

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.

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SUBSIDIARY ENGLISH
[PASS COURSE]

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**SEG - 1
Subsidiary Course
in English**

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Elizabethan Lyric Poetry 1540-1630

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Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey	1516-1547
Edmund Spenser	1552-1599
Sir Philip Sidney	1554-1586
Samuel Daniel	1562-1619
Michael Drayton	1563-1631
William Shakespeare	1564-1616
Thomas Campion	1567-1620

Jacobean and Caroline Lyric Poetry 1603 - 1660

Metaphysical and Cavalier Poetry

John Donne	1573-1631
Robert Herrick	1591-1674
George Herbert	1593-1633
John Milton	1608-1674
Richard Crashaw	1613-1649
Abraham Cowley	1618-1667
Andrew Marvell	1621-1678
Henry Vaughan	1622-1695

Restoration and Augustan Poetry 1660-1798

Neo-classical Poetry

John Dryden	1631-1700
Jonathan Swift	1667-1745
Alexander Pope	1688-1744
Samuel Johnson	1709-1784

Pre Romantic Poetry 1700-1780

James Thomson	1700-1748
Thomas Gray	1716-1771
William Collins	1721-1759
Oliver Goldsmith	1728-1774

William Cowper	1731-1800
George Crabbe	1754-1832
William Blake	1757-1827
Robert Burns	1759-1796

Romantic Poetry 1780-1830

William Wordsworth	1770-1850
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	1772-1834
George Gordon Byron	1788-1824
Percy Bysshe Shelley	1792-1822
John Clare	1793-1864
John Keats	1795-1821

Victorian and Georgian Poetry 1830-1910

Elizabeth Barrett Browning	1806-1861
Alfred Tennyson	1809-1892
Robert Browning	1812-1889
Emily Bronte	1818-1848
Matthew Arnold	1822-1888
Dante Gabriel Rossetti	1828-1882
Christina Georgina Rossetti	1830-1894
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Modern Poetry 1910-1970

William Butler Yeats	1865-1939
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Thomas Stearns Eliot	1888-1965
Wilfred Owen	1893-1918
Louis Mac Neice	1907-1963
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Stephen Harold Spender	1909-1995
Philip Larkin	1922-1985
Ted Hughes	1930-1998
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MODULE -1

UNNIT 1 □ WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE-SINCE BRASS NOR STONE...

Structure

- 1.1 The Sonnet: Its origin and early history
 - 1.1.1 The Petrarchan Model
 - 1.1.2 The English Sonnet
 - 1.1.3 Sonnet Sequences
- 1.2 Shakespeare's Sonnets
 - 1.2.1 Time and Love in Shakespeare's Sonnets
 - 1.2.2 The Text: Sonnet 65 : Since brass, nor stone
 - 1.2.3 Discussion and Glossary
- 1.3 Select Bibliography
- 1.4 Comprehension Exercises

1.1 THE SONNET : ITS ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

The sonnet (derived from the word 'sonnetto' which means 'a little song') is of Italian origin. The first sonnets were written by Giacomo Lentino and Pier delle Vigne at the court of Frederick II in about 1230. Some hundred years later the form was further developed by Cavaleanti, Dante and Petrarch. Their subject was primarily love. With Cavaleanti the sonnet was a rhyming series of sighs associated with neo-Platonic **worship of an** inaccessible Muse. Dante employed the form in his **Le Vita Nuova (The New Life) which** was a sonnet-sequence (a series of Sonnets on a single subject) **where the poet's love** for Beatrice was merely a means to attain the divine.

1.1.1 The Petrarchan Model

It is with Francesco Petrarch (1304-74) that the sonnet form is commonly associated. His sequence of sonnets entitled **Rime** (318 of 366 Rimes are Sonnets) expresses his love for a woman called Laura. His love however, is idealized and hence unattainable. Laura is not only beautiful but also virtuous. On the other hand, the nature of the poet's

desire is erotic. So their love remains unfulfilled although the poet is ennobled by the virtue of Laura. This complex relationship was treated with great depth and feeling by Petrarch so that his sonnet-cycle became a classic model for Post-Petrarch Renaissance love poetry in Europe.

The Petrarchan sonnet has its own unique structure. It is a poem of fourteen decasyllabic lines (each line consisting of ten syllables) divided into two parts. The first eight lines, called the octave or octet, have the rhyme-scheme ABBA ABBA. The remaining part of six lines has the rhyme-scheme CD CD CD or CDE CDE and is called the sestet. Such rhyme variations are admissible only in the sestet but in a true Petrarchan sonnet there is never more than a total of five rhymes. Of these two parts the octave puts forward the theme or the problem of the poem, while the sestet provides its resolution. There is a volta or turn or shift in thought or feeling after the octave.

A good example of the Petrarchan type of sonnet in English is John Keats's (1795-1821) poem **On First Looking into Chapman's Homer**. Let us read the poem given below:

OCTAVE	1st Quatrain	Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,	a
		And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;	b
		Round many western islands have I been	b
		Which bards in fealty to Appollo hold.	a
	2nd Quatrain	Oft of one wide expanse had I been told	a
		That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demense;	b
		Yet did I never breathe its pure serene	b
		Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold	a
Turn or Volta			
SESTET	Then felt I like some watcher of the skies	c	
	When a new planet swims into his pen;	d	
	Or like stout cortez when with eagle eyes	c	
	He started at the Pacific, and all his men	d	
	Looked at each other with a wild surmise-	c	
	Silent, upon a peak in Davien.	d	

It is evident from our reading that the above sonnet has two parts - the octave and the sestet. Note that the octave has two quatrains (a quatrain is a group of four lines). In the first quatrain the poet speaks of his range of reading. He uses a travel metaphor for the purpose. In the second quatrain, which is a continuation of the subject already introduced in the first, Keats confesses that he has not read Homer (for his ignorance of

Greek language) although he, has heard about Chapman's translation of the great bard. The rhyme-scheme of the first quatrain is abba. It is repeated in the second quatrain to suggest the continuation of the same subject.

The turn or the volta comes after the octave. In the sestet the poet speaks of the wonderful effect of Chapman's translation on him. He uses two metaphors from the world of exploration—the first, that of an astronomer discovering a new star; the second, of Cortez finding a new land. The rhyme-scheme here is cd cd cd.

1.1.2 The English Sonnet

The above example from the English romantic poet John Keats shows that far from being confined to protestations of love of dejected lovers and hopeful suitors, the English sonnet has over the centuries accommodated a wide range of subjects. Of course, the early examples were love poems. In England, the sonnet found its way at the beginning of the Renaissance to the Tudor court of Henry VIII through **Thomas Wyatt** (1503-42) and the **Earl of Surrey** (1517-47). It was the Petrarchan form that they imported with one change. Their sonnets ended in couplets. Very soon Surrey established a different rhyme-scheme : ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. The rhyme-scheme shows that an English sonnet has three quatrains and a concluding couplet. The turn which comes after the octave in the Petrarchan sonnet is held back till the thirteenth line in the English variety. The form was perfected by Shakespeare who used the concluding couplet to express the central theme and clinch the sonnet's argument. We will study a Shakespearean sonnet at the end of this unit to find out the effect of a belated turn.

A further variation of the English Sonnet was introduced by **Edmund Spenser** (1552-99) who was a major Renaissance figure. The rhyme-scheme in his love sonnets is ABAB BCBC CDCD EE. This type of sonnet is described as 'link sonnet' because the rhyme of the last line of the first quatrain is repeated in the first line of the second quatrain, and likewise the rhyme of the last line of the second quatrain is repeated in the first line of the third quatrain.

1.1.3 Sonnet Sequences

The Italian sonneteers usually wrote whole sequences of sonnets on the theme of love and each sequence of sonnets was addressed to a particular individual. Such sequences are also called sonnet-cycles. The advantages of a sequence are that it enables the poet to explore many different aspects and moods of his own experience, real or imagined; to analyze his feelings in detail and to record the vicissitudes of the love-affair. At the same time, each individual sonnet in the series lives as an independent

poem. Thus Dante addressed his sonnets to Beatrice and Petrarch to Laura. Sonnet sequences were also copied by the English poets of the Renaissance in the late sixteenth century. The pioneer was **Sir Philip Sidney** with his **Astrophel and Stella** (1591), and this sequence was followed by Daniel's **Delia** (1592), Drayton's **Idea's Mirrour** (1594), Spenser's **Amoretti** (1595), Shakespeare's **Sonnets** (1609), apart from many other sonnet cycles.

1.2 SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Shakespeare's sonnets were first printed in 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. But they were already in circulation in manuscripts among his private friends. Shakespeare seems to have written these sonnets in 1590s when sonnet-writing was a fashion. In fact two of his sonnets 138 and 144 were published by Jaggard in **The Passionate Pilgrim** in 1599.

1.2.1 Time and Love in Shakespeare's Sonnets

.One of the important themes in Shakespeare's sonnets is the theme of Time and Beauty, Youth and Love. While on the one hand, the poet celebrates the beauty and youth of his friend in many of these sonnets e.g. "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day/ Thou art more lovely and more temperate" (Sonnet 18), on the other hand he is painfully aware of the fleeting time and the toll it takes on youth and beauty : "That Time will come and take my life away" (Sonnet 64), In the first seventeen sonnets the poet urges his friend to marry and have children who would perpetuate his charms. Subsequently, he hopes to immortalise his friend through his deathless verse. Sonnet 65 is one such sonnets where immortality of the youth is assured through his verse.

1.2.2 The Text: Sonnet 65 : *Since brass, nor stone*

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea	a
But sad mortality o'ersways their power,	b
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,	a
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?	b
O how shall summer's honey breath hold out	c
Against the wrackful siege of battering days,	d
When rocks impregnable are not so stout,	c
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?	d

O fearful meditation! Where, alack,	e
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?	f
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?	e
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?	f
O none, unless this miracle have might,	g
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.	g

1.2.3 Discussion

The first quatrain speaks of the ravaging power of Time. The theme is reiterated in the next two. The poem has a quiet, meditative tone. Note how Line 9 begins with the words, "O fearful meditation..." The poet meditates on the overwhelming power of Time and is simply appalled. Brass, stone, earth, the boundless sea are subject to mortality. So are rocks and steel. If these apparently powerful and indestructible things are wrecked by Time, the poet wonders how beauty, which is as delicate and fragile as a flower shall withstand the onslaughts of Time. Similarly, fresh, honey-sweet summer breeze has too short a stay. What the poet actually implies is the ephemeral beauty of his friend. He is dismayed to think that while it is Time which offers these beautiful gifts, it is once again, Time that rudely takes them back just as a victorious army plunders the spoils of war from its enemy.

This unchallenged power of Time is presented through a series of rhetorical questions, like "How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea....?"; "O! how shall summer's honey breath hold out against the wrackful siege of battering days.....?"; "Where, alack, such Times best Jewel from Time's chest lie hid?; Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?"; "Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?" A rhetorical question is a figure of speech where the answer is implicit in the question itself. It is asked only to heighten the dramatic effect, not to seek any answer e.g. "When can Shakespeare's glory fade?" It implies that Shakespeare's glory can never fade. The questions impart a dramatic effect to suggest that beautiful things of this world cannot resist the havoc wrought by Time. So the poet's own answer "O none..." at the beginning of the couplet seems unnecessary. Yet it serves one important purpose. It helps to underline the strong counter statement in the couplet—his Friend would shine eternally in the black indelible ink of his poetry, thereby defying Time. The strong rhetorical questions subtly prepare us for this hopeful claim made in the couplet.

Glossary

1. Since : Since there is neither.
2. Sad : their mortal nature and destructibility causes sorrow.
2. O'ersways : overrules.
- 1-2. Since... power : everything is subject to death and to the overwhelming power of Time.
3. rage : time's fury.
3. beauty : beautiful objects like flowers which are fragile unlike brass or stone.
3. plea : how shall beauty plead its case? The metaphor is legal.
4. action : continuation of the legal metaphor. Legal action or plea of beauty is weak and hence ineffective.
5. Summer's honey breath : warm summer breeze which is as sweet as honey.
5. hold out: resist or endure.
6. wrackful: destructive.
6. siege of battering days ; persistent, unrelenting attack by Time, the metaphor is military.
6. days : Time; an example of synecdoche — 'days' part for the whole time.
- 7-8. rocks....gates of steel : continuation of the earlier military metaphor. Even rocks and steel are easily destroyed by Time. The analogy is between Time and an invading army battering down town gates and fortifications made of rocks and steel,
8. Time decays ; Time corrodes rocks and steel.
9. O fearful meditation : the fear aroused by the contemplation of Time's power in lines 1-8.
9. alack: alas.
10. Time's best Jewel : beauty or beautiful things. They are the gifts of Time, since it is with the passage of time alone, that beauty blossoms.
10. Time's chest : Time gifts beautiful objects and destroys them too. So beauty cannot escape the clutches of Time, which is inherently paradoxical.
10. chest: safe where Time hoards its spoils or gains i.e. the beautiful objects.
11. Swift foot: Time is pictured as a swift runner.
12. spoil : once again a military metaphor. The victorious Time loots or plunders its gains and keeps it in its chest. Here Time's chest may suggest coffin.

13. miracle : That black ink in which the poet writes his verse can make the beauty of his friend shine bright is a miracle, because black and beauty are believed to be opposites. Shakespeare's 'Dark Lady' sonnets explore this theme in greater detail.
14. still: eternally
14. bright: unspoiled by Time or Death.

1.3 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Fuller, John, ed. *The sonnet: The Critical Idiom*. London : Methuen, 1972.
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- Lever, J. W. *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet*. London : Methuen, 1956.

1.4 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Essay type questions

1. What is a sonnet and where did it originate from? Who introduced the sonnet into English poetry and with what variations?
2. Discuss the theme of Shakespeare's Sonnet 65.
3. Show the differences in rhyme scheme from the Italian to the English sonnet. How does it affect the treatment of the content?

Short questions

1. What are octave and sestet?
2. What is Time's 'best jewel'?
3. Briefly explain the miracle in black ink that the poet speaks of.

UNIT 2 □ JOHN DONNE-DEATH BE NOT PROUD...

Structure

2.1 Introduction

2.2 John Donne

2.2.1 Metaphysical Poetry and Donne : Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry

2.2.2 The Text : Holy Sonnet : Death Be Not Proud

2.2.3 Interpretation

2.3 Comprehension Exercises

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous Unit you have had a brief idea about some Elizabethan poets who wrote from the middle to the end of the 16th century. In those poems you saw the Renaissance influence bringing about a revival of English poetry. A number of new verse forms like the sonnet, the blank verse, the terza rima, the ottava rima were introduced to English, in imitation of Italian poetry. But with the rise of the English sonnet in general and the Shakespearean, sonnet in particular, other ideas like reflections on love, death, constancy and change, as also the proper language of poetic expression become part of the thematic concerns of poetry.

The language of poetry written during the first and especially the second phase of the Renaissance in England (from the middle to the last years of the 16th century), is elaborate and ornate. The theme of love is treated in a courtly chivalrous style, in the manner of the Italian poet, Petrarch. But in the previous Unit—you have also noticed that the poets also expressed other moods, such as playfulness, cynicism, denunciation of love, etc. and used expressions which were not very courteous or smooth. This shows that side by side with the courtly, polished language of poetry, there was a more robust, direct, native tradition of verse in the 16th century.

The poetry of Donne was an altogether new idiorn. His contemporaries called his poems “strong-lin’d verse”, because his language did not have the smooth melody of the majority of Elizabethan poems. It has also been said that Donne’s poetry was a revolt against the Petrarchan and courtly tradition of Elizabethan poetry. But while

Donne has a very individual and original style in his poetry, we can also see a subtle use of the courtly tradition of verse in his works. He combined the courtly with the robust native tradition of verse and wrote a new variety of lyric poetry.

Donne's manner of writing was not directly followed by later poets. But some poets of the 17th century show certain characteristics associated with the poetry of Donne. One of them is George Herbert.

2.2 JOHN DONNE (1572-1631)

Donne had a colourful life, and literary gossip about him increased interest in his poetry. His father was a well-to-do London iron monger. His mother was the daughter of a minor early Tudor writer, John Heywood, He was born a Roman Catholic. After studying in Oxford and making a tour to Europe he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn to study law in 1592. Most of his earlier poems, satires, elegies, songs and sonnets were written during this period. He took part in two novel expeditions, and then entered the service of a nobleman, Sir Thomas Egerton. He then destroyed a promising career by marrying Anne More, a relative of Egerton. He was dismissed from service, imprisoned and had suffered many hardships in the following years. Later on, he joined the Anglican Church and took Holy orders. In 1621 he became Dean of St. Pauls. As a priest he delivered many memorable sermons which have the same kind of emotional power and harmony of language as his poems.

Donne wrote both love poetry and religious poetry. His love poems were written during his youth. They show an intense personal feeling, a wide range of various moods of love, from the cynical or sensual to the passionate and spiritual. Their language is complex, rich and very individual. His religious poems, written both before and after his ordination, express the conflict in his soul, his sense of being a sinner, fear of Death, and faith in God's mercy. Like his love poetry, his devotional poems are also written in a dramatic manner, they too use colloquial language and express an intensely personal emotion.

2.2.1 Metaphysical Poetry and Donne : Characteristics of Metaphysical Poetry

In general the term metaphysical means something abstract, abstruse or philosophical. The word was used by the poet John Dryden in the late 17th century to adversely criticize Donne's practice of using philosophical argument, abstract thought and learned reference and allusion in love poems. If we compare Donne's poems with the Elizabethan poems, we will notice that the language of Donne's lyrics is very densely

woven. Sometimes the lines are so condensed that we have to read with very close attention to understand the meaning. He expresses passionate love, but at the same time carries on a process of rational argument. This blend of intellect and feeling is the chief characteristic of metaphysical poetry. It is seen mainly in the poetry of Donne and Andrew Marvell. But although Donne's references are often very learned, and his arguments complex, the language he uses is colloquial. He uses simple, everyday words, but frequently combines them in startling, unexpected ways as it is in *Good Morrow*. The manner is dramatic and within a single poem one can find the mood shifts and the language, in keeping with the moods, also changes, like dramatic dialogue. Donne was a frequent theatre-goer, and he used the various qualities of Elizabethan dramatic verse in his lyric poetry. Another striking feature of Donne's poetry, perhaps an import of the influence of drama, is the suddenness of his opening lines.

Donne also used out of the way allusions or references to theology, medieval philosophy, history, geography etc. He introduces abstract philosophical ideas to express the feeling of love. His images are wide-ranging and very unusual. They may be taken from the commonplace activities or from learned doctrines.

A special characteristic of the poetry of Donne and his followers is the metaphysical conceit. A conceit is a comparison which is very striking and unusual. In the metaphysical conceit two extremely unlikely things are compared in such a way that the reader is convinced of their likeness. In one of his famous conceits, Donne has compared two lovers to the two legs of a pair of compasses (*A Valediction : forbidding mourning*). Such conceits are not used merely as ornaments, they are used as part of an argument in a poem, to prove its ideas.

In metaphysical poems a particular point of time or a particular situation is vividly imagined and dramatically presented. The situation inspires a complex process of thought, which is very unusual. The poet then simultaneously conveys a deep feeling and establishes that feeling through logical reasoning.

2.2.2 The Text : Holy Sonnet : *Death Be Not Proud*

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee;
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,

And soonest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie,
Thou art slave to Fate, chance, kings and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sickness dwell,
And poppie or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better than thy stroake; why swell's! thou then?
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

2.2.3 Interpretation

It is one of a group of six sonnets called “Divine Meditations”. They were probably written in 1609. Donne’s devotional poems were written at different times in his life. Some were written before his ordination and express a spiritual conflict, but a few were also written after his ordination.

There are many similarities between Donne’s love lyrics and his religious poems. In both categories, Donne’s language has the ring of the living voice. The speeches are dramatic, but plain and unadorned, with idiomatic turns. Both show the dramatising of a situation, use of argument and images taken from everyday life.

But there are differences as well. In the devotional poems his brilliant wit is subdued. The playful humour is absent. He uses argument, but it is generally weaker and over the argument hangs the knowledge that argument is futile. The way to salvation is only through God’s grace. His God has a more powerful presence in his religious poems than any mistress in his love poems.

The two major ideas in Donne’s devotional poems are: faith in God’s mercy and a fear of death, which comes from a sense of his own unworthiness. He knows he is a sinner, so he is afraid of what will happen to him after death. This preoccupation with death is found in other writers of the 17th century also.

ll : 1-2 —The poem begins dramatically, with an admonition to death, personified.

ll : 3-4 —He works out the Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul and simultaneously applies it to himself, so that a traditional idea also becomes an expression of personal feeling.

l : 5-6 —Rest and sleep are states which resemble death. Since both give us pleasure he makes a brave attempt to convince himself that he will get even greater pleasure from death.

l : 7—He is probably referring to the proverbial saying that the good die young.

ℓ : 8—Death brings about the soul’s liberation from the body.

ℓℓ : 9-10—This is a slightly playful of the dreaded Death, but the playfulness is very low-keyed compared to similar witty denigrations in his love poems.

ℓ : 11-12—This is self-contradictory. In ℓℓ 5-6 he says that death must be better than sleep. But here he says that sleep is better than death.

ℓ : 13—A strong assertion of the Christian faith.

ℓ : 14 —The last four words end on a note of climax, but they weaken the argument of the poem. He has insisted from the beginning that death is nothing to be afraid of, so at the end he does not sound very convincing when he uses death as a threat to Death. The line uses language of the Bible—compare Corinthians 13-26 : “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”

We notice that the arguments in this **Holy Sonnet** are not as well-organised and convincing as in secular lyrics of love .like ‘The Good Morrow’ as The Sunne Rising’ for instance. The contradictions reflect the doubts within his heart. It is as if he tries to convince himself but knows that salvation depends not on successful argument, but upon faith.

In his **Holy Sonnets** Donne chose the more difficult form of the sonnet, unlike the majority of Elizabethan sonneteers. He limits the rhymes in the octave to two, and arranges the rhymes in two closed quatrains (4 line stanzas) [Compare similar arrangement in Wyatt’s Farewell Love and Sidney’s Loving in Truth and contrast them with Shakespeare’s form]. The sestet has a quatrain and a couplet (two lines rhyming together). The couplet as in Death be Not Proud gives a dramatic twist to the development of thought or argument in the rest of the sonnet.

2.3 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Essay type questions

1. What do you understand by the term ‘Metaphysical Poetry’? Discuss the chief features of Metaphysical poetry with regard to Donne’s poem.
2. Analyse ‘Death Be Not Proud’ as a religious metaphysical poem.
3. Write a brief note on Donne’s use of conceits with reference to ‘Death Be Not Proud’.

UNIT 3 □ NEO-CLASSICISM AND TRANSITION

Structure

- 3.1 Neo-classical poetry
- 3.2 The epic : Characteristics
- 3.3 The mock-epic or mock-heroic
- 3.4 Satire
- 3.5 Heroic couplet
- 3.6 Pre-romanticism : Introduction
- 3.7 James Thomson (1700-1748)
 - 3.7.1 Introduction to the poet
 - 3.7.2 Text : Excerpts from *The Seasons* : Spring
 - 3.7.3 Introduction to the Poem
 - 3.7.5 Commentary
- 3.8 Comprehension Exercises

3.1 NEO-CLASSICAL POETRY

Chronologically speaking, the neo-classical period in English literature extends from the Restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660 to the publication in 1798 of Wordsworth and Coleridge's **Lyrical Ballads**, which marks the beginning of the 19th century revival of romanticism. What is neo-classicism? John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift and Dr. Samuel Johnson are labelled neo-classicists for they share some common characteristics in their literary ideas and practice. This was a strong sense of respect for classical, especially Roman writers whom they considered their literary role models.

Poetry particularly, was regarded not so much as spontaneous exuberance but as a fine art of requiring meticulous attention to technical detail. The subject-matter of their poetry was primarily man living in an organised society with poetry being allotted the duty of imitating human life with the purpose of teaching as well as providing artistic pleasure. Belief in artistic decorum and correction made the poets choose the heroic-couplet as their primary mode of expression.

3.2 THE EPIC : CHARACTERISTICS

The epic is long narrative poem about a serious and exalted subject, the language being deliberately elevated, describing the varied exploits of a heroic character. You must be familiar with the Indian epics **The Ramayana and The Mahabharata**. In Europe the earliest epics were **The Iliad and The Odyssey** written 2,800 years ago by the Greek poet Homer. In the 1st century B.C. the Roman poet Virgil wrote **The Aeneid**. These classical examples set the standards for epics in the future. The greatest English epic is John Milton's **Paradise Lost** (1667). Today a long panoramic prose novel like Tolstoy's **War and Peace** or even a film with the grand sweeping prospect of **Ben Hur** is labelled an epic.

The traditional epic is a highly conventional poem requiring great skill on the part of the poet. The subject matter is grand and lofty—the story being of some national interest like the destruction of Troy or the origin of Rome. It is a record of the customs and traditions of a proud civilisation. At the same time it is the story of one towering figure—the epic hero—after whom very often the poem is named. He possesses extraordinary physical strength, courage and lofty moral beliefs. He is a man of honour (an epic ideal) and fights bravely against formidable forces and accepts whatever the gods have decided about his future. Because of these military exploits of the hero the epic is also known as a heroic poem.

An epic is very long, many have twelve or more books, each of many lines. It describes a variety of experiences of the hero over a long period of time. He journeys over land and sea, into the underworld as with Beowulf, fights battles, faces many dangers and enjoys romantic interludes. The gods and supernatural agents who keep watch over the hero actively intervene at crucial moments to keep the story moving like the angels in **Paradise Lost**. In the neo-classical age these supernatural beings are called **the machinery**.

As the theme of the epic is grand the language is consciously elaborate, lofty and different from everyday language. This **grand style** is created with the help of certain poetic devices :

- a) High-sounding, poly-syllabic words are used.
- b) Words or phrases are used in a stylised manner as distinct from contemporary language. This is known as **poetic diction**.
- c) Use of periphrasis / circumlocution or describing something in elaborate phrases in a round-about manner instead of saying it directly.
- d) The **epic or sustained simile** is frequently used to compare the characters and events to distant but noble objects, thus creating a feeling of wonder.

e) Highly abstract moral comments are made about human life in general.

The structure of the epic follows some common conventions. The story-teller begins the poem by declaring his theme in the **argument**. Then he **invokes** or calls on a guiding spirit or the Muse (The goddess of poetry) for inspiration during the process of writing the poem. The narrative begins at a crucial point in the action and then goes back to the past relating earlier events. This type of beginning “in the middle of things” is known as **in medias res**. [Beginning at the beginning and moving forward in time is **ab ovo** or starting at the egg. Apply this when you read short stories, novels and plays and identify how they begin.] Epics also provide long catalogues of names in formal order, of the principal characters involved.

3.3 THE MOCK-EPIC OR MOCK-HEROIC

The neo-classical period in England was a time of constant political, religious and social controversy. There was radical doubt about the stability and health of the society. This is the pre-condition for successful satire. The veneration of the epic and the necessity for social and political satire led to the popularity of the mock-epic or mock-heroic literary mode.

The mock-heroic takes a trivial, common subject matter and describes it using the grand epic style. It is a form of burlesque, that is, it imitates the style and theme of a serious literary genre to arouse satiric laughter. Dryden in his mock-heroic poem **Mac Flecknoe** uses some epic conventions to indicate the lack of heroic status in the poet Shadwell and mock his negative qualities. Pope in **The Rape of the Lock** considered the masterpiece of this form, exaggeratedly describes a trifling incident to bring about a balanced perspective of life.

Remember, the mock-epic does not mock the epic, but it mocks errant human behaviour through the application of some epic conventions.

3.4 SATIRE

You may have heard the two terms **comedy and satire**. **Comedy** is a piece of literature which is created with the primary purpose of amusing the audience or reader. The term is generally applied to plays, e.g. Shakespeare’s **As You Like It**. But comic elements may also be identified in prose fiction like the novel, the short story as well as in narrative poetry.

In satire the author’s objective is not only to amuse but also generate attitudes of scorn towards some object, person, concept or situation. Here laughter is used as a

weapon to arouse disdain and thus correct human behaviour. The satirist considers himself a guardian of the value-systems and standards of life around him. He uses various types of laughter from the loud belly laugh to the sudden grin at a clever statement. He provokes his readers into realising the follies and vices of individuals (Dryden's **MacFlecknoe**), of people in general (Ben Jonson's play **The Alchemist**) as well as of society as a whole (Swift's **Gulliver's Travels**).

The satirist though a protester is also an artist. So he must refine and sublimate his anger within the rules of an acceptable artistic form. He must not demean himself by voicing only private malice or self-motivated slander as in Shadwell's **The Medal of John Bayes**.

Satire was originally popularised by the Romans. Horace (1st cent. B.C.) and Juvenal (1st cent. A.D.) are two satirists who represent two basic types of satire. Horatian satire uses relaxed language, a tone of amusement rather than offence, and the attitude is that of a witty, tolerant person who is able to smile at human foolishness e.g. Pope's **The Rape of the Lock**. In Juvenalian satire the speaker is an outraged moralist vehemently criticising the foolishness of the world around him. There is much of Juvenal in Dryden's **MacFlecknoe**. Dryden and Pope are the two great satirical poets of the 17th and 18th centuries, regarded the golden age of satire in England. Increase of trade and commerce, development in science and technology contributed to a sophisticated urban culture. The satirists aimed to keep this life style safe from being abused. Hogarth's paintings, Swift's ruthless prose, Dryden and Pope's poems—ail ridicule corruption, social snobbery, religious excesses, political manipulation, even artistic hypocrisy.

It is interesting to note that Dryden not only translated Juvenal but was also one of the earliest critics to theorise about the function and method of satire. He says about satire, "There is a vast difference between the slovenly butchering of a man, and the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place."

The mock-heroic naturally appeared to Dryden as the most suitable genre for his purpose of satire. Dryden admired **Le Lutrin** by the French poet Boileau which inflated a minor quarrel in a church over a bucket into an epic dispute. Here Dryden discovered a parallel to his own attitude that the venom of satire must be finely mixed with the majesty of the heroic. In that sense **MacFlecknoe** is a highly original poem. There is no earlier work in English which may claim to be the literary prototype of this poem. He was followed by his worthy successor Alexander Pope who, in **The Rape of the Lock** improved on what Dryden had achieved earlier.

3.5 HEROIC COUPLET

A heroic couplet is a pair of rhyming iambic (unaccented, accented foot) pentameter or ten syllabic verse lines. The term 'heroic' was used as these couplets were frequently employed in the 17th and 18th centuries in poems and plays which had a heroic or epic style and subject matter. This was the most popular metre used by the poets during this period.

Dryden in **MacFlecknoe** often uses the 'closed' couplet (lines 1-2) just as Pope does in **The Rape of the Lock**. In the 'closed couplet the end of the couplet coincides with the end of a sentence or a major part of a sentence, Frequently each line is subdivided by a caesura or sense pause in the middle, the two halves balancing each other, and the second line is antithetical to the first. Antithesis is the contrast of ideas marked by parallelism in grammatic structure. This is more frequent in Pope's **The Rape of the Lock** [lines 5-6], This balanced antithetical style is particularly suitable for satire permitting precise, witty, epigrams. Dryden and Pope are masters of this verse style. Yet within this fixed pattern they worked out numerous variations and achieved great variety in effect.

In the lesser poets the heroic couplet is heavy and monotonous but when you read Dryden and Pope you have to appreciate the amount of effort that has gone into the composition of each chiselled, sparkling couplet which ultimately appears so effortless to read. This is the fine art of concealing art.

3.6 PRE-ROMANTICISM : INTRODUCTION

Pre-romanticism or the term 'Precursors of Romantic poetry are useful labels to group poets of the later 18th century. These poets were moving between two literary worlds —

A. The World of neo-classicism

The poetic world of which Dr. Johnson was the last great representative where :

- i. Pope, Addison and Swift exerted tremendous influences ;
- ii. Pope's influence, particularly, was at its zenith ;
- iii. Satire, Panegyric and the moral essay predominated ;
- iv. There was a close adherence to the life and interests of the age
- v. Poetry was moderated by rationality, common sense and restraint.

B. The World of Romanticism

The first world of neo-classicism was, of course, more clearly defined than the second, of which these poets were totally unaware. They had no idea whether their work was likely to culminate into any future movement. In a sense therefore, they straddled worlds, but were more inclined forwards a Romantic perspective that:

- i. involved emotion, passion and imagination ;
- ii. was spontaneous lyrical ;
- iii. frees from formalism and stereotyped conventions of poetic diction preferring individuality of expression ;
- iv. had a growing sense of the picturesque ;
- v. responded emotionally to Nature;
- vi. sympathetically handled humble rural life.

3.7 JAMES THOMSON (1700-1748)

3.7.1 Introduction to the poet

The poet in whose poetry the new scientific interest was imaginatively presented was Thomson. Born in Scotland, he came to London in 1725 to make a living by writing. Of his poetic works, **The Seasons** and **The Castle of Indolence** are the most important. He was involved in politics, wrote five tragedies, and was a great admirer of Milton. You will also notice that Pope (1688:1744) and Thomson were exact contemporaries. They spoke the same poetic language though the matter which interested them was strikingly different. Thomson was not aware of sparking off any reaction against Pope nor was the latter, sensitive as he was, conscious of any revolt against himself.

Poetry in the 18th century was urban and more concerned with man than with nature. Thomson was forward-looking in that he had an avid interest in the description of natural phenomenon and his feelings for nature were genuine and not literary. He constantly recognised the Divine force which “pervades, adjusts, sustains & agitates the whole”.

Unlike Milton he was not interested in the stern interpretation of Christian doctrines. It was Newton’s deep understanding and appreciation of Natural Law (or the law that rules Nature and which men decipher by virtue of their Reason) and Deism which attracted him. And this religion of God as seen in nature, we find coming up in Collins, the poets of the younger generation and in Wordsworth, all of whom he influenced greatly.

3.7.2 Text : Excerpts from The Seasons : Spring

James Thomson : Text The Seasons

Spring L 143-185

The North-East spends his Rage, and now shut up
Within his iron Caves th' effusive South
Warms the wide Air, and o'er the Void of Heaven
Breathes the big clouds with vernal showers distant
At first a dusky Wreath they seem to rise,
Scarce staining Ether; but by fast Degrees,
In Heaps on Heaps, the doubling Vapour soils
Along the loaded sky, and, mingling deep,
Sits on the Horizon round a settled Gloom.
Not such as wintry storms on Mortals shed,
Oppressing Life, but lovely, gentle, kind,
And full of every Hope and every Joy,
The Wish of Nature. Gradual, sinks as the Breeze,
Into a perfect Calm; but not a Breath .
Is heard to quiver thou the closing Woods,
Or rustling turn the many-twinkling Leave's
Of Aspin tall. Th'uncurling Floods, diffus'd
In glassy Breath, seen thro, delusive Lapse
Forgetful of their course. 'Tis silence all,
And pleasing Expectation. Herds and Flocks
Drop the dry spring, and mute-imploring eye
The falling verdune. Hushed in short Suspense,
The plummy people streak their wings with oil
To throw the lucid Moisture trickling off;

And wait th' approaching sign to strike, at once
Into the general Choir. Even Mountains, Vales.

And forests seem, impatient, to demand
 The promis'd sweetness — Man superior walks
 Amid the glad creation, musing Praise,
 And looking lively Gratitude. At last,
 The clouds consign their Treasures to the Fields,
 And, softly shaking on the dimpled Pool
 Prelusive Drops, let all their Moisture flow,
 In large Effusion o'ef the freshen'd world
 The stealing shower is scarce to patter heard,
 By such as wander thus the Forest-walks.
 Beneath th'umbrageous Multitude of Leaves.
 But who can hold the Shade, while Heaven descends
 In universal Bounty, shedding Herbs,
 Fruits, and Flowers, Nature's ample Lap ?
 Swift Fancy fin'd anticipates their Growth ;
 And, while the milky Nutriment distills,
 Beholds the kindling Country colour round.

3.7.3 Introduction to the Poem

Thomson's *Seasons* is an attempt to write sublime poetry with a touch of the religious and the rhetorical which was very much in vogue in the early 18th century. When Thomson wrote to Mallet "My idea of .your poem (**The Excursion**) is a description of the grand works of Nature, raised and animated by moral and sublime Reflections", he was actually giving an idea of his own poem. Before **Winter** was published Thomson had consulted the **Bible**, Psalm 104, part of the 6th chapter of Mathew and especially the **Book of Job** to support the great and serious subjects he was in search of.

The Seasons began with the publication of **Winter** in July 1726 and then through development in successive stages to the final publication in 1746 consisting of **Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and A Hymn** (on the seasons).

1. Spring lines 142-185

Summary

The North-Eastern winds have vanished and now the Southern winds blow warmly

bringing clouds swollen with rain. At first sight, they quickly fill the sky resting on the horizon. They are not the oppressive winter storms but joyous life-giving winds. A pregnant silence is diffused over the earth. The whole of Nature : rivers, flora and fauna wait in eager anticipation. Men too, wander through creation in grateful wonderment. At last the rain falls softly refreshing the world and filling the imagination with thoughts of its generous future bounty in a plenitude of colourful herbs, fruits and flowers.

lines 143-4 : These lines remind us of Virgil's **Aeneid**

ℓ **146 distent** : swollen

ℓ **148 ether** : This is not the 'Air' in line 145, but the lighter fluid medium through which light is transmitted. According to Newton's **Opticks** ether was expanded through all the heavens.

ℓ **159 uncurling** : without ripples

ℓ **160 through delusive lapse** : because their falling cannot be detected,

ℓ **164 falling verdune** : an instance of double prolepsis. The rain has not yet begun to fall or the grass has turned green as a result of its falling. It could also mean 'freshness' as in Shakespeare.

ℓ 183-5 this anticipation is strengthened by the periphrasis for rain look in the text for 1. "the falling Verdune" (Line 164). 2. "the promis'd sweetness" (line 170) 3. "clouds Treasures" (line 173) 4. "Heaven descends in universal Bounty" (line 181-2)

ℓ **184 milky Nutriment : sap**

ℓ 183 Fancy : synonymous with imagination.

3.7.5 Commentary

To understand **The Seasons** we must have a basic idea of the '**pastoral**'. Primarily it concerns itself with the hypothetical idealisation of the lives of shepherds leading a peaceful and uncorrupted existence in the countryside. The tradition is of great antiquity. Its origins may be traced back to Theocritus. (C 316-C260 BC), followed by Bion and Moschus and then Virgil. The tradition, passing down the ages, underwent several modifications in form and content and in the seventeenth century found exquisite expression in Milton's **Lycidas**. In the eighteenth century Pope, Ambrose Philips, John Gay published several pastoral poems. Though popular it had however become unreal and conventional in their hands. It had ceased to furnish the relief it was expected to

bring, by an escape into fresh air and freer conditions, Apart from the above mentioned poets most eighteenth century poems in the pastoral tradition were, as in **The Seasons**, descriptive of particular places and may be termed topographical or landscape poetry. Two very popular poems should be remembered in this context: Denham's **Cooper's Hill** and Pope's **Windsor Forest**,

Thomson's Landscape art has the colouring of a Reubens painting and is so detailed as to be enumerative in style. **The Seasons** were also instrumental in giving rise at around this period to the new or natural school of landscape gardening and served as a counterpart to the flourishing art of landscape painting. -

Although superficially pastoral, **The Seasons** should be sharply distinguished from the well established tradition of English pastoral poetry. Thomson described nature for its own sake, including human incidents as a background, thus inverting the traditional pattern in which nature is a background for moral dramas. If we compare **The Seasons** with Pope's **Winter** we will be able to see the newness of Thomson's approach. One proof that this was the work of a fresh and independent genius was the spate of imitations it gave rise to.

The acknowledged model for **The Seasons** was Virgil's **Georgics**. The Georgic is a form of didactic poetry and its main purpose is to extol and give instructions about rural life and husbandry. Not only did Thomson draw upon Virgil's thoughts on nature's secrets, he also drew upon his myths, patriotism, exotic excursions and practical advice.

We have already discussed the devotional aspect of Thomson's **Seasons** (see Introduction to the poet) : the spectacle of uncontrolled power in nature evoking reverential awe and turning the mind towards God. We will now turn to the scientific aspect. Newton and Boyle's lectures seem to have contributed to the making of the poem in a large way. Another "shadowy presence" is Lucretius' **De Rerum Nature** - the great classical model for early 18th century scientific poems. **The Seasons** echoes Lucretius in its passage on science and social evolution and in accounts of human misery. See lines 311-21 in **Winter**.

Thomson is in many ways an Augustan poet. Wordsworth called **The Seasons** a work of inspiration, offering new images of external nature. He complained however, that the style was vicious. Thomson's diction is highly Latinate, academic and wordy e.g. "verval showers", "distent", "Plumy people", "Prelusive Drops", "milky nutriment". In spite of this one should notice the change in verse forms which was an outward sign of the revolution in poetic feeling. **The Seasons** is written not in the almost mandatory heroic couplet but in blank verse. Wordsworth has pointed out that Thomson's distinctive

quality lay in his close observation and in the novelty, particularity and exactness of nature description. These are things we do not find in the poetry of the Augustan school. The passion for mildness, grandeur and solitude of Romantic poetry may yet be missing, but it must be remembered that **The Seasons** is a pioneering work and in its return to nature, it represents the transition that must be taken into account in any complete history of romanticism.

3.8. COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Essay type questions

1. Examine in brief the transition from the Neo-classic to the Romantic school of poetry.
2. Examine Thomson's 'Spring' as a poetry of the transition.

UNIT 4 □ WILLIAM BLAKE - CHIMNEY SWEEPER POEMS

Structure

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Blake's Major Books
- 4.3 The Chimney-Sweeper poems (Innocence & Experience)
 - 4.3.1 Critical Analysis of the Chimney-Sweeper poems (Innocence & Experience)
 - 4.3.2 Summary
- 4.4 Select Readings
- 4.5 Comprehension Exercises

4.1 INTRODUCTION

William Blake, the first major English Romantic poet, was born on 27 November 1757, the third son of a fairly prosperous London shopkeeper who dealt in hosiery goods. As child, Blake never went to school, perhaps because he was too high spirited and rebellious, and he was probably taught how to read and write by his mother at home. The young William however possessed two unique abilities as a child—the ability to see visions, and a marked artistic talent. It is because of the latter that Blake's father admitted him first into drawing school, and then when he was fourteen, apprenticed him to an engraver. Later, after the completion of his apprenticeship, Blake entered the Royal Academy Schools for artists, and on two occasions exhibited some of his pictures at the School's annual exhibitions.

Blake's visionary faculty also manifest itself early in his life. Legend has it that when he was only four years old, he saw God's face at a window—and screamed. When he was about eight or ten, he saw a tree full of angels adorned with bright and shining wings. But no one believed him when he came back home and reported what he had seen, and only, his mother's intervention saved him from getting a beating from his father who thought that the child was telling a lie. On another day in summer, Blake saw a number of angels in the midst of a group of haymakers at work in a field. The ability to see visions is a gift often possessed by young children, who however lose it when they grow up. But Blake never lost this talent, and the power of his visionary eye

is manifest in many lines, phrases and images of even his most mature poetry.

Blake's career as a poet also began early. The fruits of his earliest literary exertions—poems, prose and drama-fragments written between the ages of twelve to twenty—were printed by a contemporary gentleman (a Reverend Mathews) in a book form in 1783 as the **Poetical Sketches**. Blake however appears to have regarded these juvenile pieces as having little importance or merit, for he seems to have shown virtually no interest in either selling or distributing the fifty copies of the book that were in his possession. Indeed, Blake never again published his writings by printing them conventionally, preferring instead to issue his own works by using a special technique of his own invention that allowed him to illustrate his texts with colourful designs set around them.

The exact process followed by Blake is still not wholly clear, but it seems that Blake would take a copper plate and write or draw upon it, with an acid-resistant ink or fluid, an inverted or mirror-image of the words and designs he wished to print. He would then immerse the plate in an acid bath so that all the surface of the plate not covered with the ink-written lines would be eaten away. This would leave the text and illustrations standing out on the surface of the plate as a kind of printer's stereotype, and Blake would apply ink on these raised portions and print them off by laying and pressing sheets of paper on the copper plate. Finally, the illustrations would be coloured by hand (Blake's wife Catherine often helped him in this), and the separate pages (or plates) would be stitched together by Blake to form small books. The whole process was cumbersome and laborious but cheap, and since Blake could keep the plates in his own possession, it enabled him to print just as many copies of a work as there was an immediate demand for. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the technique itself took on a special significance in Blake's own mind as a method by which false appearances could be melted away, and hidden truth brought forth or revealed. As Blake described it on plate 14 of his work **The Marriage of Heaven & Hell**, his printing technique was "salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid."

4.2 BLAKE'S MAJOR BOOKS

One of the first major books that Blake printed by this process was the **Songs of Innocence**. The title-pages of this little book of poems and colourful illustrations is dated 1789, but many of the poems were written much earlier, a few having appeared in an early prose satire entitled **An Island in the Moon** that Blake had written around 1785. The poems of **Innocence** are apparently about children and the golden world of

childhood innocence, about laughter and play, sunshine and bird-song. Some of the poems also apparently embody morals about the goodness of God (or Jesus) and about the importance of generosity and benevolence, unselfishness and sympathy. In this, Blake seems to have been following the tradition extant in his age, of books of religious verses for children. But while such contemporary volumes as Isaac Watts' **Divine and Moral Songs for Children** and Mrs. Anna Letitia Barbauld's **Hymns in Prose for Children** were heavily didactic, Blake's lyrics of Innocence are delightful and charming, but not without intricate structural and thematic complexities that become evident only on a close reading. Some critics have indeed suggested that the **Songs of Innocence** are in fact anything but "innocent", being really full of deep and resonant ironies.

Five years after producing the first copies of the **Songs of Innocence**, Blake prepared the plates for a second complementary book of poems which he named the **Songs of Experience**. This latter book however was not issued separately, but bound in with the pages of the earlier **Songs of Innocence** to make a single volume which Blake entitled "**The Songs of Innocence and of Experience : Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul**". In total contrast to the songs of **Innocence**, the lyrics of **Experience** are about suffering, exploitation, death, fear and hopelessness. In poem after poem in the **Songs of Experience**, Blake depicts scenes and situations about the frustration of desires, the deprivation of freedom, and at best, of the gaining of a bitter knowledge. Yet, as Blake critics have often pointed out, the darkness of **Experience** is not wholly negative, for it leads on to a vision of a "Higher Innocence". According to this view, the "contrary States" of "Innocence" and "Experience" are related in a relationship of dialectical contrariety or interplay—as thesis and antithesis—which leads on to a visionary synthesis. To put it simply, it is said that "Innocence" by itself is a fragile and imperfect state, and that it needs to be enlarged or charged with "Experience" in order that a true "Organised" Innocence may emerge. Such arguments are based on Blake's own words in **The Marriage of Heaven & Hell** : "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (plate 3). However, this view has not gone unchallenged, and recent commentators on the poetry of Blake have indicated that the relationship between Innocence and Experience is not dialectical but rather set in the form of a dialogue.

Yet, whatever the nature of the connection between Innocence and Experience, Blake was sufficiently seized with the idea of contrariety to write poems reflecting contrary perspectives or attitudes on the same topic or theme. Hence one comes across

many paired poems in the **Songs of Innocence and Experience** with either the same or contrary titles. There are, for instance, two lyrics entitled “Nurse’s Song”, two titled “Holy Thursday”, and two called “The Chimney Sweeper”. Then again, against “The Lamb” of the **Songs of Innocence**, there is “The Tyger” in the **Songs of Experience**. “Infant Joy” against “Infant Sorrow”, “The Divine Image” balanced against “The Human Abstract”, and “The Little Boy Lost” and “The Little Boy Found” against “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found.”

4.3 THE CHIMNEY-SWEEPER POEMS (INNOCENCE & EXPERIENCE)

Innocence

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.

There’s little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb’s back, was shaved, 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 locked up in coffins of black,

10

And by came an angel who had a bright key,
And he opened 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 and 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 and never want joy.

20

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Though the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm.
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

Experience

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 health,
And smiled 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’.

10

4.3.1 Critical Analysis of the Chimney-Sweeper poems (Innocence & Experience)

It is clearly evident that “**The Chimney Sweeper**” of **Innocence** is a deeply ironic poem. On the surface, his lyric of twenty-four lines tells the story of a small boy, a chimney sweeper, who dreams a beautiful dream about an angel who releases them from the toilsome drudgery of their daily lives. And the poem apparently points to a conventional devotional moral :

And the Angel told Tom, if he’d be a good boy,
He’d have God for his father, & never want joy.

Such a reading of the poem, however, cannot be sustained, given the direct if somewhat understated, condemnation of the condition of the children who were forced into the work of sweeping chimneys. This is evident in the very first stanza of the poem :

When my mother died I was very young,
Any my Father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry “weep! ‘weep!’ ‘weep!’”
So your chimneys I sweep, & in soot I sleep.

It was a fact that the chimney sweepers of London were little boys as little as four years old who were virtually sold by their poor parents to master-sweeps for as small a sum as twenty or thirty shillings. Small children were required for chimney sweeping, for chimneys were then too narrow for adults to climb up them and to clean them from inside. For this, the little child-sweeps would be forced to enter the chimneys, and also get beaten up if they refused or showed any reluctance. To make them work faster once they were inside the chimneys, they would be prodded with poles or pricked with pins or sometimes fires would be lit at the bottom of the chimneys. Inevitably, it was not uncommon for the sweeps to die of burns or suffocation, and nearly all suffered from some kind of disease or the other, including skin-ulcers and cancer. The working hours of the children were also long— from well before sunrise when they would be forced to walk the streets of the city in rain, hail, snow, or frost, calling out their trade-cry “Sweep!”, to midday, when they were turned loose, unwashed and without proper food, or clothes, or shelter. It is about the plight of such child-sweeps that Blake wrote his poem, giving a voice to one such boy ;

There’s 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, & that very night
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned & 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 & set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in a river, and shine in the sun.

By speaking these words, the child narrator apparently performs the role of a comforter. Yet it is undeniable that Tom Dacre’s dream which the narrator holds out as a panacea or cure for all the ills of the chimney sweepers’ miserable lives is really no

more than a dream—a reverie or imaginative vision having little or no connection with reality. Certainly Tom Dacre’s dream does nothing to alter the material conditions of the existence of the sweeps. Indeed, as some of the last lines of the poem stress, the little children have to go out to work as usual :

And so Tom awoke, and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho’ the morning was cold.....

Of course it is true that in so far as Tom is concerned, his dream does bring in a kind of benefit—a psychological comfort :

Tho’ the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

But it hardly needs any elaboration to understand that these lines are not as innocent as they appear. The vision of the angel and the message that God would be Tom’s father is typical of the promises held out by religion. Tom Dacre’s dream-vision only momentarily reconciles him to his own suffering and blinds him to the injustice that is done unto him. To see the matter in another way, we may note that while the concluding lines of the poem are spoken by the child-sweep, they were of course **written** by William Blake. The child-narrator speaks about “all” doing their duty; but Blake’s point is that if “all” (including the real father of the sweep) really did their duty, there would be no suffering, no pain, and no children forced to sweep chimneys for the profit of a few cruel men and the comfort and convenience of the heartless house-holders who hired the little children whenever their chimneys needed to be cleaned.

“The Chimney Sweeper” of the **Songs of Experience** is different from that of the **Songs of Innocence** discussed above in that the **Experience** poem is a devastating exposure of the terrible reality that the **Innocence** lyric had hinted at. The poem opens with the voice of narrator who observes, records, and then asks a questions :

A little black thing among the snow,
Crying””weep!’ ‘weep!’” in notes of woe!
“Where are thy father & mother, say?”

As in “The Chimney Sweeper” of the **Songs of Innocence**, the child sweep here too is too small to be able to pronounce the whole word “Sweep”, and it comes out as “weep! weep!” from his mouth. But there is also the implication here that the child is really weeping, having been forced out to walk through the winter snows dressed only

in his soot-covered black rags. Hence, in the perception of the narrator, he is no longer a child, but a little black “thing”—a dehumanized object like a clot of soot. But the answer of the child proves that it is not he who is less than human, it is rather his parents who “clothed (him) in the clothes of death/And taught (him) to sing the notes of woe”—that is, sold him and forced him to become a chimney sweeper.

Nine of the twelve lines of “**The Chimney Sweeper**” of **Experience** are spoken by the child-sweep, but this cannot disguise the fact that this poem, like “The Tyger” and the “Nurse’s Song” of **Experience**, is about adults and an adult-dominated society. The whole poem is actually built around the sense of a contrast between childhood innocence and adult hypocrisy and repression. There is on the one hand the happiness and gaiety of the child, his smiles and dancing and singing, and on the other the inhuman behaviour not only of his parents who sell him into a life of virtual slavery, and then quite unconcernedly go to church’ to pray for the salvation of their souls :

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 & dance & 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.

The last line in particular ironically concludes the sense of contraries which had been initiated in the first line of the Jyric with the contrast between the “black thing” and the (white) “snow”. Now, at the end of the poem, the chimney sweeper underlines the bitter truth that in the world of Experience, the ‘heaven’ of the privileged is the darkest ‘misery’ of the exploited.

Blake’s phrase “God and his Priest and King” also deserves attention for it throws light on his attitude to religion and politics. Blake was born to a family of dissenting Christians, and he always regarded the established Church with suspicion and hostility. One of his “Proverbs of Hell” in **The Marriage of Heaven and Hell** thus reads :

As the caterpillar chooses the fairest leaves to lay her eggs on, so the priest lays his curse on the fairest joys.

Similar sentiments are also to be found expressed in the **Experience** lyrics “The

Little Vagabond” and ‘The Human Abstract’, and in “The Garden of Love” in which “Priests in black gowns” are said to “blind with briars.....joys and desires.” Blake viewed monarchy with suspicion and he perceived it as the fount of oppression, hence there is no big wonder that he writes of the hypocritical parents of the chimney sweeper praising God and the kin£, who is God’s priest’.

4.3.2 Summary

At the simplest level, “The Chimney Sweeper” of the **Songs of Experience** is a poem of protest. This lyric like ‘The Tyger’ and ‘The Nurse’s Song’ of **Experience** reflect upon a fallen state in which the felicities of Innocence are sadly lacking. The three poems do not say the same things, or carry the same messages, but they do depict a bleak world of tyranny, bondage, and frustration. Yet, as ‘The Tyger’ indicates, while Experience may seem to be hopeless, the very feeling of hopelessness may act as a spring for change and reform. In one way, Blake’s pattern of **Innocence and Experience** conforms to the idea of a “Fortunate Fall”, the concept that (as Milton’s Adam put it), “much more good...shall spring” out of the suffering of man. For as Blake prophetically wrote in his long poem Milton, “Generation is swallowed up in Regeneration” (plate 41).

4.4 SELECT READINGS

All quotations from the poems of Blake cited above have been taken from the Oxford University Press edition **Blake : Complete Writings** edited by Geoffrey Keynes (1979). Another good edition in the Norton Critical Edition **William Blake’s Poetry and Designs** edited by Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant (1979). Some helpful works of criticism containing material on the **Songs of Innocence and of Experience** are the following :

1. **Edward Larissy** — William Blake (Basil Blackwell, 1985).
2. **Heather & Glen** — Vision and Disenchantment: Blake’s “Songs “ and Wordsworth’s ‘Lyrical Ballads’ (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
3. **Margaret Bottrall**— Casebook on Blake’s Songs, (Macmillan, 1969).
4. **Ed. Morton D, Paley** — “Twentieth Century Interpretations of Songs of Innocence and of Experience”. (Prentice Hall, 1969).
5. **Michael Forbear** — The Poetry of William Blake (Penguin, 1991).

4.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Essay type questions

1. Bring out the significance of the titles 'Innocence' and 'Experience' in the context of the two 'Chimney Sweeper' poems.
2. What aspects of early Romanticism do you find in the 'Chimney sweeper' poems?

MODULE - 2

UNIT 1 □ WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : LINES WRITTEN A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY

Structure

- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 Study Guide
- 1.3 Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey on revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a tour, July 13, 1798
 - 1.3.1 Introduction
 - 1.3.2 Explanation
 - 1.3.3 Glossary
- 1.4 Comprehension Exercises
- 1.5 Select Readings

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The objective of this section is to acquaint you with one of the famous poems written by the pioneering Romantic poet—Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey by William Wordsworth.

The introduction tells you about one of the most important and common features of Romantic poetry—its association with and interpretation of the external world of nature. It also gives you an idea of Wordsworth’s attitude to nature.

A reading to **Tintern Abbey** helps you understand the importance and significance that nature had in the poet’s life.

1.2 STUDY GUIDE

Go through the poem once. After reading the introduction you should read the unit 85.2 carefully. Make sure that “Tintern Abbey”, being a poem of considerable length, is understood section by section. Note and understand the “shifts in mood, feeling emotion; mark the transitions carefully. Wordsworth is a very personal poet, hence

biographical details are of great value. A gradual development of the poet's attitude towards Nature is very prominent and should be well understood. It is not a mere nature-poem, though. It is an assertion of the poet's faith in the Great Soul of the world, on its formative influence and the fact that he returns again and again to her is ample testimony to Wordsworth's Pantheistic mind.

1.3 LINES COMPOSED A FEW MILES ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY ON REVISITING THE BANKS OF THE WYE DURING A TOUR, JULY 13, 1798

Five years have passed; 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,
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
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 20
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
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 :

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
 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. 40
 In which the heavy and the weary weight
 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
 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, 50
 We see into the life of things.
 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,

Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer through 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
 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,
 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,
 All 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, 90
 Abundant recompense; For I have learned
 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 am'pie power
 To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
 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,
 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 recognize
 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.
 Nor perchance,
 If I were not thus taught, should I the more
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay;
 For thou art with me here upon the banks
 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch

The language of my former heart, and read 120
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
 May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy; for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress.
 With quietness and beauty, and so feed 13
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life.
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
 And let the misty mountain-winds be free
 To blow against thee; and, in after years,
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure : when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms.
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies : oh! then,
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me.
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
 If I should be where I no more can hear 150
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams

and the unseen. But for the Romantic, imagination was fundamental. To them, the mind is the central point and the governing factor. As poets they insisted that the most vital activity of the mind is imagination. For them it was the very source of spiritual energy and thus they believed it to be divine. However, the most important fact we should note here is that the awakening of the imagination takes place through love of nature. The Romantic believed that the invisible powers which sustain the universe work through and in the visible world. It was through nature that they found those exalting moments, when they passed from the sensory to a visionary world. As Wordsworth explains, the imagination 'Is but another/Name for absolute power/And clearest insight, amplitude of mind/And Reason in her most exalted mood?' (**The Prelude**).

Coleridge, on the other hand, in his **Biographia Literaria** distinguishes between the Primary imagination, the Secondary Imagination and Fancy. To him, the primary imagination is the act of self-consciousness that is the foundation of all knowledge and all perception. It is the act by which each one of us creates his world, and is a human repetition of the act by which God created the world as a whole. The secondary imagination is the poetic imagination. Just as the primary imagination unites the knower and the known in a single act, so the secondary or poetic imagination unites the poet's mind with the objects of its contemplation, and the various objects with each other. It is that which makes a poem not merely a reproduction of things previously existing in the world, but a new unity, with an existence of its own. It is this power that makes **Tintern Abbey**, for example, something more than a remembered landscape. And Fancy, according to Coleridge, merely recombines existing things in a new way.

Wordsworth held with Coleridge that imagination is not fancy. For him imagination is the most important gift a poet can have. Moreover, he felt that the imagination must be subservient to the external world, because that world is not dead but living and has its own soul, which is distinct from the soul of man.

Wordsworth was essentially the poet of 'nature' and thereby of 'man'. He believed that man's task was to enter into communion with the 'soul' of nature, and emphasized that he can hardly avoid doing so, since from birth onwards human life is continuously shaped by nature which penetrates his being and influences his thoughts. He believed that he helped to bring this soul of nature closer to man, that he could show how exquisitely the external world is tuned to the individual mind, and the individual mind to the external world.

Perhaps no other poem expresses so clearly and powerfully as **Tintern Abbey**, what nature meant to the Romantics. It shows Wordsworth not merely as the lover

of nature, but the 'worshipper' of nature. She is exhibited here- as man's prime teacher exercising a purifying influence, enabling him to see into the life of things, and bringing in him the sense of an all-pervading spirit, that 'rolls' through all things. Thus briefly stated, we see in Wordsworth not only an awareness of the strong bond between nature and human life, but a perception of the immanence of the spiritual in nature. Wordsworth never mentions this as divinity in any abstract form, he calls it a 'presence'. This pantheism, (the philosophy that perceived a divine presence and therefore, a harmony in all creation) Wordsworth had in common with P.B. Shelley and S.T. Coleridge. But whereas Coleridge was so conscious of the symbolical substratum of nature that the physical surface appearances 'vanish from my thought', Wordsworth always remained 'A lover of the meadows and the wood's', observing with eye and ear the realities of nature as well as their divine significance.

Composition of the poem :

The poem **Tin tern Abbey** was composed in July 1789 and first published in **The 'Lyrical Ballads** the same year. Wordsworth's note tells the history of its composition : '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 (10th—13th July) with my sister.'

The Landscape / The Setting :

The Wye is a beautiful mountain river which flows through Wales and England. **Tintern Abbey** is situated on the bank of this river. It is one of the most famous ecclesiastical ruins in England. The ruins of some old buildings with a massive abbey, believed to have been built in the 13th century, are to be found here.

The Occasion :

The occasion of the poem is a visit to the Wye, already visited five years before. This gives rise to reflections on the significance that the landscape has had for Wordsworth in the interval.

1.3.2 Explanation

The first section of **Tintern Abbey** describes the calm and quiet beauty of the scene above Tintern Abbey. Five years have passed since Wordsworth's visit to the banks of the Wye, Once again he hears the murmur of the river. He beholds the steep and 'lofty cliffs' that seem to meet the sky. This brings to his mind a deep sense of loneliness. Resting under the dark fig tree he looks at the green cottage garden and orchard tufts with their green unripe fruits. Once again he sees that hedge-rows run

wild and the pastoral farms are all draped in green. Wordsworth sees the curl of smoke rising from among the trees—the smoke which may be coming out from the tent of a gipsy or from the cave of a hermit.

The scene, we may note, is arranged in a pattern of horizontals and verticals, each boldly drawn, and in their total effect given exact definition to spatial relationship. The sound of the stream is the only sound heard. The stream, heard, not seen, so that its embowered depth is suggested, carries the mind horizontally into the valley, a movement that is strengthened by ‘inland murmur’. The cliffs carry the attention downwards into the ‘more deep seclusion’ of the hidden valley floor, whilst at the same time they invite a contrary movement of the eye toward heaven. This is again repeated in the description of the fields and woods. The lines of the hedge-rows, and the greenness that runs ‘to the very doors’ of cottages, are quietly balanced by the ‘wreathes of smoke/ sent up, in silence, from among the trees.’

The description of the scene is totally romantic. The scenery here, as we see, is all about the wild or the untamed, silently tucked away from human habitation. The landscape is sombre and grand. The smoke might suggest the presence of some itinerant travellers, but no human figures are seen. ‘Vagrant dwellers in household woods’ or ‘some Hermit’s cave’ emphasize a close harmony between man and nature.

The second section, we may note, shows what Wordsworth owes to the scene. The memory of the Wye has given the poet, ‘sensations sweet.../With tranquil restoration.’ It accounts for the moments of peace which are felt ‘mid the din./Of town and cities’. The thrill, the pleasure, re-enacted in recollection, influences the emotions and the mind in turn. Such pleasure is not only calming and restorative, but has aroused in the poet almost unnoticed, sensations of pleasure which have had their results in impulses of kindness and love.

Wordsworth owes to the calm, quiet beauties of nature on the banks of the Wye,- another gift ‘of aspect more sublime’ which brings a serenity of being and a sense of sharpened insight—‘that serene and blessed mood,/In which the affections gently lead us on.—/Until, the breath of his corporeal frame/And even the motion of our human blood/Almost suspended, we are laid asleep/In body, and become a living soul’. In other words, Wordsworth was thrown into a mood of spiritual ecstasy that produced in him a trance-like state and led him into a higher spiritual existence. In the trance-like state his breathing activity was suspended and the very circulation of blood stopped. He caught a vision of harmony ruling the whole universe. In this exalted mood he could see into the essence of life—‘the life of things.’

Notice that Wordsworth does not explain or defend the doctrine, he merely states it as an experience in verse of such serene liveliness, that it carries with it its own guarantee of authenticity.

In the third section, a passage of great emotional intensity follows in which, we see, an entirely different mood that is ascribed to the influence of the river. This longing is for the harmony and the quiet of the Wye, and is independent of the earlier suggestion that the river is the inspiration of the rare moments of insight. The poet, amid the hustle and bustle of city-life, has longed deeply for the peace of the Wye. The fretful life of the city is conveyed through the rapid and irregular movement of the verse.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
In darkness amid the many shapes
Of joyless delight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart...

suggesting a quickened pulse and disordered breaking, so that the longing for the ‘sylvan Wye’ seems to be almost a physical need for the peace that only a more natural, more highly ordered, and quieter environment can give. There is no doubt that the contemplation of the lovely landscape comforted and soothed his mind in times when he was pressed by the struggles and turmoils of life.

In section four we see that Wordsworth is now turning to the scene before him. The ‘picture of the mind’ which now ‘revives’ is no doubt the faint impression left after five years in the memory. He hopes that the scene will not only provide immediate pleasure but ‘life and food/For future years’. This hope is entertained in spite of the knowledge that his earlier and more spontaneous joy in nature—a joy which was intensely passionate—has been left behind with the growth of a new mode of feeling. However, Wordsworth does not stop here; he goes on to trace the stages through which his response to nature has passed. He goes on depicting the pictures in words.

Long ago in his boyhood days, when he came first among these hills, like a roe he bounded over the mountains, by the sides of the deep rivers and the lonely streams—wherever nature led. Nature was to him a fascinating playfield. He was passionately wedded to the many-faced beauties of nature. But in this stage a sense of awe, at times, blended itself with the ‘glad animal movements’. He bounded over the alluring treasures of nature’s beauty, but did so ‘more like a man/Flying from something that he dreads than one/Who sought the thing he loved! An extreme passion often does lead to such contraries of behaviour and makes one blushful of encountering the object of his attractions.

Clearly Wordsworth is running away from himself, from his thoughts, from the terrible turmoil in his mind following his disillusionment with the French Revolution. (though, of course, he doesn't specifically say so). We should remember that the first visit was in 1793, when not only did England join the allies and declare war on France, but also when Napoleon's imperialist designs became apparent. Wordsworth at first encountered the real agony of having to abandon loyalty either to his own country or to his deepest intellectual and moral convictions that he found in the Revolution. Before any solution to this impasse, the Terror started in France. The period is described in detail in *The Prelude*. He describes the disconsolate effect it had on all those who placed their ideal hopes in the Revolution.

We can understand what nature meant to the poet when he says 'Nature then.../ To me was all in all'. The 'sounding cataract' haunted him. The tall rocks and mountains and the deep, gloomy woods with their forms and colours were then to him objects of intense longing. The sensuous pleasures derived from nature were then to him an appetite that he could feel in his mind and body.

Wordsworth proceeds to describe the 'abundant recompense' which he has gained for the loss of the 'aching joys'. Notice that the poet does not now look at nature only through his eye and ear. The mind is also now active. The sensuous pleasures are now followed by spiritual delight and he hears 'the still and music of humanity' in the sounds of nature. Through the chastening influence of sorrow and afflictions, nature and man have become inter-linked. He now feels the presence of a living spirit in nature that stirs his mind with lofty thoughts and pervades all things of the universe as well as the mind of man. He feels the 'presense' whose dwelling is 'the-light of setting suns/And the round ocean and the living air. And the blue sky and in the mind of man'. This spirit binds the animate and inanimate worlds together. Therefore, Wordsworth is still a lover of the sights and sounds as perceived by the eye and ear, as well as by the imagination. The contemplation of nature through the senses has made him recognize her as the "anchor" of his 'purest thought', 'the nurse/The guide the guardian' of his heart and the mainspring or 'soul' of his 'moral being'.

An important point to be noted here is that Wordsworth's spiritual attitude did not replace his simple sensuous delight in the objects of nature. The spiritual meaning was added to it and not substituted for it. The poet now sees nature as the expression of 'something far more deeply interfused', as 'a motion and a spirit that impels./All thinking things, all objects of all thought/And rolls through all things'. This is profound and undogmatic pantheism, unfettered by moral accretions. Although the experience of 'a motion and a spirit' is described as something felt by the poet, and therefore personal

and individual, the tone of quiet assurance suggests anything but an eccentric individualism or a mere private enthusiasm. Wordsworth writes here with the assurance of a poet who has imagined and felt the truth of a view of reality—that the universe cannot be understood as a collection of separate dead objects, but only as a unified living entity.

In section five, the poet says that even if he had not learnt to look upon nature as his friend, philosopher and guide, he would still be happy for he is accompanied by his sister, his ‘dearest friend’ in whose lustrous eyes he catches glimpses of that sensuous delight in nature which he himself had once felt. He tells his sister that nature never betrays the ‘heart’ that loves her, she rather leads one ‘from joy to joy’. Nature feeds man with such lofty thoughts that slanders, harsh criticism, contempt of selfish men or the numbing and deadening influence of social custom cannot affect him adversely, nor shake his faith that everything he sees is ‘full of blessings’. The poet therefore, wants Dorothy, his sister, to experience like him, the sensuous pleasures in the beauties of nature. However, later she will overcome the ‘wild ecstasies’ and her mind in its more nature state, would be experiencing ‘a sober pleasure’. Wordsworth tells her that if then she is afflicted with loneliness or pain or is separated from him, she can then draw comfort from the recollection that she and her brother had once stood on the banks of the Wye, enjoying nature’s bounteous beauty, which is ‘more dear’ to the poet both for the beautiful landscape as well as for her presence. Thus at the end, Wordsworth looks beyond the present to his own death, when his spirit and his belief will -live on through Dorothy.

Tintern Abbey is thus a panoramic vision of the power of a remembered landscape, working under the surface in a mind perplexed with five years of turmoil. It is a journey not merely on the physical plane, but more importantly on the mental or spiritual plane since it is primarily a journey of the mind the poet is depicting here. The setting of the meditation we have seen, is a harmonious landscape in which earth, sky and the signs of human life are blended in complete repose. The poem moves quietly through unquiet memories, then with gathering power traces the stages of its author’s communion with nature to its culmination. His passion breaks free from restraint in the concluding address to Dorothy in whose eyes he can read the record of his earlier self.

1.3.3 Glossary

Sycamore — kind of fig tree.

Orchard tufts — cluster of fruit trees,

corporeal frame — physical body,

dizzy raptures — extreme joy.
grating — discordant,
interfused — pervading,
mansion — store house,
exhortations — address, advice.

1.4 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Trace the development of Wordsworth's attitude to nature of presented in **Tintern Abbey**.
2. Examine **Tintern Abbey** as a poetic statement of Wordsworth's faith in man and nature.
3. Show how Wordsworth invests familiar objects and experiences with rich symbolic associations in **Tintern Abbey**.
4. Comment on Wordsworth's philosophy of nature as expressed in **Tintern Abbey**.

1.5 SELECT READINGS

1. **Graham Hough**—*The Romantic Poets*
2. **C. M. Bowra**—*The Romantic Imagination*
3. **Wordsworth**—*Herbert Read*
4. **R. Langbaum**—*The Evolution of Soul in Wordsworth's Poetry*
5. **B. Groom**—*The Unity of Wordsworth's Poetry*
6. **G. H. Hartman**—*A Poet's Progress : Wordsworth and he via Naturaliter Negative*

UNIT 2 □ JOHN KEATS : WHEN I HAVE FEARS...

Structure

- 2.1 Introduction to the Poet
- 2.2 Important Works
 - 2.2.1 Sonnet : When I have fears
 - 2.2.2 Glossary
- 2.3 Discussion
- 2.4 Summing up
- 2.5 Comprehension Exercises

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

John Keats was born in 1795 and lived for 26 years. His greatest and best poems were written in 1819 when he was 22, He was denied the education and social advantages of his contemporaries. After schooling he was apprenticed to a surgeon and graduated with a diploma in Apothecary from St. Thomas and Guy's Hospitals. He found, however, that the prospect of a surgeon's profession did not appeal to him. Between 1814 and 1816 he had been writing some poetry as reading intensively both English literature and translation of the classics. He then resolved to devote his life to poetry. One of his intimate and devoted friends was Charles Brawne, at whose house in Hampstead Keats lived for some time. Here he met and fell in love with Charles' sister Fanny Brawne. At this time Keats' brother Tom fell ill and died of tuberculosis, Keats became engaged to Fanny Brawne (1819) and the following year was perhaps the happiest of his life. After this he, too, succumbed to tuberculosis. He spent the last few months of his life in Rome and died in February, 1821.

2.2 IMPORTANT WORKS

- 1817 — First published work; Poems, 1817 includes Sleep and Poetry and sonnet **“On First Looking into Champan's Homer”**
- 1818 — **Endymion; a Poetic Romance**—a long lyrical narrative; sonnets: “When I have fears”, “The Human Seasons” etc.
- 1819 — Writes **Hyperion** which he leaves unfinished **The Eve of St. Ages, Lamia, Isabella, La Belle Dame Sans Merci**, sonnet **“Bright Star”**

1810-20 — The great odes—**Psyche, Indolence, Melancholy, Nightingale, Grecian Urn, Autumn.**

2.2.1 Sonnet : When I have fears

Introduction :

This sonnet was written between January 22 to 31, 1818, and copied out in a letter to Reynolds. It was first published in 1848. Keats' earlier sonnets were written in the Italian form. This is his first attempt at the Shakespearean sonnet.

Text :

The Terror of Death

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-piled books, in charact'ry
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's stair'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair Creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the fairy power
Of unreflecting love—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

10

2.2.2 Glossary

glean'd — Gathered after a harvest,
charact'ry — (Character) handwriting,
garners — granaries.

fair Creature of an hour—refers probably to a woman Keats had seen in Vauxhall Entertainment Garden in London.

2.3 DISCUSSION

The poet fears that he may be cut short by death before the early promise of his poetic powers is fulfilled. The first quatrain is an extended metaphor which embodies poetry as the harvest of the mind. The piled volumes of poetry, his life's achievement, are the granaries which contain this harvest. Words such as "glean'd", "rich garnerers" "full-ripened grain" sustain the idea of a rich autumn harvest. Beauties of nature hold out promise of worlds to be enjoyed and captured in poetry through the transforming powers of imagination ("the magic hand of chance"). The poet has also experienced the enchantment of a woman's beauty and the delights of young, thoughtless love. As yet these are fleeting pleasures or "fairy" charms, whose true depths remain unexplored. At every turn the poet feels thwarted by fears of untimely death. So, distancing himself from ordinary life, he gives way to deep thought and the questions of time, love, fame which had weighed him down, recede into insignificance. Some critics read in the sonnet a premonition of the poet's own untimely death,

In structure and theme, the sonnet shows Shakespearean influence, the power of Time over human life is a recurrent theme in Shakespeare. The three-fold structure, beginning with the conditional "when..." which sets the premise, followed by the resolution in the final couplet, is distinctly Shakespearean, reminding us specially of sonnets like "When I do count the clock that tells the time."

2.4 SUMMING UP

1. The poet fears that untimely and unexpected death may hamper his full poetic achievement.
2. He overcomes this fear by deep contemplation which elevates him above transitory desires of Love and Fame.

2.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. Examine the reason for the poet's terror of death. How does he overcome this fear?
2. Explain the phrase "glean'd my teeming brain." What rhetorical device is being used here?
3. What does the phrase "full-ripened grain" refer to?

Unit - 3 □ ALFRED TENNYSON - ULYSSES

Structure

- 3.1 Glimpse into the life and works of Alfred Lord Tennyson**
- 3.2 Reducible Content of the Poem**
- 3.3 Detailed analysis of the Text**
- 3.4 Comprehension Exercises**
- 3.5 Select Bibliography**

3.1 GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) was one of the leading poets of Victorian England. It has been variously noted that his poetry embraces a wide range of subject matter spanning across medieval legends and classical myths to domestic situations and observations of nature. These are penned with rich imagery and intense descriptions that are largely inspired by Shelley, Keats and other Romantic poets. In this sense Tennyson may truly be seen as building a bridge between Romantic sensitivity and the various cross currents of Victorian thought.

The chief fame of this Poet Laureate rests on volumes like *Poems* (1833) which contain works like *The Lady of Shalott*, *Oenone*, *The Lotos Eaters* and *The Palace of Art*; a revised volume of poetry and a second new collection (both in 1842) containing pieces like *Morte d' Arthur*, *Ulysses* and *Locksley Hall*. Longer poems like *The Princess*, *In Memoriam* and *Maud and Other Poems* came in the later stages of his career. Much of Tennyson's verse has been inspired by Arthur Hallam, his intimate friend who was a fellow poet at Trinity College Cambridge; as also his most immediate early critic, Andrew Sanders holds that Tennyson's rise as 'the most influential and admired poet of the Victorian era owed much to his intellectual and emotional debt to Hallam.' Tennyson devoted several poems to the memory of his friend, among which the most important is 'In Memoriam' which was composed over a long period of seventeen years beginning from the year of Hallam's death in 1833.

Ulysses too is said to have been largely prompted by the death of the poet's closest friend, Tennyson began work on it as early as 1833 but the poem saw the light of day only in 1842 in the second collection of *Poems*, When the news of Hallam's death reached him on 1st October 1833, Tennyson was at Somersby, Lincolnshire leading a

life in cramped quarters with his mother and nine of his ten siblings, following the death of his father in 1831. The family had little income, and three of Tennyson's brothers were mentally ill. Just as the poet was trying to adjust to his new domestic duties, regaining contact with friends and had even published his 1832 book of poems—the news of Hallam's death arrived. Tennyson shared his grief with his sister, Emilia, who had been engaged to Hallam. Such a string of incidents lends credence to the view of the Victorian scholar Linda Hughes who reads *Ulysses* as an account of the emotional gulf between the state of Tennyson's domestic affairs and the loss of his special friendship, particularly the domesticity angle that the speaker seems to deplore in the poem.

Tennyson adopts aspects of the character of *Ulysses* primarily from the *Odysseus* of Homer, though critics have also found pervasive shades of Dante's *Ulisse* from the *Inferno*. There is however no denying that Homer's *Odyssey* provides the main narrative background of the poem. In its eleventh book the prophet Tiresias foretells that *Ulysses* will return to Ithaca after a difficult voyage, then begin a new and mysterious journey, and later die a peaceful, 'unwarlike' death that comes vaguely 'from the sea'. At the conclusion of Tennyson's poem, it is perhaps this new voyage that *Ulysses* is seen contemplating. It is also interesting how Tennyson adapts classical material to Victorian thought.

Tennyson's Style

Ulysses is a poem in blank verse that is oft quoted to illustrate the form of the dramatic monologue, which was however perfected by the other eminent Victorian poet Robert Browning. In the poem, *Ulysses* describes to an unspecified audience, his discontent and restlessness upon returning to his kingdom of Ithaca, after his far-ranging travels. Facing old age but not being daunted by it, he yearns to explore again, despite his reunion with his wife Penelope and son Telemachus. The speaker's language is unadorned and forceful, and it expresses *Ulysses*' conflicting moods as he searches for continuities between his past and future. There is often a marked contrast between the sentiment of *Ulysses*' words and the sounds that express them. This has given rise to conflicting interpretations on how exactly to take the words of the speaker that seem to hover between a soliloquy at times and a public speech at others. But to an extent, that is the pleasure inherent in a dramatic monologue and it would be prudent to let the reader decipher his own meanings from a close reading of the text. The overall impact is however in sync with most other poems of the Tennyson canon - replete with felicity of expression, mastery of verbal melody that raises the poem to a crescendo and the vivid use of imagery that constructs an unattained world into which the reader is beckoned.

Text of the poem

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades (10)
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight or battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains or windy Troy,
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades (20)
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer or new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire (30)
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus.
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle-
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good,
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail (40)
 In offices or tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods,
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
 There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail:
 There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me-
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads-you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil; (50)
 Death closes all: but something ere the end,
 Some work or noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:
 The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows: for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths (60)
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the guffs will wash us down:
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
 e are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts.
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (70)

3.2 REDUCIBLE CONTENT OF THE POEM

As the poem begins, Ulysses has returned to his kingdom Ithaca, having had a long, eventful journey home after fighting in the Trojan War. Confronted again with domestic life, Ulysses expresses his discontentment, including his indifference toward the ‘savage race’ (line 4) that he must now govern. Ulysses contrasts his restlessness and boredom with his heroic past. He contemplates his age and eventual death—“Life piled on life / Were all too little, and of one to me / Little remains” (24-26)- and longs for further experience and knowledge. His son Telemachus will inherit the throne that Ulysses finds burdensome. While Ulysses the father thinks Telemachus will be an ideal king, the explorer in him seems to have little empathy either for his son-”He works his work, I mine (43)~or for the necessary methods of governance-” by slow prudence” (36) and “through soft degrees” (37). In the final section, Ulysses cannot help responding to the call of the wild, so he turns his attention to his fellow mariners and calls on them to join him on another quest: the final one perhaps. He can make no guarantees as to their fates, nor does he want to; rather he only attempts to stir them by reviving memories of their heroic past. Interestingly, Ulysses is invoking only their glorious days of supra human endeavours and envisaging an equally distant and imaginative future wherewith he hopes to transcend the desultory present.

Keywords in-the Text :

- Barren crags: Infertile stretch or rocky land
- Mete and dole: Administer
- To the lees: Till the last drops
- Scudding drifts: broken clouds driven by winds
- Rainy Hyades: a constellation of stars whose appearance is generally accompanied by heavy rains
- Ringings: astir with battle sounds
- Windy Troy: Heavy winds are said to have swept the plains of Troy during the entire period of the Trojan War.
- Sceptre: the King’s rod, here it stands as a symbol of royal power ‘men that strove

with gods': Given the epic proportions of the Trojan War, both the Greeks and the Trojans had to fight against Divine powers. The Greeks, it is said, had to fight against Venus and Mars who sided with the Trojans.

Smite: strike (as with oars)

Furrows: mounting waves and the hollows between

'the baths/of all the western stars' : A reference to the classical belief that the stars actually sank into the waters of the sea when they set.

Happy Isles: Mythologically, this would refer to the island where the dead unite; and in the biographical context or the poem this could be a reference to Tennyson's desire to be reunited with Hallam.

3.3 DETAILED ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

The poem opens on a note of lament where Ulysses, the hero of the Trojan War has been reduced to a life of domesticity as king over his kingdom of Ithaca. Or so he thinks. The series of negatives in the long opening line are remarkable—'idle king', 'stil hearth', 'barren crags' and above all, 'an aged wife'. He is pained that his subjects are given only to a life of dull slovenliness and are immersed in the material pursuits of life; so much so that they do not even know him Ulysses, who as he himself soon asserts, has 'become a name'! In contrast with his home bound people, Ulysses 'cannot rest from travel', so dauntless is the spirit of adventure and so firmly rooted in him is the urge for discovery by trying to attain the yet unattained. The metaphor of 'drink(ing) life to the lees' adequately expresses his urge to make fruitful use of his own life till the last breath. The rest of the poem is actually a meditation on this very aspect of making the most of life. These lines are an admirable contrast to the mood of romantic languor expressed in Keats' *Ode To A Nightingale*:

"Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains

One minute past."

Ulysses then lapses into a reverie of his adventurous past which has been enjoyable as well as challenging too. He reminisces with fondness those innumerable trials he and his fellow mariners have undergone on the high seas in course of their maritime adventures. Having been through it all, he claims that he is now a name, a paradigm by himself, of the eternal explorer undeterred by any kind of calamity and refusing to be cowed down, whatever the impediments might be; and being driven by the thirst for knowledge. Indeed there can be no other worldly gain as big as to fuel such a fire, and in this, Tennyson's hero assimilates in him a rich tradition that spans across classical literature through the Renaissance into the Victorian.

Though he has assimilated within him all this diverse experience in travelling through life, yet he feels it is like 'the petty done the undone vast'. The metaphor of the arch through which 'gleams that untravelled world' is a supreme instance of Ulysses' wanderlust that drives him on and on. He makes a difference between living and existing, saying ;

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished not to shine in use! (22-23).

Ulysses is in no way anything like the Yeatsian old man of Sailing to Byzantium, rather his zest for life impels him to make the most of 'One Life', making redundant all thoughts of abandoning action due to old age. So instead of any contentment at what has been achieved, or even without giving in to any kind of impassivity as one lays waiting for death, he is only too eager to snatch away hours from the inevitable end and make the most of it. So Ulysses' 'gray spirit' yearns in desire To follow knowledge like a sinking star/Beyond the utmost bound of human thought' (30 -31) It is important to observe that he is repeatedly insisting on charting new territories of thought and knowledge hitherto unexplored by man, thereby showing his zeal to be a pioneer ever more. This is indeed a new variant or the carpe diem theme that is so pervasive in Metaphysical poetry; it is also a new dimension to the Shakespearean dilemma of the Time-Love-Beauty problematic triad. Ulysses is thus seen as a heroic character whose determination to seek "some work of noble note" is courageous in the face of a "stil hearth" and old age. The passion and conviction of Tennyson's language-and even his own comments on the poem-signify that the poet, as was typical in the Victorian age. admired courage and persistence. Read straightforwardly. Ulysses promotes the questing spirit of youth, even in old age, and a refusal to resign and face a life of passivity.

Much has been made of Ulysses words—'He works his work, I mine' (43) which he utters after having introduced his son Telemachus who is said to be ideally made out for the task of governance and for discharging all kinds of household responsibilities. Critics who feel that Tennyson identifies with the speaker read Ulysses' speech affirmatively, or without irony. Many other interpretations of the poem have developed from the argument that the poet does not identify with Ulysses, and further criticism has suggested that the purported inconsistencies in Ulysses' character are faults of the poet himself. There seems to be an unmistakable streak of paternal affection evident in the repeated use of the possessive:

This is my son, mine own Telemachus. (33)

On the other hand however, it may be argued that when Ulysses does not attach any much importance to Ithaca or its people, relegating the charge of ruling the kingdom

might be more of a royal responsibility that he is discharging in an unaffected manner. There is a straight contrast between his qualities that Ulysses has detailed and those he identifies in Telemachus-a kind of 'home' and 'world' paradigm we might say. His son, according to Ulysses, is blest with rationality of thought, has the prudence required to civilize his people and is dutiful to the household gods. It must as well be remembered that the adjectives 'blameless', 'discerning', and 'decent'-are words with positive connotations in other of Tennyson's poetry and within the classical tradition, where 'blameless is an attribute of gods and heroes.

It is this heroic quality inherent in the speaker of the monologue that surfaces in the last section of the poem. The 'port', the Vessel' and the glooming 'dark broad seas' are definitely symbolic-the final voyage and the exploration of hitherto uncharted territories of human thought and knowledge are both encapsulated in them. Like a dynamic leader who leads from the front, Ulysses addresses his comrades as 'My mariners', for he still knows that a captain can get only as good as his team. Imperative is the contrast between the people of Ithaca with whom he feels no association at all and his fellow warriors who have always been a part of his own psycho social build up. There is no empty vaunt, no illusion in the leader: he rightly tries to recall their rich past when they would accept both the thunder and the sunshine with 'a frolic welcome'. It has all been possible because they have been free thinkers and men of courage in the body as much as in the mind. With age, their physical prowess has definitely declined, but Ulysses is confident that they still have their swansong to perform :

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all; but something ere the end,
Some work or noble note may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with gods. (50 - 53)

Tennyson makes a wonderful fusion of the setting with the mood as his hero describes the approaching dusk. Ulysses' clarion call echoes amidst the darkening shadows as he prepares to undertake the final journey that will immortalise him and his fellow mariners. As in all the enterprises he has taken up in life, the results of this last one, he knows full well, are tentatively poised between extremes. The odds might either prove too much for them and they may be vanquished; alternately they may have a glimpse of heaven as they touch the 'Happy Isles', mythologically the land where the dead are all united. With Ulysses, the hero of the Trojan War, this is the promise of a reunion with Achilles; with Tennyson the poet it is perhaps the dream of his lost friend Hallam that has charged up these lines. Whatever that might be, important is the fact that Ulysses delicately balances the experience of having been a warrior perse and

adventurer with an equanimous acceptance of the final truth of his mortality. He has full knowledge of the realities of his human existence :

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'

We are not now that strength which in old days

Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are. (65-67)

It is above all, this equipoise that makes him a truly heroic figure. Readers across generations have accepted the acclaimed last lines of Ulysses as being highly inspirational in nature. If one may take the liberty of transcending strictly literary boundaries, it would come to notice that the concluding lines of the poem have often been used as a motto by schools and organisations that are tuned to collective efforts. The final three lines are inscribed on a cross at the Observation Hill, Antarctica, to commemorate explorer Robert Falcon Scott and his party, who died on their return trek from the South Pole in 1912.

One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will

To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. (68-70)

It is immensely interesting to note that the final line has been chosen to be carved into the long wall at the entrance to the athletes' village at the 2012 London Olympics! A judge at the event justified the choice in these words:

“The aim was to find a line of poetry that somehow encapsulated the endeavour, the glory and the dance with failure that Olympic sport entails.”

Strictly speaking, it is not 'failure' that the Tennyson hero is apprehensive about at any point in the poem, in fact quantitative ideas like success and failure are not part of his lexicon. The final line, climactic in its import, transcends any such considerations and raises the pitch to an ontological plane where the attitude is all about 'never say die'!

3.4 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Questions :

1. What do you understand by the term [dramatic] monologue? Answer with special reference to Tennyson's *Ulysses*.
2. Do you think that Tennyson as a poet fits into the tradition of the Romantic? Answer with reference to *Ulysses*.
3. Write a critical essay on Tennyson's poetic style with reference to *Ulysses*,
4. Write a critical appreciation of *Ulysses*.

Short Questions :

1. Comment on Tennyson's use of imagery in *Ulysses* with reference to any two images.
2. Bring out the fundamental opposition between the past and the present in the life of *Ulysses*.

3.5 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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UNIT 4 □ ROBERT BROWNING : MY LAST DUCHESS

Structure

- 4.1 Life and works of the author, Browning
- 4.2 The text of My Last Duchess
- 4.3 Reducible Content of the Poem
- 4.4 Critical Estimate of the Poem
- 4.5 Comprehension Exercises
- 4.6 Select Readings

4.1 LIFE AND WORKS OF THE AUTHOR, BROWNING

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell, southeast of London on May, 7, 1812, the same year that Dickens was born. His father was a clerk in the Bank of England, of comfortable, if not affluent, means with literary tastes which Browning inherited from his father. Both Browning and his father shared an avid interest in old tales of mystery and terror and followed the latest crime stories in the newspapers. This might have influenced Browning's later interest in the criminal mind and the aberrant personality. From his mother he received religious instruction of an austere Evangelism for which he retained respect all his life, often expressed in his poetry. His family being Dissenters, Browning could be admitted neither to Oxford nor Cambridge. However, his father by becoming a founder contributor of University College, London, ensured that he went to college when it first opened in 1828. He was a precocious and gifted child and although he did not go to a school after the age of fourteen he read widely at the library at home and acquired a taste for out-of-the-way books and had ambitions of being a playwright.

In 1823 Browning published a poem, '**Pauline**' anonymously. It was not a great success and was dismissed as 'morbid' and 'self-centred' by John Stuart Mill. This prompted him to attempt to write differently.

In 1834 he began on his long poems. **Paracelsus and Sordello** and contributed to the magazine run by a group of young writers, lawyers, artists and academics called The Colloquials.

Paracelsus was published the following year and was favourably received and

drew the attention of Wordsworth, Landor and other well-known men of letters. One of them was Elizabeth Barrett who wrote in a letter to Mary Russell Mitford in 1836, 'the pulse of poetry is full and warm and strong in it....the author is a poet in the holy sense.' It was around then that Browning was introduced to William Macready, the famous actor-manager through John Forster, Dickens's biographer. On Macready's invitation to write a play for him Browning wrote **Strafford** in 1836 which Macready performed with some success.

The experience of playing drew Browning to dramatic writing in general. In 1838 he went to Italy and came back with impressions that he integrated in **Sordello** (1840). It was not well received at all and undid much of the reputation he had built up as a poet. However, Rossetti admired it and is said to have read it aloud to his fellow painters as he worked.

Between 1841 and 1846 Browning published eight little pamphlets entitled **Bells and Pomegranates** which contained another outcome of his Italian experience, **Pippa Passes**, which later became one of his most popular poems. **Bells & Pomegranates** contained five plays.

Dramatic Lyrics published in 1842 contained "My Last Duchess," "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister". 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation,' and 'Porphyria's Lover,' considered to be some of Browning's finest dramatic monologues.

In 1846 Browning married Elizabeth Barrett, and left England for Italy. They made Florence their home from 1847 till Mrs. Browning's death in 1861.

In 1849 Browning published a collection of his works excluding **Sordello, Strafford and Pauline**. He was also working on a long religious poem, called **Christmas Eve and Easter Day** (1850) treating the same themes he was to treat more confidently in **Men and Women**. This poem shows the influence of Elizabeth Barrett to a great extent.

Browning's career suffered somewhat during this time. After the publication of two plays **Luria and A Soul's Tragedy** in 1846 he wrote only **In a Balcony** in a true dramatic form (published in **Men and Women**, 1855).

In 1855 **Men and Women** was published. The enthusiastic response of Rossetti and his uncle furthered its sales. It received good reviews and won the acclaim of Carlyle (who ranked him with Chaucer), Landor and Ruskin,

In 1860 Browning discovered an "old yellow book" in a bookshelf in Florence which contained a collection of records of murder trials at Rome and the execution of the murdered in 1698. On reading this Browning came to realize that this was exactly where his main interest lay.

In 1861 Elizabeth Barrett died and Browning left Florence with his son. After spending the first few months in Brittany with his father and sister he came to London and began to work seriously on his poetry. In 1863 he produced another collected edition of poems in which the poems of *The Men and Women* were reorganised and only thirteen poems were included. The rest appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics and Dramatic Romance*, In 1864 *Dramatis Personae* was published which included, Mr. Sludge “the medium”, ‘James Leo’s Wife’, ‘Abt Vogler,’ ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra,’ ‘Caliban upon Setebos’ and ‘A Death in the Desert’.

In 1868 Browning published what is considered to be his masterpiece, *The Ring and the Book*, one of the longest poems in English literature.

In 1872 he published ***Fifine at the Fair and 1873 Red Cotton Nightcap Country*** which dealt with criminal psychology. Another psychological study of villainy is ***The Inn Album*** (1875).

In 1889 Browning died in Venice, a couple of days after the last collected edition of his works had been published in England.

Browning is considered to be the principal exponent of the dramatic monologue even though he did not invent it. In this one of the major influences on Browning was Donne. The dramatic element, the colloquial language, the analysis of feeling are some of the obvious evidences of the influence. But whereas the greater part of Donne’s love poetry dealt with the mutuality of love, Browning’s poetry dealt with aberrant relationship and love experiences, a strain that culminates in ***The Ring and the Book***. In his poems possessiveness in its extreme form is explored and exposed as destructive and life-denying, and yet a form of love. This is seen especially in his depiction of Porphyria’s lover and the Duke in *My Last Duchess*. In both poems the characters have imposed a stasis and thereby permanence to the relationship through murder.

4.2 THE TEXT OF MY LAST DUCHESS

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now : Fra Pandolf s hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said
‘Fra Pandof by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance.

But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I) 10
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
 "Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek : perhaps
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat' : such stuff
 Was courtesy, she thought', and cause enough 20
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
 A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
 The bough of cherries some officious fool
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
 She rode with round the terrace—all and each
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech, 30
 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
 Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
 Or that in your disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 —E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
As starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir, Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity.
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

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4.3 REDUCIBLE CONTENT OF THE POEM

An envoy of neighbouring Count has come to the court of the Duke of Ferrara, with the proposal of marriage of his master's daughter to the Duke who is a widower. The Duke takes the envoy to his picture gallery, shows him the life-like portrait of his late wife, and tells him that she was light headed and brainless and had to pay the price of it with her life. At the time of going back to the court from the gallery, the Duke hints to the envoy that he does not expect not only handsome dowry from his (the envoy's) master, the Count, but also an unquestioning obedience to his wishes from his would-be-wife or he will know how to deal with her.

4.4 CRITICAL ESTIMATE OF THE POEM

In My Last Duchess the speaker of the monologue is Alfonso H'd Este, Duke of Ferrara (b. 1533)

The addressee is the envoy who has come to finalise the Duke's second marriage. The events described take place in Northern Italy. The Duke had married his first wife, daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence in 1558, when she was only fourteen. She died on April 21, 1561 under suspicious circumstances and soon afterwards the Duke started negotiations for the hand of the niece of the Count of Tyrol, the seat of whose court was at Innsbruck in Austria.

The monologue which starts with the Duke unveiling the portrait of the first wife strikes a chill immediately in the second line with the words, 'looking as if she were alive.' Evidently the Duke prefers the transformation of his wife into a work of art to her being alive. The request that he makes, 'Will't please you sit and look at her?' implies that this might have been a wish he could only see fulfilled at her death. In life her very vitality might have proved an irritant, making the Duke too impatient to 'sit and look at her.'

'Fra Pandolf like 'Claus of Innsbruck' are types rather than actual personalities whom the Duke mentions for they were artists who could draw forth that particular look in her eyes which the Duke could not have in his possession. And this is his complaint, that the blush in her cheek and the excitement in her eyes could be aroused by many things besides the Duke's presence. The little compliments that the artist would pay to her while painting her portrait—mere courtesies—would cause the same reaction as sundry other things she delighted in. The pathetic aspect of the Duchess's situation is emphasized by the widening gap between the Duke and the reader when gradually, the reader realizes that the Duke had done away with the Duchess, not because he was jealous of another man who could draw the 'blush on her cheek', but because he could not bear to see her enjoy the simple and innocent pleasures of life, or even experience the wonder of nature; that he could not bear to be placed on the same level as the artist, the sunset, the bough of cherries and the white mule she rode with round the terrace.

The pride in his 'nine hundred years old name' that he imagines the Duchess did not give proper value to, and the consciousness of his superiority to all thereby is clearly an obsession that brings into question the Duke's sanity. Moreover, as a study of a Machiavel, Browning suggests that the assertion of absolute power is itself insane. It is also dangerous for it denies life. The frank, confessional tone of the Duke's revelation takes on another aspect when we consider that the addressee is the envoy. It is then that we are forced to realize that behind this frank confession is an underlying threat: the Duke is hinting that the prospective Duchess had better be warned that the same fate awaits her if she should displease him. Further, the stress upon his 'nine hundred years old name' also suggests that the huge dowry he demands for is fully justified and he is confident that 'the Count your master' will fully understand that the exchange is more than fair. Apparently the Duke is above bargaining for money—'his fair daughter's self....is my object'—but he feels that it would be an insult to his heritage if he were not to ask for a large dowry.

The hypocrisy involved in the Duke's obvious rationalisation opens up another possible consideration : that the nine-hundred years old name was, all he had and the

power exercised through this was wearing thin, which explains his asking for a large dowry. The equal pleasure that the Duchess took in other things than the Duke's favours 'at her breast' makes him aware of something the Duchess herself was presumably not aware of : that the Duke had no power over her. It is probably this realisation that irritates him, as also the realisation that she is innocently unaware of his position in her life. In his perversity the Duke does not seek ratification. The ostensible reason he gives for it is that to even complain about her behaviour would be 'Stooping/And I chose never to stoop.' The absurdity is intensified by the Duke's decision to give 'orders' till 'all smiles stopped together.' It is indeed a fearful projection of an autocrat's villainy. In a masterful use of euphemism and innuendo Browning reveals how the Duke is seemingly unaware of the horrible act of murder, but only relieved that he would now no longer have to share his Duchess with anyone or anything else. The psychology is, at a level similar to **Porphyria's Lover** but for one thing : Porphyria's lover fears punishment for his crime and is somewhat relieved and bewildered that 'God has not spoken a word,' pointing to his mortal position. There is no sign of this in the Machiavellian Duke. His position places him above any such moral consideration. When he points to a statuette representing Neptune taming a sea horse which 'Glaus of Innsbruck' had cast in bronze for him, we are conscious of the symbolism involved : He is Neptune successful in taming the obdurate sea horse. And by 'lameness' he understands death. He is content to admire the lifelikeness of the portrait, for the life no longer disturbs him.

The apparent magnanimity of 'Nay, we'll together down, sir', which seems to waive hierarchical barriers between them has yet another aspect to it. The Duke will not allow the envoy to stay behind to react and reconsider the judiciousness of the match he has come to finalise. This last act overrides any qualms the envoy might feel and the Duke has his way again.

My Last Duchess is impressive as a dramatic monologue in its foregrounding and Browning's clever suggestion of the sub-text. It is almost with surprise that we realize that the Duke has been speaking in rhyming couplets. Bernard Richards feels it rather difficult to remember that Browning's 'My Last Duchess' is in couplet form; there are twenty three couplets in the poem, but not a single one is self-enclosed and thirty six of the lines enjamb. The effect of this technique, however, is to impart a kind of speech rhythm while still maintaining the form, which is appropriate to the tone of the speaker.

One might contrast the confused 'stream of consciousness' language of the Bishop's life in **The Bishop Orders His Tomb** with the confident skilful speech of the Duke.

Ruskin, long ago, in **Modern Painters** identified “worldliness, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury” as symptomatic of the late Renaissance spirit in Italy. ‘My Last Duchess’ should not certainly be read as a page torn from the history of the late Italian Renaissance; yet the Renaissance Italy makes its pervasive but unobtrusive presence felt all through the Duke’s Colloquy with the silent interlocutor (the envoy).

4.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long Questions :

1. Comment of Browning’s handling of the dramatic monologue with special reference to ‘My Last Duchess’.
2. How does Browning build the character of the Duke in ‘My Last Duchess’?

Short Questions :

1. What impression do you get of the Duchess’s character through the Duke’s speech? Do you think she was ‘trifling’ with his name?
2. What were the things that brought ‘the flush’ to the Duchess’ cheek? Why did the Duke resent it?
3. What is the actual message that the Duke wants the envoy to carry to his master? How does he hint at it?
4. What is the implication of the words This grew?
5. Why does the Duke insist on going down together with the envoy?
6. Why does the Duke refer to the large dowry he demands as a ‘just pretence’?
7. What is the significance of the bronze statue of Neptune taming a sea horse?

Objective Questions :

1. Who is the speaker of Browning’s monologue, My Last Duchess?
2. Who is he speaking to?
3. Who was his ‘last Duchess’?
4. How did she die?
5. Who painted her portrait?
6. Who is the sculptor that the Duke mentions?
7. What work of the sculptor did the Duke possess?
8. What did the Duke think the Duchess did not give due respect to?

4.6 SELECT READINGS

1. **Ring R.A.**—*The Bow and the Lyre : The Art of Browning* (1964).
2. **Word M.**—*Browning and His World, II Volume* (1967-69)
3. **Drew P.**—*The Poetry of Browning, A Critical Introduction* (1970).
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6. **John Garrett**—*British Poetry Since The 16th Century*. Macmiltan, 1986.
7. **Ezra Pound**—*Mesmerism, Selected Poems*, T.S. Eliot (Introd), Faber and Faber, London, rev, ed. 1948.

MODULE - 3

Unit 10 □ W. B. YEATS—AN ACRE OF GRASS

Structure

- 1.1 W.B. Yeats : An Introduction
- 1.2 Text of An Acre of Grass
- 1.3 Interpretation and Glossary
- 1.4 Select Readings
- 1.5 Comprehension Exercises

1.1 W.B. YEATS (1865-1939)

William Butler Yeats was born on 13 June, 1865 at ‘Georgeville’, Sandymour Avenue, Dublin. His father, John Butler Yeats, was a lawyer by training and an artist by profession. He was a sceptic who believed in the supremacy of personality and intellect. He exalted art and poetry, claiming that ‘a work of art is the social act of a solitary man.’ The poet’s mother, Susan Pollexfen, on the other hand, was a quiet, self-effacing person, who shared a deep bond with the world of nature and peasant life which she had found at Sligo in her childhood. The family frequently shifted residence owing to financial constraints and Yeats’ childhood was spent largely in London, Dublin and Howth, with frequent visits to Sligo, his mother’s home. Yeats studied at Godolphin School, Hammersmith, England and then went on to High School at Dublin. After completing school, Yeats joined the Metropolitan School of Art at Dublin where he became acquainted with George Russell (AE), who spurred his interest in mystical studies, much to the dismay of his rationalist father. In 1885, Yeats became a founder member of the Dublin Hermetic Society. He evolved a religion of his own -” I had made a new religion, almost an infallible Church of poetic tradition, of a fardel of stories, and of personages, and of emotions, inseparable from their first expression, passed on from generation to generation by poets and painters with some help from philosophers and theologians.”

In 1885, Yeats met John O’ Leary, a Fenian leader of native Catholic stock who, for Yeats, embodied the spirit of “indomitable Irishry.” While the family were settled at Bedford Park, Yeats met Maud Gonne, said to be one of the most beautiful women of her time in Ireland, and fell in love with her. She was fiercely devoted to the cause

of Irish liberation and inspired by her, Yeats wrote his play **The Countess Cathleen**. Meanwhile, Yeats's esoteric and literary interests continued unabated and he became a member of Madame Blavatsky's Theosophical Society. Later he became initiated into the 'Order of the Golden Dawn'. In 1891, Yeats became a member of The Rhymers' Club and met Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and others. Earlier, Yeats had made the acquaintance of William Morris, George Bernard Shaw, and Oscar Wilde, leading literary figures of the late nineteenth-century. In 1893, Yeats brought out an edition of **The Works of William Blake** in collaboration with Edwin Ellis. He shared rooms with Arthur Symonds in 'Woburn Building', who introduced him to the works of French symbolist poets. Yeats's love for Maud Gonne, his involvement in Irish politics and his interest in occult studies occupied him simultaneously, Yeats established the Irish Literary Society in England and the National Literary Society in Dublin with John O'Leary as President. Yeats's meeting with Lady Gregory in 1896 is of particular importance in his literary career. His visits to her home at Coole Park offered him the opportunity to delve deep into the folk-culture of Ireland and form ideas about establishing an Irish Theatre. His meeting with John Middleton Synge proved to be extremely propitious for both. In 1902, Yeats became President of Irish National Dramatic Society, and the famous Abbey Theatre at Dublin was established in 1904. Maud Gonne, who consistently refused Yeats's repeated proposals of marriage, married Major John MacBride in 1903. After the Easter Rising in 1916 Maud Gonne's husband was executed and Yeats once again renewed his proposal of marriage which she again refused. With her permission, he offered marriage to her adopted daughter Iseult Gonne, who also refused. In 1917, Yeats got married to George Hydelees and set up house at Ballylee Tower. His wife's power of automatic writing spurred him on to compose **A Vision** which contains his 'system' of arranging history in terms of 'gyres' (conceived as inter-penetrating double cones), where, after every two thousand years, subjective and objective phases alternate. It places human personality according to the twenty-eight phases of the moon, representing different stages of subjectivity and objectivity.

In 1922 Yeats became a member of the Irish Senate which he attended faithfully. In 1923, he received the Nobel Prize for Literature. He continued writing extensively up to his death in 1939. He went on a number of lecture tours to America and regularly delivered radio talks for the BBC. His interest in philosophy led him to a study of the "Upanishads" which he translated into English in collaboration with Purohit Swami. He had earlier met Rabindranath Tagore and wrote an introduction to the English **Gitanjali** and it was around this time that he also met and made friends with the young Ezra Pound.

Yeats has left a record of his life, describing it in ‘What comes oftenest into my memory’, which he wrote in parts over several years and which is collectively called **Autobiographies**. Yeats’s letters are also important documents of his literary career and highlight his concern with the politics, literature and philosophy of his time. He is the most representative Anglo-Irish poet, who is also the link between Romantic and Modern Poetry. **The Celtic Twilight**, projecting the cause of Irish Cultural Revival is a product of his early years while **A Vision** is that of his late years. The distinctive quality of Yeats’s achievement lies in his assimilation of diverse attitudes, ideas and poetic modes which mark the transition between nineteenth and early twentieth-century poetry. He would claim to be the “last Romantic” and yet be as modern as Ezra Pound exhorted him to be. All his life he sought for that “unity of being” whereby he could resolve the dichotomies of private and public experience, emotion and intellect, youth and age, the material and the spiritual worlds, through symbols, masks and images. And when he felt he could, perhaps, no longer call forth his images and symbols, he would turn to “where all the ladders start,/In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

Yeats died on 28 January, 1939 leaving behind a vast collection of poetry, prose and drama. He had written his own epitaph in September, 1938 in the poem “Under Ben Bulbin”;

Cast a cold eye
On life, on death.
Horseman, pass by!

1.2 TEXT OF AN ACRE OF GRASS

An Acre of Grass

Picture and book remain,
An acre of green grass
For air and exercise,
Now strength of body goes;
Midnight, an old house
Where nothing stirs but a mouse.
My temptation is quiet.
Here at life’s end
Neither loose imagination,

Nor the mill of the mind
Consuming its rag and bone,
Can make the truth known.

Grant me an old man's frenzy,
Myself must I remake
Till I am Timon and Lear
Or that William Blake
Who beat upon the wall
Till Truth obeyed his call;

A mind Michael Angelo knew
That can pierce the clouds,
Or inspired by frenzy
Shake the dead in their shrouds;
Forgotten else by mankind,
An old man's eagle mind.

1.3 INTERPRETATION AND GLOSSARY

'An Acre of Grass' was written in November, 1936, when Yeats was seventy-one. It was published in **The Atlantic Monthly** and in **The London Mercury** in April, 1938. It is included in the collection, **Last Poems**. "An Acre of Grass" deals with the theme of old age, a recurrent motif in a number of poems written during his last years. 'Are you Content', 'The Apparitions', 'Why should not old men be Mad', 'A prayer for Old Age', and "The Circus Animals' Desertion" are some poems written on the theme of age and decrepitude. In these poems, Yeats attempts to revert to the basic, elemental passions of life, shorn of all embellishment. The poet had worked through his mature years to achieve this degree of simplicity when he could reach down to "where all the ladders start, / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart". In (An Acre of Grass", Yeats prays for "an old man's frenzy" to spur him on in the search for truth. The poet had anticipated this situation in an essay written in 1917:

Stanza 1 : Yeats begins the poem with a list of the few possessions he still has—"picture", "book" and "an acre of green grass for air and exercise". He is old and his "strength of body goes" He is in his "old house," the house at Rathfarnham which he had taken on lease for thirteen years. A sense of immediacy, of reality is evoked

by the poet's mention of the time—"midnight", when the whole house is quiet,"where nothing stirs but a mouse". It could also be a hint of old-age sleeplessness.

L.5 : 'an old house' - - "Riversdale", Rathfarnham, Dublin, leased for thirteen years.

Stanza 2 : Yeats is reflecting on this restful life of picture, book and 'an acre of green grass. "My temptation is quiet", but has he been able to turn this idea into poetry? No."At life's end," that is, in old age, "neither loose imagination/Nor the mill of the mind" after "consuming its rag and bone" "can make the truth known.' Yeats feels that the bits of imagination are not enough. And surely the mind that has denied the body will not do.

L. 1 'temptation" - yearning for active life and for old times spent at Coole Park, as he wrote in a letter to Mrs. Olivia Shakespear, dated 25 July, 1932-"At first I was unhappy, for everything made me remember the great rooms and the great trees of Coole, my home for nearly forty years, but now that the pictures are up I feel more content."

L . 2: "at life's end"—in old age. L . 2: "rag and bone"—flesh.

Stanza 3 : Yeats realizes that only frenzy can fetch him from this uncreative quiet. And it is only the old that can gear up that frenzy. He invokes two famous frenzied figures from Shakespeare, Timon and Lear, the former noted for his rage and the latter for his madness, and both utterly wronged. Yeats next calls forth the name of William Blake, an early Romantic poet - philosopher, whose original theories about the Universe and profound poetry fascinated him throughout. Blake was a visionary who worked out his own concept of religion till he arrived at truth—Till Truth obeyed his call",

L . 1 : "An old man's frenzy"—possibly drawn from Nietzsche's quotation of Plato—"All the greatest benefits of Greece have sprung from madness."

L.3 : Timon and Lear "-characters in Shakespeare's plays, Timon of Athens and King Lear.

L . 4 : William Blake : 1757-1827, Visionary poet and engraver.

Stanza 4 : Yeats is craving for "a mind Michael Angelo knew", that is, for the creative energy associated with the painter -poet. 'That can pierce the clouds' is a reference to Micheal Angelo's 'Creation' Series painted on the Sistine ceiling. And 'shake the dead in their shrouds' is a reference to his 'Last Judgement' painted on the altar wall of the same Chapel in the Vatican. Piercing the clouds and shaking the dead

in their shrouds are, therefore, also symbolic of the range of creativity that frenzy alone can produce, an old man's frenzy. It is that he now needs, "an old man's eagle mind", else he will be forgotten.

L .1.: Michael Angelo : Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564), Italian painter sculptor and poet.

L .6 : "an old man's eagle mind - perhaps refers to Nietzsche's. 'The Dawn of Day', where he speaks of the genius in men, whose minds, like winged beings" separate themselves from their character and temperament and "rise far above them".

1.4 SELECT READINGS

1. W.B. Yeats, Collected Poems - Rupa & Co., 1993
2. W.B. Yeats, Autobiographies - Papermac, 1980
3. Richard Eilmann, Yeats : The Man and the Mask - Falver and Faber, 1961.
4. Denis Donoghue, Yeats - Fontana/Collins, 1971.
5. Louis Macniece, The Poetry of W.B, Yeats - O.U.P, London, 1945.

1.5 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long questions

1. What is the desired picture of old age that Yeats builds up in this poem?
2. Bring out the significance of the figures from the past that Yeats invokes in 'An Acre of Grass'.
3. Substantiate, on the basis of your reading of this poem, the idea that Yeats was one of the last Romantics

UNIT 2 □ T. S. ELIOT-PRELUDES

Structure

2.1 Thomas Stearns Eliot

2.1.1 The early days

2.1.2 The European Influence

2.1.3 The reaction against Georgian Poetry; Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound

2.1.4 Preludes

2.1.5 Preludes - Critical Analysis

2.2 Comprehension Exercises

2.1 THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT

2.1.1 The early days

Eliot was born in 1865, in St. Louis, Missouri (USA) in a conservative household of entrepreneurs, devoted to the tenets of Christianity called **Unitarianism**. The family was dominated by the patriarchal figure of his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot. His father, Henry Ware Eliot and mother, Charlotte Champes Eliot were guided by the spirit of the senior Mr. Eliot, but were not as severe in their dedication to the Unitarian faith. Eliot's grandfather and the other pioneers of the European settlers-in America preferred a creed in which there was no conflict between man's material and spiritual pursuits and in fact, the Unitarians often justified pure material intentions as aspects of duty and responsibility to the community. While the uneasy alliance between the craving for material gain and the desire for spiritual welfare was suited to the early days of the opening up of the New World, as time progressed, the ethos tended to generate an attitude of **decadence**, which disturbed the young Eliot. He was not a stranger to the subtleties of human sensibilities because Charlotte Eliot was something of a poet herself and under her influence her young son knew there was more to life than justifying pure materialism as communal duty. In his days as a student at the Milton Academy and later as a young undergraduate at the Department of Philosophy in Harvard, he came across contemporary society in the affluent as well as impoverished sections of contemporary Boston and noted that everywhere men and women simply went through

the motions of life without any vital emotional and spiritual responses to the act of living,

The times in which Eliot was growing up saw the world being increasingly guided by the physical sciences instead of the biological sciences, and inert matter was assuming great importance. Age old institutions like the Church and traditional value systems based on belief were being seriously challenged by emphatic importance on the phenomenal. If unprecedented advances in science and technology weakened the position of supremacy of the human mind over matter, the World War I drove the proverbial final nail in the coffin of man's dwindling self-esteem.

In Harvard at this time there was the inevitable backlash at the spiritual vulnerability and Eliot's teachers like **Irving Babbitt** and **George Santayana** initiated the young man's intellectual development to aggravate an already disturbed emotional state. Eliot's study of Philosophy took off from this early guidance. The chief concern of the Harvard Philosophers was the defence of religious and spiritual values against the challenge of Darwinism and the reconciliation of these with the new scientific materialism of the times. Among the philosophers whom Eliot studied, **F.H. Bradley's** approach seemed to offer the ideal middle path. Bradley identified the plane of immediate experience as the source of all **noumenal** responses, and therefore created a system where the dignity of the subject were preserved without denying the status of the objective world. Though Bradley conceived of an 'Absolute' where all contradictions would be resolved, yet his philosophy emphasized the tension between the subject and the object rather than the hypothetical 'Absolute'.

2.1.2 The European Influence

Another important experience, which formed Eliot's intellectual reaction against the contemporary dehumanization, was the young man's growing interest in French Literature. As a student of philosophy Eliot was interested in Henri Bergson's concept of Time but it was Baudelaire's poetry, with its ability to convey disturbed emotional states in terms of urban imagery and tone that took him further into French literature. The next milestone in the moulding of Eliot was his reading of Arthur Symons' translation of **The Symbolist Movement in Literature**, in the library of the Harvard Union and this book acquainted him with the creative efforts of Stephane Mallarme and Jules Laforgue. The aspiring poet noted that the poetry of these 19th century French Symbolists showed an economy of expression and an uncompromising effort to make transparent the texture. But expression needed the right amount of dilution to improve upon its communicability. And here Eliot's role model was the Italian poet of the Middle Ages, **Dante Aligheri**. The influence of Dante of course went far deeper than serving to

improve the poetic idiom. The infusion of belief into a medium that Dante so effortlessly achieved argued for a sincerity of belief, which left an indelible impression on one who encountered a generation plagued by splintered consciousness.

2.1.3 The reaction against Georgian Poetry; Eliot, T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound

The early poetry of T.S. Eliot was at one level a severe criticism of late Victorian and Georgian poetry. In this poetry that was intent upon creating idyllic worlds of **pastoral** beauty or sentiments rather than sharp, **empirical** feelings, Eliot saw an artistic parallel of the spiritual apathy, the shying away from real experience and true feelings that pervaded contemporary civilizations. Inevitably Eliot would see in the Georgian mindset a legacy of the absolute concept of selfhood of generations of **humanistic** thinking, and hence this school of poetry became a convenient target for releasing the new understandings of the living experience, Eliot in America was treading the same path in his crusade against the Georgians as T.E. Hulme and Ezra Pound were doing in Britain.

Eliot's contention that poetry could refrain from indulging in sentimental rendition so that it could entail an 'escape' from personality is fundamentally in agreement with T.E. Hulme's argument that human progression is governed by 'discontinuity' as opposed to the humanistic belief in continuity, which rules out any attempt at self-analysis and self-criticism. The suggestive, unfocussed content of Georgian poetry certainly called for a change even on purely aesthetic grounds. But the need became an intense demand for a spiritual revolution as well because the creative impulse coincided with the urge of the 20th century to probe the causes of, its emotional disturbance.

On the purely creative level the way to arrive at the core of truly felt emotion was to evolve effectively sharp imagery. Eliot developed a system of imagery he later, termed 'objective correlative'. He defined it in his essay on 'Hamlet' as :

The only ways of expressing emotion in the form of art by finding an objective correlative', in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for a particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

This filioesque prescription is similar to the efforts of the **Imagist** school of poetry, which dominated English and American poetry in the early part of the 20th century. Its main exponent Erza Pound developed an aesthetic creed upon the philosophy of

T.E.Hulme. Hulme felt that the only way of presenting the perception of the splintered consciousness or 'discontinuity' was to fashion images with precision as if they were chiselled out of alabaster. Eliot's Laforgian imagery taken from all walks of life, economic and sensual in character, drew admiration from Pound across the Atlantic and he announced that the young American had 'modernised' himself on his own.

T.S. Eliot was a poet who lived his life in his poetry. Each one of his major poems, beginning from "The Love Song" of J. Alfred Prufrock" and ending with the "Four Quartets" marks a definite stage in the developing curve of experience, where the borderline between the personal and the poetic is maintained with enough control to reveal the human element and keep out the prejudice of sentiment. 'Preludes' is remarkable as an early example of this continuous development.

2.1.4 Preludes

Preludes

I

The winter evening settles down
With smell of steaks in passageways.
Six o' clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a gusty shower wraps
The grimy scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from vacant lots;
The showers beat
On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.

10

III

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint stale smells of beer
From the sawdust-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press

To early coffee-stands.
With the other masquerades
That time resumes, 20
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising dingy shades
In a thousand furnished rooms.

III

You tossed a blanket from the bed,
You lay upon your back, and waited;
You dozed, and watched the night revealing
The thousand sordid images
Of which your soul was constituted;
They flickered against the ceiling.
And when all the world came back 30
And the light crept up between the shutters
And you heard the sparrows in the gutters,
You had such a vision of the street
As the street hardly understands;
Sitting along the bed's edge, where
You curled the papers from your hair,
Or clasped the yellow soles of feet
In the palms of both soiled hands.

IV

His soul stretched tight across the skies
That fade behind a city block, 40
Or trampled by insistent feet
At four and five and six o'clock;
And short square fingers stuffing pipes,
And evening newspapers, and eyes
Assured of certain certainties,
The conscience of a blackened street
Impatient to assume the world.

When Eliot talks of ‘burnt out ends...,’ ‘all the hands.../ raising dingy shades...’, or ‘trampled by insistent feet...’ he manages to fuse a number of acute observations into a single powerful feeling. We get the impression of mechanical actions performed with boredom but without any attempt at exploring the sense of mental fatigue. The similarity with the expression of the Imagist school of poetry is evident in the staccato quality of the pictures. Eliot’s reminiscence of Baudelaire’s ‘Crepuscule du Soir’ and ‘Crepuscule du Matin’ are also obvious in the vignettes of the first two ‘Preludes’.

Through these images the reader is made aware of the spiritual inertia in squalid, urban scenes. Further, the repetitive actions are undertaken by dismembered limbs, and they convey the impression that human beings are no longer capable of original feeling and thought; they are no longer individuals but simply automatons that are extensions of the materialism all around them. In the second ‘Prelude’ Eliot selects the word ‘masquerade’, probably digging it out from the recesses of his scholarship on Elizabethan drama, and uses its implications to add on to the impression of spiritual impoverishment, already in place. In the elaborate Elizabethan pantomimes called ‘masquerades’ the participants wore grotesque masks and this form of entertainment always emphasized the elements of exaggeration and caricature. Eliot sees the daily activity of earning a livelihood and generally surviving in the modern times as pantomimic gestures- that is, they are acts of pretence like the exaggerated actions of the Elizabethan masques, being made mindlessly, without consciousness.

The third Prelude offers a contrast to the picture of unimaginative, mindless existence. The imagery of this section most likely owes to Eliot’s passion for the novel, written by Charles Louis Phillippe called **Bubu de Montparnasse** in which he found the same unflinching emotional honesty that graced the works of the 19th century Symbolist poets. Here the protagonist, as in Phillippe’s novel, is a depraved street walker. She is engaged in the age old profession that exploits the perennial human weakness for the flesh and it is in her chamber that contemporary materialistic pompousness is most compromised because it is most clearly exposed for what it really is, namely sordid avarice. The act of prostitution is apparently much more vulgar and gross than the drudgery of the unconsciouss masses. But as she perceives, Eliot observes in the prostitute’s sound a perspective that includes an open acknowledgement of the depravity of both her customers and herself, a sharpened sensibility totally absent in the more respectable segments of society.

But the impression of liberation of sensibility is short lived. In Prelude IV the

reader returns once more to a sensation of being denied vitality as he experiences imagery that talks of the ‘soul stretched tight across the skies’. The reference to the ‘ancient women’ is interesting. A group of women, old and wise, are encountered in Greek tragedies of dramatists like **Sophocles**. They comment upon the experiences and attitudes of the protagonists, explaining to the audience the reasons for their suffering. That is to say, in Greek drama these women, collectively called the Chorus, represent the sensibility at its most alert and sharpest. Yet in Eliot’s poem the women are seen performing the menial task of scavenging upon the streets of Boston. The image, deflatory in character, is an embodiment of the poet’s realization that human sensibility is dangerously departed from responsiveness. There is a sense of threatened self-esteem that makes up the content of much of 20th century literature, and is termed by critics as the ‘crisis of identity’.

Cumulatively, the four sections that make the **Preludes** present a fragmented consciousness that is under constant stress, because of a pervasive spiritual deficiency. There is also the cynical realisation that for all its masks of civilization, it is a poor subhuman existence, no better than that of the ostracised and marginalised sections of society.

2.2 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

Long questions

1. Trace the thematic unities between the four sections of the Preludes.
2. Comment on the modernistic elements in Eliot’s poetry with reference to the Preludes.

Unit 3 □ PHILIP LARKIN—CHURCH GOING

Structure

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Text
- 3.3 The Central Idea
- 3.4 An Analysis
- 3.5 Word Notes
- 3.6 Comprehension Exercises
- 3.7 Reference

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

The Movement Poetry of the 1950s was marked by a reaction to the intellectualism and social consciousness of the previous three decades. **Philip Larkin** (1922-1985) is often regarded as one of the Movement poets who prefers traditional stanzaic and prosodic forms, native common sense and an empirical approach, while he dislikes the use of myths and allusiveness in the exploration of contemporary history. Larkin mockingly calls it 'a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets.' However, Larkin himself denies that his poetry has anything to do with the group image of the Movement and suggests that it is merely a media hype. **Church Going**, a central poem in Larkin's work, for instance, does not fit in the theoretical mould of the movement for it has a grand theme, treated, in the last analysis, in a serious enough manner.

Larkin published only four major volumes of poetry with major time gaps in between: **The North Ship** (1945), **The Less Deceived** (1955), **The Whksun Weddings** (1964) and **High Windows** (1974). Yet he is regarded as one of the most important poets of the second half of the twentieth century. Donald Davie thought in 1973 that "there has been the widest possible agreement over most of this period, that Philip Larkin is for good or ill the effective unofficial poet laureate of post-1945 England".

'Church Going' was written in 1954 when Larkin was in Northern Ireland. It was published in **The Less Deceived**. The title is ambiguous. It may mean "going into churches", indicating a particular visit, or "the church is going", that is, religion is

dying; or, going to church, as people used to go and they will despite the neglect now. Faith is inherently in us, and cannot die.

3.2 TEXT

Once I am sure there's nothing going on
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence,

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

Yet stop I did: in fact I often do.
And always end much at a loss like this,
Wondering what to look for; wondering, too,
When churches fall completely out of use
What we shall turn them into, if we shall keep
A few cathedrals chronically on show,
Their parchment, plate and pyx in locked cases,
And let the rest rent-free to rain and sheep.
Shall we avoid them as unlucky places?

Or, after dark, will dubious women come
To make their children touch a particular stone;
Pick simples for cancer; or on some
Advised night see walking a dead one?
Power of some sort or other will go on
In games, in riddles, seemingly at random;
But superstition, like belief, must die,
And what remains when disbelief has gone?
Grass, weedy pavement, brambles, buttress, sky,

A shape less recognisable each week,
A purpose more obscure. I wonder who
Will be the last, the very last, to seek
This place for what it was; one of the crew
That tap and jot and know what rood-lofts were?
Some ruin-bibber, randy for antique,
Or Christmas-addict, counting on a whiff
Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrth?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation—marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these—for whom was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;
A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our complusions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.

And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.

3.3 THE CENTRAL IDEA

The poem is a meditation on the role of the church in a predominately secular age. The poet assumes that in the second half of the twentieth century Christianity is dying. However, life will be the poorer for it. For the church has so long held the most important issues of life like birth, marriage and death in close and serious association. But now that these are found only in separation, the unity has been wrecked. And yet, the poet feels that even if the church falls into ruin, the place will attract people, for people have a hunger for 'seriousness' which they think the church can satisfy, although at a conscious level they may feel embarrassed for doing so.

3.4 AN ANALYSIS

Stanza -1 :

Out for a bicycle ride, the poet stops at a church on a weekday and goes in to have a look. He makes a brief survey of its contents, deliberately trying to be irreverent; matting, seats, stone, little books, withered flowers from the Sunday service, some brass and staff and a small organ. He pretends to be detached, skeptical, colloquial, even a little mocking. Yet he cannot but feel an "awkward reverence". He takes off his hat and cycle - clips, perhaps as a mark of respect to the place. He does not fully understand his emotions and feels slightly uncomfortable.

Stanza -II :

Then he moves forward to the font, looks at the roof, wonders whether it is cleared or restored. He goes up to the lectern and reads a few lines from the Bible, parodying the manner of the vicar or lay reader (lines 15-16). His words echo in the empty church. The words (that is, his voice) do not snigger. Only the echo mocks the meaninglessness of his action. There is no relevance of these in today's context. Then he comes back to the entrance, signs the visitor's book and donates "an Irish six pence". He thinks that the place is not important enough to make a stop.

Stanza -III :

However, the fact is that he stopped there, went in and indeed, he often does so. He wonders why at all he stops to visit church and also speculates what will happen to such places “when churches fall completely out of use”. Will some churches be kept as museums, and their contents like ‘parchment, plate and pyx’ be kept in locked cases for exhibition? Will the rest perhaps be allowed to deteriorate? Will deserted churches be regarded as ‘unlucky places’?

Stanza -IV :

He guesses churches then may be the breeding - grounds of superstitions. Some ‘dubious women’ (of suspected, questionable character or doubting, hesitating) will come here to ‘make their children touch a particular stone’ or pick medicinal herbs as a cure for cancer. Advised to visit the church on a particular night like the Hallowe’ en, the superstitious persons will see a ghost walking: there. The belief in the existence of a supernatural power will perhaps be service in a disguised way in games, riddles and other ways. But when superstitions, like religions faith, also disappear, nothing but “grass, weedy pavement, brambles, sky” will remain.

Stanza -V :

Continuing his reflection, the poet says that after superstitions have disappeared, people will not be able to recognize either the place or its purpose. He guesses that the last person who will visit and recognise the church as church will be perhaps antiquarian “ruin- bibber, randy for antique” or some “Christmas - addicf’ celebration. These types of people will be interested in the incidental, superficial objects to be collected as merely curious things, they will completely miss the true significance of the church. Or such a visitor may be like him.

Stanza -VI :

In this stanza he elaborates on the last line of the previous stanza and describes himself and others who, like him may come . He is “Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt/Dispersed” and yet incapable of resisting the attraction of the significance of the place. He thinks that because of the function of the church, marriage, birth and death in the past (in an Age of Belief) attained a unity and transcendental significance in human life. But with the decline of religious faith, these events are seen in isolation and without any sacred meaning.

For instance, marriage now no longer holds any sanctity, nor does procreation. Now birth of a child is not always accepted as a blessing, may be something unwanted, preferably to be prevented or controlled. Shorn of religious meaning, death may now be only an object of fear and disquiet, as passing into a void, into nothingness. The church, on the contrary, had conferred a divine purpose and unity to all these events.

However, the poet is still unsure of the validity of his thoughts. He calls himself, "bored" that is, not enthusiastic about such positive ideas; "uninformed, that is, not knowing enough about churches and their significance. He is pleased to stand here in silence, though he has no clear "idea/what this accoutred frowsty barn is worth". His rational mind deliberately uses these irreverent words-'frowsty barn'.

Stanza - VII :

This stanza has been called a "peroration", a formal conclusion. It contains no more doubtful question or uncertainties or deliberate understatement and downplaying of his true emotions, but are declarations in serious tone and dignified language. Here he attempts to offer an explanation for his initial 'awkward reverence'. He declares that the church is a 'serious house on serious earth'. Although man may cease to practise the rituals of an organised religion, there will forever be 'A hunger in himself to be more serious'. So lack of seriousness about many of our compulsions like marriage, birth and death—'compulsions' because these are biologically inescapable—will leave in man a spiritual and psychological dissatisfaction. But in a place of worship these compulsions are 'blent', fused to form a harmonious whole, are presented as 'destinies'. The word destinies connotes that men must accept these events with humility and positive meaning. The poet emphatically states: 'And that much can never be obsolete.'

And therefore men will for ever be 'gravitating' to churches. Gravitating in this context is sufficiently weighty, serious and apt as an expression, for the verb gravitate means 'be strongly attracted to some centre of influence' (OED). Once man considered the church a 'ground ... proper to grow wise in' by seeing, at any rate, 'so many dead lying around' in the adjacent graveyard; it was what may be called a 'memento mori'. a reminder of death. Even in the present godless age, or perhaps because of the prevalence of the forces of death as were displayed in the World Wars, the 'hunger to be more serious' has not become dated; rather it has increased. That is why even in a secular, welfare state, men like the poet visit places of worship in search of a positive meaning and wisdom.

3.5 WORD NOTES

Stanza - II.

font : a receptacle, usually of stone, for the holy water used in baptism.

lectern : reading-desk or singing-desk in church.

hectoring: blustering, imitating a grand, serious, heroic style.

snigger: utter half -suppressed mocking laughter. Not he, himself, only the echoes.

Irish sixpence : the poem was written after an actual visit to a church in Northern Ireland.

Stanza - III :

Chronically : through the ages.

pyx: the vessel in which the consecrated bread of the Eucharist is kept.

Stanza - IV :

Simples : medicinal plants.

Stanza - V :

roodlofts : a gallery at the top of a rood-screen, the ornamental partition separating choir from nave or body of church.

ruin - bibbers : one who is very interested in the study of ruins; 'bibber' actually means one who drinks much and often. Antiquarian

randy : having a rude, aggressive manner; coarse - spoken, lustful.

Christmas - addict: perhaps formed on the analogy of drug - addict and implies being excessively romantic or sentimental about Christmas and things associated with it.

Stanza VI :

ghostly silt : 'silt' is fine sediment; it is used here to describe a deposit of belief in a supernatural religion.

scrub : undergrowth or thicket; brushwood; ground covered with it. accoutred : dressed; equipped with all the paraphernalia of a church,

frowsty : stuffy; with musty warmth. Deliberately irreverential word being contradicted by the fact that keeps coming back,

barn : large outhouse

3.6 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

A. Essay-type Questions :

- 1) “Church Going” is an important statement of the mid-twentieth century consciousness. Discuss.
- 2) “Church Going” reveals an agnostic’s attitude to religion and its symbols. Do you agree with such an assessment of the poem ? Justify your Answer.

B. Short-answer type questions :

- a. How does the poet describe the contents of the Church ?
- b. When “superstition” will die what kind of visitors will come to the church?
- c. What does the poet refer to by “all our compulsions”?
- d. “And gravitating with it to this ground “—what does ‘it’ signify here?
- e. Is the title “Church Going” ambiguous ?

C. Objective-type Questions:

- a. Why have the “sprawlings of flowers” become “brownish now”?
- b. What is a “lectern”?
- c. Why does the poet say “The echoes snigger briefly” instead of “The sniggers echo briefly”?
- d. Why will “dubious women/pick simples”?
- e. What does the poet suggest by describing the church as “This special shell” in the line 52 ?

3.7 REFERENCE

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Unit 4 □ SEAMUS HEANEY-EXPOSURE

Structure

- 4.1 Historical and Political Background**
- 4.2 Text**
- 4.3 Introduction to the poet**
- 4.4 Central Idea**
- 4.5 A Critical Analysis of the Poem**
- 4.6 Word - notes**
- 4.7 Comprehension Exercises**
- 4.8 Bibliography**

4.1 HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

A proper understanding of the present poem warrants a degree of familiarity with some important aspects of Irish history as also the life of Seamus Heaney.

England was a close trading partner of Ireland in the medieval age. The English court of William the Conqueror, who became king of England in 1066, often discussed the idea of invading Ireland. Then in 1169 Dermot, a provincial ruler of Ireland, in his rivalry with other provincial rulers, appealed for help to the English king Henry II. This event became an invasion. Some Norman earls and barons conquered parts of Ireland. Finally in 1171, Henry II declared himself the king of Ireland.

However, the Irish people had fought for independence from the oppressive English rule for seven centuries. In 1922 the English rulers partitioned Ireland into two parts along religious lines: Irish Free State (later changed to the Republic of Ireland) with a Catholic majority, and Northern Ireland (often called Ulster, which is its ancient name) with a Protestant majority and still a part of the United Kingdom. The major population of Ulster considered itself British because of its religious affinity with Protestant England. But the Catholics were one-third of the population of Northern Ireland and they were discriminated against in education, employment, housing and other administrative areas. There have been prolonged protests against this. The situation became dangerous in the late sixties. In 1968 the Civil Rights movement organised marches in protest chiefly against vote-rigging and discriminations in housing allotments in Derry City, about

forty miles from where Heaney was born. The Ulster government committed excesses in trying to suppress the protests by police baton charges, internment without trial, torture and imprisonment. Rioting between the Catholics and Protestant loyalists and the Royal Ulster Constabulary followed. The British army entered the City in 1969. In January 1970 the Provincial Irish Republican Army was officially formed by Catholic extremists in Dublin. Since then terrorist violence by both the Catholics and the Protestants has increased. The trouble has not yet ended.

Heaney was born in a Catholic family on County Derry in Northern Ireland. He had to suffer all the insecurity, suspicion and humiliation for being a member of the religious minority. In a poem entitled 'The Ministry of Fear' he describes how he used to be stopped on his way, questioned, searched and abused by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and his armed and uniformed Protestant neighbours acting as B- Special Police Force. In an interview speaking of his experience of being a Catholic in Northern Ireland he says : "It's almost a racist term, a label for a set of cultural suppositions". Heaney was himself involved in the Civil Rights movement and often wrote on the political and cultural scene in Northern Ireland in various journals like the **New Statesman** and the **Listener**. But in 1972 Heaney left Northern Ireland as a consequence of threats from loyalist paramilitary and settled in a secluded cottage in Glanmore in County Wicklow in the Republic of Ireland. His move south received a great deal of media attention. It created in his mind self-doubts about whether he had shirked his responsibility towards his people and whether as a poet he had failed to respond to the situation. Then he wrote this fine poem "Exposure".

4.2 TEXT

Exposure

It is December in Wicklow:
Alders dripping, birches
Inheriting the last light,
The ash tree cold to look at.

A comet that was lost
Should be visible at sunset,
Those million tons of light
Like a glimmer of haws and rose-hips.

And I sometimes see a falling star.
If I could come on meteorite!
Instead I walk through damp leaves,
Husks, the spent flukes of autumn,

Imagining a hero
On some muddy compound,
His gift like a slingstone
Whirled for the desperate.

How did I end up like this ?
I often think of my friends'
Beautiful prismatic counselling
And the anvil brains of some who hate me

As I sit weighing and weighing
My responsible *tristia*
For what? For the ear? For the people?
For what is said behind-backs?

Rain comes down through the alders,
Its low conductive voices
Mutter about let-downs and erosions
And yet each drop recalls.

The diamond absolutes
I am neither internee nor informer;
An inner emigre, grown long-haired
And thoughtful; a wood-kerne.

Escaped from the massacre
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows;

Who, blowing up these sparks
For their meagre heat, have missed
The once-in-a-lifetime portent,
The comet's pulsing rose.

4.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE POET

The present poem "Exposure" belongs to Heaney's much-discussed book **North** (1975). In this poem Heaney explores some facts and circumstances of his own life to articulate his thoughts on the relation between poetry and politics.

4.4 CENTRAL IDEA

It is a poem of deep self-searching. The poet has reached a cross-roads of sorts in his life. Looking back at his life as a poet, he examines the significance of what he has achieved and what he might have achieved, what role his poetry should play in confronting the historical agony and the tragedy of his people and his country. In short, it is a meditation on the relationship of poetry and public life as well as his own motivations.

4.5 A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

The physical setting of his meditation, with symbolic overtones, is presented with the help of a few telling images. It is winter. Light is fading rapidly just before sunset. Alder, birch and ash trees are cold, being exposed to the cold weather. The winter picture suggests a depressed state of mind. He imagines he walks "through damp leaves. Husks, the spent flukes of autumn". It is more of a symbolic or psychological than a physical journey. There may be a pun in 'leaves' in that they may refer to the pages of his books of poems. Does he regard his poems as 'husks', 'spent flukes'?

He hopes that when night comes, a comet will be visible. The 'million tons of light' of a comet remind the poet of glimmering flowers and fruits (like... a glimmer of haws and rose - hips). The comet image fuses fear and beauty and calls up to memory Yeats's phrase 'terrible beauty' in his poem 'Easter 1916', and so suggests a bloody sacrifice, a revolutionary event. The poet also sometimes sees 'a falling star' and exclaims 'If I could come on meteorite' These images suggest his desire to be even in a lesser degree a revolutionary activist.

For in stanza IV, he speaks of 'a hero/On some muddy compound'. This hero, in the Irish context and for Heaney, may refer to a Catholic political activist, an internee now confined in the 'muddy compound' of an internment camp. He whirled his 'slingstone' (a primitive weapon) on behalf of a 'desperate' people who, perhaps, are the oppressed Ulster Catholics: they are described as 'the desperate' because they, have little room for hope, are reckless and can stake all on a small chance.

Instead of being such a hero, he has chosen to 'end up like this', that is to migrate to the safety and seclusion of a Wicklow cottage. Apparently he has taken himself away from his native place, from the centre of all political activity (civil rights marches, police firing and baton charges, bombing campaigns, internment without trial, imprisonment, road - blocks, cordons and search operations, interrogations, executions). He asks himself: 'How did I end up like this?'. He thinks both of his 'friends counselling' and the hatred of his enemies. (Ian Paisley's paper **The Protestant Telegraph** called Heaney 'the well-known papist propagandist' and his emigration was termed as a return to 'his spiritual home in the Popish republic'. Indeed their brains are like 'anvils on which one can be hammered ruthlessly!')

Questions crowd his mind. He thinks of his "responsible tristia". The word "tristia" in Latin means "sorrows", and is very evocative. The Roman poet Ovid (BC 43-18 Or 17 AD) felt his life shattered when he was banished by the emperor Augustus and was forced to take up residence at Tomis, a Roman outpost on the Black Sea. Despaired of his chances of return to his native Rome, Ovid wrote his lyrics called **Tristia**. Moreover, Neil Corcoran points out, **Tristia** is the title of one of the books of Osip Mandelstam, a Russian poet, who was forced to live in one of Stalin's camps when he wrote an anti-Stalin poem. Heaney might find some affinity with both Ovid and Mandelstam. Heaney further asks himself whether he should write his poems for attention, praise, pleasure or for the people's cause or as a rebuttal to what he is accused of: 'For what ? For the ear ? For the people ? For what is said behind backs?'

He listens to the rains and is reminded of disappointments and gradual loss of faith and confidence (let - downs and erosions). Simultaneously, however, each drop of rain also recalls "The diamond absolutes". The hard, bright, diamond-like 'absolutes' suggest his poetic beliefs and principles that are independent of and unaffected by accidental political circumstances.

The process of self - examination facilitates the discovery of his artistic identity- he is neither a political activist nor a spy or traitor to his people but an 'inner emigre'. He has left Northern Ireland to settle in the Republic, but for him both the parts constitute one country, divided merely on superficial political and religious lines. He may be legally described as an 'emigre', but he wishes to modify this description by calling

himself an 'inner emigre'. The term may also suggest another kind of emigration; he has retreated from the external world of political activism to enter into his inner world, introspecting on his true identity as a poet. He is an 'inner emigre' also 'in his internal psychological status as an emigrant from certainty and self-assurance to a transitional zone of anxiety and insecurity', as Corcoran says.

But it appears that Heaney has transcended this transitional zone as he identifies himself with a 'wood-kerne' - one of those late medieval lightly - armed Irish rebels who escaped into the forest as a tactical retreat, to avoid 'massacre' and prepare for future battle. Heaney in the same way has come to a sort of natural retreat, the Wicklow cottage among alders, birches and ash trees, permeated by wind and rain. Taking sustenance from nature, he is recovering his battered and doubt - ridden creative powers, exploring both his personal and the Irish situation from every perspective :

Escaped from the massacre,
Taking protective colouring
From bole and bark, feeling
Every wind that blows.

But this process of looking within does not produce any snugness. In the last stanza 'these sparks' with 'meagre heat' that he is 'blowing up' might be his speculations and controversial moves, With humility he acknowledges that he has missed 'The comet's pulsating rose'. The comet as a 'portent' presages something about to happen, especially of a momentous nature; he apprehends that he has missed a revelation, a possible revolution.

However, the poem on the whole does not have a despairing note. His speculations are after all 'sparks'. Besides, in lines 31-32 he speaks of himself as 'grown long-haired/ and thoughtful. Interestingly, the word 'comet' derives from Greek 'Kometes' meaning 'long-haired'. It certainly suggests that Heaney intends to be regarded as a long-haired fiery substance like the comet, but a 'thoughtful' individual. The implication is that the poet cannot shirk his political responsibility, but must remain faithful to his own art. Indeed Robert Lowell was justified in describing Heaney's **North**, to which 'Exposure' belongs, as "a new kind of political poetry by the best Irish poet since W.B. Yeats".

Neil Corcoran says that the title suggests different meanings like the greater openness to natural environment, confessional self-revelation and the media publicity which Heaney's emigration occasioned. But it is also something more: it is an illumination of the role of poetry vis-a-vis politics.

4.6 WORD - NOTES

L.8. haws : hawthorns; hawthorn berries; hedges;

L.8. rose-hips ; the fruits of the rose,

L.10. meteorite : a fallen meteor

L.12. flukes : puffs of wind; chance breeze; barbed heads of arrows

L.15. slingstone : a stone or pebble cast by a sling; a sling is a simple weapon, consisting of a loop of leather, for throwing stones

L.16. whirled : moved in a circle or curved, esp. rapidly or with force. L.19 prismatic : many coloured, full of contradictory colours.

L.27. let-downs: disappointments; drawbacks; disadvantages; lowering; in status, intensistly or strength.

L.27. erosions : the process action of destroying imperceptibly, little by little the state of being eroded;

L.29. absolutes: that which exists or is able to be thought of without relation to other things; an absolute principle or truth free from doubt or uncertainty.

L.30 internee: a person who is interned or confined as a prisoner, obliged to reside within prescribed limits of a country etc without permission to leave them.

L.30 informer: person who gives information or intelligence ; a person who informs against another for reward; spy.

L31. emigre : any emigrant, especially, a political exile. Originally a French emigrant from the revolution ; emigrant means a person who leaves one's own country to settle in another.

L.32. wood-kerne : light - armed Irish foot - soldier ; a rustic, a peasant.

L.35. bole : the stem or trunk of a tree.

L.35. bark : the layer of tissue over the stem of a tree.

L.39. portent : that which predicts something about to happen, especially of a momentous nature; a supernatural sign or revelation, prodigy; a marvel.

L.38. meagre : poor, scanty, inadequate, unsatisfying; lacking fulness and richness.

L.40. Comet : a celestial object that orbits the sun in a highly elliptical path and, when in the vicinity of the sun, usually has a bright hazy head and a long more diffuse tail; (figeratively, a portent, a herald).

4.7 COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

A. Essay-type questions :

- i) **Exposure** is a creation of anguished self-examination. Discuss,
- ii) Consider Heaney's **Exposure** as a political poem.
- iii) In **Exposure** Heaney explores the relationship of poet and his civic responsibilities. Discuss.

B. Short-answer type questions :

- i) Describe the physical setting of the poem.
- ii) Who is the hero (Line 13) imagined by Heaney in **Exposure** ?
- iii) What does the rain mutter to the poet ?
- iv) Why does Heaney call himself an inner emigre ?
- v) What does the poet say about a wood - kerne?

C. Objective-type Questions:

- i) Why is the ash tree cold to look at ?
- ii) What are haws and rose-hips ?
- iii) Explain the meaning of interneer,
- iv) What is suggested by the phrase anvil brains ?
- v) Why is a comet described as a portent ?

4.8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- III) Corcoran, Neil. *The Poetry of Seamus Heaney: A Critical Study*. London: Faber, 1998.
- IV) Vendler, Helen, *Seamus Heaney*. London: Fontana Press, 1999.
- V) Curtis, Tony (Ed). *The Art of Seamus Heaney*. 2nd Ed. Mid Glamorgan : Poetry Wales Press, 1985.

MODULE - 4

WRITING THE SUBSTANCE OF A POEM

- A substance is not a para-phrase. You should not merely give a prose ... of every line of the poem.
- Grasp the central idea and express it in your own words.
- The substance should be written in a single para. It should not be so brief that the central idea is not expressed, nor should you try to accommodate in your substance every line of the poem.

WRITING A CRITICAL COMMENT

In the critical comment try to comment on ;

- (i) the theme on central idea which may be love, nature, transience, mutability, love for motherland and so on.
- (ii) the imagery used.
- (iii) the mood which may be joyous, passionate, sombre, elegiac, nostalgic and so on.
- (iv) the tone which may be satiric, humorous, sceptical, mournful, one of languor and so on.
- (v) the language used, mentioning any archaic expression or unusual coinage.
- (vi) the figures of speech used, the more usual ones being alliteration, simile, metaphor, apostrophe, interrogation, personification etc.
- (vii) the metre used, which may be iambic pentameter, trochaic tetrameter etc.