NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

SELF LEARNING MATERIAL

UNDER GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME

HEG 7

CC-EG-07

HONOURS IN ENGLISH

BRITISH ROMANTIC LITERATURE

CHOICE BASED CREDIT SYSTEM

PREFACE

In a bid to standardize higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, generic elective, discipline Specific, ability and skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern, which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry their acquired credits. I am happy to note that the university has been recently accredited by National Assesment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) with grade "A".

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the six semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English/Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed by the teachers, officers & staff of the University and I heartily congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish you all a grand success.

Professor (Dr.) Ranjan Chakrabarty
Vice-Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University
Under Graduate Degree Programme
Subject : Honours in English (HEG)
Course Title : British Romantic Literature
Course Code : CC-EG-07

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Netaji Subhas Open University **EG : British Romantic Literature**
CC-EG-07

Subject : British Romantic Literature
Course Code : CC-EG-07

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MODULE – I

UNIT–1 : THE EUROPEAN SCENE–IMPLICATIONS ON ENGLISH CULTURE AND SOCIETY

1.1.1. Objectives
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1.1.13. Summing Up
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1.1.15. Suggested Reading List

1.1.1 Objectives

Dear learners, you might have already known from your study of CC 3 and CC 6 how the literature of the late 17th and 18th centuries exhibited a practice of order, elegance, objectivity, Good Sense, Decorum and restraint under the general name of Neoclassicism. In this span of nearly a hundred and fifty years, poets, essayists and dramatists together worked towards a revival of the literary excellence of the classical Roman era. The aim was to produce literature that was civilized, didactic and corrective; and to this end they strictly followed the ideal of Reason and Good Sense, as propounded by the 17th century French critic Boileau. You might also have noticed how chiefly as an effort to educate the newly risen middle class the periodicals and journals arose, whereas the novels originated to express the middle class life and ethos. You might have seen how, be it in poetry, drama or prose, elegant expression was the key-word

of all literary activities. Heroic Couplet became the standard poetic meter as it most closely expressed this elegance. This Course (CC 7) in general, and this opening Unit in particular will deal with the literature of the Romantic period that followed; and will introduce you to a completely new kind of literary ethos. The 'Objective' of this Unit is to lay the road map of this turn in literature through a vivid understanding of the cultural influences that shaped what is called the Romantic Movement in English literature.

1.1.2 : Introduction - Features of Romanticism

Beginning from the latter half of the 18th century, the Neoclassical spirit gradually began to give way to the spirit of Transition that was engendered in Pope's age. From the social role of poetry the attention began to be shifted to the influence of nature on man; and from satires the taste shifted to the descriptive and narrative poetry. This spirit of Transition got its final impetus from the French Revolution of 1789 which led it to the Romantic Age. Further, the heroic couplet, exploited much in the previous age, gave way to the ballads, odes and finally to lyrics. The English novel which was born in Pope's age, developed from the picaresque status through the Novel of Sensibility to the more popular Gothic fiction. A new cultural attitude, new theories of literature involving sympathy for the Middle Ages, an awakening interest in the ballads and folk literature and a new emphasis on Nature and Man as an organic part of Nature gradually led to a well-concerted movement called Romanticism.

Romanticism refers to the spirit of liberalism and the emotive and imaginative spontaneity that characterised the European literature in the early 19th century. In the English literature, Romanticism is often said to begin with the French Revolution of 1789 which, through its revolt of the common men against aristocracy and the bourgeois, upheld the ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In its broadest sense, in terms of literary understanding this came to mean a spirit of revolt against the classical standards of literature prevalent in the 18th century. In 1798, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, written jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge, triggered off the writing of poems based on Nature and its influence on human heart. The year 1798 is also thus held to be the beginning of the Romantic Period in English literature. This is the simplest introduction to one of the most productive periods in the annals of English Literature. But, as literature is held to be the immediate product of the times which influence and shape the literary artists, no proper judgement of a period in the history of literature is complete without the analysis of the times before and during which the literary works are produced. Hence, this Unit will strive to give a compact analysis of the milieu-outside in the greater Europe and inside in England herself-which contributed to the shaping of the Romantic Movement.

1.1.3 : Dating English Romanticism

Our study in this Unit and beyond is concerned with English Romantic texts. So, before we take into account the greater European milieu that shaped English Romanticism, we should note that the English Romanticism was the first such concerted movement of sorts in the history of English literature.

Now, why do we say so?

If you look back at the literary history of the periods you have already covered, you will find that before the closing years of the 18th century, we mostly have individual poets and writers whose works we broadly classify within certain patterns. The only school of poets before the Romantic poets was formed by the Metaphysical Poets of the Elizabethan and Jacobean ages who reflected some common characteristics in a scattered way. But their poetry had not been a well-concerted politically inspired Movement as Romanticism was. The English Romanticism is dated to begin in 1798 with the publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's joint volume *Lyrical Ballads*. It is also often dated to begin in 1789, with the most influential contemporary event of the times, i.e., the French Revolution, which induced the spirit of rebellion amongst the European writers, poets and critics. Its influence in England was felt immediately in poets like Wordsworth, while the later generations of the English Romantics like Byron were fed with the ideas of the Revolution. However, as *Lyrical Ballads* was the first ever poetic manifesto of Romanticism, with Wordsworth's theory of poetry as a spontaneous effusion made in languages of common men, and as it gave some sort of organizational framework to the sporadic attempts of writing such poetry, 1798 is decidedly taken to be beginning of English Romanticism. However, while this particular marking of a year might serve purposes of academic convenience in periodising, you will obviously find traces of Romantic elements in the poetry of James Thomson and his contemporaries (commonly called Precursors of Romantic Poetry) and much more pronouncedly in William Blake who is on your syllabus for this Course.

Similarly, the concluding year of the Romantic Period is somewhat problematic. The elder generation of the Romantics like Walter Scott, Wordsworth and Coleridge were still writing in the 1820s. Even Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, his autobiographical account of how Nature shaped and moulded him as the Poet Priest, came out posthumously in 1850. The Last of the Romantics, Byron, died in 1824. Historically, the Victorian Period started in 1837, tempting the literary historian to conclude the Romantic Age with the death of King William IV and the ascension of Queen Victoria in 1837. Tennyson, the Victorian poet, echoed Shelley's mellifluous lyricism, while the early poetry of W. B. Yeats of the 20th century is tinged with the Romantic angst. But,

logically speaking, the year 1832, in which the first Reform Bill was passed, is decidedly held to mark the end of the Romantic Period. The radicalism, the spirit of liberty and the greater sympathy for the common men which plummeted amongst English thinkers and characterised Romanticism found a fit ending with the passing of the Reform Bill which extended the right to vote to more people and paved the way for political democracy.

1.1.4 : Understanding Romanticism

It is often said that the Neo-classical Age of Reason and Good Sense was an insertion in the continuum of romantic sensibility in English literature. It is often said that romanticism first emerged in the Middle English Period during which the writers of romances showed some feeling for the beauties and rawness of Nature. The rich forested areas through which Sir Gawain makes his "last" journey and the shades of several colours which the forests exhibit in the four seasons suggests the romancer's feeling for the colours of Nature. The rich nature imagery of the Medieval English romancers was further woven precisely by the likes of Spenser and Shakespeare. Even in the rich days of Neo-classicism in the 18th century there was a group of poets (the Pre-romantics) who brought a break from the bookish and artificial description of nature and reflected an emotional sensitiveness to nature and the fellow human beings. English Romanticism is said to have started proper with the publication of Wordsworth and Coleridge's joint venture, *Lyrical Ballads*, in 1798. So, there must have been something there which gave a political impetus to the so-called nature poetry in English so that the Return to Nature of the Romantic Revival was possible. There must have been some external phenomenon which organized the sporadic endeavours of the romantics and gave it the status of a movement. Before venturing into the European and the national scene, let us understand the chief features of Romanticism which characterized the poets, prose writers and novelists of the English Romantic Period. Romanticism is often held to be intrinsically connected with escapism. The sense in which this is said is that it is an 'escape' from an adherence to rules and customs of society and literature: Romantic poetry in particular marks a break from the neo-classical rules of Decorum, Reason and Good Sense and correctness prevalent in the 18th century. It is also an escape from cruel reality, of life and its surroundings, and a dream for a golden age. Every Romantic poet is dreamer who wants to establish a Utopian society free from the bondages of rules. It is an escape into the lap of Nature: Nature, or the physical, objective Nature, provides the Romantic poet the ultimate shelter in his escape from the oppressing reality. To the Classical poet Nature meant the human nature and also an abstract entity symbolizing correctness. In contrast, a Romantic celebrates Nature with all its sweetness and rawness. But it is also equally

true that with Romanticism, English literature began to witness a growing sympathy for the fellow human beings. While in the Neo-classical Age poetry was a civilized activity for the elite, by the elite and of the elite, Romantic poets address the general humanity, especially the downtrodden. Wordsworth's famous "A poet is a man speaking to men" may be noted here. Romanticism is a spontaneous expression of individual emotions and feelings: Poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings…recollected in tranquility" (Wordsworth). A Romantic poet literally looks into his heart and writes. Their expressions do not obey the classical idiom of Reason. As a Romantic flouts Reason in feeling and style, lawlessness is often the very law of Romanticism. Instead of confining poetry to a few established verse forms like the English Heroic Couplet and the French Alexandrine, the Romantic poet experiments with every conceivable type of metre and stanza. A Romantic takes refuge in the world of the supernatural and into the past and its rich colour as a mode of escape from reality. Romantic poetry often exhibits a melancholy or romantic angst within the heart of the poet.

1.1.5 : The Diverse Strands of Romanticism

We hear of the English Romanticism, the French Romanticism and the German Romanticism. All of these were movements in arts, literature and culture which coincided and which had one common reference, the French Revolution. The American Revolution also gave Romanticism an impetus in its formation, while the Industrial Revolution exclusively helped the English Romanticism to flourish. German Romanticism was the dominant intellectual movement of German-speaking countries in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, influencing philosophy, aesthetics, literature and criticism. In contrast to the seriousness of English Romanticism, the German variety of Romanticism notably valued wit, humour, and beauty. The early German romantics strove to create a new synthesis of art, philosophy, and science, by viewing the Middle Ages as a simpler period of integrated culture. However, the German romantics became aware of the tenuousness of the cultural unity they sought. Late-stage German Romanticism emphasized the tension between the daily world and the irrational and supernatural projections of creative genius. Romanticism (*Romantisme* in French) was a literary and artistic movement that appeared in France in the late 18th century, largely in reaction against the formality and strict rules of the official style of neo-classicism. It reached its peak in the first part of the 19th century, in the writing of François-René de Chateaubriand and Victor Hugo, the poetry of Alfred de Vigny; the painting of Eugene Delacroix; the music of Hector Berlioz; and later in the architecture of Charles Garnier. Critics like Réné Wellek, Harold Bloom, M. H. Abrams and Paul de Man opine that

Romanticism is essentially a European tradition than an exclusively British phenomenon.

1.1.6 : French Romanticism and Rousseau

All of these "Romanticisms" share certain co-mingling of nostalgia and melancholy as a feature of Romanticism though each of them differs from the other in substantial ways. However, the origins of the new literature of Romanticism in Europe can be traced in an interesting series of interrelationships involving France, Germany and England. It is not hard to grasp the general lines of development. In 1755 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the great French thinker, in the 'Appendix' to his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* spoke of the difference between the savage man and the civilized man: "Savage man, when he has dined, is at peace with all of nature, the friend of all his fellows," while the civilized man "after having swallowed up the treasures and ruined multiples of people,…ends by cutting everyone else's throat until he makes himself master of the world." In 1761, Rousseau published two books that took Europe by storm: *Du Contrat Social* and *Émile*. "Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains," begins *Du Contrat Social*, while *Émile* begins with "God made all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil." *Du Contrat Social* states that the State is not a divine institution but a human contrivance, a voluntary association of men for their mutual benefit. The people are sovereign while the King has no divine right to be there. Liberty is not safe without equality: no man should be rich enough to buy another, says Rousseau. Du Contrat Social thus upholds the ideas of Liberty, Equality and the Sovereignty of the people. In fact, this discourse of Rousseau strengthened the foundation of Romanticism by hinting at the very origin of the word "Romantic." The noun *roman* (called "romance" in English) in French referred to the imaginative works composed in the vernacular, especially the verse epics of the Middle Ages. The vernacular, i.e., *romanz*, meant "vulgar language" which replaced the classical weighty Latin, meant for the upper echelons of society. The term romantic is thus etymologically contrasted with classicism and connected with the masses, the common people. In *Émile* Rousseau advocated a scheme of education which might in time produce citizens fit to build the New Jerusalem and worthy to dwell there. He gives a call to return to Nature, and by Nature he meant not only the country as opposed to town, but also a simple life as opposed to the corrupted life of Paris. The second paragraph of Rousseau's last and most influential book, *Confessions* (published 1781-88), contains a statement which might well serve as the battle cry of the entire Romantic Movement-"I am not made like anyone I have seen; I dare believe that I am not made like anyone in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different."-thus stirring the sense of individualism which guided the Romantic spirit. Rousseau's ideas, mingled with the mass of misery and wrong accumulated in

France for centuries, produced an explosive mixture which shattered the old regime to pieces.

1.1.7 : German Romanticism

In Germany, Romanticism denoted a modernity that was brought about when classical (pagan) culture was supplanted with a Christian culture, as the foremost German Romantic philosophers Hegel and Schelling thought so. They also thought that Romanticism connoted a division between the society and the self (foreshadowing the image of the solitary poet against a vast landscape in most of the English Romantic poems and as found in the paintings of the German painter Caspar David Friedrich) and that it is marked by a dark melancholy in the contemplation of the infinite, a melancholy governed by a sense of inadequacy. In the 1770s, the *Sturm* und *Drang* movement further decided the directions of the German Romanticism. It is derived from the name of the 1776 play *Wirrar, oder Sturm und Drang* (Confusion, or Storm and Stress in English) by Friedrich Klinger, which was a literary declaration of independence intended to liberate German drama from French Neo-classical rules. The Movement, led by men like Goethe and Schiller, created an enthusiasm for the plays of Shakespeare, a passion for the Ossianic poems, for Rousseau, folk ballads and advocated freedom from any rules. It was essentially a movement of youthful revolt. Goethe's Werther famous novel, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) was giving an immense vogue to a type of self-pitying romantic sensibility. This movement did not directly lead to the Romanticism, though it was nearly a parallel to it. Goethe looked back to the classical period, while Schiller's play retained many romantic features in a less revolutionary and more formal manner.

1.1.8 : The American Revolution

By the time France and Germany were evolving their own Romanticism, a revolutionary wave from America had already been blowing throughout Europe, fanning the spirit of Romanticism in these two countries. The American Revolution was an anti-colonial revolt which occurred between 1765 and 1783. The American Patriots in the Thirteen American British Colonies defeated the British in the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) with the assistance of France, winning independence from Great Britain and established the United States of America. The American colonies rejected the authority of the British Parliament to tax them because they had no representatives in the British Parliament. The initial protests steadily erupted into the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the burning of the Gaspee in Rhode Island in 1772, followed by the Boston Tea Party in December 1773. The British closed Boston

Harbour and took a series of repressive measures. In retaliation, the American Patriot leaders set up their own government in late 1774 at the Continental Congress to coordinate their resistance of Britain. The other colonists which maintained their allegiance to the Crown were known as Loyalists or Tories. When King George's forces attempted to destroy Colonial military supplies at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, the conflict developed into the Revolutionary War between the patriots and the British Regulars, as the Patriots (and later their French allies) fought the British and Loyalists. Each of the thirteen colonies formed a Provincial Congress which assumed power from the former colonial governments, suppressed Loyalism, and recruited a Continental Army led by General George Washington.They declared the colonies free and independent states on July 2, 1776, run on the political philosophies of equality among men, liberalism and republicanism to reject monarchy and aristocracy. The War officially came to an end with the Treaty of Paris signed on September 3, 1783, between American and French alliance on the one hand the British on the other.

With help from your counselor try and gather more information about the Boston massacre; burning of the Gaspee; and Boston Tea Party.

1.1.9 : The English Pre-Romantics

Romantic elements had already begun to be felt in English literature nearly half a century before the French Revolution. Not only so, Coleridge had spent a considerable time in Germany before the Revolution, while Wordsworth was in France on the eve of the Revolution.Long before the Neo-classical principles of Reason and Correctness came to be challenged on a broad front in the Romantic Age, a new anti-classical spirit had begun to be felt in poetry in the Augustan and the Johnsonian Ages themselves. Deeper cords of the heart began to be stirred, which even the wittiest of the Augustan wits failed to effect. The conventional, bookish and artificially pastoral Nature of the Neo-classical poetry began to give way to a genuine feeling for Mother Nature; the Augustan abhorrence for the toilers of the world gave way to a romantic sympathy. Poetry allowed a re-admission of emotions into it at the expense of Good Sense, and at the same time interest in the non-classical, Gothic (synonymous with 'barbaric' in Neo-classicism) past reawakened. The heroic couplet came to be abandoned for the Spenserian and Miltonic poetic forms. During the high time of the Neo-classical poetry of the Johnsonian school, these new sensibilities were exhibited in the poems of certain poets who are loosely grouped together as the Precursors of Romanticism. All these are facts of literary literary you've read earlier.

The pioneer among the pre-Romantics was James Thomson, who published in

1726 'Winter', out of which grew successively 'Summer' (1727), 'Spring' (1728) and ultimately in 1730 *The Seasons*, including 'Autumn' and a closing hymn. In each of the poems in *The Seasons*, between the different phases of the seasons reflective passages and descriptions of the seasons of other regions are interspersed. Thomson was a keen observer: "The cherished fields / Put on their winter-robe of purest white." His transferred epithets betray the reactions of the poet's imagination: "… the mournful grove, / And the sky saddens with the gathering storm." In a word, his theme is Nature, its explorer (Newton) and its creator (God). He constantly acknowledges the Divine Force which "pervades, / Adjusts, sustains and agitates the whole." But, quite paradoxically, great emphasis is laid on the interrelation, not the conflict, between the country and the town. Thomson's frequent recourse to descriptions of happy, therapeutic use of walks in the rustic environs of London suggests his penchant for the co-operative functioning of civilization. *The Castle of Indolence*, an allegory in two cantos written in Spenserian stanza, attempts to recapture the mood of Spenserian diction. Following Spenser's narrative in the Bower of Bliss in *The Faerie Queene*, he describes the Castle and its inhabitants with an undertouch of humour. The choice of Spenserian stanza and vocabulary and the form of the allegorical romance is an interesting testimony to the search for new models and horizons.

William Collins's fame rests on Odes on Several Descriptive and Allegorical Subjects, which covers odes to Pity, Fear, Simplicity, Liberty, "How Sleep the Brave" and, above all, Ode to Evening. The logic of these odes, except "Ode to Evening", "How Sleep the Brave" and The Passions, is uncertain, the grammar too goes astray, and the poems sometimes tail off into flatness. But what attracts in Collins is his delicate sense of beauty, especially in "Ode to Evening", where a succession of distinct images and scenes lead to a delicate evocation of the landscape. The exotic appeal of his earliest *Persian Eclogues*, collection of escapist schoolboy verses, reappears in the posthumously published Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Scottish Highlands. The wild Scotland of the poem is both "Fancy's land … where still, 'tis said, the fairy people meet" and a landscape filtered from various sources.

The poets of the Graveyard School-Thomas Gray, Edward Young and Robert Blair being central among them-wrote somber, melancholy, reflective and moral poems chiefly on human mortality. Young's "Night Thoughts" is an account of his broodings over his sorrow, his thoughts on mortality and immortality, in a carefully wrought gloomy context of night. Blair's "The Grave" is a dramatic evocation of the horrors of corruption and the solitude of death. The most enduringly famous, fluent and diversified of all "graveyard" poems is 'Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard". The poem moves with ease from contemplation of the landscape to a consideration of 'the short and simple annals of the poor'. The alternation between generalized abstractions and

individual examples and the deep personal feelings make it one of the most celebrated pre-Romantic poems. Gray's "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard" are rhetorically grand. Whereas the first traces a genealogy of the English verse, the second sustains a high note of heroic denunciation in the bitter prophecy of the bard.

George Crabbe's "The Village", which evokes the poor and bleak life of the Suffolk coastal region, earned for him the reputation of being the poet of poverty and misery. John Dyer's "Gronger Hill" succeeds in achieving the mark of truth in describing the landscape. Mark Akenside's "Pleasures of Imagination", the controversial James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems and Thomas Chatterton's pretentious *Rowley* poems succeeded in evoking the past. All these scattered attempts of the major pre-Romantics led on, with the French Revolution as the impetus, to the effusive Romanticism of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

1.1.10 : The Industrial Revolution

However, even before the French Revolution could radically influence English society and culture, the Industrial Revolution of the second half of the 18th century in England was already shaping the English demography. In the initial days of the Industrial Revolution the demand for huge quantities of wool for the power looms necessitated commercial sheep farming and the enclosure of common grazing ground. Large number of poor, having sensed better opportunities of livelihood, moved to the rapidly growing industrial towns. Unplanned urbanisation led to the cities turning into ugly slums, which stood in stark contrast to the beautiful London envisioned by the 18th century poets. London was no longer the only big city. Better roads and navigable canals brought remote areas of England into the focus of the educated urban. At the same time, colonial expansion was creating an interest in the exotic. A new class, the industrial working class, was coming into existence. Unpaid or underpaid child labourers became frequent. Division between the rich and the poor intensified to such an extreme that England was gradually becoming two nations, one for the rich and another for the poor. Urbanisation, mechanisation and industrial oppression was now beginning to create a fomenting but suppressed ire among the votaries of liberty in England. The pathos underlying such transformation is evident for instance in William Blake's poem 'London', which is decidedly a different paradigm from say, the elegantly flowing description of London and the Thames in Alexander Popes *The Rape of the Lock* that you have already come across. It is in such humanizing perspectives of literary representation that we are to trace the essence of Romanticism.

1.1.11 : The French Revolution

It was during the time of the French Revolution that the spirit of rebellion and

liberty underlying the political, social and literary developments in Germany, France and England converged. The French Revolution was a landmark event in modern European history that began in 1789 and ended in the late 1790s with the ascent of Napoleon Bonaparte. During this period, French citizens razed and redesigned their country's political landscape, uprooting centuries-old institutions such as absolute monarchy and the feudal system. The upheaval was caused by widespread discontent with the French monarchy and the poor economic policies of King Louis XVI, who met his death by guillotine, as did his wife Marie Antoinette. Although it failed to achieve all of its goals and at times degenerated into a chaotic bloodbath, the French Revolution played a critical role in shaping modern nations by showing the world the power inherent in the will of the people.

Towards the end of the 18th century, France's involvement in the American War of Independence was beginning to wreak havoc on the French coffers. Two decades of poor harvests, drought, cattle disease and skyrocketing bread prices had kindled unrest among peasants and the urban poor. Many expressed their desperation and resentment toward a regime that imposed heavy taxes - yet failed to provide any relief - by rioting, looting and striking.In the Autumn of 1786, Louis XVI's controller general, Charles Alexandre de Calonne, proposed a financial reform package that included a universal land tax from which the privileged classes would no longer be exempt. Sensing a counterattack from the aristocratic quarters, King Louis XVI summoned an assembly representing France's clergy, nobility and middle class, scheduled for May 5, 1789. In the meantime, the commoners or the Third Estate began to mobilise support for equal representation in French politics. The meeting could not be held, due to unrest among the three estates (the clergy, the nobles and the commoners), and the Third Estate formally adopted the title of National Assembly and met in a nearby indoor tennis court and took the so-called Tennis Court Oath, vowing not to disperse until constitutional reform had been achieved. On June 12, as the National Assembly (known as the National Constituent Assembly during its work on a constitution) continued to meet at Versailles, fear and violence consumed the capital. Though enthusiastic about the recent breakdown of royal power, Parisians grew panicked as rumors of an impending military coup began to circulate. A popular insurgency culminated on July 14 when rioters stormed the Bastille fortress in an attempt to secure gunpowder and weapons; many consider this event, now commemorated in France as a national holiday, as the start of the French Revolution.The wave of revolutionary fervour and widespread hysteria quickly swept the countryside. Revolting against years of exploitation, peasants looted and burned the homes of tax collectors, landlords and the seigniorial elite. On August 4, the Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, a statement of democratic principles grounded in the philosophical and political

ideas of Enlightenment thinkers like Rousseau. The document proclaimed the Assembly's commitment to replace the ancien régime with a system based on equal opportunity, freedom of speech, popular sovereignty and representative government.

Meanwhile, the political crisis took a radical turn when a group of insurgents led by the extremist Jacobins attacked the royal residence in Paris and arrested the king on August 10, 1792. The following month, amid a wave of violence in which Parisian insurrectionists massacred hundreds of accused counterrevolutionaries, the Legislative Assembly was replaced by the National Convention, which proclaimed the abolition of the monarchy and the establishment of the French republic. On January 21, 1793, it sent King Louis XVI, condemned to death for high treason and crimes against the state, to the guillotine; his wife Marie-Antoinette suffered the same fate nine months later. Following the king's execution, war with various European powers and intense divisions within the National Convention ushered the French Revolution into its most violent and turbulent phase. In June 1793, the Jacobins seized control of the National Convention from the more moderate Girondins, unleashing the bloody Reign of Terror, a 10-month period in which suspected enemies of the revolution were guillotined by the thousands. Many of the killings were carried out under orders from Robespierre, who dominated the draconian Committee of Public Safety until his own execution on July 28, 1794. On August 22, 1795, the National Convention, composed largely of Girondins who had survived the Reign of Terror, approved a new constitution that created France's first bicameral legislature. Executive power would lie in the hands of a five-member Directory (Directoire) appointed by parliament. Royalists and Jacobins protested the new regime but were swiftly silenced by the army, now led by a young and successful general named Napoleon Bonaparte.On November 9, 1799, as frustration with their leadership reached a fever pitch, Bonaparte staged a *coup d'état*, abolishing the Directory and appointing himself France's "first consul." The event marked the end of the French Revolution and the beginning of the Napoleonic era, in which France would come to dominate much of continental Europe.

1.1.12 : Impact of the French Revolotion on England & English Literature

The French Revolution introduced a new religion in England since the advent of Christianity in the 6th century. The new religion of **Liberty, Equality and Fraternity** was hailed in England with burning enthusiasm: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very Heaven," cried an elated Wordsworth. In the wake of the Revolution the artist emerged as the new Prometheus creating a new order: "I must Create System or be enslaved by another Man's," said Blake (Jerusalem). The Radicals exulted. The British politician Charles James Fox declared that the fall of the Bastille

was the best thing that had ever happened. The Whigs mostly agreed with him, while the Tories, being loyal to the throne, showed a reserved enthusiasm. Edmund Burke, who was later to denounce the Revolution, welcomed the French Revolution as a wonderful spectacle involving people who had shaken their political servitude and shed their yoke of laws and rules. It was Thomas *Paine's Rights* of Man which gave the Revolution a proper welcome to England. Paine himself witnessed the Revolution and opined that only the Revolution could have set France free from the years of oppression and misery. Paine was received so fervently in England that the frightened government suspended *Habeas Corpus* and got five reformers tried for sedition and exiled them. They accused twelve other reformers of High Treason, though a timely intervention of William Godwin whose first edition of Political Justice in 1793 observed that government is a necessary evil. As a rationalist, he urged man to choose the right course of action, disregarding convention, instinct and private affection. Edmund Burke's initial hailing of the Revolution gradually turned into a passionate denunciation in his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790). He repudiated the frenzied nature the Revolution was taking and prophesied mob-rule and military dictatorship. Burke was starkly opposed by Paine. However, the French Revolution failed to influence the Pre-Romantics except Blake, while directly influencing the early Romantics like Wordsworth and Coleridge who witnessed both the spirit of liberty and the Reign of Terror the Revolution had unleashed. The younger generation of the Romantics-Byron, Keats and Shelley-wrote when the Reign of Terror was a thing of the past. Their poetry thus reflects the ideas of liberty, spontaneity of imagination and rebellion-all the goods of the Revolution that came to them filtered.

1.1.13 : Summing Up

Thus, so far, we saw how the English Romanticism made an individual statement in becoming a well-concerted and comprehensive movement distinct from the other Romanticisms in Europe which had stemmed themselves nearly in the same period of European history. We saw how it gave a fresh impetus to individuality, feelings and sympathy for the surrounding world by slowly nurturing the poets in an era which suppressed spontaneity under the heavy weight of Reason, and then giving birth to a host of Romantic poets whose legacy continues even today.

1.1.14 : Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer-type Questions :

i) What is Romanticism? Discuss why it is called a European phenomenon.

ii) What are the several features of Romanticism which characterize the English

Romantic literature? Discuss.

iii) Discuss the role of the Transitional Poets in shaping the English Romancism.

Medium Length Answer-type Questions :

i) Why were the English Transitional Poets so called?

ii) What is Frech Romanticism? How is it different from the English Romanticism?

iii) What is German Romanticism? How is it different from the English Romanticism?

iv) Discuss in brief the role of the Industrial Revolution in shaping Romanticism.

v) In what ways did the American Revolution contribute in shaping Romanticism.

vi) How did the French Revolution affect the English Romantics?

Short Answer Type Questions :

i) When do we generally date the beginning of the Romantic period and why?

ii) What does Romantic poetry precisely mark a break from?

iii) How did Goethe and Schiller contribute to further the cause of Romanticism?

iv) What do you understand by the term Romantisme?

v) Why was the French Revolution a different kind of influence on later Romantic poets in comparison to the earlier generation?

1.1.15 : SUGGESTED READING LIST

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UNIT–2 : ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

1.2.1. Objectives

1.2.2. Introduction

1.2.3. Romanticism

1.2.4. Socio-Political and Economic Backgrounds

1.2.5. The French Revolution and English Literature

1.2.6. The Intellectual Milieu

1.2.7. Chief Features of Romantic Literature

1.2.8. Language and Form

1.2.9. Summing Up

1.2.10. Comprehension Exercises

1.2.11. Suggested Reading

1.2.1 Objectives

The major objectives of this Unit are to be read in conjunction with and as continuity to Unit 1. While in the previous Unit you have been introduced to the general European scene and its implications on English culture and society, here the focus is specifically on the ways in which Romanticism as a movement came to affect English literature. So, while some of the entries might seem similar to Unit 1, you have to see them as derivatives of the continental scenario.

1.2.2 Introduction

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

1.2.3 Romanticism

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

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

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

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

1.2.4 Socio-Political and Economic Backgrounds

In order to understand the basic tenets of Romantic thought, knowledge of the

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

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

1.2.5 The French Revolution and English Literature

There is an integral relationship between the revolution of 1789 and English Romantic poetry of the nineteenth century, as you have read in the earlier Unit. The French Revolution and the hope it generated of a new dawn for humanity made a deep impact

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

In every cry of every Man,

In every Infants cry of fear, In every voice: in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear (Blake : 'London')

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

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

1.2.6 The Intellectual Milieu

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

We shall briefly discuss the various trends of thoughts which circulated around the Romantic writers in an attempt to understand how, their reactions against and response to these thoughts defined their writings. This will help you to gain an understanding of the concept of Romanticism, and you can relate these trends with the poems that are on your syllabus.

- **Mysticism**

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

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

- **Imagination**

"If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and the special view which they held of it" -

this is what C.M. Bowra wrote in his book, *The Romantic Imagination.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- **Humanism and the Human Condition**

The Romantic poets were deeply involved with the world of mankind and thus they were poets of Man. Wordsworth chose his characters from simple humdrum humanity. These characters did not possess epical grandeur; rather they were the innocent peasants, unpretentious shepherds, a solitary reaper or a village girl working in the metropolis, all busy with their daily chores. These characters being closely associated with nature, gave the poet an opportunity to explore nature in a more vivid way through them and their relation to nature. The language spoken by those people was the language of the soil and devoid of any artificiality. As such, it was considered by poets, especially Wordsworth, to be fit to be used in poetry. This idealization of the natural state was largely inspired by Rousseau and is considered to be one of the aspects of Romantic Humanism inspired by the French Revolution.

The writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau had a pervasive influence on the Romantics. His ideas about the love of freedom, the passion of love, admiration of nature and the

state of man in society gave the Romantics the chief subjects of their poetry. Even Byron, who alone among the Romantics did not repudiate the eighteenth century and its literary concepts, paid tribute to Rousseau in 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage';

...he knew

How to make madness beautiful, and cast O'er erring deeds and thoughts a heavenly hue Of words, like sunbeams, dazzling as they past

The eyes, which o'er them shed tears feelingly and fast.

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

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

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

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

- **Nature**

Romanticism has been defined as a 'Return to Nature. It should not be confused with 'naturalism', a twentieth Century phenomenon, the Romantic's return to nature and reaction against social pretensions and artificialities was a complex affair, partly a revolt against the rational-scientific world view of the seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke, partly a reaction against the changes that were taking place in the English countryside as a result of the beginning of industrialisation and the consequent disruption of traditional community life. This admiration and love for nature is one of the chief characteristics of Romantic poetry. Nature, when it appears in earlier writings, was only thought of as an object for embellishment but, in the hands of the Romantics, the significance of nature is altogether revised and uplifted. Nature was now thought of as endowed with a personality and thus interaction with and establishment of a relationship with nature could make human beings happy and contented. Nature was ascribed a soul or spirit by Wordsworth who had deep faith in the role of nature as the guide and mentor of human beings. He believed that intimacy

with nature can provide strength to escape from all the cares and anxieties which beset human life. During the days of dejection and frustration after the failure of all the hopes and ideals associated with the French Revolution, Wordsworth attained the much-needed peace of mind from the natural beauties of the Lake Districts. In 'Tintern Abbey' he talks of his love for nature with inexhaustible enthusiasm, seeing

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

Of all my moral being"

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

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

Linked with this is the romantic idea of the association of nature with moral and physical well being of man which Wordsworth expresses in the Lucy poems :

I will to my darling be Both law and impulse

- **Hellenism**

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

truths. 'Prometheus Unbound', 'Adonais' and 'Hellas' testify to this. In 'Hellas' he talks about the Greek ideal:

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

- **Medievalism**

The Romantic poets felt an attraction for the mystery and supernaturalism associated with the Middle Ages which were integrally related to an aura of romance. Coleridge, Scott and Keats were particularly interested in medievalism and the romanticism associated with it. The element of supernaturalism has been brilliantly handled by Coleridge in 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' and by Keats in 'La Belle Dame sans Merci'. The essentially medieval setting and ambience created by Keats in 'La Belle' are direct reflections of Keats' love for medievalism. The Romantic writers' medievalism was not however a mere craving for the remote and unfamiliar. At its root lay a refusal to restrict cultivated interest within the bounds of the eighteenth century's defined boundaries of civilisation , the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. An interest in the middle ages had earlier become the fashion, with the Gothic novels of Horace Walpole, Mrs Radcliffe and others. The later period avoided the earlier extravagances of fantasy and showed a more intelligent interest in the imaginative reconstruction of history. This resulted in such serious revivals like Bishop Thomas Percy's 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry' and also in such revivals like Chatterton's pseudo-medieval 'Rowley Poems', or James Macpherson's pseudo-Gaelic 'Ossian'. While the interest in the past gives us the wonderful ambience of Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes' and adds a depth of complexity to Coleridge's 'Christabel', its chief achievement was to be the historical novels of Walter Scott. The interest in past history led to Scott's re-creation of the historical novel and Scott's imaginative understanding of the process of history would contribute a history-mindedness which would be a great boon to subsequent historical studies.

1.2.7 Chief Features of Romantic Literature

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

of the importance of childhood but also shows the hostility of the adult world to the child in his Chimney Sweeper poems or in 'Nurse's Song'. Lamb reflects the interest in childhood in his more real, though perhaps sentimental observations on children.

Another important feature of romantic writing was the expression of feelings and emotions. The earlier ideal of narrowly reasoned control in emotional life gave way to a belief in the importance of the emotions. Blake wrote "Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have curb'd and governed their Passions or have no Passions, but because they have cultivated their Understandings." Keats's letters, even more than his poems, show his beliefs in free emotional expression. Imagination becomes the most important source of poetic inspiration and this imagination is not restricted by any classical rules and norms of form in art. Romanticism focusses on the individual imagination and explores Nature as well as past history to find correspondences to the individual's feeling and realisations.

1.2.8 Language and Form

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

We can say this, that the Romantic poets used more speech rhythms than their previous generation and avoided the subjugation of rhythm to metre. Many older verse

forms , the ode for example, or the Blank verse, neglected by the previous generation came back into use. The stanza forms and the metrical schemes are more varied and unlike in the neo-classical period, each major poet treads his own path, instead of setting up and following a single norm.

1.2.9 Summing Up

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

1.2.10 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer-type Questions :

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

Mid- length Questions :

1. How did the term 'romantic' come into use?

2. In what way did the Romantic writers combine their love for nature and love for humanity?
3. What changes can be found in the language of Romantic poetry?

Short Questions :

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

1.2.11 Suggested Reading

Bowra, Maurice. *The Romantic Imagination*. OUP, 1961

Ford, Boris, ed. *From Blake to Byron: New Pelican Guide to English Literature*. Penguin, 1983.

Trevelyan, G.M. *English Social History*. Penguin, 1987.

UNIT–3 : ROMANTIC POETRY

1.3.1. Objectives

1.3.2. Introduction

1.3.3. The Precursors of Romanticism

1.3.4. Features of Romantic Poetry

1.3.5. Basic Theory of Poetry

1.3.6. The Romantic Poets

1.3.7. Summing Up

1.3.8. Comprehension Exercises

1.3.9. Suggested Reading

1.3.1 Objectives

From your reading of Module 1 Unit 2, you are now aware of the importance of poetry as a distinctive genre of the Romantic period. This Unit will take you through the transition from Neo-Classical poetry into the ushering in of the Romantic. You will see for yourselves the wide implications of the term 'Romantic', and how it changed the idiom of English poetry for good.

1.3.2 Introduction

As stated in the 'Objectives', this Unit aims to give you an overview of Romantic poetry, beginning with the Precursors of Romanticism, so that you get an idea of the gradual shift from neoclassical poetry to romantic poetry. We shall first discuss the features of Romantic Poetry and then focus on the major poets of the era. As we navigate through this Unit, you are also to keep referring back to the first Unit of this Course to understand for yourselves how the socio-cultural scenario of Europe in general, and even the American influence of the time was telling upon the poetic output of the period. Of special significance as students of literary studies is the way the democratic spirit was pervading into poetic output, and how this was effectively making common man and her/his thoughts and feelings the subject of poetry.

1.3.3 The Precursors of Romanticism

As you have seen in Core Course 6, the eighteenth century which is also called the age of 'prose and reason', is sometimes called the age of neoclassicism. It was marked by decorum, rigidity and discipline in writing. However, there is, you remember, no need to think that the romantic tendencies were completely non-existent in that age. In the later part of the eighteenth century a significant change could be traced in the ethos of poetry and literature at large. A new sensibility and temper were at work, particularly with the younger poets, who gradually began to liberate themselves from the neoclassical bent of mind and the all-encompassing influence of Pope and Dryden. It is true that they could not cut themselves off completely from the neoclassical influence. However, there was a blending of the old conventions of the neoclassical past and the elements of romanticism as far as selection of subject matter, verse patterns, choice of form and content of are concerned. These poets are called transitional poets or the Precursors of the Romantic Revival. Recall briefly the poetry of Thomson and Gray and you will get the essence of what is being said here.

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

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

melancholy. "The Deserted Village" of Goldsmith gives us an early glimpse of the changes taking place in the traditional village life, and nostalgia for the old rural ways in ways which anticipate the attitudes and concerns of the romantics.

Bishop Thomas Percy was a scholar with antiquarian interests. He edited and published a collection of ballads, metrical romances and historical songs under the title *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) which included poems ranging from the Middle Ages to the reign of Charles I. This compilation had tremendous influence on the Romantic poets . Robert Burns was inspired to write in the Scottish dialect. Coleridge's and Keats's medievalism drew from this source. Percy himself was largely influenced by the immense popularity of an earlier publication-James Macpherson's *Ossian*. Ossian is a cycle of poems on Irish mythology, which Macpherson claimed to have collected from word-of mouth Scots Gaelic and translated. This claim was untrue. The poems were written by Macpherson himself. But the book was to inspire the Romantics' interest in the past, as well as the Gaelic Revival later, i.e. an attempt, in Ireland to revive the Gaelic language and culture.

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

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

In William Collins (1721-1759) also we find a combination of both the neoclassical and the romantic elements. He excels in portraying the supernatural world of shadows

as his poem 'Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands' shows us. Collins' choice of the form of the ode, both the simpler stanzaic Horatian and the more complex Pindaric, rather than the heroic couplet , his admiration for Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton rather than for Edmund Waller, a much- admired neo-classical poet, mark his turning away from the Pope-Dryden tradition. In ‘‘Ode on the Poetical Character” his concept of poetry is essentially Romantic; it is divinely inspired, the product of Imagination, impassioned and full of insight. We quote below an short extract from this poem :

Young Fancy thus, to me divinest name, To whom, prepared and bathed in Heav'n, The cest of amplest power is giv'n,

To few the godlike gift assigns, To gird their blessed, prophetic loins,

And gaze her visions wild, and feel unmixed her flame!

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

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

Groves, heaths and smoking villages, remote...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now I a fourfold vision see And a fourfold vision is given to me

It was imagination which enabled us to see the wonder of the created world: To see the world in a grain of sand

And heaven in a wild flower Hold infinity in the palm of your hand

And eternity in an hour.

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

In every cry of every Man, In every Infants cry of fear, In every voice: in every ban,

The mind-forg'd manacles I hear.

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

I will not cease from mental fight, Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand, Till we have built Jerusalem

In England's green and pleasant land

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

A Quick Recapitulation

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

1.3.4 Features of Romantic Poetry

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

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

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

1.3.5 Romantic Theory of Poetry

John Stuart Mill, the English philosopher, political economist and civil servant whose ideas of liberty profoundly influenced the Romantic movement, stated in his *Thoughts on Poetry and its Variations,* that 'Poetry is the thought and the words in which emotion spontaneously embodies itself'. Wordsworth, taking a clue from this thought process, developed his own theory of poetry which was published as the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Two remarkable statements of Wordsworth which can be considered as the foundation stone of Romantic poetry are: 'All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' and poetry 'takes its origin from emotions recollected in tranquillity'. According to Wordsworth, being inspired is essential for writing poetry; and this inspiration helps a poet to bring forth his ideas spontaneously and create poetry of great order. This stress on spontaneity is in sharp contrast to the basic tenets of Neoclassicism.

Wordsworth also spoke about the language of poetry in the ‘Preface’ to his *Lyrical Ballads*. He said that as far as possible, he had tried to write poetry in a selection of language really used by men. Although Coleridge refuted many of Wordsworth's views about the language of poetry, the opinion shows how the Romantics were going

beyond the limits set by neoclassical poetry. From the observations of the other Romantics too, for example from Coleridge's essays in *Biographia Literaria*, Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* or Keats's letters a new and different view of poetry and the poet emerges in the early nineteenth century.

1.3.6 The Romantic Poets

To begin a discussion about the Romantic poets it becomes imperative to talk about **William Wordsworth** at the very beginning because he was not only a major poet of the Romantic age but also its most important theoretician. The charm of Wordsworth's poems lies in the fact that they give to the so-called mundane or even mean subjects a newness, vividness and dignity. Wordsworth was always fascinated by the simple trivial things and the beauties of nature present in the countryside or amongst the common people. His delineation of human nature and the philosophical approach to life create such a great impact because they are marked by a penetrating simplicity. His 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' are brilliant examples of the mystical relationship between nature and human soul. These poems also deal with the concept of Pantheism, that is, an awareness of the benign presence of the Omnipotent in all the tiny aspects of nature. The poems are touched by the spiritual bliss attained by humanity by gaining in this awareness of the presence of divinity in all things perceptible. Another remarkable feature of Wordsworth's poems was his use of a language which was very unlike neoclassical poetic language. Wordsworth's claim that he was using the language of the common man was not , as Coleridge pointed out and as later critics have corroborated, not strictly correct. But certainly, in comparison with the formality and frequent artificiality of much neoclassical poetry, his poems are marked by simplicity and a directness that goes to the heart . Sometimes, his conscious attempt to write in the ordinary, everyday language spoken by humdrum humanity resulted in bad poems, for example , 'The Thorn' in the Lyrical Ballads.

In the year 1793 Wordsworth's poems were first published in the collections *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*. The year 1795 was a significant year in Wordsworth's life because this was the year in which he met Samuel Taylor Coleridge with whom he became a close friend) and the result of this was the Lyrical Ballads (1798), one of the seminal works in English Romantic movement. This volume did not contain the names of Wordsworth or Coleridge as authors. Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey' and Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' were included in this volume. The second edition which was published in 1800 listed only Wordsworth as the author and included a preface to the poems. In the preface of the 1802 edition Wordsworth elaborates on the elements of a new kind of verse based on the language spoken by common men and also states his definition of poetry as 'the spontaneous

overflow of powerful feelings'. The final edition was published in 1805. Wordsworth's philosophical inclination, particularly in his works like The Prelude and 'Tintern Abbey', has been the source of much critical discussions. Wordsworth's poems treat the seminal issues of the Romantic Revival: love of nature, belief in the healing powers of nature. a holistic view of the relationship of man and the world, liberty, dignity of the common man, the poet's individual sensibility and its creative expression in poetry. He shows a surprising awareness of the problems of the changing social situation. We find in his poems themes like the transition from agrarian to urban life, the decay of a close-knit rural community and its effect on the individual, the dangers to the individual from an industrial, technological society. These give to his poems a living relevance for us.

William Wordsworth

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

Born: April 7, 1770, Cockermouth, United Kingdom Died: April 23, 1850, Cumberland, United Kingdom

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

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

his self-doubts , his difficulties, his hopes and his fears which establish a close bond between the poet and the reader. We give below a few lines from his poem, 'This Lime- Tree Bower', My Prison, addressed to his friend Charles Lamb.

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

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

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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

Born: October 21, 1772, Ottery St Mary, United Kingdom Died: July 25, 1834, Highgate, United Kingdom

Another poet who had immense admiration for the distant past was **Sir Walter Scott**. He also possessed deep love for his native country, Scotland, and composed several narrative poems highlighting the virtuous and vigorous lives of the simple folks of his country in the past before they lost the simplicity due to the advent of the modern civilization. His poems reflect the poet's interest in the ancient ballads of his land. His imagination was fed by fairy tales oriental and Gothic romances and the folklore and ballads of the Scottish Highlands. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, published in 1805, was immensely popular with the reading public. *The Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion* are other reputed works of Scott. He was most at home in the surroundings of Scotland

and when he chose backgrounds and stories outside Scotland, was not very successful. Scott was not an innovator so far as the language of poetry was concerned. He wrote mainly in rimed octosyllables, using variations of the ballad metre. His characterisation was not subtle, but he had great narrative power.

Walter Scott

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

Born: August 15, 1771, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

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

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

Like his more illustrious friend, Southey also was a radical and an ardent admirer of the revolutionary spirit. Like Wordsworth he too became a conservative later on. In fact, he became so pro-establishment that he virulently attacked those writers who dared oppose or criticise the government. This drew down harsh scorn on him from later writers like Byron and Hazlitt. From the pieces written in his radical youth we may mention *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), *Joan of Arc* (1796), and a two-act drama, *Wat Tyler*. In later years he wrote a number of long epic poems in the romantic vein: *Thalaba* (1801), *Madoc* (1805), *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), *Roderick, the Last of the Goths* (1814), *A Tale of Paraguay* (1825). The exotic locales and picturesque details pleased his contemporaries. But they lack the high imagination of Coleridge or Keats or the passion of Byron. Moreover, his style of versification is careful but pedestrian. He wrote both rhymed and unrhymed verse and it was from the unrhymed Pindaric verse of *Thalaba* that Shelley borrowed the irregular metre of *Queen Mab*. One poem, 'A Vision of Judgment' (1821) written on the death of king George III,

in which he depicts the late king being gloriously received in heaven is only remembered because Byron wrote a brilliant parody of it. His early ballad- like pieces like The *Old Woman of Berkeley*, *St. Michael's Chair, The Devil's Walk* however have an attractive racy narrative style. He had a touch of humour which these poems show, but which is unfortunately absent in the longer poems. We have put here below a few lines from his very well-known early anti- war poem, 'After Blenheim' (1796). You may find the full poem in most anthologies. The poem shows how famous battles are meaningless, they only result in the deaths of thousands of common men. An old man tells his grandchildren of the great victory of the British forces under the Duke of Marlborough but has no answer for the persistent question of his little grandson.

"But what good came of it at last?"
Quoth little Peterkin :-
"Why, that I cannot tell", said he,
"But 'twas a famous victory".

Robert Southey

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

Born : August 12, 1774, Bristol Died : March 21, 1843, London

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

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

who question and challenge the values of safety and prudence. Byron always sympathises with the impudent and the adventurous including himself. *Childe Harold;'s Pilgrimage* and *The Isles of Greece* show his remarkable historical imagination, interweaving the past with the present.

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

George Gordon Byron

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

Born: January 22, 1788, Dover, United Kingdom Died: April 19, 1824, Missolonghi, Greece

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

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

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

poetry, the constant attempt to burden it with his theories which prompted Keats to tell him to curb his magnanimity, be more of an artist and load every rift of his poem with ore.

Percy Bysshe Shelley is one of the major English Romantic poets. He is considered to be one of the finest lyric poets in the English language.
Born : August 4, 1792, Horsham, United Kingdom Died: July 8, 1822, Lerici, Italy

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

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

1.3.7 Summing Up

The Romantic era in England stretches tentatively from the late eighteenth century to the mid nineteenth century. This period produced some of the most eminent and influential poets whose penetrating emotions and philosophical insight created magic in their writings and created real masterpieces in the entire range of English literature.

Their unconditional love for nature, employment of passionate language, compassion for humanity, depiction of the so-called unheroic characters in the poems were certain salient features of the Romantic writers.

This age always laid more emphasis on emotion than reason, liberty and emancipation than artificiality and norms.

William Wordsworth was not only one major poet of the Romantic age but also its most important theoretician.

Coleridge excelled in the depiction of exotic, strange and unreal events and incidents.

Another poet who had immense admiration for the distant was Sir Walter Scott.

Another group of romantics who were revolutionary in spirit throughout their poetic careers is known as the second generation of Romantic poets. This group includes Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats.

1.3.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer-type Questions :

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

Mid-length questions :

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

Short Questions

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

1.3.9 : Suggested Reading

Bush, Douglas. *English Poetry* Nabu Press, 2011.

Ford, Boris, ed. *From Blake to Byron: The New Pelican Guide to English Literature* Penguin, UK. Revised Edition, 1999.

Herford, C.H. The Age of Wordsworth Kessinger Pub., 2004

Hough Graham, *the Romantic Poets.* Hutchinson. 3rd Ed. 1978.

UNIT–4 : ROMANTIC PROSE

1.4.1. Objectives
1.4.2. Introduction
1.4.3. The Romantic Essay
1.4.4. Major Essayists
1.4.5. The Romantic Novel - Major Exponents and Types
1.4.6. Romantic Literary Criticism
1.4.7. Writers of Miscellaneous Prose
1.4.8. Summing Up
1.4.9. Comprehension Exercises
1.4.10. Suggested Reading

1.4.1 Objectives

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

1.4.2 Introduction

To say that poetry was the predominant literary form in the Romantic period is not to imply that there was no prose literature worth mentioning. In fact, as this Unit will show, the cultural turns of the time did give rise to a variety of prose. While the novel of the Romantic period is decidedly different in its concerns from that of the 18th century, non-fictional prose that develops from the tradition of Addison and Steele gets much more invested with the cult of personality that is typically a Romantic trait. With novelists like Jane Austen and Walter Scott shinning bright in this period, issues of domestic space and medievalist nostalgia come into play. With Mary Shelley, the element of the gothic is exploited to the hilt and we have the beginnings of what later emerged as the genre of science fiction. The poets whom you've been introduced to in the previous section also wrote their ideas of poetry in prose tracts, and this served to firmly ground the poetic ethos of the age.

1.4.3 The Romantic Essay

In Core Course 6 you have seen the rise and development of the essay form in the Elizabethan period and the 18th century. The Romantic essay developed into a distinct literary genre which did not merely follow the tradition of the eighteenth century Periodical essays, written by Joseph Addison, Richard Steele and others. It would be interesting to note how the features of Romanticism that have been detailed in Unit 1 make themselves evident in this literary genre. At the outset of our discussion, we shall briefly enumerate the characteristics of the Romantic essay and then we shall discuss individual essayists and their contributions.

Characteristics of the Romantic Essay

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

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

1.4.4 The Major Essayists

❖ **Charles Lamb**

The works of Charles Lamb are usually divided into three periods. First, there are his early literary efforts, including the poems signed "C.L." in *Coleridge's Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), his romance *Rosamund Gray* (1798); his poetical drama *John Woodvil* (1802) and different other works in prose and poetry. The second period was largely devoted to literary criticism. In this period, he wrote *Tales from Shakespeare*

(1807) in collaboration with his sister, Mary Lamb. His *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare* appeared in 1808. The third and final period includes Lamb's personal essays, which are collected together in his *Essays of Elia* (1823), and his *Last Essays of Elia* (1833). 'Dream Children: A Reverie', 'The Superannuated Man', 'Old China', 'Praise of Chimney Sweepers' are some of his memorable essays. As a point of convergence between the poetry and prose of the period, notice how the chimney sweeper, a figure of the dark shadows of the ensuing Industrial Revolution, recurs in the works of William Blake and Charles Lamb. These are important hints regarding the discursive and humanist potential of the Romantic period and its literature.

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

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

❖ **Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) :**

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

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

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

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

❖ **William Hazlitt (1778-1830) :**

His earliest writings consisted of miscellaneous philosophical and political works. He is, with Coleridge, the foremost literary critic of the age. Both men recognized the importance of journals in disseminating information and in reflecting on contemporary issues, and both successfully responded to, and profitably indulged, the growing metropolitan taste for public lectures. His reputation chiefly rests on the lectures and essays on literary and general subjects all published between 1817 and 1825. Published in 21 volumes, many of the essays are on topics which may no longer interest us. But there is a body of literary and social criticism which has stood the test of time. His tastes were wide ranging. He was interested in literature, politics, painting and philosophy and he pursued studies in all these areas. He was an early pioneer in arousing popular interest in Shakespeare. He was not an inspired literary critic like Coleridge but he

gave the common reader sensible guidance. *My First Acquaintance with Poets* (1823) is a delightful essay, conveying the pleasure and encouragement he received on meeting Wordsworth and Coleridge. But his judgments on the older poets are always very balanced. The main collections of his lectures are *Characters of Shakespeare's plays* (1817, 1818), *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818, 1819), *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), and *Lectures on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (1820). *The Political Essays* (1819) belonging to this period is probably the most neglected of his first-rate books.

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

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

1.4.5 The Romantic Novel - Major Exponents and Types

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

❖ **Jane Austen (1775-1817) :**

Jane Austen is one of the greatest novelists in English. She began writing light fiction, partially parodying earlier writers' works, especially the Gothic romances, before

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

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

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

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

Emma is different from the other novels in having a heroine who is not in a financially disadvantageous position. The heroine is a wealthy heiress conscious of her social role, privileges and obligations. Emma's abuse of her social power, especially at the cost of her social inferiors, is the subject of Austen's attack. Her intervention in the alliances between various couples (Harriet and Martin, Harriet and Elton, Jane and Frank) and finally her discovery that she is in love with Knightly (with whom Harriet has fallen in love) is the subject of some brilliant irony and characterization. Austen's insight into and the inner workings of the minds of the people is certainly one of the finest in English Literature. *Persuasion* emphasizes the importance of the process of learning and judging through which all her heroines pass. Anne Eliot is not only Austen's most astute literary critic, she is also her most discriminating woman character, the one whose intelligence most effectively balances the merits of conflicting opinions, ideas, impressions and feelings.

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

Women characters in her novels are intelligent, witty, vivacious, sparkling and resourceful and they are comparable to women characters of William Shakespeare.

❖ Walter Scott and the Historical Novel

Whereas Jane Austen deliberately limited her area of concern, Sir Walter Scott (1771- 1832) opened up the novel to the full panorama of revolution, dissent, rebellion and social change. Having written verse romances with great success for several years, he published his first novel only in 1814, at the very end of the Napoleonic wars when Britain was triumphant. Equally significantly, the settings of his novels are in the past, rather than the immediate and highly troubled present. Scott wrote the largest selling historical romances of his time and has remained one of the most popular authors for the reading public well into the 20th century. He made a great impact on the European novel, his influence stretching from Tolstoy to Alexander Dumas. He wrote about the transformation in Scottish society from the feudal-agrarian to the urban-rural. His tales revolved around the themes of Scottish nationalism, the Civil War, class and feudal issues in society as well as the Jacobite Rebellions. His novels combined realistic descriptions with poetic representations. The combination of historical detail with imaginative plots and evolved symbolism made for complex narratives laced with fact and fiction. Scott adopted the medieval romance tradition of heroic narratives: the hero's quest, his adventures, themes of social status, courage, chivalry and virtue. That was his way of escape from the changes he disliked in his own society. In most cases however, he substituted gentry or middle-class heroes for the knights of medieval romances. After the Napoleonic wars, Britain entered a time of severe social unrest; of high unemployment, of widening gaps between the rich and the poor, employers and workers, upper, middle and lower classes. These contemporary concerns, vividly enunciated by writers from the poet Shelley to the social campaigner William Cobbett, are not directly present in Scott's works. But at the same time, like all the other Romantic writers, he hated the new industrial -commercial society that was coming up, not because, like the young Wordsworth or like Shelley, he believed in equality, but because it was destroying the old social ties, the paternalistic relation of landowners and peasantry.

His great achievement was the re-creation of the **historical** novel. In their attempts to separate the novel as a species of realistic narrative from the non-realism of the medieval romance, early novelists had either used historical material or had claimed fictional narratives to be histories. The European Enlightenment and The Scottish Enlightenment in Scott's own home country has aroused a renewed interest in history and a more comprehensive understanding of the past as a shaping force for the present. This interest provided the inspiration for Scott's historical novels. His own antiquarian interests and his early upbringing in the Highlands, listening to the recapitulation of

history in the Border ballads, further deepened his interest in history as a living, vital spirit. He was the ideal man to revitalize history in his novels in a way that can only be compared with Shakespeare's history plays.

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

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

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

point of view and the Scots language dialogue they speak in his Scottish novels. Scott's Romanticism lies in using the colloquial language and not only including the common people, but seeing history through their eye.

1.4.6 Romantic Literary Criticism

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

English literary criticism of the Romantic era is closely associated with the writings of William Wordsworth in his 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Modern critics disagree on whether the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge constituted a major break with the criticism of their predecessors or if it should more properly be characterised as a continuation of the aesthetic theories of seventeenth and eighteenth century German and English writers. In 1800, in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth expressed his famous proclamation about the nature of poetry as "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." With this statement, Wordsworth posited a very different view of poetry than was standard at the time, shifting the center of attention from the work as a reflection or imitation of reality to the artist, and the artist's relationship to the work. Poetry would henceforth be considered an expressive rather than a mimetic art. Although the analogy of art as a mirror was still used, M. H. Abrams says that the early Romantics suggested that the mirror was turned inward to reflect the poet's state of mind, rather than outward to reflect external reality. William Hazlitt in his 'On Poetry in General' (1818) addressed the changes in this analogy "by combining the mirror with a lamp, in order to demonstrate that a poet reflects a world already bathed in an emotional light he has himself projected," according to Abrams.

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

to different writers, friends, publishers and correspondents.

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

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

In addition to the primacy of the poet, the aesthetic theories associated with Wordsworth and Coleridge in particular were severely critical of the "poetic diction" of earlier poets, which to the Romantics, was affected and artificial. They preferred, according to William

K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks "the primitive, the naive, the directly passionate, the natural spoken word." Wordsworth argued that there should be no difference between the language of prose and that of poetry, thus defending his use, within the *Lyrical Ballads*, of the everyday language of the middle and lower classes. Wimsatt and Brooks write that "Wordsworth's primitivism was part of a general reaction, setting in well before his own day, against the aristocratic side of neo-classicism." But where Wordsworth associated poetic diction with artifice and aristocracy and his own poetic

language with nature and democracy, Coleridge looked upon the issue differently. "To Coleridge it seemed more like an issue between propriety and impropriety, congruity and incongruity. In effect he applied the classic norm of decorum."

❖ **Wordsworth: Preface to *Lyrical Ballads***

The major points in Wordsworth's Preface are : a) his definition of poetry - '…all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling…' b) his opinion about the poet's characteristics--'poems to which any value can be attached were never produced on any variety of subjects but by a man , who being possessed of more than usual organic sensibility, had also thought long and deeply' c) the value of poetry; for Wordsworth, various causes were "acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind" in his own time. He had in mind the steady progress of industrial capitalism and its dehumanising effect on society. He believed that the poet, in such predicament, could carry feeling and sensation into the human heart to re- humanise it d) his views on the language of poetry; after declaring that he had written the poems on 'incidents and situations from common life', he says he has 'related or described them, throughout, as far as possible in a selection of language really used by men' .This has been a controversial claim and Coleridge was among the first to challenge. What Wordsworth tried to do in his declaration however was to show how, a selective language for poetry constricted the scope of poetry and reduced poetic language to clichés.

❖ **Coleridge's views on Imagination**

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

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

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

The term Fancy he uses for the eighteenth century view of imagination, which was mechanical and associative. It does not transform the materials it deals with, but merely reproduces them. Imagination on the other hand, is essentially creative. He subdivides it into **Primary** and **Secondary** imagination. Primary Imagination is the living power of basic human perception, which enables us to identify and discriminate things and

create order out of chaos. Secondary Imagination is the artistic imagination. . It is active and vital, projecting itself into the world of objective phenomena to bestow life to it, to make it responsive to man. It dissolves and diffuses in order to recreate. It reconciles opposites, unifies and synthesizes disparate elements.

❖ **Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry***

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

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

1.4.7 Writers of Miscellaneous Prose

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

Maria Edgeworth's (1767-1849) writings are divided into three categories: short

stories for children, such as "Simple Susan," which were collected in *The Parent's Assistant* (1795-1800) and *Early Lessons* (1801-15); *Irish tales*, which include her best works, *Castle Rackrent* (1800), *The Absentee* (1809), and *Ormond* (1817); and full length novels, such as *Belinda* (1801), *Leonora* (1806), *Patronage* (1814), and *Harrington* (1817).

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

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

Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864): Though he was a prolific writer of both poetry and prose, it was through his prose writings that Landor became well- known, especially with the series of *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-1829) between literary and political personalities from all periods of European history. But the prose is linked to the verse by the control or "mastership" that Friedrich Nietzsche described as "its polite warfare with poetry." The dialogues are common representations of what Ezra Pound called "a whole culture," extending from Greece and Rome to the Enlightenment and Landor's own times. His long life span enabled him personally to influence Robert Browning and Swinburne in the formation of a counter-tradition in nineteenth-century English poetry concerned with the difficult and adverse relaying of past culture-a tradition especially influential on Pound, Landor's greatest advocate, for whom Landor was the most important English writer between Pope and Browning.

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

1.4.8 Summing Up

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

1.4.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer-type Questions :

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

Mid-length Questions

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

Short Questions

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

1.4.10 Suggested Reading

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

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Sampson, George. *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 3rd Edition 1970.

Sanders, Sanders. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

MODULE – 2

UNIT–5 : WILLIAM BLAKE -THE VISIONARY MYSTIC & “INTRODUCTION” TO *SONGS OF INNOCENCE*

2.5.1. Objectives

2.5.2. Introduction

2.5.3. William Blake: The Poet and His Poetry

2.5.4. *Songs of Innocence* and of *Experience :* An Overview

2.5.5. Text 'Introduction' from *Songs of Innocence*

- **2.5.5.A. Annotations**
- **2.5.5.B. Summary of the Poem**
- **2.5.5.C. Critical Reading of the Poem**
- **2.5.5.D. Imagery, Symbolism and Myth**

2.5.6. Blake: A Visionary Mystic

2.5.7. Blake - The Painter

2.5.8. Summing Up

2.5.9. Comprehension Exercises

2.5.1 Objectives

This Unit is meant to introduce you to the poetry of William Blake, who is generally looked upon as a forerunner of the Romantic Movement in British poetry, as you have gathered from Module 1 Unit 3. You will first have a brief account of the poet's life and then about his literary and artistic career.

Blake is quite different from other poets. In this Unit, you will read him first as a mystic visionary and then study his most important literary work, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. We shall thereafter move on to discuss the opening poem, 'Introduction' to *Songs of Innocence*. So there are basically two parts of this Unit. A close reading of the text of the poem 'Introduction' followed by exhaustive critical discussions will help us understand some of the distinctive features of British Romantic poetry in general and the poetry of Blake in particular. To talk of Blake is also to talk of his visual art that greatly augments his poetic content. Blake's paintings guide the reader to discover new meanings out of his poetry. We have tried to incorporate a few

relevant plates as well and we hope that with help from your counselor, you will have enjoyable readings of this Unit and the following two units which again are studies of Blake's poems from Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience.

2.5.2 Introduction

William Blake may be best introduced as the most radical thinker and perhaps the greatest among the Pre-Romantics. He was a bard, a poet who was a visionary, a myth-maker who created his own universe of symbols and mythology, a painter, an engraver, a mystic dreamer who claimed to have seen host of angels on trees and cloudson several occasions. He was a reformer too, for through his works he wanted to purge the society of oppression and exploitation. Most importantly, he wanted to free the minds of men from the mind-forg'd manacles'designed by man himself.

The greatest influence in Blake's life and his works in his love for *The Bible*. There are many references to Biblical themes in both his paintings and his writings. Symbols from *The Bible* and Christ are frequently seen in his work and art. The eighteenth century adherence to classical form and structure in poetry was not for him. His was the poetry of the soul. Apart from *The Bible*, Blake was influenced by Shakespeare and Milton. Like the intellectuals of his age, he was influenced by Rousseau's individualism, the writings of Thomas Paine and the theologian-mystic Emanuel Swedenborg.

Like Gray, Goldsmith, Thomson, Cowper and Burns, Blake belongs to the dawn of Romanticism. However, unlike them he is not simply naturalistic or faintly mystic. He was a visionary bard and he found himself in the tradition of the prophetic writers. His sensations, his mysticism, his spirituality were all equally profound.

2.5.3 William Blake - The Poet and his Poetry

❖ **Blake : A Short Biography**

William Blake, was born in a respectable working-class family in Soho, London on November 28, 1757. Blake had no formal education. He stopped attending school after he merely learnt to read and write and was primarily educated at home by his mother Catherine Blake. The Bible had a lasting influence on him from a very young age .He showed a keen interest in languages and by his own effort he learnt Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian, besides English. Blake was blessed with a prized imagination and since the age of seven he claimed to have seen angels and God Himself. He developed a passion for drawing, sketching Greek antiquities from a very tender age. He was greatly inspired by the work of the masters, Raphael and Michelangelo. At the age of ten, his parents enrolled him at the Henry Par Drawing Academy, a preparatory school for young artists.

In 1772, Blake's passion for painting led him to be apprenticed to a well-known engraver, James Basire of Great Queen Street, London. At the age of 21, he enrolled in the Royal Academy and became a professional engraver.His art is marked by a profound sense of spiritualism. In deep contrast to the scientific skepticism of the eighteenth century Blake's poetry glorifies intuition, vision and imagination.

On 18 August 1782 Blake married Catherine Boucher whom he after marriage taught to read and write and who in turn learnt to help him with his art of engraving. He was greatly influenced by the ideals of the French and American Revolutions but was later disillusioned by them. Though not an activist under a particular political banner, Blake's poetry is a cry against the abuse of class power as is evident in David Erdman's "Blake: Prophet Against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of His Own Times".

Blake was a peerless genius, but his creative spirit and radical ideas were largely incomprehensible to his contemporaries. He received very little praise or recognition during his lifetime. Unsung and unpraised, the poet continued to live poor and somewhat anonymous, by engraving and illustrating other men's work till he died in London on August 12, 1827.

❖ An Overview of Blake's Poetry

Here is an overview of Blake's major works along with the year of publication and a brief note on their themes :

The Work	Year of Publication	Themes at a glance
Poetical Sketches	1783	Blake's first volume of poetry. The poems reflect his protest against war and tyrannical monarchy
The Book of Thel	1789	An allegorical poem, a collage of various themes like love, innocence, religion and experience.
Songs of Innocence	1789	A collection of illustrated lyrical poems dealing with themes of childhood, hopes and fears of childhood and gradual transformation to adulthood.

The Work	Year of Publication	Themes at a glance
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell	1790	Blake's singular prose work.Here he attacks the codes of conventional morality and satirizes oppressive authority in church and state.
Vision of the Daughters of Albion	1793	One of Blake's complex visionary works encompassing themes of slavery, social constructionism and the virgin- fallen woman dichotomy.
Songs of Experience	1794	In deep contrast to the Songs of Innocence these poems conjure up an adult world of corruption and repression.
Europe : A Prophecy	1794	This prophetic book is both obscure and complex. This Continental Prophecy deals with the revolutionary spirit of Blake's contemporary time. Europe reflects Blake's statement against oppression perpetuated by religion and monarchies , represented by Urizen.
The Book of Urizen	1794	One of the major prophetic books of Blake. It takes its title from Urizen, a character from Blakean mythology, who got alienated from other Eternals and create his own realm of religious oppression.

The Work	Year of Publication	Themes at a glance
The Book of Ahania	1795	The book is populated by characters of Blakean mythology- Urizen, Orc, Ahania (who is the female counterpart of Urizen), the poem describes the struggle between Urizen and Orc, the defeat of Orc and the birth of Urizen's son, Fuzon.
Vala or The Four Zoas	1797-1804	The epic poem has four main characters or four Zoas from Blakean Mythology- Urthona, Urizen, Luvah and Tharmas. The Zoas were created by the fall of Albion. Blake had intended to create his mythic universe in Vala but being dissatisfied with the work, he abandoned it.
Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience	1799	Subtitled 'Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul' the volume contains the Songs of both Innocence and Experience.
Milton	1804	An epic poem with the poet, John Milton as the central character. In this poem Milton descends from heaven and unites with Blake to undergo a mystical journey to purge his own spiritual error.

The Work	Year of Publication	Themes at a glance
Jerusalem	1804	Written during the Industrial Revolution the title Jerusalem symbolically stands for improvement, revitalisation and heaven itself.

❖ General Characteristics of Blake's Poetry

'If the doors of perceptions were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.'- William Blake

Like classical poets, Blake was of the opinion that poetry had a twin role - to delight and to instruct. His poetry appeals to us by virtue of its simplicity, spontaneity, melody and moral earnestness. The apparent simplicity of his style is the mark of great art. Robert F. Gleckner in his essay, "Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs," quotes Blake's preface to Jerusalem, in order explain Blake's art: "Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts; . .

Blake's poetry represents a strong criticism of the Neo-Classical preference for empiricism, formal precision and decorum. He rejects the poetic structures so revered by the Augustans and experiments freely with form and metre. Blake's is not the world of sensory perceptions, but one of intuition and imagination.

'No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings' said Blake. Blake believed 'In the universe, there are things that are known and things that are unknown, and in the between, there are doors'. As a prototype of the Romantic mind, for Blake, these 'doors' were inspiration and individual imagination, which blessed the artist with a higher sensibility and a mystic vision where he could indeed see the world in a grain of sand and could hold infinity in an hour. His 'possessed' imagination is the life-force of his poetic art. Indeed, he is a true harbinger of Romanticism in nineteenth century British poetry.

2.5.4 Introducing *Songs of Innocence* & *Songs of Experience*

Blake's most celebrated work with which you students perhaps are acquainted to, ,since your school days are *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. Printed in 1789 and 1794 respectively, the Songs were reprinted five years later, in one volume titled *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* showing the two contrary states of the

human soul. These poems were illustrated and printed by the poet himself and therefore termed an 'illuminated book'. We will discuss this very soon in another section.

Apparently childlike in appearance, these songs taken as a body, trace the journey of the human soul from the state of idyllic innocence through the labyrinth of harsh reality to one of dark experience. The volume rightly subtitled 'Shewing the two contrary states of the human soul', explores the values and limitations of the two different perspectives on the world, for the world is neither white, nor black… it is a mosaic vision of varied perspectives, not one. Blake consciously sets his poems in a pattern of pairs so that his readers can explore a situation first through the lens of childhood (innocence) and then through the glasses of an adult (experience).It is only when a situation is analysed through multiple perspectives that wisdom dawns. This state of wisdom is higher innocence.

Songs of Innocence are, as the title suggests, songs of innocence, songs of childhood. They 'sing' of the simple joyous lives of children, their simple hopes, gurgling laughter, fears and wonderment. But the *Songs* also trace their gradual transformation as they move towards adulthood. Not all poems are written from the perspective of children, some are about children as the adult poet sees them. Therefore all the poems are not happy poems of wonderment. Some poems like "The Chimney Sweeper" about which we will discuss in the following module, is a wail against exploitation in an adult world of lust and avarice.

Songs of Experience deals with more worldly, complex themes, bi products of socio-economic and political issues that corrupt the adult world, devoid of the bliss of simplicity and innocence. *Songs of Experience* are utterance of anguish, agony and despair of souls caught in a malign grip of aggression and exploitation. These songs reverberate a world of predatory tigers who prey on the meek lambs, a world of repression, jealousy and secrecy.

While *Songs of Innocence* are 'day poems' celebrating the sunny hours of life with the sun, hills, sparkling streams, echoing pastures, birds and butterflies, lambs, children and Christ, Songs of Experience are ' night poems', set in the sinister dark, deep forests of Urizen ,with stalking predators or a society of men with 'mind-forg'd manacles'. In the poem, 'London', Blake writes,

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

If *Songs of Innocence* celebrate simple Christian virtues of fraternity and charity, empathy and humility; *Songs of Experience* records Blake's criticism of the Church of

England as an organised institution (like the institution of monarchy or a capitalist, industrial economy) the 'opium of the people' that plays a pivotal role in constructing the social psyche and enslaving humanity for its own profit.

❖ **Blake's Poetic Style in *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience***

Although Blake adopts a direct and simple style for his *Songs*, the language and rhythms are masterly crafted. Beneath the mask of simplicity, these poems convey ideas that are often complex. Some of Blake's favourite techniques are allegory, personification, the abundant use of Blakean symbolism. The language is sometimes childlike, sometimes hymn-like, sometimes with echoes of folk ballad. He often employs the first person plural 'our' as used in The Bible to refer to humanity in general. He employs meters of ballads, common hymns, nursery rhymes and fuses these conventional modes with his unorthodox poetic styles to convey sublime truths.

2.5.5 Text 'Introduction' from *SONGS OF INNOCENCE*

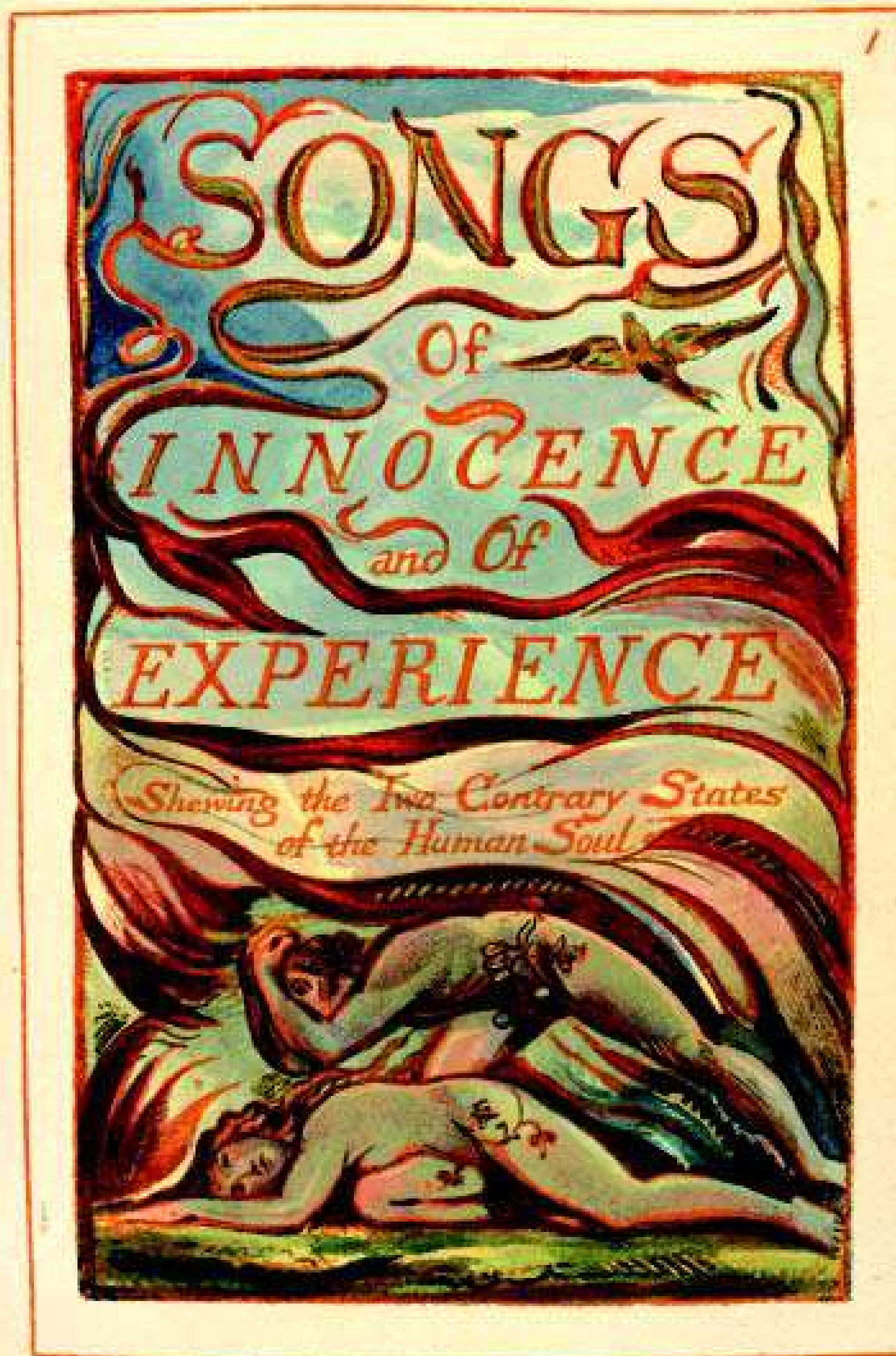
"… I wrote my happy songs,
Every child may joy to hear."

Blake says in *Songs of Innocence*. But his songs 'piped with merry cheer' and the apparent simplicity of the child are so full of wisdom that they make others weep. We cannot but be struck by the originality of Blake's mind. "In innocence I have washed my hands," Blake declares and proceeds to establish his perspective of the ladder of innocence, experience and 'higher innocence' symbolised respectively by the child, the Holy Father and Christ.

INTRODUCTION

Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"
So I piped with merry cheer.
"Piper pipe that song again."
So I piped: he wept to hear.


SONGS
Of
INNOCENCE
and Of
EXPERIENCE
Shewing the Two Contrary States
of the Human Soul

"Drop thy pipe, thy happy pipe:
Sing thy songs of happy cheer."
So I sang the same again,
While he wept with joy to hear.

"Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read."
So he vanish'd from my sight,
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.

2.5.5.A. ANNOTATIONS

Stanza 1

Piping - playing music on a pipe

Pleasant glee-heartfelt joyfulness

On a cloud I saw a child-The child is a reference to Christ whose abode is Paradise. It may be the representative all innocent children or the muse of pastoral poetry.

Stanza 2

Pipe-(used as verb) the child seen on the cloud asks the port to play his pipe

Lamb-a reference to Jesus Christ; 'lamb' is a symbol of innocence

Merry cheer-blissfully and enthusiastically

He wept to hear-the music of the poet touches the soul of the divine child (Christ/ the angel of innocence) and he sheds tears of joy

Stanza 3

thy happy pipe- an example of transferred epithet; the happiness of the poet is transferred to his pipe, therefore the pipe is happy he wept with joy to hear-the simplicity of the song wells up tears of joy in the divine child

Stanza 4

Piper, sit thee … all may read-reference to the most important step of poetic creation, the oral word now to be immortalized in the written form for generations of readers to read Hollow reed-a tall, slender-leaved plant of the grass family growing in marshy ground or in water

Stanza 5

rural pen-the poet plucks a hollow reed and makes a pen of it, the 'rural' denotes the pastoral setting of the Songs of Innocence stain'd the water clear-he used water to make ink to write his song; it may also suggest the water of the holy spring of the muses

2.5.5.B. SUMMARY OF THE POEM

In "Introduction", the poet sets both, the landscape as well as the spirit of his songs of childhood. The poet envisions himself as a shepherd, happily 'Piping down the valleys wild'. At this point of time, he encounters a heavenly child on a cloud. The music played by the poet brings joy to the heavenly child and the child instructs the poet to 'pipe that song again'. The piper follows the instruction and obediently played his tune on his pipe 'with merry cheer'. Then the heavenly child on the cloud overwhelmed with excessive joy requests the poet to drop his pipe and sing the words to the song. After listening to the song, the heavenly child 'wept with joy'. He further instructs the poet-singer to write down his joyous songs in the form of a book so that the songs may bring joy to all children who may hear them with delight ('write/In a book that all may read'). After this, the heavenly child disappears. The poet sits down as instructed , makes a pen out of a hollow reed, and begins to write his" happy songs,/ Every child may joy to hear."

2.5.5.C. CRITICAL READING OF THE POEM

'Introduction' is the opening poem of *Songs of Innocence*, and it envisages the entire collection within the context of its pastoral nature. This style of writing evokes an idyllic Golden Age, the pre pre-lapsarian world of innocence and simplicity.

The poem is made up of five quatrains. Stanzas 1 and 4 are written in the traditional ABAB rhyme scheme (Heroic Stanza) while stanzas 2, 3, and 5 use an ABCB rhyme. Each line of the poem consists of seven syllables thus lending the poem the required rhythm and melody of a song. Another characteristic of song evident in the poem is - a lot of repetition ("pipe", 'piper', merry cheer-happy cheer', 'joy to hear' etc). Repeated use of sounds like "p" as in piper, piping, pleasant, piped, plucked, etc. and the "s" in sing, song, so, sung, etc gives the poem a strong alliterative quality.

The poem begins in a pastoral setting with the shepherd-poet (who presumably is a child) playing his pipe, 'piping down the valleys wild/ piping songs of pleasant glee'. All of a sudden, he sees a child in the sky, upon a cloud. Thus, in the first two lines, Blake achieves the following-he paints the ideal scene (remember he was a master painter), strikes the appropriate tone and introduces the central character of the series of his songs, the child, the embodiment of innocence and joy. Just as the image of the poet, as a shepherd, immediately brings in the mind Biblical references, the image of

this child on the cloud, is rich in significance. The child may be a simple, unnamed child, an embodiment of innocence , who represents all innocent children. It may signify the angel of innocence. The heavenly child is a direct reference to Christ. It may also be considered the inspiration behind poetry, the personified muse of pastoral poetry.

The child on the cloud urges the shepherd first to play his pipe, then to sing his tune to words of a song , and finally to write his songs in a book so that all children may derive joy from listening to these songs. (However, Blake must have insinuated that his songs would appeal not only children but the childlike at heart.)

The child further instructs the shepherd-poet to play the song about a "Lamb"

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"

The "Lamb" is a direct reference to Jesus as the innocent Lamb of Christianity. To Blake, Christ is the loving God who like a good shepherd guides his flock in the correct path of goodness and salvation, and unlike the wrathful Urizen whom we meet in the *Songs of Experience*.

Now, divinely inspired, the poet sits down to write his songs in a book with a purpose to spread his message of joy to the world.His choice of using the reed for a pen and stained water for the ink connects him and his act of creation to the natural world, it suits the pastoral setting. Moreover, the choice of materials for pen and ink, highlights childlike innovation , as for children who are characteristically imaginative, the whole world is an organic playground and all things are his playthings.

"Introduction" may also be regarded as a poetic statement on the process of poetic composition. The shepherd-poet's gradual advancement from piping, to singing, and finally to writing parallels the poet's own progression from inspiration, to formless abstract ideas and finally breathing life into his fragmented thought through the creative act of penning the words on paper, thus completing his own act of creation so that

'Every child may joy to hear'.

The poem sets the tone for the entire sequence. It establishes the poet as a prophet who is divinely inspired. It also establishes the child as the voice of the poems. The shepherd-poet claims the subject matter of his song would be "happy cheer", though several poems of the *Songs of Innocence*, say, "The Chimney Sweeper" to cite an example, highlights the plight of the poor children in England .

Thus, the poem has twin themes-the innocence which is synonymous to childhood and the act of poetic creation.Blake asserts that an artist does not speak with his own voice but is under the influence of a guiding spirit, the imagination. He says it is this divine influence that provides the true vision of reality.

2.5.5.D. IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

Blake's poetry is a richly woven fabric of myth, imagery and symbols. These myths, images and symbols enable the poet not only to add music and colours to his work, but also gives his oeuvre a deeper significance. It posits the poet in a particular literary tradition.

The first image that the readers come across in "Introduction" is of the child. Childhood is a recurring image of innocence and gentleness, of simplicity and hope for the future. For the visionary bard, children were symbols of the imagination and artistic creativity devoid of sin or guilt. *The New Testament* states that the kingdom of God belongs to those who become like little children in their innocence and humility.

Blake was a devout Christian. His poetry thus, is a conscious reflection of essential Christian values through the appropriate use of Christian and Biblical imagery. In the poem 'Introduction', the religious undertone beginning with the third line, 'on a cloud I saw a child'. Immediately, Blake's readers, predominantly Christians, identify this child on the cloud with images of Nativity. This child, laughing in glee, requests the shepherd-poet to 'Pipe a song about a Lamb'. This is however not to say that the significance is lost upon non-Christian readers,

Christ was a shepherd who took great care of his flock of sheep and lambs. Indeed, in the Bible, Jesus Christ is identified with a lamb. Christ belonged to the Jewish community and according to Jewish rites, the lamb was the animal commonly sacrificed to please God (refer *The Old Testament*). So, for the followers of *The Bible*, a lamb denotes not just a soft, woolly animal but a sacrificial victim.Like children, it represents the gentle, meek and tender in life, and simultaneously, like children, draws the reader's attention to the vulnerability that stems from its meekness. Jesus is called 'the Lamb of God' and is identified as a sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

One of the characteristics of Romantic poetry is its passion for Hellenism. Blake too makes many references to Greek and Roman mythology in his poetry. The image of the piper has distinct mythological and Biblical associations. The piper, playing his simple flute in the idyllic natural setting, suggests the Greek god of rustic music, Pan. The piper reminds the reader of Orpheus ,the great Greek god of music, whom the Romantics regarded as an inspired singer-creator. The image of the piper echoes the story of David playing music and composing the Psalms of David (refer The Old Testament) alike our shepherd-poet who, on instruction from his muse, the divine child 'made a rural pen,' and 'stain'd the water clear', and composed his 'happy songs', the Songs of Innocence, that 'Every child may joy to hear'. The use of the imagery of the prophet-like piper lends Blake's *Songs* the quality of divinely inspired imagination.

Commenting on Blake's symbolism C M Bowra writes " Blake's state of innocence,

set forth in symbols of pastoral life akin to those of the twenty-third Psalm, seems at first sight to have something in common with what Vanghan, Traherne and Wordsworth say in their vision of Childhood…"According to Joseph H Wicksted, " The symbolism and the very form of verse suggest a bodily and spiritual union, complete and secure …." We have already discussed the 'child' is a reference to Christ as well as divine inspiration. Similarly, 'Lamb' indicates Christ, 'the good shepherd'. The valleys wild stands for the pagan stage of the poet from where he has a spiritual transition to the stage of Christian religiosity. This transition is propelled by the child's plea to sing 'about a Lamb'. Moreover, the choice of a 'hollow reed' as pen and 'water' for ink are symbols of pastoral poetry as well as symbols of purity.

2.5.6 BLAKE - A VISIONARY MYSTIC

In this section we will discuss Blake as a visionary, mystic poet. Before reading on, you are advised to research on the concepts of a visionary and a mystic.

William Blake, was a poet of ebullient mysticism and peerless genius. However, he was an iconoclast as a result of which he was little understood and largely neglected by his generation. A large fraction of his message was incomprehensible to his fellowmen. Even today the depth of his poetry has not been fathomed. What we understand of his poems is just the visible tip of an iceberg, the totality of his message is impossible to decipher.

It is believed that since his childhood Blake had visions of angels and supernatural beings. As a boy of seven, he brought to the notice of his parents that he had seen a tree full of angels. On another occasion he said he had met the prophet, Ezekiel, under a tree in the fields. According to another story, he saw angelic figures walking in and out among the human haymakers in a hay-field. One day he screamed in fear because, he claimed, he had seen God put His face to the window. His childhood was full of such visions-visions of angels, gods and goddesses on trees or standing by the roadside. Such dreams did not cease to be even when he grew up. In his manhood he had fantastic visions of spiritual presences concerning his fate or that of his friends.

These varied visions played a pivotal role in shaping his poetic sensibility and imagination. The Blakean imagery takes its birth from the poet's visions and dreams. Gifted with an unusual poetic talent Blake lived in his self created ideal world, proffering unimaginable imaginings and giving bodily form to abstractions with the help of powerful symbols and allegories. Blake sings of things unheard and unseen before. He may be considered more purely a mystic than Swedenborg. Blake addressed his readers without taking recourse to either pedantic logic or scholastic theology. He was endowed with the power of summoning up "the angels that soar regions of demons that lurk."

As is a characteristic of holy men, outwardly Blake led a calm and industrious life, pouring out his artistic passion through his poetry, his paintings and printing them making little commercial success. Inwardly, his inner soul suffered unparalleled excitement and restlessness as is evident in his prophetic books.

Blake believed that "One power alone makes a poet : imagination, the Divine Vision." For him, Christ and Imagination are inseparable for Christ is the constructive potential in man and apart from man, the idea of God is meaningless. The poet left his signature imprint on the arts of painting and literature because of his visionary nature. He was disinterested in the physical manifestation of a thing but the wise visionary was perpetually seeking the roots of things lying deep below the surface, for the glories and horrors of the spiritual and visionary world. Often, a reader studying his poems is confronted with a wild confusion of imagery that makes his works somewhat obscure. This chaos emerges since the visionary in him overpowers and has a hold on the artist. However it is precisely this obscurity that gives his works the touch of exquisite beauty and subtlety.

Blake's mysticism is manifest in *Songs of Innocence*, *The Book of Thel*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *The Vision of the Daughters of Albion*, etc. Even *Songs of Experience*, which highlights the darker aspects of life, is not bereft of visionary elements. Blake recreates his visions of an idyllic world and paints in the *Songs of Innocence* a Garden of Eden which is forever lost to the fallen man. The 'Introduction' to these songs describes a vision and the mystical notes in the poem are unmistakable. The poet meets a child on a cloud, who talks to him, weeps out of joy and inspires him to write down his songs for children. The child is both, every child as well as divine and may be identified as Child Jesus -- speaking from the clouds (or from the Garden of Eden). The child connotes childlike happiness, innocence, joy, and may also be associated with the spirit of pastoral poetry.

Like "Introduction," another simple poem of praise "The Shepherd", is rich in overtone. The reader readily identifies the parallels between the shepherd and sheep and the relationship between God and humankind. He can pleasantly discover the mystical nature of the vision of God in heaven in "The Little Black Boy". The mother (in "A Cradle Song") while she watches over her sleeping infant sees a vision of God manifesting himself as Infant Jesus who wept for all mankind.

Sweet babe, once like thee
Thy maker lay and wept for me
Wept for me, for thee, for all ,
When he was an infant small.

In 'Holy Thursday' Blake paints the picture of children from charity schools 'their

innocent faces clean' sitting 'with radiance all their own / The hum of multitudes was there but multitudes of lambs … raising their innocent hands' and raising to Heaven their song like 'harmonious thundering' among the seats of Heaven.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song

Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among

ln 'The Chimney Sweeper', Tom Dacre has the vision of an angel with 'a bright key' coming to liberate him and his friends from the black 'coffins' of soot.

In yet another visionary poem 'A Dream' the speaker tells us how he in a dream over his 'Angel-guarded bed' sees ant loses the way and 'Troubled, wildered, and forlorn,/

Dark, benighted, travel-worn'weeps to think that her children must be crying for her. The speaker empathizes with her in her plight. Soon there comes a glow-worm, 'the watchman of night' who sheds light for the ant to see her way. Then comes the beetle whose humming would guide the ant homewards.

'Follow now the beetle's hum;

Little wanderer, hie thee home.'

Here Blake beautifully weaves together facts and fantasy. The poet expresses his deep faith in God who will come, again and again, in one form or the other to rescue the distressed ones. ln this poem the Divine Spirit is represented in a veiled allegorical form.

Blake's mysticism is a perfect amalgam of the idealistic as well as the practical facet of life, life with its multifarious problems and complex ways. The poet's ingenious artistic mesh of the idealistic and the dark reality is more prominent in *Songs of Experience*. Both *Songs of Experience poems*, "Introduction" and "Earth's Answer" have the form of visions. "Introduction" is mystical for its reference to the 'Holy Word' and of God/Christ dwelling among the trees of Eden.

the voice of the Bard!

Who Present, Past, & Future sees

Whose ears have heard,

The Holy Word,

That walk'd among the ancient trees.

The poet is described as the bard whose gifted vision embraces 'Past, Present and Future.' He calls 'the lapsed Soul' and persuades Earth to rise up and follow the divine path of salvation.

The 'Earth's Answer' is the response of the Earth to the bard's persuasion. In this poem, the poet vividly describes the nature of fallen earth. She is paralysed with dread,

her locks turned grey 'cover'd with grey despair' and her beauty lost. Earth's Answer is a plea to the bard to help her break the chains of slavery thrown around her by 'the Father of the ancient men / Selfish father of men' by the mighty tyrant, 'Urizen'.

"The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found" too are visionary poems. The Lion in this poem sheds its form of lion and reappears as an angel,'A spirit armed in gold', before Lyca's parents. It convinces them that Lyca , their daughter, has not been led astray but is safe under the protection of love .

'Then they followed
Where the vision led,
And saw their sleeping child
Among tigers wild.
To this day they dwell
In a lonely dell,
Nor fear the wolvish howl
Nor the lion's growl.'

"The Tyger", perhaps one of the most powerful poems in English anthologies, is strong in visionary element. The poem describes how the beholder is awed by the powerful figure of the tiger and raises the reader's wonderment at how the maker envisions and creates such a figure of strength and fearsome beauty. The passionate ideas and zealous imagery throb with a visionary energy. This gives the poem its strength and power.

Blake's vision embraces fantasy, mysticism, spirituality and blends with it gross socio-economic reality and the inevitable suffering of mankind groaning under exploitation. This establishes Blake as a visionary mystic and lends his poetic creation its unparalleled charm.

2.5.7 BLAKE, THE PAINTER

As we have discussed earlier, in his lifetime, Blake had earned little recognition from his generation and had left little influence on his contemporary academic institutions. Today, he holds a unique status in the history of western art and literature. Widely celebrated for his poetic genius, he was an equally gifted painter and printer, having produced water colour prints on literary, historical and Biblical themes, around 400 plates for his own books and approximately 1400 designs to illustrate the works of other men of letters. As an innovative painter, he invented a new method of printing, which he termed 'illuminated printing'.

Blake called his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* 'illustrated manuscripts' bringing

into the mind medieval manuscripts which combined text and pictures. This illuminated book is comprised of fifty-four relief-etched plates. *The Songs* were handmade copies which were also printed on copper plates. After the initial printing, detail was added to individual prints by using watercolors. It is interesting to note that Blake consciously worked out variations in the colouring and the rearrangement of the plates within each copy to ensure that no two copies are quite alike. Most of the songs of innocence were printed in brown ink while the songs of experience were in orange and black with orange predominating. Thus readers, you can well understand that not only the texts of the Songs but the illustrations (and their colour scheme) too are highly symbolic.

Learners should keep in mind that for a great avant-garde genius like Blake, illustrations can never be simple translations of the written word. Indeed, in the Songs, the text and pictorial narrative do not complement each other. It is only when the reader discovers of stylistic similarities in the poetic and pictorial narratives that a holistic reading of the song is possible and the reader is left with 'a joy forever', a joy that can be derived only from great art.

2.5.8 Summing Up

In this Unit, we have therefore

- been introduced to William Blake, as a versatile talent, a mystic visionary and painter.
- tried to locate him in the timeline of English poetry, as a Pre Romantic poet.
- read his biography, assimilated knowledge on his major works, their thematic concerns.
- discussed elaborately the themes and poetic style adopted in the Songs.
- Made a detailed study of the poem 'Introduction' from *Songs of Innocence*.

We shall be discussing Blake in further details in the next two Units and we shall be reading some of the best poems from Songs of Innocence and of Experience

2.5.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Discuss the Romantic elements in William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*.
2. Blake's poetry is the poetry of pure vision. Elucidate with reference to *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience.*
3. Compare and contrast William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience.*

4. Discuss Blake as a prophetic poet.
5. Give a critical analysis of "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*.

Mid Length Questions

1. Discuss the themes of "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*.
2. Blake's poems are rich in symbolism and imagery. Assess this statement on the basis of your reading of "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*.
3. How far is it correct to call William Blake a precursor of the Romantic revival in England?
4. Write a short note on the Christian and Biblical elements in "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*.

Short Questions

1. Write a short note on the pastoral elements in "Introduction" to the Songs of Innocence.
2. Discuss two major images in "Introduction" to the *Songs of Innocence*.
3. Discuss the image of the piper in "Introduction."
4. Locate and annotate
   a) ' So I piped: he wept to hear.'
   b) '… I pluck'd a hollow reed…'
5. Discuss Blake as a painter of the Romantic Era.

UNIT–6 : WILLIAM BLAKE - 'THE LAMB' AND 'THE TYGER'

Structure

2.6.1. Objectives

2.6.2. Introduction - Blake's Concept of God, Christianity and the Church

2.6.3. 'The Lamb' from *Songs of Innocence*

- **2.6.3.A. Text**
- **2.6.3.B. Annotations**
- **2.6.3.C. Substance and Development of Thought**
- **2.6.3.D. Critical Commentary**
- **2.6.3.E. Themes**

2.6.4. 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience*

- **2.6.4.A. Text**
- **2.6.4.B. Annotations**
- **2.6.4.C. Substance and Development of Thought**
- **2.6.4.D. Critical Commentary**
- **2.6.4.E. Themes**

2.6.5. Summing Up

2.6.6. Comprehension Exercises

2.6.1 Objectives

This is the second Unit on Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, where two much anthologised poems 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' are on your syllabus. Commonly held to be companion poems from the *Songs*, these two pieces exemplify best the contrary states of the human soul, the amalgam of the meek and the bold, both inherent in man's nature. So in this Unit, we will learn about Blake's treatment of and assimilation of such contrary states of the mind within his poetic oeuvre. Contextually, we will also try to come to an understanding of Blake's views on God, Christianity and the Church.

2.6.2 Introduction - Blake's Concept of God, Christianity & The Church

In this section, we will introduce you to William Blake's religious views and philosophy, both of which are important in understanding the texts that we are dealing with in this Unit. Blake was born to a family of English Dissenters as a result of which his views of religion were largely unorthodox. But that should not lead you to draw an inference that he was a non-believer or an atheist. Since childhood, *The Bible* had a great impression on his mind. Since the age of seven, Blake claimed to have visions of angels, spirits and God Himself. His *Poetical Sketches* reflect the influence of the Psalms. Blake had an individualistic viewpoint on God which defied the Biblical Creator. Blake was a devout Christian, rebelling against all forms of organised religion in general and the Church of England in particular. One should keep in mind that Blake was a torchbearer of individual freedom and free expression. Orthodox religion, on the contrary, chained and limited individual freedom by imposing codes of behaviour as the 'eternal correct'. An institutionalised religion demanded uncontested, unquestioning authority of its followers. In order to achieve this, the Church oftentimes 'misled' people by generating the consent of the believers through various means like weaving the image of God as a strict wrathful father who punished His children for their sins. The Church formulated concepts of 'sin' and 'guilt' and 'penance' to trap people and make them obediently follow codes imposed by religion which is against the natural desires and spirit of life.

As a consequence of his radical religious thought, Blake rejected institutionalised religion and was considered an iconoclast and an anarchist. He was convinced that the Church of England had drifted away from its spiritual mission of guiding its followers to the true spirit of Christianity. Instead of binding its flock through love and compassion, charity and fraternity, the Church laid a malign web of moral laws to trap 'god-fearing' followers with baits of 'shame', 'guilt', 'sin', fear of punishment, 'penance' and so on. The Church exerted control over the society at large by structuring the thought process of the followers and enslaving them to regimented social laws and rules and calling for a life of self-denial. Not only had the Church failed in instilling spiritual growth of its flock, but acted as an unjust agent to perpetuate social slavery in alliance with other forces of repression and exploitation (like monarchy and a capitalist economy). Thus in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake vents his indignation at the orthodox church-

'Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion'.

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake further says-

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

The Church not only enforces the burden of the 'Original Sin' and so called 'natural laws' on its 'god-fearing' flock but also through its religious texts and teachings deprive people of a life of natural desires and free love.

In the same Prophetic book, Blake not only contradicts but challenges the basic tenets of 'good' and 'evil' as is conventionally believed. He advocated, that 'good' is being passive and obeying reason unconditionally while 'evil' is the 'active springing from energy' of a thinking mind.

"Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and repulsion, reason and energy, love and hate, are necessary to human existence. From these contraries spring what the religioncalls Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason; Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is heaven. Evil is hell."

❖ Blake's God

As we have mentioned in Module 2 Unit 5, Blake's spiritual philosophy was greatly influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish theologian-mystic who believed in the idea of God in man. The1959 'Introduction' to The Penguin Poets: William Blake, edited by J. Bronowski states that "Blake's form of Christianity was heretical, for it identified Christ the Son with all spiritual goodness and made God the Father a symbol of terror and tyranny." Blake rejected God the Father as represented in The Old Testament for He appears to be severe and vengeful. Sinners could appease His wrath by offering sacrifice. Blake discarded this notion of God as a transcendent ruler enthroned in heaven as he felt that such a view legitimised a hierarchical power structure in the society of men, where a powerful minority imposed ' mind-forg'd manacles' on a disenfranchised majority.

However, Blake was not a godless man. His faith was more deep-rooted than that of a god- fearing churchgoer. A follower of Swedenborg, he had Christ in his heart, in his wake and in his sleep. Blake's Christ was not a Messiah or a Saviour, neither a moralising preacher nor a philosopher but He was more profound. For Blake, Christ is imagination, the muse present in all sensitive heart. He is the 'embodiment of the poetic' above all reason, all logic, even above all morality. He is not just the Son of God, but the Son of Man who had come to the Earth in the human form. Christ symbolises the unity between divinity and humanity. Christ is the voice, the conscience within, with whom we are in a dialogue forever. In The *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake says, "Men forgot that all deities reside in the human breast". Therefore, in *Songs of Innocence*, it is Christ who is forever present with children and within their hearts, for as Wordsworth says :

' Heaven lies about us in our infancy.'

2.6.3 'The Lamb' from *Songs of Innocence*

'The Lamb', a short lyric of twenty lines, was published by Blake in 1789 in the volume *Songs of Innocence*. Blake uses the simple cadences of children's verse and familiar Biblical symbols in this poem. However, as a reading of the poem will show, this simplicity is only apparent; for the deeper philosophical questions that the dismay of the child speaker leads us to, brings into context all that we have just discussed in the preceding sections.

2.6.3 A : THE TEXT

Little Lamb who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?
Gave thee life & bid thee feed.
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice!
Little Lamb who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee!
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek and he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child and thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee
Little Lamb God bless thee.

2.6.3 B : ANNOTATIONS

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

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

The Lamb

Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee
Gave thee life & bid thee feed,
By the stream & o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing wooly bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice:
Little Lamb who made thee
Dost thou know who made thee

Little Lamb I'll tell thee,
Little Lamb I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For he calls himself a Lamb:
He is meek & he is mild,
He became a little child:
I a child & thou a lamb,
We are called by his name.
Little Lamb God bless thee,
Little Lamb God bless thee.

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

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

2.6.3 C : SUBSTANCE & DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

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

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

Lines 11-20 The next ten lines offer answers to these questions. The questions are answered by the child himself, without any kind of help from any adult. The child's observations clearly rule out the possibility of any intrusion of the world of experience into the idyllic setting of the poem. The poem is a tribute to a conviction prompted solely by innocence. The child goes on saying that the Creator, i.e. God (or Jesus Christ, the Son of God) is Himself called by the name of the lamb for His infinite mildness. He concludes that because of their mildness and innocence, he himself and the lamb are called by the name of God. He places God, himself and the lamb in a single and inseparable thread of Creation, each creature a breathing sigaturen of God's infinite gentleness. His innocent and altruistic zeal finally leads him to pronounce divine blessings on the mild creature.

2.6.3 D : CRITICAL COMMENTARY

The short poem, echoing the 23rd *Psalm*, represents a wonderful manifestation of the glory of childhood innocence, which unfalteringly answers confounding queries with artless and immediate responses. Not a single question raised by the child remains unanswered, and this clearly demonstrates the child's innate conviction of divine benevolence. A typically Romantic note of pantheism, which would later become a credo with Wordsworth, seems to be pervasive in almost all the lines of the poem. It is this pantheistic spirit that enables the speaker to have a glimpse of divinity in himself and the lamb. The final prayer for Divine bliss upon the lamb is perhaps the strongest

blow over the rational world of the Neo-Classicals, which preferred to allow space for nothing except reason till the closing decades of the eighteenth century. The melodious language and the association of tenderness, delight and softness, with the lamb create an impression of gentleness which connects this idyllic world and its inhabitants to the qualities of the meek and mild creator mentioned in the second stanza.

2.6.3 E : THEMES

❖ Symbolism

A remarkable feature of the poem is that it is symbolic in spirit, without using too many symbols in the body of the text itself. Innocence, as a leitmotif, runs through the text. The sense is created and maintained by the use of two dominant symbols, the child, and the meek and mild lamb. The description of the landscape creates an idyllic setting evocative of an earthly Paradise reflecting the state of the uncorrupted soul. Words like "clothing of delight" to describe the lamb's fleece reinforce the sense of unchallenged joy. The lamb is associated with the qualities of softness and brightness. His clothing and his tender voice are actually the manifestations of a benevolent creator. In the second section of the poem (i.e. lines 11-20) the poet makes full use of the Biblical associations of the child and the lamb, when he establishes through his mouthpiece, the child, an inseparable communion between divinity and the created world. Here, the allusion to the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, as the son of Man, becomes significant for the desired expansion of the theme. The poem comes full circle when the child finally declares that he himself as a child and the lamb as a meek and mild creature carry within themselves the signs of divinity. Blake successfully communicates an idea of metaphysical merit in spite of an apparently straightforward narration.

❖ The poem as a Romantic lyric

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

- investing the physical with metaphysical significance.

2.6.4 'THE TYGER' from *Songs of Experience*

'The Tyger' was published by Blake in 1794 in the volume *Songs of Experience*. The poem is a true representative of this volume which depicts the fierce forces that are unleashed as innocence is challenged by experience. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell Blake* had proclaimed that "The tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction." The tiger in this poem seems to be exactly such a force which evokes terror but also purges the evils of our civilization. As in 'The Lamb', here too the persona of the speaker is central, not just in constructing the image of the tiger as an awe inspiring figure, but also in the rhetorical questions that are posed. In 'The Tyger' as well, the movement of thought from the creation to the Creator is evocative of Blake's deep philosophical understanding of theology.

2.6.4 A : Text

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies.
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

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

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

The Tyger

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

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

2.6.4 B : ANNOTATIONS

Symmetry (l.4): Shape, rather than the usual meaning of regularity. The sense of proportion, which, though a neoclassical quality almost, is here used by Blake more to imply content than form. Hence, the symmetry of the tiger as a created being becomes a recurrent idea, one that inspires a wide array of thoughts that are voiced in a series of rhetorical questions.

Deeps (l.5): Seas

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

Sinews (l.10): Tendon / muscle.

When the stars … with their tears (l. 17-18): This might allude to the fierce fight between God and the rebel angels led by Lucifer. God struck them with thunder, and hurled them headlong down to the depths of Hell from Paradise. Their fall resembled the movement of meteors or shooting stars.

2.6.4 C : SUBSTANCE & DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

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

You may be surprised by the spelling 'Tyger' in the title. Blake here deliberately uses a quasi-archaic spelling to generate an initial sense of surprise among his readers. This sense culminates in the awed question at the end of the poem where the speaker

SONGS
of
EXPERIENCE
1794
The Author & Printer W Blake

muses how the Creator of the meek and gentle lamb also created the taut energy and ferocious power of the tiger.

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

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

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

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

Stanza V-The terrific grasp of the Creator reminds the speaker of the fierce struggle between God and the angels led by Lucifer, which ended by making the rebels feel God's sharp vengeance and beg for mercy.

Stanza VI-The speaker concludes with awe at the wonderful capacity of God, who is simultaneously the Creator of the meek and mild lamb, and the terrible and alarming tiger. These two opposite aspects of the Creator Himself indicate two contrasted sides of creation at large: one that leads to innocent and delightful involvement; and the other that makes one retreat in apprehension. Clearly, such profundity of thought is not to be sought in a child; the whole poem is rather an expression of a mind that belongs to the world of maturity and experience. Notice in particular the impact created by the change of only one word from the first stanza to the last - he replaces 'Could' in Stanza 1 with 'Dare' in Stanza 6. You will definitely understand that this change denotes conclusivity in the poet's mind as far as the awe-inspiring creative potential of the Creator is concerned. While 'could' implies a sense of dismay, 'dare' established beyond doubt the poet's acceptance of the infinite limits of Divine creativity. As we have said earlier, the crux of the poem is its constant transference of thought from the creation to the Creator - in that sense, even the title of the poem is a veiled symbol!

2.6.4 D : CRITICAL COMMENTARY

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

2.6.4 E : THEMES

❖ **Symbolism**

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

In the fifth stanza, we come across a significant allusion to the mythical war between God and the rebel angels led by Lucifer, which ended in the expulsion of the

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

❖ **Contrast with 'The Lamb'**

The two poems together form the contrasting parts of a single pattern. They exemplify Blake's design in the combined volume, which was to portray the contrary states of the human soul. 'The Lamb' is couched in lyrical strains. Its gentle cadence of sibilant sounds and the soft lilting rhyme, its image of a serene pastoral landscape, all belong to the world of secure childhood. 'The Tyger', on the other hand uses a trochaic rhythm. Its lines end in emphatic syllables, which create the impression of hammer-strokes. It tells of elemental powers and its canvas is not the secluded valley, but the vast cosmos. The symbols of the former poem are drawn from the Bible, while in the latter the poet devises his own symbols. As we read the poem, we realise that Blake was also the writer of prophetic works. The lyric voice of the first poem gives way to the awed, unanswered questions of the second, as faith is replaced by a tortured seeking for answers which are never explicit.

2.6.5 Summing up

Dear students, in this Unit we have therefore assimilated knowledge on:

- ❖ the poet's concept of God, Christianity and the Church and how his views were radical and contradictory to popular concept of faith and divinity
- ❖ the two poems, 'The Lamb' and 'The Tyger' and how their form, diction, meter and symbols are different in keeping with the theme
- ❖ Why the two poems are termed companion poems

We shall be discussing the Chimney Sweeper poems from Songs of Innocence and of Experience in the next last module on Blake. We hope these cluster of Units help you get a glimpse into the mind and thoughts of the polymath, William Blake.

2.6.6 Comprehension Exercises

A. Long Questions

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Lamb' by William Blake.

2. How does the poet glorify innocence in the poem 'The Lamb'?
3. Would you consider 'The Lamb' to be a successful Romantic lyric? Substantiate your answer.
4. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Tyger' from *Songs of Experience*.
5. How do the poems 'The Tyger' and 'The Lamb' express two opposite sides of the human soul? Answer with textual references.

B. Mid-Length Questions

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

C. Short Questions

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

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

3. What is the significance of the spelling of the animal's name in the title of the poem 'The Tyger'?
4. Write a short note on the mythological figures with whom the creator of the tiger is identified in the poem 'The Tyger'.
5. Explain with reference to the context the following lines:

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

6. Write a short note on Blake's views on God and religion.
7. Discuss Blake's presentation of Urizen.

UNIT–7 : WILLIAM BLAKE - "THE CHIMNEY SWEEPER" POEMS

2.7.1. Objectives

2.7.2. Introduction-The Industrial Revolution, English Society and William Blake

2.7.3. 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence*

- **2.7.3A. Text**
- **2.7.3B. Annotations**
- **2.7.3C. Substance and Development of Thought**
- **2.7.3D. Critical Commentary**
- **2.7.3E. Themes**

2.7.4. 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs Of Experience*

- **2.7.4A. Text**
- **2.7.4B. Annotations**
- **2.7.4C. Substance and Development of Thought**
- **2.7.4D. Critical Commentary**
- **2.7.4E. Themes**

2.7.5. Summing Up

2.7.6. Comprehension Exercises

2.7.7. Comprehensive Reading List (Units 5 - 7)

2.7.1 Objectives

In this third and final unit on William Blake, you will be introduced to a cultural reading of one of the most important events of British history - the Industrial Revolution. As an early Romantic poet, Blake would have witnessed the beginnings of the IR, and how it was changing notjust the economy but also social stratification in England in irreversible ways. The 'Chimney Sweeper' poems from *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* are precisely deliberations on this change from two points of view - innocence of childhood and battered experiences of a grown up. So, these evolutionary perspectives will be our desired learning objectives from these two poems. But prior to that, in the Introduction, we shall have a glimpse into Blake's contemporary England,

the role of Industrial Revolution in shaping it and understand the cause for the poet's criticism of his present times. We also need to reflect on how the *Songs* become Blake's vehicle of suave protest against despotism and repression prevalent within the ecosystem in which he was writing. Finally, and as a cumulative objective of these three Units, you should be able to comprehend the universality of Blake's poetic vision in an era of globalisation. This will give you a clear idea of the humanist spirit that pervaded the early phase of Romantic poetry, of which, Blake is the most important representative.

2.7.2 Introduction - The Industrial Revolution, English Society & William Blake

Dear learners, in this section we will discuss the socio-economic environment of England during the time of the Industrial Revolution. This study will help us to understand the themes of repression and social injustice that are explicit in Blake's Songs. The Agricultural Revolution in the eighteenth century paved way for industrialisation in Britain. This in turn led to the Industrial Revolution. According to Eric Hobsbawn and T.S. Ashton, the Industrial Revolution began between mid eighteenth century, (17860 -1780) with mechanized spinning and gathered momentum by 1830-1840. It marked an era of per capita economic growth. However, several new social challenges stemmed out as a result of the economic and rapid industrial growth. Industrialisation brought about mass migration from villages to London and other industrial towns like Manchester. People flocked to London in hope of a brighter future. Paradoxically, the consequences of rapid urbanisation led to the following social evils--

- poverty
- unemployment
- exploitation of workers by factory owners
- unplanned and poor housing and sanitation
- poor hygiene and medical facilities
- prostitution
- rise in crime
- child labour
- premature deaths

❖ **Blake's *Songs* : A Protest against Despotism and Repression**

Blake lived during an eventful time in the history of Europe. In Blake's Britain,

some social and legislative reforms were made for the betterment of the condition of the labourers, especially the children. However, the evils of industrialisation largely dominated the English society.

As a conscientious thinker, Blake infers that society is the root cause for the misery of the poor. Society perpetuates poverty and exploitation of a majority by a group of powerful minority through institutions like the monarchy, the church etc. Therefore, in his Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience Blake depicts and vehemently criticises veiled tyranny and despotism that had infected the English society of his period.

Apart from 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems that we will read in detail in this Unit, 'London' is one of the most famous poems of Blake that highlights the misery of the people and criticizes the contemporary society. In this poem we find 'a heap of broken images' (T.S.Eliot) which portray an appalling picture of Blake's contemporary London. As the poet wanders through 'each charter'd street' and nearby the 'charter'd Thames', he meets people and notes that in every face he can read

Marks of weakness, marks of woe.

In this poem, Blake denounces the major causes for the misery of the people-the indifference of the Church to the plight of the poor

…the Chimney-sweepers cry
Every black'ning Church appalls

The adversities of war and the callousness of the society towards this meaningless slaughter of

young lives-

…the hapless Soldiers sigh
Runs in blood down Palace walls

…And human lust that knows no bounds

…the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear

Thus Blake's 'London' is a deafening cacophony of painful utterances of souls chained to slavery, not unlike Dante's Inferno

In every cry of every man
In every infant's cry of fear
…The mind forg'd manacles I hear

The same anguish is voiced in the speech of the young chimney sweeper in 'The Chimney Sweeper' (*Experience*)

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?

In both the 'Holy Thursday' poems, Blake's quill attacks the attitude of the philanthropists, the 'aged men wise guardians of the poor' towards the poor children of the charity schools. On closer analysis, the gulf between institutionalised charity of the schools and the warmth of Christian charity becomes self-explanatory to the reader.

Is this a holy thing to see,
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reducd to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?
Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

The poet's sincere question and his simple deduction leave the reader with just a helpless sigh.

2.7.3 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence*

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

2.7.3 A: Text - 'The Chimney Sweeper' (*Songs of 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 curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd, so I said,
Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.
And so he was quiet, and that very night,

7

The Chimney Sweeper

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 & in soot I sleep.

Theres little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curl'd like a lambs 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.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind.
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

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

As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight,
That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black,
And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins and set them all free.
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And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm.
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm.

2.7.3 B: ANNOTATIONS

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

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

asleeping (l.10) - asleep.

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

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

Want (l.20) - lack.

2.7.3 C: SUBSTANCE & DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The present poem from *Songs of Innocence*, deals with the life of poor children, who, being deprived of parental care, are forced to embrace the humiliating and hard

job of chimney sweepers. They have no other scope for joy and laughter except that in dream, where they are reassured of divine blessing and care. The poem received much praise from Charles Lamb, the great Romantic essayist, who himself had to undergo much hardship in early life.

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

Stanza I : Here the speaker is a child, who lost his mother early in his life. To make matters worse he was sold away by a heartless father even before he could properly pronounce 'weep', the shortened form of the call 'sweep' used by the chimney sweepers of London. The use of cheap child labour for various industrial jobs, and in particular to clean chimney soot by getting into narrow cramped spaces where adults could not get in, was a rampant problem during the IR. You can read more about this on https://www.brighthubeducation.com/history-homework-help/91810-child-labor-during-the-industrial-revolution/#:~:text

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

Stanza III : Reassured by his friend, Tom falls asleep. The images of the day are transformed into a nightmare vision of thousands of young boys lying in black coffins. Thus the endemic robbery of childhood continues even in the realm of the subconscious.

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

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

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

2.7.3 D: CRITICAL COMMENTARY

The poem apparently glorifies innocence without deploying any kind of linguistic

pedantry. This simplicity is, however, the result of Blake's sophisticated artistry. By identifying completely with the childlike vision of the world, the poet succeeds in conveying a picture of unquestioning innocence which finds consolation in faith and hope. But, the poem also unveils the dark countenance of a coldhearted, exploitative society, which confines the weak and the underprivileged even before they have the ability to voice their protest. The child in this poem is sold into a life of hardship even before he has acquired a tongue of his own. Tom's vision confirms that the child still has faith in the idea that virtue is rewarded Divine benevolence. As a fitting contrast to this gloomy, material world, the parentless children hanker for a visionary plain of greeneries, where they might espy God as their true father. This innocent faith stands in stark contrast with the moral standards of the adult world, which falters not for a single moment to rob them of their birthright to care, affection and protection.

2.7.3 E: THEMES

❖ Symbolism:

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

❖ The note of Romanticism in the poem:

Blake anticipates certain Romantic tendencies in his language and theme. The lucid language, free from meretricious pedantry, is an early indication of a style which

presages the Wordsworthian dictum that "a poet is a man speaking to men". The note of colloquialism appeals directly to the readers, while the symbols lead you into a lingering contemplation of some of the crucial social concerns of the poet. The overall music of the poem is guaranteed not by any strict adherence to set norms of versification, but by retaining faith in the inner rhythm of common, everyday speech.

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

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

❖ **Treatment of Childhood :**

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

It would be interesting here to relate Blake's vision of childhood with that of other important writers who have spoken strongly about childhood, innocence and exploitation. William Wordsworth's 'Ode on the Intimations of Childhood' remains one of the central views on childhood as a continuation of the soul's state of innocence as it was when in heaven. Charles Dickens's novels depict the state of Victorian England after the industrial revolution and especially the abject condition of children who fall prey to social vices in a rising materialistic society. His fiction of protest and social reform connects him as a direct descendant of Blake. You can compare the similarities in their treatment of childhood for yourself when you read Dickens's novel David Copperfield.

2.7.4 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Experience*

Blake's 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Experience* (1794) is a short lyric of twelve lines, divided into three four-line stanzas. Interestingly, the length of this poem is just half of the other Chimney Sweeper poem included in the volume *Songs of Innocence*. The present poem seems to have been rightly included in *Songs of*

Experience, as it highlights a little chimney sweeper's unhappy experience of the adult world that seeks to legitimise its oppressive order at the expense of the basic rights of childhood.

2.7.4. A. Text 'The Chimney Sweeper' ***(Songs of 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 heath,
And smil'd among the winter's snow,
They clothed me in the clothes of death,
And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

And because I am happy and dance and sing,
They think they have done me no injury:
And are gone to praise God and his Priest and King,
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

2.7.4 B : ANNOTATIONS

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

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

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

Woe (l.8) : pain.

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

2.7.4 C: SUBSTANCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

Comparing the present poem with the previous one, you realise the difference in the voice that you hear. The boy here has the hard-won wisdom that his plight is the result

THE Chimney Sweeper

A little black thing among the snow;
Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
Where are thy father & mother? say?
They are both gone up to the church to pray.

Because I was happy upon the heath,
And smil'd among the winters 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 & his Priest & King
Who make up a heaven of our misery.

of an unjust society. There is a sense of suppressed anger and bitterness in him at having to learn the "notes of woe".

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

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

Stanza III: The little boy concludes that since he tends to smile away the hardship inflicted upon him, his parents think that they have done him no wrong, and so they have gone to praise the Church and the State, two institutions which shamelessly legitimise the tyrannical rule of the strong at the expense of the underprivileged. Unlike Tom Dacre, he seems unwilling to accept the misery to which he is consigned.

2.7.4 D : CRITICAL COMMENTARY

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

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

unhappiness. This young boy's vision of heaven is made up of the misery of the weak and the helpless.

2.7.4 E: THEMES

❖ **Symbolism**

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

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

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

2.7.5 Summing Up

So in this Unit, we have read-

- ❖ the socio-economic-political landscape of England post Industrial Revolution that led to despotism and exploitation of the mass especially the poor
- ❖ how Blake used his poetry to protest against the despotism and oppression the two poems, 'Chimney Sweeper' poems
- ❖ How the poet had portrayed the suffering of young children in both the poems

To conclude, though Blake and his works, both his poetry and paintings were largely overlooked during his lifetime as creations of a mind 'possessed', today he is held in high esteem in the history of the Romantic Era. A divinely gifted poet, painter and original thinker, his art has immense influence over generations of writers and artists till this day and for days to come. We conclude our discussion on Blake with the views of the 19th-century scholar, William Michael Rossetti who regards Blake as a "glorious luminary"… "a man not forestalled by predecessors, nor to be classed with contemporaries, nor to be replaced by known or readily surmisable successors".

2.7.6 Comprehension Exercises

A. Long Questions

1. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence*.
2. How does the poem 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence* glorify innocence against a gloomy social background?
3. Assess the poem 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Innocence* as a successful Romantic lyric.
4. Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem 'The Chimney Sweeper' from *Songs of Experience*.
5. Make a comparative study of 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems by William Blake.
6. How is the hypocrisy of the privileged class unveiled in 'The Chimney Sweeper' poem from *Songs of Experience*?

B. Mid-length Questions

1. Write a short essay on Blake's criticism of contemporary England in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.
2. Give in your own words the central idea of 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems.
3. Write a note on the use of symbols in 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems.
4. With reference to 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems reproduce in your own words the sad story of the little chimney sweepers' lives.
5. What is the significance of Tom Dacre's dream?
6. Based on your reading of 'The Chimney Sweeper' poems,write a short note on the imagery.

C. Short Questions

1. What does the little chimney sweeper in the *Songs of Innocence* say about his own life in the first stanza of the poem?

2. Why did Tom Dacre cry? How did the speaker try to console him?
3. What, according to you, is the implication of the phrase 'coffins of black'?
4. What was the angel's message to Tom Dacre?
5. How does the speaker sum up Tom's dream at the end of the poem?
6. Explain the significance of the following lines:

   "They clothed me in the clothes of death,

   And taught me to sing the notes of woe".
7. What is the implication of the phrase "heaven of our misery"?
8. Whom does the chimney sweeper from *Songs of Experience* hold responsible for his misery?

2.7.7 Comprehensive Reading List (Units 5 - 7)

1. Ferber, Michael. *The Poetry of William Blake*, Penguin,1991.
2. Heather & Glen. *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads*. Cambridge University Press, 1983.
3. Keynes, Geoffrey (ed.) *Blake : Complete Writings.* Oxford University Press, 1979.
4. Larrisy, Edward. *William Blake*. Basil Blackwell, 1985.
5. Paley, Morton D. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. Prentice Hall, 1969.

UNIT–8 : WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: POET AND THEORIST

2.8.1 Objectives

2.8.2 Introduction

2.8.3 William Wordsworth: A Bio-Brief

2.8.4 Poetry of Wordsworth

2.8.5 Wordsworth - The Theorist of Poetry

2.8.5a Views on Poetry

2.8.5b Who is a Poet?

2.8.5c Views on Poetic Diction

2.8.5d The Subject of Poetry

2.8.5e Views on Imagination and its Role in Poetic Creation

2.8.5f The 'Preface' as a Romantic Manifesto

2.8.6 Summing Up

2.8.7 Comprehension Exercises

2.8.8 Suggested Reading

2.8.1 Objectives

- To introduce William Wordsworth as a poet and literary critic to the learners. The common notion about Wordsworth among the learners is that he is only one of the most important poets of the 19th century Romantic Revival. But the fact that besides being a poet he is also a literary critic who wrote the 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads* is often not adequately discussed. The objective of the lesson is to bridge that gap.
- To understand Romantic literary criticism
- To identify the salient features of Romantic literary criticism
- To locate William Wordsworth's contribution to Romantic literary criticism
- To appreciate Wordsworth's ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads*
- To understand different aspects of Wordsworth's poetic theory

2.8.2 Introduction

William Wordsworth is a poet as well as a critic. He is one of the pioneering of Romantic poets who initiated a new approach to poetry and poetic aesthetics. He is a poet-critic like Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Both in his poetry and his poetic criticism, he strongly revolted against the eighteenth century concept of poetic aesthetics enunciated and practised by John Dryden, Alexander Pope, Doctor Samuel Johnson etc. Wordsworth completely repudiated and rejected the Neo-classical poetic rules and regulations. In a sense, both Wordsworth's poetry and his thoughts on poetry can be said to have ushered in the Romantic Movement in English literature.

2.8.3 William Wordsworth : A Bio-Brief

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) was the son of steward of the Lonsdale estate, Westmorland. He was born in 1770 at Cockermouth, Cumberland, where the Derwent flowed in a zigzag way. In 1778, his mother died, Wordsworth became a boarder at Hawkshead School. Here, apparently, the unroofed school of nature attracted him more than the discipline of the classics, and he learned more eagerly from flowers and hills and stars than from his books. In 1790, he walked 2000 miles through France and Alps in the Cambridge Long Vacation. In 1791, he went to France, driven by the revolutionary idealism of the French Revolution. There he met Annette Vallon and love bloomed immediately, leading to the birth of their daughter in 1792. The time that followed was difficult - Wordsworth had to return home for funds, and political unrest prevented a reunion between him and Vallon. He met Coleridge for the first time in 1795, and eventually moved to live near him with his sister Dorothy. In 1798, Lyrical Ballads was published. He married Mary Hutchinson. In 1813, he was appointed as Stamp Distributor (Tax Collector) for Westmorland. In 1843,Wordsworth was appointed the Poet Laureate. He died in 1850.

Outwardly his long and uneventful life divides itself naturally into four periods: firstly, his childhood and youth, in the Cumberland Hills, from 1770 to 1787; secondly, a period of uncertainty, of storm and stress, including his university life at Cambridge, his travels abroad, and his revolutionary experience, from 1787 to 1797; thirdly, a short but significant period of finding himself and his work, from 1797 to 1799; fourthly and lastly, a long period of retirement in the northern lake region, where he was born, and where for a full half century he lived so close to nature that her influence is reflected in all his poetry.

2.8.4 Poetry of Wordsworth

As we have mentioned in an earlier section, William Wordsworth brought a completely new approach to the writing of English poetry. As students, you have all been acquainted with his poetry at some stage or another. Here we will try and first understand what it is about Wordsworth's poetry that makes him so readable and so popular.

As a striking contrast to the poetry of the Neo-Classical Age that preceded him, Wordsworth's objections to an over-stylized poetic diction, his attitude to Nature, his choice of simple incidents and humble people as subjects for his poetry are all well known. However, it is not just in opposition to a preceding age that Wordsworth is important. Poetry for him was primarily the record of a certain state of mind, and the value of poetry for him lay in the value of the state of mind which the poem recorded. Wordsworth was unique in his view of what constituted poetry. He was profoundly influenced by the philosophical, social and political forces of his time. His views were in fact hammered out with reference to the impact on him of the contemporary situation. The French Revolution and the social and political thought which preceded and followed from it; the eighteenth-century development of the psychological views implicit in John Locke's view of perception and knowledge; the rational and humanitarian principles of the Enlightenment; his own simple and democratic upbringing in the elemental countryside of the Lake District – these were important factors in the development of his view of poetry. His walking tour in France and Switzerland in 1790, and his extended visit to France in 1792, had brought him into personal contact with the French Revolution and made him welcome the overthrow of corrupt and tyrannical institutions. His first poem 'An Evening Walk' (1793), shows the influence of the French poets Rosset, Roucher, and Delille, who described the agricultural scene with aristocratic feeling, and of Saint Lambert, whose poetry on the seasons (1769) emphasized the place of agriculture in the life of the nation. It also shows the influence of the eighteenth-century English topographical poetry, with its meditative mood and moralising digressions, and of eighteenth-century views of the picturesque.

William Wordsworth is considered to be the patriarch among the Romantic poets. A thorough knowledge about the biographical details of Wordsworth is essential since it enhances our understanding of his poetry. Our knowledge of his personal history should not so prejudice our response to his work that our appreciation of it is distorted rather than enriched, but a certain quantum of biographical information is of particular use to the reader of a poet such as Wordsworth, whose work draws upon his own life---upon the experiences of his childhood, the growth of his imagination, his changing political opinions and his complex relationship with the natural world. "*Descriptive*

Sketches", also published in 1793, is another work written in a conventional mode of the day, though it bears more directly the influence of his French experience. It is a travel poem, dealing with his Alpine tour of 1790. *Lyrical Ballads* was planned in collaboration with Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797, and the volume got published in the following year, with four poems by Coleridge and nineteen by William Wordsworth. Wordsworth made an attempt to explain what he was doing in a brief "Advertisement" in which he proclaimed that the materials of poetry can be found "in every subject which can interest the human mind" and explicated that these poems were experiments written primarily "to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure". He warned his readers that different people can mean different things by the word "poetry" and that his poems were probably not poems in the sense in which they were accustomed to use the word. So it is initially necessary to understand what he meant by 'poetry', and that is something we will attempt in this Unit.

Wordsworth was not a dramatic poet, his vein was what John Keats called the "egotistical sublime". He himself had to be implicated in everything he wrote, however apparently objective the narrative might be. His greatest poems are those where autobiography, perception, and narrative are woven seamlessly into one texture. Wordsworth, whose task in his narrative poems was to tell a story with assumed objectivity while keeping his own sensibility before the reader continually, was really more at home in a more highly charged kind of verse. Something, of course, he learned from the ballads, the opening of 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', with its lively plunge into the very midst of the situation, seems to owe something to them; but in his best poetry he speaks in his own accents. In 'The Thorn' he claimed to have put the narrative into the mouth of the retired captain of a small trading vessel, but we cannot take this very seriously, and in so far as the poem does seem to be spoken by such a character there is an unsatisfactory casualness in the narrative. 'Simon Lee', again, is unsuccessful partly because the poet as observer and narrator and the poet as commentator are separate, and partly because Wordsworth's ear never seemed to have told him certain double rhymes in English are irrepressibly comic. 'The Idiot Boy' is a poem of strange power deriving from Wordsworth's ability to show the attraction of this commonplace incident as he tells it. In the careful precision with which the actions are handled, in the clearly etched imagery and carefully chosen detail, the poet's humane curiosity shines through; the story is made to appear relevant, the characters to share something important with humanity.

The poem is significant in explaining and expressing one of the most succinct of Wordsworth's accounts of the development of his attitude to Nature–moving from an animated pleasure of childhood through adolescent passion for the wild and gloomy

to adult awareness of the relation of our perception of the natural world to our senses of the human and moral world. But its poetic interest lies in its brilliant combination of the lyric and the meditative, the subjective and the objective. Wordsworth's great creative poetic period lasted for a relatively few years, after 1805, he turned his attention more and more from a poetry based on moments of inspired perception to a rhetorical, moral poetry, often very effective and fruitful in its own way but lacking the characteristic Wordsworthian touch. In the best poetry of his prime – in 'Michael', in 'Resolution and Independence', in the Lucy poems, or in 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' and elsewhere – he succeeds in imparting moving cogency to the record of his experiences in an idiom of extraordinary freshness that blends quiet precision with poetic suggestiveness. Purity and power are the significant characteristics of Wordsworth's most individualistic poems, and the power can be either of the massive, elemental kind that is perceptible in 'Michael' or something less clear and made up of multiple cumulative elements of uncannily precise recording, where the clarity of perception or imagination gives the poem an atmosphere of almost trance-like lucidity; this latter quality can be found, in different and divergent manners, in the Lucy poems and in such poems as 'The Idiot Boy' and 'Peter Bell'. In some sonnets like 'Upon Westminster Bridge', as well as in the poem on the daffodils and 'The Solitary Reaper' and similar poems based on "emotion recollected in tranquility", he demonstrates perfectly and flawlessly his gift for according poetic effect to the emotionally charged recall of luminous perception.

In 'Immortality Ode', a poem on your syllabus, Wordsworth offered his most complete account of the balance sheet of maturity as he witnessed it. In a poem whose very structure is remembered perception giving way to reflection, he charts the course of the developing sensibility, much as he did in 'Tintern Abbey' (also syllabised) though in much greater detail. The naive freshness of the child's awareness gives way to the more sober vision of the man; mediated by love, the child's perceptions in a strange world take on a meaning which, as he grows up, finally emerges as the recognition of profound human significance in nature. The poem is a faithful record of the profit and loss of growing up. The poet is only born when the child's bliss gives way to the man's more sober but profound sensibility, which works through "relationship and love" rather than through mere animal sensations. The poem is thus one of Wordsworth's most seminal and illuminating works.

The poem in which Wordsworth could most fully and adequately exploit his gift for the "egotistical sublime" was 'The Prelude', which contains a long autobiographical account of his own development. The first version was completed in 1805, but Wordsworth kept changing and improving it throughout the rest of his life, not only to purify crudities of expression but also to remove some of the more startling flexibilities of his earlier position. It was first published, in its final form, posthumously in 1850,

having been originally intended as an early part of or a preliminary poem to 'The Recluse', "a philosophical poem containing views of Man, Nature, and Society...having for its principal subject the sensations and opinions of a poet living in retirement". 'The Recluse' remained an unfulfilled ambition, only 'The Excursion', representing a small part of the total scheme, was written. 'The White Doe of Rylstone', a narrative poem in seven cantos written in 1807, possesses imaginative vigour and shows the working of a moral imagination; but there are some lapses of style, and there is a sentimental rhetorical strain running through the poem, the moral meaning being achieved more through this means than in the manner to be found in Wordsworth at his most characteristic and greatest.

Wordsworth's most sustained attempt is 'Peter Bell', the story of how an odd adventure with a faithful donkey and its drowned master awoke in the heart of a coarse and insensitive hawker some feeling for the sacredness of human emotions and their relationship to the natural world. The humorous introduction is hardly successful, but the tale itself is told with a stark particularization which achieves an almost trance-like clarity and compels the reader into attention to the precise nature and meaning of the strange things that befall Peter. The poem is both ordinary and strange; both commonplace and fantastic. The style of 'Michael' is very different, and its simplicity is of a different type. The opening has a persuasive colloquial movement that Wordsworth often aims at but does not often succeed so fully in attainment. As the story of the elderly rustic couple and their only child develops, the tone becomes more and more elemental and biblical. The tone of grave personal meditation on the events the poet is recording is captured impressively in the verse paragraph following the account of the son's having gone to the bad and fled abroad.

2.8.5 Wordsworth - The Theorist of Poetry

You must have gathered from the previous sub-section and from what we mentioned at the outset that an understanding of the poetry of Wordsworth also demands a thorough knowledge of his views on poetry. While the *Lyrical Ballads* published jointly by Wordsworth and Coleridge in 1798 formally ushered in the Romantic Movement in English literature as is commonly held, it was the former's addition of a 'Preface' to it in 1803 that actually clarified the purpose behind Romantic poetry. In that sense, Wordsworth can rightly be considered as the earliest theorist of Romantic Poetry, who clearly laid down his credo as a poet and the role he envisaged for poetry in the 'Preface'. In the following sections, we will acquaint you with some of the salient features.

2.8.5 a: VIEWS ON POETRY

Not for intellectual bullying but for the future of a class of poetry "well adapted to

interest mankind permanently", is how Wordsworth theorizes on the purpose of poetry. Clearly, this is an oppositional stance to the Neo-Classical perception of poetry that preceded his era. He provides the right approach to his *Lyrical Ballads* in the form of a Preface to "temper the rashness of decision" on the part of the readers. Wordsworth knows that it will be too much to obtrude upon the public "without a few words of introduction", for his poems are "materially different" from those upon which "general approbation" is at present bestowed. Wordsworth finds "poetry fettered." It drives him to execute the break away like William Blake from the 18th century formal authority. Just as Blake turns from literary artifice to "Enthusiasm and Life" so also Wordsworth turns to "vivid sensation" and "spontaneous feeling." In the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth imparts a charm of novelty to the commonplace experience to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural. Thus he awakens attention from the lethargy of custom. Both Shelley and Wordsworth rate personal experience very high. In contrast with Dante's conception of poetry as an "elaborate and painful toil" they stress on the "spontaneous overflow" of the emotions of the poet.

Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is generally considered to be the manifesto of the Romantic revolt against the rules and decorum of poetry, emphasized in the neoclassical poetics. But it is strikingly interesting that a thorough critical examination discloses his modified adaptations of many a neoclassical conception commonly perceived to be abandoned. He believes that poetry must be artless, that the impressiveness of the subject as it is in nature should be enough to make a poem. And at the same time, he steadily sees poetry as made things, the result of craft, workmanship and "long and deep thinking". "In historical terms", comments Lindenberger, "we must think of Wordsworth veering between two irreconcilable literary systems: between the demands of decorum and the demands of sincerity (spontaneity)…". This is something that we need to understand at greater length.

"Poetry", asserts Wordsworth in the Preface of *Lyrical Ballads*, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". The definition involves a metaphor for 'overflow' implying the idea of a container which is overfilled and so overflows. The container is the poet's mind and the things contained are his feelings. He is forced into utterance because he cannot contain his feelings within himself and so overflows on the page. This shifts the emphasis from the material which is organized into the poem to the poet himself. This way of thinking in which the poet himself becomes the major element generating both the poetic product and the criterion by which the value of the product is to be judged has been marked as the "expressive theory" by M. H. Abrams. The major criteria of value are the spontaneity and powerful involuntary expression, as opposed to the neoclassical maintenance of rules, art of expression, decorum and propriety. Thus the statement marks the divergence between the neoclassical and

Romantic modes of poetry. But when it is studied along with his other propagated formulations, the problem becomes evident. The main reason is that in his later theoretical pronouncements, Wordsworth advocates what may be called modified neoclassicism. Secondly, his remark is interpreted, many a time, overlooking what follows immediately: "it takes its origin from the emotion recollected in tranquility". When the act of recollection is overlooked, what remains is a literal theory of spontaneity. So we must understand that for all his insistence on spontaneity, Wordsworth is not overlooking the role of memory that acts as go-between perception and its recollection - the latter taking the form of poetry.

As students of literature, we need to understand that the repeated remark in the 'Preface' about spontaneity is not the most emphatically important statement, but it is the most easily remembered. It gives expression to the dignity and prestige of the spontaneity which is the one characteristic of the age of sensibility, where it is the guarantee of sincerity. Wordsworth's phrase confirmed by Shelley's skylark-the poet's "unpremeditated art" becomes the definition of poetry and a description of what the Romantic poet allows to happen. His acquaintance with Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783) is known to all. Blair asserts that in the golden age, there had been no distinction between spontaneity and art. Poetry, at that time, was artless and for that reason "captivated and transported" the reader's mind. Only when it became "a regular art", it brought down the curse of insincerity on its head. These things are close to Wordsworth but they are not close enough. There can be found many references to the re-workings and revisions of his own poems. He is impatient when other poets claim spontaneity: and in reality the composition of verse is infinitely more of art than men are prepared to believe.

More interesting is a comment on the notion of spontaneous verse in a letter written shortly after the death of his brother John: "I composed much, but… I was unable to remember it… This work must therefore rest till I am something calmer…. ". The phrase, "something calmer" takes one back to his 'Preface'. When he repeats that poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", he adds that "it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility". The notion of spontaneity, then, comes to have little importance. For Wordsworth, the problem of sincerity is not to be solved by such a naive notion and thereafter in the 'Preface' the emphasis falls increasingly on the poet as 'maker' and on the poem as a thing 'made'. His poetic medium is the "selection of the real language of men" and this selection may include additions and deductions. When he says in the 'Preface' that his "ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance", he is certainly thinking of "decorum". This is however not the rigidity of the neo-classicals, but in keeping with Wordsworth's idea of the proper subject of poetry - an aspect that we will soon take up.

Wordsworth in his early years has the belief that Art is the opposite of Nature and a failure in spontaneity is a failure in sincerity. But as he matures, he comes to reality that Art is no longer opposed to Nature: the demands of Art and Nature can be reconciled. In one of his sonnets he defends the 'Form':"Scorn not the sonnet; …/ …with this key Shakespeare unlocked his heart…" But what is most interesting is that this reconciliation has no definite and authoritative ground to be sustained. That is why, in his later comments the emphasis is laid on poetry as an art, craft and workmanship. In the 1815 'Preface' he lists a number of powers requisite for the production of poetry and the last, judgement, will show "how and where and in what degree, each of these faculties ought to be executed". But judgement turns out to be decorum, for it must determine "what are the laws and appropriate graces of every species of composition". In 1828, he talks about the "rules of art and workmanship which must be applied to an imaginative literature". For him poetry becomes "infinitely more of an art than the world is disposed to believe". This increasing emphasis on the rules of art and craft marks his falling away from the reconciliation of sincerity and art which he has achieved partly in his formative years.

From this line of development, the question of spontaneity comes to have little importance. This is implicit in the 'Preface' where he talks about the process of composition. The process has four stages: recollection, contemplation, recrudescence and composition. If a poet has to go through these four stages, his verse can in no way be "unpremeditated" and "spontaneous". Actually what is needed is an interpretation of the word 'spontaneous'. If it is interpreted as an attempt to abandon the superfluous ornamentation by poetic diction, it makes sense and fits with his later comments. Through spontaneity, then he seems to imply that a poet in his art of composition must not exercise any superficial or superfluous reworking which would become a bar to relish the presentation of primal humanity's aspects. His objection against the 'inane phraseology' can be an example of what he intends to advocate through spontaneity. Seen from this point of view, his spontaneity is not so much an advocacy of sincerity as much a matter of poetry of primal humanity. It also accords with the whole tune of the Preface where he asserts that "a poet is a man speaking to men".

2.8.5 b : WHO IS A POET?

Wordsworth's views on the role of the poet constitute an integral part of his theories on poetry, and this is an interesting take on the ideas that were then prevalent. To the neoclassical critic the poet is a craftsman, though a gifted one. He observes and reproduces general nature with the help of ancient precedent and the "rules". To Wordsworth, the poet is 'a man speaking to men.' Gifted with 'a more lively sensibility', 'enthusiasm and tenderness' and 'greater knowledge of human nature', he has to his advantage a 'more comprehensive soul.' Vitality and joy in the universe move him to

enthusiasm. It overflows in the form of a creative urge to be imparted to others. Not only by immediate impressions, he is almost to an equal degree affected by the memory of similar experiences stored up in mind. Constant 'practice' along these lines confers upon him 'a great readiness and power' to express himself whenever the urge is on him, even without the immediate stimulus of external excitement.

However, the poet can express only a part of 'which is uttered by men in real life'. The transcription of passions is to a certain extent mechanical. Therefore, it must fall short in 'liveliness and truth' of "the freedom and power of real and substantial action and suffering." To overcome this difficulty the poet has to identify himself with the feelings he wishes to transcribe. In the process he modifies the language of real men so that it can give pleasure. The modification is made on the principle of 'selection.' Driven by creative urge it will ensue spontaneously from contact with reality and truth.

A gap thus remains between 'the real passion itself' and the language that expresses it. The poet, as a translator, seeks an approximation. According to Wordsworth, "Aristotle…has said that poetry is the most philosophic of all writing." The object of poetry is truth --- not resting on localized perception, it is 'truth carried alive into the heart by passion". In fact, poetic statements are reinforced by powerful feelings. Directly related to the poet's experiences they do not depend on external testimony for veracity. Poetry thus gives us the image of man and nature. On the other hand, the historian and biographer are tied to the evidence and documents for their basis. The sole obligation which binds the poet is that he must give pleasure to the reader. Wordsworth connects poetic pleasure with the process of poetic composition.

Giving pleasure is no degradation of the poetic art. The *sine qua non* of genuine poetry is whether it affords pleasure or not. Knowledge can never be achieved if no pleasure is involved. The man of science acquires knowledge with considerable pain but his sympathy for the subject gives him pleasure. So also it is with the poet. As to the poet's proper field of activity Wordsworth says that the poet considers man and the objects that surround him, acting and reacting upon each other. It gives rise to a network of pain and pleasure. The feelings are immediate and intuitive. As the poet expresses the association between man and nature it excites in the reader a sympathetic interest accompanied by "an over-balance of pleasure."

The poet sees man and nature as essentially adapted to each other. Man's moral nature is moulded in association with enduring forms of nature such as 'mountains and lakes.' As mind is considered as an active participant with nature in this formation Wordsworth deviates from Locke. What the poet sees in nature is universal-that all men acknowledge as a result of habitual association. The knowledge of the man of science is a personal and individual acquisition. The distilled quintessence of the objective world is to science only a material fact but to the poet it is a possession. The

poet overrides the limitations of local conditions like race, religion or language as sense and sensibility are the same everywhere. By passion and intuitive knowledge the poet binds together the vast empire of human society through all times. That is why, the poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

Wordsworth affirms that the poet differs not 'in kind' but 'only in degree' from common humanity. He is more intuitive and better able to express than a non-poet. But what he expresses is the general passion and thoughts of common people connected with animal sensations, moral sentiments and the visible universe. Wordsworth believes that the poets write for the non-poets. Therefore, the metre he uses must be regular and uniform. It must not impress upon the language the arbitrariness of personal caprice as in 'poetic diction'. Metre should conform to established laws to which both the poet and the reader willingly submit. It may here be pointed out that Wordsworth himself does not attempt in the *Lyrical Ballads*, dialect poetry like William Barnes. His main object is to cut out all language not used in ordinary speech. The poet relates isolated and individual experience to the sum-total of life. He, therefore, selects for his themes, life at its simplest. For general truths of man's experiences can be found in the unalloyed passions of a humble, half-witted man, a shepherd, a leech-gatherer and an idiot boy. The idea of passion is essential in Wordsworth's theory. It depends not on stylistic devices but on the poet's perception.

In his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth raises certain critical issues like those of poetic diction definition of poetry, composition of poetry etc. The poet and his function in society is also an important issue in the Preface. In Wordsworth's works, the poet is a man speaking to men. He is a man endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, a man who has a great knowledge of human nature and a comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind. The poet writes under one restriction, only namely, the act of giving immediate pleasure to a human being. The man of science seeks truth as a remote and unknown benefactor; he cherishes and loves it in his solitude. The poet sings a song in which all human beings join with him, rejoices in the presence of truth as our visible friend and homely comparison.

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2.8.5 C : VIEWS ON POETIC DICTION

According to William Wordsworth, language of poetry should be the real language of men. There should not be any gaudiness or inane (mindless/ unrequired) phraseology in poetry, just for the sake of giving it a degree of pompousness. The language of poetry should not be artificially contrived; it should be true to nature, true to the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions. Wordsworth wishes to keep the readers of his poetry in the company of flesh and blood. So, he discards the conventional form of poetic diction. He further says that he wants "to bring his language near to the language of men". As his object of poetry is not to make any falsehood of description, there should not be any falsehood to be used in the language of poetry. So there will be no use of conventional phrases and figures of speech. This implies that the language of poetry will be in many cases the language used in prose. Many poets and critics may call it prosaic but Wordsworth is not discouraged by it. He wants to establish this fact that language of a good poem except its metre is not different from the language of a well-written prose. In his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* he has quoted passages from the best poets including Milton to justify the truth of this assertion. To justify this assertion, he has once quoted from Gray:

> In vain to me the smiling mornings shine, /And reddening Phoebus lifts his golden fire: /In fruitless mourn to him that cannot hear /And weep the more because I weep in vain.

Wordsworth opines that in this quotation, there is no basic difference between the language of prose and that of poetry as used here. The only difference is that there is rhyme in this poem and the word "fruitless" has been used instead of its adverbial form "fruitlessly".

Therefore, Wordsworth tells us that "there neither is, nor can be, any essential (or fundamental) difference between the language of prose and metrical composition". Both prose and metrical composition emerge out of the same source of the human mind. Their bodies are clothed by the same substance and their purpose is also identical. So, he says "poetry sheds no tears" such as Angels weep', but natural and human tears; she can boast of no celestial Ichor that distinguishes her vital juices from those of prose; the same human blood circulates through the veins of them both". As rhyme and metrical arrangements only constitute a distinction between the language of prose and metrical composition, there is no difficulty to adopt in poetry the language really spoken by men.

2.8.5 D : THE SUBJECT MATTER OF POETRY

You have definitely understood by now that in the 'Preface', Wordsworth expresses his desire to break away from the decorated style of the 18th century poetry and create a comprehensible art form for the "ordinary man". In breaking away from the decorated style, Wordsworth states that "personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose". Instead, Wordsworth wants to emphasize and adopt the language of men, which rejects personification as a "mechanical device of style or as a family language which Writers in metre seem to lay claim to by prescription". In essence the Preface is Wordsworth's poetic manifesto. The most obvious point that what Wordsworth makes in it relates directly to the style and technique used in writing the poems themselves, as well as to the subject matter or focus of the poems which resides in common, everyday scenes of rural life and folk. Wordsworth categorically states:

> The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way. (164)

It must be kept in mind that though a reader of today may find nothing unusual in the style employed throughout the *Lyrical Ballads*, the simplicity of language and the depiction of 'common' people, places and events used by Wordsworth, was quite new as an idea to the poetic conventions of his day. The fact that Wordsworth chooses for his characters men, women and children from a rural setting, as opposed to the more

cosmopolitan characters of his contemporaries, leads to another important facet of his poetry which he expounds in his 'Preface'. Wordsworth held a remarkably close affinity to nature. He argued that one who lives close to nature (as he himself did for most of his life residing in the English Lake District), lives closer to the well-spring of human-nature. Many of Wordsworth's poems are autobiographical in as far as they display a love and deep appreciation of the natural environment as experienced by the poet himself. However even more than a simple aesthetic appreciation of nature, Wordsworth believed that there a was an element of the Divine to be found in nature, which held a tremendous potential to mould and even to instruct the minds of men who live in its midst and to conjure a depth of emotional response unattainable outside of nature. Wordsworth set out in his 'Preface' to convey that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility." Wordsworth states that subjects are poetic in themselves. A slight incident of village life may be material for poetry, if the poet can make it meaningful. Thus Wordsworth extends the scope of poetry, by bringing within its folds themes chosen from humble and common life. Wordsworth's aim was to choose incidents and situations from common life, to relate them in a selection of language really used by men. The reason that he gave was that the rustic people were close to nature and hence free from artificiality and vanity.

2.8.5 E : VIEWS ON IMAGINATION & ITS ROLE IN POETIC CREATION

Wordsworth's theory of Imagination and its role in poetic process brings out one of the cardinal features of his theoretical pronouncements. His basic contention about imagination is that it is a higher power that coalesces, unifies, shapes and modulates and finally works as an aesthetic principle. Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* is not only a manifesto of romanticism; it also substantiates a notion of romantic imagination. Wordsworth considers it to be a co-relating factor which is highly important in aesthetic matters. Thus Wordsworth points out that he intends to "choose incidents and situations from common life" and his subject should be expressed through "a selection of language really used by man". But this co-relation between subjects and language is not exactly easy. He refers to the "colouring of imagination" which will present everything in its unusual aspect. It is through the proper exercise of this colouring of imagination that the poetic sublimation is properly reached.

Again, while talking about the purpose of poetry he says "all good poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Here he refers to the inner imaginative creative faculty of the artist. The power of imagination remains within the mind and it works as a creative power. But he suggests that this power cannot be restricted within a fixed boundary. In fact, he visualizes the image of a container and the contained: the container is the poet's mind and the imaginative faculty is the contained. In other

words, Wordsworth creates an aesthetic of dynamics. It becomes associated with the expressive theory of imagination. He also suggests that imagination may be considered to be an organic sensibility which allows the poets on to think "long and deeply". But there are also certain interactions of part feelings which are modified and directed by creative thoughts. There is a distinct touch of Hartleyan Associationism. In the analysis of Hartley the idea of experience and consequent thoughts on the basis of memory come to work as distinctly creative functions. This theory of Associationism is largely influenced by the Lockean Empiricism. Thus imagination is associated with emotions which are "recollected in tranquility" and the process of recollection is a critical process that substantiates the imaginative faculty of the artist. Wordsworth formulates this process of reaction which is significantly co-related with the powers of imagination. Thus emotion is contemplated till, by a speech of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. Thus Wordsworth considers imagination a creative faculty that modifies the poetic principle and operates through a passionate ecstasy. It is true that the poet is a man speaking to men. But the powers of imagination become extremely functional in giving an articulate and coherent picture of the poet's passions.

The idea of imagination has always been a critical term giving way to significant forms of controversy. During the 17th century the terms imagination and fancy had often been used in a vaguely synonymous way to refer to the realm of fairy tale or make-belief. Yet in certain places imagination and fancy came to be distinguished from each other and this is largely evident in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. This has been in harmony with the medieval and Renaissance tradition where "imagination" and fantasia had been fairly close together and in certain places fantasia was considered to be the lighter and less responsible kind of imagination. In the light of 17th century reasonableness fancy suffered a decline in reputation. But it was during the 18th century that imagination gradually came to be considered as more functional than fancy. Thus the 18th imagination moved through different stages of transition and it so happened that imagination began to assume a higher role of reference because it was associated with creative mental power.

Wordsworth's ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads* is not only a manifesto of romanticism, it also substantiates a notion of romantic imagination. Wordsworth considers it to be a co-relating factor which is highly important in aesthetic matters. Thus Wordsworth points out that he intends to "choose incidents and situations from common life" and his subject should be expressed through "a selection of language really used by man". But this co-relation between subjects and language is not exactly easy. He refers to the "colouring of imagination" which will present everything in its unusual aspect. It is

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He also suggests that imagination may be considered to be an organic sensibility which allows the poets on to think "long and deeply". But there are also certain inter-action of part feelings which are modified and directed by creative thoughts. There is a distinct touch of Hartleyan associationism. In the analysis of Hartley the idea of experience and consequent thoughts on the basis of memory come to work as distinctly creative functions. This theory of associationism is largely influenced by the Lockean Empiricism. Thus imagination is associated with emotions which are "recollected in tranquility" and the process of recollection is a critical process that substantiates the imaginative faculty of the artist. Wordsworth formulates this process of reaction which is significantly co-related with the powers of imagination. Thus emotion is contemplated till, by a speech of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. Thus Wordsworth considers imagination a creative faculty that modifies the poetic principle and operates through a passionate ecstasy. It is true that the poet is a man speaking to men. But the powers of imagination become extremely functional in giving an articulate and coherent picture of the poet's passions.

2.8.5F : WORDSWORTH'S 'PREFACE' AS A ROMANTIC MANIFESTO

Wordsworth Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* is generally considered to be the manifesto of the Romantic revolt.The cardinal characteristics that make it so are :

- Spontaneity or artlessness is one of the prominent features of Romantic theory and this is unambiguously perceptible in Wordsworth's Preface. Wordsworth believes that poetry must be artless and natural. "Poetry", asserts Wordsworth, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".
- Plea for simplicity in subject-matter and treatment is another significant attribute of Romantic criticism and this is explicitly evidenced in Wordsworth's 'Preface'.Wordsworth's perspectives on the subject-matter of poetry form an

inseparable part of his theoretical aesthetics as enunciated in Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*. Wordsworth expresses his desire to break away from the ornate style of the 18th century poetry and create a comprehensible art form for the "ordinary man". In breaking away from the decorated style, Wordsworth states that "personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose".

- The Romantics had always assigned a special position to imagination and Wordsworth is not an exception in his treatment of imagination in 'Preface'. Wordsworth categorically states: "The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these poems, was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way."
- Avoidance of artificiality and excessive ornament in use of poetic diction or language has been strongly pointed out by the Romantic poets. Wordsworth writes against "the gaudiness and inane phraseology" of the poets who were his immediate predecessors. As the spokesman of the Romantic school of poetry, Wordsworth is critical of the poetic practices of the age of Dryden and Pope. He has no mind to imitate thereby to continue the tradition of the so-called urbane poetry in the poems he wrote. That is why, in the Preface he has stated his purpose as a poet. First he is willing to choose incidents and situation from common life. Secondly, he wishes to delineate the subject-matter with the help of the language really used by men; and lastly he wishes to throw a certain colouring of imagination on the subject he chooses.
- The selection of the ordinary language as the language of poetry is primarily inspired by the Romantic doctrine of "Return to Nature." To a Romantic theorist like Wordsworth, the emphasis on Nature is really important. He wishes to invest the language of poetry with the pleasant familiarity. That is why, the so-called poetic diction with its cultivated artificiality may not be found in the poems included in *Lyrical Ballads*. Since Wordsworth speaks in favour of the natural language, he tries to avoid the artificial devices in the poetic style. For instance, he has intended to carefully avoid personification, forced metaphoric expressions, superimposed similes & similar other rhetorical devices. What is needed is the avoidance of "falsehood of description" and to inculcate good sense in poetry.
- The Romantic poets have always tried their level best to maintain a familiar and intimate rapport with the readers and Wordsworth's Preface is a pioneering

work in this regard.The purpose is to establish a communion with the readers and to invest poetry with intelligibility. Thus, for the purpose of easy understanding "the language of prose may be well adapted to poetry." In order to substantiate his argument he further writes that there is no essential difference "between the language of prose and metrical composition." The first reason behind the sameness of language of language is that both poetry and prose address themselves to the same body of readers. Moreover, both prose and poetry borrow their basic impulses from the fundamental human feelings and emotions.Wordsworth wishes to keep the readers of his poetry in the company of flesh and blood. So, he discards the conventional form of poetic diction. He further says that he wants "to bring his language near to the language of men".

- As far as the role and function of the poet is concerned, Wordsworth is a true representative of Romantic criticism and theory. According to Wordsworth, a poet is essentially a man speaking to men. He thus emphasizes the social function of poetry. A poet writes not for his pleasure alone, but for the pleasure of his readers. To impart pleasure is the primary function of poetry. A poet differs from an ordinary individual not in nature, but in degree. He is a man who has greater and more lively sensibility, greater power of imagination, greater knowledge of human nature , a more comprehensive soul so that he can sympathize and feel for others, greater zest for life, and greater powers of communication.
- The stages of poetic creation or composition which are described in Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* are indicative of the steps in Romantic poetic aesthetics. There are four stages through which poetic composition takes place: observation, recollection, contemplation and imaginative excitement of the emotions which were experienced earlier. Such is the process of creation and it provides joy to the poet. The poet wants to communicate his own joy to his readers.

2.8.6 Summing Up

- William Wordsworth is simultaneously a poet and a theorist. He is a theorist who has formulated cardinal principles of evaluating and judging poetry and has endeavoredto implement those critical and theoretical tools in his own poetry. In this context, it is pertinent to point out that he could not fully apply his critical instruments enunciated in his theoretical propositions to his poetry as such. There is a gap between his theoretical tenets and poetic practices.
- Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* is rightly called the manifesto of

Romantic poetic aesthetics and criticism as it underscores and underlines the cardinal and fundamental propositions and principles of Romantic literary criticism in a nutshell. Wordsworth has presented his views on the function and role of the poet, the use of language in poetry or poetic diction, the role of Imagination in poetic creativity, subject matter of poetry, role of the readers and definition of poetry in a cogent and coherent manner.

2.8.7 Comprehension Exercises

Broad Questions

1. Critically analyse Wordsworth's definition of poetry.
2. What does Wordsworth say about the function of metre in poetry? Discuss.
3. Who, according to Wordsworth, is a poet? What are the characteristics of a poet according to him?
4. Comment critically on Wordsworth's views on imagination.
5. Examine Wordsworth's views on the function and role of the poet as envisaged in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*.
6. Assess Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* as a Romantic manifesto.
7. Write an essay on Wordsworth's views on the use of language in poetry or poetic diction.
9. What, according to Wordsworth, should be the subject-matter of poetry as revealed in 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*.
10. How do the Romantic principles of literary criticism differ from the Augustan or Neoclassical principles?

Semi-long Questions

1. What are Wordsworth's opinions on the role of readers of poetry?
2. "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Discuss with textual references from poems on your syllabus.
3. Comment on Wordsworth's distinction between Imagination and Fancy.

Short Questions

1. Briefly elucidate Wordsworth's views on the use of diction in Augustan poetry.
2. Write a brief note on Wordsworth's opinions on Aristotle's idea of poetry.
3. Write briefly on Wordsworth's concept on the role of metre in poetry.

2.8.8 Suggested Reading

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D:\\NSOU\D\CC7 (Materials)
M-2\Unit-8 \ 3rd Proof (Alok)

UNIT–9 : WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : 'TINTERN ABBEY'

2.9.1. Objectives
2.9.2. Introduction
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2.9.1 Objectives

After the detailed Introductory Unit on Wordsworth's poetry and thoughts on poetry, Units 9 and 10 will bring you to detailed readings of two of his long poems that are seminal to any understanding of the poet's oeuvre. After reading the present Unit, you should be able to find a depiction of landscape, informed with a moral and philosophical vision. The view of nature that he presents in his poetry is subjective - half created and half perceived- as he claims in 'Tintern Abbey'. Between this creation and perception, you will come to an understanding of the pantheistic creed that characterises Wordsworth's appreciation of nature. By the way, do remember that when we read Wordsworth, it is customary to write of 'Nature' with a capitalised 'N'. Our objective in this Unit is to present Wordsworth not just as a time-warped poet of nature, but to understand how he presages what we now know as 'ecocriticism' in literature.

2.9.2 Introduction

Popularly known as 'Tintern Abbey' the poem entitled 'Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, 13 July 1798' is one of the most significant poems of William Wordsworth. It is a poem which will be of great value in your understanding of Wordsworth's views on Nature, literary Romanticism and its characteristic views on the role of the poet and poetry, and the

philosophical and spiritual life of man. The poem was composed in the month of July, 1798. It was published in the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) where it was placed at the very end, as if it was the culmination of all that the poet had wanted to convey throughout the volume.

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

> No poem of mine was composed under circumstances more pleasant for me to remember than this. I began it upon leaving Tintern, after crossing the Wye, and concluded it just as I was entering Bristol in the evening, after a ramble of four or five days (10th- 13th July) with my sister. Not a line of it was altered, and not any part of it written down till I reached Bristol.

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

2.9.3 Text of "Tintern Abbey"

The poem is divided into five sections. The detailed title announces the time frame, which as you now know, has immense implications in the life of the poet. Thereafter, it settles to establish the dominant mood of tranquil repose in a secluded, 'inland' river landscape. It sets out the key symbolic markers of cliffs and river, and the sensations of eye and ear that will reverberate throughout the thoughts and feelings of the text. Wordsworth's diction draws the reader out of any easy expectations of Neo-classical picturesque and mildly hints at the metaphysical discourse to follow. The second and third sections advance this movement by extolling Nature in its manifold effects for humanity, its many references to the feelings, and its sublime capacity to work on the imagination and the memory. This follows Wordsworth's recollection of Nature's healing influence experienced during his unpleasant urban interlude when reflections on his early Wye visit helped to sustain him through anguished periods of fever and fret. Notice first the situatedness of the title:

❖ ***Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour. July 13, 1798)***

Text

FIVE years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.–Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, 5
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view 10
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines 15
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods, 20
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.
These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye : 25
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart; 30

And passing even into my purer mind,
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, 35
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burthen of the mystery,
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 40
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,
We see into the life of things.

If this Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft- 50
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world, 55
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart-
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought, 60

With many recognitions dim and faint, And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts 65
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides 70
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days, 75
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all.-I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood, 80
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.-That time is past, 85
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur, other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompence. For I have learned 90

To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt 95
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air, 100
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods, 105
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,-both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
In nature and the language of the sense, 110
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
Nor perchance,
If I were not thus taught, should I the more 115
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 125
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 130
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 135
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, 140
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, 145
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- 150
If I should be where I no more can hear
Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
Of past existence-wilt thou then forget

That on the banks of this delightful stream
We stood together; and that I, so long
A worshipper of Nature, hither came
Unwearied in that service: rather say 155
With warmer love-oh! with far deeper zeal
Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
That after many wanderings, many years
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

2.9.4 Annotations & Word Meanings

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

Repose (l.9) : rest

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

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

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

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

Sportive (l.16) : playful

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

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

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

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

Trivial (l.33) : insignificant

..aspect more sublime(l.38):

Burthen (l.39) : burden

Unintelligible (l.41) : impossible to understand

Serene (l.42) : calm

Corporeal (l.44) : bodily, physical

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

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

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

Roe (l.69) : young deer

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

…gloomy wood (l. 80) : dark woods

Recompense (l.90):

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

Interfused (l.98): permeated with, interspersed

Impels (l.102): compels Anchor (l. 111) : mooring Perchance (l.114): Perhaps Genial (l.116): cordial

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

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

Exhortation(l.149) : encouragement, persuasion

Zeal (l.157) : passion

2.9.5 Substance and Critical Summary

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

Stanza I The poem begins with Wordsworth's declaration of the fact that after a gap of five years he has been able to visit the banks of the Wye and the adjoining landscape. Once again he is overjoyed to hear the murmuring flow of water in the river Wye as he discreetly beholds the serene landscape consisting of sharp and towering wooded hills uniting with the clear sky. The scene encourages a deep feeling of solitude seclusion and introspection. The green cottage garden, orchard tufts loaded with unripe fruits clad in one green hue, the pastoral farms, the smoke which might be coming

from the dwelling of some vagabond or the cave of a hermit only enhance his happiness and deep seclusion. The unbroken green of the countryside denote a happy co-existence of man and nature, cultivation and wilderness.

Critical Commentary on the Stanza

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

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

The description that the poem begins with is famously called 'return to nature'. The 'steep and lofty cliffs', 'waters, rolling from their mountain-springs', 'dark sycamore', are each introduced by 'again' or 'once again' and alert the reader to the fact that Wordsworth's poem will deal with the present experience in the light of what once had been. By drawing attention to the continuity in nature he also depicts how the passage of 'five long winters' has changed the mind of the poet who is the onlooker. The description is obviously connected with the poet's reflective mood as he emphasises how the serenity of the scene gives rise to profound thoughts.

Points to Ponder for the Learner

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

Stanza Two

In this stanza you will find how the poet asserts that in the period that has elapsed between his first visit and the present one, the serene landscape and its natural beauty, though physically absent during these five years, have never been absent to him. He gained enormous amount of pleasure and happiness out of the recollection of the

landscape. The natural beauty has seeped into his soul so powerfully that it has restored him to tranquillity amid the squalor and weariness of urban life and has prompted him to be kind and generous. Seeing the landscape with the mind's eye has uplifted him to the height of spiritual ecstasy producing a 'blessed mood' of calmness which dissolved the negativities of life. It inspired in him an exalted state of higher spiritual consciousness which enabled him to understand the harmony in greater nature and cosmos, and in all inanimate things which are touched by the same power.

Critical Commentary

This section enables you to comprehend that Nature in Wordsworth is no mere background or a simple setting in time and place. The landscape, though empirically absent after his first visit, does not appear to have any less motivating and captivating spell on the poet. This idea contests the basic spheres of rationalist and scientific studies involving presence and absence of things. The Wordsworthian view of nature is more philosophical. Nature inspires a meditative mood and is capable of pushing aside the alienation and disregard that man faces in the urban life. Wordsworth is seen indirectly contesting contemporary notions of development and 18th Century principles of scientific truth and Enlightenment. It is nature (and not urban development which signifies a regular disengagement and departure from nature) that is capable of harmonising the world so vexed with insensitive compartmentalisation of man.

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

Points to Ponder

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

Stanza Three

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

Critical Commentary

Reiterating what he mentioned in the previous section Wordsworth is again challenging the empiricist and rationalist views which would view his claims as invalid and fanciful. His reiteration of the recreational, reenergizing, revitalizing potency of Nature leads us to the next sections where he is to compare the stages of his own psychological and spiritual maturation in the context of the landscape's psychological omnipresence. The stanza is an early indication of the concept of the "spots of time" which Wordsworth speaks of in The Prelude, which have a shaping influence on the poet's psyche. The temporal shift that occurs in both the second and the third stanzas projects the visual portrait of the artist's/ man's growth in the realm of nature.

Stanza Four

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

Wordsworth, returning to his present sensibility and understanding of what Nature has done in promoting his growth, declares the stage of ecstasy and insane sensuous

agitation to be over. However, he is in no mood to mourn the loss. He is rather overjoyed to notice that such loss is compensated by a sense of the sublime which has been gifted to him by the affective power of nature. He now looks at Nature with the eye of the adult, not fuelled by boyish agitations of sensuous delight but conditioned by a deeper insightful consideration of the sorrows and hardships of fellow human beings. Now nature appears to him as no diversion but the source of thought in man. Nature now is a mysterious system, the greater cosmos which holds together the living and the non-living objects and aspects, and all the binaries of the world. Nature is the source of pleasure still, but it is now the chief supplier of spiritual wisdom and thought which permeates every aspect of creation. He is still the drinker of the intoxication that nature's beauteous sights and sounds offer, but in addition to that he is now made wiser. Contemplating such sights and sounds now lead him towards the purest thoughts involving humanity and morality. The stanza ends with an eloquent tribute to the outward forms of nature which act as a gateway to the world of mystical vision which unites human consciousness with the elements and the cosmos.

Critical Commentary

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

Wordsworth indirectly mentions that while Nature is an externally visible and empirically valid combination of beauteous sights and sounds, it is never a fixed and

specified locale without altering abilities. To Wordsworth, Nature is a reality as well as a phenomenon. Every phenomenon of nature that exists is mediated through the consciousness of the perceiving mind. And with the growth of the mind and differences in terms of contexts, the phenomenon too alters and develops. To the young Wordsworth Nature had seemed to be only an enjoyable diversion full of intoxication and pleasure. But this phenomenon is silently developed and modified when the actual sights and sounds were physically absent for five years and yet continued to grow within the viewer's mind. The poet who revisits the banks of the river Wye is, therefore, acutely conscious of the "remoter charm" of the place "by thought supplied". The sublime aspect of Nature is thus a by-product of the mind that it has nurtured. The same process is highlighted and reiterated in the third phase of Wordsworth's attitude towards Nature, as now fully aware of the processes of development of nature and the human mind, he is able to unite man and nature, to find in nature the music and expression of man's existence.

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

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

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

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

Points to Ponder for the Learner

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

Stanza Five

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

Critical Commentary

The final stanza of Wordsworth's poem is in one way a reiteration of the captivating and revitalizing, redeeming, transcending, trans-substantiating potency of nature. However, more significantly, the stanza stands as a progression. It offers the sublime heights of Wordsworth's ideas related to nature and in many ways his critique of man's unnatural social existence. Wordsworth stands as a firm believer of the fact that Nature has not merely curative potencies; it is the sole guide and friend to humanity. It is a mother that nourishes the child in man, fills its mind with spontaneous overflow of calmness and gentle graciousness. It restores and replenishes the broken spirit of man. It heals the external body as well as the maladies of the internal self. Wordsworth critiques the so called elitism of the urban world where development has only given more fuel to the hypocrisies of the world. The spontaneity of the natural world stands in opposition to the mechanical status of human life in urban setting. Nature here is no longer a backdrop but an animated presence reaching out to man.

Significantly enough, the poem, after revealing the inter-connectedness of man and nature in the pursuit of mutual growth in the previous stanza now declares another philosophy of inter-subjectivity. The poet's sister in the present context offers the poet

a glimpse of his previous self. T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' in *The Four Quartets* begins with the famous lines:

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

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

Points to Ponder :

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

2.9.6 Analysis of Major Themes

❖ 'Tintern Abbey' as a Romantic Poem:

Wordsworth is noted as the most significant exponent of Romantic poetics who displayed a sharp break from the Neo-Classical tendencies of versification, insistence on poetic diction, and a mathematically studied craftsmanship in the realm of poetic creation. This revolt is often associated with a 'return to nature' a phrase which may be interpreted in more than one way. On the one hand it suggests a glorification of the 'natural' as opposed to the 'artificial', on the other hand it is also a new way of looking

at the spiritual impact of nature rather than its purely picturesque aspect. The Romantic sublime captures a sense of the wonder and awe inspired by nature's aspects which reaches beyond the material prospect and creates a phenomenon that is transcendent. The poet became the interpreter of the language of the metaphysical realm as revealed in the book of nature. *Lyrical Ballads* announced the primacy of this new way of looking at nature, not through the naked eyes, but through the lens of the imagination and reflection.

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

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

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

provide a pastoral landscape in place of largely urban images of contemporary Neo-Classical literature. However, nature, as displayed in the quoted lines, does not merely appear as a mere background, for Wordsworth always views nature as a phenomenon more internally and spiritually located with man as the chief proprietor of thoughts and

impressions. It comes alive through the thoughts and feelings of man. This indeed is the ultimate expression of the 'egotistical sublime' which is Wordsworth's unique contribution to Romantic aesthetics.

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

❖ Autobiographical Elements in 'Tintern Abbey':

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

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

Principally, however, his poem must be read as a reflection of the Romantic principles in the evaluation of nature and man's connectedness to the same. The poem is a philosophical revelation and in many ways is prescribing paths that shall enable humanity to view in nature a guide, a sublime reflection of humanity, an expression of man's own being, consciousness, and conscience. There is no doubt in stating that Wordsworth's poem is based on a personal experience and association involving nature, and in more ways than one the poem narrates in the manner of spiritual autobiography the poet's

maturation. However, the poem, in stating that his past is contained in his sister's present, in stating that nature never betrays the heart that loves it, in finding in nature the expression of purest humanity reflects more than a mere personal account or an autobiographical documentation.

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

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

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

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

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

Let Nature be your teacher.

……………………………..

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

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

She gave me eyes,
she gave me ears; And humble care, and delicate fears;
A heart, the fountain of sweet tears;
And love, and thought, and joy.
The same sentiment is expressed by him in 'Tintern Abbey',
for to Wordsworth Nature is,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

❖ **Form and Vocabulary in 'Tintern Abbey':**

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

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

'Tintern Abbey' is written in blank verse which is unrhymed and is closest to the cadence of regular prose used in ordinary conversation in the human world. This in a

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

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

2.9.7 Summing Up

'Tintern Abbey', we might say, is *The Prelude* in its miniature form. *The Prelude*, a very long autobiographical poem in blank verse, gives the readers a vivid and attractive account of the "Growth of a Poet's Mind". Wordsworth points out how his mature attitude towards man and Nature is the last of the three stages through which he has passed while growing up. You will find that the first two stages are chronicled in the first two books of *The Prelude*; the third is described in book VIII.

As we have seen in this Unit, 'Tintern Abbey' is unquestionably one of the finest poems in English language and certainly the best and most important of Wordsworth's contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads*. You will be surprised to know that Sri Aurobindo had poems like Tintern Abbey in mind when he wrote in the concluding paragraph of Chapter XVII of *The Future Poetry* (Pondicherry, 1991,p.118): 'But still one of the seer-poets he (Wordsworth) is, a seer of the calm spirit in Nature, the poet of man's large identity with her and serene liberating communion: it is on this side that he is admirable and unique'.

Our reading of 'Tintern Abbey' in this Unit has brought home the following:

- The evolutionary stages in Wordsworth's appreciation of Nature
- The perception of Nature as a living entity, one that can serve to mediate between human beings and Divinity

- The passage of thoughts in the poet's mind that can link perception to reflection
- The abiding value of communion with Nature

2.9.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

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

Mid-Length Questions

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

Short Questions

1. Discuss the poet's feelings about nature during his first visit of the Tintern Abbey landscape.
2. What impact of nature was observable on the mind of the poet during the five years of the physical absence of the landscape?
3. Explain with suitable reference to the context the following lines:
   Nature never did betray The heart that loved her ;

2.9.9 Suggested Reading

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UNIT–10 : WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : ODE ON INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY FROM RECOLLECTIONS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD– 'IMMORTALITY ODE'

2.10.1. Objectives
2.10.2. Introduction
2.10.3. Text of Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode'
- **2.10.3A. History of Composition and Publication**
- **2.10.3B. Substance and Development of Thought**
- **2.10.3C. Detailed Summary (Stanza-wise)**
- **2.10.3D. Major Themes**

2.10.4. Summing Up
2.10.5. Comprehension Exercises
2.10.6. Suggested Readings

2.10.1 Objectives

In this third Unit on William Wordsworth, our objective is to read the poem 'Immortality Ode' as Wordsworth's reckoning of the stages of life through which one passes from childhood to maturity. It is important to understand the development in man's relationship with his natural surroundings that pervades every stage of this growing up. Like 'Tintern Abbey', in a sense this poem too is the poet's journey of the self that he universalizes in poetic representation. The aspect of 'recollection' that is central to Wordsworth's poetics, occurs in the very title of the poem; and is an important thread all along.

2.10.2 Introduction

The word 'Immortality' in the title of this poem is used in the sense of eternity. Wordsworth had a great love for childhood which he has idealised here in this ode. He takes us away from the glory and the freshness of a dream that invested his objects of sight in childhood. He takes us to the sober and reflective thought of a philosophic mind about the soul, our life's star, and it's rising and setting. In childhood, nature and

her beautiful objects appear to be clothed in brightness, but as the child grows up, the vividness of youth fades away and the realization of the supernatural elements becomes more and more difficult. This leads us to think that man is nearer to God in his childhood than in his adult years. Nature's beauty is lost in later years. Only certain objects of nature then remind him of the glory and splendour of childhood. Sadness grows on him as he advances in years and he finds himself altogether out of divine effulgence; becoming narrow in his outlook, and being hedged with conventions. So, the poet explains that our birth is but a sleep and forgetting and he comes to the conclusion that every child appears as if surrounded by a halo, a lingering radiance from that imperial palace. This loss of childhood's knowledge of the supernatural is, however, compensated by the acquisition of philosophical contemplation.

Everyone believes that in childhood the objects of our sight are invested with a certain dream-like vividness and splendour which make us believe in a pre-existence stage. This ode is on echo of platonic philosophy according to which, corresponding to the visible perishable world of ours, there is another world, namely, the world of eternal ideas or archetypes. Plato holds that the soul in previous existence held these eternal ideas which are present at our birth and which we could not have learnt from experience. Our souls in a previous existence must have gazed on truth and beauty, the resemblance of which is not altogether effaced. That is why, the glories of the other world continue to haunt our soul long after they have been born into this world of shadows. Wordsworth has gone a step further and thinks that the new-born infant is more perfect then the grown-up man -- he is a 'mighty prophet' and 'seer blest'. The child's soul has existed, before it entered into the body in a world. Superior to ours, therefore, it is true that the child finds this natural world rather strange. Very soon with the growth of years he loses his kinship with the spiritual realm and becomes acclimatized to earth, losing the freshness of insight. In this sense, Wordsworth calls the child 'the father of man.' As the boy grows old, the ears and troubles of life begin to cast their shadows on him and the spiritual light as well as the visionary gleam gradually fades away. When he becomes a full-fledged man, he is still conscious that he once possessed a radiant glory and that this world is dull and dreary. These are the intimations of the immortality of the soul.

Of course, as successive commentators have pointed out, the Metaphysical poet, Henry Vaughan in his poem 'The Retreat' offers the most suggestive similarities with Wordsworthian glorification of the child especially in the opening lines,

Happy those early days when I
Shined in my angel infancy.

Thus, while the idea of immortality is essentially platonic, the glorification of the child is a heritage from the 17th century. To Wordsworth belongs the credit of effecting a fusion between the two in harmony with his own spiritual experience.

The first four stanzas tell us of a spiritual crisis, of a glory passing from the earth, and the end by asking why this has happened. The middle stanzas examine the nature of the glory and explain it by a theory of reminiscence from the pre-natal existence. The last three stanzas show that though the vision has perished life has still a meaning and value. When we are born into the world, we forget our previous existence, just as dreams are forgotten in working hours. The soul that is within us in to this world seems to re-appear after having run its course in the spiritual world. But as a child we are not entirely forgetful of our pre-natal existence. Some portions of our past life cling to us till the troubles of the world efface it.

Wordsworth's adoration of childhood life was put to certain questions. It was pointed out that the poet had presented an idealistic picture of childhood which could not be warranted by facts of experience. Wordsworth examined this criticism in the changing part of the poem. He brought some modification in the theory that the life of the child was one of glory which an adult human being could not enjoy. He made concessions for old age and philosophic mind that come with advancing years though the old recollections of spirituality which a child enjoys cannot be enjoyed by grown-up persons. They need not feel sorry for all that, because in advanced age we can have 'advantages' which are denied to a child in his infancy. The philosophic aspects of human life which come with advanced age have their own points which cannot be found in the period of childhood. The compensating advantages of old age are sympathy, fortitude, faith and wisdom-

We will grieve not, rather find,
Strength in what remains behind.

2.10.3 Text of 'Immortality Ode'

Text : Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood

The child is father of the man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.
(Wordsworth, "My Heart Leaps Up")

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

It is not now as it hath been of yore;-
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

The rainbow comes and goes,
And lovely is the rose;
The moon doth with delight
Look round her when the heavens are bare;
Waters on a starry night
Are beautiful and fair;
The sunshine is a glorious birth;
But yet I know, where'er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

Now, while the birds thus sing a joyous song,
And while the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound,
To me alone there came a thought of grief:
A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong :
The cataracts blow their trumpets from the steep,
No more shall grief of mine the season wrong:
I hear the Echoes through the mountains throng,
The Winds come to me from the fields of sleep,
And all the earth is gay;
Land and sea
Give themselves up to jollity,
And with the heart of May
Doth every Beast keep holiday;-
Thou child of joy,
Shout round me, let me hear thy shouts, thou happy Shepherd-boy.

Ye blessèd Creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fullness of your bliss, I feel-I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the babe leaps up on his mother's arm:-
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
-But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone;
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting
And cometh from afar;
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
And, even with something of a mother's mind,
And no unworthy aim,
The homely nurse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate Man,
Forget the glories he hath known,
And that imperial palace whence he came.

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:

Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,-
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest
Which we are toiling all our lives to find,
In darkness lost, the darkness of the grave;
Thou, over whom thy Immortality
Broods like a day, a master o'er a slave,
A Presence which is not to be put by;
Thou little child, yet glorious in the might
Of heaven-born freedom on thy being's height,
Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with thy blessedness at strife?
Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lies upon thee with a weight,

Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:-
--Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise;
But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a creature
Moving about in worlds not realized,
High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us--- cherish --- and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor man nor boy,

Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence, in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither;
Can in a moment travel thither---
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We, in thought, will join your throng
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.

And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!

Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquish'd one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway;
I love the brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripp'd lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born day
Is lovely yet;
The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears

2.10.3A : HISTORY OF COMPOSITION & PUBLICATION

The poem was begun in the spring of 1802, and by summer the first four stanzas were presumed to have been completed. The primary design of the poem was conceived and it was finished within two to four years. The delay in composition did not make any distinction to the unity of the poem. It is built on a simple but gorgeous plan or scheme.

We have earlier referred to Henry Vaughan in the context of this poem, but Wordsworth actually goes farther than his predecessor. His poem has a much wider range and connotation.The concept of pre-existence is a very significant component in both the poems. Wordsworth's apotheosis of childhood is not only more impassioned, it is also more exaggerated. One of the fundamental concepts of Wordsworth bears a striking resemblance to that of Vaughan--- that the child is much nearer to God than the mature man. Henry Vaughan emphasizes the purity and innocence of childhood, and simultaneously suggests that the child's memory of his celestial heritage is naturally stronger than that of the adult. Wordsworth not only considers the question of memory but also considers two main points: the child can perceive in Nature a better glory than that which is visible to the naked eye, though this divine glory gradually disappears while the child grows up. Besides, the child possesses a strong intuitive faculty and a magnificent prowess of paradisal vision. It is held that Wordsworth returned to complete the poem two years after he had written the first four sections, the publication coming in *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807). You will notice a decided turn in thought between these two phases of composition as evident in the poem.

2.10.3B : SUBSTANCE & DEVELOPMENT OF THOUGHT

The first four stanzas tell of a spiritual crisis, of a glory passing from the earth, and end by questioning why this has happened. The middle stanzas (v-viii) examine the nature of this glory and explain it by a theory of reminiscence from a pre-natal existence. Then the final three stanzas demonstrate that, though the vision has disappeared, life has still a meaning and a value. The three parts of the poem deal in turn with a crisis, an explanation, and a consolation, and in all three Wordsworth speaks of what is most important and most original in his poetry.

The theory of recollection goes back to Plato, but Wordsworth did not take it from him, nor is his application of it Plato's. His sources are Coleridge and Henry Vaughan. Coleridge toyed with the idea of pre-existence as an explanation of a feeling that we have in a previous existence done something or been somewhere. He explicates it in a sonnet which he wrote in 1796 on hearing the news of Hartley's birth. Wordsworth coined the concept because it helped him to explain his own visionary moments. But of course the actual experience of which he speaks is different from that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. It is not an isolated moment but a process in which the visionary power, at its most powerful in childhood, slowly and gradually declines and this decline was what Wordsworth found in Henry Vaughan's poem, 'The Retreat'. Vaughan recalls and regrets the days of his "Angell Infancy", and tells us how the vision of celestial things has grown weaker with passing years. But this idea, too, changes in Wordsworth's treatment. He is concerned with the loss not of imagination but of innocence. From Coleridge Wordsworth took the idea of pre-existence and from Vaughan that of a slow decline in celestial powers, and from this combination formed his own original theory.

2.10.3C : DETAILED SUMMARY (Stanza-wise)

Stanza 1 : In the opening stanza, the poet looks back to a time when everything was transfigured by a 'celestial light.' Every natural object appeared to be clothed in heavenly radiance because the poet was intuitively aware of, and responsive to, a life in and beyond Nature.

Stanza 2 : In stanza two, it is seen that the poet has an aesthetic appreciation of natural beauty but this dispassionate appreciation is inferior to what was known to the poet before. The decadence in his responsiveness to natural phenomena is conspicuous in the flat and unemotional opening line of the stanza.

Stanza 3 : The third stanza stresses that the harmony or solidarity with the natural world that the poet felt as a child has been disrupted. The entire nature seems to be united by the jollity of springtime but it is a joviality from which the poet is excluded.

Stanza 4 : Though the poet desperately tries to connect with the mood of celebration going on in the external Nature, in reality he is still alienated from the life and Nature

around him and it is explicitly suggested by the opening of fourth stanza. Melancholy engulfs him at the end of this stanza and when he looks at the tree, the field and the pansy he no longer sees paradisal gleam that he used to see in his childhood days and these are reminders of his loss, speaking of something that has gone away.

Stanza 5 : In this stanza, the poet seeks to substantiate the causes for the loss of the visionary gleam or divine radiance. He does this by enunciating a view of human growth but is remarkably more pessimistic. The concept of pre-existence outlined at the outset of stanza five is definitely new. His primary concern is to suggest the decline of the visionary power that occurs with the passing of time, and the myth of a prior state of existence, the memory of which steadily diminishes from the time of our birth and this helps the poet to elucidate this. The child still feels close to the eternal source of life and can sense its presence all around him. As his consciousness of his body's finite, and material existence increases, however, his awareness of the eternal gradually decreases.

Stanza 6 : In this stanza, the poet argues that the visionary power fades completely with the advancement of years and adulthood. The celestial light gets obscured and finally is replaced by a different type of light, that of ordinary material reality. Nature helps the growing child to take pleasure in natural objects for their own sake rather than respond to their inner reality. Fascinated by sensory pleasures, the boy gradually forgets the glories that he had known.

Stanza 7 : In this stanza, the poet describes how the child begins at an early age to be engrossed in the trivialities of everyday existence. The child is keenly interested to take part in the daily activities of life. The child practises his future roles at weddings and funerals and learns the language of business, love and strife. The poet compares the child to an actor and suggests that he imitates his elders but simultaneously implies that he betrays his true identity. His deep involvement in the dreary and superficial activities of daily life escalates his remoteness from the source of his existence, the eternal abode to which he belongs.

Stanza 8 : In the eighth stanza, the poet directly addresses the child who was the subject of stanza seven. The child is referred to as the best philosopher not because he has enormous reasoning power and is capable of complex intellectual argument but because he knows intuitively the truth that adult beings, whose responsiveness to inner reality have been stultified by the course of time, work hard to discover. Gradually but inevitably, the child is increasingly suppressed by the dull repetitiveness of daily intercourse.

Stanza 9 : In this stanza, the poet, William Wordsworth, makes an attempt to come to terms with his loss and considers what is left to sustain the adult. Firstly, the ability to recollect childhood experiences means that those experiences are not lost to him but can still exercise an active influence on his perception. If he is unable to feel directly

what he felt, then his memory at least makes available to him something akin to the childhood vision.

Stanza 10 : In stanza ten, the poet reverts to the exuberant natural scene depicted in stanza three and four respectively. The poet is now able to share in the joy from which he had earlier felt excluded. However, the child's spontaneous and unthinking involvement in the life of nature is no longer possible. Man's solidarity with the natural world is not intuitively felt but perceived as an intellectual truth. Recognition of what has disappeared is coupled with a determination to find comfort in the consolation of adulthood. The quiet and contemplative response to life that the adult alone is capable of is the dominant idea in this stanza.

Stanza 11 : The concluding stanza confirms and strengthens the poet's resolution of the problem that he confronted at the inception of the poem. He reiterates that what he has gained is a new sensitivity to the mortality and suffering of his fellow human beings. He has lost divine or heavenly splendour of his childhood days but what he has gained as recompense is not trivial or insignificant. He has now achieved philosophical mind and meditative nature which he did not have when he was a child.

2.10.3D : MAJOR THEMES

❖ Immortality Ode as a Philosophical Poem

A philosophical poem is one which is saturated with some philosophical truth without affecting the essential poetic qualities. As Coleridge has mentioned it in *Biographia Literaria*, "No man was ever a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher." Wordsworth, for example, wished to be considered as a teacher or as nothing. Even his most trifling pieces close with some pregnant reflections which leave a permanent treasure to the soul. Philosophical thoughts have, thus, considerable importance in poetry of all great poets. What makes for the difference between poetry and philosophy is not the presence or absence of philosophical ideas, but the nature of treatment of ideas. As Hudson has put it, "We need not quarrel with a poet who offers philosophy in the fashion of poetry. We require only that his philosophy should be transfigured by imagination and feeling, that it should be shaped into a thing of beauty: that it should be wrought into true poetic expression."

'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' is a philosophical poem, because it is completely in unison with the definition of a philosophical poem. The central idea of the poem is the glorification of childhood based on the poet's own experiences of his childhood. In childhood Wordsworth sees the imagination at work as he has known it himself in his finest and most creative moments. To explain the presence of this power in childhood and its slow disappearance with the coming of maturity, he advances his account of recollections from a celestial state before birth. The theory of recollection goes back

to Plato, but Wordsworth did not take it from him, nor is his application of it is Plato's. His sources are Coleridge and Henry Vaughan. Coleridge had played with the ideas of pre-existence as an explanation of a feeling that we have in a previous existence done something been somewhere. Wordsworth picked up the idea because it helped him to explain his own visionary moments. However, his philosophy is also somehow different form that of Coleridge with the loss of innocence whereas Vaughan is concerned with the loss of imagination. We come into world, not with minds that are merely 'tabulae rasae', but with a kind of attendant light. That is why, the child sees "the earth and every common sight" apparelled in celestial light and doubts about the reality of the worldly things. As the child grows in years, "shades of the prison-house begin to close upon him." Maturity, with its habits and its cares and its increase of distance from our celestial origin, wears away the light of recollections of pre-existence come to him, though fitfully. Thus, when he sustains the mood of calm, spiritual contemplation, he can catch glimpses of eternity. In the last stanza, he begins with a declaration of his trust that Nature will still sustain him:

"And O, Ye Fountain, Meadows, Hills and Groves
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel yours might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual away"

Although the 'Ode' propagates profound philosophical doctrines, its most outstanding feature is rather the inspired beauty of expression. Indeed, poetry and philosophy have been admirably wedded here. When we read the poem, we are carried forward in a surge of impassioned emotion that derives an increasing intensity from its continuous contact with the world outside, transmutes that world into something glorious in its spirituality --- now shedding upon it "the light that never was on sea or land" - the hollowed vision of an inspired poet; now elevating the ecstasy of the poet with the seer's inspired visions in which truth becomes strangely illuminated in the spiritual daylight of conviction. In the lines,

Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sports upon the shore
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

The expression attains to the highest height of emotional intensity and imaginative suggestiveness that can hardly be scaled. According to Helen Derbyshire, "these lines, the most beautiful in the poem are at the height of imaginative vision. The image has a magic and a sensuous beauty rare in Wordsworth." Even to those who are unable to catch the full significance of the philosophical ideas, the emotion of the poet is admirably carried by the varying cadence of the verse at every transition of thought. To conclude, we can see in the Ode a satisfactory blending of form and substance which makes it a supreme achievement in English literature. It is, thus, a philosophical poem par excellence in the true sense of the term.

❖ Art and Spirituality

Wordsworth has always been rightly regarded as a philosopher poet. His philosophy concerns the fundamental question of human existence on earth. He finds that man exists and can only exist in the midst of nature. He, therefore, centers his thought on the relation between man and nature. He does not contemplate this relation as a just natural one. He firmly believes that such a relation has a spiritual aspect. He, therefore, attempts at discovering the true impact of this aspect. Wordsworth's Ode on Intimations of Immortality is a magnificent poem, endowed with rare artistic and philosophical merits. The philosophical thought contained in this poem can be broadly categorized into the following philosophical doctrines: firstly, immortality of the human soul, secondly, capability of bearing heavenly vision during childhood and thirdly and lastly, insight gained into the riddle of existence during manhood.

As regards the first philosophical doctrine, it is needless to assert that it was propounded by the eminent Greek philosopher, Plato. However, it is also commonly known that the religious scriptures of Hindus dilated on this doctrine rather elaborately. It is in man's nature that he can never accept that death bringing an end to his existence. The doctrine of the immortality of human soul is, therefore, closely related to human nature. As regards the second doctrine, it goes without saying that the child often displays a rare gift in perceiving things in their true, simple and profound innocence. However, it is extremely doubtful whether this common experience can be rendered into a philosophic view. A philosophic view needs to be based on only such experiences that are universal. Therefore, an experience which is not beyond controversy can hardly be made a basis for conclusions of general nature. As regards the third doctrine it can safely be affirmed that a man of even insufficient intelligence gains a conception about the transitoriness of human life on earth during the course of his living.

The conception lends sobriety to his views about human life on earth. We, therefore, see that only the second doctrine contained in the poem under discussion can be subjected to criticism and those who attack the poem choose this doctrine as their main forget. However, if it is granted that the criticism of the poem on this ground is

irrational it must be admitted that Wordsworth treats the aforestated philosophical doctrine rather consistently. That is why, the poem's aesthetic integrity does not suffer even to the slightest extent. It, therefore, becomes obvious that the critic of the poem does not approach it from a purely artistic standpoint.

The poem gives us to understand clearly that Wordsworth firmly believes in some special faculties of a child. A child according his view, is a seer' by his own natural right. All the common things of nature had a certain divine glow around them in a child's eyes. Wordsworth holds that this glory is an essential part of the child vision. However, as he grows and starts imitating his elders, he loses their gleam and the earth begins to exert increasingly strong influence over his mind. He becomes a creature of nature, his moorings with the 'access of immortality' get severed. However, as he progresses along the course of life, his loss of supernatural vision gets amply compensated. He gains maturity and he gains sobriety. The subject of mortality attains due importance in his consideration. Thus, he gets aware of the true passport of his existence bounded by birth on and death on the other. It, therefore, rises above all controversy that Wordsworth has constructed the poem upon theme which is superbly coherent.

As for the creation of the poem, it is superfluous to note that it is written on such a style that is in perfect harmony with its subject matter. He has employed simple, yet graceful words to convey his message. The metre used in the poem varies depending upon the means of expressions selected by him. Although the poem is mainly a philosophical one, he has made use of nice images, which rendered the poem into a rare piece of artistic composition. The rhyme scheme is rather elaborate and if ends both with solidity and fluidity to the thoughts contained in the poem. On the whole, the poem is a gem of undiminished brilliance in the storehouse of English poetry.

❖ Glorification of Childhood

The Romantics idealize childhood as the hiding place of man's power. They celebrate the innocence and purity of child life. Blake is the first great poet of child life, his children are touched with a kind of solemn joy. Their beauty makes him glad, and he reads mysterious revelations in the child's innocence. Wordsworth extols childhood as the best and most perfect portion of human life. He calls the child the 'father man' and credits him with the power to penetrate into the secrets of human life. He is the 'seer', the 'mighty prophet' hunted forever by the eternal mind. Wordsworth calls the child the 'best philosopher', the eye another the blind.

Some critics are of the opinion that this glorification of childhood by Wordsworth is overdone. Coleridge, who had genuine admiration for Wordsworth's poetry, gets impatient at the rather wild effusions of the latter in attributing to a child what no man remembers to have possessed in the childhood, what does all this mean? In what sense is a child of that age (six years) is a philosopher? Wordsworth points out that the child

recollects his pre-natal existence in heaven and retains his visionary gleam. The theory of recollection goes back to Plato, but Wordsworth's sources are Coleridge and Vaughan. Wordsworth suggests that the visionary power which was at its most powerful in childhood slowly declines in manhood and this decline is what Wordsworth finds in Vaughan's poem, 'The Retreat' in which the latter recalls and regrets the days of his angel infancy, and relates that the vision of celestial things has grown weaker with passing years. Wordsworth is concerned with the loss, not of imagination, but of innocence. From Coleridge, Wordsworth took the idea of pre-existence and from Vaughan that of a slow decline in celestial powers and from this combination he formed his own theory.

Wordsworth connects the visionary power with imagination, with a special insight into the nature of things. In children he sees this creative power in its purest form. The child fashions his little world of the mind because he is divinely inspired by heavenly memories. The child's whole vocation seems to be an 'endless imitation'. Secondly, Wordsworth finds his explanation of imaginative power into the capacity to create and to imagine. The heavenly preexistence is the source of the child's imaginative power. He can have glimpses of eternal power, he can have his imaginative power as it is reflected in children:

And see the children sport upon the shore
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

The child lends into the adult the imperial nature, the "primal sympathy which having been must ever be." The sympathy is not so pure and intense on maturity as in childhood, but only because another relation grows up beside the relation with Nature. A child recollects his heavenly existence and he finds visionary gleam and he retains his imaginative power. The recollections of childhood sustain the primal feelings of and imaginative power of the poet. Childhood is to be praised not for its 'delight' and 'liberty' but for its idealism. It is this idealism of childhood which is the source of all power to sustain and cherish man in the midst of the perplexing realities of life. So a man has fitful glimpses of eternity in moments of calmness and tranquility. His mature imagination recognizes the truth of immortality and his ability to realize the unknown. The mature man has reverent feelings for his childhood boys. The 'philosophic mind' of the mature years is but a natural spiritual development of the feelings of childhood in this ode and it is convincing as it is related to the structure of the poem.

❖ Wordsworth's Poetic Faith – Pantheism

Wordsworth, we know, is preeminently a poet of nature. But to say just that is half the truth, for Nature to him is not an abstraction in the way we might just see scenery or appreciate a sunrise for its beauty. To repeat the obvious, this means a triad relationship where Nature is perceived as an intermediary between humanity and Divinity, a palpable

manifestation of the Divine as it were. This explains Wordsworth's creed of a poet priest in the temple of Nature, 'a worshipper of nature', 'unwearied in his service.' In that sense, he hand-holds us if we are ready to comprehend this elemental relationship. Hence, in the main body of his poetry, Nature comes first and man second, subordinated to Nature. As a poet of Nature, Wordsworth is concerned far less with the sensuous manifestations that delight most of the English poets than with the spiritual that he finds underlying these manifestations. The primroses and the daffodils were to him a symbol of Nature's message to man, they gave him 'thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears'. Thus, the external beauty of things counted little with him and he always penetrated into the heart of things from which springs their charm. In other words, he has spiritualized and intellectualized Nature which was not to him a mere attractive form of colour and smell. It was not the beauty of Nature that gave him joy and peace, but the life in Nature. He had caught a vision of that life, he knew it and felt it in his blood and it was this feeling that transforms the whole existence for him.

The education of Wordsworth's feelings, passions and receptive power was mainly the work of Nature. Both in *The Prelude* and 'Tintern Abbey', he has carefully distinguished the several stages of his love for her. During the first of these stages in his boyhood Nature was but secondary "to my own pursuits/ And animal activities and all/ Their trivial pleasures." He surrendered to the sensuous appeal of Nature whole-heartedly: "The sounding cataract haunted me like a passion/their colours and their forms, were then to me on appetite." Wordsworth did not depreciate this, but to him this was the only stage that led him to something higher, when he would be able to hear often 'The still sad music of humanity.' His love of nature was subdued to a dominant scheme of thought and was combined with the love of man, and with a deep sense of pathos and things. Nature becomes very dear to him because in Nature he heard "The music of humanity that wore a harmony around him and made him feel more than ever a that "all that we behold is full of blessings; Nature never did betray / the heart that loved her; Its her privilege / through all the ears of this our life, to lead / from joy to joy."

It was because of the presence of one spirit permeating through all he objects of nature and human life that there could be communion between man and nature. After all, they were bound together by ties of divine love, and as such between human life and the life of Nature. There could be a healthy understanding and a mutual dependence. Stopford Brooke says, "between the spirits in Nature and the mind of man there is a pre-arranged harmony." According to Wordsworth, it is this harmony that enables Nature to communicate its own thoughts to man and to reflect upon them until an union between them was established.

The greatest thing about his Nature poetry is that he is not merely a poet, but a

'prophet of Nature.' Wordsworth has got a definite philosophy of Nature and he was the first English poet to proclaim with emphasis and clarity. Nature is a ministering Angel --- a friend, philosopher and guide to man, never betraying the heart that loves her. All these aspects of his nature philosophy find their fullest and most satisfactory expression in 'Tintern Abbey'. Nature leads a lover form joy to joy, fortifies his mind against the evils of the world in the shape of evil tongue, rash judgment and sneers of selfish man. Thus, according to Wordsworth, worship of nature is the panacea for the ills of the human society. But this is not all. Contemplation of Nature, according to Wordsworth, has a great influence on the highest part of man's life and inspires his thousand nameless, unremembered acts of kindness. But to man most sublime gift that proceeds from contemplation of Nature's loveliness is the inducement of a rare and exceptional mood, in which the burden of the mystery of the universe is lightened, the prior sentiments of the heart are roused into activity. The body becomes nought and the soul becomes preternaturally awakened. In this mood man acquires on intuitive perception of the deepest mysteries of life, which his reason is toiling in vain to solve, this mystic mood is a peculiar gift of Nature to Wordsworth. Stopford Brooke says, "The poet of Nature, in a special way, Wordsworth is even a poet of man." It is by his close and loving penetration into the realities and simplicities of human life that he makes his claim on our reverence as a poet. In his attitude to Nature he is always eager to pass from the concrete to the abstract, more concerned with certain qualities, common to Mankind than with the individuals.

He saw man through Nature's eyes dwelling not on the accident of temperament and disposition that go to differentiate men and women from each other but on those primal qualities where man and nature go hand in hand. He has emphasized the tender homeliness of the rustics, their fearless independence and rugged sincerity. His peasants are essentially the children of the soil, untouched by the sophisticating influence of convention and artificiality. The primal qualities of head and heart find in them a better soil for nourishment than in the dwarfed and corrupted humanity which is the product of civilization. Their grandeur and simplicity strike us most as they are not complex, and viewed in the background of Nature in which they appear most alive and vital.

One aspect of his poetry of man that specially concerns us is his glorification of childhood. The child has been glorified and idealized by the poet. Wordsworth believes that a child remains surrounded by heavenly radiance and innocence. A child's fife is the hiding place of man's power, where the man must seek all his mature faculties. The child's soul is great but his outward appearance gives an incorrect idea of his greatness. He has the strange perception of the deep truths of life. He is nearer to God than the soul of a grown-up man. Heaven lies about her in infancy but this instinct and the divinity in a child gradually die afterwards when he attempts manhood. To conclude,

it can be said that Wordsworth is a poet of man as well as a poet of Nature. Man and Nature are inseparable in his poetry. They are parts of an integrated whole.

2.10.4 Summing up

Like his predecessor William Blake, William Wordsworth deals with childhood as the symbol of an untarnished innocence which ought to be, but which in modern civilization cannot be. His poem 'Immortality Ode' is part of the adult response to the world of childhood days. Both Blake and Wordsworth are valorizers of childhood innocence and pristine beauty. Like many Romantic poets, Wordsworth often writes with a self-reflexive irony, a sort of self-mockery that mingles with a serious idea. Here he seems to partially mock his own praise of the child's knowledge in the earlier stanzas of the Ode. Plainly put, he wonders what the point is of the child carrying all this knowledge within himself if he cannot communicate "the truths" to adults who "are toiling all their lives to find" it. In facing and negotiating his own crisis, William Wordsworth could not but think about Coleridge's. Their cases were apparently similar or identical, and it may be surmised that even at the outset of the poem Immortality Ode Wordsworth had Samuel Taylor Coleridge in mind. If he was impressed by his sympathetic and considerate understanding of Coleridge, his sympathy was the more powerful and effective because he understood his friend's situation through his knowledge of his own. The problem that afflicted and concerned both Wordsworth and Coleridge was that of poetical inspiration. Each felt that his hold on it was precarious and asked why this was so. Wordsworth confronted the problem in the first three stanzas of the Ode and then discarded it for at least two years. Coleridge, slower perhaps to start but quicker once he had started, told of his crisis in the poem which he afterwards called "Dejection."

Long before Wordsworth completed his Ode, Coleridge had given full and powerful voice to his own crisis, and Wordsworth could not but take heed of it. Wordsworth's Ode, at least in its last eight stanzas, is a kind of answer to Coleridge's "Dejection." From one perspective it may be considered as a poem of comfort and encouragement, but it is much more than that. It is a declaration of belief, intended to counteract the searching doubts and melancholic apprehensions that Wordsworth saw in Coleridge and has perceived to a lesser degree in himself. The two poems are concerned with central problems in the Romantic outlook and show to what different conclusions two men could come who shared their innermost thoughts, and followed, as they believed, very similar aims.

2.10.5 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions :

1. Do you consider William Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' as a philosophical poem? If yes, then why? Illustrate your answer with reference to the poem.
2. What is your idea of the relationship of philosophical thought to poetic beauty in a philosophical poem? Discuss how far the two components are blended in Immortality Ode.
3. Examine Immortality Ode as a statement of the restoration of the poet's faith in man and nature.
4. Wordsworth's nature poetry is finally less about nature than about man. Discuss with reference to Immortality Ode.
5. Give an account of varied and myriad ways in which Wordsworth responds to human life and nature in Immortality Ode.
6. Write a critical appreciation of Wordsworth's Immortality Ode.
7. "The appeal of the poem lies more in its poetic quality than in its philosophic content." Discuss the statement with reference to Immortality Ode.
8. How far does the title Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood give a full and accurate conception of the poem's contents?

Mid-length questions:

1. What are the Intimations of Immortality that the child is told to enjoy in Wordsworth's Ode? What by comparison does the child gain or lose?
2. The poem Immortality Ode is Wordsworth's conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers. This interpretation of the poem has been called erroneous. What is your view?
3. Discuss Wordsworth's use of imagery in the poem Immortality Ode.

   OR,

   Discuss the images called up by Wordsworth in Immortality Ode to convey his idea of immortality.
4. How does Wordsworth exalt the state of childhood in Immortality Ode?
5. Show how Wordsworth's intimations of immortality are related to his recollections of childhood.
6. Show how in the Ode on the Intimation of Immortality Wordsworth reconciles childhood with old age.

2.10.6 Suggested Reading

The reading list remains the same as for Module 2 Unit 9.

UNIT–11 : SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: THE POET AND HIS POETRY

2.11.1. Objectives

2.11.2. Introduction

2.11.3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bio-Brief

2.11.4. Influences on Coleridge

2.11.5. Coleridge - The Poet

2.11.6. Coleridge - The Literary Critic

- **2.11.6.1. Coleridge's Theory of Imagination**
- **2.11.6.2. Concept of Aesthetic Pleasure**
- **2.11.6.3. Views on Poetic Diction**

2.11.7. Wordsworth and Coleridge as Literary Critics

2.11.8. Coleridge's Supernatural and Conversation Poems - A Brief Understanding

2.11.9. Assessing Coleridge as a Romantic

2.11.10.Summing Up

2.11.11.Comprehension Exercises

2.11.12.Suggested Reading

2.11.1 Objectives

After the three Units on Wordsworth, it is only natural that we now come to study Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for since the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) as a joint work of the two poets, our basic understanding of Romanticism majorly rests upon the body of their work. In this Unit, we will:

- Briefly acquaint you with the life and literary works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- Provide an idea of English Romanticism from a Coleridgean perspective
- Learn about Coleridge as a literary critic
- And of course, also learn about Coleridge as a poet

2.11.2 Introduction

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was not only a major Romantic poet, he was

also the foremost philosopher and literary critic of his age. His poetic output is often considered erratic in comparison to Wordsworth's, but his contribution to English literary history also includes his literary criticism and his lively discussion of the ideas of the German Idealist philosophers, particularly Immanuel Kant. His theory regarding the cognitive and synthesising role of the imagination is one of the most important cornerstones of the Romantic Movement. John Stuart Mill summed up his influence on the age when he called Coleridge a "seminal mind". It remains to be seen in course of our discussions on Coleridge's poetry, how much of his critical thoughts have pervaded his creative art.

2.11.3 Samuel Taylor Coleridge : A Bio-Brief

Coleridge was born at Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire, on October 21, 1772, the youngest son of John Coleridge, Vicar, and Ann Bowdon, his second wife. A precocious boy, dreamy and introspective, he finished the *Bible* and the *Arabian Nights* before he was five. At ten, following the death of his father, he was sent to Christ's Hospital, London, as a charity boy. Though poor and neglected, he became an accomplished Greek and Latin Scholar. Here he met Charles Lamb. It was the first of many significant literary friendships. He entered Jesus College, Cambridge on a scholarship in 1791; but in spite of a brilliant career in classics, he finally left the college in 1794, without taking a degree.

At University, he was interested in the radical political and religious ideas of his day. He had already been attracted by the motto of the French Revolution and Jacobin politics, though later he dismissed it as a youthful folly. These early years of radical politics later put him under the suspicion of the Government which was preparing to wage war against Revolutionary France. To go back to Coleridge's university days, he also ran up substantial debts, to avoid which he ran away and joined the Royal Dragoons as a conscript, using a pseudonym. He was brought back and readmitted after three months, but did not complete his degree. It was probably during his university days that he became increasingly addicted to opium, which had been prescribed to him as a pain-killer. Coleridge's youthful views of social reform found expression in his scheme for Pantisocracy. Through all the ups and downs of his life, he retained his fundamental faith in religion, and was a part of the Broad Church Movement, a liberal group which emerged within the Anglican Church. Coleridge met Robert Southey in 1794, and the next couple of years he spent in Bristol. With Southey and Robert Lovell he fervently desired to establish a pantisocracy, a utopian concept of a community based on ideal equality, on the banks of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania, New England. This scheme ultimately failed because of want of funds, and also a bitter quarrel between Coleridge and Southey over politics and money.

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

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

2.11.4 Influences on Coleridge

Coleridge, who is also considered to be a philosopher, was influenced by the transcendental idealism of German philosopher Immanuel Kant and post-Kantians such as J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling. His metaphysical philosophy was a contrast to the British empiricists. Lord Byron described him:

Explaining metaphysics to the nation-
I wish he would explain his explanation.

Coleridge spoke for 'spiritual platonic' tradition opposing the empiricist philosophy of Samuel Johnson, Erasmus Darwin, Hume, Joseph Priestley, William Paley and William Pitt. The economic improvement according to Coleridge led to the decline of culture, tradition and society. Advancement in science and technology proved fatal for spiritual wellbeing. This is an important feature of 'Germano-Coleridgian' thought. Coleridge thought an over-civilized society to be 'varnished rather than polished'. He did not want to overlook the historical development and the socially and psychologically significant meanings embedded in religion, tradition and cultural symbolism. Going against the tide of his time, Coleridge wanted to focus on cultural and spiritual elevation than sensual pleasure and materialistic approach. In this way, his poetics, like that of most Romantics, becomes a discursive approach to contemporary socio-economic trends.

At a young age Coleridge was influenced by David Hartley's Associationist theory of mind. He found a connection between a very trivial thing and the sublime spirituality. Here he has a similarity of thought with Spinoza who saw mind and matter as the only attributes we can perceive of the infinite being he called *deussive natura* (God or nature). Philosophy to Coleridge is the science of being altogether. Following Kant,

Transcendental philosophy would start out from the fundamental fact of subjectivity, the "I AM" or immediate self-consciousness, which Coleridge sees as "the ground of all other certainty." In proceeding to examine nature, we would find that this is identical with our self-consciousness (*BL*, I, 260). In other words, all the "external" objects that we view are in fact modifications of this self-consciousness or "I AM" which is the fundamental principle of all philosophy: "Only in the self-consciousness of a spirit is there the required identity of object and representation . . . the spirit in all the objects which it views, views only itself" (*BL*, I, 272, 278).

2.11.5 Coleridge - The Poet

Coleridge's early works are tinged with a sense of radicalism and political reform. ‘France: An Ode’ which was published in 1798 expressed his hatred for monarchy and aristocracy. 'Spirit of Divinest Liberty' can only be found in nature according to Coleridge. Together with Wordsworth they sought a change in society and literature. His conversation poems like 'This Lime-tree Bower my Prison' and 'Frost at Midnight', were written in between 1797-98. In 1802 he composed 'Dejection: An Ode'. At this time, he became conscious of his poetic inspiration and found interest in writing about his poetic theory. The result was his major critical work *Biographia Literaria* (1817).

Coleridge is one of the important pioneers of Romantic Revival in England. Though he wrote few poems, the intensity of thought and experiments with technique that underlie his poetry make Coleridge a significant contributor in the journey of English Romanticism. While Wordsworth focused on 'Return to Nature', Coleridge principally attempted to bring back the mysticism of the supernatural elements in human life. His poems carry distinctive features that helped critics to define English Romanticism. With vivid pictorial imagery and word music, his poems make him an original writer.

A new trend was set by both Wordsworth and Coleridge. With the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 English literary tradition started a new journey. Ordinary life of the people got attention of these poets. Wordsworth wrote in the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should focus on the common and ordinary life which is closer to nature. One should be close to nature. This was a new thought.

'The Rime of Ancient Mariner' was contributed by Coleridge to *Lyrical Ballads*. The mariner is an ancient one. Coleridge's chief character does not belong to 18th century. In fact, this practice of creating characters removed in time and space is a feature of his 'Supernatural Poems', something that we will eventually discuss at length. This mariner is on a voyage, during which he opens fire to kill a bird, an albatross, that was actually a sign of Divine benediction upon the voyagers. This act of killing instills a sense of haunting fear in the mariner. As soon as he kills it he starts pondering over his act. He is in moral dilemma. He starts thinking about death, cruelty. A sense

of guilt pervades the mind of the mariner. By killing the bird he commits a sin against nature. Human mind cannot be in peace if the nature is disturbed by a human. Nature and human being are interdependent. Nature should be preserved by the humans. This poem sets up a new way of seeing nature and man in the 19th century.

In his poetry, Coleridge sought to take attention away from contemporary social life, and focused instead on the realm of nature and human mind and their inter-relationship. For him poetry and the mind cannot be separated. Coleridge plays with the supernatural. Everyday subjects are explored by him and a romantic or supernatural touch is given to them. He was preoccupied with the autonomous functioning of the mind which was unprecedented in his time. His poem, 'Kubla Khan' was supposedly written under a trance. The poem speaks of pure imagination. Kubla Khan wants to build a magical sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice and the poet feels that had he been able to whip up inspiration within him he would also be able to build such a dome with his poetry.The poem ends with the picture of the divinely inspired poet.

'Christabel' is a long poem and it ends abruptly. The central character Christabel is a woman who belongs to the nobility. Here is another woman who is called Geraldine. This woman's identity is unknown. At midnight she appears and spends the night with Christabel. She enters into the mind of Christabel and virtually possesses her. By creating in Christabel an Everyman figure, Coleridge toys with the ways in which external forces can influence us and prevail on our will-power and faculty of decision making and rationality. Using the ballad form, the poem conveys the understanding that life sometimes brings us face to face with the sinister or the grotesque, and we may not be conscious about it. Thus by using the supernatural to psychological effect, Coleridge's poetry, specially the 'Supernatural Poems' become an exploration of the human mind in complex ways. The other set of poems, those which are called 'Conversation Poems', are more rooted in the thought processes of the times.

2.11.6 Coleridge - The Literary Critic

Coleridge was a poet in the first phase of his life and then came his literary criticism which was an effect of his stay in Germany and the close contacts he had with German philosophers. Coleridge and Wordsworth primarily revolted against the elevated poetic language that was in vogue in the Neo-Classical period. They adopted the common language of ordinary people and the life of common people as their subjects. Coleridge's first important critical document was the verse-letter 'Dejection: An Ode' (1802) in which he explored the essential nature of the Creative Imagination. For a complete understanding we have to go to his *Biographia Literaria* (1817). The terms 'Imagination' and 'Fancy' were frequently used synonymously before Coleridge, but in the eighteenth century they were beginning to be considered separately. The term imagination comes

from the Latin verb *imaginari* meaning "to picture oneself." This root definition of the term indicates the self-reflexive property of imagination, emphasizing the imagination as a private sphere. As a medium, imagination is a world where thought and images are nested in the mind to "form a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses." The root of "fancy" was the Greek word *phantasia*, which meant "appearance, perception, imagination".

2.11.6.1: COLERIDGE'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

In giving imagination a deeper significance Coleridge was influenced by Dante, Plotinus, the Cambridge Platonists and the German Philosopher Kant and Schelling. With the Romantics there was a shift in sensibility from the 18th century mechanistic world view to the 19th century vitalistic world view. The mind-machine equations gave place to the mind-plant analogy and the current Romantic terms of criticism such as organic unity, vital growth, assimilation, fusion, and inner unity emerged.

For the Romantics, imagination is a living power of the mind which unifies and coalesces, shapes the apparently patternless chaos of the world and creates unity of diversity. For Blake, imagination is the organ that perceives the ultimate spiritual reality. For Shelley, it is with the help of Imagination that the poet creates…

But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man
Nurslings of Immortality. (The Poet's Dream)

For Wordsworth Imagination was that 'awful power…reason in her most exalted mood'. Lamb has observed that Imagination 'draws all things into one'.

The world as we know it is full of polarities, antithesis and patternlessness. To Coleridge the critic, it is primary imagination which makes ordered perception possible. It is an analogical power akin to Reason that is possessed by all mankind. The secondary imagination is akin to the primary in that both are vital and perform the common function of creating order out of chaos and confusion of sense-impressions. But the secondary imagination is not possessed by all. It is a special gift of the poet or the creative individual and is at the basis of all artistic activity. You can find a resemblance between Coleridge's understanding of 'secondary imagination' and Wordsworth's perception of a poet being a man like any other, but one who is endowed with "a more lively sensibility".

The secondary imagination is a power of synthesis, 'it dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate'. It is an Essemplastic (one making) power that reorganizes reality into unity, it imposes pattern and form on the formless, patternless and otherwise contradictory and intractable material of this world- "it effects the reconciliation of opposites". This is poetically expressed in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan', which is why it

is also looked upon as "a poem about poetry":

A miracle of rare device

A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice.

It is a miraculous power that reconciles polarities (such as sun and ice) to create that unity and harmony of art. Imagination fuses and blends the flux of the senses into harmony and unity; it re-orders and re-creates reality into unity.

Coleridge's idea of unity cannot be described as something "single" or "linear," but is best expressed by certain terms which recur in his writings- "agglomerative" and "progressive." An unfolding, associative structure is advocated. "You will find this a good gage or criterion of genius," Coleridge once remarked. If the "contents and purposes" of a composition can be summarized with perspicuity, and each of the separate parts tends toward a common end, the requirement of inner unity has been fulfilled. Eternal structure, or framework, receives less attention. Coleridge's own works often contain explicit divisions, and he has a propensity for antitheses, triadic groupings, and numbered listings. His arrangement, however, is frequently dictated by circumstances of composition and publication rather than by a predetermined plan or outline. The relationship of parts to the whole is the fundamental consideration for Coleridge. Not solely a literary question, the concept of organic unity is basic to his worldview. In Coleridge's view, however, the organic, inner unity of a work--the reconciliation of a number of elements, each "generating, and explaining, and justifying, the place of another" --is more important than its external framework.

2.11.6.2: CONCEPT OF AESTHETIC PLEASURE

Coleridge describes poetry as "that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having this object in common with it) it is discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part". Coleridge could as well be describing a symphony, a play, or a painting. All the arts have pleasure as their immediate end, although some (folk art or craft) may also be useful.

The process of responding to a work of art - creating the aesthetic experience - is similarly described by Coleridge. Returning to chapter fourteen of the Biographia Literaria, we find the activity of responding to a poem depicted as follows: "The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive

movement collects the force which again carries him onward". The first sentence of the passage should remind us of Coleridge's ideal poet/poem/artist/art: the aim is pleasure; "the activity of the mind excited by the attractions of the journey itself" describes the intrinsic value of art, appreciated not for an ulterior end, but for itself. When reading a mystery story or studying an auto repair manual, the reader might progress through the text impatiently, anxious to reach the necessary solution; not surprisingly, in forms of expression other than art, we want to 'get to the point,' and not doing so with expedience is considered a liability.

But in art, just as the artist must attend to "distinct gratification from each component part," so must the person responding to it enjoy "the attractions of the journey itself." There is this similarity, then, of process in creating and respondent: in both instances, what Coleridge calls the "active" and "passive" powers of the mind are at work. The active power is forging ahead, gaining territory, as it were: this is the artist writing, applying brush strokes, etc.; and it is also the person responding to the artwork - taking it in, reading the poem or novel, moving his or her eye across the canvas, watching the dancer unfold from the floor into a leap. The passive power, the consolidating effort of the mind, pauses and makes meaning: this is the artist considering what he or she has written thus far; the painter standing back from the canvas, assessing what he or she has made before progressing further; and it is the person responding to art, pausing, and - rather than moving further into the work - considering the meaning or effect of what he or she has experienced up to then. The "pauses" intrinsic to works of art themselves encourage this consolidating effort - stanza breaks in poetry, chapters in the novel, movements in music, or even smaller units like line, musical phrase, choreographed rhythms. Coleridge asks, "by what principles [is] the poet to regulate his own style?" and answers, "By the principles of grammar, logic, psychology!

In one word by such a knowledge of the facts, material and spiritual, that most appertain to his art, as, if it has been governed and applied by good sense, and rendered instinctive by habit, becomes the representative and reward of our past conscious reasonings, insights, and conclusions, and acquires the name of taste." In Coleridge there is virtually no distinction between creation and response and, further, that it is precisely this integration of artist/art/aesthetic experience which makes Coleridge valuable.

2.11.6.3 : VIEWS ON POETIC DICTION

At the outset of his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge announced that one of his major objects was "to effect, as far as possible, a settlement of the long continued controversy concerning the true nature of poetic diction; and at the same time to define with the utmost impartiality the real poetic character of the poet, by whose writings this controversy was first kindled and has been since fuelled and fanned" (p. 1). Coleridge identified as the primary cause of the controversy Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical*

Ballads, containing his principles of the language of real life, the equivalence of the language of prose and poetry, and the rejection of embellished and elevated diction. He synthesized traditional stylistic principles and Wordsworth's theories to formulate an organic theory of style in which conventional levels of style and innovative individual expression could be reconciled in the organic unity of a work.

Coleridge clearly stated his conception of the styles of language. He divided language into "three species" and described the style appropriate to each: "first, that which is peculiar to poetry; second, that which is only proper in prose; and third, the neutral or common to both" (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XXII, p 252). Accordingly, the three species, which Coleridge omitted to mention, could only be poetry, prose and lingua communis. While acknowledging that 'the words themselves', which Wordsworth used even in his 'more elevated compositions' were 'sufficiently common', Coleridge denied that Wordsworth's style was the 'conversational or neutral style'. He asked: "are those words in those places commonly employed in real life to express the same thought or outward thing? Are they the style used in the ordinary intercourse of spoken words? No! nor are the modes of connections; and still less the breaks and transitions" (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XX, P. 201).

Coleridge commented how he was struck by the fact "that a theory which would establish this *lingua communis*, not only as the best, but as the only commendable style, should have proceeded from a poet, whose diction, next to that of Shakespeare and Milton, appears to me of all others the most individualized and characteristic" (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XX, p. 199). Coleridge concluded that Wordsworth was influenced by his "mistaken theory" in only a comparatively small number of experimental poems, "and this experiment we will supposed to have failed. Yet even in these poems it is impossible not to perceive that the natural tendency of the poet's mind is to great objects and elevated conceptions" (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XXII, P. 250.). The "real characteristics" of Wordsworth's poetry were not to be found in his simple treatment of humble subjects (II, 95), because in his "more elevated compositions, which already form three-fourths of his works," the diction and style were unique (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XX, p. 238). To Coleridge, it was "the impassioned, lofty, and sustained diction which is characteristic of his genius". Thus Coleridge paved the way for his concluding estimate of Wordsworth's poetry in Chapter XXII of *Biographia Literaria*. He judged the defects to be minimal (and "more or less connected with his theory") in comparison with the achievements in his more elevated works of imaginative poetry and profound truth. The synthesis Coleridge achieved in matters of language and style is highlighted clearly by considering Hazlitt's responses in reviewing the *Biographia*. Coleridge successfully synthesized established standards and new concepts into a functional organic criticism having practical and

theoretical applications. For practical description of Wordsworth's poems, Coleridge used the traditional hierarchy of styles and kinds. But in dividing them into elevated and low styles, he did not invoke rigid rules prescribing embellished language and style as Hazlitt did. Coleridge did not sanction poetic diction, as Jeffrey, Hazlitt, and other reviewers did, because it was not organic but a mechanical recipe for diction and style. Theoretically Coleridge examined the language of poetry and prose. He identified lingua communis and its neutral style common to both poetry and prose. The results, like Hazlitt's description of the colloquial and the ornamental as opposite styles with the "natural," dramatic style in the middle, can best be depicted as a continuum rather than a hierarchy.

The distinction between a horizontal and a vertical scale illustrates a change, evident during the Romantic Movement, from thinking about and symbolizing the literary kinds and the levels of style in terms of an ascending order of value and esteem. Among the reasons for new theorizing about style were the rapid decline in authority and observance of traditional rhetorical rules, and their inadequacy to explain newer expressive modes. Unfortunately, Wordsworth's theorizing about simplicity was flawed and easily misunderstood. He did not reject figurative language, but held in the 1802 'Preface' that language should arise naturally from and be appropriate to the poet's actual passions. Coleridge's effective synthesis of the traditional hierarchical values and the newer levelling principles of simplicity formed a harmonious part of his total organic theory. It established a universal principle of style which accommodated the uniqueness of each work. Coleridge's "test of a blameless style" was "its untranslatableness in words of the same language without injury to the meaning." And he continued, "I conclude in the meaning of a word not only its correspondent object, but likewise all the associations which it recalls." What Coleridge proposed was "in short a perfect appropriateness of the words to the meaning." While the ideas of appropriateness and proper words in proper places clearly are compatible with traditional standards of decorum, "untranslatableness" goes beyond such general conventions. In the truly organic whole, none of the component elements could be changed without changing the nature of the entity. Thus the idea of untranslatableness becomes, a universal standard at the same time that it is tied to the organic unity of a particular work or context. Consequently, Coleridge's principles of style, upon which his practical judgments of Wordsworth's works were based, serve as a specific example of the most successful kind of reconciliation he achieved in his aesthetics--a reconciliation of Aristotelian and neoclassic fundamentals with the autonomy of the poetic imagination.

2.11.7 Wordsworth and Coleridge as Literary Critics

Now that you have had brief insights into the literary criticism of both these poets,

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

When Wordsworth and Coleridge collaborated in writing *Lyrical Ballads*, they had a mutual understanding. There was similarity in their critical perceptions. Coleridge had great admiration for Wordsworth's genius. Coleridge accepted Wordsworth as a great poet and wrote "It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth of height of the ideal world around forms, incidents, and situations,of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops"(*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter IV, p. 55) regarding Wordsworth's poetry as there is a synthesis of feeling and thought, imagination and intuition. Coleridge thought that Wordsworth could produce philosophical poetry. According to Wordsworth poetry is the "Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" and "emotions recollected in tranquility". These two statements might apparently seem contradictory if we take them at face value, which will mean that we are missing the point regarding the implicit role of memory as a 'go-between'. Of course, Coleridge's view in this regard, expressed in *Biographia Literaria*, shows more finesse:

The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusive appropriated the name of imagination. This power, first put in action by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed, control reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with therepresentative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter, and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry (*Biographia Literaria*, 1834, Chapter XIV, p. 180).

In the 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth argued that the subject and language of poetry should be rooted in the rustic life of England because

In that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language…

In rustic people there are more genuine emotions. He thought that rustic subject and the language should be purified by a poetic mind. He believed in the intellectualisation of the emotions. He spoke about regulated emotions, modified and cast into the language of good prose. According to him a poet addresses other people. He is a man speaking to men. He tried to build an audience for the kind of poetry he was writing.

Biographia Literaria can in turn be regarded as Coleridge's preface to his own poetry. Coleridge believed that in the 'Preface', Wordsworth had put too much emphasis on the language of the rustic people. They appear to be fundamentally different in their views of language. Poetry according to Coleridge is "The art… of representing external nature and human Thoughts and Affections, both relatively to human Affections; to the production of as great immediate pleasure in each part, as is compatible with the largest possible Sum of Pleasure in the Whole". (*Coleridge on Shakespeare, Collier's Diary* : the Transcripts of Lecture 1 and 2, Routledge, 2005, P. 54)

For Coleridge art is not a copy but an imitation of nature. It does not aim to be reality but represent reality. As a critic he was more interested in the process of creation than the end product. He brilliantly united literary criticism with philosophy and psychology. Although his readers thought him not so organised as a poet his clear and logical ideas prove him to be a more systematic critic.

2.11.8 Coleridge's Supernatural & Conversation Poems - A Brief Understanding

Going against the neoclassical tradition of writing Coleridge introduced poetry which had supernatural elements.We come to know from his *Biographia Literaria*, while Wordsworth was to take his subjects from ordinary life, Coleridge was to write poems of the supernatural, but in such a way that the reader's would be induced to a "willing suspension of disbelief".

The closest you have come to the use of the supernatural in poetry is in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, where the effect is largely of comic satire. Before Coleridge, the emergent genre of Gothic novels was bringing supernatural elements to the readers, but they were hard pressed to move a sensible reader. The supernaturalism of the gothic novels was far away from the real world and too crude to attract the 18th century readers. With Coleridge however, we see the supernatural being employed to

secure an effect of psychological conditioning. Coleridge's supernatural poems are set in a distant place and time, so much so that the fairy-tale structure of 'Once upon a time ...' can be used to mix supernatural elements with human life without taxing credibility. ‘Kubla Khan’ for instance, is set in the time of medieval Chinese ruler Kubla Khan. ‘Christabel’ is set in medieval England, and the moat that separates the castle of her father, Sir Leoline, becomes a metaphorical dividing line between suspense and reality. As a result, whatever story the poet weaves comes across to the reader as being acceptable. Christabel begins with a familiar story but then Geraldine appears as a seductress/ temptress, and a hint is there she is not a normal woman. He introduces supernatural elements very subtly, and even weaves it as offering counter-discourses to established theology by schematically suspending the faculty of disbelief/ rationality. This leaves readers tantalised, even though there is an awareness of watching a poetic performance as it were; nonetheless it often so happens that we are unable to locate the point where Coleridge mixes natural and supernatural elements. 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', the third poem in the category of the supernatural, also employs this same effect.

Essentially therefore, while Wordsworth's poetry was all about commonplace events and surroundings that he was perceiving in a mystic light, Coleridge was doing just the reverse, at least in the supernatural poems. He was in fact naturalising the supernatural, enhancing our limits of credibility from the possible to the probable, and thereby securing what he famously called the "willing suspension of disbelief".

While living at Nether Stowey Coleridge also wrote a series of 'conversation poems', including 'Fears in Solitude', 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', 'The Nightingale' and 'Frost at Midnight'. These are written in a casual tone or conversational tone. A common setting is used. The poems share a basic feature. The poet is seemingly talking to someone else; a listener who might not as well be present there, or sometimes he is talking to his child. These poems begin with a sense of crisis. The speaker is feeling alone or dejected or alienated, but these poems are not anything like the dramatic monologues of Robert Browning, the Victorian poet. There is a difference between a dramatic monologue and a conversational poem. A dramatic monologue is a mimetic representation of the world, and Coleridge's conversational poems draw attention to its representational illusion. The poet is less interested in worldly affairs as such. Rather he is interested in reflecting upon the experiences collected from those worldly affairs. In his Conversation Poems therefore, Coleridge presents a poetic persona and with the help of his imaginative power he creates an illusion in a dramatic context. Imagination we might say, is his muse, and the invocation is necessary for the poetic flight. We will come to this in greater detail in Module 2 Unit 13.

2.11.9 Assessing Coleridge as a Romantic

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

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

Coleridge collected his materials from the layers of human mind. His free play of imagination explored experiences in a new way. His way of introducing supernatural elements amuses the reader and he is considered by all as a poet of mystery and vision. He found a deep connection between nature and humans. Wordsworth also approved this connection but their approaches to nature and artistic creation are different. For both human mind is the centre of interest. For the Romantics material world or economic prosperity were regarded inferior to an imaginative mind. These visionaries had experienced emotional aspects of the human mind and its power of imagination. Coleridge fascinated his readers by the mysterious, unknown and unfamiliar. With them he explored the nature of threat, sin, virtue: various aspects of human spirit. This journey to the human mind makes him a romantic, far away from the neoclassical writers who absorbed themselves with the materialistic world view.

2.11.10 Summing up

In this Unit you have learnt about the English Romantic movement of 19th century and the contribution of Coleridge as an important figure of the movement. You can understand now the fundamental points where Coleridge and Wordsworth share their opinions and where they differ from each other. They both were romantic poets but they were unique in their own ways. Also remember that the salient points of Coleridge's literary criticism will be important in contextualizing the poems in the next two Units.

2.11.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer type Questions:

1. Write a note on Coleridge's contribution to poetry.
2. Assess Coleridge's contribution to literary criticism.

3. How is Coleridge different from Wordsworth in his theory of poetry and in his use of language in poetry?

Short Essay type questions :

1. Write a short essay on the influence of German philosophers on Coleridge.
2. Summarise Coleridge's theory of Imagination.
3. Write a short essay on Coleridge's concept of aesthetic pleasure.

Short Answer type questions:

1. What is the difference between fancy and imagination according to Coleridge?
2. What is secondary imagination according to Coleridge?
3. Who,according to Coleridge, is a good poet?

2.11.12 Suggested Reading

Christie William, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge : A Literary Life*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007

Bloom's Major Poets : *Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Chelsea House Publishers, 2001.

Frederick Burwic (ed.) *The Oxford Book of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/samuel-taylor-coleridge

https://www.bl.uk/people/samuel-taylor-coleridge

UNIT–12 : SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE : 'CHRISTABEL' – PART I

Structure

2.12.1. Objectives
2.12.2. Introduction
2.12.3. Text of 'Christabel' Part 1
2.12.4. Annotations
2.12.5. Central Idea
2.12.6. Substance and Critical Summary
2.12.7. Themes
2.12.8. Summing Up
2.12.9. Comprehension Exercises
2.12.10. Suggested Reading

2.12.1 Objectives

Having introduced you to Coleridge the poet and theorist of Romantic poetry in the previous Unit, here we set out to study one of his most famous supernatural poems - 'Christabel'. You have on your syllabus only Part 1 of the poem, but that will give you an idea of the ways in which Coleridge uses the supernatural to secure a degree of psychological conditioning necessary to execute his theme. As we go through this text, you must watch out on something we have already mentioned in Unit 11 - the poet's conscious build-up at transporting the reader to a past time and milieu that makes much of his intended effects credible.

2.12.1 Introduction

'Christabel', which is usually looked upon as one of the finest supernatural poems by S. T. Coleridge, brings back to one's mind echoes of the tales of wonder involving supernatural agencies, popularised by the German Romantics during the eighteenth century. Originally meant to be in five parts, he could not finish more than two, though he struggled with it for years. The poem thus remains a fragment. The first part of 'Christabel' was written in 1797 at Nether Stowey, Somerset, while the second part was composed in 1800 at Keswick, Cumberland, after the poet's return from Germany. Factors like personal indolence, domestic discord, quarrel with intimate friends like

Lamb and Lloyd, and above all, lack of poetic enthusiasm might have impeded him from finishing the poem, though he tried again and again to give it a complete shape. Over the years, there were many references by the poet, to his struggles with finishing the poem, though he claimed: "The reason for my not finishing 'Christabel' is not that I don't know how to do it - for I have, as I always had, the whole plan entire from beginning till the end in my mind, but I fear I cannot carry on with equal success of execution of the idea, an extremely subtle and difficult one". Wordsworth however, was rather sceptical of this claim. The truth is that Coleridge seems to have felt a strange revulsion in carrying on with the poem. The first part of 'Christabel' was intended for inclusion in the first edition of Lyrical Ballads (1798), but it was finally debarred from inclusion since this part was not technically complete by that time. Though it was subsequently decided that both parts would be included in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, the plan was never translated into reality. For, the style of the second part of 'Christabel' appeared so 'discordant' from that of Wordsworth that he thought that it could not be printed by the side of his own poems 'with any propriety'. Coleridge however, thought that his poem failed to receive accommodation chiefly because of its inordinate length. The poem thus lay unpublished, though the manuscript was circulated and read by many in the Romantic circle. In 1816, John Murray, on the recommendation of Lord Byron, published it under the title Christabel and Other Poems, the accompanying pieces being 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Pains of Sleep'.

For an understanding of the music of the poem, you would do good to keep in mind what Coleridge himself pointed out as a metrical principle in the poem - "…counting in each lines the accents, not the syllables".

2.12.3 Text

"CHRISTABEL"

'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock;
Tu-whit! Tu-whoo!
And hark, again! the crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew.
Sir Leoline, the Baron rich,
Hath a toothless mastiff bitch;
From her kennel beneath the rock

She maketh answer to the clock, 10
Four for the quarters, and twelve for the hour;
Ever and aye, by shine and shower,
Is the night chilly and dark?
The night is chilly, but not dark.
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full;
And yet she looks both small and dull. 20
The night is chill, the cloud is gray:
'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.
The lovely lady, Christabel,
Whom her father loves so well,
What makes her in the wood so late,
A furlong from the castle gate?
She had dreams all yesternight 30
She stole along, she nothing spoke,
The sighs she heaved were soft and low,
And naught was green upon the oak
But moss and rarest misletoe:
She kneels beneath the huge oak tree,
And in silence prayeth she.
The lady sprang up suddenly,
The lovely lady Christabel!
It moaned as near, as near can be, 40
But what it is she cannot tell.- On the other side it seems to be,
Of the huge, broad-breasted, old oak tree.
The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek-
There is not wind enough to twirl

The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high, 50
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.
Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
Jesu, Maria, shield her well!
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.
What sees she there?
There she sees a damsel bright, 60
Drest in a silken robe of white,
That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
The neck that made that white robe wan,
Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
Her blue-veined feet unsandl'd were,
And wildly glittered here and there
The gems entangled in her hair.
I guess, 'twas frightful there to see
A lady so richly clad as she- Beautiful exceedingly!
Mary mother, save me now!
(Said Christabel) And who art thou?
The lady strange made answer meet,
And her voice was faint and sweet:-
Have pity on my sore distress,
I scarce can speak for weariness:
Stretch forth thy hand, and have no fear!
Said Christabel, How camest thou here?
And the lady, whose voice was faint and sweet,
Did thus pursue her answer meet:-
My sire is of a noble line,
And my name is Geraldine: 80
Five warriors seized me yestermorn,
Me, even me, a maid forlorn:
They choked my cries with force and fright,
And tied me on a palfrey white.

The palfrey was as fleet as wind,
And they rode furiously behind.
They spurred amain, their steeds were white:
And once we crossed the shade of night.
As sure as Heaven shall rescue me,
I have no thought what men they be; 90
Nor do I know how long it is
(For I have lain entranced I wis)
Since one, the tallest of the five,
Took me from the palfrey's back,
A weary woman, scarce alive.
Some muttered words his comrades spoke:
He placed me underneath this oak;
He swore they would return with haste;
Whither they went I cannot tell-
I thought I heard, some minutes past, 100
Sounds as of a castle bell.
Stretch forth thy hand (thus ended she).
And help a wretched maid to flee.
Then Christabel stretched forth her hand,
And comforted fair Geraldine:
O well, bright dame! may you command
The service of Sir Leoline;
And gladly our stout chivalry
Will he send forth and friends withal 110
To guide and guard you safe and free
Home to your noble father's hall.
She rose: and forth with steps they passed
That strove to be, and were not, fast.
Her gracious stars the lady blest,
And thus spake on sweet Christabel:
All our household are at rest,
The hall as silent as the cell;
Sir Leoline is weak in health, 120

And may not well awakened be,
But we will move as if in stealth,
And I beseech your courtesy,
This night, to share your couch with me.
They crossed the moat, and Christabel
Took the key that fitted well;
A little door she opened straight,
All in the middle of the gate;
The gate that was ironed within and without,
Where an army in battle array had marched out.
The lady sank, belike through pain,
And Christabel with might and main 130
Lifted her up, a weary weight,
Over the threshold of the gate:
Then the lady rose again,
And moved, as she were not in pain.
So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.
And Christabel devoutly cried
To the lady by her side, 140
Praise we the Virgin all divine
Who hath rescued thee from thy distress!
Alas, alas! said Geraldine,
I cannot speak for weariness.
So free from danger, free from fear,
They crossed the court: right glad they were.
Outside her kennel, the mastiff old
Lay fast asleep, in moonshine cold.
The mastiff old did not awake,
Yet she an angry moan did make!
And what can ail the mastiff bitch?
Never till now she uttered yell
Beneath the eye of Christabel.
Perhaps it is the owlet's scritch:
For what can ail the mastiff bitch?

They passed the hall, that echoes still,
Pass as lightly as you will!
The brands were flat, the brands were dying,
Amid their own white ashes lying;
But when the lady passed, there came
A tongue of light, a fit of flame;
And Christabel saw the lady's eye, 160
And nothing else saw she thereby,
Save the boss of the shield of Sir Leoline tall,
Which hung in a murky old niche in the wall.
O softly tread, said Christabel,
My father seldom sleepeth well.
Sweet Christabel her feet doth bare,
And jealous of the listening air
They steal their way from stair to stair,
Now in glimmer, and now in gloom,
And now they pass the Baron's room, 170
As still as death, with stifled breath!
And now have reached her chamber door;
And now doth Geraldine press down
The rushes of the chamber floor.
The moon shines dim in the open air,
And not a moonbeam enters here.
But they without its light can see
The chamber carved so curiously,
Carved with figures strange and sweet,
All made out of the carver's brain, 180
For a lady's chamber meet:
The lamp with twofold silver chain
Is fastened to an angel's feet.
The silver lamp burns dead and dim;
But Christabel the lamp will trim.
She trimmed the lamp, and made it bright,
And left it swinging to and fro,
While Geraldine, in wretched plight,

Sank down upon the floor below.
O weary lady, Geraldine, 190
I pray you, drink this cordial wine!
It is a wine of virtuous powers;
My mother made it of wild flowers.
And will your mother pity me,
Who am a maiden most forlorn?
Christabel answered-Woe is me!
She died the hour that I was born.
I have heard the grey-haired friar tell
How on her death-bed she did say, 200
That she should hear the castle-bell
Strike twelve upon my wedding-day.
O mother dear! that thou wert here!
I would, said Geraldine, she were!
But soon with altered voice, said she-
'Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine!
I have power to bid thee flee.'
Alas! what ails poor Geraldine? 210
And why with hollow voice cries she,
'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine-
Though thou her guardian spirit be,
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.'
Then Christabel knelt by the lady's side,
And raised to heaven her eyes so blue-
Alas! said she, this ghastly ride-
Dear lady! it hath wildered you!
The lady wiped her moist cold brow,
And faintly said, ' 'tis over now!'
Again the wild-flower wine she drank: 220
Her fair large eyes 'gan glitter bright,
And from the floor whereon she sank,
The lofty lady stood upright:
She was most beautiful to see,
Like a lady of a far countrèe.

And thus the lofty lady spake-
'All they who live in the upper sky,
Do love you, holy Christabel!
And you love them, and for their sake 230
And for the good which me befel,
Even I in my degree will try,
Fair maiden, to requite you well.
But now unrobe yourself; for I
Must pray, ere yet in bed I lie.'
Quoth Christabel, So let it be!
And as the lady bade, did she.
Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness.
That vain it were her lids to close;
So half-way from the bed she rose,
And on her elbow did recline
To look at the lady Geraldine.
Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest, 250
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side-
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!
Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay,
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
Then suddenly, as one defied, 260
Collects herself in scorn and pride,

And lay down by the Maiden's side!-
And in her arms the maid she took,
    Ah wel-a-day!
And with low voice and doleful look
These words did say:
'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,
Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess,
Beauteous in a wilderness,
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow; 270
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy power to declare,
That in the dim forest
Thou heard'st a low moaning,
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'

THE CONCLUSION TO PART THE FIRST

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

With open eyes (ah woe is me!)
Asleep, and dreaming fearfully,
Fearfully dreaming, yet, I wis,
Dreaming that alone, which is-
O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,
The lady, who knelt at the old oak tree?
And lo! the worker of these harms, 300
That holds the maiden in her arms,
Seems to slumber still and mild,
As a mother with her child.
A star hath set, a star hath risen,
O Geraldine! since arms of thine
Have been the lovely lady's prison.
O Geraldine! one hour was thine-
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,
The night-birds all that hour were still.
But now they are jubilant anew,
From cliff and tower, tu-whoo! tu-whoo! 310
Tu-whoo! tu-whoo! from wood and fell!
And see! the lady Christabel
Gathers herself from out her trance;
Her limbs relax, her countenance
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds-
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!
And oft the while she seems to smile
As infants at a sudden light!
Yea, she doth smile, and she doth weep,
Like a youthful hermitess, 320
Beauteous in a wilderness,
Who, praying always, prays in sleep.
And, if she move unquietly,
Perchance, 'tis but the blood so free
Comes back and tingles in her feet.

No doubt, she hath a vision sweet.
What if her guardian spirit 'twere,
What if she knew her mother near?
But this she knows, in joys and woes,
That saints will aid if men will call: 330
For the blue sky bends over all.

2.12.4 Annotations

Drowsily (l. 5) : sleepily.

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

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

Weal (l.30) : wellbeing. Damsel (l. 58): maiden. Clad (l.67): dressed.

Meet (l. 71) : proper.

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

Palfrey (l. 84) : horse.

Swore (l. 98) : promised.

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

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

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

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

Cordial (l. 191) : refreshing.

Woe (l.195) : sorrow.

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

Lofty (l.223) : tall.

Countree (l.225) : country (archaic)

Unrobe (l.233) : undress. Doleful (l.265): gloomy. Utterance (l. 268): speech. Shield (l.278): protect.

Jagged (l.282) : irregular in shape.

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

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

Countenance (l.313) : face.

2.12.5 Central Idea

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

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

2.12.6 Substance and Critical Commentary

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

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

The description of the night in the following lines reinforces the sense of some impending

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

Critical commentary

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

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

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

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

Critical Commentary

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

As Christabel's silent prayer is disrupted by an eerie sensation of a second presence,

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

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

Outside her kennel, the old mastiff lies asleep. She does not awake as the two ladies pass by her, but growls in her sleep. This seems unusual, because until then, the mastiff bitch has never uttered the shortest of yells in Christabel's presence.

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

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

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

Critical Commentary

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

ministering angel who rescues a fallen soul with her pristine innocence? The answer is for the reader to decide.

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

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

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

Critical Commentary

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

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

Critical Commentary

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

The Conclusion to Part the First

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

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

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

Critical Commentary

The key line of this part is "A star hath set, a star hath risen," It suggests a fundamental change in Christabel, who was held captive in Geraldine's embrace. Yet, with all the strength of her faith, Christabel seems to emerge from the nightmare, changed, but strong in her belief that the saints will protect her. The full psychological implication of the poem begins to crystallise here.

This part may also be read as symbolising Christabel's voluntary acceptance of suffering which will ultimately purge evil of its potency, as we see Geraldine sleeping

like a child. Christabel's trance may remind us of the sufferings of the saints and it finally gives way to a reaffirmation of faith in the concluding lines.

2.12.7 Themes

❖ **Medievalism**

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

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

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

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

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

Apart from witchery, the poem also refers to the medieval problems of banditry and harlotry. Geraldine's tale of being abducted by a group of ruffians is believed because of

widespread brigandage prevalent at that time. The beautiful Geraldine, with her cinctured breast appears to be an experienced temptress, a suggestion which becomes more obvious in the next part of the poem.

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

❖ Supernaturalism

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

The entire atmosphere is built up by presenting natural objects with an air of mystery which creates an impression of the unnatural; this induces in the readers 'a willing suspension of disbelief' so that they are prepared for the final scene of Geraldine's sorcery with its suggestion of a sensational horror. The 'accidents' of dim moonlight in the wood, or, in Christabel's chamber, create an atmosphere of eerie mystery which sets the tone of the poem. As Christabel steps out into the dim wood, we are filled with a sense of some hidden danger which culminates in her discovery of Geraldine. All this corresponds to the sense of premonition already created by references to the drowsy, untimely call of the crowing cock, the howls of the toothless mastiff in response to the midnight clock, and finally, the wandering spirit of Christabel's deceased mother in the opening lines of the poem. These omens are part of supernatural lore and warn us of the incursion of evil within the protected precincts of the castle.

The enduring interest of the poem lies in the ultimate mystery, left perpetually unresolved by the poet himself. No doubt the details of Geraldine's eyes, gesture, and finally the description of her breasts as 'a sight to dream of, not to tell' mark the pinnacle of sensationalism and horror in the poem; but after the immediate horror is

over, we are left with a series of questions never to be answered. What is the status of Geraldine and what is her motive behind casting her spell on Christabel? Can she really espy the spirit of Christabel's dead mother? What does Geraldine mean by the mark of her shame and the seal of her sorrow? What is the peculiarity of Geraldine's bosom and why are the breasts particularly used to cast on Christabel the evil spell? What will happen to Christabel next - would there be any remedy of her suffering or not? These questions, as we have already observed, have no answer in this poem left incomplete by its poet. It is left to the reader to use his imagination to make up an ending. This makes the poem live on in our minds.

❖ **Gothic Elements**

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

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

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

2.12.8 Summing up

In this Unit therefore, we have introduced you to one of the most famous poems of Coleridge, and thereby to an entirely new kind of poetics of the Romantic period.

With help from your counselor, try to read 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' to understand the consistent patterns that are at work in the supernatural poems. Through such an exercise, you will definitely discover that the work of Coleridge recalls the tales of wonder involving supernatural agencies, popularised by the German Romantics during the eighteenth century.

2.12.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

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

Mid-Length Questions

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

Short Questions

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

2.12.10 Suggested Reading

Cooke, Katharine. *Coleridge*. Routledge, 1979.

Modiano, R. *Coleridge and the Concept of Nature.* Palgrave Macmillan, 1985

Spencer Hill, J. *Imagination in Coleridge*, Palgrave, 2015

Wheeler, K M. *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry.* Harvard UP, 1982

UNIT–13 : SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE : ‘DEJECTION : AN ODE’

2.13.1. Objectives
2.13.2. Introduction
2.13.3. Text of 'Dejection: An Ode'
2.13.4. Annotations
2.13.5. Detailed Paraphrasing
2.13.6. Critical Appreciation
2.13.7. Summing Up
2.13.8. Comprehension Exercises
2.13.9. Suggested Reading

2.13.1 Objectives

This Unit will introduce you to a poem that is very different from the previous one. As will be evident from the title, this poem deals with a negative state of mind. Such sadness, it is believed, is the result of perceptions of failure in personal life and of challenges to literary creativity. Our objective in this Unit will be to bring out how Coleridge makes even a negative frame of mind an occasion for poetry. In that sense, this is not only subjectivity at its best, but also an artistic opening up of the poet's mind.

2.13.2 Introduction

The poem was originally written as a verse letter (of 340 lines) to Sara Hutchinson, who was soon to be Wordsworth's sister-in-law. After listening to Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode', Coleridge wrote this poem on 4th April, 1802. There are some lines which can be contrasted with Wordsworth's Immortality Ode, though the general moods are totally different. Coleridge's unhappy marriage with Sara Fricker, and the supposed waning of his creative powers seem to weigh heavy on this poem. In fact, in the original poem he lamented at length his unhappy marriage. Later he omitted most of the lines and published the 139 lined poem in the *Morning Post* on 4th October, 1802. It was addressed to Wordsworth, on the latter's wedding day. Finally it was published in 1817 in the collection of his poems called *Sibylline Leaves*, where the poem was addressed to a mysterious 'Lady'.

As stated in the previous sub-section, the poem is a personal lyric and reveals the pain of the poet faced with dual challenges of receding poetic powers and oppressive troubles of the material world. Nature once soothed his mind but he can no longer find solace in it. This melancholic mood pervades the whole poem. It is an intimate expression of personal grief. It is commonly known that Coleridge's wife Sara lacked the sensibility to cope with a passionate poet like him. This could explain the poet's falling in love with Sara Hutchinson, but that too was a foredoomed relationship. These are some of the prevalent reasons that had given rise to 'Dejection Ode'. Let us now come to the text and a detailed understanding of the poem.

2.13.3 Text

Dejection: An Ode

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
With the old Moon in her arms;
And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!
We shall have a deadly storm.
(*Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence*)

I

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light, 10
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
        And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
                And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live! 20

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
        A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
        Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
                In word, or sigh, or tear-
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
        All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
        And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze-and with how blank an eye! 30
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

III

                My genial spirits fail;
            And what can these avail 40
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
                It were a vain endeavour,
                Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:

I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
        And would we aught behold, of higher worth, 50
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
        Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
                Enveloping the Earth-
And from the soul itself must there be sent
        A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be! 60
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
        Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
        A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud- 70
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud-
                We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
        All melodies the echoes of that voice,

All colours a suffusion from that light.

VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
        This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
        Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine, 80
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
                But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
        My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
        But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
        From my own nature all the natural man- 90
        This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
                Reality's dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
        Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
        Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree, 100
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
        Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,

Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
        Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!
            What tell'st thou now about? 110
              'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
        With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds-
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!
        And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings-all is over-
        It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
              A tale of less affright,
              And tempered with delight,
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay,- 120
              'Tis of a little child
              Upon a lonesome wild,
Nor far from home, but she hath lost her way:
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

VIII

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
        And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling, 130
        Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
              With light heart may she rise,
              Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
        Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!

O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.

2.13.4 Annotations

Stanza I :

Bard : the poet who wrote the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, describing the wrecking of Sir Patrick's ship off Aberdeenshire in a fierce storm.

Tranquil : calm and peaceful

Ply : to work at steadily

Dull sobbing draft : current of air making a sobbing sound.

Aeolian lute : a stringed musical instrument upon which the wind is playing. Lute is a stringed musical instrument. Aeolus in ancient mythology was the god of the wind. Here the Aeolian lute is a symbol for the poet's mind and the wind symbolizes natural inspiration. The lute moaning to the 'sobbing draft' conveys to the reader a mood of despair.

Phantom light : pale light

Squally blast : furiously raging storm

Gust : strong wind

Raised me : stimulated me

Awed : terrified.

Sent my soul abroad : drove me to a flight of imagination.

Wonted impulse : customary thrill.

Startle : awaken

Dull pain : paralyzing pain

Stanza II

Pang : piercing sensation.

Void : empty

Drear : dull

Stifled : suppressed

Drowsy : sleepy

Unimpassioned : unaroused

O Lady : Sara Hutchinson.

Wan : pale

Throstle : a kind of singing bird.
Woo'd : persuaded.
Serene : peaceful.
Tint : colour.
Flakes : small pieces.
Crescent moon : the new moon in the shape of an arc.

Stanza III

My genial spirits fail : I have lost my natural cheerfulness.
Smothering weight : crushing burden.
Vain endeavour : futile effort.
Linger : stay on.
External forms : outward objects.
Fountain : sources

Stanza IV

Behold : see.
Issue forth : come out.
Glory : radiance.
Luminous : bright.
Potent : powerful.

Stanza V

Effluence : flowing out
Suffusion : spreading out as a covering.

Stanza VI

Dallied with distress: played with distress.
Fancy : imagination.
Vine : a creeper.
Twining : growing upward round a tree.
Foliage : leaves.
Afflictions : sorrows and misfortunes.
My only resources : my only means of help.
Infests the whole : affects the whole personality.

Stanza VII

Reality's dark dream: thoughts that bring to the poet's mind the dark reality.

Raved : raged, blown fiercely.

Scream of agony : shrieking in pain.

Crag : rock

Blasted tree : a tree burnt by lightning.

Pine-grove : pine forest.

Clomb : the old past tense of climb.

Methinks : I think.

Fitter instruments : more appropriate objects.

Lutanist : lute player.

Yule : the season or feast of Christmas.

Timorous leaves : trembling leaves.

Trampled men : defeated soldiers.

Smarting wounds : painful wounds.

Tremulous shuddering : trembling with fear.

Otway's self : the poet Otway himself. Thomas Otway (1652-1685) was a dramatist, noted for The Orphans and Venice Preserved. Both the plays were sentimental and the pathetic plight of their heroines drowned the contemporary audiences in tears.

Tender lay : touching story.

Lonesome wild : desolate moorland.

Stanza VIII

Eddying : moving in a whirlpool; here the word is used to mean expansion.

Friend devoutest : most faithful friend.

2.13.5 Detailed Paraphrasing

The Ode begins with a reference to the 14th century Scottish ballad, where the shipmate who has seen a lunar ill-omen warns Sir Patrick Spence not to sail on the following morning. As it would befit a Romantic poet, Coleridge expressed his experience through the natural symbolism and imagery.

Stanza I The external nature here symbolises the turmoil of his suffering mind. The phenomenon of the new moon with the old moon in her lap forewarns of storm to come. Though the night is calm, the dull melancholy breeze touches the strings of the Aeolian lute gently; the poet foretells the coming of a storm. The wind symbolises

nature and the lute or harp symbolizes the poet's soul. This identification brings much clarity to the present discussion. The wind (nature) has gone mad so the lute (poet's soul) is tortured with agony. Earlier he had been moved by storms like this and now he desires the storm to wake his drooping spirits and to startle his benumbing pain. It has the power to stir his mind out of this state.

Stanza II gives an account of how gloomy the poet is. His grief cannot be lessened and it has a connection with his loss of poetic inspiration. In him there is no joy which is an integral quality of a poet. By addressing 'O lady!' he makes her a companion through this ordeal. He looks at the beautiful sky with floating clouds, sparkling stars and crescent moon but he cannot feel the beauty of it. He cannot respond to this beauty, the poetic inspiration having suffered a sloth.

A very short stanza III records the intensity of the poet's grief and the difference between the external world and the poet's internal world. The poetic inspiration does not originate from the nature outside but its 'fountains' are in the heart of the poet. A poem is created in the poet's imagination and this is an important point about Coleridge's theory of poetry.

Stanza IV develops his explanation of poetic inspiration: the fountains of creativity activity are within. Here he contrasts two ways of perceiving nature. 'Poor loveless ever anxious crowd' is a perception of the world as lifeless. In contrast, a poetic soul perceives the value of higher worth by its own creative activity. In poetic terms Coleridge states here the function of a poet's power. The power of the soul will emanate 'A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud' that would surround the Earth. The human soul must itself send forth a sweet and powerful voice which will endow the sounds of nature with sweetness.

Stanza V emphasizes the importance of the Lady to whom the poem is addressed. This 'virtuous Lady' possesses a pure heart. The qualities of the poetic power are still being explored. The one atmosphere or mood in which the poet's power can work is 'joy', and the poetry that fosters joy can only reside in a pure heart. This 'joy' is given only to the 'pure' and in their hour of greatest purity. Joy is at once life and the thoughts and feelings which arise from life; joy is at once the cloud which pours forth the shower and the shower itself. This poetry making power together with Nature creates a new earth and new heaven.

Stanza VI explains the effect of grief on the poet in the past. Then 'joy' enabled him to grapple with the sorrows. Even his misfortunes were used by 'fancy' to transform them into visions of delight. He even was surrounded by hope like 'twining vine'. But now his sorrows spoil his 'shaping spirit of imagination'. The sorrows have gone deeper inside the soul and have changed the nature of his heart. He then prescribes a remedy for dejection- besides being still and patient to engage in 'abstruse research'. But immersing in deep metaphysical studies (abstruse research) has now wholly affected the nature of the poet and the joy (the poetry making power) has left the poet permanently.

Stanza VII presents a different Coleridge to us when he turns his attention away from 'abstruse research' to the wild wind. The wind is blowing so violently that it should play upon a bare rock, a mountain lake, a tree struck with lightning, a pine grove or an abandoned house. He calls the wind 'Mad Lutanist' who makes 'Davils' yule' through the foliage of dark brown garden. He calls it an actor who is perfect in the ranting of tragedy and a 'mighty poet', so bold that one would think him insane- the original meaning of 'frenzied'. The tale told by the wind-poet is like a vision of a battle. It is of an army being routed, with all the slaughter and carnage as we find in Homer. Soldiers are trampled; they are groaning of painful wounds and shuddering with cold. Then there is stillness, worse than the battle sound- a stillness of the death left in the battle's wake-'all is over'. It again tells a tale with less terrific sound. It is like the tender story by Thomas Otway of a little girl who has lost her way on a desolate moor not very far from home. This tale also has a touch of 'Lucy Gray' by Wordsworth. The poet almost seems to identify his bitter grief, loneliness and fear with the child's.

The meaning in general of this stanza is that the soul of the poet is at odds with nature. Nature has gone mad as far as the poet is concerned. There is no intellectual or aesthetic contact. His soul is in agony. Lacking the joy his poetic powers need, he is out of harmony with nature. E. H. Coleridge speaks of Coleridge's idea of joy in the following way: "he called it JOY, meaning thereby not mirth or high spirits, or even happiness but a consciousness of entire and therefore well being, when the emotional and intel1ectual faculties are in equipoise." The poet's soul is here certainly not in equipoise. The balance is thrown over by the clash with the wind. Even in the next stanza he will speak only of the lady as being in harmony with the things of Nature. The dreamlike quality of much of Coleridge's poetry has often been noticed. Certainly it is remarkable in the more fanciful compositions such as "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan." It is also present in "Dejection," especially in Stanza VII. Certainly the violence, the fading from one scene into another, and the eerie vision of the lost child are experiences usually encountered only in a nightmare.

In stanza VIII the tone abruptly changes from fury to peace. It almost seems as though the melancholy lament that is "Dejection" has eased the burden of dejection from his soul and allowed him to shake that particular burden off his back, at least temporarily. After the commotion he can hardly sleep. His thoughts have turned from introspection to altruism. He wishes all good things for the lady. She is now very close to the poet. For the lady he wishes peaceful sleep and above all, joy. He wishes good effect of storm on her. She is the closest companion he has, and he wishes her eternal happiness.

2.13.6 Critical Appreciation

'Dejection: An Ode' is a confession that he has fled from the conflict with his soul

to the metaphysics. Here a poet is expressing his intense grief as he no more is able to engage himself in the act of creativity. He is tormented by his unsuccessful marriage, ill-health, desertion by friends, financial stress and hopeless affair with Sara Hutchinson. He cannot respond to any other emotional situation. He has started apprehending the decline of his poetic faculties.

The Romantic era was defined by an emphasis on the individual and emotionality, internal realities, and the imagination. Coleridge's literary treatise, Biographia Literaria, illustrates the importance of the imagination in the lives of the Romantics. In this work, Coleridge defines "imagination" as the "prime Agent of human perception" and a means by which the mind participates in "the eternal act of creation in the I AM". This faculty also helps to unite with the divine creative power which is the progenitor of this universe. Dejection is a lament for loss of that faculty in Coleridge. On a tranquil evening he is watching the floating clouds, stars and the shining moon. But he cannot feel the beauty of this serene nature. Worldly sorrows have dulled his sensibility. Earlier his sorrows enriched his mind and his imaginative faculties were relived. But now his drooping spirit cannot be raised by the beauty of nature. Addressing the 'Lady' the poet says that Nature only gives back what we offer her. It is the glory of the mind with which we observe Nature makes it glorious. He has lost 'joy' or 'glory' of his mind. So he no more can connect himself with the spirit of Nature and his creative powers have left him. Only a storm can revive his creative faculties.

A close examination of the images used by the poet help us to decode a Romantic poet's agony and how it is expressed through symbols. The poem starts with the image of a calm evening with the stars gliding behind or between the clouds. The moon is overspread with phantom light. The poet sees the old moon on the lap of the new and this foretells a furious storm. The storm will soon disturb the tranquil evening. The poet desires the wind to raise his deadened spirit. His mind is compared with 'Aeolian lute' and the violent wind is the player on the 'lute'. The wind is addressed as 'Mad Lutanist' by the poet. It is blowing among the blossoms, buds, tremulous leaves and flowers and makes sound as if Devil' Christmas party is going on. He calls the wind an actor who can make all tragic sounds and a 'mighty poet' who is caught in a spell of poetic frenzy. The sounds of the storm remind the groaning sound of a retreating army. Then the sound changes and it is now less fearful and even 'tempered with delight'. Then there is an imagery of a little girl who has lost her way on a desolate moor. The wind is imitating the girl's cry for her mother. The breeze represents the creative power of Nature acting as a muse for the poet and the 'lute' represents the poet who responds to nature by creating poetry. The music created by him reflects his dejection with rakes and moans 'which better far were mute'. When the fruitlessness of looking outward to find the inspiration to break the sadness, or at least to make it productive, fail, Coleridge asserts that the inspiration

must come from within. This is the conception, the ideal, which gives rise to the Romantic poets' emphasis on the imagination and internal realities. For the Romantics, reality is created first in the mind; feelings and personal attributions are internal creations that give meaning to external experiences in a phenomena known as the egotistical sublime. These are the ideas that occur to Coleridge as the poem continues.

The storm wind and harp are used not only as images. They are meaningful symbols. The wind is to the grass-harp as the world-soul or Nature is to the human soul. The third symbol is the moon-an interesting image. The moon provides atmosphere for the descriptive parts of the poem, Stanzas I, II, and VIII. What the poet sees is bathed in moonlight. The moon is also the precursor of the storm that will affect the soul so vigorously. For Coleridge the moon is connected with poetic illumination and inspiration. The moonlight which pervades the descriptive passages is the atmosphere in which the creative imagination is able to work; the windstorm is the almost-Pantheistic Nature spirit of the romantics; and the Aeolian harp is animate nature, or here more specifically, the poet's soul, with the possible association with scenes of happy domestic life. He seems to desire the catharsis of Stanza VII. Nature has moved the soul before; a great deal of the poem is a lament that this is no longer so. He misses the impulse that gives motion and life to his soul. Coleridge often uses "Joy" for a sense of abounding vitality and of harmony between one's inner life and the life of nature. He sees himself in a state of spiritual dryness. There is a positive clash between the wind-storm and the harp; between the soul and Nature. The wind in its frenzy wrings a 'scream of agony' from the harp. Nature seems to run wild in his imagination. It is a mad poet and a tragic actor. It tells a tale of violence and one of pathos. The poet cannot calmly, joyfully, come into harmony with Nature and this situation leads him to a state of dejection. The frustration arises from the lack of internal life. Misery arises not from depression, but from unproductive depression, the lack of feeling inside the person. There is a certain level of depression, of sadness, that fosters the creative powers, pushing writers to their best abilities; there is a certain level of stress, of anxiety that facilitates work and aids in the creative process. Beyond this level, depression becomes debilitating, nonsensical, and numb. It is this unproductive depression that Coleridge experiences in "Dejection."

John Stuart Mill called Coleridge and Bentham two seminal minds of the period. Coleridge was influenced by philosophers from a very young age and he also believed that no poet is perfect without being a philosopher. He was influenced by David Hartley, Spinoza, Plato, Kant, Schelling and later by Plotinus. Plotinus is the mystical metaphysician who explains the universe as 'one flowing continuity of being'. Coleridge believed that Human mind shares the imaginative power of creation with the divine power which has created this world. Both are able to create beauty. So the Aeolian lute that is the poet's soul, is able to create beauty or poetry. Now he lost his connection with the divine creative power which is symbolized by the storm in the poem. He has been cut off from

that natural spirit by sorrow and guilt feelings. The soul has become evil so the clash between the good (storm or divine spirit) and bad results into a scream of agony. He has driven happiness and joy out of himself. So he no more is feeling one with the creative spirit of the universe and cannot create beauty through his poetic lines.

The poem is ultimately a testament to the importance of the imagination in Romantic thought and ideology. Imagination gives life to external situations and objects; perception is everything. Throughout the Ode, Coleridge, while in the depths of despair, tries to stimulate his imagination and creative powers through outside experiences of nature, but he fails. He realizes that only in his own mind is meaning attributed to otherwise neutral stimulus; outer perceptions are nothing without internal attribution of meaning. Then he turns his thoughts from this state of despair to sleeplessness and the idealized joy of his loved one. Panthea Reid Broughton in her article "The Modifying Metaphor in "Dejection: An Ode." says that because "he ends the poem with a prayer for the lady surely does evidence that his soul has traveled outward beyond the confines of self to challenge the separateness of an alien world". To transcend the self requires imagination. The Romantics felt that poetry and imagination increase empathy. This idea is most evident in Shelley's Defense of Poetry, in which he regards that "a man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and many others; the pain and pleasures of his species must become his own". In this aspect of imagination Coleridge does not seem to be lacking, even in the midst of his unproductive depression. Perhaps he does not even realize his capacity to empathize for the Lady, which he most assuredly does, because it takes imagination and empathy to wish that she "ever, evermore rejoice". Because he can still wish for the happiness of another being, the presence of empathy is suggested, which, in turn, indicates the presence of a functioning imagination. The very fact that Coleridge is able to empathize with the lady and use his imagination illustrates the relevance of the internal experiences in consideration of the outside world.

2.13.7 Summing up

In this Unit therefore, we have seen an instance of how a Romantic poet transforms a personal emotion into a subject of universal appeal. We have tried to understand the essence of a conversation poem where the flow of thoughts is incessant, even though the theme might be a halting one. Coleridge's use of the 'Ode' as a literary form, the reference to ballad poetry, and the blend of philosophy and poetry are aspects that have influenced the shaping of thoughts in this poem. As an additional activity, you might like to read other Conversation Poems by Coleridge like 'Frost at Midnight' or 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison', to realize that these poems offer a completely different idea of his poetics compared to the more famous Supernatural Poems. You can follow

this link for a better understanding: https://agnionline.bu.edu/blog/its-just-us-talking-here-coleridges-conversation-poems/

2.13.8 Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions :

1. Write the critical appreciation of Dejection: an Ode.
2. Critically examine the function of the wind in the development of thought in Dejection: An Ode.
3. Treat Dejection: an Ode as a romantic poem.
4. Meyer Abrams divides the "Greater Romantic Lyric" into three stages -- a description of the natural scene, an analysis of that scene and the problem about which it reminds the speaker, and an emotional or "affective" resolution of the problem. Does the speaker resolve his problem in this poem? Explain.

Mid-length Questions :

1. What relationship between mind and nature does this poem posit?
2. How would you characterize the relationship between the speaker and "Lady"?
3. What do you think is the cause of the speaker's "dejection"? What clues does the poem provide?
4. How does the poem's form affect the way you read it?
5. Discuss the imagery of the poem.
6. Is this poem an incomplete romantic poem? Give your reasons.

Short Questions

1. Why did Coleridge write the poem?
2. What he wishes the storm will do in the first stanza?
3. What is the poet's wish at the end of the poem?
4. Where does the speaker of "Dejection: An Ode" seek solace for his grief?

2.13.9 Suggested Reading

Chambers, Edmund K. *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Biographical Study*. ABC-Clio, 1978

House, Hamphry. *Coleridge*. R. Hart Davis, 1962

Read, Herbert. *The True Voice of Feeling: Studies in English Romantic Poetry*. ANS Press, 1978.

MODULE – III

UNIT–14 : PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY - POETRY AND PROSE

3.14.1. Objectives

3.14.2. Introduction

3.14.3. P. B. Shelley - A Bio-brief

3.14.4. Shelley's Poetry

- **3.14.4.1. Poetic Career**
- **3.14.4.2. Features of Shelley's Poetry**
- **3.14.4.3. Reformative Ideals and the Golden Millennium**
- **3.14.4.4. Lyricism**

3.14.5. Shelley's Prose

- **3.14.5.1. Career as a Prose Writer**
- **3.14.5.2. Some Aspects of Shelley's Prose**
- **3.14.5.3. Assessing Shelley as a Literary Critic**

3.14.6. Summing Up

3.14.7. Comprehension Exercises

3.14.8. Suggested Readings

3.14.1 Objectives

In Unit 14, we shall study P.B. Shelley, one of the major Second-Generation Romantic poets-his poetry and prose. The objectives of this Unit are to make you familiar with:

- Shelley's life, thought and works.
- Detailed career of Shelley as a poet and prose writer.
- His beliefs, reformative zeal, and prophetic ideals.
- His views about poetry and the poet's duties and social responsibilities.
- Shelley's genius as a romantic poet.
- Lyrical quality of his verse.
- Shelley as a literary critic.

3.14.2 Introduction

As a Romantic poet Shelley shares certain common features with the other great exponents of Romanticism. But his approaches and thoughts in poetry are unique and more radical than the other Romantics. A true romantic as he is, Shelley inspires humankind to truth, beauty and a revolutionary ideal. His life and ideas, his poetry and his prose are all intimately connected. His works exemplify romanticism in extremes - that is to say he gets to both ends of ecstasy and sheer despondency in his work. Though personal despair is there in his works, Shelley epitomizes hope and aspiration. He symbolizes the ideal that humankind should aspire for. As a lover of freedom, Shelley opposes tyranny and bondage and rebels against the authority. He has his own vision of a new world where everything would be perfect. All this find expression in Shelley's life, thoughts and works. In this Unit we shall try to be familiar with Shelley's life and literary career - particularly with his poetry and prose. Let us first begin with his Bio-brief.

3.14.3 P.B. Shelley - A Bio-Brief

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born on August 4, 1792 at Field Place, near Horsham, in the country of Sussex. He was the eldest son of Timothy (later Sir Timothy), a prosperous landowner and Elizabeth Pilfold. When he was about six years old, he began to be taught, together with his sisters, by Mr. Edwards, a clergyman. Between1802-04, Shelley studied at Syon Academy, but according to one account, after he blew up a part of Field Place with a chemistry experiment, he was sent to Eton (1804-10) where he manifested the courage to live by his beliefs which was to characterize him ever after. Experiments in chemistry and electricity gave him intense pleasure. In his childhood Shelley was a mischievous, lovable lad of independent, energetic, generous disposition, with large, beautiful blue eyes, long bushy hair, delicate features, and strong slender figure. His school experiences were somewhat unfortunate. He hated tyranny and brutal force, and the system of floggingthat was prevalent in the school.During these school days, Shelley learnt Greek and Latin, and acquired what was then forbidden knowledge: science, William Godwin's Political Justice, and the French skeptics.

In 1810, Shelley entered University College, Oxford and made friendship with his classmate Thomas Jefferson Hogg. Here, he was very enthusiastic about his studies, specially of poetry, philosophy and classical literature, but his free religious opinions brought him in conflict with the authorities. Shelley spoke and wrote with frank independence and he hated Christian dogmas. He was expelled from Oxford with Hogg in 1811 for publishing a pamphlet, The Necessity of Atheism, which caused

considerable friction with the authorities. The same year, he eloped with Harriet Westbrook and married her in Edinburgh. Always on the side of liberty, in 1812, he went to Ireland to campaign for the liberation of the Irish people. The same year, he met the philosopher William Godwin who had been an early influence on him. In 1814, Shelley left Harriet for Mary Godwin, daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1816, after Harriet drowned herself, Shelley married Mary Godwin. He met Byron, Leigh Hunt and Keats about that time. In 1818, he departed for Italy, never to return to England again. On July 8, 1822 Shelley, along with his friend Williams, was drowned at sea near Leghorn, less than a month short of Shelley's thirtieth birthday. His body was washed up a few days later and recognized only by the copy of Keats's poetry found in his pocket. On August 15, 1822 in the presence of Byron, Trelawney, and Hunt, Shelley and Williams were cremated on the beach between La Spezia and Livorno. In 1823, Shelley's ashes were laid beside those of Keats in the Roman cemetery that he had nobly hymned.

3.14.4 Shelley's Poetry

As we know, Shelley belongs to the Second-Generation Romantics. Like Byron, Shelley was deeply influenced by the French Revolution. His poetry glowed with passion, fervour and enthusiasm. Like Keats, Shelley's poetic career was also short. It spanned over roughly only for a decade. But within this short span he produceda number of memorable shorter and longer poems. Again, like Keats, he was severely attacked by his contemporary critics. Buthe was later praised by many for his radical idealism, prophetic note and brilliance of imagery. The clear unequivocal message that resonates through Shelley's poetry gives hope to the hopeless and inspires humanity in the search for a better path.

3.14.4.1 : POETIC CAREER

In his short life-span Percy Shelley produced a number of longer and shorter poems. In 1810, Shelley published Original Poetry by Victor and Cazire, poems by himself and his sister, Elizabeth and Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson. However, Shelley's earliest effort of any note is Queen Mab (1813), a long poem which contains much of Shelley's cruder atheism. This poem was followed by Alaster, or The Spirit of Solitude (1816), a kind of spiritual autobiography that shows Shelley's growing skill as a poet. After that came Laon and Cythna (1817), afterward called The Revolt of Islam (1818). The Cenci, a tragedy of sombre pathos, came out in 1819.

Prometheus Unbound (begun in 1818, published 1820) is a combination of the lyric and the drama. *Julian and Maddalo*, *The Masque of Anarchy* and *The Witch of Atlas* written in this period are extraordinary in quality. *The Masque of Anarchy*, inspired by the news of the massacre of Peterloo, expresses Shelley's revolutionary political views,

and is very severe on Lord Castlereagh. *Epipsychidion* (1821), rich in imagery, contains some of his most fervent writing. *Adonais* (1821) is a lament for the death of Keats modelled on the classical elegy. The Platonic and pantheistic strains in the poem add to its philosophical stature and place it high among English Elegies. *Hellas* (1822), modelled on Aeschylus' *Persal*, is a lyrical drama, full of charming choruses and songs. Other than the longer poems some of Shelley's shorter lyrics are - 'To a Skylark', 'Ode to the West Wind', 'The Cloud', 'The Sensitive Plant', 'The Indian Serenade', 'On a Faded Violet', 'To Night' etc. 'The Triumph of Life' (544 lines) was Shelley's last unfinished poem.

3.14.4.2 : FEATURES OF SHELLEY'S POETRY

No other Romantic poet has attracted such extreme comments as Shelley has done for the corpus of his work and personal life. While his contemporaries attacked him for his atheism, infidelity and moral turpitude, others like Matthew Arnold and Leslie Stephens have found fault with his 'unreality' and 'ineffectuality'. Shelley's revolutionary doctrines and idealistic philosophy, his poetic technique and his personal life have all come under severe attack from the critics, notably the New Critics. Yet, he has been acclaimed by many admirers as the most radical of all the Romantic poets who criticized all the social institutions responsible for curbing the free human spirit. He also maintained his anti-establishment stand consistently throughout his life.

The prophetic note, the hope in a golden millennium, the regeneration of mankind - these are some of the facets that underlie the major poems of Shelley. Though Shelley's radical views were often unacceptable to readers, he received his due praise for the lyrical splendour, the spontaneity, and the musical richness of his verse. Shelley imparted to Romantic poetry the touch of idealism, dreaminess, and visionary fervour. He introduced the power of imagination and idealism in Romantic poetry, and made the poet a prophet and a seer, interested not so much in the fleeting realities of the present moment, as in projecting the future into the present, and in creating a world according to his heart's desire. The quality of futurity, of viewing the world and creating it according to a certain idealistic pattern of the poet's imagination was given to Romantic poetry by Shelley. He added the note of noble idealism to poetry, and made poetry an instrument of attacking the evils of society. The visionary quality of his poetry, his attitude to Beauty and Love, his intense love for Nature, his fine word-painting and brilliant images, his descriptive power, his lyrical brilliance, and his successful handling of the blank verse make him a great Romantic poet. In fact, Shelley was undoubtedly the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer in Romantic poetry.

Recent critics like Carlos Baker and R. H. Fogle have discovered a unique system of imagery in Shelley's poetry. Carl Grabo and Neville Rogers have analyzed the

scientific aspects of Shelley's imagery and Earl Wasserman has made a scholarly study of Shelley's mythmaking faculty.

3.14.4.3. REFORMATIVE IDEALS AND THE GOLDEN MILLENNIUM

As we have already noted, Shelley had certain inherent tendencies of character which ultimately made him a rebel and a reformer, a prophet and an idealist in his life. From his Eton days, Shelley was a lover of liberty and freedom, and his soul revolted against all forms of tyranny and oppression. He became a confirmed rebel against the practice of sham religions and morals, the long-cherished conventions and traditions prevailing in the contemporary society. He raised his strong voice against tyranny and oppression of all sorts. If we study Shelley's poetry, we shall find him rising against statesman, kings and warriors; we shall hear him thundering against exploitation and denouncing religious priests and unholy preachers.

In Queen Mab, Shelley denounces statesman, priests and warriors with the fury of a grand rebel. He also lashes against the rich persons who suck up the poor people's blood and exploit them for their personal power and pelf. *The Revolt of Islam* and *Prometheus Unbound* are marked with Shelley's characteristic rebellion and anti-institutional fervour.

Shelley was not only a rebel, but also a reformer of the evils that he attacked in his poems. He sought to reform the existing order of things in preparation for the attainment of his ideal. In fact, Shelley has his eyes on the future, and visualized the picture of a world reformed of all existing evils. He pointed out in *Prometheus Unbound*, "My purpose has hitherto been simply to familiarize the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealism of moral excellence."Dreamer of dreams as he was, Shelley had a passion for reforming the world, and this passion blazes out again and again in his poetry.

Shelley wanted that the world should be free from the domination and control of tyrants, oppressors and despotic rulers. He sought to usher in a society in which equality, liberty and justice would be watch-words of social life. He dreamt of a golden millennium - a reformed world of ideal happiness for all human beings. And Shelley was optimistic about the advent of a new millennium in human history. The last lines of "Ode to the West Wind" are an assertion of his optimism:

O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

D:\\NSOU\D\CC7 (Materials)
M-3\Unit-14 \ 3rd Proof (Alok)

<u>Activity for the Learners!</u>

Can you name some poems by Shelley where the reformative zeal is pervasive?

3.14.4.4 : LYRICISM

What is a Lyric?

Let us first get familiar with the term 'lyric'. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th Edition, M.H. Abrams defines lyric thus:

> A lyric is a fairly short poem, consisting of the utterance by a single speaker, who expresses a state of mind or a process of perception, thought, and feeling." However, "in the original Greek, lyric signified a song rendered to the accompaniment of a lyre. In some current usages, lyric still retains the sense of a poem written to be set to music.

As a lyric poet Shelley's supremacy is incomparable and all-knowing. Shelley's temperament was peculiarly responsive to lyrical impulses. His intensely imaginative and sensitive nature was aptly fitted for the lyric. In fact, Shelley poured the best of his poetic genius into the lyrics. His heart flowed out so spontaneously in his songs. With his keen ardour of passion, eager sensitiveness, his sense of personal sorrow and his prophetic vision, Shelley could not be anything else except a lyric poet. According to Prof. Elton, "Shelley's genius was essentially lyrical. All his poetry is really lyrical, for his lyrical impulse penetrates into even his unlyrical verse."

Though the lyrical strain is present in almost all the longer poems of Shelley like *Queen Mab*, *Alastor*, *Rosalind and Helen*, *Epipsychidion* and *Prometheus Unbound*, yet it is in the smaller lyrics where we find Shelley at his best. Shelley's lyricism finds best expression in shorter poems like ''The Cloud'', ''Ode to the West Wind'', ''To a Skylark'', ''Lines Written Among the Eugene Hills'', ''Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples'', ''World's Wanderers'' etc. These lyrics are bewitching in their charm and are truly unsurpassable in their poetic qualities.

Shelley's lyrics are of a wide range and variety. Some of them are written on the subject of love, while others are on nature. Regeneration of mankind and the state of life in the future form the subject matter of some of his lyrics. In short, Shelley's lyrics deal with the poet's own personal life, life of nature and the life of humanity in the present and the future under the impress of love.

To understand the true nature of Shelley's lyrics, we may refer to his statement in *A Defence of Poetry* where he declares, "Poetry is not like reasoning, a power to be exerted according to the determination of the will. The poetic power rises from within like the colour of a flower and fades and changes as it is developed." The lyrics of

Shelley are based on his conception that poetry is like a flower. Flowers grow effortlessly and so should poetry come spontaneously to the poet.

Features of Shelley's lyrics

- Spontaneity - His lyrics seem to come directly from the poet's heart. They are so effortless and there is absolutely no laboured artistry or studied deliberation in them.
- Music-Shelley's lyrics are extremely musical and rapturous. Their musical harmony and the melody rings in our ears and win its way to our emotion as if magically.
- Rush and impetuosity-His lyrics are gifted with a unique glow of rush and impetuosity. Shelley catches the emotional inspiration at its white heat and glow, and fuses it into his lyric flow.
- Simplicity and rapture - Simplicity and rapture are the two essential qualities of Shelley's lyrics. They flow in simple streams of overflowing ecstasy.
- Emotional ecstasy - The ecstatic quality of Shelley's lyrics is a characteristic feature. His poems spontaneously come out of an emotional ecstasy.
- Note of sadness and melancholy - The note of personal grief, agony and melancholy marks many of Shelley's poems. In Ode to the West Wind, as we shall see in Unit 14, his personal sadness comes out very poignantly.
- Prophetic note and touch of humanism - Many of Shelley's lyrics are coloured with liberty, freedom, equality, fraternity and love for mankind. Note of optimism, regeneration of mankind, dream of a new millennium etc. mark most of Shelley's lyrics.
- Intensity - Shelley's lyrics possess lyrical intensity, passion and penetration. They are marked by a flourish of imagination, haunting loveliness and beauty.

3.14.5 Shelley's Prose

As a Romantic thinker Shelley's reputation, as we have just seen, primarily rests on his poetry. But there are some important prose works of Shelley which are worth studying. He wrote prose on a variety of subject matters -literature, art, love, life, death, future state, religion, metaphysics etc. Shelley's prose works throw significant light on his thoughts and ideas on a variety of issues. Like the prose works of other great Romantics - Wordsworth's 'Preface' to the *Lyrical Ballads*, *Coleridge's Biographia Literaria* and *Keats's numerous Letters*- it is very important to study Shelley's prose works, especially his A *Defence of Poetry* to have clear ideas regarding his concepts of the poet and poetry.

3.14.5.1: CAREER AS A PROSE WRITER

In 1810, Shelley began his literary career when he was still at school, with two boyish gothic romances - *Zastrozzi* and St. Irvyne. While he was at the Oxford University he wrote several pamphlets, one of which, *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811), caused him to be expelled from the university. In *An Address to the Irish People* (1812), Shelley advised the Irish people to eschew violence for attaining independence. His essays like *On Love*, *On Life*, *Essay on the Literature*, *the Arts*, and *the Manners of the Athenians*, *A Vindication of Natural Diet*, *A Refutation of Deism* express his thoughts and observations on the titular subjects. Shelley's published Letters are also important documents as they help us understand Shelley, the man and the artist. Shelley also wrote his impassioned prose *A Defence of Poetry*, (written in 1821, and published in 1840) which was a reply to Peacock's attack on poetry in his essay Four Ages of Poetry. In this prose he voiced his views on the poet and poetry and upheld the historic role of the poet as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world". We will have a detailed discussion about the importance of this prose at 3.14.5.3. Apart from all these prose we have some of the fragments - the unfinished Essay on a Future State, the unfinished Essay on Christianity, the unfinished Essay on the Punishment of Death, and the scattered Speculations on Metaphysics.

3.14.5.2 : SOME ASPECTS OF SHELLEY'S PROSE

Shelley's prose works are intimately connected to his thoughts and ideas as reflected in his poetry. Shelley wrote his proses, as we have already seen, on a variety of subjects and issues. In fact, his prose works, particularly his *A Defence of Poetry*, give us the required clues to understand his poems better. In Unit 15 and Unit 16, we shall find how Shelley's thoughts and ideals, as expressed in his prose, are exemplified in 'Ode to the West Wind' and 'To a Skylark'. Undoubtedly, it will be difficult for us to understand those two poems without having a thorough knowledge of *A Defence of Poetry*. As Wordsworth's ''Preface'' to Lyrical Ballads contains his basic thoughts and ideas regarding the poet and poetry, similarly *A Defence of Poetry* is a strong exposition of the Romantic point of view of Shelley.

Features of Shelley's prose

- Shelley's prose works are an important milestone in literary criticism. They place him in a very high position as a literary critic.
- Shelley's prose is marked with sound, clear and strong exposition of ideas and thoughts.
- Shelley is very passionate and confident about his subject matter and holds a high and serious opinion about the social duty and responsibility of a poet.
- The prose works show Shelley as a man of considerable common sense.

- Sometimes they are somewhat heavy with his passionate ideals and firm beliefs.
- He is not a crazy theorist and his prose style is clear, argumentative and readable.

3.14.5.3 : ASSESSING SHELLEY AS A LITERARY CRITIC

As a literary critic, as we have already noted, Shelley's reputation largely depends on his essay *A Defence of Poetry*. So, we shall focus our attention to this particular prose to assess Shelley as a literary critic. If you go through *A Defence of Poetry*, you will find how Shelley presents his basic faith about poetry and his conception of the poet's vocation there. You may also find it interesting to note that he endorses many of the views about poets and poetry which had earlier been enunciated by Sir Philip Sidney in *An Apology for Poetry*.

According to Shelley, a poet is not satisfied with merely what he sees in external life. He has an oversensitive imagination, and by the power of his imagination, he can go beyond the external phenomena, and view in its purity the white radiance of eternal reality. To the poet, who is essentially a creature of imagination, the realities of life give a message of abiding value, which cannot be felt by an ordinary man. The poet can hear in the hoarse sound of the west wind the clarion call for the regeneration of humanity. The song of the skylark can give message of eternal life. The universal is revealed to the poet in the local, and what appears temporary and fleeting can be an object of eternal and abiding value for the poet.

Shelley believed that poetry is a matter of inspiration and can be composed only in moments of rare inspiration. "A man cannot say I will compose poetry", it is only under the spell of poetic imagiation that he composes verse. Poets, in Shelley's view, are the "unacknowledged legislators of the world." They lay down the order in which the working of society should be carried on for the greatest good of greatest numbers. They legislate for the people, give the picture of an ideal society.

According to Shelley, the poet is an alchemist, for he knows how to turn dross into gold. In the hands of the poet everything undergoes a sea change, and becomes more beautiful than reality. A rainbow and a piece of natural beauty become more beautiful when they are given a poetic shape. Poetry in Shelley's view is the mother of wisdom and delight. "A great poem," says Shelley, "is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight." Thus, poetry delights and imparts wisdom along with delight.

Poetry, Shelley believed, can serve as a medium of social reform and an instrument for bringing about the regeneration of mankind in future. The poet is a prophet who sees into the future and can bring about the betterment of human life in times to come. Shelley did not believe in poetry being purely for artistic delight. Poetry can have a palpable design and can work for the well-being of society.

You have already learnt that Shelley had an idealistic view and vision about poetry and the poet. He believed that poetry can serve as a medium of social reform and an

instrument for bringing about the regeneration of mankind in the future. The poet, says Shelley, can colour with the hues of the ideal everything he touches. All these ideas and ideals are best expressed in *A Defence of Poetry*. A few memorable excerpts from *A Defence of Poetry* which will help you understand Shelley's poetic vision and views may be quoted here: -

"A poem is the very image of life expressed in its eternal truth" (Line 38).

"Poetry is indeed something divine" (Line 979).

"Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and bestminds" (Lines 1030-31).

"Poetry thus makes immortal all that is best and most beautiful in the world" (Lines1054-55).

"Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed…its secret alchemy turns to potable gold the poisonous waters which flow from death through life…" (Lines1062-71).

"For he[the poet] not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those

laws according to which present things ought to be recorded, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and the fruit of time" (Lines126-30).

"A poet is a nightingale, who sits in darkness and sings to cheer its own solitude with sweet sounds…." (Lines282-83).

"Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world"(Lines 1200-01).

These excellent and adequately expressed excerpts suggest that Shelley holds a high and idealistic opinion regarding poetry and the role and duty of a poet in the society. "For Shelley", says C.M. Bowra, "the poet is also a seer, gifted with a peculiar insight into the nature of reality. And this reality is a timeless, unchanging, complete order, of which the familiar world is but a broken reflection".

Activity for the Learners!

What similarities or differences do you find between Shelley and other Romantic literary critics?

3.14.6 Summing up

In this Unit we have learnt about P.B. Shelley's life and works - his poetry and prose in general. We have noted the basic features of Shelley's poetry and prose and

how notes of reformation, liberation, regeneration, idealism, dream of a golden millennium etc. run throughout his poetry. We have noted Shelley's power of imagination in his lyrics. We have also noticed how Shelley was conscious about the social responsibility of a poet. Shelley's place as a Romantic critic and the importance of his criticism caught our attention too. What you have learnt here in general about Shelley, you can apply to your study of the two particular poems in Unit 15 and Unit 16, *Ode to the West Wind* and *To a Skylark* respectively. After reading this Unit, you are hopefully feeling curious about Shelley - the artist and his art.

3.14.7 Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions :

1. Give an estimate of Shelley as a lyrical poet.
2. Write a note on Shelley as a reformer and a visionary.
3. What are the basic tenets of Shelley's conception of poetry and the poet? Answer with close references to *A Defence of Poetry*.

Mid-length Questions :

1. Discuss the salient features of Shelley's poetry.
2. Write a note on Shelley's idealism.
3. Write a note on the prose works of Shelley. Do you think they are worth reading? Discuss.
4. "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." Do you agree with this view? Comment critically.

Short Questions :

1. Why was Shelley expelled from the Oxford University?
2. Whose death was mourned in Adonais? What was it modelled on?
3. What kind of poems are The Cenci and Prometheus Unbound?
4. Why did Shelley write A Defence of Poetry?
5. Name the two romances written by Shelley when he was at school.

3.14.8 Suggested Readings

Baker, Carlos. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press, 1948.

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King-Hele, Desmond. *Shelley, his thought and work*. Macmillan, 1962.

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UNIT–15 : PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY - ODE TO THE WEST WIND

3.15.1. Objectives

3.15.2. Introduction

3.15.3. Text of 'Ode to the West Wind'

3.15.4. Glossary and Commentary

3.15.5. Development of thought

3.15.6. Textual Issues

3.15.7. Summing Up

3.15.8. Comprehension Exercises

3.15.9. Suggested Readings

3.15.1 Objectives

In Unit 14, we have had a detailed discussion on Shelley's life and thought, and his poetry and prose in general. Keeping in mind all that we have learnt there, in this unit we shall have a close textual analysis of Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'. After reading this Unit you are expected to understand :–

- Shelley's ideas and beliefs as exemplified in 'Ode to the West Wind'
- His striking imagery, pictorial personification and unique similes and metaphors as have been used in the poem
- Shelley's personal despondency and his prophetic vision as expressed in the poem
- Lyrical quality of 'Ode to the West Wind'
- His poetic craftsmanship

3.15.2 Introduction

As we noticed in Unit 14, Shelley's life was a chequered one. As a Romantic poet Shelley shares certain common characteristics with other great Romantic thinkers like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Keats. But Shelley's poetic thought and style are unique. He was much bothered about the human bondage, social injustice, inequality

etc., though he was, perhaps, conscious of the inevitable gap between desire and fulfillment. Led by his reformative zeal, he saw the vision of a golden millennium. 'Ode to the West Wind' is a representative poem of Shelley, which testifies to his genius as a brilliant artist who knows how to handle both the content and the form. You are advised first to read the text and enjoy the music of the lines. Then you should go for the underlying layers of meaning with the help of the discussions contained in this unit. After reading and rereading the poem, you may make a self-assessment through the questions provided at the end of the Unit.

- **Composition and Publication**

Written between October and November 1819 (first published in the *Prometheus Unbound* volume of 1820), 'Ode to the West Wind' is considered to be one of the finest of Shelley's lyrics. In his own note to the poem, Shelley describes the exact circumstances under which the poem was composed: "This poem was conceived and chiefly written in wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, and on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapours which pour down the autumnal rains. They began, as I foresaw, at sunset with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions."

In a way, the poem is a companion piece to 'The Cloud', and 'To a Skylark', all three standing together, as "an abiding monument to Shelley's passion for the sky," says Desmond King-Hele. Shelley wrote in one of his letters: "I take great delight in watching the changes of the atmosphere."

One very important point about the Ode is its poignant autobiographical significance. When Shelley wrote the poem, he and his wife were passing through peculiar mixed feelings. There was sadness for the death of a child (William) and also some joyous expectation of a new child who was going to be born (Percy Florence). The Shelleys were naturally thinking in terms of birth, death and rebirth - creation, destruction, and re-creation. This eternal process, which is at work in human life, is found repeated in the cycles of seasons in nature. The 'West Wind' is an appropriate symbol of this life and death dichotomy and no wonder that Shelley addresses it as 'Destroyer and Preserver'.

- **Central Thought**

'Ode to the West Wind'combines two of the characteristic Shelleyan notes of personal despondency and prophetic passion. The whole poem is in the direct voice of the poet and the West Wind which is apostrophized throughout, is never allowed to recede to the background. The poem is a prayer, beginning with an invocation. Shelley prays to the wildness of the West Wind which, according to Irene Chayes, is "a dynamic,

destructive, universal force that is ultimately beneficial, both 'destroyer' and 'preserver'". Ode to the West Wind', as Timothy Webb has put it, brings together nature, politics and Shelley's private life in a richly complex fusion which transcends all three."

The structure of the poem is based on the Italian terza rima. There are five fourteen-line terza rima stanzas. Each such stanza has four divisions of three lines each, followed by a rhyming couplet. The first three stanzas describe the effect of the West Wind on the land, the sky and the sea. The perspective is earth-bound and human. He first describes what is closest to him. Then, as if raising his eyes, he describes the sky from zenith to horizon. Finally, he moves beyond this to what he cannot see, the Mediterranean and the surface and floor of the Atlantic Ocean. The reason for Shelley's prayer is in Stanza IV which records the poet's own sense of dejection and despair at not being able to fulfill his heroic mission of a poet-prophet. And the final Stanza is once more an appeal or prayer to the West Wind, as mover of the seasonal cycle, to assist the poet's aim by spreading his message and, thereby, helping him to contribute to a moral or political revolution that is seen as paralleling the seasonal change. All through, the poem, the trumpet of prophecy is the symbol of the revolutionary change that Shelley always stood for. So its tone is inevitably messianic, exalted.

3.15.3 Text

Ode to the West Wind

I

O WILD West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes! O thou, 5
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The wingèd seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill 10
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill :

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, O hear!

II

Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning : there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head 20

Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night

Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: O hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams

The blue Mediterranean, where he lay, 30
Lull'd by the coil of his crystàlline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss, and flowers 35
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know 40

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: O hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share 45

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed 50
Scarce seem'd a vision–I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd 55
One too like thee-tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone, 60
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe,
Like wither'd leaves, to quicken a new birth;
And, by the incantation of this verse, 65

Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind? 70

3.15.4 Glossary and Commentary

Stanza I

wild : it refers to the combined ideas of tumultuous, tameless, fierce and mighty. It strikes the keynote of Shelley's admiration of the West Wind as an impetuous power. When it communicates its wildness to the mind of the poet, he becomes wild also in

a second sense - 'excited by joy, desire etc'. The poem conveys both the implications.

breath…being : life-breath of Autumn which is personified. The West Wind is an autumnal wind.

unseen presence : the West Wind is invisible, but its presence is felt in its voices and mighty power.

dead : withered.

enchanter : magician.

Yellow, and …red : different leaves assume different colours when they wither.

hectic : wasting or consuming (referring to the 'hectic flush' of tuberculosis).

Pestilence-stricken multitudes : the fallen leaves whose colours remind the poet of contagious disease and death. Just as the complexion of dying and diseased persons changes, so the colour of the leaves also changes in autumn.

In lines 2-5, Shelley embodies the traditional epic simile found in Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Milton, in which souls of the dead are compared to fallen leaves driven by the wind. G.M.Matthews notes that the four colours are not only actually found in dead leaves, but are those traditionally representing the four races of man - Mongoloid, Negroid, Caucasian, and American Indian.

dark wintry bed : dark place under the soil in which the seeds lie throughout the winter in order to be quickened into life in spring.

winged seeds : flying seeds.

corpse : dead body.

azure sister of the Spring : the mild wind of spring which heralds the coming of bright sunny days with blue skies. The traditional name of the autumnal west wind was Ausonius. (Italy was poetically was poetically known as Ausonia). Though the spring west wind was masculine in both Greek (Zephyrus) and Latin (Favonius) mythology, Shelley revises the tradition by making the restorative force of the spring mildly feminine.

azure : blue.

blow her clarion : send forth her message loudly and clearly.

clarion : a narrow shrill-sounding war trumpet. 'Clarion' is one of the many images of stanza 1 repeated in stanza 5 ('trumpet'). Clarion-trumpet-Wind-breath-word-lips-Spring-prophecy links the West Wind with the poet and change through violent action.

dreaming earth : the earth which sleeps and dreams in winter. A brilliant personification.

and fill…plain and hill : the warm wind of spring fills the earth with fresh colours ('hues') and smells ('odours'). The buds that bloom in spring are compared to a flock of sheep driven to pastures by shepherds.

Destroyer and Preserver : the destructive and regenerative powers of the West Wind. These titles come directly from the titles of the Hindu gods Siva, the destroyer and Vishnu the preserver, known to Shelley from both the translations and writings of Sir William Jones and Edward Moor's *Hindu Pantheon* (1810). Shelley's myth-making power is evident here.

The images of death and rebirth are announced in the first stanza.

Stanza II

steep sky's commotion : the vault of the sky, which rises in a steep slope from the horizon, is in an agitated state. The ancient Greeks described the sky as an inverted bowl, its highest point the zenith. Shelley used their image but did not share their belief in the sky as a bowl.

Loose clouds : high, wispy cirrus clouds (the word means 'curl' or 'lock of hair' in Latin)

Thou…shed : a beautiful image in which Shelley draws a parallel between the dead leaves of the previous stanza and the clouds described here. The West Wind is compared to a stream on which the clouds are borne, just as a stream carries on its current dead leaves of trees scattered by wind. tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean: during the storm the clouds fill up all spaces between the sky and sea which seem to meet together and look like the intertwining branches of trees.

Angels : literally 'messengers'. One of the many instances of Shelley's use of Biblical-sounding image without orthodox Biblical meaning.

aery surge : the movement of the wind across the blue skies is compared to the rushing forward of waves across the ocean.

Maenad : frenzied female worshipper of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine. Shelley had seen the Maenads as depicted in Florentine sculpture as drunken women with loose hair, in a frenzieddance. This image makes it appropriate to term the clouds as the "locks of the approaching storm".

dim verge : dark border.

zenith : highest point of the sky.

The locks…storm : the hair-like shreds of long wavy clouds that show a coming storm.

ll.18-23 : The cirrus clouds are scattered all over the sky by the West Wind. The clouds are beingcompared to the light hair of the Maenads.

dirge : a song of mourning; a funeral song. The West Wind is associated with autumn ('dying year'). The sound of it announces the approach of winter and the death of the year. Its music is therefore mournful.

closing : drawing near.

dome : hemispherical roof.

sepulchre : tomb. (Note the many images of death in Stanza II: 'dying year', 'closing night', 'vast sepulchre'.)

vapours : clouds.

vaulted…vapours : the vault of the tomb will be formed by the accumulated mass of clouds in the sky.

solid atmosphere : compact gaseous mass having the appearance of being solid. This is a powerful oxymoron iterating the idea of Wind as Destroyer and Preserver. The poem is built on this oxymoron which also shores up the force with which the storm will burst. Shelley may have had volcanic rain in mind, hence 'black rain' and 'fire'.

Stanza III

ll.29-31 : The Mediterranean is calm and still in summer, but becomes rough in autumn when the West Wind starts blowing.

summer : all the four seasons of the European year are mentioned in this poem. Here, summer is associated with the past (over, done with). Summer is also associated with sleep and dream which Spring and the poet's words will end.

lulled : soothed to sleep.

pumice isle : volcanic island. The porous rocks formed by volcanic lava are known as pumice.

Baiae's bay : a fashionable sea-side resort of the ancient Romans in the Bay of Naples on the western coast of Italy. "From a boat beside an island of pumice (porous lava) Shelley had the previous December seen the overgrown villas from the days of imperial Rome underneath the waters of the Bay of Baiae". (Shelley, Letters, II, 61)

wave's intenser day : the clear water acts as a lens that gathers and intensifies the rays of the sun; the image quivers because of the water. Shelley, like Coleridge and others of this post-Newtonian world, was fascinated by the properties of light.

the sense…them : the sense seems to be overpowered in the attempt to imagine its fragrance, not to speak of inhaling it. Shelley's sensuous imagination is at its full flight here.

Thou : a sonnet's effect depends on the turn from the octave to the sestet. In this last line of the octave, Shelley switches to the describing the Atlantic Ocean. He makes similar switches just prior to the onset of the sestet in stanzas I, II, and V. Stanza IV, a transitional stanza in many ways, is the only one in which it is difficult to locate the shift.

Atlantic's level powers…chasms : the West Wind parts the waters of the Atlantic Ocean into deep hollows. Another instance of the precision with which Shelley observed and recorded the empirical world. Note the onomatopoeia.

ll.39-42 : even the vegetation deep below the sea reacts to the transforming powers of the wind. "The phenomenon alluded to at the conclusion of the third stanza is well known to naturalists. The vegetation at the bottom of the sea, of rivers, and of lakes, sympathizes with that of the land in the change of seasons, and is consequently influenced by the winds which announce it." (Shelley's note).

Nora Crook says, "the sapless foliage of the Ocean that inspired that line was seen by Shelley in a glass bottomed boat in the Bay of Naples on 8 Dec. 1818".

voice : Shelley uses "voice" not "sound", linking the Wind's power to 'incantation', 'prophecy', 'words'.

Stanza IV

If I were…thy power : in these lines the poet applies the images of dead leaves, the clouds and the waves to himself. These lines link the stanza with the previous three stanzas where the poet has spoken of the 'dead leaf', 'swift cloud' and 'wave'.

If even…in my boyhood : this regret for the passing away of the days of childhood or of youth is a recurrent note in English romantic poetry.

The comrade…vision : if ever I could run with the wind as I did in my boyhood, when to race with the swift wind seemed almost possible to me.

I fall upon the thorns of life : Shelley's favourite self-portrait which occurs again in Adonais. Here, Shelley refers to the miseries of his life. He was abandoned by the society and howled down by the critics. Behind Shelley's image - besides other literary references - lie Jesus's crown of thorns and Dante's metaphor of life as "a dark wood…rough and stubborn" (Inferno, I.1-5).

ll.55-56 : an echo of Rousseau's famous words 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains.'

Stanza V

Make me thy lyre…forest is : the autumnal forest is like an Aeolian harp which plays melodious music when the wind flows through it. The poet also wants to be the 'lyre' (as the forest is) of the West Wind.

The 'lyre' probably alludes to Orpheus, the mythical poet who created the world by playing his lyre just as the present poet hopes to create a new world through his poetry. Orpheus also returned from the land of the dead. So, the image is also connected with regeneration - a recurrent image in the poem.

mighty harmonies : i.e. 'harmonious madness' of “To a Skylark”. Here lies the

uniqueness of the West Wind to Shelley. It can create harmony through its fierceness - something 'sweet' out of 'sadness'. This is an oxymoron.

Be thou, Spirit fierce…impetuous one : the poet prays to be identified with the West Wind in its fierce impetuosity. He aspires to merge with the Wind so that he can transform the present world.

dead thoughts : ideas which are outdated.

quicken a new birth : the leaves of trees fallen in autumn lead to vigorous burst of life in spring. Similarly, the 'dead thoughts' of the poet will give way to a 'new birth' - a new set of social idea where there will be no ills, evils and oppressive laws.

incantation of this verse : magic spell of poetry. The poet's words will act like magic on earth - that is his hope. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley said that ancient poets were "magi" or wise men whose poetry was magical, which was why they had the status of prophets in society.

as from…hearth : the mind of Shelley is like a hearth which has been dimly burning because he has been weakened by time and miseries of life.

Ashes and sparks : i.e. dead thoughts and new bright ideas for regeneration.

unawakened earth : earth which is sleeping. The people of the earth are yet to be awakened to consciousness about the social injustice and evils.

trumpet : in stanza I, the dreaming earth will awaken in spring when a clarion will blow; in stanza V, the poet's words are the trumpet of a prophecy that will awaken an 'unawakened earth'. Shelley's zeal for reforming the world finds pointed expression here.

Shelley believed that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" and therefore a poet has a prophetic role to play.

O Wind…behind? : when winter appears, we may be sure that spring and the rebirth of vegetation cannot be far distant. This is a strong and profound note of hope, very characteristic of Shelley, and uttered here with a great deal of conviction.

3.15.5 Development of Thought

Stanza I : Shelley begins the Ode with an invocation to the West Wind and describes its activity on the earth. The wind is 'wild'; it is the tumultuous and omnipresent spirit of autumn. It has a dual role of the "Destroyer and Preserver": the 'pestilence-stricken multitudes' of the dead leaves are driven away in the octave and the winged seeds are preserved in their dark wintry bed (for their future resurrection during spring) in the sestet.

Stanza II : The second stanza of the Ode describes the activities of the West Wind

in the sky: the effect of the wind upon the formation of clouds. The clouds are supposed to be the foliage of heaven and ocean (thus the first three stanzas are beautifully linked) and are swept off by the West Wind like real dead leaves shaken into a river. The clouds are again compared to the dishevelled hair of a frenzied female worshipper of Bacchus. Again, the wind is regarded as the singer of the dirge of the dying year to which the clouds of the dark autumn night form a sepulchral vault. Winter rains are a prelude to the fertility that returns with the spring.

Stanza III : The effect of the wind upon water is described in stanza III. Not only the life on land, but the life in the sea is also affected by the mighty power of the wind. The West Wind agitates the ocean and awakens the blue Mediterranean from his summer dreams. It cleaves the glassy surface of the Atlantic and the vegetation at its bottom is ruffled by the sound that heralds its approach.

Stanza IV : In the fourth stanza Shelley invokes the West Wind for strength and expresses his eagerness to share the impulse of its force. By bringing in the leaf, the cloud, and the wave of the previous stanzas Shelley wants the wind to fill him with strength and to lift him from his dire misery - 'the thorns of life'. Once upon a time he also, like the West Wind, was tameless, swift and proud. But now, he is chained by a heavy weight of time which also crushes his once-indomitable spirit.

Stanza V : In the concluding stanza, the wind is a metaphor for the invisible force that will scatter the poet's words. The poet hopes that with the endless energy of the wind his glowing prophecy of reawakened earth and man's victory over evil will be broadcast to mankind. Shelley compares himself to the autumnal forest, when the trees become apparently dead. He compares his thoughts to the dead fallen leaves, which by concealing and fertilizing the seeds, help the efflorescence of a new life in spring. So, he hopes that his winged words will help the new ideas and impulses, which he thinks are hidden in humanity, to blossom forth into beautiful activities. For this to happen he appeals to the autumnal wind to be to himself and his thoughts what it is to the forest and its leaves. The Ode concludes with the prophetic utterance and the hope for the future regeneration of mankind.

Activity for the Learners!

1. Find out words from the poem which are related to death and decay.

2. All the four seasons are mentioned in the poem. In what particular contexts are they referred to?

3.15.6 Textual Issues

❖ **Hopes and Aspirations :**

As you have already noted, Shelley is mainly a poet of regeneration and reconstruction. So far as humanity and the world at large were concerned, Shelley was a hardcore optimist. His optimism and aspiration moulded him in the role of a prophet. But it must be admitted at the same time that there is a deep undercurrent of melancholy in most of his poems. This melancholy was due to the fact that Shelley could not reconcile the hard facts with his ideas and ideals. Shelley's personal despondency, however, did not give rise to any morbid feeling. His poetry is full of hopeful messages - that happiness would follow misery, that the world of evils and corruption would be replaced by a new millennium where justice, liberty, equality and fraternity will reign.

Ode to the West Wind contains some notes of depression, no doubt. Shelley almost groans "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!". But this kind of depressive note is but exception. Rather a bold and determining attitude is that of optimism and aspiration, of dream and hope. In 'Ode to the West Wind', Shelley at first wonders at the might of the West Wind on the earth, in the sky and the sea. He feels the inadequacy of his life in comparison to the mighty potential of the West Wind. But he does not allow himself to be carried away by depression and frustration. He rather takes shelter in hope and aspiration. He implores the West Wind to imbue him with his dynamic thoughts and also to scatter his own thoughts and ideas, lying still dormant, throughout the world just like the withered leaves of trees in autumn in order to quicken a rebirth of humanity:

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!"

In every detail of the poem Shelley has emphasized life coming out of death, a motif of hope. The present in the poem is imaged in terms of objects that are nearly dead but have seeds of life in them. The future is represented by images of new life (seeds, spring, rain, awakening etc.). New life emerges from death-like states such as sleep (stanzas I, III and V). In stanza III, The Mediterranean turns back nostalgically and sees "old palaces and towers" that were the remains of the Roman Empire. But, unlike the Mediterranean, Shelley is not interested in palaces and towers. Instead, he concentrates on the life that has grown over the ruined signs of a dead empire, "the azure moss and flowers." The moss and flowers are the natural growth that has hidden the ruins of the Roman Empire.

Towards the end of the Ode, Shelley appeals to the West Wind to give him faith, valour and inspiration; he wants to regenerate himself so that he could preach his thoughts, ideas and messages of hope to mankind, steeped in ignorance and inertia.

The poet is quite sure of the birth of a new era. He sees beyond the dismal winter the dawn of a happy spring on humanity - full of happiness and possibilities: "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?". This last line of the poem can be source of unfailing inspiration to all men and women at any time, anywhere. Shelley believed that man is to be made perfect by the complete dissolution of all traditional ties by which the race is at present bound together. This is the hope and aspiration of a revolutionary who believed in the idea of a new millennium - the future Golden Age of great happiness and prosperity for everyone.

❖ Imagery

If you read 'Ode to the West Wind' with rapt attention, you will feel Shelley's highly spontaneous lyricism. His intensity of feelings and deep passions are best expressed through his individual expressions which are marked by a cluster of images, metaphors and similes. For Shelley was fond of visualizing his idea in concrete shapes, his use of images is 'kaleidoscopic', i.e. Shelley did not give one or two features at a time but a whole series of them.

Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' is rich in dazzling images. The images used here are decorative, apt and compelling and show the influence of Greek literary art upon him. In the poem image succeeds image in rapid and spontaneous flow. The images are pictorial, natural, scientific, mythical and even biblical. The theme of death and rebirth is worked out in the poem in powerful images. The poem begins with autumn and ends with spring. The Wind is the spirit of destruction and regeneration, the common power that moves through both. With the instinctive truths of a fervid imagination, Shelley creates myths and his myth-making power is exemplified in the personifications used to describe the various activities of the West Wind.

In the very beginning, the Wind has been conceived as a spirit driving through the earth, scattering away the old and dead leaves. The mighty impact of the Wind on the leaves has been likened to the magical power of an enchanter who mysteriously drives away ghosts. The ghosts symbolize death, which image is further enlarged upon by the use of the sickly colour effects. The 'yellow', 'black' and 'pale' are colour words which give us pictures of disease, calamity and death. This death imagery reaches its climax when the fleeing, dead leaves are compared to people rushing away "pestilence-stricken". The image of 'chariot' is very significant. A chariot carries a king with due ceremony; likewise, the wind conveys the seeds amidst splendid dusty display. The image of the archangel blowing clarion is biblical. Again, the images of death and rebirth are suggested in "Destroyer and Preserver".

In the second stanza, the sky is imagined as a tree from whose boughs the leaves like loose clouds are shaken. Here, Shelley employs the mythological image of the fierce Maenad. The dark masses of moving clouds are imaged as dishevelled hair of

a Maenad streaming up from her head as she dances in religious frenzy. Next, the Wind is imagined as the dirge of the dying year. In the third stanza, there is the calm image of the Mediterranean sleeping and dreaming in summer by "the coil of his crystalline streams". The West Wind lashes the Mediterranean Atlantic into fury. The underwater vegetation shedding the leaves is imaged as a man losing his glowing appearance when fears grip him. These pictures are objective, visual and descriptive.

In the fourth stanza, the poet relates his own sense of oppression and restraint to wind's freedom and strength. The images of 'chain', 'weight', 'thorns' suggest his personal oppressions, sorrows and despondency in the society. In the last stanza, the poet uses the image of the dreary autumnal forest to describe his own weak condition. But the poet is sure that the West Wind will awaken powerful music in him, just as it does in the autumnal forest which is imagined as a lyre. The poet brings in the images of a dying hearth to describe his mind which though apparently dead can produce a new conflagration. The poem ends with the image of the cycle of seasons - of dreary winter followed by spring which symbolizes regeneration.

Shelley's imagery used in 'Ode to the West Wind' reflects the state of the poet's mind - his heightened imagination, his lofty idealism and his intense love for nature and natural phenomena. What Shelley tries to convey through his imagery is that nature is a permanent force which not only provides a sense of joy but also a sense of beauty which is not subject to wear and tear of the physical world. The telescoping of the images that can be noticed here gives to the poem a beauty and excellence of its own. Shelley's love of nature expressed through his imagery highlights the loftiness of his vision and idealism.

3.15.7 Summing up

After going through the poem and the discussions on it, you can now understand how Shelley's personal despondency, his ideas and ideals, his optimistic vision of a new millennium, his ideas about the social duty of a poet are expressed through the brilliant images of the poem. We see that Shelley's revolutionary thoughts and social ideals make him a romantic with a difference. However, the above discussions on the poem will, hopefully, help you understand the various aspects of Shelley's poetry and also make you interested in reading Shelley further.

3.15.8 Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions :

1. Consider Shelley as a romantic poet with reference to 'Ode to the West Wind'.
2. What is an image? Discuss the images used by Shelley in 'Ode to the West Wind'.

3. Estimate Shelley as a poet of hope and aspiration with reference to 'Ode to the West Wind'.
4. Shelley's poetry is a vehicle of his prophetic message - Discuss with reference to 'Ode to the West Wind'.

Mid-length Questions :

1. Discuss the function of the West Wind both as Destroyer and Preserver with reference to Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'.
2. Consider Shelley as a lyrical poet with reference to 'Ode to the West Wind'.
3. Examine Shelley's attitude to Nature as expressed in 'Ode to the West Wind'.
4. Consider 'Ode to the West Wind' as an ode.

Short Questions :

1. What
1. Describe the various activities of the West Wind on land.
2. What personal picture of Shelley do you get in Stanza IV of 'Ode to the West Wind'?
3. How does Shelley presentthe theme of death and rebirthin 'Ode to the West Wind'?
4. "If Winter comes can Spring be far behind?"-Bring out the significance of the above line with reference to Shelley's own ideals.

3.15.9 Suggested Reading

Baker, Carlos. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press, 1948.

Donovan, Jack and Duffy, Cian. *Percy Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*. Penguin Classics. 2017

Fogle, R.H. *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*. University of North Carolina Press., 1949.

King-Hele, Desmond. *Shelley, His Thought and Work*. Macmillan, 1962.

Reiman, Donald H. and Fraistat, Neil. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. 2nd edn. Norton, 2002.

UNIT–16 : PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY - TO A SKYLARK

Structure

3.16.1. Objectives
3.16.2. Introduction
3.16.3. Text of 'To a Skylark'
3.16.4. Glossary and Commentary
3.16.5. Development of thought
3.16.6. Textual Issues
3.16.7. Summing Up
3.16.8. Comprehension Exercises
3.16.9. Suggested Reading

3.16.1 Objectives

In Unit 15, we have discussed various aspects of Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind'. In Unit 16, in the light of what we have learnt there and also in Unit 14, we shall take up another poem of Shelley, 'To a Skylark', for a close analysis. After going through this Unit, you are expected to learn about:

- 'To a Skylark' as a poem that embodies Shelley's characteristic thoughts, ideas and ideals.
- Numerous similes and metaphors in the poem through which Shelley tries to make us feel about the exact nature of the Skylark and its song.
- Shelley's awareness of the human limitations and the Skylark's unmixed joy which he earnestly needs to bring about a change in the society.
- Soothing and sonorous music that is produced by the movement of the lines and stanzas of the poem.
- Shelley's style of writing and his artistic excellence as expressed in 'To a Skylark'.

3.16.2 Introduction

Like 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark' is another important lyric of Shelley, which contains typical Shelleyan ideas and ideals. Soaring higher and higher, the

skylark becomes a perfect symbol of Shelley's aspiration. The poem is especially remarkable for the exquisite beauty and loveliness of its various images. The poem is of imagery all compact. While enjoying the soothing music of the poem, you should also note how Shelley compares and contrasts the human condition with the ideal world of the skylark. Enjoy reading the poem, relate it with Shelley's thoughts and beliefs and then test yourselves with the self-assessment questions set at the end of the Unit.

❖ Composition and Publication

"To a Skylark" was composed near Leghorn (Livorno) in late June 1920 and published with *Prometheus Unbound*. About the origin of this poem Mary Shelley observes: "It was on a beautiful summer evening, while wandering among the lanes whose myrtle-hedges were the owners of the fire-flies, that we heard the caroling of the skylark." The material for this poem was provided in June 1820 during an evening walk near Leghorn.

It can also be noted that Shelley was reading the Platonic Dialogues, particularly Phaedrus, during the composition of this poem. The basic idea of the Skylark as a bodiless spirit might be taken from this.

❖ Central Thought

Skylark (Alauda arvensis) is a small European bird that builds its nest on the ground but sings only in flight, usually when it is too high to be clearly visible. This quality of the bird makes it a mysterious being.

Like other well-known lyrics, 'The Cloud' and 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To a Skylark' gives ample evidence of Shelley's tenacious observation of nature, although the central idea is "the bird's easy movements and fluent song" in contrast to "Man's clumsy attempts at each", says Desmond King-Hele. The metre suits the subject, the four short lines matching "the quick wing-beats of the lark's hectic climbs" and the prolonged floating last line representing "its easier descent". Shelley's description of the bird is almost analogous to his Platonic conception of the mysterious spirit of the universe which remains invisible but pervades the world with its creative power.

Thematically, the thought of the poem has a three-fold development. The first six stanzas (lines 1 - 30) describe the poet's impression of a bird, a 'blithe Spirit', as a barely seen, imagined and keenly felt phenomenon. Stanzas seven to twelve (lines 31-60) attempts but fails to find a fitting natural or human analogue for the bird and its song. In stanzas thirteen to twenty-one (lines 61-105) Shelley conceives of the skylark as abstract beauty possessing a rare vision denied to earthlings. He relates the skylark's song (and the contents of the song) to the human situation and to the aspirations of mankind. The poet asks the ethereal bird to teach humanity its secret joy.

3.16.3 Text

To a Skylark

Hail to thee, blithe Spirit!
Bird thou never wert,
That from heaven, or near it,
Pourest thy full heart
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art. 5

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire;
The blue deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest. 10

In the golden lightning
Of the sunken sun,
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
Thou dost float and run,
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun. 15

The pale purple even
Melts around thy flight;
Like a star of heaven
In the broad daylight
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight, 20

Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see-we feel that it is there. 25

All the earth and air
With thy voice is loud,
As, when night is bare,
From one lonely cloud
The moon rains out her beams, and heaven is overflowed. 30

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?
From rainbow clouds there flow not
Drops so bright to see
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody. 35

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not: 40

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower: 45

Like a glow-worm golden
In a dell of dew,
Scattering unbeholden
Its aerial hue
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view: 50

Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,

Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-wingèd thieves: 55

Sound of vernal showers
On the twinkling grass,
Rain-awakened flowers,
All that ever was
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass. 60

Teach us, sprite or bird,
What sweet thoughts are thine:
I have never heard
Praise of love or wine
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine. 65

Chorus hymeneal
Or triumphal chaunt
Matched with thine would be all
But an empty vaunt,

A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want. 70

What objects are the fountains
Of thy happy strain?
What fields, or waves, or mountains?
What shapes of sky or plain?
What love of thine own kind? what ignorance of pain? 75

With thy clear keen joyance
Languor cannot be:
Shadow of annoyance
Never came near thee:
Thou lovest, but ne'er knew love's sad satiety. 80

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream? 85

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not:
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught;
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought. 90

Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near. 95

Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground! 100

Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then, as I am listening now! 105

3.16.4 Glossary and Commentary

Stanza-I

Blithe spirit/ Bird thou never wert : The mysterious quality of the bird is referred

to here. Shelley starts calling the bird 'spirit' ('unbodied joy' in l.15), and listening to its song, he is convinced of its ethereality, devoid of flesh and blood. This basic idea of the poem might be taken from Plato's Phaedrus.

unpremeditated : spontaneous.

Stanza-II

Like a cloud of fire : like a column of fire that soars into sky. Shelley stresses the disembodied nature of the lark.

The blue deep : the blue sky.

And singing…ever singest : Unlike other birds, the skylark has no strain in performing the acts of soaring and singing simultaneously.

Stanza-III

unbodied joy : spirit of joy divested of body ('blithe spirit' in l.1).

Stanza-IV

The pale purple even : "Shelley watches the skylark rise until he loses it in the evening sky."

even : evening

Like a star of Heaven : Venus as the evening star.

Stanza-V

arrows : sharp arrows of Cupid, Venus's son.

silver sphere : Venus as the morning star. Many editors have, almost traditionally, considered "the silver sphere" to be the moon. Critics like King-Hele maintain that it is a misreading "partly because 'intense' applies better to Venus than to the moon, and partly because the moon can easily be seen by day".

Stanza-VI

loud : full.

As when…lonely cloud : the barrenness of the night is further heightened by the presence of a solitary cloud. This idea of intense loneliness of a surrounding has been denoted by Coleridge in Christabel and Wordsworth as in the Tintern Abbey Lines.

The similes in stanzas 8-12 both involve all five senses and descend from human poet and lover through the animal, vegetable, and mineral realms.

Stanza-VII

What thou art…thee? : The poet is attempting in vain to find a fitting analogue for the bird and its song. He frankly confesses his difficulty.

Stanzas 8 - 12 give a series of similes to describe the invisible nature of the bird in

flight and the effect of its song on the senses of sight, hearing, touch and smell.

Stanza-VIII

Like a poet…thought : Shelley is in search of an apt simile for the bird and its spontaneous joy. He comes upon the image of the poet, who emerges from himself by projecting nothing but his illuminating thought. In *Queen Mab* Shelley mentions "the bright Reason's ray".

unbidden : spontaneously.

Stanza-IX

Like a high-born…bower : the image is of a princess imprisoned in a palace tower comforting her sad heart with sweet and spontaneous music. This spontaneity is the point comparable to the lark-song. The stanza is also marked with Shelley's love of medievalism.

Stanza-X

unbeholden : unseen.

aerial hue : faint light.

Stanza-XI

heavy-winged thieves : The winds that force upon the buds and drink of sweetness, which makes them faint. A case of personification.

Stanza-XII

vernal showers : light showers of rain in Spring. Here is an auditory image in this line.

Stanza-XIII

Sprite : spirit.

Praise of love or wine : Short poems in praise of love or wine, called Anacreontics, were an established tradition descending from the Greek poet Anacreon (ca. 563 - 478 B.C.).

Stanza-XIV

Chorus Hymeneal : Wedding song; Hymen was the Greek god of marriage.

triumphal chaunt : Songs sung in celebration of military triumph.

chaunt : chant.

hidden want : unknown deficiency.

Stanza-XV

What love…pain : Is the song of the bird inspired by love for its mate, or by the ignorance of what suffering is?

Stanza-XVI

love's sad satiety : when too much, man gets weary even of love and feels frustrated.

Stanza-XVII

Thou of death…dream : The skylark's advantages over man are evinced by the fact that while man envisages death in his dream like reveries, the bird has truer and deeper insights into the mysteries of death. Little wonder then that the notes of the bird are ecstatic, copious and unhampered.

Stanza-XVIII

We look before…is not : The difference between human beings and animals lies in the fact that human beings have the capacity to rationalize everything whereas animals react to stimuli instinctively. Shelley echoes Hamlet, IV.iv.33 - 39, where Hamlet distinguishes between human beings' "god-like reason" and mere animal life.

Stanza-XIX

Yet if…fear : "Even if we could conquer the passions of hate, pride and fear" - the three evils that Shelley always fought against.

Stanza-XX

Scorner of the ground : the skylark is rarely seen on the ground.

Stanza-XXI

harmonious madness : In his translation of Plato's *Ion*, Shelley says, "For a poet is indeed a thing ethereally light, winged and sacred, nor can he compose anything worth calling poetry until he becomes inspired and, as it were, mad.".

Shelley's estimate of the effect of poetic joy in lines 101-05 contrasts with the isolation that Coleridge sees as its result in Kubla Khan, lines 42-54. Refer also to Shakespeare's 'fine frenzy'.

In these lines, Shelley expresses his faith in the power of poetry to transform the world. If he can unravel the mystery of the source of happiness that seems to inspire the skylark's song, then he too would be able to create impassioned poetry that might move humanity.

3.16.5 Development of Thought

Stanza I : The skylark is not a bird of flesh and blood; it is a spirit of bodiless joy. It soars higher and higher and sings spontaneously from the sky. A mere bird of flesh and blood cannot produce such a divine melody; so, it cannot be an earthly creature. It is a spirit of joy.

Stanza II : Like a cloud of fire the skylark soars very high in the sky. It is a singing spirit which soars and sings at the same time.

Stanza III : The skylark is seen flying like an unbodied joy when the clouds in the western sky are brightened up by the setting sun. The pictorial quality of these lines is excellent.

Stanza IV : When the light of evening fades the skylark becomes invisible in the high sky, just like the evening star in day light. But the sharp shrill cry of delight still reaches the poet's ears.

Stanza V : The skylark remains invisible, but its rapturous song fills the earth.

Stanza VI : The song of the skylark permeates the earth and air as the light of the moon overflows the sky from behind a solitary cloud.

Stanza VII : The poet is at difficulty because he does not know what the skylark is, or what it is like. Its shower of melody is more beautiful than rain drops falling from the rainbow clouds.

Stanza VIII : The skylark is compared to a poet whose thoughts are unknown to the world. But his songs carry messages of hope and fear to which the world is compelled to respond.

Stanza IX : The skylark is compared to a high-born maiden soothing the love-laden soul with song in her secret bower.

Stanza X : The poet compares the skylark to a glow-worm which scatters its golden light, though it remains hidden behind the screen of flowers and grass. The skylark also scatters its melodious song though it is invisible in the sky.

Stanza XI : The skylark is compared to a rose which, though remains hidden behind the leaves, scatters its fragrance in the air. Similarly, the skylark remains invisible but pours forth its song through the air.

Stanza XII : The skylark's song surpasses all things that are clear, fresh and joyous. It is superior to the music of the rains in spring as they fall on the grass and flowers.

Stanza XIII : Being deeply impressed by the joyous song of the skylark, the poet now asks the bird to tell him about the mystery of its song. The poet has not experienced any music equal to this divinely song.

Stanza XIV : The song of the skylark is superior to marriage song or song of victory. These songs seem to be empty and meaningless when compared to the song of the skylark.

Stanza XV : The poet wants to know the sources of the bird's song. Earthly poetry is inspired by the beauties of nature, but the skylark's song can not be inspired by earthly beauties. It must be something unique to make the skylark sing like this, with such divine ecstasy.

Stanza XVI : The skylark's joy is so pure and intense that it never feels weariness

or annoyance. It loves, but its love does not suffer from the weariness that follows the over-enjoyment of love. Consequently, the skylark is able to sing out of the fullness of its love.

Stanza XVII : The bird must have truer idea of death than men. That idea must be something that makes for such clear and unclouded happiness of the bird.

Stanza XVIII : Men always look at the past with a vain regret or at the future with a vain longing. We long for things unreal or unattainable. Hence all our happiest moments have a tinge of sadness. And the most tragic songs give us the greatest pleasure.

Stanza XIX : If men could rise above such weaknesses as hate, pride and fear that cloud men's happiness on earth and were destined to enjoy an eternal happiness, the poet does not know how even then it could be possible for us to approach the joy of the skylark.

Stanza XX : The skylark's skill in singing is far better than all the melodies and all the treasures of wisdom.

Stanza XXI : The poet prays to the skylark to teach him a portion of the joy that is known to the skylark alone. If he gets that he will be able to enter the world through his ecstasy and rapture. And people all over the world will be compelled to listen to his songs as he is now listening to the skylark's song.

Activity for the Learners!

1. Make a list of the Similes used in the poem and try to classify them

2. Compare this poem with other bird poems of the Romantic period

3.16.6 Textual Issues

❖ **Similes/Images**

'To a Skylark' abounds in similes and analogies. To some they are excessive and spoil an otherwise very beautiful poem. But if we go to the depth of the poem, we will see that Shelley's use of similes is closely linked to his basic thought in the poem.

In the first part of the poem, Shelley tries to apprehend his experience of listening to the invisible bird. But as he cannot directly apprehend either the bird or what it represents, he can only have recourse to similes and comparisons. In lines 31 and 32, the poet frankly confesses his difficulty:

What thou art we know not;
What is most like thee?

So, the poem is full of beautiful images - images come one after another in quick succession throughout the poem. The sweet joyous song is audible to us but the bird itself remains invisible in the dazzling light of the sun. To illustrate this phenomenon Shelley brings a host of ethereal images. The skylark is compared to a cloud of fire, to Venus - the morning star, and to the moon raining out her beams from behind a solitary patch of cloud. Thus, the images come in profusion. But they are like the tail of a Homeric simile which stay on for their own sake and by their dazzle and glitter, surprise and enthrall us apart from their uses as images.

While we think one image would serve the purpose Shelley piles images on images. To present the skylark as a 'sightless song' Shelley draws a host of similes - both from the human and the natural world. In stanzas 8-11, the bird is compared to a poet hidden in the light of thought, a high-born maiden in a palace tower, a glow-worm golden in a dale of dew, and a rose embowered in its own green leaves. Each of these images presents a concealed source of some beauty which spills into the world around. And the poet's vision of the bird is greatly enriched by association with the manifestations of beauty which are different but akin.

As with a true romantic, Shelley's images reflect the intensity of imaginative power, wonderful suggestiveness and the romantic cast of the poet's genius. One single image of the high-born maiden in a palace tower is sufficient enough to illustrate this point:

"Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower."

All through Shelley's images have unique pattern which make us spell bound with their intensity of imagination, minute observation of nature and natural elements, their evocation of synesthesia and the easy and spontaneous lyrical quality attached to them.

❖ Shelley's Ideals/Idealism

From Unit 14, you are already familiar with Shelley's vision and ideals in general. Now, we shall try to discuss those in this particular poem. "To a Skylark" itself constitutes", says Alasdair Macrae, "an example of what Shelley aspires to, and the mixture of imagery of the ethereal and the beautiful earthly elements conveys, as does the very idea of the skylark, a sense of an elevated dimension at the extreme frontier of human understanding." Indeed, Shelley aspires after a state of existence where ideal joy, beauty, love, freedom and happiness exist. 'To a Skylark' represents Shelley's search in the physical world for reassuring analogies to substantiate belief that mankind

should heed the prophetic voice of poets. Like the west wind and the cloud, the skylark is a Shelleyan symbol for the spirit liberated from the trammels of the material. It is an appropriate object to kindle the creative imagination of a poet who has been felicitously described by Browning in his "Pauline : A Fragment of a Confession" as the 'sun-treader'.

The skylark is one of the few birds that sing during flight and so is quite an appropriate symbol for Shelley's soaring imagination. It is, in fact, Shelley's poetic self. The upward flight of the bird represents Shelley's limitless aspiration for a world of ideal joy and beauty. The bird is a denizen of the ideal world of Shelley's imagination. It is a winged desire, always rising, aspiring, singing, "like an unbodied joy, whose race is just begun.""The bird is everything that man, circumscribed in his actual life, is not - he is even a better philosopher with an insight into the mystery of life and death, the ultimate purpose of existence denied to thinking and rational man. He is a perfect stranger to that feeling of ennui and satiety that wait upon human efforts, and is the quintessence of that throbbing, joyous life which slips away so quickly and inevitably from man."(Dr. Srikumar Banerjee).

As in 'Ode to the West Wind', Shelley's strong belief in the prophetic role of the poet is well expressed in 'To a Skylark' too. The comparison of the skylark to a poet hidden "in the light of thought" whose singing converts the world to "sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not" is evidence of Shelley's hopefulness about the possibility of the world's redemption from the socio-political wrongs and injustices through the power of human thought when it is given memorable expression in poetry. The last section of the poem reminds us of his famous statement in the essay, *A Defence of Poetry* (1821): "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world." In the concluding stanza, Shelley asks the bird so to teach and inspire him as a poet that he can be fired with inspiration - 'harmonious madness' and create something marvelous about the mystery and ideal truth. The readers would then be moved by a poetic vision of which they are not usually capable. This is Shelley's vision of the ideal millennium - a dream world where all the oppressions and injustices of the present day would be absent and justice, love and sympathy would reign supreme.

3.16.7 Summing up

While reading the poet and the poem, you have, hopefully, noted how Shelley has expressed his own thoughts, ideals and vision through the symbol of the skylark. The poem, as you see, abounds in rich and brilliant images, which though apparently excessive, actually enrich the poem and are closely related to the basics of it. You can now feel his intense love for Nature, his attitude to Beauty, his descriptive power and

brilliant word-painting, lyrical quality, and the synesthetic effects of the poem. All these things, as we have discussed so far, may help you appreciate the poem and make you interested in Shelley.

3.16.8 Comprehension Exercises

Essay Type Questions :

1. Do you think that the similes and analogies used in 'To a Skylark' are excessive and spoil an otherwise very beautiful poem? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Discuss 'To a Skylark' in the light of Shelley's claim that "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world".
3. Comment on the distinctive features of Shelley's imagery with reference to 'To a Skylark'.
4. Do you think that Shelley's vision of the millennium and his ideals are essentially utopian? Answer with close reference to 'To a Skylark'.

Mid-length Questions :

1. "We look before and after,
   And pine for what is not:
   Our sincerest laughter
   With some pain is fraught;
   Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought."

   Is this an adequate description of Shelley's attitude to life? Or, would you regard him as a poet of hope and aspiration? Discuss briefly.
2. Consider Shelley as a poet of Nature with reference to 'To a Skylark'.
3. What is a lyric? Do you think that 'To a Skylark' is a perfect specimen of a lyric? Discuss.
4. Show, with reference to 'To a Skylark', how Shelley uses objects of nature as vehicles of his own personality and ideas.

Short Questions :

1. How does Shelley compare the Skylark to a poet? In what way is this simile related to Shelley's idea of a poet?
2. "What thou art we know not;
   What is most like thee?"
   What difficulty is brought out here? How does Shelley try to solve it?

3. "Bird thou never wert"

   Comment on Shelley's concept of the Skylark in the light of the above line.

4. Critically comment on the final stanza of Shelley's 'To a Skylark'.

3.16.9 Suggested Reading

Baker, Carlos. *Shelley's Major Poetry: The Fabric of Vision*. Princeton University Press, 1949

Donovan, Jack and Duffy, Cian. *Percy Shelley: Selected Poems and Prose*. Penguin Classics. 2017

Fogle, R.H. *The Imagery of Keats and Shelley*. University of North Carolina Press., 1949.

King-Hele, Desmond. *Shelley, his thought and work*. Macmillan, 1962.

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UNIT–17 : JOHN KEATS - THE ROMANTIC 'CLASSICIST'

Structure

3.17.1: Objectives

3.17.2: Introduction

3.17.3: John Keats: A Brief Bio-Sketch.

3.17.4: Poetry of John Keats.

3.17.5: John Keats-the Poet and the Critic.

3.17.5a: Views on Poetry and Poetic Aesthetics.

3.17.5b: Keats as a 'Romantic'.

3.17.5c: Keats as a 'Classicist'

3.17.6: Summing Up

3.17.7: Comprehension Exercises

3.17.8: Suggested Reading

3.17.1 Objectives

- To introduce John Keats as a poet to the learners.
- To analyse John Keats as a Romantic.
- To discuss Keats as a Classicist.
- To deliberate upon John Keats both as a Romanticist as well as a Classicist.
- To understand Romantic poetic aesthetics with reference to John Keats.
- To locate John Keats's contribution to Romantic poetry
- To understand divergent facets of Keats's poetic practice.

3.17.2 Introduction

Literary historians have traditionally drawn sharp boundaries between Romanticism and the neoclassical era that preceded it. You have read something about this evolution in Module 1 Unit 1 of this Course. In the neoclassical era, writers looked to ancient Greek and Roman models and derived from them precise formal rules of composition to which they attempted to adhere to in their literary works. Romantic writers, on the other hand, looked directly to nature or to the light of their own genius for their

inspiration. When we read a passage from Alexander Pope, for instance, we look instinctively to Horace or Virgil or Homer and compare the achievement of the English poet with his classical predecessors. When we read a passage from William Wordsworth, however, we usually do not, even when his verse is modelled on the very same Greek and Roman writers. Yet, in Wordsworth's time or in Keats's time, as in Pope's, to be educated meant to be learned in the language and literature of classical antiquity: schoolboys of the privileged classes began their formal studies with Latin, acquired Greek by their teens and their university education at Oxford and Cambridge almost entirely consisted of intensive training in classical authors. Moreover, the Romantic era was a time of immense vitality in classical studies: the rise of historical criticism reshaped the ways in which ancient authors were understood and read. There was a revival of Greek studies during the British Romantic period. Archaeological discoveries, especially at Pompeii and Herculaneum, supplied new information about the ways the ancients lived, and Greco-Roman antiquities were brought back to England from all over the Mediterranean and put on display, for the first time, in public museums. All this fired the imagination of Romantic writers, whether it was John Keats viewing the Elgin marbles, Felicia Hemans reading the excavations at Pompeii, or Samuel Taylor Coleridge studying classical philology at the University of Gottingen. 'Romantic Classicism' is the fascination with ancient Greece that emerged during the first decades of the nineteenth century. Romantic poets, particularly John Keats, transformed the most classical of literary genres and incorporated the classical elements or components in his romantic writings. John Keats has fused the Romantic and Classical characteristics effectively and successfully in his writings.

3.17.3 John Keats : A Brief Bio-sketch

John Keats (1795-1821), son of the manager of a London livery stable, attended not Eton or Harrow but Enfield School, a dissenting academy. Here he learnt much English poetry before leaving at 15, already the head of his family. At 20 he qualified as an apothecary surgeon at Guy's Hospital but decided to be a poet. Through Leigh Hunt, he met William Hazlitt, Charles Lamb and Percy Bysshe Shelley. His 4000 lines poem titled *Endymion* was published in 1818. His Poems appeared in 1820. He died of tuberculosis in 1821 in Rome. While in the poems of Walter Scott the reader often finds the poet telling stories, in those of William Wordsworth the reader experiencesa departure from the neo-classical poetry of Pope. Again, Percy Bysshe Shelley advocated social and political reforms, and Lord Byron voiced his own egoism and the political discontent of the times. John Keats lived apart from men and from all political measures, worshiping beauty like a devotee, perfectly content to write what was in his own heart, or to reflect some splendour of the natural world as he saw or dreamt it to be. He

studied and unconsciously imitated the Greek classics and the best works of the Elizabethans. His illness started with a severe cold, but soon developed into consumption, and added to this sorrow was his intense passion and love for Fanny Brawne, to whom he was engaged, but whom he could not marry on account of his poverty and growing illness.

3.17.4 Poetry of John Keats.

John Keats was a pure poet. Never was there a poet more devoted and committed to poetic ideal than John Keats. In stark contrast to his contemporary, Byron, who professed to despise the art that made him famous, Keats lived for poetry alone. His first volume of poetry entitled *Poems* was published in 1817. It contains many short poems and sonnets. Keats's second anthology of poetry titled *Endymion* was published in 1818. The poem is a narrative which is the tale of a young shepherd beloved by a moon goddess. The poem begins with the striking lines and one such line is"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever". Keats's third and last volume of poetry comprises poems like Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St.Agnes, and other Poems. It was published in 1820. Keats's recognition as a poet is mostly posthumous.

3.17.5 John Keats-the Poet and the Critic.

John Keats is an exceptional poet and his poetic talent is rare and extraordinary. He was a poet who looked upon poetry from a disinterested perspective. As a critic, he is mainly concerned with poetry and its finer qualities. His critical viewpoints or opinions are noticeable in his letters. Unlike his contemporaries like Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and Byron, Keats did not write any critical or theoretical treatise. His poetic self and critical self are fused inseparably. He enunciates poetry and holds its superiority not for any ulterior reason but for its internal qualities. He accords utmost significance to art solely for art's sake.

3.17.5a : VIEWS ON POETRY & POETIC AESTHETICS

Keats's concept of imagination is inextricably bound up with the concept of beauty and truth. Like Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley, Keats has looked upon imagination as a creative faculty of the poet which plays a pivotal role in synthesizing and unifying disparate elements in order to generate a new reality. Like other romantic theorists and critics, he has claimed a much more exalted position for imagination which has the shaping, ordering and modifying power. Like Plato, Keats has no faith in mere cold knowledge and reason. To him, poetry of any sort has its genesis in imagination, and feeling is both its rudder and its sails. Keats shares the idea that imagination emancipates the poet's mind from the incidental and temporary, leaving it free to probe the deeper mysteries of existence. Imagination, with its springs in the heart rather than in the

head-though the head has also its place- becomes with Keats the highest and most authentic guide to truth.

Keats has proclaimed his complete faith in the authenticity of the imagination. He perceives that the final way to great poetry is through the imagination. The imagination is the highest, and most generative, of all poetic functions. Reason and knowledge are requisites, it is true; but only as educators of the imagination. Keats has expressed his allegiance to freedom-giving, truth-revealing intuitive imagination as the informing spirit of poetry, and his deep-rooted antagonism to the idea of verse coldly thought out, cut by feet and chiselled by rule. Keats adopted a very balanced view of the use of imagination in poetry. He would have the imagination and the intellect work together, like twin sisters, as it were, except that the imagination should have the stronger, cleaner eyes and the deeper, more accurate seeing power, and so should always be the authority in case of dispute. Keats believed that the imagination of the true poet was capable not only of perceiving, but of creating essential reality.

His critical observations and comments are deeply imbued with the concept of disinterestedness. An instance of his critical objectivity has been evidenced in his celebrated formulation of 'Negative Capability'. Keats was always intensely conscious of a poet's creed and he never regarded poetic process and creativity as trivial. Rather sometimes he was desperately restless with his imperfection as a poet. He was not unaware of the truth that to be a poet and to write poetry is to live precariously. Keats has strongly asserted that a perpetual dilemma persists between the human self and the creative self of a poet. He has clearly stated that the poet or the artist who can completely negate his private self or entity while writing a literary work is capable of identifying himself with any person or object easily and unconditionally. The artist who has attained this state is looked upon as a great artist. Here Keats means to say that the poetic self has no particular identity of its own because it can adjust or adapt itself to any changing circumstances. It does not look down upon evil nor does it take side with the good. It is capable of identifying itself with an Iago as well as it does with Imogen or Miranda. The view that the poet or the artist must annihilate his personal self and project or sacrifice himself into other identities in Keats's earlier letters but now he affirms that the supreme purpose of human existence is to achieve identity. These two perspectives regarding the conflict of personal self and the creative self of the artist are diametrically opposite. Keats continues to consider his poetic ambitions and speculates on the clash between his concern for 'human affairs' and 'finer spirits', his familiar split between the real and the ideal. Keats stated that human life is replete with uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, no one system or formula can explain everything. What is needed is an imaginative openness of mind and heightened receptivity to reality in its full and diverse concreteness.

There is always a dichotomy or contradiction between the perfection of life and the perfection of art, between the private life and the artistic life. A creator cannot be creative throughout his entire career nor can he totally nullify his human self or entity. This bifurcation between the human self and the poetic self which is so pervasively present and substantiated in Shakespeare does not necessarily characterize Keats's creative and original endeavours. It should be noted here that Keats's inner life and his works are closely integrated. The theory of impersonalisation or the impersonal theory of art which Keats borrowed from Hazlitt was fundamentally alien to his temperamental and poetic genius. It is also in a big way connected to the streak of classicism that is attributed to Keats.

Closely related to this concept is Keats's formulation and employment of the expression 'the poetical character'. Keats has alluded to the idea of the poetical character in a letter to Woodhouse on 27th October, 1818 (Gittings, P.157). The poetical character, as differentiated from the Wordsworthian or egotistical self, only delights in 'gusto'- active participation in all forms of life, fair or foul - and this participation entails an elimination or erasure of the ego, of the self that evaluates experience with the yardstick of morality. Only through this ability to enter into other identities can the artist re-create unique characters - an Iago or an Imogen - and here the readers have an echo of Hazlitt's exposition of Shakespeare's genius.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the poetical character is aesthetic detachment or self-effacing disinterestedness serving the cause of humanity. The separation of the human self and the creative self, of the beautiful and the good, of art and life is implicit in many of Keats's pronouncements and in this respect, he is chiefly influenced by William Hazlitt. According to Keats, an ideal poet is a Chameleon, assuming each and every mood and attitude, and the distinctive mark of a many-sided genius is its elusiveness and impersonality, its disinterested perception of good and evil. The ideal poet is looked upon as a protean personality taking on every possible shape and attitude, or as a superior being looking upon the manifold aspects of life as beautiful forms. According to Keats, negative capability in another aspect can be interpreted as a unique potentiality of the artist which also involves the ideal poetical attitude to see life as a mystery, to submit to experience without reason or dogma, to remain content with half-knowledge without looking for any comfortable assurance in faith and certitude.

Keats has firm belief that in the creative act, ethical and other considerations are irrelevant because the artist is solely concerned with beauty, born of expressive adequacy, of self-effacing perception, of simultaneous attachment and detachment and this beauty is independent of both moral goodness and philosophical truth. The artist's delight is in 'conceiving' diverse characters, in the comprehension of vital form in varied

experiences. Keats has considered characters like Goneril, Regan and Iago as 'beautiful' as those of Cordelia, Desdemona and Imogen. Shakespeare's creative self may have delighted in conceiving both Iago and Imogen, but his personal self has clearly demonstrated how evil consumes much of the goodness in the real life.

Keats is primarily concerned with poetry and its aesthetic quality. He strongly endorsed the thesis of art for art's sake, and not for societal reform as Shelley has vociferously enunciated in his Defence of Poetry: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Neither does Keats assert like Wordsworth did in 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads, 1800, that "A poet is a man, speaking to men". Matthew Arnold thought that poetry could be a substitute for religion and be the mainstay of a race that had lost faith. Unlike other poets, Keats did not explicitly express a doctrine about poetry. He believed in the autonomy of poetry and this is tangible in his poems and letters. He was one of the foremost exponents of aestheticism which was initiated in England in the late nineteenth century. He was an aesthete, a fond lover of beauty and he never deemed art useful to human society and morality. To him, art has an independent existence, devoid of practical concerns of life and devotion to beauty is above all considerations, rather it makes other factors subservient.

Keats thinks that art should be completely divorced from all external purpose - social, political, ethical, ideological and others. Like Walter Pater, he has strongly recommended the pursuit of art as a means of enriching and elevating our moments. A work of art is to be valued purely for the immediate aesthetic pleasure it imparts and not for any reference to social, moral and ethical concerns of human life. Keats never wrote one single line of poetry with the least shadow of public thought. According to him, art or poetry is a thing of supreme value and this is a recurrent motif in Keats's earlier verses and letters. Keats has opined that a poet is always deeply engrossed in his imaginative contemplation, which is why, he is not at all dependent on society and association of others. Keats later criticized Shelley for favouring art which had an overt didactic 'purpose' - always trying to support a cause or prove a case. Keats's poetic aesthetics was characterized by the conflict or dilemma between social conscience or commitment and artistic conscience as it is also envisaged in his letters.

Paradoxically enough, Keats felt at the same time that he could achieve his self-realization and perform his role properly in society only by writing poetry, but the thought of doing good to the world by dedicating himself to some public cause always preoccupied him. Though Keats was averse to 'Mawkish Popularity', he was simultaneously acutely conscious of his commitment to society and its betterment. Therefore, there is no denying the fact that Keats as a theorist of poetic aesthetics was oscillating between art for art's sake and art for society's sake in an unpredictable manner.

Keats was always baffled by the demarcation between poetry and philosophy. He

never held that poetry would mesmerise by propagating theory and concept. Rather it will elevate and enrich our minds by sheer magic of emotional spontaneity. Poets will never experiment with theoretical tenets and principles, rather imagination will be his primary tool to conquer the hearts of the readers. Poetry will be necessarily spontaneous and natural. He has also opined that spontaneous and imaginative outpourings of the heart are always sacred and we can easily lift ourselves to the height of truth through imagination and beauty perceived in this way is inseparable from truth.

Keats made a clear difference between ethics and aesthetics and he has a firm conviction that the yardstick for the one is not applicable in case of the other. In this context, he has substantiated that "though a quarrel in the streets is a thing to be hated, the energies displayed in it are fine". From the ethical perspective, "A quarrel in the streets" is a thing to be despised or condemned, but when it is considered purely form the aesthetic point of view, "the energies displayed in it are fine" and it is fairly supportable. This isolation of ethics from aesthetics has positively contributed to Keats's growing aestheticism which has been manifest in his poems and letters.

Keats was not a philosopher in the technical sense of the term, and he did not formulate any system or theory. Like Blake, what Keats's genius urgently required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have given Keats more impetus in writing poetry. The fundamental difference between Blake and Keats is that unlike Blake, Keats did not indulge in a philosophy of his own. Rather he concentrated his attention upon the problems of the poet though he did not succeed in formulating a fixed set of tenets or a system for his own and for other poets. According to Keats, sublimity and amplitude are no longer regarded valid criteria of poetic worth. Concern for humanity is now held as the standard of reference, and from this perspective, Wordsworth appears superior to Milton.

3.17.5b : Keats as a Romantic

John Keats occupies a very significant position in the Romantic period and he belongs to the second generation of Romantic poets along with Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron. His poetry is characterized by a cluster of romantic features such as Imagination, love of Nature, sensuousness, meditativeness, medievalism, love of liberty or freedom, fondness for beauty and penchant for sensations. These attributes are expressed in his poems like Ode to a Nightingale, To Autumn, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Endymion: A Poetic Romance, Lamia, Hyperion, Ode on Melancholy, Ode on Indolence, Ode to Psyche etc. Ironically and paradoxically, these poems of Keats simultaneously comprise elements and features which are classical. A highly imaginative and purely romantic poet like Shelley or Keats cannot be reconciled with real life which they feel as oppressive and restrictive in every manner.' Ode to a Nightingale' being one of John Keats's most significant poetical utterances, does illustrate an

imaginative trend of the poet. The poet wants passionately to 'leave the world unseen' and with the nightingale 'fade away into the forest dim'. The poet eagerly wants to escape from the life of reality, which has given him a surfeit of torment and misery in the form of ill-health and failure in poetic career and in love and bereavement of a younger brother and seeks refuge in the forest world of the nightingale. The poet decides to fly on the wings of poetic imagination and stays in the company of the nightingale on the shady branch of a leafy tree. He indulges in the contemplation of nature's beauty and pleasures. The note of escapism and imagination asserts more strongly in the death-wish of the poet. He definitely asserts the longing to invite painless death in order to escape the constantly painful life.

The contrast between the imperishable nature of the world of art or the emblem of imagination and the transience of life is a common theme in romantic poetry and analogies are frequent in Keats' poetry. But what gives greater depth to and accounts for the subtler effect of Keats' presentation of this contrast is his ironical and paradoxical awareness of the other side of things. The moment, when Keats listens to the superb spell of the Nightingale and glorifies its song as well as the singer as 'immortal', is not measured in terms of clock-time or calendar- time, it is an eternal moment and once 'eternal' it remains so even after the fading away of the 'plaintive anthem', with the flying away of the bird to the other side of the hill.

Reconciliation of transience and permanence is one of the cornerstones of Keats' romanticism. Graham Hough perceived that Keats' major odes 'are closely bound up with this theme of transience and permanence'. It is his romantic urge that forces him, after acutely feeling the tragic loss of all that is lovable and precious in life in the inevitable flux of the world of reality, to discover an imaginative resource of permanent beauty and happiness, which would defy the decaying power of time. In his poetry Keats continuously makes an 'attempt to reconcile the contradiction' between mutability of human life and permanence of art.

Love of Nature is an important characteristic of Keats' romanticism. This aspect of Keats is explicitly present in his poem 'To Autumn'. Keats is a lover of sensuous beauty. He has painted the season of Autumn in minute details which are not only faithful but also charming. All significant sights and sounds of Autumn are brought alive to us in a memorable way with lovely imagery. The external aspect of things described is vividly realistic, but what lends an additional charm to the photographic vividness is the inner vision of the poet. The fruit of autumn like apples and hazels are ripe to the very core of them, and the secret is the sweet conspiracy between Autumn and the friendly sun. Autumn produces many 'later flowers' after the summer's abundant contribution in this sphere. But Keats, not content to talk about the colour and fragrance of flowers, focuses on their relationship with the bees. Exploring the psychology of the

tired bees, who wonder why summer is continuing, he creates a fine fusion between the human and the natural worlds. The picture is not yet complete. The cells of the bee-hives have already become clammy, overflowing with honey gathered during summer. The poem To Autumn is a rare specimen of picture -painting in English poetry.

Sensuousness or voluptuousness is a very important trait of John Keats' romanticism. Keats focuses on the richness, plenitude, and peaceful joy of Autumn. Phrases like 'mellow fruitfulness', 'load and bless with fruits', 'ripeness to the core', have an enormous sensuous impact. The climax in this respect is reached with the "O'er brimmed clammy cells" of the bee-hives. But there is something more than naive celebration of plenitude: the very first line refers to 'mists', and soon the bees fondly think 'warm days will never cease'.

Meditativeness is another important touchstone of Keats's romanticism. Keats is not only sensuous, but also deeply meditative. He has contemplated on the sorrows and miseries of life. In spite of these, man can respond to the melodious song of the bird. He has often thought of escaping from the harsh reality of this world and next the thought of death has captured him, but at last he has returned to the reality of this world.

Medievalism or revival of medieval world which constitutes one of the most significant aspects of romanticism reaches its culmination in Keats's 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'. Keats was ever enamoured of the Middle Ages. But it was the external glitter and glamour of the Middle Ages that captivated him. Their weird spirit--the elements of their magic and marvel hardly stirred his imagination. In 'La Belle' he not only reproduces the medieval pomp and chivalry, but also creates the typical medieval atmosphere of enchantment and marvel. The picture of the knight-at-arms with which the poem opens at once transports us into the medieval days of knight-errantry.

3.17.5c : Keats as a Classicist

John Keats was just as fascinated with classical Greece as Shelley, but the terms of his engagement were dramatically different. Unlike Shelley and Byron, Keats did not receive a privileged education. Son of a successful London hostler, Keats attended Enfield Academy as a boy, a school which gave as much emphasis to the sciences and modern history and literature as it did to the ancient classics. Latin was taught there, but Greek was not, and thus Enfield students would have had difficulty gaining entrance to Oxford and Cambridge. When his parents died, Keats himself was forced to leave the school. As a result, throughout his life he had to rely on the mediation of translation and secondary works, such as Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, for his understanding of classical antiquity. His ambiguous relationship to the ancient classics is dramatized in the early sonnet 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'. Here Keats allegorizes the Homeric poems as a 'wide expanse', whose 'pure serene' he had never breathed, until he read Homer, not in Greek, but in the seventeenth century translation of the dramatist, George Chapman. Chapman's translation, he claims, gives a truer sense of

Homer's power than the carefully turned couplets of Alexander Pope, whose Homeric translations were the standard in Keats's time.

Keats's ambiguous relation to the arts of ancient Greece can also be seen in his poems about Greek sculpture: his sonnets on the Elgin marbles and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. In 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Keats again dramatizes the problem of how to approach Greek art. His speaker or narrator cannot interpret the urn's 'leaf-fringed legend', and thus can only ask questions that, in the poem, remain unanswered: 'What men or gods are these?'; 'What pipes and timbrels?; 'Who are these coming to the sacrifice?; 'What wild ecstasy?' For Keats, these questions are a central part of the aesthetic pleasure the urn provides: it 'tease(s) us out of thought/ as doth eternity', he concludes and all we can finally know of the urn is the famous dictum 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Here, at the conclusion of the poem, Keats seems to suggest, paradoxically, that those lacking a classical education, those who do not know too much, may very well be the most insightful critics of Grecian art.

It is well-known that the great Renaissance of the early sixteenth century drew its life largely from the renewed study of Greek letters. That the same is true of the second Renaissance is illustrated by John Keats in England. If it be asked how the son of an hostler came to be the typical representative of Greek thought, in a sense in which Wordsworth and Coleridge and even Shelley were not, the answer can only be given in Shelley's own words, "Keats was a Greek". Through which channels did the Greek spirit come to Keats? The answer is three-fold: it came to him by literature, by sculpture, and by innate tendency. It is the last of these forces that is the most potent: without it the others would have had little or no effect because they were in reality slight. As regards literature, it is said undoubtedly that Keats could not read Greek, and his knowledge of the Greek classics was, therefore, derived from translations and books of reference. When at school, he seemed to learn by heart–so we are told–Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*.

Keats's first long poem *Endymion: A Poetic Romance* is replete with indisciplined luxuriance, of sensation introduced for its own sake, so that the story-the Greek myth of the shepherd of Mount Latmos who was loved by the Moon-is lost in the abundance of contrived settings through which he takes his hero: each setting being the excuse for the exercise of Keats's rich descriptive power rather than playing an organic part in the development of the story or the enrichment of its meaning. Hyperion, which followed, shows the influence of John Milton in its relatively weighty and sonorous blank verse, a new style for John Keats. As in Endymion: A Poetic Romance, the theme is from Greek or Classical mythology, and again Keats endeavours to put profound or deep allegorical meaning into the story. Keats left Hyperion unfinished, and later worked on a revised version The Fall of Hyperion where the style is less

obviously Miltonic and a deliberately discursive and philosophic tone is introduced, but this, too, he left unfinished, being unsatisfied with the consequences of Milton's influence on him. Both are notable poems, in which the story of the overthrow of the Titans by the new order of gods is treated both with imaginative particularization of setting and incident and with symbolic implications of the nature of poetry and the development of the poetic character. In both the poems, Keats's emphasis on craftsmanship is unambiguously tangible and perceptible.

Hellenism is one of the touchstones of Romantic literature. It is one of the salient characteristics of John Keats's poetry and it bears an unmistakable stamp of Keats' classicism. The three great odes of Keats reveal his Hellenism. It explicitly manifests that Keats's art grows increasingly more Hellenic as he passes from Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn and To Autumn. The penultimate ode is the most Hellenic of them, all with its remarkable personification of the urn that belongs to Greek times and its serenity. P. B. Shelley points out that "Keats was a Greek". But Keats, a surgeon's apprentice, never had the excellent classical education that the Oxonian Shelley had, and could not read Greek literature in the original. Yet, his reading of Greek literature in translation (one of his memorable sonnets is titled "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer") and his visual experience of Greek sculpture (especially the notable Elgin Marbles and the marble urns belonging to Lord Holland) simply overwhelmed him. It has been suggested by A. R. Weekes in the introduction to his edition of *The Odes of John Keats* that the 'calm grandeur' of Greek art, its majesty and symmetry and simplicity, its economy of ornament (frugality) and subordination of parts to the whole, came to Keats through the sights of the Elgin marbles.

A. R. Weekes draws the attention of the readers to the inborn, temperamental 'Greekness' of Keats's mind. Like the Greeks, Keats was an ardent lover of beauty: "To him, as to them, the expression of beauty is the ideal of all art; and that such an ideal should be full, lofty, and severe is due to the fact that for him, as for them, beauty is not exclusively material, nor spiritual, nor intellectual, but finds its expression in the fullest development of all that goes to make up human perfection." Weekes further points out that Keats is a Greek in his manner of personifying the powers of Nature and his Autumn is a divinity in human shape; she sets her hand to all manner of work, and directs every operation of harvest. This is the typical Greek attitude. To Greeks, the distinction between god, demi-god and heroic man was faint and variable.

Gilbert Highet provides the readers some excellent observations on Keats's Hellenism in his The Classical Tradition. He rightly points out that the Titanic majesty of the divinities in Hyperion was inspired by the Elgin Marbles and it was the sublimity and the repose of the Parthenon sculptures which had a tranquil impact on his burning imagination and gave his poetry a wider scope. Highet is full of appreciation for the

exquisite evocation of the delicate grace and the vivid reality of Greek vases in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' but notes at the same time that it is not the description of a particular vase: "It blends motives from at least two–a calm religious rite, and an ecstatic dance with 'men or gods' in pursuit of maidens loath. These are the two central elements in his own life, his quest for tranquility and his consuming passion. Many different sources have been suggested for the single urn which Keats, imagined; but what he created was a unique fusion of his own mortal genius with the immortality of Greece". A few lines later, in an eloquent passage, Highet beautifully explains the significance of Keats's Hellenism: "What Greek poetry and art meant to Keats, he himself has told us; they meant beauty. They meant the highest manifestations of physical beauty, in women, in sea, and sky and mountain and forest, in flower-laden earth and winding grottoes, in noble statues and immortal paintings; and they meant the spiritual beauty of friendship, love, and the kind emotions of imagination, and above all, of poetry".

The two aspects of beauty-physical and spiritual---were, for Keats, indissolubly linked. Physical beauty was the expression of spiritual beauty. Physical beauty evokes love, imaginative ardour and poetry. But physical beauty remains limited and temporary. Only spiritual beauty is perennial. They have to be closely connected like body and soul, otherwise one and perhaps both lose their meaning. However tempestuous may be the passion which fills a moment, the moment is no more than a bursting bubble unless it is made eternal by the spirit. This is what Keats learnt from the Greeks: "Physical beauty exists only as a symbol of spiritual beauty, and as a way to it. Like Endymion, it is always searching and always in danger of death until it is transfigured by the kiss of an immortal. Like the lovers on the Grecian urn, it is transient and mortal unless it is made permanent by art and imagination. All things in this world die; only their beauty can become immortal. Keats says that beauty is truth, and truth is an eternal reality." Keats remains first and foremost a poet who is a votary of beauty.

His sonnet titled 'On Seeing the Elgin Marble' reveals the important and unusual influence exercised over John Keats by Greek sculpture. A critic has pointed out that Hyperion "is in poetry what the Elgin marbles are in sculpture"; and it is clear that the "calm grandeur" of Greek art, its majesty and symmetry and simplicity, its economy of ornament and subordination of parts to the whole, came to Keats through the sight of these marbles. This influence is most conspicuous in his 'Ode on Indolence' and 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. But stronger than either of these is the third element in Keats's art--the inborn, temperamental "Greekness" of his mind. The Hellenes were lovers of beauty; so is John Keats. To him, as to them, the expression of beauty is the ideal of all art; and that such an ideal should be full, lofty, and severe is due to the fact that for him, as for them, beauty is not exclusively material, nor spiritual nor intellectual, but finds its expression in the fullest development of all that goes to make up human perfection.

He is a Greek, too, in his manner of personifying the powers of Nature. When Thomas Gray wrote of the rosy-bosomed Hours and William Collins of pensive Eve or the bright-haired Sun, they did no more than use a picturesque figure of speech imitated from a classic model. But with Keats it is a different matter. The Pan of Greek myth was more than half human, whoever wandered in lonely places of the woods might expect to hear his pipe or even to catch a glimpse of his hairy body and puck-nosed face; and the Pan of Keats's Ode is half human too, as he sits by the riverside or wanders at evening in the meadows.

In truth, Byron was right: Keats has "contrived to talk about the gods much as they might have been supposed to speak". The world of Greek paganism lives again in his verse, with all its frank sensuousness and joy of life, with all its mysticism and deep-hearted questioning of the natural world. More intensely even with Shelley the pantheist, John Keats, looks back and lives again in the time:

When holy were the haunted forest boughs,
Holy the air, the water, and the fire. (Ode to Psyche)

Keats knew no Greek, yet Greek literature fascinated and absorbed him completely as he saw its broken and imperfect reflection in an English translation of George Chapman. Keats was so much influenced by George Chapman's translation of Homer that he wrote a poem titled "Much have I travelled in the realms of gold", a sonnet which is based on Classical Literature and which reflects Keats's strong penchant for Classicism. Like William Shakespeare, who also was but poorly educated in the schools, he had a tremendous faculty of discerning the real spirit of the Classics–a faculty denied to many scholars, and to most of the "classic" writers of the preceding century and so he set himself to the task of representing in modern English the spirit of the old Greeks. Endymion: A Poetic Romance is the story of a young shepherd loved by a moon goddess. In this poem, Keats is concerned with the exploration of the underlying beauty of Greek mythology. Keats's third and last volume of poems entitled Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems (1820) is the one which has only two subjects: Greek mythology and medieval romance.

With the publication of Lord Byron's 'Child Harold's Pilgrimage' (1812), which focuses on the ruin and desired rebirth of classical glory, literary philhellenism (love of Greece or Classical world) can be said to have become a widespread movement. For John Keats, who shared with his fellow Romantics an admiration for the simplicity and sensuousness of the pagan world, the classical Greeks affirmed the pre-eminence of Art and Beauty. The Hellenic revival was, at least in part, a reaction against the dominant values and beliefs of the policy makers in Regency Britain: it is not insignificant or unimportant that Book III of Endymion opens with an attack upon the 'baaing vanities' of bishops, kings and emperors.

3.17.6 Summing up

Keats is one of the prominent Romantic poets who is therefore a romantic and a classicist at the same time. His poetry is a peculiar fusion of Romanticism and Classicism. He is "Romantic" in his relish of sensation, his feeling for the Middle Ages, his idea of poetry or creativity, his conception of the function of the poet. At the same time, he developed self-discipline in both feelings and craftsmanship. It should be pointed out that the synthesis he made of these Romantic and Classical elements or components was very much his own. This amalgamation of Romanticism and Classicism is one of the distinguishing features of the poetry of John Keats.

3.17.7 Comprehension Exercises

1. Critically examine John Keats as a Romantic poet.
2. Consider John Keats as a Classicist.
3. Discuss critically John Keats's views on poetry and poetic aesthetics.
4. Critically analyze John Keats as a theorist of poetry.
5. Write an essay on the salient features of John Keats's poetry.

3.17.8 Suggested Reading

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UNIT–18 : JOHN KEATS – 'ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE'

Structure

3.18.1. Objectives
3.18.2. Introduction - The Genesis of the Poem
3.18.3. The Ode in Romantic Literature
3.18.4. Text of John Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'
3.18.5. Summary & Annotations - Stanza-wise
3.18.6. Critical Commentary
3.18.7. Thematic Issues
3.18.8. Summing Up
3.18.9. Comprehension Exercises
3.18.10. Suggested Reading

3.18.1 Objectives

After an expansive discussion on the poetics of Keats and his critical understanding of the vocation of a poet in the previous Unit, here we come to the textual analysis of one of his Odes. Our objective here will be first, to understand the Ode as a poetic genre. You already have come across one by Wordsworth in Unit 10, so here we will understand how the same poetic form takes different dimensions in the work of two Romantic poets. Thereafter, we will come to a detailed understanding of how Keats constructs his world of 'fancy', which he ultimately universalizes as a human condition, and finally establishes vital connections between such a rhapsodic state and the reality of lived life. So, the element of dramatic reversal will be an important aspect to understand in our analysis of this poem.

3.18.2 Introduction - The Genesis of the poem

In the spring of 1819 Keats was residing in a house in Hampstead near London, with his friend, Charles Armitage Brown. One morning he sat out in the garden for two or three hours and Brown noticed that when he came back into the house, the poet had some scraps of paper in his hand, which he quietly thrust behind some books. Brown recovered the papers and found them to be the draft of this exquisite poem. The statement of Charles Armitage Brown on the composition of the poem is notable:

In the spring of 1819 a nightingale had built her nest near my house. Keats felt a tranquil and continual joy in her song; and one morning he took his chair from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree, where he sat for two or three hours. When he came into the house, I perceived he had some scraps of paper in his hand, and these he was quietly thrusting behind the books. On inquiry, I found those scraps, four or five in number, contained his poetic feeling on the song of our nightingale.

So you understand that the sight of a real bird was the occasion behind the poem. Obviously, the range of thoughts that Keats engages in with the birdsong as the trigger, are what become the staple of everlasting poetry. As we go through this Unit, with reference to the biographical knowledge about the poet you have acquired in Unit 17, you should be able to understand how personal predicament translates into poetic expression of universal worth.

3.18.3 The Ode in Romantic Literature

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

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

A typical structure of the Romantic ode includes :

- Description of a place or object

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

With this knowledge, try and analyse first Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode', and after reading this Unit and the next, the Odes of Keats to discover the varying effects that the form has produced in the corpus of British Romantic literature.

3.18.4 Text - 'Ode to A Nightingale'

Before we come to the actual text of the poem, a few words would be in place. Notice that even though the occasion was a particular bird, Keats uses the generalized 'a' rather than the more expected 'the' in his title. The word 'nightingale' in fact appears only in the title, but the bird and its rich intoxicating night-time world are at the centre of the poem. Keats, a lover of the Hellenic spirit would have known the Greek myth of Philomel, daughter of Pandion, king of Attica. She was raped by her sister's husband, Tereus, and at her own prayer was changed by the gods into a nightingale in order to escape his vengeance. In the poem, the nightingale is a symbol of beauty, immortality and freedom from the world's troubles. The reference in the title prepares us for the many allusions to Greek myth that we will find in the poem.

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

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

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been
Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,

Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!
O for a beaker full of the warm South,
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,
And purple-stained mouth;
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget
What thou among the leaves hast never known,
The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs,
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

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

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,

But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-May's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

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

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the selfsame song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft times hath
Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell

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

3.18.5 Summary & Annotations – Stanza-wise

- **Stanza 1 :**

As the poet listens to the song of the nightingale, he feels an acute sensation of pain in his heart through an excess of pain. His senses get numbed. He feels that like a wood nymph, the nightingale sits on a tree and sings from it. The bird sings spontaneously to celebrate the charms of summer.

My heart....numbness pains : here the poet, John Keats, feels an aching sensation in his heart. That sensation is so acute and intense that he becomes drowsy. His senses seem to be gradually lost in a state of paralysis or numbness. It also implies that the poet is gradually losing his consciousness and he is induced to a state of sleepiness or slumber.

Hemlock : a poison prepared from a herb or a poisonous or venomous drink prepared from that herb. Socrates, an eminent Greek philosopher, died of a cup of hemlock which he drank. Hemlock can also be used as a sedative. Christopher Marlowe has referred to it in his translation of Ovid's Amores (iii, 613). The poet thinks that a state of numbness or paralysis has been injected into his senses by some doses of hemlock. He also feels that he had taken a certain quantity of hemlock and this has generated a numbing effect on his physical sensations.

Emptied ....the drains : The poet also imagines that he has drunk the entire narcotic to the full or to the lees. Language here used by the poet is fraught with metaphorical or figurative associations. It brings to the surface the picture of a cup, containing opium to the brim.

Lethe : a river in Hades, in the Underworld. According to Greek myth, the dead are obliged to drink the water of this river in order to forget their past lives or everything said and done when alive. Keats has become thoroughly forgetful or oblivious of his

own conscious existence after taking opium or narcotic to the full. Charles Lamb, one of the notable romantic essayists and prose writers, has alluded to this river in his essay titled "Dream Children: A Reverie".

'Tis not ..... happy lot : here the poet intends to mean that he does not feel envious or joyous of the happy destiny of the bird, nightingale.

But being..... happiness : rather the poet becomes happy in the blissful state of the nightingale. The poet has attained a stage in which he has annihilated his private or personal self and surrendered himself completely and unconditionally to the nightingale.

Light-winged Dryad of the trees : a wood nymph. Dryad or nymph is a female personification of natural features like mountains and rivers; they are young, beautiful and long-lived. They like music and dance. Dryad was connected to a specific tree and died when the tree died.

Melodious plot : place resonant with the melody or music of the nightingale. It is an example of Hypallage or Transferred Epithet because here the plot is not musical or melodious. Rather the song of the nightingale is melodious or musical. The epithet or adjective 'melodious' has been shifted or transferred from its proper place to a place to which it does not originally fit.

Beechen green : green beech trees. 'Beechen' is the adjective form of 'beech'. These trees are green to the core and from the core.

Singest of summer in full-throated ease : The nightingale sings about summer days in a spontaneous, effortless and natural way. The expression 'full-throated ease' suggests the picture of a bird singing at a very high pitch of the voice in a care-free and normal manner.

● **Stanza 2 :**

The poet yearns to lose himself completely into the song of the bird. He seeks inspiration from wine which has been cooled and stored for a long time under the earth. The thought of drinking wine reminds him of the romantic associations of the country where the wine originated. He visualizes the picture of a cup full of wine which will redden his lips when he drinks it.

Oh, for a draught of vintage : the poet invokes vintage that might play an important role in conjuring up a romantic world of the nightingale.

Draught of vintage : a certain quantum of wine or vintage that can be taken at a single gulp.

Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth : quality of wine depends on how long it is kept in the abysmal depth of the earth. Its quality is also determined by how much cool it is. The greater the cool, the better is the quality of wine. The poet has a firm

belief that nature of a wine is dependent upon the duration and extent of coolness. In this regard, it is relevant to mention that use of 'vintage' in place of 'wine' is much more poetic. Keats has used the term 'vintage' again in *Lamia* (ii, 203) and *Otho the Great* (Act v, scene v, 123).

Tasting of Flora...... green : wine is supposed to be more intoxicating and inebriating when it contains the flavour of Nature in her green panorama. Wine is assumed to be tastier when it is prepared from the different aspects of green Nature in the countryside.

Flora : is the Roman Goddess of flowers.

Provencal song : song of Provence which is a famous wine-producing area of France. Here, wine is prepared from ripe grapes.

Sunburnt mirth : recreation or carnival in the warm sunshine. It also refers to the merry-making at the annual grape gathering.

Oh....beakerful of Warm South : here the poet once again makes an earnest and sincere address to the wine made in the southern parts of France.

Beaker : a large drinking vessel with wide mouth.

Warm South : wine which is prepared in Southern France and Italy. It is an example of Metonymy because here place stands for the product or object it is famous for. Here, Warm South means wine from the South. European countries around the Mediterranean are notable for a superior kind of wine.

The true, the blushful Hippocrene : Hippocrene is the spring or fountain on Mount Helicon which is sacred to the Muses in Greek mythology. Water of this spring is refreshing and invigorating. If one drinks this water, he or she will be empowered with poetic creativity. In Keats's imagination, Hippocrene is always identified or equated with poetic abilities. Keats is willing to drink this water because it will endow him with creative and poetic capabilities. Keats is fond of taking this wine which is reddish in colour. Here Keats has given a catalogue of the essential features of wine that will enable him reach the romantic and imaginative world of the nightingale.

Beaded : clustered.

Bubbles : bubbles of wine when it is poured into a glass. Wine produces bubbles as water does. Bubbles are transient and short-lived. These are clustered around the rim of the glass which is full to the brim.

Winking at the brim : Bubbles are created and these rise to the surface when wine is poured into a glass. Bubbles twinkle at the border of the glass. Gradually and finally, these subside and disappear. The easiest way to understand this is when you pour a cola in a glass full to the brim and then see the fizz that gathers!

Winking : twinkling or brightening constantly and ceaselessly.

Brim : border or edge.

Purple-stained mouth : the poet imagines that his mouth will get reddish when he will drink the wine in the cup. Here, the colour 'red' is significant because it is associated with poetic inspiration.

Leave the world unseen : Keats is keenly interested to leave the world of reality in such a manner that none will detect him. His flight from this mundane world is invisible and imperceptible.

And with.....dim : here the poet wants to transport himself to the world of the nightingale which is a world of beauty, romance, perfection and fulfillment.

● **Stanza 3 :**

The poet expresses his keen desire to escape from the sorrows and sufferings of this world. The bird knows nothing of these woes of human life. Here each man sits and hears the other groan. Old men here get afflicted with palsy, young men wither away and die prematurely, beauty loses its charm and love its warmth too soon.

Fade.....forget : the poet is intensely eager to depart from the mundane existence ready to lose his own entity or identity and forget everything of this world.

What thou.....known : the poet is of the view that the nightingale does not know the worries, anxieties of mundane life. It is completely devoid of the annoyance of the earthly existence.

The weariness.....fret : the nightingale is free from the ennui, boredom, anxiety that plague human beings intermittently and continually. This line bears a close resemblance to Wordsworth's words in ''Tintern Abbey'' (lines 52-53). This world-weariness which has diseased the human beings in this mundane universe is also easily noticeable in the speeches and soliloquies of Hamlet in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet.*

Here......groan : Keats has made a comparison between the world of the nightingale and that of the human world where people are subjected to endless suffering and miseries both at the physiological and psychological levels. He is of the view that in this mundane existence, people hear the tales of languishment, separation and trauma.

Where....hairs : here 'palsy' has been personified. It has been endowed with living or human attributes. In this context, Palsy refers to Old man. 'Few, sad, last grey hairs' are suggestive or connotative of the old age. Keats is of the opinion that in this mundane world, people are beset with decay, old age, ravages of Time and Death.

Where.......dies : the poet is extremely sad when he ponders over the common phenomena of decay, death and destruction of beautiful things and persons in this mundane world. He has expressed his sense of anguish that in this world, youth gradually loses his lustre or glamour. He becomes as thin as a ghost or apparition and

ultimately dies. This line is reminiscent of Tom Keats who died of tuberculosis in the month of December, 1818 at the age of 19. This line also has a striking similarity with Wordsworth's poem "Excursion" (iv,760): "While man grows old, and dwindles, and decay..."

Where......despairs : the poet has said that in this world of human beings, thinking makes a man sad, melancholy and pensive. A thoughtful or contemplative person is sure to be burdened with sorrows, miseries and despondency. Keats thinks that this world is a vale of tears, miseries and sufferings. These are all inevitable and unavoidable. Despairs have been personified. These have been presented as living beings with lead-like eye balls. Keats has used a concrete image in order to bring out depression and dejection which pervade this universe. This line has a striking correspondence or equivalence in Keats's letter written to Benjamin Bailey, May; 1818: ".... I have this morning such a Lethargy that I cannot write...I have not an Idea to put to paper --- my hand feels like lead --- and yet it is an unpleasant numbness it does not take away the pain of existence".

Where....eyes : Here Beauty is personified and consequently it is used in capital letters. The poet is intensely pained to think that whatever is beautiful in this world is evanescent and short-lived. Beautiful persons lose their bright complexion or lustre in this mundane world in course of time.

Or new.....tomorrow : Love has been personified in this context. The poet, John Keats, points out that in this time-bound world, people are easily tired of old love and they hanker after new love or new lovers. Here people cannot retain their love for each other for a long time. They go on changing their concept of love and lovers quickly. Their love is transient and temporary.

● **Stanza 4 :**

The poet gives up the idea of flying to the nightingale's world with the help of wine. He will do so on the invisible wings of poetic imagination and the next moment, he finds himself with the nightingale. The moon shines in the sky, surrounded by the stars.

Away! Away! This is a kind of refrain, indicating the poet, John Keats's desperate wish to fly from this world of grim reality and actuality. He is keenly interested in escaping from this mundane world to the world of the Nightingale, representing the world of idealism, romance, beauty, perfection and permanence.

Charioted : rode in a chariot.

Bacchus : the Roman God of Wine, also known as Dionysus.

Pards : the leopards that pulled Bacchus's chariot. The poet has rejected wine as a means of escaping to the world of the Nightingale.

Viewless wings of Poesy : here Imagination has been referred to. The poet has discarded the first option of opium or wine as a means of conveyance to the world of the Nightingale. He regards Imagination as an effective and fruitful vehicle of transportation to the world of the Nightingale.

Though....retards : the poet's brain cannot work logically and properly though his imaginative flight is high and intense enough. His cerebral power is not strong enough to take him to the land of the Nightingale.

Already with thee : the poet imagines that he is one with the Nightingale's world. He imagines that he has reached there.

Tender is the night : the poet thinks that the night in the world of the nightingale is calm and quiet. Keats is a poet of sensations rather than of thoughts. This has been evidenced here. This expression is connotative of strong tactile sense of the poet.

Haply : perhaps, possibly, probably.

Queen-Moon : Diana, Apollo's twin, is the goddess of the moon. Apollo, god of poetry, was special to Keats in the way that Bacchus was to Shelley. There is an implied suggestion that Keats abandons the feminine for the masculine deity of poetry though the moon is feminine in Greek mythology. Moon, Queen of Heaven, has been imagined by the poet to be seated on her throne.

Clustered....fays : the Moon-goddess is encircled by the fairy-like creatures who are the attendants. Here the stars have been imagined to be attending on the moon-goddess.

But....blown : the poet imagines that in the world of the nightingale, there are the glimmerings of dim light here and there which are coming from heaven as the wind.

Verdurous glooms : enveloping darkness created by the green leaves of the trees.

Winding mossy ways : zigzag or mazy passages through which the trees covered with moss. Here the poet, John Keats, has attempted to create an atmosphere or ambience, sometimes darkened and sometimes lighted by the rays or beams of the Moon. It is an atmosphere of semi-light and semi-darkness.

● Stanza 5 :

The poet is in the darkness of the forest by the side of the nightingale. He cannot see what flowers have blossomed around him but he can identify each flower by its smell. The impression therefore is one of a composite sense, a peak of romantic hush where the sensuous is completely unbridled. It is imperative to find in these lines of description an echo of the Spenserian bower of bliss.

I....feet : the poet cannot visualize the flowers at his feet.

Nor.....boughs : neither does the poet discover the fragrant or scented flowers and fruits hanging from the branches of the trees. But he imagines that he is seated with

the nightingale in a world of romance, beauty and permanence. The expression 'soft incense' is revelatory of Keats's use of tactile or tactual sensations in conjuring up the atmosphere. Keats is extremely sensuous and voluptuous in his approach to different objects of Nature.

Embalmed darkness : darkness filled with or fraught with the fragrance of the flowers. It is darkness steeped in scents. The word 'embalmed' foreshadows the preoccupation with death in many of the poems of Keats.

Seasonal month : Month of May in which flowers bloom luxuriantly. The poet, John Keats, can easily understand the flowers and the fruits there even in the midst of brooding darkness.

The thickest : the bush.

Pastoral Eglantine : a kind of wild rose that usually grows in the countryside.

Fast-fading violets : flowers that fade away quickly and swiftly.

Full of dewy wine : the rose is saturated with the evening dew on the surface and there it is juicy.

Murmurous haunt of flies : the scented and fragrant flowers seem to attract the bees which have gone out to collect honey from the sweet flowers. The whole atmosphere is resonant with the buzzing sound of the bees.

Summer eves : the bees come out in swarms in the evenings of the summer.

● Stanza 6 :

The poet says that he has often been in love with easeful death. It is a luxury to die in the midst of such ecstasy listening to the song of the nightingale. But the bird would not cease singing even after his death.

Darkling : in the dark or in darkness. The poet listens to the song of the nightingale in darkness.

Half in love : the poet, John Keats, is as much fond of life as he is of death. He has equal fondness or fascination for life and death. F. R. Leavis comments, "Keats is strictly only half in love with death...The desire not to die appears in the thought of becoming a sod to the nightingale's high requiem and of having ears in vain (line 59-60), and it swells into strong revulsion against death in the opening lines of the next stanza" (Revaluation, 1936, 249). Self-referentiality is one of the prominent characteristics of Romantic poetry. Here Keats ironically recalls his early poetry in which death had been spoken of as a luxury.

Called....rhyme : the poet has addressed Death in many of his poems by sweet, tender and endearing expressions.

To....breath : the poet is highly indebted to Death for taking his breath, the very symbol of life, without giving him any physical pain and agony.

Now.....pain : Keats thinks that this is the high time on his part to embrace Death because at this time, he is listening to the melody of the nightingale's song. He hopes that in this intense moment of joy and happiness, his death will be a means of relief or emancipation from worldly worries and anxieties. Further he hopes that his death will be painless. Such a death is also luxurious to the poet. Death here has been celebrated as a luxury as it has been in Endymion (ii, 33-34). Paradoxically or ironically enough, Keats finds extreme pleasure in the experience of Death.

While....ecstasy : this is the prime time for the poet to die because the nightingale has been singing in a spontaneous, effortless and unpredictable manner. The bird is also singing in a loud way out of a sense of excitement, joy, jollity and joviality.

Still.....vain : the nightingale will continue singing for an infinite time though the poet will not be in a position to listen to the bird's melody. He is thinking that his ears will cease to function properly because he is physically dead.

Requiem : a song of mourning or lamentation. It also means a song for the dead.

Sod: a lump of clay.

To...sod : The poet thinks that the nightingale's song will be a befitting elegy for the demise of the poet. He will be insensible and lifeless as a cold patch of earth - unresponsive to the miseries of the fading world, and in complete surrender to the song of the nightingale. Logically, if the poet were to die, the bird's singing would be unaffected, but because it would be singing at a time of death, its song would be the equivalent of a requiem. The logic makes the poet's longing for death ridiculous; but it also expresses a desire of being frozen through the medium of art. This is a theme to which Keats keeps returning time and again in different ways. You will see one of these - a dramatic reversal of thought, in this poem itself. His 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is a very mature treatment of this same theme, in a different context - the key parallel being the contest between art and life with regard to permanence/ reality. In fact, it is possible to trace a line of argument on this aspect in English poetry from the sonnets of Shakespeare to the poetry of John Keats.

● **Stanza 7 :**

Unlike the death wish of the poet, the bird however is not born for death. If you keep in mind that it is not one particular nightingale that Keats addresses in this poem, then you can easily understand why he writes that the voice of the bird is immortal. The voice must have regaled the ears of men and women also in the past. It must have soothed the agonized heart of Ruth and have reached the ears of a captive lady in some enchanted castle.

Thou ....bird : Keats is evidently thinking of the nightingale's song unchanging from time to time, from age to age. This line is subject to divergent critical interpretations and perspectives. Some critics have pointed out that the song of the nightingale is immortal or eternal though the bird is mortal and perishable. Others have said that the nightingale as a species, not as an individual bird, is considered deathless and imperishable. Therefore, though the particular nightingale will die away in course of time, its music is permanent and perpetual.

No....down : Keats is assertive in saying that nothing under the sun will wipe out or demolish the nightingale. The bird's music will be equally appealing and enthralling to each and every generation of mankind.

This passing night : the night when Keats was listening to the bird's song.

Ancient days : primitive times.

Emperor and clown : the nightingale's song had been heard by the people of all classes, starting from the monarchs to the fools in the court.

The self-same song : this very song of the nightingale.

The sad.....corn : Ruth, a Moabitish woman mentioned in the old Testament, was driven by famine from her native land and had to work in the fields of her kinsman Boaz (Ruth ii,3).

Ruth was consoled by the sweet and melodious song of the nightingale during the time of exile, solitariness, seclusion and loneliness.

Oft-times : often times, almost always.

Charmed : captivating, hypnotizing influence

Magic casements : openings of the enchanted castle in which a princess has been confined by an evil spirit.

Opening on the foam : encircled by the seas full of foams, the wild seas that is. Notice that like Coleridge, Keats is also constructing a nowhere-nowhen environs, where it becomes possible for fancy to luxuriate. But towards the end of the section, the word 'forlorn' rings a bell in his mind, and it becomes a trigger to return to reality.

Perilous seas : dangerous, tumultuous and tempestuous seas, full of fierce animals like sharks etc.

Fairy lands : lands of imagination, fancy lands created by the poet imaginatively, utopian lands.

Forlorn : discarded, deserted, alone and solitary.

● **Stanza 8 :**

The word 'forlorn' in the last stanza reminds the poet of his own miseries and

desolate state. He comes back to reality. The bird flies away. He hears the notes of the bird gradually fading away from his ears. He doubts if all this was a mere dream or a vision.

Forlorn : an admission or acknowledgement that the poet's romantic daydream is at an end. Forlorn is a refrain here, indicating the poet's consciousness of reality or actuality.

The very....bell : here the very word refers to 'Forlorn'. It acts as a kind of bell or warning calling the poet back to grim reality or actuality.

To toll....self : it suggests that return to reality is a kind of death to the poet. Cleanth Brooks has rightly pointed out that the world of the imagination offers release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time renders the world of actuality more painful and compelling by contrast. Yet the return to reality brings a significant closure to the poem.

Adieu! : bidding farewell to the world of the nightingale.

The fancy...well : according to the poet, fancy has so long created a false, illusory and tantalizing world of romance and in this way, it has deceived the poet who thinks that fancy is devoid of power which keeps a person under false impression of euphoria for a long duration.

As.....do : Fancy has been presented as a female.

Deceiving elf : elf is the inhabitant of fairyland. Keats here underlines the negative aspect of the imaginative vision by referring to it as a deception by the elf. Elves are often maliciously mischievous in folk tales. Fancy was at the other end from the imagination in the Romantic hierarchy of poetic tools.

Adieu! Adieu! : Keats has repeatedly bade his farewell to the nightingale's world.

Plaintive anthem : the sad, melancholy tune of the nightingale which gradually fades away.

Meadows : grassy fields.

Still stream : river which is calm, quiet and tranquil.

Now....glades : eventually or finally, the song of the nightingale was buried in the valleys which are far away from the poet's habitation.

Was....dream : the poet is undecided and confused. When he thinks whether he was really with the nightingale or he was simply day-dreaming to be with the nightingale in the nightingale's world.

Do I wake or sleep? : The poet has been baffled by the dilemma arising out of the overlapping of the state of reality and that of reverie. He cannot decipher whether he was waking or sleeping while listening to the nightingale's song. A sense of doubt or

uncertainty has plagued him at the end of the poem. He was not at all sure whether he was in a wakeful or dreamy state. The subtle borderline between the world of actuality and the world of imagination represented by the nightingale seems to trouble him intensely and acutely. The poem concludes with a note of questioning or interrogation

3.18.6 Critical Commentary

One of the prominent concerns of the poet in 'Ode to a Nightingale' is the perception of the conflicted nature of human life---the interconnectedness of pain and joy, intensity of the feeling and numbness or lack of feeling, life and death, mortal and immortal, the actual and the ideal, and separation and connection. In this ode, Keats focuses on immediate and concrete sensations and emotions from which the reader can draw a conclusion. In the meditation or contemplation on poetic experience, the poet attempts to conceptualize a reconciliation of beauty and permanence through the symbol of the nightingale. Often thought of as the second of the spring odes, 'Ode to a Nightingale' was written in May 1819. The ode was first published as 'Ode to the Nightingale' in *The Annals of the Fine Arts* (1819): 354-356 and then in 1820. Keats in this ode uses a stanza that combines a Shakespearean quatrain (a b a b) with a Petrarchan sestet (c d e c d e). Keats could have looked back to a long tradition of poems about nightingale including those written by Anne Finch, Mary Hays, Joseph Warton, George Dyer, three poems on the nightingale written by Charlotte Smith in her Elegiac Sonnets (1784), two odes by Mary Robinson, 'Eastern Ode' by Anna Seward and two poems written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge titled 'To the Nightingale' in 1796 and 'The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem' in 1798. Keats reports that when he met Coleridge on Hampstead Heath on April 11, 1819. they spoke about "nightingale" among "thousand things" including poetry and metaphysics. The influence of William Wordsworth and William Hazlitt has been identified in the final two stanzas in particular.

3.18.7 Thematic Issues

❖ **Keats' Sensuousness**

Sensuousness in the language of poetic criticism consists in a poet's responsiveness to the impressions of external nature on the mind through the sense organs of sight, touch, sound, smell and taste. All Romantic poets are bound to be more or less sensuous; but with John Keats poetry is hardly anything else than sensuous. "Keats", says Matthew Arnold, "is abundantly and enchantingly sensuous" and Wordsworth is for him a 'spring-board'. Shelley has laid emphasis on idea first, then sense while in Keats senses are of paramount importance and in case of Wordsworth sensuous

enjoyment contributed him to grasping the idea which contains the deeper truths of life. On this ground they are all akin to the mystic poet. Though Keats's poetry is abundantly sensuous, it is not without the element of reflection. His poetry reflects on the evanescent nature of human life, and joy, the relation between life and art and conflict between the ideal and the real.

The pleasures of the senses are raised to the region of poetry by the magic of his genius. He longs to share the Nightingale's joy more completely. So, he at first seeks to taste a wine 'cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth'. The drink will inspire his soul to rise to the beauty of the song. Old wine gains in flavour. Keats, a sensuous poet, is here an epicure. The wine brings to his mind all the associations of its land of origin, Italy or South France. He will see the beaker's liquid beauty of "a purple-stained mouth". The sensuous observation of the poet is worth- mentioning here. Keats rightly notices that the beak of a cup of red wine looks redder than the rest of the surface and again this "blushful Hippocrene with beaded bubbles winking at the brim" will bring poetic inspiration to him. Taste, smell, colour, sound, touch -- all are to be gratified by the cup of wine. He will also hear the Nightingale which sings in "verdurous glooms" and "the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves". The sensuous aspect has been explicitly brought out by the onomatopoeic effect of the line containing 's' and 'z' sounds. Besides, his smell is regaled by the "soft incense hangs upon the boughs". Pleasures of the senses are a luxury to him. The fourth stanza reflects a spontaneous luxuriance of his sensuous feelings.

❖ Relation between Art and Life

In 'Ode to a Nightingale', Keats makes an attempt to compare the world of art represented by the nightingale's world and the world of life or reality symbolized by the world in which the poet and other humans live. Wordsworth escapes to Nature, the limitless world of flowers, trees, mountains, valleys etc., Coleridge to the mysterious world of the supernatural and the Middle Ages and Shelley to the Golden Millennium of the future. Like the earlier poets, Keats is also a poet of escapism. A note of escapism is noticeable in this poem. The poet wants passionately to 'leave the world unseen' and with the nightingale 'fade away into the forest dim'. Though the poem is read as a poem of escape dealing with the world of imagination or fantasy, reflection of human reality and condition cannot be completely overlooked. The poet reflects on the tragic human experience that human life is a boring tale of sorrows and miseries. Third stanza of the poem is a powerful commentary on the predicament of human situation. The old men with their bald heads and white hairs grow more feeble and struck with paralysis, young men become pale, spectre-thin and bound to face a premature death, beauty fades in course of time. This is a highly imaginative and romantic poem in which the poet initially strives to flee from reality. He intends to get

rid of the tyranny and bondage of life. Being tired with harsh realities of life, the poet wants to escape because he does not find any trace of happiness in this mundane world. In order to forget sorrowful experience and existence, the poet is willing to escape to the ideal world of his imagination. His personal afflictions are considered as part of the sad destiny of humanity as a whole. The general scenario of malady is undeniably moving in its pitiful starkness. He decides to fly on the wings of poetic imagination and resides in the company of the nightingale on the shady branch of a leafy tree. The note of escapism is more strongly accentuated in the death-wish of the poet. The soothing darkness brings out his desire for dark death. The poet definitely asserts the yearning to court painless death in order to escape the constantly painful life.

Finally, Keats does not fail to realize that escape from reality is absurd and realistically he can feel that the nightingale's song is nothing as joyous as it pretended to be, but a 'plaintive anthem'. At the end of the poem, he wakes up from his indolent dream to face actual life on its terms.

❖ Poetry of Escape or Deeper Reality

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❖ **Blend of Classicism and Romanticism**

Keats was an ardent lover of Greek literature, mythology, sculpture and almost everything Greek. It has influenced his attitude to nature and life immensely. Throughout the entire poem of "Ode to a Nightingale", references to the classical world are scattered. In the word 'Hemlock', the readers discern an allusion to Socrates, one of the notable Greek philosophers, who has drunk the juice produced from hemlock. A small quantity of it leads to profound sleep, a greater quantity generates death. Socrates died by taking a cup of Hemlock. Keats' classicism is perceptible in his reference to 'Lethe' which, in Greek mythology, is the river of forgetfulness or oblivion flowing round hell. The souls of dead men forget their earthly memories when they cross this river. Hippocrene is one of the fountains of the Muses in Greek mythology, drinking the water of which makes one achieve poetic power. Keats wants to drink such wine which shall have the poetic efficacy of the Hippocrene, but at the same time it should have the visual attractiveness of a reddish colour, like that of a blushing face. Here wine is spoken of as the true inspirer of poetry. Reference to Ruth undoubtedly creates an ambience of classicism in the poem. Ruth was a Moabitish woman in the Old Testament, who might have been consoled by it when she became a widow and spent her days gleaning corns in the field of Boaz, a Kinsman of her mother-in-law, Naomi, to maintain herself.

Keats's romanticism is manifested in his use of imagination. His concern is with imagination in a special sense and he is not far from Coleridge in his view of it. His romanticism is clearly evidenced in his sincere yearning to get away from the miseries and frustrations of life, to escape 'the weariness, the fever and the fret', which the poet experienced from his failure to achieve fame, love and health. What he generalizes as the lot of humanity is authentically based on his personal afflictions. The nightingale, the source of the purely joyous music, is a symbol of perfect happiness and beauty, and its world amidst the forest is the ideal offering a contrast to the sordid, painful and morbid world of man. This purely romantic conception of aspiring for the ideal and bewailing the fact that it cannot be attained by mortal man, is comparable to the attitude

of Shelley in 'To a Skylark' and of Yeats in 'The Stolen Child'. the poet is intensely aware of tragedies of human life and he wants to escape from this stark and gruesome reality to the world of the nightingale on the 'viewless wings of imagination'. by virtue of his unfettered romantic fancy he can lose himself in the midst of the dark foliage of the trees and sit beside the nightingale.

Sensuousness or voluptuousness is another characteristic of Keats' romanticism. The richly sensuous stanza on flowers where the sense of smell is highly exercised is noteworthy. The poet at once takes us into a fragrant atmosphere of the dark garden, where we inhale and identify white hawthorns, eglantines, violets and the musk-rose, astonishing mythed as 'Mid-May's eldest child'. Sensuousness is explicitly visible in Keats' description or narration of wine. Love of romance, deep delight in different aspects of Nature and fondness for classical art and sculpture are other significant components of romanticism in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The voice of the nightingale is the voice of romance and beauty, a voice that is deathless.

3.18.8 Summing up

'Ode to a Nightingale' is said to be the most personal or subjective of the Odes; it is also one of the most anthologized and syllabised poems of Keats. Perhaps it would be better to say that from the abrupt/ frenzied beginning of the poem 'My heart aches' onwards, it creates the impression of being the most subjective. Leaving aside the claim by many critics that it is personal in an autobiographical manner, how is this impression of subjectivity achieved or attained? It is the process and movement of the poet's mind that are the central concerns of 'Ode to a Nightingale', and the personal 'I" is very much in evidence. But as we have repeatedly shown here, it is equally important to see the progress from the subjective 'I' to the universality of theme.

3.18.9 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions :

1. Is Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' a poem of escape or a reflection of human experience?
2. How the contrast between transience of life and permanence of art has been presented in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale'?
3. 'Ode to a Nightingale', unlike other Odes, has no one central theme'. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Illustrate with reference to 'Ode to a Nightingale' Keats's art of sensuous depiction of natural beauty.

Mid-length questions :

1. Comment on Keats's treatment of the themes of Beauty and Mutability in the Nightingale Ode.
2. Analyse the theme and structure of 'Ode to a Nightingale'.
3. Do you read Ode to a Nightingale as a poem of escape or a reflection of the human experience? Discuss.

Short Answer Type Questions :

1. Analyse the moment of reversal in 'Ode to a Nightingale'.
2. List the several sensory images that Keats uses in the Nightingale Ode.
3. Show how Keats uses the idea of fairy land in 'Ode to a Nightingale' to secure the element of return to reality.

3.18.10 Suggested Reading

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UNIT–19 : John Keats – ‘Ode to Autumn’

Structure

3.19.1: Objectives

3.19.2: Introduction

3.19.3: Text of John Keats' ‘Ode to Autumn’

3.19.3a: Stanza-wise summary

3.19.3b: Critical Commentary

3.19.3c: Themes

3.19.4: Summing Up

3.19.5: Comprehension Exercises

3.19.6: Suggested Reading

3.19.1 Objectives

In this third Unit on Keats, which is also a study of a second Ode after Nightingale, our objective is to introduce you to two specific aspects of Keats' poetry. On the one hand, you will notice the rich sensuousness that is pervasively present in the true style of Romanticism; on the other notice also the realistic appraisal of the significance of each season of the year - which in turn becomes symbolic of the passing stages of life culminating in maturity. Together, Autumn Ode will come across as another instance of the Keatsian blend of romanticism and classicism.

3.19.2 Introduction

John Keats wrote 'To Autumn' on 19th September 1819, in Winchester after a short trip to and from London. He describes the occasion in his letter to Reynolds on 21st September 1819; he copied the poem 'To Autumn' in a letter Written to Richard Woodhouse on 21st and 22nd September 1819. The ode is often described as the most perfect of Keats's poems. Helen Vendler in her book titled *The Odes of John Keats*, points out that the poem is derived from William Shakespeare's sonnets "That time of year thou mayst in me behold" (73) and "How like a winter hath my absence been" (97), Edmund Spenser's Mutability Cantos, William Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight". To Autumn is a valediction, a poem of partings -- of the day, of the season, and above all and after all, the poem is

about a parting from life itself. Yet none of this makes it in anyway gloomy. The poem shows a clear and open development of thought and movement over its three stanzas: from maturing fruitfulness to harvesting, and then, with night about to fall, its attention drifts towards the close of this season and beyond. It is not an end either, for the poem argues that these things have no end but only change, that the very idea of 'season' is open to question.

3.19.3 Text

To Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run;
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease,
For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook
Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers:
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook;
Or by a cyder-press, with patient look,
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
  Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,-
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,
  And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
  Among the river sallows, borne aloft
    Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;
  Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft
  The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;
    And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

3.19.3a : STANZA-WISE SUMMARY

Stanza 1 : Autumn is the season of mists and ripe fruits. Autumn, in close co-operation with the sun, accomplishes the task of producing and ripening fruits. In Autumn, the vines are loaded with grapes; apples grow so abundantly and plentifully that the branches of the trees seem to bend down under the heavy load. All kinds of fruits grow ripe and mature: the gourd swell, and the hazelnuts are filled with a soft and savoury pulp. Flowers grow in abundance, one crop after another; and the bees gathering honey from them seem to think that this year there would be no end to the hot days of summer.

Stanza 2 : The authentic image of Autumn is best discerned amid the rich store-house of Autumn's plenty. Sometimes, Autumn can be seen sitting carelessly upon the threshing floor of the granary. Sometimes, Autumn can be found fast asleep on a half-reaped furrow in a corn field, as if lulled into sleep by the drowsy scent of the poppies. Sometimes again, he appears in the shape of a gleaner crossing a brook with a bundle of corn on the head; while at other times, he can be seen sitting patiently by the side of a cider-press watching the wine oozing out drop by drop from the pressing machine.

Stanza 3 : In Autumn, the songs of Spring are heard no more. But there is a kind of music which is Autumn's own. When the western sky is gently lit up by the sun-lit clouds and the reaped or harvested cornfields glow softly in the rose-red rays of the setting sun -- then we can hear the plaintive humming of the small gnats rising and falling with the wind, the loud bleating of full-grown lambs shut up in the sheep-folds on the hill-side, the shrill song of the hedge-crickets, the soft whistle of the red-breast, and the gentle twittering of swallows flying in the sky. These constitute the music of Autumn.

3.19.3b : CRITICAL COMMENTARY

“To Autumn” is considered to be the subtlest and most beautiful of all Keats's odes,

and as close to perfection as any shorter poem in the English language. The incredible and unbelievable richness of this ode is such that it will sustain many readings, and indeed will demand them. To paraphrase the words of G. Wilson Knight, "To Autumn" is a round solidity casting shadows on the flat surfaces of our criticism; we need as many planes at as many angles as we can get.

The Autumn of the first stanza is a process and a beneficent agricultural conspire, plotting secretly and clandestinely with the sun to bring ripeness to a state of all. The stanza is aureate, Spenserian in the globed fullness of its style, replete with heavily accented, single-syllabled parts of speech. As this process, Autumn loads, blesses, bends, fills, swells, plumps, and sets budding. The only receptive consciousness of all this activity is that of the bees, who sip their aching pleasures to such a glut that they think that warm days will never cease, because the honey of harvest pleasure has over-brimmed their natural storehouses. The fullness of nature's own grace, her free and overwhelming gift of herself, unfallen, is the burden of this ripe stanza. There is only slight, but vital premonitory shading: the later flowers have deceived the bees.

The first stanza is natural process; the remaining two stanzas are sensuous observation of the consequences of that process: first, sights of the harvest in its final stages; then, post-harvest sounds, heralding the coming-on of winter. The sequence of the three stanzas then is pre-harvest ripeness, late-harvest repletion, and post-harvest natural music. The allocation of the senses is crucial: the late-harvest art is plastic and graphic -- the art of millennium. The art of past ripeness and harvest is the art of the ear, apocalyptic, the final harmonies of music and poetry.

As the second stanza of 'To Autumn' opens, the readers see Autumn already "amid" her store. The promised overabundance of the first stanza has been fulfilled; the harvest plot has been successful, the blessing so overflowing that nature's grace abounds. Autumn is no longer an active process, but a female overcome by the fragrance and soft exhaustion of her own labour. She is passive, an embodiment of the earthly paradise, the place of repose, after the sexual and productive activity hinted at by her having been "close bosom-friend of the maturing sun". But she is also the peasant girl drunk with the odours and efforts of gathering, winnowing, reaping, and gleaning. She sits "careless" on the granary floor; the word is very rich. She is careless because there is more to be stored, though she sits, and yet amid all the fresh abundance she can indeed be without care. But the wind, softly lifting her hair, which is the unreaped grain, reminds us of the winnowing yet to be done. Again, she lies on her "half-reap'd furrow sound asleep, drows'd with the fume of poppies", late bee-deceiving flowers, which in a sense deceive her also. But the poem celebrates her drowsiness even as it gently chides her, for her hook, in sparing the next swath, spares also its twined flowers.

The concluding four lines of the stanza take us to the very end of harvest, the gleaner bearing her laden head so steadily as to suggest motionlessness even as she moves, which further suggests the running-down to stasis of a process. Finally, or eventually the readers are shown the girl patiently watching, hours by hours, the meaning sameness of the "cyder-press" with its final oozings, the last wealth of complete process itself. With those "hours by hours" the readers are ready for the music of time in the penultimate stanza. The readers start with only the "stubble-plains", but even as they are seen to have their own peculiar visual beauty, so the readers are to say that the songs of Spring have been replaced by a different but not a lesser music.

3.19.3.C : Themes

'To Autumn' occupies an important place in Keats's poetry because it is apparently free from some of his usual themes and attitudes like medievalism, a contrast between imagination and reality or an anguished yearning for ecstasy. The poem is one great sigh of relief. It seems to have been written in a mood of quite contentment. All the other odes to a greater or lesser degree protest and exclaim. But the poem simply accepts the inevitability of the natural cycle without Keats's usual fondness for dramatic debate.

The sense of fruition and fulfilment is clear from the very beginning where there is all ripeness and plenitude. The cottage trees bend under the load of fruits and vines hanging tensely under the weight of grapes. The word 'load', 'bend', 'sweet', 'plump' are all packed with sweetness and nourishment. The first strophe celebrates the rich fruitfulness of nature, seen as something static and fixed, only towards the end of the stanza movement and passage of time are suggested by the mention of the bees which think wrongly that summer will never cease.

In the second stanza the readers come to a broad landscape of cornfields with little brooks, of farmer's granary and cyder- presser. In the first strophe, Autumn exists as a spirit of prodigal luxuriance. But in the second she is presented visibly as a person, sitting carelessly on a granary floor like a gleaner moving across a brook or watching the last oozings of the cider press. This stanza constitutes the greatest personification in English poetry. It is also remarkable for the activities of Autumn which are concretized through this personification which links Autumn with the mother earth. It should also be pointed out that in this stanza an exquisite balance is maintained between statis and flux. There are suggestions of activity with a peculiar inactivity which symbolize the desire to linger in the enjoyment of the ripeness and fullness of Autumn. But the last image of the cider-press makes the readers aware of the fact that Autumn is not only the season of fruitfulness but also of harvesting and that it is slowly moving into the desolation of winter. A note of tender pathos enters in the second stanza which spills over into the third and last strophe.

The poem begins with the 'maturing sun' and it ends with the sky --- "barr'd clouds bloom the soft-dying day / And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue". Thus, the readers get the full implication of the word 'maturing' in the first stanza. Autumn is not only the season of fruition, it is the harbinger of cold winter, the season of death. Hence, the melancholy words like 'wailful ', 'mourn', 'die' predominate in this stanza and this note of pathos finds a lingering echo in the thin sound of the bleating of lambs, in the chirping of the hedge-crickets, whistling of the red-breast and in the twittering of gathering swallows.

But the note of sadness in the last strophe does not indicate any protest or rejection or perplexity but an acceptance of the inevitable cycle of seasons which includes winter. If there is any nostalgia --- "Where are the songs of Spring ", it is only a gentle nostalgia. It may be true that the swallows gather for migration because of the coming winter but the gathering itself has its own sense of forgetfulness and warmth. Thus in *To Autumn* Keats shows all his characteristic joy at the fullness of life without any straining after lushness and at the same time he could deal with his most favourite concern as a poet -- the contrasting experiences of life's beauty and its tragic transience. In 'To Autumn' Keats probably found a kind of resolution of these contraries which inform his other poems like 'Ode to a Nightingale' or 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci'.

The poet has here outgrown his immaturity and what appeals to him most is the maturity that he finds everywhere in nature during autumn. Mellow, mature, ripe--these are the words that now come readily to his pen. 'Mellow' is introduced in the very first line when he hails autumn as the 'Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness.' 'Maturing' crops up in the next line and 'ripeness' is used in the sixth line: 'And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core.' It is this hollowness that brings fruitfulness all around, the mellow fruitfulness that is the poet's frame of reference in the opening stanza. Critics have referred to Edgar's words in Shakespeare's King Lear in their search for the most appropriate and significant epigraph for this ode: 'Ripeness is all'.

Ripeness goes with fecundity. The creative process is in full play during autumn. The male force represented by the sun is united with the female force represented by the earth in a kind of Lila or love play. Keats's verbal form to express this idea is 'conspiring'. The products of the union are found everywhere -- as much in the grapes and apples as in the gourd and hazel shells. This is undoubtedly a sexual metaphor which is sublimely employed for the ceaseless work of creation. If Ceres or mother-earth is the basis of Keats's conception of Autumn, then it is only natural that 'bosom' appears in line 2, followed by 'ripeness'. In "Bright Star", Keats has used the epithet 'ripening' in line 6, 'swell' and 'plump' in line 7. There are other words and phrases in the stanza which also may have some veiled or implied female or erotic associations. The warmth of the warm days pervades the entire stanza and it contrasts sharply with the 'coldness' emitted by 'Cold Pastoral' in Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn.

Everything is in abundance. To describe autumnal bountifulness in Keats's To Autumn, it is pertinent to quote lines from Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra:

For his bounty,
There was no winter in't; an autumn't was
That grew the more by reaping. (V, ii, 86)

It is somewhat ironic that this boundless bounty of the most romantic of the poets is found in the most classical of his odes.

The second stanza is remarkable for its series of four pictures typical of autumn. Once again the feminine form comes to the surface. To a Bengali reader of Keats, the first picture --- of a young girl sitting careless with her hair soft-lifted by the wind -- seems to come straight from the love songs of Tagore. The exuberance of the first stanza is recollected in tranquillity in the second: ....with patient look / Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours'.

Tranquillity is one of the cardinal principles of Keats's 'To Autumn'. At long last Keats has reached his paradise. After the internal stress and strain of the Nightingale Ode, in 'To Autumn', the readers come across 'calm of mind, all passion spent'. The tranquillity of Keats in this ode is the tranquillity that is found in the last plays of William Shakespeare. The dominant characteristic of the plays of Shakespeare's final phase is a rare serenity and it is this serenity that is experienced in the deep autumnal tone of the maturest ode of the most Shakespearean of English poets.

Critical commentaries on the poem have generally agreed that it is the most mature and satisfying of the Odes; and it is pretty generally agreed that it is the most objective and impersonal of them. It is commonly regarded as an evocation of the sounds and sights of autumn, expression of placid fulfilment and having no further suggestion. C. H. Herford's paragraph on the poem in *The Cambridge History* represents the general view: "In Autumn, finally, written after an interval of some months, the sense that beauty, though not without some glorious compensation, perishes, which, in varying degrees, dominates these three Odes, yields to a serene and joyous contemplation of beauty itself. The 'season of mellow fruitfulness' awakens no romantic vision, no romantic longing, like the nightingale's song, it satisfies all senses but enthralled and intoxicates none; everything breathes contented fulfilment without satiety and beauty too, is fulfilled and complete....Keats feels here no need either of prophecy or of retrospect. If for a moment, he asks "Where are the songs of spring"? it is only to reply "Think not of them, thou hast thy music too". This is the secret of his strength, if also, of his limitation -- to be able to take the beauty of the present moment so completely into his heart that it seems an eternal possession".

This reading is obviously possible, or it would not be so widely accepted; and it is

apparently supported by Keats's own reference to the poem in his letter to J. H. Reynolds of 21st September 1819: "How beautiful the season is now---How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking charming weather--Dian skies--I have never liked stubble fields so much as now --Aye better than the chilly green of the spring. Somehow a stubble plain looks warm in the same way that some pictures look warm--This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it". Yet there are details in the poem that suggest something that is hardly compatible with a simple mood of satisfied fulfilment. "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?"-- that has an indisputable note in it of the sad longing for what was lovely and is gone, the 'wailful choir' of gnats that 'mourn', the light wind that 'lives or dies', the day which, though bloomed is 'soft-dying', the sleeper 'drows'd with the fume of poppies'---these are touches that come closer to the world of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' than to happy fulfilment and suggest that there is more in the poem than the naive celebration of fruitfulness. The fact is also worth considering that the readers all know "To Autumn" by heart, whereas the beautiful, exact and sensitive descriptions of Nature have been admired and enjoyed but not remembered.

Possibly 'To Autumn' imprints itself on our verbal memories not only because it is a beautiful picture of a season but because it comes home to us in a more important way. It is in fact my purpose to suggest that readings of the Herford kind are seriously wrong and do not do justice to the poem. As the readers read it, "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they? Think not of them, thou hast thy music too" is not a momentary intrusion but the point of the whole poem.

The central element in the concept of Autumn created by the poem is that the season is a boundary, a space between two opposite conditions, a moment of poise when one movement culminates and the succeeding movement has scarcely begun. Keats begins deftly touching in these opposites from the first line: "mists" and "mellow fruitfulness"; "bosom friend", "conspiring", "load and bless" and the desirable apples nevertheless "bend" the Old ("moss'd") trees that bear them. Then follow three lines that appear to be equivalent evocations of simple ripeness and fruitfulness, but the ambivalent note recurs in set budding, later flowers, collocating beginnings and endings; and there is suggestion of fullness and of loss together in until they think warm days will never cease---'oe'r-brimmed', while warm days, summer, clammy cells echo the initial contrast of mists and mellowness.

The two ideas of pause and of opposites continue in the next stanza. The hook spares the next swath for a moment. Since one does not spare anybody something pleasant but only something painful, it is inevitably suggested that while from one point of view the reaping of the grain may be good, from another it is not---in fact, it involves the destruction of the 'twined flowers'. The furrow is 'half-reaped', the brook

is a boundary over which a figure is seen in the poised act of stepping. But in this stanza the foreground is filled with Autumn seen as a woman in four postures of repose in harvest sitting relaxed in a granary, sleeping in the midday break in the harvest field, keeping steady her head beneath her load of gleanings and watching the final oozing of the cider press. It is inconceivable that Keats could in this year have had in his mind the images of harvest fields and a gleaner without also having in mind somewhere the image of Ruth whose sad heart among the alien corn provided one of his most memorable passages in 'Ode to a Nightingale'. It is worth remembering in connection with 'To Autumn', that Ruth lay down at Boaz's feet in the threshing floor. Ruth had left her own country and now lived in a foreign land; she had lost her husband and was now a widow, though in due course she was to become the wife of Boaz. The point of pause and the opposites are there in the Biblical story and offered to Keats's imagination associative links with the context in 'To Autumn'. But in 'Ode to a Nightingale', Keats had established a strong association between Ruth and the 'hungry generations' that tread down the human individual who must die and give place to them. There, Ruth stands as an example of the transient individual, consoled in her grief by the unchanging song of the nightingale. The three quasi-Ruth figures in 'To Autumn' may well have had in Keats's imagination association harmonizing with the reaping hook that both harvests and destroys, with the fruit that blesses but loads the vines, with the apples that ripen and flourish but bend the bearing tree, with the press that squeezes the last oozing drops from the apples themselves. The reader may not have the same spontaneous associations, but it seems likely that under the surface of the poem there has by this point developed not only the concept of Autumn as the place between the desirable and the undesirable, between warmth and chill, between summer and winter, but also as the pause between the generation which is its fruit. And it seems likely that most readers have reacted in some way to these concepts, for it feels imaginatively right that the third stanza of the poem should bring this bitter sweet out into the open, with the songs of spring lost and replaced by the music of autumn.

The music of autumn which ends the poem is a music of living and dying, of staying and departure, of summer-winter. The wailful choir of small gnats rises and falls as the gusts of the light wind live or die -- a beautiful symbol of the generation that falls and rises and in autumn the young gives place to the old.

The 'full-grown lambs' is a phrase that has been objected to on the common sense grounds that a full-grown lamb is not a lamb any longer, but is either a ewe or a ram. But it is a phrase that is fully justified on this reading of the poem: that which was a lamb in the Spring is now full grown and on the point of superseding the generation of its begetters. It begets from 'hilly bourne' which is an ambiguous phrase. It might mean hilly brook but it more likely means 'hilly boundary'.

It is known that the poem was composed at Winchester, where, as Keats remarks in a letter to John Taylor of 5th September 1819, 'there is on one side of the city a dry chalky down. But whether 'bourn' means brook or boundary, it still connotes a place between two areas and the full grown lamb, poised between two phrases of life, is appropriately situated. Hedge-crickets are grasshoppers. Why then did Keats not say "Grasshoppers sing"? Perhaps, in part, because a hedge is a boundary, but possibly, too, because he had already seen the grasshopper and the cricket as types of the music of summer and winter. By using the alternative name, Hedge-cricket', Keats manages to suggest in one word both the singer of the past summer and the singer of the coming winter. The red-breast that whistles from the garden-croft is characteristically a winter bird and remains in England; the swallow is proverbially the bird of summer and leave the country when summer is over: its departure is the signal for the beginning of winter.

This final image of the swallows is of special interest. The readers know that Keats translated the *Aeneid* while he was still a schoolboy; and in the sixth book there is the striking and memorable description of the souls of the dead on the banks of the river of the underworld. It is a crowd in which generations come together, and Virgil mentions matrons and men, heroes, young boys and unwedded girls, and youth taken to the pyre before the eyes of their sorrowing parents, and of this crowd some pass on over the river into a new state of existence and some must remain on the hither bank. The general links with the contents of “To Autumn” are clear. But more interesting are the two similes Virgil uses to describe the throng. Birds gathering for migration have links, in fact, with both the decay of Autumn and with the dead generations of mankind. The wailful choir of gnats may also be linked with Virgil's account of the souls who must stay òn the hither bank and for a hundred years 'wander' and 'float hovering' about 'these shores' until they are permitted to return to the still and fenny waters that they yearn for.

Some details of 'To Autumn' may have originated in Samuel Taylor Coleridge. There are notable parallels to the final paragraph of 'Frost At Midnight':

"Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to the

Whether the summer clothe the general earth

With greenness or the red breast sit and sing

Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare brunch

Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch

Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall

Heard only in the trances of the blast,

Or if the secret ministry of frost

Shall hang them up in silent icicles,

Quietly shining to the quiet moon".

If Coleridge's poems were indeed stirring in Keats's memory, it would harmonize well with 'To Autumn', for 'Frost At Midnight' is about Coleridge the parent regretting his frustrated and lost youth but determined that his baby son should have a fuller and more natural life, out of the parent's spoiled life should come a new and better being.

The complete maturity so earnestly laboured at in Keats' life, so lucidly and persuasively theorized about in his letters, is wholly realized in Keats's art in 'To Autumn'. In this poem, the readers see genius having at its disposal a perfect sensibility. Keats's meditation on maturity, his efforts to achieve it, here issued into a disciplined poetic act. The poem exhibits, like the best romantic poems, a radically original, first hand response to experience, and exhibits it, moreover, with the characteristic Keatsian virtues of density and definition, weight and pressure. Autumn in this poem is neither attenuated by customary perception nor conventional expectation, nor idealized away as in other romantic poetry---into a thin and misty abstraction. Keats's art shows us not an ideogram, not the pictured structure of the season, but its dimensions and complex aspects. For it gives us not only the fullness and softness of Autumn---- the ripeness of it---- but also it's more masculine qualities, the acrid, the rough, and the vigorous. Or rather it embodies a more inclusive conception of ripeness. Not only does it offer mellow fruitfulness and clammy cells, the fume of poppies and the last oozing, but also the moss'd cottage trees, the granary floor, the brook, the cider press, the stubble plains, the small gnats and the river sallows. By this point in his career it is clear that ripeness has come to be for Keats both a varied and ordered concept. It represented a rich fund of experience which had been examined and weighed by a scrupulously just and delicately balanced mind. It is no accident that the ripeness which is the theme of the poem should stand in so close an analogy to the maturity which is the theme of Keats's moral and intellectual life. In this poem, maturity is both achieved and transcended. Keats's poem gives us the right to use a dangerous and difficult word. It gives us a sanction for saying that here maturity is transformed into wisdom.

'To Autumn' stands apart from the other Odes of John Keats, it is a brilliant rendering of a scene and a season and a mood, the final perfection of English landscape poetry. Keats wrote ‘To Autumn’ on September 19, 1819, in Winchester after a short trip to and from London. He describes the occasion and context in his letter to Reynolds of September 21. He copied the poem into a letter to Woodhouse of September 21, 22. The ode is often read as the most perfect of Keats's poems.

In his critical biography titled *John Keats* (1963), Walter Jackson Bate says that in the poem 'To Autumn' the poet himself is completely absent, there is no "I", no suggestion of the discursive language that is found in the other odes. He substantiates that there are no 'dramatic debate, protest, and qualification in the poem. Geoffrey Hartman observes similarly as he remarks that the poem is of the voice of a 'true impersonality'. But Helen Vendler remarks that there is a 'dialogue of the mind with itself in the poem. For Vendler, there is a poet-speaker and the poet engages himself in an inner dialogue. Yet the speaker does not demonstrate any narrative subjectivity. The poet-speaker seems to be self-effacing and he appears to be an onlooker or spectator. He becomes an interpreter, a reader of the season. Even if he poses rhetorical questions for himself in stanza two and three, however, he seems to do it in a disinterested manner. At the inception of the poem, a note of disinterestedness has already been established. The poet narrates a beautiful season to us and he does it in an objective way:

"Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness

Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;

Conspiring with him how to load and bless

With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eves run".

The poet seems to be like the third-person omniscient narrator as there is no lyric subjectivity displayed in these lines. Such a characteristic pervades the entire poem.

The most striking characteristic of the ode is its highly pictorial and sensuous nature; even the most abstract of thoughts is conveyed in a concrete form. There are examples of various specific types of images and rhetorical devices in this ode, but the most dominant image is explicitly and unambiguously personification. The ode begins with an apostrophe to a personified Autumn, 'bosom friend' of the 'maturing sun', and, through a list enumerating the different maturing fruits and flowers, conveys a sense of overflowing ripeness and plenitude. This sense of heavy abundance is further conveyed in such syntactic doubling as 'mists and mellow fruitfulness', in the multiple nouns and verbs, and in the numerous long vowel sounds and clusters of consonants that force one to read slowly. That weightiness and abundance, however, are combined with a sense of vitality in the active verbs: vines are loaded with fruits, trees are bent with the weight of apples.

The suggestion of a movement towards conclusion, towards death, in the last stanza and the striking effect of this colloquial word – 'oozing' of the second stanza is taken up in the final stanza. 'Where are the songs of Spring?' or is it Autumn? This effectively combines synecdoche and personification. Rejecting these, he instead enumerates the music of autumn. Now he moves towards images which are suggestive of death: the 'soft-dying day' and the small gnats who mourn. These images and symbols are,

however, followed by descriptions of singing crickets and twittering swallows. Such simple and lively onomatopoeic words such as 'whistles' and 'twitter' function to offset the weightiness of death with a sense of the vitality of life. The poem concludes, therefore, as it starts: stasis and process are still joined.

'To Autumn' was written in the decade which was replete with severe economic and political crisis. There were widespread food riots, demands for electoral reform, work opportunities, better wages and lower prices. The Peterloo Massacre took place one month before Keats composed this poem. Historicist critics have generally considered 'To Autumn' as an attempt or endeavour to evade or repress the disruptions of history. An intriguing discourse which underscores how it is actually a strategic suppression of history, an effacement of the oppressed, may be found in Andrew Bennett's book titled Keats, Narrative, and Audience.

❖ **Serenity and Calmness**

Keats is completely serene in ‘To Autumn, There is nothing of the spiritual disturbance that marks 'Ode to a Nightingale', or the pathos of 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', no allegory as in 'Ode on Indolence' and 'Ode on Melancholy'. 'To Autumn' represents the culmination of Keats's power of tapestry-making. Earlier critics such as Sidney Colvin, Garrod and Downer have reviewed the poem as nothing but a series of tapestry representing Autumn. Shakespeare's line 'teeming autumn big with rich increase' captivated Keats's imagination and the younger romantic discovered the pictorial, the architectural and the symphonic flourish of the season of 'mists and mellow fruitfulness'.

He calmly enjoys the sights of the fruits and flowers of autumn -- the vines 'that round the thatch-eves run', 'the apples that bend the moss'd cottage trees,' the 'plump hazels with their sweet kernel; later flowers out of which bees suck honey. In the first stanza, the image of aging or ripeness predominates. The entire stanza conjures up symphony of colours. In the second stanza, the image is one of lingering and passing. This stanza records a symphony of movements. In this stanza, he feasts his eyes, to his full contentment, with the sights of the harvester "sitting careless on a granary floor", the reaper fallen asleep "on a half-reaped furrow", the gleaner crossing a narrow bridge with the sheaf on her head etc. In the third stanza, he regales his ears with the sweet sounds of autumn -- the mournful choir of swarming gnats, the familiar bleating of full-grown lambs, the chirping of hedge-crickets, the whistling of the robin red-breast and twitter of the swallows in the sky. The poet is fully satisfied with what he sees and hears in autumn and does not look for anything beyond autumnal sights and sounds. Though he does not hear the sweet songs of spring in autumn he can easily guess her sweetness from autumn's music. Autumn has enough to satisfy him:

'Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?

Think not of them, thou hast thy music too!'

However, the poet's enjoyment of autumnal beauty is disturbed by no romantic longing, no aspiration for the ideal existence, no looking before and after, no pining for what is not, no foreboding of winter, no regret for the spring that is gone and no prophetic thought of other spring to follow. Thus, in 'To Autumn', the serenity is achieved through the complete surrender to the beauties of Nature. 'Ripeness in all' looms large in 'To Autumn'.

But, it the poem 'To Autumn' is studied from a critical perspective, it is found that this ode is not an exception to the general scheme of Keats's odes which embodies a conflict between mutability in life and nature and perennial beauty. But for its full contentment and satisfaction, the ode reveals Keats's usual tension to some extent. Unger in his essay 'The Music of Autumn' reviews the ode as representing a tension in the mind of Keats about mutability of nature though subdued in the apparent calm and placidity of autumn. In the last stanza, Unger asserts that the image of gathering swallows twittering in the skies as foreboding the onset of winter. The following lines from 'Ode on Melancholy' give a clue to this ode:

Ay, in the very temple of delight
Veil'd melancholy has her shrine.

Therefore, Keats actually is not freed of his tension -- the problem of perpetuation of beauty. At last he comes to conclusion that true beauty must embrace the sorrow and melancholy. So, here, Keats's serenity is perceived in the surface of the poem.

3.19.4 Summing up

'To Autumn' is thus unquestionably about autumn. It records some of the occurrences of the season, delighting first in its abundance and then easing towards a sense of death and departure in the concluding stanza. This transition and its contemplation are attained with a tone of hopeful acceptance rather than the despair and frustration of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' or the comfortless terror of being driven back into a sense of grim reality at the final stanza of 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Unlike these, the present poem anchors itself not in illusion but in the painful, unavoidable, yet eventually bearable experience of the real world and its seasonal flux. That process is not poeticized by the introduction of classical gods, not sanctified by reference to the Christian God. It is there; it is negotiated in the text and confronted without support in a way that generates its own strengths. Keats faces life as it sinks towards winter, takes lyrical pleasure in its beauty and notes down its incipient decay. It is done with quite courage, the same kind of courage to combat in the face of distress that he admired in the people of England the day before he wrote the ode.

3.19.5 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Give an account of the descriptive power of Keats as you find in 'To Autumn'. How does the poet personify Autumn?
2. Show how Keats brings out the spirit of Autumn through vivid descriptive details.
3. 'Where are the songs of Spring?' How does Keats answer this question, and what attitude of the poet is revealed through that?
4. Keats' Autumn Ode conveys a serene acceptance of life. Discuss.
5. Write a critical appreciation or analysis of Keats's To Autumn.

Mid-length questions

1. Consider the view that Keats's poems are both sensuous and reflective.
2. Keats's Odes combine sensuousness with contemplation or reflection. Discuss.
3. Write a note on the "magical felicity" of Keats's style.

3.19.6 Suggested Reading

Abrams, M.H, (Ed.) *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*. Oxford University Press, 1975.

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Website: https://www.poetryfoundation.org

MODULE – IV

UNIT–20 : CHARLES LAMB : 'DREAM CHILDREN : A REVERIE'

Structure

4.20.1. **Objectives**
4.20.2. **Introduction**
4.20.3. **Charles Lamb - A Bio-Brief**
4.20.4. **Charles Lamb as a Romantic Essayist**
4.20.5. ***Essays of Elia***
4.20.6. **'Dream Children: A Reverie' - Text**
4.20.7. **Detailed Notes**
4.20.8. **Textual Analysis**
4.20.9. **Characteristics of Charles Lamb's Style**
4.20.10. **Summing Up**
4.20.11. **Comprehension Exercises**
4.20.12. **Suggested Reading**

4.20.1 Objectives

In this unit, the students will be introduced to another great contributor of the Romantic Age, a sensitive dreamer, Charles Lamb. Lamb is the perfector of the literary type of essays -essays subjective, personal and literary. You will learn about the life of the essayist, his works in general and Essays of Elia in particular. You will read one of his well-loved essays, "The Dream Children: A Reverie". This will be followed by a detailed discussion on Lamb as a literary architect. Reading him thoughtfully, you will understand what makes Charles Lamb such a winsome literary figure not only of the Romantic Age but for all students of English literature across the globe.

4.20.2 Introduction

You are now fairly mid-way in your acquaintance with the 'Essay' as a literary form in the history of English literature, having read Francis Bacon, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele in your previous Courses. As one moves from Bacon to the 18th century essayists, the major shift is from Baconian 'scientific method' and epigrammatic style of comprehending philosophy to social and moral commentary of the age of

periodicals. The 18th century essayists' sterling contribution was the creation of character sketches in a style that was to influence later generations. In this line, the next major contributor to the form of the essay is obviously Charles Lamb, with his popularizing of the intimate conversational style of writing. Lamb was Romantic in temperament, talking about old memories, common trivial things that make our otherwise mundane lives beautiful. It is also relevant to talk about Lamb's contemporary William Hazlitt, whom you will be reading in the next Unit. Unlike Lamb, Hazlitt had a somewhat different take on life. His life was also fraught with sorrow, poverty and tragedy like that of Lamb, but instead of accepting them quietly and cheerfully, as Lamb did, he often voiced an angry protest. His essay 'On the Pleasure of Hating' is a good example of this. Here he described how the ideals of his youth were destroyed by the hard experiences of life:

As to my old opinions, I am heartily sick of them. I have reason, for they have deceived me sadly....Instead of patriot and friends of freedom, I see nothing but the tyrant and slave....I see folly join with knavery, and together make up public spirit and public opinions.

Units 20 and 21 will therefore further your knowledge of the English Essay with special reference to these two essayists.

4.20.3 Charles Lamb - A Bio-Brief

> Charles Lamb, born in the Inner Temple, 10th February, 1775; educated at Christ's Hospital; afterwards a clerk in the Accountant's Office, East India House; pensioned off from that service, 1825, after thirty-three years' service; is now a gentleman at large; can remember few specialities in life worth nothing, except that he once caught a swallow flying.

This is how Lamb summarised his life in the *Autobiography* that was published in the *London Magazine* almost as an obituary four months after he died. He also made a list of his works in *Autobiography* : a tale in prose *Rosamund Gray*; a dramatic sketch named *John Woodvil*; a 'Farewell to Tobacco' with sundry other poems; *Essays of Elia* (which fetched him recognition); and *Specimens of English Dramatic Writers who lived about the Time of Shakespeare*.

The significance of the *Autobiography* lies not in what it says, for it says almost nothing about the influence that Lamb had on the development of the genre of essay writing in English literature; but rather in what it hides. It hides the pathetic tale of his life, the thousand slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune that failed to take away his sense of humour, his goodness and honesty. It is, however, characteristic of Lamb's

writing, for though he shares the intimate details of his life with his readers, he twists and turns and simulates reality in such a way that it becomes hard to separate it from fantasy that colours a Romantic mind.

To grow as an informed reader and to understand Lamb better we need to know a few grim details of his life. He was the seventh and youngest child of his parents and it was only his brother James (born 1763) and sister Mary (born 1764) who survived childhood. Poverty forced him to leave his studies in 1789 and find employment first at South Sea House and later at East India Company. During this time he spent his holidays at Blakesware, in Hertfordshire, where his maternal grandmother Mrs Field worked as a housekeeper to the Plumer family. During one such visit he came to know Ann Simmons, with whom he fell in love but the relationship never matured. Ann Simmons is represented as Alice Winterton in his Essays and as Anna in his poems. Both his grandmother and Ann feature in the essay that we are about to read. In 1796 he suffered the first attack of madness and many biographers think that it is because of this illness that the courtship came to an end.

His personal life continued to worsen. His parents were ill and his brother James lived separately in a comfortable lifestyle. His sister Mary was the one who took care of his parents and perhaps the hardship of such a life coupled with the hereditary weakness resulted in her mental derangement as well. On 22 September, 1796 in one such violent fit of insanity she killed her mother, wounded her father. This terrible shock strengthened Charles Lamb but his sister continued to suffer attacks of madness throughout her life. In spite of that, Lamb took the responsibility of his sister formally (he appealed to the court) and his brother who wanted her to remain in the asylum left the whole cost of her support to Charles. Uncomplaining, Charles devoted his life to his sister's care but never uttered anything against his brother in his portrayal of him in his essays.

This extended biographical note would convey to us Lamb's genial temper and his good humour. Even after he had been confined for madness, Lamb wrote to Coleridge, his closest and life-long friend: 'I am got somewhat rational now and don't bite anyone'. He referred to him and his sister as 'shorn Lambs'. His essays are marked by the same tolerance and patience, his humour is essentially self-reflexive, he seldom moralises and never disapproves of human weakness. All these, as A. C. Benson famously wrote in this essay, 'The Art of the Essayist' are marks of a great essayist. This geniality of temper pervades the present text as well. But before going to that, we will definitely try and place Lamb as a writer of the romantic essay. You will once again understand in this effort, the varying meanings that can be associated with the term 'romantic'.

4.20.4 Charles Lamb as a Romantic Essayist

Charles Lamb has been classified as a Romantic though there is an essential difference between the type of Romanticism practised by Wordsworth and Coleridge, and that expressed by Lamb in his essays. Lamb is a man of the city. He was born and brought-up in London, and unlike Wordsworth who sought in natural surroundings the source of his poetic inspiration Lamb preferred the streets of London. In a letter to his friend he wrote:

"Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres, churches, Covent, Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses...authors in the street with spectacles...lamp lit at night, pastrycooks' and silversmiths' shops...noises of coaches, drowsy cry of mechanic watchmen at night...these are thy pleasures, O London with the-many-sins."

Now, we may question on what premises we call Lamb a Romantic who was decidedly a 'scorner of the fields'? We have long associated the Romantic Movement with the 'return to nature'. However, we must remember nature does not simply mean the mountains and vales, it also implies what is natural in man. And it is here that Romanticism owes its etymological evolution to the Enlightenment that preceded it. It was a movement that questioned and challenged the preponderance of the intellect over the emotions that characterized literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth century England. English Romantics emphasized the qualities of imagination, emotion and feelings. Truth was not what was found by the mere allocation and study of facts accumulated by careful scientific experiments, but truth was what the imagination seized to be true. From all these perspectives, Lamb is definitely a Romantic.

4.20.5 *Essays of Elia*

It is interesting to note that Lamb did not begin his literary career as an essayist. He rather began as a poet, contributing to volumes published by Coleridge, tried his hand at the drama and the novel. At the age of forty-five he found his true vocation-that of essay writing. The first of the essays made their appearance in *London Magazine* in August 1820 under the penname Elia. In his '*Autobiography*' he wrote: 'He is also the true Elia, whose essays are extant in a little volume, published a year or two since, and rather better known from that name without a meaning than from anything he has done, or can hope to do, in his own name.' Many critics believe that Elia is anagrammatic of 'a lie'. (An anagram is a word or phrase formed by changing the order of the letters in another word or phrase. For example, 'triangle' is the anagram of 'integral'). Lamb, however, says that he borrowed the Italian name from one of his old acquaintances who worked with him thirty years before at South-Sea House. 'I went the other day'

writes Lamb in June 1821, '(not having seen him for a year) to laugh over with him at my usurpation of his name, and found him, alas! no more than a name, for he died of consumption eleven months ago, and I knew not of it. So the name has fairly devolved to me, I think, and 'tis all he has left me'.

The essays continued to appear in the London Magazine till December 1822. When a collected form was published in 1823 it had twenty-five essays. The content of the essays is chiefly personal bordering on the autobiographical. Many critics later ruefully commented that had Lamb started writing the essay at an earlier age, English literature would have been more enriched. But we must remember that as a writer he had to reach that level of ripeness when he could look back at his personal experience in a humorous and detached way and all the preceding years of hopes and disappointment were but a period of growth and preparation for this artistic culmination.

4.20.6 'Text of Dream Children : A Reverie'

CHILDREN love to listen to stories about their elders when they were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a traditionary great-uncle, or granddame whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother field, who lived in a great house in Norfolk (a hundred times bigger than that in which they and papa lived) which had been the scene-so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country- of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar with from the ballad of the Children in the Wood. Certain it is that the whole story of the children and their cruel uncle was to be seen fairly carved out in wood upon the chimney-piece of the great hall, the whole story down to the Robin Redbreasts, till a foolish rich person pulled it down to set up a marble one of modern invention in its stead, with no story upon it. Here Alice put out one of her dear mother's looks, too tender to be called upbraiding. Then I went on to say, how religious and how good their great grandmother Field was, how beloved and respected by everybody, though she was not indeed the mistress of this great house, but had only the charge of it (and yet in some respects she might be said to be the mistress of it too) committed to her by the owner, who preferred living in a newer and more fashionable mansion which he had purchased somewhere in the adjoining country; but still she lived in it in a manner as if it had been her own, and kept up the dignity of the great house in a sort while she lived, which afterwards came to decay, and was nearly pulled down, and all its old ornaments stripped and carried away to the owner's

other house, where they were set up, and looked as awkward as if someone were to carry away the old tombs they had seen lately at the Abbey, and stick them up in Lady C.'s tawdry gilt drawing room . Here John smiled, as much as to say, 'that would be foolish indeed'. And then I told how, when she came to die, her funeral was attended by a concourse of all the poor, and some of the gentry too, of the neighbourhood for many miles round, to show their respect for her memory, because she had been such good and religious woman; so good indeed that she knew all the Psaltery by heart, ay, and a great part of the Testament besides. Here little Alice spread her hands. Then I told what a tall, upright, graceful person their great-grandmother Field once was; and how in her youth she was esteemed the best dancer-here Alice's little right foot played an involuntary movement, till, upon my looking grave, it desisted the best dancer, I was saying, in the county, till a cruel disease, called a cancer, came, and bowed her down with pain; but it could never bend her good spirits, or make them stoop, but they were still upright, because she was so good and religious. Then I told how she was used to sleep by herself in a lone chamber of the great lone house; and how she believed that an apparition of two infants was to be seen at midnight gliding up and down the great staircase near where she slept, but she said 'those innocents would do her no harm'; and how frightened I used to be, though in those days I had my maid to sleep with me, because I was never half so good or religious as she- and yet I never saw the infants. Here John expanded all his eyebrows and tried to look courageous. Then I told how good she was to all her grandchildren, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Caesars, that had been Emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion, with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oaken panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out-sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me-and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my ever offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then- and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew-trees, or the firs, and picking up the red berries, and the fir-apples, which were good for nothing but to look-at or in lying about upon the fresh grass, with all the fine garden smells around me-or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and

the limes in that grateful warmth-or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond, at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings -I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such-like common baits of children. Here John slyly deposited back upon the plate a bunch of grapes, which not unobserved by Alice, he had meditated dividing with her, and both seemed willing to relinquish them for the present as irrelevant. Then in somewhat a more heightened tone, I told how, though their great-grandmother Field loved all her grandchildren, yet in an especial manner, she might be said to love their uncle, John L-, because he was so handsome and spirited a youth, and a king to the rest of us; and, instead of moping about in solitary corners, like some of us, he would mount the most mettlesome horse he could get, when but an imp no bigger than themselves, and make it carry him half over the county in a morning, and join the hunters when there were any out-and yet he loved the old great house and gardens too, but had too much spirit to be always pent up within their boundaries-and how their uncle grew up to man's estate as brave as he was handsome, to the admiration of everybody, but of their great-grandmother Field most especially; and how he used to carry me upon his back when I was a lame-footed boy for he was a good bit older than me-many a mile when I could not walk for pain; and how in after life he became lame-footed too, and I did not always (I fear) make allowances enough for him when he was impatient and in pain, nor remember sufficiently how considerate he had been to me when I was lame-footed; and how when he died, though he had not been dead an hour, it seemed as if he had died a great while ago, such a distance there is between life and death; and how I bore his death as I thought pretty well at first, but afterwards it haunted and haunted me; and though I did not cry or take it to heart as some do, and as I think he would have done if I had died, yet I missed him all day long, and knew not till then how much I had loved him. I missed his kindness, and I missed his crossness, and wished him to be alive again, to be quarrelling with him (for we quarreled sometimes) rather than not have him again, and was as uneasy without him, as he their poor uncle must have been when the doctor took off his limb. Here the children fell a crying, and asked if their little mourning which they had on was not for uncle John, and they looked up, and prayed me not to go on about their uncle, but to tell them some stories about their pretty dead mother. Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice

W--n ; and , as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens-when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of representment, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which, without speech, strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech: 'We are not of Alice, nor of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice called Bartrum father. We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe millions of ages before we have existence, and a name' -and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my bachelor arm-chair, where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side -but John L.(or James Elia) was gone for ever.

4.20.7 Detailed Notes

Reverie : a waking dream.

to stretch : Lamb hints at the imaginative attitude of children who want to extend their imagination to that distant past which their parents inhabited.

my little ones : his dream children - John and Alice. Lamb, in reality, did not have children as he was never married. These are children of imagination.

the other evening : a sense of familiarity is created.

their great-grandmother Field : Lamb's grandmother, Mary Field was actually a housekeeper to the Plumers in Hertfordshire and not in Norfolk as mentioned.

Ballad : a story told in the form of poetry or song.

The Children in the Wood : it was an old ballad of rather an uncertain origin as well as authorship. This found included in Percy's Reliques. The ballad has a poignant tale of the tragic murder of two unfortunate orphans under the guardianship of their cruel and greedy uncle. The dead bodies of the children were left uncovered in the dense forest, but some robin redbreasts took pity and covered them with dry leaves and thus gave them a decent burial.

modern invention : of latest design.

too tender to be called upbraiding: though the little girl was resentful against the man who pulled down the wooden chimney-piece, her expression was too gentle to convey the anger she felt. Here, through Alice's expression, Lamb focuses on the nature and psychology of children.

charge of it : i.e. she looked after it.

kept up the dignity : maintained the house in good condition.

Abbey : Westminster Abbey, national church of England.

Lady C's : an imaginary lady of fashion.

tawdry : the etymology of this word is interesting; it is derived from Saint Audrey, and originally implied any trinket or the like bought at a fair held in honour of the saint.

where they were…drawing room : the massive furniture and the costly decorations of that big building were taken and fixed to the new, modern, rather much smaller house, where the owner used to live. But they, however, looked odd there, exposing the owner's lack of refined taste and culture. Lamb here engages a humorous analogy. If the old tombstones of the Westminster Abbey were shifted and fitted in the modern, small drawing room of a fashionable lady, the situation would be awkward and ludicrous. So is the case here.

Psaltery : the word is inaccurately used for 'psalter'(prayer- song), devotional verses(psalms) as printed in the Book of Common Prayer. 'Psaltery' is actually a musical instrument with strings.

Testament : the Old Testament and the New. You have already read about the Bible in CC 6. This is a good instance of how it has repeatedly been a part of secular literary usage as well.

Alice's little right foot…movement : hearing the word 'dancer', Alice's foot started moving/ almost in the sense of tapping on its own, automatically. This is another vivid presentation of child psychology. Also notable is the precision of visual imagination created by Lamb.

apparition : ghost.

the twelve Caesars : the twelve Emperors of Rome from Julius Caesar to Domitian.

till the old marble…with them: the author and the marble busts seemed to have become one losing their separate identity. This shows how Lamb was rich in imagination even in his boyhood.

forbidden fruit : i.e., was not allowed to pluck the fruits. This is an allusion to the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of Knowledge in the Garden of Eden, cf. "The fruit of that forbidden tree" - Paradise Lost, Book I.

good for nothing : because they could not be eaten.

orangery : an artificially heated glass-roofed shed for growing oranges in cold countries.

dace : a kind of fish.

pike : a big variety of fish.

busy-idle : Lamb kept himself busy in idleness. He was apparently inactive, but his senses were occupied. This is an oxymoron founded on Horace's 'strenua inertia', energetic idleness.

common baits of children : things that generally tempt children.

John L : John Lamb, the author's brother whose recent death was the occasion of this pathetic self-revelation.

mettlesome : high-spirited.

imp: small boy.

man's estate : i.e., manhood.

make allowances : showed consideration.

such a…death : as soon as a man dies, he belongs to the past. Even a recent death gives rise to the impression that a long time has passed since the death.

haunted : came repeatedly into his thoughts and perturbed his existence.

crossness : irritability.

little mourning : little black dress worn to mourn death.

Alice W - n : Alice Winterton, the feigned name for Ann Simmons whom Lamb courted but without success.

coyness : shyness, maidenly reserve.

representment : reappearance in another's shape. The mother and the daughter were so alike that it seemed as if the mother had been reincarnated in her daughter.

receding : moving back.

mournful features : sad faces.

without speech…effects of speech : even though they did not speak, Lamb seemed to understand what they wanted to say. This is a beautiful realistic touch.

Bartrum : a pawn-broker of London to whom Ann Simmons (Alice W - n of the essay) was actually married. Personal touches like this are often found in Lamb's essays.

what might have happened : something that might have happened but did not in reality.

Lethe : In Classical mythology, Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Hades (underworld). The souls of the dead are to wait across this river in order to forget their earthly lives and to reach heaven. The banks of the river are supposed to be crowded with all the souls of the dead, waiting for their turn to be taken across. This is a Classical allusion, also found in Keats' Ode to a Nightingale'.

bachelor's armchair : reality of his bachelor life.

Bridget : Lamb's sister Mary Lamb.

4.20.8 Textual Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the essay was published in the *London Magazine* in January, 1822. Lamb's elder brother John was then lately dead. The 'broad, burly jovial' John Lamb, lived his prosperous life on his own, avoiding social relation with his brother and sister. But as we have already noted Charles Lamb was quite fond of his brother. He mourned his death, and in a letter written during this time, he complained to his friend Wordsworth that his brother's death had made him aware of a certain 'deadness to everything'. He also became keenly aware of his solitude and loneliness. With John dead, he was left with but one near relation, and Mary was also away from home in the periods of insanity. The bleakness of the present scenario made him wonder what could have been had he married and had children. This pathetic longing for companionship is hidden under the warmth of the imaginary parlour where on a winter afternoon, the children Alice and John crept to their father to listen to the story of their grandmother and uncle. The chatter of the dream children keeps us busy and it is only at the end that we realize that the author was sitting on his 'bachelor' arm chair and day-dreaming.

The entire essay in a single paragraph resembles the unhindered flow of thoughts, feelings and emotions. In a way Lamb, in form, becomes a fore-runner of the 'stream of consciousness' writers, the continuous flow of thoughts being structurally represented in his style of not breaking up the essay into any paragraphs or sections. However, for our convenience, we may thematically divide it into three parts to make our reading easier. The first part talks about the great grandmother Mrs Field who worked as housekeeper for the Plumers in Blakesware. Lamb disguises the locality of the house, probably because Walter Plumer, for many years M.P. for Hertfordshire was still living. Norfolk also gave Lamb the opportunity to refer to the ballad of 'The Children in the Wood; or the Norfolk Gentleman's Last Will and Testament'. The ballad narrates the story of the two children who were murdered in the woods by two ruffians at the consent of their uncle. The last lines of the ballad refer to the robin redbreasts, and reads as following:

No burial of this pretty pair
Of any man receives,
Till Robin redbreast piously
Did cover them with leaves.

The reference to ballad (see notes) creates an enchanted atmosphere of the woods. The old story of cruelty and pathos marks the mellowed beginning of a reminiscence

that slyly voices the unfulfilled wishes of the author. We now have a long section on Mrs Field who was a good-natured, religious and god-fearing lady who loved her grandchildren, and was respected by everyone near her.

The memory of the grandmother brings forth the other happy memories associated with her, that is, Lamb's visit to Blakesware during his holidays. The description of his childhood experiences in her house constitutes the second part of the essay. This portion also projects the Romantic Lamb at his best. He almost takes us by hand and leads us from the garden to the palatial house, through its rooms, and again to the garden, orangery (a glass-roofed conservatory, artificially heated, in which oranges are grown), and the fish-pond. We have earlier discussed that Lamb is not a worshipper of nature in the way Wordsworth was. He was rather the man of the city. Here in the description of nature we would not find any worship of nature, nature would also not teach us the lessons of life, give us solace and strengthin times of need. Nature here is presented as it influenced a boy. What is conveyed to us is his sensitivity, his love for beauty. He finds no animal delight in eating the fruits, but enjoys basking in the orangery and feels a sense of ripening with the limes and oranges. This reference to the orangery may also remind us of Keats' 'Ode to Autumn', where in the 'season of mist and mellow fruitfulness' the poet watches the fruits growing to their fullness. He also looks at the busts of twelve Caesars (from Julius Caesar to Domitian) which were kept in the garden and felt either the stones turning to life or he changing into marble. This vision of oneness with the objects is a characteristic feature of the romantic, imaginative mind, and is known as empathy.

Among all the children Grandmother Field was most fond of John Lamb. As we move into the third section of the essay, we find a description of John and his closeness with Charles in their boyhood days. He was of a different temperament, preferring active life to the 'busy-idle' diversions that kept the young Charles so occupied. He rode and went with the hunters, he was brave and handsome and to the lame-footed stuttering Charles', he was nothing short of a hero. He narrates how he used to carry him on his back. Lamb mourns his death and feels that he has been impatient with him in his hours of pain. We know from the biographical note that this is hardly true. But we are not after the facts or truth for we are reading a dream, a wish-fulfilment not a mere narrative of his life. It is his life as he wanted it, not as he lived it. And thus we find the reference to the children's mother, Alice Winterton, Ann Simmons of real life. The reference to Alice makes him look at his dream- daughter Alice who is made in her mother's image; so much so that he feels he can see their dead mother in her. Then suddenly the vision of the children grows dim and he remembers that the children of Alice calls Bartram father for Ann Simmons married one Mr Bartram, a pawnbroker of Leicester Square, London. The children are still waiting at the banks of Lethe, for it is the river of forgetfulness at whose side the souls wait for next incarnation. Another

parallel of this classical allusion can also be found in Virgil's Aeneid:

> Souls destined to inhabit
> A second body, sit by Lethe's stream,
> Quaff opiate draughts of long oblivion.

As he wakes up he finds his sister Mary (Bridget of the essay) still sitting beside him but John (James Elia) was gone forever.

The reverie is punctuated by the voice of the children. As they listen to their father's story they comment, laugh, feel afraid, find interest, twitch their feet, weep when they listen to the sad death of their uncle. They also utter the final words that bring Lamb back to the normal world. These children are fragments of dream, but Lamb's extreme sensitivity portrays them as living beings, and he shows a keen understanding of the child's mind. For instance, when he narrates how he used to love more the atmosphere of the garden as a child, John, his dream-son keeps the bunch of grapes back in the platter, trying to show how he finds the story more fascinating than the grapes. These small humorous touches enliven the sad reality of the background. Along with Charles Lamb we also forget the present world of experience, and travel to the world of make-believe.

4.20.9 Characteristics of Lamb's Style

There are certain essential features of Lamb's composition. Let us note a few of them:

Perceiving Nature : We have already discussed that Lamb is a Romantic with a difference. He describes nature with a sensitivity that is akin to that of Keats. But he never tries to draw moral lessons from it. Nature is not worshipped but rather enjoyed for the sake of beauty.

Death as a Consciousness : There is a tremendous consciousness of death that pervades the entire essay. The description begins with the death of the two children as narrated in the ballad, and continues with the description of Grandmother Field's funeral, brother John's death, Alice's death. These references to death do not intend to make us aware of the transience of human life, but rather the inevitability of death adds to the charm of life giving us a scope to languish in sorrow.

The Fantastic and the Real : There is a thin line of demarcation between the fantastic and the real. Fantasy is so realistically portrayed that we begin to believe it as real when the dream breaks into the sad reality of life. Lamb also alters the facts to suit his purpose. For instance, he changes the location of his grandmother's house from Blakesware to Norfolk. Sometimes these changes also hide the grim truth. He

imagines a loving and doting elder brother which he never had in John. He describes him with 'superhuman sweetness' endowing him with qualities he never had. Similarly, he conceals the identity of Alice in his real life by changing her name. Perhaps, though Lamb shared his dreams, openly regretted his loneliness, he did not want the public with uncertain sympathies to pry too near to destroy his privacy or comment on others close to his heart. Thus the memories are thinly disguised, slightly distorted, garbed in fantasy. The essay remains an essay with autobiographical elements; but if we try to find the facts of the writer's life we shall be deceived.

Humour and Pathos : Another speciality of Lamb's prose is the artful blending of humour and pathos. We must remember that humour and fun are not the same. Fun involves a laughter which is more caustic, usually directed at someone, and harbours a kind of insensitivity towards that person or his habit. We are struck by the difference between what is expected of him and what he does. For example, the antics that a clown performs on stage, strike us as 'funny' because a 'normal' human being does not act in that manner. A waiter tripping over something with a handful of crockery tickles us for we expect him to be portly and efficient. But notice, in both the cases we are not touched by the individual's plight (a poor man being forced to behave abnormally to make people laugh or the great waste of the fine china or the possibility of the man being hurt), otherwise we would be too much of a moralist and such grave concern can never raise laughter. Fun is also associated with a jovial mood, a physical enjoyment; for instance, we say that we went for a picnic and 'we had fun'. Now picnic is not a serious or sensitive affair, so fun in the sense of a light mood goes well with it.

Humour evokes a very different kind of laughter. It is tolerant, usually directed at the very person who is narrating the incident or story, it is thus something more delicate. It would not make you burst into a peal of laughter; rather it would make you smile. It is more akin to pathos. We may say that they are the two sides of the same coin. In both humour and pathos the most distinguishing feature is the narrator's sensitiveness. If he can tolerate his grief and break into a smile, we have humour, otherwise it turns into pathos. That is why it is widely believed among the students of literature that *King Lear* a celebrated tragedy of Shakespeare had every predilection to change into a comedy had the playwright not decided otherwise.

Now to turn to Lamb once again, his humour is of rare order. It must be enjoyed in silence. He does not make us laugh as P. G. Wodehouse or Jerome K. Jerome does; rather, his humour nestles with such an intensity of grief that even tears cannot comprehend. It is quite complex. One must be extremely perceptive to understand its delicate shades. It is far from fun and closer to pathos. Let us see what J. Lewis May, Lamb's biographer and critic says regarding this:

With Lamb, the humour often resides not in the theme narrated, but in something

interjected, an aside, an apparent innocent addition, analogous, not to a wink...but to the faintest flicker of an eyelid, something that might easily be missed if our attention were not on the alert....

Take for instance how in the essay, Alice reacts when she learns that her grandmother was a great dancer or John tries to look brave when he listens about the infants. The narrative itself is not humorous; it is a description of the past-not bitter memories but sweet remembrances. The humour is introduced by the little descriptions of the children's reaction to the story. Pause, think deeply, the children do not exist! We may be reminded of the film Limelight. In one scene, Charles Chaplin acts as a joker and performs his antics. We roll in laughter. The very next moment, the camera pans and we find that there is no audience in the hall, and we realize the hard fact that as a joker the character has been an utter failure. We laugh and cry at the same instant. Such is Lamb's humour. It does not satirise, it does not provoke malice. It is simple feeling of being delighted at life's little ironies.

A Boisterous Appeal: Last but not the least, we should categorically state, that Lamb is not a moralist. He has no aim to instruct. His themes are homely as Lewis May says that his essays are like 'the chambers in a house of dreams, furnished and adorned with all the relics of the gracious past-old portraits, old books, old prints, old china...'. He does neither scorn nor support anyone for their moral infirmities. He is a detached observer of life. However, we cannot say that he believes in the theory of 'art for art's sake', chiefly because though Lamb does not deliberately instruct, yet his humble philosophy of acceptance and tolerance is evident in all his writings. In spite of the commonality of his theme, his goodness is almost infectious, so much so that it brings out the best in us.

How then, could we assimilate the aforementioned points to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the prose style of Charles Lamb?

It is myself that I portray."Michel Eyquem de Montaigne

Lamb wrote to Barron Field, "You shall have soon a tissue of truth and fiction impossible to be extricated, the interlacing shall be so delicate, the partitions perfectly invisible, it shall puzzle you . . . , & I shall not explain it." Though Lamb disguises this reality, blending perfectly autobiography and fiction, the reader can promptly feel the creator's presence in his essays. The present one is indeed a good manifestation of this.

The charm of the Elia essays lies in the charm of Lamb's personality-his originality and singularity and his seemingly artless mode of expression. All of Lamb's stylistic features are found in "Dream Children": a casual, relaxed, polite, nonliterary voice in an amiable conversation with his reader(s), a 'spontaneous overflow of powerful

emotions', nostalgic personal recollections, elements of humour, whimsy and touches of pathos.

Lamb's style in his essays is fundamentally story-telling narration. His essays are indeed "loose sally of the mind". ‘Dream Children’, too begins with a very familiar, informal tone: "Children love to listen to stories …", a story for Lamb's readers about his children listening to stories of his past. It is a rich fabric of many personal tales woven on it- the story of his paternal grandmother, Mrs. Field, the grandeur of the Norfolk mansion, the fall of the mansion after the death of Mrs. March, the legend of the children in the wood, the pathetic death of John Lamb, his brother, his love for Ann Simmons ,the subsequent failure of the relationship, and finally the story of the children ,the children he might have had …This style of Lamb is characterised by a childlike simplicity, empathy and fellow feeling for others and a deep understanding of life and acceptance of life's dictum . He narrates his tale in a simple, candid style, enriching it with humour, pity, pathos and wisdom.

‘Dream Children’ incorporates a range of moods. The rather short essay begins on a genial note, almost adhering to the Classical unities of time, place and action, opening with the picture of a cosy nineteenth century English domestic space where a doting father recounts to his two children, John and Alice, stories of his childhood and of their great grandma and late uncle. However, when the readers reach the end of the essay, the picture of this warm domesticity melts in thin air. Lamb controls the progression from one mood to another smoothly, sharing with his readers a final sense of loss without taking recourse to sentimentalilty. The reader shockingly realizes the domestic space and the children are a 'reverie' or figments of the distressed mind of the essayist. It is, in all probability the perfect picture of the family that Lamb secretly nurtured in his mind and heart but he never actually had. The end of the essay attains a stasis with Lamb finding himself seated in his bachelor armchair with the faithful Bridget unchanged by his side.

Hugh Walker pointed out, Lamb's style is not wholly modern, he belonged to an old time. In 'Dream Children', Lamb's love for the past is transparent not only in his themes but in his authorial style. Indeed, it has been rightly said that Lamb was "the last of the Elizabethans". Lamb's close acquaintance with Elizabethan and Jacobean masters had left a distinct signature in his prose style. His love for word-coining ('tawdry gilt' and 'busy-idle diversions); his fondness for alliteration; his use of compound words ; his frequent use of proper nouns as adjectives and musical language show his indebtedness to the Elizabethans.

Again as a true Romantic his fascination with the supernatural and escapism is evident through the vehicle of a reverie. Dreams and reveries allow Lamb scope for self-examination through apparent distance. Lamb's pen interweaves realism, memory

and dream and inscribes on paper an absorbing tale of personal longing and pain in an indelible and concise manner. Another feature of the Romantics that is reflected in the essay is the priority of the subjective over the objective; Lamb's essay emphasizes on the autobiographical .Lamb is often considered a visualiser of memories. He dives into the depths of his bottomless memory, picks up a treasured memory/moment, perfects it with his fictional art and gifts to the world a priceless literary gem.

Lamb, like his friend Coleridge, shows deftness in presenting the preternatural. A real sense of eeriness is felt by the readers when John and Alice reveal themselves to be mere dreams, bewildering not only the readers, but also the dreamer himself.

"..while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, … We are nothing; less than nothing, and dreams. We are only what might have been …."

The warm intimate picture of blissful family suddenly dissolves, giving way to pitiful images "receding, and still receding till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance… without speech". Here Lamb adopts a style, different from the earlier parts of the essay, to suit the seriousness of the subject-matter. Consciously, his sentences are slow-paced and languorous, highlighting the pathos without overt sentimentality.

The style in 'Dream Children' has a most subtle charm-not the result of labour, but the natural garb of his thoughts. Like Shakespeare's Fools, Lamb possessed the power of conveying the deepest wisdom in a jest of uniting the wildest merriment with the truest pathos. What is most dominant in "Dream Children" is his persuasive romantic, tender style, which is at once derivative and original, realistic and mystical.

4.20.10 Summing up

Lamb's friend, the essayist William Hazlitt, characterised him:

> Mr. Lamb ... does not march boldly along with the crowd .... He prefers bye-ways to highways. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive description over a tottering doorway, or some quaint device in architecture, illustrative of embryo art and ancient manners. Mr. Lamb has the very soul of an antiquarian ...."

We see Lamb creates a magical atmosphere in 'Dream Children: A Reverie' through his seemingly 'artless art'. His distinct evocative style lends his essay a lyrical charm. The essayist's concoction of pathos, humour, musical language and mystification makes the essay not only a lyric in prose but the lyric of the human soul.`

4.20.11 Comprehension Exercises :

Long Questions

1. Discuss the Romantic elements in Lamb's Essays of Elia with particular reference to "Dream Children: A Reverie".
2. Comment on the blend of autobiography and fiction in Lamb's "Dream Children: A Reverie".
3. In Lamb's essays, pathos is never far away from humour. Discuss Lamb's mastery in weaving humour and pathos in "Dream Children: A Reverie".
4. Write a note on Lamb's prose style with particular reference to "Dream Children: A Reverie".
5. After reading the essay "Dream Children: A Reverie" discuss the character of the essayist in details.
6. Consider Lamb as a personal essayist with reference to "Dream Children: A Reverie".

Mid Length Questions

1. Discuss the autobiographical elements in Lamb's "Dream Children: A Reverie".
2. Write a note on the blend of fact, fiction and willful mystification in "Dream Children: A Reverie".
3. Justify the title of the essay, "Dream Children: A Reverie" and explain its relation to the themes.
4. On the basis of your reading of the essay, "Dream Children: A Reverie", write an essay on Lamb's family as he describes it.
5. How does Lamb portray his boyhood days in "Dream Children: A Reverie"?
6. Lamb was at heart an antiquarian. Discuss the statement with reference to his essay prescribed for you.

Short Questions

1. Give a pen-picture of Lamb's grandmother as you find it in "Dream Children: A Reverie".
2. What memories of John Lamb does Lamb share with his dream children?
3. Discuss Lamb's 'busy-idle diversions' as he has shared with his readers in "Dream Children: A Reverie".
4. Comment on the ending of "Dream Children: A Reverie".
5. Draw a contrast between the characters of the Lamb brothers, Charles and John.

6. Comment on the ending of "Dream Children: A Reverie".

4.20.12 Suggested Reading :

Commins, Saxe. (Ed.) *The Complete Works and Letters of Charles Lamb*. The Modern Library, 1935

Lamb, Charles. *The Essays of Elia*. https://archive.org/details/essayselia01lambgoog page/n7/mode/2up

Walker, Hugh. *The English Essay and Essayists*. Palala Press, 2016.

UNIT–21 : WILLIAM HAZLITT : 'ON GOING A JOURNEY'

Structure

4.21.1. Objectives
4.21.2. Introduction to William Hazlitt
4.21.3. About 'On Going a Journey'
4.21.4. The Text of the Essay
4.21.5. Annotations & Critical Understanding
4.21.6. Hazlitt as a Romantic Essayist
4.21.7. Summing Up
4.21.8. Comprehension Exercises
4.21.9. Suggested Reading

4.21.1 Objectives

In this unit you will be introduced to the Romantic essayist William Hazlitt and his essays. Here, we shall devote our attention to an understanding of William Hazlitt- the essayist, various features of his essays, with particular focus on 'On Going a Journey'. While studying this Unit, you will feel the charm of Hazlitt's personal essays and understand the multiple aspects of the essays written in this great era of Romanticism. His essays can be read and his style then compared with those of Lamb's essays, whom you have read in the previous unit. After reading the prescribed essay on your syllabus, you will realise that the Romantic age is not only famous for its poetry, the essays also contributed a great deal to the enrichment of literature of the age and in creating a prose-style for future essayists.

4.21.2 Introduction to William Hazlitt

William Hazlitt (1778-1830) was one of the leading prose writers of the Romantic period. Influenced by the concise social commentary in Joseph Addison's eighteenth century magazine, the Spectator, and by the personal tone of the essays of Michel de Montaigne, Hazlitt was one of the most celebrated practitioners of the "familiar" essay. Characterized by conversational diction and personal opinion on topics ranging from the eminent English poets to ordinary folk, the style of Hazlitt's critical and autobiographical writings has greatly influenced methods of modern writing on aesthetics. Hazlitt took his first education from his father, a Unitarian minister. He went to Paris

in his youth with the aim of becoming a painter, but gradually convinced himself that he could not excel in this art. He then turned to journalism and literature, and came into close association with Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb, Hunt, and others of the Romantic School. He was, however, of a sensitive and difficult temperament, and sooner or later quarrelled with most of his friends. Though a worshiper of Napoleon, whose life he wrote, he was a strong liberal in politics, and supposed himself persecuted for his opinions. Of all Hazlitt's voluminous writings, those which retain most value to-day are his literary criticisms and his essays on general topics. His clear and vivacious style rose at times to a rare beauty; and when the temper of his work was not marred by his touchiness and egotism he wrote with great charm and a delicate fancy.

❖ Major Works

Hazlitt's most important works are generally divided into two categories: literary criticism and familiar essays. Of his literary criticism Hazlitt wrote, "I say what I think: I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are." Representative of his critical style is Characters of Shakespeare's Plays'' (1817), which contains subjective, often panegyrical commentary on such individual characters as Macbeth, Othello, and Hamlet. This work introduces Hazlitt's concept of "gusto," a term he used to refer to qualities of passion and energy that he considered necessary to great art. In accord with his impressionistic approach to literature, Hazlitt's concept of gusto also suggests that a passionate and energetic response is the principal criterion for gauging whether or not a work achieves greatness. Hazlitt felt that Shakespeare's sonnets lacked gusto and judged them as passionless and unengaging despite the "desperate cant of modern criticism." Hazlitt was no less opinionated on the works of his contemporaries. In the final section of *Lectures on the English Poets* (1812) he criticized Coleridge and Wordsworth, whose emphasis on nature and the common aspects of life acknowledged, in his view, "no excellence but that which supports its own pretensions." In addition to literature, Hazlitt also focused on drama and art in his critical essays, many of which are collected in A *View of the English Stage* (1818) and *Sketches of the Principal Picture Galleries in England* (1824). The many and varied familiar essays that Hazlitt wrote for magazines by the side of those collected in volumes like *The Round Table, Table-Talk*, and *The Plain Speaker* are usually considered his finest works. Critics often hold that the essays of *The Round Table* and those in *Table-Talk* and *The Plain Speaker* differ among themselves in this that the former contain observations on "Literature, Men, and Manners" in a style that tends to imitate the essays of Addison and Montaigne, while the latter focus on Hazlitt's personal experiences in a more original, conversational style. Often beginning with an aphorism, Hazlitt's familiar essays are characterized by informal diction and an emotional tone. This informal style,

in Hazlitt's words, "promises a greater variety and richness, and perhaps a greater sincerity, than could be attained by a more precise and scholastic method." For, Hazlitt himself described his essays as "experimental" rather than "dogmatical," in that he preferred to use the model of common conversation to discuss ordinary human experiences rather than to write in what he believed was the abstract and artificial style of conventional nonfictional prose.

4.21.3 About 'On Going a Journey'

'On Going a Journey' was first published in *New Monthly Magazine*, January, 1822 issue. Later it was collected in *Table Talk*, *Essays on Men and Manners*, published in 1822. The essay bears out Hazlitt's love of going on a journey. He calls it the 'pleasantest thing in the world'; but at the same time he prefers to go on a journey alone. He does not like to criticize hedgerows and black cattle as many city-dwellers do. For him, the essence of a journey is solitude - liberty, perfect liberty to think, feel and do just as he pleases. Hazlitt feels that the beauties of nature can be better appreciated by a reciprocal heart than by means of any verbal interaction with others. He is of the opinion that good and learned talk often spoils out-of-door prospects, and hence it should be reserved for table-talk. However, there is at least one subject that can be discussed with others while on a trip, and that is food.

Hazlitt also makes allowance for company when he chooses to visit ruins or aqueducts, for they are 'intelligent matters' and will bear talking about. On foreign travels too he prefers the company of friends so that he might hear the sound of his own tongue. While speaking on journeys abroad, he finally switches to Napoleon, his 'first love', and concludes that the glory of the French Revolution has gone simply because the Bourbons have come back to the French throne. Hazlitt closes the essay by saying that though the sensation of travelling in a foreign country is pleasing, there is no permanent value in it. That is why he says, "Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves for a while from the ties and objects that recall them; but we can be said to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth." He is thus prepared to spend one life in travelling if he could be provided another life to spend afterwards at home.

4.21.4 The Text

'On Going a Journey'

One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to do it myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company for me. I am then never less alone than when alone.

"The fields his study, nature was his book."

I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country, I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedge-rows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room and fewer incumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

"a friend in my retreat
Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet."

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

"May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,"

that I absent myself from the town for awhile, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a post-chaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with and vary the same stale topics over again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner — and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder

rolling cloud, I plunge into my past being and revel there, as the sunburnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things like "sunken wrack and sumless treasuries," burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again. Instead of an awkward silence, broken by attempts at wit or dull common-places, mine is that undisturbed silence of the heart which alone is perfect eloquence. No one likes puns, alliterations, antitheses, argument, and analysis better than I do; but I sometimes had rather be without them. "Leave, oh, leave me to my repose!" I have just now other business in hand which would seem idle to you, but is with me "very stuff of the conscience." Is not this wild rose sweet without a comment? Does not this daisy leap to my heart set in its coat of emerald? Yet if I were to explain to you the circumstance that has so endeared it to me, you would only smile. Had I not better then keep it to myself, and let it serve me to brood over, from hear to yonder craggy point, and from thence onward to the far-distant horizon? I should be but bad company all that way, and therefore prefer being alone. I have heard it said that you may, when the moody fit comes on, walk or ride on by yourself and indulge your reveries. But this looks like a breach of manners, a neglect of others, and you are thinking all the time that you ought to rejoin your party. "Out upon such half-faced fellowship," say I. I like to be either entirely to myself, or entirely at the disposal of others; to talk or be silent, to walk or sit still, to be sociable or solitary. I was pleased with an observation of Mr Cobbett's that "he thought it a bad French custom to drink our wine with our meals, and that an Englishman ought to do only one thing at a time." So I cannot talk and think, or indulge in melancholy musing and lively conversation by fits and starts. "Let me have a companion of my way," says Sterne, "were it but to remark how the shadows lengthen as the sun declines." It is beautifully said; but in my opinion, this continual comparing of notes interferes with the involuntary impression of things upon the mind and hurts the sentiment. If you only hint what you feel in a kind of dumb show, it is insipid; if you have to explain it, it is

making a toil of a pleasure. You cannot read the book of nature without being perpetually put to the trouble of translating it for the benefit of others. I am for the synthetical method on a journey, in preference to the analytical. I am content to lay in a stock of ideas then, and to examine and anatomize them afterwards. I want to see my vague notions float like the down of the thistle before the breeze, and not to have them entangled in the briars and thorns of controversy. For once, I like to have it all my own way; and this is impossible unless you are alone, or in such company as I do not covet. I have no objection to argue a point with anyone for twenty miles of measured road, but not for pleasure. If you remark the scent of a bean-field crossing the road, perhaps your fellow-traveller has no smell. If you point to a distant object, perhaps he is short-sighted, and has to take out his glass to look at it. There is a feeling in the air, a tone in the colour of a cloud which hits your fancy, but the effect of which you are unable to account for. There is then no sympathy, but an uneasy craving after it, and a dissatisfaction which pursues you on the way, and in the end probably produces ill humour. Now I never quarrel with myself, and take all my own conclusions for granted till I find it necessary to defend them against objections. It is not merely that you may not be of accord on the objects and circumstances that present themselves before you — these may recall a number of objects and lead to associations too delicate and refined to be possibly communicated to others. Yet these I love to cherish, and sometimes still fondly clutch them, when I can escape from the throng to do so. To give way to our feelings before company, seems extravagance or affectation; and, on the other hand, to have to unravel this mystery of our being at every turn, and to make others take an equal interest in it (otherwise the end is not answered) is a task to which few are competent. We must "give it an understanding but no tongue." My old friend Coleridge, however, could do both. He could go on in the most delightful explanatory way over hill and dale a summer's day, and convert a landscape into a didactic poem or a Pindaric ode. "He talked far above singing." If I could so clothe my ideas in

sounding and flowing words, I might perhaps wish to have some one with me to admire the swelling theme; or I could be more content, were is possible for me still to hear his echoing voice in the woods of All-Foxden. They had "that fine madness in them which our first poets had"; and if they could have been caught by some rare instrument, would have breathed such strains as the following.

"Here be woods as green
As any, air likewise as fresh and sweet
As then smooth Zephyrus plays on the fleet
Face of the curled streams, with flow'rs as many
As the young spring gives, and as choice as any;
Here be all new delights, cool streams and wells,
Arbours o'ergrown with woodbine, caves and dells;
Choose where thou wilt; whilst I sit by and sing.
Or gather rushes, to make many a ring
For thy long fingers; tell thee tales of love;
How the pale Phoebe, hunting in a grove,
First saw the boy Endymion, from whose eyes
She took eternal fire that never dies;
How she convey'd him softly in a sleep,
His temples bound with poppy, to the steep
Head of old Latmos, where she stoops each night,
Gilding the mountain with her brother's light,
Too kiss her sweetest.

Had I words and images at command like these, I would attempt to wake the thoughts that lie slumbering on golden ridges in the evening clouds; but at the sight of nature my fancy, poor as it is, droops and closes up its leaves, like flowers at sunset. I can make nothing out on the spot:—I must have time to collect myself.

In general, a good thing spoils out-of-door prospects; it should be reserved for table-talk. Lamb is for this reason, I take it, the worst

company in the world out of doors; because he is the best within. I grant, there is one subject on which it is pleasant to talk on a journey; and that is, what one shall have for supper when we get to our inn at night. The open air improves this sort of conversation or friendly altercation by setting a keener edge on appetite. Every mile of the road heightens the flavour of the viands we expect at the end of it. How fine is it to enter some old town, walled and turreted, just at approach of nightfall, or to come to some straggling village, with the lights streaming through the surrounding gloom; and then after inquiring for the best entertainment that the place affords, to "take one's ease at one's inn!" These eventful moments in our lives' history are too precious, too full of solid, heart-felt happiness to be frittered and dribbled away in imperfect sympathy. I would have them all to myself, and drain them to the last drop; they will do to talk of or to write about afterwards. What a delicate speculation it is, after drinking whole goblets of tea,

"The cups that cheer, but not inebriate,"

And letting the fumes ascend into the brain, to sit considering what we shall have for supper — eggs and a rasher, a rabbit smothered in onions, or an excellent veal-cutlet! Sancho in such a situation once fixed upon cow-heel; and his choice, though he could not help it, is not to be disparaged. Then, in the intervals of pictured scenery and Shandean contemplation, to catch the preparation and the stir in the kitchen [getting ready for the gentleman in the parlour] Procul, O procul este profani! These hours are sacred to silence and to musing, to be treasured up in the memory, and to feed the source of smiling thoughts hereafter. I would not waste them in idle talk; or if I must have the integrity of fancy broken in upon, I would rather it were by a stranger than a friend. A stranger takes his hue and character from the time and place; he is a part of the furniture and costume of an inn. If he is a Quaker, or from the West Riding of Yorkshire, so much the better. I do not even try to sympathize with him, and he breaks no squares. [How

I love to see the camps of the gypsies, and to sigh my soul into that sort of life. If I express this feeling to another, he may qualify and spoil it with some objection.] I associate nothing with my travelling companion but present objects and passing events. In his ignorance of me and my affairs, I in a manner forget myself. But a friend reminds one of other things, rips up old grievances, and destroys the abstraction of the scene. He comes in ungraciously between us and our imaginary character. Something is dropped in the course of conversation that gives a hint of your profession and pursuits; or from having some one with you that knows the less sublime portions of your history, it seems that other people do. You are no longer a citizen of the world: but your "unhoused free condition is put into circumspection and confine." The incognito of an inn is one of its striking privileges — "Lord of one's self, uncumber'd with a name." Oh! It is great to shake off the trammels of the world and of public opinion — to lose our importunate, tormenting, everlasting personal identity in the elements of nature, and become the creature of the moment, clear of all ties — to hold to the universe only by a dish of sweet-breads, and to owe nothing but the score of the evening — and no longer seeking for the applause and meeting with contempt, to be known by no other title than the Gentleman in the parlour! One may take one's choice of all characters in this romantic state of uncertainly as to one's real pretensions, and become indefinitely respectable and negatively right-worshipful. We baffle prejudice and disappoint conjecture; and from being so to others, begin to be objects of curiosity and wonder even to ourselves. We are no more those hackneyed common-places that we appear in the world; an inn restores us to the level of nature and quits scores with society! I have certainly spent some enviable hours at inns — sometimes when I have been left entirely to myself and have tired to solve some metaphysical problem, as once at Witham-common, where I found out the proof that likenesss is not a case of the association of ideas — at other times, when there

have been pictures in the room, as at St Neot's (I think I was), where I first met with Gribelin's engravings of the Cartoons, into which I entered at once, and at a little inn on the borders of Wales, where there happened to be hanging some of Westall's drawings, which I compared triumphantly (for a theory that I had, not for the admired artist) with the figure of a girl who had ferried me over the Severn, standing up in a boat between me and the twilight — at other times I might mention luxuriating in books, with a peculiar interest in this way, as I remember sitting up half the night to read Paul and Virgiria , which I picked up at an inn at Bridgewater, after being drenched in the rain all day; and at the same place I got through two volumes of Madam D'Arblay's Camilla . It was on the 10th of April, 1798, that I sat down to a volume of the New Eloise, at the inn at Llangollen, over a bottle of sherry and cold chicken. The letter I chose was that in which St. Preux describes his feelings as he first caught a glimpse from the heights of the Jura of the Pays de Vaud, which I had brought with me as a bon bouche to crown the evening with. It was my birth-day, and I had for the first time comer from a place in the neighbourhood to visit this delightful spot. The road to Llangollen turns off between Chirk and Wrexham; and on passing a certain point you come all at once upon the valley, which opens like an amphitheatre, broad, barren hills rising in majestic state on either side, with "green upland swells that echo to the bleat of flocks" below, and the river Dee babbling over its stony bed in the midst of them. The valley at this time "glittered green with sunny showers," and a budding ash-tree dipped its tender branches in the chiding stream. How proud, how glad I was to walk along the high road that overlooks the delicious prospect, repeating the lines which I have just quoted from Mr Coleridge's poems! But besides the prospect which opened beneath my feet, another also opened to my inward sight, a heavenly vision, on which were written, in letters large as Hope could make them, these four words, Liberty, Genius,

Love, Virtue; which have since faded in the light of common day or mock my idle gaze.

"The Beautiful is vanished, and returns not."

Still I would return some time or other to this enchanted spot; but I would return to it alone. What other self could I find to share that influx of thoughts of regret and delight, the fragments of which I could hardly conjure up myself, so much have they been broken and defaced! I could stand on some tall rock and over look the precipice of years that separates me from what I then was. I was at that time going shortly to visit the poet whom I have above named. Where is he now? Not only I myself have changed; the world, which was then new to me, has become old and incorrigible. Yet will I turn to thee in thought, O sylvan Dee, in joy, in youth and gladness as though then wert; and thou shalt always be to me the river of Paradise, where I will drink the waters of life freely!

There is hardly anything that shows the short-sightedness or capriciousness of the imagination more than travelling does. With change of place we change our ideas; nay. our opinions and feelings. We can by an effort indeed transport ourselves to old and long-forgotten scenes, and then the picture of the mind revives again; but we forget those that we have just left. It seems that we can think but of one place at a time. The canvas of the fancy is but of a certain extent, and if we paint one set of objects upon it, they immediately efface every other. We cannot enlarge our conceptions, we can only shift our point of view. The landscape bares its bosom to the enraptured eye, we take our fill of it and seem as if we could form no other image of beauty or grandeur. We pass on and think no more of it; the horizon that shuts if from our sight, also blots it from our memory like a dream. In travelling through a wild, barren country, I can form no idea of a woody and cultivated one. It appears to me that all the world must be barren, like

what I see of it. In the country we forget the town and in the town we despise the country. "Beyond Hyde Park," says Sir Fopling Flutter, "all is a desert." All that part of the map which we do not see before us is a blank. The world in our conceit of it is not much bigger than a nutshell. It is not one prospect expanded into another, country joined to country, kingdom to kingdom, land to seas, making an image voluminous and vast; —the mind can form no larger idea of space than the eye can take in at a single glance. The rest is a name written in a map, a calculation of arithmetic. For instance, what is the true signification of that immense mass of territory and population, known by the name of China to us? An inch of pasteboard on a wooden globe, of no more account than a China orange! Things near us are seen at the size of life; things at a distance are diminished to the size of the understanding. We measure the universe by ourselves, and even comprehend the texture of our own being only peace-meal. In this way, however, we remember an infinity of things and places. The mind is like a mechanical instrument that plays a great variety of tunes, but it must play them in succession. One idea recalls another, but it at the same times excludes all others. In trying to renew old recollections, we cannot as it were unfold the whole web of our existence; we must pick out the single threads. So in coming to a place where we have formerly lived and with which we have intimate associations, every one must have found that the feeling grows more vivid the nearer we approach the spot, from the mere anticipation of the actual impression; we remember circumstances, feelings, persons, faces, names that we had not thought of for years; but for the time all the rest of the world is forgotten! — To return to the question I have quitted above:

I have no objection to go to see ruins, aqueducts, pictures, in company with a friend or a party, bur rather the contrary, for the former reason reversed. They are intelligible matters and will bear talking about. The sentiment here is not tacit, but communicable and overt. Salisbury

Plain is barren of criticism, but Stonehenge will bear a discussion antiquarian, picturesque, and philosophical. In setting out on a party of pleasure, the first consideration is always where we shall go to, in taking a solitary ramble, the question is what we shall meet with by the way. "The mind is its own place"; nor are we anxious to arrive at the end of our journey. I can myself do the honours indifferently well to works or art and curiosity. I once took a party to Oxford with no mean Ãclat — showed them the seat of the Muses at a distance

"With glistering spires and pinnacles adorn'd..."

descanted on the learned air that breathes from the grassy quadrangles and stone walls of halls and colleges — was at home in the Bodleian; and at Blenheim quite superseded the powered Cicerone that attended us, and that pointed in vain with his wand to commonplace beauties in matchless pictures. — As another exception to the above reasoning, I should not feel confident in venturing on a journey in a foreign country without a companion. I should want at intervals to hear the sound of my own language. There is an involuntary antipathy in the mind of an Englishmen to foreign manners and notions that requires the assistance of social sympathy to carry it off. As the distance from home increases, this relief, which was at first a luxury, becomes a passion and an appetite. A person would almost feel stifled to find himself in the deserts of Arabia without friends and countrymen; there must be allowed to be something in the view of Athens or old Rome that claims the utterance of speech; and I own that the Pyramids are too mighty for any single contemplation. In such situations, so opposite to all one's ordinary train of ideas, one seems a species by one's self, a limb torn off from society, unless one can meet with instant fellowship and support. — Yet I did not feel this want or craving very pressing once, when I first set foot on the laughing shores of France. Calais was peopled with novelty and delight. The confused, busy murmur of the place was like oil and wine poured into my ears; nor did the mariner's

hymn, which was sung from the top of an old crazy vessel in the harbour, as the sun went down, send a alien sound into my soul. I only breathed the air of general humanity. I walked over "the vine-covered hills and gay regions of France," erect and satisfied; for the image of man was not cast down and chained to the foot of arbitrary thrones; I was at no loss for language, for that of all the great schools of painting was open to me. The whole is vanished like a shade. Pictures, heroes, glory, freedom, all are fled; nothing remains but the Bourbons and the French People! — There is undoubtedly a sensation in travelling into foreign parts that is to be had nowhere else; but it is more pleasing at the time than lasting. It is too remote from our habitual associations to be a common topic of discourse or reference, and, like a dream of another state of existence, does not piece into our daily modes of life. It is an animated but a momentary hallucination. It demands an effort to exchange our actual for our ideal identity; and to feel the pulse of our old transports revive very keenly, we must "jump" all our present comforts and connexions. Our romantic and itinerant character is not to be domesticated. Dr. Johnson remarked how little foreign travel added to the facilities of conversation in those who had been abroad. In fact, the time we have spent there is both delightful and in one sense, instructive; but it appears to be cut out of our substantial, downright existence, and never to join kindly on to it. We are not the same, but another, and perhaps more enviable individual, all the time we are out of our own country. We are lost to ourselves, as well as our friends. So the poet somewhat quaintly sings, "Out of my country and myself I go."

Those who wish to forget painful thoughts, do well to absent themselves of while from the ties and objects that recall them; but we can be said only to fulfil our destiny in the place that gave us birth. I should on this account like well enough to spend the whole of my life in travelling abroad, if I could anywhere borrow another life to spend afterwards at home!

4.21.5 Annotations & Critical Understanding

I am then never less alone than when alone : A reminiscence of a Latin saying attributed to Scipio Africanus (236-183 BC), who is famed to have defeated Hannibal in the Second Punic War. The meaning of the Latin saying as reported by Cicero is, "I feel least lonely when I am all alone, because then I have, and enjoy, the company of nature undisturbed." It was first introduced in English by Jonathan Swift. Shelley, in one of his letters expresses a similar sentiment. In a letter to his cousin he complained of "that deserted state when we are surrounded by human beings." The field his study, Nature was his book: Taken from a poem by Robert Bloomfield (1766-1823), "The Farmer's Boy", which is hailed as a rural poem. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It* we also read of "…books in the running brooks, Sermons in stones, and good in everything." Wish to vegetate like the country: To grow in silence as vegetables grow. Here Hazlitt figuratively speaks of the growth of his ideas.

Encumbrances : Burdens or impediments.

A friend…is sweet : From William Cowper's poem "Retirement".

May plume…sometimes impair'd : From Milton's Comus with slight variations. Hazlitt suggests that the wings of a man's imagination are damaged when in the midst of the noise and bustle of the city. When he moves to the country, his imagination is regenerated.

Have a truce with impertinence: have the liberty to enjoy and discuss something that is not to the point.

Sunken wrack and sumless treasuries: quoted from Shakespeare's Henry IV, Part I. This line is spoken by the Archbishop of Canterbury about the valour of England. The simile compares old forgotten events to wreckage and incalculable treasures lying buried at the bottom of the ocean. Mine is that undisturbed…perfect eloquence: Hazlitt means that the best feelings are often best left unexpressed. Keats framed a similar paradox in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter."

Leave me, oh leave me to my repose: an altered quotation from Gray's "Descent of Very stud of conscience: From Shakespeare's "Othello". A speech of Iago reads:

"Though in the trade of war I have slain men Yet do I hold it very stuff to the conscience To do no contriv'd murder."

Mr. Cobbet : William Cobbet (1763-1835), an English Tory Journalist, whose style was admired by Hazlitt. His important works include *Advice to Young Men* (1829) and *Rural Rides* (1830). Sterne: Lawrence Sterne (1713-1768) was an English novelist, his most popular work being *Tristram Shandy*, Bk 1 of which you have read in CC 6.

Synthetical method : the method involving addition of one impression to another. Hazlitt says that when on a journey he prefers to store up the impressions in synthesis rather than analyze them.

Give it an understanding and no tongue : This line is spoken by Hamlet in Shakespeare's masterpiece, when he is about to see the ghost of his father. It means "not to express in words what one has seen".

He talked far above singing : From Beaumont and Fletcher's play *Philaster*. Hazlitt here pays a tribute to Coleridge's poetic ability.

Allfoxden : Allfoxden and Nether Stowey are places associated with the relationship between Wordsworth and Coleridge. Hazlitt refers to the fruitful discussions on poetry that must have taken place between the two at Allfoxden in the Lake District.

That fine madness…our first poets had : Adapted from Drayton's elegy which has this phrase, "that fine madness still he did retain which rightly should possess a poet's brain".

Here the woods…kiss her sweetest : these lines occur in Fletcher's pastoral play The Faithful Shepherdess. The passage presents the picture of a lover paying court to his beloved in ideal pastoral surroundings.

Zephyrus : Zephyrus, the god of west wind in Greek mythology abducted the goddess Chloris and gave her dominion over flowers. In Roman myth he is called Favonius, the protector of flowers and plants.

Endymion : a shepherd youth whom the moon goddess, Phoebe deeply loved. She put him into perpetual slumber so that she might kiss him without his knowledge.

Latmos : Mount Latmos where Diana used to meet Endymion.

Take one's ease at one's in : In Shakespeare's "Henry IV", Part I Falstaff says: "Shall I not take mine ease in my inn but I shall have my pocket pick'd?"

Shandean : A good natured, simple and unworldly character like Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Procul, O Procul este profani: "far off, oh, far off the vulgar be". This is part of the exhortation to laymen uttered by Roman priests. "Vulgar" means the uninitiated.

Quaker : A Quaker is a member of the nonconformist religious sect founded by George Fox (1624-1691).

Lord of one's self, uncumbered with a name : Adapted from Dryden's Epistle, where the statement runs, "Lord of yourself, uncumbered with a wife". Hazlitt suggests that he was to go on a journey with his identity not disclosed to anybody.

St. Neot : A place in Cornwall.

Madame d'Arblay : Her maiden name was Fanny Burney (1752-1840). Her two-volume novel Camilla came out in 1795. It tells of the simple home life of a virtuous

girl, who being inexperienced is exposed to the dangers of the world. Her other important novels include *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782) and *The Wanderer* (1814).

Tenth of April : the birthday of Hazlitt.

New Eloise : a novel by Rousseau (1712-1778).

St. Preux : the hero of Rousseau's novel New Eloise.

Green upland swells that…bleat of flocks : From Coleridge's poem "Ode on the Departing Year" (1796).

Glittered green with sunny showers : From the same source - Coleridge's poem

Where I will drink of the waters of life freely: in Revelation in the Bible one reads:"And he showed me a purer river of Water of Life; clear as crystal, proceeding out of the thrones of God and the Lamb.

Sir Fopling Flutter : A character in Etherege's play *The Man of Mode*. Actually these words are spoken by Harriet in the play.

The mind is its own place : Satan's words from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Bk-1).

Bodleian : the famous library of Oxford University.

Blenheim : Blenheim palace, a gift to the Duke of Marlborough from Queen Anne as a recognition of his victory at the Battle of Blenheim. Robert Southey wrote a famous poem titled 'After Blenheim' about this battle.

Calais : a town in France.

Bourbons : the dynasty that ruled over France after the downfall of Napoleon Bonaparte.

4.21.6 Hazlitt as a Romantic Essayist

In his essay 'The Art of the Essayist', A.C. Benson thus emphasizes the personal character of the essay: "The point of the essay is not the subject…but the charm of personality". In fact prose literature in the beginning of the nineteenth century is found immensely affected and shaped by the subjective spirit that precisely defined the literature of the age. The essayist in Hazlitt, like Lamb, is essentially romantic in this that in his essays the personal note is patent, although the former is not as much autobiographical as the latter. Hazlitt's essay is basically subjective, and gives out much of his inner self - his personal taste and temper. He is quite outspoken in his admission of his preferences and aversions, and has no recourse to mystification in his self-revelation like Lamb.

The Familiar or Personal Essay is supposed to indicate a tone of familiarity of the essayist, who seems to establish an intimately personal relation with his reader. In 'On Going a Journey', Hazlitt unequivocally records his temperamental reactions to different

things, apparently trivial, and calling for significance only because of the essayist's masterly style, marked by a familiar tone. Thus he clearly states that he prefers to go on a journey alone, because he does not wish his enjoyment of the varied charms of Nature to receive any oblique comment from his fellow travelers:

"I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it."

The note of familiarity is however, not the only test of Hazlitt's romanticism. Imaginative exaltation goes hand in hand with this. Feeling and fancy often combine to create a typically romantic style to suit the mood best. For instance, in another famous essay 'On a Sundial', while he indulges in fascinating imagination about the sun-dial near Venice and its motto of serenity, he cannot help fancying that "some monk of the dark ages must have invented and bequeathed to us…this exquisite device..".

A haunting association with the past, in other words, a hankering for the 'days so sweet, but no more' is also a salient feature of a Romantic essay, and it is found to feature persistently in the essays of Hazlitt. The quiet beauty of a pleasant natural setting casts an inescapable pull on a romantic mind. The present essay clearly underscores Hazlitt's joy in what is serene and silent. His romantic impulsiveness and reflective nature are perfectly in 'On Going a Journey'. A lyrical impulse and a profound thoughtfulness go together in his comments on what he sees and feels and imagines. The quality of solitude as an exhalting aspect that pervades the essay is another instance of Hazlitt's romantic subjectivity:

"One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, Nature is company enough for me".

Such profoundly subjective impulses often touch upon the edges of egotism; still their boldness and authenticity successfully prevent his statements from sounding melodramatic and sentimental.

Indeed, Hazlitt shares many of the characteristics that define a Romantic or Familiar essayist. With his straight-forward yet pregnant, precise yet elegant prose-style, he remains a Romantic essayist par excellence.

4.21.7 Summing up

In this unit you were introduced to the Romantic essayist William Hazlitt and subjected to a detailed reading of one of his essays. You were given an understanding of the various features of his essays. Hazlitt's most important works are generally

divided into two categories: literary criticism and familiar essays. Often beginning with an aphorism, Hazlitt's familiar essays are characterized by informal diction and an emotional tone. The quiet beauty of a pleasant natural setting casts an inescapable pull on a romantic mind. His romantic impulsiveness and reflective nature are perfectly harmonized in the essay that is prescribed in your syllabus. Hazlitt shares many of the characteristics that define a Romantic or Familiar essayist. With his straight-forward yet pregnant, precise yet elegant prose-style, he stands as a Romantic essayist at quite another spectrum than where he find Charles Lamb.

4.21.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions :

1. Evaluate Hazlitt as a Romantic/ Personal/ Familiar Essayist with reference to the essay in your syllabus.
2. Write a critical note on Hazlitt's prose style with reference to 'On Going a Journey'.

Mid-Length Questions :

1. Critically comment on the theme of the essay 'On Going a Journey'.
2. How does the title of the essay 'On Going a Journey' bring out the essence of the text?
3. How does Hazlitt blends literary allusions to the context of his essay 'On Going a Journey'?

Short Questions :

1. Why does the author prefer solo travel?
2. In what kind of circumstances does the author make allowances for the company of friends on a journey?
3. How does Hazlitt differentiate between synthesis and analysis?

4.21.9 Suggested Reading

Birrell, Augustine. *William Hazlitt*. Macmillan,1902.

Bromwick, David. *Hazlitt: The Mind of a Critic*. OUP, 1991.

Jones, Stanley. *Hazlitt, A Life*. OUP, 1989.

UNIT–22 : MARY SHELLEY : *FRANKENSTEIN*

Structure

4.22.1. Objectives
4.22.2. Introduction
4.22.3. Mary Shelley: A Bio-brief
4.22.4. *Frankenstein*: A Critical Summary
4.22.5. Glossary
4.22.6. Plot and Narrative Technique
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4.22.7.1. *Frankenstein* as a Gothic novel
4.22.7.2. Nature vs Nurture
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4.22.7.4. The Creator and the Created
4.22.8. Mary Shelley's Art of Characterisation
4.22.8.1. Victor Frankenstein
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4.22.8.3. Elizabeth Lavenza
4.22.9. From Myth to Movies: The Appeal of *Frankenstein*
4.22.10. Summing Up
4.22.11. Comprehension Exercises
4.22.12. Suggested Reading

4.22.1 Objectives

- To provide the learner with a detailed look at the genre of the Gothic novel.
- To help the learner study *Frankenstein* as a Gothic novel.
- To explain the prevalent themes and issues in *Frankenstein* to the learner.

4.22.2 Introduction

To understand *Frankenstein*, it is necessary to understand the spirit of the Romantic novel first. In the eighteenth century, the socio-political and economic landscape of

Europe was dominated by the Age of Enlightenment, which placed a lot of emphasis on ideas of rationality and reason. Emerging as a counter to these ideas was the Romantic movement, which primarily started in Germany with the writings of thinkers like J.W. Goethe and Friedrich Schelling. Romanticism laid emphasis on the exploration of beauty in nature, a juxtaposition of the beautiful and the grotesque, and a celebration of the individual instead of society. Instead of focussing on the imitative nature of the Neoclassical era, writers and poets chose to dwell on imagination. While poets like William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge based their work on these principles, it can be argued that the Romantic novel realized its full potential in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Victor Frankenstein's quest to create the perfect "human", and the resulting mayhem that follows, perhaps sums up the desire for juxtaposing human idealism against an unyielding nature. This makes Mary Shelley's novel a fascinating one.

4.22.3 Mary Shelley - A Bio-Brief

The daughter of philosopher and political writer William Godwin and famous feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley was born as Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin on August 30, 1797 in London. Unfortunately, Mary could never see her mother alive; she died shortly after childbirth. Mary was, therefore, left in the care of her father William Godwin, along with Fanny Imlay, her older half-sister. After Godwin's subsequent marriage to Mary Jane Clairmont in 1801, the family dynamics changed. Mary Jane Claremont already had two children before the marriage; she and Godwin had a son together as well. However, Mary's relationship with her stepmother suffered as a result. As a result, Mary was denied the opportunity of a formal education, even though her stepsister Jane (later Claire) was sent away to school. From a very early age, Mary was interested in reading, and she made use of her father's extensive library. In spite of her lack of a formal education, she also sought refuge in writing. In 1807, her first poem, ‘‘Mounseer Nongtongpaw’’ was published though her father's company.

In 1814, Mary began a relationship with the noted poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was already married. Even though he was a devoted student of her father, it did not take long for Mary to catch his fancy. The same year, the couple fled England, with Mary's stepsister Jane in tow. This led to a breakdown in relations between Mary and her father for some time. Mary and Percy Shelley travelled around Europe for some time. Beset by financial struggles, Mary gave birth to a baby girl, who only lived for a few days, before dying in 1815. The following year, the Shelleys went to Switzerland with Jane Clairmont, Lord Byron and John Polidori. The group sought entertainment in a book of ghost stories one rainy day. This led Lord Byron to suggest that everyone present there should try their hand at composing horror story of their own. This led Mary to begin work on what would ultimately become *Frankenstein*.

Later that year, Mary had to contend with the suicides of her half-sister Fanny Imlay and Percy Shelley's first wife. She and Percy Shelley were ultimately able to marry each other only in December 1816. Mary published a travelogue of their escape to Europe, *History of a Six Weeks Tour* in 1817, while continuing to work on Frankenstein. In 1818, *Frankenstein*, or *The Modern Prometheus*, was published under anonymous authorship, with an introduction by Percy Shelley. The book proved to be a huge success, and soon the couple moved to Italy. However, Mary and Percy's marriage was a troubled one, with multiple instances of adultery and heartbreak, including the loss of two more children. In 1819, Mary gave birth to their only son, Percy Florence, who was her only child to live to adulthood. In 1822, she received the news of her husband's death; he had drowned while sailing with a friend in the Gulf of Spezia.

After being widowed, Mary Shelley worked hard to support herself and her son Percy Florence. She wrote a number of works, including *Valperga* (1823) and *The Last Man* (1826). She also focussed on promoting her husband's literary heritage. She died of brain cancer on February 1, 1851 in London at the age of 53. Initially buried at St. Pancras Cemetery in London, her remains were later exhumed and reinterred at St. Peter's Church in Bournemouth.

4.22.4 *Frankenstein* : A Critical Summary

The novel begins with explorer Robert Walton looking for a new passage from Russia to the Pacific Ocean via the Arctic Ocean. After weeks at sea, the crew of Walton's ship finds an emaciated man, Victor Frankenstein, floating on an ice flow near death. The reader learns about Victor's tragic story as narrated by Walton in letters addressed to his sister. Growing up in Geneva, Switzerland, Victor is a bright child, adept at learning a number of new subjects. He is raised with Elizabeth, an orphan adopted by his family. Being wholly interested in the sciences, Victor prepares to leave for his studies at the University of Ingolstadt, when his mother Caroline and Elizabeth become ill with scarlet fever. While Caroline succumbs to the disease, Elizabeth recovers.

At the university, Victor meets his professors M. Krempe and M. Waldman. For two years, Victor becomes very involved with his studies, even impressing his teachers and fellow students. His ambition is to recreate and reanimate a dead body. He uses a combination of chemistry, alchemy, and electricity to make his ambition a reality.

After bringing the creature to life, Victor is consumed by guilt when he realizes that he has brought a new life into the world with no provisions for taking care of the monster. He runs away in fear and disgust from his creation and his conscience. The monster wanders the countryside while Victor seeks solace in a tavern near the university. Henry Clerval, Victor's closest friend, appears to save Victor and restore him to health.

Alphonse writes to Victor telling him to come home immediately since an unknown assailant murdered his youngest brother, William, by strangulation. Justine Moritz, their housekeeper, is falsely accused of the murder of William, and she goes to the gallows willingly. Victor knows who the killer is but cannot tell his family or the police. He journeys out of Geneva to refresh his tortured soul and visits Mount Montanvert when he sees the monster coming to confront his maker with a proposition - "make me a mate of my own." Victor refuses, and the monster asks that his part of the story be heard. The pair retreats to a small hut on the mountain where the monster tells his story. The monster has taught himself to read and understand language so that he can follow the lives of his "adopted" family, the De Laceys. While the monster wanders the woods, he comes upon a jacket with a notebook and letters that were lost by Victor. When the monster learns of his creation, he decides to take revenge on his creator's family to avenge the injury and sorrow he endures from others.

Victor refuses to make a second monster, but is convinced when the monster assures Victor that he will leave Europe and move to South America. Victor agrees to begin work on a second creation and makes plans to go to England and Scotland, with Henry Clerval, to begin his secret work. Before he leaves Geneva, Victor agrees to marry Elizabeth immediately upon his return from the British Isles. Victor takes up residence in the Orkney Islands, off the coast of Scotland. Victor destroys his project and goes out to sea to dispose of the remains. The monster vows revenge on Victor not upholding his end of their bargain.

While at sea, Victor's boat is blown off course by a sudden storm, and he ends up in Ireland. Henry Clerval's body has washed up on the shores of Ireland, and Victor is set to stand trial for murder. Fortunately, Mr. Kirwin, a local magistrate, intercedes on Victor's behalf and pleads his case before a court, which then finds Victor innocent of the crime. Victor is miserable knowing he has caused the deaths of so many, but recovers enough to finalize the plans for his marriage to Elizabeth.

With a wedding date set, Victor torments himself with the thought of the monster's threat to be with him on his wedding night. The wedding goes off as planned. While Victor makes sure he covers all possible entrances that the monster could use to get into the wedding chamber, the monster steals into Elizabeth's room and strangles her.Victor now wants revenge and chases the monster through Europe and Russia. He nearly catches the monster near the Arctic Circle when Robert Walton discovers him. Victor, now near death, is taken aboard Walton's ship to recover from exhaustion and exposure.

The monster appears out of the mists and ice to visit his foe one last time. The monster enters the cabin of the ship and tells Walton his side of the story. Victor dies, and the monster tells Walton: "I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult

in the agony of the torturing flames." The monster then disappears in the waves and darkness, never to be seen again.

4.22.5 Glossary

- malignity - intense ill will; spite.
- gaolers - archaic spelling of 'jailers'.
- despondency - a state characterized by lack of hope or courage.
- inconsolable - unable to be comforted.
- terrific - in the context of Shelley, 'terrifying'.
- placid - peaceful; serene.
- pertinacity - persistence.
- natural philosophy - an antiquated branch of study, which encompassed a broad sense of studying how the world works. It maps most closely onto what we now call 'science', though other disciplines, such as math, were also included in this category.
- charnel houses - houses for dead bodies.
- physiology - in Shelley, the science of living things, and of life as a concept, in a broad sense.
- indefatigable - persisting tirelessly.
- imperious - urgent.
- chimerical - imaginary; fanciful.
- predilection - a bias in favor of something.
- the philosopher's stone - an object sought by alchemists, believed to be able to turn any metal into silver or gold.
- dissimilitude - diversity; dissimilarity.
- syndic - chief magistrate.

4.22.6 Plot and Narrative Structure

Frankenstein is a remarkable novel in most regards, but one aspect that makes it stand out from all other novels of its time is its unique narrative structure. Working within the conventions of the "ghost-story" or "horror story", Mary Shelley developed a unique narrative style that could add adventure and emotion to the proceedings without sacrificing realism. She uses the device of the framed narrative (or embedded narrative), to propel the story forward. In a framed narrative, the action and story are

presented to the reader in multiple layers, or as "picture-frames" encapsulating a story within a story. A close reading of the plot structure of *Frankenstein* reveals a three-tiered structure.

The reading sequence is the first tier, by which readers move through a series of "picture-frame" narratives, as Walton's letters frame (or enclose) Frankenstein's history, which in turn frames (or encloses) the Creature's tale. During this sequence, the reader moves from the exterior to the interior, and also from the most recent narrative (Walton's letters) to the earliest (the Creature's tale), all of which are recorded by and related through Walton. Walton's sister, Margaret Saville, is basically Shelley's version of the reader. By reading her brother's letters as Margaret, we experience the narratives as a set of texts arranged not according to the chronology of actions they represent, nor the order in which the narratives were originally related, but instead as they were received and came to have situational meaning to the perceiver (in this case, Walton). The reading sequence thus suggests the "picture-frame" metaphor by providing transitional spaces, introducing Shelley's readers to increasingly alien narrators and situations as we move from Walton to Frankenstein to the Creature.

In the second tier, the action sequence is the series of narrated events reconstructed as they occurred chronologically. This sequence is directed by Victor Frankenstein, who relates the earliest events in the story (his parents' courtship and marriage, his own upbringing and education, and so forth). By interpolating the Creature's narrative within his own, Frankenstein supplies information that would otherwise not be known by the reader (the Creature's education, his murder of William and implication of Justine Moritz, and so on).

In the third tier, the narrative sequence in *Frankenstein* is yet a deeper structural arrangement: it is the chronological order in which the narrative acts take place. This sequence actually enables and shapes the reading and action sequences in Shelley's work. There are several plots in the story which are not explored by Victor. For instance, Victor writes several letters to his family, but fails to mention anything about his life in Ingolstadt. Most of these gaps are filled in by the Creature's subsequent narrative, and it is in this narrative sequence that Shelley plays her masterstroke. By posing the Creature's narrative as a counter to Victor and Walton's storytelling, Shelley enables the reader to look at a more well-rounded version of the events taking place in the novel, while also making us question who the real villain is in this case. While Victor paints himself as the victim and the Creature as a "monster" with no feelings, the Creature's narrative actually portrays him as a thinking being, capable of emotion.

Shelley's three-tiered framed narrative thus helps to lend *Frankenstein* an aura of mystery and realism tinged with emotion and pathos, which would not have been possible in a linear narrative.

4.22.7 Themes

4.22.7.1 *Frankenstein* as a Gothic Novel

Frankenstein is by no means the first Gothic novel. Instead, this novel is a compilation of Romantic and Gothic elements combined into a singular work with an unforgettable story. Even though several novels had appeared using Gothic themes, but the genre, remarkably, had only been around since 1754.

But what is a "Gothic novel"? Works belonging to this genre had the ability to shock the reader into fear and submission, because the narratives usually dwelt on the supernatural and the fear of the unknown or unexplained forces which could not be explained by a rational mind. This genre was heavily influenced by the Gothic architecture all over Europe, which could be found in old and decadent castles, mansions and even monasteries.

The first Gothic horror novel was *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, published in 1754. Perhaps the last type of novel in this mode was Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847. In between 1754 and 1847, several other novels appeared using the Gothic horror story as a central story telling device, The *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) and *The Italian* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe, *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew G. Lewis, and *Melmouth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin.

Gothic novels focus on the mysterious and supernatural. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley uses rather mysterious circumstances to have Victor Frankenstein create the monster: the cloudy circumstances under which Victor gathers body parts for his experiments and the use of little known modern technologies for unnatural purposes. Shelley employs the supernatural elements of raising the dead and macabre research into unexplored fields of science unknown by most readers. She also causes us to question our views on Victor's use of the dead for scientific experimentation. Upon hearing the story for the first time, Lord Byron is said to have run screaming from the room, so the desired effect was achieved by Mary Shelley.

The narratives of Gothic novels also generally take place in gloomy places like old buildings (particularly castles or rooms with secret passageways), dungeons, or towers that serve as a backdrop for the mysterious circumstances. A familiar type of Gothic story is, of course, the ghost story. Also, far away places that seem mysterious to the readers function as part of the Gothic novel's setting. Frankenstein is set in continental Europe, specifically Switzerland and Germany, where many of Shelley's readers had not been. Further, the incorporation of the chase scenes through the Arctic regions takes the reader even further from England into regions unexplored by most readers. Likewise, Dracula is set in Transylvania, a region in Romania near the Hungarian border. Victor's laboratory is the perfect place to create a new type of human being.

Laboratories and scientific experiments were not known to the average reader, thus this was an added element of mystery and gloom.

Shelley takes full advantage of the gruesomeness of raising the dead to enhance the strange feelings that Frankenstein generates in its readers. The thought of raising the dead would have made the average reader wince in disbelief and terror. Imagining Victor wandering the streets of Ingolstadt or the Orkney Islands after dark on a search for body parts adds to the sense of revulsion purposefully designed to evoke from the reader a feeling of dread for the characters involved in the story.

In the Gothic novel, the characters seem to bridge the mortal world and the supernatural world. Dracula lives as both a normal person and as the undead, moving easily between both worlds to accomplish his aims. Likewise, the Frankenstein monster seems to have some sort of communication between himself and his creator, because the monster appears wherever Victor goes. The monster also moves with amazing superhuman speed with Victor matching him in the chase towards the North Pole. Thus, Mary Shelley combines several ingredients to create a memorable novel in the Gothic tradition.

4.22.7.2 : NATURE vs NURTURE

The nature vs. nurture debate is at the forefront of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*. The two main characters, Victor Frankenstein and the creature he creates, both have an innate nature that factors into each one's personality and way of life; however, Frankenstein and the creature are subjected to two very different nurturing styles. Although both nature and nurture are important throughout the novel, the nature argument is responsible for the fall of Victor Frankenstein, while the nurture argument is responsible for the fall of the creature. Shelley makes this idea clear to the reader through her powerful diction when describing Victor's and the creature's personalities. Shelley also makes use of light and fire as a symbol for an intellectually intriguing, yet physically destructive, force. This symbol is key to supporting the nature vs. nurture argument throughout the novel.

Shelley first addresses Victor's nature. He describes being borrn "a Genevese" with a family that is "one of the most distinguished of that republic" (Shelley 24). Victor explains that his ancestors, for many years, had been "counsellors and syndics" (Shelley 24). Frankenstein continues to describe his family with adjectives such as, "honour," and "integrity" (Shelley 24). Shelley's careful selections of the powerful words used to describe the Frankenstein family, as well as their prestigious placement in society, insinuate the family's innate ability to lead. This rich ancestral history is part of Victor's nature, being no exception to this prestigious heritage, and Victor ultimately becomes a victim of his nature. Victor's greed for power, like the power that had succeeded him, is too much for him to handle. This comes to fruition when Victor brings life to his

creature, and reflects on the toils of the past two years. "I had worked…for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body… I had desired it with ardour that far exceeded moderation," Victor states (Shelley 39). Shelley's use of powerful words such as desire, ardor, and exceeded portray the idea of this overwhelming familial need for power and control present in Victor's nature, and foreshadows Victor's ultimate downfall. Furthermore, Victor's natural curiosity about the sciences is depicted through Shelley's use of lightning as a symbol for intellectual inquisitiveness. "I remained, while the storm lasted, watching…with curiosity and delight…this excited my extreme astonishment" (24). Shelley's use of light symbolizes the spark of curiosity just before the lightning flash and the discovery of a newfound intelligence or skill after the lightning has flashed. Shelley introduces the reader to the symbol of light when Victor utilizes it to give life to his creation during a storm. Victor explicitly states his curiosity for the sciences is sparked by the sublime nature of lightning; however, he describes his father "had taken the greatest precautions that [his] mind should be impressed with supernatural horrors," such as science (Shelley 33). His father's careful attitude speaks highly of Victor's nurture.

It is important to take into account Victor Frankenstein's nurturing situation during his childhood. Victor states that his father "had devoted himself to the education of his children" from very early in Victor's life (Shelley 24). Victor also states that "no creature could have more tender parents than [his own]" (19). Shelley's use of words such as "devoted" and "tender" illustrate the type of compassionate environment Victor was privileged with throughout his childhood. Each example of nurture that Shelley provides the reader positively influences Victor's personality and physical well-being. Nurture works against Victor's natural, dangerous desire to be in a position of power; however, it cannot overcome it, and Victor falls prey to his natural needs and innate instincts.

The creature, Victor Frankenstein's polar opposite, is left at the mercy of his environmental situation. The creature's nature is quite different than that of Victor's. Shelley's use of diction creates a powerful image for the reader to get a sense of the way in which Victor collects his "materials" to build the creature's physical body. The reader has small glimpses of the creature's natural desire to learn to read, write, and be accepted by other human beings, but beyond this, the creature's lack of nurture is solely responsible for the corruption of him and the terrible deeds he commits throughout the novel.

Again referencing the lightning symbol to illustrate the way in which the creature is given life, Victor abhors and resents his creation from the moment he is "born" of electricity and Victor's own intellectual endeavors. Victor describes his feelings toward the "demoniacal corpse to which [he] had so miserably given life to" (40). Shelley's

diction in the description of the creature is quite striking. The phrase "demoniacal corpse" and the word miserable generate a hostile and wretched representation of this "birth" for the reader. Shelley's use of this depressing diction creates a gloomy tone and foreshadows coming events in the creature's life. Victor is a father figure to the creature. He has given life to someone (or something) and he immediately abandons him. After being left to fend for himself, the creature describes how he is treated by the world around him. Again we see Shelley make use of light as a symbol for curiosity and knowledge, this time through fire. Shelley utilizes the creature's description of the first fire he sees fire as being "overcome with…the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers" (81). The creature is not capable of understanding why he is met with horrific pain from this sublime element of nature, thus beginning his quest for human knowledge. This is one of the more tender moments the creature experiences in his nurturing environment. Shelley's diction here creates a sense of warmth. She not only uses the word warmth itself, but also makes use of words such as joy, thrust and embers. These words have a positive, cozy tone to them and insinuate the creature is expressing some sort of enthusiasm for this newfound thing.

As the story of the creature's nurturing progresses, he describes the moment when he becomes known to his first human family, those living in the cottage. Some of the family fled, some fainted, and the male family member "struck [the creature] violently with a stick" (110). Shelley's diction during this brutal scene portrays the intense cruelty and abuse the creature receives from other human beings. Shelley deliberately chooses the word fled, making sure that the reader gets the full sense of how terrified these humans were of the creature. Additionally, the statement that some fainted, simply by looking at him, allows the reader to understand how fearful this family truly is. This devastating situation reinforces the creature's awareness of his lack of nurturing environment. As the creature furthers his narrative, he describes the way in which Victor's younger brother treated him when he laid eyes upon his being. The child screams at the creature, calling him an "ogre" and states that he is a "hideous monster" (117). Not even an innocent child, free from most prejudices of the world, will accept the creature's being. Shelley's conscientious choice of diction when referring to the creature as an ogre allows the reader to fully understand the nurturing environment, or lack thereof, he is subjected to. This constant degradation fuels the creature's symbolic fire and causes his ill deeds. Much like an abused animal, the creature lashes out at those around him, killing and harming fellow human beings because he is constantly met with anger and violence himself. Perhaps the creature would have shown compassion to others if he had been taught compassion himself.

Throughout Shelley's novel, the effects of the nature vs. nurture argument are

illustrated for the reader through the way in which the two main characters, Victor Frankenstein and the creature he creates, are portrayed to the reader through the use of methodical diction. Victor falls victim to nature and the creature to nurture. Shelley elucidates this for the reader through her diction and the symbolism of light and fire as an intellectually intriguing, yet physically destructive, force.

4.22.7.3 : Feminine Ecriture in *Frankenstein*

In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, issues of gender identity are explored through the creation of an unnatural monster set in an otherwise idyllic society. With its central characters that exemplify the idealized gender roles of the time, the creation of Frankenstein's monster poses critical questions dealing with the social make-up of nineteenth-century British society. Particularly, the unusual nature of the monster's birth as well as his subsequent experiences serve as counterpoint to foreground the significance of female gender roles in British society, and ultimately suggest that far from being merely companions to men, women instead play a central role in contributing to the stability of the prevailing social order.

It is not surprising that Mary Shelley chose to foreground Frankenstein in a feminist framework, albeit subtly. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft was an avid supporter of women's rights, and her book of essays, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) is considered by various critics to be a pioneering text in feminism. Wollstonecraft's work was responsible for kickstarting a wide range of socio-political movements all over the world that tried to interrogate prevailing social realities, and establish the political, social, economic and personal equality of both sexes.

From the outset, the presentation of the male gender in Frankenstein is marked by strong similarities with traditional male archetypes. Male characters display a detachment from domestic matters and in its place, possess an obsessive single-mindedness in the pursuit of their goals. As a "calm and philosophical" man who "delighted in investigating the facts relative to the actual world" (66), Victor Frankenstein epitomizes masculine attributes with his logical and composed nature, as well as a strong scientific bent well-suited for the male-centric field of natural philosophy. Indeed, Frankenstein's "days and nights in vaults and charnel houses" where he "lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit" (78) attest to a focused, driven nature which borders on fanaticism. Throughout Frankenstein's research, he also displays a careless neglect of his domestic and social obligations, and his confession of how he "knew [his] silence disquieted them" (81) underscores a certain selfishness through his constant indifference to those closest to him. Frankenstein's monster similarly parallels his master's obsessive nature through his own insular fixation on acquiring a mate and subsequently, on revenge. The lines, "I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart" (156), clearly denote the monster's prodigious determination and the depth of his devotion to

this aim, which he lives up to with the subsequent consecration of his life to the lifelong torment of Frankenstein. The monster as "a slave to these impulses" (218) thus counterparts Frankenstein's zealous devotion to his work in the sense that both male characters' impulses and passions inexorably spiral out of their control. In this way, the presentation of the central male characters in Frankenstein typifies the male sex as exceedingly self-absorbed and single-minded, or in other words, as the embodiment of Victorian traits in their unreserved neglect of the domestic sphere.

By contrast, the female gender in *Frankenstein* is portrayed in a more sympathetic light and corresponds closely to Victorian ideals of women as familial care-givers. Elizabeth Lavenza is described as "docile and good tempered" (66), yet "gay and playful" (66); these seemingly paradoxical qualities underscore Elizabeth's role as that of the model Victorian woman whose sole duty concerns tending to her husband and family. Throughout the novel, Elizabeth's selfless nature is also evinced through how she "continually [endeavors] to contribute to the happiness of others, entirely forgetful of herself" (73) - the use of "entirely" here underscores the female gender's complete relegation to the background of the Victorian social milieu. In addition, the phrase "gentle and affectionate disposition" further identifies Elizabeth with maternal qualities and entrenches her role as the primary care-giver for the family. This sense of altruistic benevolence is shared by Safie De Lacey; save for "some jewels and a small sum of money" (141) which provide for her escape, she renounces great luxury to reunite with her lover, Felix De Lacey. During the journey, Safie even nurses her attendant "with the utmost affection" (141); this reversal of the lord-servant relationship stresses Safie's motherly compassion, which transcends both rank and station. The repetition of "affection" further calls attention to the common thread of a warm and tender disposition which is ubiquitous among the female characters in Frankenstein. In both description and action, Frankenstein's female characters thus uniformly exhibit self-sacrificing, maternal traits that conform closely to the role of the Angel in the House, whose life is characterized by complete dedication to the needs of her household.

With its hyper-idealized portrayals of the female gender, Shelley goes further to explicate the significant influence of such maternal figures. Frankenstein himself professes that "no creature could have more tender parents than [he did]" (65), which suggests a childhood replete with parental care and attention; in contrast, his monster's first experiences are characterized by his being "poor, helpless and miserable", which conveys a marked poverty of maternal nourishment and nurture. Tellingly, though the monster gains consciousness while physically mature, the lines "feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept" (121) highlight the monster's delayed recognition of his own powerlessness and a deferred grief which echoes an infant's wailing and vulnerability upon emerging from the womb. Crucially, the perceived significance of a female

nurturing presence is alluded to in the monster's cry of how "no Eve soothed [his] sorrows, or shared [his] thoughts; [he] was alone" (145), which emphasizes not just the prolonged isolation of the monster from birth, but also specifically how "Eve", or a necessarily female companion, will provide the affection which he desires. Because of the congruence of feminine gender roles with care-giving and affection, the monster's declaration of how he is "malicious because [he is] miserable" (pg.156) and his bitter cry of "Shall each man… find a wife for his bosom… and I be alone" further undergird his actions as reactive responses indicative of an underlying desperation at the dearth of female tenderness and maternal figures in his life. The monster's specific requests of female companionship for "the interchange of those sympathies" (156) when thus contextualized therefore stresses the patent importance of the female gender in its domestic roles of mother and nurturer. By contrast, there is a plethora of female characters that pervade Frankenstein's supportive environment - though Frankenstein himself suffers great tragedy throughout the novel, Elizabeth constantly attempts to "chase away the fiend that lurked in [his] heart" (114), which encapsulates the prevalence of female companionship and its ameliorative effects on his life. Instead, the creature does not share the same luxuries. Though of course his cruelty cannot easily be reduced to a singular cause, the paucity of female presence nonetheless occludes all redemptive potential for the monster and in this way, cleaves a dichotomy between the narrative trajectories of him and his creator. Within the polarized gender dynamics that operate in the diegetic world of Frankenstein, the idea of nurture itself necessarily assumes a feminine dimension - from this perspective, his creature hence serves as a foil that suggests how the consequences of a poverty of female influence and maternal nurture are inadvertently the figurative molding and shaping of monsters.

While *Frankenstein* elucidates the marked importance of women as guiding, maternal figures in the family, the novel also explores the centrality of female gender roles as bulwarks of the social order. As alluded to earlier, one central question which features in the novel is whether it is the unnatural circumstances of the monster's creation or his ensuing abandonment by Frankenstein which factors more for his monstrosity; however, if nature is understood to be an ideal state conducing to the optimal, in *Frankenstein* the importance of feminine care in ensuring societal stability thus underscores a false dichotomy between nature and nurture because of the contingence of social stability on contemporary female gender-roles. The creation of Frankenstein's monster upends nature entirely through its circumvention of natural birth; indeed, Frankenstein's pursuit of nature to "her hiding places" (81) emphasizes his unravelling of natural laws which were concealed for a reason. On an organic level, the artificial nature of the monster's creation renders moot the biological imperative of the female gender; this theme is actualized through the monster's systematic elimination of feminized characters in the novel, including biological males such as Henry Clerval whose spending

of an entire winter "consumed in [Frankenstein's] sick room" nonetheless recalls the maternal selflessness. During Frankenstein's dream on the night of the creature's creation, his vision of Elizabeth's metamorphosis into "the corpse of [his] dead mother" (84) similarly constitutes a vivid metaphor for how the monster's unnatural birth at once heralds both the physical and metaphysical deaths of the fairer sex. Yet, this seeming superfluity of the female sex is suggested to be ill-founded, for Frankenstein details the implicit consequences of such an alternate reality. Where once Elizabeth's "gentle voice would soothe [Frankenstein] when transported by passion" (194), the scarcity of such feminine characters at the end of his life directly signifies the absence of mediating influences to temper his inhuman fury. Alongside the dearth of female nurturing and affection in the monster's psyche, this thematic paucity of female influences culminates in a barren wasteland, with two masculine figures consumed in an endless game of cat-and-mouse, devoid of feminine influence and consequently simply the "prey of feelings unsatisfied, yet unquenched" (220). The juxtaposition and framing of this icy apocalyptic vision within Walton's frequent correspondence with his sister further underscores the disparity between this speculative male-centric dystopia and the stable nineteenth-century society, with all its prevailing gender roles, to which Walton belongs. Hence, insofar as the monster's creation may have sounded the death knell for the female sex on some level, Frankenstein's ending illustrates the devastating inadequacy of this hypothetical new normal. The novel suggests that even without the biological imperative of the female sex, their social gender-roles as maternal nurturers are enshrined into the natural societal equilibrium, or nature itself, and in this way, on equal footing with the gendered roles of men.

As Wayne Tan notes :-

> At its core, *Frankenstein* is a parable which explores the manifest possibilities and consequences when humanity confronts and breaches the limits of nature. However, through imbuing its characters with conventionally gender-specific traits, Frankenstein illustrates that the female gender roles of nineteenth-century British society are not simply accessory to that of men; insofar as women are instrumental to the nurturing of children and loved ones, Shelley does not simply foreground their maternal significance but elevates its importance to parity with men's social roles.

4.22.7.4 : The creator and the created

In Victor Frankenstein we find a man who attempts to give himself meaning in life but is ultimately destroyed by the pursuit of said meaning. Victor Frankenstein is not only a victim of his pursuit; he is also a fickle creator whose care and interest in his creation is not much different than that of a small child. He is a creator who creates and then abandons. In turn, we see in the discarded creature a being created for no other reason than the whim of a fickle creator. As we look closer at the experience of

Frankenstein's creation we are forced to ask, What if our creator does not have a plan for us?

Upon his creation the monster flees and seeks, much like Frankenstein, to find meaning in his life. Rather than having grandiose dreams of achievement like his creator, the monster seeks meaning in more humble things. He seeks companionship, hoping that finding others who embrace him will give him reason for his existence. Unfortunately, he fails to find anyone to embrace him. In the novel, his ghastly appearance makes it impossible for others to accept him.

Some would argue that the monster's inability to find acceptance is unrealistic. Surely not all are so small-minded as to be unable to see beyond an individual's physical appearance. However, the monster's inability to find purpose and meaning is not a result of his physical appearance alone. It is intrinsically tied to the capricious creator who, out of lack of concern or care for his creation, leaves it in a state where meaning is impossible to find. The monster realizes this and ultimately seeks out his maker to create him a companion. The result is that he is spurned by Frankenstein once again. The monster is left to face an existential problem that is rooted in the one who created him.

The monster learns the same truth that Victor Frankenstein found. It is impossible to self-create an ultimately fulfilling purpose for one's own life. Having no other available options, the monster lashes out in an attempt to give himself a sense of purpose. He becomes the very opposite of his creator. He fashions himself the destroyer of the creator, deciding that if he has a creator that has abandoned him, then his purpose will be that of vengeance-to destroy all that Frankenstein holds dear. We see that the monster ultimately finds this to be unfulfilling. Once his purpose is completed and Frankenstein is dead, he has no lasting peace. Lacking this ultimate consolation, he chooses to end his existence, burning himself on a funeral pyre. In this he acts much like Frankenstein did when originally giving the monster life. The difference is that the monster is not under the illusion that his actions will provide fulfillment and self-definition.

4.22.8 Mary Shelley’s art of Characterisation

We have already seen how the use of the "framed narrative" helps Mary Shelley add emotion and intrigue to what is clearly a tragic story. However, the use of multiple overlapping and nested narratives also helps create a more well-rounded and humanized view of the characters, whereby the reader cannot decide whether a particular character is good or bad. All characters in *Frankenstein* exist somewhere in the "grey zone", where their actions cannot always be justified using traditional binaries of good/bad, right/wrong, monster/victim and so on.

4.22.8.1 : VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

Victor Frankenstein is the main protagonist of the novel. His existence is marked by an obsession with scientific achievement, which drives him to discover the secret of creating life. He devotes all his time to his studies, at the cost of his health and his relationships.

After spending his adolescence reading outdated theories on alchemy and the philosopher's stone, Frankenstein goes to university, where he succeeds in germinating life. However, in trying to create a being in the mould of a man, he fashions a hideous monster. The monster runs off and wreaks havoc, and Frankenstein loses control of his creation.

The ability to create life, however, leads to a tragic flaw in Victor's character: he suffers from a "God complex", meaning that, at one point of time, he thinks he can play around with nature and assume the mantle of a god. This becomes clear in the scene where he agrees to the Monster's demand to create another being as a partner. This overarching ambition, however, leads to his downfall, as well as to the deaths of Victor's love Elizabeth as well as his family at the hands of the monster.

Victor Frankenstein represents the dangers of enlightenment and the responsibilities that come with great knowledge. His scientific achievement becomes the cause of his downfall, rather than the source of praise he once hoped for. His rejection of human connection and his single-minded drive for success leave him bereft of family and love. He dies alone, searching for the monster, and expresses to Captain Walton the necessity of sacrifice for a greater good.

4.22.8.2 : THE MONSTER

No other creation in Gothic literature has perhaps evoked as many diverse reactions as the monster in Frankenstein. Created by Victor Frankenstein at the University of Ingolstadt, the monster, as described in the novel, is "formed into a hideous and gigantic creature." Due to his appearance, the monster is shunned by society, and faces rebuke from his own creator as well. At one level, he could be considered as the victim of a scientific experiment gone horribly wrong, but the monster also acquires some humane characteristics due to his interactions with the de Laceys, even though he still seeks revenge for his plight. On his quest for revenge, he also acquires a lot of knowledge about the ways of the world, sharpening his own intelligence and sense of rationality. In a way, it can be said that the monster represents Victor's conscience-the one part of his own being Victor constantly chooses to repress.

4.22.8.3 : ELIZABETH LAVENZA

The daughter of a Milanese nobleman and a German mother, Elizabeth Lavenza loses her parents at a very early age, and is reduced to living with a poor family near

Lake Como. Together, with Victor Frankenstein, she is lovingly raised with great care by the Frankenstein family. She is a kind and generous girl, who is always upright and wants to do the right thing. Growing up together, Elizabeth keeps writing to Victor when he goes away for studies. In Victor's absence, she is the one who keeps the Frankenstein family from psychologically disintegrating about Caroline's death to scarlet fever. In fact, Elizabeth herself survives the fever. The letters she writes to Victor form a major part of Frankenstein's narrative.

When Justine Moritz is accused of murder, Elizabeth is the only one who jumps to her defence. Later on, Victor gets married to Elizabeth. However, her life is tragically cut short when she is killed by the monster on their honeymoon. Her death is a major turning point in the narrative, and signals the loss of humanity and goodness in the story.

4.22.9 From Myth to Movies - The Appeal of *Frankenstein*

Why has *Frankenstein* remained relevant more than two hundred years after its publication? If one looks at popular culture, the concerns of the novel have remained timeless. The horrors of an artificial creation wreaking havoc on its own creator is a fear that has survived the Age of Enlightenment, well into the modern day. Being trapped by technology, especially in an age dominated in all spheres of life by machines and artificial intelligence, is a fear most of us can identify with, and Frankenstein was the first novel to predict these concerns.

Perhaps the most important lesson that the novel successfully transplanted into the minds of readers over subsequent decades was a grim picture of absolute power. Victor's creation of the Creature, and his subsequent attempts to suppress the humanity of the being he has created, reflects the anxieties of readerslearning about various technological breakthroughs. It has given rise to the most pressing question in science and popular culture: what will happen if machines or artificial "beings" start controlling humanity?This question, in turn, has been at the heart of various narratives in science fiction in literature and film.

According to the leading worldwide film database iMDb, there are nearly 60 adaptations of *Frankenstein* in cinema, either as full-length feature films or short films. Some of the most well-known ones include *Frankenstein* (1931) and its sequel, Bride of *Frankenstein* (1935); the animated film *Frankenweenie* (2012) and so on. This alone proves how fascinating the subject of Frankenstein still remains to audiences even after more than two centuries.

4.22.10 Summing up

Ultimately, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is a path-breaking work of great literary and cultural significance in English literature. Through the characters of a creator and his creation, Shelley explored multiple themes such as feminism, the "God complex" and whether artificial beings could successfully take over humanity or not. Many of the conflicts and anxieties surrounding machines and artificial beings, which have become part of not just scientific enquiry but also popular culture, owe their genesis to Shelley's work. The "horror" that is born out of Victor Frankenstein's misery is not just written for shock value, but it serves as a window into the prevailing social anxieties of the era about man's position in the grand scheme of things. In this regard, Frankenstein surely remains a work that stands the test of time and feels relevant even now.

4.22.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long-Answer Questions

1. What relationship does Victor share with his creation? Discuss.
2. Do you think Victor is ambitious and greedy for power? Discuss.
3. How apt is Frankenstein as a Gothic novel?
4. Discuss the care-giving side of the creature in Frankenstein.
5. Does Victor exhibit a "God complex" in his relationship with the monster? Discuss.

Medium-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief character analysis of Victor Frankenstein.
2. Grief a brief character analysis of the Monster/Creature.
3. Give a brief character analysis of Elizabeth Lavenza.
4. Briefly discuss the narrative structure of Frankenstein.
5. How does Frankenstein portray the "nature versus nurture" conflict in its story?

Short-Answer Questions

i) Briefly enumerate a few Gothic elements that Mary Shelley incorporates in Frankenstein.

ii) How has Frankenstein as a figure been adapted in popular media?

iii) Is Mary Shelley's Frankenstein heavily reliant on traditional male archetypes in its story? Discuss briefly.

4.22.12 Suggested Reading

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UNIT–23 : JANE AUSTEN: *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

4.23.1. Objectives

4.23.2. Introduction - The Author and her Works

4.23.3. *Pride and Prejudice* : Importance in the Austen Canon

4.23.4. A Preview of Characters

4.23.5. Textual Summary

4.23.6. Plot Construction

4.23.7. Austen's Art of Characterisation

4.23.8. Title - History and Significance

4.23.9. Themes of Love, Money and Marriage

4.23.10. The Social Picture

4.23.11. Irony and Humour

4.23.12. Summing Up

4.23.13. Comprehension Exercises

4.23.14. Suggested Reading

4.23.1 Objectives

The objective of this Unit is to give you an idea of Jane Austen's art of fiction, with focus on *Pride and Prejudice* as a representative text by the author. It is a novel with a finely structured plot, glinting with the brand of satirical humour that is so characteristic of Austen. A strong vein of social criticism runs through the work, as it touches on themes of love, marriage and money in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century England. In exploring Austen's fiction, it is impossible not to explore the time and society to which she belonged, as you will find in this unit. As you read on, do remember that a woman novelist writing under her own name was not something very common in Austen's time. Naturally, critical understanding of her work(s) was also late in coming. A careful look at the plot and characterisation of this novel will reveal that it is a layered text, in the sense that what appears on the surface often leads to far deeper issues. It is also very important to understand how Austen in general and this novel in particular stand out as an interesting counterpoint to a supposedly Romantic milieu. You need to keep in mind that the novel was published in 1813, that is to say in the heyday of the Romantic Movement.

4.23.2 Introduction – The Author and Her Works

Jane Austen was born in 1775 in the village of Steventon in Hampshire, the daughter of a quiet, scholarly Rector, George Austen, and his witty wife, Cassandra. The seventh of eight children, Jane would always be close to her elder sister, also called Cassandra. Her foray into literature started early, with a short play begun in 1793 and finished in 1800, titled *Sir Charles Grandison* or The Happy Man, a Comedy in 6 Acts. A short epistolary novel, *Lady Susan*, was also written between 1793 and 1795. But it was *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), warmly received by the reading public, that paved the way for *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814) and *Emma* (1815). *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) were published after her death.

Neither Jane nor her sister Cassandra ever married. Their's seems to have been a quiet life, rarely straying far from Hampshire, with some time spent in London and Bath. From 1811, Austen lived in Chawton, not far from her childhood home of Steventon. In 1817, aged 41, Austen died after a prolonged illness, now thought to be Addison's disease. Austen's novels were drawn from the small world that she inhabited, the details of its manners and morals picked out by a writer's eye. In a letter to her nephew Edward, she would famously say, "What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited sketches, full of variety and glow? How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two inches wide) of ivory on which I work with so fine a brush…?"Her works would become classic examples of the early nineteenth century "novel of manners". For, though fairytale endings were often designed for her heroines, Austen's novels were remarkable for their clear-eyed, acerbic portraiture of contemporary English and European society, particularly the role assigned to women in a patriarchal society.

4.23.3 *Pride and Prejudice* - Importance in the Austen Cannon

Published in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* is a famous novel of manners. Primarily labelled as a romantic tale about love, courtship, and marriage, the novel is also a significant piece of documentation of social issues of the time. The position of women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, class differences, fashions, the complexities of the man/woman relationship, parenthood-all these are explored through Austen's natural ability at maintaining an implicit symbolism. The novel also inspires a great amount of debate on the nature and degrees of emotion and rationality with which an individual must negotiate a world controlled by social codes. Many of these were issues related to the public world that supposedly belonged to men. The private world depicted in the novel comes alive through relationships. The plot structure is complex, with multiple threads coming together in the end. The characters, with their stock dispositions, are representa-

tive of the society of that time. Strains of irony and parody run through this romantic tale, the trademark of a comedy of manners

4.23.4: A Preview of Characters

Before we go into a detailed discussion of the novel, it would be good to introduce you, dear learner, to the characters that Austen creates in *Pride and Prejudice* :

- **Elizabeth Bennet** - The novel's protagonist. The second daughter of Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth is the most intelligent and sensible of the five Bennet sisters. She is well read and quick-witted, with a tongue that occasionally proves too sharp for her own good.
- **Fitzwilliam Darcy** - A wealthy gentleman, the master of Pemberley, and the nephew of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Though Darcy is intelligent and honest, his excess of pride causes him to look down on his social inferiors. Over the course of the novel, he tempers his class-consciousness and learns to admire and love Elizabeth for her strong character.
- **Jane Bennet** - The eldest and most beautiful Bennet sister. Jane is more reserved and gentler than Elizabeth. The easy pleasantness with which she and Bingley interact contrasts starkly with the mutual distaste that marks the encounters between Elizabeth and Darcy.
- **Charles Bingley** - Darcy's considerably wealthy best friend. Bingley's purchase of Netherfield, an estate near the Bennets, serves as the impetus for the novel. He is a genial, well-intentioned gentleman, whose easygoing nature contrasts with Darcy's initially discourteous demeanor. He is blissfully uncaring about class differences.
- **Mr. Bennet** - The patriarch of the Bennet family, a gentleman of modest income with five unmarried daughters. Mr. Bennet has a sarcastic, cynical sense of humor that he uses to purposefully irritate his wife. Though he loves his daughters (Elizabeth in particular), he often fails as a parent, preferring to withdraw from the neverending marriage concerns of the women around him rather than offer help.
- **Mrs. Bennet** - Mr. Bennet's wife, a foolish, noisy woman whose only goal in life is to see her daughters married. Because of her low breeding and often unbecoming behavior, Mrs. Bennet often repels the very suitors whom she tries to attract for her daughters.
- **George Wickham** - A handsome, fortune-hunting military officer. Wickham's good looks and charm attract Elizabeth initially, but Darcy's revelation about

Wickham's disreputable past clues her in to his true nature and simultaneously draws her closer to Darcy.

- **Lydia Bennet** - The youngest Bennet sister, she is gossipy, immature, and self-involved. Unlike Elizabeth, Lydia flings herself headlong into romance and ends up running off with Wickham.
- **Mr. Collins** - A pompous, generally idiotic clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet's property. Mr. Collins's own social status is nothing to brag about, but he takes great pains to let everyone and anyone know that Lady Catherine de Bourgh serves as his patroness. He is the worst combination of the snobbish and the obsequious.
- **Miss Bingley** - Bingley's snobbish sister. Miss Bingley bears inordinate disdain for Elizabeth's middle-class background. Her vain attempts to garner Darcy's attention cause Darcy to admire Elizabeth's self-possessed character even more.
- **Lady Catherine de Bourgh** - A rich, bossy noblewoman; Mr. Collins's patron and Darcy's aunt. Lady Catherine epitomizes class snobbery, especially in her attempts to order the middle-class Elizabeth away from her well-bred nephew.
- **Charlotte Lucas** - Elizabeth's dear friend. Pragmatic where Elizabeth is romantic, and also six years older than Elizabeth, Charlotte does not view love as the most vital component of a marriage. She is more interested in having a comfortable home. Thus, when Mr. Collins proposes, she accepts.
- **Georgiana Darcy** - Darcy's sister. She is immensely pretty and just as shy. She has great skill at playing the pianoforte. Mary Bennet - The middle Bennet sister, bookish and pedantic.
- **Catherine Bennet** - The fourth Bennet sister. Like Lydia, she is girlishly enthralled with the soldiers.

4.23.5 Textual Summary

When wealthy young Charles Bingley arrives at Netherfield Park, a husband-hunt begins among the marriageable ladies at Longbourn. Mr and Mrs Bennet of Longbourn have five unmarried daughters - Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia. Mrs Bennet, desperate to marry off her daughters, prods Mr Bennet into paying a visit to Bingley. Soon afterwards, the Bennet girls attend a ball at Meryton where Jane and Bingley are attracted to each other. Bingley's friend, Mr Darcy, however, haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth. The revelers at Meryton conclude that he is an excessively proud man.

Elizabeth tries to laugh off the slight, but her animosity towards Darcy is obviously aroused. Jane and Bingley's friendship grows, and Darcy begins to find Elizabeth attractive.

Once Jane falls ill while on a visit to Netherfield Park, forcing her to stay there for a few days. Elizabeth braves a downpour to go and nurse her ailing sister. Darcy's admiration for her becomes increasingly evident, arousing the ire of snobbish Miss Bingley, who herself had hopes of catching Darcy's fancy. Back home, the sisters have a visitor - the pompous Mr Collins, a distant cousin to whom the Longbourn estate is entailed (see note). Keen to marry in order to promote his career, he wants to find his bride in one of the Bennet sisters. Warned by Mrs Bennet that Jane was on the verge of getting engaged, he proposes to Elizabeth but is quickly rejected. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls meet officers in the nearby military camp. Among them is Mr Wickham, whose attentions flatter Elizabeth. He tells her that Darcy, out of jealousy, has cheated and robbed him of a living which had been promised to him. The story reinforces Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy. That winter, Darcy and Bingley leave Netherfield Park abruptly. This comes as a shock to Jane, who has fallen in love with Bingley and had believed that the feeling was reciprocated.

In another startling turn of events, Mr Collins announces his engagement to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth's friend and, at twenty seven, considered beyond the marriageable age. As the daughter of the recently knighted Sir Charles Lucas, whose means do not match his new status, Charlotte chooses to marry Mr Collins rather than face an uncertain future as a single woman. Shortly afterwards, Jane goes to London, hoping to meet Bingley. However, she only encounters Miss Bingley, who behaves arrogantly, while her brother fails to visit Jane. Later that spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte, who now lives with her husband, Mr Collins, at a parsonage near Rosings Park, the estate owned by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Darcy's haughty aunt who has a very insipid daughter.

At Rosings, Elizabeth meets Darcy again, and he soon calls at the parsonage to propose to her. He confesses to loving her against his better judgement, detailing his misgivings about the match, "his sense of her inferiority" and "family obstacles". Elizabeth has no hesitation in refusing him, charging him with ruining Jane's chances with Bingley, destroying Wickham's fortunes, with being arrogant and failing to behave in a "gentleman-like manner". Darcy leaves but gives her a letter next morning. He had advised Bingley to keep a distance from Jane, he explains in the letter, as he did not consider that Jane was serious about the affair. He also reveals that Wickham had tried to seduce his younger sister and elope with her, hence the bad blood between them. Darcy's letter shows him in a new light, and Elizabeth begins to revise her estimate of his character and

her feelings towards him. Back home, she is cold to Wickham, who leaves soon for Brighton, where his regiment is shifting. Lydia manages to get her father's permission to visit Brighton. In June, Elizabeth goes to the north with her uncle and aunt, the Gardiners. They visit Pemberley, which is Darcy's country seat. After making sure that Darcy is away, Elizabeth visits Pemberley and is delighted by its beauty. She also learns from the housekeeper that Darcy is an exceptional employer. Darcy appears then, on a sudden visit, and behaves cordially with her and the Gardiners. He makes no further mention of his proposal, and invites Elizabeth to visit his sister.

The growing warmth between Darcy and Elizabeth is suddenly interrupted by a letter from home, informing Elizabeth that Lydia has eloped with Wickham. The couple could not be traced and, worse, they were thought to be living together without being married. The Bennets are threatened with social disgrace. Elizabeth quickly reaches home, from where Mr Bennet and Mr Gardiner set out to look for the couple. In the midst of this crisis, a letter arrives, informing the Longbourn household that the couple had been found and Wickham had agreed to marry Lydia if an annual income was assured to him. While initially it is believed that Mr Gardiners has paid Wickham, it is later discovered that Darcy was the one who had rescued the Bennets from social ignominy. The storm passes and Wickham and Lydia are received at Longbourn, though Mrs Bennet seems the only person delighted to see them - she considers the marriage of a daughter an achievement.

Soon, Bingley, too, reappears and begins to court Jane. Darcy accompanies Bingley and though he occasionally visits the Bennets, he never proposes to Elizabeth. Later, Lady Catherine de Bourgh arrives and instructs Elizabeth to refuse Darcy, if he at all approaches her, since she cannot countenance a match between her nephew and a Bennet. Elizabeth refuses to accept any of her demands, and tells her that though she does not harbour any intention of marrying Darcy she is not going to compromise her happiness. Reports of this exchange bring Darcy to Longbourn once more. Elizabeth and he go on a walk, where he reveals that he continues to love her and still wishes to marry her. Elizabeth, now very changed in her opinion of him, accepts. The novel ends with the marriages of Jane and Bingley, and Elizabeth and Darcy. Mrs Bennet is beside herself with delight.

Note for the Learner :

- **Entailment and Property Law** - This law was of feudal origin. In Austen's time it was used to prevent property from passing on to female heirs. The aim was to prevent fragmentation of landed property. It was an extension of the law of male primogeniture, by which inheritance was passed on to the eldest male son or in-heritor. In the absence of any male heir, the property would be divided equally among all the surviving daughters, in which case the value of the inheritance de-

clined substantially. The entailment is the cause of the Bennet girls' needing to marry rich husbands, as after the death of Mr Bennet the property would pass on to his nearest male relative, the odious Mr Collins.

- This will immediately help you realize that even though Austen is a novelist of the Romantic period, her treatment of the themes of marriage and/or love are hardly only romantic in the conventional sense. You are strongly advised to read the full text of the novel to understand this better for yourselves.

4.23.6 Plot Construction

Austen's brilliant sense of drama, intrigue, and almost Neo-Classical sense of craftsmanship is amply evident in *Pride and Prejudice*. She has complete mastery over the narrator's art, with a perfect sense of drama in working out the twists and turns of the plot. The main theme of love and marriage revolves found the love story of Darcy and Elizabeth. This is juxtaposed with the stories of other couples: Mr and Mrs Bennet; Charlotte and Mr Collins; Jane and Bingley; Lydia and Wickham. Though they don't hold our attention in the same manner, the subplots strengthen the philosophy contained in the main plot, neatly stitching all the strands together. These plots are not digressions. They are rather central to the very design of the novel both structurally and thematically. Rather than serving any decorative function, these subplots display multiple varieties of marriage and love, and are brilliantly intertwined to substantiate different stages in the main action involving Elizabeth and Darcy. They offer a relative view of the perfect relationship by helping us to recognise the deficiencies of the other relationships.

Events and individuals in the subplots in many ways contribute to the development of the narrative. Darcy's initial role in separating Jane and Bingley makes Elizabeth view him as arrogant and ill-willed. Wickham's arrival on the scene unleashes a chain of events which end in a crisis which precedes the final resolution of the novel. The plot proceeds through three main twists. Elizabeth visits Charlotte's new house after her marriage and accidentally encounters Darcy again at Rosings. It is here that he proposes to her. Her angry rejection prompts him to write the letter which would explain why he took Bingley away, and unmask the true history of Wickham. This inspires Elizabeth to re-examine her own self, eventually leading to a dawning of self-knowledge. The second twist occurs when Elizabeth visits Pemberley and realises that Darcy's pride is not just self-importance. As the master of a huge estate, upon whose benevolence a large number of people depended, he was justified in his self-esteem. This realisation is soon accompanied by the sudden arrival of Darcy and his courtesies towards her, which revises her opinion of him. Finally, the elopement of Lydia with Wickham initially seems to part her from Darcy forever. But as Darcy's role in that marriage is revealed to her, her gratitude to him is

complete. Her pride, the source of the initial misunderstandings in their relationship, is finally humbled.

The last stumbling block to their love is ironically removed by Lady Catherine de Bourgh, whose intention to check the relationship only results in Elizabeth's assertion that she would not be subordinated to her command. The road to their final union is thus opened and Darcy has only to walk through the doors of her house and walk out with her, to claim his beloved forever.

Just to reckon, the major turning points of the plot are :

- Darcy's letter,
- Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley,
- The elopement of Lydia with Wickham.

4.23.7 Austen’s Art of Characterisation

- **Elizabeth and Darcy :** The main plot of Austen's novel revolves around the relationship and individual developments of Elizabeth Bennet, the second daughter of the Bennet couple, and Fitzwilliam Darcy who is the master of Pemberley estate. Elizabeth has in her a lively spirit. She has a sharp intellect and sparkles in her witty conversation. Handicapped by her lack of a dowry, and her unconventional looks, she strains against the limitations of choice imposed on women by a patriarchal society. She considers herself to be a 'rational creature', a woman who seeks to retain her autonomy of choice even though the odds are stacked against her. She almost wilfully refuses to be like Charlotte Lucas, who settles for the comforts of a home and husband, rather than remain a spinster in straitened circumstances. In an age when women had very little options of financial independence, her refusal of two extremely advantageous offers of marriage may even seem to be foolhardy. In fact Mrs Bennet cautions her after she refuses Mr Collins that she may not have any suitors. Her refusal to give in to societal pressure earns her our admiration.

  However, she is not perfect. Her pride in her ability to judge people is challenged by her inability to assess the people close to her. Her reaction to Charlotte's acceptance of Mr Collins exposes her blindness. Later on, upon reading Darcy's letter, she realises that vanity had clouded her judgement of Wickham's character. It is from this point that we see her character mature. She learns to revise her hasty conclusions about Darcy with a more informed opinion about his actions. She learns to acknowledge her own folly in letting her vanity affect her views of people. Most significantly, by the end of the novel, she learns the importance of

a more compassionate nature, when she stops short of teasing her newly betrothed fiancé, realising that he was not yet prepared for it.

Elizabeth is not only Jane Austen's favourite character; through her Austen also seems to voice her own impatience with the restricted circumstances of women in eighteenth and nineteenth century England. Elizabeth's follies may also be attributed to the limited sphere of her experience, which doesn't let her natural abilities the scope to mature. Once she moves out of the narrow existence of Longbourn, her intellect fulfils its promise.

In comparison to Elizabeth, Darcy, is a less engaging character, though he is a benevolent master and a loving and dutiful brother. In the beginning of the novel he appears to be an incorrigible snob, looking down upon people he considers to be his inferiors in culture and breeding. He is inordinately conscious of his social ascendency, and knows his value in the marriage market. His haughty and unfeeling rebuff of Elizabeth at the Meryton ball arouses her prejudice against him. But Darcy soon shows that his faults are more of manners than of nature. Elizabeth may not have been impressive enough to draw him to dance with her, but her genuine concern for her sister Jane, when she falls ill in Netherfield, draws his admiration. It is here, through Miss Bingley's bid for his attention, that we come to know for the first time that he takes an active interest in Elizabeth. Darcy's pride soon falls at the feet of Elizabeth's intelligence and vivacity. Her oblivious attitude to his growing attraction is also a change for a man used to female attention. His first proposal, which he says is made against his better judgement, shows the force of his passion. He is conditioned to expect that Elizabeth would accept him because of the advantages of wealth and position that he offered. Nothing prepares him for her vehement rejection. Unlike Mr Collins however, he doesn't do her the injustice of thinking her merely coy. He takes her rejection to heart, and though he refutes her allegations, they open his eyes to his own deficiencies. What hurts him most is Elizabeth's accusation that his manner was uncivil. For the first time in his life he is forced to review his own behaviour. The humiliation of Elizabeth's refusal makes him realise that power doesn't only come from privilege. Throughout the rest of the novel we find him making amends for his initial flaw of haughtiness. Elizabeth's influence on him mellows his egotistical nature, the faults of which he had himself attributed to the lack of a proper feminine influence in his childhood. The individual internal developments of these two characters are central to the understanding of the motif of good sense in *Pride and Prejudice* and probably for this reason they appear to be the source of delight and education for the readers.

- **Jane Bennet and Mr. Bingley:**Austen has given full rein to her imagination in her delineation of the characters of her main protagonists. In contrast, Jane and Bingley are flat characters who are drawn as foils to Elizabeth and Darcy respectively. Their story serves as a subplot, but one that provides dynamism to the main plot, through the twists and turns it takes. Jane, in striking contrast to her sister, is gentle, and in many ways a cheerful, friendly, and romantic lady who can be easily convinced and made happy. She does not have a modicum of false pride in her, and her manners would easily satisfy the writers of books on social decorum. Bingley is a friendly man with none of the egotism that is displayed in Elizabeth and Darcy. They have a natural sense of bonding with each other, and right from the beginning of the novel it is clear that they are going to be a potential couple. They are drawn by Austen in the tradition of simple, adorable, romantic lovers who are naturally attracted to each other in their first meeting, and the first impression would serve for their final one. They have no agency upon their own fate and remain at the mercy of the actions of the stronger characters.

- **Mr. and Mrs. Bennet:** In her depiction of Mr and Mrs Bennet, Austen at first seems to be portraying Mr Bennet as an intelligent, erudite, man who has made the mistake of marrying a beautiful woman of little understanding. His sardonic humour is very often directed towards his wife and daughters, except Elizabeth. She is his favourite daughter because of her good sense and wit, and it is through the lens of her perception that we view him.

  As Elizabeth grows in maturity, we get a more qualified picture of Mr Bennet, as someone who has abdicated his responsibilities as a father. His study is a retreat into which he escapes, resigning all the authority that he should have exercised.His lack of judgement which is suggested to the reader by his choice of a spouse, becomes pronounced when he overrides Elizabeth's objections and allows Lydia to leave for Brighton. He is an entirely ineffectual character, both in his refusal to discipline his family and in his inability to dispose off his legacy. The first is self-willed, while the second is the result of an unfair inheritance law that denied women the right to inheritance.

  On the other hand, Mrs. Bennet is a noisy and foolish woman, hysterically committed to seeing her daughters married off. She is one of the caricatures Austen draws in this novel. She lacks refinement and wisdom, which ironically repel the very people she wants to attract. However, she also represents the dilemma of a woman with no male progeny to offer her a secure old age. In contrast to the vacuous goodness of Jane, her boisterous machinations to forward the marital prospects of her daughters show her active attempts to gain a modicum of control

over her circumstances. Although in keeping with the farcical dimensions of her character her efforts seem to be headed for failure, the sensitive reader will sympathise with her predicament.When she reprimands Elizabeth for refusing Mr Collins, we hear the voice of reality as she reminds her daughter of her limited prospects for the future. Her faults are as much the defects of her character as the deficiencies of a society built upon the inequality of the sexes. Where she appears to be most unreasonable, in her objection to the entailment of the property, she appears to be nearest to Elizabeth in her rebellion against accepted laws.

- **Minor Characters:** Though primarily about Elizabeth and Darcy, the novel has many important stock characters that are significant in the discussion of the novel's characterisation and the functions that such characterisation serves. Being a novel of manners, similar to that of the comedy of manners, these stock characters are part of the social milieu that Austen wants to demonstrate, and often criticise and satirise.

Among these minor stock characters, **George Wickham** is of prime significance as he plays the role of the wicked, harmful, vengeful womaniser who attempted to seduce Miss. Darcy and after being punished for that he pours venom into Elizabeth's ears and poisons her mind against Darcy. He seduces Lydia and like a thorough opportunist takes advantage of the Bennets' crisis to extract financial gain for himself.

Lydia Bennet is the foolish variety of the romantic heroine who is easily misled by Wickham. There is also the foolishly snobbish **Lady Catherine** who probably stands as Austen's representation of the fact that elites can also be fools, and their pride based on social ascendency is a by-product of their foolish notions about the world. Following these lines Miss Bingley, **Mrs. Hurst**, and **Miss Darcy** are characters that also appear to be foolishly snobbish.

Charlotte is a representation of the poor woman trapped in a world governed by patriarchal oppression. She is a victim of this divisive system and is doubly marginalized by her economic dependence and her gender. Since she is growing older, and since she can neither afford to neither remain a spinster nor become a governess she has to make the compromise of marrying Mr. Collins who is sketched as the typical clown figures available in the comedy of manners.

4.23.8 Title – History and Significance

When Austen first thought of *Pride and Prejudice* in 1797, she used the working title, *First Impressions*. The novel was given its present name when it was published in 1813. The title plays a crucial role in analysing the novel, its preoccupations, the development

of its characters and relationships. The action of the novel springs from Darcy's innate pride in his position and upbringing, which prejudices him to the gathering at the Meryton Assembly, as well as Elizabeth's pride in her superior judgement and independent spirit, which makes her quick to form her opinion about Darcy once her vanity has been offended. The flaws of "pride" and "prejudice" however, do not define Elizabeth and Darcy alone. They recur in various forms in various characters. Pride based on social ascendency is a motif in the novel, and many characters such as Miss Bingley and Mrs Hurst, Bingley's sisters, are equally afflicted by it. Raised to the status of gentry by virtue of their brother's success in trade, they behave contemptuously towards Jane and Elizabeth, putting the most uncharitable gloss on their actions. Lady Catherine's pride is almost caricature. She is keenly aware of her rank and title, of the differences between fortunes made in trade and those inherited by the old aristocracy. She believes in a sort of feudal noblesse oblige, but those who are recipients of it, such as Mr Collins, are never allowed to forget her charity. A marriage between Darcy and her daughter, Anne, is a natural alliance, in her scheme of things. A marriage between Darcy and the middle class Elizabeth Bennet is, to her, a ghastly aberration. The fairytale ending of the novel implies a salutary lesson for such snobbish people when the middle class Elizabeth's unaffected and spontaneous nature not only charms Darcy but also softens the stiff edges of his character. The core of the novel however, lies in the lessons in humility which has to be learnt by the two central characters of the novel. Darcy dismisses Elizabeth as "not handsome enough to tempt me" and says that he refuses to lend consequence to a woman by dancing with her when she has been overlooked by other men. He doesn't just cruelly hurt her vanity; he hurts her pride in her ability to overcome the limitations of fortune, beauty and gender, through her sharp wit and intellect. Much later in the novel she acknowledges to Jane how the first encounter had led her to a sweeping judgement of Darcy:

> I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind.

This is the voice of a chastened Elizabeth whose self-knowledge in the course of the novel has humbled her and made her realise the dangers of hasty conclusions and the reality of the power and privilege conferred by birth and gender even in an age of growing individualism. Darcy's letter shows her how her judgement had been clouded by her hurt pride. Her visit to Pemberley reveals that Darcy's pride is not entirely unjustified as it stems from the real power he wields as the master of a huge estate. In realising this, she also becomes conscious of the real honour he has conferred upon her by overlooking the huge gulf between them and offering her his hand in marriage. Just as his continued attentions to her may have fed her pride in her power over him, the disastrous elopement of Lydia with Wickham brings home to her the bitter fact that the intemperate words with

which Darcy had first proposed to her, the reservations he had expressed about the lack of breeding among her mother and younger sisters, were mortifying truths. Her full appreciation of the extent of Darcy's feelings for her, come at a time when the onslaught of circumstances seem to render her powerless to reclaim his regard. Her acceptance of his second proposal is therefore rendered even more joyful. Darcy on the other hand has to learn the lesson that social superiority doesn't necessarily entitle one to the unquestioning regard of those who are his inferior in the social hierarchy. Elizabeth's angry rejection of his first proposal, when she accuses him of ungentlemanly behaviour, is a rude shock to him. It forces him to look at himself as others might see him. Her rejection also makes him realise that inspite of his wealth and consequence, it is in the power of a woman that he has placed his happiness. Accustomed to having his every whim pandered to, from his childhood, he is forced to accept her 'no' for an answer. His subsequent endeavour to redeem himself in her eyes by his courtesy to her aunt and uncle, and his intervention in securing the marriage of Lydia and Wickham, earn him the right to Elizabeth's hand. He too has learnt to temper his haughty manner with amiability, to overcome the gentry's prejudice about trade, to recognise the shortcomings of his superior attitude. His second proposal to Elizabeth is thus made with the consciousness of the good fortune of securing the affections of an intelligent and spirited woman like Elizabeth. Austen's novel therefore is a delightful exposition of how vanity engenders prejudice, whereas justified pride may be rewarded if it is accompanied by a humanising and compassionate accommodation of other viewpoints. As Mary says in her rather pedantic manner,

"Pride relates more to our opinions of ourselves, vanity to what we would have others think of us."

Austen, by allowing Darcy, who ends up as a truly romantic hero, and Elizabeth, her favourite character, to marry each other, reinforces the rewards of achieving true growth by overcoming blind spots and delusions.

Learner Please Note !!

- **Difference between legitimate pride and mere vanity**
- **How vanity and prejudice are sometimes related**
- **How these elements are woven into the narrative structure of the novel**

4.23.9 Themes of Love, Money and Marriage

The much celebrated opening sentence of Pride and Prejudice sets the mood of the novel by establishing husband hunting as the chief pre-occupation of the novel:

"It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."

Beneath the tale of 'pride' and 'prejudice' being overcome to forge an everlasting bond of love, runs the themes of love, money, and marriage, in their multiple dimensions. Courtship and marriage, the staple of romantic fiction, is the framework which is used by Austen to explore larger social concerns such as the limited scope of self-advancement for women, which leaves marriage as the major source of stability. This is why the mothers of marriageable girls must compete to catch eligible bachelors and social occasions like balls turn into huge marriage markets. The marriage of Mr and Mrs. Bennet, a failed marriage, is the cautionary tale which is used in this novel as reminder of the unhappiness of an incompatible marriage. The two occupy mutually exclusive worlds. Mrs Bennet's energies are single-mindedly directed towards finding husbands for her daughters, while Mr Bennet seeks refuge from the predominantly feminine atmosphere of the household in the sanctum of his study. Their incompatibility is most vigorously displayed in the lack of a proper upbringing of the younger daughters of the Bennet household. Mrs Bennet's lack of sense, and her husband's refusal to be drawn into the brainless atmosphere of his drawing room, leave the younger siblings vulnerable to different kinds of follies.

This has a negative impact on the marriage prospects of the girls which Mrs Bennet is so eager to advance. Austen's novel, though romantic in nature, is rooted in social realism. Austen realistically portrays the Eighteenth Century English society, urban and suburban, where marriage is the only recourse of women to find economic stability, even social ascendancy. The alternative, of becoming a governess, was not considered attractive in a society driven by social hierarchies. The opening line ironically underscores the fact that while a wealthy man can have the choice of remaining a bachelor if he so prefers, a woman, needs a husband to secure her social and financial position. Thus, Mrs. Bennet, though she appears to be foolish and hysterical, is rightly anxious regarding the future of her daughters, for if they remain spinsters they would ultimately end up as governesses in wealthy households.

Austen's implied criticism draws our attention to the fact that in an age of rising capitalism which gave men new avenues for rising in society, the same freedom was denied to women. Charlotte makes a compromise and marries Mr. Collins, a foolish and clownish character, who nevertheless gives her prosperity and a social standing. Her marriage based solely on the calculations of sustenance and social security, is devoid of any love or romance. It is a marriage of convenience which is unacceptable to Elizabeth whose sensibilities are outraged at Charlotte's resignation to the limited choices which society has offered her. On the other hand, Austen places a contrasting image of the marriage of Wickham and Lydia. Lydia is completely irrational, and her romantic, fanciful nature finally leads her to being trapped by the womaniserWickham. Their marriage is born out of treachery on the part of Wickham and foolish romantic fancies on the part of Lydia. It is doomed to be unstable from the very beginning for it is not based on genuine love or

respect. These two unsuitable marriages are complemented by the two ideal romances in the story. Austen parallels the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy with that of Jane and Bingley.

Jane and Bingley's relationship is a static one of traditional courtship, often threatened by outside forces directly or indirectly infiltrating into their private territory. Their marriage is a result of continued commitment and love, and results finally in emotional security. But their relationship is based on the traditional premises of conjugality in which the woman submits herself completely and is rewarded for it by gaining love, stability and prosperity.

In contrast, Darcy and Elizabeth's love, courtship, and marriage, which constitute the focal point of the plot, remain Austen's best example of a dynamic evolving relationship, which achieves a desirable balance of the head and the heart. Elizabeth and Darcy battle the demons of pride, prejudice, vanity and a wide social gulf, to finally win for themselves the perfect mixture of sense and sentiment which Austen holds up as an ideal marriage. Elizabeth's quest for dignity and recognition of her individuality and worth is satisfied by Darcy's passionate regard for her charm and intellect. But before she can be thus rewarded, she too has to understand and accept the fine network of power and privilege which governs the society that she lives in. Her reward is the hand of the handsomest and richest man in the novel. As she becomes the mistress of Pemberley, she and Darcy are held up as the ideal couple whose union signifies the accommodation of changing mores within the established tradition. Austen provides the reader with a complex structure of multiple marriages which layer our perception of the institution. However, through this complex system of events she probably asserts the fact that it is not good to marry for money, but it is also silly to marry without it. In a world where marriage is a compulsion for the women it is imperative that they should look for advantageous marriages, but without compromising the integrity of their affections .The marriages of Charlotte and Lydia are imperfect ones. Jane's is a romantic one; but Darcy and Elizabeth's union, based on both reason and emotion, is the ideal one.

Points to Ponder Upon for the Learner

- **Marriage as an economic compulsion for women**
- **Compatibility and happiness**
- **Balance of sense and sentiment in an ideal marriage**
- **Marriage as a means of enforcing social order**

4.23.10 The Social Picture

As stated earlier, *Pride and Prejudice* is a novel narrating a romantic tale which also

contains a valuable and realistic portrayal of the contemporary English society. It is a comedy of manners portraying the themes of love, money, and marriage; it also projects the gender-hierarchies of the society. Being a novel of manners, the chief design of the novel's ironic humour is to satirise the aberrations of the contemporary society. Austen's novel exposes the hypocrisies of the contemporary middle class. She indirectly condemns the snobbery of the elite who are prejudiced against their suburban and poorer counterparts. Lady Catherine, Miss Bingley, Mrs. Hurst, are all portrayed as snobs who derive a false sense of superiority out of their social ascendancy. The deplorable state of the women is amply displayed by both Charlotte and Lydia who are victims of a patriarchal society which subjugates and exploits the women folk. In the case of the former it results in a calculative nature, while in the latter it elicits a flirtatious exhibitionism, devoid of any propriety. Through the predicament of the Bennet sisters, Austen represents the unfairness of the law of entailment, as it perpetuates patriarchal privilege, while denying women the right to their parental property. Austen who herself remained a spinster herself, provides a realistic picture of the marginalisation of women in such a society. Threatened with the prospects of straitened circumstances, marriage turns into their sole goal. The rigidly hierarchical society is also mocked at in Pride and Prejudice. In many ways Austen seems to portray that idiosyncrasy and hollow pride are central to the society she knew. She critiques the elite notion that only the less privileged are ill-bred and manipulative. In her novel both Mrs. Bennet and Lady Catherine appear to be equally callous. However, Austen is also criticised for ultimately conforming to the very norms she critiques. Her depiction of Darcy as the saviour of the Bennet family's honour, seems to reinforce the power of money, prestige and male domination, which belongs to the dominant discourse of the time.

Learner make a note of:

- **The position of women**
- **Snobbery**
- **Marriage and money**
- **Law of entailment and try to write short notes on each.**

4.23.11 Irony and Humour

Irony is Austen's potent weapon of satire. It runs through the novel as an undercurrent which lifts a neatly structured, sentimental tale of love and marriage, to the stature of greatness. Irony works in the novel through the subversion of each and every authoritative position, beginning with the opening statement. The verbal irony of the opening draws our attention to the relation between money and marriage; but with the use of the

word 'want' Austen also draws our attention to the women's desire and need for marriage. Austen inspires laughter in her description of Mrs. Bennet when she writes:

She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper ... The business of her life was to get her daughters married.

Even this authoritative assertion is rife with verbal irony. Mrs Bennet maybe foolish, but as the mother of five daughters living on an entailed property, does she have any choice other than to make the marriage of the girls her sole 'business'? The various reversals of the novel also give rise to situational irony. Darcy's arrogant rejection of Elizabeth as a dance partner stems from his consciousness of his male prerogative and his ability to confer consequence to any woman. He would soon be captivated by her pair of expressive eyes, and find to his consternation, that in matters of the heart, an intelligent woman may still exercise her power of rejection. Similarly, Lady Catherine discovers that money and aristocratic privilege alone will not secure for her daughter the prize catch of Darcy. Her haughty manner towards Elizabeth when visits, hides her desperation in the face of the inevitable. Middle-class, unaccomplished Elizabeth, ultimately has it in her power to rebuff her. The comedy of their final encounter is undercut by this ironic reversal of the power equation. Austen's irony also adds spark to her characterisation. It adds a fine touch of social criticism to a character like the obsequious Mr Collins. His proposal to Elizabeth is depicted with hilarity. He indeed is a man who is "in want of a wife" and so he quicklytransfers his attentions from Jane to Elizabeth:

... and it was soon done - done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire.

But, his comment after Lydia's elopement that it would have been better if she had died, startles us with a new insight. On the one hand it shows a most uncharitable side of a clergyman, on the other, it does voice the grave social consequences of Lydia's actions upon her family. The shortcomings of the minor women characters like Ms Bingley, Mrs Hurst, Lady Catherine, as well as of someone like Charlotte Lucas, shows the inevitable meanness that is bound to creep into women when they are confined to their narrow world with no recourse to independent means or exercise of talents. This leads the aristocratic ladies to pettiness and bad behaviour which is punished by Austen by denying them the most ardently desired prize - the most eligible bachelor, as a husband or a son-in-law. Their foibles elicit laughter also reveal the irony of their situation. Even Elizabeth is not exempt from this narrow vision, as her pride in being a "studier of character" misleads her into misjudging Wickham, Darcy and even her friend Charlotte. Her education is complete only when she travels out of Longbourn. The insight that she gains not only corrects her views of Darcy and Wickham, it also makes her aware of the shortcomings of Mr Bennet. The ironic outsider's stance which he takes is revealed to her as being one of the causes of their troubles, and so, she is no longer able to share his views as

completely as she had done before. Elizabeth, through whose eyes the characters are depicted, shares the same ironic vision as her creator. In her letter to her sister Cassandra, Austen stated that the novel was 'rather too light and bright and sparkling'. It is indeed so; but, it is not a mere comedy inspiring laughter. Its ability to inspire laughter aids its ironic insight into the follies of the age and the society. This wealth of irony enriches its role as a comedy of manners.

The different uses of Irony in the Novel

- **Irony as an instrument of satire**
- **Irony as subversion**
- **Difference between irony and humour in the novel**

4.23.12 Summing Up

- In this Unit you were introduced to Jane Austen's art of fiction.
- You were shown how beneath a tale of romantic love lies a deeper picture of a social milieu ridden with class rigidities and unfair economic and legal systems.
- You learnt that the novel is a comedy of manners portraying the themes of love, money, and marriage and the gender-hierarchies of the society.
- And also that, Austen's novel is a delightful exposition of how vanity engenders prejudice, whereas justified pride may be rewarded if it is accompanied by a humanising and compassionate accommodation of other viewpoints.

4.23.13 Comprehension Exercises

Long Questions

1. Comment on the significance of the title of *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. Discuss the themes of love, money, and marriage in *Pride and Prejudice*.
3. What is the significance of the complex plot structure in *Pride and Prejudice*? Discuss by analysing the text thoroughly.

Mid-Length Questions

1. Comment on the character of Elizabeth Bennet.
2. Do you think that Darcy is less faulty compared to Elizabeth? Discuss with suitable illustrations from the text of *Pride and Prejudice*.
3. Comment on the social picture presented in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Short Questions

1. Comment on the role played by Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*.
2. Discuss the significance of Darcy's letter to Elizabeth.
3. Sketch the character of Mr. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice.
4. What thematic purpose is served by the marriage between Charlotte and Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*?
5. Discuss the opening sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*.

4.23.14 SUGGESTED READING

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Norton Critical Edition, W. W. Norton & Co., 2016.

Copeland, Edward and Juliet McMaster (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*. Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Marsh, Nicholas. *Jane Austen: The Novels.* Red Globe Press, 1998. (Analysing Texts Series)

Watt, Ian (ed.). *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Prentice Hall, 1963.

Notes

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Notes

Timeline Chart (The Romantic Period)			
Year	**Major Events**	**Year**	**Major literary figures and their works**
1789	French Revolution Fall of Bastille	1789	William Blake (1757-1827), *Songs of Innocence*
		1790	Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France;* Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*
1791	Flight of Louis XVI to the Austrian border. He was caught and executed by the Jacobins in 1793.	1791	James Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson;* Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (Part I)
1792	September Massacres. Triumph of the Jacobins in France.	**1792**	Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
1793	Execution of Louis XVI; Reign of Terror; Britain and France at war.	**1793**	William Blake, *America*
1794	Executions of Danton and Robespierre; Habeas Corpus Act suspended in Britain.	**1794**	William Blake, *Songs of Experience*
1796	Bonaparte's Italian Campaign	**1796**	Burney, *Camilla*
1798	Nelson's victory at the Battle of Nile against France. This proved the English supremacy in naval War.	**1798**	William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), *Lyrical Ballads*; Wollstonecraft, *The Wrongs of Woman*
1799	Napoleon became the First Consul. Most of the internal administrative reforms were undertaken during this period.		

Year	Major Events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1800	Act of Union with Ireland		
1801	Union of British and Irish Parliaments; Habeas Corpus Act Suspended		
1802	Peace of Amiens. France and England entered into a temporary Truce through this treaty.		Foundation of the *Edinburgh Review*
1803	Renewal of war against France.		
1804	Napoleon, Emperor of France	**1804**	Blake, *Milton*
1805	Nelson's victory at Trafalgar	**1805**	Wordsworth's first version of his autobiographical poem *The Prelude*
1807	Abolition of slave trade in the British Empire	**1807**	Wordsworth, *Poems*
1808	Peninsular War between France and the combined forces of Spain and Portugal, supported by England. Napoleon later remarked that 'the Spanish Ulcer' ruined him.	**1808**	Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), *Marmion*
		1809	George Gordon Byron (1788-1824), *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*; foundation of the *Quarterly Review*
		1810	Scott, *The Lady of the Lake*

Year	Major Events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
		1811	Jane Austen (1775-1817), *Sense and Sensibilty*
1812	French retreat from Moscow which signalled the failure of Napoleon's Grand Army.	**1812**	Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*
		1813	Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*; Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822), *Queen Mab*
1814	Abdication of Napoleon; restoration of Louis XVIII Stephenson's invention of the steam locomotive;	**1814**	Wordsworth, *The Excursion*; Austen, *Mansfield Park*
1815	Battle of Waterloo. Final defeat of Napoleon.	**1815**	Wordsworth, *Poems*
		1816	Coleridge, Christabel and Kubla Khan; Shelley, *Alastor*; Austen, *Emma*; Scott, *The Antiquary* and *Old Mortality*
1817	Habeas Corpus Act suspended	**1817**	Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*; Byron, *Manfred*; John Keats (1795-1821), *Poems*; William Hazlitt (1778-1830), *The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*
1818	Habeas Corpus Act restored	**1818**	Austen, *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*; Keats, *Endymion*; Scott, *Rob Roy* and *The Heart of the Midlothian*; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; Hazlitt, *Lectures on the English Poets*

Year	Major Events	Year	Major literary figures and their works
1819	Peterloo massacre. Eighteen people, including a woman and a child, died and over 700 men, women and children received serious injuries when they were attacked by the army while staging a mass protest for liberty and freedom from poverty.	**1819**	Byron, *Don Juan*; Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*
1820	Death of George III; accession of George IV	**1820**	Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*; Keats *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*; Scott, *Ivanhoe*; Charles Lamb (1775-1834), *Essays of Elia* begun
1821	Greek War of Independence	**1821**	Shelley, *Adonais*; De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*
		1824	Death of Byron in Greece; foundation of the *Westminster Review*
1825	Financial crisis. The stock market collapsed as a result of the closing down of banks.	**1825**	Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*; publication of Pepys's diary
1830	Death of George IV; accession of William IV	**1830**	Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*