prince and other Tales*
1889		**1889**	▪ Robert Browning: *Asolando* ▪ Jerome K. Jerome: *Three Men in a Boat* ▪ Robert Louis Stevenson: *The Master of Ballantrae*
1890	• Scotland Yard moves to Metropolitan Services in London as New Scotland Yard • The Rhymer's Club (a group of poets led by W.B. Yeats and Ernest Rhys) begins to meet informally at the Cheshire Cheese in Fleet Street in London	**1890**	▪ James George Frazer: *The Golden Bough* (volume one) ▪ Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* ▪ William Morris (1834-1896): *News From Nowhere* (serialized in *Commonweal*)
1891	• The Great Blizzard	**1891**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the d'Urbervilles, A Group of Noble Dames* ▪ William Morris: *News from Nowhere*(published as book) ▪ J.M. Barrie: *The New Minister* ▪ George Gissing: *New Grub Street*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1892	• Gladstone becomes Prime Minister at the head of Liberal Party	**1892**	▪ Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* ▪ Rudyard Kipling: *Barrack-Room Ballads*
1893	• Establishment of British Parsonage Museum	**1893**	▪ Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Refugees*
1894	• Gladstone resigns as Prime Minister • Debut performance of George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*	**1894**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *Life's Little Ironies* ▪ Rudyard Kipling: *The Jungle Book* ▪ Arthur Conan Doyle: *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*
1895	• The first performance of Oscar Wilde's comedy *The Ideal Husband* followed by the premiere of *The Importance of Being Ernest* soon at St James' Theatre • Wilde convicted of gross indecency and sentenced two years hard labour (Regina vs. Wilde) • General Elections won by Salisbury	**1895**	▪ Joseph Conrad (1857-1924): *Almayer's Folly* ▪ Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure* ▪ H.G. Wells (1866-1946):*The Time Machine*
1896	• The Queen becomes the longest reigning monarch	**1896**	▪ Christina Rossetti: *New Poems* ▪ William Morris: *The Well at the World's End* ▪ H.G. Wells: *The Island of Doctor Moreau* ▪ Joseph Conrad: *An Outcast of the Islands* ▪ Robert Louis Stevenson: *Weir of Hermiston*

Dates	Major Historical Events	Dates	Major Literary Figures And Their Works
1897	• Oscar Wilde released from Reading Gaol • Celebration of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee of reign	**1897**	▪ Joseph Conrad: *The Nigger of Narcissus* ▪ H.G. Wells: *The Invisible Man* ▪ Rudyard Kipling: *Captains Courageous* ▪ Henry James: *What Maisie Knew* ▪ William Somerset Maugham: *Liza of Lambeth*
1898		**1898**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* ▪ Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw* ▪ H.G. Wells: *The War of the Worlds* ▪ Oscar Wilde: *The Ballad of Reading Gaol*
1899	• Second Boer War begins	**1899**	▪ Joseph Conrad : *The Heart of Darkness* ▪ Rudyard Kipling: *The White Man's Burden*
1900	• British troops defeated in the Boers, in South Africa	**1900**	▪ Joseph Conrad: *Lord Jim*
1901	• Edwardian Era begins, with the death of Queen Victoria and ascension of Edward VII to the British Throne	**1901**	▪ Thomas Hardy: *Poems of the Past and the Present* ▪ Rudyard Kipling: Kim ▪ H.G Wells: *The First men in the Moon*

Module-1 : The Victorian Scene

Unit-1 ❑ Victorian England: Society, History and Politics

Structure:

1.1.0. Introduction

The seven decades of the nineteenth century in England, from 1832 to 1901, is the Victorian Period and it is the period when the monarch Queen Victoria ruled over England (from 1837). The Victorian Period was marked by growing wealth and power, radical development in science and technology led to sweeping socio-economic changes. Victorian literature too reflects the contemporary society—the celebration of the progress and the social ills arising from rapid industrialisation. In

this unit thus, you will be acquainted with the various aspects of the Victorian age – its society, history and politics – before you are introduced to individual writers and their works in later modules; this will help you contextualise their works.

1.1.1. Victorian England: Historical Significance

Any period, needless to say, has its own nuances, events, revolutions, discoveries, transformations, creations and typical thinkers, which gives each period its uniqueness and difference from the other epochs. Even a cursory glance on the Timeline of the Victorian period will make a reader realize that the era was rife with important socio-political-religious-economic events that gives it a historical significance. We will be discussing about the historical significance of the Victorian Period.

Queen Victoria

It can be surmised from the Introduction that the most tumultuous event that brought a transformation in the Victorian Era is the **Industrial Revolution**. According to Suroopa Mukherjee: 'If there was a single social phenomenon that fascinated the Victorians, it was the Industrial Revolution. As a social movement it was essentially economic. It drew away men away from the land by opening out new and exciting career options.' The Victorian Period saw the gradual shift from feudal, agrarian economy to a democratic, commercial and urban economy based on manufacture, international trade and business. The era witnessed the peak of Industrial Revolution. As a consequence of the industrialisation, Great Britain became the hotbed of commerce, with plethora of workshops and factories. After 1870, it became the world's banker. The industrialisation lead to the invention of fast railways and ships, established a more improved postal system, made the telephonic communication easily possible; thereby making it possible for the country to reach globally. The workshops and factories employed many labourers, thus leading to social climbing, the peasants becoming industrial workers. Apparently it brought happiness and wealth, but simultaneously it lead to constant fear of inability to keep pace with the progressive change and competitiveness to cling to the

hard-earned status. Dichotomy between the will to keep pace with the rapid changes and the desire to cling to moral standards, gave way to the Victorian dilemma. While ostensibly the era shone with national success, underneath it cried with labour exploitation. The replacement of manpower— that was a prerequisite in cultivation— by machines, resulted in dismissal of many workers and hence unemployment loomed large in the Victorian England. Due to the rapid industrialization and possibility of lucrative jobs, there was an odyssey of people into the island which led to overpopulation very soon. When the Queen came to the throne the population of London was about two million inhabitants, and during her death in 1901, the population was about six million. The industrialization and the intensification of the need of working classes gave rise to the significant political movement Chartism (It has been discussed in details in the sub-unit Political Movements).

As far as the international relationships are concerned, the Victorian Era witnessed many upheavals. **Imperialism** was at its most glorious state during this time. The Queen who was the only monarch reigning for the longest time witnessed the expansion of the empire. There were the First Opium War (1839-1842) and Second Opium War (1858-1860) against China. With the annexation of the island of Hong Kong to Great Britain perpetually, via the Treaty of Nanking, the First Opium War ended. The Second Opium War furthered the enlargement and commercial power of England. Apart from legalising opium trade and coolie trade, this war also opened entire China to the British merchants. The Crimean War (1853-56) was a mean by the United Kingdom and France to stop Russia to flourish at the cost of the Ottoman Empire. The Sepoy Mutiny or the Great Indian Rebellion of 1857, reassured the power of the Empire with their victory over colonised India Although the Mutiny ended the rule of East India Company in India, the British administration was strengthened. The First Boer War (1880-1881) fought between Great Britain and the South African Republic, joined both the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State to the British Empire. The Second Boer War (1899-1902) saw the use of the modern technologies and war artillery and in a way anticipated the World War I.

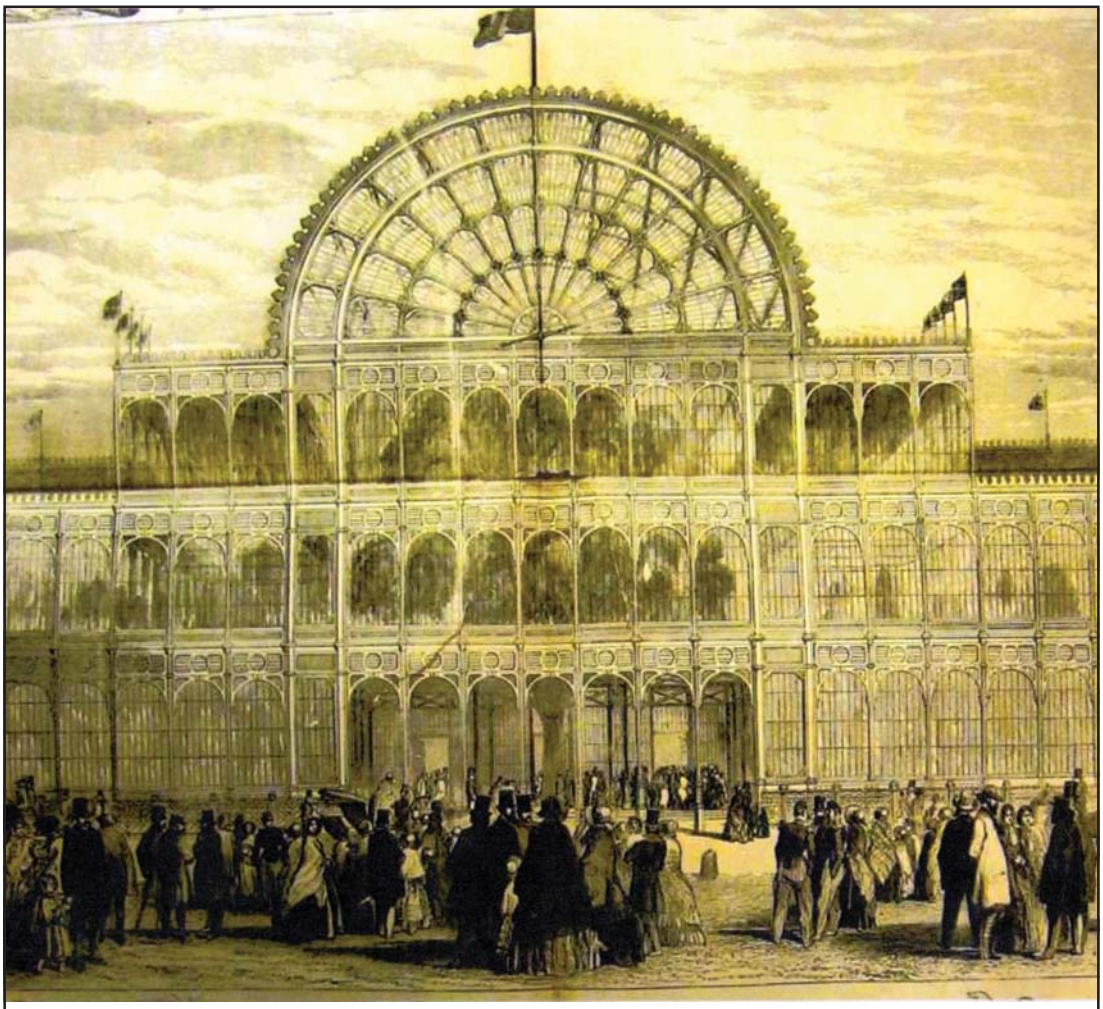
The passage of the **Reform Bills**, in 1832, 1867 and 1884 extended the democratic rights. The right to vote and decide the government, that was restricted only to the privileged classes, began to extend to the working classes. The

dissatisfaction of the working classes for the exploitation and the discontent of the middle classes for the discrimination they faced, culminated in the demand for Parliamentary Reform. From the few handful of boroughs, which had only seven members from which two were sent to the Parliament; the franchise reached to the industrial north, which was the habitation of innumerable workers with Reform Act 1832. Any man owning £10 could now vote, increasing more than two million voters. The detrimental policy of monopolising the Parliament only by the wealthy was mitigated to some extent. The Reform Act of 1867, albeit enforcing no novel law furthered the franchise and many more urban men could vote. The Third Reform of 1884 did away with the disenfranchisement of the unprivileged rural Victorian males. Thus these three Reform Acts are milestones in history, ushering England to a democracy.

The Victorian Era witnessed the peak of scientific progress, and one of the revolutionary, historic discoveries was the **theory of Evolution**, through the process of 'natural selection' of species, proving that humans owe their origin to evolution from lower mammals and not creation by a God, as the Bible professed. This far-reaching, havoc-creating thesis was propagated by Charles Darwin in On the **Origin of Species** and augmented the science-religion conflict; resulting in doubts, disillusionments, skepticism, vacuum in the Victorian minds. Herbert Spencer's principle of 'survival of the fittest' raised questions about the criterion of being 'fit', lead to competition and often the tendency to break free from the restraints of religion in order to survive, was perceptible. The **education system** too expanded its horizon, science and its branches were incorporated in the curriculum in the newer institutes although Oxford and Cambridge Universities continues teaching only the classics. Technical and night schools were established for the mechanics and artisans. Literature saw prospects of development, there was the emergence of many new periodicals like *The Edinburg Review, The Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Cornhill Magazine* where many litterateurs first published their works in serial form before publishing in the form of novels and these included George Eliot, Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy.

Another cultural landmark in the Victorian England is **the Great Exhibition of 1851** which took place in the Crystal Palace of Hyde Park. It was a way to promote

export-import globally and was a cultural meet of many people of distinctions (**You may see an image of this provided alongside for a better understanding**).



The Great Exhibition of 1851, in the Crystal Palace at Hyde Park, London

Source from : google images (pinterst.com)

Thus, nationally and internationally, culturally and technologically, politically and economically; Victorian Period in England bears historical importance.

Activity for Learners

It would be interesting to make a list or chart of the significant historical events which happened during the long rule of Queen Victoria. You may take the guidance of your counselors or the time line provided at the back of the SLM to do this.

1.1.2. Victorian Society

The Victorian Society, with its all-round and revolutionary progress in various fields, looking ostensibly 'so various, so beautiful, so new', and lying 'like a land of dreams', with rapid industrialisation, was underneath suffering from social ills, unemployment, political agitations, dissatisfaction with implemented laws, disparity between classes and conflicts. Science undoubtedly underwent extensive progress in all its fields, revolutionary discoveries were established, giving way to religious doubts in the Victorian minds. Yet expansion of the franchise, reform acts concerning the factories, sanitation acts and certain legislative measures for women's progress, made the era glorious. The scientific temperament, the religious outlooks, the imposition and withdrawal of legislative measures and the status of women when they were considered as the weaker sex, cumulatively construct the society. We will deal with each four factors separately.

1.1.2a) Science

> 'In the course of the nineteenth century, the scientific disciplines which until recently have remained the main areas of inquiry were established: palaentology, geology, zoology, biology, physiology, as well as physics and chemistry.'
>
> ***(Peter Mudford: 'Science, Literature and Society in the Late Victorian Period')***

In all the domains of science, the age saw unprecedented progress. Sir Charles Lyell's pioneering discoveries in the field of **geology** aroused new findings regarding the strata of earth. In *Principles of Geology*, his studies found words and he opined that the earth's age is actually limitless. Expanding uniformitarianism to develop gradualism, he asserted that the earth is actually made up of physical and chemical changes in the earth's layers over a long geological time, thus confirming James Hutton's conviction 'no vestige in beginning, no prospect in end'. This affirmation of Lyell refuted the Biblical connotation of the Creation of cosmos, and was a blow to the minds of the Victorians still firmly clinging to religion and its precepts. Charles Darwin's groundbreaking research in **anthropology** and the resultant invention of man's origin forwarded in his epoch-making book *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was a thundering blow to the beliefs in the Divine Creation of mankind. His assertion that 'our ancestor was a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habitation' interrogated the long-cherished faith of the Biblical Origin of mankind. T.H. Huxley took the responsibility of propagating and

publicizing the Darwinian tenets to the audience, leading to further disillusionment as the scientific creation of man was further confirmed. The Victorian Period also observed the revolutionary expeditions in the realm of **physical science**, and Humphry Davy's name is worth mentioning here, who began to split the substances in their chemical components; the elements like sodium, potassium, magnesium, strontium, calcium, boron, barium and silicon were named. Robert Chambers' pioneering work in the field of **natural history** and **zoology**, a quasi-science, named *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) was an extremely popular book in the Victorian society, widely appreciated initially but gradually sowed the seeds of skepticism in the Victorian minds. The Bible perceived that man was the crowning glory of the Creation, Chambers pointed out that in the zoological terms, Man was but another genus in the animal kingdom. The nomenclatures like transmutation, nebular hypothesis, spontaneous generation, intelligent design have been formulated by Chambers. Michael Faraday's contribution to the other two major areas of science, namely **chemistry** and **electromagnetism**, too enhanced the scientific temperament of the Victorian period. He popularised the terminologies 'anode', 'cathode' and 'electrode', invented carbon and chlorine and another apparatus which is known as Bunsen burner today. His scripting in his notebook, 'I have at last succeeded in illuminating a magnetic curve or line of force and in magnetizing a ray of light' perhaps implies the light he ignited in the path of science, leading to the worldly success of the Victorians. Towards the middle of the nineteenth century, appeared another Scottish mathematician and physicist Kelvin William Thomson whose postulations in **physics**, especially in the Second Law of Thermodynamics undoubtedly added a gem to the English crown of scientific achievement. Kelvin contended that the main subject in the interpretation of the **Second Law of Thermodynamics** was the explanation of irreversible processes. He noted that if entropy always increased, the universe would eventually reach a state of uniform temperature and maximum entropy from which it would not be possible to extract any work. He called this the Heat Death of the Universe. He concluded: 'Within a finite period of time past, the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at present constituted, unless operations have been, or are to be performed, which are impossible under the laws to which the known operations going on at present in the material world are subject.' This unprecedented development in science and the its breakthrough while on the one hand added prestige to the name of the United Kingdom, on the other hand, it raised questions in the mind of the Victorians: what to believe in and

what to dismiss; and even in the universities: whether to continue teaching the classics or incorporate science in their curriculum.

Activity for the Learners

Learners, kindly note that science, especially evolutionary biology, was a blossoming field of research in the Victorian period. Can you name the most important theorists/scientists from your reading of the above section? Also, try to write in your own words what was so new and revolutionary about Charles Darwin's theory of the evolution of mankind. This is important because the theory of evolution shook the traditional assumptions of religion and its impact is evident in the literature of the age.

1.1.2b) Religion

'The Sea of Faith
Was once too at its full, and round the earth's shore,
But now I only hear,
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar.

'Dover Beach': Matthew Arnold

The early days of the Victorian Age held religion as the firm ground of peace, the Bible was considered as the Gospel truth. In the epoch of rapid change, the easy replacement of the agrarian economy by industrial bounty, the competition and unemployment, the rigorous vocation in the factories, the disparity between classes, the fear of losing the hard-earned social status; the only anchorage was Religion. The Bible and unquestionable belief in Christian religious dogmas equipped and strengthened the Victorians to struggle against the socio-economic odds that continually threatened their inner peace. The morality of the Victorians was apparently governed by the religious standards. Evangelical Christianity was the dominant religious belief. G.M. Young suggests that Evangelical theory 'rests on profound apprehension of the contrary states: of Nature and of Grace, one meriting eternal wrath, the other intended for eternal happiness.' Evangelicalism stressed on the fact that humans are actually depraved after the Fall and in order to be ushered to salvation, they need to establish a personal relationship with God which, they believed, can be done neither through sacramental services nor through virtuous deeds but only through unshakeable faith in God. **The Oxford Movement** which took place in the beginning of the Nineteenth

century, sought the renewal of the Roman Catholic thoughts and practices in the Church of England, as opposed to the marked tendencies of Protestantism. Leaders of the movement were John Henry Newman, a clergyman and subsequently a convert to Roman Catholicism and a cardinal, Richard Hurrell Froude, a clergyman, John Keble, a clergyman and poet and Edward Pusey. Initially science and religion were in harmony William Paley's *Natural Theology*, which was widely read, affirmed that there was a scheming God who designed everything. However, towards 1830s, some Victorians began to express their need of the evidence of a Ruling God's existence. The positivist tradition of Hobbes, Locke and Newton opened up intellectual debates and threw down a direct gauntlet at Christianity. Positivism asserts that knowledge is asserted only through sensory experiences and validated through logic. Thus the theory was an impetus to spark a disbelief in the existence of God. August Comte propagated the theory that society had a history of its own, which moved through three stages—theological, metaphysical and scientific. Christian religion was thus replaced by the broader, religion of humanity. It is the revolutionary work of Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species*, with the radical discovery that mankind owes its origin to apes and not God as the Bible asserts, that shook the strong base of the Biblical Faith. Thus dichotomy arose between Science and Religion, leading to dichotomy between Faith and doubt, peace and unrest, stability and paradox. Agnosticism was perceptible towards the end of the Nineteenth century, the religious theory which neither believes nor disbelieves in the existence of God.

1.1.2c) Laws

The Victorian Period in England witnessed many laws formulated, amended and abolished. The laws were intended to galvanize a social progress—sometimes enhancing the betterment, sometimes bringing more confusion and chaos. The laws pertained to different spheres, and their imposition, revision or repeal collectively and cumulatively led to the socio-politico-economic vicissitudes. Some major domains affected by the legislation are as follows:

- **Economic Laws:**

  Innumerable laws had been enforced that ensued to economic changes, resulting in elation or bewilderment. The **Anti-Corn Law League**, enforced in 1846, vouchsafed the Repeal of the Corn Laws which were implemented in 1815, leading to levy in the price of wheat. Abolishing the Corn Laws, the Anti-Corn Law League established Free Trade in the country. The Robert

Peel government, observing that the note issuing policy of the banks as a major cause of price inflation, implemented the **Bank Charter Act** in 1844 and the Act restricted the new banknotes-issuing right and printing notes only to the Central Bank of England. **Repeal of Corn Laws** was enforced in 1846.

- **Religious Laws**

  Laws were enforced in the arena of religion as well, leading to conflict sometimes and sometimes, harmony. The **Repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts** (the act introduced in 1673) in 1828 allowed the Dissenters to sit in the Parliament and participate in the local government discussions. The **Catholic Emancipation Act** enforced in 1829 allowed the Catholics to sit as MPs for the first time since Elizabethan Settlement, and changed the Anglican Constitution to a Protestant one. **The Ecclesiastical Titles Act** enacted in 1851, was an anti-Roman Catholic measure. In response to the agitation-causing restoration of Catholic Hierarchy by Pope Pius IX, this Act made it a criminal offence for anyone outside the Church of England to use any papal title. **Disenchantment and Disendowment of the Irish Church**, enforced in 1871, emphasized that all ecclesiastical properties of the Church of England would be vested in the commissioners, no Irish Bishop would sit in the House of Lords and the Church of Ireland was to have a General Synod elected triennially by the diocese.

- **Political Laws**

  The **Reform Bill**, the passage of which officially heralded the beginning of the Victorian Period, was a significant political measure to extend democracy. Proposed by the Whigs and led by the then Prime Minister Charles Grey, the Act affected the electorate in England and Wales. It granted seats in the House of Commons to the large cities that emerged after the Industrial Revolution and withdrew seats from the boroughs. It also included in the franchise, those who did not own landed property. The **Abolition of Property Qualification for the MPs** was another legislative measure enforced in 1858 and it being one of the demands by the Chartists, recommended that there was no need of possessing property in order to be a candidate for election. The **Second Reform Act** of 1867 extended the right of suffrage to the urbane male working class in England and Wales. The **Ballot Act** carried out in 1872, pertaining to the demands of the Chartists introduced secret ballot

in all the elections. The **Conspiration and Protection of Property Act**, executed in 1875, legalized peaceful picketing by the trade unions. The Third Reform Act of 1884 ensured franchise to most adult males and expanded the voting right from towns and boroughs to the countryside. **Local Government Act** enforced in 1894 divided the country into Urban District Councils and Rural District Councils.

- **Civil, Domestic and Development Laws**

The nineteenth century observed modification and operation of several civil laws repeatedly, because dissatisfaction and discontent with the prevalent ones and to serve for the betterment, modification was necessary. There had been the implementation of the **Factory Acts** several times, amending the working hours of the factory labourers, targeting the minimization of exploitation. In 1833 it was passed by the Whig government to regulate and fix certain duration each day of work for men and women. In 1844, the Act was again passed saying that the adult workers should not work more than twelve hours a day, those under thirteen years should not work more than eight hours and no employee should be below eight years of age. In 1848, the Factory Act reduced the working hours to ten hours a day. In 1874, the Factory Act was enforced again to state that there should be no child labourer below ten years and no full-time worker below fourteen years. The **Coal Mines Inspection Act** of 1850 (coal mine owners could sit in the House of Lords), **Coal Mines Regulating Act** of 1872 (guaranteeing safety in coal mines with sufficient fan ventilators and stronger timber support), **Employers and Workmen Act** of 1875 (workmen will have legal footing in case of breach of contract), **Factory and Workshops Act** of 1878 (workshops with more than forty people would be regularly inspected) and **Workmen's Compensation Act** of 1897 (employers should compensate the injury of men in potentially hazardous jobs) were also sanctioned and akin to the Factory Acts. Then there were other civil laws like **Matrimonial Causes Act** passed in 1857 which established divorce causes, although women had limited provisions for divorce except adultery and **Married Women's Property Act** of 1870 that said that women could keep £20 of their earnings and the latter was reestablished in 1882 said that women would continue as separate owners of property post-marriage.. One debatable Act was **Poor Law Amendment Act** of 1834, intended to alleviate the condition of poors, but basically worsened it. The workhouses where the poor people were sent for were miserable and grotesque, called poor law bastilles. The **Irish Land**

Act of 1870 passed under Gladstone's government enforced that it would be illegal to forcefully evict the tenants. It was again passed in 1881, guaranteeing fair tents, fixity of tenure and free state of tenancy for Irish tenants.

- **Education and Health Laws**

  Laws were passed in the spheres of education and health as well. **Forster's Education Act** of 1870 set up new boarding schools, **University Test Act** of 1871 said that the entry to Oxford and Cambridge would be open to all on the basis of merit and not limited to the members of the Anglican Church. **Mundella's Elementary Education Act** (1881) stated free and compulsory education of children from five to ten years. **Food and Drugs Act** of 1860 prevented adulteration of food and stated that inclusion of additives would be a criminal offence.

These laws, as it is apparent, collectively intended a holistic development of the country and do away with all discontents and disappointments that were detrimental to progress.

Activity for the learners

The learners can make a chronological list of the different laws executed in the Victorian Age. They can explore and write down the positive and/or adverse effects of these laws on the overall structure of society.

1.1.2d) Position of Women

The English historian George Malcolm Young produces a reflective analysis of the position of Victorian women in his work *Victorian England: The Portrait of an Age*. He asserts: 'The notable Victorian woman is a blend of the great lady and intellectual woman, not yet professional, and we can graduate the proportions until, at the opposite ends of the scale, we encounter the limiting instances of the queen herself and Harriet Martineau.' The complete erasure of womankind from the Reform Bills drives home the marginalization of women. The denial of their rights to vote, a crucial socio-political and more importantly democratic right, is evidence to the marginalization women faced. The only two entities that were meant and expected to define her were 'wifehood' and 'motherhood'. She was expected to inculcate all 'feminine' values in her that would enhance her femaleness and tend her husband and children with unquestionable dutifulness and utmost compassion. The

paradigm in which a Victorian woman was expected to fit herself has been beautifully delineated by **John Ruskin** in ***Of Queen's Gardens*** where he says: "She (a woman) must be enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise—wise, not for self-development, but for self-renunciation: wise, not that she may set herself above her husband, but that she may never fail from his side..." Entirely self-sacrificing, a woman stood for the domesticity and hearth, and that gave her sanctity and purity. Rather than an intellectual partner, she was considered as a body to her husband—to provide him with services; with children, sex and domestic chores. A Victorian woman was defined in two binaries: the 'angel' and the 'fallen woman'. A woman who had given in to seduction, lapsed from the duties that society imposed on her, deviated from the conventional image of femininity was tagged as a fallen woman.

Yet the age saw literature and journalism, two previously male dominated areas, practised by women. The age saw the emergence of women poets like Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Elizabeth Barrett Browning and novelists like the Brontë sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot. Women, during the latter years, became conscious of their rights, and the struggle for Women's Suffrage germinated, which will be discussed under the section Political Movements.

Dear Learner…Stop and Think!

The Victorian age was a period of stark contrasts—in socio-economic conditions as well as in the position and construction of woman/womanhood. On the one hand it was an age dominated by a woman-Queen Victoria- on the other an era when women had no social power, economic independence or freedom to work. In fact women had only two roles defined by a very patriarchal society—those of motherhood and marriage. It is interesting for you to note the coinages described to define women—'angel' or 'fallen woman' and reiterated in the literature of the time. It is thus interesting to note the age saw literature and journalism, two previously male dominated areas, practised by women. Women, during the latter years, became conscious of their rights, and the struggle for Women's Suffrage germinated, which will be discussed under the section Political Movements.

1.1.3. Political Movements

We have already seen that there were several causes which demanded perpetual solution and that engendered political movements. The Victorian Period was never an unperturbed one and was pervaded by political movements now and then. Apart from agitations by Trade Unions and protests by the exploited labours, there were political movements of national significance.

- **Anti-Corn Law League**

  The **Anti-Corn Law League**, as a campaign protest against the Corn Laws that issued levy on a staple agricultural product like wheat, gained momentum from 1828 to 1832. A Corn Law was first introduced in Britain in 1804, when the landowners, who dominated Parliament, sought to protect their profits by imposing a levy on imported corn. Farmers were afraid that when the Napoleonic war would be over in 1815, the import of foreign corn would make the prices of indigenous crops fall. This fear was proved true and the price of corn fell massively three years later. British landowners applied pressure on members of the House of Commons to take action to protect the profits of the farmers. Parliament responded by passing a law permitting the import of foreign wheat free of duty only when the domestic price reached 80 shillings per quarter (8 bushels). Cobden found this law to be economically harmful and morally wrong. The members of this movement were mainly middle-class manufacturers, merchants, bankers and traders. They wanted the Corn Laws to be repealed so that they could sell more goods both in Britain and overseas. The source of the protectionist system was thought to be the Corn Laws: once they were repealed, the Anti Corn Law League thought that free trade would follow. The campaign headed a nation-wide campaign for the repeal of the Corn Laws which ended in success in 1846 when the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Peel repealed the legislation.

- **Chartism**

  Another noteworthy political movement was **Chartism**. It was established and controlled by the working class in 1836 to achieve parliamentary democracy as socio-economic reform. They expressed their resentment against provisions like Factory Act, Reform Act of 1832 and Poor Law that promised so much and failed. The economic cause of Chartism was the widening gulf between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The low wages in lieu of long hours of life risking work, periodic unemployment and prices of

necessities too high to afford agitated the working class. The working class was not included under the umbrella of franchise extended by 1832 Reform Act. 1833 Factory Act was disappointing as it enforced exploitation of labourers by employers while 1834 Poor Law in no way alleviated the condition of poor. The infuriated workers now sought for political help. Chartism was a product of Industrialization and it proclaimed the fundamental belief that economic exploitation and political subservience could be corrected by Parliamentary means. The strength of Chartism intensified between 1838-39, 1842-43 and 1847-48. It appeared under the Whig government and ended under Robert Peel's economic reforms. The Chartist circular provided for the Representation of the people of the great Britain and Ireland in the Common Houses of the Parliament; embracing the principles of the Universal Suffrage, no Property Qualification for the MPs, Annual Parliament, Equal Representation of Electoral Districts, Regular Payment of Members and Vote by Secret Ballot.

- **Women's Suffrage**

  Sadly enough, the three Reform Acts that extended franchise to many, excluded the women citizens. The Women's struggle for the right to vote and the need of the women to execute their political rights and establish themselves in the Parliament was not conspicuous until late Victorian Age. The Women's Suffrage Movement in England became a national movement from 1872 with the formation of National Society for Women's Suffrage formed by Lydia Becker. National Unit of Women's Suffrage Society founded in 1897 under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett was more influential and acted vehemently to propagate the women to struggle for their democratic rights. By the time Victorian Period was over, the suffrage was not achieved.

Note for the Learners

It is thus observed that the women were deprived perceptibly of one of the foremost socio-political rights—the right to decide who would form the government. However the Women's Suffrage Right which was implemented many years after the Victorian Period came to an end, had its embryonic stage in the Victorian era. It is to be noted that there had been many women, agencies, platforms, movements and journals which strove for accomplishing this right. Learners, please make a note of the various feminist agencies and

the notable women suffragettes whose activities culminated in the flourishing of Women Suffrage. It must also be mentioned that the 1880s and 1890s saw the emergence of the socio-literary phenomenon called the 'New Woman', who challenged existing ideas of dress, work and spheres of movement of women. You can see a few pictures of the New Woman, and how she was caricatured in the contemporary press for her new role and dress in the Periodical press, provided along with this Unit.

1.1.4 Literature and its Concerns: Early and Late Victorian

The Victorian England upheld a rich gallery of literary masterpieces. The literature of the nineteenth century typifies the unrest and paradox, social ills on the one hand, and on the other, the stability and tranquility sought in the creed. Although prose fiction reached the apex of development with its variedness, versatility and abundance, the poetry and non-fictional prose contributed to the wide kaleidoscope as well. The litterateurs of the era can be categorized into two divisions—the Early Victorian ones and the Later Victorian ones.

1.1.4a) Early Victorian Literary Masters

❖ **Fiction**

The major novelists of the early Victorian period were Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope, George Eliot, Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell. The novels of **Charles Dickens** are characterized by his keen observation of social ills, a comic humour, and humorous use of class and dialect difference. His *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37) is on a series of adventures by the protagonist Samuel Pickwick and other Pickwickians. The characters are humorously drawn on. *A Christmas Carol* (1843) deftly shows clash between wealth and poverty and the celebration of togetherness and love. The latter novels of Dickens are however imbued with a vein of seriousness. *Oliver Twist* (1837-38) remarkably shows Dickens' empathy with the poor orphans whose condition was worsened by the Poor Laws. The suffering of the children in the Yorkshire schools is the subsistence of *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), the helpless Victorian femininity has been projected in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) through Little Nell. *David Copperfield* (1849-50) is semi-autobiographical—the hero marries beloved Dora and after her death, Agnes. *Bleak House* (1852-53) throws light on the legal system of

contemporary England through the microcosmic Jarndyce and Jarndyce case going on in the Court of Chancery, the plot involves the innovative double narrative technique. A turn from a more individual hero to portrayal of society is in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) showing the situation of pre and post French Revolution London and Paris. *Hard Times* (1854) is a poignant account of the drastic effect of Utilitarianism and the deadening consequences of tutelage on Utilitarian principles. The title of *Great Expectations* (1860-61) is rather an irony, because it ends with despondency and disillusionment on the part of the hero. The final and unfinished novel of Dickens is *The Mystery of Edwin Drood.* **William Makepeace Thackeray**'s (1811-63) *Vanity Fair* (1847-48), a satire on the mid nineteenth society, revolves around two women—Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley. *The History of Henry Esmond* (1852) is a historical fiction, the protagonist being a colonel serving Queen Anne. *The Newcomes* (1853-54), story of the colonel Newcome and his sone Clive has travel, history, love, marriage for money, capitalism, Methodist religion embedded within it. *The Virginians* (1857-59), another historical fiction, is a sequel to *Henry Esmond*, because it is the story of Esmond's twin grandsons George and Henry Warrington. Some of the major novels of another Victorian novelist named **Anthony Trollope** (1815-1882) are *The Macdermots of Ballycloran* (1847), *The Three Clerks* (1858), *Castle Richmond* (1860), *Orley Farm* (1862), *Rachel Ray* (1863), *Miss Mackenzie* (1865), *The Belton Estate* (1866), *The Claverings* (1867), *The Vicar of Bullhampton* (1870), *Sir Harry Hotspur of Humblethwaite* (1871) and *Lady Anna* (1874). Some of the women novelists who established their merit with their creative feats were **George Eliot** aka Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880), Brontë sisters and Elizabeth Gaskell ( ). George Eliot wrote seven novels: *Adam Bede* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861) *Romola* (1863), *Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), *Daniel Deronda* (1876). Love as a transmuting force, seduction, Methodist ways, balance between morals and aesthetics, social realism have been etched out in *Adam Bede*. Issues like dichotomy between love and loyalty and social constrictions have been depicted in *The Mill on the Floss.* The issues of religion, industrialization and Victorian community have been dealt in *Silas Marner*. With Florence as the locale, *Romola* charters the fifteenth century chronicle of the city from different perspectives. With a huge gallery of characters, *Middlemarch* manifests many aspects of Victorianism including women's position, double standards, political reform, industrialization and morals. **Charlotte Brontë**, with her four novels *Jane Eyre, Villette, The Professor* and *Shirley* met astounding literary success.

Bertha Mason of *Jane Eyre* is the icon of insanity and herself being confined within the attic brings out the woman's stance in marital relationship. Jane's "Reader, I married him" is one of the oft-mentioned lines from literature. Written in first person narrative, *The Professor* traces the career of the protagonist William Crimsworth. Shirley is a social novel showing the uprisings in the Yorkshire textile industry while *Villete* draws the adventure and love of Lucy Snowe. **Emily Bronte**'s *Wuthering Heights* shows the issues of class and gender, and the class barriers that counter the love between a boy and a girl from different classes. Catherine-Heathcliff love story remains an example of one of the passionate romances. Written in the narrative-within-a-narrative style (Lockwood's and Nelly Dean's), it is a Gothic romance. Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865) contributed to the genre of fiction with novels and short stories. Her *Mary Barton* is on the difficulties of the lower-class life in Manchester. The status of a woman and the constant judgement of her character with the two yardsticks 'angel' and 'fallen woman' have been portrayed in *Ruth*. *Cranford* and *North and South*, on the other hand, are social novels, depicting the industrial England and its vagaries.

❖ Non Fiction

The Victorian essayists, with their profound thinking and brilliant intellect, have expressed many concerns related to their contemporary age. In the medium of prose, fiction was undoubtedly matchless in its projection of the Victorian Spirit; but non-fictional ones nevertheless equaled their fiction counterparts in keen observations and propounding theories. Some of the Victorian non-fiction writers are John Stuart Mill, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, Thomas Babington Macaulay, Charles Darwin and Matthew Arnold.

- **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873) founded the Utilitarian society to study the Benthamite idea that all policies should be judged by the standard of what promoted 'the greatest happiness for the greatest number'. In the book *Utilitarianism* (1863), Mill advocates a single ethical principle to be the source of all ethical principles: 'The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest-Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. In the book *On Liberty* (1848), Mill affirms the need of the Individual to be free from the dominance of the society in order to establish Utilitarianism, because Individualism is the key of Well-being. In Principles of Political Economy (1863), Mill discusses the

requisites of labour and capital for production. *The Subjection of Women* (1869) is a feminist work, promulgating the equality between the sexes, asserting logically that since men and women are anatomically or intellectually equal, society and state should also promote their equality.

- **Thomas Carlyle** (1795-1891) is best known for his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) where in the form of six lectures, he says that the greatness of a man makes him a hero, manifesting six perspectives of a hero: as Divinity, as Prophet, as Poet, as Priest, as Man of Letters and as King. His *Chartism* (1840) presents the picture of England of his times and the vagaries caused by different social and political turmoil. His 'Condition of England Question' discusses the extent of success of Chartism to uplift the ailing condition of the working classes. As a historian, he wonderfully chronicles the Reign of Terror in *The French Revolution: A History* (1837). In *Past and Present* (1843), he invokes to the historical events if England and mentions the contemporary issues, thus depicting the differences. In *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* he collects and elucidates the writings of Cromwell.
- **John Ruskin**'s (1819-1900) first major work is *Modern Painters* (five volumes, 1843-1860) was written as a defence of the work of J.M.W Turner and was a masterpiece on art, stating that in the art of landscape the contemporary painters were superior to the old masters. *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849) discusses the seven ideas or lamps of good architecture, and is a key text to Gothic Revival. *The Stones of Venice* (three volumes, 1851-53) is on the architecture of Venice's Byzantine, Gothic and Renaissance times. *Unto this Last* (1860), first published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, is on economy. *Sesame and Lilies* shows the eternal difference in nature between men and women whereas *Of Queen's Garden* is Ruskin's discourse on repressive Victorian feminine values.
- **Matthew Arnold** (1822-1888) in his *The Study of Poetry* opined that in the face of conflict between science and religion, in poetry only the Victorians will find 'a surer and surer stay'. In *Culture and Anarchy***,** he dwelt on the schism between Hellenism and Hebraism, dismissed the aristocrats as Barbarians and ridiculed the middle class as Philistines.
- **Charles Darwin**'s *On the Origin of Species* (1859) proposed the evolutionary theory of mankind, that we evolved from apes; thus refuting the Biblical Divine Creation.

- Two minor non-fiction writers were Macaulay and Newman. **Thomas Babington Macaulay** (1800-1859) has his writings mainly on his visualization of India. His *Minutes on Education* is a cornerstone on the education in colonial India, and his 'downward filtration theory' where he said that formal education is for chosen few who will percolate it through the masses, was applied vehemently.
- **John Henry Newman** (1801- 90) contributed to the genre with texts like *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (1832), *Tracts for the Times* (1833-41), *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864) and *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865).

1.1.4b) Late Victorian Literary Masters

- **Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928), the ameliorist, masterfully brings out the sublime human tragedy in his novels. The universal note 'happiness is but an occasional episode in the general drama of pain' lies as an undercurrent in almost all his novels'; mankind is in a constant battle against a inscrutable, malevolent, malign Destiny. The indifferent, relentless, rueful force as he prefers to call 'Immanent Will' permeates the plots of his novels in the form of chances and coincidences. Nature is not passive, but an active participator in the lives of his characters; in his Wessex novels Nature is manifested sometimes as a cruel Force—red in tooth and claw—against whom his characters continuously combat as in *Tess of d'Urbervilles*, sometimes a serene comforter like the compassionate dog of Gabriel Oak in *Far From the Madding Crowd* (The novel you will be reading in this course, discussed in Module-3, Unit-2), sometimes bleak and solitary as the Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*. His novels show his compassionate handling of the female characters. Opposed to the idealisation of marriage as the goal of woman's sexuality, there is our New Woman Sue Bridehead in *Jude the Obscure*. In a society where virtue and virginity were synonymous, there Tess's apparent 'fallenness' when seduced by Alec, "'Justice' was done" at the end with Tess's execution is Hardyesque irony. *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, *Desperate Remedies*, *Under the Greenwood Tree*, *The Woodlanders* and *Two on a Tower* brilliantly project Hardy's literary feats. The collection of short stories, *Life's Little Ironies* and *A Group of Noble Dames* also equal the novels in brilliance.
- **Samuel Butler** (1835-1902) established his name as a Victorian novelist mainly for two novels—the Utopian satire *Erewhon* (1872) and semi-autobiographical *The Way of All Flesh* published posthumously in 1903.

Erewhon which is actually an anagram/palindrome of 'nowhere', is a satire on Victorian society, Darwinian machines and contains many clues of dystopia. Revolving around the Pontifex family and chiefly around the protagonist Ernest, the story of *The Way of All Flesh* has loss in Evangelical Christianity and the Bible, sexual assault on women, bigamy and alcoholism and therefore it is in a way defying the Victorianism. Butler's minor novels are *Life and Habit, Evolution: Old and New*, *Erewhon Revisited*, *Unconscious Memory* and *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino*. **George Meredith** (1828-1909) in his novels The *Adventures of Harry Richmond* (tragic story of Richmond Roy, a music teacher), *Beauchamp's Career* (satire on Conservative establishment), *The House on the Beach* (a young woman's engagement to an older man), *The Egoist* (another novel depicting male domination on woman's sexuality) and *Diana of the Crossways* (the protagonist Diana resembles the paradigm of a New Woman) enriched the late Victorian world of fiction.

- **George Gissing** (1857-1903) is known for his works like *The Nether World* (the lives of poor people of the London slums and their miseries), *New Grub Street* (the literary world and career of a litterateur) and *The Odd Women* (the shifting role of women in times of social change and the Woman Question).

Note for the learners

The learners have formed an idea of the major literary masters of the Victorian Period. They can take the help of the suggested readings (listed later) and make a note of the styles, narrative techniques and philosophies in the works of the Victorian writers.

1.1.4c) Conservatism/ Prudery and Circulating Libraries

The circulating libraries reached the height of popularity during the Victorian period. During the nineteenth century, circulating libraries were traced in communities all over England. While they initially appeared in London, Edinburgh and resort destinations, in the Victorian Age circulating libraries with smaller collections were established everywhere. Additionally, clienteles in remote areas could pay the larger circulating libraries to deliver books to their homes. Women from upper classes, who could afford these libraries, widely used them as the place of pastimes. However the libraries were prudish and conservative and did not issue all novels. The novels

that went against the Victorian standards and morals were not given. Thus, indirectly they exerted control over novelists, who would not wish to risk their novels being banned from readers and hence chose moderation in discussing issues like—sexuality, pregnancy, illicit love—in their works. The three volume novels were popularized during this period. These circulating libraries not only encouraged readership, but also made reading fashionable. Muddie's Select Library (1842-1937) and W.H. Smith and Son were two of the biggest circulating libraries.

1.1.5. Summing Up

- The Victorian England was an epoch which witnessed many changes from social, political, religious, cultural and literary perspectives. It officially started with the passage of the Reform Bill in 1832, although the monarch who nominates the age accessed the throne in 1837.
- The period ushered England to democracy, enforcing and extending franchise almost all over England, except the men of lower classes and all the women, with the consecutive Reform Acts.
- With the rapid industrialization and progress in science, England became the glorious seat of commerce and business, with wealth and power in her hands.
- Religion and science which were so long in concordance came into conflict with revolutionary discoveries that challenged the Biblical precepts.
- Woman in this age was only to fulfill to goals—be a good wife and mother. Virginity and virtues were synonymous, and a woman breaching the social construction of femininity was given the diminutive nomenclature 'fallen woman'.
- The fiction reached the peak of success, and widely practiced by male and female novelists; yet non-fictional proses and poetry too prevailed in the panorama of Victorian literature.

1.1.6. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Analyse the historical significance of the Victorian period
2. How did the enforcement and abolition of various legislative reforms cumulatively lead to the constant change in the Victorian England?

3. Write an essay on the Non-Fictional Prose that enriched Victorian Literature.
4. How did the Early Victorian novelists use their works as the reflection of the contemporary society?
5. Reflect on the Scientific Temperament of the Victorian Age.

● **Middle Length Questions-12 Marks**

1. What was the effect of industrialisation on Victorian social set up?
2. Write a note on the position of women in Victorian England.
3. Write a note on the Religion and its complexities in the Victorian Period.
4. Write a short note on Chartism

● **Objective Type Questions-6 Marks**

1. Why was the Anti-Corn Law League such a necessity?
2. What is the significance of the binaries 'angel' and 'fallen woman'?
3. What is the basic philosophy of Utlitarianism?

1.1.7. Suggested Reading

1. Alexander Michael. *A History of English Literature.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007
2. Bagchi, Jashodhara (Ed): *Literature, Society and Ideology in the Victorian Era*
3. Baugh, A.C. *Literary History of England*, Volume IV. Great Britain: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1967.
4. Carter, Ronald and John McRae (Ed). *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2001.
5. Hughes, Linda K. *The Cambridge Introduction to Victorian Poetry*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
6. Mukherjee, Suroopa (Ed). *Victorian Poets*. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2011.
7. Young, G.M. *Victorian England: Portrait of an Age*. London: Oxford University Press, 1936.
8. www.victorianweb.org/history/legistl/html
9. www.britannica.com
10. www.jstor.org

Unit-2 ❑ Victorian Poetry

Structure:

1.2.0 Introduction

The objective of this module is to introduce you to the poetry of the Victorian Period. It will first discuss the characteristics of the Victorian poetry, so that you can get an idea of the typical features of these poems that gave them their uniqueness and mirrored the times they were written in. You will then learn about the various types of the Victorian poetry that were most commonly perceptible. The following subunit will discuss on the major poets of the period, categorised into Early poets and Later poets. The Victorian Period witnessed the contribution from the women poets too, who will also be discussed. This unit will hence give you a general idea of Victorian poetry, its growth and development.

1.2.1 Features of Victorian Poetry

The poetry of any particular period has certain salient features that give it uniqueness and an impression of the contemporary era. That is what is called the

zeitgeist—the spirit and mood of the period to which it belongs— and Victorian poetry bears the zeitgeist. We shall now discuss the predominant features discernible in the Victorian poetry that give it the individuality.

Thomas Carlyle in 'The Hero as a Poet' in his phenomenal achievement *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* (included in Module 3, Unit 3 of this SLM) said that the poet must be committed to the moral commitment to convey the prophetic vision of his age. Unlike the Romantic poems which were extremely personal and expressed the poets' private experiences, the Victorian poems expressed the **feelings of unrest and helplessness of a bewildered nation**. **Nostalgia for the bygone years**, when life was ruled by idyllic agrarianism and not affected by the rigorous industrialism, underscores the poetry of these times. The apparent glory and national success of the imperial power seethed with the **cries of disenchantment, bitterness and intolerance.** Arnold shows this transformation in 'To Marguerite': 'we were parts of a single continent' has now changed to 'we mortal millions live alone.' The collective voices of the Victorians in despair get expressed here. The **dichotomy between Religion and Science** and the fear that the Science will shake off the protective cocoon finds words in the Victorian poems, Arnold's 'Dover Beach' is the case in point. Nature is a recurrent motif in the Victorian poetry, but Nature not in an idealized and mystified form like that of Romanticists but **Nature in its realistic shape**—'red in tooth and claw', 'roots wrapt about the bones', 'sullen tree'. **Interest in the medieval legends, myths and fables** was also conspicuous in the Victorian times and the evidences are the poems like 'The Lady of Shalott', Idylls of the King, 'Mort d'Arthur' and 'Locksley Hall' and Arnold's *Tristan and Iseult*. Simultaneously with the despair, prevailed **hope and a positive look towards life**, reflected in the optimism in Browning's poem—'the best is yet to be' (Rabbi Ben Ezra) and the lurking faith in Tennyson's poem, particularly *In Memoriam*—'Thou wilt not leave us in the dust'. **Love for art and intense passion for architecture** was also noticed in the poems, especially in Browning like 'Andrea del Sarto' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi'. The **Victorian dilemma** that ensued out of the radical competitiveness brought along by Industrial Revolution is predominant feature of the Victorian poems It being an age where women were categorized in two binaries—'angel' and 'fallen woman', the women's poetry reflect the feminine sentiments and their souls' urge to identify themselves as independently thinking individuals.

1.2.3. Victorian Poetry—Types

Victorian Poetry employs every kind of verse forms in the language and exploits every form of poetic subgenres (genre means literary type, therefore subgenre is a particular narrower form of the specific genre). However, the most popular were dramatic monologue, the verse novel sonnets, Arthurian poetry, domestic poems and pastoral elegy. In the realm of Victorian poetry, one would observe numerous types that nevertheless enhanced the genre. We will be discussing the major types of Victorian Poetry.

i. **Dramatic Monologues**: Dramatic monologue is fundamentally considered to be a definitive Victorian poetic genre. Dramatic monologue consists of a single speaker who is not the poet, and an implied auditor. The speaker utters the speech that constitutes the entire poem, in a specific situation and at a crucial moment. The readers become aware of the silent auditor's presence, every movement, clues of every physical actions from the speaker's words. Robert Browning perfected this subgenre single-handedly, with poems like 'My Last Duchess', 'Porphyria's Lover', 'Andrea del Sarto', 'Caliban Upon Setebos', 'Fra Lippo Lippi', 'The Bishop Orders his Tomb on St. Praxed's Church' and so on. In 'My Last Dutchess', the speaker is the Duke of Ferrara and the non-speaker is a painter. The active presence of the auditor is perceptible from the speaker's hints only, like 'will it please you rise? We'll meet/The Company below', 'oh sir, she smiled', 'nay, we'll go together down sir'. The reader can speculate that the auditor's movements are governed by the speaker's commands. In 'Porphyria's Lover', the presence of the interlocutor Porphyria is more distinct in her— gliding in… shutting the cold out…untying the hat…putting her arm about the lover's waist…murmuring her love until the speaker kills her. The speaker communicates to us verbally and the actions of both, as in a drama, are articulated to us. Tennyson's 'Ulysses', 'Tithonus', 'The Lotos Eaters', 'St. Simon Stylites', are also dramatic monologues. In 'Ulysses', the speaker is the Greek hero and speaking to his men. The men are silent, but their presence as auditors is felt by the speaker's words 'you and I are old', 'come, my friends…push off'. Christina Rossetti's 'The Convent Threshold', Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and 'The Happiest Girl' and A.C. Swinburne's 'Hymn to Proserpine' are minor Victorian dramatic monologues.

ii. **Elegies:**

But what—I dream! Two hundred years are flown
Since first thy story ran through Oxford halls,
And the grave of Glanvil did the tale inscribe
That thou art wander'd from the studious walls
To learn strange arts, and join a gipsy-tribe;
And thou from earth art gone
Long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid—

'The Scholar Gipsy': Matthew Arnold

The element of mourning over the deceased is evident from the above lines, and that is the crux of an elegy. Nostalgia, memory, estrangement, lamentation are the basic tenets of elegy. The private experience is turned into a public meaning in elegies. Tennyson's *In Memoriam A.H.H* is the profoundest elegy of this time. Written on the death of his Cambridge friend Arthur Henry Hallam, these series of elegiac poems also express the crisis of Faith, the marked catastrophe of the age. The bleakness that the poems illustrate the sense of despondency that comes as the result of the loss of the loved ones. Arnold's *Thyrsis*, written on the lamentation over the death of Arthur Clough perfectly manifests the elegiac note. Fundamentally, these were pastoral elegies, where a rural idyllic backdrop consisting of shepherds, bleating sheep, shepherds' lamentation is sketched.

iii. **Sonnets:** Victorian Period gave a fresh lease of life to this subgenre of lyric poetry. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, Christina Rossetti's *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet of Sonnets* and *Later Life*, Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet cycle *The House of Life*, George Meredith's *Modern Love* and Augusta Webster's *Mother and Daughter* are the Victorian sonnet sequences. Hopkins curtailed his sonnets into ten and a half lines from fourteen, and thereby known for his curtal sonnets. Meredith invented sixteen lined sonnets in *Modern Love*. In *Sonnets from the Portuguese* Barrett Browning as a woman expresses boldly and unabashedly her undying love for the male addressee. The cycle consists of forty-four love poems. Rossetti's *Monna Innominata* is a sonnet sequence as a response to her brother's sonnet sequence *The House of Life*, both published in 1881. Whereas the former projects an ideal woman conceived on the paradigm of Dante Gabriel's wife Elizabeth Siddal, the latter criticizes the divine mistress of conventional sonnets for her 'scant of attractiveness'. Augusta Webster's

Mother and Daughter, an uncompleted sonnet sequence, as the title suggests is on the kaleidoscopic emotions in the relationship between mother and daughter. Meredith ponders on his failed love with Mary Ellen and disillusionment in *Modern Love*.

iv. **Verse novels:** Prose fiction flourished conspicuously during this period, and lengthy narratives, almost as long as novels, in the form of verses were also produced. These verse novels were written in simple or complex stanzas. Some examples are Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, Arthur Hugh Clough's *The Bothie of Tober-na-vuolich* and *Amors de Voyage*, Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, and Edmund C. Nugent's *Anderleigh Hall: A Novel in Verse*. Linda Hughes says that *Aurora Leigh* 'melds poetic and novelistic narrative into an innovative hybrid medium.' The poem can be read from the feminist aspect, where the heroine Aurora wills to thrive as a poetess and the hero Romney counters, negating poetry as useless. In almost eleven thousand lines in nine books the poem is like an epic. Browning's *The Ring and The Book*, in twelve books and hence in conventional epic tradition, is on a murder–trial-case. The narration is in verse obviously, the first and the last books, by the poet and the rest ten by different speakers, not the poet. *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, is a lengthy narrative poem of 1732 lines. The poem is on Philip, as he departs from his Oxford companions who are studying in the Scottish Highlands, to pursue a life filled with love and adventure.

v. **Arthurian Poetry:** The nobility, gallantry, dignity and chivalry, perceived in Medieval Arthurian Romances, appeared in some Victorian poems too. Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* (1888) is the most remarkable among the Arthurian poems; it consists of 'Enid', 'Vivien', 'Elaine' and 'Guinevere'. The following lines signify the medieval virtues that Tennyson adorns his knight with:

> To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
> To honour his own words as if God's,
> To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
> To love one's maiden only, cleave to her
> And worship her by years of noble deeds.

These values were expected to be observed in the upper-class Victorian culture. 'Guinevere' however bears anti-feminist standpoints because Guinevere is projected as an adulteress, she is upbraided by Arthur. *Mort d'Arthur* and *The Lady of Shalott* also presents the Medieval ethos. *The Lady*

'The Lady of Shallott' painted in 1888 by Pre-Raphaelite painter John William Waterhouse. It represents a scene from Alfred, Lord Tennyson's poem 'The Lady of Shallott'

Source : wikepedia

Famous painting 'Ophelia' (Drowned in Hamlet) by John Everett Millais of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.

Source : wikipedia

of Shalott presents the world of Camelot, Arthur's legendary city. The cloistered life of the lady drives home the secluded life of the Victorian women. Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult* (1852) is drawn on the twelfth century French poem of the same name. Tristram was one of the beloved knights of King Arthur. The poem weaves themes of passion, temptation, adultery and regret.

vi. **Domestic and Idyllic Poems:**

"This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division."

***Of Queen's Garden*: John Ruskin**

Victorian Period was the era that idealized homely virtues and hearth was considered to be the comfort zone pitted against the external socio-political upheavals. There was the emergence of domestic poems, praising the blisses of home, warmth of togetherness and family bonding. Felicia Hemans' *Records of Women* is a case in point. It contains a series of poems that glorify the affections of husbands and wives, parents and children, and siblings. 'Madeline: A Domestic Tale' depicts the unquestionable power of maternal love, for which the lonely daughter in exile pines. In 'The Homes of England', Hemans glorifies the peace that emanates from the 'merry homes of England', the cottages that 'are smiling over the silvery brooks and along the hamlet fanes'. In *Songs of the Affection*s, another collection of domestic poems, Felicia Hemans expresses the emigrants' longing for the 'flowering orchard trees where first our children played' and the security of the soldiers on returning homes. The poem 'King of Aragon's Lament for his Brother' poignantly brings out the impossibility of getting the substitute of fraternal love: 'There are many by my throne to stand, and to march where I lead on/ There was one to love me in the world,—my brother! Thou art gone'. Anne Bronte's poem 'Home' in *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* rings with the resonance of the narrator's desire for the home, wherein mansion and halls cannot tempt as much as home, hence 'Oh give me back my home' is the earnest appeal to God. Domestic poems were also composed by Eliza Cook who expressed attachment for household objects, as they radiated the closeness and bonding of domesticity. 'The Old Armchair' is close to the poet's heart not per se, but because her mother used to sit on it.

1.2.3 Victorian Poets

In the context of the development and perfection of the Victorian Poetry, we are immediately reminded of the contribution of the three poets: Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold. They belonged to the earlier phase of the Victorian Age, although with them were some minor poets like Arthur Clough and Coventry Patmore. In the latter phase, there was another group of poets who in their thoughts and poetic nuances differed from the earlier ones, like Thomas Hardy, G.M. Hopkins and A.C Swinburne. Ample contribution was from the women poets too, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rossetti and the Brontë sisters.

1.Early Victorian Poets

i. Alfred, Lord Tennyson : The development of Victorian poetry owes immensely to Tennyson. Landscape was a pertinent motif in his works—as a symbol rather than simply a location. He adopts external landscape to express the internal state of mind, as in the poem 'Mariana' contained in *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830) where the flower pots crusted with 'blackest moss' symbolize the despondent heart of the heroine. Another remarkable feature of Tennyson is his profuse use of the medieval legends and myths; 'The Lady of Shallot', *Idylls of the King*, 'Morte d'Arthur' are finest examples. His 'Ulysses' and 'The Lotos Eaters', both inspired by Homer's *Odyssey* strikingly describe two contradictory states of life. He is neither too optimistic like Browning nor too melancholic like Arnold, but oscillates in the middle and hence typifies Victorian compromise. While in 'Ulysses' the protagonist vigorously expresses his thirst for further adventures after returning from the war and detests to 'rust unburnished', 'The Lotos Eaters' depicts the mariners' sloth. The crisp words in the former and long-drawn monosyllables in the latter enhance the themes. The one hundred and thirty one lyrics in *In Memoriam A.H.H* (1850) project all his faiths and doubts. Written on the death of his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, *In Memoriam* ostensibly reflects the poet's deeply personal and intimate griefs, but through him the entire human race speaks. He universalized his individual sorrows over Hallam's death with the awareness of spiritual dilemmas of the epoch. The Prologue establishes the collective expression of Victorian minds' dilemmas and the urge to cherish Faith in God :

Strong Son of God, Immortal Love
Whom we have not seen they face,

By faith, and faith alone embrace,

Believing where we cannot prove;

In spite of universalizing his grief and transcending death to a universal bereavement, often he cannot hide his intense personal ones: ‘That loss is common would not make/My own less bitter, rather more’. The poems are written in iambic tetrameter, with ABBA rhyme-schemed four line stanzas. The acceptance and positive Faith is promptly externalized in the much quoted lines:

I hold it true, whate’er befall;

I feel it when I sorrow most;

’Tis better to have loved and lost

Than never to have loved at all

The Princess (1847) is a blank verse narrative feminist poem wherein the protagonist Princess Ida is a young, ambitious university student. Woman’s education and her equal rights with men is thus pioneered. Although at the end, the princess becomes a wife to the fiancé who tried to reach her in every way, there is an optimistic note regarding a future equality between the sexes that the prince envisions. *Enoch Arden* is the melancholic saga of a man, who estranged from his wife and children for ten years, marooned in solitariness, returns homeland to find his wife happily married to another man. Ostensibly implying the promiscuity of women that was a scandal in Victorian world, the poem is about loss, grief and sacrifice. In 1889, *Demeter and Other Poems* were published which contains the famous short allegorical poem ‘Crossing the Bar’ that contemplates on death and the final sojourn to God’s Abode.

Alfred Tennyson, Lord was a British poet during Queen Victoria’s reign. He became the Poet Laureate in 1850.

Born: August 6, 1809, Somersby, Lincolnshire, United Kingdom

Died: October 6, 1892, Lurgashall, United Kingdom

ii. Robert Browning: The second of the trio, whose poems illustrate a robust optimism, quite unexpected in the age of despair and melancholy is Robert Browning. His literary virtuosity in projecting the intricate recesses of the speaker’s psychology, give his works the colour and fervour of modernity. *The Ring and the Book* (1868-1869), the longest work of Browning, is a verse-epic of twenty one thousand lines consisting of twelve books. The first and the last are akin to Preface and Appendix

respectively as they are spoken by the poet. The rest ten books are in the forms of dramatic monologues, spoken by nine different narrators, twice by Count Guido. The poem is on the trial of Count Phildo Hayes, who is accused of murdering his wife. *Men and Women* was published that contains fifty one dramatic monologues like 'Evelyn Hope', 'A Woman's Last Word', 'Fra Lippo Lippi', 'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came', 'Two in the Campagna', 'The Last Ride Together' and 'Andrea del Sarto'. He brought dramatic monologue to perfection in this collection. A single emotion is crystallized into a choice situation, every side and feature of a drama are present from one side view, all the climax and catastrophe and denouement in a few lines and from the mouth of a single speaker—all are done with absolute perfection. 'The Last Ride Together' is a love poem in which the rejected lover proposes the beloved to have a ride together for the last time. His robust optimism is echoed in the lover's expression of happiness and fulfillment that his last wish of the togetherness on horse ride has been materialized:

What if we still ride on, we two?
With life forever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity—

'Andrea del Sarto' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi' are both inspired by Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. *Dramatic Lyrics* published in 1842, contains poems like 'Porphyria's Lover' (a striking depiction of the macabre and the human psychology), 'My Last Duchess' and 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin'. *Dramatis Personae*, published in 1864, the situations imaged are rather more suggestive than explicit. Three of the dramatic monologues here are in blank verse, others are in varied lyric measures.

Robert Browning was an English poet and playwright responsible for the blossoming of dramatic monoogues. He married Elizabeth Barrett.

Born: May 7, 1812, Camberwell, United Kingdom

Died: December 12, 1889, Venice, Italy

iii. Matthew Arnold: Matthew Arnold is another representative of Victorian Poetry, whose poems reverberate the Victorian melancholy—'the eternal note of sadness'. With the belief that, in poetry, 'our race, as times go on, will find an even surer and surer stay', he adopted poetry as the channel of Victorian dilemma that was the result of clash between Religious Faith and Darwinism, traditional morals and

dynamic industrialism. Arnold meticulously delineates this state in 'The Scholar Gipsy':

> For what wears out the life of mortal men?
> 'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
> 'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,

Another elegy *Thyrsis* reverberates with the nostalgia for the times spent with the poet Arthur Clough, and the lamentation on his death. The poems in *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* (1949) are noted for their vivid descriptive passages. Arnold's poems are characterized by the presence of profound melancholy, strong lyrical qualities and deep contemplation. In 'Dover Beach' contained in *New Poems* (1867), the speaker expresses the melancholy and dejection over the crisis of Faith—that Faith which once like 'the folds of a bright girdle furled' has now receded. He valorizes human love as the only anchorage, that can provide stability to the unrest souls, and hence the calm, earnest appeal to the wife, instead of a passionate one: 'Ah Love, let us be true/ To one another.' Arnold has written quite a few dramatic poems—*Empedocles on Etna* (1852) alluding to the life of the Greek philosopher Empedocles is an instance. Tristan and Iseult (1852) is tragic and romantic .

Matthew Arnold was an English poet and cultural critic, who acutely brought out the Victorian zeitgeist.

Born: December 24, 1822, Laleham, United Kingdom

Died: April 15, 1888, Liverpool, United Kingdom

iv. Coventry Patmore: Famous for his *The Angel in the House* that contemplates on marital bliss and an ideal wife, Coventry Patmore was a close associate of the Pre-Raphaelites, and being associated with them he contributed the poem 'The Seasons' to *The Germ*. *The Angel in the House*, tracing on the courtship and marriage of fictional Felix and Honoraria, is on the poet's wife Emily. Interspersed among his sequence *The Unknown Eros* (1877) Patmore wrote a number of poems after the death of his wife, many addressed to her. The first installment, the most commonly known part of *The Angel in the House* which was also more popular in its own time than the second part, takes the form of two sections (or "books")— "The Betrothal" and "The Espousals." Similarly, the second installment of *The Angel in the House*, commonly referred to by critics as The Victories of Love, was also written in two separate sections — "Faithful Forever" and "The Victories of Love." These two

separate installments published at different dates and different points in Patmore's life are essentially two different poems.

Coventry Kersey Dighton Patmore was a Victorian English poet and critic.
Born: July 23, 1823, Woodford, London, United Kingdom
Died: November 26, 1896, Lymington, United Kingdom

v. **Arthur Clough**: Arthur Clough has established his identity as the author of the verse novel *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* (a solemn religious apologia in casual hexameters). In 1849 Clough went to Rome and was a witness to the defence of the Roman Republic by Garibaldi and Mazzini and the result was the semi-autobiographical verse-novel *Amours de Voyage*.. He stands in profound doubt which is inscribed on its title page: II doutait de tout, même de l'amour'. *Dipsychus*, called a 'little Victorian Faust' was an unfinished poem written in Venice. The spirit with whom Dipsychus talks is not a Marlovian 'fallen and hateful fiend' but his own worldly common sense. In the end he submits to the standards of the world, his moral strength slackened and he regrets the departure from his ideals.

Arthur Clough was an English poet and educationalist. He was a close friend to Arnold.
Born: January 1, 1819, Liverpool, United Kingdom
Died: November 13, 1861, Florence, Italy

2. Late Victorian Poets

If early Victorian poetry was enriched in the hands of Tennyson, Browning and Arnold; the late Victorian poetry nevertheless brought out the tenets of Victorianism. The most notable among these poets were Thomas Hardy, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne.

i. Thomas Hardy: Thomas Hardy published about eight volumes of short poems. His *Wessex Poems* (1898) present the dichotomy between ancient rustic traditions and modern urban developments. With unrelenting irony, these poems question the cosmic order of things—expressing the pain and despair of trying to assert the value of human life. Set against Dorset as the backdrop, the poems project a bleak nature. His 'The Darkling Thrush' , contained in *Poems of the Past and the Present* (1901) begins with the typical note of Victorian despair and melancholy, perfected by a dreary landscape of 'spectre-gray' 'frost', 'winter's dregs', 'strings of

broken lyres' but ends with an optimistic note. He wrote a number of war poems, relating to the Boer Wars and anticipating the cataclysmic World War I, like 'Drummer Hodge', 'In Times of Breaking of Nations' and 'The Man He Killed'. *Time's Laughing Stocks* (1909) is another volume that exhibit Hardyesque philosophy. The elegiac poems of the period 1912-1913 published in *Satires of Circumstances, Lyrics and Reveries* (1914) celebrate the memory of Hardy's first wife Emma. His Emma poems are 'the finest and the strangest celebrations of the dead in English poetry'.

Thomas Hardy was an English novelist and poet. He brilliantly brings out Aristotelian tragedy in his novels. In spite of the destructive Immanent Will, he yet hints at the beauty of human life.

Born: June 2, 1840, Stinsford, United Kingdom

Died: January 11, 1928, Dorchester, Dorset, United Kingdom

ii. Gerard Manley Hopkins: Hopkins invented 'curtal sonnet' and 'sprung rhythm'. A brilliant instance of curtal sonnet with sprung rhythm is 'Pied Beauty'. Curtal sonnet consists of ten and a half lines. Sprung rhythm replaces a system of regular syllabic feet with a system of stresses governing irregular unstressed syllabic patterns. Being like the natural speech, sprung rhythm has a musical effect on the auditory sense of the readers. He invented 'inscape' (unified complex of characteristics which gives each object its uniqueness and distinguish it from other likely objects) and 'instress' (the unseen Force or Energy that holds the inscape together). The following lines from 'Pied Beauty' best explain the inscape and instress:

> All things counter, original, spare, strange;
> Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
> With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
> He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change

The multivariegated things on earth that are continually in a state of flux constitute inscape, but God Himself is Unchangeable and Eternal and hence He is instress. Hopkins' major single poem is *The Wreck of Deutschland* (1876), on the drowning of some nuns due to a disaster at sea. 'The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord', 'Caged Skylark', 'Carrion Comfort' and 'God's Grandeur' are some of the poems that express Hopkins' rejection of despair and the continuity in believing in

God's Grace. His God is One who resolves all contradictions and is the Creator who draws all the strands of Creation back to Himself.

Gerard Manley Hopkins was an English poet, Roman Catholic convert, and a Jesuit priest, whose posthumous fame established him among the leading Victorian poets.

Born: July 28, 1844, Stratford, London, United Kingdom

Died: June 8, 1889, Dublin, Republic of Ireland

iii. Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909): The Pre Raphaelite Brotherhood member, A.C. Swinburne's long verse play *Atalanta in Calydon* (1865) is an attack on religion, in the form of Greek tragedy and the language of the Old Testament. The rich imagery with which he adorns the description of spring is reminiscent of Romantic poetry:

> 'The faint fresh flame of the young year flushes
> From leaf to flower and flower to fruit;
> And fruit and leaf are as gold and fire,
> And the oat is heard above the lyre.'

Poems and Ballads (1866) and *Poems and Ballads* second series (1878) produced a sense of sensuality that is both a moral and spiritual challenge to the ethos of the period. His rebellion against the established codes is reflected in his anti-Christian stance, and that baffled many Victorians. His love poems, instead of celebrating the nature of love, rather explore the pains. *A Forsaken Garden* (1878) is a case in point, where he says, 'in the lips that whispered, the eyes that had lightened/Love was dead'. *Songs before Sunrise* (1871), almost a continuation of his long poem 'A Song of Italy' is on Italian unification. One can delineate an eternal youth in Swinburne—in his paganic rebellion and his eloquence on overthrow of established governments.

A.C. Swinburne was an English poet, playwright, and critic. He was a member of the Pre Raphaelite

Born: April 5, 1837, London, United Kingdom

Died: April 10, 1909, London, United Kingdom

iv. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The pioneer of the Pre-Raphaelite Movement formed in 1848, Dante Gabriel Rossetti was rather famous for *The Blessed Damozel*, which was both a poem and a painting. In 1850 Rossetti and his Pre Raphaelite colleagues initiated a little periodical, their in-house journal *The Germ*, as a medium

for proclamation of their doctrines and a vehicle for their poems. His poetic agility is reflected in his adoption of sensuous imagery. *The Blessed Damozel* is a case in point:

The Blessed Damozel

Her eyes were deeper than the depth
Of waters stilled at even,
She had three lilies in her hand,
And the stars in her hair were seven.

The simplicity and the spiritual quality that permeates in the portrayal of the 'blessed damozel' pertain to the qualities of the Pre Raphaelite ideals. His love for his wife Elizabeth Siddal, who died an early death, has also been immortalized in *The House of Life*, a collection of one hundred and sonnets. In 1881, he published *Ballads and Sonnets*, a remarkable volume of poems which contained 'The Confession' modeled after Browning, 'The Ballad of Sister Helen' founded on medieval superstition, 'The King's Tragedy', a masterpiece of dramatic poem and many others.

D.G. Rossetti was an English poet painter. He founded the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood in 1848.

Born: May 12, 1828, London, United Kingdom

Died: April 9, 1882, Birchington-on-Sea, United Kingdom

3. Women Poets

Till now we have discussed on the male poets and their laudable contribution to the Victorian Poetry, we are now going to talk about some women poets whose contribution was nevertheless as enriching as their male counterparts. The position of women was repressive, she was expected to be an 'angel in the house' and nurture feminine qualities. Yet there were female poets like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Christina Rossetti and Amy Levy whose poems gave expressions to the female identity, experience and their struggle to carve a niche of their own.

i. Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Elizabeth Barrett wrote her Homeric epic *The Battle of Marathon: a Poem* at the age of fourteen. It is because of this zeal for Greek literature that she translated Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* in 1850. Her first renowned work was *The Seraphim and Other Poems* published in 1838. Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*, a novel in verse, bears conspicuously the poetess' self-inscription. The heroine Aurora is a young, ambitious poetess who confronts convincingly to the social reformer and her cousin Romney Leigh that poetry can change the world. While the patriarch Romney stands for Utilitarianism, Aurora symbolizes artistry. The poem ends in its ninth book, with a union between the hero and the heroine, symbolizing that life is a harmony of both. In *The Cry of Children* she protests against the employment of children in factories. Her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* succinctly bring out, in a compilation of forty four sonnets, the assertive, candid love of a daring woman for her beloved. The sonnets therefore are the externalization and immortalization of her passionate romance with Robert Browning. Sonnet 43 pithily brings out the fierce love of a woman's heart, quite unconventional because of the candidness:

I love thee freely, as men strive for right,
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise,
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood Faith;

Her *Casa Guidi Windows* (1851) is a combination of poetry and politics. *Poems before Congress* (1860) and *Last Poems* published posthumously were her last poems.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning was an English woman poet of the Victorian era. She married the poet Robert Browning after a long courtship.
Born: March 6, 1806, Kelloe, United Kingdom
Died: June 29, 1861, Florence, Italy

ii. Brontë sisters: Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë, known for their prose fiction, also wrote poems that were compiled in *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. The poems by Currer (Charlotte) are 'Pilate's Wife's Dream', 'Mementos', The Wife's Will', 'Frances', 'Life', 'Gilbert', 'Evening Solace', 'Stanzas', 'Apostasy' and so on. Ellis (Emily) wrote poems like 'The Lady to her Guitar', 'The Two Children', 'Last Words', 'Old Stoic', 'My Comforter', 'Encouragement' and 'Warning

and Reply'. Acton's (Anne) poems like 'Despondency', 'Confidence', 'The Narrow Way', 'Lines Written from Home', and 'Domestic Peace' are contained in this volume too. In 'Pilate's Wife's Dream', the speaker is a woman whose feminine predicament has been subtly expressed in the dichotomy between despair and hope. 'Mementos' describes the hopelessness of a woman writer, whose plethora of 'mementos of past pain and pleasure' expressed in 'relics old' are becoming antique and 'mossing over'. 'The Wife's Will' expresses the loyalty and longing of a woman to be with her lover. In 'The Lady to her Guitar' manifests the nostalgia of a broken hearted woman whose memories are replenished with the tune of her 'old Guitar'. The poems like 'Sympathy' and 'Plead for Me' dwells on a solitariness and love for that. Anne's poems also glisten with gloom and despondency, but finally a dream for distant freedom triumphs.

Charlotte, Emily and Anne were the three Brontë sisters who wrote novels and poems. Their novels bring out the position of women in the Victorian society.

Charlotte Brontë—1816-1855, Emily Brontë—1818-1848, Anne Bronte—1820-1849

iii. Amy Levy: With one of her seniors, Vernon Lee, another poetess, Amy Levy composed poems on Sapphic love, which tags her as the 'New Woman' poet discussing on unconventional themes like homoeroticism. The poem 'To Vernon Lee' brings out the affection between Levy and Lee in sensual imagery. .*Xantippe and Other Verses* (1881) was however a much popular collection by Amy Levy. The nominating poem 'Xantippe' is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The speaker Xantippe is an old woman, voicing her angst that her husband rather treated her as one expected to serve 'maiden labour' instead of intellectual companionship while her 'high thoughts', her 'golden dreams' and soul 'yearned for knowledge'. Levy's other notable feminist poems include *Magdalen* (1884) and *A Ballad of Religion and Marriage* (1888). The former is a bitter dramatic monologue spoken by a 'fallen' woman who is dying in a religious penitentiary where she redeems her earlier conduct. The latter poem contests the traditional division into 'married' and 'odd' women. With the choric repetition on marriage as a way of God, there is the implicit grievance of the Victorian woman fatally trapped in incompatible marriage. *A Minor Poet and Other Verses* (1884) contains dramatic monologues and lyric poems. 'A Minor Poet' perceptibly bears Amy's self-inscription, she is a 'poet crawling between

earth and heaven', her lack of popularity is the victim of gender politics: 'Queen Luck, that rules the world befriend me now/And freely I'll forgive you many wrongs'. Tom Leigh is perhaps a fictitious male-poet, whose masculinity made his poems famous, even if he wrote 'a blot, a blur, a note'.

Amy Levy was a Victorian Jewish poet who was educated as the only Jewish woman in Newnham College, Cambridge.

Born: November 10, 1861, London, United Kingdom

Died: September 10, 1889, London, United Kingdom

iv. Christina Rossetti: Another Pre-Raphaelite poet and sister to D.G. Rossetti, Christina Rossetti is best known for her feminist poem *Goblin Market*. Being a woman, she was not included within the group Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, though she contributed to *The Germ*. *Goblin Market* paints the potential force of sisterhood, wherein a sister can risk herself to recuperate a pining sister. Gender politics in the Victorian market economy, commodification of female body, female sexuality, temptation and fall and recuperation with the love of a sister give the poem a feminist and Biblical touch. Lizzie is the emblem of the 'New Woman' who carries a silver to the market to buy fruits that would save her sister Laura. In spite of being harassed and bulldozed by the goblin men for her daring, which is but a symbol of molestation; Lizzie at the end is married and becomes a mother:

> Days, weeks, months, years.
> Afterwards, when both were wives,
> With children of their own;…

Christina Rossetti's sonnet sequence *Monna Innominata: A Sonnet on Sonnets and Other Life* counters her brother Dante Gabriel's *The House of Life* in challenging the image of a woman that patriarchy constructs. Rossetti employs a more empowered speaker who idealizes her beloved instead of being idealized by him as traditional sonnets do. Her *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems* (1866) contains poems like 'The Prince's Progress', 'Maiden Song', 'Spring Quiet', 'A Portrait', 'The Poor Ghost', 'Dream Love', 'Songs in a Cornfield', 'Light Love' and devotional poems like 'Long Barren', 'If Only', 'Despised and Rejected', 'Weary in Well Doing' and so on. Her devotional poems speak of her Faith in God, who has born a 'crown of thorn' for her, that triumphs over the pervading pessimism. Nevertheless, her poetry has been described as "Pre-Raphaelite" in its rich and precise natural detail, its use

of symbol, its poignancy, and its deliberate medievalism. You will be reading two of her short lyrics in Module 4, Unit 3.

Christina Georgina Rossetti was an English poet who wrote a variety of romantic, devotional, and children's poems.

Born: December 5, 1830, London, United Kingdom

Died: December 29, 1894, Torrington Square, London, United Kingdom

1.2.4 Summing Up

Now, let us sum up briefly what we have discussed so that you can get a quick idea of the Victorian Poetry.

- The poetry is characterized by a sense of nostalgia, Victorian dilemma, melancholy and paradox that resulted from the radical socio-economic and cultural change that advancement in science and Industrial Revolution brought along.
- Yet there was the conspicuity of hope and optimism in many poets, especially Browning. Interest in Medievalism and the legends and myths were noticed, Arthurian poems are evidences to that.
- Some other types of poetry that were predominant were dramatic monologues, verse novels, domestic poems and pastoral elegies. Tennyson brings out the Victorian compromise, the Medievalism patterned with Victorian morals, and he subtly makes his personal grief a public sorrow.
- Browning is marked for projecting the intricate psychology and robust optimism in his dramatic monologues, while Arnold expresses Victorian melancholy.
- The latter poets like Hardy, Hopkins, Rossetti and Swinburne exhibit their philosophy, spiritual devotion and their skill of using sensory images.
- The women poets masterfully depict the female experiences, identity and situation in a patriarchal society.

1.2.5 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions-20 marks**

a) Does Victorian Poetry essentially bring out the sense of zeitgeist?

b) Do the works of the late Victorian poets anticipate the Modernism?

c) How is the female identity manifested in the women's poetry?

d) How do Tennyson and Browning, in diverse ways, manifest their times?

- **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

a) Write a note on dramatic monologue as a poetic genre.

b) Write a note on the style of Swinburne. How does he advocate Aestheticism?

c) How is *In Memoriam* a reflection of the Victorian spirit?

d) Write a note on the Hardyesque thoughts as reflected in his poetry?

e) Write a note on awakening of Medievalist ethos in the Victorian Age?

- **Short Questions-6 marks**

a) Why is *Sonnets from the Portuguese* named so?

b) What is the narrative technique of *The Ring and the Book*?

c) On whose death is *Thyrsis* written? To which poetic genre does it belong?

d) What does Hopkins mean by instress and inscape?

1.2.6 Suggested Reading

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11. www.victorianweb.org

Unit-3 ❑ Victorian Prose: Fictional and Non-Fictional

Structure:

1.3.0 Introduction

The aims and objectives of this unit are to acquaint you with the trends and tendencies of English prose during the Victorian period, which embraces both fiction and non-fiction. The fictional prose consists of such literary types as novel and short story, while the non-fictional prose includes the essays— popular and social, critical and literary. The unit will also inform you about the novelists and essayists, who have enriched the literary realm with their imaginary texts and/or critiques.

1.3.1 Victorian Fictional Prose

The rapid growth of Victorian fiction owes to different factors—social, cultural and literary. In most of the cases the major Victorian novelists intended to satisfy the ethical and aesthetic demands of the contemporary middle classes. The middle class preference for prose fiction as the source of diversion and edification was also determined by various journals and literary magazines who patronized the serial publications of novels on a regular basis to increase their sale and circulation among

the educated section of middle classes. We may classify the Victorian novelists in two groups- **the early Victorian novelists, the late Victorian novelists** and the **women novelists.** These include the social novelists, the novelists devoting themselves to the writing of historical novels and romances, and lastly, those who combined in their works the spirit of social realism with that of psychological realism.

a. Early Victorian Novelists

i. Charles Dickens (1812-1870)

Any critical account of Victorian prose fiction should appropriately begin with Charles Dickens. Born in a lower middle class family, living in London, Dickens spent his early life in the midst of economic hardship. His father, John Dickens was a government clerk and was extremely extravagant in his habits. He was imprisoned for debt in the Marshal Sea (the debtors' prison). It was a shocking experience for young Dickens. Incidentally, the image of prison house, directly or indirectly, recurs in his different novels. Dickens began his writing career as a journalist, and all his novels were serially published in periodicals, especially in two edited by himself- *Household Words* which started in 1850 and *All the Year Round* which started in 1859, both of them being weeklies.

Dickens' long and eventful career as a novelist, according to Edmund Wilson, may be divided in three phases. The first phase begins with *Pickwick Papers* (1837) followed by *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge* (both in 1841) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844).In the second phase, he wrote two novels *Dombey and Son* (1848) and *David Copperfield* (1850), considered to be one of the best known novels of Dickens, largely autobiographical in its content.In the third and final phase Dickens wrote his mature novels, enriched with symbols and symbolic meanings, thematic ideas and sociological imagination. In *Bleak House* (1852), Dickens employs fog as a natural and sociological symbol. Everything in the state of England is affected by a foggy confusion- whether it is law or legal procedure, politics, the reformist tendency. In the next novel *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens exposes the basic limitations of utilitarianism and industrial capitalism. In *Little Dorrit* (1857) Dickens criticizes the red-tapism of English bureaucracy under the disguised title of Circumlocution Office. The next novel *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) shows Dickens attempting to re-create the tense political atmosphere of the Revolution of 1789 against the backdrop of personal relationships of love and friendship among its major characters. Dickens,

however, went back to the social themes and problems both in *Great Expectations* (1861) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). According to the Dickens- critics *Great Expectations* is perhaps the best ever novel written by Dickens. The story of Pip and Estella, the complex relationship between them is situated against a large panorama of mid- Victorian society, mainly dominated by the spirit of cash-nexus, moral confusion and dilemma.

Dickens's entire career as a novelist traces his gradual progress from the simple and straightforward to the complex and the subtle. The evolution in his fictional art shows how in his later novels he fuses together the essence of social realism with that of psychological realism. You will be better acquainted with Dickens and his novelistic style and features in the Module 3 Unit 1 where we take up *David Copperfield*, his autobiographical novel, in detail.

i. William Makepeace Thackeray(1811-1863)

The name Charles Dickens is frequently coupled with that of William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) just as in earlier ages of English literature the names Caedmon and Cynewolf, Chaucer and Langford, Spenser and Sidney, Marlowe and Shakespeare, Dryden and Poepe, Richardson and Fielding, Wordsworth and Coleridge, Shelley and Keats are cited for the sake of comparison and contrast.

Thackeray's writings include satiric humorous studies of London manners, i.e. *The Yellowplush Correspondence* (1837- 1838), the memoirs and diary of a young cockney footman written in his own vocabulary and style; *Major Gahagan* (1838–39), a fantasy of soldiering in India; *Catherine* (1839–40), a burlesque of the popular "Newgate novels" of romanticized crime and low life and so on. The parodies and satirical writing laid the foundation of his later career as a novelist, since in his works of prose fiction he showed his fondness for ironical and satirical presentation of characters and situations with the definite strain of humour and parody.

His first major novel is *Vanity Fair* (1848), followed by *Pendennis* (1850), *The Newcomes* (1853-55), *The Virginians* (1859) and *Esmond* (1852). It is in *Vanity Fair* that Thackeray reaches the maturity of his literary art and the critics consider that it expresses the strong social consciousness of the writer. The narrative of *Vanity Fair* gives an unusual perspective of the Napoleonic Wars covers historically a long stretch of time beginning with the Battle of Waterloo (1815) and ending with the enactment of the First Reform Bill (1832). The source of the main title is directly taken from Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, while the sub- title "A novel without

a hero" primarily draws the attention of the readers to Becky Sharp, the central protagonist who appears to be constantly throwing a challenge to the long- cherished social and moral values of a male-dominated society, mainly governed by the spirit of cash-nexus, and social snobbery. *Pendennis* traces the career of Arthur Pendennis: his first love affair, his experiences at "Oxbridge University," his employment as a London journalist, and so on. *The Newcomes*, ostensibly tracing the lives of Colonel Newcome and his generations, focuses on marriage for the sake of money. Capitalism and Methodism have been dealt with. *The Virginians* tells the story of Henry Esmond and his two grandsons and, with the temporal reference being the American war of Independence and circumstances of lives centering it.

ii. Anthony Trollope (1815-1882)

Trollope was mainly famous for his novels on the ecclesiastical life, commonly identified as the Barsetshire novels. The series contain *The Warden*(1855), *Barchester Towers* (1857), *Dr. Thorne* (1858), *Framely Parsonage* (1864), *The Smell House at Allington* (1864) and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* (1867). *The Barchester Towers* basically mocks at the intense antipathy in between High Church and Evangelical supporters. *Dr. Thorne* is a significant inspection of the relationship between money and morality and also considers illegitimacy as a factor for marriage. Trollope's novels offer considerable insight into the 'progress' of society in Victorian England. His plots contain all the manifold contrivances and complications which have come to be seen as typical of the Victorian novel: inheritance, intrigues, scheming and manipulating, property and propriety.

iii. Wilkie Collins (1824-1889)

Wilkie Collins is considered to be the first ever detective novelist in English. In fact, the atmosphere of mystery and suspense prevailing in his novels *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868) indirectly influenced Dickens in the depiction of underworld figures in his novels, both early and late. Wilkie Collins's mastery rested mainly over plot- construction. Generally, typified as the 'sensation novelists', particularly in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary***,** *A Message from the Sea***,** *No Thoroughfare*, *No Name* and *Armadale*, Collins in these works, succeeded in the presentation of the marginalized figure of the Victorian others.

In the next part of the discussion about early Victorian novelists let us focus our attention on the social novelists of the Victorian period. **The social novel** as a distinctive fictional genre emerged and developed in the Victorian periods, propelled

and inspired by several factors. There were the rapid industrialization of the society, the growth of industrial capitalism, the divide of the country into the industrial south and the agrarian north, the spread of utilitarianism as an economic force, and the emergence of young England movement in imitation of Young France and categorize the social novelists of the period, since the contemporary English society with all its variegated problems was taken up for their fictional rendering almost by all the Victorian novelists.

iv. Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

Disraeli, a social novelist like Dickens, wrote more than one hundred novels. ***Coningsby*** (1844), ***Sybil*** (1845) and ***Tancred*** (1847) make his 'Young England Trilogy'. The themes of these novels are supported and sustained by some political agenda, rooted in Disraeli's faith in the Young England movement as a regenerating force for an anarchical and corrupt industrial society. *Sibyl* echoes Carlyle's Past and Present in its concern for the poor, one of the two nations that the novel identified. While the abovementioned novels were thematically political, ***Lothair*** (1870) was different. Amidst the treatment of the themes of money, religion, aristocracy and patriotism, Disareli makes his protagonist Lothair searching for Christian truth.

v. Charles Kingsley (1819-1875),

Kingsley professionally a clergyman and temperamentally a reformer, is the other notable social novelist of the period. His best- known work of fiction is ***The Water Babies*** (1863) with the subtitle "A Fairy Tale of a Landbaby". Apparently, the book remains as the children's classic for the sake of the ingenuity of its fantasy, actually the exploitation of the child labour and brutalization of the poor. The novels ***Yeast*** (1848) and ***Alton Locke*** (1850) are concerned with the theme of social injustice. In his social novels Kingsley on the one hand exhibits his reformist tendency and on the other hand has attempted to fictionalize the basic principles of the movement, known as Christian socialism, led by F.D. Maurice. According to the famous French critic Caramian, the basic of the theory of Christian socialism are self- contradictory because like his great contemporary Dickens, he aims at socio economic equality to be perpetrated in the different social classes simply on the basis of the change of heart.

Among the social novelists of Early Victorian England was also Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, about whom you will learn later in this Unit, under the sub-section 'Women

Novelists'. The social novelists of the Victorian period succeeded in situating the contemporary fiction against some specific social contexts and problems. The delineation of the problems is almost always very intense, distinguishes and characterized by the spirit of social realism, sometimes sporadically blended with the spirit of psychological realism.

b. Late Victorian Novelists

We will discuss about the late Victorian novelists— George Meredith and Thomas Hardy. In their novels we may notice the last twilight-glow of Victorianism and the early sunshine of modernism.

i. George Meredith (1828-1909)

Meredith was educated in Germany, and his writings were influenced by the Germans, especially the novelist Jean Paul Richter (1763-1825) who stimulated his concept of comedy. The ***Ordeal of Richard Feverel*** (1851) was his first novel, followed by ***Evan Harrington*** (1861) which is now regarded as one of his best. In 1862 came out his most famous volume of poems ***Modern Love.*** George Meredith was a prolific writer and the fecundity and richness of his imagination as a fiction writer in his several other publication- *Sandra Belloni* (1864), *Rhoda Fleming* (1865), *Vittoria* (1867- a sequel to Sandra), *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871), *Beauchamp's Career* (1875). *The Egoist* (1879) is one of his best known novels. The reference may also be given to other fictional works like *The Tragic Comedians* (1880), *Diana of the Crossways* (1885), the first of his novels to have wide publicity.

ii. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

In his art of writing, and in his attempt to bring out the psychological complexity in the man- woman relationship Hardy temperamentally belongs to the twentieth century. The essence of Victorianism may be perceived in his commitment to social realism. The novels he wrote may be stratified into three groups. There are for example, the novels of character and environment like *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886), *The Woodlanders*(1887), *Tess of the D'urbervilles* (1891) and *Jude the Obscure* (1896), 'romances and Fantasies' belong *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *The Trumpet- Major* (1880), *Two on a Tower* (1882), *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891), *The Well Blessed* (1897) and the novels of ingenuity *Desperate*

Remedies (1871), *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876), *A Labodicean* (1881). Hardy's poetic self has frequently converged upon his identity as a novelist, so much so that in the descriptive details of nature and the natural of the English countryside, in his novels the fictitious geographical space Wessex, Hardy appears to be more a poet than a simple narrator. In his early novels the rustic characters appear to be the embodiments of the spirit and essence of Wessex- the microcosm of the English rustic life with all its manners and mannerisms, rituals and festivals, simplicity and straightforwardness. But in his later novels like *Tess* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the rustic characters and rustic life undergo the distinctive changes due to the incoming forces of industrialization. Hardy in his later novel depicts the conflict between the old agrarian and the new industrial society.

Hardy is also called a tragic novelist. He is also mentioned as an evolutionary meliorist. Hardy's tragic vision is crystallized in the concluding lines of *Tess***,** which bring out adequately this duality in Hardy's philosophy of life:

> "Justice was done, and the President of the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) had ended his sport with Tess—The two speechless gazers bent themselves down to the earth, as if in proper, and remained thus a long time, absolutely motionless: the flag continued to wave silently. As soon as they had strength they arose, joined hands again, and went on."

He has incorporated the chances and coincidences to illustrate man's futile struggle against the impersonal forces of Destiny or Immanent Will.

Apart from Meredith and Hardy, Samuel Butler with his utopian novel *Erewhon* (1872) and satirical novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903), George Gissing with his naturalism in *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), *The Unclassed* (1884) and *The Netherworld* (1889), George Moore with his *A Modern Love* (1883) set in Bohemian artistic society too contributed versified thoughts to Victorian novel. Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) has brought diversified views and its content was an initial shock to the Victorian morality.

Activity for Learners

Learners, to know more about the topography you may consult Herman Lea's book *Thomas Hardy's Wessex*. You are also advised to read the essay on Hardy by D.H. Lawrence, 'The Study of Thomas Hardy'. Also read more about Hardy in Module 3, Unit 2.

c. Women novelists

The Victorian prose fiction was considerable enriched under the hands of the women novelists like Mrs. Gaskell, the Brontë sisters and George Eliot.

i. Mrs. Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell (1810-1865)

She was primarily a novelist and thereafter a biographer who spent her married life in the industrial town of Manchester and the memories and associations of the Manchester life left their impact on *Mary Barton* (1848) that pleaded for justice and sympathy for the industrial workers. Her next novel *Cranford* (1851-1853) was published in Dickens' periodical *Household Words.* The immediate social background of the novel is in an imaginary little town, Kinsford. Her next novel *Ruth* (1853) is based on the same place. *North and South* (1855) is another study of industrial relations, rooted in the binary appositions between the agrarian north and the industrial south of England. The novel fictionalizes the binaries of oppositions between two different cultures, social and economic status. Her best novel is, however, *Wives and Daughters* (1864-1866) is more a novel of manners than an industrial novel in its design, story-element and 'motif'.

Psychological realism got the upper hand of social realism in the novels of the women novelists of Victorian period. These novelists are the three Brontë sisters and George Eliot. The heroines in these novels established their identities as human beings, and in many occasions they protested against the conventions of the patriarchal society, constantly dominating and supporting them as individuals simply because of their gendered position. Women as social protestants emerged in their different novels, although ultimately they were made to compromise with the conventional values of Victorian patriarchy.

ii. The Brontë sisters

Emily Brontë (1818-48)'s *Wuthering Heights* (1847) has always been regarded as one of the most singular and isolated among English novels. The novel with the perceptible prance of the Gothic Fiction is its background and story elements depict the gender- relationship in the most convincing style. The social context of the novel is as complex as the human context. The novel tells the story of human relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine (Cathy), the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw, the foster-father of Heathcliff, originally an orphan of the slams of Liverpool. The lovers in their relationship are sometimes violently passionate, sometimes moderately romantic,

but never indifferent to each other. The class- consciousness of the Victorian bourgeoisie is presented in the relationship between the members of the Earnshaw family and the social marginals, represented by the young Heathcliff. *Wuthering Heights* is further remarkable for its nature background. Heath itself is as stormy and violent as the human passion. Emily Bronte's attempt to synchromise between man and nature anticipates Hardy's and D.H. Lawrence's treatment of nature. The narrative strategy, adopted by Emily Bronte, is as innovative and experimental as any modern novel. The polyphonic voices (the multiple voices) of different characters are heard throughout the narrative. These voices have their self- entity, although at the same time they sometimes converge, and sometimes mingle with one another.

Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) wrote the following novels- *The Professor* (posthumous publication in 1849), *Jane Eyre* (1847)**,** *Shirley* (1849)**,** *Villette* (1853). In *Jane Eyre*, figure of the heroine Jane Eyre, appointed a governess in the household of Mr. Rochester, a widower with the mad woman in the attic with her horrifying and shocking presence provides the ideal setting for an extraordinary love story, since the attitude of the Jane towards Mr. Rochester tentatively moves between love and hatred, sympathy and antipathy, fascination and repulsion. Written in the first person narrative technique, the novel seems to present Jane as opposing the Victorian patriarchy, but finally succumbing to the conventional values of the society. This is suggested by confident self- declaration; "Reader, I married him."

Anne Brontë (1820-1849) was at once a novelist and a poet. Under the pseudonym of Aston Bell she contributed to the volumes of poems by all three sisters. Her two novels are *Agnes Grey* (1847) and *The Tenant of the Wildfell Hall* which are the books of some distinction, but they are not on the same level of importance as the works of her two sisters.

iii. George Eliot (1819- 1880)

Mary Ann Evans' (who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot) novels began with *Scenes of Clerical Life* followed by *Adam Bede* (1850)**,** *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), *Silas Marner* (1861), *Romola* (1862-63), *Felix Holt* (1866), *Middlemarch* (1871-72), and *Daniel Deronda* (1876). As the delineator of the English countryside life, she may be compared to Hardy because like the later, she presents the country life with details. She idealizes some of the countryside figures. For example, Silas Marner, Adam Bede, Stephen Guest in *The Mill on the Floss* are the idealized portraits of English countryside persons who represent the simplicity and moral

integrity, supposed to be the adorable human qualities, at least, to the novel reading people mostly belonging to the Victorian middle class. The heroines in her novels are, however much superior to their male counterparts, whether she be Dinah Morris, a Methodist preacher in *Adam Bede*, Romola, and Dorothea in Middlemarch. These heroines have in common one basic characteristic quality- steadfastness, supported by intense moral earnestness. George Eliot's modernism in the embryonic form may be perceived in her attempt to blend together the essence of social realism with that of psychological realism, to depict the man-woman relationship more frankly while the strain of Victorianism lies in her final appreciation of sobriety and seriousness not only in human relationship but also in the man- society equation.

Margaret Oliphant's series *Chronicles of Carling-ford* (1863-76) and *Stories of the Seen and the Unseen* (1880), Elizabeth Braddon's sensational novels *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *Aurora Floyd* (1863) and Eliza Lynn Linton's anti-feminist journal *The Girl of the Period* (1883) gave different dimensions to Victorian Prose fiction.

The woman novelists of the Victorian period, because of the intrinsic qualities in their writings, have found a permanent place in any critical account of Victorian fiction. In their novels they have simultaneously focused their attention on the social and sociological aspects and attempted to probe psychologically the complexities of the characters, the men and women they have created.

1.3.2. Victorian Non-Fictional Prose

The world of fiction being introduced to you, you will now be given a foray into the factual writings of the Victorian period. The Victorian non- fictional prose is a rich sequel to the earlier traditions—the English prose that began with Sidney's 'An Apology of Poetry' and continued through eighteenth century essays and diaries till the criticisms and critiques of the Romantics like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, although it has the distinctiveness of its own. You should also keep it in mind that the non- fictional prose of the Victorian period is to be situated against a specific social, economic and cultural background. In the previous units, you have already been acquainted to the Victorian social setting, and hence have an idea of the zeitgeist of the Victorian non fictional prose The age, as it has already been stated, was an age of various social and philosophical movements which conditioned the Victorian mood and temper.

We may now concentrate on the major non- fictional prose writings of the period, whose writings are also distinguished as “sage writings”, and accordingly, the writers are addressed as sage writers. Sage writing emerged in the early Victorian period as a distinctive form of non fictional prose. This kind of writing confronted the new and difficult problems, posed by modern, industrial urban life and proposed solutions to these problems with the help of specific modes of action or more general philosophical principles. John Holloway, the literary historian, gave the name “sage writing” to this body of Victorian Literature. In this connection it may be said that the wide- spread popularity of sage writing during the Victorian period was due to the dramatic increase in nineteenth- century periodicals and newspapers like *The Edinburgh Reviews,* the *Quarterly Reviews, Fraser’s Magazine, Blackwoods Magazine* and similar such publications.

a. Major Victorian essayists

The most meaningful contributions to the storehouse of sage writing are made by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Matthew Arnold (1822-1888),.

i. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881)

He was a Scottish essayist, historian and philosopher. In his writings he is found to be highly and intensely critical of the intellectual and spiritual mediocrity of his time. He is no less critical of the self- contentment with material prosperity, moral lassitude, the surrender to scientific skepticism and analytic reasoning. In fact, in his non- fictional prose writings he speaks against the dilettantism of his contemporaries. Carlyle had his own original idea about history which he looked upon as the storehouse of examples, provided by some great men, designated as ‘heroes’ by him. He made his clear unambiguous in *On Heroes, Heroworship and the Heroic in History* (1841). The list of ‘heroes’ includes in itself Mahomet, Napoleon, Dante, Shakespeare, Luther and others under the categories of the heroes as ‘divinity’, ‘prophet’, ‘poet’, ‘priest’, ‘man of letters’ and ‘king’. The book was preceded by *French Revolution* (1837) and succeeded by other historical works like *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters and Speeches* (1845), *Frederick II of Prussia* (1858- 65). In *Past and Present* (1843) he reconstructed the life of a medieval abbott to contrast his vigour with the mediocrity of 19th century middle- class rulers. With the ascetic attitude of a sage he denounced the monetary greed, defined by him as ‘Mammonism’ the materialist tendency of the contemporary middle class. Like Matthew Arnold, he

had the belief that the members of the middle class, to a great extent, are responsible for the spiritual degradation of his age. *Chartism* (1839), expresses the writer's sympathy for the poor and the industrial class in England and dwells on the 'Condition of England Question'. Carlyle's own personality was strong and individualistic; this, combined with his own intention of contracting the abstract intellectual thought of writers like Bentham, caused him to write in a prose which is eccentric, passionate and oratorical. The following excerpt from *Past and Present* may give you some idea about the distinctive features of Carlyle's prose style:

> But it is my firm conviction that the "Hell of England" will cease to be that of "not making money"; that we shall get a nobler Hell and nobler Heaven! I anticipate light in the Human Chaos, glimmering, shining more and more; under manifold true signals from without that light shall shine. Out deity no longer being Mammon,- O Heaven, each man will then say to himself: "why such deadly haste to make money? I shall not go to Hell, even if I do not make money! There is another Hell. I am told! (**Past and Present** Book 4, chap. 4).

ii. John Ruskin (1819-1900)

Ruskin began his career as an art critic and in that connection he pointed out the relationship of proximity between art and society. He had the conviction that great art is moral, and the working men of industrial England were spiritually impoverished. As a writer on the aesthetics of painting, he had great similarity with the Pre-Raphaelites because like them he had the belief that medieval writers were more free in their thoughts and expressions than the Victorians. Though a supporter of the Pre-Raphaelites, Ruskin like them did not lean towards the principle of 'art for art's sake' but towards 'art towards the spiritual health of man'. In the latter part of his life he directed his critical offence against the social philosophy of political economists, particularly John Stuart Mill, although his attacks, none of them appear to be unjustified.

Ruskin's major works include *Modern Painters* (1843- 60), *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1840) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851- 53). In the above mentioned works Ruskin mainly introduced himself as an art- critic, an aesthetic who is well familiar with the ways of Victorian paintings, specially the paintings of Turner, considered to be the greatest Victorian Painter. After 1850, Ruskin focused his attention on the problems, related to the industrial society, in *The Political Economy of Art* (1857), *The Two Paths* (1859), his best- known work, *Unto this Last* (1862),

Sesame and Lilies (1865), *Ethics of the Dust* (1866), *The Crown of Wild Olive* (1866). The literary historians consider these works as essays in criticism on the age. Of all these works *Unto this Last* deserves special mention. There are altogether four essays in political economy, published in *The Cornhill Magazine.* The publication aroused contradictory responses from the contemporaries of Ruskin. The middle-class people considered Ruskin's attack because in their opinion Ruskin had transgressed his specialized area of art criticism to attack the predominant economic theory of trading relationships. Dickens, however, was inspired by Ruskin when the principle of utilitarianism is subjected to satiric criticism in *Hard Times*. Ruskin's main argument in ***Unto this Last*** is that, what is called political economy is really 'commercial economy'. In spite of the hostility of some of Ruskin's contemporaries, his ideas have been largely accepted by later sociologists and economists. As the stylist of prose Ruskin employed two different types of style in his writings on art, and these on society. In his books on art his style is characterized by elaborate but precise and delicate eloquence, while his social gospels have more concentrated and direct fervor.

iii. Matthew Arnold (1822-1888)

Matthew Arnold, well known and celebrated headmaster of Rugby School, spent his boyhood and early youth under the strict guardianship of his father who partially succeeded in installing the liberal ideas, reformist tendency and moral earnestness in the mind of his son. The academic programmes at Rugby School acquainted him with classical literatures and languages. This helped substantially in the formation of the critical principles and social ideas in his writings as a literary critic and social philosopher. It will not be irrelevant to mention that, owing to his early training in the classics of ancient Greece and Rome, and the study of the *Bible*, in his poems too there is a graceful fusion of classicism and Romanticism to the students of English language and literature.

Arnold's major non- fictional prose works include *Essays in Criticism,* First and Second series, published respectively in 1865 and 1888; *On Translating Homer,* 1861 and *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869, "The Study of Poetry", (1880). In *Essays in Criticism*, he repeatedly shows how authors as different as Marcus Aurelius, Leo Tolstoy, Homer and Wordsworth provide the virtues he sought in his society. In *On Translating Homer* reveals Arnold's intimate reading of and passionate attachment to the literary heritage of the classical past. Arnold had the belief that the poet, being

a serious thinker, could offer guidance to his readers. It is this belief that caused him to undervalue other qualities in literature.

Arnold's best-known non-fictional prose work is *Culture and Anarchy* where he mainly introduces himself as a critic of society. Victorian middle classes were ignorant, narrow-minded and suffering from the intellectual dullness. They were addressed as "Philistines", while the aristocrats were called 'Barbarians" and the working classes a "Populace". Arnold borrows the phrase "sweetness and light" from Jonathan Swift's *The Battle of the Books* and insisted that his "Philistine" contemporaries were lacking in sweetness of temper, and enlightenment of spirit, that resulted in the moral anarchy. The sole remedy to this anarchy is the study and pursuit of perfection-the two basic attributes of culture. The forces of the two races of man are called Hebraism and Hellenism. Arnold's prose style is at once terse and vigorous, satiric and semi-bantering. The following excerpt from ***Culture and Anarchy*** may give you some idea of his prose style:

> "Our coal, thousands of people were saying, is the real basis of our rational greatness; if our coal runs short, there is an end of the greatness of England. But what is greatness?—culture marks us ask greatness is a spiritual condition worthy to excite love, interest, and admiration… Well, then, what an unsound habit of mind it must be which makes us talk of things like coal or iron as constituting the greatness of England…"
>
> ("Sweetness and Light")

iv. Charles Darwin

The epoch-making *On the Origin of Species* in 1859 was a thundering blow to the Victorian religious Faith. The doctrine of the evolution of humans and the 'natural selection' and the consequent 'survival of the fittest' in Herbert Spencer's *The Principles of Biology* had profound effects on the Victorian mind. It postponed the publication of any scientific work in the next few years.

b. Victorian Minor Essayists

Undoubtedly Carlyle, Ruskin and Arnold with their philosophical, observant and enlightened thoughts had contributed to the domain of the Victorian non fictional prose. There were some minor essayists too, like Walter Pater, John Stuart Mill and Thomas Macaulay.

i. Walter Pater (1839-1894)

Pater was a scholar, critic and an essayist at the same time. He was associated with the Pre- Raphaelite movement, since he personally believed in their idealistic worship of beauty. He exerted a potential influence on the cult of art which led to the Aesthetic Movement in the closing years of the century. His most important work was *Studies in the History* of the Renaissance, published in 1873. The book is a collection of essays on Italian painters and writers from fourteenth to sixteenth century. The conclusion to these essays is really important and interesting, in which he advocates a fusion of psychic, moral and sensuous ecstasy. Consequently, the conclusion reads like a manifesto of the Aesthetic Movement. His other works are *Imaginary Portraits* (1887), *Appreciation with an Essay in Style* (1889), *Plato and Platonism* (1893), *The Child in the House* (1894), *Greek Studies and Miscellaneous Studies* (1895).

ii. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Mill's *Utilitarianism* (1861), that is another observant thesis, is an essay written to provide support for the value of utilitarianism as a moral theory, and to respond to misconceptions about it. Mill defines utilitarianism as a theory based on the principle that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." Mill defines happiness as pleasure and the absence of pain. His *The Subjection of Women* (1869) attacks the concepts that have subjected women and considered them inferior to me.

iii. Thomas Macaulay (1800-1859)

Macaulay was a historian and political writer. His Minutes on Indian Education is a discourse on educational institutions and development. It is here that he opined for the 'downward filtration of education' in India that postulated that the institutions would educate the elie who in turn would educate the masses.

There were some biographies and autobiographies too. Anthony Trollope wrote an autobiography titled simply as *An Autobiography* (1883. Another great example of biographical writings is Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857). The reference should also be given to John Forster (1872-1876) who is merely credited as the biographer of his friend Charles Dickens- *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872-1874).

1.3.3 Summing Up

On completing the detailed discussion of the Victorian Fictional and Non fictional Prose, let us now recapitulate briefly.

- The many-sidedness of the Victorian prose fiction reflects the many sided complexity of the age itself.
- In fact, any reading and understanding of the Victorian period remains incomplete if we do not try to realize the age vis- a- vis the Victorian fiction.
- The early novelists like Dickens, Thackeray and Disraeli's works manifest social concerns,
- The later novelists like Meredith and Hardy penetrate into complex human relationships and dwell on psychological realism, the latter with a tragic vision,
- While the women novelists' work portray psychological intricacies of the women.
- A brief history of the Victorian non- fictional prose reveals its range and variety, no less fascinating then its fictional counterpart.
- Carlyle, Ruskin, Arnold, Mill, Darwin and Macaulay have, with their own literary virtuosity, enriched the Victorian literature.

1.3.4 Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer type questions: 20 marks**

1. Who according to you are the two major early Victorian novelists? Write a short critical note on any of them.
2. Write an essay on the Bronte sisters.
3. Write a critical essay on either George Meredith or Thomas Hardy as novelists. Why are they considered 'modern'?
4. Assess the contributions of the following non- fictional prose writers- (a) Thomas Carlyle, (b) John Ruskin, (c) Matthew Arnold.

- **Medium length questions: 12 marks**

1. Comment on the use of chances and coincidences in Hardy's novels.

2. Write a short note on the historical novels of the Victorian period.
3. Compare and contrast Carlyle's and Arnold's prose style.
4. Comment on the distinctive features of the prose style of either Carlyle or Arnold or Ruskin**.**
5. Comment on the social critiquing with a fictional touch by Mrs. Gaskell

- **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Write short notes on the following:
   (a) Great Expectations.
   (b) Vanity Fair.
   (c) Wuthering Heights.
2. Who are the major sage writers of the Victorian period? Name the important works of anyone of them.
3. Who was addressed as "the sage of Chelsea" and why?
4. Write short notes on the following: (a) *Past and Present* (b) *Culture and Anarchy.*

1.3.5 Suggested Reading

1. Gillie, Christopher- *Longman* Companion *to English Literature.* Longman. 1986
2. Greenblatt, Stephen (ed.)-*The Norton Anthology of English Literature (vol.2).* W. Norton and co. 2006.
3. Harvey, Sir Paul (ed.). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature.* Oxford. 1983.
4. Tulks, Herbert (ed.) *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture.* Blackwell. 1999.

Module-2 : Reading Victorian Poetry

Unit-1 ❑ Alfred Lord Tennyson : a)'Ulysses' b)'Break Break Break'

Structure:

2.1.0. Introduction

In this Unit you will be introduced to the most prominent of Victorian poets, Alfred Tennyson—who later became the Poet Laureate of England in 1850. Tennyson's poetry can be seen in his treatment of and approach to Nature. Like Shelley, he presents the various aspects of Nature with a scientific accuracy and precision of detail. Influenced by the evolutionary theory, he discards the traditional idea of a benevolent and motherly Nature, and brings out her fiercer aspects as well. He also

finds Nature ‘red in tooth and claw’, and shows the cruelty perpetrated in the form of the struggle for existence. His scientific temper blunts his sensitiveness to the soothing charms of Nature. Tennyson is a true representative of his Age, who voices the various feelings, sentiments, ideals and trends as well as social and moral concerns of his Age. He cherishes the values and ideals of his Age, but he also protests against those of them that he finds to be wrong or unsuitable for people. Tennyson’s poetry contains the most faithful reflection of, and offers the best commentary on, the life, thoughts and beliefs of the Victorian Age.

2.1.1. Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Literary Life

More than any other Victorian writer, Tennyson (1809-1892) has seemed the embodiment of his age, both to his contemporaries and to modern readers. In his own day he was said to be—with Queen Victoria and Gladstone—one of the three most famous living persons, a reputation no other poet writing in English has ever had. As official poetic spokesman for the reign of Victoria, he felt called upon to celebrate a quickly changing industrial and mercantile world with which he felt little in common, for his deepest sympathies were called forth by an unaltered rural England; the conflict between what he thought of as his duty to society and his allegiance to the eternal beauty of nature seems peculiarly Victorian.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

When he was not quite eighteen his first volume of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827), was published. Alfred Tennyson wrote the major part of the volume, although it also contained poems by his two elder brothers, Frederick and Charles. It is a remarkable book for so young a poet, displaying great virtuosity of versification and the prodigality of imagery that was to mark his later works; but it is also derivative in its ideas, many of which came from his reading in his father’s library. Few copies were sold, and there were only two brief reviews, but its publication confirmed Tennyson’s determination to devote his life to poetry.

Most of Tennyson’s early education was under the direction of his father,

although he spent nearly four unhappy years at a nearby grammar school. His departure in 1827 to join his elder brothers at Trinity College, Cambridge, was due more to a desire to escape from Somersby than to a desire to undertake serious academic work. At Trinity he was living for the first time among young men of his own age who knew little of the problems that had beset him for so long; he was delighted to make new friends; he was extraordinarily handsome, intelligent, humorous, and gifted at impersonation; and soon he was at the center of an admiring group of young men interested in poetry and conversation. It was probably the happiest period of his life.

Tennyson's *In Memoriam* and Arthur Henry Hallam

Arthur Henry Hallam, (1811-1833), English essayist and poet who died before his considerable talent developed, is remembered principally as the dear friend Alfred Tennyson commemorated in his fine elegy *In Memoriam.* Hallam met Tennyson at Trinity College, Cambridge (1828), where they joined other artistically and politically progressive students in the club called The Apostles. The sudden and unexpected death of Hallam was a brutal shock to Tennyson, who took years to recover from it. *In Memoriam* remains a testament to the years of struggle to come to terms with his personal grief and the Victorian search for faith in the midst of skepticism unleashed by the theories of Evolution, to ultimately find anchorage in a renewed hope for union with his friend.

2.1.1 a) 1.The Text of 'Ulysses'

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone, on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees

Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

2.1.1. a) 2. Glossary - 'Ulysses'

1. Barren crags - it refers to the island of Ithaca which is covered with rocks that are barren as nothing can grow on them.
2. Drink life to the lees - make the most use of life
3. Rainy Hyades – Hyades is a group of stars that was held by the ancients to indicate rainy weather; therefore called rainy Hyades.
4. there gloom… seas – the sea looks dark and sombre
5. touch the Happy Isles – in Greek mythology the Happy Isles were considered to be the paradise of perpetual summer where spirits of dead heroes of the past lived.
6. Achilles – the great Greek hero of the Trojan war famous for his valour and manly beauty.
7. Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek) is a legendary figure in Tennyson's poem whose adventures were first recorded in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Tennyson draws on Homer's narrative in the poem although most critics think that his poem recalls Dante's Ulisse in Inferno. The poem is in the form of a dramatic monologue. Ulysses himself is the speaker and he seems to be addressing his mariners who were his companions in the Trojan War. His son Telemachus seems to be standing by him.

2.1.1. a) 3. Summary of the poem 'Ulysses'

Ulysses (Odysseus) declares that there is little point in his staying home "by this still hearth" with his old wife, doling out rewards and punishments for the unnamed masses who live in his kingdom.

Still speaking to himself he proclaims that he "cannot rest from travel" but feels compelled to live to the fullest and swallow every last drop of life. He has enjoyed all his experiences as a sailor who travels the seas, and he considers himself a symbol for everyone who wanders and roams the earth. His travels have exposed him to many different types of people and ways of living. They have also exposed him to the "delight of battle" while fighting the Trojan War with his men. Ulysses declares that his travels and encounters have shaped who he is: "I am a part of all that I have met," he asserts. And it is only when he is traveling that the "margin" of the globe that he has not yet traversed shrink and fade, and cease to goad him.

Ulysses declares that it is boring to stay in one place, and that to remain stationary is to rust rather than to shine; to stay in one place is to pretend that all there is to life is the simple act of breathing, whereas he knows that in fact life contains much novelty, and he longs to encounter this. His spirit yearns constantly for new experiences that will broaden his horizons; he wishes "to follow knowledge like a sinking star" and forever grow in wisdom and in learning.

Ulysses now speaks to an unidentified audience concerning his son Telemachus, who will act as his successor while the great hero resumes his travels: he says, "This is my son, mine own Telemachus, to whom I leave the scepter and the isle." He speaks highly but also patronizingly of his son's capabilities as a ruler, praising his prudence, dedication, and devotion to the gods. Telemachus will do his work of governing the island while Ulysses will do his work of traveling the seas: "He works his work, I mine."

In the final stanza, Ulysses addresses the mariners with whom he has worked, traveled, and weathered life's storms over many years. He declares that although he and they are old, they still have the potential to do something noble and honorable before "the long day wanes." He encourages them to make use of their old age because " 'tis not too late to seek a newer world." He declares that his goal is to sail onward "beyond the sunset" until his death. Perhaps, he suggests, they may even reach the "Happy Isles," or the paradise of perpetual summer described in Greek mythology where great heroes like the warrior Achilles were believed to have been taken after their deaths. Although Ulysses and his mariners are not as strong as they were in youth, they are "strong in will" and are sustained by their resolve to push onward relentlessly: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."

2.1.1. a) 4. Critical Appreciation of the poem 'Ulysses'

In this poem, written in 1833 and revised for publication in 1842, Tennyson reworks the figure of Ulysses by drawing on the ancient hero of Homer's *Odyssey* ("Ulysses" is the Roman form of the Greek "Odysseus") and the medieval hero of Dante's *Inferno.* Homer's Ulysses, as described in Scroll XI of the Odyssey, learns from a prophecy that he will take a final sea voyage after killing the suitors of his wife Penelope. The details of this sea voyage are described by Dante in Canto XXVI of the *Inferno*: Ulysses finds himself restless in Ithaca and driven by "the longing I had to gain experience of the world." Dante's Ulysses is a tragic figure who dies while sailing too far in an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Tennyson combines these

two accounts by having Ulysses make his speech shortly after returning to Ithaca and resuming his administrative responsibilities, and shortly before embarking on his final voyage.

However, this poem also concerns the poet's own personal journey, for it was composed in the first few weeks after Tennyson learned of the death of his dear college friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1833. Like *In Memoriam,* then, this poem is also an elegy for a deeply cherished friend. Ulysses, who symbolizes the grieving poet, proclaims his resolution to push onward in spite of the awareness that "death closes all" (line 51). As Tennyson himself stated, the poem expresses his own "need of going forward and braving the struggle of life" after the loss of his beloved Hallam.

The poem's final line, "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," came to serve as a motto for the poet's Victorian contemporaries: the poem's hero longs to flee the tedium of daily life "among these barren crags" (line 2) and to enter a mythical dimension "beyond the sunset, and the baths of all the western stars" (lines 60–61); as such, he was a model of individual self-assertion and the Romantic rebellion against bourgeois conformity. Thus for Tennyson's immediate audience, the figure of Ulysses held not only mythological meaning, but stood as an important contemporary cultural icon as well.

"Ulysses," like many of Tennyson's other poems, deals with the desire to reach beyond the limits of one's field of vision and the mundane details of everyday life. Ulysses is the antithesis of the mariners in "The Lotos-Eaters," who proclaim "we will no longer roam" and desire only to relax amidst the Lotos fields. In contrast, Ulysses "cannot rest from travel" and longs to roam the globe (line 6). Like the Lady of Shallot, who longs for the worldly experiences she has been denied, Ulysses hungers to explore the untraveled world.

As in all dramatic monologues, here the character of the speaker emerges almost unintentionally from his own words. Ulysses' incompetence as a ruler is evidenced by his preference for potential quests rather than his present responsibilities. He devotes a full 26 lines to his own egotistical proclamation of his zeal for the wandering life, and another 26 lines to the exhortation of his mariners to roam the seas with him. However, he offers only 11 lines of lukewarm praise to his son concerning the governance of the kingdom in his absence, and a mere two words about his "aged wife" Penelope. Thus, the speaker's own words betray his abdication of responsibility and his specificity of purpose.

Ulysses is old now in age but not in spirit. He is greatly dissatisfied with his present condition as the king of Ithaca, an island. His subjects are rugged and savage in the sense that they do not value the importance of work and justice in life. They are the people who only “hoard, and sleep, and feed and know not me.” His wife is old now and his son is young enough to take over the responsibility of his father’s kingdom and family. Ulysses has been a great explorer and has made great discoveries. Though old now his spirit yearns for new adventures abroad. He says that he has been to different places of different kinds of people and of different “manners, climates, councils, governments” and all those people have paid honour and tribute to him as a result of which his name has become a substitute for great adventurer and explorer. He has proved his exploits in the Trojan war and as an explorer he has found that the world is too large to be measured by a single life and that the more he explores the more of it remains to be discovered. He says that his spirit is indefatigable and for him old age is not the time for rest and rusting but to gain more experiences in life. He is of the opinion that life means experiences and the more one gathers them the greater in age one becomes.

He then contrasts his present life with that which has been and wishes “to shine in use”. He also says that he will not be alive for any more years and wishes that before he is laid to rest he wants to become a discoverer of new things. His spirits are very high and his ambition is to follow knowledge even beyond the seas.

He also says that in his absence his son Telemachus will be the king of Ithaca and he will try in every possible way to civilize his rugged and savage people by slow degrees and try to make them useful and good. Moreover, his son knows what his duties towards his family are and he will also properly worship his household gods. While he goes abroad his son will remain at home and perform all the duties that are expected of the head of a family. All preparations for Ulysses’s departure have been completed — the sails of his ship full of air and his mariners are prepared to sail with him to meet any and every kind of adventure that comes their way. His mariners are undaunted and have never known any fear. They have been “free hearts, free foreheads” and though as old as he himself is yet they and he are alike inspirits. Like him his mariners also believe that though death is an unfailing certainty yet before death and even in old age “some work of noble note” can be done. For they were the people who “strove with gods” in the past.

All is ready for his departure. It is the evening time, the moon is visible in the

sky and the sea seems to invite the mariners with many kinds of noise. Ulysses asks his mariners to get ready immediately for "pushing off", because his ambition is to reach the legendary

"Happy isles" where he hopes to see his great ancestor Achilles face to face. He now regrets that he and his mariners are now not in possession of that energy and vigour that were theirs in their former youthful days when they could move "earth and heaven". They have now been considerably weakened both by fate and by time. But for them there is no cessation from activity. They are all of "One equal temper of heroic hearts" and by defying both time and fate they must continue their old mission "to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield".

This poem is written as a dramatic monologue: the entire poem is spoken by a single character, whose identity is revealed through his own words. The lines are in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, which serves to impart a fluid and natural quality to Ulysses's speech. Many of the lines are enjambed, which means that a thought does not end with the line-break; the sentences often end in the middle, rather than the end, of the lines. The use of enjambment is appropriate in a poem about pushing forward "beyond the utmost bound of human thought." Finally, the poem is divided into four stanza-like sections, each of which comprises a distinct thematic unit of the poem.

Tennyson had once said, "There is more about myself in Ulysses, which was written under the effect of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end". The loss referred to in the foregoing lines is the death of his father in 1831 but the more important event for him was the death of his close and intimate friend Arthur Henry Hallam in 1933. Hallam had been Tennyson's close Cambridge friend and Tennyson was emotionally tied to him.

2.1.1.b) 1. The text of 'Break, Break, Break'

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.
O, well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O, well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!
Break, break, break
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

2.1.1.b) 2. Explanation/Analysis of the Poem - 'Break, Break, Break'

The sea is breaking on the "cold gray stones" before the speaker. He laments that he cannot give voice to his thoughts. Yes, the fisherman's boy shouts with his sister while they play, and the young sailor sings in his boat, but the speaker cannot express such joy. Other ships travel silently into port, their "haven under the hill," and this observation seems to remind him of the disappearance of someone he cared for. No longer can he feel the person's touch or hear the person's voice. Unlike the waves, which noisily "break, break, break" on the rocks as they repeatedly come in, the "tender grace" of bygone days will never return to him.

- **Analysis**

This short poem carries the emotional impact of a person reflecting on the loss of someone he (or she) cared for. Written in 1834 right after the sudden death of Tennyson's friend Arthur Henry Hallam, the poem was published in 1842. Although some have interpreted the speaker's grief as sadness over a lost lover, it probably reflects the feeling at any loss of a beloved person in death, like Tennyson's dejection over losing Hallam.

The poem is four stanzas of four lines each, each quatrain in irregular iambic tetrameter. The irregularity in the number of syllables in each line might convey the instability of the sea or the broken, jagged edges of the speaker's grief. Meanwhile, the ABCB rhyme scheme in each stanza may reflect the regularity of the waves.

On the surface, the poem seems relatively simple and straightforward, and the feeling is easy to discern: the speaker wishes he could give voice to his sad thoughts and his memories, to move and speak like the sea and others around him. The poem's deeper interest is in the series of comparisons between the external world and the poet's internal world. The outer world is where life happens, or where it used to

happen for the speaker. The inner world is what preoccupies him now, caught up in deep pain and loss and the memories of a time with the one who is gone.

For example, in the first stanza, the sea is battering the stones. The speaker appears frustrated that the sea can keep moving and making noise while he is unable to utter his thoughts. The sea's loud roar, its ability to vent its energy, is something he lacks. The repetition of "break" aptly conveys the ceaseless motion of the waves, each wave reminding him of what he lacks.

In the second stanza, Tennyson similarly expresses distance between himself and the happy people playing or singing where they are. They possess joy and fulfillment, whether together or alone, but he does not. The brother and sister have each other; the sailor has his boat; the speaker is alone. They have reason to voice pleasure, but he does not. One might sense envy here, but "O, well" also suggests that these blithe young people have losses yet to come.

In the third stanza the poet sees the "stately ships" moving to their "haven under the hill," either to port or over the horizon. Either way, they seem content with a destination. But the mounded grave is no pleasant haven, in contrast. That end means the end of activity; there is no more hand to touch, no more voice to hear. Again the speaker is caught up in his internal thoughts, his memory of the mourned figure overshadowing what the speaker sees around him. The critic H. Sopher also interprets the contrast in this stanza as such: "The stateliness of the ships contrasts with the poet's emotional imbalance; and the ships move *forward* to an attainable goal ... while the poet looks *back* to a 'vanish'd hand' and a 'voice that is still.'"

In the fourth stanza, the speaker returns to the breaking of waves on the craggy cliffs. The waves come again, again, again, hitting a wall of rock each time. But for him there is no return of the dead, just the recurring pain of loss. Why speak, why act? It explains that "the poet's realization of the fruitlessness of action draws the reader's attention to the fact that the sea's action is, seemingly, fruitless too—for all its efforts [it] can no more get beyond the rocks than the poet can restore the past." Nevertheless, both the sea and the speaker continue with their useless but repeated actions, as though there is no choice. The scene evokes a sense of inevitability and hopelessness.

While the feeling here could involve merely the loss of a romantic relationship, it seems more poignant if the speaker has no hope for the return of the one who is lost. Without a death, there is no opportunity to connect the "hill" to a mounded

grave, the “still” voice would be harder to interpret, and the “day that is dead” would be a weaker metaphor.

2.1.1. b) 3. Dominant Themes of the poem ‘Break, Break, Break’

The poem pronounces the emotional state of loss and the apprehension that there is something beyond the progression of life and death. The elegy encompasses Tennyson’s mental state of melancholy. The suffering in this poem is identical with “In Memoriam”. The personal loss of his friend weaves the lines together.

1. Theme of Death:

The speaker does not explicitly uses the word death, but he ironically refers to his friends death when he wishes to “touch” the “vanish’d hand” and to hear “the voice that is still” which dominantly emphasises the missing part from the speaker’s life. Then he refers to “day that is dead” for the first time embedding the theme of death through time which will never come back thereby making his friend mortal. The speaker sees emblem of death in all the material objects around him like the “cold grey stones” which is the symbolic grave stone. The “stately ships” that travel to their “haven under the hill” is the symbolic coffin which is in transit to be buried.The “haven under the hill” sounds rather gruesome – it advocates entombment knolls in graveyards, where the dead find rest or “haven” andthe wooden “ships” might represent wooden coffins touching progressively toward burial.He only imagines a disembodied “voice” that is now “still.” Instead of envisioning his friend in his completeness, he visualises him only as a sequence of absenteeism. To the speakerit’s the time that he has spent with the friend that is “dead” and never to come back again.

2. Theme of time:

The repetition of the words “Break, Break, Break” suggests the monotony of time consumed grief and loss which is increasing with the rolling waves. The speaker seems to suggest that time rolls by and is ever evolving, which instead suggest that the bygone cannot be enlivened and ceases with continuity of forlorn days.The first two lines of the first and last stanza are starkly compared with the static and the evolving. Towards the end it seems that the speaker realised that time takes one to his future overcoming the past belongings which resides in the mind. It seems that time has paced down the speaker’s life compared to the jovial surrounding as the speaker delves further with grief accumulated by time.

3. Theme of Memory and Nostalgia:

The speaker constantly brings back in the poem the theme of memory and nostalgia by his mourning for his friend who is dead. In the first and the last stanza that wailing vowel sound "O" makes us listen to the enragement of the sea. The negative 'Break, break, break' creates a gloomy atmosphere and in 'O, well for the fisherman's boy' the lasting sigh can be heard. The narrator cannot enjoy or find pleasure in the virtuousness or innocence appreciated by the people he observes. Here Tennyson uses images of youth in this stanza, adding to the regretful tone of the section: 'boy', 'play' and 'lad'. The use of memory and nostalgia aggravates the theme of death and loss where the poet metaphorically alludes to death, " And the stately ships go on / To their haven under the hill;" - the ship acts as the metaphor of life, which has gone to its rest (or 'haven') and is out of sight buried under the earth.

4. Theme of Youth:

Tennyson's friend, Arthur Hallam, was only 22 when he died. The trauma of Hallam's death captivated Tennyson and made him realise how precious the youth is. To accentuate this impression, and to unravel the distress he suffers at the loss of young Hallam, Tennyson weaves images of youthful joys: the fisherman's son playing with his sister and the "sailor lad" singing in the bay.

2.1.1. b) 4. Symbolism in the poem 'Break, Break, Break'

1. Sea:

The sea acts as an appropriate image in this poem. The speaker realizes that time waits for no onewhich looms large over this poem. It seems to the speaker that the world has stopped with the loss of his friend.The speaker also seems to be angry on the sea for it seems to him that the sea doesn't bother about his friend's loss and is constant with its daily chores. In lines 1 and 2 (later in lines 13 and 14) the speaker apostrophises the sea as he speaks with it resembling a communication.

2. Utterances:

The speaker is terribly concerned with the voice, which will narrate the content. In the first stanza he delimits his talking, which shapes up the psychological turmoil in his mind. He then refers to the shouting, playing and singing which are audible. In the third stanza the speaker explains his tongue tiredness and the voice which is "still" as he is clogged up with grief. The fisherman's boy is shouting but the content

of his shouting isn't clear. Similarly the sailor's boy is singing, but it is not clear if it is happy or unhappy lyrics.

3. The Vanish'd hand:

The speaker symbolises his friend in the form of the allegorical "vanish'd hand". The friend is never primarily cited but he exists in the form of fragmented symbols of human life as the voice which is "still". He is represented by a series of absences trapped in the dead of time which is never to enliven. The synecdoche expressions are nothing but the remains of the friend in the poet's mind.

2.1.1. b) 5. Break, Break, Break: A Sea Elegy

Break, Break, Break is a sea elegy written by Lord Tennyson on the death of his university friend Arthur Henry Hallum. Here, the ever-breaking sea, the fisherman's boy, the stately ships, etc. all show the permanence of the world around and yet they remain unaffected by the poet's personal grief. However, the thoughts contained in this elegy are not so elaborate and high as in *In Memoriam* but the Current of thoughts is not less pathetic.

In this short lyric, Nature serves as a mirror of poet's intense feelings of sorrow. The poem has reference to a watering place on the Bristol Channel where his friend is buried. Simple and lucid, the poem regards the poet's intense grief which is shared by Nature. In the opening lines, the impression of an unpleasant face is being hammered into the poet's consciousness. The poet wishes, he could give his voices to his humbled and anguished feelings just as sea breaks on the story surface. Farther, the cold gray stones could be interpreted as gravestones, as well as the cliff walls.

Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

In the next stanza, the dead past and sea both create a feeling of soft melancholy. The friendship between the children and the contentment of the sailor boy make him feel the loss of his friend more acutely:

O well for the fisherman's boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play!

O well for the sailor lad,

That he sings in his boat on the bay!

Life goes on as usual, once the poet is miserable and solitary and longs for his company of his dead friend. The stately ships of life are taking its voyage towards the domain of death- under the hill. Thus in the description of Nature there goes the image of deceased Arther Hallum who has been silenced forever by the hidden hand of death. The following lines seem to indicate the poet in a melancholy mood. He is missing his dear friend who was a source of comfort. In fact, in *In Memoriam* the image of touching hands is repeated frequently and almost becomes a motif for Tennyson's grief for his friend. He always wants to touch his hands once more and it is similar in this poem, he longs to be able to touch Hallam again because he knows he never will:

And the stately ships go on

To their haven under the hill;

But o for the touch of a vanished hand

And the sound of a voice that is still"

Life flows on uniformly in Nature, only the poet will not be able to recover the joy of his early life when Hallum was alive. The melancholy notes of breaking the sea waves remain Sophoclean eternity in the concluding lines:

But the tender grace of a day that is dead

Will never come back to me.

2.1.2. Summing Up

- The poem 'Ulysses' by Tennyson makes him realize that for him there was no escape and that life had to be lived and fought and at this time
- The myth of Ulysses gave him great encouragement. He wrote that the poem gave him an impetus about the need of going forward and braving the struggle of life.
- On the other hand the poem 'Break, Break, Break' describes feelings of loss and the realization that there is something beyond the cycle of life and death.

2.1.3. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Critically comment on Tennyson's use of autobiographical content in the two poems.
2. Do you consider 'Break, Break, Break' a poem of melancholy? Elucidate.
3. Comment on Tennyson's handling of 'Ulysses' Legend.

● **Medium Length Questions-12 Marks**

1. Discuss on 'Ulysses' as a dramatic monologue.
2. Briefly comment on Tennyson's narrative technique in both the poems.
3. Is there any spirit of optimism in Tennyson's 'Ulysses'? Answer with textual references.

● **Short Questions-6 Marks**

1. What story is the poet referring to when he says "I cannot rest from travel: I will drink/ Life to the lees"?
2. Explain the lines— "And the stately ships go on / To their haven under the hill; /But O for the touch of a vanish'd hand, / And the sound of a voice that is still!"
3. "Yet all experience is an arch" – To whom 'experience' seems like an 'arch' and why?

2.1.4. Suggested Reading

1. F.L. Lucas, Tennyson (London, 1957)
2. W. H. Auden, Tennyson: a Selection and Introduction (London, 1946)
3. P.F. Baum, Tennyson Sixty years After (London, 1949)
4. Walker, H. The Age of Tennyson (London, 1897)
5. Graham, Richard. The Masters of Victorian Literature 1837-1897 (London, 1897)

Unit-2 ❑ Matthew Arnold 'Dover Beach'; 'To Marguerite: Continued'

Structure:

2.2.0. Introduction

You have already read in the earlier module on Victorian society and politics that in Victorian England there was peace and prosperity on the one hand and poverty, doubt and anxiety on the other. Culturally, this was reflected in some ways in the simultaneous increase in the taste for luxury, decadence and a revival in the taste for both Baroque and Gothic architecture and an increase in the awareness of poverty and other social evils and a feeling of isolation and loneliness. The literature of the period mirrored this stark contrast through the simultaneous existence of the literature of writers like the Pre-Raphaelities and the writings of Charles Dickens and Matthew Arnold. However, it may be said of Tennyson and Browning that they had, in some

ways, incorporated both tendencies in their work. In the writings of the Victorians, therefore, one encounters, simultaneously, the religiosity of *The Blessed Damozel*, the doubts against religion raised in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the soul-searchings of *In Memoriam* as well as the attempt to restore lost faith in *Dover Beach*. It is with Arnold's search for a wavering faith that you will be introduced in this unit.

2.2.1. Matthew Arnold: Biography

A school teacher and historian named Thomas Arnold married Mary Penrose, the daughter of an Anglican priest, in 1820 and settled in Laleham-on-the-Thames. The couple had seven children and their eldest son was Matthew Arnold, born on 24th December, 1822. In 1828, when he was six years old, his father was appointed the headmaster of Rugby School and the family moved from Laleham to Rugby. The next year, Arnold met Arthur Hugh Clough, a boy four years older to him, who would go on to become a poet, an educationist, and his lifelong friend. In 1829, the Arnold family moved to a holiday house at Fox How in the Lake District where Arnold met William Wordsworth.

Matthew Arnold

Arnold began his studies at his uncle the Reverend John Buckland's Preparatory School, as a boarder, and was enrolled at Rugby School in 1837, where he began to win prizes for essay writing and for poetry in Latin and English. In 1840, he composed the poem *Alaric at Rome* which won a prize and was immediately printed. In the same year he received an open scholarship to Balliol College, and he joined the institution the following year. In 1842, however, his father died of a sudden heart attack just before his forty-seventh birthday. Arnold won the prestigious Newdigate Prize for his poem *Cromwell* in 1843, but in the following year he received a second class honours degree, dismaying his family and friends who had expected he would secure a first. He went back to Rugby School, in the same year, to work as a trainee teacher of sorts. In 1846 he secured a one year open scholarship at Oriel College much to the joy of those whom he had dismayed earlier with his second honours. During his studies at Oriel College, he toured places like Ireland, Wales and France and also cultivated his poetic talent.

In 1847, Arnold was appointed the private secretary of Lord Lansdowne, the president of the Privy Council, and two years later he published his first volume of verse, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*. He got the position of an Inspector of Schools in 1851, a job that he would be doing for the next thirty-five years, retiring in 1886. Having secured a stable means of livelihood at twenty-eight, Arnold married Frances Lucy Wightman, the daughter of a titled judge. The couple settled at Laleham-on-the-Thames and had six children together.

Arnold did not remain very happy in his profession after the first few years. He often complains, in his letters, of the drudgery of the work that he had to do. Robert Lowe, the minister who had been responsible for introducing certain changes into the education system that made Arnold's professional life difficult to endure, was critiqued later in *Culture and Anarchy*. The nature of Arnold's profession, taxing though it had been, had enabled him to observe his country and its people from very close quarters. Arnold's job required him to travel across a large part of England and to interact with the Nonconformist[1] part of the population, who were the poor and the middle class people and were fast becoming the most important segment of the electorate and of the society.

The squalor, poverty, disease and hopelessness of the lower strata of the society clashed very inharmoniously, in Arnold's thoughts, with the materialism and complacency of the middle class and with the indifference and the excesses of the upper class. (In his *Culture and Anarchy*, he terms the upper and middle classes 'Barbarians' and 'Philistines' respectively, and advocates the socio-economic and cultural development of the lower classes, whom he terms the 'Populace'.) As a consequence, he could not entirely rejoice in the technological and socio-economic advancement that the society was undergoing. In one of his letters, he talks of a wave of moral, intellectual and social vulgarity breaking over the British nation. One may be reminded of *Dover Beach* at this idea.

Arnold had by this time, published some more of his verse. In 1852, he published *Empedocles on Etna*, and *Other Poems*. In the next year *Poems* was published with a preface where Arnold talks of the role of the poet as a guardian of sorts of the morality and education of their readership. In 1857, Arnold becomes professor of poetry at Oxford and during the ten years that he remains in this post, he publishes quite a few books on literary criticism. In 1861, his childhood friend, Arthur Hugh Clough dies and the grief-stricken Arnold composes the poem *Thyrsis*.

In 1865, Arnold publishes *Essays in Criticism* and resigns from his post of professor of poetry two years later, giving poetry up and concentrating on social criticism instead. He publishes *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869 and for the next four years he publishes treatises like *Friendship's Garland* and *Literature and Dogma*. He returns, however, to literary criticism with the essay *Wordsworth* in 1879. Between 1883 and 1886, he tours America twice, delivering lectures.

In 1886 he gives up his post as Inspector of Schools due to his failing health and dies of a heart attack two years later, on 15th April, 1888, at sixty-five years of age.

2.2.2. Features of Arnold's Poetry

In a letter to his friend Clough, Arnold writes about Keats (and about Browning and Tennyson) that they were, in spite of being poetically gifted, consumed by a desire to produce movement and fullness and therefore were able to obtain only a "confused multitudinousness" in their poetry. This reveals something about Arnold's own poetic creed as much it expresses his views on those of these other poets. In Arnold's views, these poets were guilty of unalloyed subjectivity and allusiveness in their poetry and therefore, of moving away from the moral responsibilities of a poet towards their readership. Arnold confesses, elsewhere, of having been sometimes tempted by such a desire. However, he resolved to ground his poetry in a poet's moral responsibility towards the society.

In Arnold's views, therefore, something may be termed as poetry only when it is able to provide 'enjoyment' to the readers; by 'enjoyment' Arnold meant the act of deriving aesthetic pleasure. This was not possible, according to Arnold, if the poet could not depict suffering to have found "vent in action". Such an action should be such a one that appeals to the "primary human affections"; in other words, those actions which transcend space and time and can be termed universal. Arnold here refers to actions of epic height. Thus, only that could be termed poetry which attempts to ennoble the reader's mind by depicting actions of the greatest sublimity. Arnold himself attempted works of epic height like *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853) and *Balder Dead* (1855).

However, Arnold is at his truest and perhaps at his best when he does not consciously strive to achieve sublimity but spontaneously attains a lyrical intensity through an honest depiction of the dilemma he was in. He was torn between, as says

Isobel Armstrong, “the ethical, stabilizing poetry of joy he wished to create” and his anxieties and doubts which were seeking expression through his poems. Arnold’s anxieties stemmed from an awareness of the dwindling of faith and a resultant feeling of psychological isolation. The reason for the loss of faith in God and religion was, in Arnold’s eyes, a diseased condition of the mind burdened with material desires and concerns. In *The Scholar Gipsy*, he urges the eponymous Oxonian to quit the company of his (Arnold’s) contemporary society with the following words:

O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
Before this strange disease of modern life,
With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
Its heads o’ertax’d, its palsied hearts, was rife—
Fly hence, our contact fear!

Although Arnold sounds disillusioned here, and elsewhere in his poetry, yet he is no pessimist. In *Dover Beach*, he tells (supposedly) his wife:

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

Having faith in one another seems to be the antidote to the problem of “modern life”.

Arnold’s dilemma is evident not only in his treatment of subject, but also in his language. The poem The Scholar Gipsy he ends thus:

Then fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles!
—As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea,
Descried at sunrise an emerging prow
Lifting the cool-hair’d creepers stealthily,
The fringes of a southward-facing brow
Among the Ægæan Isles;
And saw the merry Grecian coaster come,
Freighted with amber grapes, and Chian wine,

Green, bursting figs, and tunnies steep'd in brine—
And knew the intruders on his ancient home,

The young light-hearted masters of the waves—
And snatch'd his rudder, and shook out more sail;
And day and night held on indignantly
O'er the blue Midland waters with the gale,
Betwixt the Syrtes and soft Sicily,
To where the Atlantic raves
Outside the western straits; and unbent sails
There, where down cloudy cliffs, through sheets of foam,
Shy traffickers, the dark Iberians come;
And on the beach undid his corded bales.

The poet uses an extended similie to urge the scholar gipsy to distance himself from the company of "modern"people. Such a studied sort of conclusion hampers, somewhat, the lyricism which is an essential feature of this poem. Arnold's language seems to have a sort of stately elegance that is *very apparently* the result of careful skill.

Arnold, a very acute social observer, strives, in his poetry to bring to light the doubts and anxieties of his countrymen that lay hidden beneath their material prosperity and complacency. Arnold believed where there was poverty and ignorance degrading one part of the society, there could not be any true advancement; and what was being termed as advancement was actually contributing to a general loss of faith and alienation for, as has been mentioned earlier, it was concerned exclusively with material wellbeing.

2.2.3. Dover Beach

The text of the poem:

The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanched land,
Listen! you hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Notes:

Stanza 1:

line 3: straits: refers to the Strait of Dover which is the narrowest part of the English Channel, a waterbody that separates England from France.

line 7: long line of spray: refers to the mass of water dispersed as droplets for some distance all *along* the shoreline when a wave strikes the shore.

line 8: moon-blanched land: refers to the white colour of the chalk cliffs of Dover; the expression compares the paleness of the cliffs to that of the moon. It could also be said that the white chalk cliffs of Dover seeemed to the poet as having been further whitened by moonlight.

line 9: grating roar: refers to the loud rasping sound that is produced when a sea wave pulls back from the shore dragging sand and pebbles along.

line 11: strand: beach

line 13: cadence: the rhythmic flow of music.

Stanza 2:

line 1: Sophocles: an ancient Greek tragedian.

line 2: Aegean: the Aegean Sea, that is, the part of the Mediterranean Sea that is located between the mainlands of Greece and Turkey.

line 3: turbid: (here) turbulent.

line 6: northern sea: refers to the North Sea, of which the English Channel is a part.

Stanza 3:

line 1: Sea of Faith: a metaphorical comparison of faith to the sea.

line 3: girdle: anything that encirles; like a sash worn around the waist.

line 3: furled: rolled or gathered together.

line 7: drear: dreary, bleak.

line 8: shingles: large, smooth pebbles usually found on beaches.

Stanza 4:

line 4: various: (here) varied in character; multifaceted.

line 6: certitude: the state of being cetain or assured.

line 7: darkling: (in the) dark.

line 8: alarms: certain musical sounds used in the battlefield to call soldiers to arms.

line 9: Where ignorant armies clash by night: the line refers perhaps to an ancient Greek historian Thucydides' account of the battle of Epipolae that took place in 413 B.C. during the Peloponnesian War, when the Athenians attacked the Syracuseans near Sicily. Thucydides, in his account, says that although there was a full moon, the Athenians were finding it difficult to distinguish between friends and opponents and were often mistaking fellow Athenians for Syracuseans and hitting out at them. It may be worthwhile to note that Arnold's father had translated Thnucydides and that, the story of the battle of Epipolae was familiar to the boys at Rugby during Matthew Arnold's time there.

2.2.3 a) Context:

Arnold had got married in June 1851 and had spent a week long honeymoon in Alverston in Hampshire, on the last day of which he is supposed to have visited Dover with his bride. In September that year a second visit was made to Dover from where the couple travelled to Paris in France, and it may be that *Dover Beach* was composed sometime during or immediately afterwards these visits to Dover. The draft of the poem *Dover Beach* appears among the notes that Arnold had been making for his poem *Empedocles on Etna* which was published in 1852.

2.2.3 b) Summary:

The poems opens with a description of the chalk cliffs of Dover and the sea beyond, under a moonlit sky. The poet (who is probably standing at a window facing the sea) informs that the sea was calm, although in full tide, and that a light gleamed on the French coast momentarily and went out, adding to the peaceful solitude of the scene. He then beckons someone to come to the window and enjoy the tranquil atmosphere. He says the night air was sweet and tranquil, the only sound that could be heard being that of the waves continuously lashing against the shore and then withdrawing, and the poet urges his companion to listen to it. The stanza closes with

the poet observing that the rhythmic sound of the pebbles being dragged along with the withdrawing waves brings in the “eternal” note of sadness.

In the second stanza the poet says that the note of sadness had also been heard by Sophocles on the coast of the Aegean Sea and that it had reminded him of human misery. Although the Aegean Sea and the North Sea are greatly distant from one another, the sound of the pebbles in the latter sea too is capable of evoking a thought (and a similar one, as is revealed in the next stanza) in the minds of the poet and his companion.

The poet explains the thought in the third stanza. He compares faith to the sea and says that the sea of faith had once encircled the world like a bright girdle but now all that can be heard is a grating sound that gets fainter and fainter still as that sea gradually withdraws away from the world, leaving only the dreary beach and the ‘naked’ shingles behind.

In the concluding stanza, the poet addresses his companion as “love” (which leads to the assumption that he was perhps addressing his bride) and suggests that they should be true to one another for the world, in reality, was not a land of dreams but a joyless, loveless, restless, selfish place devoid of light. The poem closes with the idea that living in the world was analogous to being on a dark pain where confused armies, who know not whether their opponents are friends or foes, clash with one another by night.

2.2.3 c) Analysis:

The poet opens the poem with the description of a tranquil, moonlit scene and concludes with a plea to his wife to be true to him while he is true to her for the world was not such a happy place as it seemed to be: in this poem one may find the theme of love intertwined with the idea of the Victorian problem of loss of faith. The poem has a melancholy and yet a calm tone which shows that the poet is resigned to the loss of faith that had been troubling him and consequently he does not lament it and it does not become the sole object of focus in the poem.

The first stanza closes with the poet feeling the “eternal” sadness by the rasping sound made by the withdrawing waves and the gravel on the beach. That the poet tries to say this sadness was not peculiarly his own, but represented the misery of the human condition itself is evident in the second stanza where, in a rather Keatsian fashion[4], he says that the same sound had been heard by Sophocles too (although

millennia ago and miles away on the coast of the Aegean Sea) and it had reminded him of “the turbid ebb and flow/ Of human misery”. The North Sea too, although it was was away from the Aegean, the poet says, was capable of evoking similar thoughts.

Sophocles was one of three great tragedians of ancient Greece whose works have come down to us and the fact that the poet is convinced that he too must have been reminded of human misery by the sound implies that the profound tragic vision that Sophocles had is shared by the poet as well. This further implies that the “sadness” that the poet talks about is not that which is peculiar to any particular time or any particular race, but, as has been mentioned earlier, an essential feature of the human condition itself.

Arnold, in next stanza goes on to explain what exactly was the cause of this sadness. Faith is first compared to a sea and is then further compared to a girdle that encircled the world. The poet could hear that sea of faith receeding away from it with a melancholy grating sound which, as the sea moved further away, could be heard only faintly (and it sounded like a gust of night wind). As the sea moved away it left behind the dreary edges of the beach of the world and the naked pebbles; that is to say, as faith receded away, it was replaced by doubt, uncertainty and confusion that made life dreary and bleak. The word “naked” here evokes an image of loneliness and vulnerability.

The poet, however, has a solution to the problem. He reminds his beloved that the world that seemed varied, beautiful and forever new was not really so, but a place where one could have no happiness, no love, no feeling of assurance and certitude, no help from any quarter if one was in trouble, no peace therefore, and nothing positive. There was no light in the world, as it were, and it was like a plain in darkness where all that one could hear was the confused sound of battle raging on between armies who were, in that darkness, unable to distinguish friend from foe. This darkness, of course, represents the lack of hope that results from a loss of faith, and the selfishness and animosity it generates. The solution, or the antidote was to remain true and faithful to one another.

What must be emphasized yet again is that Arnold, albeit disillusioned and without hope, *accepts* the world, as it was, without any bawling lament, and with a stoic resignation instead. (This kind of a stoicism was perhaps the fruit of his interest in, and study of, the *Bhagavad Gita*.) He merely uses the “turbid ebb and flow/Of

human misery" as a context for making his plea to his newly wedded bride, the plea that they should be true to one another. The opening description does indeed set the mood of the poem: it is not a poem of despair, but a poem of love; albeit love in the times of despair and loss of faith.

It is interesting to recall that the poem was first composed while Arnold was planning his other poem *Empedocles on Etna*, a poem he later criticizes himself for it depicts "suffering [that] finds no vent in action". In other words, he criticizes that kind of lyricism that results from unabashed soul-searching, but *Dover Beach* seems to be another poem in the same vein. Although, it is not helpless and passive suffering that is depicted here, but a resigned sort of suffering that seeks to alleviate the pain through love.

The poem consists of four stanzas of unequal length and rhyme scheme so as to give the reader the impression of being privy to the poets thoughts as they unfold and take shape.

Attention Learners

After you have read and understood the theme of the poem 'Dover Beach', it may interest you to read some other poems by Arnold with similar themes about the loss of faith. You may read his poem 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartruese' where he feels a helplessness:

Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—

For both were faiths, and both are gone.
Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born…

Does this not resound the 'Long, withdrawing roar' of the 'sea of Faith' in 'Dover Beach?'

2.2.4. To Marguerite: Continued

The text of the poem:

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
We mortal millions live alone.
The islands feel the enclasping flow,
And then their endless bounds they know.

But when the moon their hollows lights,
And they are swept by balms of spring,
And in their glens, on starry nights,
The nightingales divinely sing;
And lovely notes, from shore to shore,
Across the sounds and channels pour—

Oh! then a longing like despair
Is to their farthest caverns sent;
For surely once, they feel, we were
Parts of a single continent!
Now round us spreads the watery plain—
Oh might our marges meet again!

Who order'd, that their longing's fire
Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
Who renders vain their deep desire?—
A God, a God their severance ruled!
And bade betwixt their shores to be
The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

Notes:

Stanza 1:

line 1: sea of life: life is here metaphorically compared to the sea.

line 1: enisled: made into an island; isolated.

line 1: in the sea of life enisled: Arnold here opposes the assertion that Donne has made in his poem *No Man is an Island*:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.

line 2: straits: a narrow strip of water that connects larger water-bodies, like seas, to one another.

line 3: wild: an unhinhabited and uncultivated region.

line 5: enclasping: (here) holding as ifin a grasp.

Stanza 2:

line 1: hollows: (here) valleys.

line 2: balms: (here) refers to the pleasantly warm breezes of spiring that sympolize the comforting and healing qualities of the season.

line 3: glens: valleys.

line 6: sounds: (here) a wide part of a sea that is larger than a strait but smaller in size than an entire sea; the sea.

Stanza 3:

line 6: marges: margins

Stanza 4:

line 4: severance: separation.

line 5: bade: (here) ordered.

line 5: betwixt: between.

line 6: unplumbed: unmeasured with a plumb; vast enough to make itself impossible to be measured; (and by implication) unexplored.

line 6: salt: salty in taste and/ or smell.

line 6: estranging: (possessing the ability of) making one feel alienated.

2.2.4. a) Context:

To Marguerite: Continued was first published in the collection *Empedocles on Etna* (1852), with the title, *To Marguerite, in Returning a Volume of the Letters of Ortis.* The 'Letters of Ortis' refes to a late eighteenth century epistolary novel written in Italian called *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis* by Ugo Foscolo. The novel deals with love in times of social unrest: Jacopo Ortis, the titular charater, is forced to retreat to a village for having been a patriot. He and a girl called Teresa fall in love with each other only to realize that their love could not reach fruition in marriage as she was engaged to someone else. Desparing and disillusioned, Ortis travels around and engages in philodsophical mediations before committing suicide. The theme of the impossibility of finding happiness in love is shared by the present poem and also by the poem *Isolation: To Marguerite* to which *To Marguerite: Continued* was added as a sequel in the 1857 edition of *Empedocles on Etna.*

The identity of 'Marguerite' has not been clearly established, although Park Honan, a biographer of Arnold, brings forth the idea that a girl called Mary Claude, with whom Arnold probably fell in love while in his mid-twenties, had inspired these poems as well as his *Switzerland* poems (to which *To Marguerite: Continued* had been added by Arnold in 1853).

2.2.4. b) Summary:

The poem opens with a "yes", affirming emphatically something that immediately preceded the poetic utterance. The poem then goes on to state that each of us live alone like islands dotting a sea. The stanza closes with the observation that each such 'island' is made aware of the boundaries of his or her being by the currents of water that flow around it, grasping it as it were.

The second stanza and the third share a sort of causal connection: the second opens with "But when" and the third continues the idea left unfinished with "Oh! then". What these two stanzas try to say together is that when moonlight bathes the valleys of these islands, *when* the balmy and soothing breezes of spring blow upon

them and the nightingales, on clear nights when the sky is full of stars, sing with divine beuty in their (the islands') valleys, and the sounds can be heard across the sea and the straits, *then* a longing that feels like a despair is felt to the core of their beings by these islands and they begin to feel they were once united with one another as parts of the same landmass. The islands (and the poet here refers to them as "we") at this point wish to be reunited to one another.

The last stanza opens with a query: who was it that decreed that this longing for reuniting with one another would be suppressed as soon as it was felt, and who was it who thus made their (the islands') desire to unite useless? The poem closes with an answer to this query: it was *a* God who had orchestrated the separation of the islands from each other and it was he who had ordered the vast, alienating sea to lie in between.

2.2.4. c) Analysis:

The poem opens with an affirmation of something that had passed just before: it could have been an acknowledgement of the idea expressed in the novel *The Last Letters of Jacopo Ortis*, a volume of which, as the initial title of the poem suggested , had been returned to 'Marguerite' along with the poem. The "yes" could also have been used to re-emphasize the idea expressed in *Isolation: To Marguerite* and to use this second poem as a further elucidation of that idea and this time, in a universal context. In either case, the "yes" affirms the impossibility of finding fruition and happiness in love.

The poet then goes on to metaphorically describe the human condition as he viewed it: each individual was trapped within their own life and their own selfish being thus making life itself (symbolized by the sea) a separating and alienating factor.The resultant feeling of loneliness has been brilliantly described by the line, "We mortal millions live alone". The stanza closes with two other expressions, equally powerful: "enclasping flow" and "endless bounds". The former expression refers to the inescapability of the people trapped within the islands of their own selfish minds obsessed with materialistic concerns. They have been caught in the overwhelming grasp of the quality of life that they had chosen: a gross, materialistic, self-obsessed life that had done away with religion and with faith too, and had thus plunged them into doubt and despair. The next expression is seemingly paradoxical; however a closer look reveals the implication: the boundary of selfishness and mistrust that each individual had restricted the spontaneous feelings of the heart with offered no respite at all to them and was limitlessly oppressive.

The description of vernal nature in its moonlit and melodious beauty hints at the awakening of the desire of love in the mind. This feeling, however, comes coupled with hopeless longing as each “enisled” individual feels the inability to shake off their solitude and reunite with one another in love thus reforming the community they instinctively feel had once existed in the past, and of which they are constantly reminded by the partial connection that is created when music from one island echoes in another as well (that is, the individuals are aware of each others’ presence and attractiveness, but still cannot unite in mutual love). The line “Now round us spreads the watery plain” evokes a feeling of deep pathos, and makes the fervent wish of the next line sound as being utterly devoid of hope.

The concluding stanza attacks that aspect of the changing Victorian society that troubled Arnold the most: the loss of faith. He refuses to accept the idea that God could have brought about the alienating attitude of selfishness and doubt, and suggests, with his use of the expression “a God” that it was no more the true faith that people followed but a false faith with a false God (repreesentative, in all probability, of industrialization and the resultant changes in social mores) which was the very travesty of the true faith based on love and trust.

The poem *Isolation: To Marguerite* is in some ways a bitter expression of disappointment and resentment. The poet, not having found his feelings for his beloved reciprocated, visualizes her in utter solitude and isolation. The poem *To Marguerite: Continued* builds upon that idea and looks at the thought from the opposite viewpoint: *because* everybody was mentally isolated from one another, no love could exist.

The poem is composed in iambic tetrametre with the rhyme scheme of ‘ababcc’ that results in each stanza concluding with a couplet which seems to emphasize what has been discussed in that stanza. The rhythm of the poem appears a little stately, however, and perhaps at odds with the poignant lyricism, but nevertheless, it exerts a sort of control on the emotion that prevents the poem from sounding sentimental.

End notes:

1. **Nonconformist :** the Nonconformists were originally those people who were begun to be termed thus Act of Uniformity passed in England and Wales in 1662 for they chose not o follow the Church of England. By the late 19th century, the term included Baptists and Methodists among other groups.

2. **Gothic Revival :** refers to a revival of Medieval or Gothic architecture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that was adopted by other areas of English culture as well.

3. **Jingoistic :** The term originated from a mild form of the oath "by Jesus" ("by Jingo") that was used in the chorus of a song commonly sung in British pubs and music halls around the time of the Russo-Turkish War (1877–78). The chorus was as follows:

We don't want to fight but by Jingo if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men, we've got the money too
We've fought the Bear before, and while we're Britons true
The Russians shall not have Constantinople.

The term came to denote an aggressive form of foreign policy, and later came to include in its meaning aggressive nationalism too.

4. **in a rather Keatsian fashion :** Although Arnold did not much like Keats' lyricism, an influence of Keats may be traced sometimes in his poetry. In Keats' *Nightingale Ode* the following lines may be found:

The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;

2.2.5. Summing up:

- In summing up, it could be said that these two love poems of Arnold poignantly reflect the anxiety and dilemma of the Victorian poetic mind.
- The poems are not those of despair, however.
- While 'Dover Beach' talks of faithful love as being the solution to the problem of loss of faith,
- 'To Marguerite: Continued' hints that the state of alienation was not intrinsic to people who by nature wish to unite, even after they have grown egocentric enough to get alienated from each other.

2.2.6. Comprehension Exercises:

- **Long Answer Type Questions: 20 marks**

    1. Can 'Dover Beach' be called a love poem? Give reasons for your answer.
    2. Comment on the use of metaphor in 'To Marguerite: Continued'.
    3. What do you think of Matthew Arnold as a Victorian poet? Use your understanding of the two poems 'Dover Beach' and 'To Marguerite: Continued' to substantiate your view.

- **Medium-length Type Questions: 12 marks**

    1. Why does the poet want himself and his "love" to be "true" to one another?
    2. In 'To Marguerite: Continued' why does the poet say "We mortal millions live *alone*."?
    3. Comment on the use of the sea as a metaphor in the poems 'Dover Beach' and 'To Marguerite: Continued'.

- **Short Questions: 6 marks**

    1. Why does the poet refer to Sophocles in the poem 'Dover Beach'?
    2. What does the opening "Yes!" of the poem 'To Marguerite: Continued' signify?
    3. In the poem 'To Marguerite: Continued', why does the poet couple longing with despair?

2.2.7. Suggested Reading:

1. Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics*. New York/; London: Routledge, 1993. Print.
2. Arnold, Matthew and J. Dover Wilson. *Culture and Anarchy: Landmarks in the History of Education*. Cambridge University Press, 1932. Print.
3. Bristow, Joseph. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.
4. Saintsbury, George. *Matthew Arnold*. William Blackwood and Sons, 1899. Print.

Unit-3 ❑ Robert Browning: (a) 'Porphyria's Lover' (b) 'My Last Duchess'

Structure:

2.3.0. Introduction

You have already gained substantial knowledge about Victorian poetry from Module 1, Unit 2. Therefore, you are now in a position to appreciate and discuss individual poets of the period. In the previous two units you studied the poetry of Tennyson and Arnold. Here you shall now study the poetry of Robert Browning. As soon as you read his poems you will realize the ways in which his poetry is different from the two others just mentioned. Although they all belonged to the same age their oeuvres differ remarkably in spirit. In the course of your study of Browning and his poetry you will also gain valuable insight into the different ways in which sensitive minds from the same age react to situations and compulsions inflicted upon them.

2.3.1.Browning and the Victorian Age

Robert Browning (1812 -1889) belonged to the Victorian age, spanning the years roughly between 1830 and 1900. It was an age marked by a number of developments in the political, social, economic and cultural spheres. First, it was the age of Queen Victoria's long, uninterrupted reign which witnessed great imperial expansion and ensured political stability for England. This was reflected in the social environment where Victorianism became an ethos in itself, entailing a set standard of public behavior. Decorum, propriety, correctness and moral righteousness were upheld with great zest. It was also an age of great economic well-being for some, but great economic distress for factory workers and peasants. The Industrial Revolution brought about a greater division between working classes and ruling classes. Caught in this conflicting world were the writers, thinkers and artists. Some hailed the overall prosperity of England while some deplored the unjust system. Scientific progress and new discoveries only heightened the divide, Darwin's theory of the evolution of man becoming the chief centre of conflict between complacent faith and skeptical questioning. Tennyson, the poet-laureate, hailed the greatness of his nation, but was also aware of progress 'halting on palsied feet'. Matthew Arnold was torn between faith and unfaith and found himself 'enisled'. Browning, though aware of all these developments, kept his work largely free of these conflicts, focusing on his own artistic evolution. Further, he had relocated to Italy after his elopement and marriage to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a leading poet of the times. Against the backdrop of such diverse developments, Browning experimented with a variety of themes and forms, which were markedly different from the mellifluous poetry that people in England were used to since the Romantics and then, Tennyson.

Robert Browning

Born in this age of conflicting conditions, Browning, with his bold innovativeness, had to wait a long time to find his rightful place in the world of contemporary literature. Tennyson, his contemporary, enjoyed fifty years of success, while Browning

tasted success only in the last phase of his life, twenty years after the collected volume of 1849. It took a long time for Victorian England, as it continued to stick to conventional standards, to recognize the range of Browning's poetry. Browning was a poet ahead of his times who anticipated modern techniques such as impressionism and psycho-analysis in poems such as 'My Last Duchess', 'Porphyria's Lover', 'Home Thoughts from Abroad' and so on. His intellectual analysis of the human psyche was a disturbing feature for the complacent Victorian world.

2.3.2. Browning's Works

Robert Browning was born on 7th May, 1812 in Camberwell, England. He began his writing career with 'Pauline, a fragment of a Confession'. This was followed by 'Paracelsus' in 1834-35; 'Strafford', his first verse drama; and 'Sordello' in 1840. Between 1841 and 1846, Browning published a series of pamphlets with the title 'Bells and Pomegranates' containing his poems and plays. 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess' were included in the third volume of 'Bells and Pomegranates' (1842). He married Elizabeth Barrett, a well-known poetess and an invalid, following a dramatic elopement in 1846, and moved to Italy. 'Men and Women' was published in 1855, which contained many of his earlier poems, including 'Porphyria's Lover'. Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in 1861, leaving behind a twelve year old son with whom Browning returned to England. His volume of poems, 'Dramatis Personae' was published in 1864. 'The Ring and the Book', his verse-novel, (1868-69), established Browning as a leading writer of his times. His last work, 'Asolando', was published on the day of his death on 12th December, 1889. Browning's four major volumes of verse include 'Dramatic Lyrics' (1842), 'Dramatic Romances and Lyrics' (1845), 'Men and Women' (1855) and 'Dramatis Personae' (1864) – all of which contain poems published earlier as well as new pieces. His first Collected Volume was published in 1849.

2.3.3. Browning and the Dramatic Monologue

The Dramatic Monologue was a form that Browning had perfected in the course of his experiments with different forms of poetry and verse drama. In this, a speaker tries to justify his own position and convince the listener about his point of view and his actions. Most of his dramatic monologues are set in a particular milieu, a particular time. The historical setting is very important for a proper understanding of

the poem. In ‘My Last Duchess’, the setting of late Renaissance Italy is fundamental to our understanding of the Duke’s character – specially the fine sensitivity to art and, on the other hand, his feudal, uncompromising, materialistic temperament.

A dramatic monologue is different from a soliloquy. In the former, the speaker’s attention is directed outward, towards the listener whom he is trying to influence. In the latter, the attention is entirely directed inwards, where the speaker is trying to come to terms with his ideas and emotions and consists of internal debate, as in Hamlet’s famous soliloquy, ‘To be or not to be.’ Further, the meaning that emerges from a soliloquy is exactly what the speaker is intending to communicate. In a dramatic monologue, the speaker tries to impose his established point of view, but, with the opposite result. The reader’s/listener’s reaction is contrary to what the speaker had aimed at.

A dramatic monologue is generally uttered at a moment of historical crisis when the speaker is desperate to convince his listener as in ‘My Last Duchess’ or trying to get out of a sticky situation as in ‘Fra Lippo Lippi’, or trying to justify his convoluted psychology as in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’.

A dramatic monologue, while consisting of an utterance by a single speaker, also contains elements of drama by making the presence and reactions of the listener/ audience palpable. In ‘My Last Duchess’, the presence and responses of the envoy are communicated to us throughout. Also, there is a sense of movement and unfolding of action as in ‘Porphyria’s Lover’.

Browning’s dramatic monologues explore the psychological complexities of the speaker’s mind, where the speaker unwittingly reveals his character while trying to mislead the listener. In the course of justifying and explaining his standpoint, Browning makes the speaker reveal his true nature through his diction/language, images, metaphors, turn of phrase etc. In fact, Browning established the technique of ‘point of view’ long before it was developed in prose fiction by Henry James, Virginia Woolf, and others in the twentieth century.

Browning’s principal concern was the creation of dramatic speakers and dramatic situations. In the poems prescribed for you, we find some of the best illustrations of the dramatic monologue as developed by Browning.

2.3.4 ‘Porphyria’s Lover’

This poem was first published as ‘Porphyria’ in the journal, *Monthly Repository*

in 1836. It was re-published in the collection of poems, *Dramatic Lyrics* along with ‘Johannes Agricola in Meditation’ under the general title of ‘Madhouse Cells’, as in the journal. It got its present title in 1863 when it was included in *Dramatic Romances*.

Possible sources for the poem include John Wilson’s ‘Extracts from Gosschen’s Diary’, report of a ghastly murder in ‘Blackwood’s Magazine, volume iii (1818), and Barry Cornwall’s poem ’Marcian Colonna’.

Porphyria’s Lover

The rain set early in to-night,
    The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
    And did its worst to vex the lake:
    I listened with heart fit to break.
When glided in Porphyria; straight
    She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
    Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
    Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
    And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
    And, last, she sat down by my side
    And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
    And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
    And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
    And spread, o’er all, her yellow hair,
Murmuring how she loved me — she
    Too weak, for all her heart’s endeavour,
To set its struggling passion free
    From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

And give herself to me for ever.
But passion sometimes would prevail,
Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
A sudden thought of one so pale
For love of her, and all in vain:
So, she was come through wind and rain.
Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do.
That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her. No pain felt she;
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
As a shut bud that holds a bee,
I warily oped her lids: again
Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
And I untightened next the tress
About her neck; her cheek once more
Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
I propped her head up as before,
Only, this time my shoulder bore
Her head, which droops upon it still:
The smiling rosy little head,
So glad it has its utmost will,
That all it scorned at once is fled,
And I, its love, am gained instead!
Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
Her darling one wish would be heard.

And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word!

'Porphyria's Lover' is the first short dramatic monologue by Browning. It is uttered by a lover who strangles his beloved to death to eternalize 'that moment' when she was his –'perfectly pure and good'. The poem begins by describing a stormy night when Porphyria 'glided in' and 'straight/ She shut the cold out and the storm'. She lighted the fire in the grate and then removing her 'dripping cloak and shawl', she laid aside her 'soiled glove'. She then 'untied her hat' and 'let the damp hair fall' and sat beside the speaker, calling out to him. 'When no voice replied', she put his arm around her waist and made him rest his cheek on her bare 'smooth white shoulder' and 'spread o'er all, her yellow hair'. She murmured 'how she loved' him, struggling in her weakness to express her passion, having left behind a 'gay feast' to come to him 'so pale/ For love of her'. She had come to him, giving up pride and 'vainer ties'. The speaker then realizes that Porphyria 'worshipped' him and surprise made his heart 'swell' and he 'debated what to do'.

It was a moment of realization that she was all his – fair,/ Perfectly pure and good' and he found 'A thing to do'. He made a string with her long yellow hair and wound 'three times her little throat around' and — 'strangled' her ! In his mad glee at having found the means to stop time at a particular, perfect moment, he feels sure that 'she felt no pain'. Cautiously he opens her eyelids and found they held no pain, but 'laughed without a stain'. On untying the hair from around her neck, he finds the colour returning to her cheeks, 'burning bright beneath 'his kiss. He 'propped her head up as before', but this time it was his shoulder that bore her head. He thinks that 'the smiling little head' is happy that all that stood in the way of her love is 'fled' and she has gained him, her love. The speaker feels that Porphyria's 'one wish', that is, to be with him, has been answered and thus they sit together 'all night long'. The last line –'And yet God has not said a word!' –may be an expression of justification for his terrible act.

2.3.4(a) 1. Word meanings of 'Porphyria's Lover'

Sullen – bad-tempered and silent

Spite- desire to hurt someone

Endeavour – labour, hard work

Dissever –break, cause to separate

Prevail – be more powerful, hold sway

Restrain – keep under control

Tress - a long lock of hair

Droops –bend or hang downwards

Scorned –treat with contempt, look down upon

Stirred –moved slightly, woke up

2.3.4(a) 2. Critical Commentary

This is a dramatic monologue, uttered by a person of the most unusual kind of psychology. Here is a lover who tries to stop time at a moment of perfect bliss by murdering his beloved. The ramblings of the lover illustrate the peculiar thought processes in his mind. His response to beauty and love is almost psychotic, while the manner in which he commits the murder is almost in the manner of ritualistic sacrifice.

In the first half of the poem we listen to the speaker's description of Porphyria coming to him on a night of storm and rain, laying aside worldly thoughts of propriety. He is observing her, saying nothing. Porphyria is the active agent performing various actions while he is silently submitting to her directions. She 'made his cheek lie' on her shoulder', while he remains passive. All the actions seem to be part of an artistic process. Then when he looks into her eyes he thinks he sees a kind romantic idolatry. He debates' what to do' as he sees the worship in her eyes.

In the next section we witness a horrific tableau where he strangulates her in a ritualistic manner, commensurate with her 'worship'. The repeated reference to her hair adds to the sense of ritual. Here, too, there seems to be an imitation of artistic creativity. We are shocked into realizing that we are audience to a murderer. He tries to justify his action by claiming that it was Porphyria's 'darling one wish'. There is an element of Romantic egotism in his claim that she wished to be dead and that she 'felt no pain'. Perhaps there was fear of losing her to the world which prompted the unnatural act. Through the narration of events, the speaker is redefining the roles of Porphyria and his own. She becomes the passive receiver while he takes on the role of doer, who remakes Porphyria as an eternal object of adoration. And as the masterful agent, he feels that even God is silenced. At the same time, the mention of God's silence does evoke a sense of uneasiness.

As a dramatic monologue, this poem is different in not being addressed to any particular audience. There is no definite placing in time and place. The setting and situation is rather reminiscent of Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes', with lovers meeting at night in stormy weather. There is a projection of the speaker's mood onto the world of nature. However, as in his other dramatic monologues, the utterance is made at a moment of historical crisis. There is also the characteristic attempt at justification, while leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions.

The poem has a neat structural division with Porphyria as the active agent in charge of the action in the first half and a neat reversal of roles in the second half. Browning makes subtle use of contrast, by replacing the 'soiled gloves' of the first part by the eyes 'without a stain', as if his act of murder has purified her eternally. Also, she had made him rest her cheeks against her shoulder and later he 'propped her head' on his. There are many such little details which act collectively in bringing out the changed positions of the protagonists. It is to be noted that the speaker is looked at in the beginning and is speaking in the second half. The rhyme scheme of ababb adds to the effect of a tableau being played out. Browning makes extensive use of transferred epithet as in 'sullen wind' or 'cheerless grate' with great effectiveness. The language is simple yet highly hypnotic in its effect, vividly bringing out the romantic setting, followed by the artistically executed murder. The arrangement of the dramatic action in the poem unobtrusively brings out the abnormal psychology of the speaker.

As is typical in a dramatic monologue, there is a sense of dramatic movement in the course of the poem's unfolding. Porhyria arriving at her lover's place, laying aside her wet cloak, letting drop her wet hair, placing his hand around her waist, making him rest his head on her shoulder – all these movements are meticulously described in the first half where both the speaker and the audience watch with anticipation. A dramatic turn follows after this, when the speaker discovers the worshipful adoration in her eyes. Now it is the speaker who performs the actions in the drama and the audience is led to a state of hypnotized shock by the artistically executed murder of Porphyria. So, this is Porphyria's lover!

Also, the monologue is uttered in a moment of crisis, a typical feature of Browning's dramatic monologues, when the lover has just killed his beloved and is compelled to justify his act to the world. Further, the response of the audience or the reader is distinctly unlike that which the speaker had intended to produce. However,

unlike Browning's other dramatic monologues, the response of the audience is not recorded or indicated within the poem. Also, the place and time against which the poem is set, is not indicated, which is usually found in his other poems. But it is one of Browning's shortest and finest dramatic monologues which is open to a variety of psychological interpretations and responses.

2.3.5. 'My Last Duchess'

This poem was first published under the general title 'Italy and France', with the contrasting poem, 'Count Gismond'. It had its present title in 1849, and in 1863 was included in 'Romances'. Browning collected the material of this poem while preparing for 'Sordello'. The Duke is modelled on Alfonso II, the fifth Duke of Ferrara and the last of the Este family. Alfonso was born in 1533 and married Lucrezia de Medici, daughter of the Duke of Florence, in 1558, when she was only fourteen years of age. She died in1561 in mysterious circumstances. In 1565, the Duke married the daughter of Ferdinand I, the Count of Tyrol and whose capital was Innsbruck. The emissary of the Count to whom this dramatic monologue is addressed is Nikolaus Madruz.

My Last Duchess

FERRARA

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now; Fra Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess' cheek; perhaps
Fra Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat." Such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?— too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. She thanked men—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—which I have not—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark"—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse—
E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet

The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretense
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me

'My Last Duchess' was written in the summer, or early autumn of 1842. It is placed in the Renaissance, when art was deeply appreciated, especially painting. The Duke is the speaker, addressing the envoy of the Count of Tyrol, who has come to discuss marriage negotiations between the Duke and the Count's daughter. As the Duke takes the envoy on a tour of his house, he points to a picture of the 'last duchess', i.e., Lucrezia de Medici, painted by Fra Panfdolf, an imaginary painter. The point to note here is that the Duke had commissioned a priest, and not any other painter, to paint a picture of his wife. The Duke is full of admiration for the painting and calls 'that piece a wonder'. He asks the envoy to sit and look at the painting with care and states that he mentioned the name of the painter as 'Fra Pandolf' deliberately, because he did not want ordinary people looking at her. In fact, even now, after her death, no one but he can remove the curtain that covers the painting. He explains that his wife was very easily pleased and the envoy may be wondering as to what had 'called that spot of joy' in her cheeks. He goes on to explain that something as insignificant as the priest saying, by way of courtesy, that her wrist was too beautiful to be covered by the mantle or that the painter's brush can never reproduce the 'half-flush that dies along her throat', could make her glad. In fact, according to the Duke, she had a heart that was 'too soon made glad'. She 'liked whate'er she looked on, and her looks went everywhere'. She considered his 'favour' for her at par with other little things such as 'the dropping of the daylight in the West' or the 'fool' who brought cherries for her or the white mule she rode on. She was equally thankful towards all and 'ranked' his 'gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name' with 'anybody's gift'. She did not realize the worth of being married into such an old family. Incidentally, her family did not have such an illustrious lineage as his. But the Duke was too proud to correct her lack of discernment and even if he had that 'skill in speech', he would not have bothered to make his 'will' clear to 'such an one'. And

even if she were prepared to correct herself where she missed or exceeded the mark, he would still think that there would have been some stooping and he had chosen 'never to stoop'. He says that she always smiled when he passed her, but then, she smiled on everybody else who passed her. As she continued in this manner, he 'gave commands' and 'all smiles stopped together'. The Duke ordered her death as he found her unworthy of the honour of being the wife of a Duke with a 'nine-hundred-years –old name'. And now, in this painting she looks 'as if alive'.

After describing the last Duchess and her fate, the Duke asks the envoy to rise and go below where the others are. He slyly refers to the generosity of the Count in the matter of dowry and hypocritically states that it is his daughter in whom he is actually interested. As they go down together, the Duke draws the attention of the envoy to a sculpture of Neptune, identified with the Greek sea-god, Poseidon, taming a sea-horse, which Claus, an imaginary sculptor from Innsbruck, the capital of Tyrol, had 'cast in bronze' for him.

2.3.5(b) 1. Word meanings

Fra–Brother of a missionary sect, priest

Design – on purpose

Pictured- painted

Countenance-expression, appearance

Durst- dare

Mantle – cloak

Officious – interfering in an obtrusive way

Lessoned – taught, corrected

Forsooth – indeed

Stooping - lowering one's standard, bending

Company – gathering, guests

Munificence - great generosity

Warrant – justification, authority

Pretence – claim

Avowed – openly stated

Rarity – a rare or precious thing

2.3.5(b) 2. Critical Commentary

Placed in the Renaissance, 'My Last Duchess' works out a delicately delineated portrait of the Duchess and more subtly, of the Duke. As in 'Porphyria's Lover', here too, Browning anticipates Impressionistic art in his depiction of the object of discourse as a work of art. The 'aesthetic' man, i.e., the Duke is trying to convince the envoy of his masterful presence, which actually indicates his need for assurance on that head. He tells the story of the last duchess in order to inform the envoy about what he expects from his future bride, perhaps. In a dramatic manner, he unveils the picture of his former wife, pointing out its artistic merit and then moves on to discuss her nature and conduct which he found unbecoming for the wife of a Duke with a 'nine-hundred-years-old name'. In the course of defining her lapses, he unwittingly reveals his own insecurity which prompted him to give 'commands' so that her smiles which she bestowed on all were 'stopped' forever. The Duke in his insane logic feels that he did the right thing in killing her, thereby preserving the dignity of his family's name and preserving her beauty in art. The Duke's attitude illustrates Freud's theory of obsessional neurosis. The psychological complexity of the Duke is brought out in his blind belief that he can never be wrong, that he is to decide the fates of others. He even controls the actions of such insignificant people as the envoy who m he orders to 'sit' or 'rise'. He behaves as a theatrical producer. He even monitors the responses of the envoy towards the portrait of the last duchess, prompting him to notice her wrist, her cheeks, the 'faint half-flush that dies along her throat'. These reveal his own sexual frustration in failing to have been the sole proprietor and controller of her life. Despite being a connoisseur of art and beauty, his elevated aesthetic sense does not protect him from sinking into the lowest depths of depravity, insecurity and cruelty. The Duke's theatrical rhetoric produces a series of dramatic shocks and as Robert Langbaum has pointed out, the last ten lines 'produce a series of shocks' that reveal the Duke's character which leave the reader 'panting after revelation'. Before we have time to recover from the shock of his crime we find him ruthlessly exposing his greed by referring to the dowry he expects from his future bride and his intention of exercising control by the reference to the sculpture of Neptune taming a sea-horse.

In the course of narrating the story of the last duchess, the Duke reveals his supreme arrogance and his distorted view of aristocratic lineage. He is harsh, cruel, heartless and ruthless, with inhuman pride. The swift change of topic in his discourse reflects his complete indifference and absence of feeling towards others. There is no trace of guilt, no regret, no fear. He is almost lunatic in his egotism and blindness. At the same time, he has the cool, practical logic of a heartless man. In a business-

like, practical way he introduces the subject of dowry. For him, marriage is a business transaction to be negotiated. He is also avaricious. His extreme greed is brought out in the reference to the Count's munificence'. His calculating nature and hypocrisy is revealed in his claim that his daughter's 'fair self' is all that interests him. In drawing the envoy's attention to Neptune taming a sea-horse there is a note of misgiving regarding his expectations from his new bride.

The Duke utters the monologue at a critical point in his life, when he is about to take a decision about his second marriage. He wants to make his position clear regarding his relations with the last duchess. The scene and situation is indicated in the title and the first few lines with the utmost economy, where the Duke leads the envoy from his future bride's home to view the portrait of his 'last duchess'. The Duke's typical Renaissance attributes such as love of art, painting and pride of aristocratic lineage are brought out right at the beginning. The moment of historical crisis in his life has the effect of splitting the speaker's personality into opposing elements and the conflict of these leads to revelation of character. There is an indirect exploration of psychological processes in the Duke's mind. Presence of audience forces the speaker to assume a stance or mask according to the effect he wants to make on the listener.

Throughout the poem, the presence of the listener is made palpable through references to his reactions, expressions and movements. The element of drama, both in content and presentation is strongly present, while the monologue offers the audience a chance to glimpse into the hidden recesses of an abnormal mind. In this, it is a perfect dramatic monologue.

And, in the attempt to justify his treatment of his former wife, he reveals more of his own failings than he would have done at any other time. His intention of conveying what he expects from his second wife by pointing out the lapses of the last duchess, has just the reverse effect. He lets slip a number of his character traits which at any other time he would have tried to conceal, such as his greed, arrogance, hypocrisy, insecurity and insane jealousy. This revelation of character is the fundamental object of Browning's dramatic monologues. It is done in an oblique way with great subtlety and dramatic effect. While the Duke thinks he is making a grand impression on his audience, he is actually exposing his frailties and grievous lapses. He ends up bringing out the last duchess's goodness, while trying to dismiss her. For him, the real person was insignificant, but her life-like portrait makes her 'seem alive'. She has become an object of art for the connoisseur.

Browning's handling of the dramatic monologue is best brought out through his

use of language. The Duke in all his pride of superior artistic taste leads his listener to look upon the portrait of his dead wife and appreciate the 'piece' which is a 'wonder'. And at the same time, he makes the envoy understand that the merit of the work of art should not be confused with the subject of that work. It is through a subtle use of language that the Duke tries to monitor the responses of his listener. The metaphor of art acts as a continuing motif through the poem, culminating in the reference to the statue of Neptune taming a sea-horse. The vulnerable duchess who could not be tamed as he wished had to pay with her life and become transformed into an object of art. And the sculpture of Neptune sends a veiled message as to what he would want from his future bride. The imagery of Neptune taming a sea-horse is in contrast to the duchess riding her 'white mule' on the terrace. Strength is pitted against vulnerability.

Browning makes use of subtle irony in revealing the character of the Duke by making him utter the most damaging things about himself while he felt he was making a great impression by his self-satisfied account of his opinions and actions.

The unobtrusive rhyming couplets and the syntax of the lines help in creating a dramatic effect as well as the rhythm of speech. The run-on lines with pauses here now and then especially convey a sense of conversational rhythm. The dominating presence of the Duke is brought out through the swift changes of subject and tone. The lover of art and beauty who fails to love humanity begins and ends his monologue with peremptory orders to notice works of art – first, a painting of the duchess he killed and, second, a statue of Neptune in the act of taming, as he wished to do with the last duchess and proposes to do with the next.

2.3.6. Summing Up

Both the poems 'Porphyria's Lover' and My Last Duchess' are extremely intriguing, interesting and terrifying studies in abnormal psychology. While the former reveals the peculiar psychology of a lover with his self-claimed power over time through the killing of his beloved at a moment of perfect love, the latter reveals the twisted psychology of a person who kills his wife for the absence of perfect and complete surrender to him.

2.3.7. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Analyse the Duke's character in 'My Last Duchess'.

2. Comment on Browning's handling of the dramatic monologue as found in 'Porphria's Lover' and 'My Last Duchess'.
3. Analyse either of the two poems as a dramatic monologue.
4. Attempt a critical appreciation of 'Porphyria's Lover'.
5. Discuss Browning's use of language in the two poems. Is it different from the language used by other Victorian poets? How?
6. How far can you call Browning a 'typically' Victorian poet? Discuss with illustrations from the two poems.

- **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

1. Give an account of the way the Duchess's story is unfolded.
2. Give an account of the murder of Porphyria as narrated by the speaker.
3. Comment on the character of the speaker in 'Porphyria's Lover'.
4. Consider either of the two poems as a study in abnormal psychology.

- **Short Questions-6 marks**

1. How does the speaker justify his action in 'Porphyria's Lover'?
2. Which trait in the duchess's character made the duke angry?
3. Comment briefly on the concluding image in 'My Last Duchess'.
4. Why did the lover kill Porphyria?

2.3.8. Suggested Reading

1. Jack, Ian. *Browning's Major Poetry*
2. Venn, William D. *Browning Handbook*
3. Langbaum, Robert. *The Poetry of Experience*
4. Berdoe. *The Browning Encyclopaedia*
5. Willey, Margaret. *Men and Women*
6. Phelps, W.L. *Robert Browning – How to Know Him*
7. Gibson, Mary Ellis, ed. *Critical Essays on Robert Browning.* G.K. Hall & Co., New York, 1992.
8. Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics.* Routledge, London, 1993.

Module-3 : Reading Victorian Prose

Unit-1 ❑ Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*

Structure:

3.1.0. Introduction

In this module you will be introduced to the most important genre of Victorian literature—the novel. The eighteenth century, as you have seen in previous Study Materials was the time of the emergence of the English novel and it was in the Victorian period that it reached its peak of maturity and versatility. This Unit of the module on novels rightfully begins with the master of early Victorian fiction, namely Charles Dickens. Dickens was a novelist by profession and a social reformer at heart,

hence his novels almost always portray the socio-economic problems of Early Victorian England in a rapid stage of transition from an agrarian to an industrial country, of the sad plight of orphans and social maladies which were undoubtedly the offshoot of overpopulation. His novels were also rich in autobiographical material and it is in *David Copperfield* that this can be found at its best.

3.1.1. Tracing the Literary Career of Charles Dickens (1812 – 1870)

Born to John and Elizabeth Dickens on 7 February 1812, Charles Dickens was widely hailed as the literary colossus of his age. He achieved early recognition with *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of 56 short pieces concerning London life, with illustrations by George Cruikshank, published in 1836. Following the resounding success of *Sketches*, Dickens was approached by Chapman and Hall to provide stories to match a series of sporting cartoons by Robert Seymour. This resulted in the genesis of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7), which would establish Dickens's reputation as a great comic genius. Buoyed up by the popularity of *Pickwick*, Dickens experimented with drama, authoring a farce, *The Strange Gentleman*, and a libretto, *The Village Coquettes*, which were performed in September and December of 1836 at the St. James's Theatre.

Charles Dickens

Dickens's next literary triumph came with *Oliver Twist* (1837-9). A realistic portrayal of the unkind treatment of orphans in mid-nineteenth century, the novel marked Dickens's foray into social fiction. While still working on *Oliver Twist*, he began *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9), a product of his growing reformist enthusiasm, where the notorious 'Yorkshire Schools,' institutions for the disposal of unwanted children, were critiqued. His next two fictional endeavours appeared in his weekly magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*: *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), the story of Little Nell and her maternal grandfather, and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), a historical narrative set during the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780. In 1842 Dickens visited the United States, later describing his impressions in the travelogue *American Notes* (1842). His

American experiences also found expression in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4), a novel featuring two of his notable villains, Seth Pecksniff and Jonas Chuzzlewit. In 1843 Dickens also wrote the first of his universally acclaimed Christmas books, *A Christmas Carol*.

For the next three years he toured the Continent with his family. While he was hardly inactive during this period (among other things he wrote the novella *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), the travelogue *Pictures of Italy* (1846), and edited the *Daily News*), he did not write another major novel until *Dombey and Son* (1846-8). Considered as Dickens's first artistically consummate work, *Dombey and Son* addresses the effects of the railways on the English world as one of its many themes. *Dombey and Son* was followed by *David Copperfield* (1849-50). In the same year that he completed *David Copperfield* Dickens started a new magazine, *Household Words*, later assimilated into *All the Year Round*, which acted as his principal literary vehicles. His next novel was *Bleak House* (1852-53), best-known for its unique double narrative and satirical delineation of the legal system. Dickens's tenth novel was *Hard Times* (1854), a 'Condition-of-England' tale, while his eleventh novel *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), a critique of the institution of debtor's prison, met with mixed critical response.

The year 1857 saw the staging of the play *The Frozen Deep*, based on the unfortunate 1845 Franklin expedition, written by Dickens in collaboration with his protégée, Wilkie Collins. Major works soon followed, including *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), a historical saga set around the French Revolution, and *Great Expectations* (1860-1), a rags-to-riches story detailing the transformation of a blacksmith's boy into a sophisticated gentleman. Dickens's penultimate novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) pursues the themes of money and predation, offering one of his darkest visions of Victorian London. In what would become his swansong *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens wanted to narrate a thriller along the lines of Collins's sensation potboilers. But on 9 June 1870 he died, thus leaving the novel unfinished. Dickens is buried in Westminster Abbey, London.

Dickens's works have been both celebrated and criticised by scholars and readers. They have received praise for their striking realism, humorous note, moral vision, prose style, unforgettable characters, and socio-cultural commentary. On the other hand, the charge-sheet framed against Dickens's works complains of loose episodic storylines, intellectual weakness, lack of psychological profundity, and sentimental extravaganza.

3.1.2. Introducing *David Copperfield*

Dickens's eighth novel, *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, & Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery* (Which He never meant to be Published on any Account), was serially published in monthly instalments by Bradbury and Evans from May 1849 to November 1850, with accompanying illustrations by Hablot Knight Browne. A one-volume edition of the novel followed in 1850 with the abbreviated title, *The Personal History of David Copperfield*, and a brief Preface dated October 1850.

Usually considered as the dividing point in Dickens's 40-year career, *David Copperfield* evinces a centrality in tone, combining the exuberance and irony of the early fiction with the serious, probing intensity of the later novels. The novel holds a special place in the Dickensian canon for a number of reasons: it provides ample drama, comedy, suspense, satire and sentiment; it presents over 50 well-delineated characters; it weaves the three main plotlines (David's own trials and tribulations, the James Steerforth – Emily affair, and Uriah Heep's schemes against the Wickfields) with several subplots (concerning the Micawbers, the Strongs, Betsey Trotwood, and the Tommy Traddles – Sophy Crewler romance); and it reveals at almost every turn Dickens's command of an eloquent style of writing.

David Copperfield has won the approbation of influential authors. The American Henry James eavesdropped as a child to hear the first instalment read aloud to his mother. The Russian Fyodor Dostoevsky was mesmerised by an early translation he pored over during his Siberian exile. The German, Franz Kafka used the novel as a source of inspiration for *Amerika* (1927). And the English Virginia Woolf, who had little admiration for Dickens, acknowledged the novel's perennial charm for literary enthusiasts.

A first-person narrative charting the life of the eponymous protagonist from childhood to maturity, *David Copperfield* is often deemed as a classic example of the bildungsroman in English. The standard formula of the genre, which is conventionally traced to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795-96), is as follows: a child orphaned or alienated to a degree from his father, growing up in a provincial or parochial milieu, making his way eventually to the metropolis, seeking an education both in and out of school, learning from his love relationship(s), sensitive beyond most of his peers but rather slow to discover his talents, finding after struggle a vocation and a philosophic attitude towards his varied experience. If read carefully, *David Copperfield* could be seen as adhering more or less closely to this formula; and although the novel opens with David's proclamation that 'Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my

own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show' (Chapter 1), his progress from innocence to experience, like that of a bildungsroman protagonist, successfully resolves the issue and establishes him as the indisputable 'hero' of his 64-chapter autobiography.

One of the chief concerns of the novel is the disciplining of David's undisciplined heart. The chronological process of his maturity from naive childhood to reflective adulthood thematises the process of his learning to navigate his emotions in the right direction. He undergoes no radical change of heart, as so many of Dickens's heroes do; rather, his heart becomes strengthened through his many experiences. He succeeds to curb the 'mistaken impulse[s] of an undisciplined heart' (Chapter 48) and cultivates what his aunt Betsey, the novel's spokesperson for Victorian values, calls 'strength of character' (Chapter 19), one of the most positive attributes an individual can possess. In short, the evolution of his selfhood becomes possible because David acquires the skill of balancing his unsteady heart.

What is a 'Bildungsroman'?

Bildungsroman **is a novel of formation, novel of education,or coming-of-age story. It is a literary genre that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist from youth to adulthood (coming of age), in which character change is extremely important. It is a special kind of novel that focuses on the psychological and moral growth of its main character from his or her youth to adulthood. A *Bildungsroman* is a story of the growing up of a sensitive person who looks for answers to his questions through different experiences. Generally, such a novel starts with a loss or a tragedy that disturbs the main character emotionally. He or she leaves on a journey to fill that vacuum.**

During the journey, the protagonist gains maturity gradually and with difficulty. Usually, the plot depicts a conflict between the protagonist and the values of society. Finally, he or she accepts those values and they are accepted by the society, ending the dissatisfaction. Such a type of novel is also known as a coming-of-age novel.

There are numerous examples of *Bildungsroman* or coming-of-age novels in English literature—*The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* by Henry Fielding. This is among the famous Bildungsroman examples written in a comic mode. James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. This is a coming-of-age story of a character, Stephen Dedalus.

The novel has been narrated in a peculiarly complicated mode. The reader has not only Dickens the novelist to attend to, but the adult narrator, David (himself also a novelist), and his remembered self, young David the protagonist. The young David, having limited knowledge, offers a raw, unphilosophical perspective on his experiences; the adult David, having full knowledge, offers, at the same time, a systematic interpretation of those same experiences behind young David's back as it were; and Dickens simultaneously suggests a critique of that systematic interpretation offered by adult David, behind *his* back. When these three narrative voices are taken into consideration, the complexities of the method of storytelling can be seen not as mere artistic virtuosity, but as a major contribution to the whole meaning of the novel.

3.1.3. *David Copperfield*: An Autobiographical Novel?

In the Preface to the 1867 edition, Dickens candidly declares that *David Copperfield* is his favourite novel, adding that, of all the characters he has created, David is dearest to him. That the nominal hero's initials (DC) are a reversal of his own (CD) further bears testimony to Dickens's preference for David. The novel may have had such significance to Dickens because it was largely autobiographical, and some of the important events of his life were only thinly disguised in it. The oblique revelations about Dickens's personal history in the novel rendered it extra special to him and contribute to its credibility as an autobiographical narrative.

The account of David's menial labour at Murdstone and Grinby's wine bottle-washing factory in a rat-infested warehouse uncannily resembles Dickens's traumatic experiences at Warren's blacking factory recorded in the autobiographical fragment he entrusted to his friend, John Forster. Uppermost in both accounts is Dickens's painful sense of being abandoned, of having no one to care for his well-being. He emphasises how a 12-year-old is unjustly deprived of his childhood, almost forced to take on the responsibilities of the adult world long before he is ready. The agony of recalling those grim days, so long a much-guarded secret until revealed to Forster, is evident in David's words:

> The two things clearest in my mind were, that a remoteness had come upon the old Blunderstone life – which seemed to lie in the haze of an immeasurable distance; and that a curtain had for ever fallen on my life at Murdstone and Grinby's. No one has ever raised that curtain since. I have lifted it for a moment, even in this narrative, with a reluctant hand, and dropped it gladly.

> The remembrance of that life is fraught with so much pain to me, with so much mental suffering and want of hope, that I have never had the courage even to examine how long I was doomed to lead it. Whether it lasted for a year, or more, or less, I do not know. I only know that it was, and ceased to be; and that I have written, and there I leave it. (Chapter 14)

Many other particulars from Dickens's past found their way into the novel. For instance, Wilkins Micawber, a comic character memorable for his eternal optimism and oratorical flourish in hyperbolic language, is modelled on Dickens's father, John Dickens, whose insolvency led to the untold miseries of Dickens's childhood and dogged his adult life until John's death. Micawber's imprisonment for debt mirrors John's, and like Micawber, his father was an affable, generous individual whom Dickens regarded with affection as well as annoyance. In fact, Micawber's classic observation on economics, 'annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen [pounds] nineteen [shillings] and six [pence], result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery' (Chapter 12), may have been a piece of advice given to the young Dickens by his own father.

While David's impulsive infatuation with Dora draws on Dickens's courtship of Maria Beadnell, the idea of David and Dora's incompatibility as a couple seems to derive from Dickens's strained relationship with his wife, Catherine Hogarth. David speaks of 'the old unhappy loss or want of something' (Chapter 44) that had some place in his heart, though not to embitter it:

> I did feel sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been. (Chapter 44)

The intermingling of fact and fiction is also perceptible in the marked similarity between Dickens's and David's careers. David's vocations – from proctor in Doctors' Commons to shorthand reporter to professional novelist – follow those of his creator. Moreover, crucial to both David and Dickens is the nurturing power of literature. The novels of Smollett, Fielding, Goldsmith, Cervantes, Defoe, and Le Sage, according to David, 'kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time' (Chapter 4), just as they sustained Dickens in the blacking

factory. And just as Dickens entertained the boys at Warren's by narrating the stories he had read, David wins over Steerforth and other boarding-mates by telling them nightly stories in the dormitory of Salem House School, stories based on the ones he had read in his father's well-stocked library. Dickens and David are, in some senses and at some times, interchangeable.

What was 'The Debtors' Prison?'

The Marshalsea Prison was a debtors' prison which is mentioned frequently in the works of Charles Dickens. It was located on the south bank of the River Thames in the London borough of Southwark, near London Bridge. In Victorian England, people could be jailed indefinitely for nonpayment of debt. They would be held in a debtor's prison until the debt was paid. Although their family members were not forced to go to jail, it was commonplace for the wives and children of failed business men and other debtors to accompany them to the jail. Very often they had nowhere else to go, since the main bread winner of the family was imprisoned. Very often, these family members were free to take up work outside of the jail during the day, returning only at night. The income that they earned helped pay off the debt of their jailed loved one, and keep him alive, for otherwise they would have had no way to buy food.

The Marshalsea Prison

Most of the inmates were herded into small rooms with dozens of other prisoners, imprisoned, often for several years even for small amounts of debt, which increased for non-payment of the prison's service fees. Charles Dickens' father was imprisoned in this prison for a debt of 40 pounds and 10 shillings when the novelist was twelve years old. As a result of his father's imprisonment, Dickens was forced to leave school and work in the factory to support himself. The experience deeply affected Dickens, and the imprisonment of debtors in the Marshalsea prison is a frequent theme in his novels.

3.1.4. Characters of the Novel

3.1.4.1. Murdstone and Heep: Agents of Evil in *David Copperfield*

Edward Murdstone (**note: the surname is a compound of two words: murder and stone**) is the main antagonist of the novel's first half. His entry into the Copperfield household as David's step-father has killing effects on David and his passive mother, Clara. Murdstone champions the principles of firmness endorsed by the evangelical Protestants of the time. Similar to Mr. Brocklehurst in Charlotte

David with Urial Heep, An Illustration by Frederick Barnard from Chapman and Hall 'Household Edition' of the serialised novel in 1870's.

Bronte's 1847 *Jane Eyre*, a bildungsroman like *David Copperfield*, Murdstone prides himself on his autocratic disciplining of the young, which amounts to nothing more than inflicting mental torment and physical cruelty. Like Jane, David is punished for daring to retaliate against his oppressor in self-defence: he is locked away in his room for biting Murdstone's hand. Murdstone sends David away to Salam House, owned by his equally dictatorial friend, Mr. Creakle, and later, after his mother's demise (possibly due to Murdstone's tyranny) to London to work at Murdstone and Grinby's. When David flees to Dover to seek refuge with Betsey, Murdstone offers to take back him unconditionally from Betsey but is refused and rebuked by her. Near the end of the novel, David learns from an old acquaintance that Murdstone married a rich young woman but 'reduced her to a state of imbecility' (Chapter 59). Modern

readings opine that although David vehemently resists everything that his evil step-father stands for, he unconsciously adopts some of Murdstone's hard philosophy when he attempts to mould the mind of his child-wife, Dora ('I had endeavoured to adapt Dora to myself,' states David in Chapter 48), who is much like his mother. The result, Dora's premature death, recalls his mother's similar decline and death.

Undeniably one of Dickens's greatest villains, Uriah Heep has become synonymous with hypocritical opportunism. Dickens's description of Uriah's repulsive appearance marks him as a negative character: his cropped red hair, lashless red eyes, high shoulders, 'long lank skeleton hand' (Chapter 15), and snakelike writhing align him with the devil. Uriah pretends to be subservient, self-deprecating — 'ever so 'umble' is his catch phrase – while all the time contriving to take over the alcoholic Mr. Wickfield's business and defraud his clients. He is eventually defeated but not prosecuted. He is later imprisoned for an attempted fraud on the Bank of England. Interestingly, Uriah serves as a doppelganger to David. His ruthlessly ambitious rise from articled clerk to partner in Wickfield's firm, his aspiration for the hand of his employer's daughter Agnes, his dedication in studying law from William Tidd's *Practice* – all have their equivalents in David's rise from proctor to novelist, marriage to Dora, and his perseverance with Thomas Gurney's handbook on the art of shorthand. David's determined refusal to acknowledge Uriah as his dark double is countered by Uriah's equal determination to remind him of it through the alteration of his form of address from 'Master' to 'Mister' Copperfield and back again. Uriah's repeated insinuations that David is no better than he is are fuelled by his strong antipathy towards David's claims to moral superiority. Once Micawber exposes his treachery, Uriah drops his veneer of false humility and vents his repressed anger: 'Copperfield, I have always hated you. You've always been an upstart, and you've always been against me' (Chapter 52). Dickens based Uriah's manners and physical attributes on Hans Christian Anderson, the renowned Danish author of fairy tales, and Uriah's machinations on Thomas Powell, an employee of Dickens's friend, Thomas Chapman.

3.1.4.2. 'Angel in the House' and 'Fallen Woman': Agnes and Emily

The patriarchal culture of Victorian England promulgated a dyadic model of femininity that pigeonholed women into two mutually exclusive categories, namely the angel in the house and the fallen woman. While the first referred to a self-sacrificing, asexual wife/ mother acquiescently engrossed in the nitty-gritty of her

domesticity, the second was a blanket term applied to a variety of women: prostitute, adulteress, seduced/ raped woman, or any woman engaged in socially unauthorised sexual activity. The angel in the house, perceived as the ethical stewardess of the family and state, was positioned at the centre of the Victorian social universe, whereas the fallen woman, seen as libidinous and therefore morally culpable, was conveniently pushed to its periphery.

Dickens perpetuates the stereotype of the angel in the house through his portrayal of Agnes Wickfield. When David first meets her, he associates her with the pious aura of 'a stained glass window in a church':

> Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquillity about it, and about her – a quiet, good, calm spirit, — that I never have forgotten; that I never shall forget.... I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait for us, above, I thought of that window; and I associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards (Chapter 15).

The association continues till the end of the novel, when David and his 'quiet, good, calm spirit' ultimately marry and rear children. In the meantime, Agnes cares for her widowed father, Mr Wickfield; rebuffs the attentions of Heep; counsels David against Steerforth; tends Dora on her deathbed, both physically and emotionally; and sustains David by mail as he grieves in Switzerland after Dora's passing away. Through it all David remains, in the words of Betsey, 'blind, blind, blind' (Chapter 60), considering Agnes only as a sister in whom he can confide. When he finally admits his love for her, she confesses, 'I have loved you all my life!' (Chapter 62). Although Dickens knew from her first appearance in the novel that Agnes was the true heroine of the story, most critics have blasted her for her angelic perfection. They find her wooden and far less attractive than David's child-wife, Dora. Agnes is more of a virtuous conscience than a flesh-and-blood character; she brings discipline and responsibility into David's life, but she seems to lack the human qualities of folly and fickleness that makes the playful Dora so appealing. One possible reason why Agnes comes off as unconvincing is because we have only David's version of her story. David, from his privileged position as male narrator and husband, constructs Agnes as an icon of domestic sainthood that guarantees his role as paternal protector and provider for his family.

The figure of the fallen woman is epitomised by Emily, Daniel Peggotty's niece. Emily's fall is foreshadowed early in the novel. While playing with David at Yarmouth beach, she risks danger by walking out on an old jetty, 'springing forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I have never forgotten, directed far out to sea' (Chapter 3). David's remembrance of this childhood incident and Emily's actual 'destruction' later in life compels him to contemplate whether it would have been for the best if Emily had drowned that day. Furthermore, as a child, Emily wishes to become a lady. This ambition to rise above her working-class status plays an instrumental role in her fall. As she grows up, she does not relinquish her wish until the upper-class Steerforth comes along with the offer of realising her cherished dream. He seduces her, eloping to Italy with her on the eve of her marriage to Ham Peggotty. But Steerforth perceives Emily as nothing more than a mere distraction at his disposal and becomes bored of her quite quickly. It is also unlikely that he had any intentions of marrying Emily in the first place, since marriage with her would have meant a significant step down the social ladder. It should be noted that Emily's tainted fate seems to be entwined with that of her friend, Martha Endell. After she is dishonoured – the reasons for her fall are not explained – and ostracised by her townsfolk, Martha runs off to London using money given to her by Emily. There she becomes a prostitute, contemplates suicide out of postlapsarian guilt, but redeems herself by bringing about Daniel's reunion with Emily. Towards the end of the narrative, Emily and Martha immigrate to Australia with Daniel in search of a better life. However, once in the colony, their lives turn out differently. Martha achieves domestic happiness after marrying a bushman, whereas Emily finds peace in the burly bosom of Daniel and doing good to others. Here fiction seems commensurate with historical fact, for, like Emily and Martha, several of the inmates of Urania Cottage, the refuge for the rehabilitation of fallen women that the philanthropic Dickens managed under the patronage of the heiress Angela Burdett-Coutts, found husbands and led productive lives in the colonies.

'Angel in the House' and 'Fallen Woman': What do they mean and Signify?

Coventry Patmore's popular, long narrative poem 'The Angel in the House' was published in parts between 1854 and 1862. Inspired by his wife, Emily, the poem charts their traditional courtship and marriage. Today, it is known for the way in which it idealised women as devoted, docile wives and mothers;

paragons of domesticity, virtue and humility. Hence, the phrase 'angel in the house' came to signify the utmost purity—moral and sexual for women in Victorian England, something which again was a theoretical construct rather than an actuality.

On the other end of this bipolar spectrum was the construct of the 'Fallen Woman'. In the Victorian novel, gender-based social norms dictated appropriate behaviour. Female wrongdoing was not only judged according to the law, but also according to the idealized conception of womanhood. It was this implicit cultural measure, and how far the woman contravened the feminine norms of society, that defined her criminal act rather than the act itself or the injury her act inflicted. When a woman deviated from the Victorian construction of the ideal woman, she was stigmatized and labelled. The fallen woman was viewed as a moral menace, a contagion.

3.1.5. Themes in the Novel

3.1.5.1. Failure of Marriage in *David Copperfield*

David Copperfield is often read as Dickens's interrogation of the institution of marriage, an institution dearly held and deeply revered by the Victorians. That the novel came after *Dombey and Son* – itself a novel that centers around the failed marriage of Edith and Paul Dombey and that takes as its focal point Edith's desertion of her husband – is, of course, very important. One could argue that *David Copperfield* takes over *Dombey and Son*'s theme, the spectacle of a marriage's failure, and makes it part of both the main plot and subplots. However, whereas the failure of loveless conjugal relation is seen in *Dombey and Son* as a highly melodramatic occurrence, *David Copperfield* portrays the end of marriage as something less than an event, certainly not melodramatic. In it dissolution of marriage is common and commonplace, an occurrence to be expected – almost a part of the usual order of things.

Despairing depictions of marriage permeate the novel. From the deterioration of David-Dora relationship to the improvidence of Wilkins and Emma Micawber to the threat of adultery survived by Annie and Dr. Strong to Murdstone's iron-fisted control of his two wives to the alienation of Betsey from her blackmailer husband, *David Copperfield* is concerned in a multiplicity of ways with the miseries caused

by marriage. Appearing in the year that saw the formation of a Royal Commission to study the state of marriage and divorce law – a commission formed in large part because so many people were managing to obtain divorces despite the fact that they were illegal, Dickens's novel participates in the general turmoil which resulted in the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act which began to legalise divorce seven years later.

3.1.5.2. Role of Memory in *David Copperfield*

David Copperfield is a quintessential narrative of retrospective memory, a coming-of-age fiction recollecting from the perspective of a later time the gradual formation of David's identity through his many experiences. As David remarks: "this narrative is my written memory" (Chapter 58). The novel is replete with myriad references to memory and its operations; the entire plot is built upon reminiscences drawn up from what David calls "the sea of my remembrance" (Chapter 53).

There are passages which assert the pictographic vividness of memory, the way certain scenes from the past are relived in all their concrete immediacy:

> Can I say of her face – altered as I have reason to remember it, perished as I know it is – that it is gone, when here it comes before me at this instant, as distinct as any face that I may choose to look on in the crowded street? (Chapter 2)

Superimposition of past and present via the associative link of some specific sensation in the present is a hallmark of David's autobiography. In his hypersensitive mind, a smell or a sound in the present can trigger a moment from the past preserved in the formaldehyde of his extraordinary memory:

> The feeling with which I used to watch the tramps, as they came into the town on those wet evenings, at dusk, . . . came freshly back to me; fraught, as then, with the smell of damp earth, and wet leaves and briar, and the sensation of the very airs that blew upon me in my own toilsome journey (Chapter 60).

David's memories are always linked to one another. They hang together to form a unified whole, the integrated continuum of his bygone life as it has led by stages up to his present condition:

> I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages, that, from

> the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its forecast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days (Chapter 55).

In its handling of the process of memory, the novel resembles William Wordsworth's poetic excursions into the past, especially his *Prelude*, coincidentally published the same year as *David Copperfield*. Both autobiographical works champion the edifying effect of memory. Yet for all its resemblances to Wordsworth's poetry, particularly in Chapter 58, where David experiences a Wordsworthian awakening, the novel often seems closer to another personal exploration published in 1850, Alfred Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Like Tennyson's poem, Dickens's novel, at times, gives expression to the oppressive effect of remembrance, the potentially debilitating effect of memory. In other words, the novel paradoxically dramatises the force of memory as both edifying and oppressive.

3.5.1.3. Efficacy of the Storm Scene in *David Copperfield*

The storm scene in Chapter 55, titled 'Tempest', of the novel is one the best-remembered scenes in the whole of Dickens. Here the drama is centred around (i) David's hazardous journey to Yarmouth in a storm-laden weather to deliver Emily's last letter to Ham, and (ii) his witnessing of a shipwreck off the coast of Yarmouth in which Steerforth (stranded aboard the ship) and Ham (selflessly attempting to rescue him) are both drowned in the storm-tossed sea. The first conjures up an apocalyptic vision, as if the whole world is falling apart under the elemental power of the storm, whereas the second is a tragic set piece reminiscent of William Turner's oil painting of the steamer in distress.

Often seen as the emotional climax of the novel, the storm scene draws us towards the conclusion with a sense of relief and resolution. After Chapter 55 the tone of the narrative changes from high drama to serene reflection as David discusses his maturity. He travels abroad and eventually settles in Switzerland. He mourns the deaths of Dora, Steerforth, and Ham and begins to ruminate upon his sorrows. Alone, he becomes, for the first time, the sole subject of his autobiography, and we learn about the growth of his character. The storm scene seems to have been a climax in another sense as well: Dickens never again attempted anything similar on the same scale. Storm episodes crop up in his later novels but usually briefly. The nearest Dickens came to recreating the sinister mood of *David Copperfield* was in *Great Expectations*. Though the storm does not materialize in the *David Copperfield* manner, but on the night of Abel Magwitch's return from Australia, the weather is

wild and stormy and ‘gloomy accounts [had] come in from the coast of shipwreck and death’ (Chapter 39). This atmospheric turbulence reawakens memories of Pip’s childhood on the desolate marshes and prepares us for the re-entry of Magwitch, a figure from that past.

Integral to the storm scene is the powerful description of how the tempest effects the ‘tremendous sea’ (Chapter 55), a sea raised to a terrible power by the furious wind; this sea, as many incidents show, has ominous associations for David – he hears of Daniel’s drowned relations on his very first visit to Yarmouth. However, unlike David, Steerforth is fond of the sea. He finds in it a reflection of his restlessness, a chance to free some of his pent-up energy. While David prudently applies himself to his profession, falls in love and marries, Steerforth becomes an adventure-seeking seafarer, burning up his ‘fervent energy’ in the ‘rough seas’ (Chapter 28). Against David’s purposeful life, Steerforth’s is seen as a rebellious quest for self-destruction. His death in the sea is in keeping with his constitutional recklessness: hanging from the mast of his sinking ship, he waves his red cap at those on the beach as a last gesture of mockery and disregard towards life. He is Dickens’s version of the Byronic cavalier, who lightened the dreary moments of David’s boyhood, and David can never quite overcome his admiration for Steerforth’s dare-devil charisma despite knowing that Steerforth had seduced and ruined Emily. Even his last remembrance of Steerforth is qualified by his love and affection: ‘I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school’ (Chapter 55). Throughout, Steerforth has offered David an image of unbridled freedom which perhaps corresponds with his own concealed desire for adventure and excitement. David comes to reject this desire as he matures, but Steerforth’s personal magnetism never fails to pull him back towards his boyhood and always reasserts their first relationship of hero and hero worshipper.

Learner Please Note!

Like the storm scene in *David Copperfield*, there are other important Storm scenes in the gamut of English Literature and the most important occurs in William Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. The storm in Lear works inventively on a number of levels: the elemental storm, the social storm which shakes the divided kingdom, the inner storm that drives Lear mad; all are interconnected and reinforce one another to achieve the sense of overall darkness and despair. The extreme weather works as a symbol as it matches the extreme anger, hurt and disappointment that Lear feels.

3.1.5.4. Use of Prison Motif in *David Copperfield*

Though not very prominent in other Dickens novels, the prison motif is central to *David Copperfield*. To begin with, there are instances of actual imprisonment in the narrative: Micawber is incarcerated in debtor's prison after failing to meet his creditors' demands; Dora visits the page who had pilfered her watch and been imprisoned, and faints when she finds herself 'inside the iron bars' (Chapter 48); and David accepts an invitation to visit Creakle's model prison where he finds Littimer, Steerforth obsequious manservant, and Heep among the model prisoners (although David leaves the prison convinced that the two have not changed from their former scheming selves and have fooled Creakle into believing their repentance).

The prison motif is also palpable in the representations of David's two wives and Jane Murdstone, the spinster sister of his step-father. Jane arrives at the Copperfield household with 'a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain' (Chapter 4); she even makes 'a jail-delivery of her pocket handkerchief' (Chapter 4). Her most vicious act as penal authority, however, is taking over the keys to the house and keeping them in her bag, 'her own little jail,' (Chapter 4) so as to function as sole confiner and deliverer. Even when she appears later in the novel as Dora's friend, the bracelets of her arm reminds David of 'the fetters over a jail-door' (Chapter 26). Interestingly, the prison image is deployed in case of Dora too, but it has no menacing overtone: Dora's death is expressed in terms of her spirit escaping from the prison of her body: 'The spirit fluttered for a moment on the threshold of its little prison, and, unconscious of captivity, took wing.' (Chapter 48). References to prison and keys also occur in relation to Agnes. In Chapter 35, Agnes is associated with a 'quaint little basket of keys hanging at [her] side', and she tells David, in Chapter 60, that she has connected him in her remembrance with 'the basket-trifle, full of keys'. This last reference comes immediately after she makes the following remark regarding her teaching (she runs a small school for girls): 'I must be a prisoner for a little while' (Chapter 60).

3.1.6. Adaptations of *David Copperfield*

After *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield* has inspired more dramatic adaptations than any other work by Dickens. During the 1850s alone there were at least 25 productions. The first of these, *Born with a Caul*, a three-act rendition by George Almar which premiered at the Strand Theatre, introduced key alterations in the narrative; for example, Almar saved Steerforth from drowning – he emerges in the

flesh after being presumed dead, declares that he and Emily are actually married, and vows to emigrate to Australia with the Peggotty clan. Other early adaptations were more faithful to the original text. Later in the nineteenth century, Andrew Halliday's four-act *Little Em'ly* (1869) – first staged on either side of the Atlantic within weeks of one another at the Olympic Theatre (London) and Niblo's Garden (New York City) – provided a template for many subsequent stage reworkings. Repositioning the fallen Emily as the lead over the novel's hero, Halliday's play and its spin-offs – *Lost Em'ly, Poor Lost Em'ly, Little Em'ly's Trials* – replaced nearly all other theatrical versions of the novel in the last three decades of the Victorian period. In the twentieth century, Micawber proved a more engaging focus. He was the central character in Louis Napoleon Parker's 1914 stage adaptation, in which Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree played both Micawber and Daniel Peggotty.

Although *David Copperfield* has been filmed on several occasions, the two most eminent celluloid versions were made in 1935 and 1969. The first was directed by George Cukor and produced by David O. Selznick. A number of characters and incidents from the novel were omitted in this cinematic adaptation – notably David's time at Salem House School, although Steerforth, whom he met at the school, was retained for the film as head boy at the school David attended after Betsey gained custody of him. The 1969 version was a British American international co-production directed by Delbert Mann for 20th Century Fox. Starring Robin Phillip in the title role, the film was very unusual — instead of being a linear story, David's bildungsroman is told in flashbacks from the point in his life when he leaves London and all his friends for three years.

3.1.7. Summing Up

- Dickens was a novelist by profession and a social reformer at heart
- The novel *David Copperfield* may have had such significance to Dickens because it was largely autobiographical, and some of the important events of his life were only thinly disguised in it.
- *David Copperfield* is a quintessential narrative of retrospective memory, a coming-of-age fiction recollecting from the perspective of a later time the gradual formation of David's identity through his many experiences.
- Edward Murdstone is the main antagonist of the novel's first half. His entry into the Copperfield household as David's step-father has killing effects on David and his passive mother, Clara.

- Undeniably one of Dickens's greatest villains, Uriah Heep has become synonymous with hypocritical opportunism
- *David Copperfield* is often read as Dickens's interrogation of the institution of marriage, an institution dearly held and deeply revered by the Victorians.

3.1.8. Comprehension Exercises:

● **Long Questions-20 Marks**

1. Dickens's life is the backbone for David's story. Illustrate.
2. David is the least interesting character in the novel. Do you think this was Dickens's choice, to make David simply a background on which to display the more interesting characters? Why or why not?
3. How does Dickens's treatment of the fallen woman in *David Copperfield* compare with that of other novelists of the time?
4. '*David Copperfield* is about marriages laden with angst and lacking in trust, marriages between people who apparently could not be more incompatible.' Comment.

● **Mid-length Questions-12 Marks**

1. 'The sea is a powerful force in the lives of the characters in *David Copperfield*, and it is almost always connected with death.' Elucidate.
2. How does the novel portray parent-child relationship? Discuss with suitable examples.
3. 'Born "a child of close observation," David is an adult of incredible memory.' Explain.
4. Write an essay on the narrative complexity of the novel.

● **Short Questions-6 Marks**

1. Uriah acts as a negative mirror to David. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What comic exaggerations characterize the Micawber family?
3. Compare and contrast the characters of Dora and Agnes.
4. What type of education is advocated by Mr. Murdstone, and what effect does this have on David?

3.1.9. Suggested Reading

Bloom, H. (Ed.) (1987). *Charles Dickens's David Copperfield*. New York: Chelsea House.

Buckley, J. H. (Ed.) (1990). *David Copperfield*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Burgis, N. (Ed.) (1981). *David Copperfield*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Collins, P. (1977). *Charles Dickens: David Copperfield*. London: Edward Arnold.

Dunn, R. J. (1981). *David Copperfield: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Garland.

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Peck. J. (Ed.) (1995). *David Copperfield and Hard Times: New Casebooks*. London: Macmillan.

Storey, G. (1991). *David Copperfield: Interweaving Truth and Fiction*. Boston: Twayne.

Tambling, J. (Ed.) (2004). *David Copperfield*. London: Penguin.

Unit-2 ❑ Thomas Hardy: *Far From the Madding Crowd*

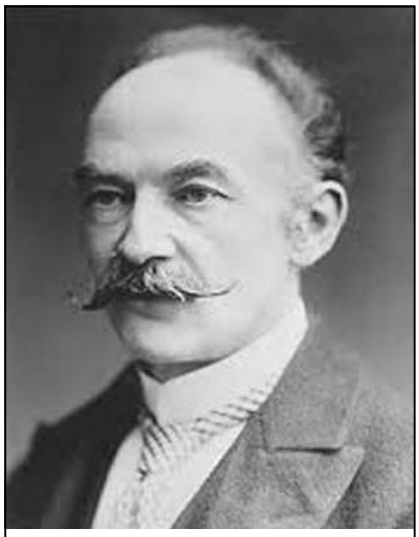
Structure:

3.2.0. Introduction

In this unit you will be introduced to a novel by Thomas Hardy, a late-Victorian novelist and poet. It will be interesting for you to continuously compare this novel with that of Charles Dickens, which you have read in the previous Unit. It will be interesting to note the differences in social concerns, setting and style of the two novelists. While Dickens' novels have a concern that may be regarded as chiefly urban, Hardy's is definitely rural and regional. The novel under focus, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, from its very title, may make you expect a pastoral, idyllic setting, an expectation which may not hold true after you read the novel. So, let us begin looking at the novelist before we enter his novel-universe.

3.2.1.Thomas Hardy: Biography and Style

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was a Victorian novelist, poet and writer whose work reflects the philosophical, spiritual and social milieu of the age distinctly. Hardy was born when the young Queen Victoria had been on the throne only three years, and he died when the 1920s were drawing to a close. Hardy rose from lower-class rural obscurity to climb the ranks of society to become the foremost writer of the age. His funeral drew large crowds, the Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, led the nation's mourning, and his ashes were laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. Since Hardy's death, his reputation both as a novelist and as a major poet has grown; his short stories and his minor novels are being revalued, while developments in literary theory and criticism continue to reveal fresh aspects of a writer whose modernity continually surprises. Intensely private, evasive and ironic, Hardy has always proved an elusive subject for biographers. Much of Hardy's life, as he observed, is present in his novels, poems and short stories, and there is a complex strand of relationship between his life and his writings. These encompass, uniquely, his depiction of the topography of Dorset, where he was born and grew up, for his fictional county of 'Wessex', and his exploration of its society and history. In his writing Hardy engages with the thought, ideas and trends of his age: developments in science, new philosophies that sought to fill the vacuum left by the loss of religious faith, the growth of a radical politics that gave expression to the striving of the working class for social equality and democracy, the struggle for a better status for women, and the effects of the First World War. Another important aspect of Hardy's work is the literary market place in which his work was published, especially since the majority of his novels and some of his short stories first appeared as serials in the popular magazines of the day. The Victorian writer's relationship with editors and publishers was difficult. Hardy in particular, as he departed in thought and writing from established values, had to run the gauntlet of prudishness of Victorian publishers and reading public. On the brink of a new literary era, Hardy broached topics and themes, such as relationship between the sexes, with greater frankness and



Thomas Hardy

starkness than some Victorian readers liked; consequently, he lived through a period of outraged criticism. Today however we wonder at the furore and rather admire Hardy's ability to voice the ideas and issues far ahead of his times. Hardy was a great champion of individual liberty, full of empathy for the lot of women and in fact he created such powerful women in his novels that many critics and readers have opined that his male characters appear lifeless and insipid in contrast to his spirited heroines – Bathsheba, Tess, Sue or Eustacia.

Sickly from an early age, he was educated at home until he was sixteen. He then began an apprenticeship, and then a career, as an architect. He started writing poetry in the 1860s but did not publish his first novel until 1871. He married Emma Lavinia Gifford in 1874. After some time in London he built himself a house (called Max Gate) in his native Dorsetshire and lived there for the rest of his life. The marriage was initially satisfying, but gradually the couple grew apart because of temperamental incompatibility, until Hardy's later novels such as *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* made Emma take his views of marriage in them so personally that she shut herself up in a life of seclusion in the attic rooms of the Hardys' home Max Gate till her death in 1912. He married Florence Dugdale, who was his secretary for many years, in 1914.

His first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, was published anonymously in 1871. This and his two succeeding novels, *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) and *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), although not popular successes, were favorably reviewed by the critics. It was not until the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy's fourth novel, that Hardy won widespread popularity as a writer, and he was able to give up architecture. Hardy went on to write novels at an extraordinary rate for more than 20 years, writing one every one or two years. His most famous novels written during these years include *The Return of the Native, Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. After the publication of *Jude the Obscure* caused a major scandal in 1895, Hardy stopped writing novels and devoted the rest of his life (more than 30 years) to poetry. He wrote eight volumes of poetry till the end of his life, which ranged from mid-Victorian to early twentieth century, and positioned him among poets of the Modern period. His last great project was an epic poem titled *The Dynasts*, a versed chronicle of the Napoleonic Wars. What perhaps remains less known are the large number of short stories which he wrote—Fifty plus collected in seven volumes such as *Wessex Tales, Life's Little Ironies, A Group of Noble Dames* and also some very important non-fictional essays like 'The Dorsetshire Labourer'.

Hardy was a devoted reader of philosophy, scientific texts, the Bible, and Greek literature, and he incorporated much of his knowledge into his own works. One of the most profound influences on his thinking was **Charles Darwin**, particularly Darwin's emphasis on chance and luck in evolution. Though brought up to believe in God, Hardy struggled with a loss of faith suffered by many of his contemporaries; he increasingly turned to science for answers about man's place in the universe. When he died in 1928, at the age of 88 years, venerated as a poet of national and Universal importance, much of his faith in the 'meliorism' towards which the Universe was moving, as expressed again and again in *The Dynasts*, had been shaken by the mindless slaughter of a generation in the First World War.

3.2.2. *Far From the Madding Crowd*: Composition and Publication

It was not until the publication of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, Hardy's fourth novel, that Hardy won widespread popularity as a writer, and he was able to give up architecture. The book was published serially in 1874, in Corn Hill Magazine, edited by Leslie Stephens. The novel was published in short sections, and as you read it, you can see that they intentionally leave the reader in suspense; this was a device to motivate readers to buy the next issue of the magazine. Illustrations were an integral part of such serial publication and like in many of his novels Helen Paterson provided 24 illustrations for *Far From the Madding Crowd* **(two have been provided in this Unit for your benefit on p. 156, 160)**. Early reviewers compared Hardy's writing to that of George Eliot and recognised him as an important new voice in English fiction.

One of Hardy's central concerns in all of his writing was the problem of modernity in a society that was rapidly becoming more and more industrial. One of his projects as a writer was to create an account of life in the swiftly changing Dorsetshire as it had once been. He was particularly interested in the rituals and histories of that part of England, as well as the dialect of its locals. The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* suggests avoidance of the life of a city, modernised government, crowds and industry; in it, Hardy tries to fashion a portrait of what he saw as an endangered way of life and to create a snapshot for future generations to look at.

At the beginning of the novel, Bathsheba Everdene is a beautiful young woman without a fortune. She meets Gabriel Oak, a young farmer, and saves his life one evening. He asks her to marry him, but she refuses because she does not love him.

Upon inheriting her uncle's prosperous farm she moves away to the town of Weatherbury. Bathsheba stands out as one of the earliest, powerful and independent women characters in the Hardy-Universe and through her Hardy portrays the innate capacity of women to be strong, resourceful and independent in a social world which restrains them and curtails opportunities for their growth. The novel is also one whose Preface for the first time chalks out the geographical dimensions of his 'wessex' **(you can read about this in a text box below)**.

3.2.3. Cast of Major and Minor Characters in the Novel

Major Characters

Bathsheba Everdene: Spirited young mistress of a large farm.

Gabriel Oak: Patient, reliable shepherd; suitor of Bathsheba.

William Boldwood: Gentleman farmer in love with Bathsheba.

Francis Troy: Lover and, later, husband of Bathsheba.

Fanny Robin: Runaway maid, who is betrayed by Francis Troy

Minor Characters

Mrs. Hurst: Bathsheba's aunt.

Liddy Smallbury: Bathsheba's maid.

Maryann Money: Bathsheba's charwoman.

Mrs. Coggan: Employed by Bathsheba.

Cainy Ball: Young under-shepherd to Gabriel.

Benjy Pennyways: Bathsheba's ex-bailiff.

Bill Smallbury, Henery Fray, Jacob Smallbury, and **Labal Tall** Some of Bathsheba's farmhands.

3.2.4. Brief Summary of the Plot

The events of the novel occur in Hardy's 'wessex' which is South West of England beginning in the 1840s. Gabriel Oak is a 28 year old shepherd and aspires to be a farmer with his own flock of sheep. He meets and proposes to the alluring Bathsheba Everdene, who has recently arrived in the hamlet. But she turns him down because he seems too plain and is unpropertied. Disaster strikes soon as Gabriel's

flock, which had been paid for with borrowed money, falls off an embankment due to his undisciplined sheep dog George. At about the same time, Bathsheba inherits her Uncle's farm near Weatherbury. After chancing on her property during a fire and helping her out, Oak is employed by her and eventually becomes the *de facto* supervisor on her a farm in reduced circumstances. Bathsheba is depicted as a sprightly, beautiful but vain woman who flirtatiously sends an enticing Valentine to her neighbor Farmer Boldwood on a whim. Encouraged thus, and believing that Bathsheba wishes for his attention Boldwood proposes marriage to her, which she turns down. In the meantime Sargent Troy, an unprincipled man of questionable reputation, seduces her affections with a dazzling display of his swordsmanship and smooth talking, and they eventually wed hastily in Bath, despite Gabriel Oak warning her against Troy's reputation. Boldwood tries to buy Troy off when he learns he has returned, unaware of the marriage. Troy, who is a dandy, is not suited to run the farm and wastes money in gambling while the crops are neglected. An important sub-plot of the novel rests with Fanny Robin, Bathsheba's former servant, who has become pregnant by Troy before his marriage with Bathsheba and arrives in extreme poverty at the Casterbridge Union House to have her baby and to eventually die. When the truth is revealed, Troy is distraught at the death of his one true love and arranges to have her buried with a headstone listing both their names. Troy and Bathsheba have by then fallen out and Troy wanders to the ocean shore and seems to have drowned, but actually is rescued by some boatmen and ends up in America. Boldwood, now once again, presses Bathsheba for a date when she will marry him, much to her distress. Troy returns to perform in a travelling act at the sheep fair and is spotted by the previously fired bailiff, Benjy Pennyways. At the Christmas Eve party at Boldwood's, Troy turns up and Boldwood, now a man driven to madness by his obsession over Bathsheba, kills him with a shotgun. Bathsheba cleanses the body and maintains an overnight vigil with it, then arranges for it to be buried besides Fanny. Boldwood goes to jail. Oak at last marries Bathsheba, now a much sober and less lively person.

3.2.5. About the Title

The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* comes from Thomas Gray's famous 18th-century poem 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard', where the poet says:

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;

Along the cool sequestered vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

By alluding to Gray's poem, Hardy evokes the rural culture that, by Hardy's lifetime, had become threatened with extinction at the hands of ruthless industrialisation. His novel thematises the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world. It is through this vital connection that Oak is able to emerge successful in protecting Bathsheba's farm from harm and finally achieve fulfillment.

Note to Learners
Thomas Hardy's 'Wessex'

Thomas Hardy set all of his major novels in the south and southwest of England. He named the area "Wessex" after the medieval Anglo-Saxon kingdom that existed in this part of that country prior to the Norman Conquest. Although the places that appear in his novels actually exist, in many cases he gave the place a fictional name. In a 1895 preface to the novel Far From the Madding Crowd he described Wessex as "a merely realistic dream country". The actual definition of "Hardy's Wessex" varied widely throughout Hardy's career, and was not definitively settled until after he retired from writing novels. When he created the concept of a fictional Wessex, it consisted merely of the small area of Dorset in which Hardy grew up; by the time he wrote *Jude the Obscure*, the boundaries had extended to include all of Dorset, Wiltshire, Somerset, Devon, Hampshire, much of Berkshire, and some of Oxfordshire, with its most north-easterly point being Oxford (renamed "Christminster" in the novel *Jude the Obscure*). The idea of Wessex plays an important artistic role in Hardy's works (particularly his later novels), assisting the presentation of themes of progress, primitivism, sexuality, religion, nature and naturalism; Learners are requested to have a look at the Map of Hardy's Wessex to gain a better understanding of the 'partly real, partly dream' locations used by the author in his fictional universe. See the Map of Hardy's Wessex provided alongside, for a proper understanding of the setting of the novel.

The Map of Hardy's Wessex

Source : www.fulltable.com

3.2.6. Important Themes

a) Chance, coincidence and moral responsiblity

As in every Hardy novel, chance and coincidence play vital roles in charting the course of the characters in *Far from the madding crowd*. From the inception, chance plays a shaping role in the lives of Bathseba Everdene who is suddenly raised from being a penniless woman to the owner of Weatherbury farm. The use of chance and coincidence as a means of furthering the plot was a technique used by many Victorian authors but with Hardy it becomes something more than a mere device. Fateful incidents (overheard conversations and undelivered letters, for instance) are the forces working against mere man in his efforts to control his own destiny. In addition, Fate appears in the form of nature, endowing it with varying moods that affect the lives of the characters. Those who are most in harmony with their environment are usually the most contented; similarly, those who can appreciate the joys of nature can find solace in it. Yet nature can take on sinister aspects, becoming more of an actor than just a setting for the action. It is chance which leads to Oak losing his status as independent Farmer and yet it is chance again which leads him on to become the Bailiff of his sweetheart's farm. It is mischance which takes Fanny Robin to the wrong church on her marriage day and eventually leads to her suffering and death. It is also chance which destroys Boldwood's final joy, of acquiescing Bathsheba into promising to marry him, as her missing husband Troy returns. Thus chance and coincidence are woven into the plot as a leitmotif, which makes the reader question how much of what happens to the characters is dependent on their moral actions and how much on Fate?

Learners' Activity

Learners, it would be an interesting task for you to read the novel carefully on your own and make a list of chance events and coincidences which determine the plans or lives of the characters or affect the course of the plot. You may tally your list with that of fellow learners to see how many you have actually noticed or missed.

b) Unrequited Love

Much of the plot of *Far from the Madding Crowd* depends on theme of unrequited love—love by one person for another that is not mutual in the seme that

the other person does not feel love in return. The novel is driven, from the first few chapters, by Gabriel Oak's love for Bathsheba. Once he has lost his farm, he is free to wander anywhere in search of work, but he heads to Weatherbury because it is in the direction that Bathsheba has gone. This move leads to Oak's employment at Bathsheba's farm, where he patiently consoles her in her troubles and supports her in tending the farm, with no sign he will ever have his love returned.

Oak's feelings for Bathsheba parallel Boldwood's feelings for Bathsheba. Given the fact that Bathsheba whimsically sends Boldwood a valentine, sealed with the strong message "Marry Me," Boldwood has enough reason to believe she might love him. Though she tries to extinguish any such belief, telling Boldwood repeatedly she will not marry him, unlike Oak, who is willing to take Bathsheba at her word, Boldwood looks for the slightest sign that she may soften or relent. This finally causes him to become insane and kill his rival, Troy, and lands leading to his arrest and incarceration. Bathsheba herself suffers a similar unrequited love for Sergeant Troy. She gets married to Troy, but feels he is mistreating her once they are married. But she cannot help herself because she loves him so much. He, on the other hand, is not capable of a stable love relationship. Having deserted his one true love Fanny Robin, who is pregnant of him, at a momentary attraction for Bathsheba, he is filled with regret at Fanny's death. He dseserts Bathsheba and mourns for his lost love. When he is thought to have drowned, though, Bathsheba still thinks enough of him to go on waiting, to see if he will come back. Unrequited love thus shapes much of the could-be-tragic ingredients of the plot. The woman we see at the end of the novel, marrying Oak, is not the same spirited Bathsheba but one who is much sober and broken by heartbreak.

c) Nature: As Guide and Enemy

Nature is almost always a leading character in Hardy's novels and it seems to work as shaper of fates of the human characters or as a major agent in the events in the. In *Far from the Madding Crowd*, nature at times aids humans in their actions, but, on occasions, nature seems to work more to mar them. Hardy imagines and describes Nature as a feminine force and she does seem to sympathise with Bathsheba and Gabriel Oak, a character especially attuned with nature. The seasons of the year correspond to the moods mainly of Bathsheba and Gabriel. Nature seems to work to draw Bathsheba and Oak together. It serves as a means of protection for Bathsheba, but it expresses its cruelty toward Sergeant Troy. It helps to impair his fate, perhaps, because he is not one who is obeisant to its order. Recollect his sword

play in chapter 28, which seduces Bathsheba and "The caterpillar was spitted upon (the sword's) point"? A contrast to Gabriel Oak's warming of new born animals this whimsical destruction of nature in Troy marks him out as an antagonistic force.

Nature guides its children and assists them when it can. Hardy refers to Nature as the mother of man throughout the novel. He describes Bathsheba Everdone as "a fair product of Nature, in the feminine kind." He again refers to Nature as a mother when he speaks of "one of those whimsical coincidences in which Nature, like a busy mother, seems to spare a moment from her unremitting labours to turn and make her children smile." Much later in the novel when Hardy describes an imminent storm and the animals as they sense its presence, he again refers to Nature as the mother of humanity.

> Gabriel proceeded towards his home. In approaching the door, his toe kicked something which felt and sounded soft, leathery, and distended, like a boxing-glove. It was a large toad humbly travelling across the path. Oak took it up, thinking it might be better to kill the creature to save it from pain; but finding it uninjured, he placed it again among the grass. He knew what this direct message from the Great Mother meant.

Nature attempts to warn its children to prepare for foul weather, but its advice is ignored. Hardy's narrator explains that "every voice in nature was unanimous in bespeaking change".

3.2.7. The Significant Episodes in the Novel

a) Dying of the sheep

In chapter 5 of the novel 'A Pastoral Tragedy' strikes Gabriel Oak. An instance of an animal suffering a terribly ironic fate which parallels that of man occurs in Chapter xxii of *Far from the Madding Crowd*. Gabriel Oak's dog works laboriously to drive the flock off a precipice. He then is shot although he had expected to be rewarded for his deed. Hardy states: "The dog came up, licked his hand, and made signs implying that he expected some great reward for signal services rendered."' The tragedy which George has unwittingly led his master to is his complete loss of independence as farmer, because the flock was bought and raised with borrowed money. It is however important to take note of the fact that it was the same dog who had come to his rescue at a time when he hardly escapes death. Bathsheba explains

how she comes to save Oak from suffocation: “I heard your dog howling and scratching at the door of the hut when I came to the milking ... . The dog saw me, and jumped over to me and laid hold of my skirt”. The dying of the sheep however is an episode in the novel which determines the future course of action for its protagonist.

b) Bathsheba’s sending of the valentine to Boldwood

In chapter 13 Bathsheba sends a Valentine to Farmer Boldwood in jest, hardly fathoming the long felt repercussions of her actions. tries out her new role of farmer. Proud as she is, moving independently in a man’s world, the only man oblivious to her beauty is Mr. Boldwood, who does not look at her once, as Liddy remarks on the way home from Church. When Bathsheba and Liddy are at home on Sunday, Bathsheba is about to send a valentine to a young boy when Liddy suggests that she send it to Boldwood instead. On a whim, Bathsheba agrees, setting in motion one of the novel’s tragedies. The valentine contains a meaningless ditty, “Roses are red, Violets are blue...” but Bathsheba impulsively stamps it with a seal that reads, “Marry Me.” The narrator reflects that Bathsheba’s action may have been motivated by Bolwood’s indifference to her charms. Unfortunately, the letter has a profound effect on Boldwood. It is the one ornate object in his puritanically plain home and life. This one act will haunt both Bathsheba and Boldwood until the end of the novel. Hardy uses this set of circumstances to analyse one of his favorite concerns: how a person’s life is determined by minor, seemingly insignificant events. Sometimes these events are questions of luck or forces beyond human control. Here, however, Hardy examines human agency: Bathsheba sends the valentine in jest, without thinking, but her act results in extraordinary consequences. The narrator says later when Bathsheba, pursued by Boldwood, resolves never to disturb his life by look, sign or action: “But a resolution to avoid an evil is seldom framed till the evil is so far advanced as to make avoidance impossible”.

c) Sergent Troy’s Swordplay

In chapter 28 titled ‘The Hollow amid the Ferns’ Troy finally has possession of Bathsheba’s attention and her heart through a display of his swordplay. The swordplay is symbolic in revealing the reckless, irresponsible and flashiness of Troy. Troy is so completely in command of his sword and so perfectly confident of his skill that he does not hesitate to risk Bathsheba’s life for the sake of his performance. His actions have utterly overwhelmed Bathsheba: “She felt powerless to withstand or

deny him." We must not overlook Hardy's own showmanship. He creates a sensuous chapter, with the lush setting, textures, colors, and lighting all playing their parts. In an age of prudery and strict censorship against improper material in print, Hardy cleverly weaves sexual overtones into this episode of this novel, as Troy's swordplay is symbolic in many ways. The narrator points out the success of Troy's actions with Bathsheba who is now in love with him: "…Troy's deformities lay deep down from a woman's vision whilst his embellishments were upon the very surface; thus contrasting with homely Oak, whose defects were patent to the blindest, and whose virtues were as metals in a mine." This blindness makes Bathsheba, an otherwise strong and wise woman, pay a heavy price.

''She tooke up her position as directed.'' Troy Courts Bathseba; *Cornhill* illustration by Helen Paterson Allingham

d) The storm scene

The storm in chapter 37 is one a catastrophe in the novel yet again inflicted by the natural world. In this struggle with nature, we see how different people respond to forces beyond human control. Gabriel emerges as the person most attuned to reading the signals of nature and able to comprehend them and control them as well as he can. Chapter 36 gives an extraordinary account of a series of natural signs—-a toad on the path, a slug crawling across the table, and sheep huddling together. Hardy first presents this information to the reader who is incapable of interpreting it, and then shows how Gabriel is able to interpret it correctly: Gabriel realizes that the sheep's position foretells a long and constant rain after the initial storm. Richard L. Purdy observes that the novel moves like a natural calendar, by the seasons for lambing, shearing, haying, and the harvest. He states that "the fortunes of Bathsheba and Oak and Troy are closely bound up with the unvarying cycle of Weatherbury Farm." Nevertheless, the storm reveals to everyone Sergeant Troy's irresponsibility and his inadequacies. Nature shows a lack of sympathy for Troy as he laments the death of Fanny Robin. After the death of Fanny and her baby, Troy feels remorse for the manner in which he treated the ill-fated girl, by making her suffer as unwed

mother and die ultimately. In an attempt to atone for his behavior, he buys her a beautiful grave stone and spends the evening planting snow-drops, hyacinth, crocus bulbs, violets, daisies, and many other varieties of flowers upon her grave. Nature refuses to let Troy receive satisfaction from his labours the weather unleashes its fury as rain begins to fall soon after Troy finishes his planting, washing away his futile efforts at atonement.

e) Fanny Robin's arrival at Casterbridge Union

An instance occurs in the novel in which an animal shows compassion and gives aid to a fellow being. The dog is spurned, just as man is often treated unjustly in his attempts to do good. A dog comes to the aid of Fanny Robin as she, in the last stages of exhaustion, struggles toward Casterbridge Union. Hardy describes the dog as he discovers Fanny: "The animal, who was as homeless as she, respectfully withdrew a step or two when the woman moved, and, seeing that she did not repulse him, he licked her hand again." Hardy then describes an extremely poignant scene in which the dog drags Fanny toward Casterbridge Union:

> 'The ultimate and saddest singularity of woman's efforts and invention was reached when, with a quickened breathing, she rose to a stooping posture, and resting her two little arms upon the shoulders of the dog, leant firmly thereon, and murmured stimulating words… The dog, who now thoroughly understood her desire and her incapacity, frantic in his distress. . . . ".

The dog drags the unwed mother Fanny to the union, and ironically, he is stoned away by the people of the refuge. Fanny's fate is mirrored in the dog's plight. Both the animal and the woman are homeless, and they wish only for someone to care about them. The dog is rejected by man in much the same way as Fanny is rejected by society. This scene remains etched in the reader's mind for its poignancy, irony and the suffering of the unwed mother in Victorian society—a theme which would recur again in Hardy's fiction with greater emphasis (read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* for a better understanding of Hardy's empathy for women and their oppression through Victorian sexual double standards).

3.2.8. Analysis of the Important Characters

a) Bathsheba Everdene

Very early in the novel, Gabriel's conversation with Bathsheba shows her to be

a capricious, spirited young woman who has never been in love. The two of them discuss marriage with frankness and Bathsheba admits that she would like to have all the trappings of marriage—she would delight in a piano, pets, and her own carriage; she would enjoy seeing her name in the newspaper's marriage announcements—but she objects to the concept of having a husband in the first place and to losing her freedom. While Bathsheba seems a bit superficial, her independence and strength are admirable, and she remains a sympathetic character. Bathsheba is the central figure of the novel. At the beginning of the novel she is around twenty years old and poor, helping to tend her aunt's farm. She is vain. The first time Oak sees her she is seen taking out a mirror and examining her face, unaware that anyone is looking. She flirts with Oak but does not accept his proposal of marriage because she does not believe he can put up with a strong-headed and independent woman like herself and proudly declares: "I want somebody to tame me: I am too independent; and you would never be able to, I know". When an uncle dies and leaves her his farm, Bathsheba takes control. She fires the bailiff for stealing, and instead of hiring another bailiff, she takes on the duty of managing the farm herself. Her independence and determination to carve her niche in a male-dominated world makes her an admirable character.

Julie Christie, as Bathsheba Everdene, in the 1967 Hollywood adoptation of *Far from the Madding Crowd.*

Source: google images (daily mail)

Though raised by fortune to a stature of responsibility, that she still has the flirtatious girl in her, is revealed on Valentine's Day when she sends an anonymous valentine to the serious and indifferent bachelor Mr Boldwood who lives next to her farm. When he takes this claim of love seriously, she feels guilty and finds herself unable to refuse him outright. It is this act of whimsicality which initiates tragic

consequences for her and other characters in the novel. Bathsheba however, is a conscientious employer. She gives her workers bonuses when work is going well. When news arrives that Fanny Robin, who once worked for her uncle, has died, Bathsheba arranges for the body to be brought back to Weatherbury, to be buried in the local cemetery. When she meets the dashing Sergeant Troy, she is seduced by his extravagant flattery and falls in love with him, and ends up marrying him. When Bathsheba has fallen in love, the narrator comments ominously, "When a strong woman recklessly throws away her strength, she is worse than a weak woman who has never had strength to throw away", pointing to her consciousness somewhere deep down that Troy will not be her ideal husband. Gabriel and Boldwood are the only ones who know (from Fanny's letter) that Troy was Fanny Robin's lover, whom she intended to marry when she ran away. Knowing this, Gabriel tries to hint at Troy's immoral character but Bathsheba refuses to listen. Troy after marriage mistreats Bathsheba— spends her money, ignores her, and almost ruins her farm. Throughout these difficult times, she relies on Oak, both for help in managing her farm and as a sympathetic ear to listen to her troubles. Bathsheba becomes a colder, more pragmatic person after Troy leaves.

In the end, when Boldwood is in jail and Troy is dead, Bathsheba rekindles the same playful, flirtatious relationship with Oak that she had at the beginning of the novel. She recognizes his loyalty through all that has happened and realises she has loved him all along.

b) Gabriel Oak

From the very first chapter, the novel's rustic focus clearly emerges. Hardy's treatment of his subject alternates between a painstaking realism and an idealised romanticism. While he details the minutiae of rustic culture and includes specific information about the practice of farming, he also links Gabriel to the pastoral literary tradition, an ancient classical form that enjoyed new popularity during the Renaissance. Playing his flute as he tends his sheep, Gabriel evokes the carefree, flute-playing shepherds that populated these poems' idyllic landscapes. Furthermore, throughout the novel Gabriel will occupy the position of the observer who watches others make mistakes without ever implicating himself in the action; the traditional pastoral lyric commented on the civilized world in a tone of similar detachment. The thing that characterises Gabriel Oak most consistently in this book is the quiet, dignified way he goes about his life, no matter what tragedy strikes his life. This calm allows Gabriel to quietly appreciate life and contribute his help to a lot of things in

life which other characters do not. Even when Gabriel's sheep fall off a cliff and lead him into total bankruptcy, he does not create a furore but accepts his fate. Instead, we find that "there was left to him a dignified calm he had never before known and that indifference to fate which, though it often makes a villain of a man is the basis of his sublimity when it does not" (6.5). He just draws strength (his surname 'oak' is not given without a symbolic resonance) from his experiences and keeps pushing onward. If there is one thing that really sets Oak apart from the other characters in this book, it's his loyalty to Bathsheba Everdene. Even when Bathsheba rejects his first marriage proposal, he claims, "I shall do one thing in this life—one thing certain—that is, love you, and long for you, and keep wanting you till I die" (4.65). But unlike Farmer Boldwood or Sergeant Troy, Oak never bothers Bathsheba with proposals until she relents. He has too much dignity to force Bathsheba to marry him if she doesn't love him. Without question, if there's a moral center to this book, it's definitely Gabriel Oak. The final ending of the novel, where Oak is finally married off to Bathsheba, has been criticised for its tame and unconvincing nature but it was probably a virtue-rewarded ending which Hardy chose, his vision of life not yet overwhelmed by pessimism.

''Do you want a shepherd Ma'am?'' February 1874 installment of the *Cornhill Magazine* Serialisation of the novel.

c) William Boldwood:

Farmer Boldwood is Bathsheba's second suitor in the novel. Boldwood is a bachelor, about forty years old, who owns the farm next to the Everdene farm. He is depicted as a man with dignity and of reserved nature who takes responsibility for Fanny Robin when her parents die. Boldwood, as his name suggests, is a wooden, reserved man. He seems indifferent to women or love until Bathsheba sends him a valentine on a whim. This one act will haunt both Bathsheba and Boldwood until the

end of the novel. Hardy uses this set of circumstances to analyze one of his favorite concerns: how a person's life is determined by minor, seemingly insignificant events. Bathsheba Everdene first becomes aware of Boldwood when he comes to visit soon after she takes over her uncle's farm. Her maid Liddy explains that Boldwood is a confirmed bachelor and shows no interest in women, which spurs the vanity in Bathsheba to send him an anonymous valentine. The valentine starts Boldwood thinking about women. He becomes convinced that he is in love with Bathsheba and he is obsessed with the thought of getting her to marry him. Because he is used to business interactions and not personal ones, he pressures her to marry him and is confused when she is reluctant. When she secretly marries Troy, Boldwood feels she has been stolen from him and in his obsession lets his farm go to ruin. After Troy is thought to be dead, Boldwood interprets the fact that she will not remarry for seven years to mean that at the end of that time, she will marry him, ignoring the legal parameters for such abstinence. When she says she will give him an answer at Christmas, he prepares a lavish party, assuming she will become his fiancée. When Boldwood is jailed for shooting Troy on his reappearance, the extent of Boldwood's delusions/obsessions becomes clear. Locked closets are found in his house, laden with dresses, furs, and jewelry, all inscribed to "Bathsheba Boldwood," with a date seven years from the present date, when he expects her to marry him. Because he is clearly insane, Boldwood is not hanged for Troy's murder and his sentence is changed to life imprisonment.

d) Sargent Frank Troy:

Sergeant Frank Troy is presented in the novel as a contradiction. Throughout the novel, his actions show him to be an opportunist and a womaniser. As a soldier dressed in Scarlet has much attractiveness, an attractiveness which he uses recklessly over women. He is first introduced as responding to Fanny Robin, who has walked miles in winter to the town to which his battalion has moved. Fanny asks Troy when he is going to marry her, but Troy says he cannot come out and see her. He does agree to marry her, though, but when she shows up late to the wedding, as a result in the confusion over Church names, he uses it as an excuse to call off the wedding. In courting Bathsheba Everdene, Troy shows himself to be skillful and witty. He uses Bathsheba's love for him as a leverage to squander her wealth, iltreat her and almost ruin her farm through mismanagement. He swindles Boldwood out of money when he offers him to make leave Bathsheba, by taking the money although he and Bathsheba are already married. Troy spends Bathsheba's money on liquor for the

farm hands, who are not used to hard liquor, and as a result almost ruins a year's work. He also loses heavily at the horse races.

On the other hand, he is, at heart, a romantic. When he hears of Fanny's death, he is truly grieved, to such an extent that he is willing to lose his comfortable position as Bathsheba's husband. He impulsively tells Bathsheba she means nothing to him, that Fanny was his true love. He erects a tombstone to Fanny that says he was the one to put it up, despite the scandal that could ensue. He then runs away, eventually joining a traveling show, in order to forget his beloved and her death. He is taken to be dead after drowning but he returns again, as villain

who tries to make Bathsheba obey him. He meets his nemesis in Boldwood, who shoots him for supposedly stealing his Bathsheba a second time. Sergeant Troy is depicted as the only figure who is in antagonism to the benevolent forces of Nature, as mentioned in earlier sections.

e) Rustic Characters

Rustic characters, who have been listed above, are an important ingredients of Hardy's novel-universe, especially in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. In chapter 22 the scene characterising the farm laborers is typical of Hardy's novels. Here, Hardy pauses the plot for an entire chapter, giving a detailed account of how the laborers speak, how they spend their free time, and their opinions about each other. These groups of lower-class, common characters figure in almost all of Hardy's novels; like Shakespeare, he often uses them to effect comic relief, offsetting a tragic scene with one of a more light-hearted tone. There are many such instances where the rustic characters— **Bill Smallbury, Henery Fray, Jacob Smallbury,** and **Labal Tall** Some of Bathsheba's farmhands.—or her maid **Liddy** act as choric figures and also at times further the course of the plot. With the detailed conversations and activities of the rural characters, Hardy also intends to introduce urban or middle-class readers to the many different kinds of people that exist in the lower classes. In a later essay on 'The Dorsetshire laborer', he complains that people tend to stereotype farm workers and lump them all together as the figure named as 'hodge'; It is his aspiration to break that stereotype by developing three-dimensional rustic figures.

3.2.9. *Far From the Madding Crowd*: A Pastoral Ending?

As Howard Babb describes, "At bottom, Hardy's story juxtaposes two different

worlds or modes of being, the natural against civilized and it consists on the superiority of the former by identifying the natural as strong, enduring, self-contained, slow to change, sympathetic, while associating the civilised with weakness felicity, modernity, self-centeredness" The ending of the novel has been criticised as being tame and unromantic, because it seems that the union of Bathsheba and Oak is not natural and convincing. Bathsheba had never looked upon Gabriel as a possible husband, except taking his love for her as granted. It is difficult to believe that a woman like Bathsheba would marry Gabriel just because he has become indispensable to her for looking her farm and business. The ending would have been more appropriate and more in harmony with Hardy's philosophy of life if Gabriel were to leave Bathsheba and his love for her were to remain unfulfilled. Hardy did not wish to make this novel too sad. It is one of his early works and Hardy's philosophy of life had not yet become so dark and pessimistic, neither his faith in the eventual improvement of mankind been eroded. Many readers welcome the happy ending because they would like to see Gabriel Oak rewarded for his loyalty and devotion to Bathsheba, as a fit ending to a novel with at least apparent pastoral patterns.

3.2.10. Summing Up

- Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) was a Victorian novelist, poet and writer whose work reflects the philosophical, spiritual and social milieu of the age distinctly.
- The novel under focus, *Far From the Madding Crowd*, from its very title, may make you expect a pastoral, idyllic setting, an expectation which may not hold true after you read the novel.
- On the brink of a new literary era, Hardy broached topics and themes, such as relationship between the sexes, with greater frankness and starkness than some Victorian readers liked; consequently, he lived through a period of outraged criticism.
- The title *Far From the Madding Crowd* suggests avoidance of the life of a city, modernised government, crowds and industry; in it, Hardy tries to fashion a portrait of what he saw as an endangered way of life and to create a snapshot for future generations to look at.
- Bathsheba stands out as one of the earliest, powerful and independent women characters in the Hardy-Universe and through her Hardy portrays the

innate capacity of women to be strong, resourceful and independent in a social world which restrains them and curtails opportunities for their growth.

- His novel thematises the importance of man's connection to, and understanding of, the natural world. Gabriel Oak embodies Hardy's ideal of a life in harmony with the forces of the natural world. It is through this vital connection that Oak is able to emerge successful in protecting Bathsheba's farm from harm and finally achieve fulfillment.

3.2.11. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Examine the role of chance and coincidence in furthering the plot of *Far From the Madding Crowd.*
2. Discuss some of the important themes in the novel *Far From the Madding Crowd*.
3. Comment on the role of Gabriel Oak as Bathsheba's guardian angel with textual illustrations.
4. Bathsheba is an independent woman who throws away her own strength willingly. Examine her character in the light of this statement.

● **Medium Length Questions: 12 marks**

1. Briefly examine the role of Boldwood in *Far From the Madding Crowd*
2. Discuss the role of Nature in *Far From the Madding Crowd* as both friend and enemy of man with suitable textual references.
3. What role do animals play in the plot of *Far From the Madding Crowd*?
4. Examine the character of Sergeant Troy and his treatment of women.

● **Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Explore the significance of the valentine episode in the novel.
2. What role does Fanny Robin play in *Far From the Madding Crowd*? Discuss in brief.
3. Describe and bring out the significance of Sergeant Troy's swordplay in 'The Hollow amid the Ferns'.

4. Comment on Hardy's portrayal of rustic characters in the novel. Point out any significant role played by any two of them.

3.2.12. Suggested Reading

Hardy, Thomas. *Far From the Madding Crowd*. London: Macmillan (The New Wessex Edition), 1974.

Online version of text: http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/27

Kay-Robinson, Denys. *Hardy's Wessex Reappraised*. London: David and Charles, 1972

Morgan, Rosemarie (ed.). *Student Companion to Thomas Hardy*. USA: Greenwood Publishing, 2006.

Howard, Babb. 'Setting and theme in Far From the Madding Crowd'. ELH, Vol.30, 1963.

Unit-3 ❑ Thomas Carlyle: *The Hero as Poet*

Structure:

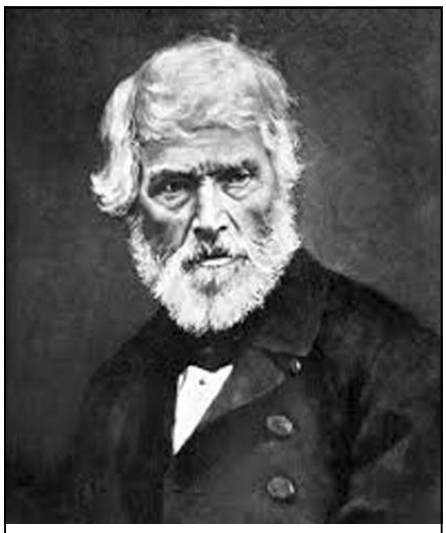
3.3.0. Introduction

The poets of the Victorian Age no doubt held a very high position. But those who employed prose as their medium commanded a larger audience and exercised a greater influence on thought and conduct. Apart from the novelist whose primary purpose was to provide entertainment, there were many others who aimed at propagating ideas. Their writings are prolific and voluminous. They reflect the intellectual, scientific, philosophical and practical interests a remarkable age of expanding horizons, noble efforts and buoyant aspirations. Their style suitably adapted to a wide range of subjects shows variety; some write lucid, limpid prose; others prefer ornateness, and still others aim at poetic effects. Carlyle, Macaulay, Ruskin and Arnold occupy important positions in the history of Non-Fictional prose in the Victorian Age. You have read about them in Module 1, Unit 3. In this Unit we shall study in detail Thomas Carlyle's *The Hero as Poet.*

3.3.1. Thomas Carlyle as a Non-Fictional Prose Writer

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) is the foremost of the writers of Non Fictional prose of the Victorian age. His voice resounded in his generation with more force and

aroused wider echoes than any other. His earliest work consists of translations, essays and biographies. He established his reputation with *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), an allegorical autobiography inspired by German transcendentalism. Here, pretending to reproduce the work of a German professor, he seeks to pierce beneath appearances in search of reality. It is written in a tone of intense, massive and imaginative irony; in it Carlyle employs for the first time the forceful, bizarre, tormented and poetic prose, which is his characteristic style. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1841) is another important work of Carlyle. It consists of a series of lectures. Our present topic of discussion, *The Hero as Poet* is a part of this work. In this book Carlyle discovers in the individual the noblest and highest mystical figure of a hero, a person with a searching insight into the reality underlying the world of manifestations. Carlyle also composed a series of historical studies of which *The French Revolution* (1837) is by far the most important. The work embraces a series of vital word pictures, but fails as sober history. His other historical works include *The History of Fredrick II of Prussia, called Fredrick the Great* (1858-65), *Past and Present* (1843) and *Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845). In all these works he re-lives the past.



Thomas Carlyle

In all his works, Carlyle is animated by an earnest prophetic zeal. He attacks the evils of a world given over to the worship of Mammon and the pursuit of pleasure. He denounces materialism and utilitarianism. He tried to lead England back to a more spiritual life by proclaiming that life could not be governed mechanically or solely by reference to the audited accounts of nations. To his generation, he proclaimed a spiritual and ethical standard of conduct with the zeal of a Hebrew prophet.

Carlyle's passionately held ideas are expressed in an eccentric and powerful style into which enters several elements borrowed from German, but which on the whole is entirely personal. This vehement style is endowed with an intense life, animated by a rugged humour and by the gift of comic exaggeration. Indeed, you will be affected by it before the thought makes its impression. The sentences come cascading

forth, stumbling and spluttering as he proceeds amid a torrent of whirling words. Yet, he is flexible to a wonderful degree; he can command a beauty of expression that wrings the very heart: a sweet and piercing melody, with a suggestion, always present, yet always remote, of infinite regret and longing. In such divine moments, his style has the lyrical note that requires only the lyrical meter to become great poetry.

Thomas Carlyle and *Chartism (*1839)

Learners, since you have been told about the prophetic zeal of Carlyle, it would be interesting for you to read another important work by him *Chartism.* Carlyle first raised the questions, which came to be later popularized in the contemporary press as the, 'condition of England question' in *Chartism* (1839), in which he expressed his sympathy for the poor and the industrial classes in England and he vehemently argued the need for a more profound reform. He noticed a discrepancy between a new form of economic activity called "industrialism", which promised general welfare, and a dramatic degradation in the living conditions of the urban poor. He wished to shake the reformed parliament from his apathy towards general welfare of the working classes in the name of *lassaiz faire.*

3.3.2. *Heroes and Hero-Worship*: Structure of the Lectures

Heroes and Hero-Worship is one of the most interesting works of Carlyle. It consists of six lectures which he delivered during 1837-40. Carlyle divides his heroes into six categories: (i) the Hero as divinity or God, (ii) the Hero as prophet, (iii) the Hero as poet, (iv) the Hero as priest, (v) the Hero as man of letters, and (vi) the Hero as king. One lecture is devoted to each class of Hero. For the Hero as Divinity, he selected Odin; as Prophet, Mahomet; as Poet, Dante and Shakespeare; as Priest, Luther and Knox; as man of Letters, Johnson, Rousseau, Burns; as Kings, Cromwell and Napoleon.

The lectures represent Carlyle's idea that all history is the making of great persons, gifted with supreme power of vision or action. According to him, only when persons of heroic temperament step forward to lead the masses can true progress for society occur. The persons featured in the lectures were just such people, whose actions and their willingness to live in accordance with the vision of society that

motivated them, changed society for the better. Carlyle finds no one around him acting in a way to set his own age right. The people of the nineteenth century being given over to commercialism and self-gratification, lack the will or the leadership to make something worthwhile of their lives. Thus the lectures represent not so much soundly based ideas about the making of history as they do Carlyle's view of how the world would be if powerful and inspired people were to have the power he thought they deserved.

3.3.3. *The Hero as Poet:* The Text

The Hero as Divinity, the Hero as Prophet, are productions of old ages; not to be repeated in the new. They presuppose a certain rudeness of conception, which the progress of mere scientific knowledge puts an end to. There needs to be, as it were, a world vacant, or almost vacant of scientific forms, if men in their loving wonder are to fancy their fellow-man either a god or one speaking with the voice of a god. Divinity and Prophet are past. We are now to see our Hero in the less ambitious, but also less questionable, character of Poet; a character which does not pass. The Poet is a heroic figure belonging to all ages; whom all ages possess, when once he is produced, whom the newest age as the oldest may produce;—and will produce, always when Nature pleases. Let Nature send a Hero-soul; in no age is it other than possible that he may be shaped into a Poet.

Hero, Prophet, Poet,—many different names, in different times, and places, do we give to Great Men; according to varieties we note in them, according to the sphere in which they have displayed themselves! We might give many more names, on this same principle. I will remark again, however, as a fact not unimportant to be understood, that the different sphere constitutes the grand origin of such distinction; that the Hero can be Poet, Prophet, King, Priest or what you will, according to the kind of world he finds himself born into. I confess, I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be all sorts of men. The Poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior, unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other degree, he could have been, he is all these. So too I cannot understand how a Mirabeau, with that great glowing heart, with the fire that was in it, with the bursting tears that were in it, could not have written verses, tragedies, poems, and touched all

hearts in that way, had his course of life and education led him thitherward. The grand fundamental character is that of Great Man; that the man be great. Napoleon has words in him which are like Austerlitz Battles. Louis Fourteenth's Marshals are a kind of poetical men withal; the things Turenne says are full of sagacity and geniality, like sayings of Samuel Johnson. The great heart, the clear deep-seeing eye: there it lies; no man whatever, in what province so ever, can prosper at all without these. Petrarch and Boccaccio did diplomatic messages, it seems, quite well: one can easily believe it; they had done things a little harder than these! Burns, a gifted song-writer, might have made a still better Mirabeau. Shakespeare,—one knows not what he could not have made, in the supreme degree.

True, there are aptitudes of Nature too. Nature does not make all great men, more than all other men, in the self-same mould. Varieties of aptitude doubtless; but infinitely more of circumstance; and far oftenest it is the latter only that are looked to. But it is as with common men in the learning of trades. You take any man, as yet a vague capability of a man, who could be any kind of craftsman; and make him into a smith, a carpenter, a mason: he is then and thenceforth that and nothing else. And if, as Addison complains, you sometimes see a street-porter, staggering under his load on spindle-shanks, and near at hand a tailor with the frame of a Samson handling a bit of cloth and small Whitechapell needle,—it cannot be considered that aptitude of Nature alone has been consulted here either!—The Great Man also, to what shall he be bound apprentice? Given your Hero, is he to become Conqueror, King, Philosopher, Poet? It is an inexplicably complex controversial-calculation between the world and him! He will read the world and its laws; the world with its laws will be there to be read. What the world, on this matter, shall permit and bid is, as we said, the most important fact about the world.

Poet and Prophet differ greatly in our loose modern notions of them. In some old languages, again, the titles are synonymous; Vates means both Prophet and Poet: and indeed at all times, Prophet and Poet, well understood, have much kindred of meaning. Fundamentally indeed they are still the same; in this most important respect especially. That they have penetrated both of them into the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls "the open secret." "Which is the great secret?" asks one.—"The open secret,"—open to all, seen by almost none! That divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, "the Divine Idea of the World, that which lies at the bottom of Appearance," as Fichte styles it; of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of Man and his

work, is but the vesture, the embodiment that renders it visible. This divine mystery is in all times and in all places; veritably is. In most times and places it is greatly overlooked; and the Universe, definable always in one or the other dialect, as the realized Thought of God, is considered a trivial, inert, commonplace matter,—as if, says the Satirist, it were a dead thing, which some upholsterer had put together! It could do no good, at present, to speak much about this; but it is a pity for every one of us if we do not know it, live ever in the knowledge of it. Really a most mournful pity;—a failure to live at all, if we live otherwise!

But now, I say, whoever may forget this divine mystery, the Vates, whether Prophet or Poet, has penetrated into it; is a man sent hither to make it more impressively known to us. That always is his message; he is to reveal that to us,—that sacred mystery which he more than others lives ever present with. While others forget it, he knows it;—I might say, he has been driven to know it; without consent asked of him, he finds himself living in it, bound to live in it. Once more, here is no Hearsay, but a direct Insight and Belief; this man too could not help being a sincere man! Whosoever may live in the shows of things, it is for him a necessity of nature to live in the very fact of things. A man once more, in earnest with the Universe, though all others were but toying with it. He is a Vates, first of all, in virtue of being sincere. So far Poet and Prophet, participators in the "open secret," are one.

With respect to their distinction again: The Vates Prophet, we might say, has seized that sacred mystery rather on the moral side, as Good and Evil, Duty and Prohibition; the Vates Poet on what the Germans call the aesthetic side, as Beautiful, and the like. The one we may call a revealer of what we are to do, the other of what we are to love. But indeed these two provinces run into one another, and cannot be disjoined. The Prophet too has his eye on what we are to love: how else shall he know what it is we are to do? The highest Voice ever heard on this earth said withal, "Consider the lilies of the field; they toil not, neither do they spin: yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." A glance, that, into the deepest deep of Beauty. "The lilies of the field,"—dressed finer than earthly princes, springing up there in the humble furrow-field; a beautiful eye looking out on you, from the great inner Sea of Beauty! How could the rude Earth make these, if her Essence, rugged as she looks and is, were not inwardly Beauty? In this point of view, too, a saying of Goethe's, which has staggered several, may have meaning: "The Beautiful," he intimates, "is higher than the Good; the Beautiful includes in it the Good." The true Beautiful; which however, I have said somewhere, "differs from the false as

Heaven does from Vauxhall!" So much for the distinction and identity of Poet and Prophet.

In ancient and also in modern periods we find a few Poets who are accounted perfect; whom it were a kind of treason to find fault with. This is noteworthy; this is right: yet in strictness it is only an illusion. At bottom, clearly enough, there is no perfect Poet! A vein of Poetry exists in the hearts of all men; no man is made altogether of Poetry. We are all poets when we read a poem well. The "imagination that shudders at the Hell of Dante," is not that the same faculty, weaker in degree, as Dante's own? No one but Shakspeare can embody, out of Saxo Grammaticus, the story of Hamlet as Shakspeare did: but every one models some kind of story out of it; every one embodies it better or worse. We need not spend time in defining. Where there is no specific difference, as between round and square, all definition must be more or less arbitrary. A man that has so much more of the poetic element developed in him as to have become noticeable, will be called Poet by his neighbors. World-Poets too, those whom we are to take for perfect Poets, are settled by critics in the same way. One who rises so far above the general level of Poets will, to such and such critics, seem a Universal Poet; as he ought to do. And yet it is, and must be, an arbitrary distinction. All Poets, all men, have some touches of the Universal; no man is wholly made of that. Most Poets are very soon forgotten: but not the noblest Shakspeare or Homer of them can be remembered forever;—a day comes when he too is not!

Nevertheless, you will say, there must be a difference between true Poetry and true Speech not poetical: what is the difference? On this point many things have been written, especially by late German Critics, some of which are not very intelligible at first. They say, for example, that the Poet has aninfinitude in him; communicates an Unendlichkeit, a certain character of "infinitude," to whatsoever he delineates. This, though not very precise, yet on so vague a matter is worth remembering: if well meditated, some meaning will gradually be found in it. For my own part, I find considerable meaning in the old vulgar distinction of Poetry being metrical, having music in it, being a Song. Truly, if pressed to give a definition, one might say this as soon as anything else: If your delineation be authentically musical, musical not in word only, but in heart and substance, in all the thoughts and utterances of it, in the whole conception of it, then it will be poetical; if not, not.—Musical: how much lies in that! A musical thought is one spoken by a mind that has penetrated into the inmost heart of the thing; detected the inmost mystery of it, namely the melody that

lies hidden in it; the inward harmony of coherence which is its soul, whereby it exists, and has a right to be, here in this world. All inmost things, we may say, are melodious; naturally utter themselves in Song. The meaning of Song goes deep. Who is there that, in logical words, can express the effect music has on us? A kind of inarticulate unfathomable speech, which leads us to the edge of the Infinite, and lets us for moments gaze into that!

Nay all speech, even the commonest speech, has something of song in it: not a parish in the world but has its parish-accent;—the rhythm or tune to which the people there sing what they have to say! Accent is a kind of chanting; all men have accent of their own,—though they only notice that of others. Observe too how all passionate language does of itself become musical,—with a finer music than the mere accent; the speech of a man even in zealous anger becomes a chant, a song. All deep things are Song. It seems somehow the very central essence of us, Song; as if all the rest were but wrappages and hulls! The primal element of us; of us, and of all things. The Greeks fabled of Sphere-Harmonies: it was the feeling they had of the inner structure of Nature; that the soul of all her voices and utterances was perfect music. Poetry, therefore, we will call musical Thought. The Poet is he who thinks in that manner. At bottom, it turns still on power of intellect; it is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a Poet. See deep enough, and you see musically; the heart of Nature being everywhere music, if you can only reach it.

The Vates Poet, with his melodious Apocalypse of Nature, seems to hold a poor rank among us, in comparison with the Vates Prophet; his function, and our esteem of him for his function, alike slight. The Hero taken as Divinity; the Hero taken as Prophet; then next the Hero taken only as Poet: does it not look as if our estimate of the Great Man, epoch after epoch, were continually diminishing? We take him first for a god, then for one god-inspired; and now in the next stage of it, his most miraculous word gains from us only the recognition that he is a Poet, beautiful verse-maker, man of genius, or such like!—It looks so; but I persuade myself that intrinsically it is not so. If we consider well, it will perhaps appear that in man still there is the same altogether peculiar admiration for the Heroic Gift, by what name soever called, that there at any time was.

I should say, if we do not now reckon a Great Man literally divine, it is that our notions of God, of the supreme unattainable Fountain of Splendor, Wisdom and Heroism, are ever rising higher; not altogether that our reverence for these qualities,

as manifested in our like, is getting lower. This is worth taking thought of. Sceptical Dilettantism, the curse of these ages, a curse which will not last forever, does indeed in this the highest province of human things, as in all provinces, make sad work; and our reverence for great men, all crippled, blinded, paralytic as it is, comes out in poor plight, hardly recognizable. Men worship the shows of great men; the most disbelieve that there is any reality of great men to worship. The dreariest, fatalest faith; believing which, one would literally despair of human things. Nevertheless look, for example, at Napoleon! A Corsican lieutenant of artillery; that is the show of him: yet is he not obeyed, worshipped after his sort, as all the Tiaraed and Diademed of the world put together could not be? High Duchesses, and ostlers of inns, gather round the Scottish rustic, Burns;—a strange feeling dwelling in each that they never heard a man like this; that, on the whole, this is the man! In the secret heart of these people it still dimly reveals itself, though there is no accredited way of uttering it at present, that this rustic, with his black brows and flashing sun-eyes, and strange words moving laughter and tears, is of a dignity far beyond all others, incommensurable with all others. Do not we feel it so? But now, were Dilettantism, Scepticism, Triviality, and all that sorrowful brood, cast out of us,—as, by God's blessing, they shall one day be; were faith in the shows of things entirely swept out, replaced by clear faith in the things, so that a man acted on the impulse of that only, and counted the other non-extant; what a new livelier feeling towards this Burns were it!

Nay here in these ages, such as they are, have we not two mere Poets, if not deified, yet we may say beatified? Shakspeare and Dante are Saints of Poetry; really, if we will think of it, canonized, so that it is impiety to meddle with them. The unguided instinct of the world, working across all these perverse impediments, has arrived at such result. Dante and Shakspeare are a peculiar Two. They dwell apart, in a kind of royal solitude; none equal, none second to them: in the general feeling of the world, a certain transcendentalism, a glory as of complete perfection, invests these two. They arecanonized, though no Pope or Cardinals took hand in doing it! Such, in spite of every perverting influence, in the most unheroic times, is still our indestructible reverence for heroism.—We will look a little at these Two, the Poet Dante and the Poet Shakspeare: what little it is permitted us to say here of the Hero as Poet will most fitly arrange itself in that fashion.

Many volumes have been written by way of commentary on Dante and his Book; yet, on the whole, with no great result. His Biography is, as it were, irrecoverably lost

for us. An unimportant, wandering, sorrow-stricken man, not much note was taken of him while he lived; and the most of that has vanished, in the long space that now intervenes. It is five centuries since he ceased writing and living here. After all commentaries, the Book itself is mainly what we know of him. The Book;—and one might add that Portrait commonly attributed to Giotto, which, looking on it, you cannot help inclining to think genuine, whoever did it. To me it is a most touching face; perhaps of all faces that I know, the most so. Lonely there, painted as on vacancy, with the simple laurel wound round it; the deathless sorrow and pain, the known victory which is also deathless;—significant of the whole history of Dante! I think it is the mournfulest face that ever was painted from reality; an altogether tragic, heart-affecting face. There is in it, as foundation of it, the softness, tenderness, gentle affection as of a child; but all this is as if congealed into sharp contradiction, into abnegation, isolation, proud hopeless pain. A soft ethereal soul looking out so stern, implacable, grim-trenchant, as from imprisonment of thick-ribbed ice! Withal it is a silent pain too, a silent scornful one: the lip is curled in a kind of godlike disdain of the thing that is eating out his heart,—as if it were withal a mean insignificant thing, as if he whom it had power to torture and strangle were greater than it. The face of one wholly in protest, and lifelong unsurrendering battle, against the world. Affection all converted into indignation: an implacable indignation; slow, equable, silent, like that of a god! The eye too, it looks out as in a kind of surprise, a kind of inquiry, Why the world was of such a sort? This is Dante: so he looks, this "voice of ten silent centuries," and sings us "his mystic unfathomable song."

The little that we know of Dante's Life corresponds well enough with this Portrait and this Book. He was born at Florence, in the upper class of society, in the year 1265. His education was the best then going; much school-divinity, Aristotelean logic, some Latin classics,—no inconsiderable insight into certain provinces of things: and Dante, with his earnest intelligent nature, we need not doubt, learned better than most all that was learnable. He has a clear cultivated understanding, and of great subtlety; this best fruit of education he had contrived to realize from these scholastics. He knows accurately and well what lies close to him; but, in such a time, without printed books or free intercourse, he could not know well what was distant: the small clear light, most luminous for what is near, breaks itself into singular chiaroscuro striking on what is far off. This was Dante's learning from the schools. In life, he had gone through the usual destinies; been twice out campaigning as a soldier for the Florentine State, been on embassy; had in his thirty-fifth year,

by natural gradation of talent and service, become one of the Chief Magistrates of Florence. He had met in boyhood a certain Beatrice Portinari, a beautiful little girl of his own age and rank, and grown up thenceforth in partial sight of her, in some distant intercourse with her. All readers know his graceful affecting account of this; and then of their being parted; of her being wedded to another, and of her death soon after. She makes a great figure in Dante's Poem; seems to have made a great figure in his life. Of all beings it might seem as if she, held apart from him, far apart at last in the dim Eternity, were the only one he had ever with his whole strength of affection loved. She died: Dante himself was wedded; but it seems not happily, far from happily. I fancy, the rigorous earnest man, with his keen excitabilities, was not altogether easy to make happy.

We will not complain of Dante's miseries: had all gone right with him as he wished it, he might have been Prior, Podesta, or whatsoever they call it, of Florence, well accepted among neighbors,—and the world had wanted one of the most notable words ever spoken or sung. Florence would have had another prosperous Lord Mayor; and the ten dumb centuries continued voiceless, and the ten other listening centuries (for there will be ten of them and more) had no Divina Commedia to hear! We will complain of nothing. A nobler destiny was appointed for this Dante; and he, struggling like a man led towards death and crucifixion, could not help fulfilling it. Give him the choice of his happiness! He knew not, more than we do, what was really happy, what was really miserable.

In Dante's Priorship, the Guelf-Ghibelline, Bianchi-Neri, or some other confused disturbances rose to such a height, that Dante, whose party had seemed the stronger, was with his friends cast unexpectedly forth into banishment; doomed thenceforth to a life of woe and wandering. His property was all confiscated and more; he had the fiercest feeling that it was entirely unjust, nefarious in the sight of God and man. He tried what was in him to get reinstated; tried even by warlike surprisal, with arms in his hand: but it would not do; bad only had become worse. There is a record, I believe, still extant in the Florence Archives, dooming this Dante, wheresoever caught, to be burnt alive. Burnt alive; so it stands, they say: a very curious civic document. Another curious document, some considerable number of years later, is a Letter of Dante's to the Florentine Magistrates, written in answer to a milder proposal of theirs, that he should return on condition of apologizing and paying a fine. He answers, with fixed stern pride: "If I cannot return without calling myself guilty, I will never return, nunquam revertar."

For Dante there was now no home in this world. He wandered from patron to patron, from place to place; proving, in his own bitter words, "How hard is the path, Come e duro calle." The wretched are not cheerful company. Dante, poor and banished, with his proud earnest nature, with his moody humors, was not a man to conciliate men. Petrarch reports of him that being at Can della Scala's court, and blamed one day for his gloom and taciturnity, he answered in no courtier-like way. Della Scala stood among his courtiers, with mimes and buffoons (nebulones ac histriones) making him heartily merry; when turning to Dante, he said: "Is it not strange, now, that this poor fool should make himself so entertaining; while you, a wise man, sit there day after day, and have nothing to amuse us with at all?" Dante answered bitterly: "No, not strange; your Highness is to recollect the Proverb, Like to Like;"—given the amuser, the amusee must also be given! Such a man, with his proud silent ways, with his sarcasms and sorrows, was not made to succeed at court. By degrees, it came to be evident to him that he had no longer any resting-place, or hope of benefit, in this earth. The earthly world had cast him forth, to wander, wander; no living heart to love him now; for his sore miseries there was no solace here.

The deeper naturally would the Eternal World impress itself on him; that awful reality over which, after all, this Time-world, with its Florences and banishments, only flutters as an unreal shadow. Florence thou shalt never see: but Hell and Purgatory and Heaven thou shalt surely see! What is Florence, Can della Scala, and the World and Life altogether? ETERNITY: thither, of a truth, not elsewhither, art thou and all things bound! The great soul of Dante, homeless on earth, made its home more and more in that awful other world. Naturally his thoughts brooded on that, as on the one fact important for him. Bodied or bodiless, it is the one fact important for all men:—but to Dante, in that age, it was bodied in fixed certainty of scientific shape; he no more doubted of that Malebolge Pool, that it all lay there with its gloomy circles, with its alti guai, and that he himself should see it, than we doubt that we should see Constantinople if we went thither. Dante's heart, long filled with this, brooding over it in speechless thought and awe, bursts forth at length into "mystic unfathomable song;" and this his Divine Comedy, the most remarkable of all modern Books, is the result.

It must have been a great solacement to Dante, and was, as we can see, a proud thought for him at times, That he, here in exile, could do this work; that no Florence, nor no man or men, could hinder him from doing it, or even much help him in doing it. He knew too, partly, that it was great; the greatest a man could do. "If thou

follow thy star, Se tu segui tua stella,"—so could the Hero, in his forsakenness, in his extreme need, still say to himself: "Follow thou thy star, thou shalt not fail of a glorious haven!" The labor of writing, we find, and indeed could know otherwise, was great and painful for him; he says, This Book, "which has made me lean for many years." Ah yes, it was won, all of it, with pain and sore toil,—not in sport, but in grim earnest. His Book, as indeed most good Books are, has been written, in many senses, with his heart's blood. It is his whole history, this Book. He died after finishing it; not yet very old, at the age of fifty-six;—broken-hearted rather, as is said. He lies buried in his death-city Ravenna: Hic claudor Dantes patriis extorris ab oris. The Florentines begged back his body, in a century after; the Ravenna people would not give it. "Here am I Dante laid, shut out from my native shores."

I said, Dante's Poem was a Song: it is Tieck who calls it "a mystic unfathomable Song;" and such is literally the character of it. Coleridge remarks very pertinently somewhere, that wherever you find a sentence musically worded, of true rhythm and melody in the words, there is something deep and good in the meaning too. For body and soul, word and idea, go strangely together here as everywhere. Song: we said before, it was the Heroic of Speech! All old Poems, Homer's and the rest, are authentically Songs. I would say, in strictness, that all right Poems are; that whatsoever is not sung is properly no Poem, but a piece of Prose cramped into jingling lines,—to the great injury of the grammar, to the great grief of the reader, for most part! What we wants to get at is the thought the man had, if he had any: why should he twist it into jingle, if he could speak it out plainly? It is only when the heart of him is rapt into true passion of melody, and the very tones of him, according to Coleridge's remark, become musical by the greatness, depth and music of his thoughts, that we can give him right to rhyme and sing; that we call him a Poet, and listen to him as the Heroic of Speakers,—whose speech is Song. Pretenders to this are many; and to an earnest reader, I doubt, it is for most part a very melancholy, not to say an insupportable business, that of reading rhyme! Rhyme that had no inward necessity to be rhymed;—it ought to have told us plainly, without any jingle, what it was aiming at. I would advise all men who can speak their thought, not to sing it; to understand that, in a serious time, among serious men, there is no vocation in them for singing it. Precisely as we love the true song, and are charmed by it as by something divine, so shall we hate the false song, and account it a mere wooden noise, a thing hollow, superfluous, altogether an insincere and offensive thing.

I give Dante my highest praise when I say of his Divine Comedy that it is, in all senses, genuinely a Song. In the very sound of it there is a canto fermo; it proceeds as by a chant. The language, his simple terza rima, doubtless helped him in this. One reads along naturally with a sort of lilt. But I add, that it could not be otherwise; for the essence and material of the work are themselves rhythmic. Its depth, and rapt passion and sincerity, makes it musical;—go deep enough, there is music everywhere. A true inward symmetry, what one calls an architectural harmony, reigns in it, proportionates it all: architectural; which also partakes of the character of music. The three kingdoms, Inferno, Purgatorio, Paradiso, look out on one another like compartments of a great edifice; a great supernatural world-cathedral, piled up there, stern, solemn, awful; Dante's World of Souls! It is, at bottom, thesincerest of all Poems; sincerity, here too, we find to be the measure of worth. It came deep out of the author's heart of hearts; and it goes deep, and through long generations, into ours. The people of Verona, when they saw him on the streets, used to say, "Eccovi l' uom ch' e stato all' Inferno, See, there is the man that was in Hell!" Ah yes, he had been in Hell;—in Hell enough, in long severe sorrow and struggle; as the like of him is pretty sure to have been. Commedias that come out divine are not accomplished otherwise. Thought, true labor of any kind, highest virtue itself, is it not the daughter of Pain? Born as out of the black whirlwind;—true effort, in fact, as of a captive struggling to free himself: that is Thought. In all ways we are "to become perfect through suffering."—But, as I say, no work known to me is so elaborated as this of Dante's. It has all been as if molten, in the hottest furnace of his soul. It had made him "lean" for many years. Not the general whole only; every compartment of it is worked out, with intense earnestness, into truth, into clear visuality. Each answers to the other; each fits in its place, like a marble stone accurately hewn and polished. It is the soul of Dante, and in this the soul of the middle ages, rendered forever rhythmically visible there. No light task; a right intense one: but a task which is done.

Perhaps one would say, intensity, with the much that depends on it, is the prevailing character of Dante's genius. Dante does not come before us as a large catholic mind; rather as a narrow, and even sectarian mind: it is partly the fruit of his age and position, but partly too of his own nature. His greatness has, in all senses, concentred itself into fiery emphasis and depth. He is world-great not because he is worldwide, but because he is world-deep. Through all objects he pierces as it were down into the heart of Being. I know nothing so intense as Dante. Consider, for example, to begin with the outermost development of his intensity, consider how he

paints. He has a great power of vision; seizes the very type of a thing; presents that and nothing more. You remember that first view he gets of the Hall of Dite: red pinnacle, red-hot cone of iron glowing through the dim immensity of gloom;—so vivid, so distinct, visible at once and forever! It is as an emblem of the whole genius of Dante. There is a brevity, an abrupt precision in him: Tacitus is not briefer, more condensed; and then in Dante it seems a natural condensation, spontaneous to the man. One smiting word; and then there is silence, nothing more said. His silence is more eloquent than words. It is strange with what a sharp decisive grace he snatches the true likeness of a matter: cuts into the matter as with a pen of fire. Plutus, the blustering giant, collapses at Virgil's rebuke; it is "as the sails sink, the mast being suddenly broken." Or that poor Brunetto Latini, with the cotto aspetto, "face baked," parched brown and lean; and the "fiery snow" that falls on them there, a "fiery snow without wind," slow, deliberate, never-ending! Or the lids of those Tombs; square sarcophaguses, in that silent dim-burning Hall, each with its Soul in torment; the lids laid open there; they are to be shut at the Day of Judgment, through Eternity. And how Farinata rises; and how Cavalcante falls—at hearing of his Son, and the past tense "fue"! The very movements in Dante have something brief; swift, decisive, almost military. It is of the inmost essence of his genius this sort of painting. The fiery, swift Italian nature of the man, so silent, passionate, with its quick abrupt movements, its silent "pale rages," speaks itself in these things.

For though this of painting is one of the outermost developments of a man, it comes like all else from the essential faculty of him; it is physiognomical of the whole man. Find a man whose words paint you a likeness, you have found a man worth something; mark his manner of doing it, as very characteristic of him. In the first place, he could not have discerned the object at all, or seen the vital type of it, unless he had, what we may call, sympathized with it,—had sympathy in him to bestow on objects. He must have been sincere about it too; sincere and sympathetic: a man without worth cannot give you the likeness of any object; he dwells in vague outwardness, fallacy and trivial hearsay, about all objects. And indeed may we not say that intellect altogether expresses itself in this power of discerning what an object is? Whatsoever of faculty a man's mind may have will come out here. Is it even of business, a matter to be done? The gifted man is he who sees the essential point, and leaves all the rest aside as surplusage: it is his faculty too, the man of business's faculty, that he discern the true likeness, not the false superficial one, of the thing he has got to work in. And how much of morality is in the kind of insight we get of

anything; "the eye seeing in all things what it brought with it the faculty of seeing"! To the mean eye all things are trivial, as certainly as to the jaundiced they are yellow. Raphael, the Painters tell us, is the best of all Portrait-painters withal. No most gifted eye can exhaust the significance of any object. In the commonest human face there lies more than Raphael will take away with him.

Dante's painting is not graphic only, brief, true, and of a vividness as of fire in dark night; taken on the wider scale, it is every way noble, and the outcome of a great soul. Francesca and her Lover, what qualities in that! A thing woven as out of rainbows, on a ground of eternal black. A small flute-voice of infinite wail speaks there, into our very heart of hearts. A touch of womanhood in it too: della bella persona, che mi fu tolta; and how, even in the Pit of woe, it is a solace that he will never part from her! Saddest tragedy in these alti guai. And the racking winds, in that aer bruno, whirl them away again, to wail forever!—Strange to think: Dante was the friend of this poor Francesca's father; Francesca herself may have sat upon the Poet's knee, as a bright innocent little child. Infinite pity, yet also infinite rigor of law: it is so Nature is made; it is so Dante discerned that she was made. What a paltry notion is that of his Divine Comedy's being a poor splenetic impotent terrestrial libel; putting those into Hell whom he could not be avenged upon on earth! I suppose if ever pity, tender as a mother's, was in the heart of any man, it was in Dante's. But a man who does not know rigor cannot pity either. His very pity will be cowardly, egoistic,—sentimentality, or little better. I know not in the world an affection equal to that of Dante. It is a tenderness, a trembling, longing, pitying love: like the wail of AEolian harps, soft, soft; like a child's young heart;—and then that stern, sore-saddened heart! These longings of his towards his Beatrice; their meeting together in the Paradiso; his gazing in her pure transfigured eyes, her that had been purified by death so long, separated from him so far:—one likens it to the song of angels; it is among the purest utterances of affection, perhaps the very purest, that ever came out of a human soul.

For the intense Dante is intense in all things; he has got into the essence of all. His intellectual insight as painter, on occasion too as reasoner, is but the result of all other sorts of intensity. Morally great, above all, we must call him; it is the beginning of all. His scorn, his grief are as transcendent as his love;—as indeed, what are they but the inverse or converse of his love? "A Dio spiacenti ed a' nemici sui, Hateful to God and to the enemies of God:" lofty scorn, unappeasable silent reprobation and aversion; "Non ragionam di lor, We will not speak of them, look only and pass."

Or think of this; "They have not the hope to die, Non han speranza di morte." One day, it had risen sternly benign on the scathed heart of Dante, that he, wretched, never-resting, worn as he was, would full surely die; "that Destiny itself could not doom him not to die." Such words are in this man. For rigor, earnestness and depth, he is not to be paralleled in the modern world; to seek his parallel we must go into the Hebrew Bible, and live with the antique Prophets there.

I do not agree with much modern criticism, in greatly preferring the Inferno to the two other parts of the Divine Commedia. Such preference belongs, I imagine, to our general Byronism of taste, and is like to be a transient feeling. The Purgatorio and Paradiso, especially the former, one would almost say, is even more excellent than it. It is a noble thing that Purgatorio, "Mountain of Purification;" an emblem of the noblest conception of that age. If sin is so fatal, and Hell is and must be so rigorous, awful, yet in Repentance too is man purified; Repentance is the grand Christian act. It is beautiful how Dante works it out. The tremolar dell' onde, that "trembling" of the ocean-waves, under the first pure gleam of morning, dawning afar on the wandering Two, is as the type of an altered mood. Hope has now dawned; never-dying Hope, if in company still with heavy sorrow. The obscure sojourn of demons and reprobate is underfoot; a soft breathing of penitence mounts higher and higher, to the Throne of Mercy itself. "Pray for me," the denizens of that Mount of Pain all say to him. "Tell my Giovanna to pray for me," my daughter Giovanna; "I think her mother loves me no more!" They toil painfully up by that winding steep, "bent down like corbels of a building," some of them,—crushed together so "for the sin of pride;" yet nevertheless in years, in ages and aeons, they shall have reached the top, which is heaven's gate, and by Mercy shall have been admitted in. The joy too of all, when one has prevailed; the whole Mountain shakes with joy, and a psalm of praise rises, when one soul has perfected repentance and got its sin and misery left behind! I call all this a noble embodiment of a true noble thought.

But indeed the Three compartments mutually support one another, are indispensable to one another. The Paradiso, a kind of inarticulate music to me, is the redeeming side of the Inferno; the Inferno without it were untrue. All three make up the true Unseen World, as figured in the Christianity of the Middle Ages; a thing forever memorable, forever true in the essence of it, to all men. It was perhaps delineated in no human soul with such depth of veracity as in this of Dante's; a man sent to sing it, to keep it long memorable. Very notable with what brief simplicity

he passes out of the every-day reality, into the Invisible one; and in the second or third stanza, we find ourselves in the World of Spirits; and dwell there, as among things palpable, indubitable! To Dante they were so; the real world, as it is called, and its facts, was but the threshold to an infinitely higher Fact of a World. At bottom, the one was as preternatural as the other. Has not each man a soul? He will not only be a spirit, but is one. To the earnest Dante it is all one visible Fact; he believes it, sees it; is the Poet of it in virtue of that. Sincerity, I say again, is the saving merit, now as always.

Dante's Hell, Purgatory, Paradise, are a symbol withal, an emblematic representation of his Belief about this Universe:—some Critic in a future age, like those Scandinavian ones the other day, who has ceased altogether to think as Dante did, may find this too all an "Allegory," perhaps an idle Allegory! It is a sublime embodiment, or sublimest, of the soul of Christianity. It expresses, as in huge world-wide architectural emblems, how the Christian Dante felt Good and Evil to be the two polar elements of this Creation, on which it all turns; that these two differ not by preferability of one to the other, but by incompatibility absolute and infinite; that the one is excellent and high as light and Heaven, the other hideous, black as Gehenna and the Pit of Hell! Everlasting Justice, yet with Penitence, with everlasting Pity,—all Christianism, as Dante and the Middle Ages had it, is emblemed here. Emblemed: and yet, as I urged the other day, with what entire truth of purpose; how unconscious of any embleming! Hell, Purgatory, Paradise: these things were not fashioned as emblems; was there, in our Modern European Mind, any thought at all of their being emblems! Were they not indubitable awful facts; the whole heart of man taking them for practically true, all Nature everywhere confirming them? So is it always in these things. Men do not believe an Allegory. The future Critic, whatever his new thought may be, who considers this of Dante to have been all got up as an Allegory, will commit one sore mistake!—Paganism we recognized as a veracious expression of the earnest awe-struck feeling of man towards the Universe; veracious, true once, and still not without worth for us. But mark here the difference of Paganism and Christianism; one great difference. Paganism emblemed chiefly the Operations of Nature; the destinies, efforts, combinations, vicissitudes of things and men in this world; Christianism emblemed the Law of Human Duty, the Moral Law of Man. One was for the sensuous nature: a rude helpless utterance of the first Thought of men,—the chief recognized virtue, Courage, Superiority to Fear. The other was not for the sensuous nature, but for the moral. What a progress is here, if in that one respect only!

And so in this Dante, as we said, had ten silent centuries, in a very strange way, found a voice. The Divina Commedia is of Dante's writing; yet in truth it belongs to ten Christian centuries, only the finishing of it is Dante's. So always. The craftsman there, the smith with that metal of his, with these tools, with these cunning methods,—how little of all he does is properly his work! All past inventive men work there with him;—as indeed with all of us, in all things. Dante is the spokesman of the Middle Ages; the Thought they lived by stands here, in everlasting music. These sublime ideas of his, terrible and beautiful, are the fruit of the Christian Meditation of all the good men who had gone before him. Precious they; but also is not he precious? Much, had not he spoken, would have been dumb; not dead, yet living voiceless.

On the whole, is it not an utterance, this mystic Song, at once of one of the greatest human souls, and of the highest thing that Europe had hitherto realized for itself? Christianism, as Dante sings it, is another than Paganism in the rude Norse mind; another than "Bastard Christianism" half-articulately spoken in the Arab Desert, seven hundred years before!—The noblest idea made real hitherto among men, is sung, and emblemed forth abidingly, by one of the noblest men. In the one sense and in the other, are we not right glad to possess it? As I calculate, it may last yet for long thousands of years. For the thing that is uttered from the inmost parts of a man's soul, differs altogether from what is uttered by the outer part. The outer is of the day, under the empire of mode; the outer passes away, in swift endless changes; the inmost is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. True souls, in all generations of the world, who look on this Dante, will find a brotherhood in him; the deep sincerity of his thoughts, his woes and hopes, will speak likewise to their sincerity; they will feel that this Dante too was a brother. Napoleon in Saint Helena is charmed with the genial veracity of old Homer. The oldest Hebrew Prophet, under a vesture the most diverse from ours, does yet, because he speaks from the heart of man, speak to all men's hearts. It is the one sole secret of continuing long memorable. Dante, for depth of sincerity, is like an antique Prophet too; his words, like theirs, come from his very heart. One need not wonder if it were predicted that his Poem might be the most enduring thing our Europe has yet made; for nothing so endures as a truly spoken word. All cathedrals, pontificalities, brass and stone, and outer arrangement never so lasting, are brief in comparison to an unfathomable heart-song like this: one feels as if it might survive, still of importance to men, when these had all sunk into new irrecognizable combinations, and had ceased individually to be. Europe has made much; great cities, great empires, encyclopaedias, creeds, bodies of

opinion and practice: but it has made little of the class of Dante's Thought. Homer yet is veritably present face to face with every open soul of us; and Greece, where is it? Desolate for thousands of years; away, vanished; a bewildered heap of stones and rubbish, the life and existence of it all gone. Like a dream; like the dust of King Agamemnon! Greece was; Greece, except in the words it spoke, is not.

The uses of this Dante? We will not say much about his "uses." A human soul who has once got into that primal element of Song, and sung forth fitly somewhat therefrom, has worked in the depths of our existence; feeding through long times the life-roots of all excellent human things whatsoever,—in a way that "utilities" will not succeed well in calculating! We will not estimate the Sun by the quantity of gaslight it saves us; Dante shall be invaluable, or of no value. One remark I may make: the contrast in this respect between the Hero-Poet and the Hero-Prophet. In a hundred years, Mahomet, as we saw, had his Arabians at Grenada and at Delhi; Dante's Italians seem to be yet very much where they were. Shall we say, then, Dante's effect on the world was small in comparison? Not so: his arena is far more restricted; but also it is far nobler, clearer;—perhaps not less but more important. Mahomet speaks to great masses of men, in the coarse dialect adapted to such; a dialect filled with inconsistencies, crudities, follies: on the great masses alone can he act, and there with good and with evil strangely blended. Dante speaks to the noble, the pure and great, in all times and places. Neither does he grow obsolete, as the other does. Dante burns as a pure star, fixed there in the firmament, at which the great and the high of all ages kindle themselves: he is the possession of all the chosen of the world for uncounted time. Dante, one calculates, may long survive Mahomet. In this way the balance may be made straight again.

But, at any rate, it is not by what is called their effect on the world, by what we can judge of their effect there, that a man and his work are measured. Effect? Influence? Utility? Let a man do his work; the fruit of it is the care of Another than he. It will grow its own fruit; and whether embodied in Caliph Thrones and Arabian Conquests, so that it "fills all Morning and Evening Newspapers," and all Histories, which are a kind of distilled Newspapers; or not embodied so at all;—what matters that? That is not the real fruit of it! The Arabian Caliph, in so far only as he did something, was something. If the great Cause of Man, and Man's work in God's Earth, got no furtherance from the Arabian Caliph, then no matter how many scimetars he drew, how many gold piasters pocketed, and what uproar and blaring he made in this world,—he was but a loud-sounding inanity and futility; at bottom,

he was not at all. Let us honor the great empire of Silence, once more! The boundless treasury which we do not jingle in our pockets, or count up and present before men! It is perhaps, of all things, the usefulest for each of us to do, in these loud times.

As Dante, the Italian man, was sent into our world to embody musically the Religion of the Middle Ages, the Religion of our Modern Europe, its Inner Life; so Shakspeare, we may say, embodies for us the Outer Life of our Europe as developed then, its chivalries, courtesies, humors, ambitions, what practical way of thinking, acting, looking at the world, men then had. As in Homer we may still construe Old Greece; so in Shakspeare and Dante, after thousands of years, what our modern Europe was, in Faith and in Practice, will still be legible. Dante has given us the Faith or soul; Shakspeare, in a not less noble way, has given us the Practice or body. This latter also we were to have; a man was sent for it, the man Shakspeare. Just when that chivalry way of life had reached its last finish, and was on the point of breaking down into slow or swift dissolution, as we now see it everywhere, this other sovereign Poet, with his seeing eye, with his perennial singing voice, was sent to take note of it, to give long-enduring record of it. Two fit men: Dante, deep, fierce as the central fire of the world; Shakspeare, wide, placid, far-seeing, as the Sun, the upper light of the world. Italy produced the one world-voice; we English had the honor of producing the other.

Curious enough how, as it were by mere accident, this man came to us. I think always, so great, quiet, complete and self-sufficing is this Shakspeare, had the Warwickshire Squire not prosecuted him for deer-stealing, we had perhaps never heard of him as a Poet! The woods and skies, the rustic Life of Man in Stratford there, had been enough for this man! But indeed that strange outbudding of our whole English Existence, which we call the Elizabethan Era, did not it too come as of its own accord? The "Tree Igdrasil" buds and withers by its own laws,—too deep for our scanning. Yet it does bud and wither, and every bough and leaf of it is there, by fixed eternal laws; not a Sir Thomas Lucy but comes at the hour fit for him. Curious, I say, and not sufficiently considered: how everything does co-operate with all; not a leaf rotting on the highway but is indissoluble portion of solar and stellar systems; no thought, word or act of man but has sprung withal out of all men, and works sooner or later, recognizably or irrecognizable, on all men! It is all a Tree: circulation of sap and influences, mutual communication of every minutest leaf with the lowest talon of a root, with every other greatest and minutest portion of the whole. The Tree Igdrasil, that has its roots down in the Kingdoms of Hela and Death, and whose boughs overspread the highest Heaven—!

In some sense it may be said that this glorious Elizabethan Era with its Shakspeare, as the outcome and flowerage of all which had preceded it, is itself attributable to the Catholicism of the Middle Ages. The Christian Faith, which was the theme of Dante's Song, had produced this Practical Life which Shakspeare was to sing. For Religion then, as it now and always is, was the soul of Practice; the primary vital fact in men's life. And remark here, as rather curious, that Middle-Age Catholicism was abolished, so far as Acts of Parliament could abolish it, before Shakspeare, the noblest product of it, made his appearance. He did make his appearance nevertheless. Nature at her own time, with Catholicism or what else might be necessary, sent him forth; taking small thought of Acts of Parliament. King Henrys, Queen Elizabeths go their way; and Nature too goes hers. Acts of Parliament, on the whole, are small, notwithstanding the noise they make. What Act of Parliament, debate at St. Stephen's, on the hustings or elsewhere, was it that brought this Shakspeare into being? No dining at Freemason's Tavern, opening subscription-lists, selling of shares, and infinite other jangling and true or false endeavoring! This Elizabethan Era, and all its nobleness and blessedness, came without proclamation, preparation of ours. Priceless Shakspeare was the free gift of Nature; given altogether silently;—received altogether silently, as if it had been a thing of little account. And yet, very literally, it is a priceless thing. One should look at that side of matters too.

Of this Shakspeare of ours, perhaps the opinion one sometimes hears a little idolatrously expressed is, in fact, the right one; I think the best judgment not of this country only, but of Europe at large, is slowly pointing to the conclusion, that Shakspeare is the chief of all Poets hitherto; the greatest intellect who, in our recorded world, has left record of himself in the way of Literature. On the whole, I know not such a power of vision, such a faculty of thought, if we take all the characters of it, in any other man. Such a calmness of depth; placid joyous strength; all things imaged in that great soul of his so true and clear, as in a tranquil unfathomable sea! It has been said, that in the constructing of Shakspeare's Dramas there is, apart from all other "faculties" as they are called, an understanding manifested, equal to that in Bacon's Novum Organum That is true; and it is not a truth that strikes every one. It would become more apparent if we tried, any of us for himself, how, out of Shakspeare's dramatic materials, we could fashion such a result! The built house seems all so fit,—every way as it should be, as if it came there by its own law and the nature of things,—we forget the rude disorderly quarry it was shaped from. The

very perfection of the house, as if Nature herself had made it, hides the builder's merit. Perfect, more perfect than any other man, we may call Shakspeare in this: he discerns, knows as by instinct, what condition he works under, what his materials are, what his own force and its relation to them is. It is not a transitory glance of insight that will suffice; it is deliberate illumination of the whole matter; it is a calmly seeingeye; a great intellect, in short. How a man, of some wide thing that he has witnessed, will construct a narrative, what kind of picture and delineation he will give of it,—is the best measure you could get of what intellect is in the man. Which circumstance is vital and shall stand prominent; which unessential, fit to be suppressed; where is the true beginning, the true sequence and ending? To find out this, you task the whole force of insight that is in the man. He must understand the thing; according to the depth of his understanding, will the fitness of his answer be. You will try him so. Does like join itself to like; does the spirit of method stir in that confusion, so that its embroilment becomes order? Can the man say, Fiat lux, Let there be light; and out of chaos make a world? Precisely as there is light in himself, will he accomplish this?

Or indeed we may say again, it is in what I called Portrait-painting, delineating of men and things, especially of men, that Shakspeare is great. All the greatness of the man comes out deciswely here. It is unexampled, I think, that calm creative perspicacity of Shakspeare. The thing he looks at reveals not this or that face of it, but its inmost heart, and generic secret: it dissolves itself as in light before him, so that he discerns the perfect structure of it. Creative, we said: poetic creation, what is this too but seeing the thing sufficiently? The word that will describe the thing, follows of itself from such clear intense sight of the thing. And is not Shakspeare's morality, his valor, candor, tolerance, truthfulness; his whole victorious strength and greatness, which can triumph over such obstructions, visible there too? Great as the world. No twisted, poor convex-concave mirror, reflecting all objects with its own convexities and concavities; a perfectly level mirror;—that is to say withal, if we will understand it, a man justly related to all things and men, a good man. It is truly a lordly spectacle how this great soul takes in all kinds of men and objects, a Falstaff, an Othello, a Juliet, a Coriolanus; sets them all forth to us in their round completeness; loving, just, the equal brother of all. Novum Organum, and all the intellect you will find in Bacon, is of a quite secondary order; earthy, material, poor in comparison with this. Among modern men, one finds, in strictness, almost nothing of the same rank. Goethe alone, since the days of Shakspeare, reminds me of it. Of him too you say that he saw the object; you may say what he himself says of Shakspeare: "His

characters are like watches with dial-plates of transparent crystal; they show you the hour like others, and the inward mechanism also is all visible."

The seeing eye! It is this that discloses the inner harmony of things; what Nature meant, what musical idea Nature has wrapped up in these often rough embodiments. Something she did mean. To the seeing eye that something were discernible. Are they base, miserable things? You can laugh over them, you can weep over them; you can in some way or other genially relate yourself to them;—you can, at lowest, hold your peace about them, turn away your own and others' face from them, till the hour come for practically exterminating and extinguishing them! At bottom, it is the Poet's first gift, as it is all men's, that he have intellect enough. He will be a Poet if he have: a Poet in word; or failing that, perhaps still better, a Poet in act. Whether he write at all; and if so, whether in prose or in verse, will depend on accidents: who knows on what extremely trivial accidents,—perhaps on his having had a singing-master, on his being taught to sing in his boyhood! But the faculty which enables him to discern the inner heart of things, and the harmony that dwells there (for whatsoever exists has a harmony in the heart of it, or it would not hold together and exist), is not the result of habits or accidents, but the gift of Nature herself; the primary outfit for a Heroic Man in what sort soever. To the Poet, as to every other, we say first of all, See. If you cannot do that, it is of no use to keep stringing rhymes together, jingling sensibilities against each other, and name yourself a Poet; there is no hope for you. If you can, there is, in prose or verse, in action or speculation, all manner of hope. The crabbed old Schoolmaster used to ask, when they brought him a new pupil, "But are ye sure he's not a dunce?" Why, really one might ask the same thing, in regard to every man proposed for whatsoever function; and consider it as the one inquiry needful: Are ye sure he's not a dunce? There is, in this world, no other entirely fatal person.

For, in fact, I say the degree of vision that dwells in a man is a correct measure of the man. If called to define Shakspeare's faculty, I should say superiority of Intellect, and think I had included all under that. What indeed are faculties? We talk of faculties as if they were distinct, things separable; as if a man had intellect, imagination, fancy, &c., as he has hands, feet and arms. That is a capital error. Then again, we hear of a man's "intellectual nature," and of his "moral nature," as if these again were divisible, and existed apart. Necessities of language do perhaps prescribe such forms of utterance; we must speak, I am aware, in that way, if we are to speak at all. But words ought not to harden into things for us. It seems to me,

our apprehension of this matter is, for most part, radically falsified thereby. We ought to know withal, and to keep forever in mind, that these divisions are at bottom but names; that man's spiritual nature, the vital Force which dwells in him, is essentially one and indivisible; that what we call imagination, fancy, understanding, and so forth, are but different figures of the same Power of Insight, all indissolubly connected with each other, physiognomically related; that if we knew one of them, we might know all of them. Morality itself, what we call the moral quality of a man, what is this but another side of the one vital Force whereby he is and works? All that a man does is physiognomical of him. You may see how a man would fight, by the way in which he sings; his courage, or want of courage, is visible in the word he utters, in the opinion he has formed, no less than in the stroke he strikes. He is one; and preaches the same Self abroad in all these ways.

Without hands a man might have feet, and could still walk: but, consider it,—without morality, intellect were impossible for him; a thoroughly immoralman could not know anything at all! To know a thing, what we can call knowing, a man must first love the thing, sympathize with it: that is, bevirtuously related to it. If he have not the justice to put down his own selfishness at every turn, the courage to stand by the dangerous-true at every turn, how shall he know? His virtues, all of them, will lie recorded in his knowledge. Nature, with her truth, remains to the bad, to the selfish and the pusillanimous forever a sealed book: what such can know of Nature is mean, superficial, small; for the uses of the day merely.—But does not the very Fox know something of Nature? Exactly so: it knows where the geese lodge! The human Reynard, very frequent everywhere in the world, what more does he know but this and the like of this? Nay, it should be considered too, that if the Fox had not a certain vulpine morality, he could not even know where the geese were, or get at the geese! If he spent his time in splenetic atrabiliar reflections on his own misery, his ill usage by Nature, Fortune and other Foxes, and so forth; and had not courage, promptitude, practicality, and other suitable vulpine gifts and graces, he would catch no geese. We may say of the Fox too, that his morality and insight are of the same dimensions; different faces of the same internal unity of vulpine life!—These things are worth stating; for the contrary of them acts with manifold very baleful perversion, in this time: what limitations, modifications they require, your own candor will supply.

If I say, therefore, that Shakspeare is the greatest of Intellects, I have said all concerning him. But there is more in Shakspeare's intellect than we have yet seen. It is what I call an unconscious intellect; there is more virtue in it than he himself is

aware of. Novalis beautifully remarks of him, that those Dramas of his are Products of Nature too, deep as Nature herself. I find a great truth in this saying. Shakspeare's Art is not Artifice; the noblest worth of it is not there by plan or precontrivance. It grows up from the deeps of Nature, through this noble sincere soul, who is a voice of Nature. The latest generations of men will find new meanings in Shakspeare, new elucidations of their own human being; "new harmonies with the infinite structure of the Universe; concurrences with later ideas, affinities with the higher powers and senses of man." This well deserves meditating. It is Nature's highest reward to a true simple great soul, that he get thus to be a part of herself. Such a man's works, whatsoever he with utmost conscious exertion and forethought shall accomplish, grow up withal unconsciously, from the unknown deeps in him;—as the oak-tree grows from the Earth's bosom, as the mountains and waters shape themselves; with a symmetry grounded on Nature's own laws, conformable to all Truth whatsoever. How much in Shakspeare lies hid; his sorrows, his silent struggles known to himself; much that was not known at all, not speakable at all: like roots, like sap and forces working underground! Speech is great; but Silence is greater.

Withal the joyful tranquillity of this man is notable. I will not blame Dante for his misery: it is as battle without victory; but true battle,—the first, indispensable thing. Yet I call Shakspeare greater than Dante, in that he fought truly, and did conquer. Doubt it not, he had his own sorrows: thoseSonnets of his will even testify expressly in what deep waters he had waded, and swum struggling for his life;—as what man like him ever failed to have to do? It seems to me a heedless notion, our common one, that he sat like a bird on the bough; and sang forth, free and off-hand, never knowing the troubles of other men. Not so; with no man is it so. How could a man travel forward from rustic deer-poaching to such tragedy-writing, and not fall in with sorrows by the way? Or, still better, how could a man delineate a Hamlet, a Coriolanus, a Macbeth, so many suffering heroic hearts, if his own heroic heart had never suffered?—And now, in contrast with all this, observe his mirthfulness, his genuine overflowing love of laughter! You would say, in no point does he exaggerate but only in laughter. Fiery objurgations, words that pierce and burn, are to be found in Shakspeare; yet he is always in measure here; never what Johnson would remark as a specially "good hater." But his laughter seems to pour from him in floods; he heaps all manner of ridiculous nicknames on the butt he is bantering, tumbles and tosses him in all sorts of horse-play; you would say, with his whole heart laughs. And then, if not always the finest, it is always a genial laughter. Not

at mere weakness, at misery or poverty; never. No man who can laugh, what we call laughing, will laugh at these things. It is some poor character only desiring to laugh, and have the credit of wit, that does so. Laughter means sympathy; good laughter is not "the crackling of thorns under the pot." Even at stupidity and pretension this Shakspeare does not laugh otherwise than genially. Dogberry and Verges tickle our very hearts; and we dismiss them covered with explosions of laughter: but we like the poor fellows only the better for our laughing; and hope they will get on well there, and continue Presidents of the City-watch. Such laughter, like sunshine on the deep sea, is very beautiful to me.

We have no room to speak of Shakspeare's individual works; though perhaps there is much still waiting to be said on that head. Had we, for instance, all his plays reviewed as Hamlet, in Wilhelm Meister, is! A thing which might, one day, be done. August Wilhelm Schlegel has a remark on his Historical Plays, Henry Fifth and the others, which is worth remembering. He calls them a kind of National Epic. Marlborough, you recollect, said, he knew no English History but what he had learned from Shakspeare. There are really, if we look to it, few as memorable Histories. The great salient points are admirably seized; all rounds itself off, into a kind of rhythmic coherence; it is, as Schlegel says, epic;—as indeed all delineation by a great thinker will be. There are right beautiful things in those Pieces, which indeed together form one beautiful thing. That battle of Agincourt strikes me as one of the most perfect things, in its sort, we anywhere have of Shakspeare's. The description of the two hosts: the worn-out, jaded English; the dread hour, big with destiny, when the battle shall begin; and then that deathless valor: "Ye good yeomen, whose limbs were made in England!" There is a noble Patriotism in it,—far other than the "indifference" you sometimes hear ascribed to Shakspeare. A true English heart breathes, calm and strong, through the whole business; not boisterous, protrusive; all the better for that. There is a sound in it like the ring of steel. This man too had a right stroke in him, had it come to that!

But I will say, of Shakspeare's works generally, that we have no full impress of him there; even as full as we have of many men. His works are so many windows, through which we see a glimpse of the world that was in him. All his works seem, comparatively speaking, cursory, imperfect, written under cramping circumstances; giving only here and there a note of the full utterance of the man. Passages there are that come upon you like splendor out of Heaven; bursts of radiance, illuminating the very heart of the thing: you say, "That is true, spoken once and forever; wheresoever and whensoever there is an open human soul, that will be recognized as true!" Such

bursts, however, make us feel that the surrounding matter is not radiant; that it is, in part, temporary, conventional. Alas, Shakspeare had to write for the Globe Playhouse: his great soul had to crush itself, as it could, into that and no other mould. It was with him, then, as it is with us all. No man works save under conditions. The sculptor cannot set his own free Thought before us; but his Thought as he could translate it into the stone that was given, with the tools that were given. Disjecta membra are all that we find of any Poet, or of any man.

Whoever looks intelligently at this Shakspeare may recognize that he too was a Prophet, in his way; of an insight analogous to the Prophetic, though he took it up in another strain. Nature seemed to this man also divine; unspeakable, deep as Tophet, high as Heaven; "We are such stuff as Dreams are made of!" That scroll in Westminster Abbey, which few read with understanding, is of the depth of any seer. But the man sang; did not preach, except musically. We called Dante the melodious Priest of Middle-Age Catholicism. May we not call Shakspeare the still more melodious Priest of a true Catholicism, the "Universal Church" of the Future and of all times? No narrow superstition, harsh asceticism, intolerance, fanatical fierceness or perversion: a Revelation, so far as it goes, that such a thousand-fold hidden beauty and divineness dwells in all Nature; which let all men worship as they can! We may say without offence, that there rises a kind of universal Psalm out of this Shakspeare too; not unfit to make itself heard among the still more sacred Psalms. Not in disharmony with these, if we understood them, but in harmony!—I cannot call this Shakspeare a "Sceptic," as some do; his indifference to the creeds and theological quarrels of his time misleading them. No: neither unpatriotic, though he says little about his Patriotism; nor sceptic, though he says little about his Faith. Such "indifference" was the fruit of his greatness withal: his whole heart was in his own grand sphere of worship (we may call it such); these other controversies, vitally important to other men, were not vital to him.

But call it worship, call it what you will, is it not a right glorious thing, and set of things, this that Shakspeare has brought us? For myself, I feel that there is actually a kind of sacredness in the fact of such a man being sent into this Earth. Is he not an eye to us all; a blessed heaven-sent Bringer of Light?—And, at bottom, was it not perhaps far better that this Shakspeare, every way an unconscious man, was conscious of no Heavenly message? He did not feel, like Mahomet, because he saw into those internal Splendors, that he specially was the "Prophet of God:" and was he not greater than Mahomet in that? Greater; and also, if we compute strictly,

as we did in Dante's case, more successful. It was intrinsically an error that notion of Mahomet's, of his supreme Prophethood; and has come down to us inextricably involved in error to this day; dragging along with it such a coil of fables, impurities, intolerances, as makes it a questionable step for me here and now to say, as I have done, that Mahomet was a true Speaker at all, and not rather an ambitious charlatan, perversity and simulacrum; no Speaker, but a Babbler! Even in Arabia, as I compute, Mahomet will have exhausted himself and become obsolete, while this Shakspeare, this Dante may still be young;—while this Shakspeare may still pretend to be a Priest of Mankind, of Arabia as of other places, for unlimited periods to come!

Compared with any speaker or singer one knows, even with Aeschylus or Homer, why should he not, for veracity and universality, last like them? He is sincere as they; reaches deep down like them, to the universal and perennial. But as for Mahomet, I think it had been better for him not to be so conscious! Alas, poor Mahomet; all that he was conscious of was a mere error; a futility and triviality,—as indeed such ever is. The truly great in him too was the unconscious: that he was a wild Arab lion of the desert, and did speak out with that great thunder-voice of his, not by words which hethought to be great, but by actions, by feelings, by a history which were great! His Koran has become a stupid piece of prolix absurdity; we do not believe, like him, that God wrote that! The Great Man here too, as always, is a Force of Nature. Whatsoever is truly great in him springs up from the inarticulate deeps.

Well: this is our poor Warwickshire Peasant, who rose to be Manager of a Playhouse, so that he could live without begging; whom the Earl of Southampton cast some kind glances on; whom Sir Thomas Lucy, many thanks to him, was for sending to the Treadmill! We did not account him a god, like Odin, while he dwelt with us;—on which point there were much to be said. But I will say rather, or repeat: In spite of the sad state Hero-worship now lies in, consider what this Shakspeare has actually become among us. Which Englishman we ever made, in this land of ours, which million of Englishmen, would we not give up rather than the Stratford Peasant? There is no regiment of highest Dignitaries that we would sell him for. He is the grandest thing we have yet done. For our honor among foreign nations, as an ornament to our English Household, what item is there that we would not surrender rather than him? Consider now, if they asked us, Will you give up your Indian Empire or your Shakspeare, you English; never have had any Indian Empire, or never have had any Shakspeare? Really it were a grave question. Official persons

would answer doubtless in official language; but we, for our part too, should not we be forced to answer: Indian Empire, or no Indian Empire; we cannot do without Shakspeare! Indian Empire will go, at any rate, some day; but this Shakspeare does not go, he lasts forever with us; we cannot give up our Shakspeare!

Nay, apart from spiritualities; and considering him merely as a real, marketable, tangibly useful possession. England, before long, this Island of ours, will hold but a small fraction of the English: in America, in New Holland, east and west to the very Antipodes, there will be a Saxondom covering great spaces of the Globe. And now, what is it that can keep all these together into virtually one Nation, so that they do not fall out and fight, but live at peace, in brotherlike intercourse, helping one another? This is justly regarded as the greatest practical problem, the thing all manner of sovereignties and governments are here to accomplish: what is it that will accomplish this? Acts of Parliament, administrative prime-ministers cannot. America is parted from us, so far as Parliament could part it. Call it not fantastic, for there is much reality in it: Here, I say, is an English King, whom no time or chance, Parliament or combination of Parliaments, can dethrone! This King Shakspeare, does not he shine, in crowned sovereignty, over us all, as the noblest, gentlest, yet strongest of rallying-signs; indestructible; really more valuable in that point of view than any other means or appliance whatsoever? We can fancy him as radiant aloft over all the Nations of Englishmen, a thousand years hence. From Paramatta, from New York, wheresoever, under what sort of Parish-Constable soever, English men and women are, they will say to one another: "Yes, this Shakspeare is ours; we produced him, we speak and think by him; we are of one blood and kind with him." The most common-sense politician, too, if he pleases, may think of that.

Yes, truly, it is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice; that it produce a man who will speak forth melodiously what the heart of it means! Italy, for example, poor Italy lies dismembered, scattered asunder, not appearing in any protocol or treaty as a unity at all; yet the noble Italy is actually one: Italy produced its Dante; Italy can speak! The Czar of all the Russias, he is strong with so many bayonets, Cossacks and cannons; and does a great feat in keeping such a tract of Earth politically together; but he cannot yet speak. Something great in him, but it is a dumb greatness. He has had no voice of genius, to be heard of all men and times. He must learn to speak. He is a great dumb monster hitherto. His cannons and Cossacks will all have rusted into nonentity, while that Dante's voice is still audible. The Nation that has a Dante is bound together as no dumb Russia can be.—We must here end what we had to say of the Hero-Poet.

3.3.4. Dante as Hero-Poet

Carlyle calls Dante the saint of poetry and says that he has been worshipped, and will continue to be worshipped in future as well. Not much is known about his life. The *Divine Comedy* is our only source of knowing the nature of the man and of his heroic gifts.

Dante was fairly well-educated. He was intelligent and hard-working, and so rose to be one of the Chief Magistrates of Florence. But his life was marked by suffering and loneliness. He loved Beatrice, but could not marry her as she was already married. Moreover, he was banished from Florence by his political opponents. Misery, humiliation and suffering were heaped on him. But even in the face of all these sufferings, his head remained unbowed as is always the case with truly great men. For the major part of his life, Dante was a hopeless wanderer, poor, banished, without any home, friend or hope. But the deeper he suffered the deeper was the insight that he gained into the eternal world. Dante also had the passion and sincerity which all great men possess. Intensity is another important quality of the poetic genius of Dante. “He is world-deep, not world-wide.” It is his intensity that gives him intellectual insight. He is brief and precise in communicating his thoughts. He says what he has to say in the fewest possible words, and his silence is more eloquent than speech. Dante also had the gift of sympathy which imparts picturesque vividness to his portraits and descriptions. His sympathy enables him to see into the heart of things and understand and grasp the essence of reality. Dante is the spokesman of the middle ages; his epic is the voice of ten silent centuries. As a Hero-poet, Dante is the monarch of an empire that is more abiding than any empire based on military conquest.

Carlyle is all praise for *Divine Comedy*. He calls it “divine song”, “the transcendental mystic song”, “the voice of ten silent centuries”, the “Christian epic”, which reflects the soul and the suffering, devotion, hard work, sincerity, intensity and moral profundity of its author. Dante’s epic is divided into three parts-the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso*. The *Inferno* is the description of Hell; the *Purgatorio* describes how souls experience remorse and repentance and are purged of their sins in Hell; while *Paradiso* is adescription of a world of beauty, light and song, where Dante meets Beatrice, the girl whom he loved, but could not marry. The *Divine Comedy* describes Dante’s imaginary journey through all three parts of this invisible world of spirits. Through Hell and Purgatory, Dante is led by Virgil, the ancient Roman poet, and by Beatrice through the regions of Paradise.

The *Divine Comedy* embodies a vision of the other world. It is also an allegory of Christian life, a spiritual autobiography, and an encyclopedic reflection of the knowledge of its day. The three parts of the poem are like the three parts of a symmetrical and well-proportioned building which is solemn, majestic and awe-inspiring. The poet pours out his heart in this poem, and it is because of the sincerity of the poet which touches the readers' heart. The *Divine Comedy* also abounds in vivid and graphic descriptions, and portraits. The source of this vividness lies in the poet's intellectual superiority and his deep sympathy with his subject. The scenes abound in a large variety of colours, but the background is somber and dark. Thus the *Divine Comedy*, according to Carlyle is the expression of one of the noblest of souls, which will continue to enthrall readers for ages to come.

3.3.5. Shakespeare as Hero-Poet

Speaking about Shakespeare in his lecture, Thomas Carlyle opines that what Homer was to Greece, and Dante to the Middle Ages, likewise Shakespeare was to the Modern Age. Shakespeare may well be placed on a pedestal at par with Homer and Dante. Carlyle claims that the "sovereign" poet, Shakespeare, "with his seeing eye, with his perennial singing voice, was sent to take note" of the changing times in Europe.

Carlyle is in all praise for Shakespeare. He calls him priceless; calmness of depth; placid of joyous strength; great soul, true and clear; like a tranquil unfathomable sea. Shakespeare is further on compared to an immaculately built house which makes us forget the rude disorderly raw material with which it was built. The finished product, that is, Shakespeare, is so perfect, that we forget from what raw material he was made with. In the same manner, his finished plays are just as perfect as he is, and we can no longer discern the raw materials used to make the plays. The insight with which Shakespeare arranged the plot in his plays is in itself an art and shows the true intelligence of the man.

Carlyle asserts that even the scientific works of intellect of Sir Francis Bacon is earthly and secondary in comparison to Shakespeare. What he implies is that Shakespeare's work is divine. If anyone in the modern times can be compared to Shakespeare, Carlyle believes that only the German poet, Goethe is somewhat comparable to the English bard.

Carlyle further draws attention to Shakespeare's skill at amalgamating the intellectual and moral nature of man. He does this so perfectly in his works that there is always continuity in nature. He calls Shakespeare the greatest intellect that the world has ever seen. Carlyle terms this as the, 'Unconscious Intellect' and also claims that there is more virtue in Shakespeare than he is even aware off. Carlyle believes Shakespeare's art is not artifice but something that grows from the depths of nature.

Despite knowing the poet so well, we don't know much about his own life's sorrows or struggles. It bewilders Carlyle how a man can delineate a Hamlet, a Coriolanus, a Macbeth and so many suffering heroic hearts, if his own heroic heart had never suffered. At the same time all of this is juxtaposed with overflowing love of laughter. Nonetheless, he had the fortitude and won the proverbial battle as far as comparison with Dante is concerned. This victory can be seen through all his writings.

3.3.6 Summing Up

- Thomas Carlyle is the foremost of the writers of Non Fictional prose of the Victorian age
- In all his works, Carlyle is animated by an earnest prophetic zeal. He attacks the evils of a world given over to the worship of Mammon and the pursuit of pleasure. He denounces materialism and utilitarianism.
- This vehement style is endowed with an intense life, animated by a rugged humour and by the gift of comic exaggeration.
- The lectures represent Carlyle's idea that all history is the making of great persons, gifted with supreme power of vision or action. According to him, only when persons of heroic temperament step forward to lead the masses can true progress for society occur.
- The *Divine Comedy,* according to Carlyle is the expression of one of the noblest of souls, which will continue to enthrall readers for ages to come.
- Carlyle believes Shakespeare's art is not artifice but something that grows from the depths of nature.

3.3.7. Comprehension Exercises

- **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

  1. What according to Carlyle are the essential qualities of a Poet-hero?
  2. Discuss Carlyle's views on Dante as a model Poet-hero
  3. Discuss Carlyle's estimate of the character and poetic-genius of Shakespeare

- **Medium Length Questions-12 Marks**

  1. Write a short note on Carlyle's prose-style
  2. Write a note on Carlyle's views on Dante's *Divine Comedy*
  3. How does Carlyle compare Shakespeare and Mahomet

- **Short Questions-6 Marks**

  1. Name some significant Non Fictional prose writers of the Victorian Age.
  2. Name the heroes Carlyle referred to in *Heroes and Hero-Worship*
  3. What are the three parts of *Divine Comedy*?

3.3.8. Suggested Reading

1. Goldberg, Michael K., Joel J Brattin, and Mark Engel, eds. *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
2. LaValley, Albert J. *Carlyle and the Idea of the Modern: Studies in Carlyle's Prophetic Literature and Its Relation to Blake, Nietzsche, Marx, and Others.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968.
3. Morrow, John. *Thomas Carlyle.* New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006.
4. Rosenberg, Philip. *The Seventh Hero: Thomas Carlyle and the Theory of Radical Activism.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974.

Module-4: Victorian Women Writers

Unit-1 ❑ Charlotte Brontë : *Jane Eyre*

Structure:

4.1.0: Introduction

You have already read about fictional prose of the Victorian period in Module 1, Unit 3 and have studied in detail two Victorian novels in Module 3, Units 1 and 2. Please refer to those sections while reading this unit as and where required. This Unit will introduce you to Victorian women novelists in general and Charlotte Brontë's most acclaimed novel, *Jane Eyre* in particular. After reading this Unit you will be able to comprehend the contribution of women novelists of the Victorian era to the development of the English novel. At the same time you will be able to understand the role of the Bronte sisters, Charlotte Brontë, Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë, in adding a new dimension to the English novel. Needless to say, the Unit will also provide you with an exhaustive analysis of the text itself. As a learner, you are advised to attain clarity in comprehending the entire perspective, which will enable you to have a deeper understanding of the novel as a literary genre.

4.1.1 Charlotte Brontë: A Chronological Biography

Charlotte Brontë's novels are all patently autobiographic. It is impossible to understand her work except through the medium of a chronological biography.

Charlotte Brontë

- **1816 -** Charlotte Brontë was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, England. She was the third of six children (five daughters: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Emily and Anne, and son, Branwell) to Patrick Brontë, an Irish Anglican clergyman, and his wife, Maria Branwell.
- **1821 -** Maria Branwell Brontë died of cancer, leaving the children to the care of her sister, Elizabeth Branwell.
- **1824 -** Charlotte was sent with three of her sisters, Emily, Maria and Elizabeth, to the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge in Lancashire. Its poor conditions, Charlotte maintained, permanently affected her health and physical development and hastened the deaths of her two elder sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, who died of tuberculosis. Soon after Charlotte and Maria were removed from the school.
- **1826 -** Mr. Brontë brought home a box of wooden soldiers for the children to play with. Charlotte and Branwell (brother), while playing with the soldiers, conceived of and began to write in great detail about an imaginary world which they called Angria, and Emily and Anne wrote articles and poems about their imaginary country, Gondal. The sagas were elaborate and convoluted and provided them with an obsessive interest in childhood and early adolescence, which prepared them for their literary vocations in adulthood.
- **1831-32 -** Charlotte continued her education at Roe Head School in Mirfield where she met her lifelong friends and correspondents, Ellen Nussey and Mary Taylor.
- **1833 -** Charlotte wrote a novella, *The Green Dwarf.*
- **1835-38 –** She worked in Roe Head as a teacher.

- **1839 -** Charlotte took up the first of many positions as governess to various families in Yorkshire, a career she pursued until 1841.
- **1842 -** She and Emily travelled to Brussels to enrol at the boarding school run by Constantin Heger (1809 – 1896) and his wife Claire Zoé Parent Heger (1804 – 1890). In return for board and tuition, Charlotte taught English and Emily taught music. Their time at the school was cut short when Elizabeth Branwell, their aunt died.
- **1843 -** Charlotte returned alone to Brussels to take up a teaching post at the school. Her second stay was not a happy one; she became lonely, homesick, and deeply attached to Constantin Heger. She finally returned to Haworth in January 1844.
- **1846 -** Charlotte, Emily, and Anne published a joint collection of poetry under the assumed names of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell. Although the book failed to attract interest (only two copies were sold), the sisters decided to continue writing for publication. Charlotte completed *The Professor,* which did not secure a publisher.
- **1847 -** Charlotte's *Jane Eyre: An Autobiography* was published, still under the Bell pseudonym.
- **1848 -** Charlotte and Anne visited their publishers in London, and revealed the true identities of the "Bells". In the same year Branwell Bronte (brother), by now an alcoholic and a drug addict, died, and Emily died shortly thereafter.
- **1849 -**. Charlotte began to move in literary circles in London, making the acquaintance, for example, of Thackeray. *Shirley* was published and in the same year Anne died.
- **1850 -** Charlotte met Mrs. Gaskell.
- **1852 -** Charlotte's *Villette* was published.
- **1854 -** Charlotte married Rev. A. B. Nicholls, curate of Haworth. Soon Charlotte, expecting a child, caught pneumonia.
- **1855 -** After a lengthy and painful illness, Charlotte died.
- **1857 -** *The Professor* was posthumously published and in that same year Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* was also published.

4.1.2 Charlotte Brontë as a Novelist

With Charlotte Brontë passion enters the novel. She depicts the strong human passions to which Dickens and Thackeray had shut their eyes. She is the first novelist to take as her subject-matter a woman's daydream of romantic love and turn it into literature.

Her first novel, *The Professor* failed to find a publisher and only appeared in 1857 after her death. It is based on the experiences of her own life, but the story lacks interest, and the characters are not created with the passionate insight that we find in her later portraits.

Apart from *Jane Eyre* (1847), which is her greatest novel, Charlotte Brontë's other novels include *Shirley* (1849), where she goes outside the limits of her genius and brings out a study of the conflict between workers and employers in the West Riding weaving industry in the early years of the nineteenth century, and *Villette* (1853), which again is autobiographical in nature. It is a story of love and bristles with glaring improbabilities.

Charlotte Brontë is different from the women novelists who preceded her because her heroines are in revolt against their circumstances and they are in revolt as women. In them all is the unmistakable impulse towards self-regard. Before her, no woman had written of life from the woman's point of view, as Fielding had done from the man's. She revealed woman as a human being, and she could do this as most of her novels are drawn from her own life. Thus her novels are marked by a note of intimacy and of self-revelation. She lets herself go with frank and eager abandonment directly. In this respect she is even quite different from Dickens and Thackeray. "Dickens is a friendly, easy, and a delightful companion in print; but not intimate. And Thackeray takes special pains to mask his real feelings at times behind a shade of cynicism."[3] Thus Charlotte Brontë applied to fiction what had already been applied with such delightful results by men like Charles Lamb and Hazlitt to the essay.

Moreover, Charlotte Brontë belongs to a tiny group of novelists like Lawrence and Dostoevsky in so far as her primary concern is with the depiction of the isolated naked soul responding to the experiences of life with a maximum of intensity. Diana Neill in her book 'A Short History of the English Novel' points out:

Charlotte's imagination was of the romantic kind that brooked no restraint. She

did not attempt to discipline its fiery force. Not that she permitted it to riot in the telling of the story; for the most part there are few impossibilities in her narratives and the passions that inspire them gain strength from the firm control exercised by the author. It is rather in certain symbolic incidents that the unrestrained violence, the immaturity of her imagination, shows itself.... At such moments when the daydream world asserts its hold over her all the paraphernalia of Gothic Romanticism is called into play.

However, from time to time flashes of imaginative brilliance light up her books. Imagination in such moments throws its glittering veil over life.

4.1.3 The Story of *Jane Eyre*

The novel begins with the titular character Jane Eyre, ten years old, living at her maternal uncle's house, named Gateshead Hall, with her maternal uncle, Mr. Reed, his wife, Sarah Reed, and children, Eliza, John, and Georgiana, after Jane's parents died of typhus several years ago. Jane's uncle is the only one in the Reed family to be kind to Jane, but he soon dies, leaving Jane to the care of his wife. Jane's aunt is by nature a harsh and stern woman without any kindness in her heart. Mrs. Reed and her three children are abusive to Jane, physically, emotionally, and also spiritually. Mrs Reed does not like Jane and considers her a burden. The boy John bullies Jane most of the time, and on one occasion he even beats her. Eliza and Georgiana are also contemptuous of Jane. The nursemaid Bessie proves to be Jane's only ally in the household. Jane is thus incredibly unhappy, with only a doll and books in which to find solace. One day, after her cousin John knocks her down Jane attempts to defend herself. For adopting this defiant attitude, Jane is locked in the red room where her uncle died. There she faints from panic after she thinks she has seen his uncle's ghost. She is subsequently attended to by the kindly apothecary, Mr. Lloyd, to whom Jane reveals how unhappy she is living at Gateshead Hall. He recommends to Mrs Reed that Jane should be sent to school, an idea Mrs Reed happily supports. Mrs Reed then enlists the aid of Mr Brocklehurst, director of Lowood Institution, a charity school for girls. Mr Brocklehurst was a very stern kind of man, even more cruel than Mrs Reed. Mrs Reed cautions Mr Brocklehurst that Jane has a "tendency for deceit", which he interprets as "liar". Before Jane leaves, however, she confronts Mrs. Reed and declares that she will never call her "aunt" again, that she and her daughter, Georgiana, are the ones who are deceitful, and that she will tell everyone at Lowood how cruelly Mrs. Reed treated her.

At Lowood Institution, a school for poor or orphaned girls, Jane soon finds that life is harsh, but she attempts to fit in, and befriends an older girl, Helen Burns, who makes no protest against the ill-treatment meted out to her by Miss Scatcherd. This is because Helen is a deeply religious girl and has full faith in divine justice. Jane finds the superintendent of the school, Miss Maria Temple, quite kind-hearted. During a school inspection by Mr Brocklehurst, Jane accidentally breaks her slate, thereby drawing attention to herself. He then makes her stand on a stool, brands her a liar and shames her before the entire assembly. Jane feels deeply distressed, but is later comforted by her friend, Helen. Miss Temple, the caring superintendent writes to Mr. Lloyd, the apothecary, for some definite information about Jane. The apothecary replies that Jane does not suffer from any serious faults of character. Jane is then publicly cleared of Mr. Brocklehurst's accusations. The eighty pupils at Lowood are subjected to cold rooms, poor meals, and thin clothing. Many students fall ill with the outbreak of typhus. Jane's friend Helen dies of consumption in her arms. When Mr. Brocklehurst's maltreatment of the students is discovered, several benefactors erect a new building and install a sympathetic management committee to moderate the harsh rule of Mr Brocklehurst. Conditions at the school then improve dramatically.

After six years as a student and two as a teacher, Jane decides to leave Lowood. She wants a change in her life and advertises her services as a governess and receives one reply, from Alice Fairfax, housekeeper at Thornfield Hall, which is situated not far from the large manufacturing town of Millcote. She takes the position, teaching Adele Varens, a young French girl.

Meanwhile before leaving Lowood, Jane receives a visit from Bessie, the nurse of the Reed family and comes to know how the Reed family has been getting on. John has proved to be a big disappointment to his mother because of his dissolute ways. Jane also learns that a relative of Jane's by the name of John Eyre had come to see Jane at Gateshead Hall but had felt disappointed to learn that Jane no longer lives there.

At Thornfield Hall Jane finds herself quite comfortable. However odd things start to happen at the house. On certain occasions, she hears a mysterious laugh and cannot ascertain with certainty who laughed.

While Jane is walking one night to a nearby town, a horseman passes her. The horse slips on ice and throws the rider. Despite his surliness, she helps him to get back onto his horse. Later, back at Thornfield, she learns that this man is Edward Rochester, master of the house. Adele is his ward, left in his care when her mother

abandoned her. At Jane's first meeting with him within Thornfield, he teases her, accusing her of bewitching his horse to make him fall, as well as talking strangely in other ways, but Jane is able to give as good as she gets. Mr. Rochester and Jane soon come to enjoy each other's company and spend many evenings together. On one occasion, Jane saves Rochester from a mysterious fire in the latter's room.

Jane receives a message that her aunt, Mrs Reed who is dying, is calling for her. She returns to Gateshead. Mrs. Reed confesses to Jane that she had wronged her, and gives Jane a letter from Jane's paternal uncle, Mr. John Eyre, in which he asks for her to live with him and be his heir. Mrs. Reed admits to telling her uncle that Jane had died of fever at Lowood. Soon after, Jane's aunt dies, and she returns to Thornfield.

After returning to Thornfield, Jane sinks into despondency when Rochester brings home a beautiful but vicious woman named Blanche Ingram. Jane expects Rochester to propose to Blanche. But Rochester instead proposes to Jane. Jane is at first sceptical of his sincerity, but eventually believes him and gladly agrees to marry him. She then writes to her Uncle John, telling him of her happy news. As she prepares for her wedding, Jane's forebodings mount when a strange, savage-looking woman sneaks into her room one night and rips her wedding veil in two. As with the previous mysterious events, Mr. Rochester attributes the incident to that strange woman, Grace Poole, one of his servants. The wedding day arrives, and as Jane and Mr. Rochester prepare to exchange their vows, the voice of Mr. Mason, a lawyer cries out that Rochester already has a wife, named Bertha. Mr. Mason testifies that Bertha, whom Rochester married when he was a young man in Jamaica, is still alive. Rochester does not deny Mason's claims, but he explains that Bertha has gone mad. The marriage ceremony is broken off, and Mr. Rochester takes the wedding party back to Thornfield, where they witness the insane Bertha Mason scurrying around on all fours and growling like an animal. Rochester keeps Bertha hidden on the third story of Thornfield and pays Grace Poole to keep his wife under control. Bertha was the real cause of the mysterious fire earlier in the story. Mr. Rochester asks Jane to go with him to the south of France, and live with him as husband and wife, even though they cannot be married. Refusing to go against her principles, and despite her love for him, Jane leaves Thornfield.

Jane travels as far from Thornfield as she can using the little money she had previously saved. But she became exhausted and hungry and, at last, three siblings who live in a manor alternatively called Marsh End and Moor House take her in. Their names are Mary, Diana, and St. John Rivers. Jane quickly becomes friends with them. St. John also finds her a teaching position at a charity school in Morton.

The sisters leave for governess jobs and St. John becomes somewhat closer to Jane. He surprises her one day by declaring that her uncle, John Eyre, has died and left her a large fortune: 20,000 pounds. When Jane asks how he received this news, he shocks her further by declaring that her uncle was also his uncle: Jane and the Riverses are cousins. Jane immediately decides to share her inheritance equally with her three newfound relatives.

Thinking she will make a suitable missionary's wife, St. John asks Jane to marry him and to go with him to India, not out of love, but out of duty. Jane initially accepts going to India, but rejects the marriage proposal, suggesting they travel as brother and sister. St. John pressures her to reconsider, and she nearly gives in. However, she realizes that she cannot abandon forever the man she truly loves. One night she hears Rochester's voice calling her name over the moors. Jane then returns to Thornfield to find only blackened ruins. She learns that Mr. Rochester's wife set the house on fire and committed suicide by jumping from the roof. In his rescue attempts, Mr. Rochester lost a hand and his eyesight. Jane reunites with him, but he fears that she will be repulsed by his condition. When Jane assures him of her love and tells him that she will never leave him, Mr. Rochester again proposes and they are married. He eventually recovers enough sight to see their first-born son.

Some Key Facts

- ***Jane Eyre* was published on 16th October, 1847 by Smith, Elder & Co. of London, England. Charlotte Brontë published the book under the pen name "Currer Bell." The first American edition was published the following year by Harper & Brothers of New York. (Remember, George Eliot too was a pseudonym. The author's actual name was Mary Ann Evans).**
- **Charlotte dedicated *Jane Eyre's* second edition to W. M. Thackeray, who highly lauded the novel.**

4.1.4 Analysis of *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre is primarily a bildungsroman, which is a German term signifying "novel of formation" or "novel of education" (note, this has been explained in Module 3, unit 1 in detail). The subject of the novel is the development of the protagonist's mind and character through varied experiences from childhood to

maturity, and the recognition of his or her identity and role in the world. *Jane Eyre* recounts the emotions and experiences of its title character, including her growth to adulthood, and her love for Mr. Rochester, the master of Thornfield Hall.

The novel is written in the first-person. It is set somewhere in the north of England, during the reign of George III (1760–1820), and goes through the following stages: Jane Eyre at Gateshead Hall; Jane Eyre at Lowood School; Jane Eyre at Thornfield Hall; Jane Eyre as a destitute wandering in search of food and shelter; Jane Eyre at Moor House; Jane Eyre's search for Mr. Rochester, and her arrival at Thornfield Hall only to find the place in ruins; and the finale with Jane Eyre's reunion with, and marriage to, her beloved Rochester. The novel thus recounts the experiences Jane encounters at various stages of her life, which seem to have little or no connection between them. David Cecil tries to illustrate this point by saying that the first quarter of the novel is about Jane's life as a child, the next half is devoted to her relationship with Mr. Rochester, and the rest of the book, except the final chapters, deals with Jane's relationship with St. John Rivers. The novel is, therefore, charged with having a loose structure. But, we must remember that the novel centres round one person, namely the narrator herself. It is this autobiographical mode of the novel that gives unity to the plot of *Jane Eyre.*

The novel is full of melodramatic events, which occur most during Jane's stay at Thornfield Hall. For example, setting fire to Rochester's bed-curtains, Rochester's guests hearing a woman's screams and shrieks at the middle of a night, the mystery surrounding the existence of Bertha – all these melodramatic events remind us of Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* or Mrs Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho.* But, despite the recurrence of such melodramatic events, *Jane Eyre* is the first modern novel, the first to envelop the life of a plain, ordinary woman with romance. The voice of a free insurgent woman, free to feel and to speak as she feels, is heard for the first time in modern English literature.

4.1.5 Characterisation in *Jane Eyre*

Jane Eyre : Jane Eyre, the protagonist of the novel, is an unconventional heroine who succeeds in maintaining her identity and autonomy despite being forced to contend with oppression, inequality and hardship. At various phases of her life she encounters adversity, but she remains defiantly virtuous, morally courageous and fiercely independent. Through her Bronte counters Victorian stereotypes about

women. She confronts man on equal terms. ‘Women are supposed to be very calm generally’, she explains in the twelfth chapter, ‘but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer.’

Some men attempt to establish some form of power and control over her. But Jane asserts herself in a male-dominated society. She despises Mr. Bucklehurst, who uses religion to further his own ends. Although she is ardently passionate towards Mr. Rochester and agrees to marry him, she follows the dictates of her refined conscience. Her quest is to find a partner worthy of her intelligence, her judgemental wit, and her determined selfhood, one who will respect her integrity and her determination. Mr Rochester signally fails to do so in the first courtship. He tries to enter into a bigamous marriage with Jane. When that fails, he tries to persuade Jane to be his mistress. Jane not only refuses to marry Rochester, but also leaves Thornfield. It is only when she is sure that the marriage is one between equals that Jane marries Rochester at the end of the novel. Jane maintains her independence in her relationship with St. John Rivers as well. The latter presses Jane to accept him, but she is equally firm in her strangely insistent ‘I will be your curate, if you like, but never your wife’. Thus Jane is “no man’s woman”. She maintains her impassioned self-respect and moral conviction throughout her life. For her free will and the due exercise of a God-given conscience are the secrets behind human happiness.

Edward Rochester : Jane’s employer and the master of Thornfield, Mr. Rochester is a Byronic hero. He is a wealthy, passionate man with a dark secret that provides much of the novel’s suspense. Rochester is unconventional, ready to set aside polite manners, propriety, and consideration of social class in order to interact with Jane frankly and directly. He is rash and impetuous and his problems are partly the result of his own recklessness. He has led a life of vice, and many of his actions in the course of the novel are less than commendable. He is certainly aware that in the eyes of both religious and civil authorities, his marriage to Jane before Bertha’s death would be bigamous. But he is a sympathetic figure because he has suffered for so long as a result of his early marriage to Bertha. He is tormented by his awareness of his past sins and misdeeds. At the same time, he makes genuine efforts to atone for his behaviour. For example, although he does not believe that he is Adele’s natural father, he adopts her as his ward and sees that she is well cared for. This adoption may well be an act of atonement for the sins he has committed. He expresses his self-

disgust at having tried to console himself by having three different mistresses during his travels in Europe and begs Jane to forgive him for these past transgressions. However, Mr. Rochester can only atone completely – and be forgiven completely – after Jane has refused to be his mistress and left him. The destruction of Thornfield by fire finally removes the stain of his past sins; the loss of his left hand and of his eyesight is the price he must pay to atone completely for his sins. Only after this purgation can he be redeemed by Jane's love.

St. John Rivers: Along with his sisters, Mary and Diana, St. John serves as Jane's benefactor after she runs away from Thornfield, giving her food and shelter. He serves as a foil to Edward Rochester. Whereas Rochester is passionate, St. John is austere and ambitious. He is cold and reserved. He is thoroughly practical and suppresses all his human passions and emotions. Jane often describes Rochester's eyes as flashing and flaming, whereas she constantly associates St. John with rock, ice, and snow. Jane realises that marriage with Rochester represents the abandonment of principle for the consummation of passion, but marriage to St. John would mean sacrificing passion for principle. He invites Jane to come to India with him as a missionary, thereby giving her the chance to make a more meaningful contribution to society than she would as a housewife. At the same time, Jane understands that life with St. John would mean life devoid of true love, in which Jane's need for spiritual solace would be filled only by retreat into the recesses of her own soul. She can maintain her independence, but it would be accompanied by loneliness. Joining St. John would require Jane to neglect her own legitimate needs for love and emotional support. Her consideration of St. John's proposal leads Jane to understand that, paradoxically, a large part of one's personal freedom is found in a relationship of mutual emotional dependence.

Mr. Brocklehurst: The cruel, hypocritical master of Lowood School, Mr. Brocklehurst is a religious traditionalist. He embodies an evangelical form of religion that seeks to strip others of their excessive pride or of their ability to take pleasure in worldly things. He advocates a harsh, plain, and disciplined lifestyle for his pupils, but not, hypocritically, for himself and his own family. He even indulges in stealing from the school to support his luxurious lifestyle. After a typhus epidemic sweeps Lowood, Brocklehurst's dishonest practices are brought to light and he is publicly discredited.

Helen Burns: She is Jane's friend at Lowood School. She represents a mode of Christianity that emphasises on tolerance and acceptance. She ascetically trusts her own faith and turns the other cheek to Lowood's harsh policies. In this respect she

is a foil to Bucklehurst, who uses religion to gain power and dominate over others. She also serves as a foil to Jane. While Jane's efforts involves self-assertion, Helen's self-negation. Helen manifests a certain strength and intellectual maturity. Her submissive and ascetic nature highlights Jane's more headstrong character. Like Jane, Helen is an orphan who longs for a home, but Helen believes that she will find this home in Heaven rather than Northern England. And while Helen is aware of the injustices meted out to the girls at Lowood, she believes that God will reward the good and punish the evil. Jane, on the other hand, is unable to have such blind faith. Her quest is for love and happiness in *this* world. Nevertheless, she counts on God for support and guidance in her search.

Bertha Mason: She is a complex presence in *Jane Eyre*. She impedes Jane's happiness, but she also catalyses the growth of Jane's self-understanding. The mystery surrounding Bertha establishes suspense and terror to the plot and the atmosphere. Further, Bertha serves as a remnant and reminder of Rochester's youthful libertinism. Some critics have considered her as a symbol of the way Britain feared and psychologically "locked away" the other cultures it encountered at the height of its imperialism. Others have seen her as a symbolic representation of the "trapped" Victorian wife, who is expected never to travel or work outside the house and becomes ever more frenzied as she finds no outlet for her frustration and anxiety. Within the story, then, Bertha's insanity could serve as a warning to Jane of what complete surrender to Rochester could bring about. One could also see Bertha as a manifestation of Jane's subconscious feelings—specifically, of her rage against oppressive social and gender norms. Jane declares her love for Rochester, but she also secretly fears marriage to him and feels the need to rage against the imprisonment it could become for her. Jane never manifests this fear or anger, but Bertha does. Thus Bertha tears up the bridal veil, and it is Bertha's existence that indeed stops the wedding from going forth. And, when Thornfield comes to represent a state of servitude and submission for Jane, Bertha burns it to the ground. Throughout the novel, Jane describes her inner spirit as fiery, her inner landscape as a "ridge of lighted heath" (Chapter 4). Bertha seems to be the outward manifestation of Jane's interior fire. Bertha expresses the feelings that Jane must keep in check.

Bertha Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Learners, it is would be interesting for you to know that *Jane Eyre* the novel has been the inspiration for Jean Rhys's Post Colonial novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966). It has been written and read as a prequel to the storyline and plot

of *Jane Eyre*, a narrative where Jane is replaced by Bertha Mason, Rochester's mad wife who is marginalized and remains invisible in the Victorian Novel. It would be interesting for you to read *Jane Eyre* closely first and then go to Rhys's novel to understand how it poses a challenge to the Victorian original and its depiction of colonised outsiders such as Rochester's wife Bertha who was a Jamaican Creole. The 'madwoman in the attic' who sets fire to the house in *Jane Eyre*, in Rhys emerges as a figure of empathy as a young woman married to an English coloniser, misunderstood and imprisoned in the attic. Your task would be to read both novels and understand the Post colonial critique or Neo-Victorian retelling that has made the novels popular in their own times.

4.1.6 Autobiographical Elements in *Jane Eyre*

The imaginative world of all the Brontës is inward-looking and subjective. Gilbert Phelps in 'A Survey of English Literature' points out:

The intensity of the family relationships fostered by their (Brontës') isolated, almost claustrophobic, life in the Haworth rectory, reached out after them wherever they went, affecting their brief excursions into the outside world and endowing them with the same hypnotic quality.

Charlotte's personal experiences at the dreadful Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan's Bridge fix the earlier parts of *Jane Eyre* vividly in the imagination. In the novel the death of Jane's dearest friend recalls the death of Charlotte's sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, at Cowan Bridge. The hypocritical religious fervour of the headmaster, Mr. Brocklehurst, is based in part on that of the Reverend Carus Wilson, the Evangelical minister who ran Cowan Bridge. Moreover, John Reed's decline into alcoholism and dissolution is most likely modelled upon the life of Charlotte Brontë's brother Branwell, who slid into opium and alcohol addictions in the years preceding his death. Charlotte's experiences as a governess in Brussels are also transposed in *Jane Eyre*.

Activity for the Learner

Autobiographical elements are recognizable throughout *Jane Eyre.* Read the text and try to find out from section 1.2 Charlotte Brontë: A Short Biography, of this unit, the points of similarity between Charlotte's personal life and that of Jane's.

4.1.7 Gothic Elements in *Jane Eyre*

Gothic novels dealing with horrors and ghosts clanking chains, and underground chambers echoing with groans and sighs poured in towards the end of the eighteenth century. The tradition began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, which substituted for the domesticities of Richardson with the glamour of the past and the thrill of the mysterious and the supernatural. Walpole's novel proved to be influential. It inspired a few others, like Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Beckford, M. G. Lewis and C. R. Maturin. The plot of *Jane Eyre* includes most of the elements of Gothic novels. Lowood, Moor House, and Thornfield are all remote locations, and Thornfield, like Gateshead, is also an ancient manor house. Both Rochester and Jane possess complicated family histories. Rochester's first wife, Bertha, is the dark secret at the novel's core. The mystery surrounding her is the main source of the novel's suspense. Other Gothic occurrences include: Jane's encounter with the ghost of her late Uncle Reed in the red-room; the moment of supernatural communication between Jane and Rochester when she hears his voice calling her across the misty heath from miles and miles away; and Jane's mistaking of Rochester's dog, Pilot, for a "Gytrash," a spirit of North England that manifests itself as a horse or dog. Although Brontë's use of Gothic elements heightens her reader's interest and adds to the emotional and philosophical tensions of the book, most of the seemingly supernatural occurrences are actually explained as the story progresses. It seems that many of the Gothic elements serve to anticipate and elevate the importance of the plot's turning points.

4.1.8 Summing Up

We should by now have an idea of the novel, its main characters, and note the relevance of the novel in its own time and our own. Now note the following points about the novel:

- In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Bronte makes use of her childhood memories and other personal experiences.
- The novel is written in autobiographical mode and depicts the life and experiences of the heroine from her childhood, when she was ten years old, till she attains adulthood.
- It is the first modern novel to have enveloped the life of a plain, ordinary

woman with romance. Here Charlotte concentrates on the portrayal of human passion. The novel deals with a highly exciting and romantic story, told with sober realism.

- The novel is well-structured, balancing two contrasting love relationships against each other; the one, with Rochester, a relationship which is deeply passionate but morally wrong until bereavement transforms the situation; the other, with St John Rivers, a relationship which is deeply justifiable on all moral and religious grounds, but devoid of passion. The tension endured by the heroine in countering these two 'temptations' is finely examined and movingly conveyed.
- In the novel, Charlotte Brontë makes use of melodramatic elements, which reminds us of Gothic novels.

4.1.9. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Discuss *Jane Eyre* as revolutionary novel.
2. Discuss *Jane Eyre* as a love story.
3. In what ways might *Jane Eyre* be considered a feminist novel?

● **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

1. Discuss some of the melodramatic events that took place in Thornfield Hall.
2. Compare and contrast Rochester with St. John.
3. Discuss the treatment meted out to Jane by the Reeds family.

● **Short Questions-6 marks**

1. Name some significant women novelists of the Victorian Age.
2. Who looked after Bertha Mason?
3. Where did St. John Rivers want Jane to accompany him as his wife?

4.1.10. Suggested Reading

Mirian Allott (ed.) *Jane Eyre & Villette: ASelection of Critical Essays*

T. W. Winnifrith, *The Brontës and Their Background: Romance and Reality*

Wendy Craik, *The Brontë Novels*

Diana Neill, *A Short History of the English Novel*

Wilbur L. Cross, *The Development of English Novel*

Unit-2 ❑ Elizabeth Barrett Browning: 'I Thought Once…'; Emily Brontë: 'No Coward Soul Is Mine'

Structure:

4.2.0 Introduction

In the previous Unit (4.1) you have dealt with Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, one of the most remarkable novels by a Victorian woman novelist. In the present Unit

(4.2) and in the following one (4.3) you will be made acquainted with the poetry of three most remarkable women poets of the Victorian period. As you must have noted in the previous Unit, women writers were slowly becoming more visible on the literary scene throughout the Victorian Age, and here you are going to learn about two such poets whose poetic career charted very different courses from each other. Let us begin by learning a bit about their lives and times.

4.2.1 About Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The standard histories of English literature would not probably give the readers a very clear idea of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's contemporary reputation. Revered as the most accomplished "poetess" of the period, her fame at the time of her death was definitely greater than her husband Robert Browning. Elizabeth Barrett was born on March 6, 1806 at Coxhoe Hall. The first of twelve children born to Edward Moulton-Barrett and his wife Mary Graham Clarke, Elizabeth had a prosperous and protected childhood, mostly spent in Hope End, an estate in Herefordshire which her father bought in 1809. Elizabeth had a great desire to learn the Classical languages. Therefore, availing the services of her brother's tutor, she learnt Greek and Latin, and later went on to learn Hebrew. She was also extensively read in philosophy and history. The great range of her learning has left a mark on her poetry. Her first volume of poetry— along with the poem titled "The Battle of Marathon" was published privately when she was only thirteen years old. Elizabeth's health however, began to fail from an early age though she continued to write poetry and her works were regularly published in the leading monthly magazines of the period. Around this time she developed a lung ailment that plagued her for the rest of her life. She was also diagnosed with a spinal weakness and started taking laudanum for the pain. Perhaps this led to addiction and her health weakened further. Her mother died when she was 22. Signs of this loss can be traced in *Aurora Leigh*.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Her health was further affected by the deaths, in quick succession, of two of her brothers in 1840. In 1844, *Poems, by Elizabeth Barrett* was published to popular and

critical acclaim. Robert Browning wrote to Elizabeth expressing his appreciation for her art. They met each other in her house in 1845 and this began one of the most famous courtships of the world. But their courtship had to be carried out secretly as her father would never approve of the match. Elizabeth was an invalid at the time and her mind, quite expectedly, was going through phases of emotional upheaval. *Sonnets from the Portuguese* records this turmoil during her period of courtship. They were secretly married in 1846. The couple left for Italy and Elizabeth spent the rest of her life writing and living abroad. In 1853 she began writing "Aurora Leigh", a long verse novel about a woman poet, a partly autobiographical Kunstlerroman which delineates, among other things, the role of a female poet in the society. "Aurora Leigh" was published in 1856 and till date is regarded as her most remarkable poetic achievement. Elizabeth's gradually failing health resulted in her death in 1861; her *Last Poems* was posthumously published in 1862.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry shows a remarkable range of learning coupled with an acute social consciousness. All the important socio-economic concerns of the period found expression in her poetry. Yet there are also expressions of intensely private emotions which deeply mark her poetry. It is this amalgamation of the private and the public, the social and the personal that make her one of the greatest poets of her age.

4.2.2.a) About the Poem

The poem that you are going to read shortly is the first sonnet from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet sequence *Sonnets from the Portuguese. Sonnets from the Portuguse* is a series of 44 sonnets written during the secret courtship of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning (1845-46) and was published in 1850. This intensely personal record of passionate love was presented to the world in the guise of translation— apparently the poems were translated from Portuguese. The title of the sequence has another implication. Browning's nickname for EBB was "the little Portuguese". This sequence marks an important departure in the history of the English sonnet. The traditional English sonnet, from its very beginning in the sixteenth century had been a typically male preserve. Women did figure quite prominently in the sonnets, but mainly as the silent objects of male desire. The love sonnets of Wyatt and Surrey, Sidney and Spenser, Shakespeare, and much closer to EBB's time, John Keats, privileged the male voice and the male perspective. *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, on the other hand, records the tribulations and the emotional

upheavals of a female speaker. No longer the inert object of male adoration, the female speaker is at the centre of a vortex of emotion. It is her voice that the readers hear. It is her doubts and vacillations, her intense passion and desire that are expressed through the sonnets. Being the first poem of the sequence "I thought once" broaches many of the themes that would recur in the body of the sequence. In its frequent Classical allusions, depiction of an oscillation between doubt and hope and the use of a complicated structure with apparent ease this sonnet definitely paves the way for the rest of the sequence.

4.2.2.b) The text of 'I thought once'

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished for years,
Who each one in a gracious hand appears
To bear a gift for mortals, old or young:
And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
I saw, in gradual vision through my tears,
The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
A shadow across me. Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair,
And a voice said in mastery, while I strove, ...
Guess now who holds thee?'—Death,' I said. But there,
The silver answer rang ... Not Death, but Love.

4.2.2. c) Explanation of the poem:

i. Theocritus—Classical Greek poet credited with the development of bucolic poetry in the third century BC.

v. Antique tongue—ancient/classical Greek. Remember that Elizabeth Barrett Browning had learnt Greek from her brother's tutor.

viii-ix. Structurally this is a Petrarchan sonnet, But Barrett Browning uses the poetic device called “enjambment” or the run-on line. The sense of the eighth line is carried over into the ninth thereby forming a link between the octave and the sestet of the sonnet.

ix. ‘ware—Aware

x-xi. There seems to be a reference to *Iliad,* Book I, where Athena pulls Achilles back by the hair and stops him from engaging in the battle with Agamemnon. Note the reversal of gender roles in the poem. It is the mystic shape, presumably male, who pulls the female speaker back by the hair.

4.2.2. d) Critical Appreciation

“I thought once” captures a transitional moment between long-nurtured melancholy and a promise of future happiness to be arrived at through the help of love. The ancient Greek poet Theocritus had envisioned every passing year to offer new possibilities to every mortal being, irrespective of age and station of life. The speaker’s reading of Theocritus leads her on to a contemplation of her own life, and what she sees through a vision clouded by tears is very different from what Theocritus had thought. The years which Theocritus had imagined were “sweet years, the dear and wished-for years”, whereas the years of the speaker’s own life had been, “sweet, sad years, the melancholy years”. The weight of misery had cast a dark shadow on her life. Her illness and her state of isolation covered her days and years in a pall of gloom.

In this mood of despondence and melancholy, the speaker becomes aware of another “mystic shape” lurking behind her. It forcefully draws her back by the hair. Unable to see and comprehend the nature of the shape the speaker assumes that it is death which has her in his thrall. But she is mistaken in her belief— it is not Death but Love which proposes to establish mastery over her being. This sudden inversion of her apprehension into a sense of happy optimism is remarkable at the end of this poem. The abruptness with which the theme of love is introduced into an atmosphere so long charged with melancholy helps to establish its power and announce its promise for her future. So her years too have proved true to Theocritus’ claim. They finally brought her a gift: the gift of love.

The “shadow” of the octave has turned into the “silver answer” of the sestet. Silver holds the promise of further brightness in future, to turn into gold in the full

maturity of triumphant and reciprocal love. It is interesting to note that Barrett Browning frequently uses colour imagery throughout the *Sonnets from the Portuguese.* You may take a look at Sonnet IV where the colour gold again takes on symbolic significance.

4.2.2. e) Style and Technique

The rich complexity of the sonnet's connotations cannot be fully comprehended without reference to its structure. Structurally, it is a Petrarchan sonnet divided into an octave rhyming *abbaabba* and a sestet rhyming *cdcdcd.* Twice in the octave EBB has used "years" as a rhyming word— this repetition underscores the speaker's intense longing for the years which will bring gifts of happiness as Theocritus had promised. The sestet with its alternating rhyme scheme gives a rapid movement and urgency to the second half of the sonnet. The longish vowel sounds had given a slower movement to the octave ("years", "gracious", "appears", "melancholy"), the sestet on the other hand has a brisker movement. Characteristically, the Petrarchan sonnet contains a "volta", or a turn of thought in the sestet. The volta is often marked by words like "yet", "still" or "but". Here, however EBB uses a different poetical device called "enjambment" or the run-on line. The sense is not completed at the end of the eighth line and is carried over into the ninth. The melancholy of the speaker had been so overpowering that it seeps into the second half of the sonnet which traditionally records a change in the mood/ thought of the speaker. The speaker, as it were, is saved from despair at the very last moment, and the poetic equivalent of this last moment's intervention is the brief dialogue between the "mystic shape" and the speaker which gives the last two lines of the sonnet something akin to the force of a Shakespearean couplet.

4.2.2. f) Summing Up

- "I thought once" is the first poem in the sequence of 44 sonnets titled *Sonnets from the Portuguese* by Elizabeth Barrett Browning; the sequence is a poetic record of the courtship between EBB and her future husband Robert Browning
- It is a Petrarchan sonnet with an octave rhyming *abbbabba* and a sestet rhyming *cdcdcd* ; EBB uses the poetical device called 'enjambment', whereby the octave flows into sestet without a break in the sense
- The poem depicts a moment of transition from despondence and despair to

a future promise of hope; the speaker looks back at her life as a series of gloomy years without enlightenment and joy. A passing shape falls between the speaker and her despair; it is mistaken as the shadow of Death, but in reality, it is the shape of love; come to relieve the speaker from that brooding, overpowering sense of melancholy.

- Though it is Petrarchan sonnet, the brief dialogue between Love and the speaker at the end of the poem gives the last lines the force of a couplet in a Shakespearean sonnet.

4.2.2. g) Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem with special reference to the Classical allusions used in the poem.
2. Would you agree with the view that this sonnet records a moment of transition in the speaker's life and thoughts? Give reasons for your answer.

● **Medium length answer type—12 marks**

1. Briefly comment on the structure of the poem.
2. How does the speaker describe her life in the octave of the sonnet?

● **Short Answer Type—6 marks**

1. Who was Theocritus? Mention another Classical reference used in the poem.
2. What is enjambment? Show how enjambment is used in this sonnet.
3. Comment on the use of colour imagery in this poem.

4.2.3. About Emily Brontë

A Literary Biography

Emily Jane Brontë, the fifth of the six children of Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë, was born on July 30, 1818. In 1820 Patrick Brontë moved with his family to the Yorkshire village of Haworth where he held a curacy for life. With the exception of brief intervals when she was either studying, or was in employment as a governess, Emily spent most of her brief life in the Haworth Parsonage, in the company of her family members. The Brontë children lost their mother in 1821 and were looked after by their aunt Elizabeth Branwell. In 1824 Maria and Elizabeth

Brontë, the two elder sisters of Charlotte, Branwell ,Emily and Anne Brontë, were sent to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. Charlotte and Emily were sent to the same school soon afterwards. The harsh living conditions at the school are memorably presented by Charlotte in *Jane Eyre* in the form of the Lowood School. The two elder sisters caught tuberculosis, and were brought home by Patrick only to die within a month of each other. Charlotte and Emily were also brought home and they remained in Haworth with their brother Branwell and younger sister Anne for the next five years. The four children shared a richly imaginative inner life. Fortunately neither Patrick, nor their aunt Elizabeth discouraged the children from reading, and what the children read, saw, and thought were transformed into their early collaborative narratives about the two imaginary worlds that they created. Charlotte and Branwell collaborated in creating "Angria" and Emily and Anne in "Gondal" – two imaginary nations around which the children weaved stories, plays and poems. Many of Emily's poems, in fact, deal with characters and events from the imaginary "Gondal" sagas. In 1835 Emily was sent to Roe Head School in Mirfield where Charlotte was already working as a teacher after a stint as a pupil. Emily was once again as desperately homesick and unhappy as she had been at Cowan Bridge and was finally sent home within a few weeks. After being at home for three years, Emily finally took up a position as a Governess at Law Hill near Halifax. Like the schools that Emily had been to, this job as a governess also proved uncongenial to her health and temperament and she returned to Haworth within six months. A few months' stay in Brussels with Charlotte in 1842 to learn languages was Emily's last long sojourn away from home. Unlike Charlotte, she never married; neither did she enjoy the life of a celebrated author in London. Reclusive by temperament, Emily preferred to stay at home. Meanwhile she continued to write poetry, often concealing the fact form her siblings. It was Charlotte who took the initiative and persuaded a reluctant Emily to publish some of her poems along with those of Charlotte and Anne under a pseudonym. It was thus *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* was published in 1846. The volume with twenty one poems by Emily, some depicting characters and events from Gondal, was reviewed well, but

Emily Jane Brontë

unfortunately sold only two copies. Undaunted by the poor sale and buoyed up by the critical acclaim, Charlotte attempted to have three novels by each of the sisters published. Ironically enough, it was Charlotte's *The Professor* which was rejected by the publisher and Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were accepted for publication. Charlotte replaced *The Professor* with *Jane Eyre* which was published in October 1847, while the novels by Emily and Anne followed suit in December, and received mixed responses. Emily died of tuberculosis at Haworth in 1848.

Emily Brontë as a Poet

The later critical fate of *Wuthering Heights* has somehow eclipsed the considerable achievements of Emily as a poet, so much so, that only thirty-eight of her poems were published and known to the reading public in the nineteenth century. After Emily's death in 1848, Charlotte prepared a posthumous edition of her sister's poems which included only eighteen more poems. The fact that Emily's output was far more extensive (more than two hundred poems have survived, including fragmentary ones) was established only in the early twentieth century. Like Emily's only novel *Wuthering Heights,* her poetry also records the mark of a powerful imagination, combined with a keen eye for nature and a controlled use of images and expressions. Unlike the celebrated male poets of the Victorian period, Emily was never a part of the public literary scene. Some of her contemporary, or near contemporary, women poets—especially Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti— also enjoyed literary repute and a fair degree of popularity, but Emily remained an elusive figure. She wrote her poems in a time of great change and intellectual upheaval, but her poems barely contain any direct reference to the great public debates of her time, in fact the one overwhelming characteristic of her poetry is its introspective and private nature. Let us now read the poem in detail and we shall see how we can relate Emily's poetry to her times.

4.2.4.a) The Text of the Poem

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear
v. *O God within my breast*
Almighty ever-present Deity

Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee
Vain are the thousand creeds
x. *That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,*
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
xv. *So surely anchored on*
The steadfast rock of Immortality
With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
xx. *Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears*
Though earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee
xxv. *There is not room for Death*
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

4.2.4. b) Analysis/Explanation of the Poem

i. The poem begins with an instance of litotes, a figure of speech in which a rhetorical understatement stating something in the negative is used to mean a positive statement. Thus, by stating 'No Coward Soul is Mine' the speaker attempts to bring into focus the courage of the soul. Another rhetorical device used in the line is hyperbaton—an inversion of the normal syntactical structure of a sentence for poetical effect. Lines i. and ii. also use anaphora, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence.

ii. Heaven's glories—stars which symbolize the glory of heaven

iv-viii. Look carefully at the use of capital letters in these lines. What do you think they signify?

ix. Creeds—systems of belief or faith

x. This line uses alliteration. Could you identify another use of the same figure of speech in the poem?

xi. Boundless-limitless; main- ocean

xviii-xx. The spirit of God is omnipresent; it is beyond the reach of time and; it is this spirit which creates, mutates and nurtures lives

xxi. These lines were revised by Charlotte in her edition to read "Though Earth and man were gone". Lines xxi-xxiii envision the destruction of the universe even after which the Divine presence would continue to exist as it is immortal

xxvi. Might- power

About the Poem

'No Coward Soul is Mine' was first published posthumously in 1850. The phrase "Coward Soul" was adopted by Brontë from an Ode written by an eighteenth century conduct book writer Hester Chapone. While editing the poem for publication, Charlotte made quite a number of changes to some of the phrases of the poem and capitalized certain letters for emphasis. The version that you are reading here is what Emily actually wrote.

4.2.4. c) Critical Appreciation

In the 1850 edition of Emily Brontë's poems in which 'No Coward Soul is Mine' was first published, Charlotte had identified the poem as the last composition by her ailing sister. Though later critics and biographers have contended that Emily wrote at least two other poems after "No Coward Soul", the centrality of this lyric in her poetic oeuvre has been acknowledged by most. The lyric is a triumphant assertion of the power of the human soul to survive beyond the mutable world and into eternity.

As you have already learnt, the poem begins with a hyperbaton and a litotes. The negative with which it begins is repeated in the second line to underline the sense of the soul's courage and steadfastness. The first stanza employs the submerged metaphor of the soul as a lonely traveller/ vessel in the "world's storm-troubled sphere", where the steadily shining glory of heaven, undimmed by the storm, arms the soul to strive against fear.

The second stanza locates the source of the soul's strength in the presence of God within the human breast. The poet-speaker imagines the human soul— and human life by extension—as a part of and continuous with the Divine presence. Human life, enclosed within the human form, draws sustenance from God and hence, becomes "Undying Life". The bond between the human and the Divine is reciprocal.

This belief in the immersion of the human soul in the soul Divine helps the poet to reject the doctrines and orthodoxies of established religion. The creeds taught by preachers and believed in by many, appear to the poet to be as insubstantial and hollow as the 'idlest froth' or 'withered weeds' floating on the measureless ocean.

The sense of the third stanza is carried over into the fourth (this rhetorical device is known as 'enjambment' where the sense of a line of verse or a stanza is carried over into the next without any syntactical break) where the speaker asserts the futility of any effort to plant the seeds of doubt in the mind of the staunch believer in the Immortality of the Soul. Taken together, the two stanzas focus on the powerlessness of the thousands of vain creeds to sway the mind of the believer who has complete and personal faith in the Divine.

The fifth stanza shifts the focus of the poem from the human spirit to the spirit Divine. In words which remind the readers of Coleridge's definition of the Secondary Imagination (Coleridge had defined the Secondary Imagination in *Biographia Literaria* as a power which "… dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to re-create"), the poet characterizes the Divine spirit as a presence that embraces, pervades and broods over all things and is the ultimate arbiter of all the changes and mutations that the things undergo.

This all-encompassing quality of the Divine is eternal, thus even if/ when, the "Earth and the Moon" along with the entire cosmic order is annihilated, all existence will paradoxically continue to exist in the Divine being. This stanza presents a poetic approximation of the Apocalypse, the end of the world order. This end would also signify the end of Time, but the Divine is beyond and above time and therefore would contain the universe in its very Being.

The last stanza of the poem confidently asserts the powerlessness of death over the eternal. Death does not even have the power to undo or destroy the tiniest of atoms as the atom is also a part of God. Since God is the source of all Being and all Life, and since the Divine is Eternal, immutable and indestructible, it 'may never be destroyed".

4.2.4. d) Style and Structure

'No Coward Soul is Mine' uses simple and lucid poetic diction with a controlled use of rhetorical devices which reinforce the sense of the expressions. Brontë adopts an uncomplicated yet flexible quatrain stanza which she had earlier used in many of her other poems. The rhyme scheme is *a b a b* and the lines are alternate iambic trimetre and pentametre which provide the poem with a pace suitable to its theme. Some of the most important images of the poem have been contrasted with antithetical ones. For instance—the image of the 'idle froth' has to be juxtaposed to that of the boundless sea to underscore the insubstantiality of the former. In contrast to the 'storm-troubled sphere' of the world we have the 'equal' i.e. steady shining of Faith and the "Steadfast rock of Immortality". Repetition of certain words is another technique that Brontë uses to remarkable effect. The repetition of the "No" in the first two lines strengthen the positive image of the dauntless soul, whereas "Life", repeated in consecutive lines in the second stanza establishes a metaphorical and poetic continuity between the life human and the life Divine. The adjective 'Vain', repeated in the consecutive lines of the third stanza means to highlight the hollowness of religious orthodoxies. Alliteration is used to a similar effect—the heavily accented first syllables of "Worthless as withered weeds" seem to pronounce the insignificance of the weeds with all the more conviction.

4.2.4. e) Themes of the Poem

As you have already understood from your reading of the poem, the **central theme is faith** which can triumph over various challenges. Let us discuss why this particular theme seems to be a recurrent one in the context of Victorian poetry in general and Emily Brontë's poetry in particular. The Victorian age faced an unprecedented crisis of faith—a crisis in which traditional religious beliefs were radically questioned by the findings of science. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), proposed a theory of evolution which challenged the Biblical narrative of Genesis or the creation of the world. The belief in the primacy of rational discourses which has been a marked characteristic of English thought since the eighteenth century made it impossible for rationalists to doubt the scientific evidence presented by Darwin after decades of painstaking research. Equally difficult was it to entirely discard the teachings of the Bible. Though it was Darwin whose findings shook the foundations of traditional beliefs most radically, he was not the only one to have affected public opinion in the Victorian age. Charles Lyell's *The Principles*

of Geology (1830-33) had already contested the Bible's claim about the age of the earth on the basis of geological evidences. The works of Herbert Spencer and Robert Chambers had also proposed an "evolutionary" theory of life forms as opposed to the "Creationist" ones favoured by theologists. Victorian thinkers, therefore, were faced with the tremendous difficulty of reconciling the teachings of religion to the evidence of science. This crisis has been poetically addressed most notably in poems like Tennyson's *In Memoriam* (1850*)*, Matthew Arnold's "Scholar Gypsy" and "Dover Beach". Emily Brontë's poem, written just over a decade before the publication of *The Origin of Species* and some fifteen years after the publication of *The Principles of Geology*, can hardly be untouched by this crisis. The importance of this poem in the context of this debate over faith lies in its confident assertion of the power of personal faith to face "the world's storm-troubled sphere". Very significantly, the poet-speaker firmly rejects the established creeds in favour of a private world of faith. Being a country Clergyman's daughter, Emily Brontë succeeds in offering a personal and surer way of salvation for the believer than the ones established church doctrines could offer.

Activity for the Learner

You have probably noted that Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' is another poem in your syllabus which deals with the "crisis of faith". How do the two poems differ in their treatment of the theme? Also note the image of the sea in both poems. What do you think the image stands for?

Another important theme brought up by the poem is that of **death and immortality**. Death is a theme that Emily had dealt with in many of her other poems as well (notably in poems like—"Faith and Despondency", "The Philosopher", "Remembrance" "A Death Scene"), but here we see a calm assurance in the power of the soul expressed in a poetic structure handled with maturity and consummate artistry. Moreover, the powerful claims of Immortality made for the Human Soul and the ultimate powerlessness of death may remind the readers of John Donne's "Death Be not Proud" which concluded with the proclamation:

"One short sleep past, we wake eternally
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die."

This poem seems to assert that death is a function of time which would stand defeated as God, who is the source of all life and all being is immortal. Every living being thus would continue to have existence in God and would live eternally.

4.2.4. f) Summing Up

- Now let us look back at some of the main points that we have discussed so far.
- "No Coward Soul is Mine" is a posthumously published poem in which Emily Brontë deals with the themes of faith and immortality.
- The poem uses a simple stanzaic pattern consisting of alternate iambic trimeter and penatmeter lines arranged in quatrains.
- The poem may be read in the context of Victorian crisis of faith and Emily seems to offer a personal faith as a solution to the crisis.
- Death and faith are two themes that the poet has dealt with in other poems as well, but here we have a supreme confidence in terms of expression as well as thought.
- Of all her poems, this one has been the most widely anthologized and commented upon and is generally thought of as representing her greatest poetic achievement.

4.2.4. g) Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. How does the poet treat the theme of immortality in the poem?
2. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem.
3. Would you agree with the view that 'No Coward Soul is Mine' presents a personal solution to the problem of faith?

● **Medium Length Questions-12 marks**

1. Comment on the use of imagery and rhetorical devices in the poem
2. What does the poet mean by the line "Every Existence would exist in thee"
3. How does the poet envision the end of the cosmic order in the poem?

● **Short Questions– 6 marks**

1. Why does the poet consider "thousand creeds" as vain?
2. Explain the lines with reference to the context —

   "Since thou art Being and Breath
   And what thou art may never be destroyed."
3. How does the poet represent divine omnipresence in the poem?

4.2.5. Comprehensive Reading List

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Unit-3 ❑ Christina Rossetti's 'A Dirge'; 'A Birthday'

Structure:

4.3.0 Introduction

The previous unit (4.2) has introduced to you two important women poets of the Victorian age— Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Bronte. In this unit you will be acquainted with another poet of the same period whose poetry is rich in melodies and pictorial details. Widely published and appreciated in her lifetime, Christina Rossetti had mastered the art of poetic narration as well as lyric expression. The art of Rossetti bears clear influence of the English Romantic tradition and yet manages to carve its own niche along with the works of the other important Victorian poets like Tennyson, Browning, Arnold and Hopkins.

4.3.1. Christina Rossetti: A Literary Life

The fourth and youngest child of Gabriele and Frances Polidori Rossetti, Christina Rossetti was born on 5 December 1830 in London. Christina's father, an Italian by birth, was a political refugee who came to England in 1824. Keenly interested in Italian art and literature, especially in the works of Dante, Gabriele Rossetti became a Professor of Italian in King's College London and married Frances Polidori, who was also half-Italian by descent. The four Rossetti children—Dante Gabriel, Maria Frances, William and Christina were brought up in a bi-lingual atmosphere of home under the strict supervision of their deeply religious mother. The Anglican principles that Christina's mother inculcated in her had a profound influence on her life and art. The daughters of the household did not have any formal schooling and were taught at home by Frances. From a very tender age Christian started composing poetry. She began entering her completed poems in notebooks in as early as 1842. Her poetic talents were recognized and appreciated by her family members and in 1847 her first volume of poetry was privately published by her maternal grandfather. But situation at home was not very propitious for the young poet, in 1843 Gabriele had fallen ill and the eventual threat of blindness forced him to give up his teaching post. Christina's elder sister, Maria took up a position as a governess and William became a clerk in a government office. In the following years Christina was assisting her mother in setting up a private school which, however, proved to be a commercially unprofitable venture. The year 1848 proved to be a significant one in the history of the Rossetti household and also in the history of English Literature and art. In 1848, a group of young artists, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, set up the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a consortium of painters who attempted to recreate the fusion of sensuousness and religiosity in their painting. Their stated objective of the group was to go back to the artistic principles adopted by the painters of Italian High Renaissance before Raphael. The spirit and aims of the Brotherhood found expression not only in the painting of the members but also in the poetry of Dante Gabriel,

Christina Rossetti

Charles Algernon Swinburne and Christina Rossetti. Christina, who was never a member of the Brotherhood, but remained at the margins of the group, was introduced to a young painter named James Collinson through his association with the PRB. Christina got engaged to Collinson but broke the engagement when he decided to convert to Roman Catholicism. Meanwhile Christina continued to write poetry and also started writing prose. 1862 saw the publication of *Goblin Market and Other Poems* and in 1866 *The Prince's Progress* was published. A second engagement, this time with Charles Bagot Cayley , was broken around this period as Christina could not reconcile herself with Charles' unorthodox religious views. Publication of her works had begun in earnest since the 1860s through the encouragement and mediation of Dante Gabriel. Thus in 1870 Christina's first prose volume *Commonplace and Other Short Stories* was published; it was followed by *Sing-Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book* (1872); *Seek and Find* (1879); *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881). By the time Frances Rossetti died in 1886, Christina's reputation as one of the leading poets of the late nineteenth century was firmly established. Always of frail health and suffering from various ailments, Christina was diagnosed with cancer which took her life in late 1894.

4.3.2. Christina Rossetti as a Poet

Unlike Emily Bronte, Christina was a much published and respected poet during her lifetime. Her religious poetry as well as her nursery rhymes were much admired by the contemporary readers. Though this judgment of her work still holds good, modern critics have drawn our attention to some other aspects of Rossetti's work which are equally compelling. The deft combination of the flesh and the spirit which marked so much of the paintings of the Brotherhood is also unmistakably present in Christina's poetry. She seems equally at ease while writing short simple lyrics and long, often symbolic, and complexly structured poems. Rich in imagery, mellifluous and at the same time amenable to different interpretations, Rossetti's poetry probably needs to be studied with more careful diligence and critical attention than is generally accorded to her work.

Since the hundred and twenty years or so after her death, Christina Rossetti's critical fortunes have undergone quite a radical transformation. Rossetti herself, along with Emily Bronte and Elizabeth Barrett browning before her, were writing within an already established tradition of poetry by women. They had their worthy

predecessors in the likes of Felicia Hemans, Anna Letitia Barbauld and Letitia Elizabeth Landon, all of whom were well-known and popular poets of the Romantic period. Victorian women poets though, like their Romantic counterparts, had to negotiate a discourse of their own as poetry had traditionally been thought of as being predominantly a masculine sphere of literary activity. The Victorian "poetess" had a certain public and social role to play. In an age which often thought of women as fulfilling one of the two diametrically opposite roles of being either "the Angel in the House" or "the devil in the flesh", it was no easy task for them to write poetry which would meet the standards of contemporary aesthetics as well as contemporary morality. In keeping with the critical temper of her times Rossetti's poetry was deemed suited for women readers and children. This state of things continued till long after her death. She was often remembered as a rather marginal figure hovering at the periphery of the Pre- Raphaelite Brotherhood as also someone who wrote nursery- rhymes. Standard histories of literature will characteristically give more prominence and critical attention to her brother than to Christina herself.

However, Rossetti's critical fortunes revived in the last quarter of the twentieth century with the advent of feminist literary theory and criticism, especially with that branch of it which concerns itself with writing by women ("Gynocriticism" to use the term coined by Elaine Showalter). *Goblin Market*, Rossetti's long poem revolving around the two sisters Lizzie and Laura and their dealings with Goblin men who sell luscious magical fruits and specifically tempt women to buy from them, has generally been at the centre of this critical reappraisal of her entire oeuvre. The sexual innuendoes and psychological complexities of the poem reveal hitherto undiscovered layers of connotations in a work which had long been read as a children's poem. Critics have also noted the frequent use of the grotesque as well as animals of the lower order in Rossetti's works, problematizing a straight-forward reading of her poems as merely pleasant stuff. It is important to see Rossetti's work in the context of Victorian poetry as well as in the broader context of writing by women and to evaluate her poetic achievements accordingly.

4.3.3. About the Poems

'A Dirge' was composed in 1865 but was first published in the *Argosy* in January 1874. 'A Birthday', on the other hand, was composed in November 1857 and published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in April 1861.

4.3.4. The Text of 'A Dirge'

Why were you born when the snow was falling?
You should have come to the cuckoo's calling,
Or when grapes are green in the cluster,
Or, at least, when lithe swallows muster
For their far off flying
From summer dying.
Why did you die when the lambs were cropping?
You should have died at the apples' dropping,
When the grasshopper comes to trouble,
And the wheat-fields are sodden stubble,
And all winds go sighing
For sweet things dying.

4.3.5 Analysis/Explanation

The title - Dirge is a poem of mourning on the occasion of a particular person's death. A dirge is generally shorter and less complex in structure than an elegy. Like lyric poetry dirges were also originally meant to be sung.

i-ii. The first two lines refer to two seasons— winter and spring respectively

iv. Lithe, graceful and supple; muster— assemble or gather in troops. English Swallows typically migrate to hotter climate zones during late autumn in search of food

vii. The "cropping" of lambs may refer to both the practice of docking the lambs' tail when they are very young, and to feed by grazing. In both senses it again refers to a season— the season of spring when lambs are born

ix. Probably an allusion to the well known fable of 'The Ant and the Grasshopper' found in Aesop. The indolent grasshopper sang and danced through the warm months of summer and came to trouble with the onset of winter as he had not stored food

x. Sodden- soaked through; stubble- the stalks of plant left on the ground after the harvest

4.3.6. Critical Appreciation

'A Dirge', as you have already noted, is a poem of mourning. This short poem is a lyrical expression of grief and has the graceful melody of a song. Structurally, the two stanzas run parallel to each other and the two rhetorical questions that begin each is the pivot on which the rest of the poem turns. Between " Why were you born when the snow was falling? And " Why did you die when the lambs were cropping?", we have a sense of the "untimeliness" of the death of the person being mourned. This symmetry is repeated in the concluding couplets of the stanzas as well— the repetition of the word "dying" in the last line of each reinforce the sense of the speaker's melancholy and serve almost as a refrain. The rhetorical questions posed at the beginning of each stanza are responded to in the second line of each, and the answer is followed by an enumeration of the characteristic natural scenes of the seasons being talked of. The birth of the unnamed deceased should have taken place in spring or summer and not in the dead of the winter with the snow falling. Winter is the season of desolation and barrenness; the birth of the one being mourned should have been celebrated in spring when the sky would have been echoing with the call of the cuckoo, the harbinger of spring. The birth should have taken place in the full glory of the season, when green grapes —signifying youth and vigour— hang in clusters from the boughs. At least, she/he could have been born while the swallows prepare for their annual migration before the onset of winter. Though the impending flight of the swallows indicates the death of summer, it still takes place before winter comes to wipe away every trace of new life from the face of nature.

The death of the beloved is equally untimely. It takes place when the young lambs are cropping and the world in general seems to bask in the glory of summer. The death should have visited the person during late autumn or early winter when the harvested wheat fields lose their beauty and grandeur and is covered with stubble. The sighing of the winds through the trees would have provided fit music to the dying of sweet things. This untimeliness seem to go against the very grain of nature as in the cycle of seasons spring/summer is the season of fruition whereas autumn and winter signify ripeness, maturity and eventual extinction.

While reading the poem, you may notice an interesting parallel with John Keats's 'To Autumn'. Some of the images used by Rossetti have their antecedents in Keats, most remarkably the swallows, the lambs and the stubble fields. The two poems, however, register a radical difference in the attitudes expressed towards the seasons.

We see Keats appreciating the ripeness of autumn, its fullness is taken as the climax of the seasonal cycle and the note of desolation is found only at the end of the poem and it takes the form of a calm acceptance of the inevitability of the cycles of life and death.

Activity for Learners:

Read Keats's 'To Autumn' along with this poem. Compare the images of the English countryside presented in the two poems. Think about the mood and tone of the two poems. How do you think they are different?

4.3.7 The text of 'A Birthday'

My heart is like a singing bird
Whose nest is in a watered shoot;
My heart is like an apple tree
Whose boughs are bent with thickset fruit;
My heart is like a rainbow shell
That paddles in the halcyon sea;
My heart is gladder than all these
Because my love is come to me.
Raise me a dais of silk and down;
Hang it with vair and purple dyes;
Carve it in doves, and pomegranates,
And peacocks with a hundred eyes;
Work it in gold and silver grapes,
In leaves , and silver fleurs- de-lys;
Because the birthday of my life
Is come, my love is come to me.

4.3.8. Analysis/Explanation

iv. Thickset— heavy, plump

vi. Halcyon- calm and untroubled; the term also refers to a mythical bird thought to breed in a nest floating at sea and having the power to charm the wind and waves into calm. The secondary meaning of the term recalls the

image of the singing bird of the first line whose nest is also surrounded by water

ix. Dais- platform; Down— soft, fine feathers generally used to make quilts or cushions

x. Vair— Squirrel fur ; Purple— this colour often symbolizes royalty

xiv. Fleurs-de-lys— Lily flowers

4.3.9. Critical Appreciation

In terms of the mood and the tone of the lyric, 'A Birthday' is a complete antithesis of 'A Dirge'. Jubilant and light-hearted, this lyric records the joy of the human heart at the impending arrival of the beloved; it is this arrival which has been characterized as "the birthday" of the speaker's life. The speaker compares her heart to a series of natural objects which seem to have a beautiful and blissful existence. The heart is compared to a singing bird which has made its nest in a watered shoot; it is compared to an apple tree with branches overladen with plump fruits; it is compared next to a many- coloured shell tossed about in the restless waves of the sea. But each of these objects, perfect and joyful in themselves, cannot surpass the fullness and joy of the speaker's heart. The reason of this unsullied and overflowing happiness is identified at the concluding verse of the first stanza— it is the expected arrival of the beloved that has filled the heart of the speaker to the brim with joy.

The natural objects of beauty enumerated in the first stanza are replaced by exquisite objects of human craftsmanship that the speaker desires in order to receive the beloved in full state and glory. A platform made of "silk and down", hung with carvings of gold and silver inlay of the lily flower would decorate the dais. The reception of the beloved would thus be made memorable and surrounded by objects of beauty. Like the pair of content lovers waking up to bid life "good morrow" in John Donne's poem of the same name, the coming of the beloved would mark a new beginning of the speaker's life —'A Birthday'.

Some critics are of the opinion that the Biblical Song of Solomon serves as one of the intertexts of the poem. There are certain verbal parallels to be noticed between the Song and the lyric by Rossetti. For example, compare these lines from the Song with the images used in the lyric "The voice of my beloved! Behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills…. The flowers appear on the earth; the tome of the singing birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with tender grape give

a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away" (2:8-13). This interpretation of the poem, with the speaker as the bride and God as the bridegroom adds another dimension to the poem.

4.3.10. Style, Imagery and Technique of the Poems

Both the lyrics employ simple and lucid language and a rich profusion of natural images. In 'The Dirge', the series of images drawn from nature imparts a pictorial quality to the poem. The two stanzas consisting of six lines each rhyming aa bb cc gives the poem a rapid movement. The couplets, however, are of varying length—beginning with decasyllabic ones, the later couplets give the impression (both visual and aural) of gradual compression culminating in the last line of each stanza with only five syllables. This gradual compression provides a sense of closure and finality to the last lines. Richness of details expressed in simple and evocative language is the strength of the second lyric. The images drawn from the world of nature and the world of art in the first and second stanzas respectively offer a profusion of colours—the rainbow tints of the shells, the rich purple of the dais, the silver and gold of the embroidery create a veritable riot of colours in the short space of the sixteen lines. If the rich natural imagery of 'The Dirge' reminds us of Keats's 'To Autumn', the visual richness of 'A Birthday' would take us back to 'The Eve of Saint Agnes', where a similar appeal to the senses is made by the poet. The two stanzas of the poem, comprising of eight lines each can be notionally divided into quatrains with the rhyme scheme *abcb*. The musical quality of the lyric is further highlighted by the refrain like repetition of the line "my love is come to me" at the conclusion of both the stanzas. The rich visual imagery used by Rossetti, as well as her repeated references to different shades and tints may serve to remind us of her association with the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. These two short lyrics are not only mellifluous; they also bear testimony to Christina's eye for pictorial details.

4.3.11. Summing Up

- 'A Birthday' and 'A Dirge' are both short lyrics composed in a lucid yet rich language.
- The two poems show Christina Rossetti's eye for visual details, as well as her propensity to use images and symbols drawn from the world of nature.
- The rhymed and neatly structured poems use poetic devices like refrain, interrogation and anaphora and create a beautiful but not overtly poetic verbal as well as visual pattern.

- These two short lyrics provide good examples of Rossetti's characteristic poetic techniques and style.

4.3.12. Comprehension Exercises

● **Long Answer Type Questions-20 Marks**

1. Critically comment on Christina Rossetti's use of imagery in the two poems.
2. Compare and contrast the mood and the tone of the two lyrics. Would you call 'A Dirge' a poem of melancholy and 'A Birthday' a poem of happy anticipation?
3. Attempt a critical appreciation of the two poems in your own words.

● **Medium Length Questions-12 Marks**

1. Comment on the variations of line-length as used by Rossetti in 'A Dirge'
2. Briefly comment on Rossetti's association of death with winter in 'A Dirge'
3. Do you perceive any shift in the way imagery has been used in the first and the second stanzas of 'A Birthday'? Cite examples in support of your answer.

● **Short Questions-6 Marks**

1. What story is the poet referring to when she says "When the grasshopper comes to trouble"?
2. Explain the image— "My heart is like a rainbow shell/ That paddles in the halcyon sea".
3. Why does the poet refer to the "birthday" of her life at the end of the poem?

4.1.13. Suggested Reading

Rossetti, Christina. *Poems and Prose.* Simon Humphries, ed. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Print.

Bristow, Joseph, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Poetry.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.

Mukherjee, Suroopa. *Victorian Poets: Tennyson, Browning and Rossetti.* Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2010. Print.

Rosenblum, Dolores. *Christina Rossetti: The Poetry of Endurance.* Illinois: Southern Illinois UP, 1986. Print.