PRINCIPLES

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3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This unit introduces you to:

- the range and context of poetry,
- poets on poetry and poets at work,
- some principles of verification.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

The context of poetry is the entire range of human interests. Poems, according to Wordsworth, can be about anything as long as they concern us 'as enjoying and suffering beings'. To 'enjoy' and to 'suffer' is predominantly emotional. But even though Wordsworth apparently emphasizes the 'emotional' in this statement; much great and significant poetry is more contemplative than emotional. In fact, many of Wordworth's poems are. In fact, emotion and reason, thought and feeling are all associated with man in society. Poetry is about human nature in its social relations. The purely private may not figure in poetry because the use of languages itself is a process of socialization. After all, the medium of language plays a vital part here and we have to own that much poetry is like "local wine and tends to lose its unique

source – the aroma of vineyard and weather, harvest and history – when sipped abroad." (Mc. Clatcly, 1996)

3.3 RANGE AND CONTEXT

"Thinking bone by bone, feeling with his forehead,
laboriously he resurrects what it was to be human."

The Russian poet, Osip Mandelstam, quoted above, was a victim of Stalin's torture, yet he did not stop celebrating life and tried to 'resurrect what it was to be human'. Vasco Popa of Yugoslavia, Hobeb of Czechoslovakia and Herbert of Poland were caught in mid-adolescence by the war. The attempts these poets have made to express man's awareness of what he is being put to by man and human institutions and their endeavour to transcend suffering have brought about a completely new kind of poetry. Miloz, the Polish poet, when he lay in a doorway, and watched the bullets lifting the cobbles out of street besides him realized that most poetry was not equipped for life in a world when people do actually die. They have put their poetry to this severe test and the result is a poem of immediacy with an awareness of the past. See the following by Vasco Popa:

From the distant darkness
The plain stuck out its tongue
That irrepressible plain
Split events –
Shear faded words
Leveled faces

Here and there
a hand of smoke

Sighs without oars
thoughts without wings
homeless glances

Here and there
a flower of mist

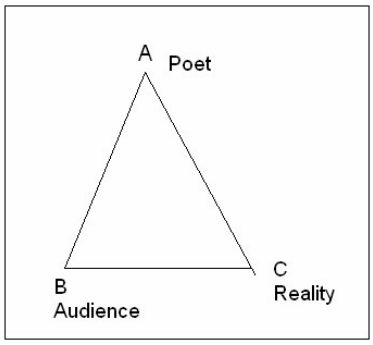
unsaddled shadows
more and more quietly paw
the hot ash of laughter

In these poems, we find the surrealism of folklore as we find a lively imaginative interest in the past in most significant modern poetry. No poet can have his meaning alone, all by himself. The poet purifies the dialect of the tribe and leaves it richer and more capable of wielding the burden of changing and even challenging realities. This enriched language looks at reality of man and his institutions but it is only an 'answering look' (Unit1 sec1) and is quite different from the look of discursive prose.

LET US KNOW



Osip Mandelstam (1891-1938) was born in St. Petersburg and had attended universities at home and abroad. His early poems brought him close to Anna Akhmatova, and Nicholas Gumiliev and they had formed the Acmeist group. In 1934, after reading an epigram denouncing Stalin to friends, Mandelstam was arrested and sent into exile. He was sentenced to hard labour in Siberia. He died in 1938 on transit from one camp to another.



"A poem may be said to exist in a triangle (See box), the points of which are, first (A), the poet, second, his audience (B) and third that area of experience (C) which we call variously 'Reality', 'truth', and 'nature'. Between these points run lines of tension, and depending on the time, the place, the poet, and the audience, these lines will lengthen or shorten. At one time we may find the poet and the audience close together, and 'reality' a great distance from them. The elongation of the triangle stifles the poem, and to a late age it will seem merely the product of an agreement between the poet and the

audience to deceive themselves. At another time we will find the poet close to the point 'reality', but the audience a great distance from them both. A later age is likely to declare of this poet that he was 'ahead of his time,' but the distance of his audience will have caused some staining of the voice, as in the case of Blake. There are infinite variations, but, (in so far as such a metaphor can be exact) the finest poems in any language are likely to be those which exist in a equilateral triangle, each point pulling equally in a moment of perfect tension." (Stead: 19) Hopkins was arguably ahead of his time while Tennyson was close to his time and audience that he seems part of the environment. After all, as W.B. Yeats says, the poet must 'picture saint or hero, or hillside as he sees them, not as he is expected to see them. 'Yeats' 'Easter 1916' is a case in point. It was disliked by Maud Gonne and party because they were seeing it form a partisan angle. May be, the poem is written for his 'ideal audience' – an idea that he addresses in 'The Fisherman':

… All day I had looked in the face
what I had hoped 'twould be
to write for my own race.

May be a twelve month since
Suddenly I began,
In scorn of that audience,
Imagining a man,
And his sun freckled face…
…A man who does not exist,
A man who is but a dream
And cried 'Before I am old
I shall have written him one
Poem may be as cold
And passionate as the dawn.'

'Easter 1916', written to commemorate the 1916 rising against the British occupation of Ireland is one of Yeats' finest public poems. It is complex poem which more than illustrates Yeats' achievement of

objectivity by means of dramatic 'mask'; it uses the terms of drama in order to stylize and objectify the world of political fact which is its subject. In the writing of this poem literacy problems have become, for Yeats, analogues for the problems of living. Here life and art interact and merge into a single image.

LET US KNOW



W.B. Yeats (1865-1939) was a pioneering modern poet who was instrumental in ushering in modernism in Anglo- American poetry along with Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot. Yeats loved and admired the Orient and had helped Rabindranath Tagore translate his poetry into English. He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1923.

But the flip side of this reality cannot be ignored either. "I detest the kind of poetry which is nothing but an intellectual pastime for the middle- of- the- roaders who wash their hands and split- hairs to evade the issues. 'I detest poetry written by those who do not take sides, do not commit themselves for fear the dirt might stick.' (Gabriel Celaya). This is an extreme position but it has the bulwark of much significant Latin American, East European and Black poetry, besides what is known as protest poetry. Here is Charles Cobb:

Mekonssippi

Yea,
the Mississippi
runs into the Mekong
get the boat at halem
sail sad rivers
black seas

or walk
from cotton to rice
from cement to silt

Vietnam
and
Amsterdam

avenues of whitey's wars
Mekonssippi

The 17th isn't parallel
doesn't
divide.

The Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech (1980) referred to his poems as bearing witness both to the natural wonders of the earth and to the demoniac doings of history in the twentieth century. Though sometimes relieved by the pleasure of the senses and always faced by a fierce intellectual prowess memory for Milosz is a wound, and the work of memory has been done in exile:

Incantation

Human reason is beautiful and invincible.
No wars, no barbed wire, no pulping of books,
No sentence of banishment can prevail against it.
It establishes the universal ideas in language,
And guides our hand so we write Truth and Justice
With capital letters, lie and oppression with small
It puts what should be above things as they are,
Is an enemy of despair and a friend of hope.
He does not know Jew from Greek or slave from master,
Giving us the estate of the world to manage.
It saves austere and transparent phrases
From the filthy discourse of tortured words.
It says everything is new under the sun,
Opens the congealed fist of the past.
Beautiful and very young are Philo-Sophia
And poetry, her ally in the source of the good.

As late as yesterday Nature celebrated their birth,
The news was brought to the mountains by a unicorn and an echo.
Their friendship will be glorious, their time has no limit.
The enemies have delivered themselves to destruction.

The context of time and place, of particular situation, enters into the context of poetry. The above piece is predominantly 'ironic' and cannot really attain to the maturity and ease of a poem like "Easter 1916' by W.B. Yeats. However, the character of protest has affinities the world over, as in the following poem by Sameer Tanti (Assamese poet):

How do I blame it?

How can I hold hunger guilty
hunger is my childhood's bounty
baning on its shadow I played the flute
played being Shyam – Kanu
back to back I dreamt
and one day drank a toast
I have no quarrels with it
How do I hold hunger guilty
Hunger is my mother's first miscarriage
The third world of my agony.

(Translated by Pradip Acharya)

In like manner, the assured ease of the country and nuclear unease of the city express themselves not only variously but contrastively; as illustrated by the following lines from Wordsworth and Eliot respectively:

It is a beauteous evening calm and free;
The holy time is quite as a Nun
Breathless with adoration; …… (Wordsworth)

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;……...(Eliot)

In the light of the above let us now try to contextualize a poem on a singer performing, may be for the first time, and she is a “mere girl-child’:

The Singer

She steps on the podium:
The rich silk folds stiff, awkward
Around her angular adolescent frame
And the obeisance she offers
Is brief, almost perfunctory

Seated among accompanists
She remains separate, remote
Enclosed in private space.
Her long-fingered hand
Beats the rhythm with a fluent
Life of its own, as if infatuated
By the impulse of music

Of what god does she sing,
This mere girl-child scares nubile?
Whom doers she see?
The haunted eyes stare
As if blinded by the very core of light
What is this ecstasy beyond art
Granted her, to us denied?

Her voice has no girlish guile
To cajole or please ; indeed it is
Harsh at times at times deep:
A cry of infinite yearning.
Anguished. So unbearable
That her taut body quivers
Articulate with worship.

If this he adoration

It is a wondrous thing akin to pain

If this he praise

It is an oblation no entire

That must ampel the beloved

To releern the grace

Upon the worshipper

The poem describes a scene, even narrates an event that of a 'mere girl child' making her debut in public singing. The scene is apparently European and the song may be hymnal. She at least is devoted to it, she is 'articulate with worship'. In her intense devotion and dedication she is at one with her song, her music. The poem, for all the description and narration, has a lyric immediacy. You will be reprised to known that it is, in fact, written by Nini Lungalang, a poet from Nagaland, who is deeply into western classical music. She creates her own context and brings it visually to us.

LET US KNOW



Surrealism: An international movement in literature and art that emerged in Paris in the early 1920s (first surrealist manifesto, 1924), presented fantasy images supposedly brought out of the artists' subconscious and sometimes explaining techniques of automatic writing (consciously uncontrolled) and painting to produce accidental images and effects likely to stimulate the imagination.

3.3.1 Context and Themes

'Nature' is both context and theme for poetry and has almost always been in its various forms and guises. The Romantic Revival has been looked at as the 'return to nature'. It was in a way a reaction against the de-mystification of Nature by the Augustans who sought to impose a kind of human nature on the world around him. The intensity of Wordsworth's feeling for

Nature and his faith in and advocacy of nature would be called 'enthusiastic' (a pejorative term for the Augustans) by eighteenth century logic. A joke in Punch seems relevant here. A professor with examination questions running in his head and a poet are walking in the woods in springtime. The poet quotes:

O Cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?

Which the professor caps by finishing the verse:
State the alternative preferred
With reasons for your choice.

Wordsworth and the Romantics and poets before and after them actually looked at man in relation to nature. Though nature is being slowly eased out of the poetry scene now, it continues to figure at least obliquely:

Nature Poem

There was too much swamp, too much blue in the sky,
It ceased to be beautiful, and was alien corn,
Trembling above a lake of clearest stone,
I felt in the water, I felt the water you.

There were open leaves, and sogginess to behold,
The turtles, alert and dusky, touched my skin,
Butterflies, left from summer, fled in the air,
Without my so much as catching at a fin.

Speedily, darkly, the clouds brushed like a dress
Over the spacious sun; and poor, bereft,
I bent my head like a burdened swan and crept
Into the chilly lake, and nearer you.

(Ruth Herschberger)

The poet makes a poem as he himself is made by god or nature or whatever. He 'sees into the life of things'; he feels and

he thinks. The quarrel among these faculties and activities is only apparent. The poet writes with his entire being, 'blood, imagination and the intellect running together.' (W.B. Yeats); though poetry often considered an affair of the heart. Here is the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet:

'Angina Pectoris'

If half my heart is here, doctor,
the other half is in China.
With the army flowing
toward the Yellow River.
And every morning, doctor,
every morning at survive my heart
is shot in Greece.
And every night, doctor
when the prisoners are asleep and the infirmary is discreted,
my heart stops at a run-down old house
in Istanbul.

And then after ten years
all I have to offer my poor people
is the apple in my hand, doctor,
one red apple:
my heart.
And that, doctor, that is the reason
For this angina pectoris-
not nicotine, prison or arteriosclerosis.
I look at the night through the bars,
and despite the weight on my chest
my heart still heats with the most distant stairs.
(Translated from the Turkish by Randy Blassing &
Mertler Konuk)

Here you can see how Hikmet's humanistic and ideological themes are raised above the merely political by their strongly

personal concerns and lyrical details. When not merely declamatory, his poems at their best are what we call 'public' poetry: the self opened and given over.

Dylan Thomas, on the other hand, may be seen as advocating a kind of return to nature. As Selder Rodman says, 'The poetry of Dylan Thomas, rooted in the local mythology and primitive linguistic associations of Wales, is the living manifestation of this return to 'nature':

And from the first declension of the flesh
I learnt man's tongue, to twist the shape of thoughts
Into the stony idiom of the brain.
To shade and knit anew the patch of words
left by the dead who, in their moonless acre,
need no word's warmth.

Its other face, the conscious effort to resolve the contradictions of un-natural modern life, by accepting its phenomena as inverted expressions of a dormant primitive will to simplicity and love, is demonstrated in the poetry of Peter Viereck:

Art, being bartender, is never drunk;
And magic that believes itself, must die …
Being absurd as well as beautiful,
Magic- like- art- is hoax redeemed by awe.

The two poets are alike in their affirmation of life and in their assumption that life cannot be altered for the better either by retreat from humanity or by superimposing on man the authority of any institution, stately or godly.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is a public poem? Describe the social dimension of a poem.

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2. What is 'protest' poetry? Do you have 'protest' poetry in your language?

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3. Critically analyze the poem 'The Singer'.

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3.4 POETS ON POETRY AND POETS AT WORK

In this section, we wish to discuss what poets have to say about poetry and how they write poetry. When Robert Frost says that poetry is a performance in words he emphasizes the special use of words in poetic pieces. But when he says that poetry is what is lost in translation, it is obviously a damaging comment about translation of poetry. We have, on the other hand underlined that it is only through translation that we get to know world poetry and that, as readers and

writers of poetry, we are enriched by that knowledge. What Frost seems to apply is that while poetry celebrates life, the world and human experience, it lives in its own language and cannot really be separated from the original words in which it is written. We may, quite fruitfully, talk about themes, techniques, message or emotions around but they remain abstractions removed from the original words. Poetry is an organism where the constitutive parts are not meaningful independently. The 'familiar compound ghost' who appears is the lost of Eliot's 'Four Quartets' speaks for all poets:

Our concern was speech and speech impelled us
To purify the dialect of the tribe
And urge the mind to afterthought and foresight

The poet's responsibility is to leave his medium better than before, more highly developed and refined. This is an arduous task. The aspiring poet will find his meaning in his awareness of the history and tradition of his own literature and in the developments in other literatures. W.B. Yeats endeavoured to achieve "a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling". But this apparent spontaneity was the consequence of incessant labour:

A line will take us hours may be
Yet if it does not seem a moments thought
Our stitching and unstitching has been sought
Better go down upon your manner bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement or break stones
Line an old passer in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler …

A poem adorns nature with a new thing says Emerson. The poet is a 'maker'. Poetry is made of words, 'the complete consort dancing

together'. It is an organic endeavour with 'blood, imagination and intellect running together' (yeats). Because poetry believes in saying a thing uniquely and complexly and since it is intent on telling the truth, personally apprehended, it stays defiantly in its own place. It does not travel well. Every cultural poetry comes in the words and idiom of that culture but yet something does carry through. After all, Urdu poetry is taught in England and the Japanese Haiku figures in our conversation. It was Dylan Thomas who said that poetry was like 'unconventional speech'. It is close to speech but it is unusual speech.

Let us ponder on how the poets write. We find that poets begin poems and then allow the poems to end as they would. W.B. Yeats saw political significance in the Greek myth of Leda and Zeus. In the myth, Zeus fell in love with Leda, disguised himself as a swan and ravished her. Among the offspring of this union were Helen and Clytemnostra. Paris abducted Helen causing to Greeks to rage Troy; Clytemnostra, wife of Agamemnon murdered her husband on his triumphant return to Greece. Yeats saw political significance in the myth of beauty and war engendered by a god, but, as he tells us, when he was composing "Leda and the Swan', the political significance evaporated:

After the individualistic, demagogic movements, founded by Hobbes and popularized by the 'Encyclopaedists and the French Revolution, we have a soil so exhausted that we cannot grow that crop again for centuries. Then I though, 'Nothing is non possible but some movement or birth from above, preceded by some by violent annunciation. "My fancy began to play with Leda and the Swan for metaphor and I began this poem, but as I wrote, bird and lady took such possession of the scene that all politics went out of it.

The manuscript version of 'Leda and the Swan' is dated 1923, the second version was printed in a magazine in 1924; and the third and final version was published in 1928. We give all the three versions

below to underline the changes that Yeats had made in the poem in the course of six years.

Leda and the Swan (Manuscript: 1923)

Now can the sweeping godhead have his will
Yet hovers, though her helpless thighs are pressed
By the webbed toes; and that all powerful bill
Has suddenly bowed her face upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
All the stretched body is laid in that while rush
And feels the strange heart beating where it lies.
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead …

Being so caught-up
Did nothing pass before her in the air?
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent back could let her drop?

It becomes, in a later version of 1924:

A rush, a sudden wheel, and hovering still
The bird descends and her frail thighs are pressed
By the webbed toes, and that all powerful bill
Had laid her helpless face- upon his breast.
How can those terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs!
All the stretched lady's laid on the white rush
And feels the strange heart beating where it lies;
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the buning roof and tower

And Agamemnon dead.

Being so caught up,
So mastered by the by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

The final version (of 1928) of 'Leda and the Swan':

A sudden blow : the great wings beating still
Above the staggering girl her thighs caressed
By the dark webs, her nape caught in his bill
He holds her helpless breast upon his breast.
How can these terrified vague fingers push
The feathered glory from her loosening thighs?
And how can body, laid in that white rush
But feel the strange heart beating where it lies?
A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and lower
And Agamemnon dead.
Being so caught up
So mastered by the brute blood of the air,
Did she put on his knowledge with his power
Before the indifferent beak could let her drop?

We can see that the vocabulary in the final version introduces a marked neutrality, while underlining the sense of mystery in the unnatural union. 'Pressed' in the earlier two versions becomes 'caressed'; 'webbed toes' becomes 'dark webs'. 'That all powerful bill' becomes 'caught in his bill', 'nape' is introduced to bring the girl closer to the bird, and the fourth line becomes 'He holds her helpless breast upon his breast'. This show how a poet revises his own poem a number of times till he feels that the poem expresses what he intends to express.

The readers may be introduced to the various revisions and reworking

of the short lyrics of the Assamese poet Nilmoni Phukan, all preserved in his Collected Poems.

Marianne Moore's piece on poetry that we had referred to earlier (Unit 1/ Sec 1) had later been revised by her into a few tense lines. Poets revise and rework their poems from an inner compulsion to make it better, which can be interpreted in a number of ways. Poets make revisions even after their poems are printed and anthologized. This is what Robert Frost says:

Like a piece of ice on a hot stove the poem must ride on its own melting. A poem may be worked over once it is in being, but may not be worried into being. Its most precious quality will remain its having run itself and carried away the poet with it. Read it a hundred times: it will forever keep its freshness as a metal keeps its fragrance. It can never lose its sense of a meaning that once unfolded by surprise as it went.

Frost has said that of his own poems his favourites are those that come all at once. 'The Silken Tent' is such a poem. It was not worried into being, but was definitely worked over.

The Silken Tent

She is as in a field a silken tent
At midday when a sunny summer breeze
Has dried the dew and all its ropes relent
So that in guys it gently ways at ease,
And its supporting central cedar pole,
That is its pinnacle to heavenward
And signifies the sureness of the soul,
Seems to owe naught to any single cord,
But strictly held by none, is loosely bound
By countless silken ties of love and thought

To everything on earth the compass round
And only by one's going slightly taut
In the capriciousness of summer air
Is of the slightest bondage made aware.

(Robert Frost)

But even the creative act that had produced this poem 'all at once' had its record thoughts. He altered the title from 'in Praise of our Poise' to 'The sillon Tent'. In lien 1 he altered' on the lawn' to 'in a field', in l6 'summit painting' to 'pinnacle to' and in line 8 'nothing' to 'naught'. In like manner James Joyce's poem 'Ruminants' was changed into 'Filly' and the reworking made it into a different and much more significant poem.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. A poem is written with labour and lots of difficulties but it most appear spontaneous. Comment.

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2. Why do poets revise their work and rework them?

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3. Do Yeats' revisions of 'Leda and the Swan' improve the poem?

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3.5 SOME PRINCIPLES OF VERIFICATION AND POETIC DEVICES

Let us now dwell upon the various devices that are used in poetry.

3.5.1 Metrical Devices

Most English poetry has a pattern of stressed or accented sounds, and this pattern is the meter. There are usually a fixed number of stressed or unstressed syllables in a line. The 'foot' is the basic unit of measurement and generally a foot contains two or three syllabus. The repetition of feet produces a pattern of stress throughout the poem. While one kind of foot is dominant in a poem there are often significant variations. We read a poem for the sense, allowing the syntax to help indicate the stresses. Stress is indicated by '/'; lack of stress by '?'.

The most common feet in English poetry are:

(a) **iamb** (adjectives iambic): one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. It is the most common pattern in English poetry. It is called a rising meter as the foot rises towards the stress.

The cur/few tolls/the knell/of par/ting day

This line from Gray's 'Elegy' has few iambic feet.

(b) trochee (trochaic): one stressed syllable followed by one

unstressed; a falling meter, the foot falling away from the stress.

Why so/pale and/ wan, fond/lover

(c) anapest (anapestic): two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed; a rising meter.

There are man/y who say/that a dog/has his day

(d) dactyl (dactylic): one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed; a falling meter.

Take her up/ tenderly

(e) spondee (spondaic): two stressed syllables; most often used as a substitute for an iamb or a trochee; it neither rises nor falls.

Smart lad,/to slip/betimes away

Because the pyrrhic foot (two unstressed syllables) lacks a stress, it is often not considered a legitimate foot in English.

Slow sinks, more lovely ere his race be run

A metrical line consists of one or more foot and is named for the number of feet in it.

monometer: one foot	*pentameter: five feet*
dimeter: two feet	*hexameter: six feet*
trimeter: three feet	*heptameter: seven feet*
tetrameter: four feet	*octameter: eight feet*

A line is scanned for the kind and number of feet in it, and the scansion tells us if it is as in the following anapestic trimeter:

As/came/to the edge/of the woods

Or, as in what follows, iambic pentameter:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea

A masculine ending is a line ending with a stress; while a line ending with an extra unstressed syllable has a feminine ending. The caesura, usually indicated by the symbol *//* is a slight pause within the line. It need not be indicated by punctuation and it does not affect the metrical count:

Awake, my St. John! // leave all meaner things
To low ambition, // and the pride of kings.

An end-stopped line concludes with a distinct syntactical pause, but a run-on line has its sense carried over into the next line without syntactical pause. The running-on of a line is called enjambment. In the following passage only the first is a run-on line:

Yet if we look more closely we shall find
Most have the seeds of judgment is their mind:
Nature affords at best a glimmering light;
The lines, though touched but faintly are drawn right

3.5.2 Other Devices

The foregoing section has discussed the metrical devices. But there are also grammatical, aesthetic and other devices, Shakespeare, in the following lines from King Lear, uses a grammatical device known as anacoluthon meaning 'not following', which is the absence of syntactical sequence in the construction of a sentence:

'Why do I trifle thus with his despair
Is done to cure it.'

Aesthetic devices exploit *figures of speech, symbols and metaphors*. In fact, poetry uses varieties of metaphysical language. The word 'metaphor' is used for all kinds of poetic

bringing together of ideas and images and as a term which describes one thing in terms of another instead of showing affinities between the things through direct analogy. 'The legs of the table' is a metaphor because what supports the table is described in terms of what helps a man stand up. Various metaphors in the following Sonnet (73) by Shakespeare elaborate the idea that the speaker is getting on in age:

That time of year thou mayest in me behold
When yellow leaves,or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold-
Bare ruin'd choirs where late sweet birds sang.

There is also the anti-metaphorical language of irony as we find in Shakespeare Sonnet (130), beginning with:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;…

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Define meter. Scan the first line of Grays' 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard.

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2. What is anti-metaphorical language?

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3. Mention the metaphors that Shakespeare uses in Sonnet 73 to bring out the idea that the speaker is getting on age.

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The language of modern poetry has often surrealistic connections which need looking into. Robert Scholes quotes W.H. Auden's 'As I Walked Out One Evening' to prove the complexity and ingenuity of connections in a modern poem. The following stanza from the poem shows how Auden manages to present a picture of the 'absurd and empty horror' that threatens modern life with apparent incongruities:

The glacier knocks in the cupboards
The desert sighs in the bed
And the crack in the tea-cup opens
A lane to the land of the dead.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit examines another vital question relating to the writing of poetry- its context. You will learn from reading the unit much about context of poetry, its relation to themes and what poets themselves think about poetry. The context of poetry is the entire range f human interests as stated by Wordsworth. Poetry takes into account the human society or rather it is about human nature in social relations. It has been argued here that poetry expresses man's awareness of his experiences in relation to individuals and institutions, whether social or political. A Russian poet Osip Mandelstam has been quoted to illustrate how Stalin's torture failed to silence his voice. A poem exists in a triangle, the points of which are 'the poet', 'the audience' and 'the area of experience'. The finest poems in any language are those which exist in an equilateral triangle. Even when a poet writes a public poem, as for example, W. B. Yeats in 'Easter 1916', he finally rises above his

immediate, objective circumstances to attain a universality that speaks of all men. Another important point to note is that the context of time and place enters into the context of poetry.

Poetry deals with themes as well as context. Nature, for example, is both a context and a theme for poets. A distinction between the Augustan view of nature and that of the Romantics looked at man in relation to nature. You will also get some ideas about how a poet writes poems. He writes about his feelings as well as about humanistic and ideological themes. A poet also revises his poems as was done by Yeats in case of his famous poem, 'Leda and the Swan' which was revised twice.



3.7 FURTHER READINGS

Robert Scholes: *Elements of Poetry*, OUP, 1969

Seamus Heaney: *Preoccupations*, London, 1980

John Haffenden: *Poets in Conversation*, London, 1981

Bernard Bergonzi: *Reading the Thirties: Texts & Context*, London, 1978



3.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. Poetry is about man 'as enjoying and suffering beings'. Critically discuss.
2. 'The poet makes a poem'. Elucidate the statement.
3. Analyze the poets' awareness of his audience.
4. What is 'public poetry'? Analyze W.B. Yeats' poem 'Easter 1916' in this context.

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