UG S1 01
(AEC)

FOUR YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER-I

GENERAL ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Subject Experts

1. Professor Bibhash Choudhury, Department of English, Gauhati University
2. Professor Lalan Kishore Singh, Department of English, Gauhati University
3. Dr. Merry Baruah, Department of English, Cotton University

Course Coordinators: Dr. Pallavi Gogoi & Dr. Chayanika Roy, Assistant Professors, KKHSOU

SLM Preparation Team

UNITS	CONTRIBUTORS
1, 6, 7, 8 & 11	Dr. Pallavi Gogoi, KKHSOU
2	Dr. Chayanika Roy, KKHSOU
3	Dr. Bashabi Gogoi, Former Academic Consultant, KKHSOU
4	Ali Akbar Hussain, Suren Das College, Hajo
5	Pritima Sharma, Former Academic Consultant, KKHSOU
9 & 10	Dr. Sukanya Kashyap, USTM, Meghalaya

Editorial Team

Content	**:** 1 & 2	:	Tapati Baruah Kashyap, Lecturer, Beltola Junior College
	3, 4 & 5	:	Prof. Robin Goswami, Former Head, Department of English, Cotton College
	6.7,8 & 11	:	In-house editing
	9-10	:	Dr. Kalpana Borah Barman, Assistant Professor, Cotton University

Structure, Format & Graphics **:** Dr Pallavi Gogoi & Dr. Chayanika Roy, Assistant Professors, KKHSOU

July, 2023

© Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University



This Self Learning Material (SLM) of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License (international): http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/

Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Headquarters: Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

City Office: NH 37, Resham Nagar, Khanapara, Guwahati 781022; Web: www.kkhsou.in

GENERAL ENGLISH

CONTENTS

		(Page No.)
Unit 1:	**William Blake: "Holy Thursday"** William Blake: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**7-17**
Unit 2:	**William Cowper: "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"** William Cowper: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**18-28**
Unit 3:	**William Wordsworth: "Simon Lee"** William Wordsworth: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**29-44**
Unit 4:	**Alfred Tennyson: "Tears Idle Tears"** Alfred Tennyson: Life and Works, Text of the Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**45-60**
Unit 5:	**W.B. Yeats: "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death"** W. B. Yeats: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**61-73**
Unit 6:	**D.H. Lawrence: "The Snake"** D.H. Lawrence: Life and Works, Text of the Poem,Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**74-88**
Unit 7:	**Keki N. Daruwalla: "Wolf"** Keki N. Daruwalla: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**89-99**
Unit 8:	**Chinua Achebe: "A Mother in a Refugee Camp"** Chinua Achebe: Life and Works, Text of the Poem, Explanation of the Poem, Style and Language.	**100-110**
Unit 9:	**William Shakespeare: *Macbeth* I** William Shakespeare: Life and Works, Background of the Play.	**111-120**
Unit 10:	**William Shakespeare: *Macbeth* II** Explanation of the Text, Major Characters, Major Themes, Style and Language.	**121-134**
Unit 11:	**Comprehension and Intelligent Reading** Comprehension and Intelligent Reading, Reading and Grasping Skills.	**135-149**

COURSE INTRODUCTION

The General English Course has been designed so as to help the learners in their all round development. It aims to enhance the linguistic, analytical and communication skills of the learners and help them articulate their views or opinions in the society. With the growing significance of English in today's society, there is a need to study English more vigorously. This Course has a total of two blocks and shall deal with some of the famous and significant poems of English literature. It also introduces the learners to one of the greatest dramatists of English literature, known as William Shakespeare and to his popular play *Macbeth.* Also an emphasis has been given to a few concepts of English Grammar that is very important in our understanding of the English language. The Course also lays importance on writing skills of the learners. This Course is compulsory in the B.A. programme.

UNIT 1: This unit introduces you to William Blake's poem "Holy Thursday" taken from the Songs of Innocence which unravels the untold stories of little orphaned children who spend their childhood days in orphanages and charity homes in England. In contrast to the artifice of the world outside, Blake mirrors the ideal world of innocence that finds expression in the hymnal songs of these little children on the occasion of Holy Thursday.

UNIT 2: This unit takes up William Cowper's "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" which captures the true story of a Scottish sailor who had been stranded on an island in the South Pacific Ocean during one of his sea journeys. The theme of the lonely soul that happens to be far away from fellow beings and the comforts of home is reflected in the verses of the poem.

UNIT 3: This unit takes up the poem "Simon Lee" by the poet William Wordsworth. The poem reads like a story that captures the changing fortunes of an old man who had once been a proud huntsman.With the turn of events in his life and the changing times, he now lived a struggling life with his wife at Cardiganshire. The poet captures the present condition of this old gentleman that stands in contrast to the good old days that he had spent.

UNIT 4: This unit presents Alfred Tennyson's poem titled "Tears Idle Tears" in which the poet tries to explain the necessity of overcoming the sorrows of life by inclining towards the sweetness of nature. It captures the moods and memories of days gone by and the tears that arise from a "divine despair". The idleness of tears is in the fact that there is nothing much that one can do about it.

UNIT 5: This unit contains W.B. Yeats' poem titled "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" which captures the tale of an Irishman in the midst of war time. The young man in his last flight reflects on the political developments of the nation that leave no options for soldiers of war.In these final moments, the young mantries to analyse these turbulent thoughts in the light of his own approach towards life.

UNIT 6: This unit introduces the learner to D.H. Lawrence's "The Snake" that reflects our sense of fascination and fear towards these shy creatures of Mother Nature. In fact, in direct contrast to the attention-seeking narrator in the poem, the snake is presented in its sense of poise and control, intending no harm, even as the poet hurls a stone to agitate the fascinating being.

UNIT 7: This unit takes up Keki N. Daruwalla's poem titled "Wolf" which is a remnant of the poet's memories of his childhood years. The haunting silhouette of the imagined wolf or the 'wolf of his imagination', ultimately transforms into a priceless memory in the mind of the thinking poet. The narrator voices his fascination and his deep concerns regarding the vulnerability of these amazing animals in the words of the poem.

UNIT 8: This unit takes up Chinua Achebe's poem titled "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" which is also considered as one of his major poems. A mother's soul is beautifully captured through the short lines of the poem which was written in the context of the civil war. The poem captures the tragedies and the helpless lives of women and their little children who have nowhere else to go except the haunting refugee camps.

UNIT 9: This unit presents an introduction to the life of William Shakespeare, who is also regarded as the greatest poet and dramatist in the History of English Literature. It also provides a glimpse of his literary works before exploring his tragic play *Macbeth*, also known as the Tragedy of Macbeth.

UNIT 10: This unit contains the second discussion on William Shakespeare's play titled *Macbeth* which continues to be one of the most popular plays even today. The course of the play reveals the prophesy by the three witches that eventually establishes, as well as, alters the fate of the protagonist Macbeth and his wife.

UNIT 11: This unit takes up with the importance of 'Comprehension and Intelligent Reading' by highlighting some of the important practices that are helpful in developing comprehension skills. The intelligent reading techniques of 'skimming' and 'scanning' provide an informative approach to the comprehension of any text source.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit which have been designed to self-check your progress of study.The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred during the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the SLM. However, this SLM is not an end in itself and the learners are strongly advised to consult the books and other resources recommended for reading.

UNIT 1 : WILLIAM BLAKE: “HOLY THURSDAY”

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 William Blake: The Poet

1.3.1 His Life

1.3.2 His Works

1.4 The Text of the Poem

1.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

1.5 Major Themes

1.6 Style and Language

1.7 Let Us Sum Up

1.8 Further Reading

1.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

1.10 Model Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain an insight into the life and works of the visionary poet William Blake
- explain both the content and context of the poem
- explore the relevant themes pertaining to the poem
- grasp the style and language employed in the poem
- appreciate the symbolism and significance of the poem.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

William Blake is considered a **‘visionary’** and a **‘prophetic’** poet who through the combination of his literary genius and creative artistry as a skilled painter and engraver added a dash of life to his literary works. He had serious philosophical inclinations early in life and cultivated a wide knowledge of **theology** which significantly found reflection in both his literary

and artistic works. The present unit will introduce the learner to the life and works of the creative genius William Blake and one of his selected poems titled "Holy Thursday" taken from his poetry collections, *The Songs of Innocence* (1789). The learner may note that there is a corresponding poem with the same title in *The Songs of Experience* (1794) as well.

The Songs of Innocence first published in the year 1789 was a complete collection, comprising poems such as "The Lamb", "The Little Black Boy" and "The Chimney Sweeper" among the other nineteen poems. It was followed by the collection titled *Songs of Experience* comprising poems such as "The Tyger", "The Little Vagabond" and "London" to name a few from the other twenty six poems. Both these collections were published together in the year 1794 under the complete title of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. Both these works contain an interesting lay out with suitable illustrations and it is centered on representing the two contrary states of the human mind i.e., 'innocence' and 'experience'. Let us then explore both the poems to study, compare and contrast between the two poems.

1.3 WILLIAM BLAKE: THE POET

Let us explore the life and works of William Blake in the following subsections before we go on to enjoy a reading of his poem "Holy Thursday'.

1.3.1 His Life

The following subsection will provide you with a glimpse on the life and works of the poet. William Blake (28 November 1757 – 12 August 1827) was born to Catherine Hermitage Blake and James Blake who were native to London. Blake was brought up in a devout and religious household and mostly tutored at home by his mother. As a young boy, he attended a drawing school called the Henry Pars's Drawing School to be trained as a skilled **draughtsman**. He attended the Royal Academy for a long time before he made up his mind to take up **engraving** as his chosen profession. Thus, at a

very tender age, Blake had received training and **apprenticeship** with the **engraver** James Basire. You may take note of the fact that the 'Bible' was a major influence throughout his life, which also found a creative expression through his literary works.

His poems were accompanied by illustrations and hand-made etchings which were indeed a labour of love. His **illustrations** for works like the *Book of Job* were indeed masterpieces that had earned him wide acclaim as a painter and engraver. Blake was married to Catherine Boucher and had settled down to a family life in the year 1782. As a husband, he made all efforts to educate his wife, training her to read, write and paint with ease. Further, they produced some of the best illustrated works together. William Blake is considered as a 'visionary' or a 'prophetic' poet owing to the visions that he was often subject to, for an instance, at the tender age of four he had a frightful vision of God peering through a window.

1.3.2 His Works

Among his major literary works are his volumes of poetry comprising epic or narrative poems like *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1789), his first collection of poetry *Poetical Sketches* (1783), *Tiriel* (1789), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Song of Los* (1795), *Jerusalem* (1804-1820), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *Milton: A Poem* (1804-1810) and *Song of Liberty* (1906). His prophetic books include: *America: A Prophecy* (1793), *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Ahania* (1795), the unfinished *Vala* or *The Four Zoas* (1797) and in parts *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* composed between 1790 and 1793.

Blake poured elements of mythology, religious and personal symbolism into his literary works and brought them alive with his remarkable illustrations. He was inspired by the art works of the classical masters such as Michelangelo, Raphael and Albert Durer. The etchings and engravings created by him are an enriching visual

delight and contain mystical, religious and mythological figures that leaves one all the more curious to know about them. Having spent a fulfilling life, Blake had breathed his last on 12 August 1827, followed by his wife in the year 1831. A memorial was built at Westminster Abbey in the year 1957 in their memory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What does the *Songs of Innocence* and of Experience deal with?

Q 2: Why is William Blake considered a 'visionary' or 'prophetic' poet?

Q 3: Name the first published poetry collection of William Blake.

1.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"Holy Thursday"

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green,
Grey-headed **beadles** walked before with wands as whites as snow,
Till into the high **dome** of Paul's they like Thames waters flow,
Oh what a **multitude** they seemed, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with **radiance** all their own.
The hum of multitude was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands,
Now like a mighty wind they raise to Heaven the voice of song,
Or like **harmonious** thundering the seats of Heaven among,
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise **guardians** of the poor;
Then cherish pity, **lest** you drive an angel from your door.

1.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

Holy Thursday is a special day in the Christian calendar which is also referred to as Maundy or Covenant Thursday. As it falls on the Thursday before Easter Sunday when the Catholic churches

conduct worship services, it is known as Holy Thursday. Easter Sunday is celebrated to mark the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ who according to the New Testament, arose from death on the third day after his **crucifixion**. In England, the celebration of Holy Thursday is known as Royal Maundy. Perhaps, you have read or heard about how Jesus had sacrificed his life on the cross for all humanity.

The opening lines of the poem captures the innocent faces of little children of the charity schools in England who stand in disciplined rows, dressed in red, blue and green to celebrate Holy Thursday at St. Paul's Cathedral. You can only imagine the elderly beadle or ceremonial officers of the church walk past the ceremonial wands. They march ahead to attend the Children's service at St. Paul's. The poet compares the little children moving in disciplined rows to the flowing river Thames and to the blossoming flowers of the season. Both the images suggest the purity and fragility of these little children. The poet almost exalts them as he would exalt the Lord in worship. These children prayed together at the service but there was only a gentle hum that rose from their midst. The thousands of little boys and girls with their radiating presence had raised their hands in prayer in all their innocence, singing hymns dedicated to the Lord.

Gradually the intensity of their singing voices begins to soar, sounding like a heavenly or angelic **choir**. The poet compares the strength of their singing to the gush of a "mighty wind" that is bound towards heaven. It reaches a **crescendo** when their singing grows louder in their "harmonious thundering". They bring to the mind the very image of little angels with radiating souls who look up to their Heavenly Father. Such a sight would easily melt our hearts. As they continue singing in the galleries, the poet directs our attention to the aged patrons and philanthropists of the charity schools who 'pose' as the "wise guardians" of the poor children. The last line of the poem stands out as an appeal to the readers "to cherish pity" or in other words to be generous of heart and compassionate towards

any child who stretches his or her hand in need. The core message of the poem is that when such little children call on for a little help or kindness, we must not turn them away from our doorsteps. The least we can do is to speak a kind word or be kind to little children who may be poor or orphaned and may look up to us for a little love and kindness, a little affection and attention in all their hope and innocence.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Where do the children visit in disciplined rows? Mention the reason of their visit.

Q 5: What are the children compared to by the poet?

1.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the major themes that emerge from the poem are as discussed below.

Orphaned Children

The short poem “Holy Thursday” reflects the ideal world of children which is filled with fancy and imagination, innocence and joy of childhood years. In contrast it also reflects the sad reality of little children who are abandoned by their own parents and are left to the mercy of charity homes in England. William Blake bore a sense of love and empathy for little children as is reflected in his volumes of poetry. He was much inspired by the works of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft who were the leading revolutionaries of England in their own right.

In the corresponding poem with the same title “Holy Thursday” in the volume *The Songs of Experience,* Blake had presented the miserable conditions and stark realities of little children who spent their childhood in the charity homes of England. Although, England was a rich and prosperous nation, there were multitudes of orphaned or poor children who cried in their grief and sorrow. These children devoid of love and care seemed to have no future or hope. Therefore, Blake wrote thus,

"And their sun does never shine,

And their fields are bleak and bare,

And their ways are filled with thorns:

It is eternal winter there"

The poet felt that the ideal environment in which children must be brought up should be an ideal place where they are nurtured like little flowers, so that they can blossom to the fullest. They must feel loved and secure, accepted and inspired to dream of a good future and in fact, be the future of the nation. It is not enough to keep them from starving in the charity homes, but their guardians had the moral obligation of nourishing their souls. This is why the poet wrote that there are plenty of poor children in England whose worlds were "eternal winter" without the promise of a secure future. These impoverished children deserved a secure future and they must be restored from a life of neglect and denial to a life that is free from the hunger of love and hope. The nation will only prosper and flourish when its children does so. Thus, the elderly guardians and philanthropists have a large role to play rather than attending mere charity functions. Thus, the celebration of Holy Thursday calls for a meaningful celebration in the true Christian spirit.

Innocence and Experience

Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* bring out the two different human states of mind i.e., 'innocence' and 'experience.' These two human states of being or condition can be compared to two opposite sides of a coin. It is 'experience' that moulds and transforms the human mind from its 'innocent' and 'inexperienced' state to its 'matured' and 'well-experienced' state, making a great difference to the early perception of the world around. It is through the gradual stages of life that the child figures out the real world, in sharp contrast to his ideal and imagined world. And it takes the 'weight of experience' for the youthful mind to be seasoned into maturity and gather worldly wisdom.

The Songs of Innocence are given to ideal happiness of childhood, untouched by the realities of life, while *The Songs of Experience* reveals the real practicalities of life. The world of innocence is symbolic of the

childhood years filled with happiness, freedom and playfulness'; a state where both innocence and ignorance are blissful, as reflected in the present poem. And the world of experience is symbolic of the adulthood years abound in sorrow, obstacles and realities of life as contained in the corresponding poem in volume *The Songs of Experience*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Name the two leading figures that had inspired William Blake. Who were they?

Q 7: What do Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* reveal to the reader?

1.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

In the economy of just a few words, the poet brings alive a vivid picture of little angels whose innocence and radiating presence almost immediately captures our hearts. The poem is filled with several images and similes that for an instance enables us to associate the radiance of little children to heavenly angels or the ambience of the celebration at the church to one filled with music at the gates of Heaven. The first image is that of 'clean innocent faces' of the children in rows, the second is their uniforms of "*red and green and blue*", the third is the *"multitudes"* of little children at the worship service, the fourth image is that of "*grey-headed beadles*" and the fifth is that of the "*aged men*" or the rich patrons of charity homes. Also, the use of similes in the poem adds to these visual images of the poem for example, phrases like "*wands as white as snow*", "*they like Thames water flow*", "*like a mighty wind*" or "*like harmonious thundering*" which also form comparative images as well.

There is a musical or a lyrical quality in the 'rhyme scheme' of the poem with rhyming words such as: clean-green, snow-flow, town-own, lambs-hands, song-among, poor-door. The poet also employs a few metaphors for an example, "*these flowers of London town*" or "*multitudes of lambs*" (refers to the little children), the phrase "*raising their innocent hands*" or the word "angel" in the closing line of the poem (refers to a little

child). The learner will find that the poem highlights striking and contrasting colours, for example the red/blue/green uniforms of the children or the colorful flowers of London, grey heads of aged men or the white of the beadles' wand. The entire mood of the poem is lifted with hymns sung in the sweet voices of little children at the worship service in St. Paul's Cathedral. It brings forth the message of hope and optimism in the Lord who is the fort of love and protection for all his children.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is the function of similes in the poem? Give examples.

Q 9: What is the core message in the poem "Holy Thursday"?



1.7 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you have received an insight into the life and works of the poet William Blake. A thorough reading of the poem "Holy Thursday" along with the detailed explanation will enable you to discuss the content of the poem and the emerging themes as well. Also, a study of the style and language of the poem will provide you with a better idea of the poetical techniques employed by the poet. Further, the learner will appreciate the core message hidden in the poem which highlights the realities of orphaned children and the importance of reaching out to them in time.



1.8 FURTHER READING

Blake, William (1967) *Songs of Innocence and Experience. Oxford : Oxford University Press.*

1) http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poet/william-blake
2) http://britannica.com/biography/WilliamBlake



1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Both these works deal with the contrary human states of 'innocence' and 'experience'.

Ans to Q No 2: He is considered as a 'visionary' or a 'prophetic' poet due to the visions he was often subject to, for an instance, at the tender age of four he had a frightful vision of God peering through a window.

Ans to Q No 3: His first collection of poetry is *Poetical Sketches* (1783)

Ans to Q No 4: The children visit St. Paul's Cathedral to celebrate Holy Thursday.

Ans to Q No 5: The poet compares the little children moving in disciplined rows to the flowing river Thames and to the blossoming flowers of the season.

Ans to Q No 6: He was much inspired by the works of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft who were the leading revolutionaries of England in their own right

Ans to Q No 7: Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* bring out the two different human states of mind i.e., 'innocence' and 'experience.'

Ans to Q No 8: The use of similes in the poem adds to these visual images of the poem for example, phrases like "*wands as white as snow*", "*they like Thames water flow*", "*like a mighty wind*" or "*like harmonious thundering*" which also form comparative images as well.

Ans to Q No 9: It brings forth the message of hope and optimism in the Lord who is the fort of love and protection for all his children.



1.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of the poet William Blake.

Q 2: Give a detailed explanation of the poem "Holy Thursday".

Q 3: What are the major themes in the poem "Holy Thursday"?

Q 4: Discuss the style and language employed by William Blake in the poem "Holy Thursday".

Q 5: Explain with reference to context:

a) "Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green,
Grey-headed beadles walked before with wands as whites as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames waters flow,
Oh what a multitude they seemed, these flowers of London town!"

b) "Now like a mighty wind they raise to Heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thundering the seats of Heaven among,
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door."

*** ***** ***

UNIT 2 : WILLIAM COWPER: "THE SOLITUDE OF ALEXANDER SELKIRK"

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 William Cowper: The Poet

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Works

2.4 The Text of the Poem

2. 4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

2.5 Major Themes

2.6 Style and Language

2.7 Let Us Sum Up

2.8 Further Reading

2.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

2.10 Model Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through his unit, you will be able to:

- familiarise yourself with the eighteenth century poet William Cowper
- describe the life and works of the poet
- explain the poem "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"
- discuss the themes of the poem
- analyse the poetic style of William Cowper.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall delve into the life and works of one of the well-known poets of the 18th century. William Cowper is also known as the forerunner of English Romantic Poetry. His poem titled "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" is the subject of our discussion in this unit. The poem is a reference to a sailor who had spent four years alone in an uninhabited

island of Scotland. However, the poem is unique and is notable for the celebration of man's imaginative power. You will also find the explanation of the poem in the unit. By throwing light upon the themes and use of language by the poet, the unit aims to acquaint you with the works and poetic style of William Cowper in general.

2.3 WILLIAM COWPER: THE POET

Regarded as the forerunner of English Romantic Poetry, William Cowper wrote in the eighteenth century drawing from the day to day experiences of his life. Mostly noted for his poetry on nature, William Cowper was a remarkable poet and essayist who also wrote hymns. His poetry had the flavour of both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Let us read through the life and works of this great poet.

2.3.1 His Life

William Cowper was born on November 26, 1731 to Reverend John Cowper and Ann Donne Cowper at Berkhamsted in London. He lost his mother at a tender age. Critics claim the loss of his mother to be the cause for the mental breakdown and instability of the poet. His experience of schooling was an unhappy one because he was bullied at Dr. Pitman's school where he was first admitted. He was next sent to Westminster school where he spent seven years from 1741 to 1748. He pursued law in Middle Temple.

Although Cowper had developed a romantic inclination towards his cousin, Theodora, his love was not a successful one as his parents were against the relationship.This resulted in increasing depression and instability in the poet.Cowper suffered from severe nervous breakdown while appearing for an examination for the position of Clerk in the House of Lords. It led to his hospitalisation at Nathaniel Cotton's asylum for two years after three failed suicide attempts. After his conversion to Evangelism he moved to Huntington to stay with a retired clergy Morley Unwin and his wife, Mary. A family

relation developed among them with the support and care bestowed on him by the Unwins. Even after the death of Morley Unwin, he stayed with Mary and a close relationship grew between them. Mary took care of Cowper in an attack of insanity in 1773 and successfully helped him to recover from his illness. They lived together until Mary's death in 1796. Her death overshadowed his life with despair. In 1800, William Cowper breathed his last after he was diagnosed with dropsy.

2.3.2 His Works

William Cowper is best remembered for the poem "The Diverting History of John Gilpin" as well as his hymns.*The Olney Hymns* was the first publication which was a joint work by Cowper John Newton. The major theme of this work is the need for salvation of human beings. Some of the hymns are "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood", "To Jesus, the Crown of My Hope", "O Lord! in Sorrow I Resign", "There is a Safe and Secret Place", to name a few. His famous poem" "The Diverting History of John Gilpin" is a comic piece published in 1782. The volume *Poems by William Cowper, of the Inner Temple, Esq.* was published in 1782. In 1785, William Cowper's" "The Task"- a poem of about five thousand lines written in blank verse was published and received wide critical acclaim. This was one of the remarkable treatments of the themes such as man and nature. His later life was engrossed in translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Besides these, Cowper's letters are known for its humour and his lively treatment of everyday life.

2.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"

I am monarch of all I survey;
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea
I am lord of the fowl and the brute.

O **Solitude**! where are the charms
That **sages** have seen in thy face?
Better dwell in the midst of alarms,
Than reign in this horrible place.

I am out of humanity's reach,
I must finish my journey alone,
Never hear the sweet music of speech;
I start at the sound of my own.
The beasts that roam over the plain
My form with indifference see;
They are so unacquainted with man,
Their **tameness** is shocking to me.

Society, Friendship, and Love
Divinely bestow'd upon man,
O, had I the wings of a dove
How soon would I taste you again!
My sorrows I then might **assuage**
In the ways of religion and truth;
Might learn from the wisdom of age,
And be cheer'd by the **sallies** of youth.

Ye winds that have made me your sport,
Convey to this desolate shore
Some **cordial endearing** report
Of a land I shall visit no more:
My friends, do they now and then send
A wish or a thought after me?
O tell me I yet have a friend,
Though a friend I am never to see.

How **fleet** is a **glance** of the mind!

Compared with the speed of its flight,
The **tempest** itself lags behind,
And the swift-wingèd arrows of light.
When I think of my own native land
In a moment I seem to be there;
But alas! recollection at hand
Soon hurries me back to despair.

But the **sea-fowl** is gone to her nest,
The beast is laid down in his **lair**;
Even here is a season of rest,
And I to my cabin repair.
There’s mercy in every place,
And mercy, encouraging thought!
Gives even **affliction** a grace
And **reconciles** man to his lot.

2. 4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

The poem is based on Alexander Selkirk, a sailor from Fife, Scotland. He ran away from home at the age of nineteen to be left alone on a deserted and uninhabited island in Chile following a feud with a young captain. Even though he asked his shipmates to join him, he was refused by all and had to spend four years of his life at the island alone which had no sign of human life in it. Many writers had been influenced by Alexander Selkirk’s adventurous stay at the island which was called Juan Fernandez. He was however accompanied by goats and cats, the animals which earlier survived shipwrecks. He spent his life there hunting and was completely engrossed in reading the Bible until he was rescued four years later by an English ship.



LET US KNOW

Highly influenced by Alexander Selkirk's story was the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. The novel has an engrossing plot and deals with the life and experiences of Robison Kreutznaer in a distant tropical island for twenty eight years. He was also rescued in the end of the novel.

William Cowper's poem is a direct address to the story of this sailor's life in the island. Cowper must have consulted many books written on Alexander Selkirk. However, his poem throws interesting light on the relationship of man with nature.The first stanza begins with the solitude life of the sailor in the island where there is no one to disrupt or interfere him. Being the only human presence, he is the king of the island. He is, however, filled with regret for his decision of staying in the island.It is evident from these line: "Better dwell in the midst of alarms,/Than reign in this horrible place."

The sailor regrets that he has nobody to share his grief too. He is out in such a faraway place where the possibility of human vegetation is less. Cut off from the society, he assured himself that he had to reside there all alone by himself. He longs to hear the "sweet music of speech" for there was no one he could talk to. He reflected on the point that the island had never before seen the presence of human beings because he found that even the beasts look at him "with indifference".

He longs for "Society, Friendship and Love" which are solely humanly affairs. He imagined how he could have escaped if he had wings like the Dove. His sorrows might then be lessened by the new hope he would find in religion and he would learn from his "wisdom of age,/And be cheer'd by the sallies of youth."

The fourth stanza reflected his utter desolation and his eagerness to go back to a life he earlier had lived with friends and family. Out of frustration he asked the wind to convey his message to his dear ones about how he missed them. The sailor's imagination is at full play in this stanza.

The fifth stanza is the sailor's return to his reality. Cowper beautifully describes the imaginative power of Selkirk as "How fleet is a glance of the mind" and emphasised on the fact that it could not last forever. The sailor had to accept his self chosen fate.

The poem ends with a note of hope for human beings are strong enough to survive in all situations and what encouraged the sailor is the hope that mercy still pervaded. This strong bent of mind led to the survival of the sailor in the island even after four years. In spite of the hopeless situation, Alexander Selkirk's determination and courage to survive has been an inspiring story for many writers. Through the poem, William Cowper manages to throw light on human trials and the necessity of courage and will to survive.

2.5 MAJOR THEMES

Let us discuss some of the major themes evident in the poem.

Power of Imagination

The most dominant theme of the poem is the power of imagination. Stuck in an uninhabited island alone, Alexander Selkirk spent four years of his life alone. Devoid of other human lives, he was compelled to live alone. His only activities were hunting goats and reading the Bible.It was, however, the flights of imagination of the sailor that had saved him from breaking down completely. He found solace in imagining about his friends, their love and companionship. Although he is aware of his reality yet his imaginative bent of mind helped him to survive in such a deserted island. The company he had in the island comprised only animals. Cowper emphasised how one's imaginative power can lead him/her to the source of happiness. If not permanent yet a temporary relief was found by the lonely sailor which encouraged him to struggle to live until finally rescued.

Man's relation to Nature and Society

Another theme evident in the poem is man's relation to nature and the society. As part of the society, men are habituated to the company of friends and lovers.The poem throws light on the fact that a life without society is worthless. A human being is complete in relation to another human being.

Also, the reliance of men on nature is quite evident through the poem. The sailor lived in the island amidst nature and survived by the provisions laid down by Nature.

2.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The influence of Evangelism on William Cowper was reflected in his hymns. The wide range of his works consisting of hymns, lyrics, letters, satires, translations is evident of his talent and genius. His tone may be didactic but his poems reflect his love for Nature, Humanity and Society. Humour is evident in his letters. He draws from the everyday life experiences and his poetry strongly has its base in the poet's psychology and inner consciousness.His works bear the influence of John Milton and Abraham Cowley, a seventeenth century poet. William Cowper is also noted for his use of blank verse.

"The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" is a simple yet elegant poem written on the sailor's mental condition during his stay at the island. The language is also simple denoting the simplicity of the sailor's imagination to become a part of a society again. Though written in a simple style, the poem has deeper philosophical implications. Man's need for a society, man's relationship with nature and his strong determination are some of the points that Cowper focuses on. Cowper's strong observation is implied through his works. His style is lively and is a reflection of his personal undertone.



2.7 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading the units, you will be familiarised with one of the forerunners of English Romanticism. William Cowper. Mostly noted for the poem "The Diverting History of John Gilpin", William Cowper's style is lively and elegant. In the poem, "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk," Cowper celebrated human courage and faith. Stuck in the lonely island for four years, Alexander Selkirk's strong determination to survive is the chief

motive in the poem. You are now familiar with the themes of the poem and aware of Cowper's poetic style.



2.8 FURTHER READING

1) Cowper, William. (2008 rpt.)*Poems*. California Pomona: Press.

2) Nick Rhodes (ed.) (2006) *Selected Poems: William Cowper*. Manchester Carcanet Press Ltd.



2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: His experience of schooling was an unhappy one because he was bullied at Dr. Pitman's school where he was first admitted.

Ans to Q No 2: After his conversion to Evangelism he moved to Huntington to stay with a retired clergy Morley Unwin and his wife, Mary. A family relation developed among them with the support and care bestowed on him by the Unwins. Even after the death of Morley Unwin, he stayed with Mary and a close relationship grew between them.

Ans to Q No 3: "The Diverting History of John Gilpin", "The Task", "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk", etc.

Ans to Q No 4: The major theme of his hymns is the need for salvation of human beings. Some of the hymns are "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood", "To Jesus, the Crown of My Hope", "O Lord! in Sorrow I Resign", "There is a Safe and Secret Place", etc.

Ans to Q No 5: Alexander Selkirk was a sailor from Fife, Scotland. He ran away from home at the age of nineteen to be left alone on a deserted and uninhabited island in Chile following a feud with a young captain. Even though he asked his shipmates to join him, he was refused by all and had to spend four years of his life at the island alone which had no sign of human life in it.

Ans to Q No 6: By "sweet music of speech" the poet means human voice.

The sailor regrets that he has nobody to share his grief too. He is out in such a faraway place where the possibility of human vegetation is less. Cut off from the society, he assured himself that he had to reside there all alone by himself. He longs to hear the "sweet music of speech" for there was no one he could talk to.

Ans to Q No 7: Man's power of imagination and man's relation to nature and the society.

Ans to Q No 8: Yes, the language is as such simple denoting the simplicity of the sailor's imagination to become a part of a society again.



2.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" by William Cowper.

Q 2: What is the central theme of the poem "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"? Elaborate.

Q 3: Write short notes on:

a) Poetic style of William Cowper

b) "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"

Q 4: Discuss the life and works of William Cowper.

Q 5: Explain the poet's intention behind writing the poem "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk"?

Q 6: Discuss "The Solitude of Alexander Selkirk" by William Cowper as a poem of human courage and determination.

Q 7: How did Alexander Selkirk pass four years in the lonely island?

Q 8: What were the thoughts that the sailor battled with during his stay on the lonely island?

Q 9: Explain with reference to context:

a) "I am monarch of all I survey;
My right there is none to dispute;
From the centre all round to the sea
I am lord of the fowl and the brute."

b) "Society, Friendship, and Love
Divinely bestow'd upon man,
O, had I the wings of a dove
How soon would I taste you again!"

c) "How fleet is a glance of the mind!
Compared with the speed of its flight,
The tempest itself lags behind,
And the swift-winged arrows of light."

d) "There's mercy in every place,
And mercy, encouraging thought!"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 3 : WILLIAM WORDSWORTH : “SIMON LEE”

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 William Wordsworth: The Poet

- 3.3.1 His Life
- 3.3.2 His Works

3.4 The Text of the Poem

- 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

3.5 Style and Language

3.6 Let Us Sum Up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

3.9 Model Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- familiarise yourself to the life and works of the romantic poet William Wordsworth
- explain the poem “Simon Lee”
- discuss the style and the language of the poem
- appreciate the poem in its totality.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the poem, “Simon Lee” by William Wordsworth (1770-1850), one of the greatest poets of the English Romantic movement. You may have read some of the poems written by him. He is perhaps the most celebrated and influential poet of the Romantic period of English literature. Together with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, another Romantic poet and also his friend, he published the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. With the publication of this collection of poems commenced the period of Romanticism

in the history of English literature. The idea for bringing out this volume was conceived when Wordsworth and Coleridge were living as close neighbours in Somerset. The "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads* is considered to be the official ***manifesto*** of the Romantic Movement. Here, the *Preface* is considered to be similar to an official statement of the principles of the Romantic Movement.

Wordsworth is primarily a poet of nature. For him, Nature is a living force. Nature is, in a sense,"a friend, philosopher and guide" to man. There is, according to him, a close relationship between man and Nature. He held the belief that Nature can never betray man. Wordsworth also acknowledged his deliberate choice of a "language really used by men", which is applied to "incidents and situations from common life".

In this unit, you will get a general idea about the life and works of William Wordsworth and an explanation of the poem prescribed. You will also get an elaboration of the poetic techniques employed, and the style and language used by the poet.

3.3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: THE POET

As has already been mentioned, Wordsworth is the high priest of the English Romantic movement and the most celebrated poet among the English Romantic poets. Devoting himself largely to the treatment of Nature, he began a prolific literary career with *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and produced such immortal poems as "The Prelude", "The Excursion", "Lucy poems", "Michael", "Simon Lee" etc.

3.3.1 His Life

William Wordsworth was born in the year 1770 at Cockermouth in Cumberland on the edge of the Lake District, the third of five children of John Wordsworth. His beloved sister Dorothy Wordsworth, who was also a poet and a diarist, was born the year following his birth. Wordsworth was very close to his sister who was his companion through most of his life. Even though a silent partner,

Dorothy was a great inspiration to her brother William and also to Coleridge, his poet-friend. His mother died when he was only eight, and after his father's death, Wordsworth was looked after by his relatives who sent him to school at Hawkshead, in the picturesque Lake District region. Here the glorious bounties of nature taught him more than his school lessons could teach him. He lost himself amidst nature and began to feel the presence of some "Living Spirit" in it. Wordsworth has beautifully recorded his feelings in the poem "The Prelude" which is considered to be an autobiographical poem. You may read it if you want to know more about his poetic genius.

Wordsworth's years at St. John's College in Cambridge were quite different from his life at Hawkshead. He had spent happy years at Hawkshead but he found life at Cambridge very uninspiring and mechanical. During this period, he made two trips to France where he was greatly influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution. He, like most of the other Romantic poets, was politically conscious and believed in the motto of the French Revolution: *"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity"*. Perhaps, you have already read about this motto in your history books. However, he was saddened and disappointed by the excesses of the Revolution, especially the beheading of Louis XVI. He, therefore, in his later stage, turned to Nature to find solace from the woes and worries of human life. And, as already mentioned he held the belief that Nature can never betray man.

Wordsworth had to face many hardships in his life and financial ***constraints*** never left him. Initially, his poetry also faced some criticism. But, he never lost faith in himself and patiently continued his work. His efforts were rewarded when he was hailed as the greatest poet that England had ever produced. He was also made ***Poet Laureate*** in 1843 on the death of Robert Southey. William Wordsworth passed away in 1850 and was buried in the churchyard at Grasmere.

The French Revolution (1789) is considered to be the bloodiest revolution in world history. It was a period of great social

and political turmoil in the political history of France and Europe in general on account of the Revolution. The structure of the French government had undergone a radical change from absolute monarchy to political liberty, social equality and national patriotism. The aristocrats were executed on the guillotine and there was much bloodshed during the days of the Revolution. Though the republican ideals of the Revolution influenced Wordsworth, he was much repulsed by its violent character. The immediate motive of the French Revolution was to abolish the French monarchy.

3.3.2 His Works

Wordsworth was a ***prolific*** writer who brought out a great variety of works throughout his literary career. Let us list some of his major works. *The Lyrical Ballads*(1798) includes poems like "Simon Lee" (which we will deal with in this unit), "Lines Written in Early Spring", "Lines Composed a Few Miles AboveTintern Abbey" (which is an autobiographical poem written when he revisited the Wye area which filled him with a "tranquil restoration"), "The Thorn", etc. *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems* (1800) includes poems like "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways" (which is the best-known of the *Lucy* poems), "Lucy Gray", "I Travelled Among Unknown Men", "Michael" and "The Two April Mornings".

Poems, in Two Volumes (1807) include "Resolution and Independence", "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud"or "The Daffodils" (which is a recounting of an experience with Dorothy when they chanced upon a "long belt" of daffodils), "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" (a deeply philosophical ode to childhood), "Ode to Duty", "The Solitary Reaper", "London 1802", "The World is Too Much with Us" (which is a sonnet criticising the material excesses of the modern world which has distanced itself from nature), etc. "The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind" is, of course, his most famous poem which is deeply autobiographical as I have mentioned earlier. Let us now look at "Simon Lee".



LET US KNOW

Wordsworth says in "My Heart Heaps Up"(The Rainbow Poem) : "The child is the father of Man". It is a characteristic Romantic idea that says that "youth" is richer in insight and wisdom than "age".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the autobiographical poem written by Wordsworth.

Q 2: When was *The Lyrical Ballads* published? Why is this volume important?

Q 3: What kind of themes and language, can you say, are typical of Wordsworth?

3.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"Simon Lee"

In the sweet ***shire*** of Cardigan,
Not far from pleasant Ivor-hall,
An old Man dwells, a little man,—
'Tis said he once was tall.
Full five-and-thirty years he lived
A running huntsman merry;
And still the centre of his cheek
Is red as a ripe cherry.
No man like him the horn could sound,
And hill and valley rang with glee
When Echo ***bandied***, round and round,
The halloo of Simon Lee.
In those proud days, he little cared
For ***husbandry*** or ***tillage***;
To ***blither*** tasks did Simon rouse
The sleepers of the village.

He all the country could outrun,
Could leave both man and horse behind;
And often, ***ere*** the chase was done,
He reeled, and was stone– blind.
And still there's something in the world
At which his heart rejoices;
For when the ***chiming*** hounds are out,
He dearly loves their voices!
But, O the heavy change! —***bereft***
Of health, strength, friends, and ***kindred***, see!
Old Simon to the world is left
In ***liveried*** poverty:
His master's dead, and no one now
Dwells in the Hall of Ivor;
Men, dogs, and horses, all are dead;
He is the sole survivor.
And he is lean and he is sick;
His body, dwindled and ***awry***,
Rests upon ankles ***swoln*** and thick;
His legs are thin and dry.
One ***prop*** he has, and only one,
His wife, an aged woman,
Lives with him, near the waterfall,
Upon the ***village Common***.
Beside their moss-grown hut of clay,
Not ***twenty paces*** from the door,
A scrap of land they have, but they
Are poorest of the poor.
This scrap of land he from the ***heath***
Enclosed when he was stronger;
But what to them avails the land
Which he can till no longer?
Oft, working by her husband's side,

Ruth does what Simon cannot do;
For she, with ***scanty*** cause for pride,
Is stouter of the two.
And, though you with your utmost skill
From labour could not ***wean*** them,
'Tis little, very little—all
That they can do between them.
Few months of life has he in store
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
Do his weak ankles swell.
My gentle reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And now I fear that you expect
Some tale will be related.
O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! You would find
A tale in every thing.
What more I have to say is short,
And you must kindly take it:
It is no tale; but, should you think,
Perhaps a tale you'll make it.
One summer-day I chanced to see
This old Man doing all he could
To unearth the root of an old tree,
A stump of rotten wood.
The ***mattock tottered*** in his hand;
So vain was his endeavour,
That at the root of the old tree
He might have worked for ever.
"You're overtask'd, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool," to him I said;

And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffer'd aid.
I struck, and with a single blow
The tangled root I ***severed***,
At which the poor old Man so long
And vainly had endeavour'd.
The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seem'd to run
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done.
— I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning;
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.



ACTIVITY 3.1

1. How many lines in the poem refer to Simon Lee's days of hunting?
2. Try to find out the reasons for Simon Lee's poverty.

3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

The poem "Simon Lee" appeared in the *Lyrical Ballads*, with *a Few Other Poems* in 1798. Let us see what Wordsworth himself has to say about Simon Lee, the huntsman–

""This old man had been huntsman to the squires of Alfoxden, which, at the time we occupied it, belonged to a manor. The old man's cottage stood upon a 'common', a little way from the entrance to Alfoxden Park. But it had disappeared. Many other changes had taken place in the adjoining village, which I could not but notice with a regret more natural than well-considered. Improvements but rarely appear such to those who, after long intervals of time, revisit places they have had much pleasure in. It is unnecessary to add, the fact was as mentioned in the poem; and I have, after an interval of forty-

five years, the image of the old man as fresh before my eyes as if I had seen him yesterday. The expression when the hounds were out, 'I dearly love their voice', was word for word from his own lips."

So, you can see that this is a poem about an old huntsman whom Wordsworth actually encountered in his travels. There is an inherent narrative element in the poem.

Simon Lee, the old huntsman lives in Cardiganshire, a county in Wales. The poet-narrator tells us that he was once an active and strong man who was a fine huntsman whom no one could rival ("Full five-and-thirty years he lived/ A running huntsman merry"). Hunting, that is, chasing and killing animals for sport was a popular hobby among the ***gentry*** and in Britain, hunting mostly referred to the sport of hunting foxes. Simon's cry to urge on a chase echoed all throughout the hills and vales. ("When Echo bandied, round and round, / The halloo of *Simon Lee*"). He was not one to engage himself in farming and tilling; he would rather enjoy himself in the merrier pursuit of hunting. Neither man nor animal could rival him in his speed. And the sound of the barking hounds was music to his ears. (At which his heart rejoices; / For when the chiming hounds are out, / he dearly loves their voices!")

Alas! there is a change in his fortunes as he is stripped of "health, strength, friends, and kindred" and has to live in poverty now where he still wears the uniform of his earlier days, when he was an active huntsman. His feudal master, the men and animals are all dead and he is the sole survivor. Don't you think that this is a terrible predicament? Simon himself is frail and weak now, his body distorted and afflicted with ailments. Impoverished and childless, the poet says, his wife is his sole companion with whom he resides in a hut by the countryside. Although he owns a piece of land, yet the irony is that he can till it no longer because his ***afflictions*** do not allow him to do so. This is beautifully expressed in the lines– "This scrap of land he from the heath / Enclosed when he was stronger; / But what to them avails the land / Which he can till no longer?"

It is Ruth, Simon's wife, who works alongside him. Although they involve themselves very hard, there is very little that they can produce. The older Simon grows, the more his ***arthritis*** troubles him. Here the poet intervenes and tells his readers that they may be expecting some kind of a ***yarn*** to be narrated now. But he is of the opinion that although he has not much left to relate, his readers can make a tale out of it if they desire. ("It is no tale;/ but should you think,/ Perhaps a tale you'll make it"). The poet says this in order to stress the fact that there is indeed the germ of a story to be narrated.

One fine summer day the poet happened to see old Simon Lee trying to sever an old tree stump with a pickaxe. But all in vain. His painstaking efforts did not yield results. ("So vain was his endeavour, / That at the root of the old tree / He might have worked for ever.") Whereupon the poet offers to help him in his task and with a single fell shot splits apart the "the tangled root". Moved by this act of kindness, Simon Lee bursts into tears of gratitude and profoundly thanks the poet. This act of weeping reveals the innate honesty of the old man and in doing so, the poet gives us the lesson that men in general have become very pitiless. As the poet comments in the concluding lines of the poem, "I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds/With coldness still returning; / Alas! The gratitude of men / Hath oftener left me mourning."

The poem seems to justify the notion of gratitude against that of cold rationalism, i.e., the belief that one's actions should be based on scientific thinking rather than emotions or religious beliefs. The poem emphasises the contrast between the emotion of gratitude and the idea of rationalism. Wordsworth is of the opinion that there is no room for rationalism in the heartfelt thanks of Simon Lee. The tragedy and the infirmity of old age are the basic theme of the poem. Simon in his old age has been discarded although he had devoted himself whole-heartedly to his duties during his ***heydays.*** His loyalty to his master was never repaid and he now lives a very pitiful life. Wordsworth's poems are about the joys and the sorrows of common

people, not of princes or heroes. In this poem, the poet draws our attention from the incidents themselves to the feelings, which give importance to the action. Here he includes the feelings not only of Simon Lee, but also those of himself. The poem is very thought-provoking in the sense that it makes us think as well as feel how even the humblest incidents of everyday life express the human condition. You may read the poem once again in order to fully grasp this notion.



LET US KNOW

The English gentry took great pleasure in fox-hunting. It had increasingly become a favourite pastime of the upper classes. The foxes would be chased by numerous hunters and hounds until they died a painful death after many hours. The hunting hounds were bred for this very purpose and sometimes they tore the fox into pieces before eating them. Sometimes the head, tail and feet of the fox were taken away as trophies. But now animal rights activists are protesting against this bloody sport and campaigning to put an end to it.

QUOTE

- "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science." –Wordsworth's notion of poetry.
- Poetry is the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings". Wordsworth's justification of his use of poetic diction.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why did Simon Lee "not care for husbandry or tillage"?

Q 5: Why do you think did Simon Lee burst into tears of gratitude when the poet helped him in his task?

Q 6: What, do you think, is the underlying theme of the poem?

Q 7: "For when the ..... hounds are out". (Fill in the blank).

Q 8: "The ..... totter'd in his hand". (Fill in the blank).

Q 9: What is the "tale" given to us? Write an outline.

Q 10: How does Wordsworth use irony in the poem?

Q 11: Look at lines 1-4 of stanza 4 : Name the feelings expressed. Who is expressing them?



ACTIVITY 3.2

1. Which lines in the poem refer to the past in Simon's life? Which adjectives are used to describe the present? Do you think Simon Lee regrets the present?
2. "Simon Lee" is a ballad. Can you name some other ballads?

3.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

Wordsworth believed that poetry should be written in the language of the common people because such language is not artificial and is more at ease with their environment. He believed that the purest poetry is written in the simplest language. *"*Simon Lee*"* is a good example of this belief. Since, his language is devoid of any ornamentation, its effect depends solely on its strength of feeling and imagination. In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*, he asserts that "there neither is nor can be any essential difference between the language of Prose and Verse".

"Simon Lee" is such an astonishingly simple poem that you will be able to relate to it spontaneously and appreciate the essential feelings.But therein,lies Wordsworth's absolute genius because in his simplicity, there is a hint of complexity. He makes us ***contemplate*** the instinctive nature of the feeling of gratitude and also on man's general cold heartedness. This gives the poem its quiet intensity and sensitivity.

'Simon Lee' is a ballad, that is, it is a poem which tells a story in a number of short regular stanzas. You will be interested to know that Wordsworth never wrote down his immediate impressions as poems. Rather, he let them sink into his mind where these impressions and feelings remained till they became clear. The poet believed that if he wrote down his immediate

feelings, he would not be able to do justice to his composition. The poem "Simon Lee" was inspired by his encounter with an old huntsman, as mentioned earlier.

Wordsworth has effectively ***juxtaposed*** the present and the past in the poem. You can notice how he first describes the old Simon Lee as he lives in ***penury*** in Cardiganshire. ("In the sweet shire of Cardigan, / Not far from pleasant Ivor Hall,/ An old man dwells, a little man"). Then he takes us to the past when Simon Lee was a strong and able huntsman whom no one could rival. ("He all the country could outrun, / Could leave both man and horse behind"). The past and the present are both important for the story.

You can notice that the poet interjects within into the narrative when he says, "My gentle reader, I perceive / How patiently you've waited,/ and now I feel that you expect/ some tale will be related." Also towards the end, the poet-narrator offers his aid to Simon Lee thus– "You're overtask'd, good Simon Lee, / Give me your tool,' to him I said." Wordsworth thus describes in the first person his feelings and sentiments regarding the entire incident.

We can also see traces of irony in the poem in the sense that, as Wordsworth says and as was mentioned earlier, Simon Lee never received his due for the services rendered during his youth. Through these lines, "One summer-day I chanced to see / This old man doing all he could / To unearth the root of an old tree, / A stump of rotten wood… So vain was his endeavour / That at the root of the old tree / He might have work'd for ever", Wordsworth tries to show us that the old huntsman is as close to the earth as the stubborn tree-root which he tries to uproot in vain.

Wordsworth, without trying to give us moral lessons and without being too suggestive, has given us a poem, which is lengthy, but at the same time full of feelings. The poem evokes deep thoughts in our minds and we are moved by the emotions which it gives rise to in our hearts. We agree with the poet when he says– "I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds / With coldness still returning; / Alas! the gratitude of men / Hath oftener left me mourning."



ACTIVITY 3.3

1. Read the poem and find the words related to hunting.
2. Explain the line: "O the heavy change!" Whose feelings are expressed here?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 12: How does the language help you to understand the story in the poem?

Q 13: Show those lines in the poem which express the poet's feelings about Simon Lee's sense of gratitude?

Q 14: Explain the phrase "blither tasks".



3.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that Wordsworth was one of the eminent figures of the Romantic Movement in the history of English literature. He gave the highest value to Nature and found inspiration in her bounties. You have learnt about his life and works and also about his belief that Nature is a living force. It is called pantheism. "Simon Lee" is the narration of an encounter that the poet had with an old huntsman.

You have learnt about the poetic techniques employed by the poet and also how this poem is a reflection of "emotions recollected in tranquility". Besides this, you have also learnt that the language of poetry must be in keeping with the language of the common man, according to Wordsworth. The prescribed poem exemplifies this belief of the poet.



3.7 FURTHER READING

1) Daiches, David (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature*.Vol 4. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.

2) Legouis, Emile (1994). *A Short History of English Literature*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.

3) Long, W. J. (1997). *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.

4) Ousby, Ian (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.

5) Sarker, Sunil Kumar (2003). *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic.



3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind

Ans to Q No 2: 1798 with the publication of this collection of poems commenced the period of Romanticism.

Ans to Q No 3: Nature

Ans to Q No 4: Simon was not one to engage himself in farming and tilling; he would rather enjoy himself in the merrier pursuit of hunting.

Ans to Q No 5: Refer to 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 6: Refer to 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 7: Chiming

Ans to Q No 8: Mattock

Ans to Q No 9: Refer to 3.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 10: Refer to 3.5 Style and Language

Ans to Q No 11: Refer to 3.4 Text of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 12: Refer to 3.5 Style and Language

Ans to Q No 13: Refer to 3.4 Text of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 14: It means happier tasks. (Elaborate)



3.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is the central idea of the poem “Simon Lee”?

Q 2: What does the poet mean when he says, ‘‘When Echo bandied round and round, / The halloo of Simon Lee.”

Q 3: Discuss the life and works of William Wordsworth

Q 4: How was Simon Lee in his youth and what is his present condition?

Q 5: “I’ve heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds / With coldness still returning; / Alas! the gratitude of men / Hath oftener left me mourning”. Comment on these lines.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 4 : LORD ALFRED TENNYSON : "TEARS, IDLE TEARS"

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Lord Alfred Tennyson: The Poet

- 4.3.1 His Life
- 4.3.2 His Works

4.4 The Text of the Poem

- 4.4.1 Context of the Poem
- 4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

4.5 Style and Language

4.6 Let Us Sum Up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

4.9 Model Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- familiarise yourself with the life and works of Lord Alfred Tennyson
- explain the poem "Tears, Idle Tears"
- describe the context and the language of the poem
- appreciate the poem in its totality.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the poem "Tears, Idle Tears" that occurs in the beginning of Canto IV of *The Princess: A Medley* (1847), a long narrative poem by Lord Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) who is considered to be a representative of the Victorian age. The poem is a touching lyric sung by one of the maidens who resides in the castle of Princess Ida. The Princess is an independent young woman. She has retreated from society with some

of her female companions to start a school from which men are excluded. The princess is pursued there by the prince, who is in love with her. He comes to the castle disguised as a woman. In the original poem, "The Princess" when this lyric is sung, Princess Ida is relaxing with her friends and the prince at sunset. That is why the mood of the poem is sad.

The poem represents the passion of love between a man and woman. It is also a poem about the impact of the past. The speaker laments the passing of time; he cannot relive the cherished experiences of the past anymore. And there is a sudden welling up of tears in the speaker's eyes but the cause of the tears is unknown.

In the title, we can notice the repetition of the word 'Tears'. It indicates the nature of the poet's sadness as felt by him. It has no apparent cause. The tears are rather involuntary; but are also 'idle' because they cannot free the poet from despair.

There are many famous poems in English on the same theme of the past. You may have heard about Wordsworth. His "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality" is also about the bygone days of the poet's childhood. You may read the poem and compare "Tears, Idle Tears" with it.

It is also important to know that the other major Victorian poet who is often contrasted with Tennyson is Robert Browning. Tennyson strikes a note of sadness because he was sensitive to the loss of faith in his age, but Browning is a poet of optimism. "Tears, Idle Tears" is, however, one of the finest expressions of a sensitive poet's sense of despair.

In this unit, you will get a bird's-eye view of the life and works of Tennyson and an explanation of the poem prescribed. You will also get an elaboration of the poetic techniques employed, and the style and language used by the poet.

4.3 LORD ALFRED TENNYSON: THE POET

Tennyson is undoubtedly a major poetic voice of the Victorian age (1837-1900), and is comparable in eminence with Wordsworth in the Romantic age. He was identified with the age itself, to the extent that he is called the 'trumpeter' of the English empire. But he was sensitive to the

general human condition and possessed great poetic skill with an extraordinary ear for cadence and rhythm.

4.3.1 His Life

Tennyson was born on August 6, 1809, in Lincolnshire, one of the eight children of Reverend George Clayton Tennyson, the rector of Somersby, a tiny village full of orchards and vast green fields. He spent his childhood amidst poverty and had his early education under his father. From 1817 to 1820, he was at school at Loath. In 1828, he entered the Trinity College, Cambridge, and spent three years there. His Cambridge life is remarkable for his friendship with Arthur Hallam who died a premature death. Tennyson immortalised this tragic event by writing *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850).

His personal life was not very happy in the beginning. His father was an alcoholic which made his mother very distressed and depressed. Two of his brothers became insane. Thus, from the beginning, he was familiar with mental illness, poverty and other troubles. His poetry reflects many such unhappy moments of his personal life. Another important fact about his life is that he was both exhilarated and disturbed by the social and industrial changes taking place in the Victorian England.

Tennyson was a typical Victorian intellectual with wide reading and the ability to debate and discuss contemporary beliefs. He was aware of the latest development in intellectual debates. Thus he was aware of the contemporary conflict between religious belief and ideas like "Darwinism" and "Natural Selection". He had inherited the Romantic idealism of great predecessors like Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats. You may be interested to know that he succeeded Wordsworth as Poet Laureate in 1850. The same year he married Emily Sellwood. Tennyson died in 1892.



LET US KNOW

The year 1830 marks the break between the Romantic and Victorian ages. The great Romantics were Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats. By 1830, Shelley, Byron and Keats had already died and Wordsworth and Coleridge ceased to write anything of significance. Tennyson began the Victorian phase of the 19th century with his first collection of poems *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, published in 1830.

4.3.2 His Works

Tennyson had a prolific literary career that spans nearly six decades. In 1827, he published an early collection of poems, *Poems by Two Brothers*, which includes works by his brothers, Frederick and Charles. This marks his beginning as a published poet, followed by his own collection, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). This collection of poems introduced him as a poet capable of describing and reflecting on the external nature as well as exploring the 'landscape of the mind'. It goes to his credit as a poet that he could bring the two together. The inner states of mind are symbolised by the description of the external nature. Tennyson published *Poems* in December 1832. This volume was received with savage criticism in the *Quarterly Review*. After this, Tennyson did not publish anything for ten years. This period is called the 'ten years silence' and it was marked by his loss of direction and emotional instability.

He also suffered a great shock at the untimely death of his friend Hallam. In 1842, he published *Poems* in two volumes, the first volumes being composed earlier. This volume includes such masterly poems as "The Lady of Shallot" and "The Lotos Eater"; the second volumes contained newly composed poems such as"Locksley Hall", "Ulysses" etc. In 1847, Tennyson published *The Princess: A Medley*. *The Princess* consists of a Prologue, a

conclusion and seven parts. They tell the story of Princess Ida, daughter of King Gama. She prefers to live alone along with her female companions after rejecting marriage. The smaller piece "Tears, Idle Tears" is included in this volume.

Other notable inclusions are the memorable songs like "Sweet and low, sweet and low", "The splendour falls on castle walls".

The crowning glory of Tennyson's poetic career is, however, the immortal poem, *In Memoriam*, written as an elegy on the death of his friend, Arthur Hallam, and published in 1850. It was written in 132 short, connected lyrics. It is interesting to know that the poem was published anonymously and people did not recognise it as Tennyson's poem. Though, some verses were written soon after his friend's death in 1833, the poet had newly added verses to the poem. You may be interested to know that the title was suggested by Emily Sellwood, his future wife. Besides this philosophical poem and the masterly *The Princess: A Medley*, Tennyson wrote many poems on some contemporary happenings.

These poems were very popular during his days. In 1852, he produced one of the most successful public poems, "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" and in 1854, one of the most popular English patriotic poems "Charge of the Light Brigade". "Maud" (1854) is another memorable poem, which is a dramatic monologue, a characteristic Victorian poetic form. This poem, written during the Crimean War (1854) has three parts, and deals with a wide range of themes such as love, madness, war, social justice and equality. *Idylls of the King* (1859-72) is a series of poems on the popular stories of King Arthur written in a loose epic form.

It is clear from the above discussion that Tennyson wrote on a great range of subjects. Many modern critics have shown a lack of sympathy with Victorian ideals. It is instructive to know that it was T. S. Eliot who restored the position of Tennyson as a major Victorian poet.



LET US KNOW

The "**dramatic monologue**" is a poetic form which consists of a speech by a single character who reveals his innermost thoughts and feelings to a listener. The "dramatic monologue", unlike the soliloquy, is, however not written for the stage nor does it form a part of a play. Robert Browning was the most prominent exponent of the dramatic monologue, and Tennyson also used it several times. T. S. Eliot uses a form of the monologue, the 'interior monologue'.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which year was *In Memoriam* published? Whose death is lamented in the poem?

Q 2: What is a dramatic monologue? Name a dramatic monologue written by Tennyson.

Q 3: Which period in Tennyson's writing career is called the "ten years silence" and why?

4.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"Tears Idle Tears"

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some ***divine despair***
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes.
In looking on the happy Autumn- fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the ***underworld***,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.
Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds

To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The ***casement*** slowly grows a glimmering square:
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.
Dear as remember'd kisses after death.
And sweet as those by ***hopeless fancy feign'd***
On lips that are for others: deep as love,
Deep as first love and wild with all ***regret***;
O ***Death in Life***, the days that are no more.

4.4.1 Context of the Poem

Published in 1847 as a part of *The Princess*, "Tears, Idle Tears" deals with the subject of women in the modern world and presents the theme of higher education of women. The princess, who rejects marriage, wishes to educate women keeping them entirely free from male influence. Thus the subject of the poem is of great contemporary interest. After a day's hard work, Princess Ida asks one of her maidens to sing a song to offer much-needed relaxation. The poem is the resultant song sung by the maiden.

As the title of the poem suggests, the poet expresses his feeling of sadness as well as sweetness. The poet tries to explain the meaning of sorrow by personifying it, but he finds no cause or source for the sorrow. He tries to find the meaning and significance of the beauty and splendour of the rich harvest of Autumn fields. One feels happy to see the Autumn fields full of ripe harvest. At the same time, there is an element of sadness that brings tears to the eyes. Thus, the strange feeling of sadness and sweetness of the poet has been suggested in the title of the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: In which volume is the prescribed poem included?

Q 5: How does the poet combine the two different feelings?

4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

The title of the poem suggests that it is about the feeling of sadness ("tears") but the cause of the sorrow is difficult to define; hence the tears are "idle tears". The poem consists of four stanzas. You can notice that in all the four stanzas the expression the "days that are no more" is a common ***refrain*** that ends the stanza. The opening words are simple and without any ambiguity. The poet speaks of the "tears" whose meaning and significance he is unable to define or understand. They are caused by some "divine despair". Man has a divine origin. Until Darwin's discovery of "evolution", the Biblical story of man's origin and fall from paradise had dominated the Christian mind. The tears are perhaps due to the inevitable death of mortal man. The sense of longing, for the poet, is also futile and there is a despair which is an essential part of human existence. This despair may well up in our eyes as "tears" but tears may also be caused by a happy moment such as "the happy Autumn fields". The last line of the first stanza mentions the sadness of remembering the days that are no more. Both the occasions naturally bring tears to our eyes; so they are both sad and sweet.

The second stanza continues this duality in the image of the ship that emerges before our eyes with the light of the morning sun glittering on its sail. The recollection of the past days can be both sweet and bitter. It is sweet to remember the joys of the past but bitter or painful to think that it brings to our mind a sense of loss. The image of the ship brings out this special mixture very clearly. The ship emerges from and returns to the land over the horizon. As the poem is essentially concerned with the memory of the past, the poet appropriately compares this feeling about bygone days to the experience one has when anticipating the arrival of friends from afar, and then seeing them sail away beyond the horizon as they return to faraway lands.

In the third stanza, we can notice the image of the dying

man. You may notice the word "Ah" at the beginning of the stanza, suggesting a sense of pain. The speaker likens his emotions to those of a dying man who sees a summer dawn and hears birds piping outside his window. You can also notice the essential duality of life and death– the man is dying but the birds are chirping and the time is "dawn", the moment of the first appearing of light in the morning sky and, hence, the suggestion is that of a beginning. So the emotions experienced are sad and sweet, involving both death and life.The birds in the lines are "half-awaken'd", i.e., they are not fully awake but you can find the dying man is fully awake. You can also note the "dying ears" and "dying eyes". Both refer to the dying man. Being placed in the same line, the two phrases emphasise the gloom associated with death. The dying man's sight is failing but the ***casement*** seems to be glittering with the morning light. The memory of the past, the poet concludes, is similarly sad and strange.

Finally, as we reach the last stanza, we find that the speaker compares his feeling for the past to that of "remember'd kisses after death". It is not clear who dies and who lives on. The memory of the "remember'd kisses" in the past becomes sweet because of the distance in time, even when the beloved is no more. Sometimes, "kisses" can be unreal, mere imagination ("fancy") indulged in by a hopeless and rejected lover. But such kisses are equally sweet, even though the lips of the beloved are meant for others. The memory of the past lies deep in our heart like "love" in general or the "first love" which lasts the longest. Thus memory is as deep as the first love and as wild as the passionate sadness that the days have become and we can no longer get them back. The bygone days, suggested by the word "Death" are brought back to life through memory, but it is tinged with sadness with the realisation that those days are no more.

From the above explanation,you learn that "Tears, Idle Tears" is about memory of the past days. The poem is part of *The Princess* where a maiden sings the present lyric as a song. The song's purpose

is to tell the listeners about sadness which comes from reflecting on the past. But when we view the poem outside the context of *The Princess* in which it first appeared, we find that the major theme of the poem here is the sadness that accompanies our reflections on the past days. This sadness comes from the realisation that the joyful experiences of the past world never come back ("the days that are no more"), and never be enjoyed again. You may find it interesting to know what Tennyson himself said about the poem.

He said to his friend Frederick Locker-Lampson that the poem was motivated by the 'yearning that young people occasionally experience for that which seems to have passed away from them forever'. This statement agrees with Tennyson's own concern with the past and with his belief that man cannot relive his past times and experiences. However, we can observe that the poet has exercised considerable restraint in presenting his emotion.



LET US KNOW

"Tears, IdleTears" is a small lyric of a larger poem, "The Princess", which is about Princess Ida. The Princess lives with her female companions, rejecting marriage and male companionship, in a school she has founded for women's education, alone. A maiden sings the present lyric as a song.



ACTIVITY 4.1

1. Make a list of the images used by Tennyson to stress the combination of sweetness and sadness.
2. The poet mentions 'happy Autumn-fields'. Why are fields in autumn described as 'happy'?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What brings tears to the poet's eyes?

Q 7: What is the effect of past memory on the poet's mind?

Q 8: What does the poet mean by "happy Autumn-fields"?

Q 9: How is the present-time being expressed? Why are days in the past "strange"?



LET US KNOW

BLANK VERSE : Blank verse is unrhymed verse composed of lines that usually contain ten syllables and have stress on every second syllable.

TRANSFERRED EPITHET : Transferred epithet consists in the moving of an adjective from the word to which it properly belongs to another with which it is associated- such an epithet is said to be transferred. For example,

He spent a sleepless night.

He was engaged in a dishonest profession.



ACTIVITY 4.2

1. Compare the two poems, "Simon Lee" and "Tears, Idle Tears". Both are about the past. Can you describe in your own words how recollection of the past is different in each poem?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Which lines in the poem are most effective in conveying to us the sadness of the poet?

Q 11: What do you mean by 'transferred epithet'?

Q 12: "Ode to Autumn" is a poem by Keats/Shelley. Choose the right answer.

4.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

As far as the style and language of the poem are concerned, we are struck by the poet's handling of imagery and use of simple words. The imagery, particularly, focuses our attention on the melancholy and sense of irony which we experience with our contemplation of the passing of life.

You can observe that in each stanza there is a simple example to illustrate our sense of loss. In the first stanza, for example, the poet describes a person looking at the “happy Autumn-fields”. Autumn also indicates the coming of winter. One can reflect on the change of seasons and this reflection brings “tears, idle tears” to our eyes.

In the second stanza, you will note, this sense of loss is compared to the feeling of a person who is visited by his friends. The friends then leave him. This is a very difficult image. The person feels the joy of seeing the sunlight on the sail (“glittering on a sail”) as the ship bringing his friends is seen from a distance; but the same friends would depart in the ship, leaving the person filled with sadness. Note the words Tennyson uses to describe the arrival and departure of the friends. When they arrive they appear to be coming “up from the underworld”, and when they depart, the ship carrying them appears to sink “below the verge”. This is the image of a voyage. It has symbolic meaning of the voyage of life, passing from birth to death. Once the idea of death is indicated in the image of the ship bringing friends from the underworld, its logical connection with the next stanza can be seen in the mention of the “dying man” hearing the birds’ notes at dawn. The speaker means that his ‘idle tears’ are like the tears of the dying man who wakes up in the summer dawn and hears the birds chirp. Here is a strong melancholic note apt to bring tears. In the final stanza, the tears are compared to those in the eyes of the lover who remembers with joy and regret his love affair that has ended without any hope of renewal. Such a person experiences the condition of “Death in Life” because he is alive but his happy past days are gone forever.

From the above discussion, it is clear that the complex subject of the poem is rendered comprehensible by the use of language and imagery – a talent in which Tennyson is unmatched.

We can also point out the words whose sounds echo the poet’s feeling of sadness that causes tears to come to his eyes. The use of the words “tears”in the title is particularly striking with its repetition. Tennyson was acutely sensitive to sounds and had the gift of appealing to our ears even more than to our senses.Tennyson is considered the greatest Victorian

poet largely because of his range and volume of poetic output. He was a consummate artist who could experiment with different poetic forms from lyric to dramatic monologue and had the capacity to suit the form to the subject. By "poetic technique" we mean the poetic devices used in a particular poem.

You may observe from the above explanation of the poem that the poem is a lyric meant to be sung by a particular maiden. The opening line speaks of "tears" and "idle tears" which may lead us to expect that there will be unrestrained emotions with the poet indulging in the most familiar theme of the recollection of the past. But we find a very compact poem with the emotions being firmly under control.

The poetic technique used in the poem takes into account some formal devices such as blank verse lines and an extensive use of images to convey the sense of sadness and sweetness as the two opposite qualities of the human recollection of the past. You may also notice the meditative and conversational atmosphere and that each stanza is connected to the previous one by a closing phrase: "the days that are no more". This phrase is repeated to remind the reader of the passing of time. The use of imagery is also similarly directed towards conveying a sense of contrast between joy and sorrow with regard to our recollection of the past. Human memory is not selective. Therefore, the image of 'happy Autumn-fields' is followed by the image of a dying man.

Another technique used by the poet is personification. In the phrase "happy Autumn-fields", he has used a figure of speech called 'transferred epithet'. It is not the autumn fields which are happy but the person looking at them. A poetic effect is created by transferring the feeling from the person to the field.

Thus, it may be said that in "Tears, Idle Tears", Tennyson has achieved a great poetic effect by using the suitable, though conventional, techniques such as use of blank verse, figure of speech and imagery for his grave subject-matter which is the recollection of the past and how the recollections are apt to make us feel both sad and happy.



LET US KNOW

The word "underworld" means "the land of the dead". In the poem, it has the obvious meaning of the land to which the ship comes, and from which it departs. But its symbolic meaning is equally important as the world of the dead.



ACTIVITY 4.3

1. How appropriate is this poem for a maiden who is soothing a princess?
2. Why does Tennyson call the tears 'idle'?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: What does the poet mean by "Death in Life"?

Q 14: What does the repetition of the word "tears" in the poem signify?



4.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that Tennyson wrote the poem "Tears, Idle Tears" as a song to be sung by a maiden in the longer poem "The Princess : A Medley". In "The Princess", he shows Princess Ida as conducting a school for women to which men's entry is restricted. The poem is about our memory of the past which may be both sad and sweet. Never is the past always an unmixed blessing nor is our memory complete. As such, we shed tears for both the happy and unhappy past. A number of images have been used to describe memory, such as the image of the autumn fields, friends arriving and departing, a dying man and the half-awake birds' song at dawn etc. There is a sad, contemplative note through all the lines and Tennyson is particularly famous for the elegiac or mournful elements in his poetry.



4.7 FURTHER READING

1) *An Anthology of English Poetry*, Vol. 2 (For B.A. Major, B.A. Elective and M.A.) Gauhati University.
2) Daiches, David (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature*.Vol 4 New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
3) Ousby, Ian (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.
4) *Poetry Down the Ages*. The Board of Studies (English).Mizoram University.Orient Longman.



4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: 1850, elegy on the death of his friend Arthur Hallam.

Ans to Q No 2: A poetic form (Elaborate), Maud (1854)

Ans to Q No 3: The period following the published work *Poem* in December, 1832 which met violent criticism, marked by his loss of direction and emotional instability.

Ans to Q No 4: Part of *The Princess*.

Ans to Q No 5: Refer to 4.4.1 Context of the Poem

Ans to Q No 6: Refer to 4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 7: Refer to 4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 8: "Transferred Epithet" Refer to 4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 9: Refer to 4.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

Ans to Q No 10: Refer to 4.4 Text of the Poem

Ans to Q No 11: Poetic device– moving of an adjective from the word to which it properly belongs to another with which it is associated.

Ans to Q No 12: John Keats.

Ans to Q No 13: Refer to 4.5 Style and Language

Ans to Q No 14: Tears– words whose sounds echo the poet's feeling of sadness that causes tears to come to his eyes.



4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is the central idea in the poem?

Q 2: Describe the images that Tennyson uses in the poem to convey his sweet and sad feelings.

Q 3: Discuss the life and works of Lord Alfred Tennyson

Q 4: "So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more". What "days" is the poet referring to?

Q 5: "O Death in Life, the days that are no more". What is referred to here? What effect do the days have on the poet's mind?

Q 6: Explain with reference to the context.

a) "Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes"

b) "In looking on the happy Autumn- fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 5 : W. B. YEATS : "AN IRISH AIRMAN FORESEES HIS DEATH"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 W. B. Yeats: The Poet

- 5.3.1 His Life
- 5.3.2 His Works

5.4 The Text of the Poem

- 5.4.1 Context of the Poem
- 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

5.5 Style and Language

5.6 Let Us Sum Up

5.7 Further Reading

5.8 Answers To Check Your Progress

5.9 Model Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- familiarise yourself with the life and works of W. B. Yeats
- explain the context and content of the poem "An Irishman Foresees His Death"
- discuss the style and language of the poem
- appreciate the poem in its totality.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we have taken up a major poem titled "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" by W. B. Yeats. You must have heard and read on this great poet who had won Nobel prize for Literature in 1923. The poetry of Yeats has great aesthetic beauty with a patriotic fervour particularly in relation to the Irish cause. In this unit, we will give you a birds'-eye view of the poet

W. B. Yeats and his poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death". The focus in this unit is on this particular poem, regarding its context, style and language. There is also a textual discussion. After reading this unit you may be motivated into reading his other poems and about his eventful life as well as grasp the poetic techniques he uses.

5.3 W. B. YEATS: THE POET

W. B. Yeats was a famous Irish poet who bridges the gap between the Victorians and the Moderns. He began as a late Victorian romantic poet and ended as a twentieth century modern poet fully abreast of the newer generations. His poetic genius can be traced by comparing the beautiful, simple, romantic poems like "When you are Old", "Lake Isle of Innisfree" with the profound "Byzantium" poems that appeared much later. He is regarded as the national poet of Ireland and the Irish background forms the very ***crux*** of his poetry. Let us now, delve into the life of this poet and the numerous works he wrote.

5.3.1 His Life

W. B. Yeats was an Irish poet born on June 13 in the year 1865 in Dublin. He was the eldest son of John Butler Yeats who was a painter and who was greatly influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites. His mother was a homely girl from ***Sligo***. She was full of love for the country side. W. B. Yeats was greatly influenced by both his parents .The intellectual side of his personality can be attributed to his father and his mother was instrumental in kindling his emotional instincts.

W. B. Yeats, in his boyhood was actually ugly and lanky and therefore he was often ridiculed by the boys in the school. This made him very self-conscious. He often ran away from school and was also severely punished at home but to no avail.

In 1876, Yeats' family shifted to London but he stayed back and spent his carefree days in the magical countryside in Ireland with his grandparents .The beauty of the place kindled his emotions and for the first time he started expressing his thoughts in verse.

Here,in the country-side he was introduced to and fascinated by Irish folklore, fairy tales and the supernatural tales and he tried to blend these aspects into his poetry. When his family returned again in1880, he was sent to Harcourt High School in Dublin. His father's ***skepticism*** had an effect on him and he criticised Christianity outright. He was soon disgusted with school-life and gave up school. But he enjoyed reading books by Balzac, Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, and others and their perusal left a deep impression on his mind.

Yeats later joined an art school and made friends with the well known philosopher George Russell. It was through Edward Dowden, a prominent writer, that some of his earliest poems were published.

In 1889, he published *The Wanderings of Oissin and Other Poems*. This volume is an outstanding landmark in the poetic career of Yeats. It was during this period that Yeats came into contact with Maud Gonne, the daughter of an English colonel and a revolutionary. She remained a constant source of inspiration for him and he often symbolised her as ***Helen of Troy***. It was during this period that he developed an interest in Indian theology as a result of his friendship with the Indian Purohit Swami who helped him in translating the *Upanishads*.

He joined the ***Rhymer's Club*** in 1891 and showed keen interest in *"**aestheticism**"* and the French Symbolist movement.

In 1896 he met Lady Gregory who became, for nearly forty years, a friend, patron and a co worker along with the dramatist, J. M. Synge. These two cast a lasting impression on his life, his personality and poetry.

And in the year 1902, he started working for the Irish National Theatre. He worked there till 1910. Since he was involved in many controversies he left everything and turned to poetry. After the death of John Macbride, husband of Maud Gonne, he again proposed to her but she refused. The disillusionment of his failure in love is clearly

reflected in the poems written during this period. In the year 1916 he was offered the Knighthood by the British government.

In 1917, he married Miss George Hyde Lees whom he had known for some years. His marriage brought stability to his life and it also proved to be the starting point of an altogether unexpected combination of the romantic and the realistic strains of his poetry. He lived a blissful married life with a daughter born in 1919 and a son in the year 1921. Along with the stability in his life came the maturity of his style.

Mrs Yeats attempted ***automatic writing*** and she produced odd sentences on subjects of which she knew nothing. Yeats was excited and stimulated and he spent hours in interpreting the "automatic script". Yeats was the co-founder of the Abbey Theatre and served as an Irish senator for a few years. In 1923 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. During the last phase of his life he sank into disillusionment and a sense of defeat and inadequacy enveloped him. In fact this sense of disillusionment led him to produce some of his best poetry. In the year 1927-28, he fell ill with consumption and though he recovered temporarily, he succumbed to this grave illness on January 28, 1939. He was buried in the churchyard at Drumcliff, near County Sligo. The epitaph on his gravestone reads: *Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by.* –W. B. Yeats.



LET US KNOW

Yeats dominated the literary world in Ireland as a poet, playwright, essayist, autobiographer. His main poetical works from the Irish Renaissance are: *In the Seven Woods* (1904), *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Responsibilities* (1914), *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919), and *Michael Roberts and the Dancer* (1921).

5.3.2 His Works

Let us now, survey the major works of W. B. Yeats. His first publication was a play, *Mosado* (1886) and two years later he began with *The Wandering of Oisin*, a series of ballads and poems that established his reputation. His important poetical works like *The Rose* (1893)*,The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) was formed from his knowledge of Irish folklore and folktales, and his interest in mysticism and the occult. Irish history and the recent surge in Irish nationalism, together with his adoration of the nationalist Maud Gonne formed the major basis of his second phase of writing style which became less lilting and incantatory as seen in *In the Seven Woods* (1903), *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* (1910), *Poems: Written in Disappointment* (1913), and *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (1914).

An experiment with automatic writing eventually produced the system of mystical symbols elaborated in *A Vision* (1925), which articulate many of the poems in collections such as *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), *Seven Poems and a Fragment* (1922), *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems* (1924), *The Tower* (1928), and *The Winding Stairs and Other Poems* (1933).



LET US KNOW

Yeats was greatly impressed by the poems of Rabindranath Tagore and was largely instrumental in getting the *Gitanjali* translated into English and published in England. He contributed an appreciative introduction to the English edition of *Gitanjali*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Name the major influences on Yeats as a poet?

Q 2: Which part of Yeats's life will be important for

the study of the given poem?

Q 3: Which collection of his poetry contains the poem "An Irish Man Foresees His Death"*?*

5.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"An Irishman Foresees His Death"

I Know that I shall ***meet my fate***
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I ***fight*** I do not hate
Those that I ***guard*** I do not love;
My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public man, nor ***cheering crowds***,
A lonely ***impulse*** of delight
Drove to this ***tumult***in the clouds;
I balanced all, ***brought all to mind***,
The years to come seemed ***waste of breath***,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

5.4.1 Context of the Poem

This is rather a thought-provoking poem on Major Robert Gregory, who was the son of one of Yeats's friends. Robert Gregory was killed in Italy during the First World War in 1918. The poem was written during the First World War (1914-1919) when many Irish men fought for the cause of Englishmen. The poem is taken from the collection *The Wild Swans at Coole*. During the first World War, Ireland was a part of "Great Britian". It became a separate nation later in1922. Therefore, when Gregory died, he actually died for the "English", not for the "Irish". The pilot sees his forthcoming death

yet he does not seem regretful or scared, but rather accepts the fate he is going to encounter.

5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

This poem captures the mind of an airman confronting death. This insight is what makes the poem memorable. This poem is about an Irish pilot fighting in the war and anticipating his imminent death. He is prepared to die after reflecting on his life. He realises that it has been a waste of time. This is reflected in the line, "A waste of breath the years behind / In balance with this life, this death." (Yeats).

It was the life of adventure that prompted the Irish airman to fight. He was totally disgusted with the monotony of daily life and he sought the thrill of the Air Force. He explicitly states that it was not under any obligation for the country nor the inspiring speeches of the leaders or the cheering of the crowds that provoked him to fight in the battlefield. It was simply the thrill of the battlefield or adventure that pushed him to take up the job of an ***Airman***.

Its must be noted that being an Irish-man Robert Gregory did not have any deep love for England. His country is ***Kiltartan's Cross***, his countrymen "Kiltartan's poor". He says that whatever is the outcome in the war it will make their lives no worse or better than before the war began. The airman lists every factor weighing upon his situation and his vision of death. He rejects every possible factor he believes to be false: he does not hate or love his enemies or his allies, his country will neither be benefited nor hurt by any outcome of the war. He does not fight for political or moral motives but because of his "impulse of delight". His past life seems a waste, while his future life promises to be the same and his death will balance out his life. He feels that only death in war can balance his life of dullness.

Don't you think that the expression, "A lonely impulse of delight / Drove to this tumult in the clouds"contains the entire perception of W. B. Yeats? Don't you think that this poem is inspiring

and can rouse plenty of its readers from lethargy? It can serve as the stimulus or incentive to take up a life of adventure.



LET US KNOW

We can draw a similarity between "An Irish man Foresees his Death" and "The Wrecker Driver Foresees Your Death," by David Baker in the sense that it readily hints at the foreshadowing of death. Baker uses the second-person pronoun "you" to warn his readers as well as the poem's reflective speaker, active speaker, reminding all of us of our mortality :

Looking at the rows of cars wrinkled
like wads of paper,
windshields webbed with cracks,
oil still oozing from the fresh ones
hauled in the night before, ……

("The Wrecker Driver Foresees Your Death" by David Baker)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Explain the importance of the lines "Those That I fight I do not Hate / Those that I guard I do not love".

Q 5: Explain what the poet mean by 'A lonely impulse of delight/ Drove to this tumult in the clouds'.

Q 6: Fill in the blanks :

Nor ....., Nor .....bade me fight,
Nor ....., Nor .....cheering .....
A .....impulse of .....
Drove to this .....in the clouds.



ACTIVITY 5.1

1. Imagine yourself as an airman fighting for your country and express your patriotic feelings in a few sentences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: "I know that I shall meet my fate?'' What is the "fate" he will meet? Is it going to be death with honour?

Q 8: Explain the metaphor "Drove to this tumult in the clouds."

Q 9: Explain :

a) "Cheering crowds"

b) "impulse"

c) "tumult"

Q 10: Why does he call the impulse, an "impulse of delight"? What does "delight" imply here?



ACTIVITY 5.2

1. Can you think of some other poem where a first person voice is used?

5.5 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The language of Yeats's poetry is plain and has the simplicity of everyday speech. He expresses ideas briefly and sharply. The language of the poem is simple and suggestive. The poem is recited in first person which makes the poem more interesting to read. The poem is written in a colloquial, pointed, ***epigrammatic*** and conversational style. This short sixteen-line poem has a very simple structure: lines are metered in ***iambic tetrameter***, and four grouped ***quatrains*** of alternating rhymes: *ababcdcdefefghgh.* Words were chosen carefully to fit the rhyme scheme and to make it more interesting to the reader. The simple form of the poem reflects the simple theme of the poem.

You have already learnt the poem "When You Are Old" by Yeats. By now you must have understood how the poet employs some poetic techniques. In this poem he uses metaphor to make contrasts and comparisons. The metaphor "Drove to this tumult in the clouds". (Yeats)

explains that the speaker had reached the zenith of his flight as well as the zenith of his life. From here he will encounter his death.

Another example of a ***metaphor*** presented in this poem is "A waste of breath the years behind." (Yeats). This is a metaphor which compares the years that have passed and how they were a waste of time. An example of ***irony*** found in the poem is when he says he does not love or want to protect the people of his country, yet when people go to war they usually fight for the honour of their country. Don't you think that the title of the poem is suggestive? The title of the poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" reflects the fact that the airman foresaw his impending death. This is significant because it reflects the fact that many people fighting on the war-front anticipating their death.

You can see that this poem is recited in first-person. The poet is recounting the thoughts that are going through his mind as his death approaches. This choice of voice i.e. "active voice" is important because it gives an insight into the thoughts of the airman fighting on the verge of death. It is the poet who is imagining these thoughts. As he does so he brings up related ideas and questions.



LET US KNOW

English is a language of stresses i.e. stress-timed rhythm, which means that the stress syllables come at approximately equal intervals of time, regardless of the number of the intervening unstressed syllables. Metre is the term used to indicate the number of stressed syllables that form beats (or feet) and the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line of a poem. Most of English poetry is written in this metre and to comprehend metrical patterns it is important to enjoy poetry .Lets take a sentence like

"A Change of air would do you good"

u / u / u / u /

This kind of rhythm is called iambic metre.

IGNOU BOOKLET–BEGE-101
(From Language to Literature –Literary Devices)
And
Marjorie Boulton's *The Anatomy of Poetry*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: The poem is written in a .....style (tick the most appropriate one)

a) complex b) pointed c) musical

Q 12: Can you find out which syllables are stressed in : "A waste of breath the years behind"?

Q 13: What are the main thoughts of the speaker in the lines "A waste of breath the years behind".



5.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that W. B. Yeats was one of the greatest modern English poets. He can truly be regarded as the poet of the Irish literary revival. "An Irish Airman Foresees Death" inspires readers to wake up from lethargy and move towards an exciting and meaningful life. It also looks at some basic human situations and experiences of life. You then learn about the poetic techniques employed by the poet and also about the style and language. You should now be able to illustrate, explain and appreciate W. B. Yeats' poetry in general and the poem in particular effectively.



5.7 FURTHER READING

1) *IGNOU. Understanding Poetry.IGNOU : New Delhi*, *1991.*

2) Larrisy, Edward (1998). *W. B. Yeats. Tavistock North Cote House.*

3) Poduri Dattatreya (2000). *W. B. Yeats Poet and Dramatist*. Jaipur

Pointer Publisher.

4) Singh, M. P. (2003). *W. B. Yeats : His Poetry and Politics New Delhi Atlantic*



5.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Intellectual side of personality (father), emotional instincts (mother), beauty of the magical contryside in Ireland with his grand parents shaped his early expression

Ans to Q No 2: Refer to 5.3.1 His Life 5.3.2 His Works

Ans to Q No 3:*TheWild Swans at Coole*

Ans to Q No 4: Refer to 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 5: Refer to 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 6: Law, duty, public man, cheering crowds, lonely, delight, tumult.

Ans to Q No 7: Refer to 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem and 5.5 Style and Language.

Ans to Q No 8: Refer to 5.5 Style and Language.

Ans to Q No 9: Cheering Crowds : crowds of people who applaud

Impulse : sudden inclination to act without thinking about results.

Tumult : Disturbance caused by battle

Ans to Q No 10: Refer to 5.4.2 Explanation of the Poem.

Ans to Q No 11: (b) Pointed

Ans to Q No 12: Refer to 5.5 Style and Language

Ans to Q No 13: A metaphor which compares the years that have passed and how they were a waste of time (to elaborate.)



5.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write in about 100 words the substance of the poem "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death".

Q 2: Discuss the life and works of W.B. Yeats.

Q 3: Discuss the style and language employed by the poet in this poem.

Q 4: Name in the light of the poem, some of the reasons that may force a man to fight?

Q 5: Comment on the feelings of the airman for the cause of his fighting?

Q 6: Comment on the greatness of W. B. Yeats as a modern poet.

Q 7: Explain with reference to the context:

a) My country is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan's poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before

b) "A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 6 : D.H. LAWRENCE: “SNAKE”

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 D.H. Lawrence: The Poet

- 6.3.1 His Life
- 6.3.2 His Works

6.4 The Text of the Poem

- 6.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

6.5 Major Themes

6.6 Style and Language

6.7 Let Us Sum Up

6.8 Further Reading

6.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

6.10 Model Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain an insight into the life and works of the English poet D.H. Lawrence
- explain both the content and context of the poem “Snake”
- explore the relevant themes pertaining to the poem
- grasp the style and language employed in the text of the poem.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit introduces the learner to the remarkable 20th century English novelist and poet D. H. Lawrence and presents a detailed study of one of his widely anthologised poems titled “Snake”. The range of his literary work includes novels, novellas, short-stories, essays, poems, plays, and travel narratives as well. Despite the widespread literary criticism and political controversies that Lawrence had confronted during his writing

career, eventually his literary worth and credibility had received its due share of recognition, as also highly noted by writers like E.M. Forster and F.R. Leavis. Lawrence was better known as an English novelist although he excelled in all forms of writings as is also visible from the range of his works. Lawrence wrote poetry prior to starting out as a writer and his first poems had been published in *The English Review* titled as "Dreams Old" and "Dreams Nascent". All together, his poetical output comprised a total of around eight hundred poems. As a writer, Lawrence was a perfectionist when it came to revising and editing his works for publication. Moreover, he was also an excellent painter who held a lifelong passion for oil painting.

6.3 D.H. LAWRENCE: THE POET

Let us then explore the life and works of one of the most prominent writers of the 20th century, D.H. Lawrence.

6.3.1 His Life

Dereck Herbert Richards Lawrence (1885-1930) was born to Arthur John Lawrence and Lydia Beardsall in a humble working class family. He was brought up in the mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire where his father had served as a coal miner. You can well imagine how difficult and challenging is the life of coal miners who work and extract coal in the gloomy underground tunnels. Thus the Lawrence family had to work hard in order to meet their needs. As a young boy, Lawrence had seen much trouble in the early part of his life, fragments of which are captured in the best of his literary works.

He received his early education at the Beauvale Board School and the Nottingham High School on scholarship. Although he was not really inclined towards studies, his mother inculcated in him a lifelong love of books, music and literature. After having finished his school education, he briefly worked at the Haywood's surgical appliances factory and then joined the British School, Eastwood as

a pupil teacher. And in the due course of time, he went on to receive a teaching certificate from the University College of Nottingham. With the sprouting of his literary abilities, he had begun to write and publish some of his early works which comprised poems, short stories and fiction. As a young man who had only started his writing pursuits, Lawrence suffered a huge setback in life when he lost his mother with whom he had shared a special bond. After the publication of his second novel, he had suffered a second bout of pneumonia but very soon decided to give up teaching in order to pursue his passion in writing.

During this phase of his life, he had also eloped with Frieda Weekly (who had three children from her first marriage) to Germany, where the couple married later in 1914. Together they travelled and spent considerable time in Italy and London where the couple also met the modern short-story writer Katherine Mansfield and the Welsh poet W.H. Davies. While in London, he also met modernist poets Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. He was mistakenly charged of being a spy during wartime and this had proved to be a difficult phase for the writer. Further, it also led him to take voluntary exile from England which is why, the couple travelled across countries right from Italy to France, Sicily to Germany, Austria to Australia and Mexico to Sri Lanka. These travels had enriched his literary narratives to a great extent.

6.3.2 His Works

Some of the best works of fiction by Lawrence are *The White Peacock* (1911), *The Trespasser* (1912), *Sons and Lovers* (1913), *The Rainbow* (1915), *Women in Love* (1920), *The Lost Girl* (1920), *Aaron's Rod* (1922), *Kangaroo* (1923), *The Boy in the Bush* (1924), *The Plumed Serpent* (1926), *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and *The Escaped Cock* (1929). The anthologies of poetry are titled *Love Poems and Others* (1913), *Amores* (1916), *Look! We Have Come Through!* (1917), *New Poems* (1918), *Bay: A Book of Poems* (1919),

Tortoises (1921), *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923), *Pansies* (1929) and *Nettles* (1930).

The learner may try reading some of his short stories from anthologies such as *The Prussian Officer and Other Stories* (1914), *England, My England and Other Stories* (1922), *The Fox, the Captain's Doll, The Ladybird* (1923), *The Woman Who Rode Away and Other Stories* (1928) or *Love Among the Haystacks and Other Stories* (1930). A few of the widely read short stories of Lawrence are: "The Captain's Doll", "The Fox", "The Ladybird" and "Odour of Chrysanthemums". Lawrence had also written a few plays namely *The Daughter-in-Law* (1912), *The Widowing of Mrs. Holroyd* (1914), *Touch and Go* (1920), *David* (1926), *The Fight for Barbara* (1933), *A Collier's Friday Night* (1934), *The Married Man* (1940) and *The Merry-Go-Round* (1941). His travels across continents are well documented in his travel narratives such as *Twilight in Italy and Other Essays* (1916), *Sea and Sardinia* (1921), *Mornings in Mexico and Other Essays* (1927) and *Sketches of Etruscan Places and Other Italian Essays* (1932).

Despite the financial difficulties and socio-political challenges in the journey of his life and career, Lawrence continued to write and publish the best of his works. Lawrence spent his final years writing and struggling with illness. He breathed his last on March 2, 1930 after suffering from tuberculosis and his ashes were interred at a chapel in New Mexico.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Write a few words on about the birthplace and early years of D.H. Lawrence.

Q 2: Name some of the best works of fiction by D.H. Lawrence.

Q 3: Name a few of the widely read short stories by D.H. Lawrence.

6.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

The poem "Snake" was first published in the collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923) which was written in Sicily. Let us briefly read through the text of the poem before we explore its meaning and emerging themes and ideas.

"Snake"

A snake came to my water-**trough**
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.
In the deep, strange-scented shade of the great dark carob-tree
I came down the steps with my **pitcher**
And must wait, must stand and wait, for there he was at the trough before
me.
He reached down from a **fissure** in the earth-wall in the gloom
And **trailed** his yellow-brown **slackness** soft-bellied down, over the edge of
the stone trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.
Someone was before me at my water-trough,
And I, like a second comer, waiting.
He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do,
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do,
And **flickered** his two-forked tongue from his lips, and **mused** a moment,
And **stooped** and drank a little more,
Being earth-brown, earth-golden from the burning bowels of the earth
On the day of Sicilian July, with Etna smoking.

The voice of my education said to me
He must be killed,
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are innocent, the gold are **venomous**.
And voices in me said, If you were a man
You would take a stick and break him now, and finish him off.
But must I **confess** how I liked him,
How glad I was he had come like a guest in quiet, to drink at my water-trough
And depart peaceful, **pacified**, and thankless,
Into the burning **bowels** of this earth?
Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it **perversity**, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?
I felt so honoured.
And yet those voices:
If you were not afraid, you would kill him!
And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid, But even so, honoured still more
That he should seek my **hospitality**
From out the dark door of the secret earth. (metaphor)
He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,
Seeming to lick his lips,
And looked around like a god, unseeing, into the air,
And slowly turned his head,
And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice adream,
Proceeded to draw his slow length curving round
And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.
And as he put his head into that dreadful hole,
And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered farther,

A sort of horror, a sort of protest against his withdrawing into that **horrid** black hole,
Deliberately going into the blackness, and slowly drawing himself after,
Overcame me now his back was turned.

I looked round, I put down my pitcher,
I picked up a **clumsy log**
And threw it at the water-trough with a **clatter**.
I think it did not hit him,
But suddenly that part of him that was left behind **convulsed** in undignified **haste**.
Writhed like lightning, and was gone
Into the black hole, the earth-lipped **fissure** in the wall-front,
At which, in the intense still noon, I stared with fascination.
And immediately I regretted it.
I thought how **paltry**, how **vulgar**, what a mean act!
I despised myself and the voices of my **accursed** human education.
And I thought of the **albatross**
And I wished he would come back, my snake.
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in **exile**, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.
And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords
Of life.
And I have something to **expiate**:
A **pettiness**.
(Taormina, 1923)



LET US KNOW

Georgian Poets: The Georgian poets of the 20th century comprised a group of English poets such as Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves, Walter de la Mare,

William Henry Davies, Siegfried Sassoon, John Drinkwater, Edmund Charles Blunden among a few others and D.H. Lawrence as well. They were interested in introducing newness in English poetry through expressions of lyrical romanticism and their writings coincided with the new reign of George V in 1910. The period between the years 1911-1922 was a fertile period for Georgian poets and their writings.

6.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

In the opening line of the poem, the first image that we receive is that of a ‘snake’ as observed by the narrator at a close distance. The snake in its thirst for water on a burning hot day, takes a drink at the water trough. You may perhaps imagine a snake relieving its thirst under the shade of a tree well before anyone would approach a water trough. Thus, the narrator is taken by surprise at the unexpected sight and stands at a safe distance waiting and watching the snake under the shade of a “strange-scented” carob tree. Now, the carob is an evergreen tree that boasts of a broad leafy crown, a thick trunk and strong branches that bear brown bean pods. You may find it interesting to know that cakes, cookies or chocolates are made from ‘carob powder’ that is produced from the seeds of the bean pods (much like cocoa powder). Here, the snake is seen enjoying its right of being the first at the water trough and keeping a person on hold while it partakes of its share of drink.

The narrator waits with a pitcher and speculates on how the yellowish brown snake must have crawled out from the crack in a mud wall and slithered to the edge of the stone trough on its soft under belly, resting its throat on the trough for a drink of water. The trough described in the poem is probably made up of stone and cement, which acts like a storage of water from the taps. Here the snake rests its throat on the stone bottom to sip the water softly, without a sound and to relieve its thirst. While the narrator describes the entire scene, one can almost feel the shade of the carob tree,

the silence of the surroundings outside and the water running through the long body of the snake. And the narrator almost immediately personifies the snake with the use of the term "someone" who reaches the trough a little earlier than the "second comer" who has to wait for his turn.

Then, suddenly the snake lifts its crown from the trough and becomes aware of the narrator's presence. At this moment, the snake only flicks its forked tongue to sense its immediate surroundings, almost gazing at the narrator for a few seconds. The snake had been the subject of the narrator's observation so far but now, the narrator becomes the subject of the snake's observation. As it sensed no danger in the narrator's presence, it took another drink of water. The snake is described as earthy probably owing to its down-to-earth nature and also its earth-brown or earth-golden colour. It seems as though the snake had almost appeared from the burning belly of the earth itself. In all probability we can imagine this entire scene in our own Indian context with which we are familiar but the present location of the poem is in a place known as Sicily, in Italy. Sicily is an independent island in southern Italy and towards the east coast of Sicily lies an active volcano known as Mount Etna. Although, a series of eruptions have occurred here, the last being in December 2015, the city Catania or town of Taormina (where the poem had been written) are both well-populated and popular tourist spots as well. Owing to these reasons, the poet talks of "Sicilian July" month and the "smoking" Mount Etna.

While the snake went about its normal activity without being disturbed or causing any form of disturbance, the narrator's mind becomes preoccupied with thoughts of disturbing the snake from its place. This, the narrator felt was his rational mind and his education that had unconsciously trained his mind to think in this manner. Thus, one can easily note the difference in behaviour of the snake which held a calm composure and the narrator who had unknowingly turned into a potential danger. The poet then reasons

that unlike the harmless black snakes in Italy, the golden ones were venomous which only justified it’s killing. His manly instincts directed him to act rationally and kill the snake. But, the narrator also admits how he had a liking for this silent guest who had quietly taken a drink from the trough and left peacefully after satisfying its thirst. The narrator tried to examine his mind, to search for the reasons that had stopped him from killing the snake. He questions himself on whether it is his lack of courage or whether it was his fascination of the snake. Whatever the reasons were, the narrator reiterates that he had somehow felt honoured to have had the chance of being hospitable to a visiting guest.

But the voices in his head did not allow him to be at peace which is why he had to assure himself that it was not his sense of fear that stopped him from taking an action. Yet, another reiterated description of the snake, shows how the mind of the narrator is absolutely captivated by the image of the snake. The narrator then observes how the snake took a momentary glance at the surrounding area and turned its length slowly, towards the direction of the mud wall. But just as it entered the hole, the narrator felt a strong urge of protesting against the snake’s ungrateful departure. The fact that the snake withdrew to its retreat and turned its back on him, made the narrator angry, thus leading him to pick up a piece of log and hurl it towards the water-trough in a bid to scare the snake and make it realise what it had done. The snake swiftly made its way and disappeared into the mouth of the crack in the wall. Strangely enough, even the sight of the snake in fear of its life continued to fascinate the narrator on that hot summer noon. But his feelings were not without a sense of regret.

The narrator suddenly realised that his actions were uncalled for and indeed much cruel and inhumane on his part. This made him dislike not just his own actions but the modes of education that had moulded his thoughts and behaviour. His actions reminded him of an albatross, probably referring to the bird in S.T. Coleridge’s

Rime of the Ancient Mariner, where the Mariner shoots and kills an innocent albatross intentionally. In the poem, the curse on the guilty Mariner was lifted only when he had truly begun to appreciate the beauty of the coiling snakes that swum in the sea. Thus, the narrator is left with the feeling of guilt and regret, missing the presence of the snake and wondering how he could have taken the opportunity of presenting himself more kindly and hospitably to the splendid being that was forced into exile. And comparing the snake to a Lord of Life, the narrator feels that he certainly had to make amends for his improper thoughts and actions.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why is the narrator taken by surprise?

Q 5: What is the present context of the poem?

Q 6: Briefly describe the conflict of both fear yet fascination in the mind of the narrator.

6.5 MAJOR THEMES

Image of the Snake

The central image in the poem is that of a snake which is gentle and means no harm to the narrator. In fact, it continues its normal activity of drinking from the water trough even as it realises that the narrator is present. Initially it does not sense any danger that it may have to confront but in a few minutes, it turns out that the narrator becomes the potential danger and almost a threat to its life. The snake in the poem is almost like a gentleman who "softly" and "silently" drinks its fill without disturbing anyone or causing any trouble. Although golden snakes in Sicily are considered venomous, this earth-brown snake crawls away in fear even when it is provoked.

The snake has a silent presence in the poem until it is compelled to hurriedly to its own safety. Moreover, it appears to be jolted from its dream-like state to its sense of reality. The snake's sleeping instinct is awakened the moment the narrator hurls an attack. But, the most important point is

that the snake is innocent and means no harm even when it faces trouble. Snakes are widely seen as a creepy and unpredictable being but the truth is they are more shy and defensive by nature. While many people regard snakes as unwanted creatures there are many cultures across the world that worship snakes, for an instance in Indian culture snakes are worshipped on auspicious occasions such as *nag panchami* or *shivratri*. The poet too compares the snake to a "god" and to a "king in exile" or a "king of the underworld" that maintains its sense of composure and gravity even in the face of danger.

Man and Education

When the narrator first notices the snake, he feels a sense of honour and amazement to unexpectedly find the visiting guest. Thus, the initial response of the narrator is that of a hospitality but it is his "voice of education" that comes in the way and causes him to switch his thoughts and actions. The rational or practical voice in his head led him to consider killing the snake as golden snakes were considered venomous. Moreover, his sense of ego challenged him to finish off the snake all at once without being so emotional. But, the truth was that the narrator liked the snake in its grace and innocence. Thus, he questions himself on whether it was cowardice that gave him a sense of fear, and whether it was his perversity to talk to the snake up-close or humility to have changed his thoughts of killing it for once and for all. Yet the voices in his head did not stop telling him that : *If you were not afraid, you would kill him!*

We are trained or educated to be practical in all situations right from our school days. And when the mind is moulded in a particular way, it is difficult to unlearn all that has been coded in our thought processes. The poet talks of a similar situation that flashes before him in just a matter of a few seconds. Also, the narrator finds that it is difficult to justify one's actions and sometimes we simply end up doing things that reflect how our brains are wired in a unique way. Here, in the poem we literally find the confused state of the narrator's mind. The moment the snake withdraws from the spot, the "honour" of the poet is suddenly transformed into "horror" and he turns unexpectedly angry seeing the snake turn its back on the

host. Even after having regretted his own actions for almost hurting the snake, he watches the snake in "fascination" as though it were some kind of experiment. Then again, it is the voice of reason that makes him realise that his actions were "petty" and "vulgar" that he had to expiate for.

6.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The first image that strikes the reader is that of a snake at a water-trough on a hot day. Throughout the poem, the charm of the snake fascinates the mind of the narrator who almost readily personifies the snake and refers to the snake as "he". For an instance, "he was at the trough before me", "he reached down from a fissure", "he sipped with his straight mouth" "someone was before me" etc. The learner may take note of the narrator's self assertion with the use of his "I", "my" for an instance, "And I. like a second-comer waiting", "my water-trough", "my wall-face", "my snake" to cite a few more examples. The poem contains seventy four lines written in free verse with the use of repetition, similes, metaphors and onomatopoeia.

You may note, that the narrator emphasises his description of the snake's presence together with his own response through the use of repetitive phrases such as "hot, hot day", "And must wait, must stand and wait", "And trailed…. And rested….And where the water…." "Earth-brown, earth-golden", "For in Sicily, the black black snakes", "Was it cowardice….Was it perversity….Was it humility…", "I felt so honoured, I felt so honoured" or "And slowly, very slowly." Some of the onomatopoeic sounds in the poem which add a dash of life and movement in the poem are words like "strange scented shade", "slackness soft-bellied", "mused a moment", "burning bowels", "peaceful, pacified", "lick his lips" and "uncrowned in the underworld".

Through the use of similes, the thirsty snake is compared to "drinking cattle", the satiated snake to that of "one who has drunken", the scared snake to "lightening", the grandeur of the snake to that of a "king in exile", as well as, to that of "God." Some of the metaphors used in the poems are "one of the Lords of Life", "the voice of my education", "the dark door of the secret earth" or "guest in quiet." Altogether, the powerful presence of the snake and the muddled thoughts of the narrator are well represented in the

words and images of the poem. The snake in its measure of soft, silent and "snake-easing" movements literally stirs the reader's imagination through the description of the narrator who tries to capture this moment of one particular day.



6.7 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to discuss both the life and works of D.H. Lawrence, apart from exploring one of his widely anthologised poems "Snake". A thorough reading of the textual explanation, the major themes and style and language will enable the learner to appreciate the core message that the poem conveys.



6.8 FURTHER READING

1) https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/d-h-lawrence.



6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Dereck Herbert Richards Lawrence (1885-1930) was born to Arthur John Lawrence and Lydia Beardsall in a humble working class family. He was brought up in the mining town of Eastwood, Nottinghamshire where his father had served as a coal miner.

Ans to Q No 2: Some of the best works of fiction by Lawrence are *The White Peacock*, *The Trespasser*, *Sons and Lovers*, *The Rainbow*, *Women in Love*, *The Lost Girl*, *Aaron's Rod*, *Kangaroo*, *The Boy in the Bush*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *The Escaped Cock*. The anthologies of poetry are titled *Love Poems and Others*, *Amores*, *Look! We Have Come Through!*, *New Poems*, *Bay:*

A Book of Poems, *Tortoises*, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers*, *Pansies* and *Nettles*.

Ans to Q No 3: A few of the widely read short stories of Lawrence are: "The Captain's Doll", "The Fox", "The Ladybird" and "Odour of Chrysanthemums" to name a few.

Ans to Q No 4: The narrator is taken by surprise at the unexpected sight and stands at a safe distance waiting and watching the snake under the shade of a "strange-scented" carob tree.

Ans to Q No 5: The present context of the poem is in a place known as Sicily, in Italy

Ans to Q No 6: The voices in his head did not allow him to be at peace which is why he had to assure himself that it was not his sense of fear that had stopped him from taking an action. Yet, another reiterated description of the snake, shows how the mind of the narrator was absolutely captivated by the image of the snake.



6.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of the poet D.H. Lawrence.

Q 2: Give a detailed explanation of the poem "Snake" by D.H. Lawrence.

Q 3: Discuss the major themes that emerge from the poem "Snake"

Q 4: Explain the style and language in the poem.

Q 5: Explain with reference to context:

a) "And depart peaceful, pacified, and thankless,
Into the burning bowels of this earth?
Was it cowardice, that I dared not kill him?
Was it perversity, that I longed to talk to him?
Was it humility, to feel so honoured?"

b) "And I wished he would come back, my snake.
For he seemed to me again like a king,
Like a king in exile, uncrowned in the underworld,
Now due to be crowned again.
And so, I missed my chance with one of the lords"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 7 : KEKI N. DARUWALLA: “WOLF”

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Keki N. Daruwalla: The Poet

- 7.3.1 His Life
- 7.3.2 His Works

7.4 The Text of the Poem

- 7.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

7.5 Major Themes

7.6 Style and Language

7.7 Let Us Sum Up

7.8 Further Reading

7.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

7.10 Model Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain a brief idea on the life and works of the Indian poet Keki Daruwalla
- explain both the content and context of the poem “Wolf”
- explore the relevant themes pertaining to the text of the poem
- grasp the style and language employed in the poem
- appreciate the poem from a child’s perspective.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Nature and its changing elements find a strong expression in the works of the Indian poet Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla. While reading his poems, one feels instantly drawn into the world of nature enraptured in its mysterious elements and driven by its powerful forces as also reflected in his works. In particular, his nature poetry leads the reader into the depths of

the unknown wilderness and directs one's sensibility into probing the significant aspects and realities mirrored in his poetical landscapes. In the present unit, we shall first gain a brief insight into the life and works of the poet and explore one of his selected poems titled "Wolf" which contains a touch of sadness and wonder in the imagination of a little child.

7.3 KEKI N. DARUWALLA: THE POET

Let us begin by reading a little about the life and works of the poet Keki Daruwalla, who is also considered one of the major Indian English poets.

7.3.1 His Life

Keki Nasserwanji Daruwalla was born in the year 1937 to a Parsi family in Lahore. His family had moved to Burhanpur in Madhya Pradesh and then to Rampur, well before the Partition. As a child he had to change several schools and much of his childhood was spent in India where he received his early education and also completed his higher studies. Daruwalla had completed his post graduation in English Literature from Government College, Ludhiana. Prior to starting out as a poet and a writer, he had begun his career in the Indian Police Service (IPS) in 1958. In addition to this, he had also served as the special Assistant to the Prime Minister on International Affairs and had retired as the Cabinet Secretariat.

7.3.2 His Works

To his credit, Daruwalla has written over twelve books that comprise both anthologies of poetry and short stories. His first poetical work to be published by the Writers Workshop was titled *Under Orion* in the year 1970. This was shortly followed by his second anthology of poems titled *Apparition in April* in the year 1971 for which he had also won the Uttar Pradesh State Award in 1972. Some of his other notable works are: *In Morning Dew*, *Crossing of Rivers*

(1976), *Winter Poems* (1980), *The Keeper of the Dead* (1982), *Landscapes* (1987), *A Summer of Tigers: Poems* (1995), *Night River Poems* (2000), *The Scarecrow and the Ghost* (2004), *A House in Ranikhet* (2003) and *For Pepper and Christ* (2009). The anthologies of his short stories are titled *Swords and Abyss* (1979) and *The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories* (1996). The recurrent themes in his writings include portrayals of Indian life, nature, wild life, rivers, landscapes, birds and animals evoked through striking and powerful imagery.

Throughout his challenging career as a police officer, Daruwalla continued to pursue his interest in writing. Today, he is one of the leading Indian English poets also received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984 for his anthology of poems titled *The Keeper of the Dead*, and also the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for Asia in the year 1987. Daruwalla was honoured with the Padmashree in 2014 and has held the post of President of The Poetry Society (India). As noted in the *Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (2007) and extracted from the poet's work *Two Decades of Indian Poetry: 1960-1980*, the poet opines thus,

"…but I feel even in poetry content is more important than form. For me poetry is first personal-exploratory, at times therapeutic…At the same time it has to be a social gesture, because on occasions I feel external reality bearing down on me from all sides with a pressure strong enough to tear the ear-drums. My poems are rooted in landscape…[It] is not merely there to set the scene but to lead to an illumination. It should be the eye of the spiral… For me a riot-stricken town is landscape." (page)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Daruwalla begin his career before starting out as a poet?

Q 2: Name the work for which Daruwalla had received the Sahitya Akademi Award.

Q 3: When was Daruwalla honoured with the Padmashree?

7.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

Let us begin with a reading of the prescribed poem before exploring its content, themes and relevant context. The poem captures the image of a frightened wolf out in the darkness of the night with searching eyes for a hiding place.

Wolf

Fire lit
half **silhouette** and half **myth**
the wolf circles my past
treading the leaves into a bed
till he sleeps, black snout
on **extended** paws.

Black **snout** on sulphur body
he **nudged** his way
into my **consciousness**.
Prowler, **wind-sniffer**, throat-catcher,
his cries drew a ring
around my night;
a child's night in a village
on the forest edge.

My mother said
his ears stand up
at the fall of **dew**
he can sense a shadow
move across a **hedge**
on a dark night
he can sniff out
your approaching dreams;
there is nothing

that won't be lit up
by the dark touch of his eyes.

The wolves have been **slaughtered** now
A hedge of smoking gun-**barrels**
rings my daughter's dreams.

7.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

The poem begins with a vague image of a form, a figure or silhouette lurking in the dark, in the wilderness as though it were hiding under the cover of darkness. This form is that of a wolf that haunted the imagination and thoughts of the poet as a child. Thus, the imagined presence of a wolf occupied the poet's mind as a child as wolves were known to be hunted down at night by men. This imaginary wolf prowls in the dark with careful and calculated movements out in the dark and falls asleep on a bed of leaves, by resting its snout on its paws. The presence of the wolf (whether it is in the dark outside the poet's home or in the poet's imagination) happens to stir up an amazing sense of wonder and bewilderment in him. The poet describes the radiating presence of the wolf to a lit fire and to an unknown or unknowable myth.

The mysterious form of a wolf (in trouble) captures the mind of the child in a very powerful way that it seeps ('nudges') into the consciousness of the child. You may very well imagine how certain mysterious aspects create a deep impression and reside in the crater of the mind in little children for a very long time. In the same way, the poet reminisces how as a child, he had been haunted by the ringing cries of wolves at night. These cries were probably not the usual howling of wolves but the painful ones when they were hunted down. It might have confused the child on how such a splendid animal as a wolf who had the freedom of prowling around its territory and hunting its own food ("wind-sniffer, throat-catcher") was now a victim of the human world suffering the fate of the 'hunted'. Earlier,

wolves were hunted not as much for game as for human security in the villages. The poet's village home was at the edge of a forest and perhaps, for this reason the cries of the wolves were clearly audible to him as a child.

In the days of his childhood, his mother would often narrate to him bed-time stories of wolves, describing how the sensitive ears of the wolves would pick up signals or any movements in its territory at midnight, out in the cold when dewdrops fell in the silence of the forest. You may perhaps know how animals are gifted with the sense of smell whether for their food or for their sense of security. The poet remembers how his mother would tell him of wolves sniffing into his dreams and leaving in him a sense of emptiness as she tries to put him to sleep. Those were the days of the poet's childhood but now there were no more wolves left in those forests as they were all killed by ruthless men. There was no more of those haunted presence of wolves or their tearing cries, all that was left was their 'absence' alone. The dark bodies with lit eyes and radiating presence were long gone with their radiating presence. All that remained were images of smoking gun-barrels that stood for violence and bloodshed of innocent animals. The poet as a father now to a little girl is only left wondering how there were no more wolves to capture her imagination or dreams as there were in his time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What does the imaginary wolf do in the dark?

Q 5: What did the poet's mother narrate to him in the days of his childhood?

7.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the major themes that emerge from the poem "Wolf" are as discussed below:

Fragmented Memories

The narrative voice of the poet reverts back to a time when he knew

of wolves that lived and prowled around their neighbourhood. The poet reminisces how his mother would put him to bed at night, when he did not want to sleep. She would simply make him believe that if he did not fall asleep, the wolves with their sharp sense of smell would find and reach him easily. You may have noticed this common bed-time trick that all mothers try on their little children just so that they become obedient and sleep on time. The poet vividly recalls the memories of hearing wolves cry at night in the nearby forests that bordered their village home. Perhaps, this is why the poet had always felt that the wolf or the pack of wolves were never far away from him as a child.

In fact, through the wonderful description of the poet, anyone reading the poem would feel as though a curious wolf was hiding from the reader somewhere nearby. The haunting quality of memories that remain ever fresh in the mindscape even with the passage of time is beautifully captured in the words of the poem. Although, the poem only represents the poet's 'imagination' of the living wolf or wolves in the form of fragmented memories, we receive a complete picture of what it must have been like in the past, when we put all of these images together. Memories have a surprising way of approaching our thoughts and leaving us emotionally charged. Sometimes they come to us in a rush and appear unexpectedly and at other times, they come in flashes and in fragmented forms. We may not always remember or recall certain memories but memories have a way of making themselves felt, just as the memory of the wolf does in the mind of the poet.

Animals in Danger

The wolf in the poem occupies the mind of the poet, long after its kind ceases to exist in their vicinity. The existence of the wolf or wolves in that area almost turns into a myth which saddens the poet. If the 'presence' of wolves had haunted the mind of the poet as a child, it is now their 'absence' that disturbs him. The poem thus expresses the alarming concerns of animal killing and the everyday threat to their existence. Further, it points towards the dangers of the widespread 'man and animal conflict'. For an instance, closer home you may have heard or read news reports on the burning issues of 'rhino poaching' even within the protected areas of Assam's National

parks. If such inhumane and illegal practices go unnoticed then, perhaps the day is not far when the future generations will find these vulnerable animals in the list of extinct species. The poet leaves an impression of a similar concern, while wondering how the wolves are now unheard of in the forests bordering his village. This is a special fragment of memory or feeling that the poet's daughter shall never know of, as he did in his childhood.

Animals are often seen as insentient beings but in truth they are more sensitive than most of their human counterparts, who instead of living in harmony with the natural world, turn into destructive forces. The poem contains a hidden message that if animals are wiped out so mercilessly, the future generations will never know the value of animal life to mankind. It is necessary for us to respect the natural world first and to ensure that the children of the future learn to respect the invaluable gifts of nature in the form of animal life. Nothing can really justify the killing or slaughtering of animals.

7.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The poetry of Daruwalla contains striking imagery that easily captures the imagination of the reader. In the poem "Wolf", the opening lines creates a 'hypnotic' effect on the reader's mind with the revelation of the mysterious presence of a wolf in the poet's memory as expressed in the opening lines: "Fire lit/ half silhouette and half myth/ the wolf circles my past." In the words of the poet, the wolf almost 'nudges' into our 'consciousness' the moment we read through the poem. Thus, the central image in the poem is the silent 'wolf' and this is emphasised through short repetitive phrases such as "half silhouette"/ "half myth," "black snout on extended paws"/ "black snout on sulphur body." Moreover, the poet recreates the haunted midnight memories of his village home at the end of the forest just he remembers wolves prowling "around [his] night/ a child's night" of the bygone years.

The learner will note that the poem has a dream-like quality as the wolf literally exists in the realm of the poet's imagination. The poet is almost drawn back in time, almost lost in his dream-like memories of those old nights when even his mother would scare him saying wolves would sniff out

his approaching dreams if he did not fall asleep. He is reminded of the same on seeing his daughter lost in her own dreams. And thus, the play of memory, the to and fro into the then and now is skillfully presented in the poem. Also, one can almost feel the silent and measured movements of the wolf in the dark forest followed by its piercing cry that ruptures the tranquil of those old nights. There is a silent restlessness in the recreation of the imaginary wolf outside the poet's childhood home, the memory of his own restlessness as a child and the restlessness thinking about the slaughtered wolves.

Thus, in a few vivid images the poem leaves a deep impression on one's mind and we imagine the wolf, true to the memory of the poet who describes the wolf as "prowler, wind surfer, throat catcher." Also, one finds that the image of the wolf is not only dream-like but is also received in fragments where the reader is gradually introduced to the fire lit presence of the wolf with its black snout, extended paws, sulphur body, standing ears, sharp sense of movement, quick nose and dark gleam of his eyes. The poem is easy to comprehend as it is written in simple language but the fine style of writing and expression is unique to Keki N. Daruwalla.



7.7 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to discuss the life and works of Keki N. Daruwalla. A thorough reading of the unit will enable you to further explain the content, context and the relevant themes pertaining to the text of the poem "Wolf". Also, you will be able to grasp the poetic techniques employed in the prescribed poem. The study of the unit shall enable you to explore and enrich your knowledge on the other interesting works by the poet.



7.8 FURTHER READING

1) www.poemhunter.com
2) www.poemhunter.com/keki-daruwalla/biography



7.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No1: Prior to starting out as a poet and a writer, he had begun his career in the Indian Police Service

Ans to Q No 2: He had received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1984 for his anthology of poems titled *The Keeper of the Dead*.

Ans to Q No 3: Daruwalla was honoured with the Padmashree in 2014.

Ans to Q No 4: This imaginary wolf prowls in the dark with careful and calculated movements out in the dark and falling asleep on a bed of leaves, by resting its snout on its paws.

Ans to Q No 5: In the days of his childhood, his mother would often narrate to him bed time stories of wolves, describing how the sensitive ears of the wolves would pick up signals or any movements in its territory at midnight, out in the cold when dewdrops fell in the silence of the forest.



7.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of the Indian English poet Keki Daruwalla.

Q 2: Give a detailed explanation of the poem "Wolf" in your own words.

Q 3: What are the main issues or themes highlighted in the poem "Wolf"?

Q 4: Analyse the style and language employed in the poem "Wolf"

Q 5: Explain with reference to context:

a) "Prowler, wind-sniffer,
throat-catcher
his cries drew a ring
around my night"

b) "a child's night in a village
on the forest edge.
My mother said
his ears stand up
at the fall of dew"

*** ***** ***

UNIT 8 : CHINUA ACHEBE: “A MOTHER IN A REFUGEE CAMP”

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Chinua Achebe: The Poet

8.3.1 His Life

8.3.2 His Works

8.4 The Text of the Poem

8.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

8.5 Major Themes

8.6 Style and Language

8.7 Let Us Sum Up

8.8 Further Reading

8.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

8.10 Model Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain an insight into the life and works of the poet Chinua Achebe
- explain both the content and context of the poem
- explore the relevant themes pertaining to the text
- grasp the style and language employed in the poem
- discuss the poem in the light of its context and significance.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit will introduce you to the African writer Chinua Achebe who is also considered as the father of modern African literature for his outstanding literary works. Achebe was a prolific poet and writer who received much acclaim for both his literary and intellectual contributions. The selected poem titled “A Mother in a Refugee Camp” will enable you to

explore and appreciate the significance of the poet. Let us then, begin with a brief study on the life and works of Chinua Achebe.

8.3 CHINUA ACHEBE: THE POET

Albert Chinuamulogu Achebe better known as Chinua Achebe was a writer, poet and critic of Nigerian origin. Let us gain an insight into the life and works of Chinua Achebe, before going on to explore his poem.

8.3.1 His Life

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013) was born in a religious Christian family to Isaiah Achebe and Janet A. Illoegbunam and had three brothers and two sisters. His village home was situated in the Nigerian forest of Ogidi which is home to one of the major African tribes known as 'Igbo' (pronounced as 'Ibo'). The Igbo people are hard-working people with a rich cultural heritage. Other famous writers and poets like Paul Robeson, Aime Cesaire and Edward Blyden were of Igbo descent as well. As a child, Achebe attended St. Philips' Central School and Central School in Nekede. He was an intelligent student and qualified for both the Dennis Memorial Grammar School and Government College at the same time, decided to attend the latter. His Christian upbringing, his early love for books and inclination towards exploring traditional religious cultures had left a life-long impression on his mind. It was out of sheer compulsion that Achebe had learnt to speak English at Government College where native African languages were not allowed.

He pursued his higher studies at the University of Ibadan earning a financial scholarship of merit to study medicine in 1948 but later opted to study English Literature, History and Theology instead. Although, he had eventually completed his graduation with a second class degree from the university, it was here that Achebe's talent for writing had begun to flower with the first publication of his writings. Following his graduation, he decided to take up teaching

at the Merchants of Light School for a brief period and then joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Service (NBS) at Lagos in the year 1954. He began to write and publish a series of literary works, thereby experimenting with African Fiction.

8.3.2 His Works

Some of his best known novels were *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of Savannah* (1987). His best poetical anthologies include *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems* (1971), *Don't Let Him Die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo* (1978), *Another Africa* (1998), and *Collected Poems* (2005). Achebe also wrote children's literature and short stories compiled as *Marriage is a Private Affair* (1952), *Dead Men's Path* (1953) and *Contemporary African Short Stories* (1992) to name a few. Achebe was also the general editor of *The African Writers Series* and wrote critical essays such as *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness* (1975) later included in *Hopes and Impediments* (1988) along with other non-fiction works such as *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012).

On the personal front, he was married to Christiana Chinwe Okoli with whom he had two children. Achebe had first met Christiana at NBS as a colleague before they began a love relationship and settled down into marriage. Later, having received the prestigious Rockefeller Fellowship, Achebe found the opportunity to travel across the African continent and gain first-hand knowledge of the wider African socio-political and socio-cultural issues. Yet, another Fellowship for Creative Artists gave him the opportunity of travelling to the United States. In 1962, he attended the conference of African writers in English held at Makarere University College, Kampala which provided him a platform to interact with writers like Langston Hughes, Wole Soyinka and Kofi Awonoor. He shared a close friendship with the Nigerian poet, Christopher Okigbo with whom he

had set up the Citadel Press. This was before the 1967 Nigeria-Biafra War in which Achebe had lost his childhood friend, a saddening experience that is recorded in his poem "A Wake for Okigbo".

Achebe took up two new publications, worked at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and later joined the University of Nigeria. He had also served at the Bard College, New York and the David and Marianna Fisher University. Achebe was also the first to be honoured with the Nigerian National Merit Award (1979) for his academic work and he continued to write and publish throughout life. Apart from earning more than thirty honorary degrees and several fellowships, he was also awarded the Commonwealth Poetry Prize, the Man Booker International Prize (2007) among others. His health had gradually declined and owing to illness, Achebe breathed his last on March, 2013 in Boston and was buried in Ogidi, Nigeria.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Write a few words on the African poet and writer Chinua Achebe.

Q 2: Where did Chinua Achebe pursue his higher studies?

Q 3: Name some of the best known novels by Chinua Achebe.

Q 4: Name the Nigerian poet with whom Achebe shared a close friendship.

8.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

"A Mother in a Refugee Camp"

No Madonna and Child could touch
Her tenderness for a son
She soon would have to forget. . . .
The air was heavy with odors of **diarrhea**,
Of unwashed children with washed-out ribs
And dried-up bottoms **waddling** in labored steps
Behind blown-empty bellies. Other mothers there

Had long ceased to care, but not this one:
She held a ghost-smile between her teeth,
And in her eyes the memory
Of a mother’s pride. . . . She had bathed him
And rubbed him down with bare palms.
She took from their bundle of possessions
A broken comb and combed
The **rust**-colored hair left on his skull
And then—**humming** in her eyes—began carefully to part it.
In their former life this was perhaps
A little daily act of no consequence
Before his breakfast and school; now she did it
Like putting flowers on a tiny **grave**.

8.4.1 The Explanation of the Poem

The poem begins with the representation of a mother’s love and sacrifice through the figure of Mother Mary and her son Jesus Christ. The opening lines spell the mood of the poem, capturing the pain and suffering of a mother. Here, a mother with a son in tow is but a ghost of her once-happy self when she held her child with hope in her eyes. Now, fate seemed to have shattered that self-image and the vibrant sense of optimism owing to the rage of war. She like many other women was a victim of the war and her story is captured in the poem “A Mother in a Refugee Camp”

The description of the refugee camp itself speaks of the sufferings met by the children and the women alike. The atmosphere in the camp was gloomy, the air heavy with the odours of diarrhea, of children suffering from malnutrition and of unwashed bodies. You can well imagine the condition of babies and little children with under-nourished bodies, protruded bellies, prominently visible ribs, feeble steps and cries of hunger. The conditions of the refugee camp were so horrifying that mothers ceased to care and surrendered to their fate except this one woman who held on despite the diminished

sense of hope. This woman was only a fragment of who she must have been once, trying hard to smile through her loss and suffering.

She seemed to cling on to the vestiges of her memories, the memories of a mother's pride that she had once cherished. She remembered all the little things that were special to her as a mother. But everything was lost in an instant. All that remained was a bundle of possessions, from which she took out a broken comb to comb her son's rust-coloured hair. She bathed her child and wiped his body with her bare hands. Perhaps, this takes her back to both their happier days when she did the same things with a mother's joy. She may have never realised how special these little moments were until they were all lost. With the uncertainty of their future hanging over her, the unfortunate mother does all that there is to do with the dying hope of her little son's survival.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Give a brief description of the refugee camp in Biafra.

Q 6: What did the mother remember in the time of her suffering?

8.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the major themes that emerge from the poem are as discussed below:

The Consequences of War

War and its trailing consequences leave individual lives shattered and paralyses the life of a nation. In the poem, we find the reflection of a tragic condition in a refugee camp which is universally true in most of the refugee camps after civil or national wars. The learner may have read or heard about how refugee camps are set up in the hours of human crises, in order to accommodate and provide human relief or aid to those who suffer during communal or ethnic clashes, natural calamities or disasters. The refugee camp described in the poem is one such temporary shelter or settlement provided to those who are displaced from their homes during

the civil war.

The context of the present poem is the Nigerian civil war which took place from July 1967 to January 1970 for almost three years costing millions of civil life. This civil war also known as the 'Biafran war' was an internal war fought in the home soil between Nigerian forces and the newly formed Republic of Biafra. Biafra was home to majority of the Igbo people and their assertion of an independent state, carved out from the Nigerian map had fuelled the civil war. Achebe supported Biafra and recorded the history of the war in his last work titled *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012). At the end of the civil war, the Nigerian forces weakened the strength of the Igbo people on the Biafran side. This particular period had witnessed widespread sickness and starvation, death and suffering, a fragment of which is mirrored and captured in the poem.

Motherhood

The relationship of a mother with her children is always special which is also universally true. One of the most amazing moments in a woman's life is motherhood. The poem reflects a mother's fortitude even during a time of great loss or crisis. When her happy world shatters into fragments, she is left in utter shock and disbelief with the turn of fate. Yet, unlike the other women in the refugee camp who surrender to their fate much as they want their children to survive, this strong woman continues to fulfill her duties towards her son, even as she fears that she would lose him very soon. The Biblical image of Mother Mary with infant Jesus who was nailed on the cross for the salvation of mankind, expresses the kind of pain that a mother goes through and the tremendous sacrifices a mother has to sometimes make for her children.

Given the circumstances of disease and suffering in the refugee camp, the mother fears that her child may not survive the hardships for too long. In her thoughts, she cherishes the special moments that she had spent with her son before her world was pulled apart, much similar to that of countless mothers. This also reminds one of the heart breaking cries of mothers who lose their sons in the war. Thus, the mother in the poem is in a similar position who senses the looming danger or threat to her son's life

but does her best to take care of him. There are times when we take the little everyday moments for granted, and realise how special they are when wish to re-live them once again. The same happens to this unfortunate mother who cannot wish her son's sufferings away even if she wants to and is almost at the edge of losing hope of finding a new lease of the life that they had once known together.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What is the context of the present poem?

Q 8: Name the volume in which Achebe had recorded the history of the Biafrian war.

8.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

The poetry of Chinua Achebe much like his other writings bear special reference to historical, political and socio-cultural contexts as also reflected in poems like "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" and "Christmas in Biafra". Achebe provides an insight into the African socio-cultural traditions, indigenous cultures and indigenous ways of life through most of his writings. The present poem is a fragment of wartime in Nigeria and it reflects how war can completely shatter innocent lives. There are many whose lives are paralysed during and after war as reflected in the lives of the children and women lodged in the confines of a refugee camp, totally displaced from the comfort of their home.

The poem opens with the first image of Mother Mary and the infant Jesus which is a universal representation of mother and child as also represented in the famous paintings of the classical masters. The central figure in the poem is that of the mother who represents the sacrifices of motherhood and the extent of suffering as a refugee during wartime. Some of the vivid images that remain with us long after we finish reading the poem are that of the mother's "ghost-smile", of children with "washed-out ribs" and "blown empty bellies". Also, the images of the once-happy mother getting her son ready for school and the same mother uncertain if her son would live long to go to school again, to dream of a new future, compel the

reader to imagine what is it to lose a happy life to political crisis and emergencies. Her eyes speak volumes as the poet captures how she holds her happy memories "in her eyes", that are now stilled with her traumatic experience. The happy songs that she once hummed in her happier days were silenced leaving only a lingering tune of their memory.

The transition from her former life to the present is captured simultaneously in the poem. At the end of the poem we confront the image of 'a grave' with tributary flowers and through the use of the closing 'simile,' the poet conveys a mother's dying hope. Thus, Chinua Achebe strongly expresses his poetical sensibility towards a mother's traumatic experience. His use of language is simple yet powerful and the poem is a testimony of the suffering confronted by innocent people during war time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Who is the central figure in the poem "A Mother in a Refugee Camp"? Explain why.

Q 10: What is the image that you find at the end of the poem?



8.7 LET US SUM UP

After a thorough study of the unit, you will be able to discuss the life and works of the African poet and writer, Chinua Achebe. The text of the poem "A Mother in a Refugee Camp" captures the ground reality of wartime conditions and the sufferings of the afflicted. The major themes emerging from the poem have been elaborated and the analyses on the poetic techniques have been provided for detailed study. Also, the unit will enable the learner to grasp the core message of the poem as reflected through vivid use of images.



8.8 FURTHER READING

1) www.britannica.com/biography/ChinuaAchebe

2) www.biography.com/people/chinua-achebe-20617665



8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Albert Chinuamulogu Achebe better known as Chinua Achebe (1930-3013) was a writer, poet and critic of Nigerian origin. He was born in a religious Christian family to Isaiah Achebe and Janet A. Illoegbunam and had three brothers and two sisters. His village home was situated in the Nigerian forest of Ogidi which is home to one of the major African tribes known as 'Igbo'.

Ans to Q No 2: Chinua Achebe pursued his higher studies at University of Ibadan earning a financial scholarship of merit to study medicine in 1948 but later opted to study English Literature, History and Theology instead.

Ans to Q No 3: Some of the best known novels by Chinua Achebe are *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of Savannah* (1987). His best poetical anthologies include *Beware, Soul Brother and Other Poems* (1971), *Don't Let Him Die: An Anthology of Memorial Poems for Christopher Okigbo* (1978), *Another Africa* (1998), and *Collected Poems* (2005).

Ans to Q No 4: Chinua Achebe shared a close friendship with the Nigerian poet, Christopher Okigbo with whom he had set up the Citadel Press.

Ans to Q No 5: The description of the refugee camp itself speaks of the sufferings met by the children and the women alike. There is a gloomy atmosphere in the camp with the heavy odours of diarrhea, of children suffering from malnutrition and of unwashed bodies. The condition of babies and little children with under-nourished bodies, protruded

bellies, prominently visible ribs, feeble steps and cries of hunger is portrayed in the poem.

Ans to Q No 6: The mother remembered all the little things that were special to her as a mother. But everything was lost in an instant.

Ans to Q No 7: The context of the present poem is the Nigerian civil war which had taken place from July 1967 to January 1970 for almost three years costing millions of civil lives.

Ans to Q No 8: Achebe supported Biafra and recorded the history of the war in his last work titled *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (2012).

Ans to Q No 9: The central figure in the poem is that of the mother who represents the sacrifices of motherhood and the extent of suffering as a refugee during wartime.

Ans to Q No 10: At the end of the poem we confront the image of 'a grave' with tributary flowers and through the use of the closing 'simile,' the poet conveys a mother's dying hope.



8.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and works of Chinua Achebe.

Q 2: Explain the content of the poem in your own words.

Q 3: Discuss some of the relevant themes that emerge from the poem.

Q 4: Analyse the style and language in the poem "A Mother in a Refugee Camp"

Q 5: Explain with reference to context:

a) "No Madonna and Child could touch
Her tenderness for a son
She soon would have to forget. . . ."

b) "In their former life this was perhaps
A little daily act of no consequence
Before his breakfast and school; now she did it
Like putting flowers on a tiny grave."

*** ***** ***

UNIT 9 : WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *MACBETH* I

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 William Shakespeare: The Dramatist

9.3.1 His Life

9.3.2 His Works

9.4 Background of the Play

9.5 Let Us Sum Up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers To Check Your Progress

9.8 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare
- explain the background of the play
- gain a brief insight into the literary treasures of William Shakespeare in the history of English Literature.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up one of the most popular plays of all time known as *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. But before, we explore the detailed content of the play, we shall gain an insight into the life and works of this great figure who had unravelled the canons of English literature with his unparalleled talent and popularity through the ages.

9.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE DRAMATIST

William Shakespeare was one of the greatest known literary figures of English literature. Let us first explore the life of Shakespeare and the times in which he wrote.

9.3.1 His Life

William Shakespeare who is also popularly known as "the Bard of Avon" was born on April 26th, 1564. Traditionally, however, his birth is celebrated on April 23rd which is also known to have been the date of his death. He was the eldest of the eight children of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-of-Avon. Of their eight children, only five survived through childhood. John Shakespeare was essentially a tradesman dealing with gloves and other commodities by occupation, but played a significant part in local affairs and later went on to become a bailiff in 1568. William Shakespeare's mother came from a higher social standing than her husband. After marriage she witnessed the gradual decline of fortunes of her husband. William, like his other brothers, was given education in a local grammar school.

On November 28, 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, a wealthy widow who was eight years senior to him. Hathaway was from the village of Shottery which was at the vicinity of Stratford. Shakespeare sired a daughter Suzanna who was born in 1853 and the twins, Hamnet and Judith, who were born in the year 1585.It has been stated in archival records that Shakespeare began as a schoolmaster in the countryside. In 1587, an actor of a theatre company called Queen's Men was killed before it could reach Stratford, and according to legend it may have filled up the vacancy, leading to his future rise as a renowned playwright.

Later, he became a leading member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. Shakespeare became prosperous as he worked with the Chamberlain's Men, and soon the theatre group became the leading theatre company of London and succeeded in occupying the famous **Globe Theatre** in 1599. The group soon came to be known as the King's Men. Shakespeare flourished as a playwright and in the year 1610, he left London for his hometown, where he began to live in a new residence at a place called New

Place. His relationship with the theatre company ceased when the Globe Theatre was burnt down during a performance in 1613. During the last years of his life, Shakespeare became more involved with Stratford and his children, especially with regard to the marriage of his daughters. Nevertheless, his connection with the theatre world did not perish and he continued composing works. Shakespeare passed away on April 23rd 1616 and was buried in Holy Trinity.



LET US KNOW

GLOBE THEATRE: It was a large polygonal, thatched building, with a centre open to the sky. It was used for the purpose of theatre performance



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Write a few lines on the William Shakespeare's origins.

Q 2: Briefly describe the famous Globe theatre

9.3.2 His Works

William Shakespeare is credited to have composed a large volume of works during his lifetime. The earliest among his writings were the two long poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594). As it was the tradition of that time, these poems were written in the form of long speeches. Another compilation of verse called *The Passionate Pilgrim* came out in 1599, but it did not have the unique appealing quality of his later poetic compositions, that is, the *Sonnets*.

The *Sonnets* of Shakespeare was printed in the year 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. The sonnets were dedicated to a mysterious "Mr. W.H" whose identity aroused the curiosity of one and all. The probable explanation regarding the identity of W.H was that he was a patron of William Shakespeare, and it was highly possible that he was referring to William Herbert, the Earl of Pembroke. There are a

total number of 154 sonnets, which have been divided into two groups. The first group comprises of sonnets written on themes of friendship and are passionately addressed to a “fair youth”. These sonnets reflect the poet’s personal relationship with a young man, probably belonging to a high rank. The second group comprises of sonnets addressed to a “Dark Lady” who is regarded as the mistress of the poet. The sonnets are a celebration of the victory of love, beauty and friendship over Time and Death, even when human life is subjected to the hurdles and obstacles laid by destiny. The poetic style of Shakespeare with his beautiful use of symbolic ideas make the sonnets immortal literary pieces. Edward Albert states in the *History of English Literature* that “If Shakespeare had not been our greatest dramatist, he would still be numbered among our greatest lyrical poets.”

There has been great discussion regarding the volume of dramatic pieces composed by Shakespeare. The reason behind this is the fact that most of the texts were not printed during his lifetime. Sixteen of these plays appeared during his lifetime in the form of quarto and it was seven years after his death that the First Folio comprising thirty six plays, came out. As such, the plays of Shakespeare have been divided into different types, in terms of their subject. The early plays written by Shakespeare are called the early comedies. This comprised of the plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *Love Labour’s Lost.*

These plays were filled with wit and word play but they lacked the finesse in characterisation seen in his later plays. The comedies that were composed in his later life were more mature in terms of their subject matter and characterisation. The group of mature comedies includes *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It*. In these plays it is seen that Shakespeare has given special focus to the women characters, representing them as strong-willed and independent women who

have ideas of their own regarding the world. Whether it is the witty Beatrice or the wise and practical Portia, Shakespeare's plays are filled with such unforgettable and vivacious women characters.

Dramatic pieces such as *Richard II, Henry IV- Part 1, Henry IV-Part 2* and *Henry V* reflect the development in the dramatic techniques of Shakespeare. The playwright's intermingling of real historical figures belonging to the court alongside commoners, and their interactions, was a remarkable innovation in his writings. He represented the kings and the princes as more mature and responsible figures, conscious of the needs of their subjects.

Plays such as *Measure for Measure, All's Well That Ends Well, Troilus and Cressida* are called the problem plays. Although the protagonists in these plays do not die, the tone is cynical and bleak. The problem plays essentially reflect disillusionment towards life. Shakespeare has created characters and situations sans the romance and mirth that was seen in the earlier comedies. These plays attempted to show some of the dark realities of Shakespeare's contemporary society. The problem plays, however, did not explore the psychological complexities of the characters as much as the four Great Tragedies of the bard: *Hamlet*, *Othello, Macbeth* and *King Lear.* Shakespeare was at the height of his art when he composed these tragedies. No other dramatic composition has influenced the world of theatre so much than these four masterpieces. The emotional depth and passion reflected in his protagonists has been the subject of study since ages. In the nature of Aristotle's definition of a tragedy, the heroes in his tragedies suffer from *hamartia* or tragic flaw in character, that lead to their destruction. Hamlet was indecisive or passive, Othello suffered from jealousy, Macbeth suffered because of his ambition and Lear's tragic flaw was his pride.

Shakespeare had also composed a few plays based on the Roman histories. These include *Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra,* and *Coriolanus*. The Roman plays were based on the translation of

Plutarch's *Lives*. The Roman historical characters were written keeping into mind the subject of political intrigues and governance. Some of his last plays were *The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* .The playwright had composed these plays in a rich, lucid style, varied in their subject matter, but similar in approach.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What were the themes that emerged in the first and second group of sonnets?

Q 4: What was Shakespeare's remarkable innovation while dealing with historical figures in his plays?

Q 5: Name the last two plays by Shakespeare during his literary journey.

9.4 BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The tragedy *Macbeth* was written and performed in the Globe Theatre in 1606. However, it was only in the year 1623 that the first folio was printed. It is believed that Shakespeare had borrowed the subject of the play from a play written by Thomas Middleton. The play was performed in front of James I, who is believed to be as the descendent of the real Banquo who is shown as one of the significant characters in the play. One of the main motives of Shakespeare in writing Macbeth was to examine the nature and evils of political ambition that exists in a monarchical state. *Macbeth*, in the manner of his other major tragedies such as *King Lear*, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, is one of the most intriguing plays of Shakespeare that provides the readers an insight into the complexities of political relationships in an ambition driven society. An interesting aspect about the play is that it is the shortest play by Shakespeare. Yet it is considered to be the most intense of the Shakespearean tragedies.

Macbeth is based on the real events from the life of Macbeth, the eleventh century king of Scotland. Shakespeare had read numerous accounts of Macbeth, principally from the *Chronicles* of Holinshed. Holinshed's historical accounts provided the primary source for many of

Shakespeare's historical dramas. According to Holinshed's account, Macbeth and Banquo conspired to assassinate King Duncan, the erstwhile ruler of Scotland. This incident provided the base for the tragedy that was recorded as an interesting narrative.

The play tells us about Macbeth and Banquo who are the generals of King Duncan, returning after a successful battle against rebels of the kingdom. On the way, they come across three witches who predict that Macbeth will be assigned an important position in the kingdom and later, he would become the king. They also prophesised that Banquo's successors would become kings, though he would never be one.

The early history of the play *Macbeth* is equally interesting. The play was first performed for King James I, ruler of England after the notoriously infamous Gunpowder Conspiracy in which a group of Catholics attempted to assassinate the king by blowing up the entire Parliament. The play is politically significant as it deals with ambition, treason and the killing of a king. King James's interest in the subjects of supernatural elements and kingship too influenced Shakespeare in the composition of the play. Further, the king had a Scottish ancestry and *Macbeth* deals with the life and times of the early kings of Scotland. As such it clearly appealed to him. King James the First's fascination towards good governance and virtues of a king was so strong that he went on to write *Basilikon Doron* in 1599 that deals with the subject of qualities of an ideal king. Shakespeare mentioned these qualities in Act IV of *Macbeth* where Malcolm speaks of "Justice, Verity, Temperance, Stableness, Bounty, Perseverance, Mercy, Lowliness, Devotion, Patience, Courage, Fortitude." Macbeth possessed none of these qualities and his greatest vice was his pride together with his unquenchable thirst for power.

The play was a success during its time, and it continues to be re-enacted on the stage even today. There have been several adaptations of the play that have been made into other forms of narratives such as films, all over the world. For example, in India, *Macbeth*, has been adapted into a film titled Maqbool by Vishal Bharadwaj where the entire plot takes place in a contemporary time and space. It shows that the subject matter of

Shakespeare's works have universally appealed to people regardless of time and place.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: When was the tragedy *Macbeth* written? From whom did Shakespeare borrow the subject of the play?

Q 7: When was *Macbeth* first performed or staged?

Q 8: Why was the play politically significant?

Q 9: What are the essential qualities of a King as described in the last act of *Macbeth*? Did Macbeth possess these qualities?



9.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, you will be able to learn about the life and works of William Shakespeare. Also, the discussion on the background of the play will help you comprehend the setting and context of the play while also gaining a brief insight into the literary contributions of William Shakespeare in the history of English literature



9.6 FURTHER READING

1) Albert, Edward. (2000) *History of English Literature*, Fifth Edition. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

2) Birch, Dinah. (2009) *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Seventh Edition. Oxford : Oxford University Press.



9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: William Shakespeare was one of the greatest known literary figures of English literature. Shakespeare who is famously known as "the Bard of Avon" was born on April 26th, 1564. He was the eldest of the eight children of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden of Stratford-of-Avon. Of their eight children, only five survived childhood. John Shakespeare was essentially a tradesman dealing with gloves and other commodities by occupation, but played a significant part in local affairs and later went on to become a bailiff in 1568. After marriage, Mary Arden witnessed the gradual decline of fortunes of her husband. William, like his other brothers, was given education in a local grammar school.

Ans to Q No 2: Globe Theatre was a large polygonal, thatched building, with a centre open to the sky. It was used for the purpose of theatre performances.

Ans to Q No 3: The first group comprises of sonnets written on themes of friendship and are passionately addressed to a "fair youth". These sonnets reflect the poet's personal relationship with a young man, probably belonging to a high rank. The second group comprises of sonnets addressed to a "Dark Lady" who is regarded as the mistress of the poet.

Ans to Q No 4: The playwright's intermingling of real historical figures belonging to the court alongside commoners, and their interactions, was a remarkable innovation in his writings. He represented the kings and the princes as more mature and responsible figures, conscious of the needs of their subjects.

Ans to Q No 5: Some of the last plays of William Shakespeare were *The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline* and *The Tempest.*

Ans to Q No 6: The tragedy *Macbeth* was written and performed in the Globe Theatre in 1606. However, it was only in the year 1623 that the

first folio was printed. It is believed that Shakespeare had borrowed the subject of the play from a play written by Thomas Middleton.

Ans to Q No 7: The early history of the play *Macbeth* is equally interesting. The play was first performed for King James I, ruler of England after the notoriously infamous Gunpowder Conspiracy in which a group of Catholics attempted to assassinate the king by blowing up the entire Parliament.

Ans to Q No 8: The play is politically significant as it deals with ambition, treason and the killing of a king. King James's interest in the subjects of supernatural elements and kingship too influenced Shakespeare in the composition of the play. Further, the king had a Scottish ancestry and *Macbeth* deals with the life and times of the early kings of Scotland. As such it clearly appealed to him. King James the First's fascination towards good governance and virtues of a king was so strong that he went on to write *Basilikon Doron* in 1599 that deals with the subject of qualities of an ideal king.

Ans to Q No 9: Shakespeare mentioned these qualities in Act IV of *Macbeth* where Malcolm speaks of "Justice, Verity, Temperance, Stableness, Bounty, Perseverance, Mercy, Lowliness, Devotion, Patience, Courage, Fortitude." Macbeth possessed none of these qualities and his greatest vice was his pride together with the unquenchable thirst for power.



9.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on the life of William Shakespeare.

Q 2: Discuss the literary works of William Shakespeare.

Q 3: Discuss the background of the play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 10 : WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *MACBETH* II

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Explanation of the Text

10.4 Major Characters

10.5 Major Themes

10.6 Style and Language

10.7 Let Us Sum Up

10.8 Further Reading

10.9 Answers To Check Your Progress

10.10 Model Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, the learner will be able to:

- discuss the content of the play
- discuss the major characters in the play
- analyse the emergent themes in the play
- explain the style and language employed in the poem.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

The present unit is a continuation of the previous unit on William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Let us now delve into the details of the text and explore the nuances of this widely read and anthologised play.

10.3 EXPLANATION OF THE TEXT

The play *Macbeth* opens in an **eerie** way with the description of three witches engaged in black magic. Their spells and words match the bleak setting of the play and their words are written in the form of riddles such as "Fair is foul and foul is fair." These riddles are very meaningful as they tell us about the changes that would take place in the personality of

the characters. The three Witches decide to meet Macbeth. In the next scene, a Sergeant comes to Duncan, King of Scotland to inform him about the victory of Macbeth and Banquo over the rebels and their leaders Macdonald and the **Thane** of Cawdor. Duncan praises the bravery of Macbeth and declares that he would be made the new Thane of Cawdor. Unaware of the decision made by Duncan, Macbeth and Banquo are riding across the wilderness when they come across the witches.

The three witches greet the two men and prophesise that Macbeth would be made the thane of Cawdor and after that he would become the king. Macbeth is surprised by the prediction and remains silent while Banquo asks about his own destiny. To this, the witches predict that he would be less than Macbeth but greater than him, and though he would not be a king, he will be the father of a line of kings. After this the three strange women disappear and the two meet Ross, a thane who informs them that Macbeth has been made the Thane of Cawdor. As the first prophesy is fulfilled, Macbeth begins to wonder whether the second prediction would really be true and he would become the king of Scotland. He thus begins to **harbour** the ambition of becoming the king.

On their return, they find Duncan, Malcolm and other attendants awaiting them. Duncan warmly welcomesand appreciates Macbeth and the Banquo, and declares that he will spend the night at Macbeth's castle in Inverness and announces the decision of making his son, Malcolm, heir to the throne. Soon, Macbeth sends his wife a letter about the king's visit as well as the witches' prophesies regarding him. He writes with **hesitation** and wonders whether there is any possibility of the second prediction becoming a reality. Lady Macbeth, however, seemed to have no objection in getting rid of Duncan so that her husband could obtain the crown. She chides her husband, when he arrives, and questions his manhood. She succeeds in manipulating his mind and persuades him to kill Duncan that very night. They plan to drug the two guards who wait outside Duncan's chamber and put the blame on them for the murder as the two will remember nothing about the previous night's events.

In the Second Act, the conspiracy to kill Duncan is finally materialised

by Macbeth when the latter stabs the old king in his sleep.Initially, Macbeth was much shaken as he began to have hallucinations of ghosts and a floating dagger, but later kills the king. Lady Macbeth, as per the plan, places bloody daggers on the two guards so as to **implicate** them in the crime. The next morning, Macduff and Lennox, a nobleman arrives and they are led to the king's chamber by Macbeth. To the horror of two noblemen, they discover the bloodied corpse of Duncan. Macbeth taking the opportunity kills the two guards before they can prove their innocence, by claiming that the act was done in rage to avenge the death of the king. After receiving the news about the **demise** of their father, the two princes Malcolm and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland respectively, fearing that they would be the next victims after their father. However, their sudden departure only lead to the belief that they were involved in the murder of their father. Consequently, Macbeth is crowned as the kingof Scotland as he was also a cousin of Duncan. This is revealed to the reader by Banquo who was present during the witches' predictions. He remembers the prophecy concerning him that hailed him as the father of a line of kings. As such, he remains wary and suspicious of Macbeth.

In the Third Act, we come to know about the gradually developing insecurities in the mind of Macbeth in spite of the fact he was successful in becoming the king. The insecurity was caused mainly by the presence of Banquo as Macbeth saw him as a threat who knew much about the witches' prophesies and whose sons would possibly become kings. So a plot develops in the mind of Macbeth concerning Banquo and his son Fleance. He invites Banquo and his son for a **royal banquet**, and hires three **assassins** to get them killed. The killers catch both the father and son as they were riding through the jungle and succeed in killing Banquo. But Fleance manages to escape from their clutches. This makes Macbeth even more wrathful as he fears that his power would be challenged very soon if Banquo's son remains alive. Nevertheless, he pretends of not knowing anything and invites his wife and the other lords to the royal banquet. As he enters the hall, he sees that the ghost of Banquo was sitting on his seat. Macbeth begins to speak in a wild manner, pointing to the chair but the

ghost was only visible to him and directing his guests to look that way. He continues to rave and the lords are troubled to see their king speaking like an insane person. Lady Macbeth attempts to control the situation by saying that it was caused by weariness and requests the lords to depart. The ghost too vanishes but Macbeth continues talking angrily. Here, it is seen that Macbeth is troubled by his guilty conscience and the ghost of Banquo essentially shows us that Macbeth is haunted by his own sins.

In the Fourth Act, we come to know of the **repercussions** of the events that occurred in the royal banquet.Macbeth is so disturbed by the appearance of Banquo's ghost that he decides to visit the three witches again and question them about the truth of their predictions. The three strange creatures summon up spirits from the world of the dead to answer Macbeth. Each of these apparitions predicts something new and fuels the dead. First, an armoured head appears and warns Macbeth to beware of Macduff. Next, a bloody child appears saying that no one can kill him except someone not born of a woman. The last prophesy is made by a crowned child, holding a tree, who says that Macbeth's life is secured until the time when the Great Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Hill. The last two prophesies provides relief to Macbeth because there can be no person in the world who is not born of a woman. Also, it is not possible for a forest to move to another location. Macbeth also expresses his curiosity to the witches about the fate of Banquo's descendents.

In reply, the witches shows him vision of eight crowned kings in a queue who are similar in appearance to Banquo, and the last of the king was carrying a mirror that reflects even more kings. Macbeth realises that Banquo's successors will become kings in other countries. After the prophesies, the witches dance in a frenzy and vanishes. Soon Lennox comes and informs Macbeth about the escape of Macduff to England. Furious with rage, Macbeth orders his men to **wreck havoc** on Macduff's castle and hires assassins to murder him and his family. As Macduff was not found, his wife and child are killed mercilessly.

The next Act (Act V) begins with an account of Lady Macbeth's increasing **paranoia** and sense of guilt associated with the ruthless crimes

committed by her husband. At the castle, a doctor and a lady-in-waiting discuss Lady Macbeth's deteriorating mental condition. She develops the habit of sleep-walking. As they talk, they notice Lady Macbeth holding a candle and walking in a trance. She expresses grief over the deaths of Duncan, Banquo and Lady Macduff, and attempts to wash away imaginary blood stains from her hands, reminding the reader of her own role in Duncan's murder. She also talks to herself about the terrible acts done by her husband and we see that she was very affected by the violence of her husband.

In another scene, Macduff comes to know about the brutal murders of his wife and child under the order of Macbeth. He is deeply anguished by the news but is consoled by Malcolm, and Macduff vows revenge upon Macbeth for the crimes committed by him. Macduff joins Prince Malcolm who has successfully raised an army in England. They are also supported by other Scottish noblemen who had enough of Macbeth's tyrannical rule and ruthless behaviour. Malcolm leads the army with the support of Macduff and the Englishman Siward, the Earl of Northumberland towards the castle in Dunsinane. As the soldiers reach Birnham wood, they are told to cut down the trees and carry the tree trunks to hide themselves and take their enemy by surprise. Before the troop of Malcolm's marching men arrive, Macbeth gets the news that Lady Macbeth has committed suicide.

This depresses him and he begins to wonder about the futility or meaninglessness of human life. As he prepares his fort against the onslaught of the approaching English troops, Macbeth is shaken with fear when he learns that the army was advancing towards Dunsinane was shielded by the trees of Birnham Wood is on the verge of fulfilment. Thus the first prophesy that his destruction would be near when Birnham Wood moves towards Dunsinane. Soon, the battle begins and Macbeth kills the young Siward first. The English men, however overpower Macbeth's army and seize his castle. Macbeth continues combating with Macduff claiming that no man born from his mother's womb can defeat him.

To this, Macduff replied that he is the one who was not born from the womb but ripped from his mother's womb before time (i.e, born by Caeserian section). This led to the fulfilment of another prophesy and

Macbeth understood the real meaning of the witches' prophesies and knew it was too late since his end was near, but refused to accept defeat. He was finally decapitated by Macduff. In the climax of the play, Malcolm spoke to the people how peace and had finally been restored, and he also declared his intention for bringing happiness and satisfaction into the lives of his subjects through just and benevolent kingship. He welcomed the people to witness his crowning as the King of Scotland at the court.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What was Macbeth's claim while combating Macduff?

Q 2: What happens in the climax of the play?

10.4 MAJOR CHARACTERS

In his section of the unit, the characters of the play will be discussed. In the play, we find that the characters can not be strictly placed under the categories of good or evil. Each character has strength or positive attributes and weakness or a negative attributes. As such we see that Macbeth is courageous but driven by too much ambition. Similarly, Lady Macbeth is an intelligent woman but uses her intelligence for a negative purpose. Duncan is the epitome of kingly qualities yet it is equally true that he has been naive enough not to see the threat posed by his own men. The play is not about the victory of good over evil, rather it is a cautionary tale. It tells us about over-ambition and how it corrupts an individual which further leads to chaos and tyranny in the society.

Macbeth

Macbeth is introduced in the very beginning of the play as a brave warrior and a victor, returning from the battle. He is one of the most skilled warriors and a captain in the army of King Duncan of Scotland. During the age of chivalry, a man's military prowess allowed him to gain not only honour and praise, but also power and riches. We come to know that Macbeth played a major role in successfully defeating the rebels. In recognition of his bravery, he was honoured with the position of Thane by the king.

In spite of his courageous nature, Macbeth suffers from human weaknesses such as pride and over ambition. When he comes to know from the three witches that he is destined to become a king, he is no longer satisfied with the position of a Thane. Instead, he designs an unscrupulous plot with his wife to murder the king and all those whocome in the way of his attainment of the throne. Macbeth, even murders Banquo, who had been his companion during the battle because of the witches' prediction that Banquo's successors would be kings. We get a glimpse of his ambitions through the **soliloquies** and **asides** that Shakespeare has used in the play. In the process, Macbeth falls from the position of a hero to that of an **antagonist.**Macbeth, with his pride and willingness for bloodshed, is completely different from King Duncan who is depicted as an honourableperson.

Macbeth, in the beginning, is troubled by a sense of guilt as he plots against the king on the suggestion of his wife. But soon, he loses his humanity and slowly it is his political ambition that draws him closer to madness and ultimately death.

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth has been one of the most ambitious and shrewd woman characters ever portrayed in the history of English literature. She is depicted as a highly clever woman, skilled in manipulating situations in her favour. Lady Macbeth deliberately refuses to let her womanly qualities of gentleness and timidity, come in the way of her aim to become the Queen of Scotland. She is determined from the very beginning, and constantly mocks her husband for his lack of courage to kill Duncan. In public, she gives the impression, especially her guests of being a wonderful hostess. In fact, she played an active role in the murder of the king with her husband. She drugs the men who were guarding the king's room and kept blood stained weapons near them, to falsely implicate that it was the guards who murdered the king.

Lady Macbeth suppresses her humanity in her desire to see her husband as the king of Scotland. But the violent events that follow the death of Duncan slowly leads to her loss of sanity. In Act V, we see that she has

started hallucinating that her hands are stained with blood. She grows more paranoid and keeps on cleaning her hands to remove the imagined odour and stains of blood. Her subsequent death leads Macbeth to think over the nature of time and mortality in his speech: “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.”

The Three Witches

The three witches or the three weird sisters are described as strange creatures, who seem to belong to a different world altogether. Their presence and words are eerie suggesting the ominous. They are ugly in appearance with thin waif-like fingers and beards on their face. The witches have been clearly inspired by the *Fates* of Greek mythology who control and manipulate the destiny of human beings. The witches are an active agent in bringing about the fall and subsequent death of Macbeth.

Macduff

In the play, Macbeth is the antagonist while Macduff is the archetypal avenging hero who fights for honour and a good cause. Macduff is an important characteras he represents a person avenging the injustice done. It is Macduff who discovers the dead body of Duncan killed under rather suspicious circumstances. He wishes the guilty to be caught and punished accordingly. However when the news of the murder of his wife and children reaches to him, it is then that he decides to take act against the tyrannical Macbeth. In the final combat between hero and antagonist, we see that it is the victory of humanity over inhumanity. While Macbeth kills people for his own interests, Macduff decides to kill Macbeth for the cause of his nation.

Banquo

In the historical account, the real Banquo was a co-conspirator of Macbeth in the murder of Duncan. But in Shakespeare’s play, the role of the fellow conspirator has been assigned to Lady Macbeth while Banquo plays a minor character as the companion as well as rival of Macbeth. Banquo is somewhat similar to Macbeth as he too is a person curious to know what destiny has in store for him. For example, when the three witches predict that Macbeth will become a king, Banquo expresses his desire to know whether destiny has similar plans for him. However, he is more humane

than Macbeth. The reader can be more sympathetic towards him since he is unaware of what Macbeth had planned for Duncan and him. Also, he is shown as a concerned father, sharing an affectionate relationship with his son.

Duncan

Duncan is the symbol of the justice and honour that is essential for the smooth running of the country. This has been depicted through the formal and gracious speech that he makes in front of his subjects. Another important quality in Duncan is his modesty in accepting his flaws. For example, he admitted that he had been ignorant about the previous Thane of Cawdor's treachery. It is this ignorance perhaps that led to Duncan becoming a victim of Macbeth and his wife's treason. Modesty is a quality that Macbeth clearly lacked as a ruler, as he undermined all around him. The king was seen as the divine representative of God in earlier ages. And Duncan's personality essentially reflected this.

Malcolm and Donalbain

Malcolm and Donalbain are the two sons of Duncan. The two princes flee from the country soon after the murder of the father fearing that they would be wrongly accused of the murder. Donalbain escapes to Ireland while Malcolm escapes to England. Malcolm was declared as the successor of King Duncan which was accepted by everyone except Macbeth. Macbeth, privately, resented the fact that Malcolm would become the ruler of Scotland. And for this reason he decides to kill Duncan and usurp or take over the throne.

Between the two brothers, Malcolm could be seen as a more resourceful young man since he manages to win the support of King Edward in England and also form an army. This essentially reflects his ability to command respect and honour from others. At the same time, he is wise enough to psychologically test Macduff's loyalty towards Scotland. While Macbeth works for his own advancement, regardless of Scotland's position, Malcolm desires the security and advancement of his country Scotland. As such, he is the rightful heir to the throne.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Describe the three witches in the play *Macbeth*

Q 4: Who were the antagonist and the archetypal avenging hero in the play *Macbeth*?

10.5 MAJOR THEMES

William Shakespeare's plays reflect his deep understanding of human nature and the society. This is especially seen in the playwright's choice of the subject matter in the tragedies written by him.*Macbeth*, in the manner of the morality plays which originated in medieval England, reflects the battle between good and evil. One of Shakespeare's contemporary playwrights called Christopher Marlowe, had also written a play called *Doctor Faustus*, in which Marlowe showed how over-ambition and pride led to the downfall of his protagonist. In a similar vein, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* deals with various themes such as corruption and misuse of power, difference between kingship and tyranny, etc.

One of the major themes in *Macbeth* is the corruption of man brought about by uncontrolled ambition and lust for power. We see that the downfall and consequent deaths of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, are mainly caused because of their excessive desire for power and the throne of Scotland. It is shown that Macbeth is not an evil man, yet he succumbs to the human weaknesses for power and success. He murders Duncan because of this excessive desire for the throne but at the same time his conscience is haunted by guilt that later draws him closer to madness. Lady Macbeth is even more ruthless when she influences her husband and acts as the co-conspirator in the murder of the king. The crime committed by the couple only resulted in more bloodshed as Macbeth had to commit more murders to hide the truth and at the same time get rid of people who were seen as threats.

After the death of Duncan, Macbeth always felt threatened by Banquo, Macduff and Fleance because they were seen as potential threats,

capable of sitting on the throne. The inhuman nature and mad rage which changed the personality of Macbeth, soon affected Lady Macbeth too. She could then see the real consequences of the sins committed by her, and as a result, her mind was filled with paranoia and distress at the sight of the violence perpetrated by her husband. She realised that she had lost control of her life and the conditions around her, and she finally ended her life.

Another theme that is evident in the play is the theme of violence. Violence is the obvious product resulting from the corrupting nature of uncontrolled ambition and desire for power. It is also seen that violence has been connected to masculinity. The characters associate the quality of masculinity to aggression or violence. Any kind of passive or gentle behaviour is seen as unmanly by the characters. For example, when Macbeth hesitates to plot against the king, Lady Macbeth questions his manhood. She taunts her husband by saying that she should have been a man herself. Even, Macbeth agrees that a woman, with such ruthlessness and scheming mind, should give birth only to sons. This is because women in that age were expected to be gentle and timid, and Lady Macbeth was a highly clever and ambitious woman. This is also evident, when Macduff breaks down after hearing about the murder his wife and child, Malcolm consoles him to accept the news in a manly manner and take revenge on Macbeth. So, it is this association of violence and masculinity that leads to much bloodshed.

Good governance and the duties of a king have also been major concerns in the plays of Shakespeare. This is also evident in *Macbeth*, where the playwright draws a line between good kingship and tyrannical rule. It is significant that throughout the play, Duncan is always referred in an honourable way as the “king” whereas Macbeth becomes notoriously infamous as the “tyrant”. In Act IV of the play, Malcolm and Macduff discuss about the kind of a person who would make a good king. Malcolm tells Macduff that a good king will have the qualities of “justice, verity, temperance, stableness/ Bounty, perseverance, lowliness.” King Duncan was honoured as he had all these qualities, and most importantly, he was loyal to the interests of Scotland rather than his own self-interests.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Write a short note on any one of the major themes of the play *Macbeth*?

Q 6: Give a brief idea on the emergent theme or aspect as represented in Act IV of *Macbeth.*

10.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

William Shakespeare was a sixteenth century playwright and as such the language that he uses is essentially archaic in style. It is important to note that he had written the play in a language that held currency in his age and society. The use of symbols and images add to the intensity of the play.The symbol of blood has been a prominent presence throughout the play. It is specifically highlighted in the words of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth to suggest their violent mindset. Also you will see, for example, that the witches speak in a way that suggests the presence of supernatural elements.For example, the play begins with the mysterious and cryptic words of the witches:

First Witch : When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightening, or in rain?

Second Witch : When the hurly burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

Third Witch : That will be ere the set of sun.

Their words have been composed by Shakespeare to show highly cryptic and unknown nature of destiny. Then again, Shakespeare makes use of formal, courtly language, especially in the words spoken by Duncan. Thus, it is seen that Shakespeare writes in a language keeping into view the subject and characters of his play.



10.7 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you will be able to discuss the Act-wise content of the play. Discussions on the major characters and the emergent themes have been highlighted for your detailed understanding of the play. Also, the use of style and language will give you an idea of the skills and mastery that William Shakespeare had acquired as one of the greatest dramatists. The unit aims to stir your interest to read the other interesting plays of William Shakespeare.



10.8 FURTHER READING

1) Albert, Edward. *(2000) History of English Literature*, Fifth Edition. Oxford : Oxfoer University Press

2) Birch, Dinah. (2009) *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, Seventh Edition. Oxford : Oxford University Press



10.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: Macbeth continues combating with Macduff claiming that no man born from his mother's womb can defeat him.

Ans to Q No 2: In the climax of the play, Malcolm speaks to the people how peace has finally been restored, and he also declares his intentions for bringing happiness and satisfaction into the lives of his subjects through just and benevolent kingship. He welcomes the people to witness his crowning as the king of Scotland at the court.

Ans to Q No 3: The three witches or the three weird sisters are described as strange creatures, who seem to belong to a different world altogether. Their presence and words are eerie suggesting something

ominous. They are ugly in appearance with thin waif-like fingers and beard on their face.

Ans to Q No 4: Macbeth is the antagonist while Macduff is the archetypal avenging hero who fights for honour and a good cause.

Ans to Q No 5: One of the major themes in *Macbeth* is the corruption of man brought about by uncontrolled ambition and lust for power. We see that the downfall and consequent deaths of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, are mainly caused because of their excessive desire for power and the throne of Scotland. It is shown that Macbeth is not an evil man, yet he succumbs to the human weaknesses for power and success.

Ans to Q No 6: In Act IV of the play, Malcolm and Macduff discuss what kind of a person would make a good king. Malcolm tells Macduff that a good king will have the qualities of "justice, verity, temperance, stableness/ Bounty, perseverance, lowliness." King Duncan was honoured as he had all these qualities, and most importantly, he was loyal to the interests of Scotland rather than his own self-interests.



10.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the action of the play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

Q 2: Analyse the major characters in the play *Macbeth*

Q 3: What are the emergent themes in the play *Macbeth*?

Q 4: Define the style and language employed by the dramatist William Shakespeare in his play *Macbeth*.

*** ***** ***

UNIT 11 : COMPREHENSION AND INTELLIGENT READING

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Comprehension and Intelligent Reading

11.4 Reading and Grasping Skills

11.5 Let Us Sum Up

11.6 Examples

11.7 Exercises

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- learn the importance of comprehension
- gain an idea of intelligent reading and grasping skills
- tackle unseen passages with relative ease
- answer unseen passages keeping in mind the points of discussion
- attempt any form of unseen passages or extracts
- practice different types of comprehension passages
- develop an interest and enjoy the mental exercise of comprehension.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

The mental exercise of comprehension may either tickle and excite your brain cells, or simply leave you head-scratching and totally jumbled. The trick of cracking any unseen passage lies in practice and once mastered can lead you to discover new ideas, information and knowledge. In this unit, the learner will be oriented to the skills of comprehension for both examination and regular reading purposes. While, it is an enjoyable exercise for many to read and comprehend any form of reading material such as news reports, editorials, magazine or journal articles, fiction narratives, prose texts or various other write-ups; for some- 'reading' itself is an ordeal.

Therefore, in this unit we shall discuss comprehension skills and explore a few examples followed by comprehension exercises to sharpen our comprehension of any form of textual source.

11.3 COMPREHENSION AND INTELLIGENT READING

The learner may wonder what makes comprehension so important, particularly in an examination. It is seen that apart from school, college or university examinations even competitive examinations prescribe a portion of reading and comprehension for the English paper. Now it is not without a reason. The purpose of comprehension in an examination is to test the candidate's ability to read and grasp meaning, to scan and select information and most importantly to answer and express the content in his/her own words within a limited time. Thus, the answers to the given set of questions of an unseen passage provide the examiner, an idea of the candidate's comprehension skills. It is in a way to measure at once the candidate's cognitive abilities.

In the first place, comprehension requires the sharpening of reading skills because **intelligent reading** provides clues to quick grasping. And secondly, it requires the practice of writing skills because the given questions of a passage look for answers which are crisp and concise and reflect the candidate's own understanding in the **correct expression**. The unit lays out ways to both develop and improve 'intelligent' reading skills as well as to tackle and express one's understanding through the exercise of writing.

11.4 READING AND GRASPING SKILLS

One's first reading of an unseen passage is bound to be incomplete as it tends to provide a vague idea of its entire content. Only in re-reading and grasping the essentials, the highlights, the keywords and the main points can one proceed to organising answers to the given questions. It is incorrect to think that reading a passage a few times over is a mere waste of time. In fact by reading carefully one invests valuable time in comprehending the content of any unseen passage.

The methods of **skimming and scanning** are two ways to do justice to your reading. In an examination one does not have all the time to read at one's own pace. And thus, in order to improve one's reading speed and extract the most of an unseen passage, it is advisable to first 'skim' through the contents of the paragraph and then 'scan' through it. **Skimming** is a way of quick reading through a passage, to receive an overview or a gist of the content and the type of questions asked. This provides a vague idea of say an almost 55% of the text that one skims through. After having skimmed through the next thing to do is to scan the content. **Scanning** is a way of detailed reading which requires one to focus on the details of the content i.e. keywords, central controlling ideas, expository sentences, highlights, figures or factual details etc. This will enable one to form a broad view of the content and also in the formulation of a mental picture or map of meaning. While the examination clock is ticking, all it requires is **concentration and intelligence** to crack open an unseen passage.

The unseen passage can be a mentally stimulating exercise and help you measure your comprehension power. The key is in both the practice of reading and writing.

For examination purpose:

- Read a given passage or extract quickly in order to **receive a vague idea of the content**.
- Re-read the passage with **a careful attention to details** along with the **questions**.
- As you re-read your mind will simultaneously be at work to **figure out the core idea**.
- **Scan through the passage** for important ideas, information and details.
- Make **mental notes of the probable answers** to the given set of questions or frame your answers mentally first
- If the questions follow the sequence of paragraphs serially, **mentally organise your answers**
- Write your answers **in your own words without altering the content of the passage** or the author's opinion (if any)

- **Do not provide your opinion** unless the questions require it.
- Check if you have **misread or misinterpreted** any portion of the passage

For general practice:

- Select and **extract a passage** from a newspaper, novel, magazine, journal, encyclopedia or any other text source.
- You may pick any form of reading material be it in print or on the web.
- **Quickly read or browse** through the material.
- **Re-read and scan** the selected passage for smaller details.
- **Jot down the core idea or central theme** of the content.
- Mark or highlight certain **keywords** that act as clues to the central theme.
- **Consult a dictionary** if you find certain keywords difficult.
- **Form self-questions** pertaining to the content.
- **Jot down a set of questions**.
- Attempt to **answer** these questions in your own words.
- In case you are **asked to provide a heading**, write a suitable one in keeping with the core idea, theme, event or character as the case may be.
- Start from easier texts that interest you and gradually try the sort of texts that you generally avoid.
- You may **time yourself** while you do attempt the entire exercise of comprehension.
- Try to ask someone who will be able to explain the meaning and context of the passage.
- **Check** how much you have been able to comprehend correctly.



11.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit the learner will gain a fair idea of the importance of comprehension through intelligent reading and grasping skills. The various examples of the selected extracts with possible answers highlight

some of the important points to note while tackling unseen passages. It also provides the learner a scope to develop both reading and writing skills through the practice exercises.

The practice exercises contain a set of questions which are to be attempted by the learner. It encourages him/her to learn by doing or practicing and to inculcate a good habit of intelligent reading in the long run. Thus, the unit aims to both develop and improve the learner's interest and ability to make comprehension an enjoyable mental exercise. The power of comprehension will also open up new windows of knowledge and learning for the learner.

11.6 EXAMPLES

The following examples contain select extracts followed by a set of questions, which have been answered for your quick reference. Also, a few important points have been highlighted to help you tackle and answer comprehension passages confidently.

Extract 1:

At last the great day came when the two caravans were due to arrive. The children stood at the end of the drive for hours, watching for them.

Mother had managed to borrow them from an old friend of hers. The children had promised faithfully to look after them well, and not to damage anything. Now they stood at the end of the drive, watching eagerly for the caravans to arrive.

'They are being drawn by cars today', said Julian.

'But they are fitted up to be horse drawn, too, I wonder what they are like- and what colour they are.'

'Will they be like travelers 'caravans, on high wheels, do you think? asked Anne. Julian shook his head.

'No, they're modern, Mother says. Streamlined and all that.Not too big either, because a horse can't draw too heavy a van.'

They're coming, they're coming! I can see them! Suddenly yelled George, making them all jump. 'Look, isn't that them. Far down the road?'

They all looked hard into the distance. No one had such good eyes as George, and all they could see was a blotch, a moving speck far away on the road. But George's eyes saw two caravans, one behind the other."

[Blyton, Enid. *The Famous Five: Five Go Off in a Caravan.* London: Hodder Children's Books, 1991]

Questions:

1. **Why did the children stand at the end of drive for hours?**
2. **What did the children promise their mother?**
3. **What did the caravans look like according to their mother?**
4. **What did George notice in the distance?**

Answers:

1. The children stood at the end of the drive for hours, watching for the caravans to arrive.
2. The children had promised their mother to faithfully look after the caravans, and not to damage anything.
3. According to their mother, the caravans were modern, streamlined and not too big because a horse would not be able to draw a heavy caravan.
4. George was quick to spot two caravans, one behind the other in the distance.

Points to Note:

a. **You may note from the above example that in general, questions for any given extract are set in a 'systematic' instead of a random pattern. This also gives the learner an ease of reference while answering questions to any given text. Therefore, in taking note of this point, you would find it easier to focus on answering your questions both quickly and correctly.**

Extract 2:

"I was born in the city of Bombay…once upon a time. No, that won't do, there's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947. And thetime? The time matters, too. Well then: at night. No, it's important to be more…On the stroke of midnight,

as a matter of fact. Clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting as I came. Oh, spell it out, spell it out: at the precise instant of India's arrival at independence, I tumbled forth into the world. There were gasps. And,outside the window, fireworks and crowds. A few seconds later, my father broke his big toe; but his accident was a mere trifle when set beside what had befallen me in that benighted moment, because thanks to the occult tyrannies of those blandly saluting clocks I had been mysteriously handcuffed to history, my destinies indissolubly chained to those of my country. For the next three decades, there was to be no escape. Soothsayers had prophesied me, newspapers celebrated my arrival, politicos ratified my authenticity. I was left entirely without a say in the matter. I, Saleem Sinai, later variously called Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and even Piece-of-the-Moon, had become heavily embroiled in Fate-at the best of times a dangerous sort of involvement. And I couldn't even wipe my own nose at that time.**"**

[Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children.* London: Vintage, 2006]

Questions:

1. **Briefly describe the exact details of the narrator's birth.**
2. **Which significant historical moment had coincided with the narrator's birth?**
3. **How does the narrator describe the moment?**
4. **What do you understand by the words "saluting clock"?**
5. **Why does the narrator blame that moment of time?**
6. **What are the various names by which the narrator is known? What is his realisation at that particular moment?**

Answers:

1. The narrator was born in the city of Bombay in Doctor Narlikar's Nursing Home on the stroke of midnight on 15th of August 1947.
2. It was the precise moment of India's independence which had coincided with the narrator's time of birth.
3. Historically, it was a celebratory moment and there were fireworks and gathering of crowds. And at the personal level the narrator's father suffered an accident of breaking his big toe and the Independence Day timed with his birthday had mysteriously

arrested him to history and he was thus chained to share similar destinies with that of the nation.

4. The words "saluting clock" refers to the clock-hands striking together at midnight which the narrator likens with or imagines as joined palms in a respectful greeting.
5. The narrator blames the moment because he considers the saluting clocks as a supernatural occurrence which had chained him for the coming three decades without escape. The soothsayers were caught busy with their prophecies on him, the newspapers celebrated his arrival and the politicians had consented to his genuineness.
6. The various names by which the narrator are Saleem Sinai, Snotnose, Stainface, Baldy, Sniffer, Buddha and Piece-of-the-Moon. The narrator's realisation is that of helplessness with the way circumstances are shaped and he finds himself dangerously heavily embroiled in Fate.

Points to Note:

a. **While answering extracts which have the first person narrative (note theuse of 'I' in the extract) write in third person speech i.e. narrate as a mere reporter of what you have received in the first person narrative.**
b. **If it so happens that you are unable to supply a synonym for a tough word, use the given word itself. Don't make guesses as it may lead you to misunderstand or misinterpret the entire sentence or idea.**

Extract 3:

"The worst pair of opposites is boredom and terror. Sometimes your life is a pendulum swing from one to the other. The sea is without a wrinkle. There is not a whisper of wind. The hours last forever. You are so bored you sink into a state of apathy close to coma. Then the sea becomes rough and your emotions are whipped into a frenzy. Yet even these two opposites do not remain distinct. In your boredom there are elements of terror: you break down into tears; you are filled with dread; you scream; you deliberately hurt

yourself. And in the grip of terror- the worst storm- you yet feel boredom, a deep weariness with it all.

Only death consistently excites your emotions, whether contemplating it when life is safe and stale, or fleeing it when life is threatened and precious.

Life on a lifeboat isn't much of a life. It's like an end game in chess, a game with a few pieces. The elements couldn't be more simple, nor the stakes higher. Physically it is extraordinarily arduous, and morally it is killing. You must make adjustments if you want to survive. Much becomes expendable. You get your happiness where you can. You reach a point where you're at the bottom of hell, yet you have your arms crossed and a smile on your face, and you feel you're the luckiest person on earth. Why? Because at your feet you have a tiny dead fish**"**

[Martel, Yann. *Life of Pi.* Edinburgh; Canongate, 2013.]

Questions:

1. **What are the emotions that the narrator describes as the "worst pair of opposites"?**
2. **How are the hours spent at the sea described by the narrator?**
3. **Explain why the two opposite emotions do not remain distinct?**
4. **What is the comparison drawn to life on a lifeboat and why?**
5. **What are the physical and moral challenges faced in the sea?**
6. **Elaborate why one is compelled to make adjustments while all alone in the sea?**

Answers:

1. The worst pair of opposites that the narrator describes is boredom and terror.
2. The narrator describes the hours spent at the sea seem quiet and endless, where there is not a splash in the sea or a stir in the wind. It is at such a point that life feels like a swinging pendulum of a clock that measure time endlessly. One is so caught by boredom that one slips into a state of apathy or comatose. But, when the sea turns rough ones emotions are stirred into a state of uncertainty and uncontrolled excitement.

3. The two opposites do not remain distinct because one experiences mixed feelings of boredom and terror at the same time. The feelings of terror creep into the feelings of boredom when one is filled with dread, in tears, with the tendency to scream and hurt oneself knowingly. And again when one is in the worst storm of terror, a sudden feeling of boredom and deep weariness tends to creep in.
4. The comparison drawn to a life on a lifeboat is compared to an end game in chess in which only a few pieces remain. Just as the end game is the most challenging part of a chess game when there's the risk of suffering a 'checkmate' position and it is difficult to decide who would be the winner, the seas are a challenging due to the involvement of high risks and the unpredictability of the elements at sea.
5. According to the narrator, while out in the seas all alone it turns physically tiresome or exhaustive in an extraordinary way and morally it turns defeating.
6. While at sea one is compelled to make adjustments in order to survive. When every resource tends to be spent one can only be happy in the moment which may not last long. One experiences moments that feel worse as hell and yet is compelled to bear it with calm and a smiling composure and make the best of the surviving moments.

Points to Note:

a. Try to write the answers in your own words from what you have grasped without altering what the narrator's conveys or expresses.

b. Read and re read the questions and answer briefly and precisely to the point.

11.7 EXERCISES

The few exercises given below are meant for the learner to practice. It takes frequent practice for one to develop a good sense of comprehension.

It is necessary to time yourself while practicing comprehension for examination purpose. Further, it is also advisable to first try reading at leisure and to develop quick comprehension skills through regular practice,

Exercise 1:

Read the passage given below and answer the given questions:

"The pumpkin was huge. Much bigger than last year's Halloween pumpkin. It was wedged in with the rest of the groceries in the shopping cart- as was Cole.

He still loved to be pushed through the parking lot. He was a little old for it, and way too heavy, but Lynn didn't mind at all. It was one of the few carefree, childlike things Cole allowed himself.

The breeze was especially crisp today, and the flame-coloured tree canopies seemed to radiate their own light against the cloudy sky. Days like this made Lynn want to rise up and soar over the earth. She hoped Cole felt it too-but when she leaned over to look at him, she could see his mind was far away.

Lynn began veering left and right. She circled around to an open part of the lot, picking up speed.

Cole's hair began to blow back in the wind. He looked up to the sun, throwing his arms outward like the wings of an airplane.

Lynn whooped with joy, pushing harder, running.

She pulled up to the rear bumper of her old Volvo station wagon with a perfect landing, Cole lowered his arms.

He was smiling now.

Sometimes, Lynn knew, the simple joys were the best.

Simple joys. Simple hopes."

[Shyamalan, M. Night. *The Sixth Sense: A Novelization.*New York: Scholastic, 2000.]

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: Mention one of the few carefree, childlike things that Cole liked to do.

Q 2: What did Lynn like about that particular day?

Q 3: What did Lynn suddenly notice Cole doing?

Q 4: What did Lynn think to herself looking at Cole?

Exercise 2:

Read the passage given below and answer the given questions:

"I had the whole afternoon before me, and examined about three miles of the road very carefully. When a tiger uses a road regularly it invariably leaves signs of its passage by making scratch marks on the side of road. These scratch marks, made for the same purpose as similar marks made by domestic cats and all other members of the cat family, are of very great interest to the sportsman, for they provide him with the following very useful information, (1) whether the animal that has mad the mark is a male or a female, (2) the direction in which it was travelling, (3) the length of time that has elapsed since it passed, (4) the direction and approximate distance of its headquarters, (5) the nature of its kills, and finally (6) whether the animal has been recently had a meal of human flesh. The value of this easily-acquired information to one who is hunting a man-eater on strange ground will be easily understood. Tigers also leave their pugmarks on the roads they use and these pugmarks can provide one with quite a lot of useful information, as for instance the direction and speed at which the animal was travelling, its sex and age, whether all four limbs are sound, and if not sound, which particular limb is defective.

The road I was on had through long disuse got overgrown with short stiff grass and was therefore not, except in one or two damp places was within a few yards of where the road came out on the ridge, and just below this spot there was a green and very stagnant pool of water; a regular drinking place for *sambhar*"

I found several scratch marks just round the corner where the road turned to the left after leaving the cultivated ground, the most recent of which was three days old. Two hundred yards from these scratch marks on the road, for a third of its width, ran under an overhanging rock. This rock was ten feet high and at the top of it there was a flat piece of ground two or three yards wide, which was only visible from the road when approaching the rock from the village side. On the ridge I found more scratch marks, but I did not find any pugmarks until I got to the first hairpin bend. Here, in cutting across the bend, the tiger had left its trace where it had jumped

down onto the same soft earth. The tracks, which were a day old, were a little distorted, but even so it was possible to see that they had been made by a big, old, male tiger."

[Corbett, Jim. "The Mohan Man-eater" *Man-eaters of Kumaon.* New Delhi; Oxford University Press, 2012.]

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: What does the narrator learn from his examination of the road?

Q 2: a. What information does a sportsman receive from a tiger's scratch marks?

b. What information do the pug marks provide?

Q 3: Describe the road on which the narrator finds the next set of scratch and pug marks.

Q 4: Give a brief description of the rock visible from the road.

Q 5: What does the narrator determine from the tracks at the hair-pin bend of the rock?

Exercise 3:

Read the passage given below and answer the given question:

"Once upon a time there was a widow who had two daughters. She and her elder daughter resembled each other so closely, in appearance and character, that when you saw the daughter you would have said that it was the mother. They were both so disagreeable and proud that they were impossible to live with. The younger of the daughters, who for gentleness and good manners was the image of her father, was also as beautiful a girl as you could wish to see. Since like attracts like, the mother was excessively fond of the elder daughter, and had a terrible aversion for the younger. She made her eat in the kitchen and work all the time.

Among other things, the poor child was obliged to be a good half-league from the house twice a day to fetch water, and bring back a great big ewer filled on the top. One day, when she was at the spring, a poor woman came up to her, and asked if she could have a drink.

'Of course you can, good mother', said this pretty girl, and she rinsed out the sewer, went to fill it at the best spot along the stream, and offered it to the old woman, holding it so that she could drink more easily. When she

had had her drink the good woman said to her: 'You are so fair, so good-natured, and so considerate, that I cannot do otherwise than give you a gift' (for she was a fairy, who had put on the shape of a poor village woman, in order to see how far the young girl's kindness and politeness would go).

The fairy continued: 'The gift that I give you is this: at every word you speak, from your mouth a flower will come, or else a precious stone.

When the beautiful daughter arrived home, her mother scolded her for coming back so late from the spring. 'I beg your pardon, mother, for having taken so long', said the poor girl; and as she spoke, from her mouth came two roses, two pearls, and two great diamonds.

'What's this?' exclaimed her mother in astonishment; 'I do believe that those are the pearls coming from her mouth; how can that be daughter?' (which was the first time she had ever called the girl daughter). The poor child told her exactly what had happened, producing huge quantities of diamonds as she did so.

'Really, I must send the other daughter,' said the mother, 'come along Florrie, look at what has come from your sister's mouth when she speaks. Wouldn't you like to have the same gift? All you have to do is to go and get some water to drink, give her some nicely.**"**

[Perrault, Charles. "The Fairies" *The Complete Fairy Tales.* New York; Oxford University Press, 2010]

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: How were the two daughters of the widow different from the other?

Q 2: What obligations did the mother place on the younger daughter?

Q 3: What happens when the younger daughter meets the poor old woman by the stream?

Q 4: How is the young daughter gifted by the fairy for her good behaviour?

Q 5: a. What does the mother plan to do after she learns of the girl's gift?

b. What strikes you about the widow's nature from your reading of the fairy tale?

Exercise 4:

Read the passage given below and answer the given question:

"I guess that one of the most embarrassing things that can happen

to a person is to forget a speech while in front of his audience. Next to forgetting the speech is the embarrassment of faltering along as if you're not sure of what you have to say. Actually, it seems to me that anyone who is asked to give a talk on any particular subject must know the subject pretty well; otherwise why would he be asked to talk about it? No; speakers who falter or hesitate during their speeches do so, I think, because they have forgotten the next word-or because they are fearful that they will forget the next word.

There, in my opinion, lies the problem. If a speech is memorised word for word, and then a word, here and there, is forgotten; it surely will not be delivered as it should be. Why should you have to grope for one particular word? If you can't think of it; why, use any other word that serves the same purpose. Isn't that much better than hemming and hawing until you remember the exact phrasing just the way you memorised it?

The people who realised this felt that the next best thing would be to simply read the speech. This solves the problem of forgetting words, until you lose your place on the paper, and forget what you're talking about altogether. Besides, it seems to me that there is a subtle annoyance evident in the speech word for word."

[Text Source: Harry Lorayne's book *How to Develop a Super-Power Memory*.]

Answer the following questions:

Q 1: What is one of the most embarrassing situations according to the narrator?

Q 2: Why do speakers hesitate or falter?

Q 3: What happen if a speech is not memorised word for word?

Q 4: What according to people is the next best thing to do, in case a speaker is not confident?

Q 5: Does this method completely solve the problem of forgetting words while delivering speech?

*** ***** ***

REFERENCES

1. *An Anthology of English Poetry*, Vol. 2 (for B.A. Major, B.A. Elective and M.A.) Gauhati University.
2. Aggarwala, N. K. (2001). *Essentials of English Grammar and Composition*. New Delhi : Goyal Brothers.
3. *Communication Skills in English*, Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Manipal (2002).
4. Daiches, David. (2001). *A Critical History of English Literature*. Vol 4. New Delhi: Allied Publishers.
5. De Sarkar, P. K. (2007). *Higher English Grammar and Composition*. Kolkata: Book Syndicate Limited.
6. Evans, B. Ifor (1948). *A Short History of English Drama*.
7. Ford, Boris, Ed. (1963). *Pelican Guide to English Literature– The Modern Age*, Second Edition.
8. Hampend, John Ed. *Justice– John Galsworthy*. New Delhi : S. Chand & Company Ltd.
9. IGNOU. Other forms of official communication. EEG-03. IGNOU (2005).
10. *IGNOU Understanding Poetry* (1991). New Delhi : IGNOU.
11. Larrisy, Edward (1998). *W. B. Yeats.* United Kingdom : North Cote House.
12. Legouis, Emile (1994). *A Short History of English Literature*. Calcutta: Oxford University Press.
13. Long, W. J. (1997). *English Literature: Its History and Significance*. New Delhi: Kalyani Publishers.
14. Ousby, Ian (1992). *Companion to Literature in English*. London: Cambridge University Press.
15. Poduri Dattatreya (2000). *W. B. Yeats Poet and Dramatist*. Jaipur: Pointer Publisher.
16. *Poetry down the Ages*. The Board of Studies (English). Mizoram University. Orient Longman.
17. Sarker, Sunil Kumar (2003). *A Companion to William Wordsworth*. New Delhi: Atlantic.
18. Schalit, Leon (1929). *John Galsworthy*, A Survey.
19. Singh, M. P. (2003). *W. B. Yeats : His Poetry and Politics.* United Kingdom : Atlantic.
20. Taylor, Shirley (2003). *Business Communication*.
21. Taylor, Shirley (2007). *Model Business Letters, E-mails and other Business Documents*, Pearson Education Limited.
22. Wren and Martin (1996). *High School English Grammar and Composition*. New Delhi : S. Chand & Company.

Website Resources :

http:/www.writinghelp.com