

## PREFACE

In the curricular structure introduced by this University for students of Bachelors 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. Co-operation 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 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**

**EEG : Paper - V**

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**Mohan Kumar Chattopadhyay**  
Registrar



## General Editor's 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 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. We are sure it 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, 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, 2015

Srideep Mukherjee  
Assistant Professor of English  
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## Paper Editors' Introduction to Paper V

By the time you approach Paper V of your EEG, 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. When you first turn the pages of this SLM some of you may feel very glad to recognise some familiar names from your school English textbooks, because the Romantic poets are, nearly always, compulsory components of poetry anthologies. You will feel that these writers, unlike the writers of the Renaissance or even the eighteenth century, write in an English which is like the English we still use and they write on topics which are still current, still of immense relevance to us. You would be quite right too.

The literature, especially the poetry of the Romantic period is distinctively different from the literature written before it. It becomes subjective, i.e. the poet's individual sensibility rather than his persona as a member of society is sought to be conveyed. The characteristics of nineteenth century Romanticism will be dealt with in detail in Module 1 Unit 3 and will be referred to time and again as we focus on individual writers. But these characteristics---- interest in Nature, the Self, the past, especially the Middle Ages, the supernatural----were part of a seminal change in sensibility which is still a living part of our heritage. Our ideas about the author, about society, about the relationship between the writer and his society, the role of literature in society, are all inherited from the Romantics. We still live under the long shadow of the great Romantics, even when, in a bid to set ourselves free, we repudiate them. The critic David Perkins has written: 'We are still living in the comet's tail of the early 19th. century'(The Quest for Permanence). The Romantics did not break the boundaries of pre - established literary forms, as the Moderns did, but they anticipated it by various divergent concepts of form and language which called down strong criticism on their work. They resurrected forms like the ballad, the ode and the blank verse which had been largely neglected during the hegemony of the heroic couplet during the neo-classical period.

The major writers of the Romantic period, especially the earlier romantics, like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and even Blake, lived and wrote against a backdrop of highly significant political and economic happenings. The chronological frame of the Romantic period is generally set between 1789---1830. The two years are not of course inflexible boundaries. They are chosen for their specific historical importance; 1789 was the year of the French Revolution; 1830 was the year of the July Revolution in Paris in which the Bourbon monarch imposed upon the French people by the European powers was driven out. The upper limits of the period can be put in 1776--- the year of American Revolution and stretched to 1832, the year the first reform bill was passed and Sir Walter Scott died. During this brief time span the political and economic structures of Western Europe underwent radical changes and those changes led to the foundation of systems which still define our lives: the emergence of the democratic nation state as a political structure and the industrial- capitalist economic system. The Romantics were deeply sensitive to the changes. If Wordsworth and his generation grew disenchanted with the Revolution, their revolutionary sympathies led to a hitherto unprecedented democratization of the topic of poetry, You meet people like poor farmers, beggars , servant girls in Wordsworth's poems and are impressed by their immense human dignity. The growing urbanisation consequent upon growth of manufacturing industry led to a social upheaval. In 'Tintern Abbey' and *The Prelude* we find Wordsworth referring to the unhappiness of city life.

The poems and prose pieces have been chosen with a view to acquaint you with the major writers and the major literary trends of the period. In Wordsworth's Preface and Keats's letters you will find the new concepts of imagination, creativity , the subject and language of poetry which underlay Romantic art and literature. You will come across the breaking away from neo-classical norms in the response to Nature (Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats's poems, Hazlitt's essay), interest in the non-rational reflected in the supernatural, the insights into childhood (Blake, Coleridge, Lamb) love of liberty, political and individual, inculcated by the French Revolution (Shelley, Hazlitt) and above all, the most defining feature of the Romantic Movement—a projection of the individual's personal values and sensibility into his writing.

De Quincey's essay directly, and Blake's 'Chimney Sweeper' poems obliquely will give you an idea of the socio-economic changes, the beginning of industrial capitalism, the urbanisation, the exploitation of child labour , while Jane Austen's novel will show you

the subtle class realignments between the upper and middle classes against a relatively stable backdrop of southern England. After completing your reading, we hope you will get a full understanding of one of the most significant periods of English history and literature in all its prismatic hues.

For both the assignment and term-end questions on this paper, covering all four modules, you will have to answer

2 (out of 6) essay-type questions of 20 marks each

3 (out of 8) 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.

Happy reading!

**DISCLAIMER:**

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

Kolkata,

15th April, 2016

Editors



# SYLLABUS

## EEG 5 – The Romantic Period

### ***Module 1 – The Romantic Revival***

*Unit 1* – Romanticism in English Literature

*Unit 2* – Romantic Poetry

*Unit 3* – Romantic Prose

### ***Module 2 – Reading Romantic Poetry***

*Unit 1* – Blake: ‘The Tiger’, ‘The Lamb’, Chimney Sweeper Poems

*Unit 2* – Wordsworth: ‘Tintern Abbey’; Coleridge: *Christabel* Part I

*Unit 3* – Keats: ‘Ode to a Nightingale’; Shelley: ‘Ode to the West Wind’

### ***Module 3 – Reading Romantic Prose***

*Unit 1* – Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

*Unit 2* – Lamb: ‘The Superannuated Man’; ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’

*Unit 3* – Hazlitt: ‘On A Sundial’; ‘On Going A Journey’

### ***Module 4 – Romantic Literary Thought***

*Unit 1* – Wordsworth: Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*

*Unit 2* – Keats’ Letters

*Unit 3* – De Quincey: Extract from *Recollections of the Lake Poets* - Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge.





**Module**

**1**

**The Romantic Revival**

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<b>Unit - 1</b>	❑ Romanticism in English Literature	15 - 29
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<b>Unit - 3</b>	❑ Romantic Prose	48 - 65

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**Module**

**2**

**Reading Romantic Poetry**

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<b>Unit - 1</b>	❑ William Blake: (a) 'The Chimney Sweeper Poems', (b) 'The Lamb', (c) 'The Tyger'	66 - 96
<b>Unit - 2</b>	❑ (i) William Wordsworth : 'Tintern Abbey' (ii) Samuel Taylor Coleridge 'Christabel'– Part I	97 - 147
<b>Unit - 3</b>	❑ Reading Romantic Poetry (a) John Keats: 'Ode to a Nightingale' (b) Percy Bysshe Shelley: 'Ode to the West Wind'	148-185

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**Module**

**3**

**Reading Romantic Prose**

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<b>Unit - 1</b>	❑ Jane Austen : <i>Pride and Prejudice</i>	186 - 206
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<b>Unit - 2</b>	❑ Reading Romantic Prose Charles Lamb: a) 'The Superannuated Man' b) 'Dream Children: A Reverie'	207 - 240
<b>Unit - 3</b>	❑ William Hazlitt: a) 'On Going a Journey' b) 'On a Sun-Dial'	241 - 268
<b>Module</b>		
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<b>Unit - 1</b>	❑ William Wordsworth : Preface To Lyrical Ballads	269 - 309
<b>Unit - 2</b>	❑ John Keats's Letters	310 - 345
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	Timeline Chart (The Romantic Period)	377 - 380

# Module - I

## The Romantic Revival

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### Unit - 1 □ Romanticism in English Literature

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#### Structure

- 1.1.0 Introduction
- 1.1.1 Romanticism
- 1.1.2 Socio-political and Economic Background
- 1.1.3 French Revolution and English Literature
- 1.1.4 The Intellectual Milieu
- 1.1.5 Chief Features of Romantic Literature
- 1.1.6 Language and Form
- 1.1.7 Summing Up
- 1.1.8 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.1.9 Suggested Reading

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#### 1.1.0 Introduction

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This module is an attempt to discuss with you what the terms ‘Romantic’ and ‘Romanticism’ usually mean in literary and artistic contexts. It goes on to deal with the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and tries to discuss the socio-political and economic backgrounds which are integral to the understanding of the writers of the Romantic period. The influence of important historical-economical events, for example the French Revolution, on nineteenth century Romanticism and their impact upon English literature have been discussed here. This module also explores the various Romantic thoughts and features which would be helpful for your understanding of the poetry of the period.

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### 1.1.1. Romanticism

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The origin of the word ‘romantic’ can be traced back to the Middle Ages. The word has evolved in meaning down the ages. For our purpose here we shall focus on the word as it came to be used during the early nineteenth century or slightly earlier. It was in England that the word first began to be widely used. At first it was used for ‘the old Romances’ dealing with gallant knights engaged in combats with giants and dragons in order to win the favour of the beloved. As a result, the word had associations of improbability, unreality, exaggeration, fictitiousness. During the seventeenth century, it denoted the opposite of rational or credible. The word acquired a positive meaning only from the eighteenth century. Around that time there began to grow a tentative interest in the Middle ages, the Elizabethan period, in the Gothic and in poets like Spenser. The word could mean something which was highly imaginative. The faculty of Imagination, unlike in the late seventeenth Century, was no longer distrusted as ‘lawless’. By the mid-eighteenth century the word carried dual meanings. It meant something that was suggestive of the old Romances. It also meant something that appealed to the imagination and feelings.

By the middle of the eighteenth century it was imported into France. The words ‘romantic’ in English and ‘romantique’ in French were employed as adjectives of appreciation for natural beauty. The use of this term in literature first became common in Germany where critics began to talk about *romantische Poesie* (romantic poetry) in the 1790s in contrast to anything related to classicism. From the 1820s the term ‘Romanticism’ came to be known by its name.

In the nineteenth century the term ‘Romantic’ was invested with manifold interpretations. The various interpretations include ‘the Return to Nature’, ‘the Revival of the Middle Ages’, ‘the Renaissance of Wonder’, so on and so forth.

Romanticism as an artistic, intellectual and literary movement originated in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century and was at its peak from 1800 to 1850. This movement was deeply inspired by the German *Sturm and Drang* movement which gave preference to emotion and intuition rather than to rationalism related to the Enlightenment. Another movement, a historical one, whose ideologies had tremendous impact on Romanticism, was the French Revolution (which is discussed in detail later in this module). Romanticism was largely a reaction to the socio-political norms of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and the scientific analysis of and approach to nature.

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### **1.1.2. Socio-Political and Economic Background**

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In order to understand the basic tenets of Romantic thought, knowledge of the social, political and economic background of the age becomes somewhat imperative. The eighteenth century saw a huge change in the economic and social structure of European, and particularly English, society which was integrally linked up with the contemporary political scenario. The Protestant weavers of France and Netherlands were left with no choice but to settle in England because of persecutions and religious struggles. Due to this settlement there was an upsurge of weaving industries in England. There was a rapid growth of capitalism because of the settlement in the colonies. The continuing enclosures of the village commons (the land that was traditionally considered community property and provided pasturage for the domestic animals of the landless or poorer sections was fenced and became private property), the introduction of machines for weaving, the foodgrain import from the American colonies, the economic impact of the colonisation of India led to the end of the English peasantry with large self supporting communities. The village landless, deprived of alternate means of subsistence, turned into migrating labourers. Invention of the steam engine and establishment of factories resulted in economic growth for the manufacturing industry. A huge gap was gradually growing between the lower and the upper strata of the society. All these factors combined together to lead to political struggles. In England there were several political uprisings like the Luddite movement (some weavers, replaced by machines, moved around the countryside, smashing weaving machinery. The government used the army against them and passed harsh laws in parliament).

The English were successful in establishing monopoly trade in India and North America by ousting the French. France was already in a devastated state because of the wars of Louis XIV and not in a position to endure the strain of further wars. Moreover, the measure to increase taxes in an attempt to somewhat recover their position caused even worse results and led to the outbreak of the Revolution ultimately leading to remarkable socio-political changes. There was the abolition of monarchy and the eradication of the nobility. Some thinkers like Burke began to lament that gone were the days of chivalry and the glory of Europe. However, the English poets saw a ray of optimism amidst this ambience of revolution and this spirit of hope can be located in the literary works of the age. The revolution in France was preceded and inspired by the American War of Independence, the declaration of American Independence in 1776, and the establishment in America of a form of Government as yet unknown in Europe, one that was not based on a hereditary system of inheritance.

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### 1.1.3. The French Revolution and English Literature

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There is an integral relationship between the revolution of 1789 and English Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century. The French Revolution and the hope it generated of a new dawn for humanity made a deep impact on the Romantic writers, from the Tory Southey to the revolutionary Shelley. Several poems composed by Byron and Wordsworth are based on the celebration of the cause of liberty. Moreover, their compassion and love for the common man were largely prompted by the ideology of Equality and Fraternity. The slogan associated with the French Revolution: 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity', was the source of inspiration for English poets like Wordsworth who even went to France in 1792 and celebrated the Revolution as the ushering in of a dawn full of promises for a wonderful future. However, later he got disillusioned with his experiences in France. The reflection of his frustrations can be observed in poems like 'Guilt and Sorrow'. The rebellious aspect of the Revolution can be best located in the poetical works of Byron where his spirit of revolt is not only against society but against life at large. Shelley's intense admiration for the Revolution can be analysed by referring to the play 'Prometheus Unbound' and poems like 'Ode to the West Wind'. In fact, Byron and Shelley represent two different perspectives on the Revolution. While Shelley, with all his optimism, dreams of an ideal society emerging out of the Revolution, Byron in a despondent mood focuses on its destructive aspect. Another impact of the Revolution is palpable in the craving for freedom of thought, the emancipation of spirit unhindered by political, social or religious obstructions. The early Romantics of the nineteenth century, influenced by the concepts of liberalism and philanthropy, express an empathy for the oppressed and the downtrodden. If you read poems like Wordsworth's 'The Reverie of Poor Susan' or 'Michael', you will find Wordsworth writes poems on people who would not have been considered fit subjects for poetry by neo-classical poets. The Romantics, fully supportive of the spirit of freedom and liberation protested strongly against any form of strangulation of that freedom. Poems like Byron's 'On the Castle of Chillon' and Coleridge's 'France: An Ode' mark such a kind of protest. In the latter poem Coleridge is found to have adopted the role of a political protester. Perhaps the best example of the romantic rebellion is a poet, who is chronologically slightly earlier – William Blake, who is strident against any kind of attempt to curtail the freedom of the individual.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (Blake : 'London' )

However, the support for the revolutionary cause was not unequivocal. The first enthusiasm which Wordsworth records (“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very heaven!”) would soon give way to doubt and disillusion. There was a dual feeling in the heart of Coleridge regarding the Revolution which can be traced in the line ‘... I hoped and feared’ (‘France: An Ode’). This duality between hope and fear was the reality not only for Coleridge, but for most of the writers and thinkers regarding their expectations from the Revolution.

In order to understand this kind of confusion and diffidence about France and the Revolution, a brief look at the role of France during the Revolution and at the European political scenario would not be out of place. On 7<sup>th</sup> February, 1792 Austria and Prussia signed an official alliance primarily out of fear of the revolutionary army. In April, 1792 France declared war against Austria and in September 1792 won the first of the revolutionary wars. As the First Republic and then the Directorate carried on a series of wars against European countries like Holland, Spain and England, the image of France as the symbol of Liberty was transformed radically into that of authoritarianism and imperialism. The annexation of power by Napoleon and Napoleon’s imperialistic plans destroyed the Revolution. Thinkers and poets, many of them already confused by the Reign of Terror (1793—94) could no longer look up to France as the torchbearer of liberty.

#### LET US SUM UP

**The origin of the word ‘romantic’ can be traced to the Middle Ages. The word ‘romantic’ meant at first the kind of matter found in medieval romances dealing with fantastic stories of gallant knights engaged in mortal combats with giants and dragons in order to win the favour of the beloved. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the connotation of the term ‘Romantic’ indicated something in opposition to the term ‘Classic’. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the words ‘romantic’ in English and ‘romantique’ in French were employed as adjectives of appreciation for natural beauty. Romanticism as an artistic, intellectual and literary movement originated in Europe towards the end of the eighteenth century and was at its peak from 1800 to 1850. This movement was deeply inspired by the German *Sturm and Drang* movement and the French Revolution. In order to understand the basic tenets of Romantic thought, knowledge of the social, political and economic**

**background of the age becomes somewhat imperative. The French Revolution had a tremendous formative influence on the major Romantic writers of the age who were inspired by the principles and ideologies of the Revolution. The poems composed by Byron and Wordsworth are sometimes based on the celebration of the cause of liberty. Moreover, the compassion and love for the common man that we find in Romantic literature have been largely prompted by the ideology of Equality and Fraternity.**

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#### **1.1.4. The Intellectual Milieu**

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Emancipation from all kinds of confinements and restrictions is one of the basic tenets of Romantic thought. Disillusion of the writers of the age regarding the existing social order and a desperate urge to escape into an ideal world, a world filled with promises of a perfect society, can be found in a number of Romantic poems. There is a tendency in all the romantic poets to transcend the barriers of this mundane world of drudgery and move into Utopia or the world of Nature sometimes with the help of the 'viewless wings of Poesy', sometimes by imbibing the spirit of the West Wind and sometimes by drinking 'blushful Hippocrene'. The romantic ethos can be understood as a new mode of thinking primarily based on the concept of freedom of mind and spirit. In these thoughts the Romantics were inspired by Rousseau on the one hand and the German philosophers on the other, particularly Kant and his concept of the Imagination. Eighteenth century critical thoughts, with strict adherence to the Rational, insistence on rigid norms of writing and put too much stress on formulated codes and values which were too constrictive. The major writers of the eighteenth century, Addison, Pope, Dr. Johnson, give the impression of operating within a small compact area of normalcy, and a small range of interests and sentiments. Writers like Cowper or Chatterton who operated outside those limits were disregarded. The Romantic writers' breaking away from the literary trends of the earlier century was a direct outcome of the revolt against the rigid norms. Thus the views of Wordsworth and Coleridge regarding poetry and the theories formulated by them can be best realized when considered a part of an entirely new aesthetic tradition which had its roots embedded in the nineteenth century socio-cultural milieu of England.

We shall briefly discuss the various trends of thoughts which circulated around the Romantic writers in an attempt to understand how, their reactions against and response to these thoughts defined their writings. This will help you to gain an understanding of

the concept of Romanticism and you can relate these trends with the poems that are to be read and understood by you.

### ➤ **Mysticism**

The Romantic poets possess a spiritual awareness which can be explained as a vision that helps them to look beyond the mundane world into the 'life of things'. This vision varies from one poet to another. For Keats this vision can be acquired through an act of sympathy and a realization that truths are beyond the faculty of reasoning. For Blake and Shelley this visionary power has so much potency that it can nourish the poets and fill them with ecstatic rapture. Shelley has the conviction that there persists a sense of unity amidst all the things of this universe. This sense of unity has been poignantly presented by the poet in 'Adonais'. Shelley lays immense stress on the power of imagination as a creative force and considers it to be a divine quality. A beautiful expression of the imaginative fecundity of Shelley is 'Prometheus Unbound'. For Wordsworth, the presence of divinity can be felt in every aspect of nature, however tiny it is. Man's appreciation of the beauty of natural things leads him to acknowledge the presence of Divine life and thus establishes a mysterious connecting link with divinity. Thus the spiritual perception enriched by imagination to perceive the presence of 'One' in many and the spirit behind every materialistic thing is what Mysticism is all about. It is the realization of truth through union with the Infinite. When you read Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', Blake's lyrics like "To see a world in a grain of sand/ And a heaven in a wild flower", you will understand the element of mysticism in Romantic poetry.

The element of mysticism that we find in the Romantics came, partially from a pre-existent concept of the poet's role as a prophet. Thomas Gray's 'The Bard' (1757) projects the Welsh Bard as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition. In Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' the poet, with his flashing eyes and floating hair, frightens those who see him. Blake was greatly influenced by the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg. Coleridge played a key role in disseminating the ideas of German Metaphysics in English. This mystic strain was generated in reaction to the Rationalism and Empiricism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This element also defined an altogether new concept of the faculty of imagination.

### ➤ **Imagination**

“If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and the special view which they held of it” — this is what C.M. Bowra wrote in his book, *The Romantic Imagination*.

The religious and metaphysical beliefs we have discussed in “MYSTICISM” laid the foundation of this new concept of Imagination. Imagination, as the poets recognised, enabled them to transform the world, either by making the day-to-day mundane reality vanish, as Keats does in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, or to bring about social and political transformation, as Blake dreams of doing in ‘The New Jerusalem’;

Bring me my bow of burning gold!  
Bring me my arrows of desire!  
Bring me my spear! o clouds unfold!  
Bring me my chariot of fire.

The Romantic poets see Imagination as a God-like faculty. Coleridge wrote in ‘Biographia Literaria’ (chapter 13):

“The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime Agent of all human perception....”

Wordsworth in *The Prelude* ( Book VI) wrote :

Imagination! Here the power so called  
Through sad incompetence of human speech,  
That awful power rose from the mind’s abyss...

Keats in a letter to Benjamin Bailey wrote: ‘I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart’s affection and the truth of Imagination. What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth. ‘

This notion of Imagination as a mysterious power runs through the poetry of all the major Romantic poets.

### ➤ **Humanism and the Human Condition**

The Romantic poets were deeply involved with the world of mankind and thus they were poets of Man. Wordsworth chose his characters from simple humdrum humanity. These characters did not possess epical grandeur; rather they were the innocent

peasants, unpretentious shepherds, a solitary reaper or a village girl working in the metropolis, all busy with their daily chores. These characters being closely associated with nature, gave the poet an opportunity to explore nature in a more vivid way through them and their relation to nature. The language spoken by those people was the language of the soil and devoid of any artificiality. As such, it was considered by poets, especially Wordsworth, to be fit to be used in poetry. This idealization of the natural state was largely inspired by Rousseau and is considered to be one of the aspects of Romantic Humanism inspired by the French Revolution.

The writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau had a pervasive influence on the Romantics. His ideas about the love of freedom, the passion of love, admiration of nature and the state of man in society gave the Romantics the chief subjects of their poetry. Even Byron, who alone among the Romantics did not repudiate the eighteenth century and its literary concepts, paid tribute to Rousseau in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage';

...he knew

How to make madness beautiful, and cast  
O'er erring deeds and thoughts a heavenly hue  
Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past  
The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and fast.

In the same poem, Byron goes on to say that from Rousseau came:

Those oracles which set the world in flame,  
Nor ceased to burn till kingdoms were no more.

Shelley and Byron were deeply concerned with the dignity of man and his rebellious spirit. For these two poets an ideal man should retain the original elements of his nature and should not be fettered by social obligations and norms. The dignity of an individual as a Man was what Humanism talked about. The Scottish poet, Robert Burns could write in 1799 "The rank is but the guinea's stamp/ A man's a man for a' that". In his preface to the Lyrical Ballads (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1800) Wordsworth said, about the subject of his poems: "... Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity..."

This focus on the human condition and respect for the common man, which resulted in an expansion and democratisation of the boundaries of poetry was the result of the influence of Rousseau and the impact of the ideas which laid the groundwork of the French Revolution.

➤ **Nature**

Romanticism has been defined as a 'Return to Nature. It should not be confused with 'naturalism', a twentieth Century phenomenon, the Romantic's return to nature and reaction against social pretensions and artificialities was a complex affair, partly a revolt against the rational-scientific world view of the seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke, partly a reaction against the changes that were taking place in the English countryside as a result of the beginning of industrialisation and the consequent disruption of traditional community life. This admiration and love for nature is one of the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry. Nature, when it appears in earlier writings, was only thought of as an object for embellishment but, in the hands of the Romantics, the significance of nature is altogether revised and uplifted. Nature was now thought of as endowed with a personality and thus interaction with and establishment of a relationship with nature could make human beings happy and contented. Nature was ascribed a soul or spirit by Wordsworth who had deep faith in the role of nature as the guide and mentor of human beings. He believed that intimacy with nature can provide strength to escape from all the cares and anxieties which beset human life. During the days of dejection and frustration after the failure of all the hopes and ideals associated with the French Revolution, Wordsworth attained the much-needed peace of mind from the natural beauties of the Lake Districts. In 'Tintern Abbey' he talks of his love for nature with inexhaustible enthusiasm, seeing

"In nature and the language of the sense  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart and soul  
Of all my moral being"

The major difference between the Romantics' love of nature and that of their predecessors lies in the fact that for the Romantics the natural world is not just a thing of beauty. Aspects of nature are admired or even revered for their ability to express the truths and perceptions of the mind. The Romantics externalise their emotions by describing them through natural correspondences: the lakes, the high mountains, the meadow flowers or the river. A creative relationship is established between the internal mind and the external world. Byron puts forward this feeling in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage':

Are not the mountains, waves and skies, a part  
Of me and my soul, as I of them?

Linked with this is the romantic idea of the association of nature with moral and

physical well being of man which Wordsworth expresses in the Lucy poems:

I will to my darling be  
Both law and impulse

➤ **Hellenism**

The word 'Hellenism' is derived from the word 'Hellene' which means Greek. Thus Hellenism represents Greek culture and spirit. One of the features of Romanticism was love for the classical past. Beset by the frustrations and disappointments of contemporary times, the Romantics sometimes sought solace and refuge in the Greek world. This world always had a charm of its own for the Romantics because the Greek gods and goddesses symbolised a harmony, a superior pattern and a sense of completeness which the Romantic poets craved for. The diverse aspects of nature reminded the poets of the aura of the classical world. For example, by imagining the locks of an approaching turbulent storm Shelley began to be reminded of the dishevelled hair of the Maenads. The passion of Hellenism is most prominently found in Keats. His works like 'Lamia', 'Hyperion' and 'Endymion' are based on Greek legends while the subject matters of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode to Psyche' are unmistakably Greek. Keats, in the process of giving expression to his passion for beauty, gets transported into the Greek world in his imagination. Most importantly, it should be remembered that Keats was a Greek in temperament and that is the best explanation for his love for everything Greek. Shelley also has his interest not only in the myths of Greece but in her timeless truths. 'Prometheus Unbound', 'Adonais' and 'Hellas' testify to this. In 'Hellas' he talks about the Greek ideal:

Greece and her foundations are  
Built below the tide of war,  
Based on the crystalline sea  
Of thought and its eternity

➤ **Medievalism**

The Romantic poets felt an attraction for the mystery and supernaturalism associated with the Middle Ages which were integrally related to an aura of romance. Coleridge, Scott and Keats were particularly interested in medievalism and the romanticism associated with it. The element of supernaturalism has been brilliantly handled by Coleridge in 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' and by Keats in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. The essentially medieval setting and ambience created by Keats in 'La Belle' are direct reflections of Keats' love for medievalism. The Romantic writers' medievalism was not however a mere craving for the remote and unfamiliar. At its root

lay a refusal to restrict cultivated interest within the bounds of the eighteenth century's defined boundaries of civilisation, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. An interest in the middle ages had earlier become the fashion, with the Gothic novels of Horace Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe and others. The later period avoided the earlier extravagances of fantasy and showed a more intelligent interest in the imaginative reconstruction of history. This resulted in such serious revivals like Bishop Thomas Percy's 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry' and also in such revivals like Chatterton's pseudo-medieval 'Rowley Poems', or James Macpherson's pseudo-Gaelic 'Ossian'. While the interest in the past gives us the wonderful ambience of Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and adds a depth of complexity to Coleridge's 'Christabel', its chief achievement was to be the historical novels of Walter Scott. The interest in past history led to Scott's re-creation of the historical novel and Scott's imaginative understanding of the process of history would contribute a history-mindedness which would be a great boon to subsequent historical studies.

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### **1.1.5. Chief Features of Romantic Literature**

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The primary focus of Romantic literature, particularly of Romantic poetry, was on free and unhindered expression of the feelings of the artist. The writer's individual self, not his social self, becomes the subject. The Romantics often speak of the essential self, a self unfettered by the conventions of society. The exploration of this central self and not only public concerns demarcates romantic literature from neo-classical. The subjective 'I' is crucial in romantic writing and hence the protagonist is often identified with the poet himself. It is this focus that led to the serious concern with childhood, because the child had not yet been moulded by society. Wordsworth calls the child "Mighty prophet, seer blest" in 'Immortality Ode', Blake shows an intense conviction of the importance of childhood but also shows the hostility of the adult world to the child in his Chimney Sweeper poems or in 'Nurse's Song'. Lamb reflects the interest in childhood in his more real, though perhaps sentimental observations on children.

Another important feature of romantic writing was the expression of feelings and emotions. The earlier ideal of narrowly reasoned control in emotional life gave way to a belief in the importance of the emotions. Blake wrote "Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curb'd and governed their Passions or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings" Keats's letters, even more than his poems, show his beliefs in free emotional expression. Imagination becomes the

most important source of poetic inspiration and this imagination is not restricted by any classical rules and norms of form in art. Romanticism focusses on the individual imagination and explores Nature as well as past history to find correspondences to the individual's feeling and realisations.

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### **1.1.6. Language and Form**

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The Romantics are not as innovative in their explorations of forms of prose and verse as in their choice of subject matter. Wordsworth's announcement, that he had tried to write the poems in the 'Lyrical Ballads' 'in "a selection of language really used by men"', was quickly challenged by Coleridge. However, the new things being attempted in literature, especially poetry, required new language. Some, like the poet Robert Southey, though a close friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge, stuck to the language and forms of the eighteenth century. Blake in 'Poetical Sketches' used mostly traditional language, although in the later prophetic books he is daringly different. Byron was an admirer of Pope, and in his satire, sticks to the older school, but used a flippant, colloquial style in 'Don Juan'. On the whole, in spite of Wordsworth's harsh criticism of the earlier poetic diction or Keats's disparagement of Pope, the Romantics revolt only against the conventionality and triteness of the bad poetry of the earlier period. They did not stick to the rigidity of the verse form of Pope and his followers. They also turned to the use of imagery stemming from direct observation and a greater variety of verse forms. Natural Imagery, picturesque depictions and lilting melody of the verses are also significant features of Romantic writing. They did not try to avoid non-conventional or non-prosaic language. Coleridge uses a lot of archaisms in 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel'. Keats drew on Spenser, and was influenced by Milton and 'Hyperion' is very Miltonic, although he said that Milton's verse was '...a corruption of our language—a northern dialect accommodating itself to Greek and Latin inversions and intonations...'

We can say this, that the Romantic poets used more speech rhythms than their previous generation and avoided the subjugation of rhythm to metre. Many older verse forms, the ode for example, or the Blank verse, neglected by the previous generation came back into use. The stanza forms and the metrical schemes are more varied and unlike in the neo-classical period, each major poet treads his own path, instead of setting up and following a single norm.

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### 1.1.7. Summing Up

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- ✓ Emancipation from all kinds of confinements and restrictions is one of the basic tenets of Romantic thoughts. The entire romantic ethos can be understood as a new mode of thinking primarily based on the concept of freedom of mind and spirit.
- ✓ The Romantic poets possess a spiritual awareness which can be explained as a vision that helps them to look beyond the mundane world into the 'life of things'. This vision varies from one poet to another.
- ✓ The Romantic poets were deeply involved with the human world and thus they were poets of Man.
- ✓ Romanticism was a return to nature and the poets raised their voice against pretensions and artificialities. This admiration and love for nature is one of the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry.
- ✓ Hellenism represents Greek culture and spirit. One of the main features of Romanticism being love for the classical and past age, it is no wonder that, beset by the frustrations and disappointments of the contemporary times, the Romantics sought solace and refuge in the Greek world.
- ✓ Romantic poets had an attraction for the mystery and supernaturalism associated with the Middle Ages which were integrally related to an aura of romance.
- ✓ Romantic poetic language was not a complete break with traditional forms but it expanded the range of formal varieties while in accommodating innovative and fresh imagery and speech rhythms it paved the way for modern poetry.

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### 1.1.8. Comprehension Exercises

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#### Long Questions: 20 marks

1. Trace the impact of the French Revolution on English literature.
2. Discuss any four of the romantic trends of thought and their application by the poets of the Romantic age
3. Analyse the various socio-political and economic backgrounds that are integrally related to the emergence of Romanticism.

**Mid-length Questions: 12 marks**

1. How did the term 'romantic' come into use?
2. In what way did the Romantic writers combine their love for nature and love for humanity?
3. What changes can be found in the language of Romantic poetry?

**Short Questions: 6 marks**

1. Discuss any three of the features of English Romantic movement.
2. What are the two movements that had strong influence on Romanticism?
3. What do you understand by Hellenism? Name the poet who was largely influenced by Hellenism.

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**1.1.9. Suggested Reading**

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Bowra, Maurice. *Romantic Imagination*

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*.

Ford, Boris, ed . *From Blake to Byron: The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*.

Legouis and Cazamian. *History of English Literature*.

Trevelyan, G.M. *Social History of England*.

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## **Unit-2 □ Romantic Poetry**

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### **Structure:**

#### **1.2.0: Introduction**

#### **1.2.1: Precursors of Romanticism**

#### **1.2.2: Features of Romantic Poetry**

#### **1.2.3: Romantic Theory of Poetry**

#### **1.2.4: The Romantic Poets**

#### **1.2.5: Summing Up**

#### **1.2.6: Comprehension Exercises**

#### **1.2.7: Suggested Reading**

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### **1.2.0. Introduction**

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This module aims to give you an overview of Romantic poetry, beginning with the Precursors of Romanticism, so that you get an idea of the gradual shift from neoclassical poetry to romantic poetry. We shall first discuss the features of Romantic Poetry and then focus on the major poets of the era. We hope this will help you to get the essential ideas regarding the Romantic poets before you go on to study the poems of the individual poets in Module 2.

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### **1.2.1. Precursors of Romanticism**

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As you have seen in the Units on poetry in Paper 4, the eighteenth century which is also called the age of 'prose and reason' is sometimes called the age of neoclassicism. It was marked by decorum, rigidity and discipline in writing. However, there is, you remember, no need to think that the romantic tendencies were completely non-existent in that age. In the later part of the eighteenth century a significant change could be traced in the ethos of poetry and literature at large. A new sensibility and temper were at work, particularly with the younger poets, who gradually began to liberate themselves from the neoclassical bent of mind and the all-encompassing influence of Pope and Dryden. It is true that they could not cut themselves off completely from the

neoclassical influence. However, there was a blending of the old conventions of the neoclassical past and the elements of romanticism as far as selection of subject matter, verse patterns, choice of form and content of are concerned. These poets are called transitional poets or the Precursors of the Romantic Revival. Recall briefly the poetry of Thomson and Gray and you will get the essence of what is being said here.

Don't you feel that in comparison or contrast to poets like Dryden and Pope, these poets put more emphasis on the elements of imagination, passion and emotional exuberance rather than on intellectuality? Why do you think was it so? For them poetry was largely dependent on inspiration. Nature played a crucial role in their poetic compositions and there was a growing interest in antiquity, especially the Middle Ages. The focus was on individualism and democratic spirit was a new element that was making itself evident, surpassing the strict rhetorical rigours of 18<sup>th</sup> century poetry. Hence their poems were subjective. There was remarkable deviation as far as the poetic structure was concerned. There were experimentations with new stanza forms and measures which were primarily reactions against heroic couplets, the chosen form of major neoclassical poetry.

The writers belonging to this group are **James Thomson, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Percy, Thomas Chatterton, James Macpherson, Thomas Gray, William Collins, William Cowper, George Crabbe, Robert Burns** and **William Blake**. **Thomson's** *Seasons*, as you know by now, is an important contribution to the romantic trend of writing and is marked by sympathetic depictions of the people, farmers and shepherds, who live close to nature. Thomson presents English rural scenes realistically, not in the standardised pastoral tradition modelled on Classical poets like Virgil or Theocritus. His handling of new subjects, his rich imaginative fervour, his fondness for nature and his selection of blank verse and Spenserian stanza instead of heroic couplet make Thomson a true precursor of Romanticism. Goldsmith foreshadows the romantics of the early nineteenth century with his sentiment of love and sympathy for the poor villagers and a note of melancholy. *The Deserted Village* of **Goldsmith** gives us an early glimpse of the changes taking place in the traditional village life, and nostalgia for the old rural ways in ways which anticipate the attitudes and concerns of the romantics.

**Bishop Thomas Percy** was a scholar with antiquarian interests. He edited and published a collection of ballads, metrical romances and historical songs under the title *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) which included poems ranging from the Middle Ages to the reign of Charles I. This compilation had tremendous influence on the Romantic poets. Robert Burns was inspired to write in the Scottish dialect. Coleridge's and Keats's

medievalism drew from this source. Percy himself was largely influenced by the immense popularity of an earlier publication—**James Macpherson's** *Ossian*. *Ossian* is a cycle of poems on Irish mythology, which Macpherson claimed to have collected from word-of-mouth Scots Gaelic and translated. This claim was untrue. The poems were written by Macpherson himself. But the book was to inspire the Romantics' interest in the past, as well as the Gaelic Revival later, i.e. an attempt, in Ireland to revive the Gaelic language and culture.

The growing interest in antiquity is best illustrated in the tragic life of **Thomas Chatterton**. The young aspiring writer imitated the dialect of medieval English and published a collection of poems written supposedly by a 15<sup>th</sup> century medieval monk, Thomas Rowley. The forgery, accepted in good faith first, was soon detected. Chatterton's later suicide turned him into a tragic victim figure for the Romantics. Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, all commemorated him in their poetry. Macpherson's translations of Scottish poems titled *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*, *Fingal, an Epic poem in six books* and *Temora, an Epic Poem in eight books* carry the readers to a world of supernaturalism and heroism, a world which is also touched by a note of melancholy, a world placed in stark opposition to the rational world of Pope.

**Thomas Gray** (1716-1771) is one of the most important poets of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. He is typical of the transition poets in his simultaneous love of tradition and exploration of novelty in poetry. His contemporaries appreciated the fine craftsmanship, reflective morality and classical echoes of 'An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'. But in its rustic setting and expression of feeling for the obscure, common, rural human beings, it anticipates the Romantics. There is a splendid reflection of the democratic spirit with the inclusion of trivial and humble aspects of life which were unthinkable as subject matters of poetry earlier. His poems like 'The Bard' and 'The Progress of Poesy' depict the poet as an inspired poetic genius like the Romantics do. Moreover, both in his use of the form of the Pindaric ode in these poems and in using medieval Welsh material, he was exploring areas beyond the taste parameters of neo-classicism.

In **William Collins** (1721-1759) also we find a combination of both the neoclassical and the romantic elements. He excels in portraying the supernatural world of shadows as his poem 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands' shows us. Collins's choice of the form of the ode, both the simpler stanzaic Horatian and the more complex Pindaric, rather than the heroic couplet, his admiration for Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton rather than for Edmund Waller, a much-admired neo-classical poet, mark his turning away from the Pope-Dryden tradition. In *Ode on the Poetical Character* his concept of

poetry is essentially Romantic; it is divinely inspired, the product of Imagination, impassioned and full of insight. We quote below an short extract from this poem:

Young Fancy thus, to me divinest name,  
To whom, prepared and bathed in Heav'n,  
The cest of amplest power is giv'n,  
To few the godlike gift assigns,  
To gird their blessed, prophetic loins,  
And gaze her visions wild, and feel unmixed her flame!

In an anonymous letter to a periodical **William Cowper** (1731-1800) anticipates Wordsworth's later attack on neo-classical poetic diction. He criticises Pope's translation of Homer's epics in heroic couplets, saying that Pope had put Homer in a straightjacket. Cowper's poetry combines the spirit of the new and the form of the old. His satires are largely imitations of Pope but as far as his phenomenal work *The Task* is concerned, it is an original work. An essential simplicity and love of nature are the chief features of this work. A simple but deep love for the countryside and details of description may seem to you almost like those in say a Wordsworth poem that you must have read earlier, or will read in this Paper. Read a few lines from *The Task* below:

...hedge-row beauties numberless, squat tow'r,  
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells  
Just undulate upon the list'ning ear,  
Groves, heaths and smoking villages, remote...

**George Crabbe** (1751-1832) is a very interesting figure among the transition poets. His work is a witness to his love, care and concern for the poor villagers. In some ways his work can be viewed as a continuation of the neoclassical tradition because he stuck to the heroic couplet. His poetic sensibility was very Augustan in texture. In the preface to his *Tales* he says that his poems are addressed to 'the plain sense and sober judgment' of his readers and not to their 'fancy and imagination'. Nevertheless, he plays an important role in bringing about the changes in poetry. In *The Parish Register* and *The Borough* Crabbe wrote character sketches through simple anecdotes. In *Tales* and *Tales from the Hall* we get complex short stories in verse about different kinds of people. Crabbe went beyond the boundaries of Augustan poetry in two major ways. He chose for his character sketches, not people who were aristocratic and important, but from the middle and working classes. The *Cambridge History of English Literature* says, he

showed that the world of plain fact and common life could be worthy material for literature. His poems gave fine details of the characters he created whereas Augustan poetic taste preferred generalities rather than details. He was friendly with writers of both the earlier and the later generations. Wordsworth said Crabbe's poetry would last 'from its combined merit as truth and poetry'. Byron said he was 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best. '

**Robert Burns** (1759-1796) was a Scottish poet. His poems are suffused with romantic lyricism, spontaneity and love for nature. His most famous composition is *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. His choice of subjects as well as in his use of Scots dialect, his use of the ballads of folk tradition, all mark him as a very important figure of the Transition. The gentle and ironic comic tone of poems like *Holy Willie's Prayer*, in which Burns ironically criticises Scottish Calvinism, is very much a part of the Eighteenth century tradition of English poetry. In poems like these he deals with human nature and behaviour, and not with personal feelings. But the choice of perennial themes like death, old age, love, suffering in most of his poems, the simple, commonplace persons and their dull, commonplace lives that his poems present with such amazing sympathy, the assertion of the dignity of the common man and the importance of the language he speaks, are distinctive features of the Romantic Revival. His fine spirit of liberty is seen in lines like

The rank is but the guinea's stamp  
The man's the gowd for a' that

Not only common and poor people, as in 'The Cotter's Saturday Night', even forms of lowly animals and insects are subjects treated with sympathetic humour. In 'To a Mouse' we find the oft-quoted lines:

The best laid plans o' mice and men  
Gang aft agley

Just notice for yourselves the amazing range of nature's creations that are now becoming subjects of poetry!

**William Blake** is perhaps the most remarkable figure of this group. He was certainly the most original. His verses are marked by world of phantoms which he considered to be even more real than the physical world we inhabit. His love for nature and longing for childhood put him in the same league as the other Romantics. But he remained markedly individualistic in everything he did. As a child he saw angels in a vision. The unique capacity for vision which remained with him all his life, was in fact an assertion

of the primacy of Imagination. He refused to be bound by the single truth of the rational faculty, as Blake expressed in a letter to his friend Thomas Butts:

Now I a fourfold vision see  
And a fourfold vision is given to me  
It was imagination which enabled us to see the wonder of the created world:  
To see the world in a grain of sand  
And heaven in a wild flower  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

Blake was an ardent champion of liberty, a radical in his political views and a great supporter of the American and French Revolutions. His visionary quality did not make him a dreamer; rather, it made him see the ills of his world with greater clarity and foresee a better future in which tyranny would be destroyed. In the later prophetic books he projects this vision. 'London' expresses his indignation at contemporary forms of exploitation.

In every cry of every Man,  
In every Infants cry of fear,  
In every voice: in every ban,  
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

In 'Jerusalem' he shows revolutionary fervour which anticipates the younger Romantics like Shelley. Blake comes very close to Shelley in his dream of an ideal world devoid of any differences and marked by love and harmony.

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land

*Poetical Sketches*, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are some of his famous works and are considered to be some of the best examples of typically romantic lyricism. You will be reading some of Blake's poems in this module and will get a chance to be better acquainted with him.

### A Quick Recapitulation

The eighteenth century which is also called the age of 'prose and reason' was the age of neoclassicism marked by decorum, rigidity and discipline in writing. . In the later part of the eighteenth century a new sensibility and temper were at work, particularly with the younger poets, who gradually began to liberate themselves from the neoclassical bent of mind and the all-encompassing influence of Pope and Dryden. There was a blending of the old conventions of the neoclassical past and the elements of romanticism as far as selection of subject matter, verse patterns and treatment are concerned in their writing. These poets are called transitional poets or the Precursors of the Romantic Revival. The major writers belonging to this group are James Thomson, Oliver Goldsmith, Thomas Percy, Thomas Chatterton, James Macpherson, Thomas Gray, William Collins, William Cowper, George Crabbe, Robert Burns and William Blake.

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### 1.2.2. Features of Romantic Poetry

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From the previous sub-unit, you must have gathered the winds of change that were affecting the poetic ethos as one moves from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Let us now try and assimilate what the basic features of Romantic poetry were.

The Romantic era in England stretches tentatively from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century. This period produced some of the most eminent and influential poets whose penetrating emotions and philosophical insight created magic in their writings and created real masterpieces in the entire range of English literature. Their **love for nature**, use of **passionate language**, **compassion for humanity**, depiction of the so-called **unheroic characters** in their poems were certain salient features of the Romantic movement in literature. This age laid more emphasis on **emotion** rather than on reason, on **liberty and emancipation** rather than on decorum and traditional norms. Other notable features include focus on **individuality**, **individual will** and **value of immediate experience** rather than on social conventions and generalised experiences. Another significant point which needs to be mentioned here is the **nostalgia and fascination for everything distant in time and place**. The poems were tinged with richness of imagination and marked by a strong spirit of revolt against the shackles of neoclassical rules.

The willingness to explore areas beyond accepted standards of social behaviour resulted in an expansion of the themes and subjects of literature. Dreams, visions, the supernatural, madness, the insights and experiences of childhood—all these become serious subjects of literature. The treatment of people's lives in geographically remote lands in poems like Byron's 'Childe Harold', the imaginative reconstruction of past history in Scott were all fruits of the Romantic liberation of Imagination.

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### 1.2.3. Romantic Theory of Poetry

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John Stuart Mill, the English philosopher, political economist and civil servant whose ideas of liberty profoundly influenced the Romantic movement, in his *Thoughts on Poetry and its Variations*, stated that 'Poetry is the thought and the words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself'. Wordsworth, taking a clue from this thought process, developed his own theory of poetry which was published as the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads*. You will read this in detail in Module 4 Unit 1 of this paper. Two remarkable statements of Wordsworth which can be considered as the foundation stone of Romantic poetry are: '**All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling**' and poetry '**takes its origin from the emotion recollected in tranquillity**'. According to Wordsworth, being inspired is essential for writing a poem and this inspiration helps a poet to bring forth his ideas spontaneously and create poetry of great order. This stress on spontaneity is in sharp contrast to the basic tenets of Neoclassicism. Wordsworth also spoke about the language of poetry in the *Preface*. He said that as far as possible, he had tried to write poetry in a selection of language really used by men. Although Coleridge refuted many of Wordsworth's views about the language of poetry, the opinion shows how the Romantics were going beyond the limits set by neoclassical poetry. From the observations of the other Romantics too, for example from Coleridge's essays in *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* or Keats's letters a new and different view of poetry and the poet emerges in the early nineteenth century.

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### 1.2.4. The Romantic Poets

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To begin a discussion about the Romantic poets it becomes imperative to talk about **William Wordsworth** at the very beginning because he was not only a major poet of the Romantic age but also its most important theoretician. The charm of Wordsworth's poems lies in the fact that they give to the so-called mundane or even mean subjects a newness, vividness and dignity. Wordsworth was always fascinated by

the simple trivial things and the beauties of nature present in the countryside or amongst the common people. His delineation of human nature and the philosophical approach to life create such a great impact because they are marked by a penetrating simplicity. His 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' are brilliant examples of the mystical relationship between nature and human soul. These poems also deal with the concept of Pantheism, that is, an awareness of the benign presence of the Omnipotent in all the tiny aspects of nature. The poems are touched by the spiritual bliss attained by humanity by gaining in this awareness of the presence of divinity in all things perceptible. Another remarkable feature of Wordsworth's poems was his use of a language which was very unlike neoclassical poetic language. Wordsworth's claim that he was using the language of the common man was not, as Coleridge pointed out and as later critics have corroborated, not strictly correct. But certainly, in comparison with the formality and frequent artificiality of much neoclassical poetry, his poems are marked by simplicity and a directness that goes to the heart. Sometimes, his conscious attempt to write in the ordinary, everyday language spoken by humdrum humanity resulted in bad poems, for example, 'The Thorn' in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

In the year 1793 Wordsworth's poems were first published in the collections *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. The year 1795 was a significant year in Wordsworth's life because this was the year in which he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge with whom he became a close friend) and the result of this was the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), one of the seminal works in English Romantic movement. This volume did not contain the names of Wordsworth or Coleridge as authors. Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' were included in this volume. The second edition which was published in 1800 listed only Wordsworth as the author and included a preface to the poems. In the preface of the 1802 edition Wordsworth elaborates on the elements of a new kind of verse based on the language spoken by common men and also states his definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. The final edition was published in 1805. Wordsworth's philosophical inclination, particularly in his works like *The Prelude* and 'Tintern Abbey', has been the source of much critical discussions. Wordsworth's poems treat the seminal issues of the Romantic Revival: love of nature, belief in the healing powers of nature. a holistic view of the relationship of man and the world, liberty, dignity of the common man, the poet's individual sensibility and its creative expression in poetry. He shows a surprising awareness of the problems of the changing social situation. We find in his poems themes

like the transition from agrarian to urban life, the decay of a close-knit rural community and its effect on the individual, the dangers to the individual from an industrial, technological society. These give to his poems a living relevance for us.

### **William Wordsworth**

**William Wordsworth was one of the major English Romantic poets who, along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, played a major role in initiating the Romantic Age in English literature with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads***

**Born: April 7, 1770, Cockermouth, United Kingdom**

**Died: April 23, 1850, Cumberland, United Kingdom**

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** is mainly remembered for the depiction of exotic, strange and unreal events and incidents in poetry. He portrayed the mysterious in the more famous of his poems. 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' is an excellent example of this kind. Another characteristic of Coleridge's poetry is his love for the distant in time and place and that is brilliantly projected in his poems 'Kubla Khan' and 'Christabel'. This love for the past brings Coleridge close to the extravagance and splendour depicted by the Elizabethans. He, much like Wordsworth, was against the spirit of the eighteenth century neoclassical poetry and believed in the immediacy of the sensation. Coleridge's Conversational Poems like 'The Eolian Harp' (1795), 'Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement' (1795), 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison' (1797), 'Frost at Midnight' (1798) are regarded by many critics as Coleridge's finest verses where blank verse has been employed with utmost skill and expertise.

Coleridge's main contribution to the Romantic Movement was to initiate a reaction against the mechanistic psychology of the eighteenth century. He revived the older tradition of Platonism and introduced the new German idealistic philosophy to England. His major poems explore the unconscious workings of the mind, what he called 'the terra incognita of our nature'. You will find this in the poems we have named above. He did not claim the prophet's status for poets as Blake, Wordsworth and Shelley do. His poems present the quintessence of Romanticism in two ways. First, he captures the strange magic of the supernatural in a way unequalled by any other poet; second, his poems can convey with a remarkable intimacy his personal feelings and circumstances, his self-doubts, his difficulties, his hopes and his fears which establish a close bond

between the poet and the reader. We give below a few lines from his poem, 'This Lime-Tree Bower', *My Prison*, addressed to his friend Charles Lamb

. . . and sometimes  
'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,  
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate  
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.

Another major contribution of Coleridge to the field of poetry was his literary criticism. In the essays of the *Biographia Literaria* He was an extraordinarily talented person. Because of personal problems and his opium addiction his poetic output was fragmentary but more than any other of the Romantics he was responsible for bringing about a revolution in literary thought that gave primacy to imagination as the sovereign creative power. He made the now famous differentiation between 'fancy' and 'imagination' and between 'primary imagination' and 'secondary imagination'. He defined 'fancy' as "a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space". Coleridge seems to consider 'fancy' something like the eighteenth century concept of 'wit'. 'Imagination' on the other hand he calls "the shaping and modifying power". 'Primary imagination' was perception through the senses. 'Secondary imagination' was the faculty of poetic vision. He took from the German Romantics the concept of poetry as an independent organic growth. He was primarily responsible for re-establishing the Elizabethans' literary reputation and enthroning Shakespeare as the greatest creative genius. A Shakespeare play, he said, grows from within, like a tree does.

### **Samuel Taylor Coleridge**

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a famous English poet, literary critic and philosopher who, along with his friend William Wordsworth, can be considered to be the pioneer of the Romantic Movement in England. He was also one of the Lake Poets.**

**Born: October 21, 1772, Ottery St Mary, United Kingdom**

**Died: July 25, 1834, Highgate, United Kingdom**

Another poet who had immense admiration for the distant past was **Sir Walter Scott**. He also possessed deep love for his native country, Scotland, and composed several narrative poems highlighting the virtuous and vigorous lives of the simple folks of his

country in the past before they lost the simplicity due to the advent of the modern civilization. His poems reflect the poet's interest in the ancient ballads of his land. His imagination was fed by fairy tales oriental and Gothic romances and the folklore and ballads of the Scottish Highlands. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, published in 1805, was immensely popular with the reading public. *The Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion* are other reputed works of Scott. He was most at home in the surroundings of Scotland and when he chose backgrounds and stories outside Scotland, was not very successful. *Rokeby*, set in Yorkshire or *The Vision of Don Roderick*, about the last of the Goths, were not popular. Scott was not an innovator so far as the language of poetry was concerned. He wrote mainly in rimed octosyllables, using variations of the ballad metre. His characterisation was not subtle, but he had great narrative power.

### Walter Scott

**Sir Walter Scott, 1st Baronet, FRSE was primarily reputed as a Scottish historical novelist. He was also a playwright and poet. Scott was the first English-language author who acquired a truly international fame in his lifetime.**

**Born: August 15, 1771, Edinburgh, United Kingdom**

**Died: September 21, 1832, Abbotsford House, United Kingdom**

A poet who deserves mention along with Wordsworth and Coleridge as an early Romantic is **Robert Southey**. Southey is a forgotten poet now but in the early 19<sup>th</sup>. century he enjoyed a fairly high reputation and was even nominated poet laureate long before Wordsworth. Unfortunately for him, his more ambitious work is hardly ever read now, and in fact, is not very readable. But some of his shorter poems are fairly popular anthology pieces. Southey was a close friend of both Wordsworth and Coleridge and the latter was also his brother-in-law. He was generally included with them as one of the lake poets. But Southey's poetry is closer in spirit and style to the poetry of Scott than to Wordsworth's. In fact, he did not agree with Wordsworth's views about the subject and language of poetry. One of the leading romantic critics of the next generation, Thomas De Quincey, in his assessment presents Southey as very different from and much inferior to either Wordsworth or Coleridge. You will read more on this in Module 4 Unit 3 of this paper.

Like his more illustrious friend, Southey also was a radical and an ardent admirer of the revolutionary spirit. Like Wordsworth he too became a conservative later on. In fact, he

became so pro-establishment that he virulently attacked those writers who dared oppose or criticise the government. This drew down harsh scorn on him from later writers like Byron and Hazlitt. From the pieces written in his radical youth we may mention *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), *Joan of Arc* (1796), and a two-act drama, *Wat Tyler*. In later years he wrote a number of long epic poems in the romantic vein: *Thalaba* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814), *A Tale of Paraguay* (1825). The exotic locales and picturesque details pleased his contemporaries. But they lack the high imagination of Coleridge or Keats or the passion of Byron. Moreover, his style of versification is careful but pedestrian. He wrote both rhymed and unrhymed verse and it was from the unrhymed Pindaric verse of *Thalaba* that Shelley borrowed the irregular metre of *Queen Mab*. His works as a poet laureate are pretty bad. One poem, ‘A Vision of Judgment’ (1821) written on the death of king George III, in which he depicts the late king being gloriously received in heaven is only remembered because Byron wrote a brilliant parody of it. His early ballad-like pieces like *The Old Woman of Berkeley*, *St. Michael’s Chair*, *The Devil’s Walk* however have an attractive racy narrative style. He had a touch of humour which these poems show, but which is unfortunately absent in the longer poems. We have put here below a few lines from his very well-known early anti-war poem, ‘After Blenheim’ (1796). You may find the full poem in most anthologies. The poem shows how famous battles are meaningless, they only result in the deaths of thousands of common men. An old man tells his grandchildren of the great victory of the British forces under the Duke of Marlborough but has no answer for the persistent question of his little grandson.

“But what good came of it at last?”

Quoth little Peterkin :—

“Why, that I cannot tell”, said he,

“But ‘twas a famous victory”.

### Robert Southey

**A contemporary of the earlier poets, Southey is remembered in the capacities of a poet, historian, biographer and essayist. He was Poet Laureate for 30 years from 1813 to his death in 1843. His life resembles Wordsworth in much of his beliefs, and must be acknowledged as a critical theoretician of Romantic poetry.**

**Born : August 12, 1774, Bristol**

**Died : March 21, 1843, London**

A period of time separates the second generation of romantic poets from the first. The second group includes **Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats**.

**Byron** was different from his other two contemporaries because of his satirical bent of writing and a penetratingly strong sense of social realism. His poems like *Don Juan* captured the actions and feelings of great minds trapped in this trivial and petty world. *Don Juan*, a poem of seventeen cantos, is considered Byron's magnum opus and is often regarded as the epic of its time. This work has reflections of the contemporary world at multiple levels- political, social, ideological and literary. Byron's poems are marked by cynicism and irony. He was probably the only poet among the Romantics who had a deep regard for Pope. Byron despised Wordsworth for his moral solemnity and had no taste for either the poetry of Shelley, who was his friend or of Keats. Nevertheless his poetry is fundamentally Romantic in the way he asserts his individuality in it. His characters are all out of the ordinary: Childe Roland, the restless wanderer, Manfred, a mysterious figure of guilt and sorrow. He and Blake are the two Romantics who question and challenge the values of safety and prudence. Byron always sympathises with the impudent and the adventurous including himself. *Childe Harold; 's Pilgrimage* and *The Isles of Greece* show his remarkable historical imagination, interweaving the past with the present.

Byron, like Scott, was immensely popular on the Continent and influenced French and German poets. His personal life was highly colourful, tinged with scandals, and the term 'Byronic' came to mean a person who was adventurous, daring, passionate, moody and cynical.

### **George Gordon Byron**

**George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron, later George Gordon Noel, 6th Baron Byron, FRS, popularly known as Lord Byron, was a reputed English poet and one of the important contributors to the Romantic movement. He died in Greece, where he was aiding the Greek freedom fighters in their struggle against Turkey.**

**Born: January 22, 1788, Dover, United Kingdom**

**Died: April 19, 1824, Missolonghi, Greece**

**Percy Bysshe Shelley**, the great social revolutionary of his time was closely related to the other Romantics as far as their seriousness of temperament was concerned.

Shelley's poems are centred on two primary ideas. He had the firm conviction that the torture inflicted by rulers, the shackles of customs and the fetters laid down by superstitions are the chief enemies of human beings and it is the inherent goodness of human beings that alone has the potential to eradicate all sorts of evil influences from this world and bring in an era of unconditional and pure love. *Prometheus Unbound*, a verse drama, illustrates these features Shelleyan poetry in an extensive way. Shelley's love for the ideal and his imaginative flight to give shape to abstractions find poignant expression in his poems like 'To a Skylark' and 'Ode to the West Wind'. He is considered to be one of the finest lyric poets in the entire range of English literature.

Shelley possessed the romantic tendency of focussing on his individual self to an extraordinary extent. The strong self-absorption which is one of the reasons for the twentieth century literary critics' disparagement of Shelley, can be found in the shorter lyrics as well in longer poems like *Adonais*, an elegy written on the death of Keats. At the same time, in *Alastor*, he shows his awareness of the problem of this self-absorption. *Alastor* depicts the tragic fate of those who indulge in self-centred seclusion. His voluminous readings in philosophy, science, religion, mythology and his political sympathies often clog up his poetry. He loved moving aspects of nature, like clouds, winds, waterfalls, storms, and his poetry leaves us with the impression of an ever-changing sensibility confronting a changing world. It was the lack of clarity of his poetry, the constant attempt to burden it with his theories which prompted Keats to tell him to curb his magnanimity, be more of an artist and load every rift of his poem with ore.

**Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the major English Romantic poets. He is considered to be one of the finest lyric poets in the English language.**

**Born: August 4, 1792, Horsham, United Kingdom**

**Died: July 8, 1822, Lerici, Italy**

**John Keats's** short life and shorter poetic career were totally dedicated to poetry. Keats was probably the best of the Romantics in his capacity for expressing immediate sensation in his poems. His poems can be described as responses to sensuous impressions. A brilliantly receptive writer, unfortunately because of his premature death, his exquisite and powerful genius could not be fully realised. Some of his best poems like *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode to a Nightingale' were all composed during the fag end of his life. It is unfortunate that Keats' poems were not appreciated by critics during his lifetime. However, after his death, his reputation grew to such an extent that by the end of the nineteenth century he turned into one of the most popular and beloved among the English poets

Keats possessed a unique habit of mind, which was characterised by a marvellous sense of the particular, and a scrupulous fidelity the object of attention, whether it was a landscape or a feeling He is the best exemplar of the Romantic organic idea of poetry. Poetry, he said, ‘should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subject’. He did reach this objective in his best odes. While his early poems like ‘Sleep and Poetry’ and *Endymion* are full of a superabundance of sensuous details, the odes show a growing discipline, and in the ode ‘To Autumn’ he creates a perfect piece, form and meaning coalescing seamlessly, and the descriptive word-picture of autumn becomes the message and meaning of the poem .

**John Keats was one of the leading English Romantic poets. He was a key figure amongst the second generation of Romantic poets along with Lord Byron and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Though his work was published only four years before his death he is one of the most important poets of the Romantic era.**

**Born: October 31, 1795, Moorgate, City of London, United Kingdom**

**Died: February 23, 1821, Rome, Italy**

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### 1.2.5. Summing Up

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- The Romantic era in England stretches tentatively from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century. This period produced some of the most eminent and influential poets whose penetrating emotions and philosophical insight created magic in their writings and created real masterpieces in the entire range of English literature.
- Their unconditional love for nature, employment of passionate language, compassion for humanity, depiction of the so-called unheroic characters in the poems were certain salient features of the Romantic writers.
- This age always laid more emphasis on emotion than reason, liberty and emancipation than artificiality and norms.
- William Wordsworth was not only one major poet of the Romantic age but also its most important theoretician.
- Coleridge excelled in the depiction of exotic, strange and unreal events and incidents.

- Another poet who had immense admiration for the distant was Sir Walter Scott.
- Another group of romantics who were revolutionary in spirit throughout their poetic careers is known as the second generation of Romantic poets. This group includes Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats.

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## 1.2.6. Comprehension Exercises

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### Long questions- 20 marks

1. Who were the Precursors of Romanticism? Why were they called so?
2. Name the major Romantic Poets. Discuss their contribution to Romantic poetry with special reference to any three of them.
3. Discuss some of the ways in which the Pre-Romantics deviated from neo-classical literary norms.
4. Analyse the socio-political background of the Romantic revival

### Mid-length questions- 12 marks

1. Discuss briefly Wordsworth's contribution to the Romantic theory of poetry.
2. In which year was *Lyrical Ballads* first published? What were the changes incorporated in the subsequent editions?
3. Discuss, with examples, some of the features of 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic poetry.
4. What were the chief features of the poetry of Keats?
5. What was Byron's contribution to the Romantic Movement?
6. Discuss Coleridge as a Romantic poet and critic.
7. Comment on Shelley as a Romantic poet.

### Short Questions-6 marks

1. Mention two major features of neo-classical literature.
2. Comment on the impact of the French Revolution on the Romantic Movement.
3. How did Percy and Chatterton influence the Romantics?
4. Assess Sir Walter Scott as a poet.

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### **1.2.7. Suggested Reading**

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Bush, Douglas. *English Poets*

Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*.

Ford, Boris, ed. *From Blake to Byron: The New Pelican Guide to English Literature*

Herford, C.H. *The Age of Wordsworth*

Hough, Graham. *The Romantic Poets*

Selincourt, Aubrey de. *Six Great Poets*.

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## Unit - 3 □ Romantic Prose

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### Structure

#### 1.3.0: Introduction

#### 1.3.1: The Romantic Essay

#### 1.3.2: Characteristics of the Romantic Essay

##### 1.3.2a: Charles Lamb

##### 1.3.2b: Thomas De Quincey

##### 1.3.2c: William Hazlitt

#### 1.3.3: The Romantic Novel

##### 1.3.3a: Jane Austen

##### 1.3.3b: Walter Scott and the Historical Novel

#### 1.3.4: Miscellaneous Writers

#### 1.3.5: Romantic Literary Criticism

##### 1.3.5a: Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

##### 1.3.5b: Coleridge's views on Imagination

##### 1.3.5c: Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*

#### 1.3.6: Summing Up

#### 1.3.7: Comprehension Exercises

#### 1.3.8: Suggested Reading

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### 1.3.0. Introduction

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In this unit, we are going to discuss Romantic Prose with you. There will be three distinct sections in this unit. In Section- I, we shall take a look at the Romantic essay. Section - II will deal with the Romantic novel. Section– III will provide an analysis of Romantic literary criticism.

### 1.3.1. The Romantic Essay

In your earlier Papers you have seen the rise and development of the essay form in the Elizabethan period and the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Romantic essay developed into a distinct literary genre which did not merely follow the tradition of the eighteenth century Periodical essays, written by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and others. It would be interesting to note how the features of Romanticism that have been detailed in Unit 1 make themselves evident in this literary genre. At the outset of our discussion, we shall briefly enumerate the characteristics of the Romantic essay and then we shall discuss individual essayists and their contributions.

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### 1.3.2. Characteristics of the Romantic Essay

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- The Romantic essay was subjective and autobiographical.
- It explored the psychological state of the essayist.
- Like Romantic poetry, the romantic essay too was marked by spontaneity, freedom of thought and intense humanism.
- Essays of the period were of different kinds. Some essays were confessional. Some were in the form of literary reviews.
- The style of the essays was informal, chatty and conversational.
- The germs of the essays were deeply embedded in the development of contemporary periodicals and magazines such as *The Edinburgh Review*, *Critical Journal*, *The London Magazine* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.
- Like the Romantic poets, the essayists revolted strongly against the eighteenth-century conventions. They developed new styles and wrote on a wider range of topics. Instead of describing the leisure pursuits of the upper and middle classes, these essayists wrote about the lives of clerks, chimney-sweepers and prize-fighters.

Let us now have a look at the major essayists of the period:

#### 1.3.2a. Charles Lamb (1775-1834):

The works of Charles Lamb are usually divided into three periods. First, there are his early literary efforts, including the poems signed "C.L." in Coleridge's *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), his romance *Rosamund Gray* (1798); his poetical drama *John Woodvil*

(1802) and different other works in prose and poetry. The second period was largely devoted to literary criticism. In this period, he wrote *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) in collaboration with his sister, Mary Lamb. His *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary With Shakespeare* appeared in 1808. The third and final period includes Lamb's personal essays, which are collected together in his *Essays of Elia* (1823), and his *Last Essays of Elia* (1833). 'Dream Children: A Reverie', 'The Superannuated Man', 'Old China', 'Praise of Chimney Sweepers' are some of his memorable essays.

The style of all his essays is gentle, old-fashioned, and attractive but has a strong element of sentimentalism. His essays are informal, conversational, chatty and personal. These are characterized by the blend of fact and fiction, humour and pathos, use of Latinized, old quaint expressions etc. Lamb was especially fond of old writers, and borrowed from the style of Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* and from Sir Thomas Browne's *Religio Medici* and also from the early Elizabethan dramatists.

Lamb has enjoyed very high literary reputation up to the mid- 20<sup>th</sup> century. To modern taste his essays might appear rather thin. There is a strong amount of self-idealisation in his personal essays, as you will find when you read 'Dream Children' or 'The Superannuated Man'. There are superficial resemblances to Addison's humour in 'Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist', but he lacks Addison's sharp wit. The little touches of nature love remind us that he was a close friend of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

### **1.3.2b. Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859):**

In De Quincey the romantic element is even more prominent than in Charles Lamb, not only in his literary and critical work, but also in his erratic and imaginative life. His works may be divided into two broad categories. The first category encompasses his numerous critical articles, and the second, his autobiographical sketches.

From a literary perspective, the most illuminating of De Quincey's critical works is his *Literary Reminiscences (of the English Lake Poets)*. It contains brilliant appreciations of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats, Hazlitt and Landor, as well as some interesting studies of the literary figures of the preceding age. *On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth* (1823) and *On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts* (1827) are among the most remarkable of his long essays. These works have never been surpassed in their psychological and imaginative acuity. The first work reveals his critical genius while the second his grotesque and black humour. Among others, special mention may be made of his *Letters to a young man* (1823), *Joan of Arc* (1847), *The Revolt of the Tartars* (1840), and *The English Mail Coach* (1849).

Of De Quincey's autobiographical sketches, the best known is his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821). This is only partly a record of opium dreams, and its chief interest lies in glimpse it gives us of De Quincey's own life and wanderings. Among other works, mention should be made of *Suspiria de Profundis* (1845), which is primarily a record of gloomy and terrible dreams generated by opiates. The most engrossing parts of *Suspiria de Profundis* are those in which we are brought face to face with the strange feminine creations *Levana*, *Madonna*, *Our Lady of Sighs*, and *Our Lady of Darkness* and these show De Quincey's marvelous insight into dreams. *Autobiographical Sketches* completes the revelation of the author's own life and it contains a series of nearly thirty articles which he collected in 1853. Among his miscellaneous works are his novel *Klosterheim Logic of Political Economy*, *the Essays on style and Rhetoric*, *Philosophy of Herodotus*, and his articles on Goethe, Pope, Schiller, and Shakespeare which he contributed to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. These miscellaneous writings quite clearly demonstrate his wide range of subjects.

De Quincey's style is mostly diffuse and digressive. He always deviates from the main concern of his narrative and often indulges in triviality, which often makes him stop in the midst of a marvelous paragraph to make some light comment or observation. He displays a wide range of knowledge though it is often flawed and inaccurate. He was deeply influenced by the Seventeenth-century writers, but he definitely attempted to create a new style, combining the best elements of prose and poetry. Consequently, his prose works are often, like those of Milton, more imaginative and melodious than some kinds of poetry. He also wrote widely on the nature of dreams, and anticipates modern psychological studies in relation to childhood experience and imaginative creation. He is a link between the Romantics, with his *Reflection of the Lake Poets*, dating from the mid-1830s, and the modern sensibility of such figures as Baudelaire in France and Edgar Allan Poe in America.

### **1.3.2c. William Hazlitt (1778-1830):**

His earliest writings consisted of miscellaneous philosophical and political works. He is, with Coleridge, the foremost literary critic of the age. Both men recognized the importance of journals in disseminating information and in reflecting on contemporary issues, and both successfully responded to, and profitably indulged, the growing metropolitan taste for public lectures. His reputation chiefly rests on the lectures and essays on literary and general subjects all published between 1817 and 1825. Published in 21 volumes, many of the essays are on topics which may no longer interest us. But

there is a body of literary and social criticism which has stood the test of time. His tastes were wide ranging. He was interested in literature, politics, painting and philosophy and he pursued studies in all these areas. He was an early pioneer in arousing popular interest in Shakespeare. He was not an inspired literary critic like Coleridge but he gave the common reader sensible guidance. *My First Acquaintance with Poets* (1823) is a delightful essay, conveying the pleasure and encouragement he received on meeting Wordsworth and Coleridge. But his judgments on the older poets are always very balanced. The main collections of his lectures are *Characters of Shakespeare's plays* (1817, 1818), *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818, 1819), *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), and *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820). *The Political Essays* (1819) belonging to this period is probably the most neglected of his first-rate books.

The best known part of Hazlitt's work is the large mass of miscellaneous essays contributed to different magazines and they were included in such familiar volumes as *The Round Table* (1817), *Table-Talk* (1821-22), and *The Plain Speaker* (1826) – the last two being his first collections. Hazlitt is an equally sharp and original critic of his literary and political contemporaries in the essays published as *The Spirit of the Age* in 1825. In this attempt to examine aspects of the *Zeitgeist* of a period that Hazlitt himself sees as “an age of talkers, and not of doers”, he deals with twenty-five prominent politicians, thinkers, and writers.

Hazlitt's writings are remarkable for their fearless expression of an honest and individual opinion, and, while he lacks the learned critical apparatus of many modern critics, he is unsurpassed in his ability to communicate his own enjoyment, and in his gift for evoking unnoticed beauties. His judgments are based on his emotional reactions rather than on objectively applied principles. The catholicity of his taste embraces almost every major English writer from Chaucer to his own day, most of them treated with a discrimination and sympathetic insight which are not blunted by his obvious enthusiasm. Hazlitt's prose style strongly contrasts with the elaborate orchestration of the complex sentence and the magic of the delicate word traceable in the writings of De Quincey. His brief and abrupt sentences have the vigour and directness which his views demand. His lectures have a manly simplicity, and something of the looseness of organization which is a typical characteristic of good conversation. His diction is always pure and his expression is always concise.

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### 1.3.3. The Romantic Novel

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In this section we are going to discuss the history of the Romantic novel, its different forms and two major writers Jane Austen and Sir Walter Scott. Although chronologically Scott comes earlier, we are going to look at Austen first, because, in our view, she is very close to the tradition of the eighteenth century novel.

#### 1.3.3a. Jane Austen (1775-1817):

Jane Austen is one of the greatest novelists in English. She began writing light fiction, partially parodying earlier writers' works, especially the Gothic romances, before publishing six novels between 1811 and 1818. One of the finest chronicles of English country life and the social mores of the country squire and his family, Austen's novels, while enjoying a steady market and literary reputation in England, present to us a very interesting problem. She is the one major English novelist who has been rather neglected by European critics and who, unlike Scott or Dickens, has not had any impact on the European novel. Later women novelists have been sharply divided over her; Charlotte Bronte denouncing her as cold and superficial, George Eliot praising her subtly nuanced writing. She explored themes of money, marriage, property, the status of women, the dysfunctional nature of the English village and the decline of the gentry. Her description of festivities, parties, marriage alliances, the countryside and clergy are unsurpassed examinations of English social life at a particular point of time

We began by telling you that Austen's novels, though they were written in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are temperamentally akin to the eighteenth century novel. Not only is her prose closely modelled on the classical balance and restraint of the eighteenth century prose writers, the social scene she depicts has, as Arnold Kettle has said, "an atmosphere of stability and security and also a certain complacent shortsightedness". Austen's own times were neither stable nor secure in the old sense. The French Revolution had already challenged the old established hegemony of the landed aristocracy. The Industrial Revolution was on the way and a new powerful class—the industrial capitalists were slowly coming up. Jane Austen was not impervious to the changes. There are subtle references to the changes that seeped in and criticism of the shortcomings of the social status quo but the social clashes lead to accommodation of interest and compromise. In a novel like *Emma*, Jane Fairfax's nightmare view of a governess's job as 'white slavery' is resolved by the timely death of Frank Churchill's aunt; in *Mansfield Park*, the West Indian plantation of Sir Thomas Bertram remains remote, while Mansfield Park itself is

foregrounded as a symbol of English values. The major novelists of the next generation onwards —the Bronte sisters, Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, Thackeray, George Eliot would focus on different forms of rebellion, both individual and social.

The chronology of Austen's novels is not easy to follow, because her works were not published in their order of composition. Her second published novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) is the most widely read of her novels. It combines a love story with the theme of money, marriage, property and family fortunes. It is a story of sisters and their marriages. The novel chiefly explores the journey of Darcy and Elizabeth from a state of ignorance to a state of enlightenment. Darcy's pride and Elizabeth's prejudice act as obstacles in their relationship but, with misunderstandings resolved, and maturity of character achieved, the novel finds a happy ending. The Elizabeth-Darcy love story is treated with sparkling wit and humour and delicate observations on what marriage involves for a woman.

*Sense and Sensibility* (1811) was the first of Austen's major novels in order of publication, and it shows the same general pattern. The novel contrasts the two states of reason and emotion in two sisters, the highly self-controlled Elinor and the impulsive Marianne. While Elinor chooses to be restrained in her demonstration of affection for Edward Ferrars, Marianne is passionately open about her love for Willoughby. The vicissitudes of the sisters' love life and the debate between sense and sensibility constitutes the plot of the novel. *Northanger Abbey* (1818), published after her death, was an earlier composition. The novel is a marvelous burlesque of the Radcliffian and Gothic horror tradition which was very popular at that time. Three other novels, *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), and *Persuasion* (1818) appeared in quick succession. *Mansfield Park*, one of Austen's more ambitious novels, takes for its theme the moral revival of a family and culture. The Crawfords represent, in Austen's view, all that is wrong with the English gentry – rivalry, dysfunctional marriages, hypocrisies, petty jealousies, extravagances and immorality. Fanny Price is morally, ethically and intellectually superior to anybody else. The novel is Austen's most sustained exploration of property and landscape in the English country society.

*Emma* is different from the other novels in having a heroine who is not in a financially disadvantageous position. The heroine is a wealthy heiress conscious of her social role, privileges and obligations. Emma's abuse of her social power, especially at the cost of her social inferiors, is the subject of Austen's attack. Her intervention in the alliances between various couples (Harriet and Martin, Harriet and Elton, Jane and Frank) and finally her discovery that she is in love with Knightly (with whom Harriet has fallen in

love) is the subject of some brilliant irony and characterization. Austen's insight into and the inner workings of the minds of the people is certainly one of the finest in English Literature. Persuasion emphasizes the importance of the process of learning and judging through which all her heroines pass. Anne Eliot is not only Austen's most astute literary critic, she is also her most discriminating woman character, the one whose intelligence most effectively balances the merits of conflicting opinions, ideas, impressions and feelings.

Austen's skillfully constructed plots are severely unromantic. Life in her novels is governed by an easy decorum, and moments of fierce passion, or even deep emotion, never occur. Her characters are developed with minuteness and accuracy. They are ordinary people, but are convincingly alive. Her characters are not types, but individuals. Her method of character portrayal is based on acute observation and a quiet but incisive irony. Her male characters, both heroes and villains, have a certain family likeness. The villains are handsome, sexually attractive and social climbers, her heroes, mainly from the landowning gentry are disciplined and strongly aware of their social and familial duties. Her female characters are almost unexpected in perfection of finish. Women characters in her novels are intelligent, witty, vivacious, sparkling and resourceful and they are comparable to women characters of William Shakespeare.

### **1.3.3b. Walter Scott and the Historical Novel**

Whereas Jane Austen deliberately limited her area of concern, Sir Walter Scott (1771—1832) opened up the novel to the full panorama of revolution, dissent, rebellion and social change. Having written verse romances with great success for several years, he published his first novel only in 1814, at the very end of the Napoleonic wars when Britain was triumphant. Equally significantly, the settings of his novels are in the past, rather than the immediate and highly troubled present. Scott wrote the largest selling historical romances of his time and has remained one of the most popular authors for the reading public well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He made a great impact on the European novel, his influence stretching from Tolstoy to Alexander Dumas. He wrote about the transformation in Scottish society from the feudal-agrarian to the urban-rural. His tales revolved around the themes of Scottish nationalism, the Civil War, class and feudal issues in society as well as the Jacobite Rebellions. His novels combined realistic descriptions with poetic representations. The combination of historical detail with imaginative plots and evolved symbolism made for complex narratives laced with fact and fiction. Scott adopted the medieval romance tradition of heroic narratives: the hero's quest, his adventures, themes of social status, courage, chivalry and virtue. That was his way of

escape from the changes he disliked in his own society. In most cases however, he substituted gentry or middle-class heroes for the knights of medieval romances. After the Napoleonic wars, Britain entered a time of severe social unrest; of high unemployment, of widening gaps between the rich and the poor, employers and workers, upper, middle and lower classes. These contemporary concerns, vividly enunciated by writers from the poet Shelley to the social campaigner William Cobbett, are not directly present in Scott's works. But at the same time, like all the other Romantic writers, he hated the new industrial –commercial society that was coming up, not because, like the young Wordsworth or like Shelley, he believed in equality, but because it was destroying the old social ties, the paternalistic relation of landowners and peasantry.

His great achievement was the re-creation of the historical novel. In their attempts to separate the novel as a species of realistic narrative from the non-realism of the medieval romance, early novelists had either used historical material or had claimed fictional narratives to be histories. The European Enlightenment and The Scottish Enlightenment in Scott's own home country has aroused a renewed interest in history and a more comprehensive understanding of the past as a shaping force for the present. This interest provided the inspiration for Scott's historical novels. His own antiquarian interests and his early upbringing in the Highlands, listening to the recapitulation of history in the Border ballads, further deepened his interest in history as a living, vital spirit. He was the ideal man to revitalize history in his novels in a way that can only be compared with Shakespeare's history plays.

Scott's first great success was *Waverley* (1814), set in the turbulent years of Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite Rebellion. *Guy Mannering* (1815) is a social novel, exploring the eroding life of the Scottish gentry, Scottish nostalgia for an old way of life, under threat from modernizing methods in the age of improvement comes through very clearly in this novel. In *The Antiquary* (1816) he returned to the same theme, though he now situated it within the Jacobin versus Anti-Jacobin tensions of the 1790s. His next major work was *Old Mortality* (1816), a novel set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and explored the religious tensions of the 1650s. *Rob Roy* (1817) was set in the Scottish rebellion of 1715 and dealt with the life of the Scottish hero Rob Roy MacGregor, and the Jacobite Rising of 1715. *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818) takes for its background the Porteous riots of 1736 and locates the tale of Davie Deans, Jeanie Deans and Effie Deans on either side of the 1707 Act of Union between England and Scotland. *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) was a novel which was set against the backdrop of immediate aftermath of the Act of Union. The novel is an excellent study in revenge theme.

Scott reverted to English history with his best-known *novel Ivanhoe* (1819—20). Scott's nostalgic feeling for romance and chivalry of the medieval and early modern world was manifested in *Tales of the Crusaders* (1825), *The Talisman* (1825) and *The Betrothed* (1825). *Woodstock* (1826) was set in the traumatic years of England's regicide and civil war, dealing with Charles II 's escape during the Commonwealth and his triumphal return in 1660. It was one of Scott's most sustained analyses of the corruption of court culture –plotting, dishonesty and seduction .Scott wrote other historical romances, but failed to achieve the narrative density of his early and middle work. *The Abbot*, *Kenilworth*, *The Monastery* and *The Pirate* were immensely popular at that time.

Scott's writings lack some of the more obvious traits of 19<sup>th</sup> century romanticism. He was not interested in nature, human beings came first for him. Nor does he use his poetry or his fiction for any expression of the self. He was a strong believer in common sense and disliked what he called "the parade of sentiment and feeling." But his interest in the past and love for romance are very romantic characteristics. Perhaps it is his broad wide ranging sympathy for the lower classes of Scottish peasantry which best reflects the spirit of the age in Scott's fiction. The social life his novels span range from royalty to rustic folk. *The Heart of Midlothian* or *Old Mortality* show great events affecting both high and low—the Duke of Argyll and Jeanie Deans or Claverhouse and the Headriggs. The novels derive their life from a sense of real people and real issues, from Scott's genuine ability to see grand events of history from the common peasantry's point of view and the Scots language dialogue they speak in his Scottish novels. Scott's Romanticism lies in using the colloquial language and not only including the common people, but seeing history through their eye.

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### 1.3.4. Miscellaneous Writers

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Apart from the leading essayists and novelists discussed already, there were numerous prose writers and novelists who substantially contributed to the growth of Romantic Prose. Among them mention may be made of **Mary Shelley**, wife of P. B. Shelley, who is best known as the author of *Frankenstein* (1818). This is a Gothic horror novel and also an early example of science fiction where Mary Shelley takes the outer format the tradition established in the late eighteenth century by Anne Radcliffe, William Beckford and Horace Walpole but goes far beyond the form, using it to explore the deepest recesses of human psychology, always stressing the macabre, the unusual and the fantastic and preferring the realities of the subjective imagination.

**Maria Edgeworth's** (1767-1849) writings are divided into three categories: short stories for children, such as *Simple Susan*, which were collected in *The Parent's Assistant* (1795-1800) and *Early Lessons* (1801-15); Irish tales, which include her best works, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *The Absentee* (1809), and *Ormond* (1817); and full length novels, such as *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806), *Patronage* (1814), and *Harrington* (1817).

**Fanny Burney** (1752-1840) was a prominent writer of sentimental fiction. Her novels are mostly heroine-centric and she followed the tradition of Samuel Richardson. Her most notable work is the epistolary novel *Evelina* (1778), subtitled, "A Young woman's Entrance into the world". *Cecilia* (1782), *Camilla* (1796) and *The Wanderer* (1814) provide explorations of women's psychological states. They all highlighted the absolute necessity of good conduct in girls, suggesting that later marital bliss depended on their perfect behavior in society during courtship. Jane Austen was influenced by her manner of exploring the problems of a young woman on the threshold of life. The title of *Pride and Prejudice* and also its theme are derived from *Cecilia*.

Among the writers of non-fiction **William Godwin** (1756-1836) is best known for his *Political Justice* (1793), a monumental polemical prose work. In this writing, he is a severe critic of all forms of exploitation and injustice. He also wrote *Caleb Williams* (1794), a socio-historical novel that adapted certain conventions and elements from the sentimental novel of the preceding age but is a very different kind of work, showing, in a concrete situation, the power of the privileged and the helplessness of the poor. Caleb, a servant knows the secret that his master is a murderer. The master, Falkland, pursues him implacably to destroy him Godwin anticipates the technique of the detective story. **Mary Wollstonecraft's** *Vindications of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is an inspirational feminist prose work which is immensely relevant even today. Her other work titled *The Wrongs of Woman* (1798) was a feminist response to Tom Paine's epoch-making *The Rights of Man*.

**Walter Savage Landor** (1775–1864): Though he was a prolific writer of both poetry and prose, it was through his prose writings that Landor became well-known, especially with the series of *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-1829) between literary and political personalities from all periods of European history. But the prose is linked to the verse by the control or "mastership" that Friedrich Nietzsche described as "its polite warfare with poetry." The dialogues are common representations of what Ezra Pound called "a whole culture," extending from Greece and Rome to the Enlightenment and Landor's own times. His long life span enabled him personally to influence Robert

Browning and Swinburne in the formation of a counter-tradition in nineteenth-century English poetry concerned with the difficult and adverse relaying of past culture—a tradition especially influential on Pound, Landor’s greatest advocate, for whom Landor was the most important English writer between Pope and Browning.

**Thomas Love Peacock** (1785–1866) in his “Essay on Fashionable Literature” analysed and critiqued his own age. This essay remained unfinished and was never published in Peacock’s lifetime. The part that survives represents the beginning of what probably would have been a full-scale attack aimed at exposing the many forms of dishonesty upon which Peacock felt periodical writing was based. The final part of the surviving fragment is devoted to Peacock’s rebuttal of an *Edinburgh Review* essay that had found fault, and very little else, in Coleridge’s *Christabel* (1816). Reviews and quarterlies of Peacock’s day represented, in his estimation, true enemies of truth and therefore irresistible targets. Peacock also wrote a number of novels, which are humourous and satirical, except for *Maid Marian* (1832), based on the Robin Hood legends and *The Misfortunes of Elphin* (1829) based on a Celtic legend. Peacock’s main satiric targets were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Shelley and a number of other contemporaries. The Romantics are the butt in *Nightmare Abbey* and *Melincourt*. In the latter, Wordsworth is Peter Paypaul Paperstamp, Southey is Feathernest, Shelley is Mr. Fortune. Coleridge is the butt in several books, as Mr Flosky, Mr. Panscope, etc.

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### 1.3.5. Romantic Literary Criticism

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In your previous Papers, you have seen how literary criticism in any age mirrors in a big way the prevalent tendencies in art and culture, broadly speaking. The Romantic period, as you have gathered by now, laid maximum stress on subjective perception of life, a broad appreciation of the value of liberty and emancipation in thought and action.

English literary criticism of the Romantic era is closely associated with the writings of William Wordsworth in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Modern critics disagree on whether the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge constituted a major break with the criticism of their predecessors or if it should more properly be characterised as a continuation of the aesthetic theories of seventeenth and eighteenth century German and English writers. In 1800, in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth expressed his famous proclamation about the nature of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.” With this statement, Wordsworth posited a very different view of poetry than

was standard at the time, shifting the center of attention from the work as a reflection or imitation of reality to the artist, and the artist's relationship to the work. Poetry would henceforth be considered an expressive rather than a mimetic art. Although the analogy of art as a mirror was still used, M. H. Abrams says that the early Romantics suggested that the mirror was turned inward to reflect the poet's state of mind, rather than outward to reflect external reality. William Hazlitt in his 'On Poetry in General' (1818) addressed the changes in this analogy "by combining the mirror with a lamp, in order to demonstrate that a poet reflects a world already bathed in an emotional light he has himself projected," according to Abrams.

Additionally, music replaced painting as the art form considered most like poetry by the Romantics. Abrams explains that the German writers of the 1790s considered music "to be the art most immediately expressive of spirit and emotion," and both Hazlitt and John Keble made similar connections between music and poetry in their critical writings. Samuel Taylor Coleridge contributed substantially to the development of Romantic literary criticism and theory by writing a number of critical documents or tracts such as *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* 1817, *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit* (essays) 1840. William Hazlitt wrote *On Poetry in General*, 1818, *The Spirit of the Age*, 1825. John Keats formulated some of the seminal and prominent aspects of Romantic literary theory and criticism and many of his theoretical pronouncements were made in his letters, written to different writers, friends, publishers and correspondents.

*A Defence of Poetry* is a critical document by P. B. Shelley, written in 1821 and first published posthumously in 1840 in *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments* by Edward Moxon in London. It consists of Shelley's famous claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". It was written in response to his friend Thomas Love Peacock's *The Four Ages of Poetry*, which had been published in 1820. Shelley wrote to the publishers Charles and James Ollier (who were also his own publishers): "I am enchanted with your *Literary Miscellany*, although the last article has excited my polemical faculties so violently that the moment I get rid of my ophthalmia, I mean to set about an answer to it.... It is very clever, but I think, very false." To Peacock Shelley wrote: "Your anathemas against poetry itself excited me to a sacred rage.... I had the greatest possible desire to break a lance with you ... in honour of my mistress Urania."

Many of the principles associated with early nineteenth-century English criticism were first articulated by late eighteenth-century German Romantics. Rene Wellek has documented the contributions of Friedrich Schiller, Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, F. W. J. Schelling, Novalis, and other important figures of the period. Novalis, for example, shared the English Romantics' belief that the poet was a member of a special breed, "exalted beyond any other human being." The literary reviews of the early nineteenth century, most notably the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review*, participated in the formulation of critical theory as well. Although earlier reviews were little more than advertisements for the books being considered, or "thinly concealed puff for booksellers' wares," in the words of Terry Eagleton, the change in reviewing style in the Romantic period was not much of an improvement. According to Eagleton: "Criticism was now explicitly, unabashedly political: the journals tended to select for review only those works on which they could loosely peg lengthy ideological pieces, and their literary judgements, [sic] buttressed by the authority of anonymity, were rigorously subordinated to their politics."

In addition to the primacy of the poet, the aesthetic theories associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular were severely critical of the "poetic diction" of earlier poets, which to the Romantics, was affected and artificial. They preferred, according to William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks "the primitive, the naive, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word." Wordsworth argued that there should be no difference between the language of prose and that of poetry, thus defending his use, within the *Lyrical Ballads*, of the everyday language of the middle and lower classes. Wimsatt and Brooks write that "Wordsworth's primitivism was part of a general reaction, setting in well before his own day, against the aristocratic side of neo-classicism." But where Wordsworth associated poetic diction with artifice and aristocracy and his own poetic language with nature and democracy, Coleridge looked upon the issue differently. "To Coleridge it seemed more like an issue between propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity. In effect he applied the classic norm of decorum."

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### **1.3.5a. Wordsworth: Preface to *Lyrical Ballads***

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The major points in Wordsworth's *Preface* are : a) his definition of poetry – '...all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling...' b) his opinion about the poet's characteristics—'poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man , who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply' c) the value of poetry; for

Wordsworth, various causes were “acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind” in his own time. He had in mind the steady progress of industrial capitalism and its dehumanising effect on society. He believed that the poet, in such predicament, could carry feeling and sensation into the human heart to re-humanise it d) his views on the language of poetry; after declaring that he had written the poems on ‘incidents and situations from common life’, he says he has ‘related or described them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men’. This has been a controversial claim and Coleridge was among the first to challenge. What Wordsworth tried to do in his declaration however was to show how, a selective language for poetry constricted the scope of poetry and reduced poetic language to clichés.

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### **1.3.5b. Coleridge’s views on Imagination**

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Coleridge’s critical theories differ from Wordsworth’s in so far as they are heavily grounded in theology. Sometimes, particularly in his later writings according to Timothy Corrigan, the theological overwhelms the literary. “What is most peculiar about his work during this period is the unusual extent to which he disregards the primary text and how completely his complex theological models and language usurp that text,” contends Corrigan.

The centre of Coleridge’s critical theory is his view of the creative imagination. He distinguishes between Fancy and Imagination,

“...fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being , according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning or...the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.”

The term Fancy he uses for the eighteenth century view of imagination, which was mechanical and associative. It does not transform the materials it deals with, but merely reproduces them. Imagination on the other hand, is essentially creative. He subdivides it into Primary and Secondary imagination. Primary Imagination is the living power of basic human perception, which enables us to identify and discriminate things and create order out of chaos. Secondary Imagination is the artistic imagination. . It is active and vital, projecting itself into the world of objective phenomena to bestow life to it, to make it responsive to man. It dissolves and diffuses in order to recreate. It reconciles opposites, unifies and synthesizes disparate elements.

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### 1.3.5c. Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*

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Shelley's ideas about literature are primarily expressed in *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) Written to refute the opinions of Thomas Love Peacock in *The Four Ages of Poetry* (1820), in which Peacock called the current age 'The Age of Brass' or a period of inferior poetry, Shelley wrote a passionate refutation, in which he bases his arguments on Plato's idealistic philosophy. He distinguishes between 'reason', which analyses and 'imagination', which synthesizes. Poetry is 'the expression of imagination, Imagination possesses the mystic faculty of apprehending the ideal order of which, according to Plato, the real world is an imitation. He dismisses the popular division between poetry and prose. Poetry is expression of imagination in harmonious language and this harmony or 'measured language' may be found in prose too. Poetry is not subject to control of reason, logic or will. The poet needs involuntary inspiration.

For Shelley, moral or ethical ideas cannot bring about the wished for revolution in the world. Poetry, which awakens the imagination and arouses the great moral force of love, can bring about the change in minds of men necessary for revolution. Poetry has always been behind all that is valuable in human civilisation. Poetry, Shelley says could save modern men from the dehumanizing effects of "an excess of the selfish and calculating principle, the accumulation of the materials of external life..." Here, as elsewhere in Romantic poetry, prose and critical thought, we can easily distinguish the sharp animosity to the unstoppable tides of industrialism, commercialism and the resultant changes in social structure and old, established value systems.

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### 1.3.6. Summing Up

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This unit gives you a valuable overview of the Romantic Literary Output and makes you realize that, though the Romantic period is fertile and rich in lyric and narrative poetry, it does not lag behind in producing a huge literary output in essay, criticism and novel. Charles Lamb, Thomas De Quincey, William Hazlitt, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Peacock, Austen and Scott contributed substantially to the development of prose writings in the Romantic era.

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### 1.3.7. Comprehension Exercises

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#### Long Questions-20 marks

1. Write an essay on the Romantic Essay with reference to Lamb, Hazlitt and De Quincey.
2. Write an essay on the Romantic Novel with reference to Austen and Scott.
3. What are the chief trends in romantic critical theory?

#### Mid-length Questions-12 marks

1. Consider Charles Lamb as a Romantic essayist.
2. Consider William Hazlitt as a Romantic essayist.
3. What was the nature of Scott's achievement in the field of the novel?
4. Analyse the main features of Romantic prose.
5. Discuss and comment on the main points in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*

#### Short Questions-6 marks

1. Write a short note on Mary Wollstonecraft.
2. Write a short note on Tom Paine.
3. Write a short note on Mary Shelley.
4. Write a short note on Maria Edgeworth.
5. Briefly comment on Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry*.
6. Comment on the contributions of Thomas Love Peacock.

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### 1.3.8. Suggested Reading

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Alexander, Michael *A History of English Literature* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

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Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. Volume I-IV. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt. Ltd.,

Sampson, George. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; New Delhi: Foundation Books,

Sanders, Sanders. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

## Module - 2 □ Reading Romantic Poetry

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### Unit-1 □ William Blake: (a) ‘The Chimney Sweeper Poems’, (b) ‘The Lamb’, (c) ‘The Tyger’

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#### Structure :

##### 2.1.0: Introduction

##### 2.1.1: William Blake: The Poet and His Poetry

##### 2.1.2a: Text and Introduction to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (*Songs of Innocence*)

##### 2.1.2a.1: Annotations

##### 2.1.2a.2: Substance and Development of Thought

##### 2.1.2a.3: Critical Commentary

##### 2.1.2a.4: Themes

##### 2.1.2a.5: Comprehension Exercises

##### 2.1.2a.6: Text and Introduction to ‘The Chimney Sweeper’ (*Songs of Experience*)

##### 2.1.2a.7: Annotations

##### 2.1.2a.8: Substance and Development of Thought

##### 2.1.2a.9: Critical Commentary

##### 2.1.2a.10: Themes

##### 2.1.2a.11: Comprehension Exercises

##### 2.1.3b: Text and Introduction to ‘The Lamb’

##### 2.1.3b.1: Annotations

##### 2.1.3b.2: Substance and Development of Thought

##### 2.1.3b.3: Critical Commentary

##### 2.1.3b.4: Themes

**2.1.3b.5: Comprehension Exercises**

**2.1.4c: An Introduction to ‘The Tyger’**

**2.1.4c.1: Annotations**

**2.1.4c.2: Substance and Development of Thought**

**2.1.4c.3: Critical Commentary**

**2.1.4c.4: Themes**

**2.1.4c.5: Comprehension Exercises**

**2.1.5. Blake as Painter**

**2.1.6: Summing Up**

**2.1.7: Suggested Reading**

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## **2.1.0. Introduction**

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The present unit is meant to introduce you to the poetry of William Blake, who is generally looked upon as a forerunner of the Romantic Movement in British poetry. You will first come across a brief account of the poet’s life and literary career. We shall thereafter move on to discuss four short but significant poems by the poet. A close reading of the text of the poems followed by exhaustive critical discussions will help us to understand some of the distinctive features of British Romantic poetry in general and the poetry of Blake in particular. To talk of Blake is also to talk of his visual art that greatly augments his poetic content and enables the reader to decipher new meanings out of his poetry. We have tried to incorporate a few relevant plates as well and we hope that with help from your counselor, you will have enjoyable readings of this Unit.

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### **2.1.1. William Blake : The Poet and His Poetry**

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➤ **A short biography**

William Blake (1757-1827), usually considered to be one of the greatest among the Pre-Romantics, was born as the son of a London hosier on November 28, 1757. An imaginative child, he never attended school, but learnt as many languages as Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian, besides English, by his own effort. His inclination to drawing from a very tender age led him to be apprenticed to a well-known engraver,

James Basire. His art is marked by a keen sense of spiritualism that offers a significant contrast to the scientific skepticism of the eighteenth century. In his poetry he glorified intuition and imagination, the early ripples of which found full flow in the poetry of the next generation poets like William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge. Hardly praised by his contemporaries, the poet continued with his scanty living by engraving and illustrating other men's work till he died in London on August 12, 1827.

➤ **Career as a poet**

Blake's first volume of poetry was published in 1783 under the title *Poetical Sketches*. A remarkable thing about Blake's poetry is that except *Poetical Sketches* the verses were not typeset. They were rather cut into copper plates by the poet himself along with the engravings that illustrated them. He however, did justice to his genius for the first time in *Songs of Innocence* (1789) and *Songs of Experience* (1794). The two volumes often underscore two contrasted states of the human soul. This may be aptly evinced by referring to the sub-title of the combined volume *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, which reads: "shewing the two contrary states of the human soul".

Another significant volume in verse to follow was *The Book of Thel* (1789), where Thel, the virgin laments the futility of life in a material world, but is finally reassured by the objects of Nature with the message that divine love encompasses all creatures and all may find happiness in unselfishness. Blake's singular prose work of note is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790), where he attacks the codes of conventional morality. His major works include *Vision of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *Europe: A Prophecy*, (1794), *Milton* (1804), and *Jerusalem* (1804).

➤ **General characteristics of Blake's Poetry**

Blake may be aptly described as a visionary and a rebel. His poetry appeals to us by virtue of its simplicity, spontaneity, melody and moral earnestness. The simplicity of his style is born of premeditated art. Robert F. Gleckner in his essay *Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs*, quotes Blake's preface to *Jerusalem*, in order explain Blake's art: "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts; . . ."

His poetry represents a strong criticism of the Neo-Classical preference for matter-of-fact reason and decorum. The hexametre couplet of the Augustans faces a heavy challenge in Blake, who experiments freely with metre and form. In short Blake not only dismisses

Plate - 1



Plate - 2



hackneyed norms of versification, but also establishes intuition and imagination as the life-force of poetry. In this sense, he is a true harbinger of Romanticism in nineteenth century British poetry.

*Songs of Innocence* was first published in 1789, while the title page of *Songs of Experience* is dated 1794. See Plates 1 and 2 which are visuals of the title pages of these texts. How do you think you can relate the titles to the content of the visuals? You must remember that Blake always issued the two as a combined volume, portraying the journey of the human soul from a state of idyllic innocence and enjoyment, to one that is caught in the web of dark reality, that is, experience; it looks forward to a state of higher wisdom which emerges from the soul's struggle with the forces of darkness. Many of the poems in the two parts are contrasted, no doubt to drive home the contrasting states of the soul. Your counselor will help you find the deeper meanings of the engravings in the context of Blake's dictum of life as a journey. It will also be an eye-opener to the essence of Romantic poetry.

### 2.1.2a. Text and Introduction to 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence*

#### ➤ Source

'The Chimney Sweeper', a lyric of twenty four lines divided into six four-line stanzas, was published by Blake along with seventeen other lyrics in the *Songs of Innocence*, a volume in which Blake depicts the untainted soul through the deceptively simple lyrics of a piper. Another poem of the same title, though of a shorter length, was included by the poet in his next volume of poetry *Songs of Experience*.

#### Text

*When my mother died I was very young,  
And my father sold me while yet my tongue,  
Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.  
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.*

*Theres little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head  
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd, so I said,  
Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head's bare,  
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.*



*And so he was quiet, and that very night,  
 As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight,  
 That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack  
 Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black,  
  
 And by came an Angel who had a bright key,  
 And he open'd the coffins and set them all free.  
 Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run  
 And wash in a river and shine in the sun.  
  
 Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,  
 They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.  
 And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,  
 He'd have God for his father, & never want joy.  
  
 And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark  
 And got with our bags & our brushes to work,  
 Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm.  
 So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.*

### 2.1.2a.1. Annotations

*'weep* (l.3) – short or colloquial form of 'sweep'. There is also a deliberate pun on this word implying the abject condition of the unfortunate boys. The ellipsis (exclusion of an alphabet) helps in creating an intensely moving picture of childhood exploitation, without even the poet commenting upon this directly.

*Curled like a lamb's back* (l.6) – a simile apparently used to describe Tom Dacre's hair. Symbolically however, it reinforces the lamb's association with childhood innocence and the infant Jesus: an idea, dealt with by Blake himself in *The Lamb*.

*asleeping* (l.10) – asleep.

*Coffins of black* (l.12) – apparently expressive of the narrow and dark inside of a chimney, but metaphorically it implies the miserable plight the little children are thrust into. The use of the preposition also suggests that the soot of the chimneys eat away the life of the innocents.

*Naked and white* (l.17) – washed of soot and black stains, the children now resemble angels in their purity and innocence.

*Want* (l.20) – lack.

### 2.1.2a.2. Substance and Development of Thought

The present poem from *Songs of Innocence*, deals with the life of poor children, who being deprived of parental care are forced to embrace the humiliating and hard job of chimney sweepers. They have no other scope for joy and laughter except that in dream, where they are reassured of divine blessing and care. The poem received much praise from Charles Lamb, the great Romantic essayist, who himself had to undergo much hardship in early life.

The short lyric may appear to be just a sentimental poem but, as you read it closely you will realise that it is actually motivated by a larger social concern. Blake takes his subject from a prevalent practice in London where hundreds of young boys toiled their lives away in the dark, sooty confines of the chimneys.

**Stanza I** Here the speaker is a child, who lost his mother early in his life. To make matters worse he was sold away by a heartless father even before he could properly pronounce ‘weep’, the shortened form of the call ‘sweep’ used by the chimney sweepers of London.

**Stanza II** The unfeeling society however, did not succeed in curbing his compassionate nature. So, as a true companion in distress, he consoles another child named Tom Dacre, who is just initiated to the drudgery and humiliation of a chimneysweeper’s life. You get a touching picture of how the child comforts Tom who is crying over his shorn head.

**Stanza III** Reassured by his friend, Tom falls asleep. The images of the day are transformed into a nightmare vision of thousands of young boys lying in black coffins.

**Stanza IV** Here an angel appears in Tom’s dream and sets all of them free. The children race across green meadows which are in stark contrast to the dark, constricted world of their daytime.

**Stanza V** The children rise, naked and white, signifying innocence, leaving behind the tools of their trade which bind them to a miserable living. The angel tells Tom that by virtue of perseverance they can attain divine blessing and reside in the protection of the Almighty Father.

**Stanza VI** Blake seems to be conveying to his readers that those who do their duty need not fear any harm. As another day of hard work begins for Tom, he remains unperturbed for he holds on to his private reserve of joy which is possible only in the state of innocence.

### 2.1.2a.3. Critical Commentary

The poem apparently glorifies innocence without deploying any kind of linguistic pedantry. This simplicity is, however, the result of Blake's sophisticated artistry. By identifying completely with the childlike vision of the world, the poet succeeds in conveying a picture of unquestioning innocence which finds consolation in faith and hope. But, the poem also unveils the dark countenance of a coldhearted, exploitative society, which confines the weak and the underprivileged even before they have the ability to voice their protest. The child in this poem is sold into a life of hardship even before he has acquired a tongue of his own. Tom's vision confirms that the child still has faith in the idea that virtue is rewarded Divine benevolence. As a fitting contrast to this gloomy, material world, the parentless children hanker for a visionary plain of greeneries, where they might espouse God as their true father. This innocent faith stands in stark contrast with the moral standards of the adult world, which falters not for a single moment to rob them of their birthright to care, affection and protection.

### 2.1.2a.4. Themes

#### ➤ Symbolism

Blake's subject matter is not just childhood, but, the state of the human soul. Note how he conveys his ideas through symbols which are easily recognisable as they are derived from the Bible. For example, the word 'weep' in the first stanza not only stands for a colloquial version of 'sweep', it also metaphorically communicates the deplorable condition of the little chimney sweepers. The child's assimilation of this word even before he can speak properly, symbolizes Blake's indictment of an oppressive society. Similarly, the analogy of the lamb's back is not simply a description of Tom's hair, but points to an association between the lamb, a little child and the Lamb of God. You will see that this idea recurs in the poem *The Lamb*. Further, Tom Dacre's dream itself is charged with symbolic overtones. The locked up coffins reflect the dark, suffocating, filthy chimneys the children have to sweep. In contrast to this image of smothering darkness, the vision of the wide and green plains represents the garden of Paradise. You may also realise that the naked and white bodies of the children symbolise their angel-like purity. Finally, the coldness of the morning might be said to symbolise the cold-hearted, unfeeling society at large, though it ultimately fails to rob the children of an innate sense of warmth. As you read the poem you will gain a better understanding of Blake's craft in using the contrasts such as black - white, dark - bright, cold - warmth, to highlight the contrasts between harsh reality and an imaginative vision of existence still

retained by the children. But, the question does come to one's mind: Is such a state sustainable? Does it provide the child with a means of survival, or does it make him a hapless victim? (See Plate 3).

➤ **The note of Romanticism in the poem**

Blake anticipates certain Romantic tendencies in his language and theme. The lucid language, free from meretricious pedantry, is an early indication of a style which presages the Wordsworthian dictum that "a poet is a man speaking to men". The note of colloquialism appeals directly to the readers, while the symbols lead you into a lingering contemplation of some of the crucial social concerns of the poet. The overall music of the poem is guaranteed not by any strict adherence to set norms of versification, but by retaining faith in the inner rhythm of common, everyday speech.

In its theme also the poem successfully exemplifies the typically Romantic preference for liberation from customs and social bondages. It highlights the heartless traits of hierarchical class conventions, which thoughtlessly impede the natural growth of children by denying their rights to affection and care. Blake was however, no reformer, nor was his poetry meant to represent the methodical structure of social tracts. What he was actually guided by was a deeper humanitarian concern that would later come to typify Wordsworth's quest for "the still, sad music of humanity".

Blake's faith in the liberating quality of the imagination, represented by Tom's dream, also presages a characteristic Romantic tendency.

➤ **Treatment of Childhood**

Although included in the *Songs of Innocence*, this particular song is all about the absence of innocence! The chimney sweeper boys in the poem are deprived of the joys and freedom associated with childhood. They get up before dawn and clean chimneys. In that sense, their innocence has been stolen from them. They're forced to live a "black" life, covered in soot and facing a premature death. They frolic and play only in dreams. The wretched figure of the child sweep is a key emblem in Blake's poems of social protest.

It would be interesting here to relate Blake's vision of childhood with that of other important writers who have spoken strongly about childhood, innocence and exploitation. William Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Childhood' remains one of the central views on childhood as a continuation of the soul's state of innocence as it was when in heaven. Charles Dickens's novels depict the state of Victorian England after the industrial revolution and especially the abject condition of children who fall prey to social vices

in a rising materialistic society. His fiction of protest and social reform connects him as a direct descendant of Blake. You can compare the similarities in their treatment of childhood for yourself when you read Dickens's novel *David Copperfield* in Paper Six.

### Activity for Learners

#### Facts About Chimney Sweepers in Blake's London

Learners, you may be urged to note that not only were the little sweepers innocent victims of the cruellest exploitation but they are associated with the smoke of industrialisation, thus uniting two central Romantic preoccupations: childhood; and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the natural world. It may shock you to learn that a report to a parliamentary committee on the employment of child sweeps in 1817 noted that 'the climbing boys' as young as four were sold by their parents to master-sweeps, or recruited from workhouses. As the average size of a London chimney was only seven inches square, to encourage the sweeps to climb more quickly, pins were 'forced into their feet' by the boy climbing behind! Is it really difficult to understand now why Blake chose to protest against such exploitation again and again through his poetry?

I would now encourage you to make a list of images in the two 'Chimney Sweeper' Poems which reveal exploitation of children.

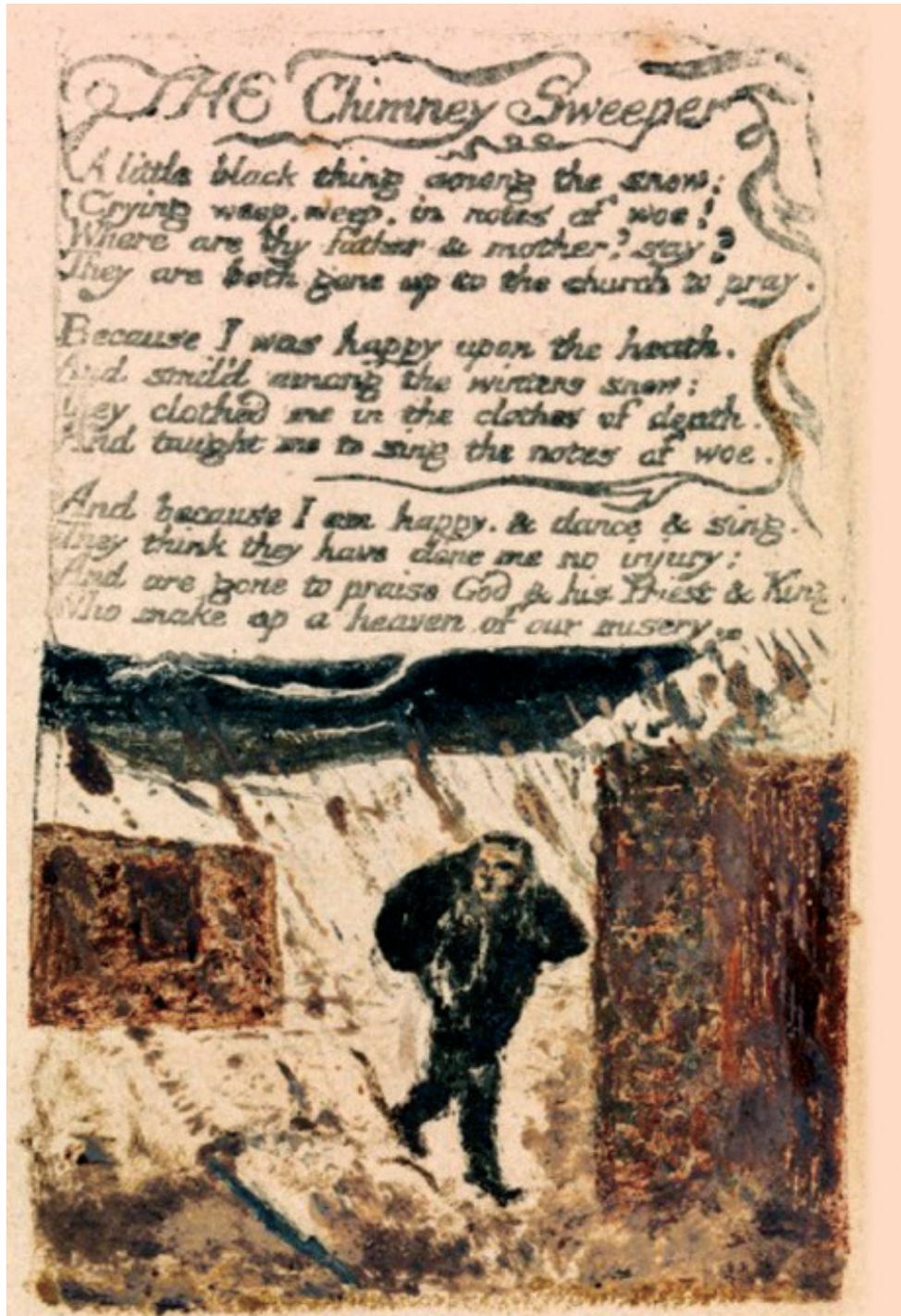
#### 2.1.2a.5. Comprehension Exercises

##### A. Long Questions-20 marks

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem *The Chimney Sweeper* from *Songs of Innocence*.
2. How does the poem *The Chimney Sweeper* from *Songs of Innocence* glorify innocence against a gloomy social background?
3. Assess the poem *The Chimney Sweeper* from *Songs of Innocence* as a successful Romantic lyric.

##### B. Mid-length questions-12 marks

1. What is the significance of Tom Dacre's dream?
2. Write a note on the use of symbols in the poem.
3. Give in your own words the central idea of the poem.



### C. Short Questions-6 marks

1. What does the little chimney sweeper say about his own life in the first stanza of the poem?
2. Why did Tom Dacre cry? How did the speaker try to console him?
3. What, according to you, is the implication of the phrase 'coffins of black'?
4. What was the angel's message to Tom Dacre?
5. How does the speaker sum up Tom's dream at the end of the poem?

#### 2.1.2a.6. Text and Introduction to 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Experience*

##### Source

Blake's 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Experience* (1794) is a short lyric of twelve lines, divided into three four-line stanzas. Interestingly, the length of this poem is just half of the other Chimney Sweeper poem included in the volume *Songs of Innocence*. The present poem seems to have been rightly included in *Songs of Experience*, as it highlights a little chimney sweeper's unhappy experience of the adult world that seeks to legitimise its oppressive order at the expense of the basic rights of childhood. Look at Plate 4.

##### Text

*A little black thing among the snow:  
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!  
Where are thy father and mother? say?  
They are both gone up to the church to pray.  
Because I was happy upon the heath,  
And smil'd among the winter's snow,  
They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.  
And because I am happy and dance and sing,  
They think they have done me no injury:  
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,  
Who make up a heaven of our misery.*

### 2.1.2a.7. Annotations

*A little black thing (l.1)*: refers to the little chimneysweeper, dressed in his conventional black outfit.

*Heath (l.5)*: a wide stretch of barren land

*Clothes of death (l.7)*: the black outfit of a chimneysweeper. Metaphorically it might also imply the sweeper boy's experience of suffering and humiliation in spite of his tender age.

*Woe (l.8)*: pain.

*Heaven of our misery (l.12)*: a sharp note of indictment against the double-dealing of the Church and the State, whose shameless sway over mankind survives at the expense of the underprivileged.

### 2.1.2a.8. Substance and Development of Thought

Comparing the present poem with the previous one, you realise the difference in the voice that you hear. The boy here has the hard-won wisdom that his plight is the result of an unjust society. There is a sense of suppressed anger and bitterness in him at having to learn the "notes of woe".

**Stanza I** A little chimney sweeper, painfully uttering his professional cry in a snowy morning of winter is asked (probably by the poet himself) the whereabouts of his parents. Surprisingly he answers that both of them have gone to the Church to pray. Blake intentionally shocks his readers into a realizing how institutionalised religion has turned away from the helpless and the suffering. There is irony in the way the boy utters the call of the chimney sweepers. This is not his natural note.

**Stanza II** The child had once smiled and been happy on the heath, even in the hardship of winter. Pathetically, even this limited happiness is cut short by his parents who seem to disregard the plight of the child. Did they think that as he smiled on a dreary habitat amidst the incessant snowfall of the winter, he would also withstand the hardship of being a chimney sweeper? They clothed him in black, the colour of death, and made him utter the notes of woe, which replaced his carefree songs of the past. There is a subtle note of bitter despair expressed by the sweep.

**Stanza III** The little boy concludes that since he tends to smile away the hardship inflicted upon him, his parents think that they have done him no wrong, and so they have gone to praise the Church and the State, two institutions which shamelessly

legitimise the tyrannical rule of the strong at the expense of the underprivileged. Unlike Tom Dacre, he seems unwilling to accept the misery to which he is consigned.

### **2.1.2a.9. Critical Commentary**

Unlike the other Chimney Sweeper poem from *Songs of Innocence*, the present one from *Songs of Experience* involves a sharp note of indictment. The young chimney sweeper's tragic testimony is tinged with the ironic undertone of the point of view of a critical adult. It gives expression to Blake's disapproval of the callousness and indifference of the parents, who disregard the natural demands of childhood, and deprive their issue of parental affection, forcing him to put on the sooty robe of the chimneysweep. From a larger social perspective also the boy provides sufficient testimony to his growing insight into the ill-motives of religion and the State. For, the Church and the State cast so potent a spell on ordinary people that thoughtlessly they waste their hours in paying homage to these two institutions forgetting the natural ties of family and children. They hardly care to understand how these two agencies abuse the name of God by turning ordinary people into their perpetual slaves.

The poem replaces Tom Dacre's vision of the happy green fields with the bleak reality of the snow and the barren heath. The glorious nakedness of the human form which rises heavenward in the earlier poem is here covered in "clothes of death" and the singing and dancing of the boy is no more than a brave front to conceal deep unhappiness. This young boy's vision of heaven is made up of the misery of the weak and the helpless.

### **2.1.2a.10. Themes**

#### **➤ Symbolism**

The short poem makes a restrained but effective use of symbols. As in the previous poem you have read, the word 'weep' is used to symbolise suffering. Similarly, the whole of the second stanza seems to be fraught with symbolic overtones. The decision of the little chimney sweeper's parents to push their son into the hard and humiliating business might allude to the Biblical story of the First Sin committed by Adam and Eve, which led their progeny to suffer the pangs of suffering and death. In this connection, symbols like 'clothes of death' and 'notes of woe' become all the more poignant. Apart from such religious symbols, the use of phrases like 'heaven of our misery' serves to unveil the hypocrisy of the powerful whose shameless sovereign survives at the expense of the downtrodden.

➤ **A peep into the world of Experience**

As we have already observed, the present poem represents a significant contrast to the other Chimney Sweeper poem from *Songs of Innocence*. While the latter apparently glorifies innocence and celebrates divine benevolence, the former casts a dubious look on the justice one might expect from religion and the State in a society governed in accordance with the interests of the privileged class. It points implicit barbs at the Church and the State for the deceit they play upon the lives of ordinary people. They keep people blind to their inner corruption and befool them with promises of equality and justice, so that unquestioningly they pay homage to these two agencies, even by sacrificing their commitment to family and children. The children of the underprivileged grow amidst dust, soot and snow, and have to embrace menial jobs, while the preachers of peace and justice exult on their success in achieving unquestionable sway over mankind at large. The overall choice of words ('clothes of death') and tone of the second Chimney sweeper poem reveal the somberness latent in it.

**2.1.2a.11. Comprehension Exercises**

**A. Long Questions-20 marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem *The Chimney Sweeper* from *Songs of Experience*.
2. Make a comparative study of the Chimney Sweeper poems by William Blake.
3. How is the hypocrisy of the privileged class unveiled in the Chimney Sweeper poem from *Songs of Experience*?

**B. Mid-length Questions-12 marks**

1. Give in your own words the central idea of the poem.
2. Write a note on the use of symbols in the poem.
3. Reproduce in your own words the sad story of the little chimney sweeper's life.

**C. Short Questions-6 marks**

1. Explain the significance of the following lines:  
"They clothed me in the clothes of death,  
And taught me to sing the notes of woe".



2. What is the implication of the phrase “heaven of our misery”?

### 2.1.3b. Text and Introduction to ‘The Lamb’

#### Source

‘The Lamb’, a short lyric of twenty lines, was published by Blake in 1789 in the volume *Songs of Innocence* (See Blake’s plates) Blake uses the simple cadences of children’s verse and familiar Biblical symbols in this poem.

#### Text

*Little Lamb who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.  
By the stream & o’er the mead;  
Gave thee clothing of delight,  
Softest clothing wooly bright;  
Gave thee such a tender voice,  
Making all the vales rejoice!  
Little Lamb who made thee?  
Dost thou know who made thee?  
Little Lamb I’ll tell thee,  
Little Lamb I’ll tell thee!  
He is called by thy name,  
For he calls himself a Lamb:  
He is meek and he is mild,  
He became a little child:  
I a child and thou a lamb,  
We are called by his name.  
Little Lamb God bless thee  
Little Lamb God bless thee.*

#### 2.1.3b.1. Annotations

*Clothing of delight (l.5)*: refers to the soft fleece on the lamb’s skin.

*For he calls himself a Lamb (l.14)*: refers to Jesus Christ, who because of the qualities of gentleness and meekness in him was called the lamb.

*He is meek and he is mild (l.15)* Blake seems to be echoing a popular hymn, 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild'.

*He became a little child (l.16):* one implication may be that Christ is at once God and Man as he took physical birth on earth. A second implication may be that Christ possesses the naïve simplicity and pristine innocence of a child.

### **2.1.3b.2. Substance and Development of Thought**

The poem contains a total of twenty lines – the first ten foregrounding a series of questions and the next ten answering them. The speaker, evidently a child, raises the most profound question: Who is the maker who bids the lamb graze by the stream and over the green meadow? Of course, the questions are answered by the child himself, without ever waiting for any kind of aid to be provided by his elders or by anybody else. His observations clearly debar the possibility of any intrusion of the world of experience into the idyllic setting of the poem.

**Lines 1-10** Seeing a lamb grazing on a green meadow a child asks if he knows who his maker is. He also asks if the lamb knows who bade him feed over the meadow by the stream, and who gave him the soft fleece on his skin, and the tender voice that makes the entire valley reverberate with happiness.

**Lines 11-20** The next ten lines offer answers to these questions. Of course, the questions are answered by the child himself, without ever waiting for any kind of aid to be provided by his elders or by anybody else. His observations clearly debar the possibility of any intrusion of the world of experience into the idyllic setting of the poem, which, to be precise, is a eulogy to a conviction prompted solely by innocence. The child goes on saying that the Creator, i.e. God (or Jesus Christ, the Son of God) is Himself called by the name of the lamb for His infinite mildness. He concludes that because of their mildness and innocence, he himself and the lamb are called by the name of God. He places God, himself and the lamb in a single and inseparable thread of creature, carry within themselves signs of God's infinite gentleness. His innocent and altruistic zeal finally leads him to pronounce divine blessings on the mild creature.

### Points to Ponder for The Learner

- What are the things that the lamb is blessed with?
- Describe the clothing of the lamb in your own words

#### 2.1.3b.3. Critical Commentary

The short poem, echoing the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, represents a wonderful manifestation of the glory of childhood innocence, which unfalteringly answers confounding queries with artless and immediate responses. Not a single question raised by the child remains unanswered, and this clearly demonstrates the child's innate conviction of divine benevolence. A typically Romantic note of pantheism, which would later become almost a creed with Wordsworth, seems to characterise almost all the lines of the poem. It is this pantheistic spirit that enables the speaker to espy divinity in himself and the lamb. The final prayer for divine bliss upon the lamb is perhaps the strongest blow over the *rational* world of the Neo-Classicals, which preferred to allow space for nothing except *reason* till the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The melodious language and the association of tenderness, delight and softness, with the lamb create an impression of gentleness which connects this idyllic world and its inhabitants to the qualities of the meek and mild creator mentioned in the second stanza.

#### Note for Learner:

##### The 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and its relevance to 'The Lamb'

**The picture of The Lamb's feeding "by the stream and o'er the mead" (meadow) is a beautiful one, which suggests God's kindness in creation, and has an echo of similar descriptions in the Old Testament book of Psalms (especially Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want") and the parables of Jesus.**

#### 2.1.3b.4. Themes

##### ➤ Symbolism

A remarkable feature of the poem is that it is symbolic in spirit, without using too many symbols in the body of the text itself. Innocence, as a leitmotif, runs through the text. The sense is created and maintained by the use of two dominant symbols, the child, and the meek and mild lamb. The description of the landscape creates an idyllic setting

evocative of an earthly Paradise reflecting the state of the uncorrupted soul. Words like “clothing of delight” to describe the lamb’s fleece reinforce the sense of unchallenged joy. The lamb is associated with the qualities of softness and brightness. His clothing and his tender voice are actually the manifestations of a benevolent creator. In the second section of the poem (i.e. lines 11-20) the poet makes full use of the Biblical associations of the child and the lamb, when he establishes through his mouthpiece, the child, an inseparable communion between divinity and the created world. Here, the allusion to the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, as the son of Man, becomes significant for the desired expansion of the theme. The poem comes full circle when the child finally declares that he himself as a child and the lamb as a meek and mild creature carry within themselves the signs of divinity. Blake successfully communicates an idea of metaphysical merit in spite of an apparently straightforward narration.

➤ **The poem as a Romantic lyric**

The poem’s central theme of pantheism and its rejection of mundane reason, anticipates some of the key features of nineteenth century British Romanticism. The language used by Blake is naturally musical, in stark contrast to the forced cadence of the hexameter couplet, which was an obsession with the Augustans. The vast green meadow, the flowing stream, and finally, the child and the lamb, carrying in them signs of the divine, represent a world of idyllic innocence. This is no ordinary vision of childhood, but an adult’s fond recollection of a state of pristine joy. This fascination with childhood presages one of the features of later Romantic poetry. By introducing a sense of the serene and the endless, Blake also breaks away from the eighteenth century tradition of city-centric literature. Above all, in ‘The Lamb’ the child’s instinctive identification with God and his creation clearly marks a triumph of subjectivism, which involves a free play of the imagination and intuition. The symbolical use of the lamb and the child to represent a state of the soul also anticipates a characteristic trait of the Romantic lyric – investing the physical with metaphysical significance.

**2.1.3b.5. Comprehension Exercises**

**A. 20 marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem *The Lamb* by William Blake.
2. How does the poet glorify innocence in the poem *The Lamb*?
3. Would you consider *The Lamb* to be a successful Romantic lyric? Substantiate your answer.



**B. 12 marks**

1. Give in your own words the central idea of the poem *The Lamb*.
2. Write a note on the use of symbols in the poem *The Lamb*.

**C. 6 marks**

1. What does the child tell the lamb about the Creator?
2. Explain the following lines with reference to the context:

He is meek and he is mild,  
He became a little child:  
I a child and thou a lamb,  
We are called by his name.

**2.1.4c. Text and Introduction to ‘The Tyger’**

**Source**

‘The Tyger’ was published by Blake in 1794 in the volume *Songs of Experience*. The poem is a true representative of this volume which depicts the fierce forces that are unleashed as innocence is challenged by experience. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake had proclaimed that “The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.” The tiger in this poem seems to be exactly such a force which evokes terror but also purges the evils of our civilization.

**Text**

*Tyger Tyger, burning bright,  
In the forests of the night;  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?  
  
In what distant deeps or skies.  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand, dare seize the fire?*

*And what shoulder, and what art,  
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?  
And when thy heart began to beat,  
What dread hand? and what dread feet?*

*What the hammer? what the chain,  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp,  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!*

*When the stars threw down their spears  
And water'd heaven with their tears:  
Did he smile his work to see?  
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?*

*Tyger Tyger burning bright,  
In the forests of the night:  
What immortal hand or eye,  
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?*

#### 2.1.4c.1. Annotations

*Symmetry (l.4)*: Shape, rather than the usual meaning of regularity.

*Deeps (l.5)*: Seas

*What the hand, dare seize the fire? (l.8)*: In Greek mythology, Prometheus, one of the Titans, stole fire from the Gods and brought it to mankind.

*Sinews (l.10)*: Tendon / muscle.

*When the stars ... with their tears (l. 17-18)*: This might allude to the fierce fight between God and the rebel angels led by Lucifer. God struck them with thunder, and hurled them headlong

down to the depths of Hell from Paradise. Their fall resembled the movement of meteors or shooting stars.

### 2.1.4c.2. Substance and Development of Thought

Having read 'The Lamb', you will find an interesting contrast in this poem. While the former poem delights in God's creation of a creature of meekness and mildness, 'The Tyger' expresses a sense of awe at the terrific stature of the Creator who possesses the power to create such a fearsome creature as the tiger. The simple faith of 'The Lamb' is replaced by unanswered questions in 'The Tyger'. They are mostly rhetorical questions, the answers being implied in the questions themselves. This makes it clear to us that the speaker in 'The Tyger' is not a naïve child, but a mature human being belonging to the world of experience.

You may be surprised by the spelling 'Tyger' in the title. Blake here deliberately uses a quasi-archaic spelling to generate an initial sense of surprise among his readers. This sense culminates in the awed question at the end of the poem where the speaker muses how the Creator of the meek and gentle lamb also created the taut energy and ferocious power of the tiger.

**Stanza I** The tiger, a fearsome animal lurking in the nocturnal forest, emerges in all its awe-inspiring lustre, as an incendiary energy which destroys the darkness. Blake begins his description by drawing attention to the burning eye of the tiger as that implies the fierce energy needed to break the shackles of experience. The amazed speaker wonders what superhuman creator could design such ferocious beauty, signified by the words "fearful symmetry".

**Stanza II** The poet depicts a Promethean creator who has seized the fire of some distant skies in the making of the beast. It seems to have originated from the daring aspiration of some Icarus-like figure.

**Stanza III** The sense of surprise deepens as the speaker contemplates on the power of the shoulders that could twist the muscle of the tiger's heart. You gradually begin to get a picture of the powerful, awe-inspiring beauty of the tiger, while its pulsating heart seems to invoke fear.

**Stanza IIII** Blake invokes images of the industrial world, as the tiger seems to be hammered out in a supernatural smithy whose presiding spirit grapples with terror. But don't forget that the chain, the anvil and the hammer are also tools of the sculptor, so the tiger remains an ambiguous symbol, representing both destructive and creative energies.

**Stanza IV** The terrific grasp of the Creator reminds the speaker of the fierce struggle

between God and the angels led by Lucifer, which ended by making the rebels feel God's sharp vengeance and beg for mercy.

**Stanza V** The speaker concludes with awe at the wonderful capacity of God, who is simultaneously the Creator of the meek and mild lamb, and the terrible and alarming tiger. These two opposite aspects of the Creator Himself indicate two contrasted sides of creation at large: one that leads to innocent and delightful involvement; and the other that makes one retreat in apprehension. Clearly, such profundity of thought is not to be sought in a child; the whole poem is rather an expression of a mind that belongs to the world of maturity and experience.

#### **Points to Ponder for the Learner**

- *What is the main element the tiger is made of?*
- *What are the regions from where the creator may have taken the fire?*
- *Name the instruments the poet mentions in the making of the tiger?*

#### **2.1.4c.3. Critical Commentary**

In 'The Tyger', Blake moves away from Biblical symbols and forges an original symbol of power and strength that is ambiguous in its nature. The tiger is at once the destroyer and the harbinger of light, burning through the dark night of experience. He represents the wrath of God but also the hope that through destruction a new dawn will arrive, no matter how terrible its birth. The allusions to Prometheus and Icarus in the second stanza hold him up to be a figure of hope and aspiration. The trochaic rhythm creates an effect of hammer strokes which is in stark contrast to the lilting rhythm of 'The Lamb'. Read together the two poems reinforce Blake's concept of the existence of contraries as a necessary condition for the maturity of the human heart.

#### **2.1.4.4. Themes**

##### **➤ Symbolism**

'The Tyger' is rich in symbols and allusions, and this in itself marks a curious contrast to its counterpart 'The Lamb' from *Songs of Innocence* which celebrates innocence through a single symbolic fabric of mildness equated to divinity. This poem makes us halt at almost every line by employing intricate symbols or metaphorical phrases, which definitely demand a mature mind for their proper explication. For example, both the

tiger and its Creator symbolise power and fierceness, the first mundane and the second metaphysical and almost beyond human imagination. The forests of night, which may symbolise the dark aspects of the human mind, or the dark regions of experience where evil dwells, are rightly chosen as the tiger's domain; the serene and green meadow the lamb grazes upon is not a place appropriate for such a fearsome animal. The reference to the immortal hands and eyes of the Creator, i.e. God, reinforces the sense of surprise already generated by the spelling of the animal's name in the title. We wonder at the unimaginable stature of the Creator, who dared to frame the fearful symmetry of the tiger. The first two lines of the second stanza may be taken as an instance of allusion, for they immediately bring to our minds an echo of Prometheus's act of stealing fire from heaven. This at once tells us that Blake's tiger is an ambivalent being which embodies the sublime power of the Almighty. As in T.S. Eliot's *Gerontion*, it is God's judgement, rather than his compassion that is represented through the symbol of the tiger. The series of material symbols like *hammer, chain, anvil, furnace, dread grasp* and the like, make us aware of the material world, poles asunder from the idyllic charms of the world of innocence celebrated in 'The Lamb'. They also convey the spiritual message that both the worlds of innocence and experience are the domains of a single Supreme Creator: their apparent contrariety being nothing except reflections of His contrasted dimensions of meekness and fierceness.

In the fifth stanza, we come across a significant allusion to the mythical war between God and the rebel angels led by Lucifer, which ended in the expulsion of the rebels from heaven. The defeated angels fell eternally from Paradise to the abysmal depths of burning hell like shooting stars. The tiger, symbolising God's wrath, seems to have been born to vanquish evil in just such a crisis of human civilisation. The final unanswered question denotes the inscrutable nature of God. This rhetorical question is the very basic query of the poem itself, which is answered by reaffirming that mildness and fierceness in spite of their apparent contrariety are two inseparable dimensions of the Creator Himself. There is no denying the share of each one of them in the world created and controlled by a single and insurmountable Power, i.e. God.

➤ **Contrast with 'The Lamb'**

The two poems together form the contrasting parts of a single pattern. They exemplify Blake's design in the combined volume, which was to portray the contrary states of the human soul. 'The Lamb' is couched in lyrical strains. Its gentle cadence of sibilant sounds and the soft lilting rhyme, its image of a serene pastoral landscape, all belong to the world of secure childhood. 'The Tyger', on the other hand uses a trochaic rhythm.

Its lines end in emphatic syllables, which create the impression of hammer-strokes. It tells of elemental powers and its canvas is not the secluded valley, but the vast cosmos. The symbols of the former poem are drawn from the Bible, while in the latter the poet devises his own symbols. As we read the poem, we realise that Blake was also the writer of prophetic works. The lyric voice of the first poem gives way to the awed, unanswered questions of the second, as faith is replaced by a tortured seeking for answers which are never explicit.

#### **2.1.4c.4. Comprehension Exercises**

##### **A. Long Questions-20 marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience*.
2. How do the poems 'The Tyger' and 'The Lamb' express two opposite sides of the human soul? Answer with textual references.

##### **B. Mid-Length Questions-12 marks**

1. Give in your own words the central idea of the poem 'The Tyger'.
2. Write a note on the use of symbols in 'The Tyger'.

##### **C. Short Questions-6 marks**

1. What is the significance of the spelling of the animal's name in the title of the poem 'The Tyger'?
2. Explain with reference to the context the following lines:

When the stars threw down their spears

And water'd heaven with their tears:

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

#### **2.1.5. Blake as Painter**

Blake was a poet, visionary, and mystic, and all his pictures are poetically conceived, but that is not to say that they are literary in any depreciatory sense. Even his illustrations to his own poems are not simple translations of the written word into pictures. Rather the poems and the pictures are each counterparts in their proper medium of the image in

his mind. These mental images had for Blake an almost objective reality, and he did not regard them as poetic fancies but as actual visions of a reality veiled from the sensual eye. In his own belief he lived in a world peopled with spirits visible to the eye of the imagination, which had a reality at least as great as that of the material world around him. In fact it may be said that for him the ordinary positions of reality and imagination were reversed, and that the world of the imagination was to him more vivid and actual than the world of the senses. How far his visions were hallucinatory is unimportant in considering his art, and each one will come to a different conclusion on this point according to his own attitude to the unseen world. What is important is Blake's own implicit belief in the reality of his visions, and it is this which gives the peculiar force and intensity to his work. It is always important to read Blake's poetry in conjunction with his original engravings, which open up several new layers of meaning for the reader. It is with this objective in mind that we have added some plates of his engravings for you.

#### Activity for Learner

**Some of the plates of Blake's engravings have been included in this unit for your benefit. For instance have a look at the Plate of the poem 'The Tyger'. What do you find? Does the tiger in the engraving made by Blake actually appear the same as the fearsome image of the tiger which he creates in the poem? If not, what are the differences or dissimilarities? Make a note of them and try to repeat the same activity for the other poems and their corresponding plates.**

#### 2.1.6. Summing Up

- From a reading of the four selected poems Blake may be aptly described as a visionary and a rebel.
- His poetry appeals to us by virtue of its simplicity, spontaneity, melody and moral earnestness.
- His poetry represents a strong criticism of the Neo-Classical preference for matter-of-fact reason and decorum.
- All these features have been elaborately explained through the four poems.
- Finally, it has to be kept in mind that all of Blake's poems were not written but

engraved by him on copper plates, hence the original engravings are profoundly important in reading the true meaning of his visionary poems.

- Hence a few sample plates have been included at in this SLM for the learners to read the poems in conjunction with the original engravings.

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### **2.1.7. Suggested Reading**

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- 1) Keynes, Geoffrey (ed.) *Blake: Complete Writings*. Oxford University Press, 1979.
- 2) Larrisy, Edward. *William Blake*. Basil Blackwell, 1985.
- 3) Heather & Glen. *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
- 4) Bottrall, Margaret. (ed). *Casebook on Blake's Songs*. Macmillan, 196
- 5) Forbear, Michael. *The Poetry of William Blake* (Penguin)
- 6) Paley, Morton D. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Prentice Hall, 1969.

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## **Unit - 2 □ (i) William Wordsworth : ‘Tintern Abbey’ (ii) Samuel Taylor Coleridge ‘Christabel’– Part I**

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### **Structure**

**2.2.0: Introduction**

**2.2.1. Coleridge and Wordsworth**

**2.2.2: William Wordsworth: The Poet and his Poetry.**

**2.2.2. i (a): Text and Introduction to ‘Tintern Abbey’**

**2.2.2. i (b): Annotations**

**2.2.2. i (c): Substance and Critical Commentary**

**2.2.2. i (d): Themes**

**2.2.2. i (e): Comprehension Exercises**

**2.2.3: S T Coleridge: The Poet and his Poetry**

**2.2.3. ii (a): Text and Introduction to ‘Christabel’**

**2.2.3. ii (b): Annotations**

**2.2.3. ii (c): Central idea**

**2.2.3. ii (d): Substance and Critical Commentary**

**2.2.3. ii (e): Themes**

**2.2.3. ii (f): Comprehension Exercises**

**2.2.4: Summing Up**

**2.2.5: Suggested Reading**

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### **2.2.0 Introduction**

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The present Unit, which takes up the peak of the Romantic Movement, is designed to introduce you to the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the

two most significant poets in the canon of English Romantic Poetry. The juxtaposition of the two stalwarts is deliberate – to give you a glimpse of the range of ‘High Romanticism’ if we may use the term. To the first, we owe the transformation of English nature poetry from the picturesque to the sublime; to the second, the uncanny ability of an imaginative-psychological creation of the supernatural. In reading Wordsworth you will find a depiction of landscape, informed with a moral and philosophical vision. The view of nature that he presents in his poetry is subjective- half created and half perceived- as he claims in ‘Tintern Abbey’. In reading Coleridge, you discover how temporal-spatial distancing can create supra-tenable illusions that make the supernatural seem real, formulate a complete transport to a past world order, and a comprehension of the theological concepts of purity and pollution. At the end of this Unit, you should be in a position to grasp the wide range of nuances of the first phase of Romanticism. As learners, we would advise you to read this Unit in consonance with the basics of Romantic literary theory that are scattered all along this study material.

### **2.2.1. Coleridge and Wordsworth**

In June, 1797 Coleridge walked to Racedown, Dorset, where he met Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy. The intense friendship that sprang up among the three shaped their lives for the next fourteen years and proved to be one of the most creative partnerships in English Romanticism. It was based on a mutual love of poetry, critical discussion, and hill-walking, and an impassioned response to the political and social problems of the age. Between July 1797 and September 1798 they lived and worked intimately together: the Coleridges at Nether Stowey, Somerset, and the Wordsworths two miles away at Alfoxden on the edge of the Quantock hills, where they were visited by Lamb, Hazlitt and others.

While living at Nether Stowey Coleridge wrote a series of ‘conversation poems’, including *Fears in Solitude*, *This Lime Tree Bower My Prison*, *The Nightingale* and *Frost at Midnight*. Between 1797 and 1798 he also wrote *Christabel (Part I)* and *Kubla Khan*. In 1798 Wordsworth and Coleridge jointly published the *Lyrical Ballads*, which after a poor critical reception, achieved a revolution in literary taste and sensibility. For this volume Coleridge contributed *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the tale of a superstitious sailor on an ill-fated voyage. We come to know from his *Biographia Literaria*, while Wordsworth was to take his subjects from ordinary life, Coleridge was to write poems of the supernatural, but in such a way that the reader’s would be induced to a “willing suspension of disbelief”.

### 2.2.2. William Wordsworth: The Poet and his Poetry

William Wordsworth (1770-1850), son of John Wordsworth and Ann Cookson is considered the greatest exponent of the Romantic school of English poetry. In 1793 he published his first collections of poems, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. He met Coleridge in the year 1795 and thus began one of the most celebrated literary collaborations. With Coleridge he published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 which was to herald the beginning of the new Romantic wave in English poetry. He added a 'Preface' to the 1800 edition which was to become a significant manifesto of the English Romantic Movement. In the Preface Wordsworth rejected the Neo-Classical concepts of poetic diction. His call for a more natural poetic diction was part of a larger quest to preserve the unspoilt and non-alienated aspects of experience in a world that was fast changing under the onslaught of industrialisation and the rise of capitalism. It was also in keeping with the emerging democratic temper of the time as it rejected the ornate poetic language of his predecessors with a "selection of language really used by men" (Preface). His themes are based on man's spiritual bond with the world of nature which is why he has been called the priest of nature. *The Prelude*, a semi-autobiographical poem which he began in 1798 remains his masterpiece in which he elaborated on his ideas regarding the influence of nature on man, a theme which runs through his earlier work as well. Between 1795 and 1797 he composed his only play, *The Borderers*. Wordsworth remained Britain's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death in 1850.

#### 2.2.2.i (a). Text and Introduction to 'Tintern Abbey'

Popularly known as 'Tintern Abbey' the poem entitled 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798' is one of the most significant poems of William Wordsworth. It is a poem which will be of great value in your understanding of Wordsworth's views on Nature, Literary Romanticism and its characteristic views on the role of the poet and poetry, and the philosophical and spiritual life of man. The poem was composed in the month of July, 1798. It was published in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), placed at its very end, as if it was the culmination of all that the poet had wanted to convey throughout the volume.

Wordsworth's '*Tintern Abbey*' displays autobiographical elements. Significantly, the history of the poem's composition is narrated by Wordsworth himself in his letter to Miss Fenwick where he famously writes:

No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just

as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days (10<sup>th</sup>- 13<sup>th</sup> July) with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol.

*Tintern Abbey* comprises five uneven stanzas written in blank verse. It begins in the manner of a conventional 'loco-descriptive' poem popular in the eighteenth century, beginning with the description of a particular locale. But as you read the poem you will become aware that it is more a meditation on the relation between man and nature than a simple word picture of a scenic spot.

Text

*FIVE* years have past; five summers, with the length  
Of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
With a soft inland murmur.—Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, 5  
That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
The day is come when I again repose  
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view 10  
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines 15  
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
With some uncertain notice, as might seem  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods, 20  
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The Hermit sits alone.

*These beauteous forms,*  
*Through a long absence, have not been to me*  
*As is a landscape to a blind man's eye: 25*  
*But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din*  
*Of towns and cities, I have owed to them*  
*In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,*  
*Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;*  
*And passing even into my purer mind, 30*  
*With tranquil restoration:—feelings too*  
*Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,*  
*As have no slight or trivial influence*  
*On that best portion of a good man's life,*  
*His little, nameless, unremembered, acts 35*  
*Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,*  
*To them I may have owed another gift,*  
*Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,*  
*In which the burthen of the mystery,*  
*In which the heavy and the weary weight 40*  
*Of all this unintelligible world,*  
*Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,*  
*In which the affections gently lead us on,—*  
*Until, the breath of this corporeal frame*  
*And even the motion of our human blood 45*  
*Almost suspended, we are laid asleep*  
*In body, and become a living soul:*  
*While with an eye made quiet by the power*  
*Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,*  
*We see into the life of things. 50*

*If this*  
*Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—*

*In darkness and amid the many shapes  
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir  
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world, 55  
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—  
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,  
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,  
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!*

*And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought, 60  
 With many recognitions dim and faint,  
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,  
 The picture of the mind revives again:  
 While here I stand, not only with the sense  
 Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts 65  
 That in this moment there is life and food  
 For future years. And so I dare to hope,  
 Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first  
 I came among these hills; when like a roe  
 I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides 70  
 Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
 Wherever nature led: more like a man  
 Flying from something that he dreads, than one  
 Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then  
 (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days, 75  
 And their glad animal movements all gone by)  
 To me was all in all.—I cannot paint  
 What then I was. The sounding cataract  
 Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,  
 The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, 80  
 Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
 An appetite; a feeling and a love,*

*That had no need of a remoter charm,  
 By thought supplied, nor any interest  
 Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past, 85  
 And all its aching joys are now no more,  
 And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
 Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts  
 Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
 Abundant recompence. For I have learned 90  
 To look on nature, not as in the hour  
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes  
 The still, sad music of humanity,  
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt 95  
 A presence that disturbs me with the joy  
 Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime  
 Of something far more deeply interfused,  
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,  
 And the round ocean and the living air, 100  
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;  
 A motion and a spirit, that impels  
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still  
 A lover of the meadows and the woods, 105  
 And mountains; and of all that we behold  
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world  
 Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,  
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise  
 In nature and the language of the sense, 110  
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
 Of all my moral being.*

<i>Nor perchance,</i>	
<i>If I were not thus taught, should I the more</i>	115
<i>Suffer my genial spirits to decay:</i>	
<i>For thou art with me here upon the banks</i>	
<i>Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,</i>	
<i>My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch</i>	
<i>The language of my former heart, and read</i>	120
<i>My former pleasures in the shooting lights</i>	
<i>Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while</i>	
<i>May I behold in thee what I was once,</i>	
<i>My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,</i>	
<i>Knowing that Nature never did betray</i>	125
<i>The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,</i>	
<i>Through all the years of this our life, to lead</i>	
<i>From joy to joy: for she can so inform</i>	
<i>The mind that is within us, so impress</i>	
<i>With quietness and beauty, and so feed</i>	130
<i>With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,</i>	
<i>Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,</i>	
<i>Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all</i>	
<i>The dreary intercourse of daily life,</i>	
<i>Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb</i>	135
<i>Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold</i>	
<i>Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon</i>	
<i>Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;</i>	
<i>And let the misty mountain-winds be free</i>	
<i>To blow against thee: and, in after years,</i>	140
<i>When these wild ecstasies shall be matured</i>	
<i>Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind</i>	
<i>Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,</i>	

<i>Thy memory be as a dwelling-place</i>	
<i>For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! Then,</i>	145
<i>If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,</i>	
<i>Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts</i>	
<i>Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,</i>	
<i>And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—</i>	
<i>If I should be where I no more can hear</i>	150
<i>Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams</i>	
<i>Of past existence—wilt thou then forget</i>	
<i>That on the banks of this delightful stream</i>	
<i>We stood together; and that I, so long</i>	
<i>A worshipper of Nature, hither came</i>	155
<i>Unwearied in that service: rather say</i>	
<i>With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal</i>	
<i>Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,</i>	
<i>That after many wanderings, many years</i>	
<i>Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,</i>	160
<i>And this green pastoral landscape, were to me</i>	
<i>More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!</i>	

### 2.2.2. i(b). Annotations

....*thoughts of more deep seclusion (l.7)*: intensely private reflections

*Repose (l.9)*: rest

*Sycamore (l.10)*: maple tree; in Biblical usage it also refers to a species of fig tree

..*orchard tufts (l.11)*: clusters of fruit trees cultivated within an enclosed space

...*groves and copses (l.14)*: a small wood or group of trees; copses are those clusters which are cut periodically.

*Hedge-rows (l.15)*: a border of wild shrubs and trees used to demarcate ownership. Here it also signifies human intervention in nature. The hedges indicate private ownership, yet in their indeterminate nature they also symbolise a place where such demarcations are relaxed and merged with the universal realm of nature.

*Sportive (l.16)*: playful

*Notice (l.19)*: The word is used here as a noun meaning intimation

***Vagrant (l.20):*** tramp, or a homeless person who lives by begging. Nature is seen as the last shelter of the outcasts of society. This is also a reminder of the socio-economic problems of a society in transition.

***Hermit (l.21):*** a person who has withdrawn from the world

***..tranquil restoration (l.31):*** restoring peace of mind

***Trivial (l.33):*** insignificant

***..aspect more sublime(l.38):***

***Burthen (l.39):*** burden

***Unintelligible (l.41):*** impossible to understand

***Serene (l.42):*** calm

***Corporeal (l.44):*** bodily, physical

***...fretful stir (l.54):*** restless activities

***Sylvan wye (l.58):*** The phrase indicates the wooded regions through which the river Wye flows.

***..half – extinguished thought (l.60):*** partly forgotten thoughts

***Roe (l.69):*** young deer

***...sounding cataract (l.78):*** refers to the waterfalls and the sound made by them

***...gloomy wood (l. 80):*** dark woods

***Recompense (l.90):***

***.....chasten and subdue (l.95):*** to discipline and overwhelm

***Interfused (l.98):*** permeated with, interspersed

***Impels (l.102):*** compels

***Anchor (l. 111):*** mooring

***Perchance (l.114):*** Perhaps

***Genial (l.116):*** cordial

***...for thou art with me (l.117):*** The poet is directly addressing his sister, Dorothy Wordsworth.

***...dreary intercourse (l.134):*** soul-destroying, monotonous relationships of the mundane world

***Exhortation(l.149):*** encouragement, persuasion

***Zeal (l.157):*** passion

### **2.2.2 i (c). Substance and Critical Commentary**

The poem traces the growth of the poet's relationship with nature. The sensations provided by the natural landscape are internalised, reflected upon and processed into a higher realisation of the moral, spiritual and restorative experience which is the backbone of Wordsworth's creed. The theme of recollection runs through the poem and you find how the overlapping of past, present and future aid the poet's enunciation of a philosophy of the mind of man and his relationship with Nature.

**Stanza I** The poem begins with Wordsworth's declaration of the fact that after a gap of five years he has been able to visit the banks of the Wye and the adjoining landscape. Once again he is overjoyed to hear the murmuring flow of water in the river Wye as he discreetly beholds the serene landscape consisting of sharp and towering wooded hills uniting with the clear sky. The scene encourages a deep feeling of solitude seclusion and introspection. The green cottage garden, orchard tufts loaded with unripe fruits clad in one green hue, the pastoral farms, the smoke which might be coming from the dwelling of some vagabond or the cave of a hermit only enhance his happiness and deep seclusion. The unbroken green of the countryside denote a happy co-existence of man and nature, cultivation and wilderness.

#### **Critical Commentary on the Stanza**

A significant motif in the poem is that of memory and personal growth. With the declaration of a lapse of five years standing between his last visit and the present one, Wordsworth offers the reader a foreshadowing of the theme of the poem: a comparison between the past and the present realms of experiences involving his response to the locale and how it leads to an appreciation of the growth and maturation of the bond between himself and nature.

The poem is inspired, as we have earlier noted, by a specific landscape and the experience associated with the landscape. Wye is a beautiful mountain river flowing through Wales and England. The abbey is located on its banks. Wordsworth is believed to have paid at least two visits to the same scenery of Wye and the adjoining ruins of the abbey possibly built in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. However, as you move along the poem, you will realise that the nature that Wordsworth worships and the effect that his experience of natural beauty has on the growth of his own mind is not restricted within this specific time and place. The poem gradually moves from the particular to the universal.

The description that the poem begins with is famously called 'return to nature'. The 'steep and lofty cliffs', 'waters, rolling from their mountain-springs', 'dark sycamore',

are each introduced by 'again' or 'once again' and alert the reader to the fact that Wordsworth's poem will deal with the present experience in the light of what once had been. By drawing attention to the continuity in nature he also depicts how the passage of 'five long winters' has changed the mind of the poet who is the onlooker. The description is obviously connected with the poet's reflective mood as he emphasises how the serenity of the scene gives rise to profound thoughts.

*Points to Ponder for Learner*

- *List the words in the stanza which express a sense of peace and calm.*
- *In which line does Wordsworth link the landscape with his own thoughts?*

**Stanza Two**

In this stanza you will find how the poet asserts that in the period that has elapsed between his first visit and the present one, the serene landscape and its natural beauty, though physically absent during these five years, have never been absent to him. He gained enormous amount of pleasure and happiness out of the recollection of the landscape. The natural beauty has seeped into his soul so powerfully that it has restored him to tranquillity amid the squalor and weariness of urban life and has prompted him to be kind and generous. Seeing the landscape with the mind's eye has uplifted him to the height of spiritual ecstasy producing a 'blessed mood' of calmness which dissolved the negativities of life. It inspired in him an exalted state of higher spiritual consciousness which enabled him to understand the harmony in greater nature and cosmos, and in all inanimate things which are touched by the same power.

**Critical Commentary**

This section probably enables you to comprehend that nature in Wordsworth is no mere background or a simple setting in time and place. The landscape, though empirically absent after his first visit, does not appear to have any less motivating and captivating spell on the poet. This idea contests the basic spheres of rationalist and scientific studies involving presence and absence of things. The Wordsworthian view of nature is more philosophical. Nature inspires a meditative mood and is capable of pushing aside the alienation and disregard that man faces in the urban life. Wordsworth is seen indirectly

contesting contemporary notions of development and 18<sup>th</sup> Century principles of scientific truth and Enlightenment. It is nature (and not urban development which signifies a regular disengagement and departure from nature) that is capable of harmonising the world so vexed with insensitive compartmentalisation of man.

The thematic growth noticeable in the stanza involves the view that from a nature that inspires 'seclusion' by scenic beauty and pastoral diversion the poem is leading to deeper philosophical levels of the bond shared between man and nature. The gift of nature is transformed from purely sensuous pleasure that is "felt in the blood" to an abstract and reflective mood which is his "purer mind" and culminates in a moral and philosophical insight, which restores the poet's unity of being leading to a mystical insight into the nature of the "life of things". This is an insight into the immanence of a unifying Being in the whole of creation. In the entire stanza you will notice how Wordsworth emphasises the suspension of all physical activity in favour of a deeply contemplative mood in which the impressions of the material world are processed deep within the mind.

#### *Points to Ponder*

- *How does landscape appear to a blind man? What is the poet trying to convey?*
- *What is the significance of the expression "become a living soul"?*

#### **Stanza Three**

The stanza is in one way a reiteration of the experiences involving the effect of Wye and the adjoining landscape during their physical absence. On the other hand, the poet refuses to view his belief as a mere figment of imagination. He ascertains that in the midst of joyless and tiring urban existence his spirit has regularly turned to Wye and has received the bountiful calmness that he so desperately needed.

#### **Critical Commentary**

Reiterating what he mentioned in the previous section Wordsworth is again challenging the empiricist and rationalist views which would view his claims as invalid and fanciful. His reiteration of the recreational, reenergizing, revitalizing potency of nature leads us to the next sections where he is to compare the stages of his own psychological and

spiritual maturation in the context of the landscape's psychological omnipresence. The stanza is an early indication of the concept of the "spots of time" which Wordsworth speaks of in *The Prelude*, which have a shaping influence on the poet's psyche. The temporal shift that occurs in both the second and the third stanzas projects the visual portrait of the artist's/ man's growth in the realm of nature.

#### **Stanza Four**

Standing before the majestic, yet serenely simple, beauty of the landscape Wordsworth feels the revival of the mental picture of the landscape that he consciously and unconsciously carried within him. He anticipates that the present experience of the landscape is going to gift him more sustenance for future years. He is assured of the presence of deeper and graver powers of nature. Not only shall this nature present him with abundant resources of happiness for the present occasion, but also food (metaphysically thoughtful and spiritually purgative) for the future. He presents a comparison between his present self and his previous self in the context of the two visits paid to the banks of Wye. His psyche and spirit has altered a great deal. He is no longer the youth who in the pursuit of beauty and freedom could only satisfy the sensuous needs of his body and mind by drinking to the lees the beautiful aspects of nature. During his earlier visit, nature seemed to him a magician casting a spell, intoxicating his mind with sights and sounds which would present before him a diversion from the mundane din and bustle of urban existence. Earlier, he was intoxicated by the sounding cataract which would haunt him, he was awed by the deep, gloomy woods, and was charmed by the liberation he could enjoy in the locale filled with rocks and mountains. At that point in time, nature appeared to him as a mere means for the coarser delights of the senses.

Wordsworth, returning to his present sensibility and understanding of what nature has done in promoting his growth, declares the stage of ecstasy and insane sensuous agitation to be over. However, he is in no mood to mourn the loss. He is rather overjoyed to notice that such loss is compensated by a sense of the sublime which has been gifted to him by the affective power of nature. He now looks at nature with the eye of the adult, not fuelled by boyish agitations of sensuous delight but conditioned by a deeper insightful consideration of the sorrows and hardships of fellow human beings. Now nature appears to him as no diversion but the source of thought in man. Nature now is a mysterious system, the greater cosmos which holds together the living and the non-living objects and aspects, and all the binaries of the world. Nature is the source of pleasure still, but

it is now the chief supplier of spiritual wisdom and thought which permeates every aspect of creation. He is still the drinker of the intoxication that nature's beauteous sights and sounds offer, but in addition to that he is now made wiser. Contemplating such sights and sounds now lead him towards the purest thoughts involving humanity and morality. The stanza ends with an eloquent tribute to the outward forms of nature which act as a gateway to the world of mystical vision which unites human consciousness with the elements and the cosmos.

### **Critical Commentary**

The stanza brilliantly captures the stages of Wordsworth's spiritual growth. Moreover, this stanza is significant in helping you to analyse the theme of nature in the poem. These lines are remarkably significant in tracing the development of the poet's response towards the same landscape. There are three distinct phases in the development of this attitude. The first involves the thoughtless but intense joys of his "boyish days" while responding to natural phenomenon which Wordsworth enjoyed during his first visit. The simile used to describe the stage is that of a roe, a young animal which at once combines the impression of innocence with immaturity. It is an instinctive stage marked by appetite and its satisfaction. This phase is dismissed by the phrase "that time is past". Wordsworth describes its "dizzy raptures" as the thoughtless response of an immature mind. The second phase involves the nature that he bore within himself unconsciously. In the third and final phase Wordsworth recognizes in nature the innate potency to generate greater thoughts, revitalize imagination, and inspire a cognitive development in man. This final recognition only occurs by understanding consciously the silent development of his internal nature, a development which is conditioned by the collaboration of the external and coarser pleasures derived from "all the mighty world/ of eye and ear" and the superior potency of nature which in its physical absence during the five years has developed the spirit of the poet. Wordsworth clearly notices the associations of nature external and internal, with perceptions and forms without and within the poet's mind.

Wordsworth indirectly mentions that while nature is an externally visible and empirically valid combination of beauteous sights and sounds, it is never a fixed and specified locale without altering abilities. To Wordsworth, nature is a reality as well as a phenomenon. Every phenomenon of nature that exists is mediated through the consciousness of the perceiving mind. And with the growth of the mind and differences in terms of contexts, the phenomenon too alters and develops. To the young Wordsworth

nature had seemed to be only an enjoyable diversion full of intoxication and pleasure. But this phenomenon is silently developed and modified when the actual sights and sounds were physically absent for five years and yet continued to grow within the viewer's mind. The poet who revisits the banks of the river Wye is, therefore, acutely conscious of the "remoter charm" of the place "by thought supplied". The sublime aspect of nature is thus a by-product of the mind that it has nurtured. The same process is highlighted and reiterated in the third phase of Wordsworth's attitude towards nature, as now fully aware of the processes of development of nature and the human mind, he is able to unite man and nature, to find in nature the music and expression of man's existence.

Wordsworth's lines thus turn out to be a celebration of humanity in nature, a celebration of man's activity conditioned by nature's influence, enabling both man and nature to grow. Wordsworth rejects the Neo-Classical view of a passive nature which was merely a setting or a background. He does not do so by rejecting the 'rationality' which the 18<sup>th</sup> Century celebrated and glorified. He probably nurtures an alternative field of logic which adds a new and more condensed dimension to humanity, ecology, psychology, and spirituality.

Wordsworth, as you probably realise by now, no longer celebrates the abundance of natural beauties of the banks of the Wye. Rather, he transcends the boundaries of the particular and presents a view of nature which is both subjectively present in the imagination and objectively present in time and space. From a mere projection of the specific physical details of the banks of the Wye, the poem now offers to include all sights of nature. The poem moves from the actual cataract and rocks to

'light of setting suns,  
And the round ocean and the living air,  
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:  
A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.'

Nature proceeds from the realm of the physical to the universal. It develops from a site, through a mental sight, to the source of all sights and impressions — external and internal.

*Points to Ponder for the Learner*

- *How does the poet describe his youthful response to nature?*
- *What is the difference between the poet's past and present*

**Stanza Five**

No longer drugged by the coarser pleasures derived from nature, but, standing empowered by the sublime effect of nature on his mind and soul, Wordsworth now declares that even if nature might not arouse the same passionate response it once had, he is overjoyed by the feeling that he is accompanied by his sister in whose eyes he recaptures his past self and his past impressions of the same landscape and wider nature. This leads the poet to announce that his sister should never forget that nature never betrays the heart that loves her and submits before the magnitude of its captivating and healing force. Nature, forever, leads man to joys in such a way that his mind is never affected by the cheerlessness of urban life, the lip-service of hypocritical men, the crudities and harshness of people and social customs. If in future years she is afflicted by misery or loneliness, her mind will yield the memories of natural beauty which will restore her tired spirit. Even when her brother is no longer with her, she should always remember that it is because of her presence beside him that he could enjoy the sights and sounds of the banks of the Wye more vigorously by seeing a reflection of his earlier self in her eyes. The poem ends with a prayer for his sister and an assertion of his continuing love for nature which is now "holier" than ever before.

**Critical Commentary**

The final stanza of Wordsworth's poem is in one way a reiteration of the captivating and revitalizing, redeeming, transcending, trans-substantiating potency of nature. However, more significantly, the stanza stands as a progression. It offers the sublime heights of Wordsworth's ideas related to nature and in many ways his critique of man's unnatural social existence. Wordsworth stands as a firm believer of the fact that Nature has not merely curative potencies; it is the sole guide and friend to humanity. It is a mother that nourishes the child in man, fills its mind with spontaneous overflow of calmness and gentle graciousness. It restores and replenishes the broken spirit of man. It heals the external body as well as the maladies of the internal self. Wordsworth critiques the so called elitism of the urban world where development has only given more fuel to the

hypocrisies of the world. The spontaneity of the natural world stands in opposition to the mechanical status of human life in urban setting. Nature here is no longer a backdrop but an animated presence reaching out to man.

Significantly enough, the poem, after revealing the inter-connectedness of man and nature in the pursuit of mutual growth in the previous stanza now declares another philosophy of inter-subjectivity. The poet's sister in the present context offers the poet a glimpse of his previous self. T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' in *The Four Quartets* begins with the famous lines:

'Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past'.

Reading these lines you will realise that past, present and future is brought within an overarching vision. The poet experiences the present in the light of the past while looking into the future with the benefit of present convictions. In 'My Heart Leaps Up', which is also known as 'The Rainbow', Wordsworth famously declared that 'Child is the father of man'. This epigrammatic expression is sometimes interpreted in a line which holds the view that the adult is the by-product of the behaviours and habits that it had as a child. In the wild eyes of his sister Wordsworth sees his own past, while realising that such a state cannot be permanent. Yet he is reassured by the conviction that her future selfhood will be sanctified by its association just as his own is. This is a domain of inter-connectedness of not merely the times past, present, and future, or merely the specific landscape in its physicality and the universal nature in all its metaphysical, spiritual dimensions. It is quite significantly the spontaneous association and union of individuals. It is a phenomenon of inter-subjectivity, a phenomenon which reflects how nature turns out to be the sole guide and vehicle in uniting different human beings and their experiences in the context of a submission before nature in opposition to the gaps and cracks in human relations in the social existence of man. This is a celebration of nature, and more importantly a glorification of man in nature rather than the man in society.

***Points to Ponder:***

- ***How does nature heal the wounds inflicted by society?***
- ***How does Wordsworth describe his enduring relationship with nature?***

### 2.2.2.i (d). Themes

#### ❖ ‘Tintern Abbey’ as a Romantic Poem:

Wordsworth is noted as the most significant exponent of Romantic poetics which displayed a sharp break from the Neo-Classical tendencies of versification, insistence on poetic diction, and a mathematically studied craftsmanship in the realm of poetic creation. This revolt is often associated with a ‘return to nature’ a phrase which may be interpreted in more than one way. On the one hand it suggests a glorification of the ‘natural’ as opposed to the ‘artificial’, on the other hand it is also a new way of looking at the spiritual impact of nature rather than its purely picturesque aspect. The Romantic sublime captures a sense of the wonder and awe inspired by nature’s aspects which reaches beyond the material prospect and creates a phenomenon that is transcendent. The poet became the interpreter of the language of the metaphysical realm as revealed in the book of nature. *Lyrical Ballads* announced the primacy of this new way of looking at nature, not through the naked eyes, but through the lens of the imagination and reflection.

The volume also unveiled a new kind of aesthetics which sought to employ the vocabulary of ordinary speech to poetic expression, thereby extending the search for the ‘natural’ to the realm of artistic expression as well. Wordsworth’s Romanticism is associated with the glorification of spontaneity associated with the natural world and the innate nature of man. But this spontaneity is heavily mediated by reflection and meditation. In its very lyrical style, ‘Tintern Abbey’ displays a subjective exploration of nature by viewing it as the expression and extension of human subjectivity. Nature here is not objectively displayed. Rather the poem explores nature by projecting upon it a subjective, metaphysical vision of the link between man and nature. The poem justifies M.H. Abrams’ view that the Romantic lyric is basically meditative in nature. It begins with a particularised locale but soon digresses to a more abstract philosophical cogitation before returning to the particularised place with a deeper understanding of its importance to the inner life of the poet.

The landscape of the banks of Wye is most evocatively displayed and serves as the backdrop of the poem. This display offers a switch in the context of contemporary scenes available in English poetry of the period. The lines:

‘steep and lofty cliffs,  
That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky...’  
or those such as,  
‘plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
‘Mid groves and copses.’

provide a pastoral landscape in place of largely urban images of contemporary Neo-Classical literature. However, nature, as displayed in the quoted lines, does not merely appear as a mere background, for Wordsworth always views nature as a phenomenon more internally and spiritually located with man as the chief proprietor of thoughts and impressions. It comes alive through the thoughts and feelings of man. This indeed is the ultimate expression of the ‘egotistical sublime’ which is Wordsworth’s unique contribution to Romantic aesthetics.

Nature in Wordsworth is also a locale of spontaneity. In his ‘Preface’ to the *Lyrical Ballads* he famously stated that poetry has its source in the ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings’ and finally matures and voices itself as ‘emotions recollected in tranquillity’. Significantly enough, nature for him represents a serene realm in which the natural, unspoilt, impulses of the heart can be recalled. It rejuvenates man by offering an escape from the hypocrisies of social existence and revealing the sublime aspect of creation. This synergy is displayed by Wordsworth’s philosophy of man-nature interdependence for mutual growth, in his critique of vain urbanity, in his insistence on a vocabulary of words which are regularly used in the daily course of human conversation, and an utter rejection of Neo-Classical craftsmanship in ‘Tintern Abbey’.

❖ **Autobiographical Elements in ‘Tintern Abbey’:**

‘Tintern Abbey’ in many ways presages *The Prelude* which Wordsworth subtitled ‘the Growth of a Poet’s Mind’. The poem which is based on the context of his individual journeys through the banks of Wye, is also a record of his intellectual journey from a life of instincts to one of meditative thoughts and wisdom. The actual circumstance of the composition of this poem, the walking trip and the mention of his own sister is to be found in references to it in his letter written to Miss Fenwick.

Critics such as Nicholas Roe have pointed out that the passage of time emphasised in the beginning of the poem draw the attention of the reader to the date of his first visit, which was significant both in terms of political and personal experiences. In 1793 Wordsworth was recently returned from France and was still dealing with his disappointment with the gory path the French Revolution had taken. England had just declared war on Republican France. The English countryside may then have provided him with a refuge from the turmoil raging outside. The entire poem can be read as a personal evaluation of his own experiences in connection with the pastoral world around Tintern abbey and the wider nature beyond it which was such a contrast to the war of ideologies in the world outside.

Principally, however, his poem must be read as a reflection of the Romantic principles in the evaluation of nature and man's connectedness to the same. The poem is a philosophical revelation and in many ways is prescribing paths that shall enable humanity to view in nature a guide, a sublime reflection of humanity, an expression of man's own being, consciousness, and conscience. There is no doubt in stating that Wordsworth's poem is based on a personal experience and association involving nature, and in more ways than one the poem narrates in the manner of spiritual autobiography the poet's maturation. However, the poem, in stating that his past is contained in his sister's present, in stating that nature never betrays the heart that loves it, in finding in nature the expression of purest humanity reflects more than a mere personal account or an autobiographical documentation.

#### ❖ **Wordsworth's Views on Nature in 'Tintern Abbey':**

In Romantic poetry nature is never a mere background but an expression of humanity and a reservoir of joys attainable. The climactic lines of "Tintern Abbey" in which Wordsworth asserts his enduring relationship with nature reveals how nebulous a concept nature can be. Based on the report of the senses, the human consciousness constructs its own view of nature: the sensuous pleasures of boyhood, the solace of the tortured mind, the guide and the teacher who directs the actions and moral nature of man, nature reveals its many faces at different stages of a man's life. If a man is able to comprehend nature as no mere external attribute or presence, but one that is resonating with a great power, then it has the potency to liberate man from the petty concerns of daily life by presenting before him a spectacle of sublime aspect which penetrates deep into man's psyche. Wordsworth's ideas seem to echo the 'Associationist' ideas of David Hartley. It is poised on three states of development, sensation, reflection and visionary insight.

Sensations derived from the objects of the senses lead to reflection and culminate in complex insight. Once that is achieved the matured man shall look upon nature as:

A motion and a spirit, that impels  
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,  
And rolls through all things.

Wordsworth's pantheistic glorification of nature stands as a foil to his critique of the hypocrisy of the world of social customs and bondage for it is Nature which stays loyal and benevolent to the heart that loves it. It educates man in delightful and philosophical manners. As he says in 'The Tables Turned':

Let Nature be your teacher.

.....

One impulse from a vernal wood  
May teach you more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can.

Wordsworth probably recognizes that nature is the mother who reveals herself in all the beauties of man's creation and must, therefore, be worshiped. In 'The Sparrow's Nest' he writes:

She gave me eyes, she gave me ears;  
And humble care, and delicate fears;  
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;  
And love, and thought, and joy.

The same sentiment is expressed by him in 'Tintern Abbey',

for to Wordsworth Nature is,  
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,  
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul  
Of all my moral being.

### ❖ Form and Vocabulary in ‘Tintern Abbey’:

In the ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth reacted sharply against the preconditioning of metre and rhyme in poetry in the Neo-Classical tradition of Pope and others. He favoured spontaneity over such restrictive views of poetic creation. As you have already learnt, Wordsworth prioritised a simple conversational tone and the vocabulary of daily human interaction and thought it to be the sole medium of narrating his experiences and evaluation of man and nature. A natural expression was preferred over the highly scholarly techniques of Neo-Classical poetry. Wordsworth proclaims in the ‘Preface’ that the poet is a “Man speaking to Men”. His chosen subject matter is culled from incidents of everyday life over which a colouring of the imagination has been added. Wordsworth chose to ‘to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature’. In doing so, the poet employed a selection of language really used by men. The poet is a teacher in Wordsworth. And since his primary aim is to teach he must reveal the sublime available in the mundane. Such a revelation is best done when the teacher uses lucid language and a simple conversational tone. Justifying the use of such simple language he writes:

such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

‘Tintern Abbey’ is written in blank verse which is unrhymed and is closest to the cadence of regular prose used in ordinary conversation in the human world. This in a way is a celebration of the ‘naked dignity of man’ in theme and style. The form in Wordsworth is not decorative. It is immensely significant in reflecting the mood and ethos of the poem. The celebration of rusticity along with spontaneity of thought and expression is central to Wordsworth’s romantic vision. He uses blank verse and a vocabulary which is only deceptively simple since it touches and theorises on the most sublime spiritual questions that man encounters. The use of iambic pentameter allows the poem to be lucidly simple and slight variations of the metrical arrangements in lines such as ‘Here, under this dark sycamore, and view’ only make the poem more spontaneously alive.

The poet's insistence on spontaneity does not harm the closely knit argumentative structure that the poem establishes, for in the poem lies a well devised stanza-wise development of the main argument of the poem. The first stanza develops the mood of return to nature with the themes of spiritual growth, memory, and so on. The second stanza and the third stanza reiterate the growth of nature's influence within man in order to eradicate traces of melancholy. The fourth shows the stages of man's development in relation to nature. Finally, the fifth prescribes submission of man before Nature for the development of his own consciousness and moral being.

### **2.2.2. i (e) Comprehension Questions**

#### **Long Questions-20 Marks**

1. Discuss the Romantic elements in 'Tintern Abbey' with suitable illustrations from the text.
2. Is 'Tintern Abbey' a celebration of Nature? Discuss Wordsworth's views on Nature in answering the question.
3. Discuss 'Tintern Abbey' as an expression of Wordsworth's philosophy.

#### **Mid-Length Questions-12 Marks**

1. Bring out the autobiographical elements in 'Tintern Abbey'.
2. Comment on the language and style of 'Tintern Abbey'.

#### **Short Questions-6 Marks**

1. Discuss the poet's feelings about nature during his first visit of the Tintern Abbey landscape.
2. What impact of nature was observable on the mind of the poet during the five years of the physical absence of the landscape?
3. Explain with suitable reference to the context the following lines:

Nature never did betray  
The heart that loved her;

## Samuel Taylor Coleridge—‘Christabel’ Book I

### 2.2.3. S.T. Coleridge: The Poet and His Poetry

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was not only a major Romantic poet, but he was also the foremost philosopher and literary critic of his age. His poetic output is erratic in comparison to Wordsworth’s, but his contribution to English literary history also includes his literary criticism and his lively discussion of the ideas of the German Idealist philosophers, particularly Immanuel Kant. His theory regarding the cognitive and synthesising role of the imagination is one of the most important cornerstones of the Romantic Movement. John Stuart Mill summed up his influence on the age when he called Coleridge a “seminal mind”.

#### ❖ Birth and the early years

Coleridge was born at Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, on October 21, 1772, the youngest son of John Coleridge, vicar, and Ann Bowdon, his second wife. A precocious boy, dreamy and introspective, he finished the *Bible* and the *Arabian Nights* before he was five. At ten, following the death of his father, he was sent to Christ’s Hospital, London, as a charity boy. Though poor and neglected, he became an accomplished Greek and Latin Scholar. Here he met Charles Lamb. It was the first of many significant literary friendships. He entered Jesus College, Cambridge on a scholarship in 1791; but in spite of a brilliant career in classics, he finally left the college in 1794, without taking a degree. At University, he was interested in the radical political and religious ideas of his day. He had already been attracted by the motto of the French Revolution and Jacobin politics, though later he dismissed it as a youthful folly. These early years of radical politics later put him under the suspicion of the Government which was preparing to wage war against Revolutionary France. To go back to Coleridge’s University days, he also ran up substantial debts, to avoid which he ran away and joined the Royal Dragoons as a conscript, using a pseudonym. He was brought back and readmitted after three months, but did not complete his degree. It was probably during his University days that he became increasingly addicted to opium, which had been prescribed to him as a pain-killer. Coleridge’s youthful views of social reform found expression in his scheme for Pantisocracy. Through all the ups and downs of his life, he retained his fundamental faith in religion, and was a part of the Broad Church Movement, a liberal group which emerged within the Anglican Church.

### ❖ **Pantisocracy**

Coleridge met Robert Southey in 1794, and the next couple of years he spent in Bristol. With Southey and Robert Lovell he fervently desired to establish a *pantisocracy*, a utopian concept of a community based on ideal equality, on the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, New England. This scheme ultimately failed because of want of funds, and also a bitter quarrel between Coleridge and Southey over politics and money.

### ❖ **Marriage and early career**

He married Sara Fricker, sister of Southey's fiancé in 1795. The newly-weds retired to a cottage at Clevedon, where their first son Hartley was born (1796). The marriage was a disaster and Coleridge has often been accused of being an irresponsible and unfeeling husband. Later, he was to fall passionately in love with Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, to whom he addressed *Dejection: An Ode*.

While at Clevedon, he edited a radical journal, *The Watchman*, which ran for ten issues. *Poems on Various Subjects*, was published in 1796 with the assistance of his friend Joseph Cottle. The poem *Eolian Harp* is one of the most celebrated poems of this period in which Coleridge created a symbol which has come to be associated with the Romantic imagination. At the end of the year he moved to Nether Stowey, to be near to the Wordsworth's. In 1797 appeared *Poems* which included, besides his own poems, those of Charles Lamb and Charles Lloyd.

### ❖ **The opium years**

Originally prescribed as a medication, Coleridge became habituated to opium. Though associated with one of the most colourful stories of creativity, the composition of *Kubla Khan*, his addiction made him subject to frequent illnesses, which hampered his poetic output. However, his opium-taking was brought relatively under control by Dr. James Gillman of Highgate, with whom the poet moved in. In the same year, 1816, a single volume named *Christabel and Other Poems* was published which also contained *Kubla Khan*. In 1817 appeared *Biographia Literaria*, a long prose work containing his principles in politics, religion and philosophy, and 'an application of the rules, deduced from philosophical principles to poetry and criticism'.

For the last four years of his life he was practically confined to a sick-room. The last work published during his lifetime was *On the Constitution of Church and State* (1830). Coleridge died in Highgate on 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1834, while dictating some portion of *Opus Maximum* to J.H. Green. Wordsworth, always chary of praise, uttered on hearing his

death: 'He was the most wonderful man I have ever known'. Charles Lamb, his lifelong friend, described him as 'an archangel slightly damaged'.

The following assessment of Coleridge is to be found in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*:

Coleridge has been variously criticised as a political turn-coat, a drug-addict, a plagiarist, and a mystic humbug, whose wrecked career left nothing but a handful of magical early poems. But the shaping influence of his highly imaginative criticism is now generally accepted, and his position (with his friend Wordsworth) as one of the two great progenitors of the English Romantic spirit is assured. Nothing has re-established him as a creative artist more than the modern editions of his *Letters* and *Notebooks*. There is a religious and metaphysical dimension to all his best work, both poetry and prose, which has the inescapable glow of the authentic visionary.

### 2.2.3. ii (a). Text and Introduction to 'Christabel'

#### ❖ Composition History

'Christabel', which is usually looked upon as one of the finest supernatural poems by S. T. Coleridge, brings back to one's mind echoes of the tales of wonder involving supernatural agencies, popularised by the German Romantics during the eighteenth century. Originally meant to be in five parts, he could not finish more than two, though he struggled with it for years. The poem thus remains a fragment. The first part of *Christabel* was written in 1797 at Nether Stowey, Somerset, while the second part was composed in 1800 at Keswick, Cumberland, after the poet's return from Germany. Factors like personal indolence, domestic discord, quarrel with intimate friends like Lamb and Lloyd, and above all, lack of poetic enthusiasm might have impeded him from finishing the poem, though he tried again and again to give it a complete shape. Over the years, there were many references by the poet, to his struggles with finishing the poem, though he claimed: "The reason for my not finishing 'Christabel' is not that I don't know how to do it – for I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning till the end in my mind, but I fear I cannot carry on with equal success of execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one". Wordsworth however, was rather skeptical of this claim. The truth is that Coleridge seems to have felt a strange revulsion in carrying on with the poem. The first part of 'Christabel' was intended for inclusion in the first edition of

*Lyrical Ballads* (1798), but it was finally debarred from inclusion since this part was not technically complete by that time. Though it was subsequently decided that both parts would be included in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, the plan was never translated into reality. For, the style of the second part of 'Christabel' appeared so 'discordant' from that of Wordsworth that he thought that it could not be printed by the side of his own poems 'with any propriety'. Coleridge however, thought that his poem failed to receive accommodation chiefly because of its inordinate length. The poem thus lay unpublished, though the manuscript was circulated and read by many in the Romantic circle. In 1816, John Murray, on the recommendation of Lord Byron, published it under the title *Christabel and Other Poems*, the accompanying pieces being *Kubla Khan* and *The Pains of Sleep*.

In a prefatory note, Coleridge pointed out a metrical principle in the poem – "...counting in each lines the accents, not the syllables".

#### Text

#### 'CHRISTABEL'

#### (Part the First)

*'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,  
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;  
Tu—whit! Tu—whoo!  
And hark, again! the crowing cock,  
How drowsily it crew.*

*Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,  
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;  
From her kennel beneath the rock  
She maketh answer to the clock,  
Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour;  
Ever and aye, by shine and shower,  
Sixteen short howls, not over loud;  
Some say, she sees my lady's shroud.*

10

*Is the night chilly and dark?  
The night is chilly, but not dark.  
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,  
It covers but not hides the sky.  
The moon is behind, and at the full;  
And yet she looks both small and dull.  
The night is chill, the cloud is gray: 20  
'Tis a month before the month of May,  
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.*

*The lovely lady, Christabel,  
Whom her father loves so well,  
What makes her in the wood so late,  
A furlong from the castle gate?  
She had dreams all yesternight  
Of her own betrothèd knight;  
And she in the midnight wood will pray 30  
For the weal of her lover that's far away.*

*She stole along, she nothing spoke,  
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,  
And naught was green upon the oak  
But moss and rarest misletoe:  
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,  
And in silence prayeth she.*

*The lady sprang up suddenly,  
The lovely lady Christabel!  
It moaned as near, as near can be,  
But what it is she cannot tell.—  
On the other side it seems to be, 40  
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.*

*The night is chill; the forest bare;  
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?  
There is not wind enough in the air  
To move away the ringlet curl  
From the lovely lady's cheek—  
There is not wind enough to twirl  
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,  
That dances as often as dance it can,  
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,  
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.*

50

*Hush, beating heart of Christabel!  
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!  
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,  
And stole to the other side of the oak,  
What sees she there?*

*There she sees a damsel bright,  
Drest in a silken robe of white,  
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:  
The neck that made that white robe wan,  
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;  
Her blue-veined feet unsandl'd were,  
And wildly glittered here and there  
The gems entangled in her hair.  
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see  
A lady so richly clad as she—  
Beautiful exceedingly!*

60

*Mary mother, save me now!  
(Said Christabel) And who art thou?*

70

*The lady strange made answer meet,  
And her voice was faint and sweet:—  
Have pity on my sore distress,  
I scarce can speak for weariness:  
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!  
Said Christabel, How camest thou here?  
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,  
Did thus pursue her answer meet:—*

*My sire is of a noble line,  
And my name is Geraldine:  
Five warriors seized me yesternorn,  
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:  
They choked my cries with force and fright,  
And tied me on a palfrey white.  
The palfrey was as fleet as wind,  
And they rode furiously behind.  
They spurred amain, their steeds were white:  
And once we crossed the shade of night.*

80

*As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,  
I have no thought what men they be;  
Nor do I know how long it is  
(For I have lain entranced I wis)  
Since one, the tallest of the five,  
Took me from the palfrey's back,  
A weary woman, scarce alive.  
Some muttered words his comrades spoke:  
He placed me underneath this oak;  
He swore they would return with haste;  
Whither they went I cannot tell—*

90

*I thought I heard, some minutes past,*

100

*Sounds as of a castle bell.  
Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she).  
And help a wretched maid to flee.*

*Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,  
And comforted fair Geraldine:  
O well, bright dame! may you command  
The service of Sir Leoline;  
And gladly our stout chivalry  
Will he send forth and friends withal  
To guide and guard you safe and free  
Home to your noble father's hall.*

110

*She rose: and forth with steps they passed  
That strove to be, and were not, fast.  
Her gracious stars the lady blest,  
And thus spake on sweet Christabel:  
All our household are at rest,  
The hall as silent as the cell;  
Sir Leoline is weak in health,  
And may not well awakened be,  
But we will move as if in stealth,  
And I beseech your courtesy,  
This night, to share your couch with me.*

120

*They crossed the moat, and Christabel  
Took the key that fitted well;  
A little door she opened straight,  
All in the middle of the gate;  
The gate that was ironed within and without,  
Where an army in battle array had marched out.*

*The lady sank, belike through pain,  
And Christabel with might and main  
Lifted her up, a weary weight,  
Over the threshold of the gate:  
Then the lady rose again,  
And moved, as she were not in pain.*

130

*So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.  
And Christabel devoutly cried  
To the lady by her side,  
Praise we the Virgin all divine  
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!  
Alas, alas! said Geraldine,  
I cannot speak for weariness.  
So free from danger, free from fear,  
They crossed the court: right glad they were.*

140

*Outside her kennel, the mastiff old  
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.  
The mastiff old did not awake,  
Yet she an angry moan did make!  
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?  
Never till now she uttered yell  
Beneath the eye of Christabel.  
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:  
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?*

150

*They passed the hall, that echoes still,  
Pass as lightly as you will!  
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,*

*Amid their own white ashes lying;  
But when the lady passed, there came  
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;  
And Christabel saw the lady's eye, 160  
And nothing else saw she thereby,  
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,  
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.  
O softly tread, said Christabel,  
My father seldom sleepeth well.*

*Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,  
And jealous of the listening air  
They steal their way from stair to stair,  
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,  
And now they pass the Baron's room, 170  
As still as death, with stifled breath!  
And now have reached her chamber door;  
And now doth Geraldine press down  
The rushes of the chamber floor.*

*The moon shines dim in the open air,  
And not a moonbeam enters here.  
But they without its light can see  
The chamber carved so curiously,  
Carved with figures strange and sweet,  
All made out of the carver's brain, 180  
For a lady's chamber meet:  
The lamp with twofold silver chain  
Is fastened to an angel's feet.*

*The silver lamp burns dead and dim;  
But Christabel the lamp will trim.*

*She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,  
And left it swinging to and fro,  
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,  
Sank down upon the floor below.*

*O weary lady, Geraldine,  
I pray you, drink this cordial wine!  
It is a wine of virtuous powers;  
My mother made it of wild flowers.*

190

*And will your mother pity me,  
Who am a maiden most forlorn?  
Christabel answered—'Woe is me!  
She died the hour that I was born.  
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell  
How on her death-bed she did say,  
That she should hear the castle-bell  
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.  
O mother dear! that thou wert here!  
I would, said Geraldine, she were!*

200

*But soon with altered voice, said she—  
'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!  
I have power to bid thee flee.'  
Alas! what ails poor Geraldine?  
Why stares she with unsettled eye?  
Can she the bodiless dead espy?*

*And why with hollow voice cries she,  
'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—  
Though thou her guardian spirit be,  
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.'*

210

*Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,  
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue—  
Alas! said she, this ghastly ride—  
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!  
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,  
And faintly said, ' 'tis over now!'*

*Again the wild-flower wine she drank:  
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,  
And from the floor whereon she sank,  
The lofty lady stood upright:  
She was most beautiful to see,  
Like a lady of a far countree.*

220

*And thus the lofty lady spake—  
'All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel!  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befel,  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well.  
But now unrobe yourself; for I  
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'*

230

*Quoth Christabel, So let it be!  
And as the lady bade, did she.  
Her gentle limbs did she undress,  
And lay down in her loveliness.*

*But through her brain of weal and woe  
So many thoughts moved to and fro*

240

*That vain it were her lids to close;  
So half-way from the bed she rose,  
And on her elbow did recline  
To look at the lady Geraldine.*

*Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side—  
A sight to dream of, not to tell!  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!*

250

*Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;  
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!  
Deep from within she seems half-way  
To lift some weight with sick assay,  
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;  
Then suddenly, as one defied,  
Collects herself in scorn and pride,  
And lay down by the Maiden's side!—  
And in her arms the maid she took,*

260

*Ah wel-a-day!  
And with low voice and doleful look  
These words did say:  
'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,*

*This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow; 270*  
*But vainly thou warrest,*  
*For this is alone in*  
*Thy power to declare,*  
*That in the dim forest*  
*Thou heard'st a low moaning,*  
*And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;*  
*And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,*  
*To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'*

*THE CONCLUSION TO PART THE FIRST*

*It was a lovely sight to see 280*  
*The lady Christabel, when she*  
*Was praying at the old oak tree.*  
*Amid the jagged shadows*  
*Of mossy leafless boughs,*  
*Kneeling in the moonlight,*  
*To make her gentle vows;*  
*Her slender palms together prest,*  
*Heaving sometimes on her breast;*  
*Her face resigned to bliss or bale—*  
*Her face, oh call it fair not pale,*  
*And both blue eyes more bright than clear, 290*  
*Each about to have a tear.*

*With open eyes (ah woe is me!)*  
*Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,*  
*Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,*  
*Dreaming that alone, which is—*

*O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,  
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?  
And lo! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild, 300  
As a mother with her child.*

*A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison.  
O Geraldine! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,  
From cliff and tower, tu—whoo! tu—whoo!  
Tu—whoo! tu—whoo! from wood and fell! 310  
And see! the lady Christabel  
Gathers herself from out her trance;  
Her limbs relax, her countenance  
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids  
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—  
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!  
And oft the while she seems to smile  
As infants at a sudden light!*

*Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,  
Like a youthful hermitess, 320  
Beauteous in a wilderness,  
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.*

*And, if she move unquietly,  
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free  
Comes back and tingles in her feet.  
No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.  
What if her guardian spirit 'twere,  
What if she knew her mother near?  
But this she knows, in joys and woes,  
That saints will aid if men will call:  
For the blue sky bends over all.*

330

### 2.2.3. ii (b). Annotations

**Drowsily (l. 5):** sleepily.

**Ever and aye (l.11):** always; offering no exception.

**Shroud (l.13):** a piece of cloth used to cover a dead body before burial. Here it implies spirit or ghost.

**Weal (l.30):** wellbeing.

**Damsel (l. 58):** maiden.

**Clad (l.67):** dressed.

**Meet (l. 71):** proper.

**Sire (l.79):** father (archaic).

**Palfrey (l. 84):** horse.

**Swore (l. 98):** promised.

**Moat (l.123):** a defensive ditch full of water around a castle.

**Belike (l. 129):** possibly, as if.

**Might and main (l.130):** entire physical strength.

**Gloom (l. 169):** here it implies darkness.

**Cordial (l. 191):** refreshing.

**Woe (l.195):** sorrow.

**Peak and pine (l. 205):** waste and wither away.

**Lofty (l. 223):** tall.

**Countree (l.225):** country (archaic)

**Unrobe (l.233):** undress.

**Doleful (l.265):** gloomy.

**Utterance (l. 268):** speech.

**Shield (l. 278):** protect.

**Jagged (l. 282):** irregular in shape.

**Tairn (l. 306):** a small mountain lake.

**Rill (l.306):** a small stream or rivulet (poetic).

**Countenance (l. 313):** face.

### 2.2.3. ii (c). Central Idea

Is there a central idea? ‘Christabel’, an unfinished poem, has defied explanations. On the surface, you might think that the poem is meant simply to arouse a flesh-creeping supernatural sensation in the reader. In fact, the poem did evoke strong, but mixed reactions on this account. Moreover, by introducing the undressing scene of Geraldine, which was followed by her physical proximity with Christabel, Coleridge also invited charges of obscenity. An impartial reading of the text would however, make us perceive that the poem definitely contains a subtler allegory. Here Geraldine stands as a symbol of evil, whose deceptive appearance bemuses the virtuous Christabel, destroying her uncompromised innocence. But, is it in the power of evil to despoil innocence unless it is aided by the latter itself? In the poem Geraldine repeatedly sinks down and appears to shrink back, but it is Christabel herself, who leads her into the sanctity of her bedchamber. Remember also that Christabel leaves the security of her father’s home to steal out to the wood, in order to pray for her beloved. She herself transgresses the boundaries which moor her to a protected world of innocence. Could Coleridge be suggesting that the knowledge which Geraldine brings with her is a part of the process of maturity? Maybe, the answer will always be elusive.

Why was Christabel, the virtuous and innocent maiden, so easily susceptible to

Geraldine? Why did she have to go through the shame and horror associated with Geraldine's touch? Did her pure innocence make her defenseless against the corruption of Geraldine? Or was the latter a kind of alter ego which asserted itself at a psychological moment. In other words, did Geraldine's spell bring her quite paradoxically to a more complete understanding of life? Seen thus, the poem is not simply a fantastic melodrama bordering on obscenity, but has deeper psychological implications.

### **2.2.3. ii (d). Substance and Critical Commentary**

**Lines 1-5:** The poem opens against the background of a medieval castle. It is midnight by the castle clock, and the screeching of the owls has suddenly awakened the cock whose untimely crowing seems but a drowsy, untimely call. There seems to be a premonition of something unnatural that is to follow.

**Lines 6-21:** Coleridge alludes to common superstitions with his reference to the strange habit of the old mastiff bitch. We learn that the owner of the castle is a rich baron, named Sir Leoline. The howling of the mastiff bitch in response to the sound of the clock, suggest to some that she can espy the spirit of the baron's deceased wife, who seems to hover like a guardian angel.

The description of the night in the following lines reinforces the sense of some impending disaster. It is a night in April, but spring is yet to arrive. The dim moonlight, the hide and seek of light and darkness invests the night with a sense of mystery.

#### **Critical commentary**

Coleridge fully utilises the eerie effects of the "accidents of light and shade" in his opening stanzas. The setting reminds us of gothic tales of horror which are often filled with transgressions of all kinds.

**Lines 23-57:** We are now introduced to Christabel, the central character of the poem. She is a lovely lady, and as an only daughter well deserves the love of her father, Sir Leoline. But, she stealthily steps out into the woods as she had been disturbed the previous night by bad dreams about her betrothed knight. That is why she goes into the night to pray for his wellbeing. She is the very picture of silence and piety as she kneels in prayer below the oak tree. Suddenly, however, the stillness of the night is broken by a moan which startles Christabel. Since there is not enough air even to lift a single curl of her hair, or move the last dry leaf in the tree, she is filled with a sudden fear which makes her heart race. Yet she folds her arms beneath her cloak in determination, and

moves to the other side of the oak to discover the source of the moaning. The poet invokes the holy spirit of “Jesu Maria” to protect her.

**Lines 58-122:** On the other side of the tree Christabel discovers, with surprise and fear, a bright lady, who is richly dressed. She has a pale, stately beauty, but there is also an air of wild disarray about her which suggests some terrible experience. To Christabel’s query she responds in a faint yet sweet voice that she comes of a noble family and that her name is Geraldine. The previous day she was abducted by a group of warriors, who left her alone in the woods swearing that they would return soon. She holds her hand out and appeals to Christabel to help her flee.

Christabel, herself a lady of piety, immediately extends hospitality to the lady on her father’s behalf. As the old Sir Leoline is weak in health, Christabel thinks it fit not to awaken him. She decides to shelter Geraldine for the night in her own bedchamber. They cross the ditch and arrive at the castle gate.

### **Critical Commentary**

The name Christabel, meaning a follower of Christ, suggests holiness and faith. It may also suggest a redemptive figure whose suffering releases others. Even as she steps out of the castle gate, she has a spontaneous faith which seems to inspire her actions. Geraldine, on the other hand, seems to be drawn from a long tradition of vampire tales, or the Greek Lamia, an unfulfilled soul in search of revenge. Her eager reaching out for Christabel’s touch suggests a need for a reciprocal gesture from the girl. But, we may never be sure whether her intention is only to corrupt the girl, or, to redeem herself.

As Christabel’s silent prayer is disrupted by an eerie sensation of a second presence, Coleridge uses short, breathless questions to build up a sinister atmosphere. Geraldine’s tale of abduction is unconvincing, but, it reinforces the idea of the hidden perils of the night. It has the desired effect of appealing to Christabel’s sympathy. The line- “And once we crossed the shades of night”- gives an early indication of Geraldine’s true nature, as it seems to hint that she is a spirit who has broken away from the dark shades in search of a virtuous soul who will rescue her.

**Lines 123-165:** Before she enters the castle, Geraldine sinks down at the iron gate, apparently because of weariness. Christabel lifts her up using all her strength, and carries her in. She instinctively prays to the Virgin Mary, and requests Geraldine to join her prayers. The latter however, discards the request pleading weariness.

Outside her kennel, the old mastiff lies asleep. She does not awake as the two ladies

pass by her, but growls in her sleep. This seems unusual, because until then, the mastiff bitch has never uttered the shortest of yells in Christabel's presence.

The half-extinguished hearth inside the castle which suddenly flames up at the entry of Geraldine, also arrests our attention. Bemused, Christabel, glances at Geraldine's eyes, but sees in them nothing other than the reflection of Sir Leoline's shield hung on the wall.

**Lines 166-189:** The ladies now move upstairs silently ("jealous of the listening air") in the shadowy lights of the castle. They pass the baron's room, and finally reach Christabel's bedchamber. Though the moonbeams do not enter the room, its interiors are dimly visible in the dying flame of a silver lamp. It is richly decorated to suit the lady who lives in it, and the lamp is fastened with a twofold silver chain to the feet of the image of an angel. Christabel brightens the light, while Geraldine, in wretched plight, sinks down upon the floor once again.

**Lines 190-203:** Perceiving the distress of Geraldine, Christabel offers her a refreshing drink, which her mother made of wild flowers. Geraldine feigns eagerness to beg the hospitality of Christabel's mother. At this Christabel answers that her mother died the moment she was born, with the wish to come back on the day of her daughter's marriage. Christabel sincerely wishes if her mother were present then, and Geraldine seems to echo her.

### **Critical Commentary**

Geraldine's faint at the iron gate, the growling mastiff bitch and the leaping flame of the dying hearth, are all the stuff of prevailing superstitions which Coleridge uses to warn us of the true nature of the strange woman who is brought into the castle by Christabel. But, even Sir Leoline's shield, symbol of the family's honour, is relegated to a corner and becomes a mere reflection in Geraldine's eye, as Christabel takes her to the bedchamber. Coleridge continues with his play on light and shade in the description of the room, where Geraldine is revived by Christabel. Could the poet be suggesting that in her willingness to entertain the stranger, Christabel too becomes complicit in the latter's design? Or is she the ministering angel who rescues a fallen soul with her pristine innocence? The answer is for the reader to decide.

**Lines 204-225** Geraldine seems to have a terrible fit, as in an altogether altered tone, she curses Christabel's mother and bids her wither away. Possibly she senses the protective spirit of the mother, as she claims in an unnatural voice that the hour is hers.

Thinking that the long ride of the previous day has acted upon Geraldine's balance, Christabel tries to soothe her and offers her again the cordial drink made by her mother. Geraldine accepts the drink and slowly gathers up her spirit. She looks exceedingly beautiful as she stands upright again. She seems not to be a usual lady, but a lady, who has come from an unknown and distant region.

**Lines 226-244:** Geraldine thanks Christabel for her charity and promises to return it as per her capacity. But before that she requests Christabel to undress and to go to bed. She proposes to join her after uttering her prayers. Christabel agrees, but though she undresses and goes to bed, she finds it impossible to close her eyes. For, her mind hardly attains respite from constant worries about her lover. She thus rises from the bed, and reclining on her elbow, fixes her looks at Geraldine.

### **Critical Commentary**

Coleridge uses all the usual symptoms of hysteria to describe Geraldine's fit. Such fits were not uncommon at the time and were usually held to be caused by demonic possession. There seems to be a tussle between her and the dead mother which drains Geraldine till she is revived by Christabel herself. The reference to her "unsettled eye" also continues a series of such references which draw your attention to the tormented state of her soul. As Geraldine stands in all her beauty, the poet seems to be hinting at the deceptive appearance of evil. Even Christabel, already restless, cannot look away from her, thus revealing the compelling fascination of evil. The protective presence of her mother's soul cannot shield her daughter from the predatory evil of Geraldine.

**Lines 245-278:** Geraldine bows her head beneath the lamp, and slowly rolls her eyes around. She then draws her breath aloud, and in an uncontrollable fit of fear or hatred, she suddenly takes off the cincture from beneath her breast so that her silken robe and inner vest drop down to her feet. Her bosom and half her side are now full in view, and as the poet himself declares, it is a sight only to dream of, not to describe. She then reaches towards the bed and lies down by Christabel, taking the latter in her arms. Then, in a low voice she tells Christabel that the touch of her bosom casts a spell on her, and it will henceforth command over her power of speech. From this moment onward, Christabel will perpetually bear the mark of Geraldine's shame and sorrow. She, henceforth, would be able only to narrate under what circumstances she extended hospitality to Geraldine; but the events that followed would ever remain beyond her capacity to narrate.

### **Critical Commentary**

In these lines Coleridge exploits the full effect of an unarticulated terror. The unspeakable sight binds Christabel to Geraldine in a silent compact which casts its spell over the young girl. You may be filled with curiosity to know what she has seen, but there is no answer. The poet seems to be hinting at a vision which is so terrible that words prove inadequate. By refusing to specify what Christabel sees, Coleridge incites our imagination to visualise our own individual fears, and so recreate within us what she may have felt. This is how a supernatural poem becomes a means of a deeper probing of the psyche in which every reader becomes a participant.

### **The Conclusion to Part the First**

**Lines 279-301:** Christabel, even as she lies staring blankly, is changed forever by what she has seen. She is no longer the pure innocent who had knelt before the oak tree. Geraldine, on the other hand, seems to have purged herself of her demons as she slept peacefully, like a mother with her child.

**Lines 302-310:** A star has set, making way for a new star to rise in the firmament of Christabel's fate. Geraldine clearly exploited the advantage of one hour to cast her spell upon Christabel, and throughout that fateful hour, the night birds were unusually silent by the mountain lake and the floating rivulet. But now they are jubilant again to welcome a fresh dawn, and their song gets spread everywhere, from cliff to tower, and from the woods to the level lands.

**Lines 311-331:** Finally, Christabel's trance is over. Her limbs relax, and the tears which had been held back, overflow her closed eyes. She wavers between tears and smiles, as even in her sleep she continues to pray, like a young hermitess. Sometimes she moves restlessly, but this may well be caused by the quick circulation of her youthful blood, which causes pricking sensation in her feet. Possibly at times, she beholds a sweet vision of her guardian spirit, i.e. her deceased mother, to make her happy again. However, Christabel has, to her final consolation, the reassuring knowledge that saints ever extend their support if men sincerely pray to them, and that the blue sky, i.e. heaven ever showers benediction over all in both joys and woes.

### **Critical Commentary**

The key line of this part is "A star hath set, a star hath risen," It suggests a fundamental change in Christabel, who was held captive in Geraldine's embrace. Yet, with all the

strength of her faith, Christabel seems to emerge from the nightmare, changed, but strong in her belief that the saints will protect her. The full psychological implication of the poem begins to crystallise here.

This part may also be read as symbolising Christabel's voluntary acceptance of suffering which will ultimately purge evil of its potency, as we see Geraldine sleeping like a child. Christabel's trance may remind us of the sufferings of the saints and it finally gives way to a reaffirmation of faith in the concluding lines.

### 2.2.3. ii (e). Themes

#### ❖ Medievalism

Romantic medievalism was an answer to classicism and the rule of reason, associated with Neo-classical literature. It employed features like ruins and castles, and stories of supernatural merit, to explore realms of experience far removed from the strictly rational. Coleridge, convinced that 'distance lends enchantment to the view', often set his poems in strange and alien lands in order to appeal to the imagination, and coax the readers to accept what would be incredible in the cold light of rationality. *Christabel* represents a curious study of Coleridge's subtle and exquisite use of medieval elements, which leave a deep and lingering impression in the minds of the readers.

It opens against the backdrop of a medieval castle, with dark stairs, and dimly lit rooms; Christabel's bedchamber, furnished with "figures strange and sweet", and a lamp tied to an angel's feet, reminds us of the wonderfully ornate gothic buildings. The woods outside the castle, where Christabel goes at midnight to pray, represents a space where unknown threats lurk, beyond the ordered world of the castle. The moat which runs round the castle marks a defining line between the two worlds which is transgressed by Christabel.

One of the major themes of the poem is sorcery; for, Geraldine may be easily looked upon as a sorceress, who comes to cast an evil spell upon the innocent lady Christabel. This reminds us of the cult of witchery and superstition, which was common among the people of the Middle Ages. References to the spirit of Christabel's dead mother and the peculiar habit of the mastiff bitch of making exactly sixteen short howls to the midnight clock are aptly used to reinforce a typically medieval atmosphere superstitious fear, which attains full expansion in the overall horror of the scene, where the undressed Geraldine takes Christabel in her arms and casts her hypnotic spell over her.

Coleridge also uses two typically medieval concepts in the poem: piety, and chivalry.

Christabel is characterized as a pious lady with an unwavering faith which is free from doubts. Secondly, upon hearing Geraldine's tale, she extends her hospitality in the true tradition of Medieval chivalry. There are also innumerable references to tournaments, adventures and trophies of battles in the poem, which successfully sustain a typically Medieval ambience.

Apart from witchery, the poem also refers to the medieval problems of banditry and harlotry. Geraldine's tale of being abducted by a group of ruffians is believed because of widespread brigandage prevalent at that time. The beautiful Geraldine, with her cinctured breast appears to be an experienced temptress, a suggestion which becomes more obvious in the next part of the poem.

Before we conclude, we should note that Coleridge has used a considerable number of archaic words and phrases, which contribute significantly to heighten the overall medieval atmosphere in the poem. Of these we may mention nouns like 'sire', 'naught', 'palfrey', 'yestermorn', 'yesternight'; adverbs like 'withal', 'belike'; verbs like 'quoth', 'scritch', 'espy'; and finally, phrases like 'ever and aye', 'I wis', 'Woe is me' and 'Ah, wel-a-day'. His attempt to set the poem into the mould of a ballad, where the entire verse is conceived as a statement of a singular bard, also reminds us of the bygone days of the medieval minstrels. In all this, Coleridge succeeds in imparting an unmistakable element of Medievalism, much like his contemporaries like Lord Byron and Sir Walter Scott.

### ❖ Supernaturalism

Coleridge's penchant for the supernatural is already evident in poems like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Frost at Midnight*. In 'Christabel', he introduces the supernatural in a more complex dimension by launching a character like Geraldine, whose true nature remains ambiguous. She is a witchlike character who puts the innocent heroine under a spell. But she is also a strange, mesmeric, presence in the poem. At times, given the way the two women are linked by touch, we wonder if she is actually Christabel's alter ego, signifying the co-existence of good and evil in the human psyche.

The entire atmosphere is built up by presenting natural objects with an air of mystery which creates an impression of the unnatural; this induces in the readers 'a willing suspension of disbelief' so that they are prepared for the final scene of Geraldine's sorcery with its suggestion of a sensational horror. The 'accidents' of dim moonlight in the wood, or, in Christabel's chamber, create an atmosphere of eerie mystery which sets the tone of the poem. As Christabel steps out into the dim wood, we are filled with a sense of some hidden danger which culminates in her discovery of Geraldine. All this

corresponds to the sense of premonition already created by references to the drowsy, untimely call of the crowing cock, the howls of the toothless mastiff in response to the midnight clock, and finally, the wandering spirit of Christabel's deceased mother in the opening lines of the poem. These omens are part of supernatural lore and warn us of the incursion of evil within the protected precincts of the castle.

The enduring interest of the poem lies in the ultimate mystery, left perpetually unresolved by the poet himself. No doubt the details of Geraldine's eyes, gesture, and finally the description of her breasts as 'a sight to dream of, not to tell' mark the pinnacle of sensationalism and horror in the poem; but after the immediate horror is over, we are left with a series of questions never to be answered. What is the status of Geraldine and what is her motive behind casting her spell on Christabel? Can she really espy the spirit of Christabel's dead mother? What does Geraldine mean by the mark of her shame and the seal of her sorrow? What is the peculiarity of Geraldine's bosom and why are the breasts particularly used to cast on Christabel the evil spell? What will happen to Christabel next – would there be any remedy of her suffering or not? These questions, as we have already observed, have no answer in this poem left incomplete by its poet. It is left to the reader to use his imagination to make up an ending. This makes the poem live on in our mind.

#### ❖ Gothic Elements

The gothic novel was a genre of fiction which enjoyed a great deal of popularity in the 1790s. It was characterized by tales of horror in a romanticised, pseudo- medieval setting. The plots very often dealt with themes of betrayal, revenge, corruption of innocence, often played out through supernatural intervention. It was essentially a genre which dealt with moral and social transgressions, through which the dark, irrational, side of human life could be explored.

Coleridge was familiar with these novels and even reviewed Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk*. Although he disapproved of what he considered their mechanically lurid language, his interest in psychology must have attracted him to this genre as it provided a glimpse into the subconscious realms of human nature. In 'Christabel' we find that he uses many elements of this genre, but, combines them with the allegorical tradition of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. The setting of the poem, the sense of suspense he creates, the eerie half-light in which the events of the night take place, all echo elements of the gothic. Geraldine, a witch masquerading as a victim, is a representation of evil as well as a *femme fatale*. She is also a Lamia-like figure, a kind of snake-woman who is a

figure of unfulfilled desires which must prey on the unwary in order to survive. By introducing a subtle sexual element in her embrace of Christabel, Coleridge also reminds us of the many forbidden relationships depicted in gothic novels.

In 'Christabel' Coleridge uses the gothic elements to explore the co-existence of good and evil in the human psyche. He thus, transforms a sensational genre into a more introspective one, using the veil of a fictional tale to focus on the tussle between the forces of light and darkness in the human heart.

### **2.2.3 ii(f). Comprehension Exercises**

#### **Long Questions-20 marks**

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of Coleridge's *Christabel (Part I)*.
2. Would you consider 'Christabel' (Part I) as a successful supernatural poem? Substantiate your answer.
3. Write a note on the Medieval elements in 'Christabel' (Part I).
4. Consider 'Christabel' as an adaptation of the gothic mode in literature.

#### **Mid-Length-12 marks**

1. Is it possible to read 'Christabel' (Part I) as an allegorical poem? Substantiate your answer.
2. What is your impression of Geraldine? Answer with textual references.

#### **Short Questions-6 marks**

1. Describe the night Christabel comes out to pray in the woods.
2. Where does Christabel discover Geraldine? What does the latter say about herself?
3. How many times does Geraldine sink down upon the ground? How does Christabel help her to gather her spirits?
4. Briefly reproduce the sorcery scene as you find towards the close of the poem.

### **2.2.4. Summing Up**

This Unit introduced you to two most important poets of the first generation of Romantic poets – William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. William Wordsworth, who

is one of the most significant poets in the canon of English Romantic Poetry, to him that we owe the transformation of English nature poetry from the picturesque to the sublime. In reading Wordsworth you will find a depiction of landscape, informed with a moral and philosophical vision. The view of nature that he presents in his poetry is subjective-half created and half perceived- as he claims in 'Tintern Abbey'. Coleridge has been variously criticised as a political turn-coat, a drug-addict, a plagiarist, and a mystic humbug, whose wrecked career left nothing but a handful of magical early poems. But the shaping influence of his highly imaginative criticism is now generally accepted, and his position (with his friend Wordsworth) as one of the two great progenitors of the English Romantic spirit is assured. 'Christabel', which is usually looked upon as one of the finest supernatural poems by S. T. Coleridge, brings back to one's mind echoes of the tales of wonder involving supernatural agencies, popularised by the German Romantics during the eighteenth century.

#### **2.2.5. Suggested Reading**

- 1) Enright, D J and Ernst De Chickera (eds.) *English Critical Texts: Sixteenth Century to Twentieth Century*, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads (1800)', Oxford University Press
- 2) Gill, Stephen.(ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Wordsworth*, Cambridge University Press, 2003
- 3) Moorman, Mary. *William Wordsworth, A Biography: The Early Years, 1770–1803*, Oxford, Clarendon Press
- 4) Hill, Alan G. (ed.). *Letters of William Wordsworth*, Oxford University Press
- 5) Abrams, M H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* Oxford University Press, New York
- 6) Coburn, Kathleen. *In Pursuit of Coleridge*
- 7) Cooke, Katharine. *Coleridge*
- 8) Modiano, R. *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature*
- 9) Spencer Hill, J. *Imagination in Coleridge*
- 10) Willey, Basil. *S.T. Coleridge*
- 11) Wheeler, K M. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry*.

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## **Unit - 3 □ Reading Romantic Poetry (a) John Keats: ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ (b) Percy Bysshe Shelley: ‘Ode to the West Wind’**

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### **Structure:**

**2.3.0: Introduction**

**2.3.1: The Ode in Romantic Literature**

**2.3.2: John Keats: The Poet and his Poetry**

**2.3.2a.1: Text and Introduction to ‘Ode to a Nightingale’**

**2.3.2a.2: Annotations**

**2.3.2a.3: Substance and Critical Commentary**

**2.3.2a.4: Themes**

**2.3.2a.5: Comprehension Exercises**

**2.3.3: P B Shelley: The Poet and his Poetry**

**2.3.3b.1: Text and Introduction to ‘Ode to the West Wind’**

**2.3.3b.2: Annotations**

**2.3.3b.3: Substance and Critical Commentary**

**2.3.3b.4: Themes**

**2.3.3b.5: Comprehension Exercises**

**2.3.4: Summing Up**

**2.3.5: Suggested Reading**

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### **2.3.0. Introduction**

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In Units 1 and 2 of this Module, you have already read about three major Romantic Poets – Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge and their poems prescribed in your syllabus. Blake as you now know is a transitional Romantic, while Wordsworth and Coleridge heralded what we have called the high phase of Romantic poetry. This Unit will introduce you to two other great romantic poets of the second generation – John Keats and P B

Shelley. The objective of this Unit is to make you familiar with the life and poetry of Keats and Shelley. You should read these two poems closely with the help of the discussions provided with each of them. This will help you to relate the poets to the broader context of British Romantic literature, as well as to their immediate literary circle. Notice why the notion of Romantic poetry as a form of escape from reality has come about, and how these poets are actually on the search for a transcendental level of reality. By the end of this Unit, you will hopefully have a glimpse of the panorama of Romanticism as it came about in the genre of poetry.

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### 2.3.1. The Ode in Romantic Poetry

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“Ode” comes from the Greek *aeidein*, meaning to sing or chant, and belongs to the long and varied tradition of lyric poetry. Originally accompanied by music and dance, and later reserved by the Romantic poets to convey their strongest sentiments, the ode can be generalized as a formal address to an event, a person, or a thing not present. There are three typical types of odes: the **Pindaric, Horatian, and Irregular**. The **Pindaric** is named for the ancient Greek poet Pindar, who is credited with inventing the ode. Pindaric odes were performed with a chorus and dancers, and often composed to celebrate athletic victories. They contain a formal opening, or *strophe*, of complex metrical structure, followed by an *antistrophe*, which mirrors the opening, and an *epode*, the final closing section of a different length and composed with a different metrical structure. The **Horatian** ode, named for the Roman poet Horace, is generally more tranquil and contemplative than the Pindaric ode. Less formal, less ceremonious, and better suited to quiet reading than theatrical production, the Horatian ode typically uses a regular, recurrent stanza pattern.

The **Romantic ode** was adopted by the Romantic poets, especially **John Keats**. He experimented with the form so that the three stanza structure is no longer necessarily the norm. *Ode to Autumn* has the regular three stanza structure, while ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ and Ode to a Nightingale are **irregular** in form, both in terms of stanzas and line length. Other famous Romantic odes are William Wordsworth’s ‘Ode on the Intimations of Immortality’ and Percy Bysshe Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’.

A typical structure of the Romantic ode includes:

- Description of a place or object
- Meditation arising from the contemplation of the place or object
- Personal or spiritual insight into issues arising out of this contemplation.

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### 2.3.2. John Keats : The Poet and his Poetry

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#### ➤ A Short Biographical Sketch

The eldest child of his parents Thomas and Frances Keats, John Keats was born in London on 31 October, 1795 into a lower-middle class family. His father, a keeper of a livery stable, died in 1804. And in 1810, Keats' mother also died of tuberculosis (that was to claim two of her sons also) leaving fourteen year old Keats, his two brothers and a sister in the care of their grandmother. Keats was never rich; he made little money from his poetry.

At the age of fifteen Keats was apprenticed to a surgeon, Mr. Hammond. The connection lasted till 1814, when Keats quarrelled with Mr. Hammond and joined St. Guy's Hospital. There he gained his license after a period of training and become a junior surgeon. At Guy's Hospital Keats became familiar with suffering, disease and death, which we find in his poems in minute details. In 1816, he made the acquaintance of Leigh Hunt, the famous Radical journalist and poet who named Keats in his article, *Young Poets*. But the Tory press did not review him favourably and conservative reviewers mocked Keats' social position and education. Besides Hunt and Shelley, Keats was also friendly with Severn, John Hamilton Reynolds, Hazlitt, Coleridge, Lamb and Haydon. He evolved his distinctive poetic style from his thorough reading of Shakespeare and Spenser, and his interactions with his contemporaries.

In October, 1818, Keats began taking mercury for a sore throat, the start of the family tendency to consumption (tuberculosis of the lungs). Then his brother, Tom, got consumption and Keats nursed him until his death on 1 December, 1818. The same year he fell in love with Fanny Brawne while staying in London. Keats became engaged to her but the enemy in his blood was slowly but surely consuming him and he got little comfort from his love. In spite of ill-health, the years 1818 and 1819 belong to his greatest poems. In February, 1820, he vomited blood, a sign that T.B. had destroyed his lungs. He was nursed by the Hunts and the Brawnes. Ultimately, at Shelley's suggestion, he sailed to Italy with the young painter Joseph Severn who nursed him with great devotion till his death in Rome on 23 February, 1821. It was a few months after his twenty-fifth birthday. Three days later he was buried in the Protestant Cemetery at Rome, not far from the place where Shelley was to lie a year after. Keats' epitaph is of his own dictation:

*"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."*

### ➤ Career as a Poet

When Keats died he was hardly known outside his own literary circle. You will be surprised to know that the celebrated *Blackwood's (Edinburgh) Magazine* actually tore apart his poetry and did not spare him even in death, writing,

“A Mr. John Keats, a young man who had left a decent calling for the melancholy trade of Cockney Poetry, has lately died of consumption, after having written two of three little books of verses much neglected by the general public.”

Many years later Matthew Arnold, the most authoritative Victorian critic of English literature said of Keats, “He is with Shakespeare”. Never has there been a more complete reversal of judgement!

In his brief poetic career Keats showed a rapid development in his poetic craft and remarkable artistic maturity. He published three volumes of verse: *Poems* (published by Leigh Hunt) in 1817, ‘Endymion’ in 1818, and *Lamia and Other Poems* in 1820, containing some of his best odes, including the ‘Ode to a Nightingale’. This third and last volume, published just before he left England, contains the richest treasures of nineteenth century verse: Keats’ finest work in narrative, his fragment of an epic, *Hyperion* (begun 1818, abandoned 1819), and his immortal odes. It also includes ‘Isabella’, or The Pot of Basil, ‘The Eve of St. Agnes’. In ‘Endymion’, Keats’ art is still immature, but the last volume shows a fast maturing genius.

Introduced to the poetry of Spenser by his landlord’s son, Keats fell in love with the older poet’s melodious verse and wrote verses in imitation of Spenser. To turn to the great odes is to come closer to the mind of Keats. Like Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’ and Wordsworth’s ‘Ode on Intimations of Immortality’, Keats here expresses his own feelings and shows how they are coloured by the events of his life. The great odes – ‘On Indolence’, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’, ‘To Psyche’, ‘On Melancholy’, ‘To Autumn’- were nearly all written in 1819, a time when Keats was going through several personal crisis in his life – agony in a brother’s death, personal experiences of hopelessness in love and anticipation of sudden termination of his creative career. From the impassioned longing for escape in the *Nightingale Ode* to the calm solemnity of ‘To Autumn’, these odes are themselves like a journey of life and reveal the gradual development of a poetic mind. Keats would have remained immortal as a poet if only he had written his superb odes. In the opinion of Middleton Murry, they are “poems comparable to nothing in English literature save the works of Shakespeare’s maturity.”

Here, we should say a few words about Keats' *Letters* which give us a clear insight into his mind and artistic development. His ideas on poetry and his philosophy as a poet are finely expressed in these *Letters*. To give just one or two glimpses:

“...if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree it had better not to come at all.”

“I am certain of nothing but the holiness of the heart's affections, and the truth of imagination. What the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth.”

### ➤ **General Characteristics of Keats' Poetry**

Keats' poetry is characterised by a rich sensuous quality, in keeping with his advice to Shelley to “load each rift with ore”. His subject matter is drawn from nature, art, myth and legend. He had no knowledge of Greek, and little of Greece, yet, his poems are saturated with images of Classical Greek art and mythology as well as medieval architecture. That is why Shelley remarked “Keats was a Greek”. Another notable feature of his poetry is an awareness of the sadness and suffering of life. This is not the whole philosophy of Keats, but it strikes the key note of the odes. The principal theme pervading most of the odes is the tension between the transience of human life where youth, beauty and love fade, and the enduring beauty of the world of art and imagination. His best poetry achieves a fine balance between the human aspiration for perfect beauty and a profound awareness of pain and suffering in the actual world of man. He beautifully recreates the sight, sound and the feel of familiar natural objects often combining different sense experiences into a single image (synaesthesia) to produce a rich sensuous effect. In his poetry, the discipline of the verse forms provides the necessary restraint to the luxuriousness of his sensuous imagination. Keats' odes are the richest and most harmonious expressions of the full current of his mind – his keen sense of the beauty of Nature, significance of Art and mythology, his all-embracing sensuousness, his profound sense of the mutability of life and his almost Shakespearean receptivity and openness of mind.

#### **2.3.2a.1. Text and Introduction to ‘Ode to a Nightingale’**

The poem prescribed in your syllabus – ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ exemplifies the qualities of Keats' great genius. Let us first become familiar with the term ‘ode’ as included in the title of the poem:

### **Occasion and Date**

Written in the Spring of 1819, the ode is normally believed to precede the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Keats composed the poem at his friend Charles Brown's house in Hampstead where he was then living with Brown. The following is the Charles Brown's account of the origin of the poem:

“In the Spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the break-fast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree when he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived that he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found these scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of the nightingale. The writing was not well legible; and it was difficult to arrange the stanzas on so many scraps. With his assistance I succeeded, and this was his *Ode to a Nightingale*, a poem which has been the delight of everyone.”

The nightingale and other song birds have often been celebrated in verse by poets like Wordsworth and Shelley. Shelley's 'To a Skylark' is the closest in spirit to Keats' poem. But Keats' treatment of the nightingale is quite unique. For him the nightingale's song is the occasion for a meditation on the nature of art and poetry.

The word 'nightingale' appears only in the title of the poem, but the bird and its rich intoxicating night-time world are at the centre of the poem. Keats, a lover of the Hellenic spirit would have known the Greek myth of Philomel, daughter of Pandion, king of Attica. She was raped by her sister's husband, Tereus, and at her own prayer was changed by the gods into a nightingale in order to escape his vengeance. In the poem, the nightingale is a symbol of beauty, immortality and freedom from the world's troubles. The reference in the title prepares us for the many allusions to Greek myth that we will find in the poem.

‘Ode to a Nightingale’

I

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot, 5  
But being too happy in thine happiness,  
That thou, light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease. 10*

II

*O for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South! 15  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stainèd mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim: 20*

III

*Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret*

*Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
 Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs, 25  
 Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
 Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
 And leaden-eyed despairs;  
 Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
 Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow. 30*

IV

*Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
 Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
 But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
 Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
 Already with thee! tender is the night, 35  
 And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
 Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays  
 But here there is no light,  
 Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
 Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. 40*

V

*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
 Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
 But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet  
 Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
 The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild; 45  
 White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
 Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
 And mid-May's eldest child,*

*The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.* 50

V

*Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die, 55  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.* 60

VII

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
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 65  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that ofttimes hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.* 70

VIII

*Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades 75  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
  
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep? 80*

2.3.2a.2. Annotations

**Stanza – I**

**Hemlock:** the juice of hemlock, a poisonous plant. In a large dose it is deadly, but a small dose dulls one's senses.

**...dull opiate:** preparation containing opium (narcotic) which produces dullness (sleep). This is an instance of transferred epithet, the epithet 'dull' is transferred from the poet to 'opiate'.

**Lethe-wards:** In Greek mythology, Lethe is a river in Hades (Lower world), from which the souls of the dead drink to forget the past. It therefore stands for oblivion.

**Dryad:** According to Greek mythology, the Dryads are tree-nymphs who are born and die with the trees which are their dwelling.

**...melodious plot of beechen green:** a typical example of synaesthesia, combining sight and sound, the bright fresh colour of beech trees with the music of the nightingale's song.

**Stanza – II**

**...draught of vintage:** A small measure of wine. 'Vintage' suggests both age and excellence. Time causes death in human life, but enriches the wine.

**...purple-stained mouth:** the mouth of the beaker stained with red wine. This may also suggest the purple colour of the lips of the poet when he will finish his drink. This is a powerful visual image, full of pictorial detail and minute observation.

**Flora:** the Roman goddess of flowers and spring

**Provençal song:** a reference to the medieval troubadours (or minstrels) of Provence. A region in France, Provence is famous for its good wine, troubadours and song.

**sun-burnt mirth:** a transferred epithet denoting the merry –making of the sun-burnt people of Provence which lies in the warm regions of southern France.

**South:** refers to the wine produced in the region of Provence in South of France, associated with an easy pace of life and warm, Mediterranean climate.

**Ll. 13-15:** another excellent example of synaesthesia in the way Keats combines the visual, the tactile and a mood, into a total experience occasioned by ‘taste’ and denoting ideas associated with a certain way of life.

**Blushful:** glowing red (refers to the colour of the wine) like the face of a blushing girl .

**Hippocrene:** in Greek mythology, it is a fountain on Mount Helicon, sacred to the Muses. It is said to have been produced by the blow of the hoof of Pegasus, the winged horse of the sun-god. This fountain is supposed to give poetic inspiration to those who drink from it.

### Stanza III

**The weariness, the fever, and the fret:** the disturbances, exciting desires and restlessness of life. We are reminded of the ‘fretful fever’ in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. In Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*, we also find a similar expression: “the fretful stir unprofitable and the fever of the world.”

**Where men...groan:** the line recalls a very miserable picture of rows of patients screaming in pain. Keats’ own experiences with illness and the death of his brother seem to be reflected here.

**spectre-thin:** thin as a ghost. The epithet reinforces the grim horror of the human condition. Here, Keats is perhaps thinking of the misery and the death of his younger brother Tom who died prematurely of consumption.

***leaden-eyed despairs***: eyes heavy with sorrow; or eyes having the colour of lead (which are a sign of despair) . The coffin or burial image is implicit in the phrase.

***Not charioted ...pards***: this is an allusion to Titian's famous painting "Bacchus and Ariadne" in the National Gallery which Keats admired very much. Bacchus is the Greek god of wine and leopards are taken to draw the chariot of the wine-god.

#### **Stanza-IV**

***the viewless wings of Poesy***: i.e. his own imaginative powers or poetic imagination.

***Though ...retards***: the pure intellect or reason hinders the free play of imagination.

***haply***: perhaps, by chance. The poet cannot see the moon from shady beechen grove of the nightingale.

***the Queen-Moon ...Fays***: a very beautiful image of Diana , the moon-goddess. Stars are imagined to be fairies attending on Queen Moon who is shining in majestic glory in the sky and looks, as it were, seated on the throne.

***save***: except

***verdurous gloom***: a brilliant phrase where two visual images are mixed . It refers to the darkness caused by the luxuriant mass of green leaves.

***the seasonable month***: the month that brings forth the flowers in its due season(i.e. the month of May)

***thicket***: bush.

***hawthorn***: a thorny shrub of the rose family.

***pastoral eglantine***: eglantine is sweet-briar, a kind of wild rose with fragrant leaves and flowers. It is called pastoral because it has the natural charm of rural scenery.

#### **Stanza V**

***incense***: scented flowers , delicious fragrance of fruit – blossoms. In Coleridge's KublaKhan , there is " incense – bearing tree ."

***embalmed darkness***: darkness that is saturated with the fragrance of flowers .But the epithet 'embalmed' conveys the thought of death . The darkness like a corpse seems to be treated with aromatic drugs to preserve it from decay. Olfactory and visual images are beautifully juxtaposed here.

***Fast-fading violets:*** violet flowers that wither away quickly, suggesting transient beauty; ‘Cover’d up in leaves’ again suggests burial image.

***mid-May’s eldest child:*** beautiful personification of the first flower that blooms in mid-summer.

***musk-rose:*** a rambling rose with large white flowers that grow in clusters and give out a musk-like odour. The evocation of whiteness in darkness is significant: the dark bower is, as it were, covered up with a shroud.

***dewy wine:*** dew-like honey (bee-wine).

***The murmurous haunt...eves:*** the fragrant musk-rose filled with honey attract bees on summer evenings and the whole place is full of the buzzing of bees. It is a fine example of onomatopoeia, the sound and music of the lines nicely conveys its sense.

#### **Stanza - VI**

***Darkling:*** belonging to the darkness

***...Call’d him soft names:*** invoked him tenderly.

***...mused rhyme:*** meditative poetry.

***...high requiem:*** rapturous funeral song;

***Sod:*** a clod of earth, unfeeling, inanimate.

#### **Stanza – VII**

***immortal Bird:*** immortality is attributed not to the bird itself, but to its song (or to its species). It is a thing of beauty and as such deathless.

***No hungry...down:*** the word ‘hungry’ is yet another addition to the catalogue of human ills listed in the third stanza.

***...this passing night:*** the night is departing swiftly, as if the night is also dying away.

***...sad heart of Ruth:*** The story of Ruth is narrated in the “Book of Ruth” of the Old Testament. She was a Moabite married to a Jew. After her husband’s death she went to Judea in Palestine with her mother-in-

law, Naomi. There she gleaned corn in the fields of the wealthy Boaz. Keats imagines that while she gleaned corn in the foreign land, she heard the song of the nightingale and pined for home.

***Charm'd magic casements***: windows of some enchanted castle. It suggests a captive princess sitting near the window of the enchanted castle. The nightingale's song seems to carry a message from her saviour sailing across the perilous seas, fill the casement with the magic of hope.

***...faery lands forlorn***: faery lands are not the countries where faeries live – they are rather the “legendary countries of romance” Leigh Hunt finds in Lines 68-70 an allusion to Claude's picture of the “Enchanted Castle” of which Keats had already written a detailed study in his “Epistle to Reynolds”.

### **Stanza – VIII**

***Forlorn***: lonely; this word is an echo from the last stanza.

***...sole self***: real solitary self.

***Adieu***: farewell (to fancy).

***...deceiving elf***: fancy is like a fairy that plays tricks on man. The higher power ‘Poesy’ is here replaced by ‘fancy’ which is considered deceitful. For the ‘elf’ Keats is probably influenced by Spenser and his Elfin Knights.

***...plaintive anthem***: the song of the nightingale is now just a melancholy song, not a joyous outpouring.

***...buried deep***: As the nightingale flies away, the song gradually recedes and is finally lost irretrievably. The burial image comes once again.

***Was it...dream?***: The query underlines the poet's divided heart, perplexity and uncertainty.

***...do I wake or sleep?***: the poet questions whether the experience was just a fleeting illusion as insubstantial as our dreams. Dream is often associated with the visionary poetry of the Romantics.

### **2.3.2a.3. Substance and Development of Thought**

‘Ode to a Nightingale’ is not merely the product of deeply felt emotion, it is also of rich philosophic interest. Prof. Harford has justly called it, “a richly meditative ode”. It is a poem inspired by the poet's experience of the joyful song of a nightingale which set aglow the poet's imagination. It celebrates the beauty of the song and contrasts the transience of human joys with the eternity of happiness promised by the enchanting melody. The powerful imagination of the poet sweeps all over the universe and blends

together the real and the imaginary – history, the Bible, and fairy tales. The drab world of reality is thus linked by its aerial ray with the ‘faery lands forlorn’. The poet in Keats is not satisfied with mere exuberance or ecstasy but ponders deeply about the meaning and purpose of life.

Keats’ flight on the “wings of Poesy” retains his artistic control over his creation. Ultimately, the poet wakes up to reality from his ‘vision’ or reverie when the bird flies away and its song fades into silence. Like the typical Romantic reverie poem, the structure of this poem is parabolic. After the imaginary journey from the chair of the Hampstead garden to the ideal world of the nightingale, culminating in the “charm’d magic casements”, the poet finally returns to the starting point, thus completing a circle. The poem ends on a note of uncertainty. The poet is left wondering which has the greater truth (or value) – the everyday reality or a vision (or a reverie). The opposing attitudes are left unreconciled in the final query of the poem.

**Stanza I:** Listening to the happy song of the nightingale, Keats is filled with an aching joy which eventually lulls him into a state of dulled numbness. It is, as if, the poet has taken hemlock or opium or has drunk the water of Lethe, the river of Hades. The poet makes it clear that it is not envy, but an excess of joy that leads him to this state. He imagines the bird as a dryad singing effortlessly among the green beech-trees in a happy summer season.

**Stanza II:** The thought of summer and joyous song makes the poet long to escape to the beautiful forest of the nightingale. He wishes to become one with the happy spirit of the bird. Keats offers a series of images, taken from classical myth and literary traditions, which are associated with a life of enjoyment. He wishes to transport himself to the world of the nightingale with the aid of a cup of wine that has been cooled a long time in the underground and evokes the Roman goddess of flowers, Flora. The wine is redolent of the green countryside and the songs and dances of Provence are associated with the Mediterranean regions. The poet wants to taste this intoxicating liquor, pouring it in a container and watching its brimming bubbles before staining his lips with its purple colour. It is no ordinary wine but one which will inspire his poetic creativity like the water of the fountain of Hippocrene in Classical mythology. His main intention is to forget the world of reality and fly away to the forest-world of the nightingale.

**Stanza III:** Keats contrasts the nightingale’s ideal world with the world of human suffering where youth, beauty and love are all too transient. He draws a moving picture of the ills and evils of human life where thinking gives us nothing but sorrow. Frustration and despair are the lot of human beings, which Keats wants to escape.

### **Critical Commentary**

At the very outset you are introduced to a mood of deep abstraction, occasioned by the joyous response to the birdsong. In true Romantic mode the mood of ecstasy numbs the senses, but, gives rise to the creative activity of the mind. The poem shows how in an intense imaginative experience sorrow is fused into joy, and the world of time merges into the world of eternity. The song of the nightingale represents ideal beauty that never fades but transcends the bounds of space and time. The entire experience is brought alive through a rich array of images appealing to the various senses.

**Stanza IV:** Sticking to his resolution to break away from the actual world, the poet, on later thought, changes his mode of flight. The poet decides not to take the route of intoxication, but depend upon his power of poetic imagination to transport him to the ideal region of the nightingale. And within a short while, he finds that his ‘viewless wings of Poesy’ takes him straight to the woodland bower right beside the singing bird. From the dark nook, the poet fancies the moon to be shining gloriously like a queen surrounded by stars. The end of the stanza anticipates the darkness which shrouds the next stanza.

**Stanza V:** This stanza is a wonderful record of a sharpened awareness of the fragrance of each and every flower and fruit, as the olfactory compensates for the absence of sight. Judging by their fragrance, the poet identifies whatever has grown in the grass, thickets and trees of the dark forest, whether it is hawthorn or eglantine or violet or musk-rose or a ripe fruit. The total sensuous experience is enriched by the buzzing of murmuring bees which fills the whole atmosphere. But, the “embalmed darkness” and the “fast-fading violet” carry a premonition of the thoughts of death which obtrude in the next stanza.

### **Critical Commentary**

The poet’s imaginative flight transports him to a realm beyond imperfect reality, signified by the bower of the nightingale. Stanza V is replete with the imagined pleasures of the senses, but there is a sense of incomplete satisfaction as the poet is unable to see the flowers that lie at his feet and can only guess what they are. The images of fading and embowering indicate a subconscious awareness of transience and death. The last line which ends with the realisation that death will rob the poet of the very senses through which he enjoys aesthetic joy. The word ‘sod’ with its hard consonant ending seems to recreate a sense of a sudden rude realisation.

**Stanza VI:** With apparent suddenness the poet expresses his desire for death. Earlier he had thought of death many a time, but now it his excess of joy which fills him with a death-wish. This seems to him to be the perfect moment to sink into 'easeful Death', with the song of the bird being his requiem. He will die quietly, but the bird will continue her singing incessantly.

**Stanza VII:** In this stanza the bird is transformed into an idea. In contrast to the mortality of human beings, Keats thinks that the nightingale is immortal. The song of the nightingale continues through the ages. The song the poet is listening to now, was heard across time and space: in ancient times by kings and clowns, by sad Ruth in a foreign land and also by the lonely captive princess in an enchanter's castle in a forlorn land.

### **Critical Commentary**

In these stanzas you discover how death is an ever-present motif in Keats' ode. It is portrayed in pallid colours in the previous stanzas, but is transformed into a sublime escape in stanza VI. The mortality of the human realm is contrasted with the perpetuation of beauty one finds in nature. The song of the nightingale which belongs to this realm of undying beauty offers the poet a glimpse into this world of ideals.

**Stanza VIII:** The thought of the forlorn princess suddenly breaks the illusion of the poet's imaginary excursion to the nightingale's world. He is hurled back to the realities of life where he doubly feels his own forlorn state. The poet realizes that so long he was cheated by fancy. But fancy cannot cheat him permanently. The song fades as the bird flies away and is heard no more. The happy song seems to be a melancholy one now. The poet expresses his wonder and cannot realize fully whether his experience was unreal and nothing but a reverie or it has some higher value.

### **Critical Commentary**

The poet realises that the fairy lands he associates the bird with are devoid of the zest of life. The flight of fancy is reversed as the poet comes back to his "sole self". The poem ends on a note of unresolved tension between imagination and reality, which is at the heart of Keats' artistic quest. The same dichotomy is also to be found in his 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'.

**Activity for the Learner:**

1. *Make a list of the images in stanza III which present a contrast to those in stanza II.*
2. *To which senses does Keats appeal in stanza V?*

**2.3.2a.4. Themes**

➤ **Theme of Transience and Permanence**

Graham Hough perceived that Keats' major odes are closely bound up with the theme of transience and permanence. After acutely experiencing the tragic loss of much that is lovable and precious in life, Keats' Romantic urge forced him to discover an imaginative resource of permanent beauty and happiness which would defy the decaying power of time. In his poetry he continually makes an attempt to reconcile the contradiction between the mutability of life and the permanence of art.

In 'Ode to a Nightingale' the principal conflict is between the real world and the ideal world. Keats also seeks to escape into the world of imagination. But this escape is repeatedly thwarted by a painful realisation of the actualities of life. It begins by pitting the poets' heart-ache and 'drowsy numbness' against the 'full-throated ease' of the nightingale's song whose joyous melody is symbolic of the undying beauty of art; and by suggesting a reconciliation of the contraries by 'being too happy in thine happiness'. But nevertheless, the stark contrast between the nightingale's forest world and the painful, troubled and decaying human world is brought into sharp focus in Stanza-III. The focus is predominantly on the ephemeral character of all that is valuable and desirable in life. In sharp contrast to this, the nightingale is 'not born for death'. The subject of the poem is not the nightingale but the idea of a life of beauty which it inspires. Its song is the voice of eternity that transcends the bounds of space and time. Thus the bird is the song merge and become one. This imaginative swerving from the finite to the infinite, from the world of time to the world of eternity is a marked feature of the greatest Romantic poetry. This contrast is a common theme of Romantic poetry. But, what makes Keats' poetry more profound and subtle is the paradoxical awareness of the other side of things. The moment, when Keats listens to the superb spell of the nightingale and glorifies its song, is not measured in terms of clock-time or calendar-time; it is an 'eternal moment' as Forster calls it, perpetuated down the generations even after the fading away. The desire to escape into a world of eternal beauty and joy

ends in failure. But the quality and intensity of this joy and freedom achieved through artistic fancy has an eternal value. John Barnard has rightly observed:

“The paradox of the poem is that by admitting failure it, as if inadvertently, demonstrates the grandeurs of the human singer, who within his limits, gives the bird immortality - an immortality that exists only in the human mind.”

### ➤ **Escapism**

You are sure to be struck by parts of the poem in which Keats wants passionately to ‘leave the world unseen’ and with the nightingale ‘fade far away into the forest dim’. These words surely denote the poet’s deep desire to leave behind his personal world of pain and suffering and revel in the promise of endless joy which seems to be offered by the nightingale’s song. Yet, to call Keats a mere escapist would be to do injustice to the complex relationship he has with the ideal world of aesthetic joy and the warm pulsating realm of reality, imperfect though it may be. Keats’ personal afflictions are also seen as part of the sad lot of humanity as a whole. The general picture of malady is undeniably moving in its pitiful starkness, and leaves us in no doubt that the poet really does want to escape into a different plane of existence symbolised by the forest world of the bird. Soaring on the wings of poesy he indulges in a rich sensuous experience amidst the ‘verdurous gloom’. The note of escapism expressed strongly through the death-wish of the poet, is a natural culmination of his love of darkness, timelessness and oblivion. The soothing darkness brings up his desire for dark death, “to cease upon the midnight with no pain.” The overwhelming sensual indulgence in stanza V, gives rise to a swooning feeling in which the poet seems to want to lose his individual consciousness which is burdened with the sufferings of life. His desire for death is a bitter-sweet one, combining an intense desire for the joy and beauty of this world with the awareness of inevitable death. His enjoyment of a “life of the senses” is combined with a tragic vision of impending death. His delightful evocation of the “Dance and Provencal song and sun-burnt mirth” and his wish for “... a beaker full of the warm South / Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene” is undeniable proof of his love for warmth and joys of life even though it is ephemeral. The poem is thus a temporary spell of imaginative excursion into the realm of supra-consciousness where the poet’s yearnings and longings find poetic release. Indeed, Keats escapes from present reality into the higher reality of dreams and yearnings. He remains there for a time by the strength of his imagination. At the end, the poet is called back to self-consciousness and wakes up from his indolent dream to face actual life on its terms. In the last stanza, there is an ironic reversal of the

poet's fantasy. Thus, 'Ode to a Nightingale' may truly be described as a wonderful poetic record of the poet's reflection of human experience.

#### Note for the Learner

##### Synesthesia

**In literature, synesthesia refers to a technique adopted by writers to present ideas, characters or places in such a manner that they appeal to more than one senses like hearing, seeing, smell etc. at a given time.**

**Dear learner, you will notice synesthetic imagery (group of similar or linked images) in Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' too:**

*"Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
Dance, and Provencal song, and sun burnt mirth!"*

**In the above example, Keats combines visual sensation with gustatory and auditory sensations. In the same poem, he further states:**

*"In some melodious plot,  
Of beechen green,  
Singing of summer in full throated ease."*

**Keats associates the act of melodious singing with a plot covered with green beechen trees and thus connects visual sense with the sense of hearing. Such use of the technique lends beauty to the language of poetry by stimulating many senses simultaneously.**

#### 2.3.2f. Comprehension Exercises

##### Long questions-20 marks:

1. Consider 'Ode to a Nightingale' as a Romantic poem.
2. Is 'Ode to a Nightingale' a poem of escape or a deep reflection on human experience? Answer with reference to the text.
3. Comment on the contrast between transience and permanence as you find it in 'Ode to a Nightingale'.
4. Discuss the imagery of 'Ode to a Nightingale'.

**Mid-length questions-12 marks:**

1. “ ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, unlike Keats’ other odes, has no single central theme.” Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Trace the autobiographical elements in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.
3. Comment on the sensuousness of Keats with reference to ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.
4. What is an ode? What features of ode do you find in ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?

**Short questions-6 marks:**

1. How does Keats portray the miseries of actual life in stanza – III of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?
2. Comment on the description of flowers in stanza – V of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’.
3. What do you think of the ending of ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?
4. What is the significance of the ‘nightingale’ in the title, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’?.

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**2.3.3. P. B. Shelley: The Poet and his Poetry**

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**➤ A Short Biographical Sketch**

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on 4 August 1792 at Field Place, near Horsham, in the country of Sussex. His father Timothy (later Sir Timothy) was a prosperous landowner. According to one account, after he blew up a part of Field Place with a chemistry experiment, Shelley was sent to Eton (1804-10), where he manifested the courage to live by his beliefs which was to characterise him ever after. Experiments in chemistry and electricity gave him intense pleasure. Shelley learnt Greek and Latin, and acquired what was then forbidden knowledge: science, William Godwin’s *Political Justice*, and the French skeptics.

In 1810, Shelley entered University College, Oxford and made friends with his classmate Thomas Jefferson Hogg. He was expelled from Oxford with Hogg in 1811 for publishing a pamphlet, *The Necessity of Atheism*. The same year, he eloped with Harriet Westbrook and married her in Edinburgh. In 1812, he went to Ireland to campaign for the liberation of the Irish people. The same year, he met the philosopher William Godwin who had been an early influence. In 1814, Shelley left Harriet for Mary Godwin, daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1816, after Harriet drowned herself,

Shelley married Mary Godwin. He met Byron, Leigh Hunt and Keats about that time. In 1818, he departed for Italy, never to return to England again. On 8 July 1822 Shelley, along with his friend Williams, was drowned at sea near Leghorn, less than a month short of Shelley's thirtieth birthday. His body was washed up a few days later and recognized only by the copy of Keats's poetry found in his pocket. On 15 August, in the presence of Byron, Trelawney, and Hunt, Shelley and Williams were cremated on the beach between La Spezia and Livorno. In 1823, Shelley's ashes were laid beside those of Keats in the Roman cemetery that he had nobly hymned.

### ➤ Career as a Poet

Shelley began his literary career when he was still at school, with two boyish gothic romances – *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne*. In the same year he published *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire*, poems by himself and his sister, Elizabeth and *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson*. However, Shelley's earliest effort of any note is *Queen Mab* (1813), a long poem which contains much of Shelley's cruder atheism. This poem was followed by *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1816), a kind of spiritual autobiography that shows Shelley's growing skill as a poet. *Laon and Cythna* (1817), afterwards called *The Revolt of Islam*. *Prometheus Unbound* (begun in 1818, published 1820) a lyrical drama, *Julian and Maddalo*, *The Masque of Anarchy* and *The Witch of Atlas* are other works of extraordinary quality. *Adonais* (1821) is a lament for the death of Keats modelled on the classical elegy. Other than the longer poems some of Shelley's shorter sweetest lyrics are – *To a Skylark*, *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Cloud*, *The Indian Serenade*, *On a Faded Violet*, *To Night* etc. Shelley also wrote his impassioned prose *A Defence of Poetry* (1821) in which he upheld the historic role of the poet as “the unacknowledged legislators of the world”.

### ➤ General Characteristics of Shelley's Poetry

No other Romantic poet has attracted such extreme comments as Shelley. While his contemporaries attacked him for his atheism, infidelity and moral turpitude, others like Matthew Arnold and Leslie Stephens have found fault with his 'unreality' and 'ineffectuality'. Shelley's revolutionary doctrines and idealistic philosophy, his poetic technique and his personal life have all come under severe attack from the critics. Yet, he has been acclaimed by many admirers as the most radical of all the Romantic poets who criticized all the social institutions responsible for curbing the free human spirit. He also maintained his anti-establishment stand consistently throughout his life. The

prophetic note, the hope in a golden millennium, the regeneration of mankind, underlies the major poems of Shelley. Though Shelley's radical views were often unacceptable to readers, he received his due praise for the lyrical splendour, spontaneity, and the musical richness of his verse. The visionary quality of his poetry, his attitude to Beauty and Love, his intense love for Nature, his fine word-painting and brilliant images, his descriptive power and his successful handling of the blank verse make him a great Romantic poet.

If you wish to read about the various views on Shelley, you may read the works of critics like Carlos Baker and R. H. Fogle who have discovered a unique system of imagery in Shelley's poetry. Carl Grabo and Neville Rogers have analysed the scientific aspects of Shelley's imagery and Earl Wasserman has made a scholarly study of Shelley's mythmaking faculty.

### **2.3.3b.1. Text and Introduction to 'Ode to the West Wind':**

#### **Source**

Written between October and November 1819 (first published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume of 1820), 'Ode to the West Wind' is considered to be one of the finest of Shelley's lyrics. In his own note to the poem, Shelley describes the exact circumstances under which the poem was composed: "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions."

One very important point about the Ode is its poignant autobiographical significance. When Shelley wrote the poem, he and his wife were passing through peculiar mixed feelings. There was sadness for the death of a child and also some joyous expectation of a new child who was going to be born. They were naturally thinking in terms of birth, death and rebirth – creation, destruction, and re-creation. This eternal process, which is at work in human life, is reflected in the cycle of seasons in nature. The West Wind is an appropriate symbol of this life and death continuum and no wonder that Shelley addresses it as 'Destroyer and Preserver'.

TEXT

'Ode to the West Wind'

I

*O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being  
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,  
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou* 5  
*Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed*

*The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow*

*Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill* 10  
*(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill;*

*Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!*

II

*Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,* 15  
*Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,*

*Angels of rain and lightning! there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,  
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head* 20  
*Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge*

*Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge*

*Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre, 25  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might*

*Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O hear!*

III

*Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, 30  
Lull'd by the coil of his crystalline streams,*

*Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,*

*All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers 35  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers*

*Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40*

*Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!*

IV

*If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share* 45

*The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even  
I were as in my boyhood, and could be*

*The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed* 50  
*Scarce seem'd a vision—I would ne'er have striven*

*As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!*

*A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd* 55  
*One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.*

V

*Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
What if my leaves are falling like its own?  
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies*

*Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,* 60  
*Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,  
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!*

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,  
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;  
And, by the incantation of this verse,* 65

*Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth*

*The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*

70

### 2.3.3b.2. Annotations

#### Stanza I

**wild:** tameless, fierce, mighty, as well as excited by joy and desire.

**breath...being:** personification; the West Wind is an autumnal wind.

**dead:** withered.

**enchanter:** magician.

**hectic:** wasting or consuming (referring to the “hectic flush” of tuberculosis).

**Pestilence-stricken multitudes:** the fallen leaves whose colours remind the poet of contagious disease and death. Just as the complexion of dying and diseased persons changes, so the colour of the leaves also changes in autumn.

**dark wintry bed:** dark place under the soil in which the seeds lie throughout the winter in order to be quickened into life in spring.

**winged seeds:** seeds carried by the wind.

**azure sister of the Spring:** the mild wind of spring which heralds the coming of bright sunny days with blue skies. The traditional name of the autumnal west wind was Ausonius. (Italy was poetically known as Ausonia). Though the spring west wind was masculine in both Greek (Zephyrus) and Latin (Favonius) mythology, Shelley revises the tradition by making the restorative force of the spring mildly feminine.

**clarion:** a narrow shrill-sounding war trumpet. ‘Clarion’ is one of the many images of stanza 1 repeated in stanza 5 (‘trumpet’).

**dreaming earth:** a brilliant personification of the earth which sleeps and dreams in winter.

***and fill...plain and hill:*** the warm wind of spring fills the earth with fresh colours ('hues') and smells ('odours'). The wind is likened to a shepherd and the buds that bloom in spring to a flock of sheep driven to pastures.

***Destroyer and Preserver:*** the destructive and regenerative powers of the West Wind. These titles come directly from the titles of the Hindu gods Siva, the destroyer and Vishnu the preserver, known to Shelley from both the translations and writings of Sir William Jones and Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810). Shelley's myth-making power is evident here.

## **Stanza II**

***steep sky's commotion:*** the vault of the sky, which rises in a steep slope from the horizon. The ancient Greeks described the sky as an inverted bowl, its highest point the zenith. Shelley used their image but did not share their belief in the sky as a bowl.

***Loose clouds:*** high, wispy cirrus clouds (the word means 'curl' or 'lock of hair' in Latin)

***Thou...shed:*** a beautiful image in which Shelley draws a parallel between the dead leaves of the previous stanza and the clouds described here. The West Wind is compared to a stream on which the clouds are borne, just as a stream carries on its current the dead leaves of trees scattered by wind.

***tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean:*** during the storm the clouds fill up all spaces between the sky and sea which seem to meet together and look like the intertwining branches of trees.

***Angels:*** literally 'messengers', this is one of the many instances where Shelley uses Biblical-sounding image without orthodox Biblical meaning.

***aery surge:*** the movement of the wind across the blue skies is compared to the rushing forward of waves across the ocean.

***Maenad:*** frenzied female worshipper of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine. Shelley had seen the Maenads depicted in Florentine sculpture as drunken women with loose hair, performing a frenzied dance. This image makes it appropriate to term the clouds as the "locks of the approaching storm".

***dim verge:*** dark border.

*zenith*: highest point of the sky.

*The locks...storm*: the hair-like shreds of long wavy clouds that show a coming storm.

**ll.18-23**: The cirrus clouds are scattered all over the sky by the West Wind. The clouds are being compared to the light hair of the Maenads.

*dirge*: a song of mourning; a funeral song. The West Wind is associated with autumn, and so, its music announces the approach of winter and the death of the year.

*closing*: drawing near.

*dome*: hemispherical roof.

*sepulchre*: tomb.

*vapours*: clouds.

*vaulted...vapours*: the vault of the tomb will be formed by the accumulated mass of clouds in the sky.

*solid atmosphere*: compact gaseous mass having the appearance of being solid. This is a powerful oxymoron iterating the idea of Wind as Destroyer and Preserver.

### **Stanza III**

*lulled*: soothed to sleep.

*pumice isle*: volcanic island. The porous rocks formed by volcanic lava are known as pumice.

*Baiae's bay*: a fashionable sea-side resort of the ancient Romans in the Bay of Naples on the western coast of Italy. "From a boat beside an island of *pumice* (porous lava) Shelley had the previous December

seen the overgrown villas from the days of imperial Rome underneath the waters of the Bay of Baiae". (Shelley, Letters, II, 61)

*wave's intenser day*: Shelley, like Coleridge and others of this post-Newtonian world, was fascinated by the properties of light. The reflections on the water are deeper and quiver because of the river current.

*the sense...them*: the sense seems to be overpowered in the attempt to imagine its fragrance, not to speak of inhaling it. Shelley's sensuous imagination is at its full flight here.

*Atlantic's level powers...chasms*: an instance of the precision with which Shelley observed and recorded the empirical world. The West Wind parts the waters of the Atlantic Ocean into deep hollows.

**ll.39-42**: even the vegetation deep below the sea reacts to the transforming powers of the wind. "The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation

at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathises with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it." (Shelley's note).

Nora Crook says, "the sapless foliage of the Ocean that inspired that line was seen by Shelley in a glass bottomed boat in the Bay of Naples on 8 Dec. 1818".

#### **Stanza IV**

*I fall upon the thorns of life*: Shelley's favourite self-portrait which occurs again in *Adonais*. Here, Shelley refers to the miseries of his life. He was abandoned by the society and howled down by the critics. Behind Shelley's image – besides other literary references – lie Jesus's crown of thorns and Dante's metaphor of life as "a dark wood...rough and stubborn" (*Inferno*, I.1-5).

**ll.55-56**: an echo of Rousseau's famous words 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains'.

#### **Stanza V**

*Make me thy lyre...forest is*: the autumnal forest is like an Aeolian harp which makes a rustling sound as the wind flows through it. The poet also wants to be the 'lyre' (as the forest is) of the West Wind.

*mighty harmonies*: the fierce power of the wind as it rages through the blends into a kind of natural music. *Be thou, Spirit fierce...impetuous one*: the poet prays to be identified with the West Wind in its fierce impetuosity. He aspires to merge with the Wind so that he can transform the present world.

*dead thoughts*: ideas which are outdated.

*quicken a new birth*: the leaves of trees fallen in autumn lead to vigorous burst of life in spring. Similarly, the 'dead thoughts' of the poet will give way to a 'new birth' – a new set of social idea where there will be no ills, evils and oppressive laws.

***incantation of this verse***: magic spell of poetry. The poet's words will act like magic on earth – that is his hope.

***as from...hearth***: a comparison Shelley's mind, which has been dimly burning because he has been weakened by time and miseries of life.

***ashes and sparks***: i.e. dead thoughts and new bright ideas for regeneration.

***unawakened earth***: earth which is sleeping. The people of the earth are yet to be awakened to consciousness about the social injustice and evils.

***trumpet***: Shelley believed that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and therefore a poet has a prophetic role to play.

### 2.3.3b. Substance and Critical Commentary

*Ode to the West Wind* introduces you to two characteristic notes associated with Shelley: personal despondency and prophetic passion. The whole poem is in the direct voice of the poet, but, the West Wind which is apostrophized throughout is never allowed to recede to the background. The poem is a prayer, beginning with an invocation. Shelley prays to the wildness of the West Wind which is, according to Irene H.Chayes, "a dynamic, destructive, universal force that is ultimately beneficial, both 'destroyer' and 'preserver'".

The structure of the poem is based on the Italian *terzarima*, which typically has four interlinked tercets (aba, bcb,cdc) followed by a rhyming couplet. There are five fourteen-line *terzarima* stanzas in Shelley's poem. The first three stanzas describe the effect of the West Wind on the land, the sky and the sea. The perspective is earth-bound and human. He first describes what is closest to him. Then, as if raising his eyes, he describes the sky from zenith to horizon. Finally, he moves beyond this to what he cannot see, the Mediterranean and the surface and floor of the Atlantic Ocean. The reason for Shelley's prayer is in Stanza IV which records the poet's own sense of dejection and despair at not being able to fulfil his heroic mission of a poet-prophet. And the final Stanza is once more an appeal or prayer to the West Wind, as mover of the seasonal cycle, to assist the poet by spreading his message, thereby, helping him to contribute to a moral or political revolution, paralleling the seasonal change. He uses natural allegory to communicate political ideas

**Stanza I:** In his opening lines of the ode you find Shelley invoking the West Wind as it sweeps over the earth. The wind is 'wild'; it is the tumultuous and omnipresent spirit

of autumn. It has the dual role of the “Destroyer and Preserver”: the ‘pestilence-stricken multitudes’ of the dead leaves are driven away in the octave and the winged seeds are preserved in their dark wintry bed awaiting resurrection in the spring.

**Stanza II:** In the second stanza of the Ode you find a powerful description of the effect of the West Wind in the sky as the gathering storm seems to sweep up the scattered clouds just as the West Wind carries the dead leaves shaken into a river. Heaven and ocean seem to combine in the overarching dome of the sky, like the interlinked foliage of the forest. The dark clouds remind the poet of the disheveled hair of the Maenad while the lightning and the rain seem to be like Angels – messengers of a new life. The stanza concludes with dark, volcanic images of ‘black rain and fire’ which seem to issue from the ‘solid atmosphere’.

### **Critical Commentary**

The opening line strikes the keynote of Shelley’s admiration of the West Wind as an impetuous power. When it communicates its wildness to the mind of the poet, it becomes an inspiration. The images of death and rebirth announced in the first stanza, seems significant in the light of Shelley’s personal situation. In lines 2-5, he alludes to the traditional epic simile found in Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, in which souls of the dead are compared to fallen leaves driven by the wind. G.M. Matthews notes that the four colours are not only actually found in dead leaves, but are those traditionally representing the four races of man – Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasian, and American Indian. The images of death are soon supplanted with the image of the clarion. Throughout the poem you will find an entire matrix of nouns, Clarion-trumpet-Wind-breath-word-lips-Spring-prophecy, links the West Wind with the poet as agents of change through violent action. The many images of death in Stanza II: ‘dying year’, ‘closing night’, ‘vast sepulchre’ combined with the mighty showers point to the central paradox of the West Wind as ‘Destroyer and Preserver’.

**Stanza III:** The might of the West Wind brings back to life a world which had been lulled to sleep, and agitates the ocean and awakens the blue Mediterranean from his summer dreams. It cleaves and darkens the glassy surface of the Atlantic and the vegetation at its bottom is ruffled by the sound that heralds its approach.

**Stanza IV:** In the fourth stanza Shelley invokes the West Wind for strength and expresses his eagerness to share the impulse of its force. It is an inspirational force which he thinks will lift his sagging strength by lifting him like the leaf, the cloud, and the wave of the previous stanzas. Shelley wants the wind to fill him with strength and to lift him

from his dire misery – ‘the thorns of life’. Once upon a time he also, like the West Wind, was untamed, swift and proud. But now, he is chained by a heavy weight of time which also crushes his once-indomitable spirit.

**Stanza V:** By the concluding stanza, the wind is a metaphor for the invisible force that will scatter the poet’s words. The poet hopes that with the endless energy of the wind his glowing prophecy of reawakened earth and man’s victory over evil will be broadcast to mankind. Shelley compares himself to the autumnal forest, when the trees become apparently dead. He compares his thoughts to the dead fallen leaves, which by concealing and fertilizing the seeds, help the efflorescence of a new life in spring. So he hopes that his winged words will help out the new bright ideas and impulses, which he thinks are hidden in humanity, to blossom forth into beautiful activities. For this to happen he appeals to the autumnal wind to be to himself and his thoughts what it is to the forest and its leaves. The Ode concludes with a prophetic utterance and the hope for the future regeneration of mankind.

### **Critical Commentary**

From the end of the third stanza you find Shelley referring to the “voice” not “sound” of the Wind; it links the Wind’s power to the power of ‘incantation’, ‘prophecy’, ‘words’ which makes the poet an unacknowledged legislator of the world. The poet’s final wish to become the wind’s lyre alludes to Orpheus, the mythical poet who created the world by playing his lyre just as the present poet hopes to create a new world through his poetry. Orpheus also returned from the land of the dead. So, the image is also connected with regeneration – a recurrent image in the poem. You will come to understand that the uniqueness of the West Wind lies in its capacity to bring forth hope and harmony, even though their birth is tumultuous. In stanza I, the dreaming earth will awaken in spring when a clarion will blow; in stanza V, the poet’s words are the trumpet of a prophecy that will awaken an ‘unawakened earth’. Shelley’s zeal for reforming the world finds pointed expression here. The Wind and the poet ultimately fuse into one identity (“Be thou me,”) and the final message of the poem is one of optimism.

### **2.3.3b. 3. Themes:**

#### **➤ Hope and Aspiration**

Shelley is mainly a poet of regeneration and reconstruction. An undaunted optimist and idealist, he was ideally suited the role of a prophet. At the same time, however,

there is a deep undercurrent of melancholy in most of his poems. This melancholy was due to the fact that Shelley could not reconcile the hard facts with his ideas and ideals. Shelley's personal despondency, however, did not give rise to any morbid feeling. His poetry is full of hopeful messages – that happiness would follow misery, that the world of evils and corruption would be replaced by a new millennium where justice, liberty, equality and fraternity will reign.

'Ode to the West Wind' contains some notes of depression, no doubt. Shelley almost groans: "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" But the more bold and determining attitude is that of optimism and aspiration, of dream and hope. And as Graham Hough has rightly said "Shelley is a dreamer of dreams and poet for the hopes and hopefuls".

In 'Ode to the West Wind', Shelley feels the inadequacy of his life in comparison with the mighty potential of the West Wind. He implores the West Wind to imbue him with his dynamic thoughts and also to scatter his dormant thoughts and ideas throughout the world, just like the withered leaves of autumn:

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe/Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!"

In every detail of the poem Shelley has emphasised life coming out of death, a motif of hope. The present in the poem is imaged as things that are nearly dead but have seeds of life in them. The future is represented by images of new life (seeds, spring, rain, awakening etc.). Which emerges from death-like states such as sleep (stanzas I, III and V). In stanza III, The Mediterranean turns back nostalgically and sees "old palaces and towers" that were the remains of the Roman Empire. But, unlike the Mediterranean, Shelley is not interested in palaces and towers. Instead, he concentrates on the life that has grown over the ruined signs of a dead empire, "the azure moss and flowers." The moss and flowers are the natural growth that has hidden the ruins of the Roman Empire.

Towards the end of the Ode, Shelley appeals to the West Wind to give him faith, valour and inspiration; he wants to regenerate himself so that he could preach his thoughts, ideas and messages of hope to mankind, steeped in ignorance and inertia. The poet is quite sure of the birth of a new era. He sees beyond the dismal winter the dawn of a happy spring on humanity – full of happiness and possibilities: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" This last line of the poem can be a source of unfailing inspiration to all. Shelley believed that man is to be made perfect by the complete dissolution of all traditional ties by which the race is at present bound together. This is the hope and aspiration of a revolutionary who believed in the idea of a new millennium – the future

Golden Age of great happiness and prosperity for everyone.

➤ **Imagery:**

'Ode to the West Wind' is marked by Shelley's highly spontaneous lyricism combined with his kaleidoscopic imagery. His intensity of feelings and deep passions are best expressed through his cluster of images, metaphors and similes. The images used here are apt and compelling and show the influence of Greek literature upon him. In the poem pictorial, natural, scientific, mythical and even biblical images come in rapid succession. The theme of death and rebirth is worked out through images of seasonal cycles. The poem begins with autumn and ends with spring. The Wind is the spirit of destruction and regeneration, the common power that moves through both. With the instinctive truths of a fervid imagination, Shelley creates myths and his myth-making power is exemplified in the personifications used to describe the various activities of the West Wind.

In the very beginning, the Wind has been conceived as a mighty spirit, a sort of charioteer driving through the earth, scattering away the old and dead leaves. The mighty impact of the Wind on the leaves has been likened to the magical power of an enchanter who mysteriously drives away ghosts. The ghosts symbolize death, which is further enlarged upon by the use of the sickly colour effects. The 'yellow', 'black' and 'pale' are colour-words which give us pictures of disease, calamity and death. They lead to the image of "pestilence stricken multitudes", which may be the sick, suffering or the poor of this world. The stanza culminates in a ceremonial image of the seeds being charioted to their winter graves before being resurrected in spring. The biblical association of burial and resurrection is emphasised through the image of spring as a herald blowing her clarion in the manner of an archangel. The phrase "Destroyer and Preserver" shows how Shelley's imagination encompassed oriental myths made familiar by Orientalists like William Jones. He displays his strong mythopoeic ability in fusing emblems from various cultural sources in a single powerful image of the West Wind.

In the second stanza, the sky is imagined as a tree from whose boughs the loose clouds are shaken like leaves from a tree. From nature, Shelley's imagination moves to Greek myth. The dark masses of moving clouds are imaged as the dishevelled hair of a Maenad streaming up from her head as she dances in religious frenzy. The next image is musical, as the howling sound made by the Wind in its fury is imagined as the dirge of the dying year.

In the third stanza, there is the calm image of the Mediterranean sleeping and dreaming

in summer by “the coil of his crystalline streams”. The West Wind lashes the sea into fury. The underwater vegetation shedding the leaves is imaged as a man losing his glowing appearance when fears grip him. These pictures are objective, visual and descriptive.

In the fourth stanza, the poet relates his own sense of oppression and restraint to wind’s freedom and strength. The images of ‘chain’, ‘weight’, ‘thorns’ suggest his personal oppressions, sorrows and despondency . In the last stanza, the poet uses the image of the dreary autumnal forest to describe his own weak condition. But the poet is sure that he West Wind will awaken powerful music in him, just as it does in the autumnal forest which is imagined as a lyre. The poet brings in the images of a dying hearth to describe his mind which though apparently dead can produce a new conflagration. The poem ends with the image of the cycle of seasons – of dreary winter followed by spring which symbolizes regeneration.

Shelley’s imagery used in ‘Ode to the West Wind’ reflects the poet’s state of mind – his heightened imagination, his lofty idealism and his intense love for nature and natural phenomena. What Shelley tries to convey through his imagery is that nature is a permanent force which not only provides a sense of joy but also a sense of beauty which is not subject to wear and tear of the physical world. The telescoping of the images that can be noticed here gives to the poem a beauty and excellence of its own. Shelley’s love of nature expressed through his imagery highlight the loftiness of his vision and idealism.

#### **2.3.3b.4. Comprehension Exercises**

##### **Long Questions-20 marks:**

1. Consider Shelley as a romantic poet with reference to ‘Ode to the West Wind’.
2. What is an image? Discuss the images used by Shelley in ‘Ode to the West Wind’.
3. Estimate Shelley as a poet of hope and aspiration.
4. Shelley’s poetry is a vehicle of his prophetic message – Discuss with reference to ‘Ode to the West Wind’.

##### **Mid-length Questions-12 marks:**

1. Discuss the function of the West Wind both as Destroyer and Preserver.

2. Consider Shelley as a lyrical poet with reference to 'Ode to the West Wind'.
3. Examine Shelley's attitude to Nature.
4. Consider Ode to the West Wind as an ode.

**Short Questions-6 marks:**

1. Describe the various activities of the West Wind on land.
2. What personal picture of Shelley do you get in Stanza IV of 'Ode to the West Wind'?
3. How does Shelley present the death and rebirth theme in 'Ode to the West Wind'?
4. "If Winter comes can Spring be far behind?"

Bring out the significance of the above line with reference to Shelley's own ideals.

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### **2.3.4. Summing Up**

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- ✓ This unit gave you a detailed picture of two great Romantic Poets of the second generation – John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley.
- ✓ Keats' poetry is characterised by a rich sensuous quality, in keeping with his advice to Shelley to "load each rift with ore".
- ✓ His subject matter is drawn from nature, art, myth and legend.
- ✓ He had no knowledge of Greek, and little of Greece, yet, his poems are saturated with images of Classical Greek art and mythology as well as medieval architecture. This comes across in his 'Ode to a Nightingale' too.
- ✓ Shelley has been acclaimed by many admirers as the most radical of all the Romantic poets who criticized all the social institutions responsible for curbing the free human spirit.
- ✓ He also maintained his anti-establishment stand consistently throughout his life.
- ✓ The prophetic note, the hope in a golden millennium, the regeneration of mankind, underlies the major poems of Shelley.

- ✓ 'Ode to the West Wind' is also imbued with such a prophetic, anti-establishment note.

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### 2.3.3. Suggested Reading

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5. Devine, Philip, *Ode to the Nightingale Among Poets* *Asian Age* 31 October 1995.
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8. Baker, Carlos *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*, Princeton University Press.
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## Module - 3 : Reading Romantic Prose

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### Unit - 1 □ Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*

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#### Structure

- 3.1.0: Introduction
- 3.1.1: Jane Austen: The Author and her Works.
- 3.1.2: *Pride and Prejudice*: Importance in the Austen canon
- 3.1.3: *Pride and Prejudice*: Sneak Preview of the Characters
- 3.1.4: Summary of the Text
- 3.1.5: Plot Construction
- 3.1.6: Austen's Characterisation
- 3.1.7: Title: History and Significance
- 3.1.8: Themes of Love, Money, and Marriage
- 3.1.9: The Social Picture
- 3.1.10: Irony and Humour
- 3.1.11: Summing Up
- 3.1.12: Comprehension Exercises
- 3.1.13: Suggested Reading

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#### 3.1.0. Introduction

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This unit aims to give you an idea of Jane Austen's art of fiction. *Pride and Prejudice* is a representative novel of the author. It is a novel with a finely structured plot, glinting with the brand of satirical humour so characteristic of Austen. A strong vein of social criticism runs through the work, as it touches on themes of love, marriage and money in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England. In exploring Austen's fiction, it is impossible not to explore the time and society to which she belonged, as you will find in this unit. As you read on, do remember that a woman novelist writing under her

own name was not something that was very common in Austen's time. Naturally, critical understanding of her work(s) was also late in coming. A careful look at the plot and characterisation of this novel will reveal that it is a layered text, in the sense that what appears on the surface often leads into far deeper issues. At the end of this Unit, you should be able to differentiate between this appearance-reality dichotomy and place the characters in their proper perspectives as devised by the novelist.

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### **3.1.1. Jane Austen: The Author and Her Works**

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Jane Austen was born in 1775 in the village of Steventon in Hampshire, the daughter of a quiet, scholarly rector, George Austen, and his witty wife, Cassandra. The seventh of eight children, Jane would always be close to her elder sister, also called Cassandra. Her foray into literature started early, with a short play begun in 1793 and finished in 1800, titled *Sir Charles Grandison or the happy Man, a comedy in 6 acts*. A short epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*, was also written between 1793 and 1795. But it was *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), warmly received by the reading public, that paved the way for *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815). *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) were published after her death. Neither Jane nor Cassandra married. Their's seems to have been a quiet life, rarely straying far from Hampshire, with some time spent in London and Bath. From 1811, Austen lived in Chawton, not far from her childhood home of Steventon. In 1817, aged 41, Austen died after a prolonged illness, now thought to be Addison's disease.

Austen's novels were drawn from the small world that she inhabited, the details of its manners and morals picked out by a writer's eye. In a letter to her nephew Edward, she would famously say, "What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited sketches, full of variety and glow? How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush...?" Her works would become classic examples of the early nineteenth century "novel of manners". For, though fairytale ending were often designed for her heroines, Austen's novels were remarkable for their clear-eyed, acerbic portraiture of contemporary English and European society, particularly the role assigned to women in a patriarchal society.

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### **3.1.2. *Pride and Prejudice*: Importance in the Austen Canon**

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Published in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* is a famous novel of manners. Primarily labelled as a romantic tale about love, courtship, marriage, the novel is also a significant piece of documentation of social issues of the time. The position of women in the eighteenth

and nineteenth centuries, class differences, fashions, the complexities of the man/woman relationship, parenthood—all these are explored through Austen’s natural ability at maintaining an implicit symbolism. The novel also inspires a great amount of debate on nature and the degrees of emotion and rationality with which an individual must negotiate a world controlled by social codes. Many of these were issues related to the public world that supposedly belonged to men. The private world depicted in the novel comes alive through relationships. The plot structure is complex, with multiple threads coming together in the end. The characters, with their stock dispositions, are representative of the society of that time. Strains of irony and parody run through this romantic tale, the trademark of a comedy of manners.

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### 3.1.3. **Pride and Prejudice: A Sneak Preview of the Characters**

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**Elizabeth Bennet** - The novel’s protagonist. The second daughter of Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth is the most intelligent and sensible of the five Bennet sisters. She is well read and quick-witted, with a tongue that occasionally proves too sharp for her own good.

**Fitzwilliam Darcy** - A wealthy gentleman, the master of Pemberley, and the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Though Darcy is intelligent and honest, his excess of pride causes him to look down on his social inferiors. Over the course of the novel, he tempers his class-consciousness and learns to admire and love Elizabeth for her strong character.

**Jane Bennet** - The eldest and most beautiful Bennet sister. Jane is more reserved and gentler than Elizabeth. The easy pleasantness with which she and Bingley interact contrasts starkly with the mutual distaste that marks the encounters between Elizabeth and Darcy.

**Charles Bingley** - Darcy’s considerably wealthy best friend. Bingley’s purchase of Netherfield, an estate near the Bennets, serves as the impetus for the novel. He is a genial, well-intentioned gentleman, whose easygoing nature contrasts with Darcy’s initially discourteous demeanor. He is blissfully uncaring about class differences.

**Mr. Bennet** - The patriarch of the Bennet family, a gentleman of modest income with five unmarried daughters. Mr. Bennet has a sarcastic, cynical sense of humor that he uses to purposefully irritate his wife. Though he loves his daughters (Elizabeth in particular), he often fails as a parent, preferring to withdraw from the never-ending marriage concerns of the women around him rather than offer help.

**Mrs. Bennet** - Mr. Bennet's wife, a foolish, noisy woman whose only goal in life is to see her daughters married. Because of her low breeding and often unbecoming behavior, Mrs. Bennet often repels the very suitors whom she tries to attract for her daughters.

**George Wickham** - A handsome, fortune-hunting militia officer. Wickham's good looks and charm attract Elizabeth initially, but Darcy's revelation about Wickham's disreputable past clues her in to his true nature and simultaneously draws her closer to Darcy.

**Lydia Bennet** - The youngest Bennet sister, she is gossipy, immature, and self-involved. Unlike Elizabeth, Lydia flings herself headlong into romance and ends up running off with Wickham.

**Mr. Collins** - A pompous, generally idiotic clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet's property. Mr. Collins's own social status is nothing to brag about, but he takes great pains to let everyone and anyone know that Lady Catherine de Bourgh serves as his patroness. He is the worst combination of snobbish and obsequious.

**Miss Bingley** - Bingley's snobbish sister. Miss Bingley bears inordinate disdain for Elizabeth's middle-class background. Her vain attempts to garner Darcy's attention cause Darcy to admire Elizabeth's self-possessed character even more.

**Lady Catherine de Bourgh** - A rich, bossy noblewoman; Mr. Collins's patron and Darcy's aunt. Lady Catherine epitomizes class snobbery, especially in her attempts to order the middle-class Elizabeth away from her well-bred nephew.

**Charlotte Lucas** - Elizabeth's dear friend. Pragmatic where Elizabeth is romantic, and also six years older than Elizabeth, Charlotte does not view love as the most vital component of a marriage. She is more interested in having a comfortable home. Thus, when Mr. Collins proposes, she accepts.

**Georgiana Darcy** - Darcy's sister. She is immensely pretty and just as shy. She has great skill at playing the pianoforte.

**Mary Bennet** - The middle Bennet sister, bookish and pedantic.

**Catherine Bennet** - The fourth Bennet sister. Like Lydia, she is girlishly enthralled with the soldiers.

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### 3.1.4. A Summary of the Text

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When wealthy young Charles Bingley arrives at Netherfield Park, a husband-hunt begins among the marriageable ladies at Longbourn. Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn have five unmarried daughters - Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia. Mrs Bennet, desperate to marry off her daughters, prods Mr Bennet into paying a visit to Bingley. Soon afterwards, the Bennet girls attend a ball in Meryton where Jane and Bingley are attracted to each other. Bingley's friend, Mr Darcy, however, haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth. The revellers at Meryton conclude that he is an excessively proud man. Elizabeth tries to laugh off the slight, but her animosity to Darcy is obviously aroused.

Jane and Bingley's friendship grows, and Darcy begins to find Elizabeth attractive. Once Jane falls ill while on a visit to Netherfield Park, forcing her to stay there for a few days. Elizabeth braves a downpour to go and nurse her ailing sister. Darcy's admiration for her becomes increasingly evident, arousing the ire of snobbish Miss Bingley, who herself had hopes of catching Darcy's fancy. Back home, the sisters have a visitor – the pompous Mr Collins, a distant cousin to whom the Longbourn estate is entailed (see note). Keen to marry in order to promote his career, he wants to find his bride in one of the Bennet sisters. Warned by Mrs Bennet that Jane was on the verge of getting engaged, he proposes to Elizabeth but is quickly rejected. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls meet officers in the nearby militia camp. Among them is Mr Wickham, whose attentions flatter Elizabeth. He tells her that Darcy, out of jealousy, has cheated and robbed him of a living which had been promised to him. The story reinforces Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy.

That winter, Darcy and Bingley leave Netherfield Park abruptly. This comes as a shock to Jane, who has fallen in love with Bingley and had believed that the feeling was reciprocated. In another startling turn of events, Mr Collins announces his engagement to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's friend and, at twenty seven, considered beyond the marriageable age. The daughter of the recently knighted Sir Charles Lucas, whose means do not match his new status, Charlotte chooses to marry Mr Collins rather than face an uncertain future as a single woman. Shortly afterwards, Jane goes to London, hoping to meet Bingley. However, she only encounters Miss Bingley, who behaves arrogantly, while her brother fails to visit Jane. Later that spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte, who now lives with her husband, Mr Collins, at a parsonage near Rosings Park, the estate owned by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's haughty aunt who has a very insipid daughter. At Rosings, Elizabeth meets Darcy again, and he soon calls at the parsonage

to propose to her. He confesses to loving her against his better judgement, detailing his misgivings about the match, “his sense of her inferiority” and “family obstacles”. Elizabeth has no hesitation in refusing him, charging him with ruining Jane’s chances with Bingley, destroying Wickham’s fortunes, with being arrogant and failing to behave in a “gentleman-like manner”. Darcy leaves but gives her a letter next morning. He had advised Bingley to keep a distance from Jane, he explains in the letter, as he did not consider that Jane was serious about the affair. He also reveals that Wickham had tried to seduce his younger sister and elope with her, hence the bad blood between them.

Darcy’s letter shows him in a new light, and Elizabeth begins to revise her estimate of his character and her feelings towards him. Back home, she is cold to Wickham, who leaves soon for Brighton, where his regiment is shifting. Lydia manages to get her father’s permission to visit Brighton. In June, Elizabeth goes to the north with her uncle and aunt, the Gardiners. They visit Pemberley, which is Darcy’s country seat. After making sure that Darcy is away, Elizabeth visits Pemberley and is delighted by its beauty. She also learns from the housekeeper that Darcy is an exceptional employer. Darcy appears then, on a sudden visit, and behaves cordially with her and the Gardiners. He makes no further mention of his proposal, and invites Elizabeth to visit his sister. The growing warmth between Darcy and Elizabeth is suddenly interrupted by a letter from home, informing Elizabeth that Lydia has eloped with Wickham. The couple could not be traced and, worse, they were thought to be living together without being married. The Bennets are threatened with social disgrace. Elizabeth quickly reaches home, from where Mr Bennet and Mr Gardiner set out to look for the couple. In the midst of this crisis, a letter arrives, informing the Longbourn household that the couple had been found and Wickham had agreed to marry Lydia if an annual income was assured to him. While initially it is believed that Mr Gardiners has paid Wickham, it is later discovered that Darcy was the one who had rescued the Bennets from social ignominy.

The storm passes and Wickham and Lydia are received at Longbourn, though Mrs Bennet seems the only person delighted to see them – she considers the marriage of a daughter an achievement. Soon, Bingley, too, reappears and begins to court Jane. Darcy accompanies Bingley and though he occasionally visits the Bennets, he never proposes to Elizabeth. Later, Lady Catherine de Bourgh arrives and instructs Elizabeth to refuse Darcy, if he at all he approaches her, since she cannot countenance a match between her nephew and a Bennet. Elizabeth refuses to accept any of her demands, and tells her that though she does not harbour any intention of marrying Darcy she is not going to compromise her happiness. Reports of this exchange bring Darcy to Longbourn once

more. Elizabeth and he go on a walk, where he reveals that he continues to love her and still wishes to marry her. Elizabeth, now very changed in her opinion of him, accepts. The novel ends with the marriages of Jane and Bingley, and Elizabeth and Darcy. Mrs Bennet is beside herself with delight.

**Note for the Learner:**

**Entailment and Property Law**

**This law was of feudal origin. In Austen's time it was used to prevent property from passing on to female heirs. The aim was to prevent fragmentation of landed property. It was an extension of the law of male primogeniture, by which inheritance was passed on to the eldest male son or inheritor. In the absence of any male heir, the property would be divided equally among all the surviving daughters, in which case the value of the inheritance declined substantially. The entailment is the cause of the Bennet girls' need to marry rich husbands, as after the death of Mr Bennet the property would pass on to his nearest male relative, the odious Mr Collins.**

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### **3.1.5. Plot Construction**

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Austen's brilliant sense of drama, intrigue, and almost Neo-Classical sense of craftsmanship is amply evident in *Pride and Prejudice*. She has complete mastery over the narrator's art, with a perfect sense of drama in working out the twists and turns of the plot. The main theme of love and marriage revolves around the love story of Darcy and Elizabeth. This is juxtaposed with the stories of other couples: Mr and Mrs Bennet; Charlotte and Mr Collins; Jane and Bingley; Lydia and Wickham. Though they don't hold our attention in the same manner, the subplots strengthen the philosophy contained in the main plot, neatly stitching all the strands together. These plots are not digressions. They are rather central to the very design of the novel both structurally and thematically. Rather than serving any decorative function, these subplots display multiple varieties of marriage and love, and are brilliantly intertwined to substantiate different stages in the main action involving Elizabeth and Darcy. They offer a relative view of the perfect relationship by helping us to recognise the deficiencies of the other relationships. Events and individuals in the subplots in many ways contribute to the development of the narrative. Darcy's initial role in separating Jane and Bingley makes Elizabeth view him as arrogant and ill-willed. Wickham's arrival on the scene unleashes a chain of events

which end in a crisis which precedes the final resolution of the novel.

The plot proceeds through three main twists. Elizabeth visits Charlotte's new house after her marriage and accidentally encounters Darcy again at Rosings. It is here that he proposes to her. Her angry rejection prompts him to write the letter which would explain why he took Bingley away, and unmask the true history of Wickham. This inspires Elizabeth to re-examine her own self, eventually leading to a dawning self-knowledge.

The second twist occurs when Elizabeth visits Pemberley and realises that Darcy's pride is not just self-importance. As the master of a huge estate, upon whose benevolence a large number of people depended, he was justified in his self-esteem. This realisation is soon accompanied by the sudden arrival of Darcy and his courtesies towards her, which revises her opinion of him.

Finally, the elopement of Lydia with Wickham initially seems to part her from Darcy forever. But as Darcy's role in that marriage is revealed to her, her gratitude to him is complete. Her pride, the source of the initial misunderstandings in their relationship, is finally humbled. The last stumbling block to their love is ironically removed by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whose intention to check the relationship only results in Elizabeth's assertion that she would not be subordinated to her command. The road to their final union is thus opened and Darcy has only to walk through the doors of her house and walk out with her, to claim his beloved forever.

#### **Importance of the subplots**

##### **The three major turning points:**

- **Darcy's letter,**
- **The visit to Pemberley,**
- **The elopement of Lydia with Wickham.**

#### **3.1.6. Austen's Characterisation**

- **Elizabeth and Darcy:** The main plot of Austen's novel revolves around the relationship and individual developments of Elizabeth Bennet, the second daughter of the Bennet couple, and Fitzwilliam Darcy who is the master of Pemberley estate.

Elizabeth has in her a lively spirit. She has a sharp intellect and sparkles in her witty conversation. Handicapped by her lack of a dowry, and her unconventional looks, she strains against the limitations of choice imposed on women by a

patriarchal society. She considers herself to be a 'rational creature', a woman who seeks to retain her autonomy of choice even though the odds are stacked against her. She almost wilfully refuses to be like Charlotte Lucas, who settles for the comforts of a home and husband, rather than remain a spinster in straitened circumstances. In an age when women had very little options of financial independence, her refusal of two extremely advantageous offers of marriage may even seem to be foolhardy. In fact Mrs Bennet cautions her after she refuses Mr Collins that she may not have any suitors. Her refusal to give in to societal pressure earns her our admiration. However, she is not perfect. Her pride in her ability to judge people is challenged by her inability to assess the people close to her. Her reaction to Charlotte's acceptance of Mr Collins exposes her blindness. Later on, upon reading Darcy's letter, she realises that her vanity had clouded her judgement of Wickham's character. It is from this point that we see her character mature. She learns to revise her hasty conclusions about Darcy by a more informed opinion about his actions. She learns to acknowledge her own folly in letting her vanity affect her views of people. Most significantly, by the end of the novel, she learns the importance of a more compassionate nature, when she stops short of teasing her newly betrothed fiancé, realising that he was not yet prepared for it. Elizabeth is not only Jane Austen's favourite character; through her Austen also seems to voice her own impatience with the restricted circumstances of women in eighteenth and nineteenth century England. Elizabeth's follies may also be attributed to the limited sphere of her experience, which doesn't let her natural abilities the scope to mature. Once she moves out of the narrow existence of Longbourn, her intellect fulfils its promise.

In comparison to Elizabeth, Darcy, is a less engaging character, though he is a benevolent master and a loving and dutiful brother. In the beginning of the novel he appears to be an incorrigible snob, looking down upon people he considers to be his inferiors in culture and breeding. He is inordinately conscious of his social ascendancy, and knows his value in the marriage market. His haughty and unfeeling rebuff of Elizabeth at the Meryton ball arouses her prejudice against him. But Darcy soon shows that his faults are more of manners than of nature. Elizabeth may not have been handsome enough to draw him to dance with her, but her genuine concern for her sister Jane, when she falls ill in Netherfield, draws his admiration. It is here, through Miss Bingley's bid for his attention, that we come to know for the first time that he takes an active interest in his sister. Darcy's pride soon falls at the feet of Elizabeth's intelligence and vivacity.

Her oblivious attitude to his growing attraction is also a change for a man used to female attention. His first proposal, which he says is made against his better judgement, shows the force of his passion. He is conditioned to expect that Elizabeth would accept him because of the advantages of wealth and position that he offered. Nothing prepares him for her vehement rejection. Unlike Mr Collins however, he doesn't do her the injustice of thinking her merely coy. He takes her rejection to heart, and though he refutes her allegations, they open his eyes to his own deficiencies. What hurts him most is Elizabeth's accusation that his manner was uncivil. For the first time in his life he is forced to review his own behaviour. The humiliation of Elizabeth's refusal makes him realise that power doesn't only come from privilege. Throughout the rest of the novel we find him making amends for his initial sin of aloof haughtiness. Elizabeth's influence on him mellows his egotistical nature, the faults of which he had himself attributed to the lack of a proper feminine influence in his childhood.

The individual internal developments of these two characters are central to the understanding of the motif of good sense in *Pride and Prejudice* and probably for this reason they appear to be the source of delight and education for the readers.

- **Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley:** Austen has given full rein to her imagination in her delineation of the characters of her main protagonists. In contrast, Jane and Bingley are flat characters who are drawn as foils to Elizabeth and Darcy respectively. Their story serves as a subplot, but one that provides dynamism to the main plot, through the twists and turns it takes. Jane, in striking contrast to her sister, is gentle, and in many ways a cheerful, friendly, and romantic lady who can be easily convinced and made happy. She does not have a modicum of false pride in her, and her manners would easily satisfy the writers of books on social decorum. Bingley is a friendly man with none of the egotism that is displayed in Elizabeth and Darcy. They have a natural sense of bonding with each other, and right from the beginning of the novel it is clear that they are going to be a potential couple. They are drawn by Austen in the tradition of simple, adorable, romantic lovers who are naturally attracted to each other in their first meeting, and the first impression would serve for their final one. They have no agency upon their own fate and remain at the mercy of the actions of the stronger characters.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Bennet:** In her depiction of Mr and Mrs Bennet, Austen at first seems to be portraying Mr Bennet as an intelligent, erudite, man who has made the mistake of marrying a beautiful woman of little understanding. His sardonic humour is very often directed towards his wife and daughters, except Elizabeth. She is his favourite daughter because of her good sense and wit, and it is through the lens of her perception that we view him. As Elizabeth grows in maturity, we get a more qualified picture of Mr Bennet, as someone who has abdicated his responsibilities as a father. His study is a retreat into which he escapes, resigning all the authority that he should have exercised. His lack of judgement which is suggested to the reader by his choice of a spouse, becomes pronounced when he overrides Elizabeth's objections and allows Lydia to leave for Brighton. He is an entirely ineffectual character, both in his refusal to discipline his family and in his inability to dispose of his legacy. The first is self-willed, while the second is the result of an unfair inheritance law that denied women the right to inheritance.

On the other hand, Mrs. Bennet is a noisy and foolish woman, hysterically committed to seeing her daughters married off. She is one of the caricatures Austen draws in this novel. She lacks refinement and wisdom, which ironically repel the very people she wants to attract. However, she also represents the dilemma of a woman with no male progeny to offer her a secure old age. In contrast to the vacuous goodness of Jane, her boisterous machinations to forward the marital prospects of her daughters shows her active attempts to gain a modicum of control over her circumstances. Although in keeping with the farcical dimensions of her character her efforts seem to be headed for failure, the sensitive reader will sympathise with her predicament. When she reprimands Elizabeth for refusing Mr Collins, we hear the voice of reality as she reminds her daughter of her limited prospects for the future. Her faults are as much the defects of her character as the deficiencies of a society built upon the inequality of the sexes. Where she appears to be most unreasonable, in her objection to the entailment of the property, she appears to be nearest to Elizabeth in her rebellion against accepted laws.

- **Minor Characters:** Though primarily about Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel has many important stock characters that are significant in the discussion of the novel's characterisation and the functions that such characterisation serves. Being a novel of manners, similar to that of the comedy of manners, these stock

characters are part of the social milieu that Austen wants to demonstrate, and often criticise and satirise. Among these minor stock characters **George Wickham** is of prime significance as he plays the role of the wicked, harmful, vengeful womaniser who attempted to seduce Miss. Darcy and after being punished for that he pours venom into Elizabeth's ears and poisons her mind against Darcy. He seduces Lydia and like a thorough opportunist takes advantage of the Bennets' crisis to extract financial gain for himself.

**Lydia Bennet** is the foolish variety of the romantic heroine who is easily misled by Wickham. There is also the foolishly snobbish Lady Catherine who probably stands as Austen's representation of the fact that elites can also be fools, and their pride based on social ascendancy is a by-product of their foolish notions about the world. Following these lines Miss Bingley, Mrs. Hurst, and Miss Darcy are characters that also appear to be foolishly snobbish.

**Charlotte** is a representation of the poor woman trapped in a world governed by patriarchal oppression. She is a victim of this divisive system and is doubly marginalized by her economic dependence and her gender. Since she is growing older, and since she can neither afford to neither remain a spinster nor become a governess she has to make the compromise of marrying Mr. Collins who is sketched as the typical clown figures available in the comedy of manners.

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### 3.1.7. Title: History and Significance

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When Austen first thought of the idea of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1797, she used the working title, "First Impressions". The novel was given its present name when it was published in 1813. The title plays a crucial role in analysing the novel, its preoccupations, the development of its characters and relationships. The action of the novel springs from Darcy's innate pride in his position and upbringing, which prejudices him to the gathering at the Meryton Assembly, as well as Elizabeth's pride in her superior judgement and independent spirit, which makes her quick to form her opinion about Darcy once her vanity has been offended. The flaws of "pride" and "prejudice" however, do not define Elizabeth and Darcy alone. They recur in various forms in various characters.

Pride based on social ascendancy is a motif in the novel, and many characters such as Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, Bingley's sisters, are equally afflicted by it. Raised to the status of gentry by virtue of their brother's success in trade, they behave contemptuously towards Jane and Elizabeth, putting the most uncharitable gloss on their actions. Lady

Catherine's pride is almost caricature. She is keenly aware of her rank and title, of the differences between fortunes made in trade and those inherited by the old aristocracy. She believes in a sort of feudal *noblesse oblige*, but those who are recipients of it, such as Mr Collins, are never allowed to forget her charity. A marriage between Darcy and her daughter, Anne, is a natural alliance, in her scheme of things. A marriage between Darcy and the middle class Elizabeth Bennet is, to her, a ghastly aberration. The fairytale ending of the novel implies a salutary lesson for such snobbish people when the middle-class Elizabeth's unaffected and spontaneous nature not only charms Darcy but also softens the stiff edges of his character.

The core of the novel however, lies in the lessons in humility which has to be learnt by the two central characters of the novel. Darcy dismisses Elizabeth as "not handsome enough to tempt me" and says that he refuses to lend consequence to a woman by dancing with her when she has been overlooked by other men. He doesn't just cruelly hurt her vanity; he hurts her pride in her ability to overcome the limitations of fortune, beauty and gender, through her sharp wit and intellect. Much later in the novel she acknowledges to Jane how the first encounter had led her to a sweeping judgement of Darcy:

I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind.

This is the voice of a chastened Elizabeth whose self-knowledge in the course of the novel has humbled her and made her realise the dangers of hasty conclusions and the reality of the power and privilege conferred by birth and gender even in an age of growing individualism. Darcy's letter shows her how her judgement had been clouded by her hurt pride. Her visit to Pemberley reveals that Darcy's pride is not entirely unjustified as it stems from the real power he wields as the master of a huge estate. In realising this, she also becomes conscious of the real honour he has conferred upon her by overlooking the huge gulf between them and offering her his hand in marriage. Just as his continued attentions to her may have fed her pride in her power over him, the disastrous elopement of Lydia with Wickham brings home to her the bitter fact that the intemperate words with which Darcy had first proposed to her, the reservations he had expressed about the lack of breeding among her mother and younger sisters, were mortifying truths. Her full appreciation of the extent of Darcy's feelings for her, come at a time when the onslaught of circumstances seem to render her powerless to reclaim his regard. Her acceptance of his second proposal is therefore rendered even more joyful.

Darcy on the other hand has to learn the lesson that social superiority doesn't necessarily entitle one to the unquestioning regard of those who are his inferior in the social hierarchy. Elizabeth's angry rejection of his first proposal, when she accuses him of ungentlemanly behaviour, is a rude shock to him. It forces him to look at himself as others might see him. Her rejection also makes him realise that in spite of his wealth and consequence, it is in the power of a woman that he has placed his happiness. Accustomed to having his every whim pandered to, from his childhood, he is forced to accept her 'no' for an answer. His subsequent endeavour to redeem himself in her eyes by his courtesy to her aunt and uncle, and his intervention in securing the marriage of Lydia and Wickham, earn him the right to Elizabeth's hand. He too has learnt to temper his haughty manner with amiability, to overcome the gentry's prejudice about trade, to recognise the shortcomings of his superior attitude. His second proposal to Elizabeth is thus made with the consciousness of the good fortune of securing the affections of an intelligent and spirited woman like Elizabeth.

Austen's novel therefore is a delightful exposition of how vanity engenders prejudice, whereas justified pride may be rewarded if it is accompanied by a humanising and compassionate accommodation of other viewpoints. As Mary says in her rather pedantic manner,

Pride relates more to our opinions of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us.

Austen, by allowing Darcy, who ends up as a truly romantic hero, and Elizabeth, her favourite character, to marry each other, reinforces the rewards of achieving true growth by overcoming blind spots and delusions.

**Learner Please Note !!**

- **Difference between legitimate pride and mere vanity**
- **How vanity and prejudice are sometimes related**
- **How these elements are woven into the narrative structure of the novel**

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### **3.1.8. Themes of Love, Money, and Marriage**

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The much celebrated opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice* sets the mood of the novel by establishing husband hunting as the chief pre-occupation of the novel:

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”

Beneath the tale of ‘pride’ and ‘prejudice’ being overcome to forge an everlasting bond of love, runs the themes of love, money, and marriage, in their multiple dimensions. Courtship and marriage, the staple of romantic fiction, is the framework which is used by Austen to explore larger social concerns such as the limited scope of self-advancement for women, which leaves marriage as the major source of stability. This is why the mothers of marriageable girls must compete to catch eligible bachelors and social occasions like balls turn into huge marriage markets.

The marriage of Mr and Mrs. Bennet, a failed marriage, is the cautionary tale which is used in this novel as reminder of the unhappiness of an incompatible marriage. The two occupy mutually exclusive worlds. Mrs Bennet’s energies are single-mindedly directed towards finding husbands for her daughters, while Mr Bennet seeks refuge from the predominantly feminine atmosphere of the household in the sanctum of his study. Their incompatibility is most vigorously displayed in the lack of a proper upbringing of the younger daughters of the Bennet household. Mrs Bennet’s lack of sense, and her husband’s refusal to be drawn into the brainless atmosphere of his drawing room, leave the younger siblings vulnerable to different kinds of follies. This has a negative impact on the marriage prospects of the girls which Mrs Bennet is so eager to advance.

Austen’s novel, though romantic in nature, is rooted in social realism. Austen realistically portrays the Eighteenth Century English society, urban and suburban, where marriage is the only recourse of women to find economic stability, even social ascendancy. The alternative, of becoming a governess, was not considered attractive in a society driven by social hierarchies. The opening line ironically underscores the fact that while a wealthy man can have the choice of remaining a bachelor if he so prefers, a woman, needs a husband to secure her social and financial position. Thus, Mrs. Bennet, though she appears to be foolish and hysterical, is rightly anxious regarding the future of her daughters, for if they remain spinsters they would ultimately end up as governesses in wealthy households. Austen’s implied criticism draws our attention to the fact that in an age of rising capitalism which gave men new avenues for rising in society, the same freedom was denied to women.

Charlotte makes a compromise and marries Mr. Collins, a foolish and clownish character, who nevertheless gives her prosperity and a social standing. Her marriage based solely on the calculations of sustenance and social security, is devoid of any love or romance. It is a marriage of convenience which is unacceptable to Elizabeth whose sensibilities

are outraged at Charlotte's resignation to the limited choices which society has offered her. On the other hand, Austen places a contrasting image of the marriage of Wickham and Lydia. Lydia is completely irrational, and her romantic, fanciful nature finally leads her to being trapped by the womaniser Wickham. Their marriage is born out of treachery on the part of Wickham and foolish romantic fancies on the part of Lydia. It is doomed to be unstable from the very beginning for it is not based on genuine love or respect.

These two unsuitable marriages are complemented by the two ideal romances in the story. Austen parallels the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy with that of Jane and Bingley. Jane and Bingley's relationship is a static one of traditional courtship, often threatened by outside forces directly or indirectly infiltrating into their private territory. Their marriage is a result of continued commitment and love, and results finally in emotional security. But their relationship is based on the traditional premises of conjugality in which the woman submits herself completely and is rewarded for it by gaining love, stability and prosperity.

Darcy and Elizabeth's love, courtship, and marriage, which constitute the focal point of the plot, remain Austen's best example of a dynamic evolving relationship, which achieves a desirable balance of the head and the heart. Elizabeth and Darcy battle the demons of pride, prejudice, vanity and a wide social gulf, to finally win for themselves the perfect mixture of sense and sentiment which Austen holds up as an ideal marriage. Elizabeth's quest for dignity and recognition of her individuality and worth is satisfied by Darcy's passionate regard for her charm and intellect. But before she can be thus rewarded, she too has to understand and accept the fine network of power and privilege which governs the society that she lives in. Her reward is the hand of the handsomest and richest man in the novel. As she becomes the mistress of Pemberley, she and Darcy are held up as the ideal couple whose union signifies the accommodation of changing mores within the established tradition.

Austen provides the reader with a complex structure of multiple marriages which layer our perception of the institution. However, through this complex system of events she probably asserts the fact that it is not good to marry for money, but it is also silly to marry without it. In a world where marriage is a compulsion for the women it is imperative that they should look for advantageous marriages, but without compromising the integrity of their affections. The marriages of Charlotte and Lydia are imperfect ones. Jane's is a romantic one; but Darcy and Elizabeth's union, based on both reason and emotion, is the ideal one.

### Points to Ponder Upon for the Learner

- **Marriage as an economic compulsion for women**
- **Compatibility and happiness**
- **Balance of sense and sentiment in an ideal marriage**
- **Marriage as a means of enforcing social order**

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### 3.1.9. The Social Picture

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As stated earlier, *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel narrating a romantic tale which also contains a valuable and realistic portrayal of the contemporary English society. It is a comedy of manners portraying the themes of love, money, and marriage; it also projects the gender-hierarchies of the society. Being a novel of manners the chief design of the novel's ironic humour is to satirise the aberrations of the contemporary society. Austen's novel exposes the hypocrisies of the contemporary middle class. She indirectly condemns the snobbery of the elite who are prejudiced against their suburban and poorer counterparts. Lady Catherine, Miss Bingley, Mrs. Hurst, are all portrayed as snobs who derive a false sense of superiority out of their social ascendancy. The deplorable state of the women is amply displayed by both Charlotte and Lydia who are victims of a patriarchal society which subjugates and exploits the women folk. In the case of the former it results in a calculative nature, while in the latter it elicits a flirtatious exhibitionism, devoid of any propriety.

Through the predicament of the Bennet sisters, Austen represents the unfairness of the law of entailment, as it perpetuates patriarchal privilege, while denying women the right to their parental property. Austen who herself remained a spinster herself, provides a realistic picture of the marginalisation of women in such a society. Threatened with the prospects of straitened circumstances, marriage turns into their sole goal.

The rigidly hierarchical society is also mocked at in *Pride and Prejudice*. In many ways Austen seems to portray that idiosyncrasy and hollow pride are central to the society she knew. She critiques the elite notion that only the less privileged are ill-bred and manipulative. In her novel both Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine appear to be equally callous. However, Austen is also criticised for ultimately conforming to the very norms she critiques. Her depiction of Darcy as the saviour of the Bennet family's honour, seems to reinforce the power of money, prestige and male domination, which belongs to the dominant discourse of the time.

**Learner make a note of :**

- **The position of women**
  - **Snobbery**
  - **Marriage and money**
  - **Law of entailment**
- and try to write short notes on each.**

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### **3.1.10. Irony and Humour**

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Irony is Austen's potent weapon of satire. It runs through the novel as an undercurrent which lifts a neatly structured, sentimental tale of love and marriage, to the stature of greatness. Irony works in the novel through the subversion of each and every authoritative position, beginning with the opening statement. The verbal irony of the opening draws our attention to the relation between money and marriage; but with the use of the word 'want' Austen also draws our attention to the women's desire and need for marriage. Austen inspires laughter in her description of Mrs. Bennet when she writes:

She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper ... The business of her life was to get her daughters married.

Even this authoritative assertion is rife with verbal irony. Mrs Bennet maybe foolish, but as the mother of five daughters living on an entailed property, does she have any choice other than to make the marriage of the girls her sole 'business'?

The various reversals of the novel also give rise to situational irony. Darcy's arrogant rejection of Elizabeth as a dance partner stems from his consciousness of his male prerogative and his ability to confer consequence to any woman. He would soon be captivated by her pair of expressive eyes, and find to his consternation, that in matters of the heart, an intelligent woman may still exercise her power of rejection. Similarly, Lady Catherine discovers that money and aristocratic privilege alone will not secure for her daughter the prize catch of Darcy. Her haughty manner towards Elizabeth when visits, hides her desperation in the face of the inevitable. Middle-class, unaccomplished Elizabeth, ultimately has it in her power to rebuff her. The comedy of their final encounter is undercut by this ironic reversal of the power equation.

Austen's irony also adds spark to her characterisation. It adds a fine touch of social criticism to a character like the obsequious Mr Collins. His proposal to Elizabeth is depicted with hilarity. He indeed is a man who is "in want of a wife" and so he quickly

transfers his attentions from Jane to Elizabeth:

... and it was soon done — done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.

But, his comment after Lydia's elopement that it would have been better if she had died, startles us with a new insight. On the one hand it shows a most uncharitable side of a clergyman, on the other, it does voice the grave social consequences of Lydia's actions upon her family.

The shortcomings of the minor women characters like Ms Bingley, Mrs Hurst, Lady Catherine, as well as of someone like Charlotte Lucas, shows the inevitable meanness that is bound to creep into women when they are confined to their narrow world with no recourse to independent means or exercise of talents. This leads the aristocratic ladies to pettiness and bad behaviour which is punished by Austen by denying them the most ardently desired prize – the most eligible bachelor, as a husband or a son-in-law. Their foibles elicit laughter also reveal the irony of their situation.

Even Elizabeth is not exempt from this narrow vision, as her pride in being a “studier of character” misleads her into misjudging Wickham, Darcy and even her friend Charlotte. Her education is complete only when she travels out of Longbourn. The insight that she gains not only corrects her views of Darcy and Wickham, it also makes her aware of the shortcomings of Mr Bennet. The ironic outsider's stance which he takes is revealed to her as being one of the causes of their troubles, and so, she is no longer able to share his views as completely as she had done before. Elizabeth, through whose eyes the characters are depicted, shares the same ironic vision as her creator.

In her letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen stated that the novel was ‘rather too light and bright and sparkling’. It is indeed so; but, it is not a mere comedy inspiring laughter. Its ability to inspire laughter aids its ironic insight into the follies of the age and the society. This wealth of irony enriches its role as a comedy of manners.

### **The different uses of Irony in the Novel**

- **Irony as an instrument of satire**
- **Irony as subversion**
- **Difference between irony and humour in the novel**

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### 3.1.11. Summing Up

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- In this Unit you were introduced to Jane Austen's art of fiction.
- You were shown how beneath a tale of romantic love lies a deeper picture of a social milieu ridden with class rigidities and unfair economic and legal systems.
- You learnt that the novel is a comedy of manners portraying the themes of love, money, and marriage and the gender-hierarchies of the society.
- And also that, Austen's novel is a delightful exposition of how vanity engenders prejudice, whereas justified pride may be rewarded if it is accompanied by a humanising and compassionate accommodation of other viewpoints.

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### 3.1.12. Comprehension Exercises

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#### Long Questions-20 Marks.

1. Comment on the significance of the title of *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. Discuss the themes of love, money, and marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*.
3. What is the significance of the complex plot structure in *Pride and Prejudice*? Discuss by analysing the text thoroughly.

#### Mid-Length Questions-12 marks

1. Comment on the character of Elizabeth Bennet.
2. Do you think that Darcy is less faulty compared to Elizabeth? Discuss with suitable illustrations from the text of *Pride and Prejudice*.
3. Comment on the social picture available in *Pride and Prejudice*.

#### Short Questions-6 Marks

1. Comment on the role played by Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. Discuss the significance of Darcy's letter to Elizabeth.
3. Sketch the character of Mr. Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*.
4. What thematic purpose is served by the marriage between Charlotte and Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*?
5. Discuss the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*.

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### **3.1.13. Suggested Reading**

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1. Marsh, Nicholas. *Jane Austen: The Novels*
2. Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*.
3. Watt, Ian (ed.). *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*

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## **Unit - 2 □ Reading Romantic Prose Charles Lamb: a) ‘The Superannuated Man’ b) ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’**

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### **Structure**

#### **3.2.0. Introduction**

#### **3.2.1. Charles Lamb: The Essayist and His Essays**

##### **3.2.2a. ‘The Superannuated Man’: Introduction**

##### **3.2.2a.1. Text**

##### **3.2.2a.2. Summary of the Essay**

##### **3.2.2a.3. Annotations**

##### **3.2.2a.4. Critical Commentary**

##### **3.2.2b. ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’: Introduction**

##### **3.2.2b.1. Text**

##### **3.2.2b.2. Summary of the Essay**

##### **3.2.2b.3. Annotations**

##### **3.2.2b.4. Critical Commentary**

#### **3.2.3. Blend of Pathos and Humour**

#### **3.2.4. Lamb’s Prose Style**

#### **3.2.5. Summing up**

#### **3.2.6. Comprehension Exercises**

#### **3.2.7. Suggested Reading**

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### **3.2.0. Introduction**

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In this Unit, you will be introduced to the Romantic essayist Charles Lamb and his essays. Here, we shall devote our attention to an understanding of Charles Lamb – the essayist, various features of his essays, with particular focus on ‘The Superannuated

Man' and 'Dream Children: A Reverie'. While studying this Unit, you will feel the charm of Lamb's personal essays and understand the multiple aspects of the essays written in this great era of Romanticism. After reading the essays prescribed for you in the syllabus, you will realize that the Romantic age is not only famous for its poetry, the essays also contributed a great deal to the enrichment of literature of the age.

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### **3.2.1. Charles Lamb: An Introduction to the Essayist and His Essays**

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#### **A Short Biography:**

Charles Lamb, who became famous under his pseudonym of 'Elia', was born in London in 1775. His father was a barrister's clerk. Lamb was educated at Christ's Hospital where he was a fellow-pupil of Coleridge, whose early eccentricities he has touched upon with his usual felicity. When the time came for leaving the school, he had learned some Greek, much Latin and mathematics and general knowledge enough for his career as an accountant. On leaving school he obtained a clerkship for a short time in the South Sea House. In 1792, he was transferred to the East India House where the remainder of his working life was spent. Wisely he chose to depend upon this post for his livelihood and not upon his talent as a writer.

There was a strain of insanity in Lamb's family, though he was himself touched with it but once at the age of twenty. His fits of depression intensified after a thwarted love affair. In 1796, occurred the terrible family tragedy which was destined to mould the whole life of Lamb. His sister Mary Lamb (1764-1847) in a sudden frenzy murdered their mother. She was sent to a lunatic asylum, but Lamb made himself responsible for her guardianship and got her back home. Lamb devoted his life to the welfare of his afflicted sister (who frequently appears in his essays under the name of Cousin Bridget) and remained a bachelor for life. Much of the time Mary was normal and shared in his literary tastes and pursuits. But at intervals, her mental disease became acute and she had to be removed to an asylum for brief periods. Thus, Lamb's life was under the constant shadow of penury and madness.

After more than thirty years' service Lamb retired (1825) on a pension and the last years of his life were passed in blessed release from his desk. The relief and strangeness of his freedom at his retirement are described in 'The Superannuated Man'. He was deeply affected by the death of his lifelong friend, Coleridge in 1834 and died in the same year at Edmonton.

Lamb was a charming man, a delightful talker, and one of the least assuming of writers. The momentous incidents of the French Revolution (1789) which left such a mark on the English literary scene, passed Lamb by.

### **His Essays and their Features:**

Despite all reverses, Charles Lamb devoted himself seriously to literary pursuits. Lamb started his literary career as a poet and wrote some poems of a slight but charming nature – ‘The Old Familiar Faces’, ‘To Hester’ etc. He attempted a tragedy *John Woodvil* (1802). Together with his sister he wrote *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807).

Lamb has remained famous to this day by virtue of his personal essays. It was not until 1820, however, that Lamb began to write the series of essays which made his reputation as an essayist and humorist. To *The London Magazine* Lamb contributed between 1820 and 1825 the essays signed “Elia” (a name taken from a clerk in the old South Sea House). A first collection was published as *The Essays of Elia* (1823); and a second under the title of *The Last Essays of Elia* (gathered from various magazines) appeared in 1833. A blend of autobiography and fiction, these essays are the maturest form of the personal essay, a genre which had been gaining popularity since the seventeenth century. The great French thinker Montaigne was the first to write in this mode, and Cowley was its first exponent in England. However, it became for the first time a literary form of its own in the Romantic era when self-expression and self-projection were encouraged. Lamb, along with other Romantic prose writers Landor, Hazlitt and De Quincey, gave a new route to the form.

Some of his memorable essays are – ‘New Year’s Eve’, ‘Imperfect Sympathies’, ‘Poor Relations’, ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’, ‘The Superannuated Man’, ‘The South-Sea House’, ‘The Praise of Chimney-Sweepers’, ‘All Fool’s Day’, ‘Christ’s Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago’, ‘My Relations’, ‘A Bachelor’s Complaint of the Behaviour of Married People’, ‘A Dissertation upon Roast Pig’, ‘The Old and the New Schoolmaster’ etc.

There are several factors which have contributed to the irresistible appeal of Lamb’s essays. In his incomparable gift of tenderness and sympathy, in his romantic and elusive note of subjectivity, in his dramatic character portraits, in his wonderful sense of humour and in his graceful poetic style, Lamb stands out as an essayist to captivate and conquer all hearts. To the dreary realm of his miscellaneous topics, Lamb has brought poetry – a bright spark of imagination. That the essay is capable of becoming lyrical is amply

demonstrated by Lamb in his essays.

Lamb's essays exhibit his unique gift of communicating to his readers all that he loved and lost, dreamed and desired. His childhood, school days, clerical life, retirement and literary experience are all recorded. Again his fondness for noise and crowd in cities, love for theatres and books and many other personal touches are found in his essays. But, though Lamb has chosen his personal experiences as the subject matter for his essays, he has transformed this personal material by virtue of a remarkable dramatic imagination. The humour is always qualified by a strain of pathos, at the same time they reveal the author's keen observation of life and the behaviour of people around him. No essayist is more egotistical than Lamb; but no egotist can be so artless and yet so artful, so tearful and yet so mirthful, so pedantic and yet so humane. Making us both laugh and weep, Lamb's essays remain classics of literature.

With regard to his style, Lamb's prose has an old-fashioned and antique flavour which points out his indebtedness to older writers like Sir Thomas Browne and Fuller. His love of word-coining, his fondness for alliteration, his use of compound words, his frequent use of exclamations, parenthesis and Latinisms reflect the influence of the Elizabethan writers. Though his style is somewhat exotic and recondite, it has a charming freshness, ease and gaiety. Lamb possesses the ideal essay manner and his essays are among the finest in the English language.

### **3.2.2a. 'The Superannuated Man': Introduction**

Lamb's essay, 'The Superannuated Man', an extremely diverting and moving Elian essay, is stuffed with personal materials. It is a touching personal account of his unbroken drudgery and soul-killing monotony of a petty clerk in the South Sea House and the East India House, and his feelings after sudden release from the same. So, the superannuated man of the essay is none but the author himself who had to drudge for long thirty-six years as an accountant in office.

The title of the essay 'The Superannuated Man' is conceived in a quite original way. A superannuated man is one who is made to retire from his work because of his age or physical infirmity. The term 'superannuation' implies a specific age, prescribing a person's retirement from the active service, out of the consideration of his physical inability and old age.

The essay is of the hard experience and the exciting feeling of a retired clerk. As the essay relates, Lamb drudged for thirty six years in office, styled fancifully by him as –

The House of Boldero, Merryweather, Bosanquet and Lacy. But the essay is also concerned with his free, leisurely, happy mode of living after his retirement. Thus, the pathos of long irksome confinement in office and humorous bewilderment at sudden release are equally and skillfully handled by Lamb in this essay.

### 3.2.2a.1. Text

#### **‘The Superannuated Man’**

*Sera tamen respexit*

*Libertas. – Virgil.*

*A Clerk I was in London gay. – O’Keefe.*

*If peradventure, Reader, it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life — thy shining youth — in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, without hope of release or respite; to have lived to forget that there are such things as holidays, or to remember them but as the prerogatives of childhood; then, and then only, will you be able to appreciate my deliverance.*

*It is now six and thirty years since I took my seat at the desk in Mincing-lane. Melancholy was the transition at fourteen from the abundant play-time, and the frequently-intervening vacations of school days, to the eight, nine, and sometimes ten hours’ a-day attendance at a counting-house. But time partially reconciles us to anything. I gradually became content — doggedly contented, as wild animals in cages.*

*It is true I had my Sundays to myself; but Sundays, admirable as the institution of them is for purposes of worship, are for that very reason the very worst adapted for days of unbending and recreation. In particular, there is a gloom for me attendant upon a city Sunday, a weight in the air. I miss the cheerful cries of London, the music, and the ballad-singers — the buzz and stirring murmur of the streets. Those eternal bells depress me. The closed shops repel me. Prints, pictures, all the glittering and endless succession of knacks and gewgaws, and ostentatiously displayed wares of tradesmen, which make a week-day saunter through the less busy parts of the metropolis so delightful — are shut out. No book-stalls deliciously to idle over — No busy faces to recreate the idle man who contemplates them ever passing by — the very face of business a charm by contrast to his temporary relaxation from it. Nothing to be seen but unhappy countenances — or half-happy at best — of emancipated ‘prentices*

*and little trades-folks, with here and there a servant maid that has got leave to go out, who, slaving all the week, with the habit has lost almost the capacity of enjoying a free hour; and livelily expressing the hollowness of a day's pleasuring. The very strollers in the fields on that day look anything but comfortable.*

*But besides Sundays I had a day at Easter, and a day at Christmas, with a full week in the summer to go and air myself in my native fields of Hertfordshire. This last was a great indulgence; and the prospect of its recurrence, I believe, alone kept me up through the year, and made my durance tolerable. But when the week came round, did the glittering phantom of the distance keep touch with me? or rather was it not a series of seven uneasy days, spent in restless pursuit of pleasure, and a wearisome anxiety to find out how to make the most of them? Where was the quiet, where the promised rest? Before I had a taste of it, it was vanished. I was at the desk again, counting upon the fifty-one tedious weeks that must intervene before such another snatch would come. Still the prospect of its coming threw something of an illumination upon the darker side of my captivity. Without it, as I have said, I could scarcely have sustained my thralldom.*

*Independently of the rigours of attendance, I have ever been haunted with a sense (perhaps a mere caprice) of incapacity for business. This, during my latter years, had increased to such a degree, that it was visible in all the lines of my countenance. My health and my good spirits flagged. I had perpetually a dread of some crisis, to which I should be found unequal. Besides my daylight servitude, I served over again all night in my sleep, and would awake with terrors of imaginary false entries, errors in my accounts, and the like. I was fifty years of age, and no prospect of emancipation presented itself. I had grown to my desk, as it were; and the wood had entered into my soul.*

*My fellows in the office would sometimes rally me upon the trouble legible in my countenance; but I did not know that it had raised the suspicions of any of my employers, when, on the 5th of last month, a day ever to be remembered by me, L— — the junior partner in the firm, calling me on one side, directly taxed me with my bad looks, and frankly inquired the cause of them. So taxed, I honestly made confession of my infirmity, and added that I was afraid I should eventually be obliged to resign his service. He spoke some words of course to hearten me, and there the matter rested. A whole week I remained labouring under the impression that I had acted imprudently in my disclosure; that I had foolishly given a handle against myself, and had been anticipating my own dismissal. A week passed in this manner, the most*

*anxious one, I verily believe, in my whole life, when on the evening of the 12th of April, just as I was about quitting my desk to go home (it might be about eight o'clock) I received an awful summons to attend the presence of the whole assembled firm in the formidable back parlour. I thought, now my time is surely come, I have done for myself, I am going to be told that they have no longer occasion for me. L— — I could see, smiled at the terror I was in, which was a little relief to me — when to my utter astonishment B— — the eldest partner, began a formal harangue to me on the length of my services, my very meritorious conduct during the whole of the time (the deuce, thought I, how did he find out that? I protest I never had the confidence to think as much). He went on to descant on the expediency of retiring at a certain time of life (how my heart panted!) and asking me a few questions as to the amount of my own property, of which I have a little, ended with a proposal, to which his three partners nodded a grave assent, that I should accept from the house, which I had served so well, a pension for life to the amount of two-thirds of my accustomed salary — a magnificent offer! I do not know what I answered between surprise and gratitude, but it was understood that I accepted their proposal, and I was told that I was free from that hour to leave their service. I stammered out a bow, and at just ten minutes after eight I went home — for ever. This noble benefit — gratitude forbids me to conceal their names — I owe to the kindness of the most munificent firm in the world — the house of Boldero, Merryweather, Bosanquet, and Lacy.*

*Esto perpetua!*

*For the first day or two I felt stunned, overwhelmed. I could only apprehend my felicity; I was too confused to taste it sincerely. I wandered about, thinking I was happy, and knowing that I was not. I was in the condition of a prisoner in the old Bastile, suddenly let loose after a forty years' confinement. I could scarce trust myself with myself. It was like passing out of Time into Eternity — for it is a sort of Eternity for a man to have his Time all to himself. It seemed to me that I had more time on my hands than I could ever manage. From a poor man, poor in Time, I was suddenly lifted up into a vast revenue; I could see no end of my possessions; I wanted some steward, or judicious bailiff, to manage my estates in Time for me. And here let me caution persons grown old in active business, not lightly, nor without weighing their own resources, to forego their customary employment all at once, for there may be danger in it. I feel it by myself, but I know that my resources are sufficient; and now that those first giddy raptures have subsided, I have a quiet home-feeling of the blessedness*

*of my condition. I am in no hurry. Having all holidays, I am as though I had none. If Time hung heavy upon me, I could walk it away; but I do not walk all day long, as I used to do in those old transient holidays, thirty miles a day, to make the most of them. If Time were troublesome, I could read it away, but I do not read in that violent measure, with which, having no Time my own but candlelight Time, I used to weary out my head and eyesight in by-gone winters. I walk, read or scribble (as now) just when the fit seizes me. I no longer hunt after pleasure; I let it come to me. I am like the man*

*“— That’s born, and has his years come to him, In some green desert.”*

*“Years,” you will say! “what is this superannuated simpleton calculating upon? He has already told us, he is past fifty.”*

*I have indeed lived nominally fifty years, but deduct out of them the hours which I have lived to other people, and not to myself, and you will find me still a young fellow. For that is the only true Time, which a man can properly call his own, that which he has all to himself; the rest, though in some sense he may be said to live it, is other people’s time, not his. The remnant of my poor days, long or short, is at least multiplied for me three-fold. My ten next years, if I stretch so far, will be as long as any preceding thirty. ’Tis a fair rule-of-three sum.*

*Among the strange fantasies which beset me at the commencement of my freedom, and of which all traces are not yet gone, one was, that a vast tract of time had intervened since I quitted the Counting House. I could not conceive of it as an affair of yesterday. The partners, and the clerks, with whom I had for so many years, and for so many hours in each day of the year, been closely associated — being suddenly removed from them — they seemed as dead to me. There is a fine passage, which may serve to illustrate this fancy, in a Tragedy by Sir Robert Howard, speaking of a friend’s death:*

*“— ’Twas but just now he went away;  
I have not since had time to shed a tear;  
And yet the distance does the same appear  
As if he had been a thousand years from me.  
Time takes no measure in Eternity.”*

*To dissipate this awkward feeling, I have been fain to go among them once or twice since; to*

*visit my old desk-fellows — my cobretthren of the quill — that I had left below in the state militant. Not all the kindness with which they received me could quite restore to me that pleasant familiarity, which I had heretofore enjoyed among them. We cracked some of our old jokes, but methought they went off but faintly. My old desk; the peg where I hung my hat, were appropriated to another. I knew it must be, but I could not take it kindly. D—— I take me, if I did not feel some remorse — beast, if I had not — at quitting my old compeers, the faithful partners of my toils for six and thirty years, that smoothed for me with their jokes and conundrums the ruggedness of my professional road. Had it been so rugged then after all? or was I a coward simply? Well, it is too late to repent; and I also know, that these suggestions are a common fallacy of the mind on such occasions. But my heart smote me. I had violently broken the bands betwixt us. It was at least not courteous. I shall be some time before I get quite reconciled to the separation. Farewell, old cronies, yet not for long, for again and again I will come among ye, if I shall have your leave. Farewell Ch — — dry, sarcastic, and friendly! Do — — mild, slow to move, and gentlemanly! Pl — — officious to do, and to volunteer, good services! — and thou, thou dreary pile, fit mansion for a Gresham or a Whittington of old, stately House of Merchants; with thy labyrinthine passages, and light-excluding, pent-up offices, where candles for one half the year supplied the place of the sun's light; unhealthy contributor to my weal, stern fosterer of my living, farewell! In thee remain, and not in the obscure collection of some wandering bookseller, my "works!" There let them rest, as I do from my labours, piled on thy massy shelves, more MSS. in folio than ever Aquinas left, and full as useful! My mantle I bequeath among ye.*

*A fortnight has passed since the date of my first communication. At that period I was approaching to tranquillity, but had not reached it. I boasted of a calm indeed, but it was comparative only. Something of the first flutter was left; an unsettling sense of novelty; the dazzle to weak eyes of unaccustomed light. I missed my old chains, forsooth, as if they had been some necessary part of my apparel. I was a poor Carthusian, from strict cellular discipline suddenly by some revolution returned upon the world. I am now as if I had never been other than my own master. It is natural to me to go where I please, to do what I please. I find myself at eleven o'clock in the day in Bond-street, and it seems to me that I have been sauntering there at that very hour for years past. I digress into Soho, to explore a book-stall. Methinks I have been thirty years a collector. There is nothing strange nor new in it. I find myself before a fine picture in a morning. Was it ever otherwise? What is become of Fish-street Hill? Where is Fenchurch-street? Stones of old Mincing-lane, which I have worn*

*with my daily pilgrimage for six and thirty years, to the footsteps of what toil-worn clerk are your everlasting flints now vocal? I indent the gayer flags of Pall Mall. It is Change time, and I am strangely among the Elgin marbles. It was no hyperbole when I ventured to compare the change in my condition to a passing into another world. Time stands still in a manner to me. I have lost all distinction of season. I do not know the day of the week, or of the month. Each day used to be individually felt by me in its reference to the foreign post days; in its distance from, or propinquity to, the next Sunday. I had my Wednesday feelings, my Saturday nights' sensations. The genius of each day was upon me distinctly during the whole of it, affecting my appetite, spirits, &c. The phantom of the next day, with the dreary five to follow, sate as a load upon my poor Sabbath recreations. What charm has washed that Ethiop white? What is gone of Black Monday? All days are the same. Sunday itself — that unfortunate failure of a holyday as it too often proved, what with my sense of its fugitiveness, and over-care to get the greatest quantity of pleasure out of it — is melted down into a week day. I can spare to go to church now, without grudging the huge cantle which it used to seem to cut out of the holyday. I have Time for everything. I can visit a sick friend. I can interrupt the man of much occupation when he is busiest. I can insult over him with an invitation to take a day's pleasure with me to Windsor this fine May-morning. It is Lucretian pleasure to behold the poor drudges, whom I have left behind in the world, carking and caring; like horses in a mill, drudging on in the same eternal round — and what is it all for? A man can never have too much Time to himself, nor too little to do. Had I a little son, I would christen him NOTHING-TO-DO; he should do nothing. Man, I verily believe, is out of his element as long as he is operative. I am altogether for the life contemplative. Will no kindly earthquake come and swallow up those accursed cotton mills? Take me that lumber of a desk there, and bowl it down*

*“As low as to the fiends.”*

*I am no longer \*\*\*\*\*, clerk to the Firm of &c. I am Retired Leisure. I am to be met with in trim gardens. I am already come to be known by my vacant face and careless gesture, perambulating at no fixed pace, nor with any settled purpose. I walk about; not to and from. They tell me, a certain cum dignitate air, that has been buried so long with my other good parts, has begun to shoot forth in my person. I grow into gentility perceptibly. When I take up a newspaper, it is to read the state of the opera. Opus operatum est. I have done all that I came into this world to do. I have worked task work, and have the rest of the day to myself.*

### 3.2.2a.2. Summary of the Essay

By addressing his readers directly, Lamb confides to them his misfortune of serving a long period as a petty clerk in the dreary confinement of an office. He began his servitude at the year of fourteen and continued the job for long thirty six years. He had little hope of release from his drudgery and hardly knew what a holiday was. Lamb says that his ecstasy at his sudden 'deliverance' from long clerical servitude would only be understood by those people with similar experience of wretchedness.

With Lamb's joining the office at such an early age, the natural joys and pleasures associated with childhood and school-days changed suddenly into a rigorous duty at the desk for eight to ten hours a day. The initial grumble of his young mind had to reconcile ultimately to his hard lot.

Of course, Lamb had Sundays as his weekly holidays. But the charm and colour of the week days were absent on Sundays, for Sundays were set aside for worship. London looked dull, desolate and depressed on Sundays without the usual crowds, sights and noises of the week days. Vacant streets, closed shops, unhappy faces of apprentices and traders, absence of ballad-singers, the ringing of the church bell and the general atmosphere of inactivity made Lamb's Sundays exceedingly disgusting and tedious.

Besides Sundays, Lamb had a few more holidays – a day at Easter, a day at Christmas and a full week in summer. Those summer holidays were his most covetous dream, which he spent at his grandmother's place at Hertfordshire. But those days seemed to slip away too quickly. And he could not derive maximum enjoyment out of it as he was haunted with feeling of losing it too soon. Lamb spent the entire holiday worrying about how to make the most of it. That golden week, however, had a sustaining effect and made his servitude tolerable to him.

Both the prolonged drudgery and the rigorous regularity in attendance, however, had an adverse effect on Lamb's body and mind. He was haunted with a strange sort of dread about his errors in account that made him restless during his daytime and even in sleeping hours. His anxiety and acute depression began to show on his face. But he had no prospect of deliverance from office in near future.

Traces of weakness were so distinctly visible on Lamb's countenance as to draw not merely the attention of his colleagues but also of his bosses. One day, he frankly confessed

his infirmity to the junior partner of the firm. And he subsequently repented it apprehending the straight dismissal by the firm for incompetence. But nothing went wrong and his employers granted him an early retirement with a handsome life-long pension. That was the unexpected and happy end of Lamb's long and gloomy drudgery.

Lamb's release was all sudden and surprising and he was not at all prepared for it. He was initially confused and overwhelmed by the dazzle of unrestrained freedom and could hardly adjust himself to his newly found freedom in the early phase of his retirement. Lamb humorously suggests that he had suddenly become so rich in Time that he thought he might require some steward or bailiff to manage the 'estates of Time' for him.

After his superannuation Lamb began to feel like a young man because most of the time of his life had been given to the service of other people. He had lived fifty years nominally, not really. The totality of time that he spent exclusively for himself was so small that by that calculation he was still a young man.

Lamb was obsessed with some strange sensations about his old office and office mates. He felt distanced from his friends at the office and thought that all of them had been long dead. In order to get rid of that feeling, he visited his old office. He was received quite cordially there, but he could not be quite at home with his much familiar faces and place. He felt that the old familiarity was missing which gave him pain. A link seemed to have been strangely severed.

Of course those early sensations did not long persist. Though the traces of the same could be marked for a fortnight after Lamb's deliverance from drudgery, he gradually came to adjust himself solidly to his new retired life. There was a through change in his mode of living and feeling. He was no more a hard pressed drudge, but rather a free man of leisure and pleasure. He could now enjoy every moment of leisure and do exactly what he pleased. He was no more haunted with the shadows of Mondays and Wednesdays. All days and seasons were same to him, for they were all holidays.

Having lived enough his life of activity Lamb was ultimately his own master. He had no more any depressed look and looked gentle and homely. He was a man of ease and happiness with no specific pursuit but to enjoy the rest of his life as he liked.

### 3.2.2a.3. Annotations

*Sera tamen...*: 'Liberty has remembered me though late' (Virgil, *Eclogues*, i. 28)

*A Clerk...*: Colman, Inkle and Yarico, iii. I. ('O'Keefe' is an error of Lamb's)

#### Para 1

*the golden years*: the bright lively days of youth.

*irksome confinement*: dull, confined, duty-bound life of a petty clerk.

*prison days*: confined days of a petty clerk in the office which pathetically likened to a prison- house.

*decrepitude*: physical infirmity.

*prerogatives*: right or privilege.

*appreciate*: estimate.

#### Para 2

*Mincing Lane*: the East India Company's office was actually in Leaden Hall Street, and not in Mincing Lane as said by Lamb. The change is a part of Lamb's slight mystification.

*transition*: the change from happy school life to the hard life of drudgery.

*frequently intervening*: occurring at frequent intervals.

*counting house*: office chiefly devoted to keeping accounts.

*doggedly contented*: forced to become satisfied.

#### Para 3

*institution*: established rule or custom.

*unbending*: relaxation, diversion.

*attendant upon*: accompanying.

*a weight in the air*: there seemed something heavy, burdensome to Lamb in London on Sunday.

*buzz*: confused noise.

*Those eternal bells*: the reference is to the church bells, summoning men to life eternal.

*knacks and gewgaws*: attractively showy trifles.

*saunter*: walk leisurely.

*to idle over*: to pass the extra time by turning the pages of book.

*unhappy countenances*: partially happy or half happy faces.

*emancipated prentices*: apprentices or trainees released from duty on Sunday.

*strollers*: those who walk idly.

#### **Para 4**

*Easter*: a Christian festival held in March or April commemorating Christ's resurrection.

*air*: to refresh.

*durance*: hard drudgery in the office.

*glittering phantom*: fascinating vision of the expected pleasure.

#### **Para 5**

*rigours of attendance*: strict rules of attendance in the office.

*haunted*: troubled.

*caprice*: a whim.

*flagged*: decayed.

*I had grown...into my soul*: the unending monotony and the soul-killing drudgery ate into Lamb's very vitals and almost dehumanized him. He was turned into wooden, incapable to respond to any hope or joy, but performing duty mechanically. This is a fine example of Lamb's humour which is intimately fused with pathos.

#### **Para 6**

*rally*: question together.

*legible*: visible.

*L -* : a fictitious name, probably Mr. Lacy, the junior partner of the firm.

*taxed*: charged.

*a handle*: an opportunity or weapon.

*anticipating*: expecting.

**B** - : the senior most partner, Mr. Boldero (a fictitious name).

**harangue**: long lecture.

**expediency**: advantage.

**panted**: got excited expecting the retirement.

**Boldero, Merryweather, Bosanquet, and Lacy**: these are all fictitious names and Lamb's characteristic mystification. In reality, he worked in the South Sea House and the India Office and retired from the latter.

**Esto perpetua!**: 'Last for ever' (Latin). Here, Lamb wishes that the firm may last for ever in a prosperous condition.

### **Para 7**

**Bastille**: the State prison in Paris built in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Following the outbreak of the French Revolution, it was destroyed by the people on July 14, 1789. Dickens also refers to this to this prison during the Revolution in his *A Tale of Two Cities*.

**vast revenue**: large income.

**giddy raptures**: stupefying feelings of joy caused by the unexpected release from the office.

**I have a...home-feeling of**: I feel at home in.

**"That's born...green desert"**: the quotation is taken from *The Mayor of Queensborough* by Middleton, a Jacobean dramatist. The sense of the line is that "the man is born afresh, and quite young in age."

### **Para 8**

**rule-of-three**: proportion.

### **Para 9**

**a tragedy**: *The Vestal Virgin*, V. i.

**Sir Robert Howard**: a 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet, dramatist and historian. He collaborated with Dryden in *The Indian Queen*.

### **Para 10**

**dissipate**: remove, get rid of.

**quill**: pen made of a large feather.

*co-bethren of the quill*: fellows of the desk work.

*in the state militant*: still fighting, that is, working with the help of pen.

*D – I*: this is rather an abbreviation of ‘Devil’.

*conundrums*: riddles, questions put to make fun.

*fallacy*: mistaken notion or belief.

*But my heart...*: I did feel pangs of regret.

*Cronies*: close friends.

*Ch –* : abbreviation possibly of the name of a clerk, Chambers.

*Do –* : Dodwell, another co-worker.

*Pl –* : Plumley, another fellow clerk.

*Gresham*: Thomas Gresham, the founder of the Royal Exchange and an eminent financier and merchant.

*Whittington*: Richard Whittington, a business magnate who became the Mayor of London on three occasions.

*Aquinas*: St. Thomas Aquinas (1227 – 1274), an Italian divine, great scholar and prolific writer.

*My mantle...*: this is from *The Book of Kings* in the *Old Testament*. Elijah bequeathed his mantle to Elisha to become the next Hebrew prophet. Here, Lamb means to say that he leaves his clerical spirit and energy as legacy to his fellow clerks.

### **Para 11**

*Carthusian*: one of the Carthusian order of monks, founded in 1086 at Chartreuse in France. Each monk was to lead a life of hard meditation in a lonely cell, without any contact with the outside world.

*cellular discipline*: to maintain a secluded life in a cell.

*Bond Street*: a fashionable quarter of London. A contrast is also implied here between the streets associated with the company’s offices and the pleasant part of London.

*flints*: pavement made of stones.

*vocal*: resounding.

**Pall Mall:** fashionable shopping centre of London.

**'Change time:** business hours at the Royal Exchange.

**Elgin marbles:** fragments of Greek sculpture chiefly from the Parthenon, at Athens. They were collected and brought to England by Lord Elgin in 1802, and bought subsequently by the British Museum in 1816.

**propinquity:** nearness.

**The genius of each day:** the distinctive character or spirit of each day.

**Sabbath recreations:** pleasures of Sundays.

**washed the Ethiop white:** made black Monday a pleasant day. Here, 'Ethiop' stands for black colour which alludes to the Ethiopian king Memnon and his sister Hemera who were dark-skinned.

**is gone of:** has become of.

**black Monday:** dismal and loathsome Monday because it meant returning to work.

**cantle:** fragment, piece.

**Lucretian pleasure:** the selfish pleasure of a spectator at the sight of the suffering of other people. The Latin poet Lucretius propagates a philosophy of divine selfishness based on the concept of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, who has represented gods as selfish, careless of human troubles and sufferings.

**carking and caring:** worrying and toiling mechanically.

**operative:** working.

**bowl it...fiends:** to throw down as low as to the bottom of hell, the abode of evil spirits. This is a reference from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (Act II, Sc. ii, 490 – 491):

“And bowl the round nave down the hill of heaven

As low as to the fiends.”

## **Para 12**

**Retired Leisure...trim gardens:** Lamb thinks that he has become an embodiment of Leisure (freedom from labour). He can now saunter leisurely in some well-kept fashionable garden. Here, we find an echo from Milton's *Il Penseroso*:

“...retired Leisure,

That in trim gardens takes his pleasure.”

**vacant:** free from care, on holiday.

*perambulating*: loitering.

*cum dignitate*: dignified calmness; an abbreviation of Cicero's 'otium cum dignitate'.

*gentility*: social superiority.

*Opus operatum est*: the work is finished (Latin).

*the day*: life.

#### 3.2.2a.4. Critical Interpretation

Lamb uses his own experiences and personality as the key material for his essay, 'The Superannuated Man'. A truly romantic author as he is, Lamb in the essay gives an account of his own life and relations and his mental state – his temperament, tastes, mood, notion, values, and all like things are included in this. The essay deals with a touching account of his long and hard life of drudgery at the South Sea House and the India Office. A penetrative picture of the poor drudge in him, pent up in drudgery and pining for holidays, is found here. With subtle touches of humour Lamb points out the sheer monotony of his work which almost turned him into a mechanical, inanimate being. The pathos of his office life comes to the fore when he compares himself with a wild animal in cage, trapped forcefully against the will. Again, Lamb humorously brings out the pathos of his long hours at the desk when he says that he felt as if "the wood had entered into my soul."

As a personal essay 'The Superannuated Man' is marked by Lamb's individual whims and idiosyncrasies. The essay bears out his love for city crowd and noise, his fondness for book-stalls, his interest in the places of art and architecture, and so on. During his tedious and boring job at the office holidays were the most cherished thing to him. But Sundays were to him unsuitable for true relaxation and enjoyment. The varied means of enjoyment which London had to offer were non-existent on Sundays. So, Sundays were to Lamb practically useless as holidays.

The manner in which Lamb describes his early, unexpected retirement is really unique. The sudden change from slavery to complete freedom threw his mind completely out of balance. He felt uneasy and bewildered. Quite humorously he introduces a number of analogies to express the bewildered existence of a retired man who has become completely alienated from the world of activities. Lamb shows his bewilderment by comparing himself with a prisoner of Bastille and a Carthusian monk. All the details of

description of what he can do now or how he can spend his retired life are full of humours and deep contemplation. Of course, we may doubt that Lamb is intentionally engaged in such witty imaginary world to forget his pathetic thirty-six years of slavery in the office.

As a romantic essayist Lamb was fond of mystifying his readers by vague hints and misleading details. In 'The Superannuated Man' Lamb amuses and misleads his readers by describing himself as the employee in the firm of Boldero, Merryweather, Bosanquet and Lacy. But, as a matter of fact, Lamb had no connection with any such firm which possibly did not exist at all. He actually worked in the South Sea House and the India Office and retired from the latter. His habit of mystification is also revealed in his use of symbols and incomplete statements, like the names of the two partners of the firm 'L – ' and 'B – ' and the names of his colleagues such as 'Ch – ', 'Do – ' and 'Pl – '. Again, his desire to christen his child as 'NOTHING-TO-DO' may possibly lead one to believe that he was a childless married man, but he was actually a life-long bachelor. So, Lamb's autobiographical sketches in the essay, like his other essay, are not wholly factual. It has a fictional character, too. In fact, he weaves the thread of fiction in the web of truth. This makes his essay so intimately personal, yet so entertaining, captivating and mystifying.

The style in which Lamb writes 'The Superannuated Man' is at once elastic and varied. A diverting yet reflective style marks the essay. His use of Latin expressions, his quotations from the Elizabethan masters, his love for word coining (such as 'NOTHING-TO-DO'), his felicitous mystification are all part of his own original style in the essay. The essay is also saturated with Lamb's egotism which bears out his tender and sensitive personality. Like all the great romantic authors of the time, Lamb speaks mostly in his own person and his subject is his own self or his friends, relations or other associates.

**Activity for the Learner:**

**Make a list of the various sights and sounds that Lamb missed on  
Sundays in London and those he found  
to his utter disgust.**

**3.2.2b. 'Dream Children: A Reverie: Introduction**

The essay, 'Dream Children: A Reverie', taken from *The Essays of Elia* (1823), is a tender account of bachelor Charles Lamb's reminiscence of bygone times and unfulfilled

yearning for a happy domesticity. Here Lamb indulges in day dreams about the happiness of wedded life which he had been deprived of in his own life. As the very title bears out, the essay contains the author's reverie – day dreaming, in which he seems to have a meeting with two children, not real, but dream children – the children of his fantasy. In reality, Lamb courted Ann Simmons (Alice W – n in the essay) for seven long years, sometimes in hope and sometimes in despair. But, ultimately he could not marry her and remained a bachelor all his life. Thus, the essay is a kind of wish-fulfilment – an account of what might have happened if he married Ann Simmons and had little children.

The essay is full of dreamy reminiscence. Here, Lamb recalls his own long courtship with Ann Simmons, his childhood days and holidays, the death of John Lamb and his grandmother, Mrs. Field. Though the essay is autobiographical, Lamb characteristically mystifies the facts with his rich imagination. The dreamy pathos and subjective intensity combine to produce a beautiful piece of writing which may be called a “lyric in prose”.

### 3.2.2b.1. Text

## ‘Dream-Children : A Reverie’

*By Charles Lamb*

*CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders, when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle or grandame, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother Field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great-grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer*

*and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining county; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterward came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if some one were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing-room. Here John smiled, as much as to say, "that would be foolish indeed." And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighborhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such a good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psalter by heart, aye, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer—here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till upon my looking grave, it desisted—the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said "those innocents would do her no harm"; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she—and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grand-children, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the Twelve Cæsars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out—sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me—and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then,—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew trees,*

or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir apples, which were good for nothing but to look at—or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me—or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening, too, along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth—or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings,—I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavors of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which, not unobserved by Alice, he had mediated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then, in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grand-children, yet in an especial manner she might be said to love their uncle, John L——, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out—and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries—and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy—for he was a good bit older than me—many a mile when I could not walk for pain;—and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient, and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is betwixt life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterward it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarreling with him (for we quarreled sometimes), rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty, dead mother. Then I told

*them how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: “We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name”—and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor armchair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side—but John L. (or James Elia) was gone forever.*

### 3.2.2b.2. Summary of the Essay

The essay begins on a realistic and familiar tone with Lamb telling us how children love to hear stories about their elders' childhood days. Lamb fancies that one evening his own children, John and Alice (of course, his dream children) gathered near him to hear something about their great-grandmother, Mrs. Field. Lamb tells them that Mrs. Field lived in a big mansion in Norfolk, where he spent many wonderful days. Although she was not the actual owner, she looked after the house as if it was her own. The house had a wooden chimney-piece on which was engraved the entire tragic story of the ballad, 'Children in the Wood'. The children particularly expressed resentment on learning that the wooden-piece was replaced subsequently by a marble one with no story on it.

Lamb narrated to his dream children Mrs. Field's good and pious nature, her kindness, sense of duty, courage and dancing skill, despite a bit of superstitious attitude. Her death was attended by a large number of people. Of course, after her death, the big mansion that he maintained so well, was demolished and all its dignified furnishings were removed and awkwardly placed in the owner's small modern residence. Though she suffered greatly before her death, she kept up her spirits and never lost the will to live. Like any father trying to entertain his children, Lamb tells John and Alice about the spirits that haunted the mansion and were only visible to his grandmother.

Lamb's next topic of talk to his dream children is the way in which he used to spend his

vacation in his grandmother's place. Lamb gives them a picturesque description of the mansion itself and the beautiful fruit-laden garden where he had spent many a lazy afternoon. Lamb tells them about his own shy, reserved and fanciful nature and his 'busy-idle diversions' in the garden. He, however, asserted to John and Alice that he never had plucked any fruit from the fruit-trees. This conduct of their father inspired them to return a bunch of grapes already taken by John and noticed by Alice.

Lamb further speaks of his elder brother John Lamb, a great favourite of their grandmother and Lamb recounts the many fond memories he has of his brother. He was a healthy, handsome and adventurous youth and attended Lamb affectionately when he was ill and lame-footed. But later, he became himself lame-footed and died. Lamb's profound sorrow at the death of his brother is also related to the dream children which makes them cry.

Thereafter, at the request of the dream children, Lamb recalls his long courtship with Alice W – n (actually Ann Simmons). But in course of his recollection, he perceives suddenly that his dream daughter Alice and his dream wife Alice W – n merges into one. As he talks about her, the children gradually disappear from his vision, and the dream comes to a sudden end. Lamb got up to find himself seated in his bachelor arm-chair with his sister Mary Bridget by his side.

### 3.2.2b.3. Annotations

**Reverie:** a waking dream.

**to stretch:** Lamb hints at the imaginative attitude of children who want to extend their imagination to that distant past which their parents inhabited.

**my little ones:** his dream children – John and Alice. Lamb, in reality, did not have children as he was not married. These are children of imagination.

**the other evening:** a sense of familiarity is created.

**their great-grandmother Field:** Lamb's grandmother, Mary Field was actually a housekeeper to the Plumers in Hertfordshire and not in Norfolk as mentioned.

**Ballad:** a story told in the form of poetry or song.

**The Children in the Wood:** it was an old ballad of rather an uncertain origin as well as authorship. This found included in Percy's *Reliques*. The ballad has a poignant tale of the tragic murder of two unfortunate orphans under the guardianship of their cruel and greedy uncle. The dead bodies of the children were left uncovered in the dense forest, but some robin redbreasts took pity and

covered them with dry leaves and thus gave them a decent burial.

**modern invention:** of latest design.

**too tender to be called upbraiding:** though the little girl was resentful against the man who pulled down the wooden chimney-piece, her expression was too gentle to convey the anger she felt. Here, through Alice's expression, Lamb focuses on the nature and psychology of children.

**charge of it:** i.e. she looked after it.

**kept up the dignity:** maintained the house in good condition.

**Abbey:** Westminster Abbey, national church of England.

**Lady C's:** an imaginary lady of fashion.

**where they were...drawing room:** the massive furniture and the costly decorations of that big building were taken and fixed to the new, modern, rather much smaller house, where the owner used to live. But they, however, looked odd there, exposing the owner's lack of refined taste and culture. Lamb here engages a humorous analogy. If the old tombstones of the Westminster Abbey were shifted and fitted in the modern, small drawing room of a fashionable lady, the situation would be awkward and ludicrous. So is the case here.

**Psaltery:** the word is inaccurately used for 'psalter' (prayer-song), devotional verses (psalms) as printed in the *Book of Common Prayer*. 'Psaltery' is actually a musical instrument with strings.

**Testament:** the *Old Testament* and the *New*.

**Alice's little right foot...movement:** hearing the word 'dancer', Alice's foot started moving on its own, automatically. This is another vivid presentation of child psychology.

**apparition:** ghost.

**the twelve Caesars:** the twelve Emperors of Rome from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

**till the old marble...with them:** the author and the marble busts seemed to have become one losing their separate identity. This shows how Lamb was rich in imagination even in his boyhood.

**forbidden fruit:** i.e., was not allowed to pluck the fruits. This is an allusion to the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of Knowledge in the garden of Eden, cf. "The fruit of that forbidden tree" – *Paradise Lost*, Book I.

**good for nothing:** because they could not be eaten.

**orangery:** an artificially heated glass-roofed shed for growing oranges in cold countries.

**dace:** a kind of fish.

**pike:** a big variety of fish.

**busy-idle:** Lamb kept himself busy in idleness. He was apparently inactive, but his senses were occupied. This is an oxymoron founded on Horace's 'strenua inertia', energetic idleness.

**common baits of children:** things that generally tempt children.

**John L:** John Lamb, the author's brother whose recent death was the occasion of this pathetic self-revelation.

**mettlesome:** high-spirited.

**imp:** small boy.

**man's estate:** i.e., manhood.

**make allowances:** showed consideration.

**such a...death:** as soon as a man dies, he belongs to the past. Even a recent death gives rise to the impression that a long time has passed since the death.

**haunted:** came repeatedly into his thoughts and perturbed his existence.

**crossness:** irritability.

**little mourning:** little black dress worn to mourn death.

**Alice W – n:** Alice Winterton, the feigned name for Ann Simmons whom Lamb courted but without success.

**coyness:** shyness, maidenly reserve.

**representation:** reappearance in another's shape. The mother and the daughter were so alike that it seemed as if the mother had been reincarnated in her daughter.

**receding:** moving back.

**mournful features:** sad faces.

**without speech...effects of speech:** even though they did not speak, Lamb seemed to understand what they wanted to say. This is a beautiful realistic touch.

**Bartrum:** a pawn-broker of London to whom Ann Simmons (Alice W – n of the essay) was actually married. Personal touches like this are often found in Lamb’s essays.

**what might have happened:** something that might have happened but did not in reality.

**Lethe:** In Classical mythology, Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Hades (underworld). The souls of the dead are to wait across this river in order to forget their earthly lives and to reach heaven. The banks of the river are supposed to be crowded with all the souls of the dead, waiting for their turn to be taken across. This is a Classical allusion, also found in Keats’ *Ode to a Nightingale*.

**bachelor’s armchair:** reality to his bachelor life.

**Bridget:** Lamb’s sister Mary Lamb.

#### 3.2.2b.4. Critical Interpretation

In ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’, Lamb indulges in a day dream about the happiness of wedded life that he always wanted but never had. It captures his wistful longings which were never fulfilled. The vivid recreation of the dream and its actual lack of substance mark the gap between imagination and reality. Lamb’s thwarted love affair with Ann Simmons (the Alice W – n of the essay) perhaps made him aware of the life he could not possess. So he peoples the essay with a family composed of both fact (his brother John, his grandmother Field) and fiction (his wife Alice W – n, his son John and his daughter Alice). Through his powerful imagination Lamb creates a wedded life with two children to whom he is narrating the story of his early days. The details of description, the realistic touches and the responses of the dream children almost make us forget that Lamb is actually day dreaming. However, his dream gradually breaks up and he again comes back to reality – to his bachelor-armchair and to the sad realization that “the children of Alice call Bartrum father”.

The essay itself is structured like a dream with the characteristic looseness of a dream. The additional title “A Reverie” which literally means a day dream or a fantasy – prepares us for the pathetic and inevitable return to reality, though the essay itself begins on a deceptively realistic note. On the pretext of satisfying his children’s curiosity about their parents, Lamb recalls his fond memories of his childhood and boyhood days – his days at the Norfolk mansion and the holidays he spent there with his grandmother Mary Field. The story is told so as to interest the children, with those details that are of more value to them (for example, the story of how the incidents of the ballad were

carved on the chimney-piece). The detailed description of the great house contrasts with Lamb's own surroundings, and is an early indication of the gap between imagination and actuality. However, the nostalgic re-creation of the beautiful garden where he spent many hours of 'busy-idle diversions', his deep attachment to his brother John Lamb and the happy times he spent courting Ann Simmons are all vividly evoked by Lamb with the skill of a highly imaginative poet. The descriptions of Lamb's imaginative oneness with the marble busts of the twelve Caesars, the nectarine and peaches in the garden, his fanciful ripening with the oranges, the melancholy yew trees, the dace and pike in the fishpond are quite sensuous.

According to many, the imaginative quality of 'Dream Children' is analogous to the imaginative richness of a poem like 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Here Lamb has created an ideal world of fancy and dream – retrospective beauty of "what might have been". He is engrossed like Keats in his dream world whence suddenly he is harked back to his reality. Lamb has the same passion for sensuous luxuriance, the same poetic imagination by which the observed and the observer are merged and identified. Like Keats Lamb is fond of savouring the sight of such delicious fruits as peaches, nectarines and oranges. Like the romanticists, Lamb is fond of solitude where he finds more pleasure in looking at the fish in the garden-pond or basking in the orangery. His fondness for the little children is another aspect of his romanticism. The expressions of the children and their movements (raising eyebrows, tapping the feet, smiling or crying) vividly present them as real people. By loading this essay with autobiographical elements Lamb has added realism to fantasy. But the illusion can not last and they fade away because they are really 'dream children'.

It has been said that Lamb "laughed to save himself from weeping." Lamb's personal life was full of unhappiness and depression. His humour was a kind of defence against the morbid reality of his own life. Although 'Dream Children' begins on a gay note, the darker side of life soon forces itself upon Lamb's attention and the comic attitude gives way to melancholy at the end of the essay.

*Dream Children* is remarkable for Lamb's quaintness of style which is in beautiful conformity with the theme of the essay. There is a magical atmosphere created through the simple artlessness, the mellow music, and the slow drawn out rhythm of the sentences. The highly evocative style gives the essay its lyrical charm. Though the essay is autobiographical, Lamb has transformed and transmuted it brilliantly. The peculiar blend of pathos, humour, mystification and delicate musical language makes it a memorable essay.

**Activity for the Learner:**

**What are the various sensuous images that Lamb mentions while speaking of his roaming about in the garden of his grandmother, Mrs. Field?**

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### **3.2.4. Blend of Pathos and Humour**

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Lamb's personal life was full of misfortunes and sad events. But he did not allow the circumstances of his life to embitter his temper and outlook on life. Rather he tried to find something to laugh at, something to jest about, so that he would not sink away into melancholy. His inborn sense of humour and balanced view of things saved him from becoming a mere melancholy recluse. In fact, we find a curious and most likable mixture of pathos and humour in Lamb. The sadness of his life and the naturally compassionate nature he had, found expression in the pathos which peeps out of so many of his essays. But his sense of humour always reestablishes itself. In his essays, we have the two elements so co-existing in the same passage that we see pathos and humour as facets of the same thing.

Lamb's 'The Superannuated Man' and 'Dream Children: A Reverie' are fine specimens of his characteristic blend of pathos and humour. The prevailing mood is pathos, but Lamb is a humorist and when on the verge of sentimentality can almost always check himself with laughter and recognizing the nearness of laughter to tears, he accomplished many of his most individual effects through this proximity. The contrast and convergence of the two moods were for him the stuff of human life.

In 'The Superannuated Man' Lamb gives a detailed description of his long, pathetic life of drudgery in the office. At the age of fourteen, Lamb had to enter the monotonous job of a petty clerk. The unending and rigorous job almost turned him into a wooden being. What is more pathetic is that the few holidays he had then, passed him by so quickly that he could hardly taste them. The suffering reached to such an extent that Lamb's physical and mental health became affected. And ultimately, he got an early retirement with a life-long pension.

But Lamb's pathos is very closely allied to humour. Even the sheer monotony of his hard work as an accountant is described with touches of humour. His feeling that "the wood had entered into my soul" is at once full of pathos and humour. The bewilderment that Lamb felt after his sudden retirement is presented in an interesting and humorous

manner. His comparing himself with “a prisoner in the old Bastille”, his requirement of a bailiff to manage his ‘estates in Time’ and his differentiation of his actual and nominal age on the basis of ‘rule-of-three sum’ are all witty and light-hearted. But we never forget the fact that this man wasted the best part of his life as an accountant in the prison-like office house.

It is in the essay, ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’, that there is a remarkable fusion of melancholy and lightness resulting in the kind of humour which has never been surpassed by any other writer. The cloudy darkness of gloom and sadness of the essay is charmingly relieved and illumined by gentle humour. Pathos is aroused in the pensive musing on his grandmother’s death and particularly his brother, John’s death. We are touched at the tragic absence of the domestic happiness with wife and children that he craved for. But the gloom is relieved by the interwoven mesh of delightful touches of humour arising from the reactions of the children to the stories told by Lamb. Furthermore, humour comes from the mystification which Lamb’s sense of mischief made him indulge in. The reactions of the children – “here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous”, “here little Alice spread her hands”, and the little by-play of John slyly putting back the bunch of grapes which he had intended to share with his sister – all these liven up the essay and add a realistic touch to it. But the ultimate disappearance of the dream children and Lamb’s sad return to the actuality of life shows the tragic aspect of his bachelor life.

Lamb’s own life had been fraught with misfortunes and extremely sorrowful incidents, and the only way to maintain his sanity was to artfully contrive a sense of humour that would hide the pain from the world as well as himself. In ‘The Superannuated Man’ and ‘Dream Children: A Reverie’, Lamb reflects on the pathetic incidents of his life in a humorous manner. These essays show how tears and laughter exist side by side, mingle and are facets of the same thing.

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### **3.2.5. Lamb’s Prose Style**

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*The Essays of Elia*, contributed by Lamb at different times to *The London Magazine*, are the finest things of fancies, humour, penetration and vivacity which have appeared since the days of Montaigne. Where shall we find such intense delicacy of feelings, such unimaginable happiness of expression, such a searching into the very body of truth as in the unpretending composition like ‘Dream Children’ and ‘The Superannuated Man’? “Style is the man” – this oft-repeated expression applies to no one more than

Lamb. The charm of these essays lies in the charm of Lamb's peculiar personality and peculiar mode of expression. The term 'peculiar' should not be taken in its negative sense; rather it should be taken as a mark of originality and singularity.

'Dream Children' and 'The Superannuated Man' are remarkable for Lamb's quaintness of style. It is a style which is not stationary but moves forward and backward with astounding grace. As Hugh Walker has pointed out, Lamb's style is not wholly modern, he belonged to an old time. But it should be remembered that despite the colour and mood of an older time, Lamb's style is basically story-telling type. Its aim is to capture the mind of the listeners. That is why Lamb resorted to personal tone and familiar method of story-telling. 'Dream Children' begins with a very familiar tone: "Children love to listen to stories about their elders when they were children..." It is transparent that Lamb wants to be very simple, playful yet candid, humorous yet pathetic in his delineation. The stuff of 'Dream Children' being homeliest, Lamb adopts the reminiscent style in order to be in the same wave-length of the feelings as the children are. The style used here are full of wit and humour, pity and pathos. Of course, the essay is free from Lamb's peculiar archaism and antiqueness. On the contrary, Lamb's style has a kind of effervescence which has come from his childlike simplicity, sympathy for others and a broad understanding of the world and its ways.

'The Superannuated Man' has a style which is typically Lambian marked by archaism, allusion and a little discursiveness. The rhythm of his sentences is reminiscent of his favourite seventeenth century prose-writers such as Burton, Fuller, Jeremy Taylor and Isaac Walton. The intricate structure is made of broad periods: "If, peradventure, Reader, it has been thy lot to waste the golden years of thy life – thy shining youth – in the irksome confinement of an office; to have thy prison days prolonged through middle age down to decrepitude and silver hairs, ...will you be able to appreciate my deliverance." Lamb freely uses hyperboles and metaphors to give expression to unbounded joy and his yearnings to live a life of full freedom after his retirement.

It has been rightly said that Lamb was "the last of the Elizabethans". His love for word-coining (e.g. 'tawdry gilt' and 'busy-idle diversions' in 'Dream Children' and 'glittering phantoms' to express Easter holidays or calling his friends 'co-brethren of the quill'); his fondness for alliteration ('pursuits of pleasure', 'Time hung heavy upon me'); his use of compound words (e.g. 'candlelight-time', 'rule-of-three sum', 'nothing-to-do', 'daylight servitude', 'pent up office' etc.); his frequent use of proper names as adjectives (e.g. 'Wednesday feelings', 'Saturday night sensations', 'Ethiop white') show his

indebtedness to the Elizabethans. Thus, Lamb's style in 'The Superannuated Man' is a mixture of antique expressions, unexpected analogies, parenthesis and quotations from various sources. The essay begins with a quotation from Virgil – "Sera tamen respexit/ Libertas" and to his firm Lamb says in Latin "Esto perpetua".

In spite of many allusions and quotations, 'The Superannuated Man' is spiced with humour, wit and fun. In fact, Lamb's style is inseparable from his humour which is evident in this expression: "Had I a little son, I would christen him NOTHING-TO-DO; he should do nothing". Sometimes his style is marked by highly exaggerated statement of the feelings: "Time stands still in a manner to me. I have lost all distinction of season". But in his apparent gay style there is a deeper note of sadness. And it has been rightly observed that Lamb lived in tragedy but wrote comedy.

The style in 'Dream Children' and 'The Superannuated Man' has, therefore, a peculiar and most subtle charm – not the result of labour, but the natural garb of his thoughts. Lamb possessed the power, which is seen in Shakespeare's Fools, of conveying a deep philosophical verity in a jest of uniting the wildest merriment with the truest pathos deepest wisdom. What surely is most dominant in the essays is his persuasive, romantic, yet tender style, which is at once derivative and original, realistic and mystical.

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### **3.2.6. Summing Up**

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After studying the discussions in this Unit, you are now familiar with various aspects of Charles Lamb's essays. The two essays, 'The Superannuated Man' and 'Dream Children: A Reverie', surely make you interested in Lamb – the man and his art. In our discussion on these two essays we have seen how Lamb sincerely and nostalgically delineates his highly imaginative mind with touches of humour. As you see, Lamb mingles fact and fiction with the help of his ordinary but brilliant prose style. If you read the essays again and again with the help of the discussions in the Unit, you will feel quite at home to face any kind of question in your examination.

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### **3.2.7. Comprehension Exercises**

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#### **Long Questions- 20 marks**

1. Discuss the romantic elements in 'The Superannuated Man and Dream Children: A Reverie'.
2. Consider Charles Lamb as a personal essayist with reference to 'The Superannuated Man and Dream Children: A Reverie'.

3. Write a note on the mingling of humour and pathos in 'The Superannuated Man and Dream Children: A Reverie'.
4. Comment on the prose style of Charles Lamb with particular reference to the essays prescribed in your syllabus.

### **Mid-length Questions-12 marks**

1. Discuss the autobiographical elements in Lamb's essays with reference to the essays prescribed for you.
2. Describe Lamb's feeling of drudgery in his office life as you find in 'The Superannuated Man and Dream Children: A Reverie'.
3. Narrate Lamb's feelings after his sudden retirement in 'The Superannuated Man'.
4. Comment on the quotations and allusions used by Lamb in 'The Superannuated Man'.
5. How does Lamb depict his boyhood days in 'Dream Children: A Reverie'?
6. Write a note on the blend of fact, fiction and willful mystification in 'The Superannuated Man'.
7. How is the title 'Dream Children: A Reverie' related to its theme?

### **Short Questions-6marks**

1. Why were Sundays in London uninteresting to Lamb in 'The Superannuated Man'?
2. Describe the circumstances in which Lamb retired from his service in 'The Superannuated Man'.
3. How did Lamb feel after a fortnight following his retirement in 'The Superannuated Man'?
4. Give a pen-picture of Mrs. Field as you find it in 'Dream Children: A Reverie'.
5. What account of John Lamb do you get in 'Dream Children: A Reverie'?
6. Comment on the ending of 'Dream Children: A Reverie'.

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### 3.2.8. Suggested Reading

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1. Lucas, E V. *Life of Charles Lamb*.
2. Walker, Hugh. *The English Essay and Essayists*.
3. Commins, Saxe. (Ed.): *The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb*.
4. Hallward, N I. and S. C. Hill (Ed.): *The Essays of Elia*.
5. Thompson, A H. (Ed.): *The Last Essays of Elia*

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## **Unit - 3 □ William Hazlitt: a) ‘On Going a Journey’ b) ‘On a Sun-Dial’**

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### **Structure**

- 3.3.0. Introduction**
- 3.3.1. William Hazlitt: A Brief Account of His Life and Career**
- 3.3.2a.1. About ‘On Going a Journey’**
- 3.3.2a.2. Text**
- 3.3.2a.3. Annotations**
- 3.3.2b.1. About ‘On a Sun-dial’**
- 3.3.2b.2. Text**
- 3.3.2b.3. Annotations**
- 3.3.3. Hazlitt as a Romantic Essayist**
- 3.3.4. Summing Up**
- 3.3.5. Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.3.6. Suggested Reading**

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### **3.3.0. Introduction**

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In this unit you will be introduced to the Romantic essayist William Hazlitt and his essays. Here, we shall devote our attention to an understanding of William Hazlitt– the essayist, various features of his essays, with particular focus on ‘On Going a Journey’ and ‘On a Sun Dial’. While studying this Unit, you will feel the charm of Hazlitt’s personal essays and understand the multiple aspects of the essays written in this great era of Romanticism. His essays can be read and his style then compared with those of Lamb’s essays, whom you have read in the previous unit. After reading the essays prescribed for you in the syllabus, you will realise that the Romantic age is not only famous for its poetry, the essays also contributed a great deal to the enrichment of literature of the age and in creating a prose-style for future Essayists.

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### 3.3.1. William Hazlitt: A Brief Account of His Life and Career

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William Hazlitt (1778-1830) was one of the leading prose writers of the Romantic period. Influenced by the concise social commentary in Joseph Addison's eighteenth-century magazine, the *Spectator*, and by the personal tone of the essays of Michel de Montaigne, Hazlitt was one of the most celebrated practitioners of the "familiar" essay. Characterized by conversational diction and personal opinion on topics ranging from the eminent English poets to ordinary folk, the style of Hazlitt's critical and autobiographical writings has greatly influenced methods of modern writing on aesthetics.

Hazlitt took his first education from his father, a Unitarian minister. He went to Paris in his youth with the aim of becoming a painter, but gradually convinced himself that he could not excel in this art. He then turned to journalism and literature, and came into close association with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Hunt, and others of the Romantic School.

He was, however, of a sensitive and difficult temperament, and sooner or later quarrelled with most of his friends. Though a worshiper of Napoleon, whose life he wrote, he was a strong liberal in politics, and supposed himself persecuted for his opinions.

Of all Hazlitt's voluminous writings, those which retain most value to-day are his literary criticisms and his essays on general topics. His clear and vivacious style rose at times to a rare beauty; and when the temper of his work was not marred by his touchiness and egotism he wrote with great charm and a delicate fancy.

#### Major Works

Hazlitt's most important works are generally divided into two categories: **literary criticism and familiar essays**. Of his literary criticism Hazlitt wrote, "I say what I think: I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are." Representative of his critical style is *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (1817), which contains subjective, often panegyric commentary on such individual characters as Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet. This work introduces Hazlitt's concept of "gusto," a term he used to refer to qualities of passion and energy that he considered necessary to great art. In accord with his impressionistic approach to literature, Hazlitt's concept of gusto also suggests that a passionate and energetic response is the principal criterion for gauging whether or not a work achieves greatness. Hazlitt felt that Shakespeare's sonnets lacked

gusto and judged them as passionless and unengaging despite the “desperate cant of modern criticism.” Hazlitt was no less opinionated on the works of his contemporaries. In the final section of *Lectures on the English Poets* (1812) he criticized Coleridge and Wordsworth, whose emphasis on nature and the common aspects of life acknowledged, in his view, “no excellence but that which supports its own pretensions.” In addition to literature, Hazlitt also focused on drama and art in his critical essays, many of which are collected in *A View of the English Stage* (1818) and *Sketches of the Principal Picture-Galleries in England* (1824).

The many and varied familiar essays that Hazlitt wrote for magazines by the side of those collected in volumes like *The Round Table*, *Table-Talk*, and *The Plain Speaker* are usually considered his finest works. Critics often hold that the essays of *The Round Table* and those in *Table-Talk* and *The Plain Speaker* differ among themselves in this that the former contain observations on “Literature, Men, and Manners” in a style that tends to imitate the essays of Addison and Montaigne, while the latter focus on Hazlitt’s personal experiences in a more original, conversational style. Often beginning with an aphorism, Hazlitt’s familiar essays are characterized by informal diction and an emotional tone. This informal style, in Hazlitt’s words, “promises a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method.” For, Hazlitt himself described his essays as “experimental” rather than “dogmatical,” in that he preferred to use the model of common conversation to discuss ordinary human experiences rather than to write in what he believed was the abstract and artificial style of conventional nonfictional prose.

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### **3.3.2a.1. An Introduction to ‘On Going a Journey’**

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‘On Going a Journey’ was first published in *New Monthly Magazine*, January, 1822 issue. Later it was collected in *Table Talk, Essays on Men and Manners*, published in 1822. The essay bears out Hazlitt’s love of going on a journey. He calls it the ‘pleasantest thing in the world’; but at the same time he prefers to go on a journey alone. He does not like to criticize hedgerows and black cattle as many city-dwellers do. For him, the essence of a journey is solitude – liberty, perfect liberty to think, feel and do just as he pleases.

Hazlitt feels that the beauties of Nature can be better appreciated by a reciprocal heart than by means of any verbal interaction with others. He is of the opinion that good and learned talk often spoils out-of-door prospects, and hence it should be reserved for table-talk. However, there is at least one subject that can be discussed with others while on a trip, and that is food.

Hazlitt also makes allowance for company when he chooses to visit ruins or aqueducts, for they are ‘intelligent matters’ and will bear talking about. On foreign travels too he prefers the company of friends so that he might hear the sound of his own tongue. While speaking on journeys abroad, he finally switches to Napoleon, his ‘first love’, and concludes that the glory of the French Revolution has gone simply because the Bourbons have come back to the French throne.

Hazlitt closes the essay by saying that though the sensation of travelling in a foreign country is pleasing, there is no permanent value in it. That is why he says, “Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them; but we can be said to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth.” He is thus prepared to spend one life in travelling if he could be provided another life to spend afterwards at home.

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### 3.3.2a.2. Text

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#### ‘On Going a Journey’

*One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to do it myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.*

*“The fields his study, nature was his book.”*

*I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room and fewer incumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for*

*“a friend in my retreat*

*Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet.”*

*The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation*

*"May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,  
That in the various bustle of resort  
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,"*

*that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner — and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being and revel there, as the sunburnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things like "sunken wrack and sumless treasures," burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. "Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!" I have just now other business in hand which would seem idle to you, but is with me "very stuff of the conscience." Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from hear to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr Cobbett's that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne, "were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." It is beautifully said; but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind and hurts the*

*sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid; if you have to explain it, it is making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomize them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with anyone for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you — these may recall a number of objects and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company, seems extravagance or affectation; and, on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must “give it an understanding but no tongue.” My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer’s day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. “He talked far above singing.” If I could so clothe my ideas in sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were it possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had “that fine madness in them which our first poets had”; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following.*

*“Here be woods as green  
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet*

*As then smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet  
Face of the curled streams, with flow'rs as many  
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;  
Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,  
Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells;  
Choose where thou wilt; whilst I sit by and sing.  
Or gather rushes, to make many a ring  
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love;  
How the pale Phoebe, hunting in a grove,  
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes  
She took eternal fire that never dies;  
How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,  
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep  
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,  
Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,  
Too kiss her sweetest.*

*Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds; but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot:—I must have time to collect myself.*

*In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects; it should be reserved for table-talk. Lamb is for this reason, I take it, the worst company in the world out of doors; because he is the best within. I grant, there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine is it to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn!" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heart-felt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop; they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,*

*"The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,"*

*And letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper — eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen [getting ready for the gentleman in the parlour] *Procul, O procul este profani!* These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathize with him, and he breaks no squares. [How I love to see the camps of the gypsies, and to sigh my soul into that sort of life. If I express this feeling to another, he may qualify and spoil it with some objection.] I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world: but your "unhoused free condition is put into circumspection and confine." The incognito of an inn is one of its striking privileges — "Lord of one's self, uncumber'd with a name." Oh! It is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion — to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties — to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening — and no longer seeking for the applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than the Gentleman in the parlour! One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainty as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world; an*

inn restores us to the level of nature and quits scores with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns — sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself and have tired to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham-common, where I found out the proof that likeness is not a case of the association of ideas — at other times, when there have been pictures in the room, as at St Neot's (I think I was), where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in a boat between me and the twilight — at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read Paul and Virginia, which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madam D'Arblay's Camilla. It was on the 10th of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the *New Eloise*, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a *bon bouche* to crown the evening with. It was my birth-day, and I had for the first time come from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr Coleridge's poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, Liberty, Genius, Love, Virtue; which have since faded in the light of common day or mock my idle gaze.

*"The Beautiful is vanished, and returns not."*

*Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts of regret and delight, the*

*fragments of which I could hardly conjure up myself, so much have they been broken and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock and over look the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as though then wert; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink the waters of life freely!*

*There is hardly anything that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay, our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we can only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on and think no more of it; the horizon that shuts if from our sight, also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild, barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like what I see of it. In the country we forget the town and in the town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Fopling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map which we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, country joined to country, kingdom to kingdom, land to seas, making an image voluminous and vast; —the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us? An inch of pasteboard on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen at the size of life; things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only peace-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same times excludes*

*all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression; we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten! — To return to the question I have quitted above:*

*I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, but rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration is always where we shall go to, in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. "The mind is its own place"; nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works of art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean Aclat— showed them the seat of the Muses at a distance*

*"With glistening spires and pinnacles adorn'd..."*

*descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges — was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powered Cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures. — As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishman to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen; there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species*

*by one's self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support. — Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariner's hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send a alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over "the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones; I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled; nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French People! — There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else; but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream of another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense, instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings, "Out of my country and myself I go."*

*Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves of while from the ties and objects that recall them; but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!*

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### 3.3.2a.3. Word notes and Allusions

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**I am then never less alone than when alone:** A reminiscence of a Latin saying attributed to Scipio Africanus (236-183 BC), who is famed to have defeated Hannibal in the Second Punic War. The meaning of the Latin saying as reported by Cicero is, “I feel least lonely when I am all alone, because then I have, and enjoy, the company of nature undisturbed.” It was first introduced in English by Jonathan Swift. Shelley, in one of his letters expresses a similar sentiment. In a letter to his cousin he complained of “that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings.”

**The field his study, Nature was his book:** Taken from a poem by Robert Bloomfield (1766-1823), “The Farmer’s Boy”, which is hailed as a rural poem. In Shakespeare’s “As You Like It” we also read of

“...books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.”

**Wish to vegetate like the country:** To grow in silence as vegetables grow. Here Hazlitt figuratively speaks of the growth of his ideas.

**Encumbrances:** Burdens or impediments.

**A friend...is sweet:** From William Cowper’s poem “Retirement”.

**May plume...sometimes impair’d:** From Milton’s “Comus” with slight variations. Hazlitt suggests that the wings of a man’s imagination are damaged when in the midst of the noise and bustle of the city. When he moves to the country, his imagination is regenerated.

**Have a truce with impertinence:** have the liberty to enjoy and discuss something that is not to the point.

**Sunken wrack and sunless treasuries:** quoted from Shakespeare’s Henry IV, Part I. This line is spoken by the Archbishop of Canterbury about the valour of England. The simile compares old forgotten events to wreckage and incalculable treasures lying buried at the bottom of the ocean.

**Mine is that undisturbed...perfect eloquence:** Hazlitt means that the best feelings are often best left unexpressed. Keats framed a similar paradox in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter.”

**Leave me, oh leave me to my repose:** an altered quotation from Gray’s “Descent of Very stud of conscience: From Shakespeare’s “Othello”. A speech of Iago reads:

Though in the trade of war I have slain men  
Yet do I hold it very stuff to the conscience  
To do no contriv'd murder.

**Mr. Cobbet:** William Cobbet (1763-1835), an English Tory Journalist, whose style was admired by Hazlitt. His important works include *Advice to Young Men* (1829) and *Rural Rides* (1830).

**Sterne:** Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768) was an English novelist, his most popular work being "Tristram Shandy".

**Synthetical method:** the method involving addition of one impression to another. Hazlitt says that when on a journey he prefers to store up the impressions in synthesis rather than analyze them.

**Give it an understanding and no tongue:** This line is spoken by Hamlet in Shakespeare's masterpiece, when he is about to see the ghost of his father. It means "not to express in words what one has seen".

**He talked far above singing:** From Beaumont and Fletcher's play "Philaster". Hazlitt here pays a tribute to Coleridge's poetic ability.

**Allfoxden:** Allfoxden and Nether Stowey are places associated with the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Hazlitt refers to the fruitful discussions on poetry that must have taken place between the two at Allfoxden in the Lake District.

**That fine madness...our first poets had:** Adapted from Drayton's elegy which has this phrase, "that fine madness still he did retain which rightly should possess a poet's brain".

**Here the woods...kiss her sweetest:** these lines occur in Fletcher's pastoral play "The Faithful Shepherdess". The passage presents the picture of a lover paying court to his beloved in ideal pastoral surroundings.

**Zephyrus:** Zephyrus, the god of west wind in Greek mythology abducted the goddess Chloris and gave her dominion over flowers. In Roman myth he is called Favonius, the protector of flowers and plants.

**Endymion:** a shepherd youth whom the moon goddess, Phoebe deeply loved. She put him into perpetual slumber so that she might kiss him without his knowledge.

**Latmos:** Mount Latmos where Diana used to meet Endymion.

**Take one's ease at one's in:** In Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I Falstaff says: "Shall I not take mine ease in my inn but I shall have my pocket pick'd?"

**Shandean:** A good natured, simple and unworldly character like Sterne's Tristram Shandy.

**Procul, O Procul este profani:** "far off, oh, far off the vulgar be". This is part of the exhortation to laymen uttered by Roman priests. "Vulgar" means the uninitiated.

**Quaker:** A Quaker is a member of the nonconformist religious sect founded by George Fox (1624-1691).

**Lord of one's self, uncumbered with a name:** Adapted from Dryden's Epistle, where the statement runs, "Lord of yourself, uncumbered with a wife". Hazlitt suggests that he was to go on a journey with his identity not disclosed to anybody.

**St. Neot:** A place in Cornwall.

**Madame d'Arblay:** Her maiden name was Fanny Burney (1752-1840). Her two-volume novel "Camilla" came out in 1795. It tells of the simple home life of a virtuous girl, who being inexperienced is exposed to the dangers of the world. Her other important novels include *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782) and *The Wanderer* (1814).

**Tenth of April:** the birthday of Hazlitt.

**New Eloise:** a novel by Rousseau (1712-1778).

**St. Preux:** the hero of Rousseau's novel "New Eloise".

**Green upland swells that...bleat of flocks:** From Coleridge's poem "Ode on the Departing Year" (1796).

**Glittered green with sunny showers:** *ibid.*

**Where I will drink of the waters of life freely:** in Revelation in the Bible one reads: "And he showed me a purer river of Water of Life; clear as crystal, proceeding out of the thrones of God and the Lamb.

**Sir Fopling Flutter:** A character in Etherege's play "The Man of Mode". Actually these words are spoken by Harriet in the play.

**The mind is its own place:** Satan's words from Milton's "Paradise Lost (Bk-1)".

**Bodleian:** the famous library of Oxford University.

**Blenheim:** Blenheim palace, a gift to the Duke of Marlborough from Queen Anne as a recognition of his victory at the Battle of Blenheim.

**Calais:** a town in France.

**Bourbons:** the dynasty that ruled over France after the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte.

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### 3.3.2b.1. An Introduction to 'On a Sun-dial'

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The essay 'On a Sun-dial' was first published in *Table Talk, Essays on Men and Manners* (1821-22). It was written during Hazlitt's stay at Winterslow, close to the Salisbury Plain. The essay expresses an earnest craving for a life of quietude, free from hurry and hustle. Hazlitt seems to feel inclined to bid adieu to a life of action and movement and lose himself in leisure and sloth, without any clock or watch to remind him of the passage of time or haunt him with the call of duty.

Hazlitt begins his essay with a reference to a sun-dial at Venice, which bears a strange motto of counting only those hours which are serene. Much inspired and soothed by the motto, the author reflects on the role of the sun-dial in human life. He prefers a sun-dial to an hour-glass, though the latter acts for him as a sort of aide memoire of life's transience. For, the fleeting sand reminds him that "all men come out of dust, and to dust they return".

However, Hazlitt is sharply critical of the French practice to decorate the clock, as this seems to him to lack seriousness and display extravagance. He also denounces repeating watches as they constantly remind him of the fleeting time. He likes, in contrast, the sound of the English curfew bell as it tells him of bygone times. He strongly dislikes the monotonous and maddening ticking of the clock at night. To him the ringing of the church bell in England four times a day is preferable to the disgusting custom in Holland to have the church-bell chiming every quarter of an hour.

Hazlitt also takes objection to the use of mechanical instruments to calculate time, and praises the primitive modes to determine the course of time by observing some specific

signs. As a rule, he keeps no watch with him, and hears the clock bell in the town, and while in the country, lives in an absolutely leisurely manner, bothering least of time and work

### 3.3.2b.2. Text

#### **‘On a Sun-dial’**

*“To carve out dials quaintly, point by point.”*

*- Shakspeare*

*Horas non numero nisi serenas - is the motto of a sundial near Venice. There is a softness and a harmon in the words and in the thought unparalleled. Of all conceits it is surely the most classical. 'I count only the hours that are serene.' 'What a bland and care-dispelled feeling! How the shadows seem to fade on the dial-plate as the sky lours, and time presents only a blank unless as its progress is marked by what is joyous, and all that is not happy sinks into oblivion! What a fine lesson is conveyed to the mind - to take no note of time but by its benefits, to watch only for the smiles and neglect the frowns of fate, to compose our lives of bright and gentle moments, turning away top the sunny side of things, and letting the rest slip from our imaginations, unheeded or forgotten! How different from the common art of self-tormenting! For myself, as I rode along the Brenta, while the sun shone hot upon its sluggish, slimy waves, my sensations were far from comfortable; but the reading this inscription on the side of a glaring wall in an instant restored me to myself; and still, whenever I think of or repeat it, it has the power of wafting me into the region of pure and blissful abstraction. I cannot help fancying it to be a legend of Popish superstition. Some monk of the dark ages must have invented and bequeathed it to us, who, loitering in trim gardens and watching the silent march of time, as his fruits ripened in the sun or his flowers scented the balmy air, felt a mild languor pervade his senses, and having little to do or to care for, determined (in imitation of his sun-dial) to efface that little from his thoughts or draw a veil over it, making of his life one long dream of quiet! Horas non numero nisi serenas - he might repeat, when the heavens were overcast and the gathering storm scattered the falling leaves, and turn to his books and wrap himself in his golden studies! Out of some such mood of mind, indolent, elegant, thoughtful, this exquisite device (speaking volumes) must have originated. Of the several modes of counting time, that by the sun-dial is perhaps the most apposite and striking, if not the most convenient or comprehensive. It does not obtrude its observations, though it "morals on the time," and, by its stationary character, forms a contrast to the most fleeting of all essences. It stands sub dio - under the marble air, and there is some*

connection between the image of infinity and eternity. I should also like to have a sun-flower growing near it with bees fluttering round. It should be of iron to denote duration, and have a dull, leaden look. I hate a sun-dial made of wood, which is rather calculated to show the variations of the seasons, than the progress of time, slow, silent, imperceptible, chequered with light and shade. If our hours were all serene, we might probably take almost as little note of them, as the dial does of those that are clouded. It is the shadow thrown across, that gives us warning of their flight. Otherwise, our impressions would take the same undistinguishable hue; we should scarce be conscious of our existence. Those who have had none of the cares of this life to harass and disturb them, have been obliged to have recourse to the hopes and fears of the next to vary the prospect before them. Most of the methods for measuring the lapse of time have, I believe, been the contrivance of monks and religious recluses, who, finding time hang heavy on their hands, were at some pains to see how they got rid of it. The hour-glass is, I suspect, an older invention; and it is certainly the most defective of all. Its creeping sands are not indeed an unapt emblem of the minute, countless portions of our existence; and the manner in which they gradually slide through the hollow glass and diminish in number till not a single one is left, also illustrates the way in which our years slip from us by stealth: but as a mechanical invention, it is rather a hindrance than a help, for it requires to have the time, of which it pretends to count the precious moments, taken up in attention to itself, and in seeing that when one end of the glass is empty, we turn it round, in order that we may go on again, or else all our labour is lost, and we must wait for some other mode of ascertaining the time before we can recover our reckoning and proceed as before. The philosopher in his cell, the cottager at her spinning-wheel must, however, find an invaluable acquisition in this 'companion of the lonely hour,' as it has been called, which not only serves to tell how the time goes, but to fill up its vacancies. What a treasure must not the little box seem to hold, as if it were a sacred deposit of the very grains and fleeting sands of life! What a business, in lieu of other more important avocations, to see it out to the last sand, and then to renew the process again on the instant, that there may not be the least flaw or error in the account! What a strong sense must be brought home to the mind of the value and irrecoverable nature of the time that it fled; what a thrilling, incessant consciousness of the slippery tenure by which we hold what remains of it! Our very existence must seem crumbling to atoms, and running down (without a miraculous reprieve) to the last fragment. 'Dust to dust and ashes to ashes' is a text that might be fairly inscribed on an hour-glass: it is ordinarily associated with the scythe of Time and a Death's-head, as a memento mori; and has, no doubt, furnished many a tacit hint to the apprehensive and visionary enthusiast in favour of a resurrection to another life! The French give a different

turn to things, less sombre and less edifying. A common and also a very pleasing ornament to a clock, in Paris, is a figure of Time seated in a boat which Cupid is rowing along, with the motto, *L'Amour fait passer le Temps* - which the wits again have travestied into *Le Temps fait passer l'Amour*. All this is ingenious and well; but it wants sentiment. I like a people who have something that they love and something that they hate, and with whom everything is not alike a matter of indifference or *pour passer le temps*. The French attach no importance to anything, except for the moment; they are only thinking how they shall get rid of one sensation for another; all their ideas are in transitu. Everything is detached, nothing is accumulated. It would be a million of years before a Frenchman would think of the *Horas non numero nisi serenas*. Its impassioned repose and ideal voluptuousness are as far from their breasts as the poetry of that line in Shakespeare - 'How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!' They never arrive at the classical - or the romantic. They blow the bubbles of vanity, fashion, and pleasure; but they do not expand their perceptions into refinement, or strengthen them into solidity. Where there is nothing fine in the groundwork of the imagination, nothing fine in the superstructure can be produced. They are light, airy, fanciful (to give them their due) - but when they attempt to be serious (beyond mere good sense) they are either dull or extravagant. When the volatile salt has flown off, nothing but a *caput mortuum* remains. They have infinite crotchets and caprices with their clocks and watches, which seem made for anything but to tell the hour - gold repeaters, watches with metal covers, clocks with hands to count the seconds. There is no escaping from quackery and impertinence, even in our attempts to calculate the waste of time. The years gallop fast enough for me, without remarking every moment as it flies; and further, I must say I dislike a watch (whether of French or English manufacture) that comes to me like a footpad with its face muffled, and does not present its clear, open aspect like a friend, and point with its finger to the time of day. All this opening and shutting of dull, heavy cases (under pretence that the glass lid is liable to be broken, or lets in the dust or air and obstructs the movements of the watch), is not to husband time, but to give trouble. It is mere pomposity and self-importance, like consulting a mysterious oracle that one carries about with one in one's pocket, instead of asking a common question of an acquaintance or companion. There are two clocks which strike the hour in the room where I am. This I do not like. In the first place, I do not want to be reminded twice how the time goes (it is like the second tap of a saucy servant at your door when perhaps you have no wish to get up): in the next place, it is starting a difference of opinion on the subject, and I am averse to every appearance of wrangling and disputation. Time moves on the same, whatever disparity there may be in our mode of keeping count of it, like true fame in spite of the cavils and contradictions of the

critics. I am no friend to repeating watches. The only pleasant association I have with them is the account given by Rousseau of some French lady, who sat up reading the *New Eloise* when it first came out, and ordering her maid to sound the repeater, found it was too late to go to bed, and continued reading on till morning. Yet how different is the interest excited by this story from the account which Rousseau somewhere else gives of his sitting up with his father reading romances, when a boy, till they were startled by the swallows twittering in their nests at daybreak, and the father cried out, half angry and ashamed - 'Allons, mon fils, je suis plus enfant que toi!' In general, I have heard repeating watches sounding in stage-coaches at night, when some fellow-traveller suddenly awaking and wondering what was the hour, another has very deliberately taken out his watch, and pressing the spring, it has counted out the time; each petty stroke acting like a sharp puncture on the ear, and informing me of the dreary hours I had already passed, and of the more dreary ones I had to wait till morning. The great advantage, it is true, which clocks have over watches and other dumb reckoners of time is, that for the most part they strike the hour - that they are as it were the mouth-pieces of time; that they not only point it to the eye, but impress it on the ear; that they 'lend it both an understanding and a tongue.' Time thus speaks to us in an audible and warning voice. Objects of sight are easily distinguished by the sense, and suggest useful reflections to the mind; sounds, from their intermittent nature, and perhaps other causes, appeal more to the imagination, and strike upon the heart. But to do this, they must be unexpected and involuntary - there must be no trick in the case - they should not be squeezed out with a finger and a thumb; there should be nothing optional, personal in their occurrence; they should be like stern, inflexible monitors, that nothing can prevent from discharging their duty. Surely, if there is anything with which we should not mix up our vanity and self-consequence, it is with Time, the most independent of all things. All the sublimity, all the superstition that hang upon this palpable mode of announcing its flight, are chiefly attached to this circumstance. Time would lose its abstracted character, if we kept it like a curiosity or a jack-in-a-box; its prophetic warnings would have no effect, if it obviously spoke only at our prompting like a paltry ventriloquism. The clock that tells the coming, dreaded hour - the castle bell, that 'with its brazen throat and iron tongue, sounds one unto the drowsy ear of night' - the curfew, 'swinging slow with sullen road' o'er wizard stream or fountain, are like a voice from other worlds, big with unknown events. The last sound, which is still kept up as an old custom in many parts of England, is a great favourite with me. I used to hear it when a boy. It tells a tale of other times. The days that are past, the generations that are gone, the tangled forest glades and hamlets brown of my native country, the woodman's art, the Norman warrior armed for the battle or in his festive hall, the conqueror's iron rule and

peasant's lamp extinguished, all start up at the clamorous peal, and fill my mind with fear and wonder. I confess, nothing at present interests me but what has been - the recollection of the impressions of my early life, or events long past, of which only the dim traces remain in a mouldering ruin or half-obsolete custom. That things should be that are now no more, creates in my mind the most unfeigned astonishment. I cannot solve the mystery of the past, nor exhaust my pleasure in it. The years, the generations to come, are nothing to me. We care no more about the world in the year 2300 than we do about one of the planets. We might as well make a voyage to the moon as to think of stealing a march upon Time with impunity. *De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio.* Those who are to come after us and push us from the stage seem like upstarts and pretenders, that may be said to exist in vacuo, we know not upon what, except as they are blown up with vanity and self-conceit by their patrons among the moderns. But the ancients are true and bona fide people, to whom we are bound by aggregate knowledge and filial ties, and in whom, seen by the mellow light of history, we feel our own existence doubled and our pride consoled, as we ruminate on the vestiges of the past. The public in general, however, do not carry this speculative indifference about the future to what is to happen to themselves, or to the part they are to act in the busy scene. For my own part, I do; and the only wish I can form, or that ever prompts the passing sigh, would be to live some of my years over again - they would be those in which I enjoyed and suffered most! The ticking of a clock in the night has nothing very interesting nor very alarming in it, though superstition has magnified it into an omen. In a state of vigilance or debility, it preys upon the spirits like the persecution of a teasing, pertinacious insect; and haunting the imagination after it has ceased in reality, is converted into the death-watch. Time is rendered vast by contemplating its minute portions thus repeatedly and painfully urged upon its attention, as the ocean in its immensity is composed of water-drops. A clock striking with a clear and silver sound is a great relief in such circumstances, breaks the spell, and resembles a sylph-like and friendly spirit in the room. Foreigners with all their tricks and contrivances upon clocks and time-pieces, are strangers to the sound of village bells, though perhaps a people that can dance may dispense with them. They impart a pensive, wayward pleasure to the mind, and are a kind of chronology of happy events, often serious in the retrospect - births, marriages, and so forth. Coleridge calls them 'the poor man's only music.' A village spire in England peeping from its cluster of trees, is always associated in imagination with this cheerful accompaniment, and may be expected to pour its joyous tidings on the gale. In Catholic countries, you are stunned with the everlasting tolling of bells to prayers or for the dead. In the Apennines, and other wild and mountainous districts of Italy, the little chapel-bell with its simple tinkling sound has a romantic and charming

effect. The monks in former times appear to have taken a pride in the construction of bells as well as churches; and some of those of the great cathedrals abroad (as at Cologne and Rouen) may be fairly said to be hoarse with counting the flight of ages. The chimes in Holland are a nuisance. They dance in the hours and the quarters. They leave no respite to the imagination. Before one set has done ringing in your ears, another begins. You do not know whether the hours move or stand still, go backwards or forwards, so fantastical and perplexing are their accompaniments. Time is a more staid personage, and not so full of gambols. It puts you in mind of a tune with variations, or of an embroidered dress. Surely, nothing is more simple than Time. His march is straightforward; but we should have leisure allowed us to look back upon the distance we have come, and not be counting his steps every moment. Time in Holland is a foolish old fellow with all the antics of a youth, who 'goes to church in a coranto, and lights his pipe in a cinque-pace.' The chimes with us, on the contrary, as they come in every three or four hours, are like stages in the journey of the day. They give a fillip to the lazy, creeping hours, and relieve the lassitude of country-places. At noon, their desultory, trivial song is diffused through the hamlet with the odour of rashers of bacon; at the close of day they send the toil-worn sleepers to their beds. Their discontinuance would be a great loss to the thinking or unthinking public. Mr. Wordsworth has painted their effect on the mind when he makes his friend Matthew, in a fit of inspired dotage, "Sing those witty rhymes About the crazy old church-clock And the bewilder'd chimes." The tolling of the bell for deaths and executions is a fearful summons, though, as it announces, not the advance of time but the approach of fate, it happily makes no part of our subject. Otherwise, the 'sound of the bell' for Macheath's execution in the Beggars' Opera, or for that of the Conspirators in Venice Preserved, with the roll of the drum at a soldier's funeral, and a digression to that of my Uncle Toby, as it is so finely described by Sterne, would furnish ample topics to descant upon. If I were a moralist, I might disapprove the ringing in the new and ringing out the old year. "Why dance ye, mortals, o'er the grave of Time?"

St. Paul's bell tolls only for the death of our English kings, or a distinguished personage or two, with long intervals between.

Those who have no artificial means of ascertaining the progress of time, are in general the most acute in discerning its immediate signs, and are most retentive of individual dates. The mechanical aids to knowledge are not sharpeners of the wits. The understanding of a savage is a kind of natural almanac, and more true in its prognostication of the future. In his mind's eye he sees what has happened or what is likely to happen to him, 'as in a map the voyager his course.' Those who read the times and seasons in the aspect of the heavens and

*the configuration of the stars, who count by moons and know when the sun rises and sets, are by no means ignorant of their own affairs or of the common concatenation of events. People in such situations have not their faculties distracted by any multiplicity of inquiries beyond what befalls themselves, and the outward appearances that mark the change. There is, therefore, a simplicity and clearness in the knowledge they possess, which often puzzles the more learned. I am sometimes surprised at a shepherd-boy by the road-side, who sees nothing but the earth and sky, asking me the time of day - he ought to know so much better than any one how far the sun is above the horizon. I suppose he wants to ask a question of a passenger, or to see if he has a watch. Robinson Crusoe lost his reckoning in the monotony of his life and that bewildering dream of solitude, and was fain to have recourse to the notches in a piece of wood. What a diary was his! And how time must have spread its circuit round him, vast and pathless as the ocean!*

*For myself, I have never had a watch nor any other mode of keeping time in my possession, nor ever wished to learn how time goes. It is a sign I have had little to do, few avocations, few engagements. When I am in a town, I can hear the clock; and when I am in the country, I can listen to the silence. What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury Plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor caring how time passes, and thus 'with light-winged toys of feathered Idleness' to melt down hours or moments. Perhaps some such thoughts as I have here set down float before me like motes before my half-shut eyes, or some vivid image of the past by forcible contrast rushes by me - 'Diana and her fawn, and all the glories of the antique world'; then I start away to prevent the iron from entering my soul, and let fall some tears into that stream of time which separates me farther and farther from all I once loved! At length I rouse myself from my reverie, and home to dinner, proud of killing time with through, nay even without thinking. Somewhat of this idle humour I inherit from my father, though he had not the same freedom from ennui, for he was not a metaphysician; and there were stops and vacant intervals in his being which he did not know how to fill up. He used in these cases, and as an obvious resource, carefully to wind up his watch at night, and 'with lack-lustre eye' more than once in the course of the day look to see what o'clock it was. Yet he had nothing else in his character in common with the elder Mr. Shandy. Were I to attempt a sketch of him, for my own or the reader's satisfaction, it would be after the following manner - But now I recollect I have done something of the kind once before, and were I to resume the subject here, some bat or owl of a critic, with spectacled gravity, might swear I had stolen the whole of this Essay from myself - or (what is worse) from him! So I had better let it go as it is.*

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### 3.3..2b.3. Word notes and Allusions

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**To crave out dials quaintly, point by point:** The epigraph is taken from Shakespeare's history play Henry VI, Act V, Scene I, l. 24.

**Horas non numero nisi serenas:** Latin, "I count only the hours that are serene".

**Bland:** mild, soothing.

**Brenta:** a slender river near Venice.

**Languor:** lethargic effect.

**Apposite:** appropriate, proper.

**Obtrude:** forward.

**Sub dio:** Latin, 'under the light of the day'.

**Contrivance:** scheme.

**Avocations:** occupations

**Resurrection to another life:** renewal to a new life.

**Edifying:** instructive.

**L' amor fait passer le Temps:** French, 'love makes the time pass'.

**Pour passer le Temps:** just a matter for passing time.

**Transitu:** in a state of transit.

**Caput mortuum:** Latin, 'a dead head', worthless residue.

**Quackery:** boastful pretence.

**Husband time:** save time.

**Allons, mon fils; je suis plus enfant que toi:** French, "come, my son, I am more of a child than you are".

**Curfew:** the ringing of the bell at 8 p.m., as a signal to put out all lights and fires.

**De non apparentibus et non existentibus eadem est ratio:** Latin, 'the same principle is applicable to what is non-apparent and non-existent'.

**In vacuo:** Latin, 'in vacuum'.

**Vestiges:** relics, remains.

**Debility:** infirmity.

**Gambols:** cheap tricks.

**Cinquepace:** a kind of dance.

**Desultory:** loose.

**Descant:** dwell, reflect.

**Prognostication:** prediction.

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### **3.3.3. Studying Hazlitt as a Romantic Essayist with reference to the Two Essays**

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In his essay 'The Art of the Essayist', A.C. Benson thus emphasizes the personal character of the essay: "The point of the essay is not the subject...but the charm of personality". In fact prose literature in the beginning of the nineteenth century is found immensely affected and shaped by the subjective spirit that precisely defined the literature of the age. The essayist in Hazlitt, like Lamb, is essentially romantic in this that in his essays the personal note is patent, although the former is not as much autobiographical as the latter. Hazlitt's essay is basically subjective, and gives out much of his inner self - his personal taste and temper. He is quite outspoken in his admission of his preferences and aversions, and has no recourse to mystification in his self-revelation like Lamb.

The Familiar or Personal Essay is supposed to indicate a tone of familiarity of the essayist, who seems to establish an intimately personal relation with his reader. In both 'On Going a Journey' and 'On a Sun-dial' Hazlitt unequivocally records his temperamental reactions to different things, apparently trivial, and calling for significance only because of the essayist's masterly style, marked by a familiar tone. Thus in 'On Going a Journey' he clearly states that he prefers to go on a journey alone, because he does not wish his enjoyment of the varied charms of Nature to receive any oblique comment from his fellow travelers: " I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it". In 'On a Sun-dial' too he categorically expresses his aversion to modern technical means of calculating time, and prefers a state of all peace, leisure and indolence, bothered neither of the passage of time, nor of the call of duty: "What I like best is to lie whole mornings on a sunny bank on Salisbury plain, without any object before me, neither knowing nor

caring how time passes, and thus with light-winged toys of feathered idleness to melt down hours to moments".

The note of familiarity is however, not the only test of Hazlitt's romanticism. Imaginative exaltation goes hand in hand with this. Feeling and fancy often combine to create a typically romantic style to suit the mood best. While he indulges in fascinating imagination about the sun-dial near Venice and its motto of serenity, he cannot help fancying that "some monk of the dark ages must have invented and bequeathed to us...this exquisite device..". A haunting association with the past, in other words, a hankering for the 'days so sweet, but no more' is also a salient feature of a Romantic essay, and it is found to feature persistently in the essays of Hazlitt. For example, one never misses the exaltation Hazlitt feels to 'plunge into' his 'past being' in the following lines from *On a Sun-dial*: " From the point of yonder rolling cloud I plunge into my past being, and revel there as the sun-burnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. The long-forgotten things like 'sunken wreck and sunless treasuries' burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think and be myself again".

The quiet beauty of a pleasant natural setting casts an inescapable pull on a romantic mind. Both essays under consideration clearly underscore Hazlitt's joy in what is serene and silent. His romantic impulsiveness and reflective nature are perfectly harmonized in the two essays. A lyrical impulse and a profound thoughtfulness go together in his comments on what he sees and feels and imagines. In *'On a Sun-dial'* he is happy to have had no watch ever in his possession simply because he cares not for learning how time goes. He takes this "as a sign I have had little to do, few avocations, few engagements". An almost similar impulse is brought forth when in *'On Going a Journey'* one encounters his preference of solo-travel: "one of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, Nature is company enough for me". Such profoundly subjective impulses often touch upon the edges of egotism; still their boldness and authenticity successfully prevent his statements from sounding melodramatic and sentimental.

Indeed, Hazlitt shares many of the characteristics that define a Romantic or Familiar essayist. With his straight-forward yet pregnant, precise yet elegant prose-style, he remains a Romantic essayist par excellence.

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### **3.3.4. Summing Up**

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✓ In this unit you were introduced to the Romantic essayist William Hazlitt and his essays.

- ✓ You were given an understanding of the various features of his essays.
- ✓ Hazlitt's most important works are generally divided into two categories: literary criticism and familiar essays. Often beginning with an aphorism, Hazlitt's familiar essays are characterized by informal diction and an emotional tone.
- ✓ The quiet beauty of a pleasant natural setting casts an inescapable pull on a romantic mind.
- ✓ Both essays in your syllabus clearly underscore Hazlitt's joy in what is serene and silent.
- ✓ His romantic impulsiveness and reflective nature are perfectly harmonized in the two essays.
- ✓ Hazlitt shares many of the characteristics that define a Romantic or Familiar essayist.
- ✓ With his straight-forward yet pregnant, precise yet elegant prose-style, he remains a Romantic essayist par excellence.

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### **3.3.5. Comprehension Exercises**

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#### **Long Questions 20 Marks**

1. Evaluate Hazlitt as a Romantic/ Personal/ Familiar Essayist with reference to his essays in your syllabus.
2. Write a critical note on Hazlitt's prose style with reference to 'On Going a Journey' and 'On a Sun-dial'.

#### **Mid-Length Questions 12 Marks**

1. Critically comment on the theme of the essay 'On Going a Journey'.
2. "I count only the hours that are serene" - how successfully is the theme borne out in the essay 'On a Sun-dial'?

#### **Short Questions- 6 Marks**

1. What is the motto engraved upon the sun-dial at Venice? What does Hazlitt say of its inception?
2. Briefly reproduce in your own words Hazlitt's impression of other modes of calculating time.
3. Why is not Hazlitt desirous of human company while he is out on a journey? What are the cases in which allowance may be made to the company of friends?
4. Whom does Hazlitt refer to as his "first love"? What is his view of the French Revolution?

5. Explain the following with reference to the context: "I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!"

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### **3.3.6. Suggested Reading**

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Birrell, Augustine. *William Hazlitt*, London: Macmillan, 1902.

Bromwick, David. *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*, OUP, 1991.

Jones, Stanley. *Hazlitt, a Life*, OUP, 1989.

Priestley, J. B. *William Hazlitt*.

## Module - 4 □ Romantic Literary Thought

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### Unit - 1 □ William Wordsworth : *Preface To Lyrical Ballads*

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#### Structure

- 4.1.0 Introduction
- 4.1.1. Understanding Romantic Literary Theory and Criticism
- 4.1.2. Text of *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* 1800
- 4.1.3. Word Notes
- 4.1.4. Wordsworth's Definition of Poetry
- 4.1.5. On the Language of Poetry or Poetic Diction
- 4.1.6. Imagination and its Role in Poetic Creation
- 4.1.7. The Vocation of the Poet
- 4.1.8. The Subject Matter of Poetry
- 4.1.9. Summing Up
- 4.1.10. Comprehension Exercises
- 4.1.11. Suggested Reading

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#### 4.1.0 Introduction

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After going through this unit you will be able to understand Romantic literary criticism and identify its salient features. It will also help you learner, to locate William Wordsworth's contribution to Romantic literary criticism and learn to appreciate Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*. Finally it will help you to understand different aspects of Wordsworth's poetic theory

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### 4.1.1 Understanding Romantic Literary Theory and Criticism

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Romantic literary theory was initiated as a revolt against the neo-classical concept of art which assumed a predominantly mechanical dimension in the eighteenth century. Poetry was regarded as craftsmanship and it was likened to the making of a clock or an engine. In such a perspective, obviously there was no place for the creative imagination. 'Imagination' was employed in the eighteenth century in a mechanical sense. But from the Romantic point of view, imagination is a mysterious creative faculty which transcends reason. It encompasses all arts including literature which are, in a way, an expression and which, in the end, determines man's relationship with external reality. Its procedure is not analytical but synthetic. It grasps truth all at once through an act of intuition and does not follow the circumlocutory and often unsure routes of reason. Romantic poet-critics such as Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge rejected the mechanical view of imagination propounded by the Neo-classicists. Blake said that imagination was the 'eternal world', 'not a state but the human existence itself', and Coleridge presents it as a human analogy of the divine act of creation. Romantic poetics privileged and favoured the function and role of imagination in unequivocal terms. Commenting on this facet of Romanticism, C. M. Bowra says: "If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and in the special view which they held of it." The Romantic writers regarded imagination to be an integral part of the creative process. The attention on the imagination also implied that the self was prioritized above the social concern that governed much of the eighteenth century literary and critical discourse. The centrality of the self, then, constitutes another characteristic of Romantic literary and critical theory.

A significant tenet of Romantic criticism which is rather contradictorily linked to the concept of Imagination is that the poet seeks to evade his own personality and self-hood. This doctrine of Romantic self-effacement has its loftiest expression in Keats's account of the 'Camelion Poet': "it is not itself — it has no self — it is everything and nothing — It has no character — A poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence; because he has no identity." Critics have sometimes described this poetical character as 'Negative Capability', coining a phrase from another letter of Keats. Creativity of the kind Keats aimed for, demanded eradication of the self and according to Coleridge this has been best exemplified by Shakespeare, 'the one Proteus of the fire and the flood.' Protean and shape-shifting, Shakespeare himself is invisible in his works, 'an omnipresent creativeness', whose poetry is 'characterless.' His personal self-presence

dissipates itself among the multiple voices he inhabits from moment to moment. One of the quintessential characteristics of Romantic poetic theory is that the poets are not at all obsessed with identity-fixity.

On one side of the Romantic idea of art there is the magnanimous invisibility of poetical or artistic self and on the reverse side of it, lies a colossal imaginative egotism. If the first criterion is self-oblivion, then the second is all-absorbing self-awareness. Coleridge scrutinized both with equal and opposite admiration, and considered the best exponent of the second category to be John Milton, who, working in quite the contrary direction to Shakespeare, 'attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL.' In his *Table Talk*, he eulogized the 'intense egotism' of Milton's verse — "It is Milton himself whom you see; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael — they are all John Milton". Keats was also regardful of that Miltonic sort of imagination which he traced in Wordsworth and regarded it as the "Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime; which is a thing per se and stands alone. Hazlitt has put a similar concept most vehemently, and not quite unadmiringly, in his review of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*: "An intense intellectual egotism swallows up everything ... he lives in the busy solitude of his own heart"'.

Romantic theory of art is a compound of a particular view of imagination, a particular attitude to nature and a particular style of writing. It begins with the affirmation of the worth of the common man and leads to the affirmation of universal brotherhood. Romantic art emphasizes the subjective dimension of human experience. This stress on individuality implies the autonomy of every individual and the consequent variety and difference. The cardinal Romantic belief is that every individual is different from every other individual. It views man as an independent and individual entity and entails a specific view of human life and man's relationship with external reality.

In their endeavour to seek the wholeness of 'Being', the Romantics repudiated reason and the mechanistic philosophy of John Locke and opted for Immanuel Kant. For them, the Kantian triad of cognitive, moral and aesthetic principles became important. Thus, a shift from the work to the human creator was initiated, and imagination instead of reason became the instrument of creativity. In Romantic concept of art, a work is judged by its sincerity, genuineness of its poetic vision as well as by the experiences the author consciously or unconsciously revealed in it. The Romantics vehemently repudiated the neo-classical triad of reason, nature and truth. Privileging feeling over reason and emotion over thought, they attempted to counter the neo-classical concepts of poetry. The fundamental change brought about by Wordsworth to the Lockean mind-memory

construct is the emphasis on the creative process of the mind in dealing with the past. This point has been succinctly expressed by R. Langbaum by stating, 'It is only through memory', says Locke, that the mind has any effectiveness and he equates the self with the sum of conscious memory, whatever has the consciousness of present and past action, is the same person to whom they both belong'. But Locke does not speak of memory as modifying the actions remembered ...'

One of the credentials of Romantic literary criticism is the use of ordinary language in poetry. There should not be any gaudiness or empty phraseology in poetry. The language of poetry should not be artificially contrived; it should be true to nature, true to the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions. The Romantics wish to keep the readers of their poetry in the company of flesh and blood. So, they discard the conventional form of poetic diction. Wordsworth says that he wants to bring the language of poetry near to the language that men use. As their object is not to make use of any falsehood of description, there should not be any falsehood in the language of poetry. So they wanted to avoid conventional phrases and figures of speech.

Inspiration is one of the central concepts in Romantic Poetic Aesthetics. Literally, to be inspired is to be breathed on by Apollo or in the Christian context by the Holy Spirit. The Romantics assert their faith in the idea of Inspiration in unmistakable terms. Closely linked to it is the idea of Spontaneity. Romantic critics, theorists and poets repudiate artifice in favour of spontaneity in literature.

Wordsworth describes poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings', showing a parallel alignment between the artist and his work. Poetry is the projection of the thoughts and feelings of the poet. In other words, poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts, and feelings of the poet. This pattern of thinking in which the artist himself becomes the major element generating both the artistic product and the criteria by which it is to be judged, is called the expressive theory of art.

One of the prominent propositions of Romantic Aesthetics is 'the return to nature' or 'the revolt against Alexander Pope' comprising a revolt against artificiality that Romantic Polemic typically characterized as Augustan — 'the dark age of English Poetry', as Robert Southey once called it. William Hazlitt once summarized a whole climate of acrimony against the Age of Pope by telling 'He was, in a word, the Poet, not of nature, but of art'. For the Romantics, nature is the criterion. John Keats told his friend Taylor "If Poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all". Wordsworth was a dominating figure in this regard; a poet to whom, as M. H. Abrams

puts it in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), 'the cardinal standard of poetic value is "nature". Organicism is another hallmark of Romantic theory of art. Plato firmly believed in innate ideas, which unconsciously enter a work of art and impart a form to it. The Romantics explain it by speaking of the work of art as an organism. Blake turned down Burke's theory of art based on the dichotomy between conception and execution. Other Romantics borrowed metaphors from the animal and the plant world to illustrate the unity of a work of art.

The process of poetic creation or composition constitutes a pivotal part in Romantic Art. Mill had strongly asserted that in so far as a literary product simply imitates objects, it is not poetry at all. He does not approve of the reference of poetry to the external universe. But he has conceded the fact that sensible objects may serve as a stimulus or 'occasion for the generation of poetry', and hence, 'the poetry is not in the object itself', but 'in the state of mind' in which it is contemplated. Poetry must be true not to the object, but to 'the human emotion'. Thus, severed from the external universe, the objects signified by a poem tend to be regarded as no more than a projected equivalent — an extended and articulated symbol for the poet's inner state of mind. Poetry, said J.S. Mill, embodies 'itself in symbols, which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind'.

Romantic concept of art endorses a specific genre of poetry. In this regard, Mill reinterprets and inverts the neo-classic ranking of the poetic branches. As the purest and effortless expression of feeling, lyric poetry is 'more eminently and peculiarly poetry than any other...' Other forms of poetry are all alloyed by non-poetic elements, whether narrative, descriptive or didactic which serve merely as convenient occasions for the poetic utterances of feelings either by the poet or any one of his invented characters. To Aristotle, tragedy had been the highest and most sublime form of poetry, and the plot, representing the action being imitated, had been its 'soul'; while most neo-classic critics had agreed that, whether judged by greatness of subject-matter or of effect, epic and tragedy are the king and the queen of poetic forms. It serves as an index to the revolution in critical norms to notice that to Mill, plot becomes a kind of necessary evil. An epic poem 'in so far as it so epic... is not poetry at all', but only a suitable frame for the greatest diversity of genuinely poetic passages; while the interest in plot and story 'merely as a story' characterizes rude stages of society, children, and the 'shallowest and emptiest' of civilized adults. Similarly with the other arts such as in music, painting, sculpture, and architecture Mill distinguishes between that which is 'simple imitation or description' and that which 'expresses human feeling' and is, therefore, poetry.

Mill is recognized as one of the great exponents of expressive theory of art. He has accepted the venerable assumption that man's susceptibility is innate, but his knowledge, skill and art are required. On the basis of this assumption he has differentiated poets into two categories: poets who are born and poets who are made, or those who are poets 'by nature', and those who are poets 'by culture'. Natural poetry is identifiable because it 'is Feeling itself, employing Thought only as the medium of its utterance'. On the other hand, the poetry of 'a cultivated but not naturally poetic mind,' is written with 'a distinct aim', and in it the thought remains the conspicuous object, however surrounded by 'a halo of feeling'. Natural poetry is 'poetry in a higher sense, than any other; since... that which constitutes poetry, human feeling, enters for more largely into this than into the poetry of culture'.

The relationship between the poet and the audience is of great significance in Romantic literary theory. According to Mill, 'Poetry is feeling, confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude'. The poet's audience is reduced to a single member consisting of the poet himself. 'All poetry', as Mill puts it, 'is of the nature of soliloquy'. The purpose of producing effects upon other men, which for centuries had been the defining character of the art of poetry, now serves precisely the opposite function. Wordsworth insisted that 'Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men' and that each of his poems 'has a worthy purpose'; even though it turns out that the pleasure and profit of the audience is an automatic consequence of the poet's spontaneous overflow of feeling, provided that the appropriate associations between thoughts and feelings have been established by the poet in advance. Keats, however, affirmed that 'I never wrote one single line of Poetry with the least Shadow of public thought.' 'A poet is a nightingale', according to P. B. Shelley, 'who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician...' For Carlyle, the poet utterly replaces the audience as the generator of aesthetic norms.

A prominent characteristic of Romantic poetic theory is that the poets and artists craved for the uncommon, uncanny, bizarre and strange and discovered it in the medieval legends, picturesque, fairy and adventurous tales, myths and romances. This penchant for medievalism triggered the imagination of several romantic writers. In 1765, Thomas Percy published his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* in three volumes. Percy's *Reliques* created a new trend in romantic poetry and immensely influenced Scott, Coleridge and Keats. The romantics also dismantled the age-old controversy regarding pleasure or instruction as the objective or aim of literature. Critics since the time of Horace had been regarding instruction as the primary end of poetry. Wordsworth, for the first time,

deviated from this classical view and wrote in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*: “The poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man”. Afterwards, his contemporary Coleridge established his views more firmly when he told, “A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to the works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth.”

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#### 4.1.2 Text of *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* 1800

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*THE FIRST volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.*

*I had formed no very inaccurate estimate of the probable effect of those Poems: I flattered myself that they who should be pleased with them would read them with more than common pleasure: and, on the other hand, I was well aware, that by those who should dislike them, they would be read with more than common dislike. The result has differed from my expectation in this only, that a greater number have been pleased than I ventured to hope I should please.*

*Several of my Friends are anxious for the success of these Poems, from a belief, that, if the views with which they were composed were indeed realized, a class of Poetry would be produced, well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and not unimportant in the quality, and in the multiplicity of its moral relations: and on this account they have advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written. But I was unwilling to undertake the task, knowing that on this occasion the Reader would look coldly upon my arguments, since I might be suspected of having been principally influenced by the selfish and foolish hope of reasoning him into an approbation of these particular Poems: and I was still more unwilling to undertake the task, because, adequately to display the opinions, and fully to enforce the arguments, would require a space wholly disproportionate to a preface. For, to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which it is susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this*

country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself. I have therefore altogether declined to enter regularly upon this defence; yet I am sensible, that there would be something like impropriety in abruptly obtruding upon the Public, without a few words of introduction, Poems so materially different from those upon which general approbation is at present bestowed.

It is supposed, that by the act of writing in verse an Author makes a formal engagement that he will gratify certain known habits of association; that he not only thus apprises the Reader that certain classes of ideas and expressions will be found in his book, but that others will be carefully excluded. This exponent or symbol held forth by metrical language must in different eras of literature have excited very different expectations: for example, in the age of Catullus, Terence, and Lucretius, and that of Statius or Claudian; and in our own country, in the age of Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher, and that of Donne and Cowley, or Dryden, or Pope. I will not take upon me to determine the exact import of the promise which, by the act of writing in verse, an Author in the present day makes to his reader: but it will undoubtedly appear to many persons that I have not fulfilled the terms of an engagement thus voluntarily contracted. They who have been accustomed to the gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of strangeness and awkwardness: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title. I hope therefore the reader will not censure me for attempting to state what I have proposed to myself to perform; and also (as far as the limits of a preface will permit) to explain some of the chief reasons which have determined me in the choice of my purpose: that at least he may be spared any unpleasant feeling of disappointment, and that I myself may be protected from one of the most dishonourable accusations which can be brought against an Author, namely, that of an indolence which prevents him from endeavouring to ascertain what is his duty, or, when his duty is ascertained, prevents him from performing it.

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an

unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.<sup>1</sup>

I cannot, however, be insensible to the present outcry against the triviality and meanness, both of thought and language, which some of my contemporaries have occasionally introduced into their metrical compositions; and I acknowledge that this defect, where it exists, is more dishonourable to the Writer's own character than false refinement or arbitrary innovation, though I should contend at the same time, that it is far less pernicious in the sum of its consequences. From such verses the Poems in these volumes will be found distinguished at least by one mark of difference, that each of them has a worthy purpose. Not that I always began to write with a distinct purpose formerly conceived; but habits of meditation have, I trust, so prompted and regulated my feelings, that my descriptions of such objects as strongly excite those feelings, will be found to carry along with them a purpose. If this opinion be erroneous, I can have little right to the name of a Poet. For all good poetry is the spontaneous

*overflow of powerful feelings: and though this be true, Poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man who, being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply. For our continued influxes of feeling are modified and directed by our thoughts, which are indeed the representatives of all our past feelings; and, as by contemplating the relation of these general representatives to each other, we discover what is really important to men, so, by the repetition and continuance of this act, our feelings will be connected with important subjects, till at length, if we be originally possessed of much sensibility, such habits of mind will be produced, that, by obeying blindly and mechanically the impulses of those habits, we shall describe objects, and utter sentiments, of such a nature, and in such connexion with each other, that the understanding of the Reader must necessarily be in some degree enlightened, and his affections strengthened and purified.*

*It has been said that each of these poems has a purpose. Another circumstance must be mentioned which distinguishes these Poems from the popular Poetry of the day; it is this, that the feeling therein developed gives importance to the action and situation, and not the action and situation to the feeling.*

*A sense of false modesty shall not prevent me from asserting, that the Reader's attention is pointed to this mark of distinction, far less for the sake of these particular Poems than from the general importance of the subject. The subject is indeed important! For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants; and he must have a very faint perception of its beauty and dignity who does not know this, and who does not further know, that one being is elevated above another, in proportion as he possesses this capability. It has therefore appeared to me, that to endeavour to produce or enlarge this capability is one of the best services in which, at any period, a Writer can be engaged; but this service, excellent at all times, is especially so at the present day. For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and*

*Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.—When I think upon this degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation, I am almost ashamed to have spoken of the feeble endeavour made in these volumes to counteract it; and, reflecting upon the magnitude of the general evil, I should be oppressed with no dishonourable melancholy, had I not a deep impression of certain inherent and indestructible qualities of the human mind, and likewise of certain powers in the great and permanent objects that act upon it, which are equally inherent and indestructible; and were there not added to this impression a belief, that the time is approaching when the evil will be systematically opposed, by men of greater powers, and with far more distinguished success.*

*Having dwelt thus long on the subjects and aim of these Poems, I shall request the Reader's permission to apprise him of a few circumstances relating to their style, in order, among other reasons, that he may not censure me for not having performed what I never attempted. The Reader will find that personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as possible, to adopt the very language of men; and assuredly such personifications do not make any natural or regular part of that language. They are, indeed, a figure of speech occasionally prompted by passion, and I have made use of them as such; but have endeavoured utterly to reject them as a mechanical device of style, or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription. I have wished to keep the Reader in the company of flesh and blood, persuaded that by so doing I shall interest him. Others who pursue a different track will interest him likewise; I do not interfere with their claim, but wish to prefer a claim of my own. There will also be found in these volumes little of what is usually called poetic diction; as much pains has been taken to avoid it as is ordinarily taken to produce it; this has been done for the reason already alleged, to bring my language near to the language of men; and further, because the pleasure which I have proposed to myself to impart, is of a kind very different from that which is supposed by many persons to be the proper object of poetry. Without being culpably particular, I do not know how to give my Reader a more exact notion of the style in which it was my wish and intention to write, than by informing him that I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject; consequently, there is I hope in these Poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense: but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases*

*and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of Poets. I have also thought it expedient to restrict myself still further, having abstained from the use of many expressions, in themselves proper and beautiful, but which have been foolishly repeated by bad Poets, till such feelings of disgust are connected with them as it is scarcely possible by any art of association to overpower.*

*If in a poem there should be found a series of lines, or even a single line, in which the language, though naturally arranged, and according to the strict laws of metre, does not differ from that of prose, there is a numerous class of critics, who, when they stumble upon these prosaisms, as they call them, imagine that they have made a notable discovery, and exult over the Poet as over a man ignorant of his own profession. Now these men would establish a canon of criticism which the Reader will conclude he must utterly reject, if he wishes to be pleased with these volumes. and it would be a most easy task to prove to him, that not only the language of a large portion of every good poem, even of the most elevated character, must necessarily, except with reference to the metre, in no respect differ from that of good prose, but likewise that some of the most interesting parts of the best poems will be found to be strictly the language of prose when prose is well written. The truth of this assertion might be demonstrated by innumerable passages from almost all the poetical writings, even of Milton himself. to illustrate the subject in a general manner, I will here adduce a short composition of Gray, who was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.*

*'In vain to me the smiling mornings shine,  
And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fire:  
The birds in vain their amorous descant join,  
Or cheerful fields resume their green attire.  
These ears, alas! for other notes repine;  
A different object do these eyes require;  
My lonely anguish melts no heart but mine;  
And in my breast the imperfect joys expire;  
Yet morning smiles the busy race to cheer,  
And new-born pleasure brings to happier men;*

*The fields to all their wonted tribute bear;  
To warm their little loves the birds complain.  
I fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear,  
And weep the more because I weep in vain.'*

*It will easily be perceived, that the only part of this Sonnet which is of any value is the lines printed in Italics; it is equally obvious, that, except in the rhyme, and in the use of the single word 'fruitless' for fruitlessly, which is so far a defect, the language of these lines does in no respect differ from that of prose.*

*By the foregoing quotation it has been shown that the language of Prose may yet be well adapted to Poetry; and it was previously asserted, that a large portion of the language of every good poem can in no respect differ from that of good Prose. We will go further. It may be safely affirmed, that there neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. We are fond of tracing the resemblance between Poetry and Painting, and, accordingly, we call them Sisters: but where shall we find bonds of connexion sufficiently strict to typify the affinity betwixt metrical and prose composition? They both speak by and to the same organs; the bodies in which both of them are clothed may be said to be of the same substance, their affections are kindred, and almost identical, not necessarily differing even in degree; Poetry sheds no tears 'such as Angels weep,' but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial choir that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both.*

*If it be affirmed that rhyme and metrical arrangement of themselves constitute a distinction which overturns what has just been said on the strict affinity of metrical language with that of prose, and paves the way for other artificial distinctions which the mind voluntarily admits, I answer that the language of such Poetry as is here recommended is, as far as is possible, a selection of the language really spoken by men; that this selection, wherever it is made with true taste and feeling, will of itself form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life; and, if metre be superadded thereto, I believe that a dissimilitude will be produced altogether sufficient for the gratification of a rational mind. What other distinction would we have? Whence is it to come? And where is it to exist? Not, surely, where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters: it cannot be necessary here, either for elevation of style, or any of its supposed ornaments: for, if the Poet's subject be judiciously chosen, it*

*will naturally, and upon fit occasion, lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truly and judiciously, must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures. I forbear to speak of an incongruity which would shock the intelligent Reader, should the Poet interweave any foreign splendour of his own with that which the passion naturally suggests: it is sufficient to say that such addition is unnecessary. and, surely, it is more probable that those passages, which with propriety abound with metaphors and figures, will have their due effect, if, upon other occasions where the passions are of a milder character, the style also be subdued and temperate.*

*But, as the pleasure which I hope to give by the Poems now presented to the Reader must depend entirely on just notions upon this subject, and, as it is in itself of high importance to our taste and moral feelings, I cannot content myself with these detached remarks. and if, in what I am about to say, it shall appear to some that my labour is unnecessary, and that I am like a man fighting a battle without enemies, such persons may be reminded, that, whatever be the language outwardly holden by men, a practical faith in the opinions which I am wishing to establish is almost unknown. If my conclusions are admitted, and carried as far as they must be carried if admitted at all, our judgements concerning the works of the greatest Poets both ancient and modern will be far different from what they are at present, both when we praise, and when we censure: and our moral feelings influencing and influenced by these judgements will, I believe, be corrected and purified.*

*Taking up the subject, then, upon general grounds, let me ask, what is meant by the word Poet? What is a Poet? to whom does he address himself? and what language is to be expected from him?—He is a man speaking to men: a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature, and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings-on of the Universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them. to these qualities he has added a disposition to be affected more than other men by absent things as if they were present; an ability of conjuring up in himself passions, which are indeed far from being the same as those produced by real events, yet (especially in those parts of the general sympathy which are pleasing and delightful) do more nearly resemble the passions produced by real events, than anything which, from the motions of their own minds merely, other men are accustomed to feel in themselves:— whence, and*

*from practice, he has acquired a greater readiness and power in expressing what he thinks and feels, and especially those thoughts and feelings which, by his own choice, or from the structure of his own mind, arise in him without immediate external excitement.*

*But whatever portion of this faculty we may suppose even the greatest Poet to possess, there cannot be a doubt that the language which it will suggest to him, must often, in liveliness and truth, fall short of that which is uttered by men in real life, under the actual pressure of those passions, certain shadows of which the Poet thus produces, or feels to be produced, in himself.*

*However exalted a notion we would wish to cherish of the character of a Poet, it is obvious, that while he describes and imitates passions, his employment is in some degree mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving pleasure. Here, then, he will apply the principle of selection which has been already insisted upon. He will depend upon this for removing what would otherwise be painful or disgusting in the passion; he will feel that there is no necessity to trick out or to elevate nature: and, the more industriously he applies this principle, the deeper will be his faith that no words, which his fancy or imagination can suggest, will be to be compared with those which are the emanations of reality and truth.*

*But it may be said by those who do not object to the general spirit of these remarks, that, as it is impossible for the Poet to produce upon all occasions language as exquisitely fitted for the passion as that which the real passion itself suggests, it is proper that he should consider himself as in the situation of a translator, who does not scruple to substitute excellencies of another kind for those which are unattainable by him; and endeavours occasionally to surpass his original, in order to make some amends for the general inferiority to which he feels that he must submit. But this would be to encourage idleness and unmanly despair. Further, it is the language of men who speak of what they do not understand; who talk of Poetry as of a matter of amusement and idle pleasure; who will converse with us as gravely about a taste for Poetry, as they express it, as if it were a thing as indifferent as a taste for rope-dancing, or Frontinac or Sherry. Aristotle, I have been told, has said, that Poetry is the most philosophic of all writing: it is so: its object is truth, not individual and local, but general, and operative;*

*not standing upon external testimony, but carried alive into the heart by passion; truth which is its own testimony, which gives competence and confidence to the tribunal to which it appeals, and receives them from the same tribunal. Poetry is the image of man and nature. The obstacles which stand in the way of the fidelity of the Biographer and Historian, and of their consequent utility, are incalculably greater than those which are to be encountered by the Poet who comprehends the dignity of his art. The Poet writes under one restriction only, namely, the necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human Being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man. Except this one restriction, there is no object standing between the Poet and the image of things; between this, and the Biographer and Historian, there are a thousand.*

*Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves. We have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure: I would not be misunderstood; but wherever we sympathize with pain, it will be found that the sympathy is produced and carried on by subtle combinations with pleasure. We have no knowledge, that is, no general principles drawn from the contemplation of particular facts, but what has been built up by pleasure, and exists in us by pleasure alone. The Man of science, the Chemist and Mathematician, whatever difficulties and disgusts they may have had to struggle with, know and feel this. However painful may be the objects with which the Anatomist's knowledge is connected, he feels that his knowledge is pleasure; and where he has no pleasure he has no knowledge. What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and re-acting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this with a certain quantity of immediate knowledge, with certain convictions, intuitions, and deductions, which from habit acquire the quality of intuitions; he considers him as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment.*

*To this knowledge which all men carry about with them, and to these sympathies in which,*

*without any other discipline than that of our daily life, we are fitted to take delight, the Poet principally directs his attention. He considers man and nature as essentially adapted to each other, and the mind of man as naturally the mirror of the fairest and most interesting properties of nature. and thus the Poet, prompted by this feeling of pleasure, which accompanies him through the whole course of his studies, converses with general nature, with affections akin to those, which, through labour and length of time, the Man of science has raised up in himself, by conversing with those particular parts of nature which are the objects of his studies. The knowledge both of the Poet and the Man of science is pleasure; but the knowledge of the one cleaves to us as a necessary part of our existence, our natural and unalienable inheritance; the other is a personal and individual acquisition, slow to come to us, and by no habitual and direct sympathy connecting us with our fellow-beings. The Man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude: the Poet, singing a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and hourly companion. Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science. Emphatically may it be said of the Poet, as Shakespeare hath said of man, 'that he looks before and after.' He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs: in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time. The objects of the Poet's thoughts are everywhere; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of Men of science should ever create any material revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the Poet will sleep then no more than at present; he will be ready to follow the steps of the Man of science, not only in those general indirect effects, but he will be at his side, carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself. The remotest discoveries of the Chemist, the Botanist, or Mineralogist, will be as proper objects of the Poet's art as any upon which it can be employed, if the time should ever come when these things shall be familiar to us, and the relations under which they are contemplated by the followers of these respective sciences shall be manifestly and palpably material to us as enjoying and suffering beings. If the time should ever come when what is now called science, thus familiarized to*

*men, shall be ready to put on, as it were, a form of flesh and blood, the Poet will lend his divine spirit to aid the transfiguration, and will welcome the Being thus produced, as a dear and genuine inmate of the household of man.—It is not, then, to be supposed that any one, who holds that sublime notion of Poetry which I have attempted to convey, will break in upon the sanctity and truth of his pictures by transitory and accidental ornaments, and endeavour to excite admiration of himself by arts, the necessity of which must manifestly depend upon the assumed meanness of his subject.*

*What has been thus far said applies to Poetry in general; but especially to those parts of composition where the Poet speaks through the mouths of his characters; and upon this point it appears to authorize the conclusion that there are few persons of good sense, who would not allow that the dramatic parts of composition are defective, in proportion as they deviate from the real language of nature, and are coloured by a diction of the Poet's own, either peculiar to him as an individual Poet or belonging simply to Poets in general; to a body of men who, from the circumstance of their compositions being in metre, it is expected will employ a particular language.*

*It is not, then, in the dramatic parts of composition that we look for this distinction of language; but still it may be proper and necessary where the Poet speaks to us in his own person and character. to this I answer by referring the Reader to the description before given of a Poet. Among the qualities there enumerated as principally conducing to form a Poet, is implied nothing differing in kind from other men, but only in degree. The sum of what was said is, that the Poet is chiefly distinguished from other men by a greater promptness to think and feel without immediate external excitement, and a greater power in expressing such thoughts and feelings as are produced in him in that manner. But these passions and thoughts and feelings are the general passions and thoughts and feelings of men. and with what are they connected? Undoubtedly with our moral sentiments and animal sensations, and with the causes which excite these; with the operations of the elements, and the appearances of the visible universe; with storm and sunshine, with the revolutions of the seasons, with cold and heat, with loss of friends and kindred, with injuries and resentments, gratitude and hope, with fear and sorrow. These, and the like, are the sensations and objects which the Poet describes, as they are the sensations of other men, and the objects which interest them. The Poet thinks and feels in the spirit of human passions. How, then, can his language differ in any material degree from that of all other men who feel vividly and see*

clearly? It might be proved that it is impossible. But supposing that this were not the case, the Poet might then be allowed to use a peculiar language when expressing his feelings for his own gratification, or that of men like himself. But Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men. Unless therefore we are advocates for that admiration which subsists upon ignorance, and that pleasure which arises from hearing what we do not understand, the Poet must descend from this supposed height; and, in order to excite rational sympathy, he must express himself as other men express themselves. to this it may be added, that while he is only selecting from the real language of men, or, which amounts to the same thing, composing accurately in the spirit of such selection, he is treading upon safe ground, and we know what we are to expect from him. Our feelings are the same with respect to metre; for, as it may be proper to remind the Reader, the distinction of metre is regular and uniform, and not, like that which is produced by what is usually called POETIC DICTION, arbitrary, and subject to infinite caprices upon which no calculation whatever can be made. In the one case, the Reader is utterly at the mercy of the Poet, respecting what imagery or diction he may choose to connect with the passion; whereas, in the other, the metre obeys certain laws, to which the Poet and Reader both willingly submit because they are certain, and because no interference is made by them with the passion, but such as the concurring testimony of ages has shown to heighten and improve the pleasure which co-exists with it.

It will now be proper to answer an obvious question, namely, Why, professing these opinions, have I written in verse? to this, in addition to such answer as is included in what has been already said, I reply, in the first place, because however I may have restricted myself, there is still left open to me what confessedly constitutes the most valuable object of all writing, whether in prose or verse; the great and universal passions of men, the most general and interesting of their occupations, and the entire world of nature before me—to supply endless combinations of forms and imagery. Now, supposing for a moment that whatever is interesting in these objects may be as vividly described in prose, why should I be condemned for attempting to superadd to such description the charm which, by the consent of all nations, is acknowledged to exist in metrical language? to this, by such as are yet unconvinced, it may be answered that a very small part of the pleasure given by Poetry depends upon the metre, and that it is injudicious to write in metre, unless it be accompanied with the other artificial distinctions of style with which metre is usually accompanied, and that, by such deviation, more will be lost from the shock which will thereby be given to the Reader's associations than will be

counterbalanced by any pleasure which he can derive from the general power of numbers. In answer to those who still contend for the necessity of accompanying metre with certain appropriate colours of style in order to the accomplishment of its appropriate end, and who also, in my opinion, greatly underrate the power of metre in itself, it might, perhaps, as far as relates to these Volumes, have been almost sufficient to observe, that poems are extant, written upon more humble subjects, and in a still more naked and simple style, which have continued to give pleasure from generation to generation. Now, if nakedness and simplicity be a defect, the fact here mentioned affords a strong presumption that poems somewhat less naked and simple are capable of affording pleasure at the present day; and, what I wish chiefly to attempt, at present, was to justify myself for having written under the impression of this belief.

But various causes might be pointed out why, when the style is manly, and the subject of some importance, words metrically arranged will long continue to impart such a pleasure to mankind as he who proves the extent of that pleasure will be desirous to impart. The end of Poetry is to produce excitement in co-existence with an overbalance of pleasure; but, by the supposition, excitement is an unusual and irregular state of the mind; ideas and feelings do not, in that state, succeed each other in accustomed order. If the words, however, by which this excitement is produced be in themselves powerful, or the images and feelings have an undue proportion of pain connected with them, there is some danger that the excitement may be carried beyond its proper bounds. Now the co-presence of something regular, something to which the mind has been accustomed in various moods and in a less excited state, cannot but have great efficacy in tempering and restraining the passion by an intertexture of ordinary feeling, and of feeling not strictly and necessarily connected with the passion. This is unquestionably true; and hence, though the opinion will at first appear paradoxical, from the tendency of metre to divest language, in a certain degree, of its reality, and thus to throw a sort of half-consciousness of unsubstantial existence over the whole composition, there can be little doubt but that more pathetic situations and sentiments, that is, those which have a greater proportion of pain connected with them, may be endured in metrical composition, especially in rhyme, than in prose. The metre of the old ballads is very artless; yet they contain many passages which would illustrate this opinion; and, I hope, if the following Poems be attentively perused, similar instances will be found in them. This opinion may be further illustrated by appealing to the Reader's own experience of the reluctance with which he comes to the re-perusal of the distressful parts of *Clarissa Harlowe*, or *The*

*Gamester; while Shakespeare's writings, in the most pathetic scenes, never act upon us, as pathetic, beyond the bounds of pleasure—an effect which, in a much greater degree than might at first be imagined, is to be ascribed to small, but continual and regular impulses of pleasurable surprise from the metrical arrangement.—On the other hand (what it must be allowed will much more frequently happen) if the Poet's words should be incommensurate with the passion, and inadequate to raise the Reader to a height of desirable excitement, then (unless the Poet's choice of his metre has been grossly injudicious), in the feelings of pleasure which the Reader has been accustomed to connect with metre in general, and in the feeling, whether cheerful or melancholy, which he has been accustomed to connect with that particular movement of metre, there will be found something which will greatly contribute to impart passion to the words, and to effect the complex end which the Poet proposes to himself.*

*If I had undertaken a SYSTEMATIC defence of the theory here maintained, it would have been my duty to develop the various causes upon which the pleasure received from metrical language depends. Among the chief of these causes is to be reckoned a principle which must be well known to those who have made any of the Arts the object of accurate reflection; namely, the pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude. This principle is the great spring of the activity of our minds, and their chief feeder. From this principle the direction of the sexual appetite, and all the passions connected with it, take their origin: it is the life of our ordinary conversation; and upon the accuracy with which similitude in dissimilitude, and dissimilitude in similitude are perceived, depend our taste and our moral feelings. It would not be a useless employment to apply this principle to the consideration of metre, and to show that metre is hence enabled to afford much pleasure, and to point out in what manner that pleasure is produced. But my limits will not permit me to enter upon this subject, and I must content myself with a general summary.*

*I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on; but the emotion, of whatever kind, and in whatever degree, from various causes, is qualified by various pleasures, so that in describing any passions whatsoever,*

*which are voluntarily described, the mind will, upon the whole, be in a state of enjoyment. If Nature be thus cautious to preserve in a state of enjoyment a being so employed, the Poet ought to profit by the lesson held forth to him, and ought especially to take care, that, whatever passions he communicates to his Reader, those passions, if his Reader's mind be sound and vigorous, should always be accompanied with an overbalance of pleasure. Now the music of harmonious metrical language, the sense of difficulty overcome, and the blind association of pleasure which has been previously received from works of rhyme or metre of the same or similar construction, an indistinct perception perpetually renewed of language closely resembling that of real life, and yet, in the circumstance of metre, differing from it so widely—all these imperceptibly make up a complex feeling of delight, which is of the most important use in tempering the painful feeling always found intermingled with powerful descriptions of the deeper passions. This effect is always produced in pathetic and impassioned poetry; while, in lighter compositions, the ease and gracefulness with which the Poet manages his numbers are themselves confessedly a principal source of the gratification of the Reader. All that it is necessary to say, however, upon this subject, may be effected by affirming, what few persons will deny, that, of two descriptions, either of passions, manners, or characters, each of them equally well executed, the one in prose and the other in verse, the verse will be read a hundred times where the prose is read once.*

*Having thus explained a few of my reasons for writing in verse, and why I have chosen subjects from common life, and endeavoured to bring my language near to the real language of men, if I have been too minute in pleading my own cause, I have at the same time been treating a subject of general interest; and for this reason a few words shall be added with reference solely to these particular poems, and to some defects which will probably be found in them. I am sensible that my associations must have sometimes been particular instead of general, and that, consequently, giving to things a false importance, I may have sometimes written upon unworthy subjects; but I am less apprehensive on this account, than that my language may frequently have suffered from those arbitrary connexions of feelings and ideas with particular words and phrases, from which no man can altogether protect himself. Hence I have no doubt, that, in some instances, feelings, even of the ludicrous, may be given to my Readers by expressions which appeared to me tender and pathetic. Such faulty expressions, were I convinced they were faulty at present, and that they must necessarily continue to be so, I would willingly take all reasonable pains to correct. But it is dangerous to make these*

*alterations on the simple authority of a few individuals, or even of certain classes of men; for where the understanding of an Author is not convinced, or his feelings altered, this cannot be done without great injury to himself: for his own feelings are his stay and support; and, if he set them aside in one instance, he may be induced to repeat this act till his mind shall lose all confidence in itself, and become utterly debilitated. to this it may be added, that the critic ought never to forget that he is himself exposed to the same errors as the Poet, and, perhaps, in a much greater degree: for there can be no presumption in saying of most readers, that it is not probable they will be so well acquainted with the various stages of meaning through which words have passed, or with the fickleness or stability of the relations of particular ideas to each other; and, above all, since they are so much less interested in the subject, they may decide lightly and carelessly.*

*Long as the Reader has been detained, I hope he will permit me to caution him against a mode of false criticism which has been applied to Poetry, in which the language closely resembles that of life and nature. Such verses have been triumphed over in parodies, of which Dr. Johnson's stanza is a fair specimen:—*

*'I put my hat upon my head  
And walked into the Strand,  
And there I met another man  
Whose hat was in his hand.'*

*Immediately under these lines let us place one of the most justly admired stanzas of the 'Babes in the Wood.'*

*'These pretty Babes with hand in hand  
Went wandering up and down;  
But never more they saw the Man  
Approaching from the Town.'*

*In both these stanzas the words, and the order of the words, in no respect differ from the most unimpassioned conversation. There are words in both, for example, 'the Strand,' and 'the town,' connected with none but the most familiar ideas; yet the one stanza we admit as admirable, and the other as a fair example of the superlatively contemptible. Whence arises this difference? Not from the metre, not from the language, not from the order of the words;*

*but the matter expressed in Dr. Johnson's stanza is contemptible. The proper method of treating trivial and simple verses, to which Dr. Johnson's stanza would be a fair parallelism, is not to say, this is a bad kind of poetry, or, this is not poetry; but, this wants sense; it is neither interesting in itself nor can lead to anything interesting; the images neither originate in that sane state of feeling which arises out of thought, nor can excite thought or feeling in the Reader. This is the only sensible manner of dealing with such verses. Why trouble yourself about the species till you have previously decided upon the genus? Why take pains to prove that an ape is not a Newton, when it is self-evident that he is not a man?*

*One request I must make of my reader, which is, that in judging these Poems he would decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgement of others. How common is it to hear a person say, I myself do not object to this style of composition, or this or that expression, but, to such and such classes of people it will appear mean or ludicrous! This mode of criticism, so destructive of all sound unadulterated judgement, is almost universal: let the Reader then abide, independently, by his own feelings, and, if he finds himself affected, let him not suffer such conjectures to interfere with his pleasure.*

*If an Author, by any single composition, has impressed us with respect for his talents, it is useful to consider this as affording a presumption, that on other occasions where we have been displeased, he, nevertheless, may not have written ill or absurdly; and further, to give him so much credit for this one composition as may induce us to review what has displeased us, with more care than we should otherwise have bestowed upon it. This is not only an act of justice, but, in our decisions upon poetry especially, may conduce, in a high degree, to the improvement of our own taste; for an accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, as Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, is an acquired talent, which can only be produced by thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced Reader from judging for himself (I have already said that I wish him to judge for himself), but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest, that, if Poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgement may be erroneous; and that, in many cases, it necessarily will be so.*

*Nothing would, I know, have so effectually contributed to further the end which I have in view, as to have shown of what kind the pleasure is, and how that pleasure is produced,*

*which is confessedly produced by metrical composition essentially different from that which I have here endeavoured to recommend: for the Reader will say that he has been pleased by such composition; and what more can be done for him? The power of any art is limited; and he will suspect, that, if it be proposed to furnish him with new friends, that can be only upon condition of his abandoning his old friends. Besides, as I have said, the Reader is himself conscious of the pleasure which he has received from such composition, composition to which he has peculiarly attached the endearing name of Poetry; and all men feel an habitual gratitude, and something of an honourable bigotry, for the objects which have long continued to please them: we not only wish to be pleased, but to be pleased in that particular way in which we have been accustomed to be pleased. There is in these feelings enough to resist a host of arguments; and I should be the less able to combat them successfully, as I am willing to allow, that, in order entirely to enjoy the Poetry which I am recommending, it would be necessary to give up much of what is ordinarily enjoyed. But, would my limits have permitted me to point out how this pleasure is produced, many obstacles might have been removed, and the Reader assisted in perceiving that the powers of language are not so limited as he may suppose; and that it is possible for poetry to give other enjoyments, of a purer, more lasting, and more exquisite nature. This part of the subject has not been altogether neglected, but it has not been so much my present aim to prove, that the interest excited by some other kinds of poetry is less vivid, and less worthy of the nobler powers of the mind, as to offer reasons for presuming, that if my purpose were fulfilled, a species of poetry would be produced, which is genuine poetry; in its nature well adapted to interest mankind permanently, and likewise important in the multiplicity and quality of its moral relations.*

*From what has been said, and from a perusal of the Poems, the Reader will be able clearly to perceive the object which I had in view: he will determine how far it has been attained; and, what is a much more important question, whether it be worth attaining: and upon the decision of these two questions will rest my claim to the approbation of the Public.*

*(N.B. The entire text is taken from *English Critical Texts* (Indian Edition) edited by D. J. Enright & Ernst De Chickera, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1962. The following notes, 1 and 2 are Wordsworth's own. The Preface has an Appendix, where Wordsworth carries on the discussion. We have not included the Appendix. If you are interested, you may read in easily available and inexpensive editions of the Preface available in the market).*

### Author's notes :

1. It is worthwhile here to observe, that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.
2. I here use the word 'Poetry' (though against my own judgement) as opposed to the word Prose, and synonymous with metrical composition. But much confusion has been introduced into criticism by this contradistinction of Poetry and Prose, instead of the more Philosophical one of Poetry and Matter of Fact, or Science. The only strict antithesis to Prose is Metre; nor is this, in truth, a *strict* antithesis, because lines and passages of metre so naturally occur in writing prose, that it would be scarcely possible to avoid them, even were it desirable.

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### 4.1.3 Annotations

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The *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* was published first along with a new edition of *Lyrical Ballads* brought out in 1800. In 1802, Wordsworth amplified it somewhat with a passage on 'What is a Poet?' and added an Appendix on Poetic Diction. Regarded as the most authentic expression of the ideals of the pioneers of the Romantic movement in English Poetry, the *Preface*, in which Wordsworth's collaborator in *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge, had no part at all, provoked strong protests, as much by the aggressive nature of the assertions and claims Wordsworth made for his 'experiments' in poetry, as by the illogicalities and extravagances of his theories about poetical subjects, poetic diction and the distinction between poetry and prose. The *Preface* comes in for devastating criticism at the hands of Coleridge himself— in itself an odd phenomenon. But more important still, Wordsworth seemed, in his poetical practice, even in *Lyrical Ballads*, to ignore his own theory that there was any 'essential' difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. His claim that the best part of language is derived from communion between rustic people and the world of Nature is, polemical exaggeration. The definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' clashes with the statement that poetry 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility'. But the militancy of the man in the prose defense of his poems does not detract from the poetic worth of the poems.

**a selection of the real language of men:** This passage has been commented upon by Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* Chapters XVII and XVIII. With the qualifications suggested by Wordsworth the language ceases to be the 'real' language of men.

**This exponent or symbol...:** Wordsworth refers to the way metre enhances the beauty of a passage and therefore the effect the words produce on the reader.

**the gaudiness and inane phraseology...:** Wordsworth has in mind the artificial diction employed by some poets of the late eighteenth century who, to keep the language of poetry free of the commonplace, used circumlocutions like 'finny tribe' instead of the word 'fish'.

**The principal object:** occurring in para 4, this is a revolutionary declaration, asserting his goal in the choice of subject and language.

**a certain colouring of imagination:** Wordsworth in this passage refers to the significant features of his poetry: (i) the habit of looking at objects of nature not in the customary way; (ii) the habit of drawing our attention to the essential humanity behind the appearance.

**we associate ideas in a state of excitement...:** Wordsworth and Coleridge were largely influenced by the philosopher David Hartley. It was his theory of associations that provided them with certain ideas. Hartley said, we associate certain sights and sounds with painful or pleasurable feelings. As we grow older our whole personality develops into a complex of these associations. Hartley also felt that nature was so organized that if we allowed ourselves to be conditioned by nature we shall all grow into morally perfect human beings. A knowledge of this doctrine is essential for an understanding of Wordsworth's poetry and the role of Wordsworth as a teacher.

**Humble and rustic life was generally chosen...:** This was based on the belief that the simple rustics living close to nature are the best specimens of humanity.

**The language too of these men...:** See Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter XVII. The point stated here need not however be considered absurd. All that Wordsworth means here is that the language should be in touch with life.

**the present outcry against the triviality and meanness:** Wordsworth perhaps refers to the contemporary reviewers of Southey's poetry and perhaps even of his own poetry.

**For all good poetry etc.:** Wordsworth describes what is now called the creative process or the act of poetic creation. Wordsworth does not mean that poetry is all feelings and emotions. The context makes it clear that the poet has a life experience which is largely emotional, nay, even sensational. It is lodged in the consciousness. It gets converted into art experience when in a state of calm (the event will, to borrow Wordsworth's own words, 'flash upon the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude'. It is contemplated,

and re-collected. This contemplation results in the production of an emotion which is kindred to but not the same as the original emotion. The modern critic calls this process 'distancing'; the ancient Indian aestheticians would have called the resulting emotion *rasa*. This new emotion is modified not only by thought but by other feelings and experiences lodged in the consciousness. Besides it is well organized. However, the way it gets organized and is given a shape is something mysterious in the sense that the poet is not wholly conscious of it. Perhaps Wordsworth uses 'spontaneous' in the sense that the process is at least partly unconscious. It is the faculty of creative imagination that selects, organizes and provides a perspective, endowing it (the process) with a purpose; the poet himself seems to know what he is creating (or has created) only when the poem has been brought forth.

**has a purpose:** That this is not anything conscious may be seen from the above.

The poems in the Lyrical Ballads, which he makes a general reference to, are truly Wordsworthian in that their themes are i) solitude (ii) inability to admit the notion of death (iii) the influence of nature in bringing out and developing moral sense and (iv) the stress on what human beings think and feel as human beings.

**belonging rather to nature than to manners:** 'manners' is here used in the sense of the sophistication brought in by city life and the way it acts as a kind of encrustation.

**the feelings therein developed:** Wordsworth, influenced by Hartley's philosophy, believed that our mental and emotional life is influenced by feelings. Hence in understanding the themes of Wordsworth's poems we have to get at the feeling part of the poem and not the so-called action part.

**a craving for extraordinary incidents . . . :** Wordsworth says, the craving for sensations and sensational news or incidents makes us neglect the simple joys and pleasures afforded by nature. He is probably referring to the popular gothic novels and extravagant and melodramatic German novels and tragedies which, in translated version, were very popular.

**The personifications of the abstract:** you should keep in mind that Wordsworth's assessment of the characteristics of eighteenth century poetry is rather one-sided, because he is trying to establish the superiority of his kind of poetry. For him, eighteenth century poetry is marred by—

(i) Personification as an artificial device to exalt when it is not warranted by the emotional context.

(ii) Employment of poetic diction— that is, the use of uncommon words and phrases in the belief that the real language is vulgar.

**endeavored to look steadily at my subject:** Wordsworth cared more for truth than for literary conventions.

**It may be safely:** One may note here that Gray himself believed that the language of the age can never be the language of poetry. Wordsworth thinks that there can only be two kinds of composition, scientific and imaginative. Poetry, coming under the imaginative, includes all literature.

**‘such as Angels weep.’:** *Paradise Lost*, Book I, 1. 690

**celestial ichor:** supposed to be a fluid like blood which ran in the veins of the gods. The implication in both the metaphors is that the raw materials which are processed into poetry belong very much to life.

**What is a poet? :** when Wordsworth says that the poet is a man speaking to men he makes it a point to endow him with certain special qualifications such as ‘a more lively sensibility.....’ etc. which distinguish him from other men. Also in the matter of communication he is different from the ordinary man even as the language he employs is different from the language of ordinary men. He may be using the language of real men but the words take on an additional meaning because of the form and structure of the poem into which they are fitted. The paragraph is interesting for showing us the difference in intensity between the language of the man who suffers and that of the poet who creates.

**Frontinac:** a wine from the grapes of Frontignan in France.

**Aristotle:** See *Poetics*. Chapter IX.

**carried alive into the heart by passion:** ‘felt in the blood’; coming to us as more than simple statements.

**tribunal to which it appeals:** It may be the heart that ‘watches and receives’.

**What then does the poet? :** the question is the same as what is his subject matter and Wordsworth says that the poet shall write on man, on life and human nature.

**Poetry is the breath and finer spirit...:** Wordsworth places the truth that poetry communicates higher than the truth that science gives us because the truth of poetry is felt and experienced by the whole being.

**the poet will lend his spirit to aid transfiguration:** C. Day Lewis in *The poetic Image* discusses the way the transfiguration is achieved by the poet.

**Poets do not write for poets alone, but for men:** though Wordsworth seeks to educate his readers he also remembers his responsibility as a poet: that he should constantly have in mind the common reader.

**the distinction of metre...:** Coleridge, critiquing this, in Chapter 18 of *Biographia Literaria* said that metre was only a stimulant, not enough by itself.

In this paragraph Wordsworth is still governed by Hartley's theory of association but the stress in these lines seems to be on the pleasure-principle:

Wordsworth refers to the experience of the reader when he responds.

**I put my hand:** Coleridge in his comment on the passage from the ballad 'Children in the Wood' points out that several other popular folk tales have survived in prose. The metre of the quoted ballad is not the sole reason for its popularity.

**There is in these feelings:** Wordsworth always felt 'that every great and original writer in proportion as he is great and original must himself create the taste by which he is to be relished; he must teach the art by which he is to be seen'.

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#### 4.1.4 Wordsworth's Definition of Poetry

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Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is generally considered to be the manifesto of the Romantic revolt against the rules of decorum in poetry, emphasized in neoclassical poetics. But it is strikingly interesting that a thorough critical examination discloses his modified adaptations of many a neoclassical conception commonly perceived to be abandoned. He believes that poetry must be artless, that the impressiveness of the subject as it is in nature should be enough to make a poem. And at the same time, he steadily sees poetry as a made thing, the result of craft, workmanship and "long and deep thinking". Wordsworth may be said to veer between the demands of decorum and the demands of sincerity (spontaneity). Though it is natural to think that as a romantic poet he ignores decorum and triumphs over art, actually his achievement lies in his capacity to satisfy the opposing demands of Art (or Decorum) and sincerity.

"Poetry", asserts Wordsworth in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". The definition involves a metaphor for 'overflow' implying the idea of a container which is overfilled and so overflows. The container is

the poet's mind and the things contained are his feelings. He is forced into utterance because he cannot contain his feelings within himself and so overflows on the page. This shifts the emphasis from the material which is organized into the poem to the poet himself. This way of thinking in which the poet himself becomes the major element generating both the poetic product and the criterion by which the value of the product is to be judged has been marked as the "expressive theory" by M. H. Abrams. The major criteria of value are the spontaneity and powerful involuntary expression, as opposed to the neoclassical maintenance of rules, art of expression, decorum and propriety. Thus the statement marks the divergence between the neoclassical and Romantic modes of poetry. But there is a problem. In his later theoretical writings Wordsworth advocates what may be called modified neoclassicism. Secondly, his remark is interpreted, many a time, overlooking what follows immediately: "it takes its origin from the emotion recollected in tranquility". When the act of recollection is overlooked, what remains is a literal theory of spontaneity.

Because in the *Preface* Wordsworth repeatedly talks of spontaneity, it is easily remembered. It gives expression to the dignity and prestige of the spontaneity which is the one characteristic of the age of sensibility. But the *Preface* I also emphasizes on the idea of the poet as 'maker' and on the poem as a thing 'made'. His poetic medium is the "selection of the real language of men" and this selection may include additions and deductions. When he says in the *Preface* that his "ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance", he is certainly thinking of "decorum".

Wordsworth in his early years had the belief that Art is the opposite of Nature and a failure in spontaneity is a failure in sincerity. But as he matures, he comes to realise that Art is not opposed to Nature: the demands of Art and Nature can be reconciled. In the 1815 *Preface* he lists a number of powers requisite for the production of poetry and the last, judgment, will show "how and where and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be executed". But his notion of 'judgment' turns out to be decorum, for it must determine "what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition". In 1828, he talks about the "rules of art and workmanship which must be applied to an imaginative literature". For him poetry becomes "infinitely more of an art than the world is disposed to believe". This increasing emphasis on the rules of art and craft marks his falling away from the reconciliation of sincerity and art which he had partly achieved in his youth.

In the *Preface* where he talks about the process of composition, the process has four stages: recollection, contemplation, recrudescence and composition. If a poet has to go

through these four stages, his verse can in no way be “unpremeditated” and “spontaneous”. By ‘spontaneity’ he seems to imply that a poet in his art of composition must not exercise any superficial or superfluous reworking which would become a bar to relish the presentation of humanity’s primal aspects. His objection to the ‘inane phraseology’ can be an example of what he intends to advocate through ‘spontaneity’.

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#### **4.1.5 On the language of Poetry or Poetic Diction**

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In the *Preface* Wordsworth writes against “the gaudiness and inane phraseology” of the poets who were his immediate predecessors. He is critical of the poetic practices of the age of Dryden and Pope. He refuses to continue the neo-classical tradition in the poems he wrote. In the *Preface* he states his purpose as a poet. First he is willing to choose incidents and situation from common life. Secondly, he wishes to delineate the subject-matter with the help of the language really used by men; and lastly he wishes to throw a certain colouring of imagination on the subject he chooses.

The selection of the ordinary language as the language of poetry is inspired by the Romantic doctrine of “Return to Nature.” To a Romantic like Wordsworth, the emphasis on Nature is really important. He wishes to invest the language of poetry with a pleasant familiarity. That is why, the so-called poetic diction with its cultivated artificiality may not be found in the poems included in *Lyrical Ballads*. He declares that he intends, “to bring my (his) language near to the language of man”. He tries to avoid artificial devices in his poetic style. For instance, he carefully avoids personifications, forced metaphoric expressions, superimposed similes & similar other rhetorical devices. What is needed is the avoidance of “falsehood of description” and to inculcate good sense in poetry. The purpose is to establish a communion with the readers and to invest poetry with intelligibility. Thus, for the purpose of easy understanding “the language of prose may be well adapted to poetry.” In order to substantiate his argument he further writes that there is no essential difference “between the language of prose and metrical composition.” The first reason behind the sameness of language he speaks of is that both poetry and prose address themselves to the same body of readers. Moreover, both prose and poetry borrow their basic impulses from the fundamental human feelings and emotions.

Wordsworth’s arguments on the uniformity of language in prose and poetry may be

justified specially with reference to Lamb's personal essays, and some of Wordsworth's own poems. But, as Coleridge pointed out, in order to be the proper language of poetry the ordinary language of common men needed change and selection. The 'colouring of imagination' Wordsworth will give to the language would no longer make it the 'real language' of men.

In the *Preface*, while discussing the nature of poetry and its function Wordsworth has referred to Aristotle's observation on poetry, to be found in chapter 9 of *Poetics*. Wordsworth echoes Aristotle and subscribes to his view in order to glorify the nature of poetry and to elevate the function of a poet and poetry to a philosophic height. In this context we should be cautious regarding the different definitions of poetry prevalent in the time of Aristotle and the time of Wordsworth.

According to William Wordsworth, language of poetry should be the real language of men. There should not be any gaudiness or empty phraseology in poetry. The language of poetry should not be artificially contrived; it should be true to nature. He discards the conventional form of poetic diction. He further says that he wants "to bring his language near to the language of men".

This implies that the language of poetry will not be absolutely different from the language of prose. He wants to establish that language of a good poem, except for its metre is not different from the language of a well-written prose piece. In his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* he has quoted lots of passages from the best poets including Milton to justify the truth of this assertion. He has also quoted Gray's "In vain to me the smiling mornings shine", to show that even though Gray believed that poetry should use an elaborately different language, there is actually no difference between the language of prose and language of this poem. The only difference is that there is rhyme in this poem and the word "fruitless" has been used instead of its adverbial form "fruitlessly".

Therefore, Wordsworth tells us that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential (or fundamental) difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". Both prose and poetry emerge out of the same source of the human mind. So, he says, "poetry sheds no tears such as 'Angels weep', but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both". A only rhyme and metrical

arrangements constitute a distinction between the language of prose and poetry, there is no difficulty in adopting in poetry the language really spoken by men.

Coleridge, however, does not accept the contention that language of poetry can be the real language of men. He opines that two buildings built side by side may be constructed with blocks cut into the same forms but they may be different from each other so far as the style of architecture is concerned. Similarly, words of prose and poetry may more or less be common but they are different where style of expression is concerned. For this style or mode of expression, use of words also differs in prose and poetry. It very often appears that words which are considered very appropriate in prose become very inappropriate in metrical composition and vice-versa. Arrangement of words is considered very important in metrical composition whereas these considerations are far less important even in good prose.

Every passion has its own characteristic mode of expression. If poetry is the product of passion i.e. the excited state of the feelings and faculties, it will have its own way of expression. In fact, language has no separate entity in poetry. Language, metre, feelings are fused together and produced as an organized whole which assimilates in it all its component parts and as such nothing, e.g. language, or metre or feeling can be separated, one from the other. Coleridge emphatically asserts that “there may be, is and ought to be, an essential difference between the language of prose and of metrical composition”.

Wordsworth’s overzealous assertion about the language of men in poetry came from a necessity to defend the new kind of poems he was offering and which met with a lot of critical censure. His own poems, such as ‘Immortality Ode’, ‘Tintern Abbey’, ‘Ode to Duty’, ‘Laodamia’, do not adhere to his prescription about language. They are not written in a selection of language really used by men.

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#### **4.1.6 Imagination and its Role in Poetic Creation**

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During the seventeenth century the terms imagination and fancy had often been used in a vaguely synonymous way to refer to the realm of fairy tale or make-belief. Yet in certain places imagination and fancy came to be distinguished from each other and this

is largely evident in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. This had been in harmony with the medieval and Renaissance tradition where "imagination" and fantasia had been fairly close together and in certain places fantasia was considered to be the lighter and less responsible kind of imagination. In the Age of Reason fancy suffered a decline in reputation. But it was during the eighteenth century that imagination gradually came to be considered as superior to fancy. Imagination began to assume a higher role of reference because it was associated with creative power.

An early and somewhat haphazard attempt on the part of Wordsworth to discriminate between imagination and fancy appears in a note to *The Thorn* where he says that imagination is "the faculty which produces impressive effects out of simple elements" and defines fancy as "the power by which pleasure and surprise are excited by sudden varieties of situations and by accumulated imagery."

Wordsworth's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* is not only a manifesto of romanticism, it also substantiates a notion of romantic imagination. Wordsworth considers it to be a co-relating factor which is highly important in aesthetic matters. Thus Wordsworth points out that he intends to "choose incidents and situations from common life" and his subject should be expressed through "a selection of language really used by man". But this co-relation between subjects and language is not exactly easy. He refers to the "colouring of imagination" which will present everything in its unusual aspect. It is through the proper exercise of this colouring of imagination that poetic sublimation is properly reached.

He also suggests that imagination may be considered to be an organic sensibility which allows the poets to think "long and deeply". Feelings are modified and directed by creative thoughts. There is a distinct touch of Hartleyan associationism. In the analysis of Hartley the idea of experience and consequent thoughts on the basis of memory come to work as distinctly creative functions. This theory of associationism is largely influenced by Lockean Empiricism. Thus imagination is associated with emotions which are "recollected in tranquility" and the process of recollection is a critical process that substantiates the imaginative faculty of the artist. Wordsworth formulates this process of reaction which is significantly co-related with the powers of imagination. Thus emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears and an

emotion, kindred to that which was the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and actually exists in the mind. Wordsworth considers imagination a creative faculty that modifies the poetic principle and operates through a passionate ecstasy.

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#### **4.1.7 The Vocation of the Poet**

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Coleridge expressed his uneasiness with some features of Wordsworth's ideas about poetry. In response Wordsworth added to the preface of the 1802 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* a long passage on "what is meant by the word poet? To whom does he address himself?" Wordsworth recommends not only a new style but also a new definition of 'poet' and 'poetry'. To the neoclassical critic the poet is a craftsman, though a gifted one. He observes and reproduces general nature with the help of ancient precedent and the "rules". To Wordsworth, the poet is 'a man speaking to men.' Gifted with 'a more lively sensibility', 'enthusiasm and tenderness' and 'greater knowledge of human nature', he has to his advantage a 'more comprehensive soul.' Vitality and joy in the universe move him to enthusiasm. It overflows in the form of a creative urge to be imparted to others. Not only by immediate impressions, he is almost to an equal degree affected by the memory of similar experiences stored up in his mind. Constant 'practice' along these lines confers upon him 'a great readiness and power' to express himself whenever the urge is on him, even without the immediate stimulus of external excitement.

But the poet can express only a part of 'which is uttered by men in real life.' The transcription of passions is to a certain extent mechanical. Therefore, it must fall short of the 'liveliness and truth' of 'the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering.' To overcome this difficulty the poet has to identify himself with the feelings he wishes to express. In the process he modifies the language of real men so that it can give pleasure. The modification is made on the principle of 'selection.' Driven by creative urge it will ensue spontaneously from contact with reality and truth.

Wordsworth says that the poet directs his attention to man and the objects that surround him, acting and reacting upon each other. The mind of man is "naturally the mirror of the fairest and the most interesting properties of nature." The poet's focus of interest are both external nature and human nature. Wordsworth considers the poet in terms not local but universal: "The poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire

of human society as it is spread over the whole earth and over all time.” The pleasure the poet gives is generated by expressing in concrete and sensuous terms those fundamental principles and passions, ideas and sensations that are illustrated both in the workings of nature and the mind of man.

Wordsworth affirms that the poet differs not ‘in kind’ but ‘only in degree’ from common humanity. He is more intuitive and better able to express than a non-poet. But what he expresses is the general passion and thoughts of common people connected with animal sensations, moral sentiments and the visible universe. Wordsworth believes that the poets write for the non-poets. Therefore, the metre he uses must be regular and uniform. It must not impress upon the language the arbitrariness of personal caprice as in ‘poetic diction’. Metre should conform to established laws to which both the poet and the reader willingly submit. It may here be pointed out that Wordsworth himself does not attempt any major formal experiment in the *Lyrical Ballads*. His main object is to avoid consciously artificial language. The poet relates isolated and individual experience to the sum-total of life. He, therefore, selects for his themes, life at its simplest. For general truths of man’s experiences can be found in the unalloyed passions of a humble, half-witted man, a shepherd, a leech-gatherer and an idiot boy. The idea of passion is essential in Wordsworth’s theory. It depends not on stylistic devices but on the poet’s perception.

In *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth raises certain critical issues like the use of poetic diction, definition of poetry, composition of poetry etc. The poet and his role in society are also important issues in the *Preface*. In Wordsworth’s works, the poet is a man speaking to men. He is a man endowed with a more lively sensibility, one who has a great knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul. The poet writes in order to give pleasure to human beings. The man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude. The poet sings a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our ‘visible friend and hourly companion’. The only restriction under which the poet writes is the ‘necessity of giving immediate pleasure to a human being possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a man’.

In this sense, poetry is the breath and fine spirit of all knowledge. The poet can “bind together by passion & knowledge the vast empire of human society as it is spread over

the whole earth and over all time” No difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs will obstruct his universality.

In the *Preface* Wordsworth’s focus is on the pleasure poetry gives. Later, he would shift his stand to the moral and didactic aspects of poetry. In 1807, in a letter to lady Beaumont, he says that his purpose in writing poetry is to “to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous.” But he affirms very strongly in the *Preface* that the poet, in making pleasure his goal, is not degrading poetry, but rather ‘acknowledging the beauty of the universe’.

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#### **4.1.8 The Subject-Matter of Poetry**

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In the *Preface*, Wordsworth expresses his desire to break away from the restrictions constraining 18th century poetry. He severely criticizes the artificial language some poets of the preceding generation employed. Wordsworth states that “personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes (*Lyrical Ballads*); and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose”. Instead, Wordsworth wants to emphasize and adopt the language of men, which rejects personification as a “mechanical device of style or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription”. In essence the *Preface* is Wordsworth’s poetic manifesto. The most obvious point that Wordsworth makes in it relates directly to the style and technique used in writing the poems themselves, as well as to the subject matter or focus of the poems, which relate to the common, everyday activities of rural life and folk. Wordsworth categorically states: “The principle object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way.”

It must be kept in mind that though a reader of today may find nothing unusual in the style employed throughout the *Lyrical Ballads*, the simplicity of language and the depiction of ‘common’ people, places and events used by Wordsworth, was in open

opposition to the poetic convention of his day. The fact that Wordsworth chooses for his characters men, women and children from a rural setting, as opposed to the more cosmopolitan characters of his contemporaries, leads to another important facet of his poetry which he expounds in his *Preface*. Wordsworth held a remarkably close affinity to nature. He argued that one who lives close to nature (as he himself did for most of his life residing in the English Lake District), lives closer to the well-spring of *human-nature*. Many of Wordsworth's poems are autobiographical in as far as they display a love and deep appreciation of the natural environment as experienced by the poet himself. However even more than a simple aesthetic appreciation of nature, Wordsworth believed that there was an element of the Divine to be found in nature, which held a tremendous potential to mould and even to instruct the minds of men who live in its midst and to conjure up a depth of emotional response unattainable outside of nature. In the *Preface* Wordsworth defines poetry as: "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." The element of spontaneity however, "modified and directed by our thoughts." Any subject can be treated poetically. Wordsworth noted in 1798: "It is the honourable characteristic of poetry that its materials are to be found in every subject which can interest the human mind." He states that subjects are not poetic and unpoetic in themselves. A slight incident of village life may be material for poetry, if the poet can make it meaningful. Thus Wordsworth expands the scope of poetry, by bringing within its folds themes chosen from humble and common life. We can trace in this democratisation of poetry the influence of the French revolution.

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#### **4.1.9. Summing Up**

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Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* is rightly called the manifesto of Romantic poetic aesthetics and criticism as it underscores and underlines the cardinal and fundamental propositions and principles of Romantic literary theory in a nutshell. Wordsworth has presented his views on the function and role of the poet, the use of language in poetry, the role of Imagination in poetic creativity, the subject matter of poetry, the role of the readers and has provided a definition of poetry in a cogent and coherent manner.

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### 4.1.10. Comprehension Exercises

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#### Long Questions-20 marks

1. Examine Wordsworth's views on the function and role of the poet as envisaged in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*.
2. Assess Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* as a Romantic manifesto.
3. Write an essay on Wordsworth's views on the use of language in poetry or poetic diction.
4. Comment on Wordsworth's views on Imagination.
5. What, according to Wordsworth, should be the subject-matter of poetry?
6. How do the Romantic principles of literary criticism differ from the Augustan or Neoclassical principles?

#### Mid-length Questions-12 marks

1. What is Wordsworth's opinion on the role of the reader ?
2. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".  
Analyse and discuss.
3. Comment on Wordsworth's distinction between Imagination and Fancy.

#### Short Questions-6 marks

1. What are Wordsworth's views on the use of diction in neo-classical poetry?
2. Comment on Wordsworth's opinions on Aristotle's idea of poetry.
3. What does Wordsworth say about poets and the non-poets?
4. Sum up and comment on Wordsworth's views on the use of metre in poetry.

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### 4.1.11. Suggested Reading

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1. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*. New York : W. W. Norton and Co., 1971.
2. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and The Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. London and New York : Oxford University Press, 1953.

3. S Ramaswamy & V S Seturaman, Ed, *The English Critical Tradition : An Anthology of English Literary Criticism* ( Volume I & II), Macmillan Publishers India Ltd, Kolkata, 1977.
4. D. J. Enright & Ernst De Chickera, Ed, *English Critical Texts* (Indian Edition), Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1962.
5. W. J. B. Owen, *Wordsworth & Coleridge : Lyrical Ballads 1798*. Oxford University Press, 1967.
6. John Blades, *Wordsworth & Coleridge : Lyrical Ballads*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.
7. Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism (1750-1950)*. London, Jonathan Cape, 1966.
8. David Daiches, *Critical Approaches to Literature*, London, 1956 (Indian Edition, Orient Longman) 1967
9. Wimsatt and Brooks, *Literary Criticism: A Short History Volume III*, London, Routledge Kegan Paul, 1957.

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## **Unit - 2 □ John Keats's Letters**

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### **Structure**

#### **4.2.0. Introduction**

#### **4.2.1. Introduction to Letters in the Romantic period**

#### **4.2.2. Introduction to Keats's Letters**

#### **4.2.3. Text of Keats's Letters**

#### **4.2.4. Keats's Views on Imagination**

#### **4.2.5. Keats's Views on the Function and Nature of Poetry**

#### **4.2.6. Keats's Views on the Nature of the 'Camelion' Poet**

#### **4.2.7. Summing Up**

#### **4.2.8. Comprehension Exercises**

#### **4.2.9. Suggested Reading**

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### **4.2.0. Introduction**

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After going through this unit you will be able to get an idea of the significance of the letters written by the major Romantic writers and also understand the different aspects of Keats's letters. You will be guided to identify Keats's poetic aesthetics as envisaged in his letters and be able to interpret Keats's poetry in the light of his letters.

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### **4.2.1. Introduction to the Importance of Letters in the Romantic period**

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Letter-writing had a long and varied history in the Romantic Age. Before the introduction of the postage stamp in 1840 the addressees had to pay for the postage. This arrangement promoted the exchange of occasional long letters rather than frequent short letters. It also encouraged recipients to treat letters as objects of importance to be preserved and fostered in the senders a sense of commitment in writing letters that would justify their expenses. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats and Austen wrote letters from which posterity has gained important critical insight into their personalities and literary credo.

By the late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century, a substantial literary market had emerged for the published letters of authors, in letter manuals, in collections with titles such as the letters of, or in biographies. Letter manuals had become a distinct genre even before the Renaissance. They were designed to teach those who could not afford a formal education how to write letters. By the mid-eighteenth century, these examples were often letters by poets and novelists.

Romantic correspondents inherited a certain type of self-consciousness from their eighteenth century predecessors, a self-consciousness based on the importance of the letter form in the literary marketplace. Byron loved to write highly confidential letters to his beloved lady, Lady Caroline Lamb, his half-sister Augusta and expose them to an older woman friend, Lady Melbourne. Byron's self-consciousness was exceptionally pronounced, but he was not an exception in his awareness of the public future of his letters. Charlotte Smith at one time made an attempt to publish her letters, as did Anna Seward, of course, there were other correspondents, such as Charles Lamb, who tried to prevent the preservation of letters by friends such as Coleridge because he feared publication. Similarly, Keats ensured that the love letters Fanny Brawne sent to him were buried with him in Rome, although Fanny kept and later bequeathed to her relatives the letters he sent to her.

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#### **4.2.2. Introduction to Keats's Letters**

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In the present unit we would like to demonstrate Keats's conceptions about poetry and poetic composition as he wrote about them in his letters. As you read, you will find that Keats never strove to lay down stipulated rules and regulations or evolve a synthetic approach towards poetry as other poet-critics have systematically and coherently done in their writings. Keats was a prolific letter-writer. When he wrote to his friends, relatives and correspondents, he often made illuminating and perceptive comments on the nature of poetry and poets. Unlike Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Arnold and T. S. Eliot, Keats never tried to formulate a set of fixed theoretical tenets and principles governing the nature of his writings. His observations and insightful perceptions regarding poets and poetry are sprinkled here and there in his poems and letters, and therefore, they are not as compact and well-knit as those of other poet-critics.

Keats's letters have long been regarded as an extraordinary record of poetic development. According to T. S. Eliot, Keats's letters are "the most notable and most important ever

written by any English poet.” They represent one of the most sustained reflections on the poet’s art we have from any of the major English poets. Quite apart from the light they throw on the poetry, they are great works of literature in their own right. Written with gusto and occasionally painful candour, they show a powerful intelligence struggling to come to terms with its own mortality. Sometimes bitterly jealous in love and socially and financially insecure, at others playful and confident of his own greatness, Keats interweaves his personal plight with the history of a Britain emerging from long years of the Napoleonic Wars into a world of political unrest, profound social change, and commercial expansion.

Keats wrote remarkable letters, struck fresh from a glowing mind, with no blemish of affectation or reserve. Their great value is that they give us so much authentic knowledge of the life and sensations of a man who, born to be a poet, with a tendency to dwell apart in imaginative realms of his own, was yet a very wise and alert citizen of the everyday world. To read these letters for the first time is to discover a new Keats: a witty, chatty, sensitive human being, a solicitous and loyal friend and brother, a sympathetic observer of men and the world about him, a sagely philosophic commentator on his own poetry, on questions of his art, and on some of the vexing, unsolved problems of existence. They show him, too, a lover, who, tormented with doubts and, in the end, with the certainties of unfulfilled passion, wrote a language of anguish at times almost too painful to be borne. In addition, the letters, themselves often rising to pure poetry, give continual new meaning to the poems. Whatever Keats put into verse, he was forever writing about to his friends, and many a hard passage in the poetry is made understandable through some lucid unpremeditated utterance in prose.

Keats’ letters are written in language no less lovely than his poetry, and it is in his letters that he laid out his ideas about poetry, including the famous “negative capability.” As he phrased it, it is “when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason.” In other words, prizing sensory experience over logic and reasoning—the idea that became the cornerstone of the Romantic Movement.

Keats’s letters are among the best produced by any literary figure. His major correspondents include his brothers Tom and George, his sister Fanny, his friend Benjamin Bailey, Fanny Brawne to whom the famous love letters were addressed; the writer Charles Armitage Brown, Charles Cowden Clarke, an early friend and literary

influence; Benjamin Haydon, a painter whom Keats profusely admired; and Joseph Severn, the impecunious artist who was with Keats at the time of death. Keats's letters are always energetic and engaging and they are replete with spontaneity, humour and emotion. The letters are rarely dogmatic or conclusive but rather explorative and questioning. It is, as a result, dangerous to read these letters with the aim of determining what Keats believed; no matter what opinion is selected, it is likely that a quite different, even opposing, opinion will be entertained a few pages later. Nevertheless, the letters offer a great deal of insight into the personality of John Keats and, used judiciously, some help in understanding and appreciating his work.

Keats's letters are some of the most lively and creative in the English Language, and they deserve to have a larger audience. They are notable for their readability and accessibility. Keats has addressed these letters to his friends, brothers, sisters, beloved lady, correspondents, poets, critics, literary scholars, editors and others. They have involved people of cross-sections of society and community of the Romantic era. This chorus of voices greatly enriched our sense of Keats's character and provides an illuminating contrast in epistolary styles. They also offer us a revealing glimpse of Keats's "Posthumous existence", the period of his illness in Italy. His letters are of different and varied nature. Some are intensely personal and private, others are purely impersonal and literary in value. Some letters have faithfully registered Keats's poetic aesthetics while others are deeply poignant, agonizing and riveting.

Keats in his letters tells us more about what it is like to be a poet, and more about his fundamental poetic thinking, than any other English poet has told us in such an informal and delightful way. The letters, in spite of all the excellent subsequent work of many critics and biographers, remain the best companions to the poems. Politics and contemporary events have not directly intruded in Keats's poetic aesthetics though there are sporadic references to such events in Keats's letters, written to his correspondents, brothers, sisters, friends and others.

The letters encompass varied moods and temperaments of the writer as he undergoes different critical situations in his life. The October-November letters (1817) first indicated this change in Keats's attitude. A few weeks in December and January witness a sudden animation which finds release in jest and jollity; but it is a brief interval, and the letters become increasingly serious and speculative. It is true that he still indulges in jokes, puns, and witticisms, trying to convert frustrations and doubts into mirth, but his laughter

gradually loses its earlier spontaneity. The sharp tonal shifts in Keats's letters from the gay to the serious and from the serious to the gay clearly suggest an endeavour to communicate contrary experiences, to unfold swift movements of thought. In tracing the varying moments we are struck by the author's keen responsiveness and his candour; but we also recognize the separateness of each mood. The contrariness is not dissolved, and the thought-process resembles a flow rather than a cluster.

Written over four years, the letters form the most comprehensive portrait the readers have of any English poet, Keats gives us, first, practically everything that can happen to a young man between the age of twenty one and twenty five; then, since his life was inextricably blended with his poetry, an almost day-by-day account of the working processes of a poet; and finally, some of the most profound comments on art, philosophy, and the human condition that any single person has produced. All this, it must be remembered, was dashed off to friends, publishers, and relations without the slightest premeditation, and often in conditions of extreme fatigue, anxiety, and even of actual illness. From autumn 1817 to spring 1818, Keats's friendship with two minor poets, Benjamin Bailey and John Hamilton Reynolds, led him to discuss with them at great length and in many letters, the principles of poetic composition and of aesthetic experience, and to formulate some of his most striking pronouncements about human nature and the development of personality. The second period is marked by the journal letters, written to his friends and brothers and these are replete with vivid natural description, personal oddities, chance observation, and a great deal of self-revealing introspection. The third stage characterizes the greatest year of Keats's creative writing, the autumn 1818 to autumn 1819. The death of his brother Tom and the absence of his other brother George in America, brought forth a large number of letters in which Keats accumulated the diurnal record of both his outer and his inner life. The smallest trivialities, the wildest humour, despair, rage, gossip, resentment, enjoyment, generosity, forgiveness, and appreciation mingle with philosophy, religion, politics, criticism and social comment. Finally, Keats's agonized relationship with Fanny Brawne in 1819 and 1820, intensified in one year by premonition of early death and in the other by the growing certainty of it, resulted in a series of letters and notes so painful to read that more than one later editor refused to print them.

The handwritten pages of these letters bring us closer to the nature of the poet and his

times in a way that few other documents achieve. The pressure and energy of his mind are apparent in every stroke of the pen. The enormous speed and spontaneity with which he wrote are self-evident. Certain characteristics become as familiar as the facial and verbal mannerisms of a speaker. The wild gaps in the middle of words as his hands leap from left to right give an impression of breathless intensity. Keats's letters have provided texts for innumerable essays in aesthetics and criticism. Phrases from them have become so familiar in this field, that they are often introduced into argument without mentioning their source, on the assumption that they are now commonplaces of poetic theory. 'The holiness of the heart's affections', 'the truth of imagination', the imagination compared with 'Adam's dream', 'the finer tone', 'negative capability', 'the pleasure thermometer', 'a fine excess', 'poetry that comes as naturally as the leaves to a tree', 'the Chamber of maiden thought', 'the Chameleon poet', and a myriad of pronouncements on the theme of beauty and truth, have passed into the general vocabulary of criticism and aesthetics, formed the titles of books and articles, and acquired sometimes such a pontifical solemnity that it is as well to remind oneself, by looking at them in these letters, how they first came into being, and how much they represent the active searching of his youthful but even-developing mind. Keats's letters are profoundly characterized by frank and natural epistolary style. The letters amply demonstrate the full flavour of Keats's many-sided genius.

The letters of Keats, have generally been seen as almost the ideal literary letters. As far as we are aware, Keats kept no journal though he did write long journal letters. He published little in the way of essays and prefaces that explore and justify his mode of writing. Instead, almost all of his comments on this subject appear in letters to friends. Often the letters seem like a way of working out and testing ideas. The fascination of the letters lies in the fact that in them we see Keats gathering strength and developing as a poet over a period of a few years. During this time he builds up a complex epistolary mythology about himself. Such letters about writing poetry are not the only means by which Keats creates a mythology about himself. Like a number of his contemporaries, he also chooses to send copies of his poems and letters, and, when he does so, the text of the letter acts as a prelude for, and context to, the poem. Keats is not grandiose in his letters, but that he has an instinctive understanding of how to use the letter form to create a dramatic, yet often self-deprecating, narrative is self-revelatory.

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### 4.2.3 Text of Keats's Letters

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*To Benjamin Bailey*

22 NOVEMBER 1817

*My dear Bailey,*

*I will get over the first part of this (unsaid)<sup>1</sup> Letter as soon as possible for it relates to the affair of poor Crips. To a Man of your nature such a Letter as Haydon's must have been extremely cutting - What occasions the greater part of the World's Quarrels? Simply this, two Minds meet and do not understand each other time enough to prevent any shock or surprise at the conduct of either party - As soon as I had known Haydon three days I had got enough of his character not to have been surprised at such a Letter as he has hurt you with. Nor when I knew it was it a principle with me to drop his acquaintance although with you it would have been an imperious feeling. I wish you knew all that I think about Genius and the Heart - and yet I think you are thoroughly acquainted with my innermost breast in that respect, or you could not have known me even thus long and still hold me worthy to be your dear friend. In passing however I must say of one thing that has pressed upon me lately and increased my Humility and capability of submission and that is this truth - Men of Genius are great as certain ethereal Chemicals operating on the Mass of neutral intellect - but they have not any individuality, any determined Character - I would call the top and head of those who have a proper self Men of Power.*

*But I am running my head into a Subject which I am certain I could not do justice to under five years Study and 3 vols. octavo - and moreover long to be talking about the Imagination - so my dear Bailey do not think of this unpleasant affair if possible - do not - I defy any harm to come of it - I defy. I'll shall write to Crips this Week and request him to tell me all his going on from time to time by Letter wherever I may be - it will all go on well so don't because you have suddenly discover'd a Coldness in Haydon suffer yourself to be teased. Do not my dear fellow. O I wish I was as certain of the end of all your troubles as that of your momentary start about the authenticity of the Imagination. I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's affections and the truth of Imagination - What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth<sup>2</sup> - whether it existed before or not - for I have the same idea of all our passions as of love: they are all, in their sublime, creative of essential beauty. In a word, you may know my favorite speculation by my first book, and the little song I send in*

*my last, which is a representation from the fancy of the probable mode of operating in these matters. The imagination may be compared to Adam's dream, - he awoke and found it truth. I am more zealous in this affair because I have never yet been able to perceive how anything can be known for truth by consecutive reasoning - and yet it must be. Can it be that even the greatest philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections? However it may be, O for a Life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts! It is a 'Vision in the form of Youth,' a Shadow of reality to come. And this consideration has further convinced me, - for it has come as auxiliary to another favorite Speculation of mine, - that we shall enjoy ourselves hereafter by having what we called happiness on earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. And yet such a fate can only befall those who delight in sensation, rather than hunger as you do after truth. Adam's dream will do here, and seems to be a conviction that imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human life and its spiritual repetition. But, as I was saying, the simple imaginative Mind may have its rewards in the repetition of its own silent Working coming continually on the spirit with a fine suddenness - to compare great things with small - have you never by being Surprised with an old Melody - in a delicious place - by a delicious voice, felt over again your very Speculations and Surmises at the time it first operated on your Soul - do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful than it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so - even then you were mounted on the Wings of Imagination so high - that the Prototype must be here after - that delicious face you will see. What a time! I am continually running away from the subject - sure this cannot be exactly the case with a complex Mind - one that is imaginative and at the same time careful of its fruits - who would exist partly on Sensation partly on thought - to whom it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind - such an one I consider your's and therefore it is necessary to your eternal Happiness that you not only drink this old Wine of Heaven, which I shall call the redigestion of our most ethereal Musings on Earth; but also increase in knowledge and know all things. I am glad to hear you are in a fair way for Easter - you will soon get through your unpleasant reading and then! - but the world is full of troubles and I have not much reason to think myself pester'd with many - I think Jane or Marianne has a better opinion of me than I deserve - for really and truly I do not think my Brothers illness connected with mine - you know more of the real Cause than they do nor have I any chance of being rack'd as you have been - You perhaps at one time thought there was such a thing as worldly happiness to be arrived at, at certain periods of time marked out, - you have of necessity from your disposition been thus led away - I scarcely remember counting upon any happiness - I*

*look for it if it be not in the present hour, - nothing startles me beyond the moment. The setting sun will always set me to rights, or if a sparrow come before my window, I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel. The first thing that strikes me on hearing a misfortune having befallen another is this - "Well, it cannot be helped: he will have the pleasure of trying the resources of his spirit" - and I beg now, my dear Bailey, that hereafter should you observe anything cold in me not to put it to the account of heartlessness, but abstraction - for I assure you I sometimes feel not the influence of a passion or affection during a whole week - and so long this sometimes continues, I begin to suspect myself, and the genuineness of my feelings at other times - thinking them a few barren Tragedy-tears. My Brother Tom is much improved. He is going to Devonshire whither I shall follow him. At present I am just arrived at Dorking to change the Scene, change the Air, and give me a spur to wind up my Poem, of which there are wanting 500 Lines. I should have been here a day sooner but the Reynoldses persuaded me to stop in Town to meet your friend Christie. There were Rice and Martin. We talked about Ghosts. I will have some talk Taylor and let you know when, please God, I come down at Christmas. I will find that Examiner if possible. My best regards to Gleig. My Brother' to you and Mrs. Bentley.*

*Your affectionate friend,  
John Keats*

*I want to say much more to you; a few hints will set me going  
Direct Burford Bridge near dorking*

**Note.** Keats and bailey became friends when the latter was a student at Oxford.  
**He remained a lifelong close friend and confidant**

### End Notes

1. The word is a pun on the legal use of "said", as in "the sais..." Rollins argues that this is a pun on the legal use of "said", with the "the said letter" being a letter from Haydon to Bailey and the "unsaid letter" Keats's present one to Bailey.
2. See the final two lines of Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn."
3. See *Paradise Lost*, VIII.452-490.
4. Jonathan Henry Christie (d.1876). On 16 February 1821 he mortally wounded John Scott, editor of the *London Magazine*, in a duel that resulted directly from the Cockney School reviews in *Blackwood's*. Scott died on 27 February.

## Word Notes

Christie : Jonathan Henry Christie is best known for mortally wounding John Scott in 1821, who had been the editor of the *Champion* and was later editor of the *London Magazine*, in a duel over J. G. Lockhart's Cockney School attack in *Blackwood's*. Christie was tried for murder, defended by Reynolds and Rice, and acquitted.

**Jane or Marianne**—sisters of Reynolds. my brother's illness—Tom's illness.

- In a word.....my last: Book I of *Endymion* and the "Ode to Sorrow" from Book IV included in his November 8 letter.
- The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth : Much critical discussion has been devoted to this line. Earlier interpretations posited that Keats meant that the imagination is a higher type of perception giving us access to a hidden spiritual reality, or the "unseen order of things." Later views have argued that Keats meant that moments of heightened imagination are more intensely "real" than ordinary moments, that imagination offers its own experience, and that this experience is valuable for its own sake: Imagination (dream) seizes upon Beauty (physical embodiment) yielding an intense and impassioned moment that it just as "real" as any scientifically-observed phenomena. The ideas in this letter (1817) seem to underlie Madeline's dream in "The Eve of St. Agnes" (written 1819).

## Analysis

This letter was written after Keats had left London and the quarrels among his friends to seek some peace at the Fox and Hounds, Burford Bridge, in Surrey, at the foot of Box Hill. This is one of Keats's best-known letters, exploring poetic imagination through the image of "Adam's dream." Keats's letters are always replete with wisdom and astute observations on different aspects of poetic aesthetics. In the opening part of the letter, he refers to his idea of men of genius. Keats says explicitly that men of genius lack any individuality and any determined character. This letter is remarkable as it consists of Keats's notion of Imagination in unequivocal terms. Keats points out that what Imagination captures as Beauty must be Truth and this assertion has a striking resemblance to his idea at the end of *Ode On A Grecian Urn* where the urn gives the message to humanity that whatever is beautiful is truth and vice-versa. To him, beauty and truth are same and identical. Keats's lines regarding the affinity of beauty and truth

in *Ode on a Grecian Urn* read as follows : ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’, — that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

In this letter, he alludes to John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (Book –VIII, Lines 309-11,452-90) where Adam dreams of Eve and awakes to find her beside him. Moreover, Keats’s idea of Imagination is preeminently masculine in nature as it is compared to Adam’s dream. Keats believes that a thin borderline exists between Imagination and reality. He also believes that Imagination is capable of making all things beautiful and truthful at the same time. Keats is fundamentally a poet of sensations rather than of meditations and philosophical contemplations. In this regard, he is markedly different from William Wordsworth. Because Wordsworth is a poet of deep and sublime philosophical thoughts and ideas. That Keats emphasizes the physical sensations of human life rather than its spiritual and philosophical facets is clearly evidenced in his exclamation: “O for a life of Sensations rather than of Thoughts!” The influence of Wordsworth on Keats is perceptible in a particular portion of the letter where Keats says: “it is necessary that years should bring the philosophic Mind.” It is pertinent to mention here that this statement of Keats finds an echo in Wordsworth’s poem “*Ode : Intimations of Immortality*”(1807, Lines 189-190) : “In the faith that looks through death, / In the years that bring the philosophic mind.”

This letter faithfully registers Keats’s day-to-day activities in a manner which is lively, vivacious and lucid. His poetic pronouncements are inextricably bound up with his private or personal statements. That is why, references to his brothers, sisters and other correspondents abound in this letter. At the outset of the letter, he has referred to Haydon and then towards the end, he has referred to the Reynolds sisters and their fear or apprehension that Keats has tuberculosis. During the course of the letter, he acknowledges that he and Benjamin Bailey know that he (Keats) is currently suffering from another malady, perhaps gonorrhoea. He further says that his youngest brother, Tom, is much improved and he is going to Devonshire and Keats would be following him immediately. Here he talks about other people as well. They are Christie, Rice, Martin, Gleig, Mrs Bentley and his publisher, John Taylor. He also speaks about his poem *Endymion* for which he has decided to write 500 lines. Keats’s letters are a queer mix-up of personal and impersonal matters. They are interspersed with reflective and humorous statements simultaneously.

*To George and Tom Keats*

*Hampstead, Sunday  
22 December 1817*

*My dear Brothers,*

*I must crave your pardon for not having written ere this, etc., etc. I saw Kean return to the public in Richard III, and finely he did it, and, at the request of Reynolds, I went to criticize his Luke in Riches;<sup>1</sup> the critique is in to-day's champion, which I send you, with the Examiner in which you will find very proper lamentation on the obsoletion of christmas Gambols and pastimes, but it was mixed up with so much egotism of that drivelling nature that pleasure is entirely lost. Hone the publisher's trial, you must find very amusing and as Englishmen very encouraging. His Not Guilty is a thing, which not to have been, would have dulled still more Liberty's Emblazoning. Lord Ellenborough has been paid in his own coin. Wooler and Hone have done us an essential service.<sup>2</sup> I have had two very pleasant evenings with Dilke, yesterday and today, and am at this moment just come from him, and feel in the humour to go on with this, began in the morning, and from which he came to fetch me. I spent Friday evening with Wells<sup>3</sup> and went next morning to see Death on the Pale horse. It is a wonderful picture, when West's age is considered; but there is nothing to be intense upon, no woman one feels mad to kiss, no face swelling into reality. The excellence of every Art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate, from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth. Examine King Lear, and you will find this exemplified throughout; but in this picture we have unpleasantness without any momentous depth of speculation excited, in which to bury its repulsiveness. The picture is larger than Christ rejected.<sup>4</sup> I dined with Haydon the Sunday after you left, and had a very pleasant day. I dined too (for I have been out too much lately) with Horace Smith, and met his two Brothers with Hill and Kingston, and one Du Bois.<sup>5</sup> They only served to convince me how superior humour is to wit in respect to enjoyment. These men say things which make one start, without making one feel. They are all alike. Their manners are alike; they all know fashionables. They have a mannerism in their eating and drinking, in their mere handling a Decanter. They talked of Kean and his low company. Would I were with that Company instead of yours, said I to myself! I know such like acquaintance will never do for me and yet I am going to Reynolds on wednesday. Brown and Dilke walked with me and back from the Christmas pantomime. I had not a dispute but a disquisition, with Dilke on various subjects; several things dovetailed in my*

*mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously — I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the Penetratum of mystery, from being incapable of remaining content with half-knowledge. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.*

*Shelley's poem is out, and there are words about its being objected to, as much as Queen Mab was.<sup>6</sup> Poor Shelley, I think he has his Quota of good qualities, in sooth la!! Write soon to your most sincere friend and affectionate Brother*

*(Signed) John*

#### End Notes

1. Kean played Luke Traffic in Sir James Bland Burges's *Riches : Or, The Wife and Brother, A Comedy* (1817).
2. Thomas Jonathan Wooler (1786?—1853) and William Hone (1780-1842), radical journalists and booksellers, had been tried for libel and acquitted, one on 5 June, the other on 18-20 December. Lord Ellenborough (1750—1818), lord chief justice, presided at the second and third trials.
3. Charles Jeremiah Wells (1800-1879) was a schoolfellow of Tom Keats.
4. Benjamin West (1738-1820), an American painter, was president of the Royal Academy. Both pictures mentioned are now in the Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
5. Thomas Hill (1760—1840) was a well-known book collector; John Kingstone, a comptroller of stamps; and Edward Dubois (1774—1850), a wit, a man of letters, and editor.
6. Shelley's *Laon and Cythna*, released in December 1817, was revised as *The Revolt of Islam* after his publishers, the Olliers, objected to its treatment of incest and religion. Shelley's visionary and radical *Queen Mab* (1813) had gained notice in 1817 as it had figured in the custody case over Shelley's children with Harriet Shelley.

## Word Notes

- One of Keats's most famous letters, setting forth his notion of "Negative Capability." It was written after Keats had returned to Hampstead, his brothers had left for Devon, and Reynolds had left for a Christmas holiday, with Keats writing theatrical reviews in his absence.
- Edmund Kean (1787/90—1833) was an innovative performer and the greatest tragic actor of the day. Kean had been ill but returned on December 15 to play in Richard III. Keats's review of Kean's performance of December 18 as Luke Traffic in Sir James Bland Burges's *Riches : Or, The Wife and Brother, A Comedy* (1817) ( an adaptation of Massinger's *City Madam*) appeared in the *Champion*, December 21, 1817.
- The *Examiner* . . . . is entirely lost : Hunt published his "Christmas and Other Old National Merry-Makings Considered, with Reference to the Nature of the Age, and to the Desirableness of Their Revival" in the *Examiner*, December 21, 1817.
- Edward Dubois (1774—1850), wit and literary man, was the editor of the *Monthly Mirror*.
- Penetrarium : the innermost part.
- Dilke Charles Wentworth Dilke, who became Keats's neighbour in Hampstead. He wrote literary articles and was for sometime editor of *The Athenaeum*.

## Analysis

Keats's letter to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817 is replete with references to contemporary events and incidents which are mostly literary. It is one of Keats's strategies that he always tried to interweave his theoretical speculations on poetics and artistic creation which are serious and grave with his comments on contemporary writers, artists and painters which are comparatively less grave and dignified. In the entire texture of the letter, Keats has incorporated the references to Reynolds, Luke Traffic in Sir J. B. Burges's *Riches : Or, The Wife and Brother*, Thomas Jonathan Wooler (1786?—1853) and William Hone (1780—1842) who were both radical journalists and who had been tried for libel and acquitted, one on 5th June, the other on 18-20 December; the pictures by Benjamin West who was the President of the Royal Academy, *The Champion*, *The Examiner*, the pictures titled *Death on the Pale Horse* and *Christ Rejected*. References to other people and personalities like Horatio, James, and Leonard Smith, the first two

wits and parodists; Thomas Hill, book collector; John Kingstone, civil servant; Edward Dubois, editor are found abundant in Keats's letter written to George and Tom Keats, December 21, 1817. These references and allusions are interspersed with his ideas on Negative Capability : "I had not a dispute.....all consideration."

This letter contains one of the most important of Keats's critical observations. In talking about Shakespeare with his friends, he says that the 'Man of achievement' in literature , i.e. the great writer, must possess 'negative capability'. What he means is best explained by his own words in a later letter to Woodhouse( 27 October, 2018):

"poetical character...is not itself...it has no self...it is everything and nothing...it enjoys light and shade, it lives in gusto..."

Keats understood Coleridge to be searching for a single higher truth as the key to the mysteries of the natural world or of life. In Keats's view Coleridge or Wordsworth lacked objectivity or universality. Keats's opinion implies a rejection of set philosophies. The poet's mind should be receptive to the beauties and mysteries, not seek absolute knowledge.

### **Keats's views on Negative Capability**

'Negative Capability' as formulated and conceived by Keats involves gradations of meaning and ramifications of significance such as distrust of dogma or openness of mind, receptivity to all kinds of experience, understanding of contrary points of view, skepticism and ambivalence, toleration of human frailties, humility, passivity, projection of the self into other identities, maximum receptivity with minimum involvement, freedom from the bondage of experience, deepening response to the beauty of life, amoral perception of life as a web of mingled yarn, interest in variety, contrast, particularity, empathy or self-projection, pervasive range of vision, self-effacing fidelity of expression, impersonality and ambiguity, non-attachment, total unconcern for self-interest, selfless humanitarianism, steadfast devotion to truth and goodness and revulsion from moral evil. In other words, this type of creative mind can make a positive strength out of doubt, it opposes the definite and the dogmatic in favour of paradox and uncertainties. Shakespeare's multi-faceted and protean poetic genius is the yardstick for him . Reference to Shakespeare's Christianity or multi-dimensional poetic character recurs in the letter to Leigh Hunt, 10th May, 1817. In a subsequent letter written on 4th September, 1817 to Jane and Mariane Reynolds, Keats has used a significant phrase — 'profundity of the Polygon'. Here he has spoken of a profound man as a 'many-

sided person'. This 'many-sidedness' may have both aesthetic and moral implications. Keats thinks that the artist splits his personality into different selves to receive varied impressions but 'many-sidedness' is also the very anti-thesis of vanity, dogma and selfishness — the three deadly sins which he has strongly denounced in no uncertain terms in his letters. What is uppermost in Keats's letters written to his friends and correspondents is the question of annihilating the self or more precisely the ego because the yawning ego hinders disinterested perception and action and ultimately leads to involvement and attachment in experience. In the letter written to Reynolds, 22nd November, 1817; Keats has strongly pleaded for detachment and tolerance. In the same letter, he speaks of Shakespeare's varied and all-pervasive range — 'He has left nothing to say about nothing or anything' — and also of the objectivity and impartiality which characterize Shakespeare's creative writings.

*To J. H. Reynolds,*

*3 FEBRUARY 1818  
Hampstead Tuesday*

*My dear Reynolds,*

*I thank you for your dish of Filberts — would I could get a basket of them by way of dessert every day for the sum of two pence.<sup>1</sup> Would we were a sort of ethereal Pigs and turn'd loose to feed upon spiritual Mast and Acorns, which would be merely being a squirrel and feeding upon filberts, for what is a squirrel but an airy pig, or a filbert but a sort of archangelical acorn? About the nuts being worth cracking, all I can say is that where there are a throng of delightful Images ready drawn, simplicity is the only thing. The first is the best on account of the first line, and the "arrow—foil'd of its antler'd food,"<sup>2</sup> — and moreover (and this is the only word or two I find fault with, the more because I have had so much reason to shun it as a quicksand), the last has "tender and true."<sup>3</sup> We must cut this, and not be rattlesnaked into any more of the like. It may be said that we ought to read our Contemporaries, that Wordsworth, etc. should have their due from us, but for the sake of a few fine imaginative or domestic passages, are we to be bullied into a certain Philosophy engendered in the whims of an Egotist? Every man has his speculations, but every man does not brood and peacock over them till he makes a false coinage and deceives himself. Many a man can travel to the very borne of Heaven, and yet want confidence to put down his half-seeing. Sancho will*

*invent a Journey heavenward as well as anybody. We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us — and if we do not agree, seems to put its hand into its breeches pocket. Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject. How beautiful are the retired flowers! How would they lose their beauty were they to throng into the highway crying out, "admire me, I am a violet! Dote upon me, I am a primrose!" Modern poets differ from the Elizabethans in this. Each of the moderns like an Elector of Hanover governs his petty state and knows how many straws are swept daily from the Causeways in all his dominions and has a continual itching that all the Housewives should have their coppers well scoured. The ancients were Emperors of vast Provinces; they had only heard of the remote ones and scarcely cared to visit them. I will cut all this. I will have no more of Wordsworth or Hunt in particular. Why should we be of the tribe of Manasseh, when we can wander with Esau? 4 Why should we kick against the Pricks 5 when we can walk on Roses? Why should we be owls, when we can be Eagles? Why be teased with "nice-eyed wagtails," 6 when we have in sight "the Cherub Contemplation"? 7 Why with Wordsworth's "Matthew with a bough of wilding in his hand" 8 when we can have Jacques "under an oak etc." 9 The secret of the Bough of Wilding will run through your head faster than I can write it. Old Matthew spoke to him some years ago on some nothing, and because he happens in an Evening Walk to imagine the figure of the old Man, he must stamp it down in black and white, and it is henceforth sacred. I don't mean to deny Wordsworth's grandeur and Hunt's merit, but I mean to say we need not be teased with grandeur and merit when we can have them uncontaminated and unobtrusive. Let us have the old Poets and Robin Hood. Your letter and its sonnets gave me more pleasure than will the 4th Book of Childe Harold 10 and the whole of anybody's life and opinions. In return for your dish of filberts, I have gathered a few Catkins. I hope they'll look pretty.*

*To J.H.R. In answer to his Robin Hood Sonnets.*

*"No those days are gone away etc," — See Coll: p.58 11*

*I hope you will like them; they are at least written in the Spirit of Outlawry.*

*Here are the Mermaid lines,*

*"Souls of Poets dead and gone, etc" — ib. p.61.*

*I will call on you at 4 tomorrow, and we will trudge together, for it is not the thing to be a*

*stranger in the Land of Harpsichols.<sup>12</sup> I hope also to bring you my 2nd book.<sup>13</sup> In the hope that these Scribblings will be some amusement for you this Evening, I remain copying on the Hill*

*Your sincere friend and Co-scribbler  
John Keats*

Note. John Hamilton Reynolds was an English poet and critic. Keats and Reynolds met in the house of Leigh Hunt when both were young aspiring poets. They often competed with one another in a friendly spirit.

### End Notes

1. Two sonnets by Reynolds on Robin Hood, sent to Keats by the two penny post.
2. Sonnet 1, line 5.
3. Sonnet 2, line 8.
4. Keats refers to Genesis and to Judges vi.15,vii. 23,etc.
5. Acts ix.5.xxvi.14.
6. Hunt, Foliage (1818), p. xxxiii.
7. Milton, "Il Penseroso", line 54.
8. Wordsworth, "The Two April Mornings," lines 59f.
9. As You Like It, II.i.31.
10. Byron's fourth canto was published in April 1818.
11. The copyist set down only the first lines of these two poems by Keats.
12. Archaic form of "harpsichord."
13. Of Endymion.

### Word Notes

- This letter was written after Keats received (by the two-penny post, as he notes) two sonnets (the "dish of filberts" or hazelnuts) by Reynolds on Robin Hood, "The trees in Sherwood forest are old and good" and "With coat of Lincoln green and

mantle too”, which were later printed in John Hunt’s *Yellow Dwarf*, February 21, 1818, p.64 and then in Reynolds’s *The Garden of Florence* (1821). Keats responds at the end of the letter with two poems of his own (though Woodhouse’s clerk did not copy them), “Robin Hood” and “Lines on the Mermaid Tavern”, published in his 1820 volume.

- Would we.....Mast : Pig fodder made from the fruit of the oak, beech, and other trees.
- I have.....true : Keats cites 1.5 of Reynolds’s first sonnet, “No arrow found,—foil’d of its antler’d food”; he criticizes 1.8 of the second, which Reynolds emended to “young as the dew.”
- But for the sake.....an Egotist : Keats echoes the sentiments of Hazlitt’s review of *The Excursion* in the *Examiner*, August 21 and 28, 1814, where he attacks Wordsworth’s “intense intellectual egotism” that “swallows up everything” and refuses to “share the palm with his subject.”
- Sancho : Sancho Panza, Don Quixote’s Squire in Cervantes’s novel (1605, 1615), imagines a heavenly image after being tricked to ride on a wooden horse, Clavileno (Part II, Chapter 41). The phrase “the very bourne of heaven” is taken from Keats’s stanzaic hymn to Pan in *Endymion*.

### **Analysis**

Keats opens the letter in a chatty, informal and colloquial manner which is a prominent characteristic of his letters. In a very conversational way, Keats talks about William Wordsworth and calls him an egotist who writes everything with an explicit purpose. The letter is immensely significant as it deals with one of the fundamental tenets of Keats’s poetic aesthetics. Here he clearly states that he does not think that an art should express anything in a direct, explicit and blatant way. It should not have any direct and ulterior purpose, apart from its aesthetic pleasure. He condemns the manifestation or representation of social, political, moral, economic issues in literary works. Simultaneously he believes that if any artistic work wants to serve an external objective, it should do so in an implied way.

The letter shows Keats’s love for old ballads and Elizabethan poetry with which he compares the poems of Wordsworth and Leigh Hunt, to the latter’s disparagement. He calls Wordsworth an ‘egotist’. If you read this letter together with the previous one to his brothers, you will begin to get a clear idea of what kind of poetry Keats aspired to write.

To John Taylor

27 FEBRUARY 1818

Hampstead

My dear Taylor,

Your alteration strikes me as being a great improvement; the page looks much better. And now I will attend to the Punctuations you speak of. The comma should be at soberly, and in the other passage, the Comma should follow quiet.<sup>1</sup> I am extremely indebted to you for this attention and also for your after admonitions. It is a sorry thing for me that any one should have to overcome prejudices in reading my Verses — that affects me more than any hypercriticism on any particular Passage. In *Endymion* I have most likely but moved into the Go-cart from the leading-strings. In Poetry I have a few Axioms, and you will see how far I am from their Centre. First, I think poetry should surprise by a fine excess and not by Singularity; it should strike the Reader as a wording of his own highest thoughts, and appear almost a Remembrance. Second, its touches of Beauty should never be half way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of imagery should like the sun seem natural to him, shine over him and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the Luxury of twilight. But it is easier to think what Poetry should be than to write it, and this leads me on to another axiom. That if Poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all. However it may be with me, I cannot help looking into new countries with "O for a Muse of Fire to ascend!"<sup>2</sup> If *Endymion* serves me as a Pioneer, perhaps I ought to be content. I have great reason to be content, for thank God I can read and perhaps understand Shakespeare to his depths and I have, I am sure, many friends who if I fail will attribute any change in my Life and Temper to Humbleness rather than Pride, to a cowering under the Wings of great Poets rather than to a Bitterness that I am not appreciated. I am anxious to get *Endymion* printed that I may forget it and proceed. I have copied the 3rd Book and begun the 4th. On running my Eye over the Proofs, I saw one Mistake. I will notice it presently and also any others if there be any. There should be no comma in "the raft branch down sweeping from a tall Ash top."<sup>3</sup> I have

*besides made one or two alterations and also altered the 13th Line, Page 32, to make sense of it as you will see. I will take care the Printer shall not trip up my Heels. There should be no dash after Dryope in the Line, "Dryope's lone lulling of her Child." 4 Remember me to Percy Street.*

*Your sincere and obliged friend,*

*John Keats ...*

*P.S. You shall have a short Preface in good time.*

Note. John Taylor was a well-known bookseller and publisher. He was the publisher of Keats and John Clare. He also published works of Coleridge, Lamb and Leigh Hunt. He was associated with the publication of Blackwood's Magazine.

### End Notes

1. Endymion, I.149 and 247.
2. Henry V, Prologue, line1.
3. Endymion, I. 334f.
4. Endymion. I. 495.

### Word Notes

- In this letter, written as he revised Endymion, Keats sets forth his axioms for poetry.
- O for a Muse of fire to ascend! : Shakespeare Henry V, Prologue, 1-2 : "O for a Muse of fire, that would ascend / The brightest heaven of invention."

### Analysis

In the letter to his publisher, John Taylor, Keats begins the letter in a homely and conversational tone. He expresses his thankfulness to John Taylor for his recommendations and instructions on the layout and punctuation of his poem Endymion

which is regarded to be his first major poetic work. The letter brings out the inextricable and inseparable inter-connectedness between Keats's letters and poems. Keats's letters are simultaneously a deconstruction as well as extension of his poems. The relationship between his letters and poems is complementary and supplementary.

Keats makes a delicate difference between poetry and philosophy. He thinks that poetry should not be directed towards highlighting ethical principles and tenets. Rather it should be an excellent arrangement of noble, lofty and sublime thoughts. Here Keats emphasizes the priority of form or structure over the theme of poetry. He further states that poetry will reveal sublime, beautiful and high aspects of life. The poet should always be concerned with the beautiful facets of human life.

Keats's idea of spontaneity which is one of the touchstones of Romantic literature is explicitly evidenced here. He coins an analogy from the world of trees and plants and points out that poetry should come out from the poet's heart spontaneously and effortlessly as the leaves come out from the trees. In this regard, Keats's concept of poetry bears a striking resemblance to Wordsworth's idea of poetry which proclaims that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions. The letter is replete with frequent references to Keats's poem *Endymion : A Poetic Romance* at the beginning and the ending.

*To Richard Woodhouse*

27 OCTOBER 1818

*My dear Woodhouse,*

*Your Letter gave me a great satisfaction, more on account of its friendliness than any relish of that matter in it which is accounted so acceptable in the "genus irritabile."<sup>1</sup> The best answer I can give you is in a clerk-like manner to make some observations on two principle points, which seem to point like indices into the midst of the whole pro and con about genius, and views, and achievements and ambition and coetera. 1st As to the poetical Character itself (I mean that sort of which, if I am anything, I am a Member; that sort distinguished from the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime, which is a thing per se and stands alone),<sup>2</sup> it is not itself - it has no self - it is everything and nothing - It has no character - it enjoys light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated - It has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of things any more*

*than from its taste for the bright one; because they both end in speculation. A Poet is the most unpoetical of anything in existence because he has no Identity; he is continually in for and filling some other Body. The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute. The poet has none; no identity. He is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures. If then he has no self, and if I am a Poet, where is the Wonder that I should say I would write no more? Might I not at that very instant have been cogitating on the Characters of Saturn and Ops? It is a wretched thing to confess but is a very fact that not one word I ever utter can be taken for granted as an opinion growing out of my identical nature. How can it, when I have no nature? When I am in a room with People, if I ever am free from speculating on creations of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself, but the identity of everyone in the room begins so to press upon me that I am in a very little time annihilated. Not only among Men; it would be the same in a Nursery of children. I know not whether I make myself wholly understood; I hope enough so to let you see that no despondence is to be placed on what I said that day.*

*In the second place I will speak of my views, and of the life I purpose to myself. I am ambitious of doing the world some good. If I should be spared, that may be the work of maturer years. In the interval I will assay to reach to as high a summit in Poetry as the nerve bestowed upon me will suffer. The faint conceptions I have of Poems to come brings the blood frequently into my forehead. All I hope is that I may not lose all interest in human affairs, that the solitary indifference I feel for applause even from the finest Spirits, will not blunt any acuteness of vision I may have. I do not think it will. I feel assured I should write from the mere yearning and fondness I have for the Beautiful even if my night's labours should be burnt every morning and no eye ever shine upon them. But even now I am perhaps not speaking from myself but from some character in whose soul I now live. I am sure however that this next sentence is from myself. I feel your anxiety, good opinion and friendliness in the highest degree, and am*

*Your's most sincerely*

*John Keats*

Note. Through his publishers Taylor and Hessey Keats got acquainted with their lawyer, Richard Woodhouse. He became a close friend, advising Keats on both literary and legal matters. He was convinced of Keats's genius very early on and began to collect Keats memorabilia. He was among the few who accompanied Keats to Gravesand, where he embarked on his last journey to Italy.

## End Notes

1. Horace, Epistles, II. ii.102.
2. Troilus and Cressida, I. ii., 15f., “he is a very man per se, I And stands alone.”
3. Characters in Keats’s Hyperion.

## Word Notes

- Keats’s famous rejection of the “wordsworthian or egotistical sublime” and identification of himself as the “camelion Poet” was written in response to Woodhouse’s letter of October 21, 1818 in which he complained about the Quarterly Review’s attack on Endymion, praised Keats and his poem, and defended modern poetry against Keats’s claim that “there was now nothing original to be written in poetry.”
- ‘genus irritabile’ : Horace, Epistles, 2.2 : 102, on the “irritable race” of poets.
- Which is a thing per se and stands alone : Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, 1.2.15-16 : “They say he is a very man per se [unique man] / And stands alone.”
- Iago : the villain of Shakespeare’s play Othello. He plays a decisive role in bringing about a tragic catastrophe in the relationship of Othello and Desdemona.
- Imogen : the virtuous heroine of Cymbeline, one of the late plays of Shakespeare. She was seduced or hoodwinked by Iachimo.
- In both these cases, Keats seems to recall some ideas from Hazlitt’s lecture on “Shakespeare and Milton” (Works 5 :44-68), which he heard in the spring.
- Delight in conceiving an Iago : a poet, more especially a dramatic poet, has to achieve full imaginative identity with the experience he is seeking to express. This is the quality which makes Shakespeare’s character portrayal so alive and interesting that we seem to have met these characters somewhere or other in real life.
- Characters of Saturn and Ops : characters in Keats’s epic Hyperion, on which he was working.

## Analysis

Keats’s letter to Woodhouse occupies a very significant position in the entire gallery of his letters for multiple reasons. First of all, it deals with Keats’s concept of the poetical Character or the camelion Poet. According to Keats, a great poet is bereft of any fixed

identity or self. He does not have any individuality. Rather he is capable of identifying himself with anything good or bad. He has to maintain a balance delicate between attachment and detachment. He takes equal care in creating virtuous and angelic characters like Imogen and Portia and evil characters like Iago, Iachimo, and Shylock. Keats firmly asserts that it is very difficult on the part of an artist to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable and contradictory traits but he must do it in order to demonstrate his poetic merit. Secondly, here Keats makes a distinction between the Poetical Character or the camelion Poet on the one hand and the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime on the other. He is critical of the intrusion of the self in Wordsworth's poetry and he declares that he wants to write a different kind of poetry. You should read this letter alongside the letter to his brothers on 21/27(?) December and the notes on it. He opines that Wordsworth's poetry has a tangible purpose and he does not approve of that kind of poetry. Thirdly, the letter is replete with references to Shakespeare's characters like Iago and Imogen. Keats also refers to the characters of his own epic Hyperion. Keats's interest in humanity is brought out in this letter. He is an artist who primarily supports art and artistic work on aesthetic grounds but this does not mean that he is detached from the world and its everyday affairs. In this respect, he is comparable to Shakespeare because like Shakespeare, he always maintains a non-moral attitude and he cannot be limited to a specific boundary.

*To Percy Bysshe Shelley*

16 AUGUST 1820

Hampstead

*My dear Shelley,*

*I am very much gratified that you, in a foreign country, and with a mind almost over occupied, should write to me in the strain of the Letter beside me. If I do not take advantage of your invitation, it will be prevented by a circumstance I have very much at heart to prophesy. There is no doubt that an english winter would put an end to me, and do so in a lingering hateful manner, therefore, I must either voyage or journey to Italy as a soldier marches up to a battery. My nerves at present are the worst part of me, yet they feel soothed when I think that come what extreme may, I shall not be destined to remain in one spot long enough to take a hatred of any four particular bed-posts. I am glad you take any pleasure in my poor Poem which I would willingly take the trouble to unwrite, if possible, did I care so much as*

*I have done about Reputation. I received a copy of the Cenci, as from yourself from Hunt. There is only one part of it I am judge of—the Poetry and dramatic effect—which by many spirits nowadays is considered the Mammon. A modern work it is said must have a purpose, which may be the God. An artist must serve Mammon;1 he must have “self-concentration”, selfishness perhaps. You, I am sure, will forgive me for sincerely remarking that you might curb your magnanimity and be more of an artist, and “load every rift” of your subject with ore.2 The thought of such discipline must fall like cold chains upon you, who perhaps never sat with your wings furl’d for six months together. And is not this extraordinary talk for the writer of Endymion whose mind was like a pack of scattered cards? I am pick’d up and sorted to a pip. My Imagination is a Monastery and I am its Monk. You must explain my metaphors to yourself. I am in expectation of Prometheus every day. Could I have my own wish effected you would have it still in manuscript, or be but now putting an end to the second act. I remember you advising me not to publish my first-blights, on Hampstead heath. I am returning advice upon your hands. Most of the Poems in the volume I send you 3 have been written above two years, and would never have been publish’d but from a hope of gain; so you see I am inclined enough to take your advice now. I must express once more my deep sense of your kindness, adding my sincere thanks and respects for Mrs. Shelley. In the hope of soon seeing you, I remain*

*Yours most sincerely,  
John Keats*

Note. Shelley and Keats respected one another’s talent but were very different types of personalities . This letter was a reply to Shelley’s, in which , hearing of his illness, a concerned Shelley invited Keats to stay with his family in Italy. Keats politely refused, as you read here.

The literary relationship was rather more disturbed. Shelley had advised Keats not to publish his early poems, telling him how he himself had received bad reviews from Tory reviewers. Keats thought Shelley was acting superior with him Shelley openly propagated his political ideologies, versifying whole ideologies in his poems. Keats realized that Shelley’s dream of singlehandedly changing the world was not what he

wanted to emulate. He wanted to engage sensuously with the world and searched for an organic style.

### End Notes

1. Matthew vi.24; Luke xvi.13.
2. The Faerie Queene, II. vii, 28, line5.
3. In his Autobiography Leigh Hunt wrote of Shelley's corpse that Keats's last volume of poems was found open in the jacket pocket : "He had probably been reading it, when surprised by the storm. It was my copy.... It was burnt with his remains"(III:15). Shelley drowned in the Bay of Spezia in the summer of 1822.

### Word Notes

- An artist must serve Mammon : a reference to Matthew 6.24 and Luke 16.13. Mammon represents material wealth. Here Keats means not money, but , as he puts it , 'self –concentration', by which , in the light of his other observations, he seems to mean , absorption in the poetry itself, and not making poetry a vehicle of ideology.
- I am picke'd up and sorted to a pip : arranged in order, with all the cards matched.
- You must explain my metaphcs to yourself : difficult to read perhaps an abbreviation of "metaphysics", but perhaps of "metaphor".
- I remember ..... Hampstead heath : while Shelley may have advised against the publication of Keats's Poems, Keats's publisher recalled Shelley speaking to him "about the printing of a little volume of Keats's first poems."

### Analysis

The recipient of this letter, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), poet, atheist, nobleman and exile, was an early champion of Keats's work. , Shelley believed Keats to be a natural talent led astray by mannerisms and affectation. This is a reply to Shelley's literary advice and kind offer of his home in Italy for Keats's recuperation. Shelley wrote the beautiful elegy Adonais upon Keats's death. Keats's letter is remarkable in

the sense that it consists of both literary and non-literary elements. Keats refers to his longing for literary fame or reputation, to Shelley's dramatic poem *The Cenci*, his idea of a modern work, of an artist, of Imagination etc. He talks of the bad English winter, his wish to travel to Italy, his desire to respond to Shelley's invitation to Italy, his debilitating nervous system, his thanks and respects for Mrs. Shelley etc.

This letter occupies a very significant place in Keats's galaxy of letters because it underlies some of the basic principles and tenets of his poetic aesthetics. He is critical of the view that a modern literary work must have a definite purpose. According to him, an artist must have self-concentration and selfishness, i.e. focus on his poetry and refuse to dilute it with intrusive ideology as Shelley often did. He frankly advises Shelley to curb and restrain his magnanimity, (meaning, Shelley's desire to change the world) and work towards perfecting the poetic element. Keats is a staunch critic of the opinion that an artist must have an ulterior purpose and his art should have a palpable design upon the readers. The poet should be solely concerned with the artistic and aesthetic aspects and nothing else.

Keats's observation on Imagination is noticeable in this letter. He refers to Shelley's *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound*. The expression that Keats uses in his advice to Shelley "load every rift" of your subject with ore" is derived from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Book –II, Chapter-vii, 28.5). His reference to Mammon has Miltonic echoes. The advice to Shelley implies that Shelley lacks artistic discipline and allows his ideas to run away with the necessary craftsmanship. Earlier Shelley, in a letter had talked about the 'rich profusion of details' in *Endymion* and said that readers may find it too much. Keats says that he has learnt artistic discipline since then. The phrases "I am picked up and sorted to a pip" and "my imagination is a monastery..." are both metaphorical, conveying the idea that he would not repeat the indiscreet profusion of his early poetry. In fact we can trace the course of self-discipline through Keats's later poems, until he reaches the high point of self-effacement in the ode *To Autumn*.

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#### **4.2.4. Keats's Views on Imagination**

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In his letters Keats has enunciated critical pronouncements on the role of imagination

in the creative process (Refer back to the discussion on letter to Bailey on 22 November, 1817) He always viewed it to be the supreme active principle in poetic composition. A careful analysis of his utterances from the middle of 1817 onwards shows that Keats has arrived at two significant conclusions as to the nature and function of imagination. First, the imagination as an instrument of intuitive insight is the most authentic guide to ultimate truth and second, the imagination in its highest form is a generative force, in itself creative of essential reality. In the same letter, Keats has spoken volumes of Imagination, “I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart’s affections and the truth of Imagination — What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth — Whether it existed before or not — for I have the same Idea of all our passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty”. He has further stated, “The Imagination may be compared to Adam’s dream — he awoke and found it truth”. Keats’s concept of imagination is inextricably bound up with the concept of beauty and truth. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, Keats looked upon imagination as a creative faculty which plays a pivotal role in synthesizing and unifying disparate elements in order to generate a new reality. Like other romantic theorists and critics, he has claimed an exalted position for imagination which has shaping, ordering and modifying power. In the same letter Keats has further clarified his stand on the position of imagination in the creative process by saying: “if a sparrow come before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the Gravel”. His propensity to ‘take part in the existence of a sparrow and pick about the Gravel’ has all too easily been read as a sign of his empathetic, protean creativity in which the chameleon nature of the poet takes on the identity of other things. Keats is in complete agreement with Plato’s assertion, ‘not by wisdom do poets write, but by a sort of genius and inspiration’. Like Plato, Keats has no faith in mere cold knowledge and reason. To him, poetry of any sort has its genesis in imagination, and feeling is both its rudder and its sail. In this regard, Professor Shairp’s comment is worth-mentioning: “One of the first characteristics of the genuine and healthy poetic nature is this — it is rooted rather in the heart than in the head”. Keats shares the idea that imagination emancipates the poet’s mind from the incidental and temporary, leaving it free to probe the deeper mysteries of existence. Imagination, with its springs in the heart rather than the head, though the head has also its place, becomes with Keats the highest and most authentic guide to truth. “Keats”, opines James Russell Lowell, “certainly had more of the penetrative and sympathetic imagination which belongs to the poet, of that imagination which identifies itself with

the momentary object of his contemplation, than any man of these later days". In one of his letters written to Benjamin Bailey, Keats says, "One of the most mysterious of semi-speculations is, as one would suppose, that of one mind's imagining into another".

Keats believed that the imagination of the true poet was capable not only of perceiving, but of creating essential reality. The world of sense is imperfect and incomplete: "The more we know the more inadequacy we find in the world to satisfy us". Perceptions of the essential reality can come only through the operation of the imaginative faculty. "A poet", Keats declared, "can seldom have justice done to his imagination — for men are as distinct in their conceptions of material shadowing as they are in matters of spiritual understanding : it can scarcely be conceived for Milton's blindness might here aid the magnitude of his conceptions as a bat in a large gothic vault".

Keats's letters adequately demonstrate his poetic aesthetics such as his ideas of the role of imagination in the creative procedure, poetic mode and the poetical character. Keats was aware that a perpetual dilemma persists between the human self and the creative self of a poet. Reread in this context the letter to his brothers (21/27 December, 1817) discussed above.

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#### **4.2.5. Keats's Views on the Nature and Function of Poetry**

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Keats is primarily concerned with poetry and its aesthetic quality. Unlike Wordsworth or Shelley, Keats did not explicitly express a doctrine about poetry. He believed in the autonomy of poetry and this is tangible in his poems and letters. He was one of the foremost exponents of aestheticism which was initiated in England in the late nineteenth century. He was an aesthete, a lover of beauty. Although he said to his friend Woodhouse "I am ambitious of doing the world some good" and he meant through his poetry, he did not mean to teach morality like Wordsworth or revolutionary doctrine like Shelley. For him art had an independent existence, devoid of practical concerns of life and devotion to beauty was above all considerations. In a letter to George and Tom Keats 21st December, 1817; Keats wrote: "With a great poet, the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration."

Keats thinks that art should be completely divorced from all external purposes — social, political, ethical, ideological and others. A work of art is to be valued purely for the

aesthetic pleasure it imparts and not by any reference to social, moral and ethical concerns. Repudiating the ethical ingredient in poetry in a letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3rd Feb, 1818, he says: “We hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us”. He has further written in a letter to J. H. Reynolds, 17th, 18th April, 1818: “I find that I cannot exist without poetry — without eternal poetry”. He has once again stated in a letter written to Leigh Hunt 10th May, 1817 : “I went to the Isle of Wight — thought so much about poetry so long together that I could not get to sleep at night—and moreover, I know not how it was, I could not get wholesome food”. Keats has opined that a poet is always deeply engrossed in his imaginative contemplation. He was very social and yet, paradoxically, fond of solitude. He observed in a letter to J. H. Reynolds on 24th August, 1819: “I think if I had a free and healthy and lasting organization of heart and lungs as strong as an ox’s— so as to be able [to bear] unhurt the shock of extreme thought and sensation without weariness, I could pass my life very nearly alone, though it should last eighty years”

Though Keats was averse to ‘Mawkish Popularity’, he was acutely conscious of his commitment to society and its betterment. In a letter to J.H. Reynolds on 9th April, 1818, he said: “I could not live without the love of my friends—I would jump down Aetna for any great public good” and in a letter to Bailey 10th June, 1818, he wrote how he welcomed the ‘glory of dying for a great human purpose’. The dilemma in Keats’s poetic aesthetics has been sharply expressed in the observation mentioned in a letter to John Taylor 24th April, 1818: “I have been hovering for sometime between an exquisite sense of the luxurious and a love for Philosophy — were I calculated for the former I should be glad — but as I am not I shall turn all my soul to the latter” . The letters show us that the young Keats as a theorist of poetic aesthetics was oscillating between art for art’s sake and art for society’s sake in an unpredictable manner.

You have already read the letter to John Taylor, 27th February, 1818; Keats has written: “That if poetry comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all.” Also refer back to the Reynolds letter of 3rd February, 1818: “Poetry should be great and unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one’s soul and does not startle it or amaze it with itself, but with its subjects.” His organic concept of poetry was that the

spontaneous and imaginative outpourings of the heart are always sacred and we can easily lift ourselves to the height of truth through imagination and beauty perceived in this way is inseparable from truth.

Keats has made a clear difference between ethics and aesthetics and he has a firm conviction that the yardstick for the one is not applicable in case of the other. He noted (14 February –4 May, 1819) “though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine”. From the ethical perspective, “A quarrel in the streets” is a thing to be despised or condemned but when it is considered purely from the aesthetic point of view, “the energies displayed in it are fine”. This isolation of ethics from aesthetics has contributed to Keats’s growing aestheticism which has been manifested in his poems and letters.

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#### **4.2.6. Keats’s Views on the Nature of the ‘camelion poet’**

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See the letter to Woodhouse (27 October, 1818). Keats points out that the ideal artistic character as distinguished from the Wordsworthian, which he defines as ‘the egotistical sublime, i.e. centred in the poet’s own self, has no self. “... it is everything and nothing — it has no character, it enjoys light and shade, it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated — it has as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks the virtuous philosopher delights the camelion poet”. This is one of Keats’s most daring explorations of the poetic character, particularly of the strange selfhood of which a poet like himself possessed.

Keats means to say that the poetic self has no particular identity of its own because it can adjust or adapt itself to any circumstance. It does not look down upon evil nor does it take side with the good. The view that the poet or the artist must annihilate his personal self and project himself into other identities is found in Keats’s earlier letters too. Later Keats expressed the same sentiment slightly differently: “The only means of strengthening one’s intellect is to make up one’s mind about nothing — to let the mind be a thoroughfare for all thoughts. Not a select party”. Keats stated that human life is replete with uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, no one system or formula can explain everything. What is needed is an imaginative openness of mind and heightened

receptivity to reality in its full and diverse concreteness. Keats was growing more certain of the impersonality of genius, especially in literature.

Closely related to this concept is Keats's formulation and employment of the expression 'the poetical character'. Keats alludes to the idea of the poetical character in the same letter to Woodhouse. The poetical character delights in 'gusto' — active participation in all forms of life, fair or foul — and this participation entails an elimination or erasure of the ego, of the self that evaluates experience with the yardstick of morality. Only through this ability to enter into other identities can the artist re-create unique characters — an Iago or an Imogen — and here the readers have an echo of Hazlitt's exposition of Shakespeare's genius. Hazlitt says, "Shakespeare was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself, but he was all that others were or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought.... He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it" (Lectures on Shakespeare).

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the poetical character is aesthetic detachment or self-effacing disinterestedness. Keats writes in the journal letter to George Keats, 19th March, 1819 that very few men have ever arrived at a complete disinterestedness of mind: "Very few have been influenced by a pure desire of the benefit of others.... I perceive how far I am from the humble standard of disinterestedness... I have no doubt that thousands of people never heard of have had hearts completely disinterested: I can remember but two — Socrates and Jesus — their Histories evince it". The thought of disinterestedness, of doing good to the world through self-sacrifice is recurrent in Keats's letters since September, 1817. In the letters written during 1817, his concept of disinterestedness seems to deepen and in the entire history of mankind, only Socrates and Jesus live up to his expectations. Keats was profoundly moved by their integrity, their martyrdom for a great human purpose and their concern for suffering and erring humanity. It is this concern for human suffering, gaining in urgency, that gives a new depth of focus to his concept of negative capability and deepens his understanding of Shakespeare.

The dichotomy in Keats's ideas is significant. As for the separation of the human self and the creative self, of the beautiful and the good, of art and life which is implicit in

many of Keats's pronouncements, he was chiefly influenced by William Hazlitt. According to Keats, an ideal poet is a 'chameleon', assuming each and every mood and attitude, and the distinctive mark of a many-sided genius is its elusiveness and impersonality, its disinterested perception of good and evil. The ideal poet is looked upon as a protean personality taking on every possible shape and attitude, or as a superior being looking upon the manifold aspects of life as beautiful forms. According to Keats, negative capability in another aspect can be interpreted as a unique potentiality of the artist which also involves the ideal poetical attitude to see life as a mystery, to submit to experience without reason or dogma, to remain content with half-knowledge without looking for any comfortable assurance in faith and certitude.

Keats has firm belief that in the creative act, ethical and other considerations are irrelevant because the artist is solely concerned with beauty, born of expressive adequacy, of self-effacing perception, of simultaneous attachment and detachment and this beauty is independent of both moral goodness and philosophical truth. The artist's delight is in 'conceiving' diverse character, in the comprehension of vital form in varied experiences. In Keats's view, characters like Goneril, Regan and Iago are as 'beautiful' as Cordelia, Desdemona and Imogen. Shakespeare's creative self delighted in conceiving both Iago and Imogen, even though as a person he must have been aware how evil consumes much of goodness in real life. Although Keats admired Wordsworth, he disapproved of the subjective nature of much of Wordsworth's poetry. For Keats, a personal or autobiographical approach limits the poet to his own identity, confining him to the "wordsworthian or egotistical sublime." Instead, Keats thought, the poet should be impersonal, able in fact to abandon his personal identity while in the act of writing. By being nothing himself, he can be all things, "continually . . . filling some other Body." The poet thus embraces contradictions and oppositions, and like a "chameleon," can change colours depending upon circumstance.

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#### **4.2.7. Summing Up**

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Keats's letters are regarded by the critics and poets as the keys to unlock the poetic aesthetics which have been practised in his poems. The letters which are discussed here contain his seminal ideas about poets and poetry. Keats's letters should be read in unison or conjunction with his poetry for better understanding not only of Keats's poetry

and his personality but also of the lives of his contemporary poets and events of the Romantic era.

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## **4.2.8. Comprehension Exercises**

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### **Long Questions-20 marks**

1. Consider John Keats as a literary critic with special reference to the letters in your syllabus.
2. Discuss the different aspects of Keats's poetic aesthetics as evidenced in the letters in your syllabus.
3. Write an essay on Keats's concept of the function and nature of poetry as revealed in his letters.
4. What do you learn about Keats, the man and Keats, the poet from his letters?

### **Mid-length Questions-12 marks**

1. Analyse Keats's idea of Negative Capability.
2. Comment on Keats's view of the 'camelion poet'.
3. What do the letters tell us of Keats's concept of the role of Imagination in poetic creation?
4. What do we learn of Keats's opinions about Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth from his letters?

### **Short Questions-6 marks**

1. What advice did Keats give to Shelley?
2. Give examples of a few contemporary literary or dramatic references you have come across in the letters of Keats.
3. Explain the phrase 'fine excess'.

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### 4.2.9. Suggested Reading

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Gittings, Robert. *The Letters of John Keats*, Oxford University Press, 1970.

Bradley, A.C. "The Letters of Keats" in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, Macmillan.

Cox, Jeffrey N. *Keats's Poetry & Prose*. A Norton Critical Edition, 2009.

Ridley, M.R. *Keats's Craftsmanship: A Study in Poetic Development*. Methuen & Co Ltd, London, 1964.

Murry, John Middleton. *Keats and Shakespeare: A Study of Keats's Poetic Life From 1816-1820*. Oxford University Press, London, 1925.

Wright, Paul. *The Complete Poems of John Keats*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1994.

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## **Unit-3 □ Thomas De Quincey–*Recollections of The Lake***

### ***Poets : Southey, Wordsworth And Coleridge***

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#### **Structure**

- 4.3.0. Introduction**
- 4.3.1. Life and Works of Thomas De Quincey**
- 4.3.2. Foreword to the Text**
- 4.3.3. Text**
- 4.3.4. Annotations**
- 4.3.5. Discussion and Analysis**
- 4.3.6. Summing Up**
- 4.3.7. Comprehension Exercises**
- 4.3.8. Suggested Reading**

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#### **4.3.0. Introduction**

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In this unit you will be introduced to Thomas De Quincey, who along with Lamb and Hazlitt, about whom you have read in units 1 and 2, was one of the great Romantic Essayists. Although De Quincey is best known for the essay ‘Confessions of An English Opium Eater’, the piece chosen for you also shows him to be a critic of the sharpest perceptiveness, of the most delicate subtlety. He brought to his criticism enormous reading in literature and a sharp, alert sensibility.

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#### **4.3.1. Life and Works of Thomas De Quincey**

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Thomas De Quincey (1785–1859) was born at Manchester, England, the son of a merchant of literary tastes. He was a precocious student, but, revolting from the harsh and tyrannical treatment of his schoolmaster, he ran away, and wandered about in Wales and in London, at times almost destitute. On his reconciliation with his family he was sent to Oxford, and during this period began taking opium. The rest of his life was spent mainly in the Lake Country, near Wordsworth and Coleridge, later in London,

and finally in Edinburgh and its neighbourhood. He succeeded in checking his opium addiction to some extent but could never conquer it altogether.

Most of De Quincey's writings were published in periodicals, and cover a great range of subjects. He was widely read, a man of varied interests with an intellect of extraordinary subtlety, but with a curious lack of practical ability. Though generous to recklessness in money matters, and an affectionate friend and father, his predominating intellectuality led him even in his writings to analyze the characters of his friends with a detachment that sometimes led to estrangement.

His most notable work, *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) was based on his own experiences, and it has long been considered a classic of its kind. Here, and still more in his literary and philosophical writings, he shows a remarkable clearness and precision of style, his love of exact thinking at times leading him to hair-splitting in his more abstruse discussions. In what he called the "department of impassioned prose," of which the *Recollections of The Lake Poets*, from which your text extract is taken, is one of the most magnificent examples. To the power of thought and expression he added here a gorgeousness of imagination that lifts his finest passages into the region of the sublime.

De Quincey first read the *Lyrical Ballads* when still at school. That began a lifelong admiration for Wordsworth which led him later to stay in the Lake District on and off, for a period of time. He even rented Dove Cottage in Grasmere, which had been Wordsworth's residence. This resulted in a close acquaintance with all three of the lake poets. But the publication of the candid appraisals in *Recollections* caused a rift, with Southey and Wordsworth particularly attacking him harshly.

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### 4.3.2. Foreword to the Text

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*Recollections of the Lake Poets* is a collection of biographical essays. In these essays, originally published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* between 1834 and 1840, De Quincey provided some of the earliest, best informed, and most candid accounts of the Lake Poets, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, and others in their circle. Together, the essays "form one of the most entertaining of Lakeland books." De Quincey's *Recollections of the Lake Poets* (1834-39) was written some twenty years after the period of his intimacy with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, and combines fulsomely admiring reminiscence with often seditious, malicious, or negative inferences about the less than sublime private shortcomings of the individuals concerned.

De Quincey wrote from direct personal familiarity, having known all three men during the first two decades of the nineteenth century. When he wrote about them twenty years later, De Quincey ignored the constraints and repressions typical of biography in his era, to produce realistic and nuanced portraits. He “certainly made many of his subjects live in the mind of the reader as few others of their biographers have been able to do. The racy, gossipy tone that often prevails makes these essays eminently readable; indeed, *Tait’s Magazine* never sold better than when De Quincey’s literary reminiscences were appearing in it.” De Quincey was the first person to address the problem of plagiarism in Coleridge’s works, a problem that would be ignored or neglected for a century and a half, until modern scholars addressed it in detail.

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### 4.3.3. Text

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*A circumstance which, as much as anything, expounded to every eye the characteristic distinctions between Wordsworth and Southey, and would not suffer a stranger to forget it for a moment, was the insignificant place and consideration allowed to the small book-collection of the former, contrasted with the splendid library of the latter. The two or three hundred volumes of Wordsworth occupied a little, homely, painted book-case, fixed into one of two shallow recesses, formed on each side of the fireplace by the projection of the chimney in the little sitting-room upstairs which he had already described as his half kitchen and half parlour. They were ill bound, or not bound at all—in boards, sometimes in tatters; many were imperfect as to the number of volumes, mutilated as to the number of pages; sometimes, where it seemed worth while, the defects being supplied by manuscript; sometimes not: in short, everything showed that the books were for use, and not for show; and their limited amount showed that their possessor must have independent sources of enjoyment to fill up the major part of his time. In reality, when the weather was tolerable, I believe that Wordsworth rarely resorted to his books (unless, perhaps, to some little pocket edition of a poet which accompanied him in his rambles) except in the evenings, or after he had tired himself by walking. On the other hand, Southey’s collection occupied a separate room, the largest, and every way the most agreeable in the house; and this room was styled, and not ostentatiously (for it really merited that name), the Library. The house itself, Greta Hall, stood upon a little eminence (as I have before mentioned), overhanging the river Greta. There was nothing remarkable in its internal arrangements. In all respects it was a very plain, unadorned family dwelling: large enough, by a little contrivance, to*

*accommodate two, or, in some sense, three families, viz. Mr. Southey and his family, Mr. Coleridge and his, together with Mrs. Lovell, who, when her son was with her, might be said to compose a third. Mrs. Coleridge, Mrs. Southey, and Mrs. Lovell were sisters; all having come originally from Bristol; and, as the different sets of children in this one house had each three several aunts, all the ladies, by turns, assuming that relation twice over, it was one of Southey's many amusing jests, to call the hill on which Greta Hall was placed the ant-hill. Mrs. Lovell was the widow of Mr. Robert Lovell, who had published a volume of poems, in conjunction with Southey, somewhere about the year 1797, under the signatures of Bion and Moschus. This lady, having only one son, did not require any large suite of rooms; and the less so, as her son quitted her at an early age, to pursue a professional education. The house had, therefore, been divided (not by absolute partition into two distinct apartments, but by an amicable distribution of rooms) between the two families of Mr. Coleridge and Mr. Southey; Mr. Coleridge had a separate study, which was distinguished by nothing except by an organ amongst its furniture, and by a magnificent view from its window (or windows), if that could be considered a distinction in a situation whose local necessities presented you with magnificent objects in whatever direction you might happen to turn your eyes.*

*In the morning, the two families might live apart; but they met at dinner, and in a common drawing-room; and Southey's library, in both senses of the word, was placed at the service of all the ladies alike. However, they did not intrude upon him, except in cases where they wished for a larger reception room, or a more interesting place for suggesting the topics of conversation. Interesting this room was, indeed, and in a degree not often rivalled. The library—the collection of books, I mean, which formed the most conspicuous part of its furniture within—was in all, senses a good one. The books were chiefly English, Spanish, and Portuguese; well selected, being the great cardinal classics of the three literatures; fine copies, and decorated externally with a reasonable elegance, so as to make them in harmony with the other embellishments of the room. This effect was aided by the horizontal arrangement upon brackets of many rare manuscripts—Spanish or Portuguese. Made thus gay within, this room stood in little need of attractions from without. Yet, even upon the gloomiest day of winter, the landscape from the different windows was too permanently commanding in its grandeur, too essentially independent of the seasons or the pomp of woods, to fail in fascinating the gaze of the coldest and dullest of spectators. The lake of Derwent Water in one direction, with its lovely islands—a lake about ten miles in circuit, and*

*shaped pretty much like a boy's kite; the lake of Bassinthewaite in another; the mountains of Newlands, arranging themselves like pavilions; the gorgeous confusion of Borrowdale just revealing its sublime chaos through the narrow vista of its gorge: all these objects lay in different angles to the front; whilst the sullen rear, not fully visible on this side of the house, was closed for many a league by the vast and towering masses of Skiddaw and Blencathara—mountains which are rather to be considered as frontier barriers, and chains of hilly ground, cutting the county of Cumberland into great chambers and different climates, than as insulated eminences, so vast is the area which they occupy; though there are also such separate and insulated heights, and nearly amongst the highest in the country. Southey's lot had therefore fallen, locally considered, into a goodly heritage. This grand panorama of mountain scenery, so varied, so expansive, and yet having the delightful feeling about it of a deep seclusion and dell-like sequestration from the world—a feeling which, in the midst of so expansive an area spread out below his windows, could not have been sustained by any barriers less elevated than Glaramara, Skiddaw, or (which could be also descried) "the mighty Helvellyn and Catchedicam,"—this congregation of hill and lake, so wide, and yet so prison-like in its separation from all beyond it, lay for ever under the eyes of Southey. His position locally, and, in some respects, intellectually, reminded one of Gibbon: but with great advantage in the comparison to Southey. The little town of Keswick and its adjacent lake bore something of the same relation to mighty London that Geneva and its lake may be thought to bear towards brilliant Paris. Southey, like Gibbon, was a miscellaneous scholar; he, like Gibbon, of vast historical research; he, like Gibbon, signally industrious, and patient, and elaborate in collecting the materials for his historical works. Like Gibbon, he had dedicated a life of competent ease, in a pecuniary sense, to literature; like Gibbon, he had gathered to the shores of a beautiful lake, remote from great capitals, a large, or, at least, sufficient library (in each case, I believe, the library ranged, as to numerical amount, between seven and ten thousand); and, like Gibbon, he was the most accomplished *littérateur* amongst the erudite scholars of his time, and the most of an erudite scholar amongst the accomplished *littérateurs*. After all these points of agreement known, it remains as a pure advantage on the side of Southey—a mere *lucro ponatur*—that he was a poet; and, by all men's confession, a respectable poet, brilliant in his descriptive powers, and fascinating in his narration, however much he might want of "The vision and the faculty divine."*

*It is remarkable amongst the series of parallelisms that have been or might be pursued between two men, that both had the honour of retreating from a parliamentary life; Gibbon, after some silent and inert experience of that warfare; Southey, with a prudent foresight of the ruin to his health and literary usefulness, won from the experience of his nearest friends.*

*I took leave of Southey in 1807, at the descent into the vale of Legbesthwaite, as I have already noticed. One year afterwards, I became a permanent resident in his neighbourhood; and, although, on various accounts, my intercourse with him was at no time very strict, partly from the very uncongenial constitution of my own mind, and the different direction of my studies, partly from my reluctance to levy any tax on time so precious and so fully employed, I was yet on such terms for the next ten or eleven years that I might, in a qualified sense, call myself his friend.*

*Yes! There were long years through which Southey might respect me, I him. But the years came—for I have lived too long, reader, in relation to many things! and the report of me would have been better, or more uniform at least, had I died some twenty years ago—the years came in which circumstances made me an Opium Eater; years through which a shadow as of sad eclipse sate and rested upon my faculties; years through which I was careless of all but those who lived within my inner circle, within “my hearts of hearts”; years—ah! heavenly years!—through which I lived, beloved, with thee, to thee, for thee, by thee! Ah! happy, happy years! in which I was a mere football of reproach, but in which every wind and sounding hurricane of wrath or contempt flew by like chasing enemies past some defying gates of adamant, and left me too blessed in thy smiles—angel of life!—to heed the curses or the mocking which sometimes I heard raving outside of our impregnable Eden. What any man said of me in those days, what he thought, did I ask? did I care? Then it was, or nearly then, that I ceased to see, ceased to hear of Southey; as much abstracted from all which concerned the world outside, and from the Southseys, or even the Coleridges, in its van, as though I had lived with the darlings of my heart in the centre of Canadian forests, and all men else in the centre of Hindostan.*

*But, before I part from Greta Hall and its distinguished master, one word let me say, to protect myself from the imputation of sharing in some peculiar opinions of Southey, with respect to political economy, which have been but too familiar to the world,*

*and some opinions of the world, hardly less familiar, with respect to Southey himself and his accomplishments. Probably, with respect to the first, before this paper will be made public, I shall have sufficiently vindicated my own opinions in these matters by a distinct treatment of some great questions which lie at the base of all sound political economy; above all, the radical question of value, upon which no man has ever seen the full truth except Mr. Ricardo; and, unfortunately, he had but little of the polemic skill which is required to meet the errors of his opponents. For it is noticeable that the most conspicuous of those opponents, viz. Mr. Malthus, though too much, I fear, actuated by a spirit of jealousy, and therefore likely enough to have scattered sophistry and disingenuous quibbling over the subject, had no need whatever of any further confusion for darkening and perplexing his themes than what inevitably belonged to his own most chaotic understanding. He and Say, the Frenchman, were both plagued by understandings of the same quality—having a clear vision in shallow waters, and this misleading them into the belief that they saw with equal clearness through the remote and the obscure; whereas, universally, their acuteness is like that of Hobbes—the gift of shallowness, and the result of not being subtle or profound enough to apprehend the true locus of the difficulty; and the barriers, which to them limit the view, and give to it, together with the contraction, all the distinctness and definite outline of limitation, are, in nine cases out of ten, the product of their own defective and aberrating vision, and not real barriers at all.*

*Meantime, until I write fully and deliberately upon this subject, I shall observe, simply, that all “the Lake Poets,” as they are called, were not only in error, but most presumptuously in error, upon these subjects. They were ignorant of every principle belonging to every question alike in political economy, and they were obstinately bent upon learning nothing; they were all alike too proud to acknowledge that any man knew better than they, unless it were upon some purely professional subject, or some art remote from all intellectual bearings, such as conferred no honour in its possession. Wordsworth was the least tainted with error upon political economy; and that because he rarely applied his thoughts to any question of that nature, and, in fact, despised every study of a moral or political aspect, unless it drew its materials from such revelations of truth as could be won from the *prima philosophia* of human nature approached with the poet’s eye. Coleridge was the one whom Nature and his own multifarious studies had the best qualified for thinking justly on a theme such as this; but he also was shut out from the*

*possibility of knowledge by presumption, and the habit of despising all the analytic studies of his own day—a habit for which he certainly had some warrant in the peculiar feebleness of all that has offered itself for philosophy in modern England. In particular, the religious discussions of the age, which touch inevitably at every point upon the profounder philosophy of man and his constitution, had laid bare the weakness of his own age to Coleridge's eye; and, because all was hollow and trivial in this direction, he chose to think that it was so in every other. And hence he has laid himself open to the just scoffs of persons far inferior to himself. In a foot-note in some late number of the Westminster Review, it is most truly asserted (not in these words, but to this effect) that Coleridge's "Table Talk" exhibits a superannuation of error fit only for two centuries before. And what gave peculiar point to this display of ignorance was, that Coleridge did not, like Wordsworth, dismiss political economy from his notice disdainfully, as a puerile tissue of truisms, or of falsehoods not less obvious, but actually addressed himself to the subject; fancied he had made discoveries in the science; and even promised us a systematic work on its whole compass.*

*To give a sample of this new and reformed political economy, it cannot well be necessary to trouble the reader with more than one chimera culled from those which Mr. Coleridge first brought forward in his early model of "The Friend." He there propounds, as an original hypothesis of his own, that taxation never burthens a people, or, as a mere possibility, can burthen a people simply by its amount. And why? Surely it draws from the purse of him who pays the quota a sum which it may be very difficult or even ruinous for him to pay, were it no more important in a public point of view than as so much deducted from his own unproductive expenditure, and which may happen to have even a national importance if it should chance to be deducted from the funds destined to productive industry. What is Mr. Coleridge's answer to these little objections? Why, thus: the latter case he evades entirely, apparently not adverting to it as a case in any respect distinguished from the other; and this other—how is that answered? Doubtless, says Mr. Coleridge, it may be inconvenient to John or Samuel that a sum of money, otherwise disposable for their own separate uses, should be abstracted for the purchase of bayonets, or grape-shot; but with this the public, the commonwealth, have nothing to do, any more than with the losses at a gaming-table, where A's loss is B's gain—the total funds of the nation remaining exactly the same. It is, in fact, nothing but the accidental distribution of the funds which is affected—possibly for the worse (no other*

*“worse,” however, is contemplated than shifting it into hands less deserving), but, also, by possibility, for the better; and the better and the worse may be well supposed, in the long run, to balance each other. And that this is Mr. Coleridge’s meaning cannot be doubted, upon looking into his illustrative image in support of it: he says that money raised by Government in the shape of taxes is like moisture exhaled from the earth—doubtless, for the moment injurious to the crops, but reacting abundantly for their final benefit when returning in the shape of showers. So natural, so obvious, so inevitable, by the way, is this conceit (or, to speak less harshly, this hypothesis), and so equally natural, obvious, and inevitable is the illustration from the abstraction and restoration of moisture, the exhalations and rains which affect this earth of ours, like the systole and the diastole of the heart, the flux and reflux of the ocean, that precisely the same doctrine, and precisely the same exemplification of the doctrine, is to be found in a Parliamentary speech of some orator in the famous Long Parliament about the year 1642. And to my mind it was a bitter humiliation to find, about 150 years afterwards, in a shallow French work, the famous “Compte Rendu” of the French Chancellor of the Exchequer (Comptroller of the Finances) Neckar—in that work, most humiliating it was to me, on a certain day, that I found this idle Coleridgean fantasy, not merely repeated, as it had been by scores—not merely anticipated by full twenty and two years, so that these French people had been beforehand with him, and had made Coleridge, to all appearance, their plagiarist, but also (hear it, ye gods!) answered, satisfactorily refuted, by this very feeble old sentimentalist, Neckar. Yes; positively Neckar, the slipshod old system-fancier and political driveller, had been so much above falling into the shallow snare, that he had, on sound principles, exposed its specious delusions. Coleridge, the subtlest of men in his proper walk, had brought forward, as a novel hypothesis of his own, in 1810, what Neckar, the rickety old charlatan, had scarcely condescended, in a hurried foot-note, to expose as a vulgar error and the shallowest of sophisms in 1787-88. There was another enormous blunder which Coleridge was constantly authorizing, both in his writings and his conversation. Quoting a passage from Sir James Stuart, in which he speaks of a vine-dresser as adding nothing to the public wealth, unless his labour did something more than replace his own consumption—that is, unless it reproduced it together with a profit; he asks contemptuously, whether the happiness and moral dignity that may have been exhibited in the vine-dresser’s family are to pass for nothing? And then he proceeds to abuse the economists, because they*

take no account of such important considerations. Doubtless these are invaluable elements of social grandeur, in a total estimate of those elements. But what has political economy to do with them, a science openly professing to insulate, and to treat apart from all other constituents of national well-being, those which concern the production and circulation of wealth? So far from gaining anything by enlarging its field in the way demanded by Coleridge's critic, political economy would be as idly travelling out of the limits indicated and held forth in its very name, as if logic were to teach ethics, or ethics to teach diplomacy. With respect to the Malthusian doctrine of population, it is difficult to know who was the true proprietor of the arguments urged against it sometimes by Southey, sometimes by Coleridge. Those used by Southey are chiefly to be found up and down the *Quarterly Review*. But a more elaborate attack was published by Hazlitt; and this must be supposed to speak the peculiar objections of Coleridge, for he was in the habit of charging Hazlitt with having pillaged his conversation, and occasionally garbled it throughout the whole of this book. One single argument there was, undoubtedly just, and it was one which others stumbled upon no less than Coleridge, exposing the fallacy of the supposed different laws of increase for vegetable and animal life. But, though this frail prop withdrawn took away from Mr. Malthus's theory all its scientific rigour, the main practical conclusions were still valid as respected any argument from the *Lakers*; for the strongest of these arguments that ever came to my knowledge was a mere appeal—not *ad verecundiam*, in the ordinary sense of the phrase, but *ad honestatem*, as if it were shocking to the *honestum* of Roman ethics (the *honnêteté* of French minor ethics) that the check derived from self-restraint should not be supposed amply competent to redress all the dangers from a redundant population under any certain knowledge generally diffused that such dangers existed. But these are topics which it is sufficient in this place to have noticed *currente calamo*. I was anxious, however, to protest against the probable imputation that I, because generally so intense an admirer of these men, adopted their blind and hasty reveries in political economy.

There were (and perhaps more justly I might say there are) two other notions currently received about Southey, one of which is altogether erroneous, and the other true only in a limited sense. The first is the belief that he belonged to what is known as the *Lake school* in poetry; with respect to which all that I need say in this place is involved in

*his own declaration frankly made to myself in Easedale, during the summer of 1812: that he considered Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction, and still more his principles as to the selection of subjects, and as to what constituted a poetic treatment, as founded on error. There is certainly some community of phraseology between Southey and the other Lakers, naturally arising out of their joint reverence for Scriptural language: this was a field in which they met in common: else it shows but little discernment and power of valuing the essences of things, to have classed Southey in the same school with Wordsworth and Coleridge. The other popular notion about Southey which I conceive to be expressed with much too little limitation regards his style. He has been praised, and justly, for his plain, manly, unaffected English, until the parrot echoes of other men's judgments, who adopt all they relish with undistinguishing blindness, have begun to hold him up as a great master of his own language, and a classical model of fine composition. Now, if the error were only in the degree, it would not be worth while to notice it; but the truth is, that Southey's defects in this particular power are as striking as his characteristic graces. Let a subject arise—and almost in any path there is a ready possibility that it should—in which a higher tone is required, of splendid declamation, or of impassionate fervour, and Southey's style will immediately betray its want of the loftier qualities as flagrantly as it now asserts its powers in that unpretending form which is best suited to his level character of writing and his humbler choice of themes. It is to mistake the character of Southey's mind, which is elevated but not sustained by the higher modes of enthusiasm, to think otherwise. Were a magnificent dedication required, moving with a stately and measured solemnity, and putting forward some majestic pretensions, arising out of a long and laborious life; were a pleading required against some capital abuse of the earth—war, slavery, oppression in its thousand forms; were a *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano* required; Southey's is not the mind, and, by a necessary consequence, Southey's is not the style, for carrying such purposes into full and memorable effect. His style is therefore good, because it has been suited to his themes; and those themes have hitherto been either narrative, which usually imposes a modest diction, and a modest structure of sentences, or argumentative in that class which is too overburthened with details, with replies, with interruption, and every mode of discontinuity, to allow a thought of eloquence, or of the periodic style which a perfect eloquence instinctively seeks.*

*I here close my separate notice of the Lake Poets—meaning those three who were originally so denominated—three men upon whom posterity, in every age, will look back with interest as profound as, perhaps, belongs to any other names of our era; for it happens, not unfrequently, that the personal interest in the author is not in the direct ratio of that which belongs to his works: and the character of an author better qualified to command a vast popularity for the creations of his pen is oftentimes more of a universal character, less peculiar, less fitted to stimulate the curiosity, or to sustain the sympathy of the intellectual, than the profounder and more ascetic solemnity of a Wordsworth, or the prodigal and magnificent eccentricities of a Coleridge. With respect to both of these gifted men, some interesting notices still remain in arrear; but these will more properly come forward in their natural places, as they happen to arise in after years in connexion with my own memoirs.*

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#### 4.3.4. Annotations

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**Expounded:** explained,

**Tatters:** (especially of cloth or paper) badly torn, damaged or completely spoiled

**Mutilated:** destroyed, damaged

**Rarely:** seldom

**Rambles:** long walks in the countryside

**Ostentatiously:** very obviously so that everyone would notice

**Merited:** deserved

**Greta Hall:** Greta Hall is a house in Keswick in the Lake District of England. It is best known as the home of the poets, S. T. Coleridge and Robert Southey. The house is made in late 18th century style: Front 3 storey, with quoins and plinth, centre flush-panelled double doors (Gothic top panels glazed with net tracery), Ionic door case with fluted 3/4 columns, frieze, cornice and dentilled pediment. 3 sash windows on each floor (2 to left and 1 to right on ground floor, other storey symmetrical), all 12-paned, in stone architraves. Large segmental 2-storeyed bow on right hand return side, otherwise 3 storey with a Venetian window. Left hand return side has a similar Venetian window and a half-bow. Interior has good carved oak fireplace dated 1684 in “Southey’s parlour”, flag floors and old ovens in kitchens, and main windows with fluted interior wood

cases, simple wood staircase. Coleridge lived there with his family from 24 July 1800 until 1803 and regularly visited Wordsworth in Grasmere. Robert Southey came to stay with his wife at Greta Hall in 1803 and lived there until his death in 1843. Coleridge left Greta Hall in 1804 leaving his family in the care of Southey. Greta Hall was visited by other literary figures including William Wordsworth, Dorothy Wordsworth, Lord Byron, John Keats, Charles Lamb, Mary Lamb, P. B. Shelley and Thomas De Quincey.

**Lucro ponatur:** Latin phrase meaning a plus point, a point of advantage

**Unadorned:** simple, undecorated

**Overhanging:** sticking out over something at a lower level

**Contrivance:** management, manipulation

**Conjunction:** togetherness

**Conspicuous:** distinct

**Cardinal:** important, significant

**Embellishments:** decorations

**Derwent:** There are several rivers of the name in England. The Derwent referred to here is a river in the Lake District of the county of Cumbria in the north of England. The river rises at Styhead Tarn underneath Scafell Pike and flows in a northerly direction through the valley of Borrowdale, before continuing through Derwentwater, giving the lake its name.

The Derwent then continues into Bassenthwaite Lake, picking up the waters of the River Greta just outside Keswick.

**Sublime chaos:** an example of oxymoron

**Vista:** a beautiful view

**Gorge:** a deep narrow valley with steep sides, usually formed by a river or stream cutting through hard rock

**“Blencathra and Catchedicam”** : This is a compressed quote from Sir Walter Scott’s poem *Helvellyn*. Helvellyn is a mountain in the Lake District. Catchedicam is a place close by it.

**Sullen:** melancholy, pensive, sad

**Insulated:** protected

**Lot:** destiny, luck, fortune

**Expansive:** large, vast, generous

**Seclusion:** solitude

**Sequestration:** seclusion

**Glaramara:** Glaramara is a fell in the English Lake District in Cumbria. It is a substantial fell that is part of a long ridge that stretches for over six kilometers from Stonethwaite in Borrowdale up to the important mountain pass of Esk Hause.

**Skiddaw:** a mountain in the Lake District of England. It lies just north of the town of Keswick, Cumbria, and dominates the skyline in this part of the northern lakes.

**Congregation:** gathering

**Gibbon:** Edward Gibbon was an English historian. His most important work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, was published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788. *The Decline and Fall* is known for the quality of its prose, its use of primary sources, and its open criticism of organised religion.

**Pecuniary:** relating to money

**Litterateur:** a person knowledgeable about literature; a professional writer

“The vision and the faculty divine” : a quotation from Wordsworth’s *The Excursion*

**Intercourse:** interaction, communication

**Levy:** to pay or impose tax, money to a government or organization

**Opium Eater:** Both De Quincey and Coleridge were opium eaters. Throughout his life, De Quincey suffered from stomach pains. De Quincey became addicted in 1804, when he studied at Worcester College, Oxford. He used it first to relieve acute toothache. He kept a decanter of laudanum by his elbow and steadily increased the dose. The drug was widely used to treat everything from syphilis to the common cold.

**Sad eclipse:** decline, decadence, deterioration

**Sate:** poetic use of ‘sat’

**Hurricane of wrath:** violent anger

**Contempt:** hate

**Raving:** crying in a mad way

**Impregnable:** powerful and impossible to beat, especially in sports

**Abstracted:** isolated, separated

**Hindustan:** Hindostan or Hindoostan was an old name for India, which Europeans often used. For De Quincey here, Canada, or Hindostan or India is not any specific place reference; he means that during his long bout of opium addiction, he was as completely cut off from these friends and acquaintances as if they were separated by a very long geographical distance like the one between Canada and India.

**Imputation:** allegation, accusation

**Vindicated:** strongly recommended or advocated

**Polemic:** a piece of writing or speech in which a person strongly attacks or defends a particular opinion, person, idea or set of beliefs

**Mr. Malthus:** The Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus (13 February 1766 – 29 December 1834) was an English cleric and scholar, influential in the fields of political economy and demography. His *An Essay on the Principle of Population* observed that sooner or later population will be checked by famine and disease, leading to what is known as a Malthusian catastrophe. He wrote in opposition to the popular view in 18th-century Europe that saw society as improving and in principle as perfectible. He thought that the dangers of population growth precluded progress towards a utopian society: “The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man”. Malthus believed that the increase of population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence.

**Actuated:** activated, motivated, to make somebody behave in a particular manner

**Sophistry:** the use of clever arguments to persuade people that something is really true when it is really false

**Disingenuous:** not sincere, especially when you pretend to know less about something than you really do

**Plagued:** troubled, ailed, disturbed

**Hobbes:** Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 4 December 1679), was an English philosopher, best known today for his work on political philosophy. His 1651 book *Leviathan* established the social contract theory, the foundation of Western political philosophy thought on rational grounds a champion of absolutism for the sovereign. Hobbes also developed some of the fundamentals of European liberal thought: the right of the individual; the natural equality of all men; the artificial character of the political order (which led to the later distinction between civil society and the state); the view that all legitimate

political power must be “representative” and based on the consent of the people; and a liberal interpretation of law which leaves people free to do whatever the law does not explicitly forbid.

**Apprehend:** understand

**Locus:** the exact place where something happens or which is thought to be the centre of something

**Prima philosophia;** Latin phrase, meaning First Philosophy

**Aberrating:** distorted, erroneous

**Presumptuously:** probably, possibly

**Bearings:** impacts, influences, effects

**Conferred:** endowed, bestowed

**Rarely:** seldom

**Westminster Review:** The *Westminster Review* was a quarterly British publication. Established in 1823 as the official organ of the Philosophical Radicals, it was published from 1824 to 1914. James Mill was one of the driving forces behind the liberal journal until 1828. In 1823, the paper was founded by Jeremy Bentham. The first edition of the journal featured numerous articles by James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill which, combined, served as a provocative adverse criticism of a rival, more well-established journal, the *Edinburgh Review*

**Superannuation of error:** the phrase means that the errors of Coleridge’s economic ideas were obsolete, or out of date.

**Puerile:** childish, infantile

**Truisms:** statements which are so obviously true that they are almost not worth saying

**Compass:** area of interest

**Chimera:** (in ancient Greek stories) a creature with a lion’s head, a goat’s body and a snake’s tail, that can breathe out fire. The general meaning is something untrue, illusory.

**The Friend:** This was a periodical that Coleridge wrote and published in 1809—10. It contained essays on politics, economics and other subjects, poems etc. Its high intellection proved too heavy for most readers and it could not run for long,

**Propounds:** expounds, enunciates

**Hypothesis:** assumption

**Adverting:** informal use of ‘advertising’ or ‘advertisement’

**Abstracted:** taken out

**Systole or diastole:** the part of the heart’s rhythm when the heart pumps blood

**Flux:** continuous movement and change

**Plagiarist:** a person who copies another person’s ideas, words or work and pretend that they are his own

**Driveller:** one who says silly things

**Snare:** a situation that seems attractive but is unpleasant and difficult to escape from

**Specious:** seeming right or true but actually wrong or false

**Charlatan:** a person who claims to have knowledge or skills that they donot really have

**Condescended:** to do something that you think it is below your social or professional position to do

**Sophisms:** arguments, reasoning

**Quarterly Review:** The *Quarterly Review* was a literary and political periodical founded in March 1809 by the well known London publishing house John Murray. It ceased publication in 1967. Initially, the *Quarterly* was set up primarily to counter the influence on public opinion of the Edinburgh Review. Its first editor, William Gifford, was appointed by George Canning, at the time Foreign Secretary, later Prime Minister. Under Gifford, the journal took the liberal-conservative position on matters of domestic and foreign policy, if only inconsistently. It opposed major political reforms, but it supported the gradual abolition of slavery, moderate law reform, humanitarian treatment of criminals and the insane, and the liberalizing of trade. In a series of brilliant articles, in its pages Southey advocated a progressive philosophy of social reform. Because two of his key writers, Scott and Southey, were opposed to Catholic emancipation, Gifford did not permit the journal to take a clear position on that issue.

**Hazlitt:** William Hazlitt (1778–1830) was the son of a Unitarian minister. He went to Paris in his youth with the aim of becoming a painter, but gradually convinced himself that he could not excel in this art. He then turned to journalism and literature, and came into close association with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Hunt, and others of the Romantic School. He was, however, of a sensitive and difficult temperament, and sooner or later quarreled with most of his friends. Though a worshiper of Napoleon, whose life he wrote, he was a strong liberal in politics, and supposed himself persecuted for his opinions.

**Pillaged:** stole things from a place or region, especially in a war, using violence, looted, plundered

**Garbled:** confused

**Fallacy:** fault, drawback

**Frail:** weak, feeble

**Prop:** a piece of wood or metal, etc. used to support something or keep it in position

**Rigour:** stiffness, discipline, toughness

**Amplify:** elaborately, broadly

**Competent:** efficient

**Redress:** to correct something that is unfair and wrong

**Redundant:** unnecessary, irrelevant, not needed, not useful

**Diffused:** scattered

**Adopted:** followed, pursued

**Hasty:** quick, speedy

**Reveries:** states of thinking about pleasant things, daydreams

**Notions:** ideas, opinions

**Currently:** presently

**Erroneous:** mistaken, flawed

**Declaration:** announcement

**Frankly:** candidly

**Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction:** In the *Preface* to the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth expressed his ideas of the language and subject of poetry. You may refresh your memory by re-reading Module 4 Unit 1 of this SLM

**Constituted:** formed

**Founded:** based

**Phraseology:** the particular way in which words and phrases are arranged when saying or writing something

**Arising:** coming out, emerging  
**Joint reverence:** collaborative respect  
**Scriptural language:** language found in scriptures  
**Discernment:** power of observation  
**Unaffected:** simple, unadorned  
**Fine composition:** excellent writing  
**Worthwhile:** worthy, eligible  
**Graces:** kindnesses, positive qualities  
**Declamation:** a speech or a piece of writing that strongly expresses feelings and opinions  
**Impassionate fervor:** passionate earnestness  
**Want of the loftier qualities:** deficiency of high and noble qualities  
**Flagrantly:** clearly, explicitly, and intensely  
**Unpretending form:** simple and unassuming form and style  
**Stately:** splendid, royal  
**Solemnity:** sublimity, loftiness  
**Majestic:** royal  
**Laborious:** hard-working, diligent  
**Oppression:** exploitation  
**Overburthened:** overburdened, overloaded  
**Eloquence:** good speaking, speaking with an excellent style and fluency to persuade and motivate the listeners  
**Instinctively:** emotionally, impulsively  
**Denominated:** expressed an amount of money using a particular unit or gave something a particular name or description  
**Posterity:** succeeding generations  
**Stimulate:** inspire, instigate  
**Ascetic:** related to a simple and strict way of living  
**Eccentricities:** peculiarities, strangeness

**Gifted:** talented

**Arrear:** due

**Connexion:** another spelling of ‘connection’

**Memoirs:** recollections, recapitulations

**Table talk:** *Table talk* is a literary genre, a species of memoir. A collector (biographer, colleague, friend, etc.) records impromptu comments by some famous person (made generally at the dining table or in small get-togethers), in anticipation of their lasting value. The precedent in classical literature was the symposium, such as the *Table Talk* of Plutarch, though this was a supposed memoir of an occasion, rather than a person. “Table talk” may also refer to a similar informal conversation, more deliberately engaged in by the famous person, with the direct intent of publication (somewhat analogous to granting an interview).

**The Friend:** *The Friend* was a periodical written by Coleridge in 1809 and 1810, spanning twenty-eight issues. It encompassed everything from grand rhetorical orations about politics and history and war, to anecdotes and poems and metaphysical observations. *The Friend* was not a great social success, with its impenetrability and demands on the reader, but as a literary work it is an outstanding example of Coleridge’s depth and reach.

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge:** Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was an English poet, literary critic and philosopher who, with his friend William Wordsworth, was a founder of the Romantic Movement in England and a member of the Lake Poets. He wrote the poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*, as well as the major prose work *Biographia Literaria*. His critical work, especially on Shakespeare, was highly influential, and he helped introduce German idealist philosophy to English-speaking culture. He coined many familiar words and phrases, including Suspension of disbelief. He was a major influence on Emerson, and American transcendentalism. Throughout his adult life, Coleridge suffered from crippling bouts of anxiety and depression; it has been speculated that he suffered from bipolar disorder, a condition not identified during his lifetime. He also suffered from poor physical health that may have stemmed from a bout of rheumatic fever and other

childhood illnesses. He was treated for these concerns with laudanum, which fostered a lifelong opium addiction.

**Sir James Stuart:** The reference is to an early (late 18<sup>th</sup> century) English economist of Scots descent, who wrote a comprehensive treatise on Economics. He was a supporter of Mercantile economy.

**Vine dresser:** an agriculturist who prunes and generally looks after vine trees in vineyards.

**The Lake Poets:** The Lake Poets were a group of English poets who all lived in the Lake District of England at the turn of the nineteenth century. As a group, they followed no single “school” of thought or literary practice then known. They were named, only to be uniformly disparaged, by the Edinburgh Review. They are considered part of the Romantic Movement. The three main figures of what became known as the Lake School were William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey. They were associated with several other poets and writers, including Dorothy Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and Thomas De Quincey.

**Keswick:** Keswick is an English market town and civil parish formerly part of Cumberland and since 1974 in the Borough of Allerdale in Cumbria. The town, now in the Lake District National Park, became widely known for its association with the poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Robert Southey. Together with their fellow Lake Poet William Wordsworth, based at Grasmere, 12 miles (19 km) away, they made the scenic beauty of the area widely known to readers in Britain and beyond.

**Blencathra:** Blencathra, also known as Saddleback, is one of the most northerly mountains in the English Lake District. It has six separate fell tops, of which the highest is the 868-metre (2,848 ft) Halls fell Top.

**Long Parliament:** Session called by Charles I in 1640 to pass financial bills . The members were resentful of the King’s assumption of arbitrary powers and refused to end the session. There was a contentious argument between the king’s supporters and the others which ultimately led to the English Civil War. The major clash was over the king’s right to levy taxes without the permission of the parliament The King’s party argued that taxes were ultimately used for the benefit of the realm .

**Ad honestatem:** latin phrase, meaning ‘of honesty’

**Currente calamo** : latin phrase, meaning , ‘offhand’, ‘without deep reflection’.

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### 4.3.5. Discussion and Analysis

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At the outset, De Quincey marks a meaningful difference between William Wordsworth and Robert Southey by saying that whereas Wordsworth had a small collection of books, Southey possessed a marvellous library of books. The writer, De Quincey, begins his discourse quite abruptly by making a distinction between the library of William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. His description is homely, informal and chatty. De Quincey says that Wordsworth had only two or three hundred volumes of books, spread over the little sitting room, and an upstairs room, which were considered to be his half-kitchen and half-parlour. De Quincey's sense of humour becomes evident in every detail he has provided the readers about Wordsworth. He states that most of the books possessed by Wordsworth were in a bad condition; they were primarily meant to be read and used rather than to be showed in the bookshelves. The volumes were in haphazard order. There is a mild joke at Wordsworth's limited resources of books. Wordsworth did not give too much time to his books; rather he used to indulge in other recreations. On the other hand, De Quincey is full of appreciation for Southey's collection of books. His books were arranged in a separate room in a stylish and elegant manner. He brings alive a portrait sketch of Southey the man. De Quincey gives a fairly detailed description of Greta Hall. Greta Hall was a remarkable dwelling place in the sense that it accommodated two families – the family of Coleridge and the family of Southey. Actually it was the more affluent Southey who took care of both his own and Coleridge's families and also of another widowed sister-in-law. Southey's good-natured tolerance of the family burden can be seen in his punning use of the expression 'the ant-hill' to refer to the low hill on which Greta Hall was situated. The family comprised of the children of the Southneys, the Coleridges, and of Mrs. Lovell, and as Mrs. Southey, Mrs. Coleridge and Mrs. Lovell were sisters, all the children had several aunts living with them. Greta Hall was divided into two apartments between Coleridge and Southey. The partition of Coleridge was distinguished by a study room where he could have a magnificent view of the landscape as well as the sky.

Quincey points out that the library of Southey was well-decorated and embellished, keeping in harmony with the over-all elegance of the room. The books in Southey's library were primarily English, Spanish and Portuguese and they constitute the classics

of three literatures. The classics were supplemented by many rare manuscripts of Spanish and Portuguese literature. According to De Quincey, the room was designed in such a manner that it could attract any spectator.

De Quincey does not merely give us the interior of Greta Hall. His gift for terse but vivid description brings alive the beautiful outside scene of the Lake district, with references to its falls, rivers, hills such as Derwent Lake, Glaramara, Skiddaw, Keswick etc. His description makes us realize why the Romantic poets found the rugged beauty of the Lakes so fascinating.

De Quincey has tried to give a fuller account of his friendship with Southey. From 1808, he started living as a neighbour of Southey and he struck a close friendship with him. There was reciprocal respect between them. But his growing opium addiction made him lose his health and genial spirit. He pays a tribute to his friends and also criticises them in this essay. For example, he compares Southey and Gibbon, eloquently appreciating the erudition, descriptive powers, narrative skills of both. Like Gibbon, Southey was an accomplished writer and scholar. He was also a Member of Parliament like Gibbon. But, according to De Quincey, Southey, being an acknowledged major poet, had an advantage over Gibbon, meaning possibly, that for Gibbon, writing history, scholarship couched in good prose style was enough, but Southey the poet had to have creative imagination.

The essay can be broadly subdivided into three parts: in the first, which we have been discussing so far, De Quincey gives us personal glimpses and views of the poets. In the second part, which is more erudite, he enters into a controversial economic discussion. In the third part, he engages in a literary discussion on the lake poets. You may initially find the references to Thomas Hobbes, Malthus, Ricardo etc. a little frightening. But we think a basic idea of what De Quincey is discussing here will give you a more comprehensive view of the Romantic poets, reminding you that they were not ivory tower poets, but instead, deeply engaged in the problems of contemporary society.

We would like you to recollect what you have already read in Module 1, Unit 1 of Paper V of your SLM regarding the historical background of the Romantic Movement. The two major happenings which framed the socio-political backdrop of the Romantic Movement were, the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars that followed on the one hand, and the Industrial Revolution on the other. These were seminal in changing the socio-economic structure of Europe in general and England in particular.

In paragraphs 5 to 7 in the extract selected for your study De Quincey takes up the arguments of major political economists, gives his reasons for accepting and supporting the ideas of David Ricardo on rent and the Malthusian view of population, briefly glances at the Malthus- Ricardo controversy, and stringently criticises Coleridge's economic opinions as found in some articles in *The Friend* and also, according to him were echoed and sometimes garbled by Hazlitt in his essays. Southey is likewise criticised for the economic ideas he sometimes discussed in *The Quarterly Review*.

**The discussion of political economy:**

The most powerful political class in England were the landowners. Since they constituted the majority in parliament, the laws were usually passed in their interest. But the emergent middle class, earning money from trade and manufacturing had a different set of priorities. The major focus of the controversy were the Corn Laws. These were restrictions imposed by the government on imported foodgrain. Heavy tariff was levied on imported grain to protect domestic product. The landowners made high profit from the resultant high food price. The manufacturers and workers were unhappy. If food was expensive, workers had to be paid higher wages for the subsistence of their families, which meant less profit for factory owners. Also, their products became less competitive in the international market. Later, under pressure from the Anti- Corn Law League, made up of Whig middle class manufacturers and traders, the Corn Laws were repealed. This gave a boost to Free Market trade and commerce.

David Ricardo, an English political economist, was a supporter of free trade and free competition without any economic restriction imposed by governments. He was opposed to any tariff on international trade. Ricardo was responsible for developing theories of rent, wages and profit. He defined rent as 'the difference between the produce obtained by the employment of two equal quantities of capital and labour.' The portion of purely individual benefit that accrues to resources such as land or gold, over and above any socially beneficial exchange, Ricardo labels 'rent'. According to Ricardo, rent costs gobble up profits as population increases. Since profits lead to reinvestments and thus growth, rising costs indirectly prevent economic progress. In Ricardo's model the interests of landowners directly oppose those of society in general. So Ricardo campaigned against the Corn Laws.

Malthus, better known for his theory of population, criticised Ricardo's view on rent. He said, Ricardo was ignoring Say's Law that all savings by definition equal investments. Malthus suggested that rent, however misplaced, constitutes a prime source of savings and investment for the future. The debate developed over the concept of a general glut and the possibility of failure of Say's Law. Malthus laid stress on economic development and persistence of disequilibrium. Ricardo's views on political economy were less restricted, less theoretical and more focussed on the actual problems of the times.

In economic theory equilibrium occurs when the economic forces of supply and demand are perfectly balanced, i.e. quantity demanded and quantity supplied are matched. Disequilibrium occurs when this equilibrium is disturbed. Say's Law, named after the French economist Jean Baptiste Say, is the law of markets in classical economy. This theory holds that aggregate production creates an equal quantity of aggregate demand. So 'general glut' i.e. widespread excess of supply over demand cannot happen.

Jaques Necker, swiss-born banker, became the director-general of finances in France under Louis XVI, in the years preceding the French Revolution. He tried to improve the disastrous state of French finances by taking several measures. He tried to divide the capitation tax more equally, abolished the income tax called the vingtieme d'industrie. He wanted to collect government revenue by introducing high rates of interest rather than by raising taxes. His most important work, which De Quincey refers to here, was the *Compte rendu au roi*, a statement of the king's or the government's income and expenditure.

De Quincey's political sympathies were towards the right. The romantic poets, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey, as you know by now, were ardent champions of revolutionary ideals in their young days. With maturity they had certainly grown more conservative in their political opinions. But all of them, including even Southey, a strong Tory supporter, retained a groundswell of sympathy for the poorer classes, and were by and large against the industrialists and manufacturers. Southey spoke out against the first Reform Bill which began the process of devolution of power from the landowning class to the emerging middle class.

Although De Quincey wrote a book on Political Economy, he was not interested in the practical problems of economics—i.e. progress or the state of society. He was attracted

by the principles of political economy. He admired Ricardo because according to him, Ricardo's principles of political economy focused on 'core concepts', —on value, on rent, on wages, profits 'foreign trade, sudden changes in trade , accumulation , colonial trade, banks machinery etc. In his treatise on political economy De Quincey always uses fictional or historical examples, whereas an economist would use actual examples from contemporary life. Unlike contemporary economists or the Utilitarian philosophers he had little interest in the link between economy and social reform. Coleridge , in his later prose writings , for example the *Lay Sermons* , shows a deep humanitarian concern with the state of contemporary society. In the wake of the Napoleonic wars England was in a bad economic condition. Inflation, slump, bank failures, bankruptcies were rife. Naturally the poor , both the agricultural labourers and the new industrial workers bore the brunt of the miseries. Joblessness led to hunger, growing misery led to mass riots which led to repressive government measures.

The views Coleridge expressed show an uncanny understanding of the basic problems of capitalist economy—of the trade cycles (good trade characterized by prosperity and low unemployment followed by slump and high unemployment). He thought economy should benefit large sections of society and not merely a few of the propertied or manufacturing classes. He advocated social and political reforms as means of maintaining a stable and cohesive society and warned against unchecked industrialization. He criticised the prevailing ideology of free market. De Quincey was a supporter of the free market so he trashes Coleridge's ideas.

Neither Coleridge nor De Quincey were economists or well versed in economic theories. It becomes obvious that De Quincey argues from the viewpoint of abstract theories so he is against mixing what he calls 'ethics' with economics. Coleridge wrote from a broad humanitarian point of view. That is why, Coleridge spoke in favour of the taxes which benefited the agrarian labourer, and De Quincey opposes taxes because the abolition would benefit industry.

Southey, in the essays in which he took up economic issues reflects the Coleridgean point of view. In critiquing Malthus he expresses the central romantic contention about the falsity of Malthus's arguments. He wrote that poverty was not the product of nature but of social arrangements All checks to population till the power of production can be

pushed no further, and actual room for further increase be wanting, must be attributed to error and ignorance in man, not to unerring nature and omniscient goodness. Southey warns that if Malthus's ideas were taken up, the poor would be left to starve. Where the social compact of a community is broken, the poor and dispossessed will have resort to the right of the strongest, i.e. become violent.

Hazlitt, inspired early in life by his father, a minister of the Unitarian church, and later by Coleridge and William Cobbett, the farmer turned journalist and radical reformer, expressed anti- utilitarian and anti- Malthus opinions in his essays. His early essay 'Principles of Human Action' contained his core beliefs. He took up the ideas in his 'Spirit of the Age'. His basic anti- utilitarian idea is that disinterested behavior is inherent in humans, both individually and socially. He rebutted Malthusian a number of essays, repeating that it was political organisation, not nature, that limited population size and there were still large tracts of uninhabited land in the world. He suggested that Malthus was a sycophant of the Rich and failed in his basic calling of a clergyman (Malthus was a minister of the church) to see in the increase of human population a corresponding increase in the quantum of human good dispensed by God.

You can see that the basic controversy was over the perceived needs of Industrial Capitalism in its early stages and a defence mounted against it by the major Romantic poets of the first generation. The controversy would be carried on by the next generation Romantics and into the Victorian period by the essayists like Carlyle and Ruskin.

The issue which caused a permanent rift between the Lake poets and De Quincey, was possibly his candid critical assessment of their literary achievement, rather than a divergence of economic views. You will find here, in this extract, only his opinions about the style of Southey. It is quite unflattering. We are not surprised that Southey called him "a calumniator, cowardly spy, traitor, base betrayer of the hospitable social hearth" and "one of the greatest scoundrels living!"

Robert Southey's reputation has suffered in comparison with Wordsworth and Coleridge, who were undoubtedly far greater than him. In the early nineteenth century however he enjoyed a popularity and became the poet laureate. His political opinions show the same trajectory as those of his friends, only more prominently. He began as a revolutionary

thinker and ended as a conservative. He was a versatile writer, writing both verse and prose. His ambition was to become a historian and in his poetry he chooses historical events and personages. His poems are geographically wide-ranging too, spanning France, Spain and even India. His early epic poem, inspired by the French Revolution was *Joan of Arc*. The subsequent events, especially the Napoleonic wars changed his views. In the *Curse of Kehama*, he narrates the tale of a Hindu pariah who, assisted by divine powers eventually achieves victory over an ambitious world conqueror—clearly intended to allude to Napoleon. *Roderick*, a story about the Christian reconquest of Spain, written towards the end of his poetical career is full of jingoistic patriotism.

De Quincey rightly says that Southey cannot be grouped together with Wordsworth and Coleridge. In choice of subject and style he was more akin to Gray and Scott than to the other two, who were his friends and neighbours. He himself said, as you see here, that he considered Wordsworth's views on the subject and language of poetry as expressed in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* to be wrong. He chose high romantic subjects, full of details of barbarous violence. He did not have the subtlety of Coleridge's handling of the remote romantic that we find in *Christabel*. His handling of metre was not very felicitous. His use of rimeless lines of varying length in poems like *Thalaba* reads like prose cut up anyhow. He used rimes in *Kehama*, but the overall effect shows a lack of design. The blank verse in *Roderick* has neither the grandeur of Milton nor the lyrical quality of the Wordsworthian blank verse.

The second part of the penultimate paragraph probably refers to Southey's prose style. Southey was the author of a number of prose works: histories, biographies, miscellaneous essays, eg. *History of Brazil*, *Life of Cowper*, *Life of Nelson*. About his prose, Southey himself said that he never thought of style. He tried to write plain, serviceable prose. In fact he is better as a prose writer than as a poet. He avoided the over-elaborate, ponderous style of the writers of the previous generation, like Dr. Johnson or Gibbon, and the high rhetorical manner of Edmund Burke. His prose is simple, plain, direct and practical. But it lacks the intellectual substance and depth of Coleridge, the personal charm of Lamb, the ironical humour and keen observation of Hazlitt and the poetic cadences of De Quincey himself. It is often colourless, nondescript, sometimes puerile. He lacked the capacity for profundity. Although a poet, he fails to use metaphors to give vivid touches and tends to use too many passive constructions.

On the plus side, it is a model of transparent functionalism, clear, simple, direct. It is closer to the unpretentious directness of the prose of Addison. We give below an extract from his best work, *Life of Nelson*, to give you a first hand idea of the prose of Southey.

Nelson was fortunate in possessing good interest at the time when it could be most serviceable to him: his promotion had been almost as rapid as it could be; and before he had attained the age of twenty-one he had gained that rank which brought all the honours of the service within his reach. No opportunity, indeed, had yet been given him of distinguishing himself; but he was thoroughly master of his profession, and his zeal and ability were acknowledged wherever he was known. Count d'Estaing, with a fleet of one hundred and twenty-five sail, men of war and transports, and a reputed force of five-and twenty thousand men, threatened Jamaica from St. Domingo. Nelson offered his services to the Admiral and to Governor-General Dalling, and was appointed to command the batteries of Fort Charles, at Port Royal. Not more than seven thousand men could be mustered for the defence of the island,—a number wholly inadequate to resist the force which threatened them. Of this Nelson was so well aware, that when he wrote to his friends in England, he told them they must not be surprised to hear of his learning to speak French. D'Estaing, however, was either not aware of his own superiority, or not equal to the command with which he was intrusted: he attempted nothing with his formidable armament; and General Dalling was thus left to execute a project which he had formed against the Spanish colonies.

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#### **4.3.6. Summing up**

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- De Quincey is best known for 'Confessions of An English Opium Eater', a fine example of the self-revelatory aspect of the nineteenth century Romantics.
- But such pieces of his literary criticism as are still available show him to be a critic of the sharpest perceptiveness, of the most delicate subtlety.
- He brought to his criticism enormous reading in literature and a sharp, alert sensibility. It is indeed a pity that we have so little left to us of the work of a critic of such remarkable gifts. What we have is, indeed, of the highest quality of literary criticism.
- We have read in this module an interesting extract from another of his well-known works; *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*. In this extract we get glimpses

of his personal views about Southey, Wordsworth and Coleridge, all of whom he came to know intimately when he lived in the Lake district as their friend and neighbour.

- So, as you read their poetry and prose, you also get an idea of what kind of personalities they had.
- The extract is also interesting because it gives you a wider perspective of the Romantic period, through the economic opinions De Quincey discusses here.

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### 4.3.7. Comprehension Exercises

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#### Long Questions-20 marks

1. Consider Thomas De Quincey as a Romantic critic.
2. What do you learn of the contemporary economic situation and controversies from the extract of De Quincey's *Recollections* that you have studied?
3. Describe after De Quincey the interior and exterior of Greta Hall.

#### Mid-length Questions-12 marks

1. Comment on De Quincey's comparison between the reading habits of Wordsworth and Coleridge.
2. What is De Quincey's opinion about Southey as an author?
3. What impression do we get of Robert Southey as a man from De Quincey's presentation?
4. What do we learn of De Quincey's economic opinions from the extract?

#### Short Notes-6 marks

1. Write a short note on Robert Southey's library.
2. Write a short note on William Wordsworth's library.
3. Why did Southey call the location of Greta Hall 'the ant-hill'?
4. What does De Quincey say about the economic opinions of Coleridge?

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#### 4.3.8. Suggested Reading

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1. The text of the essay has been taken from the website [http://: www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)
3. Jarvis, Robin. *The Romantic Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature* ( Longman Literature in English Series )
4. Dick, Alexander. *Romanticism and The Gold Standard: Money, Literature and Economic Debate in Britain 1790—1830* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013)
5. Wimsatt and Brookes. *Literary Criticism*. ( Oxford and IBH )
6. Klingopulous, G D. 'The Spirit of The Age in Prose', in *Pelican guide to English Literature* ( from Blake to Byron ) General editor : Boris Ford.

## Timeline Chart (The Romantic Period)

Year	Major Events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1789	French Revolution Fall of Bastille	1789	William Blake (1757-1827), <i>Songs of Innocence</i>
		1790	Edmund Burke, <i>Reflections on the Revolution in France</i> ; Blake, <i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
1791	Flight of Louis XVI to the Austrian border. He was caught and executed by the Jacobins in 1793.	1791	James Boswell, <i>Life of Samuel Johnson</i> ; Thomas Paine, <i>The Rights of Man</i> (Part I)
1792	September Massacres. Triumph of the Jacobins in France.	1792	Mary Wollstonecraft, <i>A Vindication of the Rights of Woman</i>
1793	Execution of Louis XVI; Reign of Terror; Britain and France at war.	1793	William Blake, <i>America</i>
1794	Executions of Danton and Robespierre; Habeas Corpus Act suspended in Britain.	1794	William Blake, <i>Songs of Experience</i>
1796	Bonaparte's Italian Campaign	1796	Burney, <i>Camilla</i>
1798	Nelson's victory at the Battle of Nile against France. This proved the English supremacy in naval War.	1798	William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> ; Wollstonecraft, <i>The Wrongs of Woman</i>
1799	Napoleon became the First Consul. Most of the internal administrative reforms were undertaken during this period.		

<b>Year</b>	<b>Major Events</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Major literary figures and their works</b>
<b>1800</b>	Act of Union with Ireland		
<b>1801</b>	Union of British and Irish Parliaments; Habeas Corpus Act Suspended		
<b>1802</b>	Peace of Amiens. France and England entered into a temporary Truce through this treaty.		Foundation of the <i>Edinburgh Review</i>
<b>1803</b>	Renewal of war against France.		
<b>1804</b>	Napoleon, Emperor of France	<b>1804</b>	Blake, <i>Milton</i>
<b>1805</b>	Nelson's victory at Trafalgar	<b>1805</b>	Wordsworth's first version of his autobiographical poem <i>The Prelude</i>
<b>1807</b>	Abolition of slave trade in the British Empire	<b>1807</b>	Wordsworth, <i>Poems</i>
<b>1808</b>	Peninsular War between France and the combined forces of Spain and Portugal, supported by England. Napoleon later remarked that 'the Spanish Ulcer' ruined him.	<b>1808</b>	Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), <i>Marmion</i>
		<b>1809</b>	George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), <i>English Bards and Scotch Reviewers</i> ; foundation of the <i>Quarterly Review</i>
		<b>1810</b>	Scott, <i>The Lady of the Lake</i>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Major Events</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Major literary figures and their works</b>
		<b>1811</b>	Jane Austen (1775-1817), <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>
<b>1812</b>	French retreat from Moscow which signalled the failure of Napoleon's Grand Army.	<b>1812</b>	Byron, <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i>
		<b>1813</b>	Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> ; Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), <i>Queen Mab</i>
<b>1814</b>	Abdication of Napoleon; restoration of Louis XVIII	<b>1814</b>	Stephenson's invention of the steam locomotive; Wordsworth, <i>The Excursion</i> ; Austen, <i>Mansfield Park</i>
<b>1815</b>	Battle of Waterloo. Final defeat of Napoleon.	<b>1815</b>	Wordsworth, <i>Poems</i>
		<b>1816</b>	Coleridge, <i>Christabel</i> and <i>Kubla Khan</i> ; Shelley, <i>Alastor</i> ; Austen, <i>Emma</i> ; Scott, <i>The Antiquary</i> and <i>Old Mortality</i>
<b>1817</b>	Habeas Corpus Act suspended	<b>1817</b>	Coleridge, <i>Biographia Literaria</i> ; Byron, <i>Manfred</i> ; John Keats (1795-1821), <i>Poems</i> ; William Hazlitt (1778-1830), <i>The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays</i>
<b>1818</b>	Habeas Corpus Act restored	<b>1818</b>	Austen, <i>Northanger Abbey</i> and <i>Persuasion</i> ; Keats, <i>Endymion</i> ; Scott, <i>Rob Roy</i> and <i>The Heart of the Midlothian</i> ; Mary Shelley, <i>Frankenstein</i> ; Hazlitt, <i>Lectures on the English Poets</i>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Major Events</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Major literary figures and their works</b>
<b>1819</b>	Peterloo massacre. Eighteen people, including a woman and a child, died and over 700 men, women and children received serious injuries when they were attacked by the army while staging a mass protest for liberty and freedom from poverty.	<b>1819</b>	Byron, <i>Don Juan</i> ; Scott, <i>The Bride of Lammermoor</i>
<b>1820</b>	Death of George III; accession of George IV	<b>1820</b>	Shelley, <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> ; Keats <i>Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems</i> ; Scott, <i>Ivanhoe</i> ; Charles Lamb (1775-1834), <i>Essays of Elia</i> begun
<b>1821</b>	Greek War of Independence	<b>1821</b>	Shelley, <i>Adonais</i> ; De Quincey, <i>Confessions of an English Opium Eater</i>
		<b>1824</b>	Death of Byron in Greece; foundation of the <i>Westminster Review</i>
<b>1825</b>	Financial crisis. The stock market collapsed as a result of the closing down of banks.	<b>1825</b>	Hazlitt, <i>The Spirit of the Age</i> ; publication of Pepys's diary
<b>1830</b>	Death of George IV; accession of William IV	<b>1830</b>	Tennyson, <i>Poems, Chiefly Lyrical</i>