UG EG S4-03
(DSC/DSE)

# FOUR YEAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE COURSE

## (CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

**SEMESTER- IV**

# ENGLISH POETRY : FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

# ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

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# ENGLISH POETRY: FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION

The Poetry paper titled 'English Poetry from Medieval to Modern' introduces the learner to fifteen representative English poems which encompasses the variety in form and practice of the genre in English literature down the historical ages.

**Unit 1:** The unit introduces the learner to the first poet of English literature, Geoffrey Chaucer and his Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* which contains the narrator's brief description of the springtime pilgrimage to Canterbury.

**Unit 2:** The unit introduces the learner to the 'Bard of Avon' William Shakespeare and his poetic compositions "Sonnet 56" and "Sonnet 144" through which the poet's initial pessimism ends with the sudden realisation of the one source that could make his love immortal.

**Unit 3:** The unit is on Metaphysical Poetry and discusses various important aspects of the form.

**Unit 4:** The unit contains two poems by the metaphysical poet John Donne namely "The Good Morrow" and "The Canonisation" which delves on the intensity of love and upholds the argument on how and why love is not only self-contained but invincible as well.

**Unit 5:** The unit takes up the great epic poet, John Milton's Invocation to *Paradise Lost*, Book I written in the best of English heroic verse rhyme and also much inspired from the earlier classical tradition.

**Unit 6:** The unit takes up a fragment from Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock" titled "Belinda's Dressing Room" which takes the learner through the evocative and the enchanting world of a young belle known as Belinda.

**Unit 7:** The unit takes up an extract from John Dryden's "Mac Fleknoe" which is a satirical work on the contemporary poet Thomas Shadwell following a long literary dispute.

**Unit 8:** The unit takes up the visionary or prophetic poet William Blake's poem "The Tyger" taken from the *Songs of Experience* which evokes the omnipresence of the "immortal hand" of creation, designing all that is complementary and contrasted at once.

**Unit 9:** The unit discusses S.T. Coleridge's poem "Love" while also highlighting the practice of Romantic Poetry.

**Unit 10:** The unit delves into the psychological realm of the Duke of Ferrara in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" which reveals the confessions of the Duke and hints at the mysterious death of the Duchess.

**Unit 11:** The unit takes up Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses" and presents various aspects on the adventure and journey of life.

**Unit 12:** The unit analyses T.S. Eliot's "Preludes" which through its vivid imagery dwells on the existential monotony of the modern world reflecting the dullness, lethargy, boredom and ennui that seeps in through the modern day existence.

**Unit 13:** The unit takes up W.H. Auden's elegy "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" written a month after Yeats' death in winter 1939 that reflects Auden's grave sense of loss and nostalgia through words, thereby conveying his admiration for Yeats.

**Unit 14:** The fourteenth poem takes up Philip Larkin's poem "Church going" which highlights the transforming world view of the modern individual and a change in modern perception towards faith and religion.

**Unit 15:** The fifteenth unit takes up W.B. Yeats' "Sailing to Byzantium" which expresses the poet's desire for eternity.

After going through these units, you will be able to analyse the poems with a proper comprehension of its theme, structure and poetic techniques. 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 some relevant ideas and concepts in "Let Us Know" along the text. We have kept "Check Your Progress" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study.

# UNIT 1: GEOFFREY CHAUCER: PROLOGUE TO *THE CANTERBURY TALES*

## UNIT STRUCTURE


1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 Geoffrey Chaucer: The Poet

1.3.1 His Life

1.3.2 His Works

1.4 The Text of the Poem

1.4.1 The Context of the Poem

1.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

1.5 Poetic Style

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

1.9 Model Questions


## 1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of Geoffrey Chaucer.
- explain the opening passage (11.1-42) of the General Prologue
- describe the poetic style and language of the poem
- appreciate of the opening passage of the General Prologue in totality.

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the opening passage (11.1-42) of the General Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, a fourteenth century English poet. *The Canterbury Tales* represents Chaucer's fullest development as a poet. He concentrated on native English models and traditions for the tone and composition of the work and was able to provide a true picture of his time. With bold but deft strokes he created a living

world, one whose life is still fresh and vivid even after six centuries have passed.

In this unit, we will introduce you to the life and works of Geoffrey Chaucer besides offering an in-depth analysis of the prescribed opening passage of the General Prologue. You will also find an elaboration of the poetic techniques he employed and the style and language he used in his works.

## 1.3 GEOFFREY CHAUCER: THE POET

Chaucer is the first great poet in the recorded history of English literature. Though he was often very busy with other pursuits, when he turned to writing he was, for his time, uniquely committed to letters. He devoted his considerable literary talents to the creation of verse that was lively and pleasing. He was not a captive of any special moral or political or social ideas, or of any set of manners. He rarely gave way to judgments or condemnations. His range and his sympathies seem almost limitless, and in this he resembles all the great poets, whose works may be considered "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time".

### 1.3.1 His Life

A prominent public figure of his age, Geoffrey Chaucer (around 1342-1400) is nowhere noted as a poet in surviving records, but there is no serious doubt about the identity of the poet statesman. Chaucer was born in London in the early 1340s, the only son of his family. Chaucer's father, originally a property owning wine merchant, became tremendously wealthy when he inherited the property of relatives who had died of the Black Death 1349. He was therefore able to send the young Geoffrey off as a page to the Countess of Ulster, wife of the King's son, Lionel. In 1359, he accompanied English forces to France where he was captured; he was ransomed in 1360. By 1366 he was married to Philippa Roet, a lady in-waiting to the Queen. Philippa's sister, Katherine, was mistress and taken wife of



***Page:*** a youth receiving education and performing services at court or in a nobleman's household.

John Gaunt, Chaucer's patron. By 1368 Chaucer was an esquire in the King's household, and from then until 1374 he travelled extensively in the King's service to France, **the Low Countries**, and Italy where he might have met Petrarch, the Italian renaissance poet.



***The Low Countries :*** Holland and Belgium

In 1374 Chaucer was appointed Controller of Customs of Hides, Skins and Wools in the part of London, which meant that he was a government official who worked with cloth imports. His experience of overseering imported cloths might be the reason for his frequent description of the garment and fabrics of his characters in details. He left this post in 1885 to serve as a justice of peace in Kent. In the next year he represented Kent in the Parliament and in the years that followed Chaucer's fortunes fluctuated, but in 1389 he was designated Clerk of Works, responsible for the maintenance of the Royal Palace and other royal properties. From about 1395, he seemed to have been in the service of Henry of Lancaster, son of John of Gaunt. Chaucer was well rewarded when Henry became King Henry IV in 1399, but he died soon after in 1400. His burial place in Westminster Abbey has since been ringed by the graves of later English poets and is known as Poet's Corner.



***Black Death:*** Great epidemic bubonic plague that ravaged Europe in the 14th century, killing between 30 to 50 per cent of population.

Chaucer lived through a time of incredible tension in the English social sphere. The **Black Death**, which ravaged England during Chaucer's childhood and remained widespread afterwards, wiped out thirty to fifty per cent of the population. Consequently, the labour force gained increased leverage and was able to bargain for better wages, which led to resentment from the nobles and the propertied classes. These classes received another blow in 1381, when peasantry, helped by the artisan class revolted against them. The merchants were also wielding increasing power over the legal establishment, as the Hundred years war created profit for England and, consequently, appetite for luxury was growing. The merchants capitalised on the demand for luxury goods, and when Chaucer was growing up, London was pretty much run by

a merchant oligarchy, which attempted to control both aristocracy and the lesser artisan classes. Chaucer's political sentiments are unclear, for although *The Canterbury Tales* documents the various social tensions in the manner of the popular genre of *estates satire*, the narrator refrains from making overt political statements and what he does say may or may not represent Chaucer's own sentiments.

**LET US KNOW**



The Hundred Years' War was a series of conflicts between England and France from 1337 to 1453. Its origins lay with the English Kings' possession of Gascony which the France Kings claimed as their fief, and with trade rivalries over Flanders.

The two kingdoms had a long history of strife before 1337, and the Hundred Years' war has sometimes been interpreted as merely intensification of these struggles. It was caused by fears of French intervention in Scotland, which the English were trying to subdue and by the claim of England's Edward III (through his Isabella, daughter of Philip of France IV) to the crown of France. After the war, domestic problems, such as war of the Roses, prevented England from attempting to conquer France again. It gave up continental aspirations and began to develop as a sea-power. France was ravaged by the Black Death, famine, and gangs of bandits, in addition to the devastation caused by the war. In both countries, the decline of the feudal nobility and the rise of the middle class allowed the monarchies to gradually become established.

The Peasants' Revolt was the rising of the English peasantry in June 1381. Following the plague of the Black Death, a shortage of agricultural workers led to higher wages. The statute of Labourers, enacted in 1351, attempted to return wages to pre-plague levels. When a poll tax was enforced in 1379, riots broke out all over England,

especially in Essex and Kent. Led by Wat Tyler and John Bull, the rebels sacked Canterbury and entered London, where they continued plundering, burning John of Gaunt's palace, and taking the prisons at Newgate and Fleet. The young King Richard II attempted to appease the mob, who demanded to end serfdom and feudalism. After Wat Tyler's murder rebellion was suppressed.

### 1.3.2 His Works

For convenience Chaucer's works are divided into three periods, the French, the Italian and the English, each one indicating dominant influences on his work.

**The French Period (to 1372):** Chaucer begins his literary career as a translator of *Le Roman de La Rose*, the famous 13th-Century love encyclopedia, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Muen. It is a dream vision in which the poet finds himself in an exquisite garden where the God of Love reveled with his retinue. Wounded by Cupid's arrows, the poet earnestly desired a Rose bud (symbol of his lady). His suit is apposed by Chastity, Pity, and Fair Welcome. The lover, by the intervention of Venus, kisses the Rosebud but is banished from the garden. Many questions regarding the authorship of the Middle English version of the poem remain unresolved but most scholars today agree that the first 1705 lines were translated by Chaucer.



***Ovid:*** Plabius Ovidius Naso (43 BC-17AD) a Roman poet whose poetry deals mainly with the themes of Love. His main works are Aras *Amatoria, Metaporphoses* and *Tristia.*

*The Book of the Duchess* or *The Death of Blanche* (1369) is a dream allegory in octosyllabic couplets lamenting the death of Blanche, the first wife of John of Gaunt. In it the poet falls asleep after being deeply moved by a reading of Ovid's story of Queen Alcyone. He dreams of meeting a black-clad knight in a forest. The knight sorrows for his lost Lady White (French Blanche) who he finally admits is dead. The poet awakes with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in his hand. It is a highly personal and tasteful elegy, the first full portrait in English literature of an English lady.

**The Italian Period (1372-85):** During this period his works are modeled on Dante and Boccaccio. To this period belong *Anelida and Arcite* and *The Parliament of Fowles*. "Anelida and Arcite" is an unfinished poem and its subject matter receives fuller treatment in *The Knight's Tale*. The latter work is a dream vision in which the birds appear on St. Valentine's day before the goddess Nature to choose their mates. Nature holds in her hand a formel (or female) eagle, and three of her kind come for her love. The other birds are bidden to decide which is the worthiest, but after they have their say the formel asks for a respite to consider for herself, and the birds fly away singing their roundel.

*The House of Fame* is a three-part vision in which the dreaming poet finds himself in a Temple of Venus, its glass walls engraved with the story of Dido and Aeneas. In Book II, Chaucer is carried up in the air by an Eagle who discusses on the theory of sound to the House of Fame, a bewildering place described in Book III. The poem breaks off abruptly as Chaucer meets a man whose name he cannot give: "But he seemed for to be A man of grat auctorite"

*Troilus and Criseyde* is a long poem adopted from Boccaccio. The story as adopted by Chaucer tells how Troilus, one of the sons of King Priam, was written with love for Criseyde, the Greek maiden whom the priest Calchas had left behind at Troy when he himself was ransomed, how by the help of her uncle Sir Pandarus he won her affection and love, lastly, when the fortune of war removed her from Troy, Criseyde proved faithless and gave herself to the Greek Prince, Diomede, written in seven-line stanzas, Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is full of human interest and pathos, vivid in colour and the sense of the beauty and fleetingness of life. He takes the story as Boccaccio had narrated and humanises and enriches it at every point.

*The Legend of Good Women* is Chaucer's last love vision, written in the first decasyllabic couplets in English. In its Prologue the god of love upbraids Chaucer for treason and Queen Alcestis

bids him to write stories of faithful women as a penance. The earliest of the legends of cupid's saints, the stories of Ucopatra, Thisbe, and Dido are interesting but the theme Chaucer had chosen left little scope for variety, and he had written nine of the nineteen tales he had planned; he turned aside to take up a happier task, the composition of the *Canterbury Tales.*

**The English Period (1385-1400):** During this period he wrote the most memorable poem in the English language up to that point in time, and one of the great poems of all English literature, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer tells how he joined in the Tabard Inn, Southwork, by a company of "Sontry folk, by adventure yfalle/ In felaweshipe, and pilgrims were they all" ready to 'wende' to 'Caunterbury'… the hooly blissful martyr for to seeks". The innkeeper proposes a tale-telling game to pass the time on the two-day ride to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket of Canterbury, killed by the agents of Henry II on December 29, 1170 at the altar of his Cathedral. The thirty pilgrims are each to tell two falls on the way and two on the way back, the teller of the tale of best sentence (moral import) and the most "solaas" (comfort, pleasure) wins a supper at the tabard paid for, by the other.

Thus the game creates the Tales; Pilgrim tales were proverbially known as "Canterbury Tales". The pilgrims tell twenty-four tales of popular kinds ranging from themes such as the lives of saints, moral fables, rude jokes, beast fables, sermons, penitential treatises etc.

While some of the tales in the *Canterbury Tales* reveal some of the characters, some like *The Nun's Priest Tale* do not. Chaucer is an author who makes fun of authority. The tales he himself narrates, such as those of Sir Thopas and Miliboeus, would not have won the supper. "Sir Thopas" is a parody of popular tail-rhyme romance, full of silly conventions, empty pauses and bad rhymes. The Host, missing the point, cuts him off with the comment that his rhyming "is not worth a tord". Chaucer then tells "a litel

thing in prose," like the lengthy moral fable of Miliboeus and Prudence. The author, dismissed by the Host, shows him the way to wisdom with many a sentence. Chaucer repositions himself with the speed of a hummingbird. The detail of the General Prologue does not lead to social realism and there is no steady or a consistent moral point of view. Chaucer's Gothic switches of genre and tone are allowed by his comprehensive conception of life, the physical, social, moral and metaphysical, shown from a variety of viewpoints. As his final retractions show, Chaucer's humanity has a theological dimension.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** On what basis are Chaucer's works divided into three periods? What are these periods?

**Q2.** Chaucer's first three major works were dream visions. What are they?



**LET US KNOW**

In England the most famous shrine was that of Canterbury which contained the relics of St. Thomas Becket, whose murder followed his quarrel with Henry II.

St. Thomas Becket (1180-1170), an English priest and politician, became Chancellor to Henry II and was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. The interest of the church soon conflicted with those of the crown. Encouraged by a hasty outburst from the King, four knights murdered Becket before the altar of Canterbury Cathedral. He was canonised in 1772 and his shrine became the busiest centre of pilgrimage in England until the Reformation.

Modern readers are familiar with the account through the poetic dramas of Tennyson [*Becket* (1884)] T.S. Eliot, [*Murder In the Cathedral* (1935)] and Jean Anouilh, [*Becket* (1959)].

## 1.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**The Prologue**

**Whan** that Aprill with his **shoures soote**
The **drogthte** of March hath **perced** to the **roote**
And bathed every **veyne** in **swich licour**
**Of which vertu** engendred is the **flour**;
Whan **Zephirus eek** with his **sweete breeth**
Inspired hath in every **holt and heeth**
The **Tendre croppes**, and the **yonge sonne**
Hath in the **Ram** his halve cours **yronne**,
And smale foweles **maken melodye**,
That **slepen** al the **nyght** with open ye
(so **priketh** hem nature in **hir corages**);
**Thanne longen folk** to goon on pilgrimages,
And **palmeres** for to **seken straunge strondes**,
To **ferne halwes**, **kowthe** in **sondry londes**;
And specially from every **shires** ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The **hooly** bliss ful **martir** for to seke,
That **hem** hath **holpen** whan that they were **seeke**.

**Bifil** that in that seson on a day,
In Southwerk at the **Tabard** as I **lay**
**Redy** to **wenden** on my pilgrimage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that **hostelrye**
Wel nyne and twenty in a **compaignye**,
Of **sondry** folk, **by aventure yfalle**
**In felaweshipe**, and pilgrim were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury **wolden** ryde.
The **chamber**s and the stables **weren wyde**,
And wel we weren **esed atte beste**.



***Whan:*** when
***Shoures soote:*** sweet showers
***Droghte:*** drought
***Perced:*** pierced
***Roote:*** root
***Veyne:*** vein
***Licour:*** liquor; moisture
***Swich:*** such
***Of which vertu:*** by virtue (beneficent power) of which
***Flour:*** flower
***Zephirus:*** west wind
***Eek:*** also
***Swete breeth:*** sweet breath
***Holt and heath:*** wood and heath; grove and field
***Yonge sonne:*** young sun (the astrological year began with the entrance of the Sun into the sign Aries or the Ram, on March 12 (old style) in April, therefore, the Sun was still young.
***Tender:*** tender; young
***Croppes:*** shoots; tops of the plants.
***Ram:*** astrology sign of Aries
***Y-ronne:*** has run
***Smale foweles:*** small birds



***Maken:*** make
***Melodye:*** melody
***Slepen:*** sleep
***Nyght:*** night
***Priketh:*** incites; inspires
***Hir:*** their
***Corages:*** hearts; spirits
***Thanne:*** then
***Longen folk:*** people long; people desire
***Palmers:*** pilgrims, (originally pilgrims to Holy Land, who brought thence a palm branch as a token of their journey)
***Seken:*** seek
***Straunge strondes:*** strange strands; foreign countries
***Ferne:*** ancient
***Halwes:*** hallows; saints; shrines
***Londes:*** lands
***Kowthe:*** known; renowned
***Wenden:*** go
***Hostelrye:*** inn
***Shires:*** County's
***Hooly:*** holy
***Martir:*** martyr
***Hem:*** them
***Holpen:*** helped

And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem **everichon**
That I was of **hir** felaweshipe **anon**,
And made **forward erly** for to **ryse**,
To take oure wey ther as I yow **devyse**.

But **nathelees**, whil I have **tyme** and space,
**Er** that I ferther in this tale **pace**,
Me thynketh it **acordaunt** to **resoun**
To telle yow al the **condicioun**
Of **ech of hem**, so as it semed me,
And **whiche** they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what **array** that they were inne;
And at a knight than **wol** I first **bigynne**

### 1.4.1 The Context of the Poem

The opening line of the General Prologue, "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote" immediately introduces us to the reverdie tradition – literally "re-greening", a mode of medieval lyric poetry celebrating the revival of spring and all that entails. The reverdie passage (el. 1-18) captures the creative uprush of new life all around as the sweet showers of April penetrate the dry earth of March. The wave of impulse that causes the birds to mate, as well as the plants to grow, is shared by the human folk and they desire to "goon to pilgrimages" This desire is something like the migrating impulse in birds. But its end is worship. Thus the poet explains his presence at the Tabard Inn outside London where he waits to begin pilgrimage to the Shrine of St. Thomas Becket in gratitude for aid during sickness. He then introduces the reader to the pilgrims and within the framework of the pilgrimage we are offered a series of sharp and revealing portraits. Chaucer's pilgrims are representatives of what were known in medieval times as the "Three Estates". Simply, this

was a three-tier social structure made up of those who fought, those who prayed and the commoners: in other words, the knightly class, the church and the rest. If we look at the group of pilgrims who gather with 'Chaucer, the pilgrim' in the Tabard Inn in Southwark, we can clearly see that he has collected representatives of all these three estates, ready to set out for Canterbury on the springtime pilgrimage.

### 1.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

The opening passage of *The Canterbury Tales* falls into two distinct parts, the first focusing on the Spring's renewal and rebirth and the second on the holy duty of the pilgrimage. The first part, which is a reverdie, presents a unified and ideal organic hierarchy– a great chain of awakenings from the rain to the roots of the plants, to the flowers, the Sun to the fields and the birds growing musical and drowsy, to humans who may sublimate the same impulses into pilgrimages to holy shrines of martyrs. This part really stresses on the creative energies of spring with words like "engendered", "inspired", "priketh" and so on. These words denote penetration and fertilisation, and the movement of the lines and short vowels in some words help to create a sense of the creative energy of a time when nature is charged with such vitality that even the birds sleep with one eye open : This creative impulse which causes the birds to mate, as well as the plants to grow, is shared by the human folk as they "longen" to "goon on pilgrimages" to renowned shrines in various distant countries. But many from different counties of England came to Canterbury to visit the relics of St. Thomas Becket, where they thank the martyr for having helped them when they were in need.

The second part starts with the words "BifIl" which conveys a sense of chance, offhandedness, subjectivity and personal specificity. The poet abandons his unfocussed, all knowing point of view, identifying himself as an actual person for the first time by inserting the first person –'I'- as he relates how he met the group of



***Seeke:*** sick
***Bifil:*** it befell; it happened
***Lay:*** lodged
***Tabard:*** name of the Inn
***Redy:*** ready
***Compaignye:*** company
***Sondry:*** sundry
***By aventure:*** by chance
***Yfalle:*** fallen
***In felaweshipe:*** fellowship; company
***Wolden:*** would; wished
***Weren wyde:*** were wide and roomy
***Chambres:*** chambers rooms.
***Esed:*** entertained
***Atte beste:*** at the best
***Everichon:*** everyone
***Hir:*** there
***Anon:*** at once
***Acordaunt:*** agreeable
***Resoun***: reason
***Condicioun:*** condition
***Ech of hem:*** each of them
***Whiche:*** of what kind
***Array:*** attire; dress
***Wol:*** will
***Bigynne:*** begin

pilgrims while staying at the Tabard Inn, in Southwork. He emphasises that this group of twenty nine pilgrims, which he encountered by accident, was itself formed by chance (el. 25-26). He then shifts into the first person plural, referring to the pilgrims as "we" beginning in line 29, asserting his status as a member of the group.

The poet ends the introductory portion of his Prologue by noting that he has "tyme and space" to tell his narrative. His comments underscore the fact that he is writing some time after the events of history, and that he is describing the characters from memory. He has met these people and spoken with them, but he has waited a certain length of time before sitting down and describing them. His intention to describe each pilgrim as he or she seemed to him is also important, for it emphasises that his descriptions are not only subject to his memory but are also shaped by his individual perceptions and opinions regarding each of the characters. He positions himself as a mediator between the two groups: the group of pilgrims of which he was a member, and us, the audience, whom the narrator explicitly addresses as 'you' in lines 34 and 38.

On the other hand, the narrator's declaration that he will tell us about the "condicioun", "degree" and "array" (dress) of each of the pilgrims suggests that his portraits will be based on objective facts, as well as, his opinions. He spends considerable time characterising the group members according to their social positions. The pilgrims represent a diverse cross section of fourteenth-century English society. Medieval social theory divided society into three broad classes, called "estates": the military, the clergy, and the laity. In the portraits that we will see in the rest of the General Prologue, the Knight and the Squire represent the military estate. The clergy is represented by the Prioress (and her nun and three priests), the monk, the Friar, and the parson. The other characters from the wealthy Franklin to the poor plowman, are members of the laity. These lay characters can be further subdivided into landowning (the Franklin), professionals (the clerk, the Man of Law, the Guildsmen,

the physician and the Shipman), labour class (the cook and the Plowman), stewards (the Miller, the Manciple, and the Reeve), and the church officers (the Summoner and the Pardoner). As we will see, Chaucer's descriptions of the various characters and social roles reveal the influence of the medieval genre of 'yestates satere'.

## LET US KNOW



The opening of *The Canterbury Tales* "When that Aprill with his shoures soote" is the first line of English verse that is widely known. In 1922, T.S. Eliot began his lament about civilisation, *The Waste Land*, reversing Chaucer's reverdia passage:

"April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain."

The difference that emerges between them is the difference between two phases of civilisation. The modern poem involves a consciousness of disharmony between man and nature, a disorganisation and dislocation of life. Something has gone wrong with the orderly relationship between man and nature which is Chaucer's starting point. The modern poem conveys the aimlessness of rootless lives which no longer appear to themselves to have social or other functions.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q3.** What is a reverdie? Why are the opening lines of the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* so called?

**Q4.** Why did Chaucer's pilgrims go to Canterbury? Why was Canterbury regarded as holy?

## 1.5 POETIC STYLE

The style of an author is his distinctive manner of writing or expressing his thought in language. In commenting on Chaucer's style, it would be well to remember that he was writing in English at a time when that language was in a poor state of development. At that time French was the language of the court and the upper class. The language of the church was Latin, and English was spoken by common people who were largely uneducated and could neither write nor read. His sure instinct and judgement, however, made him choose the dialect of his native land when his contemporaries like Gower preferred to write in Latin.

To Chaucer goes the credit of having developed the condition of his native language to such an extent, that only the addition of blank verse was required to make English poetry fully equipped. His versatility in experimenting with new verse forms makes it impossible to exaggerate his importance as a creator of English versification. He brought to an inadequate dialect, the beauty of fluid simplicity, conversational case as well as literary grace. He took up a dialect and left it a language. He enriched it by adopting words from foreign languages, especially French. He infused the rough English dialect with the refinement and polish of the French language. He brought flexibility to his native language.

The opening passage of The Prologue is in the tradition of medieval writers, who paid tribute to and welcomed spring at the beginning of their works. But as D.S. Brewer observes, the triumph of the opening as literary art lies in its purposive structure and its style. In the opening passage we have smelt the spring air, and have swooped in imagination down from Zodiac to Tabard. The focus has carried us from a general view of the season to fix sharply on the pilgrims gathered at an inn near London. The vision was spacious, as well as, precise. The passage is written in a modified 'high style'. In the term 'Zephirus' connected with "swete breeth", we have the fanciful personification in combination with sensous realism. Splendour and simplicity are beautifully harmonised. The 'high' literary tone of the astronomical allusion is followed by a line of striking simplicity and musical

charm: “And smale foweles maken meloyde”.

But the ‘high’ style of the beginning gradually gives way to the plain and simple, which would be Chaucer’s appropriate style in the rest of the General Prologue.

The style stays ‘high’ for the first eleven lines. The twelfth line. “Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages” is plain and straight forward enough. The next two lines:

“And palmers for the seken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes”

have a certain dignity and remoteness from everyday life. The next three lines show more of the common touch and brings the English reader home:

“And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende
The hooly blisful martir for to seke”

With the next line, “That hem hath holpen when that they were seeke” we come to clear simplicity and plainness. The transition is complete. From the elaborate beginning we have travelled to the easy familiar style, with a smooth and flowing manner.

In general, Chaucer’s style is direct, plain, conversational and even personal at times. His imagery is likewise direct and vivid, drawn from common and familiar fields of experience. He has a masterly ability of making a smooth transition from “high” to the colloquial style, without losing any fluidity of movement, as shown above. He shows a sure discretion and confidence in the choice of right words.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q5.** Briefly discuss Chaucer’s credit as a creator of English versification.

**Q6.** Comment on the state of the English language at the time when Chaucer wrote.

**Q7.** What is the general characteristic of Chaucer’s style of writing?

As we read the Prologue we are immediately struck by its conversational tone. The verse flows with a pleasing fluidity. It shows Chaucer's mastery of the decasyllabic line which he imported from France. It had been employed hardly at all in England previously – and he used it in both stanzaic and couplet forms. The seven line stanza (a b a b b c c) has become known as the Chaucerian stanza or Rime Royale.

We find ordinary speech, common proverbs and idiomatic terms, and even contemporary slang in his poetry. It provides a conversational slant to Chaucer's style. Some phrases, which Chaucer often tags on to the end of the lines in order to ensure an easy metrical flow, have a conversational and personal tone like "In Southwark at the Tabard as **I** lay" or "To take **oure** wey, ther as **you** devyse".

Numerous such other lines, seem to establish a direct contact with the reader which is the essence of conversation. It is done through phrases such as "I telle", "I gesee", "I seyde" etc.

A special stylistic device used by Chaucer is the emphatic manner in which he underscores his point. Some of his statements have an air of clear finality". "He was a verray parfit, gentil knight" sums up the knight in simple and direct words. Some of the words Chaucer uses frequently to intensify and emphasise a point are "ful", "al", "certainly", "wd". They are all affirmative and positive terms. It seems to indicate a stylistic device through which Chaucer associates himself with the positive and generous outlook of life.

Chaucer's style has a directness and immediacy, which comes from the habitual employment of the verb 'to be' in describing the pilgrims. His statements are so plain and simple that they admit no qualification.

The statements such as "pilgrims were they alle" or "I was hir felaweshipe anon" –are clear, solid and irrefutable. The terms in which the pilgrims are described, are simple and direct. The most common of adjectives used are, "perfect", "gay", "yain". They often gain their strength and directness through masterly placing in a line.

The simple immediacy which marks the adjectives used for the pilgrims, is to be found in Chaucer's images too. "The colours of rhetoric" was the name given to figures of speech in the Middle Ages. Chaucer uses

plenty of images and similes. But they are all simple, direct, and never elaborate. At the same time, they have vivid and arresting quality: "his mouth as greet was a greet forney's" says Chaucer and we get a direct picture of the cavernous mouth of the Miller.

The images are derived from the common spheres of experience. They are uncomplicated and direct. Chaucer does not employ extended simile or metaphor in poetry. His images are drawn from homely and familiar fields of life. His imagery is likewise direct and vivid, drawn from common and familiar fields of experience. He has a masterly ability of making a smooth transition from "high" to the colloquial style, without losing any fluidity of movement, as shown above. He shows a certain discretion and confidence in the choice of right words. The charm of fluent simplicity and perfect appropriateness of word to thought, makes Chaucer's style an important aspect of his poetry. The charm of fluent simplicity and perfect appropriateness of word to thought, makes Chaucer's style an important aspect of his poetry.



## 1. 6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt about the illustrious life and works of Chaucer, the first great poet of English literature. You have also learnt how by choosing to write in English at a time when the language was in a poor state of development he turned English into rich vehicle of literature. You have also become familiar with the opening passage of his greatest work, *The Canterbury Tales*, the most widely known lines in English verse. Besides, you have become acquainted with his style and language he used in his writing. You have also learnt about the poetic techniques he employed in his poems, especially in the General Prologue.



## 1.7 FURTHER READING

1) Brown, Peter. (ed.) (2002) *A Companion of Chaucer*. London: Oxford University Press.

2) Bowden, M.S. (1964) *A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. London.

3) Cooper, Helen. (1988) *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*. London: Duckworth Press

4) Pearsall, D (1985) *The Canterbury Tales.* London: G. Allen & Unwin

5) Pollard, A. W. (1962) *The Prologue*. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd.

6) Spiers, J. (1951) *Chaucer the Maker*. London: Faber and Faber



## 1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1.** For convenience and to indicate influences on his work. Chaucer's works are divided into 3 periods-the French, Italian and English period.

**Ans to Q No 2.** *Le Roman de La Rose, The Book of the Duchess or The Death of Blanche.*

**Ans to Q No 3.** The reverdie tradition literally “re-greening”, a mode of medieval lyric poetry celebrating the revival of spring.

**Ans to Q No 4.** For holy pilgrimage. Many pilgrims went on pilgrimage to offer thanks giving.

**Ans to Q No 5.** Chaucer developed the condition of his native language to such an extent, that only the addition of blank verse was required to make English poetry fully equipped.

**Ans to Q No 6.** It was a time when language was in a poor state of development. French was the language of the court and the upper class. The language of the church was Latin, and English was spoken by common people.

**Ans to Q No 7.** Chaucer uses plenty of images and similes. But they are all simple, direct, and never elaborate. At the same time, they have a vivid and arresting quality. His style in general is direct, plain and conversational, even personal at times.



## 1.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** How does Chaucer pay tribute to and welcome spring at the beginning of his General Prologue?

**Q2.** Describe the spring season as presented by Chaucer in the opening lines of the General Prologue, How does it affect the 'human folk'?

**Q3.** Write a note on the 'high style' used by Chaucer in describing the spring season in the opening lines of the General Prologue.

**Q4.** How does Chaucer explain his presence at the Tabard Inn in Southwark in the month of April? Whom did he meet there?

**Q5.** "Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages" – when do people "longen to goon on pilgrimages (long to go on pilgrimage?)? Where did people go for pilgrimage? Why did they go to the shrine of Canterbury?

**Q6.** How does the opening passage of the General Prologue of Chaucer express the sense of harmony between man and nature in the Spring season?

**Q7.** Write a note on the pilgrim's preparation to go on pilgrimage with a group of twenty nine pilgrims to the shrine of Canterbury?

**Q8.** Why does Chaucer tell us about the 'condicioun' , 'degree' and 'array' of each of the pilgrims gathered at the Tabard Inn?

**Q9.** Write a note on the theme of the opening lines of the General Prologue.

**Q10.** Write a note on Chaucer's style and poetic technique on the basis of the opening lines of the General Prologue.

**Q11.** Explain :

(a) "Whan Zephirus eek with its sweete breeth inspired hath in every holt and heeth the tender croppes, and the yonge sonne."

(b) "And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes/ To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes"

(c) "To telle yow al the condicioun / Of ech of hem, so as it semed me/ And whiche they weren, and of what degree."

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# UNIT 2: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: SONNETS 65 & 144

## UNIT STRUCTURE


2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Shakespeare: The Poet

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Works

2.4 The Text of the Sonnets

2.4.1 Explanation of the Sonnets

2.5 Poetic Style

2.6 Let us Sum up

2.7 Further Reading

2.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.9 Model Questions


## 2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare
- explain Sonnets 65 and 144 as a real testimony of time's immortality and the complications in love relationships.
- appreciate the distinctive characteristics of Shakespearean Sonnets.

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to one of the greatest pioneer in the field of English literature and culture, William Shakespeare. Apart from his creative genius which flowered in all its magnificence in the theatrical arena, his poems, sonnets and his histrionics have become a part of English lore. Stressing on the focus point of this unit, 'Shakespearean Sonnets', we will discuss here in detail the distinctive characteristics of his sonnets.

A sonnet is a form of lyric poetry where the poet's deep feelings and

emotions are projected within fourteen lines and a specific rhyme scheme. Shakespeare is one of the greatest sonneteers of his age. His sonnets are "the most precious pearls of Elizabethan lyricism, some of them unsurpassed by any lyricism." Shakespeare wrote altogether 154 sonnets. Majority of his sonnets were written in London in the 1590's during an outbreak of plague that closed theatres and prevented playwrights from staging their dramas. Shakespearean Sonnets are units of fourteen iambic pentameter lines rhyming according to the English or Surreyean form. Each line consists of ten syllables. The syllables are divided into five pairs called iambs or iambic feet. The first twelve lines are divided into three quatrains with four lines each. In the three quatrains the poet establishes a theme or problem and then resolves it in the final two lines called the couplet. The rhyme scheme of the quatrains is abab, cdcd, efef. The couplet has the rhyme scheme of gg. Only three of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets do not confirm to this structure: Sonnet 99 has 15 lines, Sonnet 126 has 12 lines and Sonnet 145 is written in four-foot lines.

Shakespeare addresses the majority of his sonnets (1-126) to an unidentified young man with outstanding physical and intellectual attributes. It seems like with this man, the poet shares an intense, romantic relation. The youth's love, at time, fills the poet with intense joy. Sonnets 1-17 all take the form of persuasions where the poet urges the 'fair youth' to marry and procreate so that he can pass on his superior qualities to a child, ensuring his immortality. From Sonnet 18 a new perspective opens up. Shakespeare shifts his viewpoint claiming his own poetry to be highly essential to immortalise the young man and his qualities. The final sonnets (127-154) are addressed to a mysterious 'dark lady'--- a sensuous, irresistible woman of questionable morals who captivates the poet. Evidences in the sonnets prove that both the poet and his young man have become obsessed with the 'dark lady'. The tone of the final sonnets is distressing, with language of sensual feasting, uncontrollable urges, and sinful consumption.

The critics have managed to draw out some thematic features in the sonnets like time, love, fidelity, death, immortality, art and the artist and friendship. The prescribed sonnets- 'Sonnet 65' and 'Sonnet 144'- highly

points out the theme of time, immortality and fidelity respectively. Sonnet 65 shows how the poet talks about the ravaging effects of time and claims his poetry to immortalise the ravaging effects of time. Sonnet 144, on the other hand, describes fidelity as the ambiguous relationship between the narrator, the young man and the dark lady takes on the nature of an emotional triangle. The characteristic brilliance of Shakespeare like quibbling and wordplay among are also part of the sonnets and they stand as literary marvels of the age in their own right. In the Sonnets, Shakespeare breaks away from the courtly conventions of the 1590's and explores a new emotional range.

## 2.3 SHAKESPEARE: THE POET

William Shakespeare (1564-1616) towers as a colossus over the English literary and cultural scene. He has been praised for his "knowledge of the heart", his superb poetry, aesthetic cunning in his disposition of dramatic action, his theatrical skill and his ability to create living worlds of people. External facts about his life are scanty and much of the connections between the dates associated with his life and career are based on conjecture and detective work.

### 2.3.1 His Life

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 in the village of Stratford-on-Avon in the county of Warwickshire. His father John Shakespeare was a farmer's son who came to Stratford about 1531, and began to prosper as a trader in corn, wheat, leather and agricultural products.

Of Shakespeare's education little is known. He probably attended the Grammar School at Stratford for a few years where he picked up "small Latin and less Greek." His real teachers meanwhile were the men and women and natural influences which surrounded him. His education at the hands of nature came from keeping his heart, as well as, his eyes wide open to the beauty of the world. His tremendous memory and his ability to note down and remember every significant thing in the changing scenery of earth and sky made him such a great writer that till date no one has ever equaled him in the perfect setting of his characters. At the age of fourteen, Shakespeare's father lost his

little property and fell in debt. The boy consequently was withdrawn from school. What Shakespeare did after he had left school is uncertain. But if we rely on the evidences found in his plays it can be said that he was a county school master, a lawyer's clerk, a clown, a king , a Roman etc. he was everything in his imagination, and it is impossible from his study of his scenes and characters to form a definite opinion about his early occupations.

In 1582, Shakespeare tied his nuptial knot at the age of eighteen, with Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a peasant family and his senior by eight years. When he was hardly twenty-one he was burdened with three children. It is, generally supposed, though without any sure ground, that Shakespeare left Stratford in or about 1586 for London, and took the way to fame and fortune. Of his life in London nothing definite is known. It was the period of his great literary activity. He entered into the stirring life of London with perfect sympathy and understanding which he had shown among the simple folk of his native Warwickshire. Shakespeare's first work may well have been that of a general helper, doing odd job about the theatre; but he soon became an actor. The records of the old London theatres show that in the next ten years he gained a prominent place. Shakespeare's poems, rather than his early dramatic attempts, mark the beginning of his success. By dedicating his ‘‘Venus and Adonis’’ to the Earl of Southampton he managed to get a large sum of money as a gift and he shrewdly invested the sum. He soon became part owner of the Globe and Blackfriars theatres. Within a decade of his arrival in London, he had become one of the most famous actors and literary men in England.

Shakespeare's life in London was an unbroken record of success and growing prosperity. In or about 1609 or 1611, after the period of his great tragedies he is supposed to have left London for Stratford. Though still in the prime of life, Shakespeare gave up his dramatic work to live the comfortable life of a country gentleman. After a few years of quiet at Stratford-on-Avon Shakespeare died on the anniversary of his birth, April 23, 1616 and was buried in the chancel of Stratford Church.

## 2.3.2 His Works

Little is known of the beginning of William Shakespeare's career as a writer. Perhaps, he began well as a collaborator like many of his contemporaries. Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic career extends over a period of twenty four years-1588 to 1612. His works are grouped into four periods corresponding to the growth and experience of his life and mind.

The first period extends from 1588 to about 1595 and includes *Love's Labour's Lost, The Comedy of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Romeo and Juliet, Richard II, I, II and III, Henry VI and Richard III*. To this period belong also the two poems: *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. This period served his dramatic apprenticeship. The works of this period show an extraordinary facility in expression and a rare gift of phrasing which distinguished his work. The treatment of life is superficial and there is no depth of thought or characterisation.

To the Second Period (1595-1601) belong the greatest comedies and historical plays. It includes *King John*, The *Merchant of Venice*, The *Taming of the Shrew*, *Henry IV*, I and II, *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night and the Sonnets*. This period shows a rapid growth and development in his art. First he touches on many different phases of life and presents a gallery of portraits. The historical plays epitomise the great era of Elizabeth's reign and embody her political insight and wisdom. Secondly, he shows rare skill and delicacy in drawing the female characters. Late in 1598, Shakespeare's Sonnets became a public story. The Sonnets strike the note of gloom and despair which prelude the Third Period of four tragedies.

The Third Period, from 1601-1608 includes the four tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello, King Lear* and *Macbeth*, along with *All's Well* That *Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Antony* and *Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus and Timon of Athens*. It is a period of gloom and depression and marks the full maturity of his powers-dramatic, intellectual and expression. In the tragedies, Shakespeare deals with the problems of life and fate, error followed by extreme punishment and the darker side of human experience. Apart from these, there are

the stings of ingratitude and treachery, a Motif which is further worked out in his plays of the Fourth Period, with the crowning result of forgiveness and reconciliation.

The Fourth or last period ranges from 1608 to 1612 and includes *Pericles, The Tempest, Cymbeline, The Winter's* Tale and the unfinished *Henry VIII*. During this period his temper shifts from gloomy and despair to serene and peaceful. Two features distinguish the plays of this period. Firstly, there is a tender touch about the women. Secondly, the plays take us back to the joys of the simple life of nature. Even though the groundwork still furnished tragic fashion but the evil is controlled and conquered by the good. At the same time these plays show the decline of Shakespeare's dramatic powers with the careless construction and unsatisfied characterisation.

Shakespeare Sonnets were first published in 1609, even though some of them had been written much earlier. The volume of sonnets was entered into the Stationer's Register on 20th May, 1609 by Thomas Thorpe. On the other hand, his plays were first published in quarto editions which began to appear in 1597. A complete edition of his plays appeared in 1623. It was published by his friends John Heminges and Henry Condell. This is known as the First Folio, the first fully authorised edition of the plays. Hence, Shakespeare marks a great and tremendous contribution to the field of English Literature and culture.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1. State whether True or False:**

a. Shakespeare attended Grammar School at Stratford. T/F
b. Shakespeare's first published poem is “The Rape of Lucrece”. T/F
c. Macbeth belongs to the Third Period of Shakespeare's dramatic career. T/F
d. Shakespeare wrote all together 154 sonnets. T/F

Q2. Answer the following:

a. What is the name of Shakespeare's Father?

b. Name the four tragedies written by Shakespeare.

c. Mention the format of Shakespearean Sonnets.

d. When did Shakespeare die and where was he buried?

## 2.4 THE TEXT OF THE SONNETS

### Sonnet 65



**Mortality**: the condition of being susceptible to death.
**Wreckful**: destructive.
**Batt'ring days**: days of harassment.
**Impregnable**: too strong to be penetrated.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad **mortality** o'er-sways their power,
How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,
Whose action is no stronger than a flower?
O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out
Against the **wreckful** siege of **battering days**,
When rocks **impregnable** are not so stout,
Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays?
O fearful meditation! where, alack,
Shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?
Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?
Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?
O, none, unless this miracle have might,
That in black ink my love may still shine bright.

### Sonnet 144



***Despair:*** loss of hope
***Tempteth***: tempt; to provoke someone
***Wooing***: to endeavour to gain someone's support
***Fiend***: an enemy

Two loves I have of comfort and **despair**,
Which like two spirits do suggest me still;
The better angel is a man right fair,
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.
To win me soon to hell, my female evil
**Tempteth** my better angel from my side,
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,
**Wooing** his purity with her foul pride.
And whether that my angel be turn'd **fiend**
Suspect I may, but not directly tell;

But being both from me, both to each friend,
I guess one angel in another's hell:
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

## 2.4.1 Explanation of the Sonnets

**Sonnet 65**

Sonnet 65 is an extension of Sonnet 64. These sonnets are about the ravaging effects of time on both love and life and how the poet attempts to overcome mortality with his immortal writings. Time along with its destructive force intensely disturbs Shakespeare. To illustrate how powerful and destructive time can be, he chooses to list certain objects in nature that are least vulnerable to time like stone, brass, iron, and seas rather than those more delicate of nature's object like flowers. Just like the other sonnets, here too the couplet provides a solution. It illustrates some hope that will ultimately resist and defeat time. In the poet's case, it is through his verse that he will emerge victorious. The sonnet opens with a list of elements that are subject to decay-brass, known for its power of endurance, stone, earth and sea. All these cannot withstand the ravaging effects of time. It makes the poet enquire how beauty can hold out against the destruction of time as its strength is similar to that of a flower. Here, the poet compares beauty with a flower to portray the delicacy of its survival.

The Sonnet continues with the poet's queries regarding the issue of time and mortality. Summer, which is the symbol of life, is personified here. The poet points out summer's battle against time asking how it can endure the destructive forces of time. Whatever time holds under seize is compelled to surrender. Rocks look very strong but they cannot endure the repeated blows of time. Like rocks, even gates of steel and iron fail to resist the battering of time. Time is very strong and nothing has the power to hold its swift foot back. This quatrain consists of certain rhetorical questions which very evidently highlight time's

power and the poet's obsession to hide his "best jewel", his lover from the ravages of time. When the destroyer puts the best jewel of its own creation in its chest of drawers none can retrieve it and hide it anywhere. The fair youth, who is nature's marvel and a jewel for the poet will also not endure. The couplet, just like the other sonnets, provides a solution against the destruction of time. As per the poet, immortality is possible. A miracle alone may have efficacy against the destructive powers of time. In the poet's case the possibility of this miracle is in his own verse, in the enduring power of poetry. He feels that his lover can remain immortal in his 'black ink' which can ultimately resist and defeat time.

## Sonnet 144

Sonnet 144 composed by William Shakespeare is the only sonnet where he refers to both the "Dark Lady" and the young man, his "two loves". Throughout the sonnet Shakespeare attempts to showcase a love triangle and also tries to consider the situation with detachment. A sense of uncertainty is often observed while going through each and every quatrain of the said sonnet. It is also observed that the poet's mood is cynical and mocking and the uncertainty about the relationship torments him the most. His unique style of projecting the love triangle stylistically makes him successful in creating an extraordinary space in the field of sonnet writing.

In the very first quatrain of Sonnet 144 the speaker introduces two characters considering them as his lovers, the "fair youth" and the "dark lady" respectively. According to him, one is comforting while the other is despairing. Both of these two lovers are compared to spirits dwelling within the speaker. Here, the contrast between the two lovers is also noteworthy. While the fair youth is described to be his "better angel", the "dark lady" tends to be the "worser spirit" and a woman of dark complexion.

In the second quatrain of the sonnet the speaker seems to be disappointed with the woman of dark complexion; saying that she would send him to hell soon. He is disappointed as she is very much prone to

tempt his "better lover", the fair youth and makes him step away from the speaker. She does not only snatch his "better lover" away from him but also wants to corrupt him and turn him into a devil. With the help of her dark pride, the woman of dark complexion also tries to seduce the "better angel" which is perhaps disappointing to the speaker.

In a state of bewilderment the speaker is expressing that he does not know if his better angel is turned into a "fiend" or not. All he does is to suspect the relation between the 'fair youth' and the 'dark lady'. The speaker also seems to be tormented with the feeling of uncertainty as he is not sure whether his two lovers are in a friendly relation or not. Being detached from his two lovers he can do nothing but guess the possibility of the certainty of the relationship between the two lovers.

Universally in the last two lines of the Shakespearean Sonnets one gets the solution of the problem raised in the quatrains. But exceptionally in the present sonnet, the couplet instead of providing a solution to his uncertainties, heightens it. He concludes by saying that the relation or the affair between the dark lady and the fair youth is totally unknown and uncertain, hence, keeping him in doubt. He will be in a state of uncertainty until his bad angel drives away his good angel.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q3. Choose the correct answer from the following:

a. The poet's mood in the Sonnet 144 is:
   - i. Cynical and mocking
   - ii. Pleasant
   - iii. Anger

b. The theme of Sonnet 65 is:
   - i. Love triangle complicacy
   - ii. Time immortality
   - iii. Friendship

Q4. Describe the two characters shown in Sonnet 144.

Q5. Write a few lines on immortality of time with special reference to Sonnet 65.

## 2.5 POETIC STYLE

While Shakespeare's reputation is based primarily on his plays, he became famous first as a poet. His activities as a poet of his age can be highlighted by the study of his non dramatic poetry. As Shakespeare grew in experience his style of writing reflected his intellectual development, his character study deepened, his taste improved and technique became more and more individual. It can be observed that poetry is inherent in most of his works. He only introduces prose whenever he wishes to lower the dramatic pitch and does not desire a poetical effect.

Shakespeare's poetry depends on extended, sometimes elaborate metaphors and conceits, and language is often rhetorical. His work is characterised by paradox by narrative and thematic diversity, and by attempts to render the inner workings of the mind, exploring the psychology of perception. His style of writing is to take the audience on a voyage of emotions. He incorporates perceived truths with actual events and provides a glimpse of what could love been or a perspective of what might happen. Shakespeare had an amazing genius for words. He shows unrivalled powers of expression. The beauty of words, the aptness and originality of phrases, the wealth of striking similes and metaphors, the felicities of language, the richness and sweetness of verse-these are found in his works to an astonishing degree.

Shakespeare's standard poetic form was blank-verse, composed in iambic pentameter. His verse was usually unrhymed and consisted of ten syllables to a line. Once Shakespeare mastered traditional blank verse he began to interrupt and vary its flow. This technique releases the new power and flexibility of his poetry. Shakespeare is one of the greatest sonneteers of his age. His Sonnets have marked such achievements that they have been successful in attaining their own position and genre known as Shakespearean Sonnets in the field of literature. His Sonnets consists of

three quatrains each rhyming alternately, and a rhyming couplet to conclude. Shakespeare's Sonnets sincerely reveal an emotional crisis in his life. His Sonnets are noticeable for beauty of images and the flawless perfection of style and versification. He breathed into the Sonnets a lyric melody and meditative energy which no writer of any country has surpassed.



## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading about Shakespearean Sonnets and specifically Sonnet 65 and Sonnet 144. With his unmistakable style Shakespeare tries his best to project time immortality and love triangle complicacy which are the distinctive characteristics of his Sonnets. The unit discusses the life and works of William Shakespeare and his popularity that he had gained for creating a new realm of composing sonnets in the field of English literature. His unique style of composing the dramas, as well as, other works, mark him as one of the greatest pioneers. You will find Sonnet 65 and Sonnet 144 interesting after having read through the unit and interpreting the possibilities of the sonnets on your own.



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## 2.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q.1:** a. true b. false c. true d. true.

**Ans to Q.2:** a. John Shakespeare. b. *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear* and *Macbeth*. c. Units of fourteen iambic pentameter lines rhyming according to the English or Surreyan form. d. Died on April 23, 1616 and buried in the chancel of Stratford Church.

**Ans to Q.3:** a. cynical and mocking b. time immortality

**Ans to Q.4:** The two characters shown in Sonnet 144 are the 'Dark Lady' and the 'Fair Youth'. The two characters are contradictory to each other as described by the poet. The character of the 'Dark Lady' seems to be portrayed as the "bad angel" whiles the poet is in the famous of the 'Fair Youth' describing him as the "good angel". The 'Dark Lady' is projected here as the temptress who is very much prone to tempt and corrupt the speaker's "better lover", the 'fair youth'. On the other hand the fair youth is described as innocent, having angelic qualities.

**Ans to Q.5:** It is needless to say that time has great destructive power. Nothing is permanent. Everything gets destroyed by the ravages of time. Sonnet 65 highlights this very theme. It shows how everything, even the strongest like brass, stone etc can't escape the ravages of time indicating the transitory nature evident in the world. But the poet concludes that his verses have the power to withstand the destructive ravages of time projecting its immortality.



## 2.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare

Q2. Explain the Sonnets 65 and 144 by Shakespeare

Q3. Discuss the poetic style employed in Shakespeare's sonnets.

**** ****

# UNIT 3: METAPHYSICAL POETRY: IMPORTANT PRACTITIONERS

## UNIT STRUCTURE


3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Metaphysical Poetry

3.4 John Donne as a Metaphysical Poet

3.5 Other Important Practitioners of Metaphysical Poetry

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 the unit you will be able to:

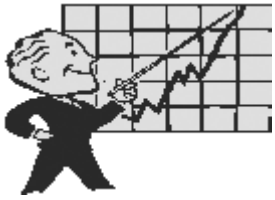
- gain a brief overview of metaphysical poetry
- analyse this particular stream of poetry called 'the metaphysical poetry'
- describe John Donne as a metaphysical poet
- discuss about some of the other metaphysical practitioners

## 3.2 INTRODUCTION

Metaphysical poetry refers to a poetic tradition in 17th century England, where a group of poets started writing unconventional poems with a unique blend of the head and the heart, that is, emotion and intellect. The term 'metaphysical' when split into two parts becomes 'meta' meaning beyond and 'physical' means the concrete universe or the physical world. Hence, the term taken together refers to something beyond the physical universe or a reality that lies outside the conventional sense of the term.

This poetry tradition paralleled the Elizabethan love poetry tradition which was more popular then. However, conventional love poetry reflected

mostly unreciprocated love and the lady beloved as an unattainable, distant object. But metaphysical poetry dealt with theme of fulfillment in love. While mainstream love poetry of 17th century England gave more preference to emotion, metaphysical poetry brought about a blend of the emotional and intellectual faculties of the human mind. No wonder, T.S. Eliot calls it a 'unified sensibility' and the greatest of the practitioners to observe this closely in his poems is John Donne.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Define the term 'metaphysical.

Q2. What was the difference between mainstream love poetry and metaphysical poetry?

## 3.3 METAPHYSICAL POETRY

First let us know what is metaphysical poetry? As students of literature, one question is likely to arise in our mind as to what makes this poetry different and distinct from the courtly love poetry. The answer is in the poems itself. Metaphysical poetry has dramatic beginnings which are noticeably absent in love poetry. Notice the abruptness in the opening line of John Donne's poem 'Canonization',

> “For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love!
>
> Or the opening line of Andrew Marvell's poem, 'To His Coy Mistress',
>
> Had we but world enough and time;”

Secondly, the presence of metaphysical conceit gives it its own distinct flavour, which is normally absent in courtly love poetry tradition. And thirdly, the whining and pining that is a much sought after theme in conventional love poetry that result out of unreciprocated or unrequited love is not seen in metaphysical poetry. It, instead, celebrates the fulfillment and satisfaction of love and contentment to have found the object of desire close at hand.

Let us discuss in details the metaphysical conceit. In one of the poems of John Donne, ‘‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’’, the two lovers are compared to the two legs of a compass and their soul as the fixed point in the

compass.

"If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two
Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if the other do."

It is interesting and at the same time intriguing to see that love, an emotion, has been compared to a geometrical equipment to define the intensity of love. Such intellectual and often unlikely comparisons require an active participation of the reader as well. Such comparisons are called conceits.

## 3.4 JOHN DONNE AS A METAPHYSICAL POET

At a tender age, John Donne was exposed to quality education by his Catholic parents. Born to an iron monger, financial shortage never hindered John Donne's education and he was taught by tutors afforded by his family. Donne studied in the University but could not receive his degree. After the death of his father, who was also named John Donne, his mother Elizabeth Heywood remarried a rich widower, Dr. John Syminges.

The kind of education that Donne was exposed to shaped his career as a satirist, lawyer and cleric in the Church of England, besides being a popular poet. He had started composing poetry at a very early age. It is said that his poetry often reflected his scorn for the social flaws and poetasters of his time. The diseases that he often referred to in his verses were nothing but metaphors for subtle invective against those social vices. It is also said that his early poems somehow give way to a sense of unrequited love and his intolerance towards hypocrites and bad poets. It is only during his middle age that Donne's poetry achieves a mature and mellowed tone because it tones down the sharp edges and raw contempt, and acquires a sense of tolerance for human frailty.

The poetry of this stage also registers a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction with Anne More becoming his wife. However, with the maturity in his literary career, one also witnesses a downside in his economic front.

John Donne spent much time travelling around and writing poetry. Before meeting Anne More, he enjoyed a satisfactory job as an apprentice to Thomas Egerton. He held the position of chief secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal and was an established man of letters at Egerton's residence in London. sadly, however, his elopement with Egerton's niece, Anne More, proved to be disastrous to Donne and his whole life and accomplishment came crumbling down. His lost the favour of Thomas More and even had to serve a short term in prison. It is only after his reconcilement with his father in law and the little amount of money he received as his wife's matrimonial share, he could set up his career once again in 1609.

John Donne's poetry became famous for its unique quality with unusual mixture of emotions with physical things like merchandise, disease, navigation, mystery and myths, geography, cartography, seasons, geometry and creatures. His poems initially circulated in manuscript form in his coterie and they were received with much enthusiasm. However, they were also critiqued for the sole reason that they required a lot of cerebral capacity to be comprehended and thus, they way not appreciated much by everyone uniformly.

In his later life, Donne began to engage himself with theology. His collaboration with personalities like Lucy, Countess of Bedford, Sir Robert Drury and Sir Robert Carr, Viscount of Rochester, Thomas Morton, Bishop of Durban resulted in intense theological discussions and the output were volumes of devotional poetry. *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), *Pseudo-Martyr* (1612), *The Progress of the Soul* (1612), *Biathanatos*(1614) and *Essays in Divinity* (1614) are some of these volumes.

Donne had a mystifying fascination with death and it is said that he even designed his own coffin and had his portrait painted thus. His later poems reflect this tendency in Donne. He suffered for a long time and it is thought that he died of cancer. He started composing his oft quoted work, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* in 1623, and another 'Death's Sermon' which was to be preached as a sermon before the king appeared on 23rd February, 1631. On 31st March, 1631, Donne breathed his last.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q3. How did John Donne's poetry acquire a more matured tone?

Q4. What were the elements that made John Donne's poetry famous?

Q5. Name some of the volumes of devotional poetry by John Donne.

## 3.5 OTHER IMPORTANT PRACTITIONERS OF METAPHYSICAL POETRY

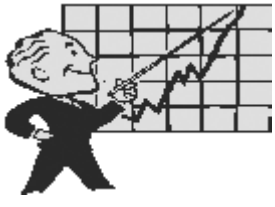
John Donne's love poetry acquired a maturity and a distinct quality that appealed to some of his contemporaries like George Herbert (1593-1633), Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649), Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), and Henry Vaughan (1622-1695). George Herbert was a Welsh poet, orator and an Anglican priest and he gained the favour of King James I. He wrote equally efficiently in English, Latin and Greek and his life of priesthood offered with ample materials to compose his poetic works. George Herbert is famously remembered for his innovative style of poetry writing where his poems were written in the shape of the object they dealt with. Such poems are called “Pattern poems”. The famous poems of this kind are “The Church Porch”, “The Altar”, “The Sacrifice” and the most famous one “Easter Wings”. His notable collections are: *The Temple*, *The Country Parson* and *Jacula Prudentum*.

Richard Crashaw was a poet and a teacher, and he wrote metaphysical poetry with a religious element that underlined his belief that the beauty of nature and spiritual existence were mutually dependent presences. He wrote and published three poetry collections during his lifetime, while a small collection appeared posthumously. His first poetry collection, based on his experience of schooling as a teacher, mostly consisted epigrams and was named *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Libreor A Book of Sacred Epigrams* (1634). His second work was *Steps to the Temple*, *Sacred*

*Poems*. With the *Delight of the Muses* (1646) which had a second edition bearing the same name and was published in 1648. *Carmen Deo Nostroor Hymns to Our Lord* was published posthumously in 1652.

Andrew Marvell was a metaphysical poet, politician and satirist who wrote poems like “To His Coy Mistress”, “Upon Appleton House”, “The Garden” and “An Horatian Ode Upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland”, which is a political allegory. One of his most notable and oft quoted poems is the love poem “To His Coy Mistress” where he tactfully uses the metaphysical conceit to make his beloved shed her coyness. Other themes that occasionally are reflected in his poetry are mostly political and satirical.

Henry Vaughan was a Welsh physician, author and a poet. He was greatly inspired by the religious works of George Herbert. He is popular for his religious poetical work *Silex Scintillans* (1650) with its second edition published in 1655. He also wrote a secular poetic work OlorIscanus(1651) or *The Swan of Usk*, that reflects a critical period in Vaughan's personal life. His other notable works are *Mount of Olives* or *Solitary Devotions* (1652) and *Flores Solitudinis*(1654).



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q6. Name of the contemporary poets who were inspired by the practice of metaphysical poetry.

Q7. Write brief notes on the following:

a. John Donne as a metaphysical poet

b. Contributions of the contemporary metaphysical poets



## 3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have been able to learn how metaphysical poets are different from the practitioners of the conventional courtly love poetry although both belonged to the 17th century. We have also seen the language and the

images used by metaphysical poets which are unique. The cerebral element that goes into their compositions caters not only to our emotions but also to our intellect.



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## 3.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Answer to Q1:** The term 'metaphysical' when split into two parts becomes 'meta' meaning beyond and 'physical' means the concrete universe or the physical world. Hence, the term taken together refers to something beyond the physical universe or a reality that lies outside the conventional sense of the term.

**Answer to Q2:** While mainstream love poetry of 17th century England gave more preference to emotion, metaphysical poetry brought about a blend of the emotional and intellectual faculties of the human mind.

**Answer to Q3:** It is only during his middle age that Donne's poetry achieves a mature and mellowed tone because it tones down the sharp edges and raw contempt, and acquires a sense of tolerance for human frailty.

**Answer to Q4:** John Donne's poetry became famous for its unique flavour-with unusual mixture of emotions with physical things like merchandise, disease, navigation, mystery and myths, geography, cartography, seasons,

geometry and creatures.

**Answer to Q5:** The volumes of devotional poetry. *Ignatius His Conclave* (1611), *Pseudo-Martyr* (1612), *The Progress of the Soul* (1612), *Biathanatos* (1614) and *Essays in Divinity* (1614) are some of these volumes.

**Answer to Q6:** John Donne's love poetry acquired a maturity and a distinct flavour that appealed to some of his contemporaries like George Herbert (1593-1633), Richard Crashaw (1613?-1649), Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), and Henry Vaughan (1622-1695).

**Answer to Q7:** a. Refer to Section 3.4 John Donne as a Metaphysical Poet
b. Refer to Section 3.5 Other Important Practitioners of Metaphysical Poetry



## 3.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Comment critically on the excessive use of imagery in John Donne's poem 'Canonization'.

Q2. What are the basic characteristics of metaphysical poetry? How is it different from the conventional poetry tradition of 17th century England?

Q3. Comment on the metaphysical conceit.

Q4. Discuss John Donne as a metaphysical poet.

Q5. Who were the contemporaries of John Donne? Discuss their work.

**** ****

# UNIT 4: JOHN DONNE: "THE GOOD MORROW" AND "THE CANONIZATION"

## UNIT STRUCTURE


4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 The Text of the Poem

4.3.1 Explanation of the Poem

4.4 The Text of the Poem

4.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

4.5 Poetic Style

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Further Reading

4.8 Answer to Check Your Progress

4.9 Model Questions


## 4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the poems "The Good Morrow" and "The Canonization" in details
- analyse the style and language employed in the poem
- further explore the poetry of John Donne

## 4.2 INTRODUCTION

Poetry has often been claimed as a product of the heart, that is, an expression of emotions which has very little to do with the intellect. But would it not be wonderful if somebody wrote poems that would strike a balance between the emotion and the intellect? John Donne's poetry blends these two faculties and has been acclaimed by T.S Eliot as a poet practising a 'unified sensibility'. The prescribed poem, "The Good Morrow", appears in Donne's collection of poems, *Songs and Sonnets* (1633). Written at a time when the sonnet form had earned popularity in England, under the patronage

of Queen Elizabeth, this poem is often identified as a sonnet. However, it does not observe the traditional sonnet pattern consisting of fourteen lines, since it consists of twenty-one lines (divided into three stanzas).

John Donne's poetry did not appeal to a large readership at that time because it was a deviation from the existing tradition of Elizabethan poetry tradition that harped mostly on courtly love traditions and unrequited love. It was a blend of wit and levity- a combination that not many readers could appreciate. Moreover, his exclusive use of the 'metaphysical conceit' lent his poetry a cerebral dimension that demanded a proper amount of concentration on the reader's part. Dr. Johnson speaks rather sarcastically about the metaphysical conceit, that it is an analogy where, "… most heterogeneous things are yoked by violence together." However, it is the same conceit that appealed to modernist poets, and T.S. Eliot has made a commendable use of this stylistic device in his own poetry.

The poem in question is about a lover waking up to a bright morning and his feelings at seeing his beloved sleeping beside him. The poem is a celebration of spiritual love, which is much above the mundane, physical love, and therefore, such love aspires to transcend boundaries of different 'hemispheres' and remain immortal.

## 4.3 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**The Good Morrow**

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
Did, till we loved? Were we not weaned till then?
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
Or snorted we in the Seven Sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,
Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love, all love of other sights controls,
And makes one little room an everywhere.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to other, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
And true plain hearts do in the faces rest;
Where can we find two better hemispheres,
Without sharp north, without declining west?
Whatever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

### 4.3.1 Explanation of the Poem

This poem in question, "The Good Morrow" deals with a mature theme and hence, it occupies the first place among his other poems in his 1633 collection *Songs and Sonnets*.

The poem conjures up a vivid image of two lovers waking up to a bright morning and wishing each other 'good morrow'. It is in the form of an 'aubade', a song or a poem recounting the experience of lovers waking up after a night of lovemaking. It encapsulates the lover's intense feelings for his beloved and his subtle regret at having met each other late in life. He wonders what they had been doing before falling in love.

The speaker creates an idyllic, remote pastoral milieu where he wakes up to a morning, beside his beloved. He says that until falling in love, he and his beloved had merely been wasting their time.

The lover imagines that all this while, they had been 'sucking' leisurely at 'country pleasures' or the rural bliss, i.e., enjoying unrefined, uncouth pleasures. The image of 'weaning' has been adopted to give the reader a feel of childlike innocence that shelters in the minds of

the two lovers. It is the process of familiarising one to food other than mother's milk. The allusion to the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers' reinforces the idea that all experiences of life before experiencing love were comparable to a long and deep sleep. However, the speaker also confesses that within this time frame, if he had 'fancied' anybody, it was his beloved's dream.

The lovers here seem to wake up from their deep slumber and the first thing they do is to wish their souls 'good morning'. The speaker acknowledges love as an all pervasive force that controls other 'sights' and exists everywhere. The lovers are so happy and satisfied with one another that for them the little room in which they lie becomes the whole world. All they care for now is one another's company, and nothing more. The geographical and other metaphors used here go on to develop more force in the next stanza. The accelerated growth of 'meaning' or significance is an important feature of Donne's poetry.

The speaker refers to geographical and climactic dimensions- a reference that would give the reader an idea of how intense and omnipotent their love is. The face of his beloved becomes his mirror where her eyes reflect him, and vice versa. These are the two worlds they possess. There is a comparison of the eyes with hemispheres which clearly delineates the transcendental quality of love. According to the lover, theirs is a world familiar and calm. In the poem the words 'declining west' possibly refers to the sunset. Then he brings in the subject of mixing elements- a phenomenon in chemistry. He argues that whatever rots was not blended properly, in exact equations, in the first place. But now that they have come together, their love is a perfect blend that would defeat the ravages of time and therefore, would never die.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Choose the correct answer:

a. The legend of the Seven Sleepers is:

i. Pagan

ii. Catholic

iii. Secular

iv. None of the above

Answer:……..……..

b. The speaker in the poem acknowledges the north hemisphere as:

i. Benevolent

ii. Friendly

iii. Cold and hostile

iv. Warm

Answer: …….....

Q2. Name the volume of poetry in which "The Good Morrow" by John Donne is included.

## 4.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**The Canonization**

For God's sake hold your tongue,

and let me love,

Or chide my palsy, or my gout,

My five grays hairs, or my ruined fortune flout,

With wealth your state, your minds with arts improve,

Take you a course, get you a place,

Observe his honor, or his grace,

Or the king's real, or stamped face

Contemplate; what you will approve'

So you will let me love.
Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drowned?
Who says my tears have overflowed his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill
Add one more to the plague bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.
Call us what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find the eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it.
So to one neutral one, both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysteriously by this love.
We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tombs and hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for love.
And thus invoke us: "You whom reverend love
Made one another's hermitage;
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;
Who did the whole world's soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes

(So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize)
Countries, town, courts: beg from above
A pattern of your love!"

### 4.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

'Canonization' is a famous poem by John Donne where he aspires to make his love for his beloved divine and immortal so as to be declared as saints in the religion of love. The term 'canonization' means the formal process through which one is declared a saint. Now let us look at the stanza-wise analysis of this poem-

This poem, like any other metaphysical poem, has a dramatic opening. The speaker is found to command another companion, besides his beloved, to stop bothering them. The speaker argues that his love has not affected his companion's life adversely and so he should be allowed to love his beloved without any hindrance from him. The speaker pleads his companion to remain silent while he involves in an emotional dialogue with his beloved. He offers his companions to make fun of (or 'chide') his palsy or his gout-two ailments occurring during old age. He also suggests him that he might as well make fun of his grey hair or his misfortune, while upgrading his own position with wealth, and refine his mind by involving in different arts. He suggests his companion to pursue an academic career by seeking different disciplines and getting a course or pay homage to the king, either his self or his replica stamped on his currency. In the last line of this stanza, the speaker says that he might do whatever he pleases to do and leave him and his beloved on their own.

In the second stanza, the speaker engages in a series of silent contemplations as to what could have been affected by their love. He wonders as to who could have been harmed by their love. He begins with a series of questions trying to come to a solution. He asks whether his sigh or tears that he had shed silently in love had drowned any

mercantile ship and caused someone's loss. He asks whether his tears deluged anybody's cultivable land. He questions whether his colds, caused due to weeping in love, dared to remove the season of spring from the year. He enquires whether the heat of passion that fills his veins ever caused the epidemic of plague to break out. It was believed that the Great Plague of London or the bubonic plague was caused because of the considerably warm weather that year. It caused the rats aboard a ship to come out and litter the streets of London.

They carried with them the germ of plague and spread it across the land. London was declared under quarantine for this reason. The speaker feels that the soldiers are interested in wars and so are lawyers, in quarrelsome men because they see their profit there. But the speaker and his beloved are interested only in love. Thus, Donne brings in matters of mercantile, agriculture, climate, diseases, and occupation of different kinds only to explain the intensity of his love. Such analogies are fine examples of the metaphysical conceit.

In the third stanza, the speaker discusses the strangeness of the nature of their love. The speaker suddenly becomes careless and announces that he is ready to be called by any name by others, because he and his beloved are made thus by love. He suggests himself to be called a fly and his beloved, another. They circle around with the insect-like attitude to perish in the candle flame. He calls himself and his beloved the candle too, that melt with the heat of their love. He finds an eagle and a dove in them, both at the same time. The eagle represents strength and masculinity, while the dove is symbolic of feminine grace and meekness. And finally he announces that they resemble the mysterious phoenix, whose is itself a mystery and it is believed to rise from its ashes after every 2000 years. But the speaker feels that their love is more mysterious than the riddles asked by the mythical phoenix. And like the phoenix, they die and rise again, and become strange and mysterious because of the love present between them.

In the fourth stanza, the speaker discerns the possibilities of making their love immortal. He says that if he and his beloved cannot live their life in love, they can at least die. And if no proper burial can be given to their bodies, followed by tombs and hearse (a song of lament sung at someone's death) then they would satisfy themselves with verses or poetry. If their love is not proved strong enough to be placed in history (chronicle) then they will find a place for their love in sonnet or fourteen-lined poems, and thus make their love immortal. Just as an urn can contain the ashes of the dead, instead of a half-acre land, so also will they find a place in hymns and everybody will come together to announce that they have been canonized for their love. Now, as mentioned earlier, canonization is the formal process through which one attains sainthood. Thus, the speaker attributes a sense of sacredness and religiosity by calling themselves saints in love.

The last stanza sums up all the apprehension of the speaker discussed in the previous stanzas. The speaker announces in a positive tone that they would be remembered for their love by posterity. People shall invoke them for their exemplary love. They would sing praises for the speaker and his beloved that their love was each other's hermitage-such was the spirituality in their love. People would regret that their love has none of the qualities of the love of the speaker and his beloved. They would recall the peaceful nature of the speaker's love and would regret at their own love which has turned horrid. Their love was so grand that it made the soul and spirit of the world reduce into each other's eyes (the speaker's and the beloved's) and like mirrors, they reflected each other's love. The greatness of their love exemplified them as saints and everybody epitomised them. 'Countries, towns, courts' and places of interest and importance-now seek a design, a pattern of their love.



**LET US KNOW**

John Donne's poetry concentrates not merely on love, but is also concerned with religion and mortality. His poetry is a record of the developments that characterise Elizabethan England. The prescribed poem, "The Good Morrow", refers to navigation and cartography, two popular occupations of that time. It was also the period that centered debates regarding a heliocentric universe. Most of his poems like "The Sun Rising" including the one in question raise issues about the globe and its paraphernalia. However, the primary focus and concern of a John Donne poem is almost always something other than a discussion of the knowledge system or social issues alluded to. The vocabulary of science or geography or metaphysics may be used, for instance, in bolstering an argument aimed at seducing a woman.

## 4.5 POETIC STYLE

Originally, a sonnet consists of fourteen lines, but John Donne deviated from the Italian Petrarchan tradition and composed a sonnet of twenty-one lines. Donne attributed any poem with the theme of love as a sonnet. His poem is divided into three stanzas and each stanza deals with a different dimension of love.

The first stanza emphasises the importance of the union of the two lovers by referring to the time spent before falling in love as wasted time. The opening lines set the tone of a pastoral, rural landscape. The spatial dimension referred to here is more about the 'outside' world ('country pleasures') and their childlike innocence. One also sees here an allusion to the legend of the 'Seven Sleepers'.

The second stanza is an extension of the image of the outside world through discoveries and cartography. It talks about unknown hemispheres, unfamiliar seas and new worlds. The last two lines express how the two lovers find total satisfaction in 'possessing' each other.

The third stanza marks a shift from the outside and one is led more into the inside of the two subjects present in the poem. The speaker here expresses the significance of the eye which is a microcosm of the vast macrocosm (the universe). These lines try to rekindle the Renaissance zeal of exploring new lands. The reference to 'mixing' could be read in terms of 'alchemy' which often involved mixing of different substances in required amounts. Some often quoted poems of John Donne are, "Canonization", "The Sun Rising", "The Flea", "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning", "Go and Catch a Falling Star" and "Death Be Not Proud".



## 4.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading Donne's poems "The Good Morrow" and "Canonization". "Good Morrow" can be read poem as a record of the Renaissance period that presents before our eyes a large canvas showing developments in various fields. The references to various systems of knowledge and experience add an intellectual dimension to the poem, but these references are not purely academic or intellectual. They only help the poet to develop his argument, his assertion of love for his beloved. It communicates the intensity of the love, which cannot be limited in any way and paints a picture of the rural, distant and almost dreamlike setting where two souls open up to each other.



## 4.7 FURTHER READING

1) Alvarez, A. (1961) *The School of Donne*. London: Chatto and Windus.

2) Bennett, Joan. (1964) *Five Metaphysical Poets*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3) Kenst, W.R. (ed.) (1930) *Seventeenth-Century English Poetry: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

4) Leishman, J. B. (1934) *The Metaphysical Poets*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

5) William, George. (1930) *The Donne Tradition*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.



## 4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

**Ans to Q No 1:** a. Catholic b. cold and hostile

**Ans to Q No 2:** "The Good Morrow" deals with a mature theme and hence, it occupies the first place among this other poems in his 1633 collection *Songs* and *Sonnets*.



## 4.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Comment on the geographical imagery used by John Donne in "The Good Morrow".

Q2. What is the philosophical basis of the statement: "Whatever dies was not mixed equally."?

Q3. Comment critically on the structure of the poem.

Q4. What does the term 'hemispheres' refer to in this poem?

Q5. Comment on Donne's reference to Elizabethan England through his use of metaphors in this poem.

Q6. Explain the poem "Canonization" by John Donne in your own words.

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# UNIT 5: JOHN MILTON: INVOCATION TO *PARADISE LOST,* BOOK I

## UNIT STRUCTURE


5.1. Learning Objectives

5.2. Introduction

5.3. John Milton: The Poet

5.3.1. His Life

5.3.2. His Works

5.4 Introduction to the Invocation

5.5 Invocation to *Paradise Lost* Book I

5.5.1 Explanation of the Text

5.6 Poetic Style

5.7 Let us Sum up

5.8 Further Reading

5.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

5.10 Model Questions


## 5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- gain an account of the life of John Milton
- discuss the literary works of John Milton
- appreciate John Milton as an Epic poet
- explain a section of his epic poem *Paradise Lost* (which is a small section of the 'Invocation' to *Paradise Lost*, Book-I
- discuss the poetic style employed in the poem
- appreciate the poetic calibre of John Milton

## 5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce you to the English poet John Milton by providing you with a detailed idea on the life and works of the great poet. Have you come across the term of 'epic'? An epic or a heroic poem is a long narrative

poem dealing with the exploits of one or more heroic individuals, historical or legendary, usually in an exalted style and involving a moral tone. The two major epic poems in the Western tradition are *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of the Greek Homer. Greek and later criticism, which considered the Homeric epic the highest form of poetry, produced the genre of Secondary epic - such as the *Aeneid* by Virgil, Tasso's *Jerusalem*, and Milton's *Paradise* Lost - which attempted to emulate Homer, often for a patron or a political cause. Thus, Milton is known to us as one of the greatest epic poets. The term "epic" is also applied to narrative poems of other traditions: the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf, Indian *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*.

## 5.3 JOHN MILTON: THE POET

With the exception of William Shakespeare has been, so highly and continuously, admired, and no other writings, except those of Milton, have been so devoutly revered by many generations. Let us know look into his eventual life and his works that have engendered such lasting popularity.

### 5.3.1. His Life

John Milton was born on December 9, 1608 in Cheapside, London. His father, John Milton, Sr. came from a Roman Catholic family that disinherited him because of his conversion to Protestantism. The intense religious fervour of the Miltons may be traced to their sense of sacrifice in renouncing the ancient faith. John Milton, Sr. became a wealthy scrivener and moneylender in London. He struck to his books, giving his eldest son the education of a scholar and a gentleman: St. Paul's School; Christ's College Cambridge; five years of private study; a grand tour of Italian Literary Patrons. Education moulded the life and work of England's most influential writer.

In 1641-42 Milton entered the realm of clamorous public controversy establishing himself by the anti-Episcopal pamphlets as a great voice of Puritanism. Shortly after the Civil War, he married Mary Powell, a girl half his age who soon went back to her Royalist

family. Milton wrote four tracts on divorce (because of estrangement from his wife); then on defence of regicide. He also wrote on education and freedom of speech. In 1645, reconciliation with his wife took place, and seven years later his wife died, leaving him with three small daughters

In 1649, after the execution of King Charles I, he was appointed Latin Secretary to the Council of State by the new Commonwealth Government under Oliver Cromwell. In that capacity he had to draft Latin documents for transmission to foreign Powers. In addition, he wrote numerous pamphlets in support of the republican cause. By 1652 his eye sight began to fail perhaps from glaucoma and he soon became blind.

In 1656 he married Katherine Woodcock, who died the following year. When in 1660 Restoration came, Milton was arrested, but was released with fine because of his blindness. He retired to an obscure village in Buckinghamshire and lived quietly and wrote poetry. In 1663 he again married Elizabeth Minshull who was more a nurse for the blind man than a wife. *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* were published in 1667 and 1671 respectively. Milton died on November 8, 1674.



**LET US KNOW**

In British history the conflict in the middle years of the 17th century between King Charles I and his supporters (Royalists or Cavaliers) and of Parliament (called Roundheads) is known as Civil War. This conflict was the culmination of Parliaments' attempt to limit Kings' power. The parliamentarians under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell dealt a series of defeats to Charles I, executing him in 1649 and established a protectorate which he ruled as Lord Protector until the re-establishment of monarchy (called Restoration) in 1660. The term Restoration applies to the entire period of the reign of Charles II.

### 5.3.2. His Works

John Milton's literary life can be divided into three distinct periods. His shorter poems are almost entirely (except for a few great sonnets) works of his early period (from 1625 to 1637). They display all the tendencies of a young, experimenting poet seeking his own voice. There are several, however, that are among the finest lyrics in the language, even the least of them manifest an individualistic expression and a remarkably high *caliber* of poetic achievement. They include "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity" and the poems "On Shakespeare" and "On Arriving at the Age of Twenty-three", “L Allegro and Il” “Penseroso” belong perhaps to the late University days. These two lyrics are a diptych, or, better perhaps, the two sides of a coin. “L’ Allegro” offers the life of gay sociability, bright and joyous, while “L’Penseroso” counters it with pensive thought. The pieces are decorative rather than descriptive, artificial rather than descriptive, artificial rather than natural, but they are full of scholarly fancy and adroit poetical phrasing.

Comus (1634) were Milton's first printed work except for the lines to Shakespeare in the Second Folio. It is a masque for a noble family. It owes something to Jonson's masque. "Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue" (1618), but Milton's virtuous Lady the Pleasure eloquently urged by Comus, the 'bouncing belly' of Jonson's masque. Virtue is Chastity (that is, obedience to divine Reason). The earnest argument of Camus shows its author's ambition.

*Lycidas* (1637) is an ambitious pastoral elegy for a Cambridge contemporary, a priest and poet who drowned in the Irish sea. *Lycidas* is the longest poem in a collection otherwise in Latin and Greek. Milton weaves into the design of the poem not only pastoral scenes but mythology, Christian belief and contemporary controversy within the Church of England. In style the poem follows no poetic rule, but Milton's own. As one critic has said: "The only rule is that of the poets' exquisite ear."

In the second period, from 1637 to 1659, Milton became involved in the burning topic of the day, the struggle between King and Parliament. Milton now turned from poetry to reforming prose, and toughened his argumentative power. In 1641-42, as has already been mentioned, he published five anti-episcopal tracts and shortly afterwards four tracts in favour of divorce. At Cromwell's death, Milton called again for a republic and liberty of conscience, publishing, *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* as Charles II returned.

But the best of all the tracts he wrote was *Areopagitica* (1644), called after Areopagus, the hill of Ares where the Athenian Parliament met. This "Speech for the liberty of unlicensed printing to the Parliament of England" is couched in the form of classical oration, beginning with a quotation from Euripides, *Areopagitica*, however, defends not free speech, but a free press.

Among his other prose, "Of Education" is still read. A Latin "On Christian Doctrine" found in censor's office in 1823, translated and published in 1825, makes his unorthodoxy, darkly visible in *Paradise Lost*, crystal clear.

More than in the verse, the prose of Milton reveals what Cromwell termed a 'Seeker'. Otherwise forgotten quarrels have been immortalised in Milton's pamphlets, each bearing the powerful stamp of a vigorous personality and a master of language. After the Restoration and amnesty, he turned again to poetry and devoted his whole mind and soul to the great work he had so long contemplated. It was an epic on the Biblical story of the 'Fall of Man'. He would retell the story of 'Man's first disobedience' so as to show the justice of Providence. The result is, in its art, power and scope, one of the greatest of English poems. Dr. Johnson, no lover of Milton's religion, politics or personality concluded his work on Milton’s Life thus: "His great works were performed under discountenance, and in blindness, but difficulties vanished at his touch; he was born for whatever arduous,

and his work is not greatest of heroic poems, only because it is not the first." Paradise Lost is a work of grandeur and energy, and of intricate design. It includes in its sweep most of what was worth knowing of the universe and of history. The blind poet balanced details occurring six books apart.

*Paradise Lost* begins with the fall of the angels; Satan's plan to capture God's newly created species, and Heavenly foresight of the future. In Book IV we meet Adam and Eve in the Garden. Raphael tells Adam of Satan's Rebellion, the war in Heaven, the fall of the angels, the creation of the universe, and of Man and of his requested mate, and warns him of the temper. In Book IX Satan deceives Eve, and Adam resolves to die with her; the Son conveys God's doom and promises redemption.

In Book X, Satan boasts of his success, but he and his angels are transformed to serpents. In Book XI and XII Raphael shows the miseries of mankind until the Redemption, where after Adam will have 'a paradise within thee, happier far.'

In conception, the poem is spacious and commanding; it is adorned with all the details that Milton's rich imagination, fed with classical and Biblical lore, can suggest. The characters especially that of Lucifer is drawn on a gigantic scale, and does not lack a certain tragic immensity; and the blank verse in which the work is composed is new and wonderful. This type of blank verse has founded a tradition in English; it has often been imitated and modified, but never paralleled.

In 1671, Milton published his last volume of poetry which contained *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. The former poem is not about the redemption but about the temptation in the desert. It lacks the exalted imagination, the adornment, and the ornate rhythms of *Paradise Lost*, Samson Agonistes is a tragedy to be read, not acted. Its form is Greek, with protagonist and chorus; its subject the fate of Israel's champion, 'eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves.'

In *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* Milton left examples to English poets of dedication to his art, but also of passionate self-assertion.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. What is an epic or a heroic poem? Is *Paradise Lost* an epic?

Q2. When was John Milton imprisoned? How and why was he released?

Q3. Of all the prose-tracts Milton wrote, which one is regarded as his best?

Q4. John Milton's Lycidas is-

(Fill up with the correct choice: masque/epic/pastoral elegy)

## 5.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE INVOCATION

The 'Invocation' to *Paradise Lost*, Book-I of John Milton. It is the opening verse-paragraph of his great epic poem. Milton follows the classical epic convention in making a statement of his theme here, and invoking the Holy Spirit to inspire him to accomplish the task he has undertaken. He also uses these twenty-six lines to indicate the ambitious and comprehensive nature of his task and expresses his desire to establish his status as an epic poet on a higher moral plane than that of the Latin and Greek classics.

The "Vacation Exercise" written in 1628 contains Milton's first promise to write an epic poem; he sketches the whole scene of epic poetry without specifying any topic. In the Latin "Ode to Manso" (1640) he states his intention to write a British epic based on Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table. Shortly after his return from Italy, Milton listed in "The Cambridge Manuscript" (1640-42) a long series of possible subjects for an epic drama, selected from the Bible and from the history of England and Scotland. The fall of man chiefly engrossed his attention and the manuscript contains a draft for a five-act play *Adam Unparadised*. But he could not have worked appropriate form for a great poetic work *Paradise Lost* was at last published in 1667,

divided into ten books; a second revised edition, with the poem divided into twelve books in 1674, represents Milton's final text.

## 5.5 INVOCATION TO PARADISE LOST BOOK 1

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste Brought Death into the World, and all our woe, with loss of Eden, till one greater Man Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat, Sing Heavenly Muse, that on the secret top Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire. That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed. In the Beginning how the Heavens and Earth Rose out of Chaos: Of if Sion Hill Delight thee more; and Siloa's Brook that flow'd fast by the Oracle of God; I thence Invoke thy aid to my adventurous Song, That with no middle flight intends to soar Above th' Aonian Mount, while it persues things un-attempted yet in Prose or Rime. And chiefly Thou or Spirit, that dost prefer Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure, Instruct me, for Thou knowst; Thou from the first Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark illumin, what is low raise and support; That to the highth of this great Argument I may assert Eternal Providence, And justifie the ways of God to men.

### 5.5.1 Explanation of the Text

Milton opens his *Paradise Lost* by formally declaring the poem’s theme - man's first act of disobedience towards God and consequences that followed from it. The act is Adam and Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, as mentioned in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Milton asserts that this original sin brought death to human beings for the first time causing us to lose our home in paradise until Jesus Christ comes to restore mankind to its former state of purity.

Milton then invokes the Muse to inspire him to accomplish the task he has undertaken. But the Muses invokes is not one of the traditional Muses who reside on Mount Helicon, rather it is the Holy

Spirit that inspired Moses to tell the Israelites how in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. He says that this poem, like his Muse, will fully above those of the classical poets and accomplish things never attempted before, because his inspiration is greater than theirs. Then he invokes the Holy Spirit asking him to fill him with knowledge of the beginning of the world, for the Holy Spirit was the active force in creating the universe. Milton announces that he wants to be inspired with sacred knowledge for he wants to show his fellow men that the fall of mankind into sin and death was a part of God's greater plan, and that God's plan is justified.

It has already been mentioned that this poem is the opening verse-paragraph of John Milton's great epic poem *Paradise Lost*. In gravity and seriousness opening lines of the epic are similar to the book from which Milton takes much of his story: The Book of Genesis of the Bible. The Bible begins with the story of Creation, and Milton's epic also begins in a similar vein. This opening verse-paragraph of twenty-six lines (or two sentences) is extremely compressed, containing a great deal of information about Milton's reasons for writing this epic and his choice of the subject matter and his attitude towards his subject. Milton follows the classical poets in beginning his epic with an invocation to a Muse. But the Muse he invokes is not one of the nine classical Muses of Mount Helicon, but the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. In invoking a Muse, but differentiating from the classical Muses, Milton manages to tell us quite a lot about how he sees his project. In the first place, by following the classical precedent Milton confirms his awareness of Homer, Virgil and other epic poets and indicates that he has mastered their format and wants to be a part of their tradition.

But by identifying his Muse with the divine spirit that spoke to Muses on Mount Sinai and inspired him to write the story of the Creation, Milton indicates that his ambition is to go beyond joining the group of the classical poets. For the water which refreshes his Muse is not the spring of Aganippe on Mount Helicon, but 'Siola's brook' and

he with no middle flight, will soar above the 'Aonian Mount', that is, above Mount Helicon, he will excel the classical epic to achieve "things un-attempted yet in prose and rime." Yet Milton's invocation is extremely humble expressing utter dependence on God's grace in speaking through him. Milton thus begins his poem with a mixture of ambition and humility, simultaneously expressing his reverence for the classical forebears and promising to soar above them for God's glorification. Milton's approach to the invocation of the muse, in which he takes a classical literary convention and reinvents it from a Christian perspective, sets the pattern for all of *Paradise Lost*. For example, when he catalogues the prominent devils in Hell and explains the various names they are known by and which cults worshipped them, he makes devils of many gods whom the Greeks and other ancient people worshipped. In other words, the great gods of the classical world have become - according to Milton - the fallen angels.

His poem purports to tell these gods' original natures, before they infected humankind in the form of false gods. Through such comparisons with the classical epic poems, Milton is quick to demonstrate that the scope of his epic poem is much greater than those of the classical poets, and that his worldview is more fundamentally true and all-encompassing than theirs. Milton clearly indicates this when he says that his Muse will fly over the classical muses living in Mount Helicon. Thus, Milton both makes himself the authority on antiquity and subordinates it to his Christian worldview.

*The Iliad* and *Aeneid* are the great epic poems in Greek and Latin, respectively, and Milton emulates them because he intends *Paradise Lost* to be the first English epic. Milton wants to make glorious are out of the English language in the way the other epics had done for their languages. Not only must a great epic be long and poetically well-constructed, its subject must be significant and original, its form strict and serious, and its aims noble and heroic. In Milton's view, the story he will tell is the most original story known to man, as it is the story of the world and of the first human beings. Also, while Homer

and Virgil only chronicled the journey of heroic men, like Achilles or Aeneas, Milton chronicles the tragic journey of all men - the result of man's disobedience. Milton goes so far as to say that he hopes to "justify" or explain, God's mysterious plan for humankind. Homer and Virgil describe great wars between men, but Milton tells the story of the most epic battle possible: the battle between God and Satan, good and evil.

## 5.6 POETIC STYLE

Milton has used blank verse or English Heroic Verse without Rhyme", as he called it in his preliminary note, in composing his *Paradise Lost*. No poet has even employed blank verse so perfectly to suit a variety of emotional pictures, to effect continuity and integration in the weaving of the epic design and above all to sustain the poem as a poem and to keep it from disintegrating into isolated fragments of high rhetoric. Milton considered Rhyme as an interference in this kind of carefully woven poetic narrative and he rightly insisted that "true musical delight" consisted not in rhyme but in "apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." Having established the fundamental rhythm of five beats to a line he plays upon it every melodic variation form the light to the heavy. Other variations are employed in enjambment position of pause, position of accent, and addition or reduction in number of syllables.

The devices which Milton uses for the flow of his great opening passage are north careful examination. It begins emphatically with simplicity and amplitude: "Of Man's First Disobedience". The sense is "then developed, extended, modified, qualified, reconsidered, in a great variety of ways, by subordination to clauses and adroit use of conjunctions, prepositions and relative pronouns - and, whose, and, with, till. The reversal of normal English word-order enables him to place the object of the opening sentence - and it is the object, the theme of the poem, which is important - at the beginning; the first main verb does not come until the sixth line, and when it does come it comes with a force, 'Sing Heav'nly Muse". But Milton does not pause here. Sustaining the flow in a similar vein he focuses on the Christian scheme of redemption that was to follow the Fall: "till one greater Man/Restore us, and

regain the blissful seat." Then he goes on to explain that the Muse he invokes is not the classical Muse but one who spoke to Muses on Mount Horeb or on Sinai and inspired him to write the story of the Creation. And he, with no middle flight, will soar 'above the Aonian Mount', that is, above Mount Helicon, and will excel the classical epic to achieve "things un-attempted in Prose or Rime." Ambition and humility are mingled in the sense and movement of the verse. The self-confidence expressed in the line "things un-attempted in Prose or Rime" is modified in the next line when he asks the Muse to "What is me in dark/illumin, what is low raise and support.

Then the lines move on without any internal pause to the grand final statement of the purpose of the narrative "And justifies the ways of God to men". As regards this verse-paragraph David Daiches aptly observes: "The placing of pauses, the rise and fall of the emotion, the high emotional charge in which the poets sense of dedication and of communion with great biblical figures of The Old Testament is communicated, the supplicatory cadence of appeal to have his darkness illumined and his mind elevated, and the final powerful simplicity of the concluding statement of his purpose - all this represent poetic art of high order."

*Paradise Lost* is a work of grandeur and energy, and of intricate design. Milton uses in his epic a highly ornate style and a stately 'organ-tone' language which T.S. Eliot labels "poetry at the farthest possible remove from prose." Milton often uses a highly Latinised vocabulary and employs familiar English words in their original Latin sense for example, 'success' in the sense of 'outcome'. Often his much accurate scholarship is distilled in one word or phrase. For example, "Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss" is Milton's rendering of the Hebrew word 'merachepheth' in Genesis 1, 2, translated by the Authorised Version as 'moved' - "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water" - but explained by both Jewish and Christian commentators as implying brooding and hatching. "This is that gentle heat that brooded on the waters and in six days hatched the world' wrote Thomas Browne in *Religio Medici*. Use of sonorous and exotic proper nouns, inversion of normal word-orders, omission of words not needed for the sense, rich allusiveness, enormous similes etc. are some of the characteristics of his poetry. The maintenance of the grand style, never slacking through twelve long books of *Paradise Lost* is one of the greatest stylistic feats of all literature.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q5. Why does Milton invoke a Muse, but not the one of the classical line Muses?



## 5.7 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you have learnt that Milton is one of the greatest English poets and his Paradise Lost is the greatest epic in English. His eventful life and literary works have been discussed in order to provide you a wider idea of the context and times in which the poet lived and wrote. After going through this unit, the learner have will be able to discuss the opening verse-paragraph, referred to as the 'Invocation' to *Paradise Lost*, Book-I, in which the poet John Milton states the theme and the philosophical purpose or the intent of his epic poem. You have also learnt about the poetic devices employed by the poet and also about Milton's highly ornate style and stately language.



## 5.8 FURTHER READING

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## 5.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q 1:** An epic or a heroic poem is a long narrative poem dealing with the exploits of one or more heroic individuals historic or legendary, usually in an exalted style and involving a moral tone. Yes, Paradise lost is an epic poem.

**Ans to Q 2:** When in 1660 Restoration came, Milton was arrested, but was released with fine because of his blindness.

**Ans to Q 3:** The best of all the tracts that Milton wrote was *Areopagitica* (1644), called after Areopagus, the hill of Ares where the Athenian Parliament met.

**Ans to 4:** Pastoral Elegy

**Ans to Q5:** Milton follows the classical poets in beginning his epic but the Muse he invokes is not one of the nine classical Muses of Mount Helicon rather it is the inspiring Holy Spirit of the Trinity invoked.



## 5.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the life of the English poet John Milton.

Q2. Discuss the literary works of the poet John Milton

Q3. Write a short note on the following:

a. Epic

b. Milton as an Epic poet

Q4. Why does Milton invoke the Holy Spirit, not one of the traditional Muses?

Q5. How does John Milton use the opening lines of his *Paradise Lost* to make a statement about the theme and philosophical purpose of the epic poem?

Q6. Why does John Milton hope that his *Paradise Lost* will surpass all classical epics?

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# UNIT 6: ALEXANDER POPE: "THE RAPE OF THE LOCK" (BELINDA'S DRESSING ROOM)

## UNIT STRUCTURE


6.1 Learning Objectives

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## 6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- find out the content of the extracted verse in the larger context of the poem
- familiarise yourself with the life and works of Alexander Pope
- learn briefly about the Neoclassical age and the spirit of the Augustan age
- analyse the content and themes of the prescribed fragment
- develop futher interest to read the entire poem "The Rape of the Lock"

## 6.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit in discussing an extracted verse from "The Rape of the Lock" will also introduce you to Alexander Pope who is regarded as the representative poet of the 18th century. The literary works of Pope are distinctly marked by a sharp sensibility towards neo-classical ideals of reason in approach, measure in expression, manner in presentation, refinement in taste and sophistication in style. Some of the literary contemporaries of Pope were Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, with whom he was also associated with, in the course of his literary career. David Fairer in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope* ('Pope and the Elizabethans') describes Pope's literary interests as such: "Pope, like his Elizabethan predecessor, was fascinated by the spaciousness of the human mind, its labyrinths, locked rooms and inviting doorways, where hope, fear, and desire are shaped into images. He was aware of these as sites of creativity as well as delusion". (91)

As also mentioned in M.H. Abrams' *A Handbook of Literary Terms*, for the convenience of study of the history of English literature, the Neo-classical period (1660-1785) as a whole may be sub-divided into three periods namely the Restoration Age (1660-1700), the Augustan Age (1700-1745) (to which we shall refer to in the unit) and the Age of Sensibility (1745-1748). Have you wondered about the term 'neo-classical'? Splitting the word into two 'neo' means 'new' and the term "classical" refers to the ancient Greek and Roman writers whose works had inspired the writers of the period as a whole.

Some of the dominant literary ideals that characterised the neo-classical period are reason, precision, measure, refinement, elegance, urbanity and sophistication. The writers of the age practiced a certain literary decorum in keeping with these ideals, drawing inspiration from the ancient classical writers and also satirising the social issues of their time. Also, the characteristics of the period which delineated the contemporary mindset, fashion and tastes had came to be termed as 'via media' or the 'golden mean' (as also inspired by Aristotle's "golden mean" of literary decorum)

which *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English* defines as an "artistic manifestation being a delight in proportion." (49)

The Augustan Age (1700-1745) derives its name from the Roman Emperor Augustus (27 B.C-14 A.D). During the rule of Augustus, the arts and in particular literature had greatly achieved an excellence through the works of the classical masters Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Longinus, Theocritus and Bion. The major writers of the period, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele drew their literary parallels to the classical writers like Virgil, Homer, Horace, Ovid and Dante. Their classical works were regarded as traditional models worthy of meditating on, emulating, as well as, re-creating.

Thus, we can consider Alexander Pope as a poet of the Augustan age which is also known as the age of reason and the following unit briefly highlights the social context of the time in which he wrote through the selected poem. Also, it encourages you to read the prescribed poem at length in order to appreciate "The Rape of the Lock" it in its entirety.

## 6.3 ALEXANDER POPE: THE POET

Before reading the extracted poem, let us discuss and find out the times that Pope lived in together with some of his major literary contributions.

### 6.3.1 His Life

Alexander Pope (21 May 1688- 30 May 1744), an English poet of the 18th century was born in London to Alexander Pope, a linen merchant and Edith Turner, a home-maker. As a young boy he discovered a close affinity towards nature, with his countryside home at Binfield located near the Windsor Forest. The surrounding environment stirred in him a love for nature and also found a certain reflection through his poetry. Although, his formal education was cut short due to the political situation in England and he suffered from Potts disease at the age of twelve, he spent his time effectively by reading and developing his own tastes in literature. Thus, he was

mostly self-taught and had cultivated interests in the classical works of Chaucer, Shakespeare and Dryden. Also, he took a keen interest in several languages and read a variety of works in French, Italian, Greek and Latin. Prior to the end of his formal education, he had attended two Catholic schools in London.

During this period, The Test Acts which favoured the established Church of England were a series of harsh laws imposed particularly on practicing Catholics. They were denied their basic civilian rights such as voting or any form of education among other restrictions. Being of a Catholic descent, Pope's family had to struggle against the severe laws enforced against both Catholics and Non conformists alike. As Catholics were prevented from living within 16 kms of London or Westminster, Pope's family had moved to the small estate situated near the royal Windsor Forest countryside in 1700.

Pope read extensively and drew inspiration from the Elizabethan poetry and particularly Edmund Spenser. Through his early poetic works, Pope had established repute among his immediate literary circles and his contemporaries. He had translated Homer's *Illiad* which was completed in 1720 and with the money he received, he shifted in 1719, to a villa at Twickenham known for the grotto and gardens he had designed. Pope's grotto (i.e., a garden with a small man made cave) which still stands today by a riverside was built as a personal shrine, embellished with mirrors, diamonds, crystals and other such precious gems and stones. He brought his aged mother to his home after his father passed away in 1717 and it was at Twickenham that he had spent most of his years and churned out some of his best works. He was a member of the satirical 'Scriblerus Club' and was well acquainted with both Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Some of his life long friends were John Caryll, the Blount sisters (Teresa Blount and Martha Blount) and also the members of the Scriblerus Club. The friendship that he had shared with Teresa Blount had enabled him to endure his health problems. Along with Jonathan Swift, he was one of the last surviving members

of the Scriblerus group, who owing to his fragile health breathed his last in 1744.

**LET US KNOW**



Alexander Pope was a trained painter under Charles Jervas and was inclined towards all the arts with the exception of music as he was tone-deaf. Yet he wrote wonderful verses which on the contrary reflect his sense of measured rhythm. Also, his interest in landscape-gardening, as well as, architecture is well reflected in his own Twickenham villa, grotto and the gardens which was designed in both an aesthetic and appealing way.

### 6.3.2 His Works

Both as a poet and satirist, Alexander Pope stood for the ideals that came to dominantly characterise the literature of the neo-classical as a whole and the Augustan age in particular which he had synthesised in his works. He had embodied a certain literary decorum in his works which was in many ways a strict adherence to reason instead of (say) the Romantic imagination.

Pope's first work ***The Pastorals*** was written at the age of 16 and was published much later as part of a leading publisher, Jacob Tonson's Sixth *Miscellany* in the year 1709. Based on the theme of the four seasons and written in the pastoral form of poetry *Pastorals* was very well-received paving his way into the literary scene in London. This publication was followed by his next poem *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) which brought him to the attention of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele who were the co-founders of *The Spectator* and *The Tatler*. Through their association, Pope published an eclogue titled ***Messiah*** (1712) in *The Spectator* as well as the first draft of "The Rape of the Lock". But owing to their Whig connection, he gradually moved out of their association (as Whigs were anti-Catholics and Addison was affiliated to the Whigs) and

partly due to his own affiliation with the Scriblerus Club who were Tory supporters. Pope thus came to be associated with the club and became a life-time member of the Scriblerus Club that comprised members like John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot.

Drawing from the locales of his childhood, he wrote **"Windsor Forest"** in 1704, (published in 1713) in the pastoral form, which was centered on the theme of anticipated peace under the rule of Queen Anne. But the political reality of the time was such that Queen Anne passed away in 1714 with the result of the Hanoverian Kings coming into power rendering the Tories politically powerless for another fifty years. During this time, due to certain compulsions his family had to shift from their home at Binfield to a more secure home at Chiswick located at West London. During this period, Pope translated Homer's epic *Illiad* in heroic couplets which saw its publication in 1715. The next translation of *The Odyssey* was shared with William Broome and Elijah Fenton completed in 1720 the publication of which in 1726 brought him financial prosperity.

The publisher Jacob Tonson had commissioned him to write an edition of *Shakespeare's Works* which was published in 1725. Inspired from Dryden's *Mac-Flecknoe*, a literary satire *The Dunciad* in its first version (comprising of three books) was published in 1728 and later a fourth book was added and published in 1742. He had published his *Essay on Man* (1733-34) anonymously and this work delved on social and philosophical issues related to man and nature. His *Imitations on Horace* (1733-38) which had also adapted and translated the works of Homer contained various discussions on the social issues of his time. The satirical work *One Thousand Seven Hundred and Thirty Eight* again adapted in Horace's style was published in 1738.

The only drama he had contributed was to John Gay and John Arbuthnot's *Three Hours after Marriage*. He had also written epistles which reflected his affection for his friend Teresa Blount, as

well as, Martha Blount, who her younger sister. Apart from the prescribed extract of "The Rape of the Lock" you may also be interested to read some more of the poems by Pope like his "Epistle to a Lady", "Epistle to Arbuthnot", "Eloisa to Abelard" among others. Although during his literary career, Pope had his share of controversy and clash of ideas with his contemporary critics, he had also established his own place in the literary scene of his time.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** State whether true or false:

a. His early years were spent in the countryside home at Binfield located near the Windsor Forest. **T/F**

b. *An Essay on Criticism* (1711) had brought him to the attention of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. **T/F**

c. Pope was politically inclined towards the Whigs **T/F**

d. The only drama he had contributed was *Three Hours after Marriage* . **T/F**

**Q2.** What were the Test Acts? Why did Pope's family suffer under these harsh laws?

**Q3.** Name the three historically sub-divided periods under the Neo-classical period

**Q4.** Mention the two major translation works of Alexander Pope.

**Q5.** Name the members of the Scriblerus Club.

## 6.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**The Rape of the Lock**

**(Belinda's Dressing Room)**

**Canto 1 (lines 121-148)**

"And now, unveil'd, the **Toilet** stands display'd, (121)
Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.
First, **rob'd** in white, the **Nymph** intent adores,



**Toilet:** dressing room.



**Rob'd:** (robed) dressed in

**Nymph:** a mythical spirit in the form of a beautiful, young woman



**Th' inferior Priestess:** The maid
**Off'rings:** (offerings) things
**Decks:** to dress up and get ready
**Glitt'ring:** shining or sparkling
**Spoil:** the best of dresses and jewellery
**Casket:** an ornamental box which is small in size
**Tortoise:** tortoise shell used to make hair combs and accessories
**Elephant:** implies Elephant ivory.
**Billet –doux**: a sweet love letter
**Sylphs:** airy spirits
**Plait:** form neat folds (in the gown)

With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs.
A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.
Unnumber'd treasures open at once, and here
The various **off'rings** of the world appear,
From each she nicely culls with curious toil,
And **decks** the Goddess with the **glitt'ring spoil**.
This **casket** India's glowing gems unlocks,
And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.
The Tortoise here and **Elephant** unite,
Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.
Here files of pins extend their shining rows,
Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, **Billet-doux.**
Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face;
Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,
And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.
The busy **Sylphs** surround their darling care,
These set the head, and those divide the hair,
Some fold the sleeve, whilst others **plait** the gown:
And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.

## 6.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Before discussing the extracted verse the following sub-section highlights the brief explanation of the opening canto of "The Rape of the Lock".

The poem begins with an invocation to Pope's Muse, his close friend John Caryll who had inspired him to write on a real-life incident

involving two warring English families (Fermors and the Petres) who were loggerheads with each other. What had caused such a furore was the act of Lord (Robert) Petre's cutting of a lock of Arabella Fermor's hair by force. Thus John Caryll, who was Pope's life-long friend and also a close relative of the Fermors had suggested Pope to write a poem based on the incident. The idea behind such a suggestion was also to reflect the triviality of the incident and to reconcile the two families. Thus, Pope adds an element of the comical through the mock-epic/heroic form in order to lighten the serious theme.

Pope dedicates his poem to John Caryll in acknowledging his gratefulness for inspiring him to write the same. In this sense, Pope also differs from the traditional invocation addressed to the nine Classical Muses at the onset of an epic-poem by invoking a person instead. The invocation begins thus:

"What dire offence from am'rous causes spring,
What mighty contests rise from trivial things
I sing-This verse to CARYL, Muse! Is due:"

The first Canto set in London well past the morning hours with Belinda and her lap dog Shock in her bed chamber. She is asleep in her bed with the sun at noon time, pouring through her bed curtains. And while Belinda rests her head on the pillow dreaming, her guardian sylph, Ariel whispers something into her ear. The poet glorifies the young Belle Belinda's youthful beauty and describes how the "unnumbered" airy elves and spirits hover above her to guard her, decking her place with gifts and "golden crowns and wreaths of heav'nly flow'ers" out of their fond affection towards her. Thus, the sleeping beauty is guarded by the presence of her airy spirits while she dreams of a young man glorifying her beauty and expressing his admiration for her. But it turns out that what her guardian sylph Ariel whispers to her is a warning (to be careful) sensing a foreboding omen in the air. This is what her sylph whispers in her ear:

"This to disclose is all thy guardians can:
Beware of all, but most beware of Man!"

Sensing that his mistress had overslept, her pet dog named 'Shock' happens to leap and awaken her from her sleep. The youth in her dream addresses her as "fairest of mortals" and she is almost unable to remember her vague dream as soon as she is awakened. So, the first thing she does is to read the love-letter ("Billet-doux") on which her eyes fall first and also her charms and ardors to gain her composure. But her dream vision slips away and disappears abruptly and she is unable to recall it. Thus, she moves from her bed chamber into the space of her dressing room i.e., the toilet. And she is all set to get ready for a social outing. From here begins the extracted verse prescribed for the learner titled here as 'Belinda's Dressing Room' for the convenience of reading.

**Belindas's dressing room (The Rape of the lock)**

**"And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd,**
**Each silver Vase in mystic order laid.**
**First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent adores,**
**With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic pow'rs.**
**A heav'nly image in the glass appears,**
**To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;**
**Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,**
**Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride.**
**Unnumber'd treasures open at once, and here**
**The various off'rings of the world appear,**

In the extracted verse of "The Rape of the Lock", the toilet refers to Belinda's dressing room. The opening lines "And now, unveil'd, the Toilet stands display'd", gives the impression of an onstage theatrical performance being unraveled for the readers and the second line adds in a dash of the mystical. With this begins the description of the dressing room activities in which the young Belinda is intently occupied in being dressed and adorned in the most fashionable finery that belongs to her. Her attendant maid referred to as the "inferior priestess" here, is initially nervous, helping her to dress up in front of the dressing-table (alluded to as the "altar") but carries out her duties

of decking her mistress, suiting the occasion. The learner may note that in a string of succession the poet here refers to Belinda as the Priestess", her maid as "inferior Priestess" and Belinda's dressing table as her "altar" as though it were a temple setting where religious rites were taking place. It in a way adds a mocking tone to the triviality of Belinda's preoccupation with herself in comparison to the serious occupation of a priest, as well as, the priestly rites compared to the "rites of Pride" that she is about to indulge in with all her dressing up. Instead of the Christian ideal of humility, Belinda is shown as taking a certain pride of her beauty and appearance.

Belinda's image in the mirror is likened to the heavenly image of a "nymph", a female spirit, with her uncovered mane, face decked with cosmetics and robed in her first under layer of white clothes. Usually the word 'heavenly' is associated with 'cosmic powers' but here the words "Cosmetic pow'rs" are used in a satirical tone (of the mock-heroic tradition) to describe the cause of the young woman's heavenly appearance. She bends and gazes intently at her own reflection in the looking glass. Generally, the 'mirror' is symbolically associated with vanity or pride and this may be the point that the poet tries to make. Thus, she indulges in her world of abundant treasures which perhaps includes all her collection of dresses, jewellery and other accessories, laid open like treasure troves for her to select from, indicating how she may simply be spoilt for choice owing to the abundance of her personal treasures.

**From each she nicely culls with curious toil,**
**And decks the Goddess with the glitt'ring spoil.**
**This casket India's glowing gems unlocks,**

**And all Arabia breathes from yonder box.**
**The Tortoise here and Elephant unite, (135)**
**Transformed to combs, the speckled, and the white.**
**Here files of pins extend their shining rows,**
**Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.**



***Enjambment:*** in poetry, the continuation of the sense without a pause beyond the end of the line.

**Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;**
**The fair each moment rises in her charms, (140)**

With searching eyes, bearing a certain sense of curiosity and at the same time a careful handling and sorting, the maid helps her to make the best of selection. She then dresses Belinda in all the glittering finery. The poet now likens Belinda's gradually transforming appearance to that of a "Goddess". The caskets around her hold the best of finery and adornments brought from faraway lands, such as precious gems from India and also the best of Arabia among other treasures. Hair combs designed from tortoise shell and elephant ivory find their place of fancy in her dressing room. In the description here suddenly the images of a living tortoise or elephant is 'reduced' to mere fancy hair accessories thereby bringing to mind the question of such fanciful necessities like hair-combs only to fulfill a ladies fancy to adorn herself.

Belinda's hair-pins, powders and patches, Bibles and love letters are arranged as though these were files, rows and ranks of the army. The war imagery is again (and also mockingly) extended here to liken her to a 'warrior' geared up in the best of armour and ready to fight. Similarly, Belinda is dressed in her best and is (almost) ready to triumph over anyone with her exuding charm and beauty.

**Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,**
**And calls forth all the wonders of her face;**
**Sees by degrees a purer blush arise,**
**And keener lightnings quicken in her eyes.**
**The busy Sylphs surround their darling care, (145)**
**These set the head, and those divide the hair,**
**Some fold the sleeve, whilst others plait the gown:**
**And Betty's prais'd for labours not her own.**

The effect and wonder of cosmetics is finally reflected on Belinda's face which both adds and hones her facial features that are naturally beautiful. With this her natural poise and grace gradually awakens and adds to her composure and her natural charm rises

over the artifice of her make-up layers. It adds a glowing radiance to her smile on her face and also highlights the powdered red blush over her naturally blushing cheeks. This adds a beauty to her eyes which flash and sparkle (like lightning), also reflecting a certain eagerness and excitement in her composure.

Hovering above her head are the busy "slyphs" or the airy spirits lovingly engaged in parting and setting her hair, folding the sleeve, tucking neat pleats on her gown and adding their final touches to her appearance before she is ready to step out of her dressing room. The final line of the verse concludes with the poet's comic observation that finally she is all set for her social outing, to receive all praises and compliments for all the toils of her maid and her airy spirits. Thus, the first stanza ends with Belinda donned in her best and all set to go.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q6.** How does the first canto of the poem begin? Briefly describe the real incident behind the poem?

**Q7.** What war imagery can you find that presents Belinda as the mock-epic hero?

**Q8.** What are the activities of the hovering airy spirits or the slyphs in the first canto?

### 6.4.2 A Brief Idea of All the Cantos

Does the first canto leave you curious about what follows in the rest of the poem? Then, you may be interested to know a little more about the poem before reading and finding out for yourself. The unit is divided into a total of five cantos which reveals the foreboding omen that Belinda's guardian slyph senses and whispers to her in warning.

The first Canto thus, takes place in Belinda's residence in London in her bed chambers where she is asleep and dreaming of a handsome youth. With the sublimation of her dream vision, she

wakes up from her bed and enters her dressing room to get ready for a social gathering.

Following the end of the first canto, the second Canto opens with the bright beauty Belinda setting sail on a gilded boat "on the bosom of the silver Thames" surrounded by her protective nymphs. This is when the "advent'rous Baron" sees her, admiring and eyeing her bright locks with a wish to possess them and secretly resolving to win them as well. His desire is so intense that he burns the tokens of love that he had won from his previous lover in a pyre, praying fervently to the heavens to bless him to achieve and "possess his prize".

The third Canto finds her in the meadows of flowers beside the river Thames where stands the majestic structure of the Royal Hampton Court Palace, a place where Queen Anne of England and Scotland sat for counsel or sometimes for tea. It is here that Belinda meets two adventurous knights and plays Ombre, a game of cards which turns into a sort of a battle game. Belinda like the (mock) hero wins the card-game with the help of her guardian spirit Ariel. But this is the chance that the knight takes to snip off the bright lock that he so desires.

Thus, in the fourth Canto with the help of his aide Clarissa, he draws "with tempting grace", "a two-edged weapon from her shining case." And so the knight arms himself with the shining "forfex' (scissors) to violently cease and snip the lock of Belinda's hair. Having committed this daring act of violence, the proud Baron declares his victory of "the glorious Prize". Even Clarissa expresses no sense of apology and rather treats this incident as a trivial matter. Thus, the damage is already done and as the act of snipping a lady's lock both violates and humiliates her, she feels a helpless sorrow. On seeing Belinda lost and lamenting in her sadness being unable to gather her composure, a sprite Umbriel (in a comical description) hurries to the deep Underworld to summon a bagful of Furies in order to help her avenge the knight's insulting act. Thus, Umbriel visits the

'Cave of Spleen' which is where he fetches and returns with the "wondrous bag" of potions.

The fifth Canto finds the potions magically affect Belinda who turns furious and finally decides to avenge herself repeatedly crying "Restore the lock! Restore the lock!" It thus describes the combat that takes place between her and the Baron in the Hampton Court. Finally, the bright lock of hair rises through the air to the skies with the flying sylphs "kindling" the flying lock as if it were a consecration to the heavens. The poet again mocks at how the lock of hair shall be glorified and turn into the center of attraction for the entire "Beau-monde" or the fashionable upper class society. The poem ends on the note that there will be a day when her mortal being has to give way and even her tresses "shall be laid in dust" as none can escape the inevitability of death. Thus, this irresistible desire to possess or engage in mindless war, all for a lock of hair is all in vain. The ending lines conclude the fate of the lock and the belle to whom it belonged to thus,

"This lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame
And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name."

### 6.4.3 Major Themes and Contexts

The snipping of Belinda's lock of hair by force explains the 'title' of the poem *The Rape of the Lock.* Do you think that the title of the poem is apt? Consider referring to the entire poem or the brief description of the cantos above to express your take on the title of the poem. Here in the poem Belinda's "sacred hair" finds its place in the heavens serving as a consecration. So appealing is the description and significance of the 'lock of hair' that it turns into a central image throughout the poem. The opening canto of the poem certainly points at to the theme of vanity in the description of a beauty-conscious Belinda, preoccupied in her dressing room with the best of cosmetics and finery.

Belinda who conducts herself and her way of life in

accordance to the ways of the rich and leisurely aristocratic class to which she belongs to is much given to vanities. *The Bible* warns against any form of 'vanity' but in the poem, the presence of Belinda's "Bibles" along with her cosmetics and fancy things itself reflects her casual attitude to Biblical wisdom. Instead of embodying the Christian virtues of austerity and humility, Belinda is seen (like the women of her time) to indulge in her womanly wiles or what is phrased here as the "rites of Pride" and vanities. The aristocratic class of her time had the wealth and leisure to indulge in the fashions of their day with much pomp and show, involving in practices of courting, socialising, etc. But true to the old adage-"pride goes before a fall", Belinda who is proud of herself pays the price of her beauty. That beauty is only skin-deep and does not last forever, renders it vain for any young women like Belinda to be so proud and conscious of, is hinted in the 'dressing room' extract.

Peter Conrad in *Cassell's History of English Literature* writes that "*The Rape of the Lock* is a poem in defence of art and of its perverse, neurotic cost to the artist: a tragic work and a genuinely epic one, no mere mock-epic deriding feminine triviality" (321). In the light of this comment, the closing of the poem where the Muse eternally consecrates the lock of hair to fame may also be read as an act of preservation through these immortalised verses, a work of art. The closing lines of the poem are given below to provide you with an idea of the same:

> "When, after millions slain, yourself shall die:
> When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
> And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
> This Lock, the Muse shall consecrate to fame,
> And 'midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name."

Therefore, although with time all vanities are reduced to nothingness and one's mortal remains to dust, Belinda's (atleast one) lock of hair escapes a mortal fate in being an immortal consecration (to fame) that rises up to the heavens. Also the leisurely

ways enjoyed by the upper class (indicating sufficient time for leisure and indulgence) is satirised in the first canto. Belinda awakens at noon time in her bed chamber and thus can afford to be a late-sleeper that is to wake up at her own leisure and indulge in her beauty regimen, given to choices of her dressing room treasures and spoilt by the services of her maid and guarding slyphs. All in all, the poem which is set in the 18th century London represents its aristocratic class and intends to point at the trivialities of their time and practice. The poem in its entirety succeeds in humourously projecting the triviality of all the feud and combat, ego-clashes and extremities for just a lock of hair.

In your opinion do you consider Belinda's rage as justified? The learner may also find that the very title as well as the reoccurring image of 'the lock of hair' in the poem comes to personify Belinda or even symbolise or signify her sense of dignity and self-esteem.

## 6.5 POETIC STYLE

"The Rape of the Lock" is a poem which is written in the mock-heroic or the mock-epic form. The mock-heroic/epic form draws from the traditional epic narratives (like the *Illiad, Aenied, Odyssey etc.*) in its grand and elevated style but it also serves the purpose of satirising and mocking (often with humour) at the triviality of representing the insignificant with grandeur. The learner is to note that there are certain similarities and differences in style and presentation of the mock-heroic/epic form and the formal epic form. These may be listed as follows:

**Similarities:**

a. The style and language employed in both the forms is grand and elevated. The use of the Heroic couplet in order to write in an elevated style and also to differentiate from ordinary language.

b. The presence of the supernatural elements is present in both the forms. In "The Rape of the Lock" you will come

across airy spirits like the slyphs, nymphs and gnomes. Also, the visit to the Underworld is a common occurrence in both the forms. Such supernatural elements of the epic poem were termed as 'machinery'.

c. The gods and goddesses are involved in the action of the poem. In the five cantos of the poem, you will find the presence of Phoebus, Venus, Thalestris, Olympus, Hermes, Latona, Pallas and Mars.

**Differences:**

a. The traditional epic begins with an invocation to the nine Muses for showering divine inspiration on the poet who is to undertake the task of writing an epic. But in the case of "The Rape of the Lock" it is the opposite where the invocation is dedicated to his inspiring friend John Caryll.

b. The quest motif, war and the spirit of adventure whether on land or in the high seas forms an integral part of the traditional epic form presented on a grand scale. Here in the poem, the purpose behind presenting (on such a grand scale) Belinda's boat-trip journey on the Thames, the battle of cards ('Ombre') with the "advent'rous" Knights and the fierce quarrel over 'a lock of hair' between her and the Baron is to only satirise its triviality.

c. The action in a traditional epic is taken forward by the epic-hero but in the poem, the poet in mocking the idea of an ideal epic-hero presents Belinda as the mock-hero. Like a hero armed for war Belinda is dressed in her best, indulging herself in the vanities of beauty to triumph over many hearts. Also she takes part in the battle of cards and retaliates against the Knight for her stolen lock as if she were the hero waging war or indulging in battle.

d. An epic poem is in general very lengthy consisting of various episodes or sagas whereas the poem "The Rape of The Lock" is short and structured.

M. H. Abrams quotes Alexander Pope as "the greatest master of the metrical, syntactical, and the rhetorical possibilities of the closed heroic couplet (127)". Pope had extensively employed the use of **'heroic couplet'** in his verses and drew his influence from John Dryden. The heroic couplet which was first introduced by Geoffrey Chaucer (*The Canterbury Tales*) is composed in the iambic pentameter (i.e. a line of ten syllables consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by stressed syllable) with the rhyme scheme aa, bb, cc and so on. Here is an example from the extract to give you an idea of the rhyme scheme.

First, rob'd in white, the Nymph intent **adores**,
With head uncover'd, the Cosmetic **pow'rs**.
A heav'nly image in the glass **appears**,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she **rears**;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's **side**,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of **Pride**.

Throughout the body of the poem, Pope uses a range of literary tropes but in the given extract of the poem you will find just a few examples of such employed devices. For an instance, Pope is seen to employ a form of exaggeration known as 'hyperbole' as in the line: "And all Arabia breathes from yonder box" or uses words with similar repetitive sounds known as 'alliteration' as in "Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux". Also the idea of the "Rape" of the lock is metaphorical, because the snipping of a lock of hair is projected as an act as brutal as rape. As Pope's idea behind the poem was to bring out the triviality of the feud centered on the lock, he had subtly employed irony throughout the body of the poem to achieve his poetic end.

According to Hayden Carruth the American poet, both Dryden and Pope wrote with the aim of "liberating poetry" from the more traditional stanzaic forms widely practiced in English poetry. This explained Pope's choice of the heroic couplet which while being a poetic form in verse was also closest to the prose form. Pope was

of the opinion that the blank verse made a poet more conscious of his language, in trying to articulate in such a way so as to make it sound different from prose. But on the other hand, stylised rhyme allowed a poet like him to articulate more naturally.

He preferred brief and concise language and in his "Essay on Criticism" mentioned that any words used as 'cant', unnecessarily or out of measure were to him mere "expletives" (*Cambridge Companion 46*). Pope was of the opinion that both art and nature were harmoniously synthesised in the works of Homer and thus he considered it important for the young poets to read the great poet.



**LET US KNOW**

According to *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, the term mock-heroic is used to describe a satirical work that employs "for comic effect an epic style elevated out of all proportion to its trivial or dismal subject matter" (674). It also quotes Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad* along with John Dryden's *Mac-Flecknoe* as examples. The term mock-heroic is also used alternately with the term mock-epic. M.H Abrams in *A Handbook of literary Terms* describes the mock-heroic form as "purposely mismatched to a lowly subject" (40).

In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope* Pat Rogers writes: "A love of Pope starts with a love of words, and it is readily accountable that poets should long have relished the effects he taught himself to achieve" (3). Samuel Johnson had observed how Pope continuously revised and worked his every word and line to its smallest details. Thus, it is Pope's credibility of working at his craft with masterly scholarship that distinctly defines his literary work. Also his works are characterised with a certain eye for precision and measure, infusing wit and humour, injecting irony and satire, reflecting urbanity and sophistication, a skillful play of tropes and yet a balanced harmony.

In *Laureate of Peace* G. Wilson Knight opines that "Shakespeare

gives us drama and Milton epic, and Pope builds from both in *The Rape of the Lock* (1712-14)" (22).The learner will find that there is a blending of the real world, the mental or inner world (Belinda's hopes and fears, her mind) and the supernatural world (slyphs, gnomes or other airy spirits) in the poem. According to Cynthia Wall, the presence of the mythical slyphs dissolves one's notion of time and space in the poem. She comments that "The Rape of the Lock reproduces the social spaces of early eighteenth century England with crisp contemporary detail" (*The Cambridge Companion* 52). The poem in its entirety captures the imagination of the readers owing much to the addition of the 'machinery' (the supernatural elements), something that Addison had initially suggested not to include. But the spectacular effect that this addition had on the poem became one of the many reasons of Pope's criticism of Joseph Addison.

Although admired by scholars today, during his literary career Pope had stirred up controversies and had attacked and counter-attacked some of his contemporary critics and writers through his works. At times he was at the receiving end of criticism and at times he was on the attacking side. And thus holding both personal and professional grudges for some reason or the other, Pope had criticised Bentley in *The New Dunciad* (1742) and other poets and critics like Lewis Theobold, Colley Cibber, John Dennis and Ambrose Philips. Also Lord Harvey, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu were attacked in his adapted works of Horace which was again counter-attacked and to which responded through his "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot" (1735). While there were poets like Colley Cibber who poked fun at Pope's only play *Three Hours after Marriage*, there were also others like Charles Lamb who is known to have spoken in defense of the poet in an august gathering.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q9.** What is reflected in Belinda's attitude to Biblical wisdom or Christian ideals?

**Q10.** What is the mock-epic/heroic form? Define a heroic couplet.

**Q11.** What is meant by 'machinery' in the epic poem? Why did it turn into one of the reasons for Pope's criticism of Addison?

**Q12.** Who were the poets, writers and critics who were subject to the attacks of Pope's criticism?



## 6.6 LET US SUM UP

At the end of the unit you have learnt about the life and works of Alexander Pope. The unit highlights the extracted verses from the first canto of *The Rape of the Lock* along with a brief idea of the content in all the five cantos of the poem. The poem has been discussed with reference to the context, the social backdrop and the relevant themes. Also an idea of the mock-epic or mock-heroic form has been discussed in order to acquaint you with the style and language employed in the poem. As you read the poem at length your imagination will be stirred with the magical elements of the supernatural world, the triviality of the real world along with the comical aspects of the Underworld in Alexander Pope's masterly control of rhyming heroic couplets.



## 6.7 FURTHER READING

1) Ousby, Ian. (1992) *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2) Rogers, Pat. (2007) *The Cambridge Companion To Alexander Pope*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

3) Sinha, M. P. (2011) *Alexander Pope: A Critical Study of His Major* Poems. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.

## 6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1.** a. True b. True c. False d. True

**Ans to Q No 2.** The Test Acts which favoured the established Church of England were a series of harsh laws imposed particularly on practicing Catholics. They were denied their basic civilian rights. Being of a Catholic descent, Pope's family had to struggle against the catholic laws as catholics were prevented from living within 16 kms of London or Westminster.

**Ans to Q No 3.** Restoration Age, the Augustan Age and the Age of Sensibility

**Ans to Q No 4.** *Illiad, The Odyssey*

**Ans to Q No 5.** Scriblerus Club: John Gay, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Parnell and John Arbuthnot.

**Ans to Q No 6.** An invocation to Pope's Muse, his close friend John Caryll had inspired him to write on a real-life incident involving to warrning families (Fermors and the Petres) that were at loggerheads with each other. John Caryll suggested Pope to write a poem based on this trivial incident.

**Ans to Q No 7.** Her hair-pins, powders and patches, Bibles and love letters are arranged in the order of files, rows and ranks of an army. The war imagery (also mockingly) extended here to liken her a warrior. Similarly, a simile of her dressing up is employed here.

**Ans to Q No 8.** The hovering spirits above Belinda's head are the busy slyphs or the airy spirits who lovingly engaged in adding their final touches to her appearance before she is ready to step out of her dressing room.

**Ans to Q No 9.** *The Bible* warns against vanity but Belinda's "Bibles" along with cosmetics and fancy things itself further reflect her casual attitude to Biblical wisdom.

**Ans to Q No 10.** Mock-heroic/epic form draws traditional epic narratives in its grand and elevated style. But it also serves the purpose of satirising and mocking. The heroic couplet is composed in the iambic pentameter with

the rhyme scheme aa, bb, cc and so on.

**Ans to Q No 11.** 'Machinary' refers to the super natural elements, something that addition had initially suggested not to include. But the spectacular effect that this addition had on the poem became one of the many reasons of Pope's criticism of Joseph Addison.

**Ans to Q No 12.** Bentley, Lewis Theobold, Colley Cibber, John Dennis, Ambrose Philips, Lord Harvey, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Joseph Addison.



## 6.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** How was the early life and education of Alexander Pope affected by the Test Acts?

**Q2.** Describe the literary ideals and the works of Alexander Pope.

**Q3.** Give a detailed explanation of the extracted verses of 'Belinda's Dressing Room' taken from "The Rape of the Lock".

**Q4.** Briefly discuss the contents of all the five cantos of the poem "The Rape of the Lock".

**Q5.** Explain with reference to context:

"A heav'nly image in the glass appears,
To that she bends, to that her eyes she rears;
Th' inferior Priestess, at her altar's side,
Trembling begins the sacred rites of Pride"

**Q6.** Explain with reference to context:

"Now awful Beauty puts on all its arms;
The fair each moment rises in her charms,
Repairs her smiles, awakens ev'ry grace,
And calls forth all the wonders of her face"

**Q7.** What are the similarities and differences of the epic and the mock-epic/heroic forms?

**Q8.** Give a brief critical reception of Pope and the poem "The Rape of the Lock"?

**** ****

# UNIT 7: JOHN DRYDEN: EXTRACT FROM MAC FLECKNOE

## UNIT STRUCTURE


7.1. Learning Objectives

7.2. Introduction

7.3. John Dryden: The Poet

7.3.1. His Life

7.3.2. His Works

7.4 The Text of the Extract

7.4.1 Explanation of the Extract

7.5 Poetic Style

7.6 Let us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

7.9 Model Questions


## 7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing you to one of John Dryden's great satirical works, Mac Flecknoe. In the course of reading this unit, you will also find some of the basic ideas that gave form to his works. The unit takes up a detailed discussion regarding certain ideas of Dryden as a poet and the representing society in which he lived. Thus, it is designed so as to enable you to read your prescribed text, Mac Flecknoe, as a representative poem of the age.

## 7.2 INTRODUCTION

"MacFlecknoe" was published in 1682 and the poem was occasioned by the outcome of a series of disagreements, personal, critical and professional between Dryden and Thomas Shadwell, the playwright with whom Dryden had been on good terms for several years. Dryden's poem is directed against the Whig poet Thomes Shadwell. Dryden took his revenge

on Shadwell, who considered himself the successor of Ben Jonson, but often wrote inept and inferior plays. Shadwell argued with Dryden on the merits of Johnson's comedies, which he thought Dryden had undervalued. And that compelled Dryden to engage in severe attack on Shadwell. In 1678, a prolific writer, Richard Flecknoe died. Dryden considered the idea of presenting Shadwell (the self proclaimed heir of Ben Jonson) as the son and successor of Flecknoe, hence 'Mac' meaning son of Flecknoe, from whom he inherits the throne of dullness.

## 7.3 JOHN DRYDEN: THE POET

Let us explore the life and works of the poet before we go through the extract of the poem "Mac Flecknoe" in details.

### 7.3.1 His Life

John Dryden is the greatest literary figure of the Restoration, age and in his work, we have an excellent reflection of both the good and the evil tendencies of the age in which he lived. Dryden, the founder of the important dynasty of English poets, the acknowledged leader of many literary movements of his time, one of the most distinguished among poets was considered as the father of English criticism. He was born on August 9, 1631 in the village of Aldwinkle, Northamptonshire. His family were prosperous people, who brought him up in the strict Puritan faith and sent him first to the famous West-minster school under Dr. Richard Busby and later studied in Trinity College, Cambridge.

He made excellent use of his opportunities and studied eagerly, becoming one of the best educated men of his age, especially in the classics. But, he failed to show his literary ability till the age of thirty. But, by his training and family connections he was allied to the Puritan party, and his only remarkable work of that period was the 'Heroic Stanzas', which was written on the death of Cromwell:

His grandeur he derived from Heaven alone,

For he was great ere Fortune made him so;
And wars, like mists that rise against the sun,
Made him but greater seem, not greater grow.

In these four lines, taken almost at random from the "Heroic Stanzas", one can have the summary of thought, the preciseness and the polish that marked all his literary work. This poem made Dryden well-known, and he was in a fair way to become the new poet of Puritanism when the Restoration made a complete change in his methods.

He then came to London for a literary life, and when the Royalists were again in power he was with the winning side. In 1667, he became more widely known and popular by his 'Annus Mirabilis', a narrative poem describing the terrors of the great fire in London and some events of the disgraceful war with Holland; but with the theatres reopened and nightly filled, the drama offered the most attractive field to one who made his living by literature. Thus, Dryden started devoting his time to stage and agreed to provide three plays yearly for the actors of the King's Theatre. Thus, for nearly twenty years that period was considered to be the best period of his life. During this period, he wrote *All for Love*, one of his best plays, to please himself, which was written in blank verse, while most of the others being in rimed couplets.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Write a few lines of John Dryden.

Q2. Mention one of the remarkable work of Dryden after he became allied to the Puritan party.

### 7.3.2 His Works

It was gradually that John Dryden had become the best known literary man of London, and was rewarded with large financial returns. At fifty years of his age, Dryden turned from dramatic work to throw

himself into the strife of religion and politics and he started writing numerous prose and poetical treatises. In 1682, his Religio Laici (Religion of a Layman) appeared where he defended the Anglican Church against all other sects, especially the Catholics and Presbyterians. But three years later, when James II came to the throne and established the Roman faith, Dryden turned Catholic and wrote his most religious poem, “The Hind and the Panther”, where the Hind was a symbol for the Roman church and the Anglicans, as a panther, are represented as persecuting the faithful. And the other sects like Calvinists, Anabaptists, Quakers - were represented by the wolf, boar, hare and other animals, which gave the poet an excellent chance for exercising his satire. But, Dryden was accused of hypocrisy by his enemies.

The controversial and satirical poems are on a higher plane, though Dryden's satire often strikes us as cutting and revengeful, rather than witty. The best known of these and a masterpiece of its kind is Absalom and Achitophel, which is undoubtedly the most powerful political satire in the history of English language. Dryden takes the help of the Bible story of David and Absalom to ridicule the Whig party and also to revenge himself upon his enemies. The poem had enormous political influence and raised Dryden to the front rank of English poets. The best expression of Dryden's literary genius, however is found in 'Alexander's Feast,' which is one of the best in English literature.

Dramatist, critic, translator, Dryden was foremost a poet, and in poetry, he was primarily a craftsman. As Arthur Compton Rickett said, "Every age has a kind of universal genius and perhaps in no poet are his own words more truly verified than are these of John Dryden." Thus, Dryden's literary significance is threefold and is expressed in his prose, his dramas and his verse.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q3. What is the characteristic of Dryden's controversial poems? Name any one such poem.

Q4. Why is Dryden's literary significance threefold?

## 7.4 THE TEXT OF THE EXTRACT

**Mac Flecknoe**

All human things are subject to decay,
And when fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustaus,young
Was called to empire, and had governed long;
In prose and verse, was owned, without dispute,
Through all the realms of Nonsense, absolute.
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace,
And blest with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state;
And, pondering which of all his sons was fit
To reign, and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried: "It is resolved; for nature pleads that he
Should only rule, who most resembles me.
Sh -alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dullness from his tender years:
Sh -alone, of all my sons, is he
Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,
But Sh -never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through, and make lucid interval;
.....
.....

.....

He said: but his last words were scarcely heard
For Bruce and Longville had a trap prepared,
And down they sent the yet declaiming bard.
Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,
Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.
The mantle fell to the young prophet's part,
With double portion of his father's art.

### 7.4.1 Explanation of the Extract

This is a satire on the poet, Thomas Shadwell, with whom Dryden had been engaged in a long literary dispute. In Dryden's opinion, Shadwell had no understanding of the true merit of Ben Jonson, whom he professed to imitate. This dispute is the basis of Mac Flecknoe, Shadwell is portrayed as a complete dunce, and the poem takes a mock-heroic form.Richard Flecknoe was a poet and dramatist, of whose work Dryden had a very poor opinion. Flecknoe died in 1678, the year in which Dryden composed this satire. Shadwell was considered by Dryden to be a worthy successor (or son of, Mac) to Flecknoe.

It is a mock-heroic poem in which Dryden lampoons the inferior poet, MacFlecknoe, choosing Shadwell as his successor. The poem traces the hero's rise to stupidity deliberately following the style as well as taking the help of the Aenied and other epics.

Dryden's method, here is somewhat very near to parody; he applies allusions, vocabulary, images and ceremony which arouse epic associations of grandeur, just to make his enemy helplessly ridiculous. Flecknoe, the king of dullness who is on the verge of death, looks for a successor and by virtue of his dullness Shadwell gets the approval. The poem begins with a philosophical and a mock-heroically significant reference to Emperor Augustus of Rome:

All human things are subject to decay,

And, when Fate summons, monarch must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
was called to empire and had governed long.
(Line 1-4)

Although, compared with Augustus, Flecknoe's realm is 'the realm of non-sense' and his successor Shadwell shall be 'mature in dullness' and only 'confirmed in full stupidity.' The rest of the poem develops by a pattern of mock-praise of poetic vices.

"The hoary prince in majesty appeared,
High on a throne of his own labours reared.
At his right hand our young Ascanius sat,
Rome's another hope and pillar of the state.
His brows thick fogs instead of glories, grace,
And lambent dullness played around his face."

For the contemporaries of Dryden, the term 'Flecknoe' symbolised 'Bad poets'. But the subtitle of the poem, A Satyr on the True Blew Protestant poet, TS, also hints at the attack on Shadwell's religious opinions too. Throughout the poem, Dryden attempts to expose Shadwell as a literary dunce. Shadwell's arrival in town is not greeted with any Persian carpets but with heaps of torn sheets from unread books-

"No Persian Carpet spread the imperial way,
But scattered links of mangled poets lay".

The aged monarch Flecknoe is seen seated high on the throne consisting piles of books written by himself. Shadwell is proclaims that he will maintain the rule of dullness in his kingdom till his death. Dryden also refers to the contagious nature of dullness. Then Flecknoe goes in for a meticulous exposure of Shadwell by first referring to his hard labour for five years in producing his most inferior play, *The Virtuoso*. When compared to the wit and brilliance of the contemporary Restoration playwrights like George Etherege, his inferiority is striking. While his tragic works make people laugh at him, his comic ones make them sleep, and his satires are considered as equally worthless.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q5. Briefly explain the context of Dryden's extract

Q6. Explain with reference to context:

"No Persian Carpet spread the imperial way,

But scattered links of mangled poets lay".

## 7.5 POETIC STYLE

As a prose writer, Dryden had a very important influence on English literature in shortening his sentences and especially in writing naturally, without depending on literary ornamentation to give effect to what he said. Unlike other writers like, Milton, Browne or Jeremy Taylor, Dryden cared less for style. But, he took pains to state his thoughts clearly and concisely. The classical school, which followed the Restoration, looked to Dryden as a leader and with his prose, Dryden rapidly developed his critical ability and became the foremost critic.

Dryden's influence on literature can be summed up as follows: firstly, he established the heroic couplet as the fashion for satire, didactic and descriptive poetry. Secondly, he developed a direct prose style. Thirdly, he developed the art of literary criticism in his essays and in the numerous prefaces to his poems. Moreover, Dryden was quite successful in developing the qualities of ease, flexibility, and lucidity that he brought into English verse, particularly the satire. His dramatic verse at its best is eloquent and spirited and his non dramatic verse extraordinarily varied. And in his lyrics or his narrative verse, he is easy and dexterous, while in his didactic verse, he is a master.

The achievements of Dryden were accepted equally by his contemporaries as well as his successors. He became popular as he set the trend of discussing of the classics, his canons of taste and theoretical principles in his writings. He was also able to occupy a central place in the history of English criticism and prose in the context of the 19th century. His

controversial and open style influenced Matthew Arnold and later T.S. Eliot, who learnt from him the value of wide-ranging experience in creative writing. But, in 1923, Allardyce Nicoll in his book Dryden and His Poetry, did not even hesitate to ask an important question -'Why Dryden a poet?' on the other hand, Arnold in his essay, “The Study of Poetry” sees Dryden as a classic English prose writer having the qualities of an age of prose and reason. But, Samuel Johnson's criticism on Dryden is perhaps more right, when he said, 'What was said of Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, he found it brick and left it marble."



**LET US KNOW**

**Heroic couplet:** Heroic couplet is lines of iambic pentameter which rhyme in pairs: aa bb and so on. The adjective was applied in the latter seventeenth century, because of the frequent use of such couplets in heroic poems and plays. This verse form was introduced into English poetry by Geoffrey Chaucer and since then it has been used widely. From the age of Dryden through that of Dr. Johnson, the heroic couplet became the predominant English measure for all the poetic kinds.

**Lampoon:** Lampoon is the way, applied to a short satirical work or to a passage in a longer work, describing the appearance and character of a particular person in a ridiculous way.

**Poetic Diction:** The term diction signifies the selection of words in a work of literature. The poetry of almost all ages has been written in a special language, a poetic diction, which includes words, phrases, a stylised syntax, and types of figures, not usedin the ordinary conversation of the time.

**Satire:** Satire is the art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evocative towards its attitude of amusement, contempt, indignation, or scorn. It differs from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire derides, i.e. it uses laughter as a weapon. It attemptts to juxtapose the actual with that of the ideal.

**Allusion:** Allusion is a work of literature, which means a brief

reference, explicit or indirect to a person, place or event or to another literary work or passage. Allusions play a vital role in Mac Flecknoe. For the modern day reader, MacFlecknoe is a very obscure poem. Dryden here uses the allusions that even speaks about phrases about John the Baptist. Dryden uses elevated words like 'glories' and 'grace', but the effect is of ridicule. And the representation of other contemporary poets is an epic device of presenting the principal characters.



## 7.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through the unit, the learner will be able to discuss the life and works of the poet John Dryden. The unit takes up an extract from Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* and discusses the extract in details while also providing a detailed idea on the poetic style and technique employed in the poem. It is recommended that the learner tries to read the entire poem in order to gain a better perspective on the prescribed extract from the text.



## 7.7 FURTHER READING

1. Dryden. J. (1709) *Mac Flecknoe : A Poem*. OUP.
2. Dryden. J. (1924) *Mac Flecknoe* Clarendon Press.



## 7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q 1:** John Dryden is the greatest literary figure of the Restoration, and in his work, we have an excellent reflection of both the good and the evil tendencies of the age in which he lived. Dryden, the founder of the important dynasty of English poets, the acknowledged leader of many literary movements of his time.

**Ans to Q2:** His remarkable work of that period was the 'Heroic Stanzas', which was written on the death of Cromwell

**Ans to Q3:** The controversial and satirical poems are on a higher plane, though Dryden's satire often strikes us as cutting and revengeful, rather than witty. The best known of these and a masterpiece of its kind is “Absalom and Achitophel’’, which is undoubtedly the most powerful political satire in the history of English language.

**Ans to Q4:** Dramatist, critic, translator, Dryden was foremost a poet, and in poetry, he was primarily a craftsman. As Arthur Compton Rickett said, "Every age has a kind of universal genius and perhaps in no poet are his own words more truly verified than are these of John Dryden." Thus, Dryden's literary significance is threefold and is expressed in his prose, his dramas and his verse.

**Ans to Q5:** This is a satire on the poet, Thomas Shadwell, with whom Dryden had been engaged in along literary dispute. In Dryden's opinion, Shadwell had no understanding of the true merit of Ben Jonson, whom he professed to imitate. This dispute is the basis of Mac Flecknoe, Shadwell is portrayed as a complete dunce, and the poem takes a mock-heroic form.Richard Flecknoe was a poet and dramatist, of whose work Dryden had a very poor opinion. Flecknoe died in 1678, the year in which Dryden composed this satire. Shadwell was considered by Dryden as a worthy successor (or son of, Mac) to Flecknoe.



## 7.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the life and works of the poet John Dryden

Q2. Give a detailed explanation of the text of the extract taken from John Dryden's "MacFlecknoe"

Q3. Describe the poetic style employed in John Dryden's "MacFlecknoe"

Q4. Write a few lines on the following aspects:

a. Heroic couplet

b. Poetic Diction

c. Satire

d. Illusion

**** ****

# UNIT 8: WILLIAM BLAKE: "THE TYGER"

## UNIT STRUCTURE


8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 The Poet

8.3.1 His Life

8.3.2 His Works

8.4 The Text of the Poem

8.4.1 Context of the Poem

8.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

8.5 Poetic Style

8.6 Let us Sum up

8.7 Further Reading

8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.9 Model Questions


## 8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of William Blake, the visionary poet
- analyse the poem in its proper context
- describe the poetic techniques, style and language used in the composition of the poem
- appreciate the poem in its totality

## 8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces one of the greatest poets of the Romantic Age, known also as the visionary poet, William Blake. Have you read any of his poems? The unit contains the prescribed poem called "The Tyger" written by Blake. You must have heard about the French Revolution which took place in France in the year 1789. The Romantic Age in

England is said to have begun as a reaction of poets' to this historical revolution. Our point of concern would be to examine how Blake's writings and especially the poem "The Tyger" is influenced by this revolutionary **zeal.** This poem was part of a collection of poems titled *Songs of Experience* which was in turn published in a combined edition with another set of poems titled *Songs of Innocence*. This publication came out in the year 1794 as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience : Showing Two Contrary States of the Human Soul.*



***Zeal:*** great energy or enthusiasm for a cause or aim

We will discuss this poem in the light of the general ideas which permeate through the entire volume of poems. They would be helpful guides in our explanation of the poem, as well as, comprehending the same in its proper context. But before that, we will take a brief look at the poet's life and works after which, we will discuss his poetic techniques along with the poetic form employed by him in the prescribed poem.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** When did the French Revolution take place ?

**Q2.** How is the Romantic age considered to have begun?

**Q3.** Name the collection of poems in which the poem "Tyger" was included?

## 8.3 WILLIAM BLAKE: THE POET

William Blake began writing from the initial stages of the Romantic Movement. His poems were greatly influenced by the political happenings around him. Most of his poems are very simple to read but there are deeper meanings hidden beneath the apparent simplicity. But before discussing his poem, we will cast a brief glance on his life and then at his works.



***Apprentice(d) :*** one who works for an expert to learn the basics of a trade.

### 8.3.1 His Life

William Blake was born in London on 28th November 1757. His father was a London hosier. He was educated at home. He widely read the Bible and the English poets and also acquired a little knowledge of French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He had from childhood, a strong visually imaginative mind who could vividly recreate in his mind whatever he saw around him. When he turned 14, his father **apprenticed** him to the engraver James Basire. At the age of 21, he entered the Royal Academy.

In 1782, Blake married Catherine Boucher. He stayed in London almost throughout his life except for three years in Sussex. Of all the other Romantic poets, only John Keats was a Londoner. However, unlike Keats, Blake had to a certain extent adjusted himself with the city-life in London. In fact, London provided him with sufficient poetic material to populate his 'world of Experience' as represented in his poems. His frequent walks to the countryside provided him with the 'world of innocence' which he contrasted with that of 'experience'. Also, his profession as an artisan brought him in close touch with the working-class and enabled him to understand their problems in a better light.

With the help of his wife, Blake designed, engraved and produced his own works. In his lifetime, his books circulated among a small circle of readers. His fellow poets and writers never got to know him properly through his writings. Also, poverty remained a constant factor in his life. However, it would not be right to consider him as an isolated figure. His *Songs of Innocence and Experience* explore the contradictory aspects of human nature and as such, it is directly related to the political events of his time. He also took a deep interest in legends and mythologies which lay the foundation for the later Romantic poets in re-discovering the past to enable a proper understanding of the present. It was in the hands of the later generations of

poets that Blake gained his rightful place in the tradition of British poetry in general. He passed away on 12th August 1827 in London.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q4.** How was Blake in his childhood?

**Q5.** To what extent did his stay in London as well as his profession as an artisan help him?

## 8.3.2 His Works

In the year 1783, two of Blake's friends printed his first book *Poetical Sketches*, a collection of poems which included "To the Muses" and "My Silks and Fine Array". In 1789, he published the first of his engraved or illuminated books, *Songs of Innocence*. In 1794, he added *Songs of Experience* to constitute a combined volume of poetry titled *Songs of Innocence and of Experience : Showing Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. Blake had his own notion of Christianity. For him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God was the symbol of goodness and mercy whereas God the Father symbolised the tyrannical authority. The Church according to Blake, represented the absolute authority of God the Father. Blake was skeptical about his human authority and expressed his radical dislike of it in his two sets of prose aphorisms called *There is No Natural Religion* and the third called *All Religions are One* (all published possibly, in 1788), as well as *The French Revolution : A Poem in Seven Books* (c. 1791). His most important prose work however, was *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which was engraved in 1790.

In the following years, Blake did some of his most famous engravings which included those for 'The Book of Job'. At this time, he had also started working on his 'prophetic books.'

They were in the form of visionary poems through which Blake put forward his personal mythology and philosophy. In 1793, he published *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* which introduced Urizen and Orc, the two prominent figures of his personal mythology. While Urizen symbolised morality and restriction, Orc stood for the arch-rebel. The drama of opposition between them is represented in *America : A Prophecy* (1793), *Europe* and *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Ahania*, *The Book of Los* and *The Song of Los* (1795). In the book *The Four Zoas : The Torments of Love and Jealousy in the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man* (1797), he introduces the figure of Jesus as Redeemer following the condemnation of Urizen's oppressive moral code and the triumph of Orc and liberty.

Other important works of Blake are *Milton : A Poem in Two Books, To Justify the Ways of God to Men* (1803-8) and *Jerusalem : The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804-20). The latter delineates the struggle of Albion (Man) who is caught between the opposing forces of imagination and of natural religion. Challenging Byron's *Cain*, he wrote *The Ghost of Abel* (1822), a minute poetic drama of 70 lines. Two of his notable but lesser known poems are *Auguries of Innocence* (c.1802) and *The Everlasting Gospel* (C.1810).



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q6.** What was Blake's notion of Christianity?

**Q7.** Name the two prominent figures of his personal mythology. What do they symbolise or represent?

## 8.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**The Tyger**

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

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

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

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

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

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



***Thy:*** your.
***Symmetry:*** the quality of being similar or equal.
***Thine:*** yours.
***Aspire:*** have an ambitious plan or a lofty goal.
***Sinews:*** a tissue connecting a muscle with its bony attachment.
***Furnace:*** an enclosed chamber in which heat is produced to heat, melt or refine ores.
***Anvil:*** a heavy block of iron or steel on which hot metals are hammered to take a particular shape
***Thee :*** you.

### 8.4.1 Context of the Poem

The poem "The Tyger" appears in the *Songs of Experience*. It is closely related to a poem titled "The Lamb" from *the Songs of Innocence*. The lamb and the tiger could be understood as representing two aspects of Christ. As already mentioned, Blake gives a human/humane dimension to Jesus and therefore, when he is compared to a lamb or a tiger, it means that he has acquired those qualities which characterise them. He can be as meek as a lamb and also equally ferocious and wrathful like a tiger. Taking these two images of Christ in mind, we will now try to provide an explanation to the poem which would help us comprehend their applicability to Blake's entire poetic argument.

### 8.4.2 Explanation of the Poem

The poet begins the poem with two exclamatory addresses to the tiger whose contrasting stripes of black and yellow are glowing in brightness against the dark background of the forests of the night. Notice the fact that it is not night-time. The forest is not dark because it is night time but because darkness here is the ruling principle. The entire poem is a series of questions. The poet expresses wonder at the awful beauty of the creature and asks what "immortal hand or eye" could have framed it. Note the two words "immortal" and "fearful". They signify the fact that the tiger is a symbol of both terror and divinity.

In the next stanza, the poet enquires about the specific place wherefrom the tiger got the fire in its eyes whether it was from the region beneath the earth's surface or from the heaven above. One can imagine the tiger being forged out from the **smith's** fire. The poet is inquisitive of its maker too as he further asks who can dare to aspire to such a height of



***Smith:*** a blacksmith

magnificent creation and whose hand can mould its perfect form out of the eternally burning fire. Who else except God could dare to do such a thing? When Blake refers to the "deeps", he might have meant the volcanoes where the workshop of Vulcan was located. Vulcan is the divine smith of the Roman mythology from whose name the word 'volcano' is derived. Again when Blake refers to the 'wings', he could have had Daedalus in mind. Daedalus was a figure from Greek mythology who made wings of wax to fly beyond the unknown. Finally, the act of seizing the fire has possible reference to Prometheus who had stolen fire from God for the sake of mankind. By indirectly referring to all these mythical and legendary figures who had the creative potential and who sought to do something extraordinary, Blake perhaps wished to present the tiger as the product of revolutionary zeal.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q8.** Explain the implications of the two words 'immortal' and 'fearful' in relation to the image of the tiger.

**Q9.** What does Blake achieve by his indirect reference to the mythical and legendary figures?

As already mentioned, the tiger is the symbolic manifestation of both terror and beauty. The terror becomes vivid in the third and the fourth stanza as the poet dwells further around the bodily details. It brings out the tiger's dreadfulness. It is shown to be the work of a hand which is twisting and forging. The use of the words like 'hammer', 'chain', 'furnace' and 'anvil' reinforces the imagery of the smith at work on his dreadful creation. However, it also re-emphasises the terrific symmetry invoked at the beginning as the smith gradually moulds the individual body-parts of the tiger. The words like 'grasp' and 'clasp' suggest the immensity of control of the



***Ferocity:*** the nature of being wild or fierce.



***Relinquishing:*** turning away from something; giving it up.

immortal creator over his creation. Do you think he can control the **ferocity** of the tiger after it has been fully created?

The fifth stanza takes a leap forward and moves from the actual process of creation to its consequences. The tiger is a product of revolution. The 'stars' and 'heaven' represent the restrictive authority of God the Father. Or it may also indicate political repression exercised by the kings, nobles and the Church during the time when Blake was writing. The image of the stars throwing down their spears can be interpreted as an act of **relinquishing** authority and the triumph of political liberty. The two questions at the end of the stanza again reinforces the identity of the maker. Is the creator happy to see his creation fulfilling the purpose for which it was conceived? One could provide a political answer to this question. If the tiger is the product of the revolutionary zeal which in turn lies at the heart of the masses, then the victory of the tiger over the 'forests of the night' symbolises the victory of the masses against political tyranny. The second question however brings the poem back to its Christian origin. At this point, remember the poem "The Lamb" mentioned at the beginning and Christ's image embodying the figure of the lamb and the tiger. If the figure of the lamb is necessary to spread the message of gentleness and mercy, then the dreadful image of the tiger is equally necessary to fight against the evil power of darkness.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q10.** What does the image of the stars throwing down their spears symbolise ?

**Q11.** Try to explain the connection between the figure of the lamb and the tiger. What does it say about Christ?

The last stanza re-emphasises the question posed at the beginning of the poem, but in a different manner. The word

'dare' in the last line replaces 'could' of the first stanza. What it does is to stress on the element of wonder and **bewilderment** initially felt by the poet. The image of the tiger is complete and it has supposedly fulfilled its purpose. But the poet is still filled with wonder. Could a spectacle like the one we have just witnessed be really conceived? Who could dare to do so? The answer is already provided but the poet still questions if such a revolution could really take place. Will Christ actually appear in the form of a tiger to restore the lost order of the contemporary times? This final stanza places the poem in the contemporary context of French Revolution and its consequences.



***Bewilderment:*** confusion resulting from failure to comprehend something.

**ACTIVITY**

Try reading the poem called "The Second Coming" by W.B. Yeats. This poem deals with the image of Christ as a rough beast.

## 8.5 POETIC STYLE

Personification is the key poetic technique which permeates the whole poem. It is a manner of representing an abstract quality or idea as a person or a creature. The image of the tiger represents one aspect of Christ as well the product of a revolution. Throughout the poem, the tiger **embodies** one meaning or the other. The suggestion of the 'immortal' creator through body parts such as 'hand or eye', 'wings' and 'shoulder' serve as helpful pointers towards their possible association with one or the other figures from the legends and the mythologies. Also, the embodiment of Christ in the figures of the lamb and the tiger invoke Christian associations which in turn, help us to understand the poem through Blake's peculiar ideas about Christianity. Blake's use of the symbols of the stars throwing



***Embodiment:*** giving a concrete or personified form to an abstract



***Repentance:*** a feeling of remorse for one's past conduct.

down their spears and of heaven has for him, contemporary historical relevance. Similar images are used in "The French Revolution" to refer to the king and his assemblies, and in 'America' to the thrones of the kings. They symbolise the defeat of the tyrants and their weeping either because of **repentance** or of unrepentant anguish.

The poems in the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* are known for their apparent simplicity. The poet takes up simple subjects and treats them with tremendous economy of language. It is to be noted that Blake used to engrave his poems. His use of words was therefore extremely precise and **meticulous**. Not a single word or phrase is **superfluous**. Every word or phrase is therefore, loaded with meaning and it makes their apparent simplicity very deceptive. In the present poem, the word 'tiger' has more than one meaning. Also, the presence of the words like 'wings', 'fire' etc. are replete with mythological **allusions**. The overwhelming presence of direct questions sustain the pace of the poem thus keeping alive the poet's sense of wonder and bewilderment.



***Allusion :*** passing reference or indirectly mentioning.

***Superfluous :*** more than is needed or required

***Meticulous :*** marked by extreme care in the treatment of details.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q11.** Note down the different meanings which emerge out of the word 'tyger' in the context of the poem.

**Q12.** Choose the correct option :

Blake's use of words in the poem is _____ (economical/ not economical).



## 8.6 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, we have developed a fair understanding of the poem. We have discussed the life and works of William Blake and learnt how he tried to portray life and its transition from the state of innocence to experience. We also have been familiarised with his views on Christianity. The poem as we have seen, can be interpreted in Christian terms and also in accordance with the contemporary revolutionary zeal .

The tiger may embody the wrathful and vengeful aspect of Christ or it may also be the symbol of energy and regeneration, born out of the revolution. While discussing the poetic techniques, we realised the presence of deeper meanings within the apparent simplicity of the words in the poem. Blake's use of words is economical, but he infuses them with meanings which move beyond our general or literal interpretation.



## 8.7 FURTHER READING

1) Bhattacharji, Shobhana (ed.) (2002) *The Romantics*. Doaba Publications.

2) Bottrall, Margaret (ed.) (1970) *A Casebook, William Blake Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Casebook Series Macmillan Student Edition.

3) Ousby Ian, *Cambridge Paperback Guide to Literature in English*. Cambridge University Press.

## 8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1.** The French Revolution which took place in France in the year 1789

**Ans to Q No 2.** The Romantic Age in England is said to have begun as a reaction of poets' to this historical revolution.

**Ans to Q No 3.** Collection of poems titled *Songs of Experience*… published in the year 1794 as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience : Showing Two Contrary States of the Human Soul.*

**Ans to Q No 4.** William Blake was born in London on 28th November 1757. His father was a London hosier. He was educated at home. He widely read the Bible and the English poets and also acquired a little knowledge of French, Italian, Latin, Greek and Hebrew. He had from childhood, a strong visually imaginative mind who could vividly recreate in his mind whatever he saw around him. When he turned 14, his father apprenticed him to the engraver James Basire. At the age of 21, he entered the Royal Academy.

In 1782, Blake married Catherine Boucher. He stayed in London almost throughout his life except for three years in Sussex. Of all the other Romantic poets, only John Keats was a Londoner. However, unlike Keats, Blake had to a certain extent adjusted himself with the city-life in London. In fact, London provided him with sufficient poetic material to populate his 'world of Experience' as represented in his poems. His frequent walks to the countryside provided him with the 'world of innocence' which he contrasted with that of 'experience'. Also, his profession as an artisan brought him in close touch with the working-class and enabled him to understand their problems in a better light.

With the help of his wife, Blake designed, engraved and produced his own works. In his lifetime, his books circulated among a small circle of readers. His fellow poets and writers never got to know him properly through his writings. Also, poverty

remained a constant factor in his life. However, it would not be right to consider him as an isolated figure. His *Songs of Innocence and Experience* explore the contradictory aspects of human nature and as such, it is directly related to the political events of his time. He also took a deep interest in legends and mythologies which lay the foundation for the later Romantic poets in re-discovering the past to enable a proper understanding of the present. It was in the hands of the later generations of poets that Blake gained his rightful place in the tradition of British poetry in general. He passed away on 12th August 1827 in London.

**Ans to Q No 5.** London provided him with sufficient poetic material to populate his 'world of Experience' as represented in his poems. His frequent walks to the countryside provided him with the 'world of innocence' which he contrasted with that of experience. Also, his profession as an artisan brought him in close touch with the working-class.

**Ans to Q No 6.** Blake had own notion of Christianity for him, Jesus Christ was the symbol of goodness and mercy whereas God the Father symbolised the tyrannical authority. The Church to him represented the absolute authority of God the Father…Blake skeptical about his human authority and expressed his radical aphorisms *There is No Natural Religion* and the third called *All Religions are One* (all published possibly, in 1788), as well as *The French Revolution : A Poem in Seven Books* (c. 1791). His most important prose work however, was *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* which was engraved in 1790.

**Ans to Q No 7.** In 1793, he published *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion* which introduced the two prominent figures of his personal mythology. The two prominent figures of his personal mythology Urizen and Orc, where the former symbolised morality and restriction, Orc stood for the arch rebel.

**Ans to Q No 8.** The poet expresses wonder at the awful beauty of the creature and asks what "immortal hand or eye" could have framed it. Note the two words "immortal" and "fearful". They signify the fact that the tiger is a symbol of both terror and divinity.



## 8.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1:** Analyse the role of William Blake as a Christian poet with a revolutionary bent of mind.

**Q2:** Do you think the poet is hopeful of a revolution, that could restore the lost order in the society? Examine the possibility by considering the last two stanzas of the poem.

**Q3:** Explain with reference to the context :

a) "What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?"

b) "In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?"

c) "On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?"

d) "When the stars threw down their spears,
And watered heaven with their tears,"

e) "Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?"

f) "What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?"

**** ****

# UNIT 9: S.T. COLERIDGE: "LOVE" FROM LYRICAL BALLADS

## UNIT STRUCTURE


9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 ST. Coleridge: The Poet

9.3.1 His Life

9.3.2 His Works

9.4 The Text of the Extract

9.4.1 Explanation of the Extract

9.5 Major Themes

9.6 Poetic Style

9.7 Let us Sum up

9.8 Further Reading

9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.10 Model Questions


## 9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the practice of romantic poetry
- explain the life and works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- analyse and discuss the poem “Love” from the Lyrical Ballads in details

## 9.2 INTRODUCTION

Before we delve into the details of the poem "Love" by S.T. Coleridge, let us gain a brief idea on Romanticism, Romantic Age and Romantic poetry.

It is important for us literature students to contextualise a poet or a writer and study his or her poetry in the backdrop of their historical and social setting and thus it is imperative that we know about the Romantic Age in literature to better appreciate Coleridge's life and works.

Romanticism was a pan European movement, ie, it spread throughout Europe and was not limited to a certain country or place. As a movement sharing certain features, Romanticism was to be found majorly in Germany, France and England. It originated towards the end of the 18th century and flourished during the first part of the nineteenth century. It occurred as a result of and in reaction against the values, critical norms and standard literary practice of the preceding age. Although, it manifested itself mostly in the arts and literature, Romanticism has had a lasting impact on history and politics and has shaped prevalent modes of thinking. Many of our conventional views regarding the poet or the author as an isolated brooding figure, away from society are a contribution of the Romantic Age. There have been many attempts to define Romanticism but there is no consensus amongst scholars as to a standard definition and thus, it is important for the learner to note that the Romantic period as a term is used generally to define the literature of roughly the end of the 18th century and the first third of the 19th century that share a common historical situation. It is when literature moved in directions that were marked in contrast to the standard literary practice and values of the 18th century. The Romantic period is generally considered to have come to an end in around 1850 or earlier when it paved the way for another movement, Realism.

The age that preceded the Romantic Age was the 18th century, also known as the Enlightenment or the Augustan Age. It was the age of reason and it advocated a rational and detached scientific approach to most human endeavours and dilemmas. The Enlightenment had developed and championed logic and reason above all other qualities and there was little room in this worldview for the emotion-based nature that would define Romanticism. According to the Enlightenment view, people and their relationships, roles, institutions, and indeed, their societies, could be understood best if organised and approached with a scientific perspective. During this time, it was believed that objectivity was not only desirable, but also achievable. Subjective emotions, contemplation of nature, and the creative impulse felt by individuals were denied any importance and only the Classical standards of order, harmony, proportion and objectivity were preferred.

Romanticism, then, emerged as a reaction against what was perceived to be a cultural climate that had been lacking in spontaneity, creativity, and individuality. It emphasised emotional and subjective spontaneity and highlighted the importance of individual feeling and imagination. The Romantics believed the imagination to be a source of creative faculty. Another important aspect of Romanticism is its distrust in society and unlike the Enlightenment, the Romantics sought a "return to nature". The Romantic Age viewed nature with reverence and assigned an important role to nature in individual development and imagination. They went against the 18th century standard of viewing Nature scientifically and regarded it as a vital, living force capable of stirring powerful emotions in humans.

Romantic poetry is thus the poetry that emerged in the Romantic Age and that which differed significantly in form and content to the poetry of the preceding age. English Romantic poetry is known for its six major poets with Wordsworth as the most towering figure among them. The others are William Blake (1757-1827), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821) and Lord Byron (1788-1824).

The Augustan Age was called so because the writers of the age imitated the literature and culture during the reign of Augustus (27 BCE - 14 CE). There was a revival of interest in the Classics and the authors sought to imitate classical forms. Their language was derivative, ordered and ornate and their relationship to nature was one of cautious imitation. They did not give in to the power of nature but sought to behold it through the lenses of reason and emphasised the importance of collective society rather than individualism. Emotion was subordinate to Reason, which was the prime source for inspiration.

The Romantics sought to lose the artificiality of that poetry and sought to communicate 'real events in simple language coloured by the imagination'. Nature was of prime importance and individual imagination was the prime creative faculty.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. What is meant by Romanticism? When did it originate?

Q2. Name some of the major Romanic poets.

Q3. Why was the Augustan Age called so?

## 9.3 S.T. COLERIDGE: THE POET

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21st October 1772 - 25th July 1834) was an important English poet and critic who belonged to the Romantic Age. He is well known for poems such as "Kubla Khan", "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and also for his famous work of criticism, *Biographia Literaria*. Coleridge, along with William Wordsworth, published *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798, which is considered the beginning of English Romanticism.

### 9.3.1 His Life

Coleridge was a well known English Romantic poet, critic and philosopher who was born on October 21st, 1772 at Devonshire, as the youngest son of the Vicar of Ottery St. Mary. It is here that he spent his childhood but was later sent to the charity school Christ's Hospital in 1782 after his father's death. He studied there till 1791 after which he went on to study at Jesus College, Cambridge. It is during this time that he discovered Voltaire and decided to be a philosopher; letting go of his initial leanings towards surgery and medicine. He continued at Cambridge till 1794 when he left without a degree and enlisted in the army under the false name of Silas Tomkyn Comberbacke. His stint with the military regiment was a short one and he promptly returned to the University after a few weeks. Around this time he met the poet Robert Southey and both of them, inspired by the French Revolution, together imagined a society and government that was by all and for

all. They referred to this idea as "Pantisocracy" and envisaged establishing a community of like-minded people in the backwoods of America. This scheme, however, did not materialise owing to unforeseen practical difficulties.

Coleridge married Sarah Fricker in 1795 and composed a number of poems which were published in a volume in 1796. In the same year, Coleridge edited the weekly paper *The Watchman* which folded after 10 issues, just a couple of months into publication. Coleridge's friends Thomas and Josiah Wedgwood saved him from debt and granted him an annuity of 150 pounds which enabled him to pursue his literary career.

Coleridge met Wordsworth in the summer of 1795 and the two soon developed a strong friendship. This was to have a big impact on the course that the Romantic Movement took in England. Their association and their discussions on poetry, life and literature resulted in the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 which is taken as the beginning of the Romantic Age in England. While Wordsworth's aim in the collection was to present poems that present the ordinary as extraordinary, Coleridge was meant to showcase the extraordinary as ordinary. Poems by Coleridge included in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* were "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Nightingale"; also added were two scenes from Osirio, a tragedy by Coleridge which was staged in 1812 as Remorse. Three more poems were added to the 1800 version; The Dungeon, The Foster-Mother's Tale and the poem that shall be taken up for discussion in the following sections, "Love".

Coleridge toured through Germany and studied at Göttingen University sometime after the first publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*. It is here that he began a lifelong study of the German philosophers such as Immanuel Kant which enabled him to rethink his views on philosophy, religion and literature. Coleridge's marriage was falling apart by the time he returned to England in 1799 and his romantic feelings

now were directed towards Sara Hutchinson, whose sister Mary would later be married to Wordsworth. Coleridge's daughter Sara was born in 1802 and this year also marked his complete estrangement with his wife. His health, too, deteriorated around this time due to the damp weather of the Lake District, and he started using laudanum to help his condition which led to his lifelong addiction with opium.

He went on a walking tour of Scotland with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy in August 1803 but soon separated from them and continued the tour alone resulting in a cooled relationship between the two poets. Having returned from Scotland, he travelled to the Mediterranean island of Malta in 1804, in an effort to recuperate from his failing health. However, the notebooks he kept in Malta reveal his inability to shake neither his physical illness nor his opium habit during the time he was there and he prayed for physical and spiritual support. The notebooks also document a period of painful self-analysis.

### 9.3.2 His Works

Coleridge established himself as one of England's foremost literary critics after 1802, a period that saw him produce very little poetry. He published his famous work of criticism *Biographia Literaria* in 1817, which is an important two-volume collection of critical essays. This also included most of his seven brilliant lecture series on Shakespeare which he delivered from around 1808 to 1819. Meanwhile his opium addiction worsened and in 1816 Coleridge confessed to Byron his daily habit of swallowing enormous doses of the drug. Towards the end of his life, Coleridge lived with a London doctor, James Gillman and his family. This was an attempt to check his addiction and failing health. It is here with the doctor and his family that Coleridge finally found happiness and tranquility and he was entirely absorbed in studying philosophy and religion towards his final years. He had also reconciled with both his wife and the Wordsworths by the time he died in 1834. This brilliant poet-critic will forever be remembered as a man of powerful imaginative vision.

## 9.4 THE TEXT OF THE EXTRACT

**Love**

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame.

Oft in my waking dreams do I
Live o'er again that happy hour,
When midway on the mount I lay,
Beside the ruined tower.

The moonshine, stealing o'er the scene
Had blended with the lights of eve;
And she was there, my hope, my joy,
My own dear Genevieve!

She leant against the arm('e)d man,
The statue of the arm('e)d knight;
She stood and listened to my lay,
Amid the lingering light.

Few sorrows hath she of her own,
My hope! my joy! my Genevieve!
She loves me best, whene'er I sing
The songs that make her grieve.

I played a soft and doleful air,
I sang an old and moving story-
An old rude song, that suited well
That ruin wild and hoary.

She listened with a flitting blush,
With downcast eyes and modest grace;
For well she knew, I could not choose
But gaze upon her face.

I told her of the Knight that wore
Upon his shield a burning brand;
And that for ten long years he wooed
The Lady of the Land.

I told her how he pined: and ah!
The deep, the low, the pleading tone
With which I sang another's love,
Interpreted my own.

She listened with a flitting blush,
With downcast eyes, and modest grace;
And she forgave me, that I gazed
Too fondly on her face!

But when I told the cruel scorn
That crazed that bold and lovely Knight,
And that he crossed the mountain-woods,
Nor rested day nor night;

That sometimes from the savage den,
And sometimes from the darksome shade,
And sometimes starting up at once
In green and sunny glade,-

There came and looked him in the face
An angel beautiful and bright;
And that he knew it was a Fiend,
This miserable Knight!

And that unknowing what he did,
He leaped amid a murderous band,
And saved from outrage worse than death
The Lady of the Land!

And how she wept, and clasped his knees;
And how she tended him in vain-
And ever strove to expiate
The scorn that crazed his brain;-

And that she nursed him in a cave;
And how his madness went away,
When on the yellow forest-leaves
A dying man he lay;-

His dying words-but when I reached
That tenderest strain of all the ditty,
My faltering voice and pausing harp
Disturbed her soul with pity!

All impulses of soul and sense
Had thrilled my guileless Genevieve;
The music and the doleful tale,
The rich and balmy eve;

And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng,
And gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long!

She wept with pity and delight,
She blushed with love, and virgin-shame;
And like the murmur of a dream,

I heard her breathe my name.

Her bosom heaved-she stepped aside,
As conscious of my look she stepped-
Then suddenly, with timorous eye
She fled to me and wept.

She half enclosed me with her arms,
She pressed me with a meek embrace;
And bending back her head, looked up,
And gazed upon my face.

'Twas partly love, and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel, than see,
The swelling of her heart.

I calmed her fears, and she was calm,
And told her love with virgin pride;
And so I won my Genevieve,
My bright and beauteous Bride.

### 9.4.1 Explanation of the Extract

Coleridge suggests that all the things in life that move the corporeal body of man (thoughts, passions, delights) arise from the purpose of promoting Love's "sacred flame". This suggests that while love might very well be placed at a higher divine level, the things that promote it are very much based in the materiality of man. Reminiscent of Shakespeare´s language; "this mortal frame" reminds us of "this mortal coil" of Hamlet´s soliloquy, but whereas Hamlet is racked with indecision and the morbid pain of death, Coleridge is feeling fully alive and trembling ("stirred") at the thought of love. The words "Sacred flame" also introduces a religious element into his devotion. This

expression leads to contemplation in the poet narrator who says that in the temporal frame of his "waking dreams" he relives a particular incident from the past, when he lay on a "mount", beside "the ruined tower". The image of the tower becomes emblematic of the nature of this memory that will be recollected.

The poet then transports the reader to that memory of his, where it appears to be twilight- where the moonlight and the light of the fading evening are entwine. Here in this memory, stood his beloved Genevieve. The imagery is near Gothic in nature: the old tower, a mount which could be a grave, and moonlight shining down on the scene, but this does nothing to detract from the poet´s happiness. In fact, he cleverly uses the somber surroundings as a contrast, further emphasising his joy. The beloved is said to be leaning against the statue of a knight, listening to him. She is carefree and loves the poet best when he sings to her woeful songs. Hence, the poet indulges her with an old sad story, whose rustic quality was well suited for the landscape they were in- that of the tower. The story he sings to her is of the very knight whose statue Genevieve is leaning against. The latter seems to modestly don the role of a coy graceful maiden, who listens to the song, in a manner expected of a lady- especially heightened by his piercing gaze upon her face. The medieval tale of the night speaks of a prolonged pining (continued over 10 years) of the knight for "the Lady of the Land" (probably a princess).

The knight's tale seems to mirror the plight of the poet narrator, and in that there is a moment of recognition- as he "sang another's love/ Interpreted my own"- and the narrating of that tale thus becomes a means of venting his own feelings towards Genevieve. The listener continues to modestly listen, forgiving his insolent gaze. However, the tale takes on a dark turn when the poet speaks of the knight's insanity, restlessness and insomnia- and of a darker side to his mind, that appears randomly- out of his gloom, sometimes suddenly even in the midst of happiness ("green and sunny glade"). What appears as an angel, the knight knows is a "fiend"- his inner demons perhaps? The

knight's rumination is halted by a shift to the next stanza, where without being conscious of his own actions, the knight charges at a band of villains- who attempt to rape the Lady. The grateful lady, who weeps at his feet, then nurtures and does away with the darker side of him- his "scorn" that drove him mad. The medieval scene takes a turn for the gothic- as the setting becomes darker, like the tale itself, and the knight is nursed in a cave. Thereafter, the "madness" of the knight is culled as he nears death. It is also worth noting the condition of the knight´s mind - "the scorn that crazed his brain" - which the loving care of his lover alleviated, helping to make the madness go away perhaps reflects Coleridge himself who suffered from depression and suicidal instincts, perhaps brought on by his opium addiction. When the poet narrator is about to sing out the dying words of the knight, his faltering voice and "pausing harp" move Genevieve greatly. The harp seems to suggest towards the minstrel tradition, where a minstrel was a medieval singer or musician who sang and recited lyric or heroic poetry to the nobility, usually accompanied by an instrument (the lyre/harp). Coleridge thus seems to be drawing from various literary traditions and tropes about love, over different time periods. Coleridge's temporal framework is located in the tradition of Romanticism. It is from this vantage point that he goes back to locate the idea and treatment of love over time. The suggestion perhaps is that Love has been an essential universal part of people's lives and has found expression in different ways in the love poetry that circulated first orally. Coleridge now takes recourse to the written word to express that very orality- which is what this tradition has originated from.

Then, Genevieve is stirred by what she has heard, and the poet's music and words. These the poet notices and begins to hope about a successful realisation of his desired love story with Genevieve. Repressed emotions surface in her. She weeps with sorrow for the woeful tale and delights in her realisation of her love for him (or him for her). It had felt unreal- dreamlike- when she had shyly

enunciated his name. In the present time of the poem, we must remember that all this- the wooing of Genevieve with the tale- had been a dream itself, a memory revived.

Genevieve breathes deeply, making her bosoms heave, and then rushes to the poet to cry. This scene mirrors the knight's tale where the Lady had wept and had run to the knight's feet. There is again a recalling of a certain tradition of love. Genevieve embraces the poet, in that memory, and now meets the gaze of the poet- directly. The poet reads her eyes as displaying a mix of love, fear and a sense of feigning this apparently bashful air of hers, while moving into his arms, and hence a practiced "art" that she puts on to express her love for him. The poet soothes her and she then confesses her love for him. And that is how the poet narrator had convinced Genevieve of his love- and how the recollection of the poet in the present time had ended.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q4. What does Coleridge suggest with regard to love in his poem?

Q5. What does the knight's tale mirror?

Q6. Why does the knight's tale take a dark turn?

## 9.5 MAJOR THEMES

**Love:** It is a song of love and a song of wooing. It is a serenade with a difference that woos with a tale of unrequited love that finally finds due recognition and response. The context serves a two-fold purpose: one that of the lover and his object of adoration. This is strengthened by the traditional and abiding nature of the experience and the pursuit. After all, since medieval times at least knights in arms and damsels in distress had dominated the narrative world of English literature. The nature of love itself in those days had an unreal ethereal aspect and there was no brash avowal of love people are used to in modern times. The admiration that develops

into an understanding reaches the perfect love and all other passions thoughts and deeds are reflection of this love.

**Chivalry:** In medieval times, chivalry was upholding the worth of the lady with the belief that the lady could do no wrong. It was based on a faith in self-sacrifice. Chivalry was the code of honour of the medieval court. Knights as the epitome of chivalry were the upholders of the codes of behaviour of the elite to be looked up to by the plebians. This courtly tradition had inspired much significant literature in all the genres of poetry, drama and fiction. Coleridge's poem "Love" keeps this tradition of chivalric wooing at the backdrop perhaps to give his pursuit the sanction of tradition. Besides this is an innocent endeavour to please the beloved.

**Ballad:** Coleridge exploits the ballad sentiment and form in Love. Ballads had been folk poems sung by an individual without personal references. Ballads were mostly about events and individuals known in the community. Even though ballads celebrate love, they often have a tragic end. Coleridge however, owing to his historical context underlines personal references and refuses to celebrate unrequited love. The ballad form and sentiment are exploited in his endeavour to win the heart of his lady love, Genevieve.

**Gothic Setting:** The Gothic setting of the poem is important as the Romantic's sense of history made them recreate the past which runs the threat of being forgotten and also to give it a currency in their poetry. Colerdige's Love has a ruined gothic tower as the backdrop which is ideally suited for the narration of a ballad upholding chivalrous sacrifice and love.

## 9.6 POETIC STYLE

The poem "Love" by Coleridge included in the 1800 edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* is a ballad. A ballad may be defined as poem or song describing a story in short stanzas. Centuries-old in practice, the composition of ballads began in the European folk tradition, in many cases accompanied by musical instruments. Ballads were not originally transcribed, but rather preserved orally for generations, passed along through recitation. Their

subject matter dealt with religious themes, love, tragedy, domestic crimes, and sometimes even political propaganda.

A typical ballad is a plot-driven song, with one or more characters hurriedly unfurling events leading to a dramatic conclusion. At best, a ballad does not tell the reader what is happening, but rather shows the reader what is happening, describing each crucial moment in the trail of events. To convey that sense of emotional urgency, the ballad is often constructed in quatrain stanzas, each line containing as few as three or four stresses and rhyming either the second and fourth lines, or all alternating lines.

The present ballad has been presented in 24 quatrains; with each quatrain rhyming alternately on the 2nd and 4th lines such as:

Whatever stirs this mortal frame,…..
And feed his sacred flame. (1st quatrain)
And told her love with virgin pride;
… My bright and beauteous Bride. (Last quatrain)

All the essential elements of a traditional ballad as mentioned in the previous paragraph can be seen in this poem by Coleridge. The clear and simple language unfolding a story in rhymes too is reflective of the oral tradition of the ballad.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q7. What is a ballad?

Q8. Why were ballads originally not transcribed?



## 9.7 LET US SUM UP

We have talked about Romanticism and the Romantic Age in England and also discussed salient features of this movement. We then proceeded to situate Samuel Taylor Coleridge in this tradition and briefly discussed his life and works. We read and discussed the poem ''Love'' by

Coleridge from the 1800 edition of the Lyrical Ballads evaluating and understanding its form and language and highlighting its major themes. This unit on Coleridge should serve as a basic introduction to the poetry and life of this great poet-critic and should encourage the learner to read further on this important English Romantic.



## 9.8 FURTHER READING

1) Abrams M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp*.

2) Bowra C.M. *The Romantic Imagination*.

3) *Critics on Coleridge. 20th Century Views*.

4) Coleridge, ST. *The Clark Lectures 1951-52*. Humphry House

5) Day, Aidan. *Romanticism. The New Critical Idiom.*

6) Sengupta, Debjani & Shernaz Cama. (ed) *Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge*. Worldview Critical Editions. 2008



## 9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q1:** Romanticism was a pan European movement, ie, it spread throughout Europe and was not limited to a certain country or place. As a movement sharing certain features, Romanticism was to be found majorly in Germany, France and England. It originated towards the end of the 18th Century and flourished during the first part of the nineteenth century.

**Ans to Q2:** Some of the romantic poets are namely: William Blake (1757-1827), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822), John Keats (1795-1821) and Lord Byron (1788-1824).

**Ans to Q3:** The Augustan Age was called so because the writers of the age imitated the literature and culture of the reign of Augustus (27 BCE - 14 CE). There was a revival of interest in the Classics and the authors sought to imitate classical forms. Their language was derivative ordered and ornate

and their relationship to nature was one of cautious imitation. They did not give in to the power of nature but sought to behold it through the lenses of reason and emphasised the importance of collective society rather than individualism. Emotion was subordinate to Reason, which was the prime source for inspiration.

**Ans to Q4:** Coleridge suggests that all the things in life that move the corporeal body of man (thoughts, passions, delights) arise from the purpose of promoting Love's "sacred flame". This suggests that while love might very well be placed at a higher divine level, the things that promote it are very much based in the materiality of man.

**Ans to Q5:** The knight's tale seems to mirror the plight of the poet narrator, and in that there is a moment of recognition- as he "sang another's love/ Interpreted my own"- and the narrating of that tale thus becomes a means of venting his own feelings towards Genevieve. The listener continues to modestly listen, forgiving his insolent gaze.

**Ans to Q6:** However, the knight's tale takes on a dark turn when the poet speaks of the knight's insanity, restlessness and insomnia- and of a darker side to his mind, that appears randomly- out of his gloom, sometimes suddenly even in the midst of happiness.

**Ans to Q7:** A typical ballad is a plot-driven song, with one or more characters hurriedly unfurling events leading to a dramatic conclusion. At best, a ballad does not tell the reader what is happening, but rather 'shows' the reader what is happening, describing each crucial moment in the trail of events. To convey that sense of emotional urgency, the ballad is often constructed in quatrain stanzas, each line containing as few as three or four stresses and rhyming either the second and fourth lines, or all alternating lines.

**Ans to Q8:** Ballads were not originally transcribed, but rather preserved orally for generations, passed along through recitation. Their subject matter dealt with religious themes, love, tragedy, domestic crimes, and sometimes even political propaganda.



## 9.10 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the historical and personal contexts that shaped Coleridge, the poet.

Q2. What was the significance of the *Lyrical Ballads*?

Q3. What was Coleridge's most famous work of criticism?

Q4. On which eminent literary figure did Coleridge deliver a series of lectures?

Q5. Where was the poem "Love" first published?

Q6. What is the basic underlying theme of the poem?

Q7. Discuss the form of the poem.

Q8. Can you identify grounds of similarity between Coleridge and the poet-narrator?

Q9. Discuss the concepts of *'Chivalry'* and '*Gothic setting*'.

Q10. What is the function of the 'narrative within the narrative' to be found in the poem?

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# UNIT 10: ROBERT BROWNING: "MY LAST DUCHESS"

## UNIT STRUCTURE


10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Robert Browning: The Poet

10.3.1 His Life

10.3.2 His Works

10.4 The Text of the Poem

10.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

10.5 Prose Style

10.6 Let us Sum up

10.7 Further Reading

10.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

10.9 Model Questions


## 10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" as an interesting psychological poem, that reveals the past of a Duke and his late Duchess
- appreciate the life and works of the Victorian poet Robert Browning
- relate the text with the literary form of Dramatic Monologue that Browning has employed in this poem
- make connections between the poem and the context of the Italian Renaissance, in which it is placed
- read into the implied possibilities that the Duke does not mention in the narrative of the poem
- appreciate the poem in its totality

## 10.2 INTRODUCTION

Have you read any poem by Robert Browning, the Victorian poet? This unit will introduce you to one of the prominent English poets and playwrights of the Victorian Age, who mastered and made popular the form of dramatic monologue in his literary works. This period represented the high point of the dramatic monologue in English poetry and you will be made familiar with the form in this unit, so that you can appreciate the poem better.

The 19th century also known as the Victorian period saw the prominence of poets such as Alfred Lord Tennyson, William Ernest Henley, Matthew Arnold and Gerard Manley Hopkins along with the husband-wife duo, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, among others. The Victorian Age provided a significant development of certain forms like the sonnet, structured into fourteen lines or the dramatic monologue which influenced the later modern poets. In the history of poetry, Victorian poetry is an important period considered to be in between the Romantic period of the 17th century and the Modernist movement of the 20th century. Like the other Victorian poets, Browning was much influenced by the Romantic poets and particularly by Percy Bysche Shelley.

The prescribed poem "My Last Duchess" is a commonly anthologised poem and one of the most frequently cited examples among Browning's monologues. The form is interesting due to the dramatic revelation of the psychology of the characters and the situations they create, through the dialogic verses of the poem. Browning was the first to bring the dramatic monologue into distinct prominence with his innovative style.

The poem "My Last Duchess" is set in the late Italian Renaissance period. This was a significant period of cultural change and achievement that began in Italy around late 13th century and lasted until the 16th century. The word Renaissance (Rinascimento in Italian) means 'rebirth', implying the renewed interest in the culture of classical antiquity and love of learning during this period. The Renaissance started as a wide European phenomenon and the Renaissance ideal was fully adopted by the ruling classes, who were patrons of art and culture. The famous Medici family

was the leading example of such patrons, who held an aristocratic position in Italy for three centuries.

If you read the poem carefully, it reveals much more than just the narration of past occurrences by a Duke. In the poem he reflects his bitterness and thoughts on looking at the portrait of his dead Duchess and in the process of narrating, unconsciously reveals his own nature. Many of Browning's poems revolve around such themes of love and its madness, power and the human psyche, revenge and intrigue, which make his poetry interesting. Browning mastered the form of the Dramatic monologue which dominated his works in his writing career.

## 10.3 ROBERT BROWNING: THE POET

This unit will introduce you to Robert Browning's poem, "My Last Duchess" which is written in the form of a dramatic monologue that first appeared in Dramatic Lyrics (1842). Among this collection, he had included a short work "Italy and France" which in 1849, he renamed "My Last Duchess, Ferrara". When he rearranged his works in 1863, he placed it finally under *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* and did not change the title. The poem is set in the background of Italy and the Italian Renaissance and is influenced in part from historical fact.

### 10.3.1 His Life

Robert Browning (7 May 1812 - 12 December 1889) was born to Sarah Anna Wiedermann and Robert Browning. He had a younger sister named Sarianna, who was very gifted. His father was a well-paid clerk who worked for the bank of England and their family was well off. Even as his paternal grand father, Margaret Tittle was a wealthy slave owner in the West Indies, his own father was an Abolitionist in supporting the end of slavery. Browning's father had been sent to the West Indies to work on a sugar plantation but he soon returned to England, disgusted by the widespread slavery

that he saw. According to an anecdotal family story, his paternal grandfather was rumoured within the family to have had some Jamaican mixed ancestry but there is little evidence for the same. Browning's mother, who was a talented musician, was the daughter of a German ship-owner, who had settled with his Scottish wife at Dundee.

Browning's father had amassed an extensive library of around six thousand books, in several languages and many of these were rare. These were the chief literary resources that helped him develop his literary interests. His father encouraged his children's interests in literature and the arts. He was very close to his mother and it was his sister, who had become his close companion in his later years.

Browning wrote a book of poetry at the age of twelve, which he later destroyed when no publisher could be found. He was a very sensitive child and showed a dislike towards school life. After attending one or two private schools, he was educated by a home tutor with the help of the literary resources in his father's library. Thus, by the age of fourteen he was fluent in French, Latin, Italian and Greek and this was the time when he became a great admirer of the Romantic poets, especially Shelley. In his admiration and influence for Shelley, he too became vegetarian and an atheist, although he did not remain so later. At the age of sixteen, he studied Greek at University College, London but left after his first year. He did not study at either Oxford University or Cambridge University which were both open to the members of the Church of England. He stayed away from these universities because of his allegiance to his mother's evangelical Protestant faith. She was a devout nonconformist, and did not follow the beliefs of the Church of England.

He composed arrangements of various songs and inherited musical abilities from his mother. He chose to stay at home,

financially dependent on his parents, until the age of 34, after which he married. Until then he had even refused to a formal career, ignoring his parents' critical protests to his serious inclination to poetry. In 1845, he married Elizabeth Barrett, who was elder to him by six years and a semi-invalid in her father's house at Wimpole Street, London. Their regular correspondence slowly developed into a romance and finally they eloped on 12 September, 1846. Initially their marriage was a secret because Elizabeth had a dominating father who disapproved marriage for any of his children and he even disinherited Elizabeth like each of his children who had married. Elizabeth Barrett was a sweet and innocent young woman who suffered her father's endless tyranny and cruelties.

The Brownings lived in Italy, residing first in Pisa for a year, and then in an apartment in Florence (now a museum to their memory). Their only son Robert Wiedermann Barrett Browning nicknamed "Penini" or "Pen" was born in 1849. During the years they lived there, his fascination led him to learn much about Italian art and culture. In his later life he also described Italy as his University. Later, he bought a home in Asolo, outside Venice. While in their Italian home the couple was very comfortable and their relationship prospered.

He returned to England only after the death of his wife in1861, and he became a part of the London literary scene, even as he kept visiting Italy frequently. Gradually, he received recognition for his works and it brought him the recognition that he had sought for nearly forty years. The Robert Browning Society was formed in 1851and his work was considered befitting the British literary canon. The last years of his life saw him travel widely and he even joined a British diplomatic mission to Russia in 1834.

According, to some reports Browning became romantically involved with Lady Ashbutton but did not remarry. In 1878, for the first time in seventeen years since his wife's death, he returned

there on several occasions. Browning breathed his last at his son's home in Venice on 12 December, 1889. He was buried in Poet's corner in Westminster Abbey, where his grave lay adjacent to that of the poet Alfred Tennyson.

### 10.3.2 His Works

Browning's writing career began with the publication of the anonymous poem "Pauline". His long poem "Paracelsus" based on the renowed doctor and alchemist, received the notice of Thomas Carlyle, Wordsworth and other men of letters. This gave him the reputation of being a promising poet on the London literary scene. During this time, he came to be acquainted with Charles Dickens, John Forster, Harriet Martineau, Thomas Carlyle and Charles Macready too.

He was encouraged to write the play *Strafford* performed in 1837 by Charles Macready and Helen Faust and even as it was no great success, he was encouraged to try again. He went on to write eight plays in all, which included *Pippa Passes* (1841), *A Blot on the Scutcheon* (1843) and *A Soul's Tragedy* (1846). A troubled production of *A Blot on the Scutcheon*, followed by the publication of the experimental and politically radical poem "Sordello" (1840) were both met with widespread dislike. And this caused him such a setback that his reputation would not rise again for 25 years. "Sordello" was a complex psychological poem about a 13$^{th}$ century troubadour or a travelling poet.

Browning was critically dismissed further by patrician or Aristocratic writers such as Charles Kingsley for his leaving the shores of England to live in Italy. It was in Florence from early 1853 that Browning worked on the poems that eventually comprised his two volume *Men and Women* (1855) and these works increased his reputation only after he returned to England. In 1868, after five years of work, he completed and published the long poem *The*

*Ring and the Book* in blank-verse, which was based on an extremely complex murder case in Rome of the1960s.The poem is composed of twelve books, with an introduction and conclusion by him and ten lengthy dramatic poems narrated by the various characters in the story, reflecting their responses to the events. It was long even by his own standards, being over twenty thousand lines and this has been his most ambitious project and praised as an accomplished achievement in poetry. This was published separately in four volumes from November 1868 to February 1869 and this poem was a success both critically and commercially, bringing him the recognition that he had sought for nearly forty years.

After a series of long poems published in the early 1870s, the poems "Fifine at the Fair" and "Red Cotton Night Cap" were well received. The volume *Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper* included an attack against Browning's critics and in particular the Poet Laureate Alfred Austin. In 1887, Browning produced the major work of his later years *Parleyings With Certain People of Importance in Their Day*. It presented the poet speaking in his own voice, engaging in a series of dialogues with long-forgotton figures of literary, artistic and philosophic history and this collection baffled the Victorian public.

Browning then returned to writing short, concise lyrics for his last volume *Asolondo* (1869) which was published on the day of his death. He had a rewarding writing career and he was awarded many distinctions. He was made L.L.D of Edinburgh, a life Governor of London University and had also the offer of the Lord Rectorship of Glasgow. Browning's fame today rests mainly on his dramatic monologues in which the dialogic voice conveys not only the setting and action but also reveal the speaker's character. This was the form that he was known to have significantly mastered and innovated in his works.



## LET US KNOW

Read to find out what M.H. Abrams says are the following three features of the dramatic monologue as it applies to poetry:

a) A single person who is not the original poet utters the speech that makes up the whole of a poem, in a specific situation at a critical moment.

b) This speaker addresses and interacts with one or more person but the reader finds the listener's presence only from clues of the speaker.

c) The main principle controlling the poet's choice and formulation of what the speaker says is to enhance the interest of the reader. The way of revealing the situation is very important as seen in the narration of a dramatic monologue and this gives away the speaker's temperament and character.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q1.** Mention whether True or False:

a. Robert Browning made popular the form of Dramatic monologue in his literary works. **(True/False)**

b. The poem "My Last Duchess" is set in the late English Renaissance. **(True/False)**

c. The poem "My Last Duchess" first appeared in 1842 in his collection *Dramatic Lyrics*. **(True/False)**

d. He had a home tutor and the resources of his father's extensive library. **(True/False)**

**Q2.** Fill in the blanks:

a. Browning's writing career began with the publication of the anonymous poem ……..

b. The book……..was based on an extremely complex

murder case in the Rome of the 1960s.

c. The book……..was published on the day of his death.

d. The……. …….. Society was formed in 1851.

**Q3.** Name some of the best known works of Robert Browning.

**Answer:**…….....

.....

.....

.....

## 10.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**My Last Duschess**

Ferrara

"That's my Last Duchess painted on the wall (1)
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That Piece a wonder, now: Fr Pandolf's hand
Worked busily a day, and there she stands
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
"Fr Pandolf" by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured **countenance,**
The depth and passion of its **earnest** glance, (8)
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there: so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the duchess' cheek: perhaps
Fr Pandolf chanced to say "Her **mantle** laps
Over my lady's wrist too much" or "Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint (18)
Half flush that dies along her throat" such stuff
Was **Courtesy**, she thought, and came enough



***Countenance:*** a person's face or facial expressions.

***Earnest:*** with sincere and serious intention.

***Mantle:*** a woman's loose sleeveless cloak.

***Courtesy:*** a polite and considerate behaviour.

For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart-how shall I say? –too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule (28)
She rode with round the terrace-all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
Or blush, atleast. She thanked men, -good! But thanked
Somehow-I know not how- as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-tears-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd **stoop** to blame
This sort of **trifling**? Even had you skill
In speech-(which I have not)-to make your will
Quite clear to such an one and say, "Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss, (38)
Or there exceed the mark"-and if she let
Herself be lessened so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, **forsooth**, and made excuse,
-E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew. I gave commands:
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then, I repeat, (48)
The Count your master's known **munificence**
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go



***Stoop:*** lower one's standards in doing something morally wrong.
***Trifling:*** unimportant or something trivial.
***Forsooth:*** indeed.
***M u n i f i c e n c e :*** generosity of someone who is very generous.

Together down, Sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me! (56)

### 10.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

The poem "My Last Duchess" is interesting due to Browning's psychological treatment of the character of the Duke of Ferrara. The Duke's love for the arts, his personal and family pride, his jealousy and tyranny as the husband and his authority as a master, make him the typical Aristocrat of the Renaissance period. On the other hand, even though the Duke presents the Duchess in a different light, she shows the characteristics of being young, inexperienced and happy-natured with a love of all things. Her smile or courtesy to all, which he reads with suspicion, appears rather as an expression of a warm all-embracing soul. The psychopathic possessiveness and jealousy in the duke's mind finally goaded him to murder his charming wife.

The background of the poem is set in the Renaissance period of 16th century Italy. The poem first appeared in Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and later in *Dramatic Lyrics and Romances* (1863). It contains 28 rhymed couplets. The poem begins with the lines:

**"Ferrara**
**That's my Last Duchess painted on the wall**
**Looking as if she were alive. I call**
**That Piece a wonder, now: Fr Pandolf's hands**
**Worked busily a day, and there she stands**
**Will't please you sit and look at her? I said**
**"Fr Pandolf" by design, for never read**
**Strangers like you that pictured countenance,**
**The depth and passion of its earnest glance,**
**(Lines 1-8)**

The narrator is an Italian Duke and the poem is set in the

Italian city of Ferrara, which one learns from the immediate exclamation of the Duke. You may be interested to know, that a Duke rules a small independent state, holding the highest, hereditary title of power. Here in the poem, the Duke plays a host to the visiting guest, showing him the painting of his dead wife, the late Duchess. Like the paintings or portraits of the Italian Renaissance period, this painting is very life-like and appears as if the Duchess was still alive, right in front of the privileged viewer. This was painted by one Fr. Pandolf and the busy artist's work resulted in capturing her portrait, which held the Duke's gaze as he admired this work of art, calling it a work of "wonder".

Asking the Envoy to be seated, he let the visitor know, how it was his privilege to view this rarely shown painting. Perhaps, this was due to the fact that, in the eyes of the Duke this man had the ability to perceive the depths of facial expressions of people to a certain extent. Thus, you will notice that generally, monologues which are one-sided happen in the presence of a silent listener.

**But to myself they turned (since none puts by**
**The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)**
**And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,**
**How such a glance came there: so, not the first**
**Are you to turn and ask thus Sir, 'twas not**
**Her husband's presence only, called that spot**
**Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps**
**Fr Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps**
**(Lines 9-16)**

No one is to have power over the strings to draw the curtain, which hides the portrait of his wife except himself. This shows a sense of absolute power in the Duke, who solely enjoys the right of what he thinks to be his own property, like any art- collector. In revealing the portrait, he also begins to give himself away and the

past. The pronoun "they", here implies to the selected strangers, who often question him about the appeal of the glance of the Duchess. Taken aback by the beauty of the Duchess, the visitor who is addressed as "Sir" is not the first person to ask him, the often repeated question about the portrait. In his answer, the Duke admits that he was jealous about not being the sole cause of the radiance in her, while the painting was made. It reflects his suspicion as he utters the word "perhaps", in imagining the reason of the "spot of joy" in the cheeks of the Duchess. He says that, while she posed for the portrait, it was the artist who caused her to blush with pleasure, when he remarked that too much of her wrist was covered. In not being the sole reason of the joy reflected in her, the Duke expresses his discontent and this reflects how in the past he had wanted to control and confine her interaction with him alone. And finally as he wished, after her death she is confined within the frame of the painting, which is solely his property.

**Over my lady's wrist too much or "Paint**
**Must never hope to reproduce the faint**
**Half flush that dies along her throat" such stuff**
**Was Courtesy, she thought, and came enough**
**For calling up that spot of joy. She had**
**A heart-how shall I say? –too soon made glad,**
**Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er**
**She looked on, and her looks went everywhere**
**(Lines17-24)**

According to him, no mixture of paint could ever produce that effect of a radiant glow in the painting. And this makes him read too much into the "faint half flush", that seems to have a compelling effect on his opinion. He sarcastically, assumes it to be her sense of courtesy that may have caused her, to blush in front of a mere painter. He felt that she did not have the required composure that a Duchess

should have had. To his eyes, she had a heart that was impressed easily and won over by anyone or anything. Probably she lacked the desired aristocratic ways, due to her origins and therefore anything would easily catch her whim and fancy. What irritates him is that he perceived her as lacking in good taste and sense of choice that was required in a Duchess. He comments on her uncontrollable eyes, all around the place, as if he alone had the right to gaze and not her. As the poem progresses, the obsessive possessiveness of the duke becomes more and more evident from what he says to the visitor.

**Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,**
**The dropping of the daylight in the West,**
**The bough of cherries some officious fool**
**Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule**
**She rode with round the terrace–all and each**
**Would draw from her alike the approving speech,**
**Or blush, atleast. She thanked men, –good! But thanked**
**Somehow–I know not how–as if she ranked**
**My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name**
**With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame.**
**(Line 25-34)**

He recounts all the instances, when he found that there was no marked difference in the things that drew her approval and even made her blush with joy. Whether it was her noticing his eyes at her bosom, the delight of the last rays of a sunset, a bough of cherry blossoms given by a young officer in admiration, or her joy of riding a white mule round the terrace, there was no difference in the pleasure that these things brought her. He felt insulted to be treated the same like the other men around, to whom she thanked too easily. His pride was hurt by what he thought to be her disrespect for him and his aristocratic lineage, a nine hundred year old name and a

royal family history.

**This sort of trifling? Even had you skill**
**In speech–(which I have not)–to make your will**
**Quite clear to such an one and say, "Just this**
**Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,**
**Or there exceed the mark"–and if she let**
**Herself be lessened so, nor plainly set**
**Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,**
**–E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose**
**(Lines 35-42)**

Perhaps, she was of humble origins to understand what was expected of a Duchess. And her behaviour could be the result of the simplicity and warmth of her nature, which he saw as "trifling". The Duke reasons that anyone with the "gift" of an inherited title, would not stoop to blame an ignorant woman who does not live up to her name, even if one had the skill of speech. Although the Duke says he lacks such a skill, you will find that he is only trying to be modest to the visitor because, right from the start it is he who takes command of convincing the visitor about his thoughts. To him, no respected man would like to instruct about what he does not like in his woman, what disgusts him or what are the things that exceed the limits set by him. The address "here you miss" that he utters sounds as if he had the disgrace to belittle his wife as if she were a child. If the woman opened her mouth to answer something in return, trying to explain herself or even make excuses, even that would be considered as lowering one's standards to a morally inferior woman.

**Never to stoop. Oh Sir, she smiled, no doubt,**
**Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without**
**Much the same smile? This grew. I gave commands:**
**Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands**
**As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet**

**The company below, then, I repeat,**
**The Count your master's known munificence**
**Is ample warrant that no just pretence**
**(Lines 43-50)**

He was too egoistic to stoop to his Duchess and he treated her in cold silence, considering it below him to condemn her. His complaint was that she smiled at others, just as she smiled at him and that there was no difference in her treatment to him and other men. When he could no longer bear it, he ensured that it never happened again. You may wonder what commands he may have given. It could be possible that he ordered the Duchess to be sent to a convent, commanded to be put to death or even killed her himself. He was such a tyrannical husband that she might have died of a nervous breakdown too. "I gave commands" suggests that she was killed on his orders. Her mysterious death, finally creates the Duchess into a work of art, to be frozen as a painting on the wall forever. There is every possibility of the Duke's hand in her untold death.

Ending his narration, the Duke asks the visitor to rise to meet the company downstairs. The word "company" may imply a party held in reception and honour of the visitor. By line 49, you will find that the visitor who has been received so ceremoniously is the Envoy of a Count and the Duke wishes to marry the Count's daughter, with a generous dowry. Perhaps, the Count sent his Envoy to bring him report of the Duke of Ferrara.

**Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;**
**Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed**
**At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go**
**Together down, Sir. Notice Neptune, though,**
**Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity**
**Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!**
**(Lines 51-56)**

The Duke is of the opinion that the generosity of the Count is assuring enough, that no justified quote for dowry would be rejected. Even though he says that it is his fair daughter who is his interest, he seems keener on the dowry. The fact that he addresses her as his "object" again reflects on how he sees woman as a possession, over whom he considers to have the sole rights.

The rank of the Envoy is established as he says, "Nay, we'll go together down". At the end of the poem the Duke draws the Envoy's attention to a rare work of art by the sculptor Claus of Innsbruck, which is the bronze statue of Neptune taming a sea horse. This is nothing but self-flattery in order to impress the Envoy who is to report back to his Count. This symbolically shows his tyrannical and immature side which wishes to tame and control anyone or anything that is his. The word "my" points to his sense of possessiveness for which he can go to any lengths to establish as his alone. The Duchess was not murdered because of immorality or infidelity but because of her unthinking nature as a wife and a Duchess and the lack of gratitude for her position. The title of the poem itself hints that it is centered on the Duchess even as she is no more which also reflects a certain guilt and self-justification in accounting the things of the past. The reader gets an insight into the psychology of the Duke and the possible chain of events.

You will be interested to know that many critics think that the poem has connections with real life incidents. The fifth Duke of Ferrara Alfonso ll d'Este (1533-1598) had abandoned his wife for two years before she died at the age of 17 on April 21, 1561. At the age of 25 he had married the 14-year-old daughter of Cosimo I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany. Her name was Lucrezia di Cosimo de'Medici. She was not well educated and the Medici's were "nouveau riche" (newly rich in status) in comparison to the distinguished Este family. She was married to the Duke with a sizeable dowry. There

was a strong suspicion of poisoning, and after her death, he sought the hand of Barbara, the eighth daughter of the Roman Emperor Ferdinand I. The Count was in charge of the arrangement of the marriage and he sent Nikolaus Madruz, a native of Innsbruck to bring report from the Duke of Ferrara.

The poem "My Last Duchess"… a well researched poem and is partly based on historical fact…first appeared in *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842 …later in *Dramatic Lyrics and Romances* in 1863…in the form of a Dramatic Monologue... contains 28 rhymed couplets…set in Italy in the Renaissance of the 16th century… about the Duke's reflection on portrait…character of the Duke and his past revealed in narration of the Duke.



**LET US KNOW**

Owing to the increasing interest in the Classical cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, portraits–both painted and sculpted– were valued as works of art in Renaissance society. The period saw the genius of Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael.

Robert Browning admired the Pre-Raphaellites who drew from myth and folklore for their artwork. Dante Gabriel Rossetti was regarded as the chief poet among them. The Renaissance brought with it a revival in pagan art, and many pagan gods were depicted in the same Classical models used in Greek and Roman times. Neptune (as you will also find mentioned in the poem) was the Roman God of water and the sea and a counterpart of the Greek God Poseidon. Neptune was the brother of Jupiter and Pluto. Each of them presided over the three realms of Heaven, Earth and the Nether regions. Like Poseidon, Neptune was worshipped as the Patron God of Horses by the Romans. As Neptune was God of the waters, he was often depicted as riding sea-horses.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q4.** Choose the correct answer:

a. The poem is a dramatic monologue in which the speaker is the Duke and the silent listener is

1. The Count
2. His friend
3. An Envoy
4. His newly wed wife

**Answer:** .....

b. The Duke felt that to instruct his wife it would result in his "stooping" as he was proud of his

1. Own Relation
2. Life of luxury
3. Nine- Hundred- year old, inherited title.

**Answer**:.....

**Q5.** Discuss briefly Robert Browning's poem "My Last Duchess". (60 words)

## 10.5 PROSE STYLE

Browning is often remembered for his dexterous use of the dramatic monologue in his verses. In his writings, he often provided psychological insight of his characters. It took a long time for him to be recognised as a great poet because the subjects that he explored did not attract much interest in the readers of his time. Often, they could not relate to his treatment of themes that were complex and **obscure**. His verses were mostly written on subjects of love, power, **intrigue, psychology**, class and society.

Browning is remembered for some of his short poems such as "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "How They Brought the Good News to Aix", "Evelyn Hope", "The Pied Piper of Hamelin", "A Grammarian's Funeral", "A Death in the Desert" among others. The poem "My Last Duchess" is one of his most cited poems. The form soliloquy is a speech in a play, where a character speaks his



***Obscure:*** difficult to understand.

***Intrigue:*** plot something harmful against another.

***Psychology:*** the mental characteristics or attitude of a person; science of the mind.

***Jury:*** a group of Judges who have to give a verdict upon the hearing of a case.

thoughts aloud to himself and it is different from the form of dramatic monologue and the two must not be confused with. Unlike a soliloquy, the meaning in Browning's dramatic monologue is not what the speaker directly reveals but in what he unintentionally gives away about himself. In the poem this process of justification of past actions happens in front of a silent listener. It is almost like a special defence, in which the reader is like a member of a **jury** who hears a case.

Browning chose some of the most lowly and even psychopathic characters in order to build a sympathetic case for such a character (as the duke) as well as to cause unwillingness in the reader. To declare such a character innocent when there is the possibility of him being a psychopath or mentally unsound makes his verses challenging and interesting. One such sensational monologue is "Porphyria's Lover" in which a waiting lover, who sees no future together with his love Porphyria, strangles her to death by winding her golden braid around the neck. The poem "My Last Duchess" is also one such example in which the Duke is eloquent in expressing himself despite his madness of mind. Browning's complex psychological poem "Sordello" about a 13$^{th}$ century travelling poet reflected the late 19$^{th}$ century Victorian Society. In other monologues, such as "Fra Lippo Lippi", Browning takes an immoral character and challenges the reader to discover the good qualities.

A lyrical element is often present in the monologues and it may either be narrative or analytical in form. Browning had employed the dramatic monologue in a variety of forms, like in the form of letters or written records like *The Ring And The Book* or as an analytical discourse of a problem like the poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra". It could be presented as 'Patriotic' lyrics represented as spoken by imaginary persons like "Boot and Saddle" or Browning himself discussing some general problem addressing a person who lived and died before his time, as seen in his *Parleyings With Certain People of Importance in Their Day*. Several of his poems consisted expressions of love with a strong lyrical element

like the poems "Two in Campagna" or "The Lost Mistress" among others. And the element of madness in love to the point of crime was narrated by a participant narrator in some of the poems such as, "Fra Lippo Lippi", "Porphyria's Lover", "Andrea Del Sarto" or the prescribed poem "My Last Duchess". In his work *The Ring and the Book*, he wrote an epic-length poem, in twelve blank verse monologues, in which he justified the ways of God to humanity, spoken by the principles in a murder trial. These monologues greatly influenced many later poets like T.S Eliot and Ezra Pound.

Today Robert Browning is considered the most influential poet of the second two-thirds of the 19th century. In his own time he was more admired than read. Hugh Walker's influential survey of Victorian Literature was called *The Age of Tennyson* (1897) and it influenced the opinions of the literary historians. During his time true appreciation lay with poets such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Algernon Charles Swinburne who himself argued against the common charge that Browning's poetry was too obscure. According to Swinburne, Browning's characteristic work was the purest and highest forms of the lyric or dramatic art. With time when everything Victorian was denigrated, Browning's verse continued to live on among the poets. A prominent historian and critic John Forster evaluated Browning's early development by emphasising that he had only partially realised his potential.

In 1880s Samuel Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was intensely passionate with the subtle style in Browning's verses. Browning was greatly admired by the Modern writers. William Butler Yeats in the final part of his last volume traced his own descent from William Blake and P.B. Shelley to Robert Browning. Ezra Pound had famously acknowledged Browning as his poetic father. T. S Eliot found Browning's monologues a model to be employed in his verses. While Robert Lowell found Browning's verses as fluid as prose, he was one of the favourite poets of Robert Frost. Richard Howard was so influenced by his verses that he wrote monologues

directly in imitation of Browning. Oscar Wilde analysed the narrative and the psychological aspects of Browning's poetry.

There have been books devoted to Browning's early relationship with critics such as Gertrude Reese Hudson's book Browning's Literary Life (1992) or Boyd Litzinger's Times Revenges (1964) on his reputation. There is also Betty Flower's *Browning* and The Modern Tradition (1976). Noted Critic Patricia O'Neill has also evaluated the poet as an index of the cultural temper of the time. His poetry is particularly remembered and popular for the rich vein of psychological speculation.



## 10.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading the poem "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning, who with his unmistakable style, has given the reader an insight into the manipulative mind of a typical Renaissance Duke. The Duke's controlled, possessive, egoistic and tyrannical persona lies in contrast to the spontaneous, loving and happy-natured Duchess. You have gained a psychological insight into the narrator of the poem and the role of events.

You have also learned about the life and works of Robert Browning and about the different ways in which he employs the Dramatic Monologue. Though he is an English poet of the Victorian age, he chose the setting of Italy and the Italian Renaissance for the poem. Browning portrays the widespread Victorian concept of human relationships and social conventions. His work reflects two of his primary interests– the Italian Renaissance and visual arts. You will find "My Last Duchess" interesting after having read through the unit and interpreting the possibilities of the poem on your own.



## 10.7 FURTHER READING

1) Bloom, Harold (2001) *Bloom's Major Poets: Robert Browning.* New York: Infobase Publishing.

2) Browning, Robert (1898) *Dramatic Romances*. New York: Crowell and Company.

3) Fletcher, Huntington. (1908) *Modern Language Notes* "Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologue" The Johns Hopkins University http://www.jstor.org/stable/2916938

4) Friedland, S. Louis (1936) *Studies in Philology* "Ferrara and My Last Duchess" The University of North Carolina Press http://www.jstor.org/stable/417234

5) Neill, Patricia O' (1995) *Robert Browning and 20th Century.* Columbia: Indiana University Press.

## 10.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1** a. True b. False c. True d. True

**Ans to Q No 2** a. "Pauline" b. *The Ring and the Book*. c. *Asolondo.* d. Robert Browning Society

**Ans to Q No 3.** *Strafford, Pippa Passes, A Blot on the Scutcheon, A Soul's Tragedy, Men And Women, The Ring and the Book, Dramatic Lyrics, Dramatic Lyrics and Romances, Pachiarotto, How He Worked in Distemper, Parleyings With Certain People of Importance in Their Day.*

**Ans to Q No 4.** a. An Envoy b. Nine-hundred-year old, inherited title.

**Ans to Q No 5.** To refer to 10.4.1 subsection of the unit.

## 10.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Discuss the content of the poem "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning.

**Q2.** How has Browning employed the literary form of Dramatic Monologue in the poem?

**Q3.** Describe Browning's use of the Dramatic Monologue in his various works? Give examples.

**Q4.** What did Browning portray through the Italian Renaissance as a background of this poem?

**Q5.** Write a character analysis of the Duke from your reading of the poem and contrast it with that of the dead Duchess.

**** ****

# UNIT 11: ALFRED TENNYSON: ULYSSES

## UNIT STRUCTURE


11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Alfred Tennyson: The Poet

- 11.3.1 His Life
- 11.3.2 His Works

11.4 The Text of the Poem

- 11.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

11.5 Poetic Style

11.6 Let us Sum up

11.7 Further Reading

11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

11.9 Model Questions


## 11.1LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of Alfred Tennyson
- explain the text of the poem "Ulysses"
- analyse the style and language employed in the poem
- appreciate the message contained in the poem

## 11.2INTRODUCTION

The present unit takes up the poem "Ulysses" by Alfred Tennyson which was published in 1842. In Homer, Ulysses, the Greek hero of the Trojan War, was the King of Ithaca. and longs to go voyaging again after returning from all his adventures to the island of Ithaca. His adventures during the return are described in Homer's journey. Tennyson makes Ulysses typical of some aspects of Victorian age -the energy and the restless curiosity of its explorers, missionaries, soldiers and empire-builders. The idea of the poem is taken from The Odysseys, but modified on the basis of a passage

from Dante's *Inferno* (Canto26), which represents the hero as pushing his single ship beyond the srait of Gilbraltar, which in ancient belief marked the end of the world. Tennyson himself stated that the poem, written shortly after the death of his friend Hallam, gave expression to his need of 'going forward and braving the struggle of life.'

## 11.3ALFRED TENNYSON: THE POET

Let us explore the life and works of Alfred Tennyson before we read through the contents of the widely anthologised poem "Ulysses."

### 11.3.1 His Life

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was born on August 6 in the rectory of Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809. His early poems reflect the sweet influences of the natural surroundings of his early childhood. When he was seven years old, he went to his grandmother's house at Louth, in order to attend a famous grammar school at that place. But, his school life was not satisfactory, so Tennyson returned home and started writing many verses and his first efforts appeared in a little volume called *Poems by Two Brothers* in 1827. Then, he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, in October 1827, where he got the opportunity to develop friendship with the young poet Arthur Henry Hallam. Two years after his entrance he gained the prize of the Chancellor's Medal for a poem called "Timbuctoo". Tennyson published his first signed work, called *Poems Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). In 1831, Tennyson had to leave the university without taking his degree, as their family was poor and immediately after, his father passed away.

In 1832, in his another remarkable work appeared as Poems containing his remarkable poems like “The Lotus Eaters”, “Palace of Art”, “A Dream of Fair Women”, “The Miller's daughter” a “The Lady of Shalott” and so on. But, the critics of the Quarterly condemned him severely. In the year 1833, Tennyson’s intimate friend Arthur Henry Hallam died and that created so much void and sorrow to him that for

nearly ten years after Hallam's death, Tennyson published nothing. But he continued writing poetry and that resulted in his immortal work *In Memoriam* and his *Idylls of the King*.

In 1850, Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate to succeed Wordsworth and the year in which he published his famous elegy, *In Memoriam*. And he, then married Emily Sellwood, whom he had loved for thirteen years, but his poverty prevented him from marrying. The last forty years of his life was spent like Wordsworth 'in the stillness of a great peace.' Tennyson was the greatest of the Victorian poets, and one of the greatest in the entire history of English poetry.

"One who reads this haunting poem of "Merlin and The Gleam" finds in it a suggestion of the spirit of the poet's whole life, —his devotion to the ideal as expressed in poetry, his early romantic impressions, his struggles, doubts, triumphs, and his thrilling message to his race. Throughout the entire Victorian period Tennyson stood at the summit of poetry in England," thus commented by William J. Long in English *Literature: Its History and its Significance*. To provide you a glimpse of the lines of "Merlin and the Gleam," it reads as given below":

"O young Mariner,
You from the haven
Under the sea-cliff,
You that are watching
The grey Magician
With eyes of wonder,
I am Merlin,
And I am dying,
I am Merlin
Who follow The Gleam."



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Write a few lines on the early life of Alfred Tennyson.

Q2. When and for which work was Tennyson appointed the Poet Laureate

## 11.3.2 His Works

In 1874, Tennyson published his first long poem, “The Princess”, which deals frankly with a problem of the day, the Woman's question. This long poem of over three thousand lines of blank verse, is Tennyson's answer to the question of woman's rights and woman's sphere. But, *In Memorium*, written to mourn the death of a dear friend, Arthur Hallam, he tries to reconcile the conflicting claims of science and religion.On the one hand, he believed in scientific progress, and on the other, he loved undogmatic but stable religion.

In 1833, he was deeply shocked by the death of A.H. Hallam, a gifted young scholar and his closest friend. His sufferings and emotional disturbances urged him to compose *In Memorium* in 1850, which was the result of nearly twenty years' thought and craftsmanship. Arthur Compton Rickett, in his *A History of English Literature* had said, "As a work of art, indeed, it is worthy of the highest praise. Not only is it a metrical masterpiece, for the movement of the verse suits to perfection the brooding and contemplative manner; but it is rich to overflowing in rhythemic felicities, and many of its lines have passed into our language and become common property." Gradually the poem became an expression, first, of universal doubt, and then of universal faith, a faith which rests ultimately not on reason or philosophy, but on the soul's instinct for immortality."

On the other hand, speaking about William J Long said, "As science has already overturned many old conceptions of life and Tennyson as a representative poet of his age, gave this poem to the

world as his own answer to the doubts and questionings of men. This universal human interest, together with its exquisite form and melody, makes the poem, in popular favour at least, the supreme threnody, or elegiac poem of our literature; though Milton's *Lycidas* is, from the critical view point, undoubtedly a more artistic work."

*Maud* (1855) is a monodrama, telling the story of a lover who passes from morbidness to ecstasy, then to anger and murder, followed by insanity and recovery. This was Tennyson's favourite poem. As a love poem, Maud is a triumph, not merely for the satisfying beauty of its phrasing, but as a glorious expression of the sheer ecstasy and rapture of passion.

Following Maud, came the *Idylls of the King* (1859), where he treated of the Arthurian Legend, in four episodes -the Welsh story of Geraint and Enid, the tale of Merlin and Vivien, one of Lancelot's adventures, and the parting of Arthur and Gueneveve.

During his seventies, Tennyson turned to the domain of conventional poetic drama. Of his three best plays, *Queen Mary* (1875), *Harold* (1876), and *Becket* (1884). Since, he started drama very late, so his success as a dramatist was not very significant.

Again, in his later works, like *Death of Eenone or Demeter*, one can notice his decline of power due to advancing age. As a national poet, he was enormously popular, and his ode on the ‘‘Death of the Duke of Wellington’’ (1852) and ‘‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’’ (1854) are most popular poems. On the other hand, his *Idylls of the King*, recounting tales of the early English King, Arthur, together with his *Ulysses* and *The Lotus-Eaters*, which deal with classical Greek themes, were very popular and appealed to Victorian taste.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q3. Describe the poem Maud by Tennyson in a few words

Q4. Write a few lines on Tennyson's widely popular contributions as the National poet of England.

## 11.4TEXT OF THE POEM

**Ulysses**

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed
Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Through scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vexed the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known: cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honoured of them all ;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met ;
Yet all experience is an ache wherethrough
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
For ever and forever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnished not to shine in use!
As though to breathe were life. Life piled on life

Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains ; but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more,
A bringer of new things ; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and board myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge, like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle -
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This about, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and through soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port : the vessal puffs her sail.
There gloom the dark brod seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toiled, and wrought, and thought with me -
That ever with a frolic welcome took
The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads -you and I are old ;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil ;
Death closes all ; but something are the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that stove with Gods
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks ;
The long day wanes ; the slow moon climbes : the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite.
The sounding furrows : for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down :
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Though much is taken, much abides ; and though
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven ; that which we are, we are ;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

### 11.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Ulysses was the king of the island of Ithaca. Soon after the Trojan War, he sailed for his own Kingdom and met several adventures on his way back home. At last he reached Ithaca, where he ruled over his people for three years. Ulysses expresses the lofty ambition of man's eternal quest for knowledge. Tennyson himself said, "There is more about myself in Ulysses which was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by."

After long absence from his kingdom Ulysses has returned home. He has been ruling over the people of his kingdom, Ithaca for quite some time. But he soon becomes tired of his life and embarks on a voyage. He had already completed so many adventurous voyages and now he felt tempted to undertake more voyages. So, he desires to set sail again to have fresh experience of life. He had travelled far and wide and he had a lot of experience of many adventurous voyages. But the more he travelled and gathered experiences, the greater became his hunger to undertaking voyage to discover new regions

and to have more knowledge and experience. He considers his present state of life as dull and useless, and wishes to set sail again to have fresh adventures and knowledge.

The area of knowledge is vast and varied. It is infinite, but human life is short. Ulysses has grown old and he has only a few more years to live. That is why, he would like to have more experiences and knowledge. He is so determined to sail for a voyage, and for this he wants to hand over the responsibility of his kingdom to his son Telemachus who is wise and kind hearted. Telemachus is a spirited young man and Ulysses believes that Telemachus would be able to discharge his royal duties with satisfaction to all, and would also be dutiful to his mother. Keeping this in mind, Ulysses is now free to leave his kingdom.

For the purpose of undertaking the voyage, Ulysses requested his old mariners to accompany him. In quest of new regions and experiences Ulysses is firm in carrying out his voyage beyond the Western Horizon. He with his company would travel to have more and more experience till their last breath of life. Beyond the Western horizon Ulysses hopes to reach the land of Happy Isles where he hopes to meet Achilles, one of the great Greek heroes of the Trojan War. Ulysses is determined "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield till the end of his life." Thus, Ulysses wants to travel to have adventures and experience.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q5. Who was Ulysses?

Q6. What were the hopes of Ulysses and what did he look forward to in his long voyage?

## 11.5POETIC STYLE

Tennyson was one of the most accomplished poetic artists, who combined the observations of a scientist with the sensibility of an artist. He tried to reconcile the conflicting claims of science and religion. As a poet, his mastery of metre and language, shows that he continued the tradition of Spenser and Keats in English poetry. Tennyson's blank verse is inexpressibly finer in quality than any attempted by the poets of the Romantic Revival.

Some of the unique characteristics of Tennyson' poetry are, – he is essentially the artist. He studied the art of poetry with a singleness of purpose. Of course, Swinburne also wrote poems with melody and perfect finish. And like all the great writers of his age, he is a teacher and a leader. In the preceding age, as the result of the turmoil produced by the French Revolution, lawlessness was more or less common in literature. But, Tennyson's theme is characteristic of his age, is the reign of order, of law in the physical world, producing evolution, and of law in the spiritual world, working out the perfect man.

Tennyson's command of language and sense of poetry have earned him a lasting place in the history of English poetry. As a poet, his mastery of metre and language, shows that he continues the tradition of Spenser and Keats in English poetry. These qualities find perfection in his shorter lyrics, where he deals with human emotions. Tennyson is hailed by critics as a philosopher-seer, a supreme interpreter of his age and a great voice of Victorian England. He was the finest expositor of the Victorian age and began his poetic career while still at Cambridge. Unlike Robert Browning, who is generally appreciated by more mature minds, Tennyson was for enjoyment and for inspiration, rather than instruction. William J. Long, in *English Literature : Its History and Its Significance*, states thus, "The secret of Tennyson's poetry is to be eternally young, and like Adam in Paradise, to find every morning a new world, fresh, wonderful, inspiring, as if just from the hands of God."



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q7. What are some of the unique characteristics of Tennyson?

Q8. "Tennyson is hailed by the critics as a philosopher poet" Explain.



## 11.6 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, the learner will be able to discuss the life and works of the poet Alfred Tennyson in details. The poem "Ulysses" which is one of the widely anthologised poems has been explained highlighting the main events in the poem. Also, the unit discusses the poetic techniques employed in the poem. The unit will stir your interest to further explore the poetical works of Alfred Tennyson.



## 11.7 FURTHER READING

1) Long. William J. *English Literature : Its History and Its Significance.*



## 11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q1:** Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was born on August 6 in the rectory of Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809. His early poems reflect the sweet influences of the natural surroundings of his early childhood. When he was seven years old, he went to his grandmother's house at Louth, in order to attend a famous grammar school at that place. But, his school life was not satisfactory, so Tennyson returned home and started writing many verses and his first efforts appeared in a little volume called *Poems by Two Brothers* in 1827.

**Ans to Q2:** In 1850, Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate to succeed Wordsworth and the year in which he published his famous elegy, *In*

*Memoriam.*

**Ans to Q3:** *Maud* (1855) is a monodrama, telling the story of a lover who passes from morbidness to ecstasy, then to anger and murder, followed by insanity and recovery. This was Tennyson's favourite poem. As a love poem, Maud is a triumph, not merely for the satisfying beauty of its phrasing, but as a glorious expression of the sheer ecstasy and rapture of passion.

**Ans to Q4:** As a national poet, he was enormously popular, and his ode on the “Death of the Duke of Wellington” (1852) and “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854) are most popular poems. On the other hand, his *Idylls of the King*, recounting tales of the early English king, Arthur, together with his *Ulysses* and *The Lotus-Eaters*, which deal with classical Greek themes, were very popular and appealed to Victorian taste.

**Ans to Q5:** Ulysses was the king of the island of Ithaca. Soon after the Trojan War, he sailed for his own Kingdom and met several adventures on his way back home. At last he reached Ithaca, where he ruled over his people for three years. Ulysses expresses the lofty ambition of man's eternal quest for knowledge. Tennyson himself said, "There is more about myself in Ulysses which was written under the sense of loss and all that had gone by."

**Ans to Q6:** Beyond the Western horizon Ulysses hopes to reach the land of Happy Isles where he hopes to meet Achilles, one of the great Greek heroes of the Trojan War. Ulysses is determined "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield till the end of his life." Thus, Ulysses wants to travel to have adventures and experience.

**Ans to Q7:** Some of the unique characteristics of Tennyson' poetry are,– he is essentially the artist. He studied the art of poetry with a singleness of purpose. Of course, Swinburne also wrote poems with melody and perfect finish. And like all the great writers of his age, he is a teacher and a leader. In the preceding age, as the result of the turmoil produced by the French Revolution, lawlessness was more or less common in literature. But, Tennyson's theme is characteristic of his age, is the reign of order, of law in the physical world, producing evolution, and of law in the spiritual world, working out the perfect man.

**Ans to Q8:** Tennyson is hailed by critics as a philosopher-seer, a supreme interpreter of his age and a great voice of Victorian England. He is the finest expositor of the Victorian age and began his poetic career while still at Cambridge. Unlike Robert Browning, who is generally appreciated by more mature minds, Tennyson is for enjoyment and for inspiration, rather than for instruction.



## 11.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Discuss the life and works of the poet Alfred Tennyson

Q2. Give a brief explanation of the poem "Ulysses"

Q3. Analyse the style and language employed by Alfred Tennyson in his poem "Ulysses".

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# UNIT 12: T.S. ELIOT: "PRELUDES"

## UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Learning Objectives
12.2 Introduction
12.3 T.S. Eliot: The Poet
12.3.1 His Life
12.3.2 His Works
12.4 The Text of the Poem
12.4.1 Explanation of the Poem
12.5 Poetic Style
12.6 Let us Sum up
12.7 Further Reading
12.8 Answers to Check Your Progress
12.9 Model Questions

## 12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

- appreciate T.S. Eliot as a voice of the 'modernist' sensibility.
- read his poetry as a verbal representation of the fragmentation that characterises the 'modern' world.
- familiarise yourself with Eliot's use of the technique known as 'stream of consciousness'.
- appreciate his images and metaphors.
- appreciate the initial incoherence between the different parts that finally achieves integrity in the poem.

## 12.2 INTRODUCTION

Three seminal texts are believed to have marked the emergence of modernism in English literature: James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Jacob's Room* and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, all published in the year 1922. Eliot's poetry seems to capture the very angst of 'modernism' that

was an inevitable given of the First World War as well as the avant garde methods of creation, stylistic innovations and inventions. In this context we are to remember Ezra Pound's famous dictum: "Make it new!" Fragmentary in nature, his poetry reflects the disintegrated perspective. The poem in question, "Preludes" is actually a pack of four 'preludes'- each consisting of uneven lines and in free verse. The poem explores the nuances of a morbid, desolate world presented in four 'cityscapes', pictures of an urban landscape.

The poem was composed between 1910 and 1911, and though written around the same time as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", its tone is in stark contrast to the comic tone that colours 'Prufrock'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term 'prelude' thus: 'an action or event leading up to another; an introductory part or piece of music'. One might remember the musical analogy involved in the last of Elot's serious poems: *Four Quartets*. In both the meanings, one rudimentary constant is coherence. Like in any event, there is a sequence or linearity, so also in music there is cadence. However, Eliot's "Preludes" seems to subvert these ideas of coherence and integrity, and adopt a 'stream-of-consciousness' technique that provokes the reader to drift from one image to another, from one scene to another. This technique allows a writer to follow one's thought automatically, unhindered. Like our thoughts do not move in a linear, sequential manner, the writers of this period (Joyce, Proust, Woolf, and Eliot) try to mirror this fluidity of thought in their works.

The poem moves from one scene to another, assembling a number of images that contribute towards establishing a gruesome picture of the modern world– the squalor behind the glitz and glamour of urban living.

## 12.3 T.S. ELIOT: THE POET

This unit will introduce you to T.S. Eliot's poem, "Preludes", as a fragmentary poetic piece which took the poet four years to complete. A poem consisting of fifty-four lines, "Preludes" reflects some of the perplexities that a person might experience in a modern metropolis. Eliot composed it during his stay in both France and the United States.

### 12.3.1 His Life

Born in a very distinguished family in New England, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) was the namesake of his maternal grandfather, Thomas Stearns. However, it was his paternal grandfather, W. G. Eliot who, according to T.S. Eliot himself, ruled the family even from the grave. W. G. Eliot was one of the most important leaders of the Unitarian Church in the U.S.A.

His father was Henry Ware Eliot, a successful businessman while his mother, Charlotte Stearns wrote poetry and was a social worker. Later, their family shifted to Missouri (St. Louis) since, his grandfather, William Greenleaf Eliot wanted to establish a Unitarian Church there.

Eliot's love for literature may be linked with his physical weakness and frequent ailments during his childhood. Ailments, which included his congenital double hernia, prevented him from participating in outdoor activities. His isolation opened before him a new vista that led him to the world of literature. He trained himself in Latin, Greek, German and French languages during his years in Smith Academy (1898-1905). Eliot's first published poem was "A Fable for Feasters" that appeared in the Smith Academy record in 1905.

Later, he attended Milton Academy in Massachusetts where he was to meet the publisher of *The Waste Land*, Scofield Thayer. Eliot pursued philosophy at Harvard College and earned a one year premature bachelor's degree in 1909. According to Frank Kermode, 1908 remains the most significant period in Eliot's undergraduate life because it was in that year that he was introduced to Arthur Symon's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899). It is through this seminal work that Eliot acquainted himself with Jules Laforgue, Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine. Some of his life-long friends were Conrad Aiken, Herbert Reed, the Woolfs and Paul Verlaine.

From 1910 to 1911 he studied philosophy at the Sorbonne.

He was back at Harvard where he pursued Indian philosophy and Sanskrit. His eclectic Harvard education is often taken to be one of the major sources of the multifarious allusions of poems such as *The Waste Land*.

Eliot was introduced to Vivienne Haigh-Wood, a Cambridge governess, by Conrad Aiken. And Ezra Pound is said to have encouraged Eliot to marry her and they were married in June 1915. Theirs was not a happy marriage. In her letter to Ezra Pound, Vivienne discloses her health related problems. She was suspected to be a neurotic and later sent to an asylum. *The Waste Land*, Eliot confesses, was partially the outcome of this friction in their married life.

Eliot converted from Unitarianism to Anglicanism in 1927 and proclaimed himself to be an Anglo-Catholic: 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'. He made this announcement about himself in the Preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes*.

It was in June, 1927, that Eliot took British citizenship. He put an end to his unhappy marriage with Vivienne and married Esme Valerie Fletcher in January, 1957 long after Vivienne had died. She had been his secretary at Faber and Faber since 1949. He died on 4th January, 1965, following lung-related health problems. He was cremated at Golders Green Crematorium and as per his wishes his ashes were interred at St. Michael's Church, East Coker.

(N.B. East Coker was the English village from which his ancestors had migrated to America.)

### 12.3.2 His Works

Eliot initially published his poems individually in journals, pamphlets and periodicals. The total number of poems he wrote remained small. He admitted it to J.H. Woods, one of his professors at Harvard, that, he was conscious of his meagre production of verse, but he wished to make each of his poem significant and eventful.

His notable collections are *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Ara Vos Proc* (London) *and Poems*: *1920* (New York). Other collections were *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), a collection of light verse, and *Poems Written in Early Youth* (1967), which included his poems written mostly between 1907 and 1910. His *The Waste Land* (1922) is often considered the most important poem to have come out of British high modernism, while many critics consider his later creation, *Four Quartets* to be his most mature poetic work. He was deeply influenced by French poets like Baudelaire and Valery. Eliot also wrote plays like *Sweeney Agonistes, Murder in the Cathedral, The Rock, The Family Reunion, The Cocktail Party, The Confidential Clerk* and *The Elder Statesman.*



**LET US KNOW**

Read to find out the characteristic features of modernism and its influence on various fields of art and literature as charted out by M.H. Abrams:

a. T.S. Eliot experimented with new forms to capture the discordant and disorderly universe as a result of the First World War, urbanisation, industrialisation, etc.

b. Gertrude Stein, often categorised with Joyce, Proust, Eliot and Woolf, would exercise automatic writing, a technique that would immediately register the thoughts as they occur to the writer's mind. This technique had affinities with Impressionistic paintings.

c. Writers also practised the stream-of-consciousness method in their work, a technique that allowed free flow of thoughts on paper.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** Say 'True' or 'False':

a. T.S. Eliot was named after his maternal grandfather, Thomas Stearns. (True/ False).

b. His paternal grandfather shifted to Massachusetts to establish a Unitarian Church there. (True/ False)

c. *The Waste Land* was published in 1930. (True/ False)

d. *The Waste Land* was his first published poem. (True/ False)

**Q2.** Fill in the blanks:

a. ……..was his first published poem.

b. Eliot proclaimed himself to be a '……in politics'.

c. Eliot took …….years to complete 'Preludes'.

d. The name of T.S. Eliot's mother was…….

**Q3.** Name the five plays written by Eliot

**Answer:**.....

.....

.....

## 12.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**Preludes**

I

The winter evening settles down
With smell of **steaks** in **passageways.**
Six o'clock.
The burnt-out ends of smoky days.
And now a **gusty** shower wraps
The **grimy** scraps
Of withered leaves about your feet
And newspapers from **vacant** lots;
The showers beat



***Steaks:*** thick slices of meat (esp. beef) or fish, usually grilled or fried.
***Passageways:*** a lane or an avenue, a street, usually a narrow one.
***Gusty:*** windy.
***Grimy:*** dirty, filthy.
***Vacant:*** empty.

On broken blinds and chimney-pots,
And at the corner of the street
A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.
And then the lighting of the lamps.

**II**

The morning comes to consciousness
Of faint **stale** smells of beer
From the **sawdust**-trampled street
With all its muddy feet that press
To early coffee-stands.
With the other **masquerades**
That time resumes,
One thinks of all the hands
That are raising **dingy** shades
In a thousand **furnished** rooms.

**III**

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



***Stale:*** leftover (food); not fresh.
***Sawdust:*** powdery fragments of wood, made in sawing timber.
***Masquerades:*** false shows or pretences.
***Dingy:*** dirty-looking.
***Furnished:*** equipped with furniture.
***Dozed:*** slept lightly.
**Sordid**: dirty, squalid.
***Flickered:*** burned or shone unsteadily
***Soiled:*** made dirty.

**IV**

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

I am moved by fancies that are curled
Around these images, and cling:
The notion of some infinitely gentle
Infinitely suffering thing.

Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;
The worlds revolve like ancient women
Gathering fuel in vacant lots.



***Insistent:*** forcing itself on one's attention; pushy, persistent.
***Blackened:*** to make something dirty, black.

## 12.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

Eliot wrote his first two preludes at Harvard, the third at Paris and the fourth on his return from America. Written in fragments, the poem evokes an individuated, troubled self in the face of an indifferent modernity. The poem adopts a detached, impersonal and objective tone throughout, perhaps, to allow the poet to look at his own era with a critical perspective.

**The winter evening settles down**
**With smell of steaks in passage ways.**
**Six o'clock.**
**The burnt-out ends of smoky days.**
**And now a gusty shower wraps**

**The grimy scraps**
**Of withered leaves about your feet**
**And newspapers from vacant lots;**
**The showers beat**
**On broken blinds and chimney-pots,**
**And at the corner of the street**
**A lonely cab-horse steams and stamps.**
**And then the lighting of the lamps.**
**(Prelude I)**

This first prelude conjures up an image of a winter evening- a scene sagged of its vitality. There are steaks cooking in passageways and its perpetual odour indicates it is supper time. The line, 'The burnt out ends of smoky days' immediately takes us back to Eliot's poem "Prufrock" where the speaker laments the swift passage of his youth as 'butt ends' of his life. Gradually a wind gathers, conspiring to shower a spell of rain and wipe away the 'grimy scrap/ Of withered leaves'. The winter rain creates a grey atmosphere as it beats on 'broken blinds and chimney pots'. A horse snorts and stamps its feet at the corner of a street. The newspapers also do not contain any exciting signs but 'vacant lots'. Overall, this prelude sets the stage for an inactive evening, similar to Prufrock's evening, 'like a patient etherized upon a table' Words like 'burnt out', 'grimy', 'withered', 'broken', 'lonely', 'vacuum' convey a lethargy that has taken roots deep into one's mindscape.

**The morning comes to consciousness**
**Of faint stale smells of beer**
**From the sawdust-trampled street**
**With all its muddy feet that press**
**To early coffee-stands.**
**With the other masquerades**
**That time resumes,**
**One thinks of all the hands**
**That are raising dingy shades**
**In a thousand furnished rooms.**

**(Prelude II)**

Generally, for poetic purposes, the morning is a metaphor for fresh beginnings, hopes and promises. But Eliot's morning is no different from his evening pictured in the previous prelude. It continues the lethargy in the morning heavy with 'faint stale smell of beer'. This prelude captures the workers walking down the road, 'the sawdust trampled street/ With all its muddy feet...' We see a movement in this activity but this movement is only a 'masquerade', a perfunctory ritual. They go to their work not as a celebration, but an unavoidable, monotonous ritual. They move forward like automatons, like somebody has turned on the switch and set them on the street. This image is evocative of Eliot's poem, "The Hollow Men". On the other hand, those who wake up in their 'thousand furnished rooms' contemplate how to pass this day which is no different from the previous day. The inhabitants of the city, the occupants of the 'furnished' are not described in any way.

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

**(Prelude III)**

Eliot, in this prelude, introduces a surprise element to the reader. The speaker here directly addresses a woman, who can be taken or is

suspected to be a prostitute. The woman sits confused and is reminded of all the nights with their 'sordid images'. A flickering light struggles to get in through the shutters of her room. The only hope that is conveyed by the sparrows' chirpings (i.e. Sparrows are usually associated with lechery) is soon relegated to disillusionment when one makes out that it is from the 'gutters'. They are rats that evoke the squalor of the corners of the city, the often neglected, insidious, breeding grounds of crime. The lady sits there remembering the night before, when she stood in the streets, ushering clients to her place. Her vision of the night stands in stark contrast to the day which the street and its passersby will 'hardly understand'. She is seen 'clasping' the 'yellow' soles (i.e. 'Yellow' is usually associated with disease, dirt, etc.) of her feet with dirty hands, in the midst of the 'sordid images' of the previous night and all the nights she has endured.

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

**I am moved by fancies that are curled**
**Around these images, and cling:**
**The notion of some infinitely gentle**
**Infinitely suffering thing.**

**Wipe your hand across your mouth, and laugh;**
**The worlds revolve like ancient women**
**Gathering fuel in vacant lots.**
**(Prelude IV)**

There is a personification of the city fog in Prelude IV as in 'Prufrock'. The scene now shifts to the street. The morning turns into night and nothing much has changed in this span of time. The street looks fatigued, being trampled by the 'insistent feet' of factory workers who return home by four, five or six in the evening (i.e. the rhythm 'four, five or six' enacts the insistent, repeated activities). The air is heavy with the smoke from their pipes, possibly not from the workers. They move each step with 'certain certainties' which is nothing but one's inability to fathom the uncertainties of these times. The smoke creates a dull, monochrome of the evening, 'a blackened street/ Impatient to assume the world.' The speaker is 'moved' by the indifference of the world– that certain phenomena continue to revolve in their own orbits, irrespective of the damages to normal human life: 'the notion of some infinitely gentle/ Infinitely suffering thing' (i.e. there is a possibility of a reference to Christ's suffering). But immediately after, the speaker adopts a sarcastic tone and smirks at the daily, monotonous routine carried forward by 'ancient women' gathering firewood and fuel. The image of the 'vacant lots' of the old women connects us to the 'vacant lots' (i.e. places where the people dumped waste) in newspapers in the first prelude. It is noteworthy that Eliot has singled out a streetwalker and some old women and to some extent, has given them a face. The rest of mankind seems to be nothing but a host of faceless anonymity. Thus, 'Preludes' is a collage of disparate images, but an insightful reading would enable the reader to have an idea about life in certain city districts in the early years of the 20th century.

"Preludes" …on alienation and disillusionment experienced in the modern, indifferent and hostile world… the four preludes offer different metaphors and images to convey nature of modern day existence… a poem picturing man in a herd of anonymous faces…robbed individuality. "Preludes" is a grey and gloomy poem… capturing monotonous and stagnant modern day existence.



## LET US KNOW

Eliot's 'Preludes' presents a gloomy picture of modern city life. It is a verbal representation of the alienation and loneliness of the world to the individual. It stands in stark contrast to the celebration of a community centric world and sets the reader to believe that one has been sent to the universe to live an uncertain, isolated life. The individuals are but herds, not different from each other, and they continue a monotonous daily routine, where each day is no different from the previous one.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q3.** Choose the correct answer:

a. How many parts are there in 'Preludes'?

i. two

ii. three

iii. four

iv. six

**Answer:** .....

b. In the first prelude which season has been described by the poet?

i. winter

ii. summer

iii. spring

iv. autumn

**Answer:** .....

**Q4.** Discuss briefly the poem, "Preludes" by T.S. Eliot. (60 Words)

## 12.5 POETIC STYLE



***Polyphonic:*** consisting of many melodies (in music); here, to include many voices.

***Dilemma:*** a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made.

***Farcical:*** absurd and useless.

***Monotonous:*** dull because lacking in variety or variation.

***Stoic:*** calm and uncomplaining.

Eliot adopts a detached and objective tone throughout the poem. Unlike 'Prufrock' which is but a lament in comic light of an individual, 'Preludes' is an enmeshed voice of many people at the same time. The voice conveyed is **polyphonic** but the **dilemma** remains the same- the indifference and monotony of the modern world– a mechanised herd that has been robbed of its individual qualities who march forward each morning to be greeted by an equally cold world.

**'Prelude I'** opens to a winter scene where everything is bleak and painted in grey. The evening downpour makes no difference to the static picture. The structure of the poem indicates stagnancy and to expect anything new in such situations is **farcical.**

**'Prelude II'** opens to a morning scene that conveys the same lethargy experienced in the previous evening scene. It is tinted with "faint stale smells of beer" and contributes nothing hopeful to the gloomy picture. It is a morning like the previous ones, when workers move out in the streets to pursue their jobs. It is a **monotonous** ritual that is exercised every day without fail.

**'Prelude III'** adds a new subject to the poem. The reader sees a human face, that of a (presumably) streetwalker, who contemplates the dirty and painful images of the previous night and all the nights she has suffered. This prelude is a picture of the neglected lanes that constitute the silent world that parallels the hustle and bustle of urban existence.

**'Prelude IV'** is an invocation of what the poem started with- an indifferent evening. The world remains indifferent and follows its regular pattern of daybreak and the gradual descent of night. The reader sees faces of 'ancient' women collecting firewood, oblivious to the damage already done to the world and its inhabitants. It brings again the image of 'vacant lots' suggesting powerfully that nothing much is expected from this world.

"Preludes" is a very important and effective poem because it marks the development of Eliot's poetry from *Prufrock* to *The Waste Land*. The

comic tone in 'Prufrock' vanishes and we see a mature handling of images and metaphors in "Preludes". Eliot's poetry has been acknowledged as a large verbal canvas that draws in imagery and metaphors to depict the disillusionment of the modern world.



## 12.6 LET US SUM UP

Eliot's poem, 'Preludes' introduced us to a whole new world of unconventional poetry writing forms and styles. It also familiarised us with his fragmentary style stitching up disparate images into one holistic picture. Eliot, through this style, tries to mirror the disintegration of the universe. "Preludes" offers us a bleak picture of a world where the evenings and mornings are just passages of time where nothing much is changed. It is a world full of automatons or robots that perform their duties in a mechanised way, devoid of any emotions. This poem vividly invokes the gloomy picture and somehow the hollowness in the modern world.



## 12.7 FURTHER READING

1) Moody, David A. (1996) *Tracing T.S. Eliot's Spirit: Essays on His Poetry and Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2) Tiwari, Nidhi. (2001) *Imagery and Symbolism in T.S. Eliot's Poetry*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributers.

3) Worthen, John. (2009) *T.S. Eliot: A Short Biography*. London: Haus Publishing.

## 12.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1** a. True b. True c. False d. False

**Ans to Q No 2** a. "The Fable for Feasters"

b. royalist

c. four

d. Charlotte Stearns.

**Ans to Q No 3.** a. four b. winter

**Ans to Q No 4.** This first prelude conjures up an image of a winter evening- a scene sagged of its vitality. There are steaks cooking in passageways and its perpetual odour indicates it is supper time. The line, 'The burnt out ends of smoky days' immediately takes us back to Eliot's poem "Prufrock" where the speaker laments the swift passage of his youth as 'butt ends' of his life. Gradually a wind gathers, conspiring to shower a spell of rain and wipe away the 'grimy scrap/ Of withered leaves'. The winter rain creates a grey atmosphere as it beats on 'broken blinds and chimney pots'. A horse snorts and stamps its feet at the corner of a street. The newspapers also do not contain any exciting signs but 'vacant lots'. Overall, this prelude sets the stage for an inactive evening, similar to Prufrock's evening, 'like a patient etherized upon a table' Words like 'burnt out', 'grimy', 'withered', 'broken', 'lonely', 'vacuum' convey a lethargy that has taken roots deep into one's mindscape.

## 12.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Comment on "Preludes" as a representation of the angst of modern existence.

**Q2.** How do the women characters in the "Preludes" convey a note of absurdity and hopelessness of human existence?

**Q3.** Comment on the 'streets' images adopted by T.S. Eliot in his "Preludes".

**Q4.** How does the landscape in the first prelude set the mood of the subsequent gloom prevalent in the poem "Preludes"?

**Q5.** Compare this poem with Eliot's "The Hollow Men" and mark the striking similarities between these two poems.

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# UNIT 13: W.H. AUDEN: "IN MEMORY OF W.B. YEATS"

## UNIT STRUCTURE


13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 W. B. Auden: The Poet

13.3.1 His Life

13.3.2 His Works

13.4 The Text of the Poem

13.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

13.5 Poetic Style

13.6 Let us Sum up

13.7 Further Reading

13.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

13.9 Model Questions


## 13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" as a significant modern poem.
- discuss the life and works of the modern poet W.H. Auden.
- assess the importance of the poet W.B. Yeats in the field of English Literature.
- learn about the traditional elegiac form of poetry that Auden employs in his poem.
- appreciate the poem in its totality.

## 13.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit you will study a tributary poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" by W.H. Auden, written on the loss of the great poet William Butler Yeats. Auden wrote the poem, a three section elegy in February1939, shortly after Yeats's death. It first appeared in his 1940 collection *Another Time.*

## 13.3 W.B. AUDEN: THE POET

Did you come across any poem by the poet W. H. Auden? Have you read, Auden's tributary poem to one of the greatest modern poets and playwrights W.B. Yeats, titled "In Memory of W.B. Yeats? Do not get confused with the names. This unit will introduce you, to both the important poets and help you to appreciate the prescribed poem, which is a tribute offered by the modern poet W.H. Auden to another legendary and foremost figure of English literature W. B. Yeats.

To make you familiar with the poets, W.H. Auden was a 20th century Anglo-American poet who was born in England and became an American citizen. On the other hand, W.B. Yeats, who belonged to the same century, was an Anglo-Irish poet and playwright who was born in Ireland and established himself as a foremost literary figure in both Ireland and England after winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1923.

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* notes that "by the time of Eliot's death in 1965…a convincing case could be made for the assertion that Auden was indeed Eliot's successor, as Eliot had inherited sole claim to supremacy when Yeats died in 1939".

At Oxford, where W.H. Auden studied, he met his poet-friends Cecil Day Lewis, Louis Mac Neice and Stephen Spender and these four were commonly (though misleadingly) identified as the '**Auden Group'**. They did share, left wing or socialist views but they were not necessarily identical in their beliefs. W.H. Auden was a distinguished intellectual and poet in his own right.

### 13.3.1 His Life

Wystan Hugh Auden (21 Feb 1907-29 Sept 1973) was born in York, England to George Augustus Auden, a physician and Constance Rosalie Bicknell. He was the third of three sons, of whom the eldest George Bernard Auden was a farmer and the second John Bicknell Auden, a geologist. Auden's grandfathers were both

clergyman of the Church of England. He grew up in an Anglo Catholic household which followed a "high" form of Anglicanism with doctrine and rituals similar to those of Roman Catholicism.

In 1908 his family moved to Birmingham, where his father had been appointed the School Medical Officer and lecturer of Public Health. Auden's lifelong interests began in his father's library. From the age of eight he attended boarding schools, returning home during vacations. His first boarding school was St. Edmund's School and here he first met Christopher Isherwood who became a famous novelist later. During 1922, at the age of 13, he went to Gresham's School in Norfolk and it was here, when on being asked by his friend Robert Medley, whether he wrote poetry, he first realised his inclination to be a poet. His first published poems appeared in the school magazine in 1923. Auden later wrote a chapter on Gresham's for the writer Graham Greene's *The Old School: Essays* by *Divers Hand* (1934).

In 1925, Auden went to Christ Church, Oxford with a scholarship in biology, but he changed his subject to English by his second year. Here he met with his poet-friends, Cecil Day Lewis, Louis Mac Neice and Stephen Spender and together they came to be known as the 'Auden Group'. He left Oxford with a third class degree and in the same autumn of 1928, he left Britain and for nine months stayed at Berlin. From the year 1930, he began five years as a much-loved school master in boy's schools, like the Larchfield Academy in Scotland and The Down School in the Malvern Hills. In 1937, he went to Spain with the intention of driving an ambulance for the republic in the Spanish Civil war, although later he was assigned other work. There he visited the war front and his seven-week visit made him understand the complexities of the social and political events.

Between the years 1941-42 he taught English at the University of Michigan and was also awarded a Guggenheum Fellowship for

1942-43. But he chose to teach at Swarthmore College from 1942 to 1945. During the years 1956-1961, Auden was Professor of poetry at Oxford University where he was required to give three lectures each year. This gave him enough time for himself and he earned his income mostly by reading and on lecture tours and writing for The *New Yorker* and other magazines. In 1972 he moved his home from New York to Oxford. His old college Christ Church offered him a cottage. He breathed his last in Vienna in 1973.

Throughout his writing career, Auden was very influential and also controversial. He traced his love for language and music, partly to the Church Services he attended as a child. He had a lifelong fascination with Icelandic legends and Old Norse sagas and even believed that he was of Icelandic descent. He had a gift for friendship and throughout his life, performed charitable acts. He was punctual in his habits and obsessive about meeting deadlines and it hampered his health. From his Oxford years onward, his friends described him as funny, extravagant, sympathetic, generous and by his own choice, lonely.

### 13.3.2 His Works

Auden began writing poetry at the age of 13, mostly in the styles of the 19$^{th}$ century romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth and later with his increase in rural interests, he was inspired by Thomas Hardy. At the age of 18, he discovered T.S. Eliot and adopted an extreme version of his style, until he found his own voice at 20. His first twenty poems of the late 1920s were included in his collected work *Poems* (1928) and these were written in an elusive style that hinted on loss and loneliness. The poems in the book were lyrical and meditative and based on hope for love or unfulfilled love and on themes of personal, social and seasonal renewal.

He wrote his first dramatic work *Paid on Both Sides*: *A Charade*, which was included in the same collection, combined style

and content from Icelandic sagas and this mixture of tragedy and farce, with a dream play-within-a -play, introducing the mixed styles and content of much of his later work. A recurrent theme in these early poems was what Auden termed as the "family ghosts", the powerful, unseen psychological effects of preceding generations on any individual life.

*The Orators: An English Study* (1932) was written in verse and prose, largely about hero-worship in personal and political life and the "six odes" reflect his new interest in Robert Burns. During these years much of his work expressed left-wing views and he became widely known as a political poet. His verse drama *The Dance of Death* (1933) was more of a political spectacular entertainment. The next two plays, *The Dog Beneath the Skin* (1935) and *The Ascent of F-6* (1937), written in collaboration with Isherwood, was a quasi-Marxist work and partly an anti-imperialist satire, respectively.

The collection *Look Strangers* included political odes, love poems, comic songs, meditative lyrics and a variety of intellectually and emotionally intense verse. In 1937, he wrote *Letters from Ireland*, a travel book in prose and verse written in collaboration with Louis Mac Neice. In the same year after observing the Spanish Civil War, he wrote a political pamphlet poem "Spain". He wrote a travel work *Journey to a War* (1939), along with Isherwood, with whom he collaborated for the last time on a play titled *On the Frontier*, an anti-war satire.

The collection *Another Time* (1940) saw his famous poems such as "Dover", "As He Is", "Musee des Beaux Arts", written before he moved to America in 1939 and later poems like "In Memory of Sigmund Freud" and "In Memory of W.B.Yeats", written in America. This was followed by works such as *The Double Man* (1941), *For the Time Being* (1944) and *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (1946). The work *Nories* (1951) had a Mediterranean atmosphere with a new theme of the "sacred importance" of the human body in

its ordinary aspects of breathing, eating and sleeping, in continuity with nature. His prose book *The Enchanted Flood: The Romantic Iconography of the Sea* (1950) was based on a series of lectures on the image of the sea in Romantic literature. In 1955 he wrote another work titled *The Shield of Achilles*.

He worked on a sequence of seven Good Friday poems and a group of poems on "history", the term he used to mean the set of unique events made by human choices and these he included in his collection *Homage to Clio* (1960). His prose book *The Dyer's Hand* (1962) were a compilation of the lectures he gave at Oxford as Professor of Poetry along with revised versions of essays and notes written since the mid 1940s. The work *About the House* (1965) included poems reflecting on his lecture tours. This was followed by a poetry collection *City Without Walls* (1969) and also his life long passion for Icelandic Legends, turned into his translation of *The Elder Hedda* (1969).

*A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (1970) was a kind of self- portrait made up of favourite quotations. Among his last works were a selection of essays and reviews titled *Forewords and Afterwords* (1973), a book of verse *Epistle to a Godson* (1972) and the unfinished poetry collection *Thank You, Fog* (published posthumously,1974) which included reflective poems about language and about his growing old.

Auden won the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1948, Austrian State Prize for European Literature and Struga Poetry Evenings Golden Wreath Laureates in 1971. He also wrote more than four hundred poems and four hundred essays and reviews on literature, history, politics, music, religion and many other subjects.



## LET US KNOW

Auden's poem "In Memory of W.B.Yeats" has influences of the traditional elegiac form. An elegy in literature is a poem that expresses mourning and grief, especially as a funeral song or a lament for the dead. The word 'elegy' is derived from the Greek term 'elegeia' and this was originally referred to any verse written in elegiac couplets and covering a wide range of subject matter, including the epitaphs for tombs.

This form is a very ancient literary tradition that began with Theocritus and Moschus, defined by Virgil, developed and enriched by the great Renaissance poets and popularly reinvented by P.B. Shelley and Matthew Arnold in the 19th century.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Q1.** Mention whether True or False.

a. The first 20 poems of the late 1920s were included in his collected work titled *Poems* (1928) **(True/False)**

b. Auden had a lifelong fascination with Icelandic legends and Old Norse sagas. **(True/False)**

c. Stephen Spender was not part of the Auden Group. **(True/False)**

d. An elegy in literature expresses the lament and grief due to the loss of someone. **(True/ False)**

**Q2.** Fill up the blanks:

a. "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" was included in the collection……(1940)

b. Auden was Professor of Poetry at……..University.

c. Auden moved to America in the year…….

d. Auden received the ……...Prize for poetry in 1948.

**Q3.** Name some of the best known works of Auden.

**Answer:**.....

.....

.....



***Dead:*** the coldest part of winter
***Brooks:*** small stream
***Deserted:*** appearing empty
***Disfigure(d):*** spoil the appearance of
***Mercury:*** liquid metallic element used in thermometers and barometers
***Untempted:*** to be unaffected
***Fashionable quays:*** a stylised platform lying alongside or projecting into the water for loading or unloading ships
***Mourn(ing):*** express deep sorrow following the death or loss of someone
***Rumour:*** a story likely to be false, spread among a number of people
***Provinces:*** areas or parts
***Revolt:*** an act of going against something
***Invade(d):*** to enter or spread in large number; forcibly occupy
***Suburbs:*** outlying residential districts of a city
***Current:*** the flow of a feeling or thought
***Scattered:*** spread across

## 13.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

You have already read in the introductory section 10.2. that the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" was penned by Auden in February 1939, after W. B. Yeats's death in Roquebrune (Southern France) on January 29, 1939. This poem follows the traditional elegiac form, which you have already been made familiar with. It is a 63-lines poem that is divided into three sections. Read the poem carefully and try to understand what the poem wants to say.

**"In Memory of W. B. Yeats."**

**I**

He disappeared in the **dead** of winter: 1
The **brooks** were frozen, the airports almost **deserted**
And snow **disfigured** the public statues;
The **mercury** sank in the mouth of the dying day.
What instruments we have agree
The day of his death was a dark cold day. 6

Far from his illness 7
The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests,
The peasant river was **untempted** by the **fashionable quays**;
By **mourning** tongues
The death of the poet was kept from his poems.
But for him it was his last afternoon as himself
An afternoon of nurses and **rumours**;
The **provinces** of his body **revolted**,
The squares of his mind were empty,
Silence **invaded** the **suburbs,**

The **current** of his feeling failed; he became his admirers. 17

Now he is **scattered** among a hundred cities 18
And **wholly** given over to **unfamiliar** affections,
To find his happiness in another kind of wood.
And be punished under a foreign code of **conscience**
The words of a dead man
Are **modified** in the **guts** of the living.
But in the importance and noise of to-morrow
When the **brokers** are roaring like beasts on the floor of the **Bourse**,
And the poor have the sufferings, to which they are fairly
**accustomed,**
And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom,
A few thousand will think of this day
As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly **unusual**.
What instruments we have agree
The day of his death was a dark cold day. 31

**II**

You were silly like us; your gift survived it all; 32
The **parish** of rich women, physical decay.
Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
In the valley of its making where **executions**
Would never want to **tamper**, flows on south
From **ranches** of **isolation** and the busy griefs,
Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives.
A way of happening, a mouth. 40

**III**

Earth, receive an honoured guest: 41
William Yeats is laid to rest.
Let the Irish vessel lie
Emptied of its poetry 44



***Unfamiliar:*** not known or encountered; unknown
***Conscience:*** a person's moral sense of right and wrong
***Modified:*** to modify or make partial changes
***Guts:*** the internal parts or essence of something
***Brokers:*** a person who buys and sells goods or shares for others; middlemen
***Bourse:*** a stock-Exchange, especially one in a continental European city
***Accustomed:*** getting used to something or habituated
***Unusual:*** not often done or occurring
***Parish:*** the smallest unit of local government in rural areas
***Executions:*** the way in which something is produced or carried out; actions.
***Tamper:*** interfere without permission so as to cause damage
***Ranches:*** large farms
***Isolation:*** the condition of being left alone, without anyone around.



***Nightmare:*** frightening or unpleasant dream
***Sequestered:*** isolated or hidden away
Intellectual: a person's highly developed mental powers.



***Disgrace:*** a shameful thing

In the **nightmare** of the dark
All the dogs of Europe bark,
And the living nations wait ,
Each **sequestered** in its hate;

**Intellectual disgrace**
Stares from every human face,
And the seas of pity lie.
Locked and frozen in each eye .
Follow poet, follow right
To the bottom of the night,
With your unconstraining voice
Still persuade us to rejoice;

With the farming of a verse
Make the vineyard of the curse,
Sing of human unsuccess
In a rapture of distress;
In the deserts of the heart
Let the healing fountain start,
In the prison of his days

## 13.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

The learner will do well to first read the text of the poem and interpret it on your own. Having tried interpreting it on your own, you may relate to the given analysis and explanation of the poem.

When Auden wrote the poem, Europe was under the shadow of World War II and so the sense of an impending catastrophe is present throughout the poem. The elegy form may be written to evoke the thought of living after death in religious terms, in terms of cherished memories or by transforming grief into an inner resolution to go on with life. Auden mimics the form to express his lament and

at the same time deviates from the typical use of such a composition. The function of poetry or any work of art is such that its longevity and social presence has the capacity to unite the minds of readers across time and space. The three sections of Auden's elegy begins with a reflection to a final **epitaph** and invocation.



***Epitaph:*** words written in memory of a person who has died

***Nostalgia:*** longing for the happy times of the past

***Remnants:*** a small remaining quantity

***Transcended:*** go beyond the range or limits of

Section I begins with the lines:

**"He disappeared in the dead of winter**
**The brooks were frozen, the airports almost deserted**
**And snow disfigured the public statues:**
**The mercury sank in the mouth of the dying day.**
**What instruments we have agree**
**The day of his death was a dark cold day"**
**(Lines 1-6)**

The poem reflects the cold, dry and barren month of winter, the last phase of the seasonal cycle; just like the final phase of a human being's life. The pronoun "He" refers to William Butler Yeats on whose death, the poem is written. During that cold season the brooks were frozen and it snowed heavily, people deserted the roads, the changing air pressure made the mercury of barometers sink in the deadening cold.

Thus, the day Yeats died is described as a dark cold day, a February afternoon in the year 1939.

**"Far from his illness**
**The wolves ran on through the evergreen forests**
**The peasant river was untempted by the fashionable quays;**
**By mourning tongues**
**The death of the poet was kept from his poems"**
**(Lines7-11)**

Here the contrast is drawn between the urban world as against the wilderness of nature. Faraway from his illness, there was another world amidst the evergreen forests where the river continued to flow on its course, the wolves ran about and everything

was as usual. Life continued ahead irrespective of Yeats's death. Even on the impending death of Yeats, life seemed indifferent. This is because death too is an inevitable part of life.

The image of a quay, that stretches out to the river is compared to the mourning tongues of people. This is to show that, just as the river is indifferent to the quay, so is the river of life to the emotions and reactions of people. The collection of poems is as if kept away from the knowledge of their creator's death, as though on knowing about the loss of Yeats, they would be affected by his absence forever. This is a way of creating a certain sense of nostalgia on such a great loss.

**"But for him it was his last afternoon as himself**
**An afternoon of nurses and rumours;**
**The provinces of his body revolted,**
**The squares of his mind were empty,**
**Silence invaded the suburbs,**
**The current of his feeling failed; he became his admirers."**
**(Lines 12-17)**

Here the poet talks of the last hours of Yeats's life and he imagines him battle with death on that fateful afternoon. The nurses were doing everything that they could do and by then it was the talk of the town. His mental powers to hold on, to the last remnants of his bodily strength, finally gave way and the flowing current of life in him was drained out. These were his last minutes in this world before he breathed his last.

**"Now he is scattered among a hundred cities**
**And wholly given over to unfamiliar affections,**
**To find his happiness in another kind of wood.**
**And be punished under a foreign code of conscience**
**The words of a dead man**
**Are modified in the guts of the living."**

**(Lines 18-23)**

Yet, Yeats still continued to be remembered and celebrated after his death. His memory spanned across generations and borders and he was still loved and admired by countless faces across hundreds of cities. It was as though, he transcended to unknown worlds of his admirers, equally subjected to their scrutiny and criticism. Thus, his words received newer insights and perspectives in the lives of the people. Such is the function of a poet and the weight of his words that live on and make their significance felt.

**"But in the importance and noise of to-morrow**
**When the brokers are roaring like beasts on the floor of the Bourse,**
**And the poor have the sufferings to which they are fairly accustomed,**
**And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom,**
**A few thousand will think of this day**
**As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual.**
**What instruments we have agree**
**The day of his death was a dark cold day."**
**(Lines 24-31)**

The modern world in its fast changing pace and self-importance may lose track of and drown the poet's memory. Auden provides an insight into the socio-economic condition with roaring brokers at the Stock-exchange on one hand and the poor with their suffering to which they are conditioned. Though every modern individual is convinced that he is free, actually he is only imprisoned and locked in himself. Only a few thousand will perhaps pause and remember this day, as one remembers a day in one's life when one did something different that made the day stand out in their memory. The truth is that except for a specific reading public, who take time

to remember the poet and his contribution, life will carry on.

The lines 30-31, "What instruments we have agree, The day of his death was a dark cold day" are a repetition of lines 5-6 and it emphasises the dark, cold day on which everyone had to accept the death of Yeats.

**Part-II**

**"You were silly like us; your gift survived it all;**
**The parish of rich women, physical decay,**
**Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,**
**For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives**
**In the valley of its making where executions**
**Would never want to tamper, flows on south**
**From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,**
**Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives.**
**A way of happening, a mouth."**
**(Lines 32-40)**

The longevity and success that poetry receives does not necessarily have to do with the quality of the person behind the poet. The idea that Yeats was "silly like us" does not in any way degrade his work. His poetry survives on its own independent strength, as poetry itself has a certain survival instinct. It is great poetry that creates a world of its own and this is how it survives, "a way of happening, a mouth". Here Auden talks of the eventual course that poetry takes in the world, like an ever flowing river. It is immortal and it survives in time, passed from one generation to another. Poetry is like the voice of the peoples' collective understanding of their own human experience.

**Part-III**

**"Earth, receive an honoured guest:**
**William Yeats is laid to rest.**
**Let the Irish vessel lie**
**Emptied of its poetry"**
**"In the nightmare of the dark**

**All the dogs of Europe bark,**
**And the living nations wait**
**Each sequestered in its hate;"**
**(Lines 41-48)**

This stanza is like an invocation to the Earth to receive the mortal remains of the poet. "William Yeats is laid to rest" this is as if the final declaration before his burial. The words "Irish vessel" refers to Yeats as he was originally a citizen of Ireland and on his death he is like an empty ship unable to create poetry anymore.

The approaching shadow of World War II loomed largely over the fate of Europe and this is what Auden refers to as the "nightmare of the dark". This was a time when the nations were waiting to wage war against each other, locked in their hatred and hostility. Auden wrote this poem in February 1939 but war did not break out until September, when Germany invaded Poland. The failure of Britain and France to resist Hitler's claims on Czechoslovakia in 1938 made Europe hostile. This proved again that man alone can be man's enemy.

Prior to this in the year 1929, there was a great economic turn down, known as the Great Depression that shook America and later England too. This had created much industrial stagnation and mass unemployment leading to poverty. This was the background in which Auden had written the poem in.

**"Intellectual disgrace**
**Stares from every human face,**
**And the seas of pity lie**
**Locked and frozen in each eye"**
**Follow, poet, follow right**
**To the bottom of the night,**
**With your unconstraining voice**
**Still persuade us to rejoice;"**
**(Lines 49-56)**

Not just the civilians but the intellectuals in power are

responsible for the peace of the state. It is on their decision and policies that the welfare of the country depends on. But there is indifference and lack of humanity or fellow-feeling is frozen.

In such a situation Yeats' poetry can be a saving grace with a ray of optimism.

**"With the farming of a verse**
**Make a vineyard of the curse,**
**Sing of human unsuccess**
**In a rapture of distress;"**
**"In the deserts of the heart**
**Let the healing fountain start**
**In the prison of his days**
**Teach the free man how to praise"**
**(Lines 57-64)**

The invocation continues and Yeats is evoked to create his verses and relate the condition of the present world just as it is. Vineyards yield grapes that are sour and that is perhaps compared to the curse of inhumanity and the warring worlds. The great poet is requested to sing in a rapture until, healing starts like a gushing fountain in human hearts that are barren like deserts. Please notice that in the earlier lines the given description is of the locked and frozen seas of pity and just as the glaciers have the potential to melt into a sea, so does the feeling of sympathy in human beings. Similarly, the comparison drawn in the above lines are with the deserts of the hearts which can be healed and sensitised with the poet's verses.In a way, man is imprisoned in the limited count of his days and yet is free to count his blessings. A world without war and strife is a blessing as it gives man a sense of freedom. Thus, the poem ends on an optimistic note in which Auden invokes the significance of Yeats's presence through his poems.The three stanzas that followed the lines, "Let the Irish vessel lie, Emptied of its poetry" (Lines 43-44) were excluded and removed by Auden from this poem in his 1966 edition of *Collected Shorter Poems*. These three stanzas were as

follows:

"Time that is intolerant
Of the brave and the innocent
And indifferent in a week
To a beautiful physique,
Worship language and forgives
Everyone by whom it lives;
Pardons cowardice, conceit,
Lays its honours at their feet.
Time that with this strange excuse
Pardoned Kipling and his views
And will pardon Paul Claudel
Pardons him for writing well"



**LET US KNOW**

At the Downs School where Auden was a teacher, he experienced what he later described as a "Vision of Agape" in June 1933. This was while he was sitting with three fellow teachers at the school when he suddenly found that he loved them for themselves and that their existence had infinite value for him. This spiritual experience he said later influenced his decision to return to the Anglican Church in 1940.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q4.** Choose the correct answer:

a. The poem "In Memory of W.B Yeats" is

1. An eulogy
2. An elegy
3. A villanelle
4. An eclogue

**Answer:**……..

b. When Auden wrote the poem in 1939, Europe was under the shadow of

1. World War I
2. Civil War
3. World War II

**Answer:**……

**Q5.** Discuss briefly what the poem "In Memory of W.B Yeats" is about. (60 words)



**Doggerel**: roughly written verse which can sometimes be intentional

**Ballad**: a poem or song telling a popular story, usually an old love story

**Limerick**: a humorous five lined poem with a rhyme scheme **aabba**

**Haiku**: a Japanese poem of seventeen syllables

## 13.5 POETIC STYLE

Like many of his generation, Auden was inspired by the poetic wit and irony of T.S. Eliot, and the metrical and verbal techniques of Gerard Manley Hopkins and Wilfred Owen. His study of English influenced his versifications and made him familiar with the rhythms and long alliterative lines of Anglo-Saxon poetry. He was also inspired by John Skelton's use of the rapid and short-lined **doggerel**. He learned much from the English music and American blues singers. Auden published about 400 poems and 7 long poems of which two were book-length. His poetry ranged from 20th century modernism to the traditional forms such as **ballads** and **limericks**, short **haiku** and **villanelles** to Christmas **oratorio** and a **baroque eclogue** in Anglo-Saxon meters.

The central themes of his poetry are love, politics and citizenship, religion and morals and the relationship between human beings and the world of nature. The style of his poems written in the late 1920s and early 1930s alternated between modern and traditional styles, written in an intense and dramatic tone and this established him as a left-wing political poet. His poems in the 1940s explored religious and ethical themes in a less dramatic manner. In the 1950s and the 1960s many of his poems concentrated on the ways in which words revealed or concealed emotions and he used the form of **opera librettos** which was suited to direct expression of strong feelings. He was admired for his abilities to write in nearly every verse form, draw from a wide range of his intellect, including his interests in socio- political theories. His poetry often literally or symbolically recounts a journey or quest and his experiences of travel itself provided enough material for his verses.



**Villanelle**: a nineteen lines long poetic form with a complex rhyme scheme.

**Oratorio**: a large-scale musical work on a religious theme for orchestra and voices.

**Baroque -eclogue**: very ornate European classical style in which a poem is written on a pastoral subject.

W.H. Auden's 1939 elegy for W.B. Yeats acknowledges the loss of a great poet who also was his contemporary. In step with John Milton's "Lycidas" or Thomas Gray's "Elegy written in a Country Churchyard", the traditional elegiac form serves the commemorative function, in which death is not the only loss treated in the poem. The poem represents a period when Auden began to lose faith in what poetry could accomplish and the loss of faith in the political power of art.



**Opera librettos**: the words of an opera or other long vocal work.

In a way, the poem also resists convention, as one finds the absence of mourning. Although, a dark and reflective tone is present, a lamentation of a loss does not seem to occur. Auden also asserts that Yeats did not immortalise his art rather he was immortalised by his art. In understanding the poetic afterlife of a poet, his poem is an additional step towards preserving Yeats's memory and works.

The 63-lined poem is divided into three sections and the first two sections are written in the form of free verse. The third section consisting of six paragraphs (lines 41-63) is written in lines of four with the 'a, a, b, b' rhyme scheme.

In much of his poetry, Auden introduced purely private symbols intelligible only to a few friends. He was always the experimenter, especially in bringing together high artifice and a colloquial tone in his poetry. In his

poems he preferred to confront modern problems directly instead of filtering them, as T.S. Eliot did by use of symbolic situations. Around the 1940s Auden showed greater clarity of imagery and he developed a more complex view of the world. His thoughts transformed from his earlier psychological diagnosis of modern ills to a more religious view of personal responsibility and values. The poems written in the last phase of his career were "About the Home" (1965) and "City Without Walls" (1970) which were personal in tone, with an informal touch and remarkable technical skill.

Auden's reputation and his stature as a poet and writer has been disputed with a range of critical opinions. Geoffrey Grigson in an introduction to a 1949 anthology of modern poetry, wrote that Auden "arches over all". His stature was suggested by book titles such as *Auden and After* (1942) by Francis Scarfe and *The Auden Generation* (1972) by Samuel Hynes. In his later collected editions, Auden rewrote or discarded some of his most famous poems like "Spain" or "September 1, 1939". He wrote that he rejected poems that he found boring or dishonest that lacked his sense of conviction and were used only for rhetorical effectiveness. John Ashbery was of the opinion that in the 1940s Auden "was the modern poet". In the 1950s and 1960s writers like Philip Larkin and Randall Jarrell lamented that Auden's work had declined from his earlier promise.

When Auden and Isherwood sailed to New York in January 1939, entering on temporary visas, their departure was seen by many as a betrayal and his reputation had suffered. With some exceptions, British critics treated his early work as best, when he was praised as a progressive voice in contrast to the politically obscure voice of T.S Eliot. The American critics tended to favour his middle and later work. Auden's reputation did not decline after his death and on 2, October 1947 a memorial stone for Auden was unveiled at Poets' corner in Westminster Abbey. Joseph Brodsky wrote that his was "the greatest mind of the twentieth century".

Today, Auden is recognized as one of the masters of the 20$^{th}$ century English poetry and has been compared with Dryden in his combination of intelligence and remarkable craftsmanship.



## 13.6 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading about the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats" by W.H. Auden. The poem is based on the great modern poet W.B. Yeats and is written in a tributary form, with a reflection on the foreshadowing events of World War II.

The poem focuses on the poetic afterlife and also the function of poetry as an art to unify the collective minds of the readers in a world crippled with modern technology and warfare. The lament in the poem is not just directed to the death of Yeats but also towards a world that is threatened by its own destructive potential. The repute and fame of W.B. Yeats was such that for his admirers, it crossed all borders of nations. For Auden while memory was to do with the past, it took place in the present. And the only way a poet could honour the dead, was to write an elegiac poem about the present. You have also gained sufficient knowledge of the elegiac form to understand the essence of the poem.



## 13.7 FURTHER READING

1) Arana, Victoria R. (2009) *W.H. Auden's Poetry: Mythos, Theory and Practice.* New York Cambria Press

2) Carpenter, Humphrey. (2011) *W.H. Auden: A Biography*. Faber and Faber Limited

3) Smith, Stan. (ed.) (2004) *The Cambridge Companion to W.H. Auden*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Websites:

http://en:wikipedia.org/wiki/w._h._auden

## 13.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1** a. True.

b. True.

c. False.

d. True.

**Ans to Q No 2** a. Poems

b. Oxford

c. 1939

d. Pulitzer

**Ans to Q No 3.** *Poems, Paid on Both Sides: A Charade, The Orators, The Dance of Death, The Dog Beneath the Skin, The Ascent of F-6, Look Strangers, Letters From Ireland, Journey to a War, On the Frontier, Another Time, The Double Man, For The Time Being, The Age of Anxiety, Nories, The Enchanted Flood, The Shield of Achilles, Homage To Clio, The Dyer's Hand, About The House, City Without Walls, The Elder Hedda, A Certain World, Forewords and Afterwords, Epistle to a Godson*.

**Ans to Q No 4** a. An elegy. b. World War II.

**Ans to Q No 5.** To refer to 13.4.1 subsection of the unit.

## 13.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Assess the significance of Auden as a modern poet.

**Q2.** How has Auden employed the traditional elegiac form along with the modern?

**Q3.** Discuss the poetic style of Auden as reflected in the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats".

**Q4.** In what context did Auden write the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats"?

**Q5.** Discuss the content of the poem "In Memory of W.B. Yeats".

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# UNIT 14: PHILIP LARKIN: "CHURCH GOING"

**UNIT STRUCTURE**


14.1 Learning Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 Philip Larkin: The Poet

14.3.1 His Life

14.3.2 His Works

14.3.3 List of Works

14.4 The Text of the Poem

14.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

14.5 Poetic Style

14.6 Let us Sum up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

14.9 Model Questions


## 14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- familiarise yourself with the life and works of Philip Larkin
- gain a brief idea on the sharp decline of religion particularly in the 1950s
- learn about Larkin's association with the Movement
- discuss the poem "Church going" with reference to the context
- explain Larkin's transforming poetic style
- highlight the critical response to his literary works
- appreciate the concerns and reflections contained in the poem

## 14.2 INTRODUCTION

Philip Larkin is one of the key poets in the English literary scene in the second half of the century. Larkin's poetry is marked by a sense of disillusionment, pessimism, insularity, and anti-modernism and it is also noted for a characteristic eloquence in many poems, as well as grace, sharpness, and humour in several others. Many of his poems address the

themes of love, marriage, freedom, destiny, ageing, death, and the isolation of the individual. Alan Sinfield in his essay "Varieties of Religion" charts the gradual decline of religion since the 17th century to the present and identifies the 1950s as marking a drastic decline in faith in the face of a growing secularity. In such a modern society that is dominated by television, advertising, modern economic practices, as well as extreme sophistication in technology and bureaucracy, the idea of a single worldview breaks down and with it, Christianity, which underpinned such a worldview, loses its relevance (quoted. in Rudnytzky Schray: 54). Larkin's "Church Going" (published in *The Less Deceived*, 1955), like many of his other poems, also engages with this decline in religion.

## 14.3 PHILIP LARKIN: THE POET

The unit takes up Philip Larkin's poem "Church Going" with a detailed reference to his life and literary works. In order to acquaint yourself to the poet the following subsections provides you with a detailed explanation of the poet's biography along with the detailed explanation of the prescribed poem.

### 14.3.1 His Life

Philip Larkin (1922-85) was born on August 9, 1922, in Coventry. He was the second child, and only son, of Sydney and Eva Larkin, the former working there as a City Treasurer from 1922 to 1944. Between 1930 and 1940, he attended the King Henry VIII School where he edited and contributed to the school magazine, *The Coventrian*. From there Larkin went to St. John's College, Oxford, in 1940, and despite the Second World War that took place during this time, Larkin (who had been unable to join the army due to his poor eyesight), completed his degree without interruption, graduating in 1943 with First Class Honours in English. Kingsley Amis and Bruce Montgomery were two of his closest friends there.

During this time, Larkin had also started publishing his poems such as, "Ultimatum", which appeared in the *Listener*, November 28, 1940, and "A Stone Church Damaged by A Bomb", "Mythological

Introduction", and "I dreamed of an out-thrust arm of land". After his graduation Larkin shifted to Wellington in 1943 as the librarian of the local library which he managed single-handedly. There he wrote his first two novels, *Jill* (1946) and *A Girl in Winter (1947). The North Ship,* Larkin's first collection of poems, came out in 1945.

In 1946, Larkin became Assistant Librarian at the University College of Leicester and in 1949 an Associate of the Library Association. In October 1950, he became Sub-Librarian at Queen's University, Belfast. There, in 1951, Larkin published a small collection of his poems, titled *XX Poems*, that was privately printed in an edition of 100 copies. His next collection, *The Less Deceived*, came out in 1955. Larkin became a Librarian at the University of Hull in the same year. In 1964 Larkin's next collection, *The Whitsun Weddings* was published. This collection, like the earlier one, was well received, and the following year, Larkin was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.

During the years 1961-71 Larkin contributed a number of monthly reviews of jazz recordings for the *Daily Telegraph*, which were published in a collected edition in 1970 as *All What Jazz: a Record Diary 1961-1968*. He also edited the *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*, published in 1973. His last collection *High Windows* was published in 1974, and consolidated his position as one of the foremost poets in England. "Aubade", his last great poem, was published in *The Times Literary Supplement* in December 1977.

Larkin chose to remain single for the whole of his life, though he had several important relationships with women. In his statements on poetry and on jazz, Larkin was hostile to the self-conscious adoption of a difficult mode by modernism, and was initially in his poetic career, was associated with the Movement, though his own work's relationship with modernism was more complex than what his position seemed to imply. In 1984, a year before his death, he was offered the Poet Laureateship but turned it down. Philip Larkin died of cancer on December 2 1985 at the age of 63 years.

## 14. 3.2 His Works

The early poetry of Larkin was influenced by William Butler Yeats and Thomas Hardy, the latter especially in Larkin's first volume of poems, *The North Ship*. The backlash against this volume led Larkin to adopt a starker, self-deprecating style in *The Less Deceived*. It was in this collection that Larkin constructed the poetic persona of the plain-speaking, sceptical, modest, awkward, commonsensical, but ironic observer that became characteristic of not only his poetry but of the Movement as a whole. The Movement consisted of the number of post-war generation of poets anthologised in Robert Conquest's *New Lines* (1956). This persona owed much to the impersonal observer of the modernist poets though the Movement itself was anti-modernist, but it also looked back specifically towards an English context than the international mooring of the modernists.

The next two collections of Larkin, *The Whitsun Weddings* and *High Windows* registered a refinement of the manner and enlargement of the scope of *The Less Deceived*. But they also indicated a move away from the Movement in that the poems in these volumes attempted to draw the reader into an immediate connection with the speaker through the use of vernacular, and slang-like language that reflected a more conversational style.

The mood of Larkin's poems is frequently "sombre, glimpsing the loneliness, emptiness, and mortality that lie underneath social rituals" (Hamilton: 289). However, his pessimism is often a poetic posture, as the poet casts himself in the role of misanthrope. As Hamilton argues,

"[e]ven his darkest poems have their element of black comedy, and there are, besides, a number of exercises in light verse, whether satirical about social mores ("Sexual intercourse began #" In nineteen sixty- three"), sardonic about human relationships ("He married a woman to stop her getting away/I now she's there all day"), or gently mocking of academic life ("Jake Balokowsky, my biographer/ Has this page microfilmed" (Hamilton: 289).

He often engages imaginatively with ordinary lives displaying a feeling of empathy towards them. There is also a note of affirmation that "comes from the metaphors of air and light, the transcendent Utopian gleams which appear throughout his work, highlighting the limitations of the real world, yet offering a vision of hope and integrity which is more than merely cruel" (Hamilton: 289-90).

After 1974, Larkin rarely published any new poem. He became depressed at the thought that "poetry had given him up", and turned increasingly to drink (Hamilton: 290). By this time, he had also become partially deaf and was no longer able to truly enjoy jazz (that had been one of his overwhelming interests). The only notable publication of Larkin during this time was his collected prose, *Required Writing*. "Apart from *'Aubade'* (the definitive statement of his fear of death) and *'Love Again'* (a haunting poem of sexual jealousy), he wrote almost nothing worth preserving in his last ten years" (Hamilton: 290). Nevertheless, Larkin remains "an original, obsessive, deep-feeling poet who courageously refused the consolations of conventional belief" (Hamilton: 290).

### 14.3.3 List of Works

**The major collections of larkin's Poetry were :**

*The North Ship* (1945), *XX Poems* (1951) *The Less Deceived* (1955), *The Whitsun Weddings* (1964) *and High Windows* (1974)

**Among his posthumously published anthologies are *Collected Poems* (1988) and *The Complete Poems* (2012).**

*Some of his works of nor-fiction are : All What Jazz: A Record Diary 1961–1971, Required Writing: Miscellaneous Pieces 1955–1982* (1983), *Further Requirements: Interviews, Broadcasts, Statements and Book Reviews 1952–1985,* Larkin, Philip (1979), "The Brynmor Jones Library 1929–1979", in Brennan, Maeve, *"A Lifted Study-Storehouse": The Brynmor Jones Library 1929–1979, updated to 1985*, Hull University Press (published 1987), *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse* (1973)



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q1.** Why was Philip Larkin unable to join the army? Where did he receive his education?

**Q2.** Which collection won Larkin the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry?

**Q3.** Which major movement was Larkin associated with and why?

**Q4.** In which year was Larkin offered the Poet Laureateship?

**Q5.** Name the collection of poetry which came to characterise both his poetic style and that of the Movement.

**Q6.** Name a few poetry collections or anthologies of Philip Larkin.

**Q7.** Who had inspired Larkin's early poetic works?

## 14.4 THE TEXT OF THE POEM

**Church Going**

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

Move forward, run my hand around the font.
From where I stand, the roof looks almost new -
Cleaned, or restored? Someone would know: I don't.
Mounting the **lectern**, I peruse a few



***Sprawlings:*** spread out irregularly over a large area
***Awkward:*** feeling embarrassed
***Reverence:*** deep respect
***Lectern:*** a tall stand with a sloping top from which a speaker can read while standing up
***Hectoring:*** talk in a bullying way
***Cathedrals:*** a church

**Hectoring** large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for.

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

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

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



***Dubious:*** hesitating or doubting, not to be relied on
***Random:*** something done in any order
***Brambles:*** a prickly shrub of the rose family
***Buttress:*** a projecting part of a mountain or hill
***Obscure:*** purpose that is not known well

Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh?
Or will he be my representative,

Bored, uninformed, knowing the ghostly silt
Dispersed, yet tending to this cross of ground
Through suburb scrub because it held unspilt
So long and equably what since is found
Only in separation - marriage, and birth,
And death, and thoughts of these - for which was built
This special shell? For, though I've no idea
What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth,
It pleases me to stand in silence here;

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognized, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be **obsolete**,
Since someone will forever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And **gravitating** with it to this ground,
Which, he once heard, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie round.



***Obsolete:*** no longer used; something that is out dated
***Gravitating:*** movement or a tendency to be moved

## 14.4.1 Explanation of the Poem

The poem begins with the speaker entering a church after ensuring that "there's nothing going on." The first stanza suggests that this person is someone who habitually visits churches but not because he has a devout belief in God. Rather he comes across as a sceptic for whom the contemporary world does not have a place for religion. There seems to be a note of monotony when he says "Another church," since it might point towards the repetitiveness of the exercise for him, or of the functions of the church in general. The

first two stanzas narrate the first impressions of the speaker upon entering the empty church in the "suburban scrub" and at the same time strive to establish the ordinariness of the visitor himself.

The speaker professes ignorance regarding church matters, and his ordinariness seems to be emphasised by his being on a bicycle and wearing "cycle-clips" but as we proceed through the rest of the poem, this is seen to be more of a pose than real ignorance since he simultaneously shows a familiarity with church ritual and other technical details. The introductory first two stanzas are filled with minute details observed by the speaker, who instinctively records the various sensory impressions he encounters as he enters the church: auditory ("the door thud shut"), visual ("brownish" flowers), and olfactory ("musty" silence). These serve to create a sense of immediacy in the reader with reference to the speaker's experience, so that we can enter into his subjectivity, and identify with his perspective. The speaker then ascends the lectern, pretends to read Bible verses to the absent congregation, hears "[t]he echoes snigger briefly," and then leaves.

Although the speaker emphasises his nonbelief, he does confess that there is something in churches which always makes him feel "at a loss" and elicits an "awkward reverence" in him, a feeling which he proceeds to analyse in the rest of the poem. He meditates on the future of the church, and other similar buildings in the face of a constant decline in the number of religious believers, and imagines a time when the church will fall completely out of use. In the third stanza he wonders if a few church buildings will be preserved because of their historical interest, while other churches will be left at the mercy of the elements, or even used as barns.

The fourth stanza then brings in the possibility of these empty church buildings drawing the superstitious, who might hope to absorb some remnant of spiritual or magical power. In the fifth stanza the speaker speculates that such places will attract antiquarians and even those "Christmas-addicts" who are eager for

"a whiff/ Of gown-and-bands and organ-pipes and myrrh". However, in the sixth stanza he refers to the building contemptuously as "this special shell" and "this accoutred frowsty barn", but still finds himself drawn towards it.

In the seventh and final stanza, he speculates that such a place will always compel people to come, since it is, he admits, a "serious house on serious earth," and "someone will forever be surprising / A hunger in himself to be more serious". This constitutes a kind of epiphany in that the attitude of ironic scepticism here suddenly gives way to a serious realisation of the impact of the church on the human (Christian) psyche which cannot even now, distance itself from a need to believe. As Rudnytzky Schray argues, "Larkin's "Church Going" becomes not so much an expression of outright scepticism towards Christianity, as a desperate struggle to understand an intangible need" (Rudnytzky Schray: 52).

## 14.5 POETIC STYLE

There is an epigrammatic quality in Larkin's poetry that is clearly evident in "Church Going" in lines such as "A serious house on serious earth it is". The poem, like many others, is long, consisting of seven large stanzas (with nine lines each) with a complex rhyme scheme. The pattern is also indicative of much of his poetry: the speaker finding himself in a particular place, and then slowly moving on from an individual meditative commentary to a wider universal statement. Tijana Stojkovic looks at the rhetorical strategies that Larkin uses in his poems, using the present poem as an illustration. She argues that the poems move from "a sensory, concrete level to a speculative, abstract level" though the "thought process of one who is asking questions, wondering, and imagining different possibilities" (Stojkovic: 83). Although the speaker's interior train of thought becomes the central structural principle of the poem, the associations resulting from it are presented in an orderly manner "with links supplied between them (churches as museums, alternative uses, different superstitions, types of

future visitors)" (Stojkovic: 83). However, even though the poem shifts to a more speculative and abstract level, it is still mediated by material or concrete details that are relevant in building up the image of the church and the activities around it, such as, "churches," "cathedrals," "parchment," "plate," "pyx," "cases," "rood-lofts," "Christmas-addict," "gown-and-bands," "organ-pipes" and "myrrh." The "epiphanic conclusion" brings about a qualification of the "non-worshipper ("I've no idea / What this accoutred frowsty barn is worth")" to a speaker who "claims a certain universality for the modern atheistic type who is nevertheless genuinely aware of "A hunger in himself to be more serious," assuaged in "this ground," the church"" (Stojkovic: 83-84). This is not, however, due to the institutionalised aspects of the church, such as the service, but because of "some deep truths about human life implied in religion, and symbolised by the dead in the church-yard" (Stojkovic: 84).Again, James Booth points towards the elegiac nature of the poem and is of the view that it "is an updated graveyard meditation
in the tradition of Gray" (Booth: 14). At the same time, it is marked by a "colloquial tenor...ironic humour and...clear-sighted realism"" (Regan: 1).



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

**Q8.** How does the opening stanza of "Church going" begin?

**Q9.** What are the various sensory impressions recorded by the poet in the poem "Church Going"?

**Q10.** Briefly note the quality and structure of Larkin's poem "Church going".

The critical consensus with respect to Larkin in the 80s after his death was that he could be identified with an "essential and enduring Englishness" that not only expressed itself through its "self-restraint and ironic reserve" but also through "its fundamental decency and tolerance" (Regan: 1). His poetry articulated the changed realities of post-war society that demanded "rational, vigilant poetry, responsive to a new mental and physical landscape" (Regan: 1). His poetry at this time was also seen a marked by a tight economy of language and a cultivated dryness of tone.

However, with the publication of the *Collected Poems* in 1988, Selected Letters in 1992, and the authorised biography of Larkin by Andrew Motion, *Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life*, in 1993, the reception of Larkin underwent a drastic change. His poetic career now seemed to imply an attempt "of a writer striving for his own distinctive style and reaching ambitiously, poem by poem, for the most felicitous use of metre, deployment of rhyme, and choice of vocabulary" (Regan: 2). These works as well as the biography also gave the impression of a poet who was less impersonal in his poetry, and instead worked the tensions and conflicts of his mind into his poetry. Larkin was also condemned on the grounds of being racist, fascist, sexist, anti-intellectual and class-conscious, especially with the publication of his letters. His poetry, again, was seen as colloquial and simple only in appearance. Earlier, in the 1970s, Larkin's poetry was already seen as possessing a "transcendental element", that was later to be tied up with the "symbolist dimension of his poetry", particularly in the critical commentary of the poet by Seamus Heaney (Regan: 7,8).



## 14.6 LET US SUM UP

At the end of the unit you have learnt about the life and works of the Modern poet Philip Larkin. It discusses Larkin's association with the Movement (upheld by the post-war generation of poets) which had a considerable bearing on his poetry. Thus, the unit provides the learner with a detailed explanation of the poem's content by highlighting the reflections of the modern man and his changing perceptions towards faith and religion in the modern world.



## 14.7 FURTHER READING

1) Booth, James. (2005) *Philip Larkin: The Poet's Plight*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

2) Hamilton, Ian. (1996) *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English.* Oxford: OUP.

3) Regan, Stephen, Ed. (1997) *New Casebooks: Philip Larkin*. Hampshire: Macmillan.

4) Rudnytzky Schray, Kateryna A. "'To Seek This Place for What It Was': Church Going in Larkin's Poetry". *South Atlantic Review,* Vol. 67, No. 2 (Spring, 2002), 52-64. JSTOR. Web.

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www.philiplarkin.com. 30 January 2014

www.poetryfoundation.org

## 14.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q No 1.** Larkin was unable to join the army due to his poor eyesight, but he completed his degree without interruption graduating in 1943 with first class in English.

**Ans to Q No *2.*** *The Whitsun Weddings* was published in 1964 following year Larkin was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry.

**Ans to Q No 3.** In his statements on poetry and on jazz Larkin was hostile to the self-conscious adoption of a difficult mode by modernism and was initially associated with the Movement though his own work's relationship with modernism was more complex

**Ans to Q No 4.** In 1984, a year before his death, he was offered the Poet Laureateship but turned it down.

**Ans to Q No 5.** In the collection titled *The Less Deceived* Larkin constructed the poetic persona of the plain-speaking, sceptical, modest, awkward, commonsensical, but ironic observer…this had turned into the characteristic of not only his poetry but of the Movement as a whole.

**Ans to Q No 6.** *The Whitsun Weddings*, *High Windows*, *The Less Deceived, The North Ship*

**Ans to Q No 7.** William Butler Yeats and Thomas Hardy

**Ans to Q No 8.** The Speaker enters a church after ensuring that "there's nothing going on." The first stanza suggests that this person is someone who habitually visits churches but not because he has a devout belief in God. Rather, he comes across as a sceptic for whom the contemporary world does not have a place for religion. There seems to be a note of monotony when he says "Another church," since it might point towards the repetitiveness of the exercise for him or of the functions of the church in general.

**Ans to Q No 9.** The introductory first two stanzas are filled with minute details observed by the speaker that reward the various sensory impressions he encounters as he enters the church: auditory ("the door thud shut"), visual ("brownish" flowers), and olfactory ("musty" silence).

**Ans to Q No 10.** Epigrammatic quality in Larkin's poetry that is clearly evident in lines such as "A serious house on serious earth it is". The poem, like many others, is long consisting of seven large stanzas (with nine lines each) with a complex rhyme scheme.



## 14.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

**Q1.** Give a concise description of the life and literary works of Philip Larkin.

**Q2.** Why does the speaker express an "awkward reverence" as he enters the church?

**Q3.** Describe the speaker's experience inside the empty church in the poem "Church going"

**Q4.** Briefly explain the characteristics of Larkin's poetic style.

**Q5.** How was Larkin associated with and later differed from the Movement?

**Q6.** Briefly describe the world-view of the modern society as a relevant concern or aspect of the poem "Church going".

**Q7.** Explain with reference to context:

"Mounting the lectern, I peruse a few
Hectoring large-scale verses, and pronounce
'Here endeth' much more loudly than I'd meant.
The echoes snigger briefly. Back at the door
I sign the book, donate an Irish sixpence,
Reflect the place was not worth stopping for."

**Q8.** Explain with reference to context:

"A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions meet,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete"

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# UNIT 15: W.B YEATS: SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

## UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Learning Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 W.B. Yeats: The Poet

15.3.1 His Life

15.3.2 His Works

15.4 Context and Explanation of the Poem

15.5 Poetic Style

15.6 Let us Sum up

15.7 Further Reading

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

15.9 Model Questions

## 15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit you will be able to:

- discuss W.B Yeats, one of the major modern poets
- describe the ways in which Yeats used Irish Folklore as the context for his early poems
- explain the poem "Sailing to Byzantium"
- highlight the emergence of Yeats as a poet and thinker can be termed as the pioneer of Celtic revival in Ireland

## 15.2 INRODUCTION

The final unit of the course takes up one of the widely anthologised poems of W.B. Yeats titled "Sailing to Byzantium" which captures the imagination of the readers with its interesting narrative.

## 15.3 ST. COLERIDGE: THE POET

Before we explore the poem let us gain a brief idea on the life and works of W.B. Yeats.

### 15.3.1 His Life

W.B Yeats was born on June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, a seaside suburb of Dublin. The family of Yeats's father were mercantile settlers. He spent his childhood alternately in London and Sligo.The first three years of infancy were passed in his birthplace Dublin. But in 1868, the family moved to London so that his father could study to become a professional painter. The family then settled at 23 Fitzory Road, Regent's park and lived there until 1874.

Rather than Sligo, London was the original home for all the children of John Butler Yeats. For W.B Yeats, the human being who first occupied a special place in his mind was not his father or mother, but grandfather William Pollexfen of Sligo, the silent and fierce old man, as Yeats describes in his poem -“In Memory of Alfred Pollexfen.” Yeats died of heart failure on 28th January and buried in accordance with the wishes expressed by him in 'Under Ben Bulben' with the inscription: "Cast a cold eye on life, on death. Horseman, pass by."

### 15.3.2 His Works

At the age of seventeen, Yeats first began to write verses. Although Yeats wanted to be an artist, yet he continued to write poetry mostly on romantic subjects in the manner of Shelley. In 1885, Yeats verse appeared for the first time in 'Dublin University Review'. Many of his early ballads reappeared in 'The Wanderings of Oisin and other poems'. In 1887, his verse was published in England for the first time, when his 'The Madness of King Groll', appeared in the magazine 'The Leisure Hour'. In the same year, he edited an anthology of poetry, which was published in Dublin under

the title *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*.

In 1888, he compiled a volume entitled Fairy and Folk Tales of the Irish Peasantry, which was published in London. Thus, gradually Yeats popularity began to grow wider. He was beginning to be accepted by the public as an authority on Irish folklore and a poet of importance.

In his grandfather's house, in 1888, Yeats completed a long poem on a theme from Irish legend, “The Wandering of Oisin' and Other Poems”. The lyrics and ballads contained in this first published book of verse -were in due course reprinted under the title *Crossways*.

Yeats, in his Memoirs, wrote: "I was twenty three years old when the troubling of my life began. I had heard from time to time in letters from Miss O'Leary's old sister, of a beautiful girl who had left the society of the Vice-regal Court for Dublin Nationalism. In after years, I persuaded myself that I felt premonitory excitement at the first reading of her name. Presently, she drove up to our house in Bedford Park with an introduction from O'Leary to my father. I had never thought to see in a living woman such beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past."

Of course, Maud Gonne became his chief interest. From the moment of their meeting all life for Yeats was changed, changed utterly. But, Maud Gonne did not respond to his passion. She accepted him with delight as a friend and she was obsessed by a burning desire to free Ireland from its seven hundred years's dominion by England.

In 1891, the Rhymer's club was formed and in that year also, Yeats founded, in London, the Irish Literary Society. During that year, he returned to Ireland on a visit, in the course of which he asked Maud Gonne to marry him. She refused but begged him for his friendship. Obsessed by her thought, he wrote in that year a play - *The Countess Catheleen*, whose heroine was no one but Maud Gonne. The theme of the play was that Cathleen is a beautiful noble

woman who, having sold her soul to the Devil so that her people may be saved from starvation, eventually goes to Heaven.

In 1894, Yeats wrote play, '*The Land of Heart's Desire*. In 1899, Yeats's third volume of verse, "*The Wind Among the Reeds*" appeared. For a long time, it was widely believed that all the love-poems in this book, and in the books which followed it, was addressed to Maud Gonne. Yet there are some poems, which point to another woman, perhaps to more than one. There was a beautiful dark woman to whom Yeats refers in his unpublished autobiography, by the name 'Diana Vernon.'

In 1908 Yeats's collected Works in verse and prose was published in eight volumes. Then in 1910, Yeats's another new volume *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* was published. In this work, Yeats had changed his style of writing his verse. John Unterecker in his book *A Reader's Guide to W.B Yeats* said- The romantic wistfulness, the dreamy decorative quality of much of his earlier verse now gave way to a manner at once more terse, astringent and masculine, which becomes apparent in this volume." This trend is evident in his next volume *Responsibilitie* (1914). In 1919, Yeats's new collection *The Wild Swans at Coole* was published.

From the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 up to the Civil War of 1922, Yeats was more affected by public events. His violent romance was replaced then by the bitter realities and that can be ascertained from his *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), which reflected the clashes of those events. *On Easter Monday* 1916 the Irish rose in rebellion against the English, and between 1916 and 1921 they fought the English in a guerrilla war. Even after 1921, rival Irish factions fought a civil war about whether to accept the peace Treaty which gave independence to the Irish Free state but separated it from the six counties known as Northern island.

In 1918, Yeats published a volume of essays on mystical subjects, *Per Amica Silentia Luna*, which showed his interest in the

hidden world and mystical things. In 1922, Yeats became Senator of the Irish Free State and during that period, he delivered several important lectures in Senate. But, before publishing Yeats's most powerful verse collection *The Tower*, Yeats wrote another verse collection *A Woman Young and Old*, and all these poems were written during 1926 or 1927. In 1923, the King of Sweden awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, which was presented to him and two years later, he published his appreciation in a short work -*The Bounty of Sweden*. In 1925, Yeats published his A Vision. It is an elaborate book on prose and it records Yeats's astrological, mystical and historical theories. In 1926, Yeats made a translation of Sophocles' Oedipus the King. Yeats presented it at Abbey Theatre. In the same year he wrote a book or a long essay on the death of *Synge* entitled *The Death of Synge* and other passages from an old diary.

In 1927, Yeats's *The Winding Stair* appeared and in 1928, he completed his other prose work, *A Packet for Ezra Pound*. In 1930, Yeats wrote a play entitled *The Words Upon a Window Pan* and in 1933, his new of collection of poems *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* and a new edition of his *Collected Poems* were published and in 1934, his *Collected Plays* appeared. In 1938, Yeats wrote *Purgatory*, a one Act Play and on 28th January, 1939, Yeats died of heart failure.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q1. Write a few lines on the early life of W.B. Yeats.

Q2. When did Yeats first begin to write verses?

Q3. Who was Maud Gonne? How did she respond to Yeats' interest in her?

Q4. How was Yeats affected by some of the contemporary public events of his time?

## 15.4 CONTEXT AND EXPLANATION OF THE POEM

The poem was written in the autumn of 1926. Yeats's knowledge of the city was largely derived from his reading of W.G. Holmes, *The Age of Justinian and Theodora* (1905). Byzantium is a holy city, as the capital of eastern Christianity and as the place where God exists because of the life after death Yeats imagines existing there. His description of Byzantium shows that he valued the position of the artist in the city. The ancient city of Byzantium was remarkable for the beauty of its buildings and the art of its craftsman. Yeats's city is both historical and ideal. It is a symbol of holiness, of perfection of art, of the world of intellect and spirit as distinct from the world of senses. The poem celebrates the permanence of art against the transitory nature. Byzantium has become for him a Utopia, a symbol of holiness, of perfect craftsmanship and of Ireland's future achievement in the arts.

**Stanza I**

**That is no country for old men. The young**
**In one another's arms, birds in the trees,**
**—Those dying generations -at their songs,**
**The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,**
**Fish, flesh, fowl, commend all summer long**
**Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.**
**Caught in that sensual music all neglect**
**Monuments of unaging intellect.**

According to the poet, Ireland is a land for young, imaginative artists, where the old men have no place at all. The young are engaged in their creative pursuits, whereas the old men continue their songs of their golden days of youth. Thus, one theme of the poem is the difference between youth and old age. Thus, the country is no more a place for old men. That is the country, the Ireland of his youth and he is going to leave in search of a place with regret. The imagery 'the salmon falls' refers to Yeats' reminiscence of Sligo. The river drops down through the town in a series of falls up which the salmon leap in the spring when returning to spawn.

Salmon are symbols of strength and beauty. The young man is caught up in the sensual music as surely as fish are caught up in a net. But the poet is determined to go in search of a perfect place fit for his soul and mind though his body is deteriorating.

**Stanza II**

**An aged man is but a paltry thing,**
**A tattered coat upon a stick, unless**
**Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing**
**For every tatter in its mortal dress,**
**Nor is there singing school but studying**
**Monuments of its own magnificence;**
**And therefore I have sailed the seas and come**
**To the holy city of Byzantium**

Yeats is sad and desperate at the innumerable problems of old age which affect man's capacity to live life pleasurably and fruitfully. Old age is insignificant like 'A tattered coat upon a stick'. It is as hollow as a scarecrow, with the physical appearance of a human being but lacking the human essence.

Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul. His soul must clap its hands for joy as it realises it is approaching nearer to perfection. The soul must also sing -an idea which combines the ideas of singing for joy and of writing poetry. To teach his soul to sing he must, metaphorically, sail to Byzantium. The only way in which the soul can learn to sing is by studying monuments of its own magnificence such as Byzantium art. The old men must look at old age as the liberation of the soul which actively experiences the beauty beyond one's immediate perception. Yeats, so, resolves to sail for Byzantium.

**Stanza III**

**O Sages standing in God's holy fire**
**As in the gold masaic of a wall,**
**Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,**
**And be the singing-masters of my soul.**

**Consume my heart away; sick with desire**
**And fastened to a dying animal**
**It knows not what it is; and gather me**
**Into the artifice of eternity.**

Yeats refers to the sages in the frieze at St.Appolinaire at Ravenna and invokes them to spiral down the cone to him. A Perne is the spool or bobbin on which the thread is spun. The Perne carried the thread of human life which is unwound within the gyre in the opposite direction to the movement of the gyre. Perne also means a kind of hawk and the image of a bird is like the descent by the sages. It is convincingly linked with the golden bird of the last stanza. By the image 'perne in a gyre',Yeats refers to successive ages as a system of gyres.

In the world of art, an image is as holy as a sage. God, is the supreme artist and is the artificer of eternity and the holy fire, like the poet with his imagination which makes all artifices.

**Stanza IV**

**Once out of nature I shall never take**
**My bodily form from any natural thing,**
**But such a form as Grecian goldsmith make**
**Of hammered gold and gold enamelling**
**To keep a drowsy Emperor awake:**
**Or set upon a golden bough of Byzantium**
**Of what is past or passing, or to come.**

Yeats seems to refer indirectly to Hans Anderson's tale "The Emperor's Nightingale" in which reference has been made to the Emperor's palace at Byzantium where there was a tree made of gold and silver and artificial birds that sang. On the other hand, it is also possible that Yeats may have had in mind "Ode to a Nightingale" written by Keats, where the latter had referred to 'the self same song heard in ancient days by Emperor and Clown.' The poet, if he is born again, wants to take his form from the artist's imagination so that he would be able to defy the transitory quality of all natural things. As an artifice he would become immortal and sing of what is past or passing or to come rather than to follow the course taken

by fish, flesh and fowl of birth and decay. Thus, by imprisoning his thought in a system, he gained a strong belief that he knew and understood - "What is past, or passing, or to come."

Thus, the poem, published in 1928, expresses Yeats's desire for eternity. Byzantium's civilisation is 'elaborately rich', but represent the perfection of the spirit as opposed to nature. He desires to escape from his own time -a period of confusion and disintegration.



**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q5. Why is the poet sad and desperate in the poem "Sailing to Byzantium"?

Q6. What is the only way that the soul can learn to sing according to the poet?

Q7. What are the indirect references to other texts that Yeats likely makes in his poem?

## 15.5 POETIC STYLE

In Yeat's poetry, one can notice the use of symbols and myth. In Essay,Yeats describes symbols as 'the greatest of all powers whether they are used consciously by the masters of magic, or half consciously by their successors, the poet, the musician, and the artist. But, Yeats uses both the symbolism of sounds and ideas. His poetry, in this connection is a communication with spirits, with an unseen order of things.

Yeats's view of Byzantium is given in his work *A Vision*. "I think that if I could be given a month of antiquity or leave to spend it when I choose, and i would spend it in Byzantium." This poem is representation of the combination and unification of the subjective and objective man, which is in reality impossible to achieve. Symbols and images becomes more subjective in Byzantium. His aim here is to achieve a unity in being -where subjectivity and objectivity become one.



## 15.6 LET US SUM UP

After having read through the unit, the learner will be able to discuss W.B Yeats, one of the major modern poets and appreciate his literary contributions. The learner will be able to grasp and explain the content of the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" and describe the ways in which Yeats used Irish Folklore as the context for his early poems. Together with the poetic style and language of the poem, you will be able to appreciate the literary imagination that Yeats pours into his poetical narratives or his refined poetry.



## 15.7 FURTHER READING

1) Yeats, W.B. (2018) *The Poetry of W.B. yeats.* London: Arcturus Publishing Limited.



## 15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

**Ans to Q1:** W.B Yeats was born on June 13, 1865 in Sandymount, a seaside suburb of Dublin. The family of Yeats's father was mercantile settlers. He spent his childhood alternately in London and Sligo.The first three years of infancy were passed in his birthplace Dublin. But in 1868, the family moved to London so that his father could study to become a professional painter. The family then settled at 23 Fitzory Road, Regent's park and lived there until 1874.

**Ans to Q2:** At the age of seventeen, Yeats first began to write verses. Although Yeats wanted to be an artist, but he continued to write poetry mostly on romantic subjects in the manner of Shelley. In 1885, Yeats verse appeared for the first time in *Dublin University Review*. Many of his early ballads reappeared in *The Wanderings of Oisin and Other Poems*. In 1887, his verse was published in England for the first time, when his *The Madness of King Groll*, appeared in the magazine *The Leisure Hour*. In the same year, he edited an anthology of poetry, which was published in

Dublin under the title *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*.

**Ans to Q3:** Maud Gonne became his chief interest. From the moment of their meeting all life for Yeats was changed, changed utterly. But, Maud Gonne did not respond to his passion. She accepted him with delight as a friend and she was obsessed by a burning desire to free Ireland from its seven hundred years's dominion by England.

**Ans to Q4:** From the time of the Easter Rising of 1916 up to the Civil War of 1922, Yeats was more affected by public events. His violent romance was replaced then by the bitter realities and that can be ascertained from his *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921), which reflected the clashes of those events. On Easter Monday 1916 the Irish rose in rebellion against the English, and between 1916 and 1921 they fought the English in a guerrilla war. Even after 1921, rival Irish factions fought a civil war about whether to accept the peace Treaty which gave independence to the Irish Free state but separated it from the six counties known as Northern island.

**Ans to Q5:** He is sad and desperate at the innumerable problems of old age which affect man's capacity to live life pleasurably and fruitfully. Old age is insignificant like “A tattered coat upon a stick”. It is as hollow as a scarecrow, with the physical appearance of a human being but lacking the human essence. Though his body is deteriorating with old age, he is resolved to find compensation by achieving a new perfection of the soul. His soul must clap its hands for joy as it realises it is approaching nearer to perfection. The soul must also sing -an idea which combines the ideas of singing for joy and of writing poetry. To teach his soul to sing he must, metaphorically, sail to Byzantium.

**Ans to Q6:** The only way in which the soul can learn to sing is by studying monuments of its own magnificence such as Byzantium art. The old men must look at old age as the liberation of the soul which actively experiences the beauty beyond one's immediate perception. Yeats, so, resolves to sail for Byzantium.

**Ans to Q7:** Yeats seems to refer indirectly to Hans Anderson's tale "The Emperor's Nightingale" in which reference has been made to the Emperor's palace at Byzantium where there was a tree made of gold and silver and artificial birds that sang. On the other hand, it is also

possible that Yeats may have had in mind "Ode to a Nightingale" written by Keats, where the latter had referred to 'the self same song heard in ancient days by Emperor and Clown.' The poet, if he is born again, wants to take his form from the artist's imagination so that he would be able to defy the transitory quality of all natural things.



## 15.9 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q1. Write a short note on the life and works of W.B. Yeats

Q2. Explain the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" in your own words.

Q3. Discuss the poetic style of W.B. Yeats with reference to the poem "Sailing to Byzantium" from your own reading of the poem.

Q4. Explain with reference to context:

a) "That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
--Those dying generations -at their songs,
The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,
Fish, flesh, fowl, commend all summer long
Whatever is begotten, born, and dies.
Caught in that sensual music all neglect
Monuments of unaging intellect.

b) "O Sages standing in God's holy fire
As in the gold masaic of a wall,
Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
And be the singing-masters of my soul.
Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is; and gather me
Into the artifice of eternity"

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