

PG EG S2 - 02 (DSC)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER - II

ENGLISH POETRY : ROMANTIC TO VICTORIAN ENGLISH



Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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DSC 5 : ENGLISH POETRY: ROMANTIC TO VICTORIAN

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course entitled English Poetry: Romantic to Victorian is the **Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course 5**. This course introduces the learners to the realm of English poetry represented by the Romantic and Victorian poets of the 18th and 19th centuries. Romanticism as a philosophical trend started in late 18th century Europe, mainly in Germany. It was, however, the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge that established Romanticism as a poetic movement in England. Romantic poetry is characterised by a strong emphasis on emotion and feelings, an increased interest in the past, return to nature, spontaneity of thought and action, autonomy of imagination, rejection of the neo-classical notions of art form as well as established social conventions. The representative English Romantic poets included in this course are William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and John Keats. Victorian Poetry, on the other hand, does not display any autonomy of the poets' own imagination as explicit among the Romantics. Subsequently, we experience certain changes and shifts in the concerns of the Victorian poets. This course includes Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold as the representatives of the Victorian poets. While the sense of a world being fragmented and life being too complicated without a real sense of order dominates the poetry of Browning, the feeling of doubts, confusion and despair characterise Arnold's poetry.

In order to introduce you to the major concerns and preoccupations of the Romantic and Victorian poets, the course comprises three Blocks. **Block 1** provides an introductory unit on Romantic poetry while also dealing with a few important poems by Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge. **Block 2** is based on the poetry of John Keats and P. B. Shelly. While, **Block 3** provides a discussion on Victorian poetry with particular reference to Tennyson, Browning and Arnold.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

There are total six units in this **Block 1**, i.e. Units 1-6. In these units, the learners will get some ideas on the first phase of Romantic poetry.

Unit 1: Introduction to Romantic Poetry shall help us to understand the general background of the poetic developments during the Romantic period in English Literature. This unit shall further enable you to fully appreciate the Romantic poets as well as their poems prescribed for your course.

Unit 2: William Blake: "A Cradle Song" I & II deal with the poetry of William Blake with reference to two of his selected poems, both bearing the same title namely, "A Cradle Song" taken from his poetry collection, *The Songs of Innocence* (1789) and from *The Songs of Experience* (1794) respectively. Blake is one of

the most prominent English poets of the Romantic Age in the History of English Literature. Besides being a talented writer and painter, he was also a skilled engraver. The combination of his poetical genius and his skilled artistry made a remarkable difference to his literary works. You will learn that Blake is also considered a 'visionary' and a 'prophetic' poet owing to his philosophical inclinations early in life and his wide knowledge of theology that had found a creative expression through both his literary as well as, artistic works.

Units 3 & 4: “William Wordsworth: Life and Works”&”William Wordsworth: Tintern Abbey, Ode: Intimations of Immortality” shall introduce us to William Wordsworth and two of his significant poems namely—”Tintern Abbey” and “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”. William Wordsworth is one of the most important of the Romantic poets. Along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, he helped to launch the Romantic Age in English Literary history with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Wordsworth challenged the prevailing 18th century view regarding formal poetic diction and thereby profoundly affected the course of modern poetry. By the time we finish reading this unit, we shall learn that freshness and emotional power of Wordsworth’s poetry, the keen psychological depth of his characterizations, and the urgency of his social commentary make him one of the most important poets in the English language.

Units 5 & 6: “Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Life and Works”&”Samuel Taylor Coleridge: “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” shall help us to discuss the poetry of S T Coleridge with particular reference to “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”. This poem narrates the plight of a sailor or Mariner and the horrible sequence of events, which followed after he had shot an albatross during his trip through the sea. The whole poem is written in the form of a mediaeval ballad that signifies Coleridge’s art of writing. Coleridge’s appealing ideas of “the willing suspension of disbelief”, the supernatural and the unseen forces beyond, haunt this poem and make it a memorable poetic creation of the era. After we finish reading this unit, we shall understand that this poem is an excellent example of Coleridge’s poetry.

Block 2 contains a total of 4 units, i.e. Units 7-10. In these units, the learners will get to read about some of the second-generation Romantic poets.

Units 7-8: “John Keats: Life and Works”&”John Keats: To Autumn & On a Grecian Urn” shall help us to discuss the poems “To Autumn” and “On a Grecian Urn” composed by John Keats, another poet of the Romantic period. The first poem was occasioned by an experience gained by Keats after walking through the water meadows of Winchester, England, in an early autumn evening of 1819. Thus, composed on 19 September 1819 and published in 1820 in a volume of Keats’s poetry, this poem has been interpreted differently as a meditation on death, as an allegory of artistic creation, as Keats’ response to the Peterloo Massacre, and as one of the perfect short poems in the English language. The second poem, on the other hand, is one of his greatest odes of 1819, which also include “Ode on Indolence”, “Ode on

Melancholy", "Ode to a Nightingale" and "Ode to Psyche". Keats was inspired to write the poem after reading two articles by English artist and writer Benjamin Haydon.

Units 9-10: "P. B. Shelly: Life and Works" & "P. B. Shelly: Ode to the West Wind" shall introduce us to yet other Romantic poets P. B. Shelley and his poem "Ode to the West Wind". Shelley was one of the most radical and the most revolutionary of the English Romantic poets. In this prescribed poem, which he wrote in a forest on the bank of the river Arno near Florence, Italy, Shelley invokes the 'wild' West Wind which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they can sprout with the advent of the Spring season, and urges that the West Wind should hear him as he himself wants to become the West Wind to bring in reforms in his society.

Block 3 contains a total of 5 Units, i.e. Units 11-15. In these units, the learners will get some ideas on the Victorian poetry and the poets.

Unit 11: Introduction to Victorian Poetry brings to you a reading of Victorian Poetry, which became a significant branch of literature. One important aspect of the period was the growing scientific developments. People in general were affected by the new scientific discoveries, which shook their belief in religion creating a crisis of 'faith versus doubt.' The poets of the Victorian age addressed the major concerns of their society in most of their poetic works.

Unit 12: Alfred Lord Tennyson: "Ulysses" deals with the poem "Ulysses" written by the Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson who is generally hailed as the most representative poet of the Victorian period. Tennyson perfectly voiced the relentless spirit of the age for gaining more and more knowledge of the unknown frontiers of the physical world of the time. Tennyson displayed a sweeping range of interests right from the imbroglio involving the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Human Species* (1859) resulting in the famous Victorian Compromise, the scientific innovations and inventions of the time, to the expansion of the British empire within the ambit of his poetic designs.

Units 13-14: "Robert Browning: Life and Works" & "Robert Browning: Fra Lippo Lippi" deal with Robert Browning, and one of his most famous poems "Fra Lippo Lippi". Based on the life of a fifteenth century Italian painter and a Carmelite friar named Fra Filippo di Tommaso Lippi, the poem, which is also a dramatic monologue, raises various questions on the role of art and the artist in the aesthetic and spiritual life of an individual. In the poem, Browning tries to demarcate the differences in attitude and philosophy of the Medieval and Renaissance artists on art.

Unit 15: Matthew Arnold: "Dover Beach," the last unit of the course, deals with Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach". The poem, despite all its brevity, is perhaps one of the most anthologized and the best known among Arnold's poetic works. The poet contemplates the sea, finding in it the melancholic reminders of the confusions and uncertainties of belief brought about by modern life. After you finish

reading this unit, you will find that Arnold in this poem, turns to faith in human relationship against the Victorian problem of loss of faith.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in “LET US KNOW” along with the text. We have kept “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We strongly advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the “FURTHER READINGS” which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know the world of literature and criticism is too big, we strongly advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you read the original texts of the authors prescribed as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO ROMANTIC POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 1.1 Learning Objectives
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Significance of Romantic Poetry
- 1.4 Literary Features of the Romantic Poetry
- 1.5 Major Romantic Poets
- 1.6 Critical Reception
- 1.7 Let us Sum up
- 1.8 Further Reading
- 1.9 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 1.10 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the ideals that shaped the intellectual background of the Romantic period
- give a detailed description of Romantic poetry in general with special emphasis on its literary features
- discuss the major Romantic poets of the period and their literary works
- gain a comprehensive idea of the poetical practices as well as their practitioners of the Romantic Age.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 1 of the Course on English Poetry: Romantic to Victorian. This introductory unit entitled 'Introduction to Romantic Poetry' shall help you to understand the general background of the poetic developments during the Romantic period in English Literature. This unit shall further enable you to fully appreciate the Romantic poets as well as their poems prescribed for your course.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF ROMANTIC POETRY

It is known to us that literature down the ages has witnessed various changes with regard to the transforming literary trends and practices. In the same manner, a sweeping intellectual and artistic change had taken place all across Europe, at the tail end of the 18th century, known as the 'Romantic Movement'. The movement marked a transition from the ideals and conventions of its preceding age as an emerging literary, artistic and an intellectual movement. This age is often marked by an emphasis on the 'individual', the imagination, intuition, subjective experiences, passions, emotions, freedom, creativity, devotion to Beauty, reverence for Nature, sensory responses, spiritual experiences, fascination with myths, the gothic, exploration of the supernatural with a growing interest in the country side and rural life. These aspects were clearly reflected in the literatures of the period that greatly differed from the literary ideals of the preceding Neo-classical Age or the 'Age of Reason' in the history of English Literature.

As the Romantic Movement was a pan-European phenomenon and spanned across multiple cultures, the connotation of the term "Romantic" accounted for the subtle differences in the usage and meaning of the term itself from one country to another. To provide the learners with an example, the English term 'romantic' and the French term *romantique* were used as adjectives in admiration of nature. However, the French usage was devoid of the implied sensuality that was found in the English usage. In the context of England, the movement coincided with the Industrial Revolution that marked the end of the century. Although, England flourished as a wealthy nation with the prosperity of the nobility and the *nouveau riche* (new rich), the poor sections of the English society remained deprived and exploited. The emergence of radical thinkers and their seminal works such as Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776) or Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), ushered in major reforms in this regard.

Romanticism captures the spontaneous elements in man and nature, in all its essence. The romantic imagination delves into individual

and subjective experiences, the irrational and the fanciful, the mystical and the supernatural, the spiritual and the divine. These aspects reflect the ways in which the Romantic Age moved away from the ideals of the Enlightenment Age that characterised the importance of rationality and reason, skepticism and empirical enquiry, as well as, the advancement of knowledge through logical inquiry, scientific approach and critical methods. On the other hand, the Romantics asserted the importance of felt or emotional experiences and the freedom of imagination, with the firm belief that the great mysteries of life could never be explained with the limits of scientific knowledge.

Another significant aspect that inspired the Romantic period was the historical French Revolution that lasted for a decade from 1789 to 1799 in France. In the pages of history, this revolt is known to have begun as a rebellion against the conventional traditions and unjust practices of the Church and the monarchy in France. Thus, the ideals of the French Revolution captured in the motto, “*Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*” that translates as ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ had inspired a revolutionary trend in the ideals of the Romantic Age as well. With this context in mind, let us then explore the most popular literary form of the Romantic Age i.e., the timeless literary treasures of Romantic Poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: When is the Romantic Movement considered to have begun?

Q 2: Make a list of some of the defining characteristics of the Romantic Age.

Q 3: What is the essence of Romanticism?

Q 4: Mention some of the characteristic ideals of the Enlightenment Age.

Q 5: What is the motto of the French Revolution?

Q 6: Mention the reason that accounted for the subtle differences in the usage and connotation of the term ‘Romantic’.

1.4 LITERARY FEATURES OF ROMANTIC POETRY

Owing to the revolution of the printing press, the period from 1770 to 1830 witnessed wide dissemination of printed texts, as well as, a growing readership of imaginative or creative literature. In Victor Hugo's words, Romantic Literature defined "liberalism in literature" with its emphasis on the creative, the sublime and the supernatural. The earlier literary conventions were replaced by the new literary trends and practices as reflected in the literature of the Romantic period, the most prominent being Romantic Poetry. Further, the joint publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge in 1798 came to be considered a significant milestone that declared the arrival of the 'English Romantic Movement'. Let us now discuss the literary trends and basic characteristics that define English Romantic Poetry.

William Wordsworth famously stated that poetry is a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings", as he was comparing poetry to a "sensitive plant" that had to be nurtured. Significantly, various schools had emerged during this period forwarding their ideas and stirring debates on what truly comprised good poetry. It was seen that Romantic Poetry had turned into one of the most powerful vehicles of expression for the Romantics that not only represented or the experiences of man as an individual with a subjective consciousness but also explored certain elements that went beyond the realm of human experiences. Some of the defining characteristics of Romantic Poetry were the elements of sublimity and spontaneity, imagination and creativity, passion and spirit of celebration that captured human experiences, the world and beyond.

The defining characteristics of the Romantic Poetry were the celebration of the surrounding world in all its forms and moods, seeing ordinary situations and mundane objects in a new light, capturing the expressions of the common man, drawing inspiration from Nature and essentially romanticizing life in all its beauty. A spontaneous flow of creativity and inspiration characterised the poetry of this period without any strict poetical conventions or limitations. When we look through the perspective

or lenses of the Romantic poets, we shall find that their poetry was in sharp contrast to the literary ideals of the neo-classical age in its emphasis on the imagination and intuition over reason and logic. Hence, the romantic ideals gave a sense of artistic liberty to its poetical practitioners, who deeply felt that it was important to express one's subjective experiences or individuality, lay emphasis on one's feelings and emotions and to enjoy the freedom of exploring the sense perceptions, as well as, spiritual elements. In addition, they believed in exploring the realm of the unknown or supernatural, conveying moments of poetical vision, taking judicious recourse to fancy, extolling the beauty of nature and being conscious of the life with its lived experience.

The Romantic period saw the development of various poetical forms and practices such as epic poetry, lyric poetry, romantic sonnets and what came to be considered romantic fragments with a striking appeal of their own. The poets William Blake and Lord Byron were some of the leading practitioners of epic poetry. While Blake's poetry was filled with personal mythology ("Milton"), Byron experimented with the satiric tradition ("Don Juan"). It is important to note that epic or epic poetry was also practiced by women writers such as Anne Yearsley ("Brutus, A Fragment", 1796), Mary Linwood (*The Anglo- Cambrian*, 1818), Eleanor Ann Porden (*Third Crusade*, 1822) and Helen Maria Williams (*Peru* 1794). Also, John Keats' incomplete work *Hyperion* (written from 1818-1819) stands as a good example of an epic poem in blank verse. In all its musicality, lyrical poetry was widely practised during the Romantic period owing to its potential of carrying a dramatic appeal. Interestingly, in ancient Greece, lyrics were sung and accompanied by an instrument known as the 'lyre' with a soothing musical tone. Poets such as Byron (*Hebrew Melodies*), Thomas Moore (*Irish Melodies*) and Robert Burns (lyrics for over 350 Scottish songs) practised lyrical poetry into which they aesthetically poured their musical sensibilities.

Similarly, the romantic sonnet saw a revival in between the years 1775-1777 after a long absence as a literary practice for over a century. The romantic sonneteers experimented with the sonnet form through their

portrayal of personal experiences through Nature or natural landscape. Some of the significant romantic sonnets are found in the works of Charlotte Smith (*Elegiac Sonnets*, 1784), William Lisle Bowles (*Sonnets, Written Chiefly on Picturesque Spots, During a Tour*, 1789), Mary Robinson (*Sappho and Phaon*, 1796), S.T. Coleridge's *Sonnets from Various Authors* (1796), William Wordsworth ('Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty' in his *Poems in Two Volumes*, 1807), as well as, the sonnets of Keats and Shelley. In addition, Romantic fragments became a common literary practise although these were completely abandoned pieces owing to various circumstances like sudden demise of poets or other factors. However, romantic fragments were somehow considered complete in themselves some of the examples being Lord Byron's unfinished *Don Juan*, S. T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan", P. B. Shelley's *The Triumph of Life*.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 7:** How did Victor Hugo define Romantic Literature?
- Q 8:** Name the joint publication by Wordsworth and Coleridge that was published in 1798. Mention the significance of the work.
- Q 9:** What is the most memorable phrase of William Wordsworth with regard to his opinions on poetry?

1.5 MAJOR ROMANTIC POETS AND THEIR WORKS

The following subsection will acquaint a learner like you with some of the major poets of the Romantic Age who are widely considered to have represented the 'spirit of the age' through their poetical works. A brief sketch on the life and works of the major poets namely, William Blake, William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley and John Keats has been provided for your study and reference.

William Blake (28 November 1757–12 August 1827):

The works of William Blake are considered to have left an everlasting impression in the literary treasures of the Romantic Age. Blake was considered both a 'visionary' and a 'prophetic' poet, owing to the extraordinary

visions that he was frequently subjected to during his lifetime. Blake was an English poet, writer, painter and engraver who was born and brought up in London. He was trained as a professional draughtsman and engraver at an early age, which eventually proved to be an added advantage in the layout of his literary works as well.

Blake illustrated several of his works with what he called 'illuminated printing' or 'relief etching' by using copper plates to etch every single design on paper, in keeping with the theme of the respective poems. His artistic creations or illustrations added a unique charm to the presentation of literary volumes. Moreover, he found great strength and support in his wife Catherine Hermitage who jointly helped him in creating some of the best illustrations for his works. Blake drew his inspiration from his constant companion, the 'Bible' and thus, his religious, philosophical and spiritual inclinations found considerable reflection in the thematic aspects of his written works. Some of the emergent themes in his poetry are elements of the spiritual and the religious, the mythical and the mysterious, the moral and the philosophical, the realm of divinity, as well as, the world of human experiences. His poetical works are layered with symbolic images and meanings that call for in-depth readings.

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

William Wordsworth (7 April 1770 – 23 April 1850):

William Wordsworth is known to have ushered in winds of change in the literary scenario of the Romantic period along with his fellow-poet S. T. Coleridge with their joint publication titled *Lyrical Ballads with a Few*

Other Poems in the year 1798 which is considered the ‘manifesto’ of the Romantic Age. Born in a privileged family in a small town of Lake District, Wordsworth was exposed to a good school education with some of the best tutors of their time. However, the loss of his parents at an early age and the compulsions of depending on his immediate relatives saw him struggle through the years of his childhood.

Wordsworth discovered his love of poetry at the age of 15, and published his first sonnet in the *European Magazine* at the age of 16, just after having graduated from St. John’s College, Cambridge. From an early age, he cultivated a love for books that he found in his father’s library and hence, he was familiar with the poetry of Shakespeare, Spenser and Milton. Some of his major volumes of poetical works were *Lyrical Ballads with Other Poems* (1800), *Poems, in Two Volumes* (1807), *Guide to the Lakes* (1810), *The Excursion* (1814), *Laodamia* (1815), *Borderers* (1842) “a verse play and *The Prelude* (1845). Among his widely anthologised poems are: “Lines Written in Early Spring”, “The Solitary Reaper”, “The Daffodil” and “Ode on Intimations of Immortality”. He was a well-travelled poet, always rooted to his home and shared a close relationship with his fellow-poet and sister Dorothy Wordsworth.



LET US KNOW

It is significant to note that Wordsworth in the preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, regarded poetry as the “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that took “its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity”. In fact, this was spelled out as one of the prominent ideas that defined Romantic Poetry. Wordsworth was also greatly inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution but he found himself greatly disillusioned with the mindless violence and practices that followed during the later stage of the revolution. Considered one of the foremost of Romantic poets, Wordsworth was appointed the Poet Laureate after the demise of the poet Robert Southey in 1843, and he also received honorary degrees from Durham and Oxford University in 1843.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834):

A man with a strikingly sharp intellect and a rebellious bent of mind, S.T. Coleridge is considered one of the most prominent poets of the Romantic Age. He was also a literary critic and philosopher who built an association with the Lake Poets, most importantly with William Wordsworth, in founding the Romantic Movement in England. Born in a reputed family, he spent most of his childhood years reading books and jotting down poetry. His readings of the classical masters, the poetry of Shakespeare and Milton inspired in him a love for poetry and its intricacies. His years at the charity school made him prone to loneliness as also reflected in his early poems and it was at school that he met his lifelong friend Charles Lamb. He went on to matriculate from Jesus College, Cambridge in 1791 where he discovered his political and philosophical thoughts that he shared with his fellow-poet and friend Robert Southey. Coleridge also studied the German language and had an interest in German philosophy.

His collaboration with William Wordsworth saw the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) which featured the poem, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in the first edition. The poems that are considered his literary masterpieces are: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan". Among his 'conversation' poems are: "The Eolian Harp", "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", "This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison", "Frost at Midnight", "Fears in Solitude", "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem", "Dejection: An Ode" and "To William Wordsworth". Another autobiographical work titled *Biographia Literaria* or *Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (1817) is also considered to be one of the most significant contributions to English literary criticism.

**LET US KNOW**

The poetry or rather poetical fragments of Coleridge explore the realm of the unknown, the mysterious and the supernatural that at once tends to capture as well as, haunt the reader's imagination thereby, distinguishing his poetry from that

**Transcendentalism:**

A philosophy that inspired the literary, socio-political and philosophical movement known as the transcendental movement.

Barony: Barony refers to administrative division of a country in Scotland, Ireland or various parts of England.

of his contemporaries. Coleridge had inspired writers like Mary Shelley, author of *Frankenstein* (1818) and the literary genre of Gothic fiction as well as, philosophers like Ralph Waldo Emerson who founded the philosophy of transcendentalism in America. His opium addiction often gave flight to his creative imagination but it also interrupted the flow of his creative genius, which also accounts for the fragments of his poetical verses. On the improvement of his health during the later phase of his life, he came up with prose works namely *The Statesman Manual* (1816), *Aids to Reflection* (1825), *On the Constitution and Church* (1830) and a series of lectures noted down with the help of an aiding assistant.

Lord Byron (22 January 1788–19 April 1824):

Lord Byron had significantly contributed to the literature of the romantic age as a poet who also had a fair share of political experience and influence in the society of his times. Although, he is popularly known as Lord Byron, his complete name was George Gordon Byron and he held the title of '6th Baron' in the English **Barony** that he had inherited from his great-uncle at the tender age of 10. Born of noble parentage, Byron received the privilege of a good education and excelled during his years at Trinity. In his early years, he had also experienced the ideal life of the Scottish countryside at Aberdeenshire, which was his mother's native place. Byron was a voracious reader who had read about 4,000 books by the time he was 19 years of age.

Although, he was born with a 'club foot' for which he called himself a 'limping devil', he excelled in swimming, athletics and horse riding. During his years at Trinity, he became a part of the Cambridge Whig Club, which spelled his early interests in politics. He also penned several elegies and significantly formed close associations with John Cam Hobhouse and Francis Hodgson who eventually became his lifelong friends. His first poetical compilation was *Hours of Idleness* (1807), followed by his satirical work *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809). One of his best-known works is *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812) which was a semi-autobiographical

narrative poem portraying a young man who finds himself exhausted with worldly pleasures and thereby sets out on his own adventures.

In addition, *Don Juan* (1819) was one of his masterpieces which was not without its set of controversies. This particular work had introduced the great Spanish legend Don Juan, which also was the source of what came to be known as the 'Byronic hero' in English Literature. The Byronic hero was represented as the popular anti-hero with his charm as well as, his flaws and contradictory ideals that considerably characterised Byron's own life and personality as well. Lord Byron is also considered to have significantly influenced gothic fiction that was popular during the period and the few practitioners of this literary genre.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (4 August 1792 – 8 July 1822):

P.B. Shelley is considered one of the finest English lyric poets with a significant contribution to the literature and socio-political life of the times in which he lived. He was born into a noble family of London, and was mostly tutored at home by Reverend Evan Edwards in his early years. He went on to study at the Eton College and University College, Oxford where he is known to have stirred controversy that ended with his expulsion from the institution. The reason behind this was the circulation of his **radical pamphlet** titled *The Necessity of Atheism* (1811) and his refusal to admit his authorship of the same to the concerned administration. He even had a secret elopement with Mary Shelley, the daughter of his mentor William Godwin.

Some of his early publications included gothic novel titled *Zastrozzi* (1810), *Rosicrucian: A Romance* (1811) together with the joint publications of poetry titled *Original Poetry by Victor and Cazie* (1810) and *Posthumous Fragments of Margaret Nicholson* (1810). Shelley's poetry reflected his zeal as a reformer and other that was one with the spirit of Nature. Some of his widely read poems are "Ozymandias" (1818), "Ode to the West Wind" (1819), "To a Skylark" (1820), "When Soft Voices Die", "The Cloud" (1820), *Alastor, or The Spirit of Solitude* (1815), *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819) and *Adonais* (1821) written in the memory of John Keats. Among his revolutionary works are his poems such as *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor*



Radical: non-conforming or diverting from traditional practices

Pamphlet: a small booklet containing important ideas and arguments on a single subject

(1815), *Hellas* (1822), *The Revolt of Islam* (1817) and *The Witch of Atlas* (1819) are also considered as his visionary poems.

Some of his other literary works include *Laon and Cynthia* (1817), *History of Six Weeks' Tour* (1817), *Rosalind and Helen: A Modern Eclogue* (1819), *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), based on the Greek myth of Prometheus, *Oedipus Tyrant* (1820), *Epipsychidion* (1821), *Wolfstein* (1822) and an incomplete work titled *The Triumph of Life* (1822). In his *A Defense of Poetry* (1840), Shelley significantly likens the poets to prophets or prophetic figures, famously declaring, "poets are the unacknowledged **legislators** of the world". His *Defense* is considered one of the major works in the area of English literary criticism that focuses on the significant role of poets, critical views on poetical practices and his defined poetical ideas. Shelley held the firm belief that poetry brought out the best in a poet and inspired a sense of moral goodness, which uplifted humanity.

John Keats (31 October 1795 – 23 February 1821):

John Keats is one of the finest English poets and names to be reckoned with the Romantic period although received wide acclaim only after his early demise. Keats was born in a humble family in London. He received a liberal education at Enfield where he discovered his love for the classics, history and Renaissance literature in the shelves of the school library. He suffered the loss of his parents at a very young age and was brought up under the care of his grandmother at Edmonton. Having experienced financial crises from an early age, he worked hard as an apprentice to a medical surgeon and established himself as a medical assistant at Guy's Hospital. However, he always desired and felt that he was destined to be a poet in life and so it was.

Keats drew poetical inspiration from his fellow poets such as Leigh Hunt and Lord Byron. Although, he found himself in a dilemma having to choose between his medical profession and writing career, after having received his hard-earned medical license, he eventually found himself giving into his passion for poetry. It is true that he had met with a few failures at the beginning of his writing career owing to the poor reception of his works; nevertheless, there were writers and publishers who believed

in his credibility as a poet. Today, he is remembered for his odes titled: "Ode to a Nightingale", "Ode on a Grecian Urn", "Ode to Psyche", "Ode on Melancholy", "Ode on Indolence" and "Ode on Fancy". Among his widely anthologised poems and ballads are: "The Eve of St. Agnes", "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" and sonnets like "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer".

Keats' poetry was exceptional in its sensual imagery and appeal that almost brought alive his verses as living experiences to his readers. Some of his other works include the poetic romance titled "Endymion" (1818), an epic poem *Hyperion* (written in between 1818-1819), a narrative poem *Lamia* (1820) and a drama named *Otho The Great* (1819) written jointly with his lifelong friend Charles Armitage Brown. He also shared a close relationship with his brothers George and Tom that finds a reflection in his personal letters. These letters were later published in 1848 and 1878. In addition, these letters were compiled into two volumes titled *The Letters of John Keats 814-1821* (1958) reflecting his literary ideas and personal thoughts both a poet and a person. His remarkable literary journey that had only begun was cut short with his untimely demise at the age of 25. However, at the turn of the 19th century, his poetry and the depth of his poetical reflections made him a much beloved English poet.

In the discussions above, the poets William Blake, William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were the first generation and Lord Byron, Percy B. Shelley and John Keats were the second-generation Romantic poets. Here, it may be noted that the Romantic period reached its peak in the years 1800 to 1850. The words 'romantic' or 'romanticism' to refer to this period were used only in the mid 19th century. In this way, this particular period came to be referred to as the 'Romantic Age' in the history of English Literature. Interestingly, the poets and writers who wrote during that period did not really know that they would be remembered as 'Romantic' writers or poets in the pages of history.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10. Answer the following short questions:

- a. Why was Blake known as a visionary or prophetic poet?
- b. When did Wordsworth first discover his love for poetry? When did he first publish his poetry?
- c. What distinguishes Coleridge's poetry from that of other contemporaries?
- d. Mention the complete name of Lord Byron and his inherited title.
- e. What was the reason for Shelley's expulsion from Oxford?
- f. Highlight the exceptional quality or characteristic of Keats' poetry.

1.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Maurice Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination* (2009) opines thus, "[t]he Romantics were concerned with the things of the spirit and hoped that through imagination and inspired insight they could both understand them and present them in compelling poetry". They were inclined towards exploring the realm of 'imagination' and in the artistic liberty of representing the world in a new light. The prominent poets of the age such as William Blake, William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge, John Keats and Lord Byron had their own distinct style and subtle variations in their poetical practices, nevertheless, their works shaped some of the theoretical trends of the age. For an instance, we could consider the theory of 'fancy and imagination' or the theory of 'negative capability'.



LET US KNOW

S. T. Coleridge in his *Biographia Literaria* (1817) highlighted the difference between the two faculties of the mind i.e., 'fancy' and 'imagination'. Imagination which was considered the active and vital source of creation, was divided into the 'primary imagination' and the 'secondary imagination'. While

the primary imagination, “automatically balances and fuses the innate capacities and powers of the mind with the external presence of the objective world that the mind receives through the senses”, the secondary imagination or the ‘free will’, “dissolves, dissipates in order to recreate” according to Coleridge. On the other hand, ‘Fancy’ was considered a passive source of creation much associated with the memory, accumulating all that was seen or experienced.

The term “negative capability” first came up in one of the letters (dated 21 December 1817) of John Keats that was written to his brothers George and Tom. In this significant letter, Keats described the artist’s experience of nature and the outer world without formulating and imposing theories of knowledge on them. According to Keats, an artist who ‘negated’ himself in the creation of something would experience artistic freedom in his or her creative pursuits, instead of being tied to the limitations of reality or rationality.

During this period, a group of poets residing in the scenic Lake District of North West England came to be known as the ‘Lake Poets’. The leading figures of the group were William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey. Several other poets and writers such as Dorothy Wordsworth, Charles Lloyd, Hartley Coleridge, John Wilson, and Thomas De Quincey were associated with the group. Moreover, a few writers who were not part of the ‘Lake Poets’ yet were ‘inspired’ through the writings produced by the group were Felicia Hemans, Walter Scott, James Payn, Bryan Procter and Norman Nicholson. It may also be noted that some of the significant women poets of the period were Anna Seward, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Hannah More, Charlotte Smith, Anne Yearsley, Mary Robinson, Helen Maria Williams, Dorothy Wordsworth, Felicia Dorothea Hemans, Mary Shelley and Letitia Elizabeth Landon who poured their feminine sensibilities and experiences through their poetry.

**ACTIVITY**

In this activity, the learner is to pause for a moment and try to concentrate on his/her breathing pattern in a relaxed sitting position with eye closed. This will certainly unnerve the level of stress that he/she may have within and enable him/her to be more sensitive and grateful for the gift of life that we carry in us. As the learner experiences the sensitivity of his/her sensory perceptions of the immediate surroundings and their beings bubbling with energy and emotions, it is expected that he/she will be more inclined to their innate creative sensibilities. The learner is to then jot down the following:

- Reflections on his/her childhood days
- Subjective or personal experiences on a picnic/excursion/ journey/trek/expedition/tour
- A few verses inspired from the literary characteristics of Romantic Poetry
- A piece of appreciation on the natural surroundings or beauty of Nature
- Make a list of things that you would like to celebrate through any mode of expression.
- It could be anything under the sun that strikes your mind.

**1.7 LET US SUM UP**

After a thorough study of the unit, you must have gained a good idea on the development and context of the Romantic Age in the history of English Literature. By this time, you must be able to grasp the ideals that shaped the intellectual period called the 'Romantic', and further illuminated the literary forms and characteristics of Romantic poetry. In addition, you should be able to discuss the life and works of selected poets who are considered the major Romantic poets of English Literature. The

unit has enabled you to appreciate and further explore some of the most memorable works of Romantic poetry.



1.8 FURTHER READING

- 1) Bowra, Maurice. (2009). *The Romantic Imagination* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Roe, Nicholas. (ed.) (2007). *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 3) Wu, Duncan. (ed.) (2006). *Romanticism: An Anthology*. Cowley Road, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Web Resource:

<http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/>



1.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: At the tail end of the 18th century...

Ans to Q 2: Emphasis on the various aspects.....

Ans to Q 3: The spontaneous elements in man and nature.....

Ans to Q 4: Ideals..... rationality and reason, skepticism and empirical enquiry, as well as, the advancement of knowledge through logical inquiry, scientific approach and critical methods.

Ans to Q 5: “*Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*”

Ans to Q 6: A pan-European phenomenon....spanned across multiple cultures, the connotation of the term “Romantic.”

Ans to Q 7: Romantic Literature defined “liberalism in literature” with its emphasis on

Ans to Q 8: *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge in 1798 came to be considered as a significant milestone.....

Ans to Q 9: “Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”

Ans to Q 10:

- a. visions that he was frequently subjected to during his lifetime....
- b. age of 15 and published his first sonnet in the *European Magazine* at the age of 16
- c. the realm of the unknown, the mysterious and the supernatural that at once tends to capture as well as, haunt the reader's imagination....
- d. George Gordon Byron Inherited title of '6th Baron' in the English Barony.....at the tender age of 10.
- e. his refusal to admit his authorship of the same to the concerned administration.
- f. exceptional in its sensual imagery and appeal that almost brought alive his verses as living experiences to his readers.



1.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Give an introduction to the Romantic Age in the history of English Literature with special reference to the poets.
- Q 2:** Discuss the major literary forms and their characteristics in the context of Romantic Poetry.
- Q 3:** Discuss the critical reception of Romantic Poetry in the history of English Literature.
- Q 4:** Explain the main ideals that shaped the intellectual background of the Romantic period.
- Q 5:** Write short notes on the following poets of the Romantic Age.
- a. William Blake
 - b. William Wordsworth
 - c. S.T. Coleridge
 - d. P.B. Shelley
 - e. Lord Byron
 - f. John Keats
- Q 6:** What is meant by the term Romanticism? Discuss the important characteristics of Romantic literature, especially Poetry.

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UNIT 2: WILLIAM BLAKE: “A CRADLE SONG” I & II

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 2.1 Learning Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 William Blake: The Poet
 - 2.3.1 His Life
 - 2.3.2 His Works
- 2.4 Explanation of the Poems
 - 2.4.1 “A Cradle Song I” (*Songs of Innocence*)
 - 2.4.2 “A Cradle Song II” (*Songs of Experience*)
- 2.5 Major Themes
- 2.6 Style and Language
- 2.7 Critical Reception
- 2.8 Let us Sum up
- 2.9 Further Reading
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 2.11 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss the life and works of the visionary poet William Blake
- grasp the content of the volume from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*
- explain both the poems under the same title—“The Cradle Song”
- explain the major themes pertaining to the poems
- analyse the style and language employed in the poems
- gain an idea on the critical reception of both Blake and his poems.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

William Blake is one of the most prominent English poets of the Romantic Age in the History of English Literature. Besides being a

talented writer and painter, he was also a skilled engraver. The combination of his poetical genius and his skilled artistry made a remarkable difference to his literary works. Blake is known to have infused life into his literary texts through the inclusion of his illustrations in the form of etched engravings. Further, Blake is also considered a 'visionary' and a 'prophetic' poet owing to his philosophical inclinations early in life and his wide knowledge of theology that had found a creative expression through both his literary as well as, artistic works. The Biblical scriptures were a major influence and a source of inspiration throughout Blake's lifetime as reflected in his mystical writings. While introducing you to the interesting biography of the creative genius William Blake, this unit will also take up two of his selected poems in details, both bearing the same title namely, "A Cradle Song" taken from his poetry collection, *The Songs of Innocence* (1789) and from *The Songs of Experience* (1794) respectively.

2.3 WILLIAM BLAKE: THE POET

Let us now go through the life and literary works by William Blake before exploring the prescribed poems for the unit.

2.3.1 His Life

William Blake (28 November 1757–12 August 1827) was born to Catherine Hermitage and James Blake to be raised among six siblings in a devout and religious household in London. He was mostly tutored at home by his mother. As a school-going boy, he was hardly inclined towards studies owing to which he had chosen to discontinue formal studies at the local school after having acquired the basic skills of reading and writing. Thus, his parents decided to enrol him in a drawing school named Henry Pars's Drawing School where he received special training to become a



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Blake

skilled draughtsman. Thereafter, he attended the Royal Academy for a long time before he made up his mind to take up engraving as his vocation.

The training and apprenticeship that he received under the guidance of the engraver James Basire for a long seven years had greatly enriched his professional skills and knowledge. Gradually, he also began to develop a keen interest in exploring the artistic works of the classical masters such as Raphael, Michelangelo, and Albert Durer among several others. It is during this phase of his life, that he began to nurture his poetic sensibilities as well. Several times in his life, Blake had experienced mystical visions and sightings for an instance, at the tender age of four he had a frightful vision of God peering through a window, and in another, he claimed to have seen Christ and his Apostles at the Westminster Abbey in London while working on his drawings. The depth of his literary reflections woven with religious symbolism and mysticism is perhaps the reason for which he is considered a 'visionary' or 'prophetic' poet.

Blake married Catherine Boucher and settled down to a family life in the year 1782. As a husband, he made all efforts to educate and train his wife to read and write, as well as, to paint and engrave with ease. She was a constant support to Blake and together they produced some of the best-illuminated works or engravings. Even in the final hours of his life, Blake did not cease working on the last of illustrations for *Inferno*, singing hymns and sketching a portrait for Catherine as an expression of his love for her. Thus, having spent a fulfilling life, Blake had breathed his last on 12th August 1827, followed by his wife in the year 1831. A memorial was built at Westminster Abbey in the year 1957 in their memory.



Draughtsman: A drafting technician who makes technical drawings

Apprenticeship: A system of training a new corp of professionals into a trade

Westminster Abbey: A reference to one of the world's greatest churches of St. Peter.

Mysticism: Vague religious or spiritual beliefs

Hymns: religious songs in the praise of God



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** Name the major source of influence and inspiration throughout the lifetime of William Blake.
- Q 2:** What was the special training that he received at Henry Pars's Drawing School?
- Q 3:** Mention some of the instances that William Blake was subject to mystical visions and sightings.
- Q 4:** What was the Blake's contribution as a husband towards his wife Catherine Boucher?

2.3.2 His Works

The major literary works of William Blake are his volumes of poetry comprising his epic or narrative poems like *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), his first collection of poetry *Poetical Sketches* (1783), *Tiriel* (1789), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Song of Los* (1795), *Jerusalem* (1804-1820), *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), *Milton: A Poem* (1804-1810) and *Song of Liberty* (1906). His prophetic books include: *America: A Prophecy* (1793), *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Ahania* (1795), the unfinished *Vala or The Four Zoas* (1797) and in parts *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* composed between 1790 and 1793. Most of his literary works were accompanied with illustrations and hand-made etchings. For an instance, the illustrations for *Book of Job*, which were begun at the age of sixty-five, were artistic masterpieces in themselves that had earned him wide acclaim as both a painter and engraver. In addition, some of his best representative art works include Blake's illustrations for the Bible and the first part of the epic poem *Divine Comedy* (1472) titled *Inferno* by the Italian poet Dante Alighieri.

Blake introduced his innovations into the art of relief

etching and employed the same in the illuminations of some of his volumes such as *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789), *The Book of Thel* (1789), *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793) and *Jerusalem* (1804-1820). Thus, he poured elements of mythology and the supernatural, religious and personal symbolism into his literary works and brought them alive with his remarkable illustrations drawing inspiration from the classical masters. The etchings and engravings created by him are an enriching visual delight containing various mystical, religious and mythological figures. He had also notably illustrated the *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791) written by the English advocate and feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Some of his contemporaries with whom he is known to have interacted with were Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine, Richard Price, William Wordsworth and William Godwin who were also some of the renowned figures of England at that time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Name the first collection of Blake's poetry that was published in 1789.

Q 6: Which were some of the major volumes that introduced Blake's innovative relief etchings?

Q 7: What did the etchings and engravings designed by Blake portray?

2.4 EXPLANATION OF THE POEMS

The Songs of Innocence first published in the year 1789 was a complete collection, comprising poems such as "The Echoing Green", "The Blossom", "The Divine Image", "Nurse's Song", "The Lamb", "The Little Black Boy", "The Chimney Sweeper", "Infant Joy", "A Dream" and "On Another's Sorrow" among a few others. Interestingly, a corresponding volume was titled *Songs of Experience* comprising poems such as "Earth's Answer", "The Clod and the Pebble", "The Sick Rose",

"My Pretty Rose", "The Garden of Love", "The Tyger", "The Little Vagabond", "London" and "The Voice of the Ancient Bard" to mention a few. While the first collection contained nineteen poems, the second collection contained twenty-six poems.

Both the collections of Blake's poems were compiled and published together in the year 1794 under the complete title of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience Showing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*. The volume had interesting illustrations suited to the text being cantered on the representation of the two contrary states of the human mind i.e., 'innocence' and 'experience'. Let us then discuss, compare and contrast between the two poems and also gain a better insight into the poems both bearing the same title i.e., "A Cradle Song", the first taken from the early compilation of *Songs of Innocence* and the second taken from the following *Songs of Experience*. The concise explanations together with a glossary for your quick reference shall further supplement your individual reading of the poems.

2.4.1 A Cradle Song (*Songs of Innocence*)

"Sweet dreams, form a shade O'er my lovely infant's head; Sweet dreams of pleasant streams By happy, silent, moony beams.	Sleep, sleep, happy child, All creation slept and smil'd; Sleep, sleep, happy sleep While o'er thee thy mother weep.
Sweet sleep, with soft down Weave thy brows an infant crown. Sweet sleep, Angel mild, Hover o'er my happy child."	Sweet babe, in thy face Holy image I can trace. Sweet babe, once like thee, Thy Maker lay and wept for me,
Sweet smiles, in the night Hover over my delight; Sweet smiles, mother's smiles, All the livelong night beguiles.	Wept for me, for thee, for all, When He was an infant small. Thou His image ever see, Heavenly face that smiles on thee,
Sweet moans, dovelike sighs, Chase not slumber from thy eyes. Sweet moans, sweeter smiles, All the dovelike moans beguiles.	Smiles on thee, on me, on all; Who became an infant small. Infant smiles are His own smiles; Heaven and earth to peace beguiles."

The poem reads like a 'lullaby' or a bedtime song that is generally sung by mothers or nurses to lull infants or even little children into sleep. The woman singing the song could also be a nurse but owing to the words 'my child' as sung in the very first lines, we will assume that the woman is the baby's mother. While reading the opening lines of the poem "A cradle song", the first image that comes to our mind is that of an infant held delicately on a mother's lap and arms, who sings a sweet song for her little baby. Like all mothers, she wishes for her baby to have a peaceful sleep and the sweetest of dreams. It is an ideal moment that reflects the pure love of a mother for her child, free from any worldly concerns and solely concentrated on that peaceful moment. While the mother enjoys the expressions on her baby's face, she is conscious that her sleeping infant is not disturbed. Thus, the opening lines of the poem capture the sheer beauty of the image of a mother who lovingly holds her infant and cherishes the joy of motherhood.

The mother wishes for little angels or cherubs to weave a garland of dreams for the little baby, hovering above her infant, as angels are believed to be the protecting guardians of innocent babies or children while they are deep asleep. In her happy and delighted thoughts, the mother notices sweet smiles on her baby's face that immediately brings a loving smile on her own as well. This special moment captures the innocence of the baby who is cushioned in care and comfort, as well as, cocooned in its own little world of innocence and purity. There is an aura of sweet charm around the baby who sleeps peacefully with a tender smile and sweet moans. The mother of the infant is careful all along in order to ensure that her baby does not wake up while singing her sweet lullaby.

She sings of Lord Jesus Christ who looks upon all with loving grace and the ways in which the smile of little infants literally reflects the smile of infant Jesus. Just in the way that the



Wiles: tricks, ploys or such devices

Softest Limbs: a reference to a baby's soft arms and legs

Cunning wiles: cunning refers to a crafty, devious or a person who is sly

Dreadful: terrible, causing or involving great suffering

Trails and Tribulations: a reference to the difficult and challenging experiences of life

Hinting: suggesting

Vulnerable: exposed to the possibility of harm or attack of something unwanted

Irreversible: something that cannot be changed or altered

baby's smile charms her, the smile of the Lord charms entire Heaven and earth into divine peace. She is literally moved to tears when a look at her baby brings to her mind the Holy image of infant Jesus because she is also reminded of the pains that Jesus had to suffer in His life. His birth itself was a revelation of God's prophecy and Almighty God has His own plans for each one, which is revealed only with time. Thus, she worries that life will not always be the same for the baby in the future to come. Yet, the song also captures the image of the Heavenly face of Jesus that smiles in blessing to her little babe.

2.4.2 A Cradle Song (*Songs of Experience*)

Sleep, sleep, beauty bright,	As thy softest limbs I feel,
Dreaming in the joys of night;	Smiles as of the morning steal
Sleep, sleep; in thy sleep	O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Little sorrows sit and weep.	Where thy little heart doth rest.
Sweet babe, in thy face	O' the cunning wiles that creep
Soft desires I can trace,	In thy little heart asleep!
Secret joys and secret smiles,	When thy little heart doth wake,
Little pretty infant wiles	Then the dreadful light shall break.

The second cradle song takes a different tone with its narrative that clearly reflects that all is not well with the world and life is only short of revealing its share of **trials and tribulations** once the little child baby up. As the mother sings for her little baby, she finds herself enveloped with worries of her baby's future. The joy and resonance of the ideal moment that found a lyrical expression in her earlier cradle song is now replaced with the gloom of an uncertain future that awaits her baby. This is why she sings thus, "little sorrows sit and weep" referring to the realities of the world that everyone has to face and struggle with sooner or later. Infanthood is the only ideal phase when an infant is protected from all the sorrows of the world under the utmost

care and protection of his or her parents.

While her baby is cocooned in a world of pleasant dreams, the mother sings of the "soft desires", the hinting of "secret joys" and the "secret smiles" that she traces on her baby's face. She feels the soft limbs of her baby and thinks of the ways in which the little heart of the baby will soon be vulnerable to the creeping and "cunning wiles" of the world. It dawns on her that there will be a day when her little child would grow up and step into adolescence followed by adulthood that spells the realm or state of 'experience' from 'innocence'. In addition, with time and experience casting its long shadows on an individual, nothing ever remains the same. This is an universal truth and for this reason, she truly 'dreads' the reality of this world and the irreversible role of 'experience' that will eventually rupture her son's 'innocence', as well as, her cherished joys of motherhood.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Mention the reason for which the lady is suddenly moved to tears while singing her cradle song.

Q 9: What is the change that is found in the tone of the second cradle song?

2.5 MAJOR THEMES

This section shall highlight some of the major themes in both the poems to which the learner may also add from his or her own reading and critical analysis of the poems.

Two States of the Human Mind:

The contrasting states of 'innocence' and 'experience' are two opposite states of the 'consciousness' and 'being' of an individual as also reflected in the volume titled *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* by William Blake. It is through the gradual stages of life that an individual figures out the realities of this world. This rupture of

innocence makes an individual realise the sharp contrast from the ideals of his or her imagined world. It is 'experience' that moulds and transforms the human mind from an 'innocent' and 'inexperienced' state of mind to its 'matured' and 'well-experienced'. In addition, it takes the 'weight of experience' for the youthful mind to be seasoned into maturity, as well as, to gather the wisdom of this world.

As portrayed by Blake, the poems in *Songs of Innocence* are given to ideal happiness of childhood that is untouched by the realities of life. The world of innocence is symbolic of the childhood years filled with happiness, freedom and playfulness, an ideal state of the mind where pure innocence and ignorance are both blissful. On the other hand, *The Songs of Experience* reveals the practicalities of life, symbolising the years of adulthood that is abound with unknown obstacles, setbacks and challenges of life. Thus, both these human states of mind may be compared to the two opposite sides of a coin that looks away from each other.

The Story of Jesus Christ:

In her cradle song, the mother of the baby infant sings of how her baby reminds her of infant Jesus. She is reminded of the story of Lord Jesus Christ, who was born as a blessing to Mother Mary and Joseph in around 6 B.C in the city of Bethlehem, Jerusalem. As the amazing story of Jesus goes, God had prophesied and destined His only Son to die on the Cross, in all His innocence for the greater benefit of mankind, so that entire mankind, appreciated the righteousness of Almighty God in Heaven and the passion of Christ Jesus for entire humanity. Thus, Jesus grew up to love humanity to such an extent that He took the sins and the burdens of people in the extreme form of his own crucifixion i.e., Jesus took the pain of being innocently nailed on the Cavalry Cross for sins committed by others.

It is this loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ that is considered to have redeemed the entire human race and established His abundant grace on the face of earth. For this reason, the mother sings of Lord Jesus who had "wept" or rather taken everyone's pain and sorrow as His own. It may

be mentioned that the complete story on the life, teachings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ is very significant for our knowledge, as well as, captivating in the moral lessons that it offers. Thus, the second cradle song takes a different tone and points to the concerns related to the realities and struggles of life as also reflected in the life of Christ. Also, the cradle songs capture the love and concerns of a mother for her child in the image of Mother Mary who suffered her share of worries and sorrows as the mother of Jesus Christ.

2.6 STYLE AND LANGUAGE

In the first poem, we are introduced to varied pleasant images as that of the mother, sleeping infant, hovering angel and the image of infant Christ almost like a spell or incantation that captures the reader's mind almost immediately. In the second poem, we find the images of the infant's tender heart and softest limbs, cunning wiles and dreaded light. Both the "Cradle Song" poems are lyrical as also reflected in the structure and the usage of words or rather lyrics in the lullaby. In addition, it is this lyrical quality of the first poem that had inspired the renowned English music composer, Benjamin Britten to cast the same into a piece of musical composition. Although, the poems are simple in essence, they beautifully capture the thoughts of a mother who admires her infant child and also worries about the future of the infant.

This first poem, written in the year 1789, contains eight stanzas or quatrains with two rhyming couplets in each, for example notice the following quatrain: "Sweet sleep, with soft down/ Weave thy brows an infant crown/ Sweet sleep, Angel mild/ Hover o'er my happy child." While the second cradle song contains four quatrains with two rhyming couplets in each. Here, as the learner shall notice the pattern in which the quatrain or four-lined stanza of the poem contains a couplet or two lines that rhyme. Thus, both rhyme and repetition are evident in the song structure with words such as: shade-head, stress-bless, down-crown, child-mild, trace-face, smiles-beguiles etc. and a constant repetition of words. For example, in the first cradle song, the word 'sweet' is repeated

ten times and 'smiles' a total of eight times thus, giving a somnolent effect to the cradle song. Further, the repetition of the chosen words also sets the mood of the poem.

You may note that some of the other repeated words are dreams, sleep, sweet sleep, and sweet babe dove-like, beguiles, happy and wept. Similarly, in the second cradle song we shall find couplets with rhyming words i.e., bright-night, smiles-wiles, creep-asleep together with repetitive words such as: sleep, weep, secret, wiles and little heart. The second poem is rather mixed in its mood as it reflects a sweet yet a serious context in its entirety. Both the poems are very expressive, in which the descriptive words of the first poem such as: pleasant, soft, smiles, moans, dovelike sighs are replaced by words such as steal, cunning wiles and dreadful light.

While the mother sings her cradle song, the face of her infant, reminds her of the image of infant Jesus. Just in the way, that infant Jesus was laid in a manger once her baby too sleeps in her arms. Thus, we find a juxtaposition of images in the poem in which the infant is likened or rather seen in the image of Christ. Further, there are several metaphors found in the quatrains of both the poems such as: "Sweet dreams form a shade/ O'er my lovely infant's head", "Sweet dreams of pleasant streams/ Be happy silent moony beams", "All Creation slept and smil'd", "Little sorrows sit and weep", "Smiles of the morning steal" or "O' the cunning wiles that creep." What makes these cradle songs interesting are the images of mother and infant, Maker and Creation, heaven and earth, dream and reality, smiles and sorrows, dark and light, innocence and experience.

The striking aspect of both his volumes is the pattern of traditional hymns and songs that were used as a defining frame or structure for his verses. This adds to its lyrical quality and creates a rich musical effect almost suited to recitation and even singing. In this regard, Bowra opines, "[i]ndeed, no English poet, except Shakespeare, has written songs of such lightness and melody" (43). While reading the cradle songs by William Blake, one receives faint echoes from the poem "Nurse's Song"

available in the same collection of *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794). Given his creative impulse and energy, Blake is considered one of the most outstanding poets of his time with his poetical gifts and artistic sensibilities, which had brought out such a relevant literary work like the *Songs* that truly enlightens the readers' mind with its reflections on the two ends of human condition and experience. Max Plowman in his *Introduction to the Study of William Blake* (1994) writes: "Blake's theme was to reveal the nature of the soul to man. From the *Songs of Innocence* to *The Ghost of Abel*, his aim was to reveal the nature of the soul. This is ultimately the concern of every true poet. This is ultimately the concern of every true poet. Blake differs from others in that it was his whole concern. For him, the soul of man was the epitome of all things" (38).

2.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Blake's philosophy was firmly rooted in the belief that the creative forces of the mind and the poetic vision of those who were gifted held an extraordinary power that was not necessarily tied to the limitations of established truths and theories. The notes of romanticism or rather romantic ideals that were in the making could be felt through the kind of symbolism and thematic concerns, philosophical and spiritual reflections, references of human experiences and the natural world etc. that was seen in his poetry. Blake intended readers to examine the 'two contrasting sides of the human soul' in his poetical volume *The Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) i.e., 'innocence' as reflected in the ideals of childhood and 'experience' as reflected in the complex realizations of adolescence or adulthood.

Maurice Bowra in *The Romantic Imagination* (2009) writes thus, "[t]he two sections of Blake's book, the songs of innocence and the songs of experience, are contrasted elements in a single design, The first part sets out an imaginative vision of the state of innocence: the second shows how life challenges and corrupts and destroys it" (29). At the same time, it must be noted that Blake's poetry is certainly not as simple as

they may apparently seem on one's first reading. His poetry is layered with symbols, images, mysteries, codes and hidden messages that require or rather call for an in-depth study of his poetical texts. Significantly, Blake's first volume *Songs of Innocence* containing his illuminations was published in the year 1789, which was also the year in which the historical French Revolution had begun.

While the critic Jean H. Hagstrum considers Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) as his "masterpiece" (see Blake's *Poetry and Designs*, 525), Northrop Frye opines that despite his creative genius and profundity as a poet, it becomes somewhat difficult for readers to fully appreciate his poetry that does not strictly follow poetical conventions and often refers to personalised symbolism or even mythology. Robert F. Gleckner makes a note of the major and minor symbols in Blake's poetry and the hidden meanings that are to be deciphered by the readers. Thus, critic Gleckner in his critical essay "Point of View and Context in Blake's Song" writes thus, "[f]or the serious reader of Blake's songs, then, a constant awareness of the context or state in which a poem appears is indispensable; and since each state is made up of many poems, the other poems in that state must be consulted to grasp the full significance of any one poem" (535).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 10:** Briefly define the two contrasting sides that William Blake presents in his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794).
- Q 11:** Why is Blake's poetry not as simple as it apparently seems? Explain briefly.
- Q 12:** What does Robert F. Gleckner opine with regard to William Blake's poetry?



2.8 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through this unit, you must have familiarised yourself with the life and times that inspired the literary works and creativity of the visionary English poet William Blake. While gaining an overall idea on the thematic contents of the volumes *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, I am sure; you must also have grasped the content and the major themes of both the prescribed poems. Further, the detailed discussion on the style, language and the critical reception of Blake's poems shall enable you to grasp the nuances of his poetry. This unit has finally helped you further to explore and appreciate the hidden messages woven into the apparent simplicity of the poems by William Blake.



2.9 FURTHER READING

- 1) Bowra, Maurice. (2009). *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Johnson, Mary Lynn. (eds.) *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- 3) Plowman, Max. (1994). *An Introduction to the Study of William Blake*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors.



2.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The scriptures.....as reflected in his mystical writings.

Ans to Q 2: Drawing School....special training.....skilled draughtsman.

Ans to Q 3: Several times.....experienced mystical visions.....frightful vision of God Christ and his Apostles

Ans to Q 4: Educating and training his wife.....

Ans to Q 5: His first collection of poetry was titled *Poetical Sketches*.

Ans to Q 6: Innovations into the art of relief etching..... Illuminations of some of his works.....

Ans to Q 7: Mystical, religious, mythological figures.

Ans to Q 8: Reminded of Holy image.... infant Jesus.

Ans to Q 9: Different tone.....narrative that clearly reflects that all is not well.....life has its share of trials and tribulations.

Ans to Q 10: The 'two contrasting sides'.....in his poetical volume.....'innocence' as reflected.....and 'experience' as reflected....

Ans to Q 11: Blake's poetry is certainly not as simple..... layered with..... that requires or study of his poetical texts.

Ans to Q 12: Major and minor symbols.....hidden meanings.....to be deciphered by readers.....corresponding poems in both the parts.



2.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

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

Q 2: Give a detailed description of the text of the poems by William Blake as mentioned below:

- a. "A Cradle Song" taken from *Songs of Innocence*
- b. "A Cradle Song" taken from *Songs of Experience*

Q 3: Write a short note on the contents and themes of *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* by William Blake.

Q 4: Explain the major themes evident in the text of the poems both titled "A Cradle Song" by William Blake.

Q 5: Comment on the style and language employed by William Blake in the poems both titled "A Cradle Song."

Q 6: Discuss the critical reception of William Blake's poetry with reference to his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1794) and his poetry in general.

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UNIT 3: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 3.1 Learning Objective
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 William Wordsworth: The Poet
 - 3.3.1 His Life
 - 3.3.2 His Poetic Works
- 3.4 Reception of Wordsworth as a Romantic Poet
- 3.5 Let us Sum up
- 3.6 Further Reading
- 3.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 3.8 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

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

- read briefly about the life and works of William Wordsworth
- discuss certain basic features of English Romanticism through Wordsworth's poetry
- identify the themes that consist in the philosophy of Wordsworth as a poet
- make an assessment of Wordsworth as a poet of his time.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall try to discuss the life and works of William Wordsworth, one of the most important of the Romantic poets. Along with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Wordsworth helped to launch the Romantic Age in English Literary history with their joint publication *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). *The Prelude* is considered his magnum opus. It is a semiautobiographical poem of his early years, and he expanded the poem for a number of times. Wordsworth was England's Poet Laureate from 1843 until his death from in 1850. In this unit, an attempt has been made to discuss the life and works

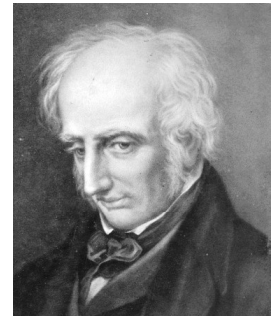
of the poet Wordsworth, which shall help you to read his poems in detail. Declaring in the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should be written in a “language really used by men,” Wordsworth challenged the prevailing 18th century view regarding formal poetic diction and thereby profoundly affected the course of modern poetry. By the time you finish reading this unit, you will learn that freshness and emotional power of Wordsworth’s poetry, the keen psychological depth of his characterizations, and the urgency of his social commentary make him one of the most important poets in the English language.

3.3 WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: THE POET

The following subsections will guide you through the life and works of William Wordsworth.

3.3.1 His Life

William Wordsworth was born on 7th April 1770 at a town called Cockermouth, outside the Lake District. His father John Wordsworth was a lawyer by profession and he managed the estates of Sir James Lowther, later Earl of Lonsdale. His mother was Anne Cookson from Penrith. William was the second among the five children of the family. Richard was the eldest brother while the others were John, Christopher, and his sister Dorothy who was twenty months junior to him. William was deeply attached to his sister and she remained a major influence and inspiration in his poetic career. As a child, Wordsworth was of stiff, moody and violent temper, which caused much anxiety to his mother. The economic condition of the Wordsworths was not too sound as Lowther refused to pay William’s father for his service, which eventually led to a lawsuit that got settled years after his death. William lost his mother at the age of eight. Five years later, when his father died, the family was left with



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

little fortune and he had to depend largely on the generosity of his uncles for his livelihood and education.

William attended Anne Birkett's infant school at Penrith in the year of 1775 when he was staying with his mother's parents. Later, in 1778, he started going to Hawkshead Grammar School at a small village near the Esthwaite Water where he, along with other boarders, stayed with an old lady named Ann Tyson. His school life at Hawkshead happened to be a most cultivating period for him. Here, Wordsworth learned Latin and developed himself as a voracious reader.

He was admitted to St. John's College, Cambridge in the year of 1787. However, he was so well taught at Hawkshead that the curriculum at Cambridge seemed to be too inadequate to satisfy his academic curiosity. He did not like the restrictions at the University and worked the least in academic lines. However, he plunged himself deeply into the study of literature of his own choice. He could manage to get his BA degree from the university in January 1791 and thereafter left Cambridge with no specific intentions and plans for his future course of life. However, the days spent at Cambridge were going to play a major role in his life and in his poetic career as the echoes of the socio-political upheaval in France could be heard at Cambridge too. The young student's artistic mind was firmly committed to the celebration of human freedom as symbolised by the momentous event of the French Revolution. Later on, he wrote in *Prelude*

“...but Europe at that time was thrilled with joy.
France standing on the top of golden hours
And human nature seeming born again.”

In 1791, he went to France and visited the Legislative Assembly and the remains of the Bastille. It was a thrilling experience to travel through Paris, which experienced most, fully the impact of the Revolution. During November 1791, he travelled to Orleans and Blois where he fell in love with a surgeon's daughter called Annette Vallon. They did not get married, but spent the summer

of 1792 together at Blois and in December 1792; Annette gave birth to a girl named Caroline. However, Wordsworth had already left for England before Caroline's birth and the outbreak of the war between England and France prevented him from going back to France to see his daughter. This separation from his beloved and the child filled his heart with remorse for a long time.

His stay at France and a trip to Switzerland helped him to come closer to the socio-political changes taking place around that time in Europe. In the summer of 1792, Wordsworth met Michel Beaupuy, an officer in the French regiment and an enlightened republican in French politics. In Beaupuy, Wordsworth found everything that he admired in the French Revolution and the conversations with this officer reawakened the egalitarian attitude that had been nurtured within Wordsworth's mind since his boyhood. Wordsworth sympathetically participated in Beaupuy's passionate belief in the beneficial change that the Revolution could bring about to the people of France.

After returning to England, Wordsworth started living a very unhappy and unsettled life for a couple of years. His first published works, *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches*, which came out in 1793, were poorly received. The violent course of events in France broke his dreams of the transformation of the world into a new world of liberty. The war between England and France made him refigure his political loyalties and beliefs. During this period, he met Godwin, had frequent conversations with him and found himself totally captivated by his ideas, even though he could not agree to Godwin's insistence on the ascendance of reason over feelings.

In the year of 1795, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. Here he finished *Guilt and Sorrow*, a poem sombre in tone and *The Borderers*, a tragedy. These works did not bear the mark of his poetic merit, which he could not show until he completed *The Ruined Cottage*. At Racedown, he started corresponding with Coleridge, whom he first

met at Bristol in August, 1795. Both admired each other's poems and soon their friendship started growing stronger through their shared interests. Wordsworth soon, in 1797, shifted himself with Dorothy to Alfoxden in the Quantocks in order to be near Coleridge. Both these poets had stimulating effect upon each other and they started working together. In 1798, they published a collection of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*, which is regarded as one of the most influential and path breaking moments in the history of English literature.

After the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth and Dorothy moved to Hamburg with the hope of learning German. However, they were not successful in learning this language. During these days, Wordsworth composed some of his well-known poems like *Lucy Gray*, *Ruth*, *Nutting*, *The Poet's Epigraph*, etc. *The Prelude*, his long autobiographical poem, was also started here. In December 1799, they returned to the Dove Cottage in Lake District in order to live there permanently and the days that followed were spent happily. In 1802, he married his cousin Mary Hutchinson. The years at Dove Cottage were the most fruitful period in his career as here he composed greater part of *The Prelude*, the first series of the Sonnets dedicated to liberty and some of his finest lyrics.

In 1813, Wordsworth moved to Rydal Mount where he spent the rest of his life. Life at Rydal Mount was apparently simple and uneventful, but prosperous. Wordsworth started earning a good living by selling his poetry. He became a frequent traveller and started touring all over Europe. However, this easy life was occasionally stirred by tragedies of losing some of the near ones, and misfortunes of friends and relatives. After Robert Southey's death, he was appointed the 'Poet Laureate' in the year of 1843. The last few days of the poet's life were spent in absolute tranquillity. Being caught by a cold, he had to spend a few weeks in passive tranquillity until he drew his last breath on 23rd April 1850. Following his wish, he was buried in the churchyard at Grasmere.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** What are the factors that helped Wordsworth develop an intimate connection with Nature in his early days?
- Q 2:** How did his return to England from France influenced Wordsworth's sensibility as a poet?

3.3.2 His Poetic Works

From his school days, Wordsworth showed a natural talent for poetry and the teachers at school encouraged him for composing poems. One of the earliest poems that the poet composed in his youthful days is "The Vale of Esthwaite". This is a long poem comprising several hundred lines; but only parts of it could be recovered from the notebooks. "An Evening Walk" (1793) is another long poem written one or two years after the composition of "The Vale of Esthwaite". These two poems show a gradual shift of the emerging poet's concern from the gothic elements to the pictures of landscapes and rural incidents. Another important poetic work of his early career, "Descriptive Sketches", was composed in 1792 in France and published in 1793. The poem commemorates a walking tour in the Alps through the patchy pictures of his wanderings, romantically conceived descriptions of Swiss chalet-dwellers and praise of the revolutionised France.

Poems like "Guilt and Sorrow"; "The Borderers" written in the period between 1792 and 1797 reflect the poet's tortured state of mind. This gloomy mental state was attributed to his sense of growing injustice that he witnessed in his society. "Guilt and Sorrow" is a distinctively morbid attack upon the social order of the time. "The Borderers" can be read as a tragedy and it deals with some problems of criminal psychology. The poem also marks the traces of the earliest inclinations of Wordsworth towards the discussion of Nature and man. "The Ruined Cottage" is regarded as the most

important poem of this period. It is a poem of poverty, sorrow and death where the poet is able to maintain an objective distance from the object of his concern. Of all poems written before 1797, only “An Evening Walk” and “Descriptive Sketches” were published. The common element among these poems was that they were reflective of the poet’s direct observation of Nature and human life.



LET US KNOW

The decade from 1797 to 1807 happens to be the most productive phase of Wordsworth’s poetic career.

In the autumn of 1798, ***Lyrical Ballads*** was published. The publication of this volume containing poems by Wordsworth and Coleridge is regarded as a path breaking moment in the history of English literature. This collection included some parts of his earlier compositions along with a few delightful lyrics like “I heard a thousand blended notes”, “It is the first mild day of March”, “Expostulation and Reply” and the most celebrated long poem called “Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey”. However, the collection also included, as the title suggests, a few ballads too. The language in these poems is simple, with most of the words being taken from everyday usage and colloquial language; even many of his ballads are partly made of conversations.

In 1798, Wordsworth composed “Peter Bell”, a rival and reply to Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner”, but published long after two decades, in 1819. The poem tells the story of Peter Bell - a hardened ruffian - who is frightened into becoming a ‘good and honest man’ by a process of purely natural visitations. This poem can be treated as a study of human psychology when the poem tries to maintain his thesis that Nature is capable of influencing for good even one of her most rebellious and insensitive children.

Among his early lyrics, the “Lucy Poems” are regarded as most famous. Wordsworth composed most of them in 1799 during his stay with his sister in Germany. These poems show the gradual

cultivation and development of certain defining features of Wordsworth's poetry such as the mode of expression in a tender personal tone soaked with emotion at the best, purest and strongest form etc. These poems open up a new set of images and references that deal with birds, flowers, stars, and the smaller and prettier details of nature. These poems, though not regarded as 'nature poems' like some of his later poems, motivate the poet's journey towards a deeper engagement with the world of Nature that results in his later works like "The Daisy", "The Daffodils", "The Cuckoo", "The Celandine" etc.

The Prelude, one of his most celebrated poems, was started in 1799 and some passages like "There was a Boy" and "Nutting" had already been published along with the *Lyrical Ballads* before the first version of it got completed in 1805. However, the poem was published after his death in 1850. As the subtitle of the poem "The Growth of a poet's Mind" suggests, the poem can be treated as a kind of subjective autobiography of the poet. F. W. Bateson (*Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation*, London: Longman, Green & Co, 1954, p. 165) comments that, "It is written, as it were, from the inside outwards. The frame of reference, that is, around which it is organised, lies deep down in Wordsworth's mind. The names, dates and places, that occur in it, and give an illusion of objective autobiography, are really subordinate to a private calendar and a geography of Wordsworth's own that has only relationship to the time and space of the world as we know it". *Poems in Two Volumes*, published in 1807, is the next major publication after *Lyrical Ballads*. This volume contains masterpieces like the "Immortality Ode", "Resolution and Independence", "Ode on Duty", "Elegiac Stanzas", "The Happy Warrior", "The Daffodils", "To the Daisy", besides sonnets like "National Independence and Liberty" and "Memorials of Tour in Scotland". These poems, despite their difference in themes and time of composition, share a common determination on the part of the poet to make the best of things and his lament

at the loss of the easy spontaneous joys and passion of the youthful days.

After 1807, there can be seen a gradual decline in Wordsworth's poetic power. *The Excursion*, published in 1814, is a notable work in two Books composed between 1809 and 1813. Towards the end of 1814, Wordsworth composed two remarkable poems - "Dion" and "Laodamia" - in a new style inspired by his reading of Virgil. His decline became clearly visible after 1814 but he still continued writing. The next few works included chiefly the memorials of his tours and different sonnets.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What are the ideas conveyed through poems like "Guilt and Sorrow", "Boarders" and "Ruined Cottage".

Q 4: State briefly the significance of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Q 5: Do you find anything significant in Wordsworth's "Lucy Poems"?

3.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF WORDSWORTH AND HIS POEMS

Most of the critics of Wordsworth have made his treatment of nature, his use of diction, and his critical theories the centre of debates. Early responses to his poetry begin with Francis Jeffrey's intensive drive to spoil Wordsworth's poetic career. His reviews of the works of the Lake poets—Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Robert Southey—and of Wordsworth's poetry in particular, were so spiteful that they stalled public acceptance of the poet for some 20 years. To Jeffrey, Wordsworth's poetic innovations were in "open violation of the established laws of poetry." He described Wordsworth's stylistic simplicity as affectation. In similar vein, Thomas De Quincey wrote of Wordsworth in 1835 that "Up to 1820 the name of Wordsworth was trampled underfoot; from 1820 to 1830 it was militant; from 1830 to 1835 it has been triumphant."

Early attacks on Wordsworth in the *Edinburgh Review* and by the

anonymous author of a parody, *The Simpliciad* (1808), were followed by criticism and satire by the second generation of Romantics; like Byron and Shelley who mocked Wordsworth as 'simple' and 'dull.' John Keats distrusted what he called the 'egotistical sublime', and Hazlitt, and later Browning, deplored him as 'The Lost Leader', who had abandoned his early radical faith. However, such critical views were almost counterbalanced by the enormous and lasting popularity of works, inviting regards from writers such as Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill with almost religious veneration. They viewed Wordsworth's works as an expression in an age of doubt of the transcendent in nature and the good in man.

Like Francis Jeffrey, many others also believed Wordsworth to be 'descending too low' in his writing, as the advertisement printed with the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 warned. In the advertisement, Wordsworth clearly stated that many of his poetic undertakings might not be what poetry readers usually prefer. Therefore, many try to frame Wordsworth's poetic inclusion of ordinary language as only an "experiment" that attempts "to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." Despite this public hesitation, Wordsworth's poetry eventually gained acceptance. By the 1830s, Wordsworth could become England's preeminent poet.

Regarding his *The Excursion*, scholar Annabel Patterson wrote in a journal called *The Wordsworth Circle* that *The Excursion* "has a history of disappointing its readers." Patterson goes on to describe how Wordsworth's literary contemporaries reacted negatively to the volume and expected far more. Yet other critics have viewed *The Excursion* like his other works, as poetic song or even a "song of daily life," in the words of scholar Brian Bartlett. Bartlett remarks on Wordsworth's distinct combination of "man's music and nature's music." William Wordsworth is considered the preeminent poet of nature, though he claimed his main subject was "the Mind of Man—/ My haunt, and the main region of my song." He portrays suffering humanity in many of his poems, showing a variety of causes: poverty, separation, bereavement, neglect. As Geoffrey Hartman has written, "those famous mis-readers of Wordsworth who say he advocates rural nature as a panacea should be condemned to read

The Excursion once a day.”

Wordsworth's *The Prelude* was published shortly after his death. Although the poem was started quite early, Wordsworth completed the poem in 1805 and then drastically revised over time. Greeted with uneven praise at its first appearance, the poem is now hailed as Wordsworth's greatest work. Scholar Alan Richardson notes that because of the work's autobiographical slant, many literary critics view *The Prelude* through a variety of lenses, most specifically the psychoanalytic. At the same time, some critics tend to explore the poem through historical criticism, preferring, to see how Wordsworth engages with contemporary events at the local level on a broader canvas.” In this vein, some scholars like to analyse the way Wordsworth may “position himself as a historical figure.” Over all, the blending of autobiography, history, and epic, the theme of loss and gain, its mythologizing of childhood experience, and its affirmation of the value of the imagination have been praised by critics.

Wordsworth's *Poetical and Prose Works*, together with Dorothy Wordsworth's *Journals*, (ed. W. Knight), appeared in 1896, and his *Poetical Works* in 1940-9 and 1952-4. *Letters of the Wordsworth Family 1787-1855* were edited by W. Knight in 1907, and *Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth* (ed. de Selincourt) appeared in 1935-9. His biography by M. Moorman was published in 1968 in 2 volumes, and a long-lost collection of letters between Mary and William appeared as *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth* (1982).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: How did the second generation of Romantic poets as well as the Victorian poets receive Wordsworth and his poems?



3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the life and works of William Wordsworth in some detail. From the reading of the different sections of

this unit, you must have gained important ideas on the upbringing of Wordsworth as an important Romantic poet in the history of English literature, besides having a fair enough idea regarding his poems. A great innovator, he permanently enlarged the range of English poetry, both in subject matter and in treatment, a distinction he would not himself have accepted. It has been almost unanimously accepted that Wordsworth was a quintessential Romantic poet. You have learnt that the Romantic Movement of the late 18th century was a reaction against the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment period. Because, during the Enlightenment, developments in science and technology ushered in the massive social change in the Western society. The Industrial Revolution brought about population explosions in European cities while the works of political scientists and philosophers laid the groundwork for the American and French Revolutions. The Romantics like William Wordsworth often shared sceptical views of the progress brought by science and technology, and instead stressed the beauty of nature and individual emotion in their works. While analysing Wordsworth critically, this background needs to be kept in mind.



3.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Abrams, M. H. (2006). *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Alexander, J. H. (1987). *Reading Wordsworth*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- 3) Arnold, Matthew. (ed.) (1879). *Poems of Wordsworth*. London: Macmillan.
- 4) Bateson, F. W. (1954). *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- 5) Bowra, C. M. (2012). *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 6) Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). Oxford University Press.

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- 8) Entry on Wordsworth in Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). OUP.
- 9) Entry on Wordsworth in *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature*. Vol 4.
- 10) Purkins, John. (2003). *A Preface to Wordsworth*. Delhi: Pearson Education.
- 11) Sanders, Andrew. (2000). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 12) Sengupta, Debjani and Cama, Shernaz, et al. (2004). *Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge*. Delhi: Worldview Publications.



3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: As a boy he used to explore the hills and dales of the region...
...this attachment with nature conditioned the development of his emotional, intellectual and aesthetic sensibility... ...this also helped him realise the intimate bond between Man and Nature which remains one of the most prominent themes of his poetry.

Ans to Q 2: The violent course of events in France broke his dreams of transforming the world into a new world of liberty... ...The war between England and France made him refigure his political loyalties and beliefs... ...Godwin inculcated in him an insistence on the ascendancy of reason over feelings.

Ans to Q 3: "Guilt and Sorrow" is a morbid attack on the social order of the time... ... "The Borderers" deals with some problems of criminal psychology... ... "The Ruined Cottage" is a poem of poverty, sorrow and death.

Ans to Q 4: The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 is a landmark event in the history of English literature... ...it expounded Wordsworth's philosophy as a poet... ...it also justifies Wordsworth's use of words

taken from everyday usages and colloquial language in most of his poems.

Ans to Q 5: The “Lucy Poems” show the gradual cultivation and development of certain defining features of Wordsworth’s poetry such as the mode of expression in a tender personal tone soaked with emotion at the best, purest and strongest form etc. These poems open up a new set of images and references that deal with birds, flowers, stars, and the smaller and prettier details of nature. These poems, though not regarded as ‘nature poems’, motivate the poet’s journey towards a deeper engagement with the world of Nature.

Ans to Q 6: Byron and Shelley mocked Wordsworth as ‘simple’ and ‘dull’... ... John Keats distrusted what he called the ‘egotistical sublime’ in Wordsworth... ...Hazlitt, and later Browning, deplored him as ‘The Lost Leader’... ...Against such views, Victorians like Matthew Arnold and John Stuart Mill praised Wordsworth with almost religious veneration and they viewed Wordsworth’s works as an expression in an age of doubt of the transcendent in nature and the good in man.



3.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** How do you connect Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature to his idea of imagination? Address your analysis with reference to some of his poems including “Tintern Abbey” where nature predominates.
- Q 2:** How did the friendship between Wordsworth and Coleridge get reflected in the *Lyrical Ballads*? Discuss.
- Q 3:** Write an essay on how some of the poems of Wordsworth demonstrate how he was influenced by the French Revolution.
- Q 4:** What are some of the greatest achievements of Wordsworth as a Romantic poet? Write a note on the critical reception of William Wordsworth.

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UNIT 4: WILLIAM WORDSWORTH: “TINTERN ABBEY”, “ODE: INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY”

UNIT STRUCTURE:

- 4.1 Learning Objectives
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Reading the Poems
 - 4.3.1 “Tintern Abbey”
 - 4.3.2 “Ode: Intimations of Immortality”
- 4.4 Wordsworth’s Poetic Style
- 4.5 Let us Sum up
- 4.6 Further Reading
- 4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 4.8 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to

- interpret the prescribed poems in terms of the different aspects
- identify and explain the different themes implicit in the poems.
- examine Wordsworth’s poetic style
- discuss the poems in its nuanced totality.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit brings to you a reading of William Wordsworth’s celebrated poem “Tintern Abbey”. The publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 symbolically marks the beginning of a new era in English literature called Romanticism. In this book, Wordsworth, along with his co-author Coleridge, published some lyrics and ballads that differed both thematically and technically from the Neo-classical poets of the earlier era. “Tintern Abbey”, one of the longer poems published in this collection, exhibits some of the defining themes and philosophies of Wordsworth that construct the identity of Wordsworth as one of the greatest Romantic poets. Therefore, composed at a defining moment in

the history of English literature, the poem exhibits some of the basic attitudes of a new generation of English poets whom we call the Romantics. The other poem "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" also known as the Immortality Ode or Great Ode was completed in 1804, and published in *Poems in Two Volumes* (1807). The poem was completed in two parts. Wordsworth wrote the first four stanzas as part of a series of poems composed in 1802 about childhood. As you finish reading this unit, along with a reading of the poems, you will also get an opportunity of discussing the major themes and other important aspects of the poems prescribed.

4.3 READING THE POEMS

The following subsections shall help you to read the prescribed poems in some details.

4.3.1 The text of "Tintern Abbey"

Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798.

FIVE years have past; five summers, with the length
Of five long winters! and again I hear
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
With a soft inland murmur.— Once again
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
That on a wild secluded scene impress
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
The day is come when I again repose
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view¹⁰
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see

These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,²⁰
Or of some Hermit's cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.
These beauteous forms
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,

Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
 And passing even into my purer mind,**30**
 With tranquil restoration:—feelings too
 Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
 As have no slight or trivial influence
 On that best portion of a good man's life,
 His little, nameless, unremembered, acts
 Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
 To them I may have owed another gift,
 Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood
 In which the burthen of the mystery,
 In which the heavy and the weary weight**40**
 Of all this unintelligible world,
 Is lightened:—that serene and blessed mood,
 In which the affections gently lead us on,—
 Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
 And even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In body, and become a living soul:
 While with an eye made quiet by the power
 Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
 We see into the life of things.**50**
 If this
 Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—
 In darkness and amid the many shapes
 Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
 Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
 Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—
 How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
 O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
 How often has my spirit turned to thee!
 And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,**60**
 With many recognitions dim and faint,
 And somewhat of a sad perplexity,

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

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air,**100**
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows and the woods,
 And mountains; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth; of all the mighty world
 Of eye, and ear,—both what they half create,
 And what perceive; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,**110**
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.
 Nor perchance,
 If I were not thus taught, should I the more
 Suffer my genial spirits to decay:
 For thou art with me here upon the banks
 Of this fair river; thou my dearest Friend,
 My dear, dear Friend; and in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read**120**
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. Oh! yet a little while
 May I behold in thee what I was once,
 My dear, dear Sister! and this prayer I make,
 Knowing that Nature never did betray
 The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
 Through all the years of this our life, to lead
 From joy to joy: for she can so inform
 The mind that is within us, so impress

With quietness and beauty, and so feed**130**
 With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
 Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
 Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
 The dreary intercourse of daily life,
 Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
 Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
 Is full of blessings. Therefore let the moon
 Shine on thee in thy solitary walk;
 And let the misty mountain-winds be free
 To blow against thee: and, in after years,**140**
 When these wild ecstasies shall be matured
 Into a sober pleasure; when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling-place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; oh! then,
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
 And these my exhortations! Nor, perchance—
 If I should be where I no more can hear**150**
 Thy voice, nor catch from thy wild eyes these gleams
 Of past existence—wilt thou then forget
 That on the banks of this delightful stream
 We stood together; and that I, so long
 A worshipper of Nature, hither came
 Unwearied in that service: rather say
 With warmer love—oh! with far deeper zeal
 Of holier love. Nor wilt thou then forget,
 That after many wanderings, many years
 Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,**160**
 And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
 More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!**162**

After a lapse of five years, Wordsworth revisits the river Wye and confronts the scenic beauty of the river and the valley whose youthful memory has been stored in his heart for the last five years. Once again, he sees the steep and lofty cliffs, the orchards, cottage gardens, pastoral farms, the hermit's cottage and hears the murmur of the Wye. The memory of these beautiful forms of Nature have always been for him the source of inspiration, comfort and a place of refuge amidst the din and bustle of cities and towns. The absence of five years does not seem to have wiped out his memory of the earlier visit which he has profound spiritual effect on him.

The memory of these forms helps him transcend the "corporeal frame/ And even the motion of our human blood" and takes him to a kind of exalted mood to "become a living soul" where he can "see into the life of things." It is a moment of illumination for him where he is equipped with the ability to perceive beyond the physical reality and see the inner life of things. Therefore, whenever he is oppressed by the mundane 'joyless daylight' and the 'unprofitable' preoccupations of life, he turns to his memory of the landscape in search of inspiration.

Now, as the poet stands again on the bank of the river, the memories of the landscape come to his mind and he compares them with his present observations. As he visualises his boyhood through his memory, he finds that a young boy's delightful participation in outdoor life marked his response to the world of Nature. Five years ago, it was through his senses that he enjoyed Nature. As his love for Nature was untouched by intellectual interests, his spirit marvelled at the beautiful colours and forms of the woods and mountains, and the music in the birds' songs and the river's murmur. However, with his advanced age his perceptions and thoughts have matured; the continuous sufferings of mankind – "The still, sad music of humanity" – have taught him a lot. Now Nature appears to him in a different light. In Nature, he realises the existence of an all-pervasive living spirit that connects everything together:

"... .. And I have felt

A presence that disturbs me with the joy

Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And round the ocean and living air,
And the blue sky and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things." (**Lines:** 95-114)

The poet's 'purest thoughts' are stimulated by the sensual reception of the world of Nature. Nature becomes "the nurse,/The guide, the guardian of my (his) heart, and soul/ Of all my (his) moral being".

Now, the poet has with him his young sister Dorothy, in whose eyes he can still see the sparkle of the pleasure that he used to experience at the same place five years ago. He has this firm conviction that Nature never betrays the heart that loves her. He believes that against all mundane and dreary intercourse of the day to day life, all evil thoughts, any rash judgment, all selfish preoccupations of men, Nature protects this cheerful faith of the human soul by leading the human life from joy to joy, and by filling the mind with quietness and beauty and nourishing it with lofty thoughts. Therefore, he asks his sister to maintain her kinship with nature all her life. He hopes that in moments of loneliness, fear and pain, she will look back to these delightful moments spent with her brother and the memory of these sweet impressions of Nature stored in her mind will comfort her. He hopes that in near or future, when the poet may not be with his sister, she will remember her brother and memory will take her to the moments when she was with him on the bank of the Wye. He hopes that she will remember him "so long a worshipper of Nature", whose heart is filled 'with warmer love' and 'with far deeper zeal of holier love'. Therefore, for Wordsworth, after many wanderings and many years of absence, the beauteous forms of the world of Nature appear more beautiful and more dearly just for themselves and for the reason that his sister is with him when he is in the midst of Nature.

The detailed description of the setting of this poem bears immense significance for the poet. Indeed, the very title of the poem bears reference to the time and place of his return visit and lets the reader know where he is positioned in the landscape that he is describing. He posits himself in a specific spot, a "few miles above" an abbey in the valley of the Wye so that he can have a broad perspective on the landscape he is going to describe. It is the middle of July, the day before Bastille Day and the poet has already asserted, "five years have past" since his last visit. The five years that the poet refers to are some of the most tumultuous years in the history of Europe as they are to the poet's life too. The nostalgic, contemplative and reflective mood of the poet shows as if he has been longing to return to this spot above Tintern Abbey. Wordsworth's detailed description of the scene - the sound of 'rolling' waters, the sublimity of the 'steep and lofty cliffs,' – appeal to the reader's eyes and ears. Wordsworth's first person narrative with repeated and emphatic use of the first person pronoun, 'I'— 'I hear/ These waters,' 'I behold,'—emphasises his personal engagement with the scene he is describing.

"Tintern Abbey" suggest three periods in the poet's development: the crude boyish period of 'glad animal movements,' when Nature was merely unconsciously absorbed; the second period when Nature was to him all in all; and the third, the mature period. As he stands on the river after a lapse of five years, he confronts with the image of himself when in youth he used to fling himself into the delight in Nature.

"... ... the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remote charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye." (Lines: 79-85)

However, with age and experience, that sensuous association with the natural world remains no more:

"... .. That time is past,
 All its aching joys are now no more,
 And all its dizzy raptures." (Lines: 85-87)

However, the poet does get his compensation for this loss. He develops an understanding of the tragedy of humanity and realises the presence, in and around him, of an omnipresent, universal, Illimitable spirit of sublime grandeur that run through all lives. The poet has been intuitively aware of this sublime presence since his childhood.

"... .. For I have learned
 To look on Nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity,

 And I have felt
 A presence that disturbs me with joy
 Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,

 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thoughts,
 And rolls through all things." (Lines: 90-105)

The poet realises that his boyhood intuition of this sublime spirit remains valid throughout ages. There is a difference in the first two verse paragraphs: the first paragraph presents the poet 'beholding' nature while the second paragraph shows him 'seeing' into 'the life of things'. This difference reflects an intellectual development from the surface to the essence. The poem records Wordsworth's discovery that the 'mighty world of eye and ear' cannot fully create the perception of the world but has the capability of lifting one to the experience of a higher and sublime reality.



LET US KNOW

In his Preface to the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."

According to Wordsworth, poetry is not primarily a mirror of men in action, but the elements in the poet's own feelings. This doctrine went against the Neoclassical manipulations of the poetic elements. However, Wordsworth carefully qualified his radical doctrine by describing poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity," and by specifying that the poet's spontaneity is the result of a prior process of deep reflections over the previous thought and revision. Keats too wrote: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all." Coleridge, on the other hand, proclaimed that each poetic work is like a growing plant evolving according to its internal principles into its final organic form.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think that the background information is necessary for the understanding of "Tintern Abbey"? Elaborate.

Q 2: Why, according to you, time matters most in the poem?

Q 3: What is Wordsworth's definition of poetry? How did Keats and Coleridge conceive the idea of poetry?

1.3.2 Major Themes in "Tintern Abbey":

The major themes of the poem "Tintern Abbey" can be studied under the following headings.

Autobiographical Interest:

As you have finished reading the poem, you must have noticed that through the poet's response to the outward world of nature, the poem traces the poet's inward journey to the

realization of the self. Like *The Prelude*, "Tintern Abbey" is a kind of self-revelation of the poet. Because of its connection to the real incidents and emotions of the poet's life, the poem is difficult to understand without the details of its occasion and the personal information of the poet. To understand the poem, we have to pay attention to Wordsworth, his sister Dorothy, and the intellectual, aesthetic and emotional relations between them. The poem is an intimate revelation of one's emotional and philosophical experiences and associations of life; and for Wordsworth such a revelation can be possible only to his sister with whom he shared a deep emotional and intellectual relationship. The poem marks the important transitional moment of a man's (also Wordsworth's) journey from childhood playfulness to the spiritual and intellectual pursuits of maturity.

Nature and Man:

"Tintern Abbey" is one of the first poems of Wordsworth that can avail him the tag "worshipper of Nature". Most of his early poems show his firsthand experience of the country life with all its spontaneity, hardships, and the beauty of its natural surroundings. However, in "Tintern Abbey" the poet, for the first time, gives a passionate account of the effect of the outer world upon his inner self. The different stages of his intellectual and spiritual development as a man are intimately connected to his understanding of the outer world of Nature. The "beauteous forms" of Nature recollected "mid the din of towns and cities" in the "hours of weariness" brings to the poet "sensations sweet felt in the blood, and felt along the heart". Here, Wordsworth takes recourse to the dominant philosophical ideas of sensationalism and associationism. The senses absorb sensations, which then get transformed into feelings. The feelings leave their impression in the mind by purifying and elevating it to the 'blessed spiritual' mood. It is the conceptualization of the 'blessed spiritual' mood availed through Nature that marks Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature as distinct from that of others.

Nature has remained a decisive influence in all the three stages of his life that Wordsworth describes in this poem. Of the three stages of the poet's life, the first is the boyhood days of pure physical sensations - "the coarser pleasure of my boyish days, and their glad animal movements". The second stage is the adolescent or early youth when Nature was "all in all" and its colours, forms and phenomena "a passion", "an appetite" for the young lover boy. This stage is marked by the feverish, passionate, unreflecting and sensuous absorption of Nature. The third and last stage is the stage of maturity; it is a stage of thought and meditation and of mystic realization of 'a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused'. It is the mystical understanding of the character of the universe that marks this stage of maturity. It is a vision into the all-pervading spirit of Nature based on grand unity and harmony. It is this moment of spiritual enlightenment that wipes out all the coarse pleasures of childhood and the passionate sensuous appetite of the "thoughtless youth" and comes to the realization of "The still, sad music of humanity".

Wordsworth correlated the tragedy or 'sad music' of humanity with his vision of Nature. This correlation makes them melt, and blend into a supreme harmony. This harmony helps the poet to feel "a presence that disturbs him" with joys of "elevated thought". He realises the existence of "a presence" that encompasses both the outer and the inner world - "the round ocean", "the living air", "the blue sky" and "the mind of man". Because of this sense of harmony, human sufferings and tragedies lose their sharp edges. The harmony between life with its reality and the all-encompassing presence of Nature creates music - 'sad' and 'still' - in the poet's mind. In the matured life, the experience widens with the intimate knowledge of human evil and suffering. The "dizzy raptures" of the "thoughtless youth" vanishes as the poet tries to integrate his old love for Nature by looking at it more thoughtfully. He discovers a vaster harmony in the vision

of Nature, which takes in "the still, sad music of humanity".

Wordsworth's treatment of Nature in this poem also throws important light on the Romantic poet's anti-Neoclassic attitude towards human sensibility. Reacting against the theoretical reduction of Man and Nature into a mechanical field of activity, determined by causality and universal rules, the Romantic poets tried to insert life into Nature and reconstruct Man as a creative being. "Tintern Abbey" celebrates that creative genius of men achieved through the working of the imaginative mind.

Use of Memory:

Memory plays a very important role in the poet's self-exploration as recorded in the poem. As far as autobiographical details of the poem are concerned, through memory, the poem honestly presents an important fact of human condition. The poem tells a story of natural growth that tests the soul of the man (the poet) and confronts him with life as it is. The mind of the poet, lost in the worldly affairs, goes back through memory to a time when Nature provided direct pleasure, when it could unify itself with Nature. It is only through memory that the mind revives that reality and revisits that faith that once gave courage and inspiration. During his five years' absence from the valley, the tranquil environments of Tintern Abbey have remained a constant present with the poet, stored in his memory as the "beauteous forms". When Wordsworth had been troubled with the ways of the 'unintelligible world,' remembering nature had not only brought him peace but had also given him insight "into the life of things." Through an act of memory, specifically through reflecting upon natural scenes, Wordsworth discovers a spirit that connects all life. Memory helps the poet to arrive at a deeper understanding of life in communion with nature.

Wordsworth and Imagination:

For Wordsworth, imagination is the most important gift that a poet can have. Both Coleridge and Wordsworth associate the

idea of creativity with imagination as they distinguish imagination from fancy. Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge that the creative faculty of imagination resembles that of God. It is this divine faculty through which a child can fashion his own little words; and poets retain this faculty even in maturity. Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in his conception of the relation between imagination and the external world. For Wordsworth, the external world has an independent- existence: it is not dead but living with a soul distinct from that of man. Imagination must be subservient to the external world. Man's task is to enter into communion with this soul of the external world. Imagination is the means through which man can attain this communion and understand the oneness of things.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the major themes of the poem "Tintern Abbey"?

Q 5: Memory plays a pivotal role in the poem. Explain.

Q 6: How did Wordsworth visualise the relation between man and nature?

Q 7: In what ways does Wordsworth differ from Coleridge while projecting his ideas on Imagination?

Q 8: What are the three stages of the poet's life?

4.3.2 "Ode: Intimations of Immortality"

[<http://www.sparknotes.com>]

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

There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,

To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day.
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

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

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

Ye blessèd creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fulness of your bliss, I feel—I feel it all.

Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While Earth herself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning,
And the Children are culling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the Babe leaps up on his Mother's arm:—
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone;
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

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

Behold the Child among his new-born blisses,
A six years' Darling of a pigmy size!
See, where 'mid work of his own hand he lies,
Fretted by sallies of his mother's kisses,
With light upon him from his father's eyes!
See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,
Some fragment from his dream of human life,
Shaped by himself with newly-learned art
A wedding or a festival,
A mourning or a funeral;
And this hath now his heart,
And unto this he frames his song:
Then will he fit his tongue
To dialogues of business, love, or strife;
But it will not be long
Ere this be thrown aside,
And with new joy and pride
The little Actor cons another part;
Filling from time to time his "humorous stage"
With all the Persons, down to palsied Age,
That Life brings with her in her equipage;
As if his whole vocation
Were endless imitation.

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

O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: not indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;
Delight and liberty, the simple creed
Of Childhood, whether busy or at rest,
With new-fledged hope still fluttering in his breast:—
Not for these I raise
The song of thanks and praise

But for those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised,
High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised:
But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which, be they what they may
Are yet the fountain-light of all our day,
Are yet a master-light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the eternal Silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
Nor Man nor Boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our Souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the Children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Then sing, ye Birds, sing, sing a joyous song!
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We in thought will join your throng,

Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts to-day
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.
And O, ye Fountains, Meadows, Hills, and Groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;
I only have relinquished one delight
To live beneath your more habitual sway.
I love the Brooks which down their channels fret,
Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
The innocent brightness of a new-born Day
Is lovely yet;
The Clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

In stanza I, the speaker of the poem states that there was a time when all of nature seemed dreamlike to him, "apparelled in celestial light." However, that that time is past as expressed in the lines: "the things I have seen I can see no more." In stanza II, the speaker says that he still sees the rainbow, and that the rose is still lovely, the moon looks around the sky with delight, and both starlight and sunshine are beautiful. However, the speaker does reiterate that the past glory is no longer to be found on the earth.

In stanza III, the speaker expressed that he was stricken with a thought of grief, while listening to the birds singing in the springtime or watching the lambs leaping and playing in the lap of nature. However, the sound of the waterfalls, the echoes of the mountains, and the sound of the breeze restored him his strength. In addition, he declares that his grief and sorrow will no longer affect the joy of the season. He urges a shepherd boy to shout and play around him. In stanza IV, he addresses nature's creatures, and says that his heart participates in their joyful festivals. He states that it would be wrong to feel sad on such a beautiful May morning, when children play and laugh among the flowers. Nevertheless, a tree and a field that he looks upon make him think of "something that is gone," and a pansy at his feet does the same. He asks what has happened to "the visionary gleam": "Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

In the next stanza, the speaker proclaims that human life is merely "a sleep and a forgetting"—that is they dwell in a purer, more glorious realm before they are born on earth. "Heaven," he says, "lies about us in our infancy!" As children, we still retain some memory of that place, which causes our experience of the earth to be suffused with its magic—but as the baby passes through boyhood and young adulthood and then into manhood, he sees that magic dying. In stanza VI, the speaker says that the pleasures unique to earth conspire to help men forget the

"glories" of the past.

In the seventh stanza, the speaker beholds a six-year-old boy and imagines his life, and the love his parents feel for him. He sees the boy playing with some imitated fragment of adult life, "some little plan or chart," imitating "a wedding or a festival" or "a mourning or a funeral." The speaker then imagines that all human life is a similar imitation. In the next stanza, the speaker addresses the child as though he were a mighty prophet of a lost truth, and rhetorically asks him why, when he has access to the glories of his origins, and to the pure experience of nature, he still hurries toward an adult life of custom and "earthly freight." In stanza IX, the speaker experiences a surge of joy at the thought that his memories of childhood will always grant him a kind of access to that lost world of instinct, innocence, and exploration. Then in stanza X, bolstered by this joy, he urges the birds to sing, and all other creatures to participate in "the gladness of the May." He says that though he has lost some part of the glory of nature and of experience, he will take solace in "primal sympathy," in memory, and in the fact that the years bring a mature consciousness—"a philosophic mind."

In the final stanza, the speaker says that this mind—which stems from a consciousness of mortality, as opposed to the child's feeling of immortality—enables him to love nature and natural beauty all the more, for each of nature's objects can stir him to thought, and even the simplest flower blowing in the wind can raise in him "thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Wordsworth in the "Immortality Ode" consciously makes the speaker compromise with the joyous atmosphere of nature around him. This is important for a poet whose consciousness is so habitually absorbed with the unity nature. With a view to expressing his grief, which is a result of his inability to experience the May morning, as he would have in childhood, the poetic persona attempts to enter wilfully into a state of cheerfulness.

However, he is able to find real happiness only after realising the fact that "the philosophic mind" has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper and more human terms, which will guide him for the rest of his life. This is very much in tune with his other poem "Tintern Abbey". But, whereas in the previous poem Wordsworth made himself joyful as a 'worshipper of nature' and referred to the "music of humanity" only briefly; in the "Immortality Ode" he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What is unique about Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode"?

4.4 WORDSWORTH'S POETIC STYLE

Wordsworth wrote "Tintern Abbey" this poem in tightly structured blank verse, and the poem consists of verse-paragraphs rather than stanzas. They are mostly in iambic pentameter. It is almost difficult to categorise the poem, as it contains elements of the ode, the dramatic monologue and the conversation poem. In the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth noted: "I have not ventured to call this poem an Ode but it was written with a hope that in the transitions, and the impassioned music of the versification would be found the principle requisites of that species of composition." At its beginning, it may well be dubbed an 18th Century "landscape-poem", but it is commonly agreed that the best designation would be "the conversation poem". In lines 1–24, the natural beauty of the Wye (which he first visited in 1793; second visit occurred in 1798) fills the poet with a sense of "tranquil restoration". From lines 88–111, after contemplating the few changes in the scenery since his last visit, Wordsworth is overcome with "a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused, whose dwelling is the light of setting suns". In the final lines from 114–160,

Wordsworth addresses his sister Dorothy, who did not accompany him on his original visit to the abbey, and perceives in the delight she shows at the resplendence and serenity of their environs a poignant echo of his former self.

In style, "Tintern Abbey" does not conform to the norms of a lyric or a ballad. Its main reason lies in the use of the poetic language. The poem does not maintain Wordsworth's resolution on the selection of diction for poetry that he expressed in the ambitious "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*". His language is not that of the "middle and lower classes of the society". The day to day language of the farmers and shepherds in Cumberland did not include words like 'sublime', 'ecstasy', 'interfused', 'genial', and phrases like 'half-extinguished thoughts', 'tranquil restoration', 'abundant recompense' etc. Going against his own propositions, the poet employs an elevated diction far removed from his ideal adobe. His syntax too appears to be more complicated and removed from ordinary usage of the language. The poem exhibits a congregation of long, involved sentences impregnated with lofty thoughts. This aspect of the poet's artistry, which can be termed to some extent as 'Miltonic', occupies much of his later works like *The Prelude*, *The Excursion* etc. The long sentences consisting of elevated words combined through complicated syntax can never make the poem what the poet calls the poetry of the people. Rather, this style can help us to penetrate into that domain of the poet's artistry where he was the most spontaneous and comfortable but never formally admitted it. "Tintern Abbey" is written in a low-toned but impassioned blank verse. The poet uses a double-exposure technique to give it a dramatic life. The poet has juxtaposed two widely separate periods in such a way that the reader is immediately confronted with the dramatic growth in the intellectual and spiritual life of the poet. The development of argument in the poem is conditioned by the distinctions of the two times. It works like two photographs of the same person taken at the same setting at two widely differing periods. Such contrast highlights the change and the growth or development becomes distinct.

Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode", on the other hand, is written in eleven variable ode stanzas with variable rhyme schemes, in iambic lines. The rhymes occasionally alternate lines, occasionally fall in couplets, and occasionally occur within a single line (as in "But yet I *know*, where'er I go" in the second stanza). The structure of poem is also unique. Unlike his characteristically fluid, naturally spoken monologues, the Ode is written in a lilting, songlike cadence with frequent shifts in rhyme scheme and rhythm. Further, rather than progressively sticking to a single idea from the beginning to the end, the poem jumps from idea to idea. The poem's metaphors and images shift from the register of lost childhood to that of the philosophic mind. When the poetic persona is in grief, the poem offers joyous, pastoral nature images, frequently personified, such as the lambs dancing, the moon looking around her in the sky etc. But when the poet attains the mature philosophic mind, he begins to employ far more subtle descriptions of nature. Here, the poet, rather than cheerfully imposing humanity upon natural objects, draws human characteristics out of their natural presences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: What are the most noteworthy elements of Wordsworth's poetic style?

Q 11: In style, "Tintern Abbey" does not conform to the norms of a lyric or a ballad. Why?



4.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit you have learnt that the poem "Tintern Abbey" is often viewed as Wordsworth's first great declaration as a nature poet that the memory of one's attachment with nature in childhood works upon one's mind even in adulthood. In his youth, the poet was oblivious to his relationship with the woods and the river. Now, after five years, he suddenly gets aware of everything that his memory of the scenes has to

offer him. Thus, the background of the poem shows that "Tintern Abbey" went towards establishing a new intellectual outlook called Romanticism against the prevailing climate of the Enlightenment. Whereas, "Tintern Abbey" is Wordsworth's first great statement about the action of childhood memories of nature upon the adult mind, "Ode on Intimations of Immortality" is his mature response to his subject. The poem makes explicit Wordsworth's belief that life on earth is a dim shadow of an earlier, purer existence, dimly recalled in childhood and then forgotten in the process of growing up. This has been best expressed in the lines in stanza V: "Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.../Not in entire forgetfulness,/And not in utter nakedness, /But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home..."



4.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Abrams, M. H. (2006). *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Alexander, J. H. (1987). *Reading Wordsworth*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- 3) Arnold, Matthew. (ed.) (1879). *Poems of Wordsworth*. London: Macmillan.
- 4) Bateson, F. W. (1954). *Wordsworth: A Reinterpretation*. London: Longmans, Green & Co.
- 5) Bowra, C. M. (2012). *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 6) Durrant, Geoffrey. (1970). *A Study of Wordsworth's Poetic Universe*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- 7) Purkins, John. (2003). *A Preface to Wordsworth*. Delhi: Pearson Education.
- 8) Sanders, Andrew. (2000). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- 9) Sengupta, Debjani and Cama, Shernaz, et al. (2004). *Blake, Wordsworth and Coleridge*. Delhi: Worldview Publications.

WEB RESOURCES:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/wordsworth/section3/page/2/>



4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The poem is based on real life experience... ..the title itself demands attention to the occasion and time of the composition... ..the difference caused by a certain amount of time plays an important role... ..detailed topographical description hints at the poet's personal engagement with the scene... ..the poem is addressed to a person intimately related to the poet... ..this personal relation conditions the mode of self revelation.

Ans to Q 2: The poem is written after five years of the actual experience... ..the poet hopes that in moments of loneliness, fear and pain, his sister Dorothy will remember the delightful moments spent with her brother years ago... ..he also hopes that if, in future, he is not with his sister Dorothy, the memory of these sweet impressions of Nature stored in her mind will comfort her

Ans to Q 3: Wordsworth declared that good poetry is "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings"... .. Keats too wrote: "If poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all"... ..Coleridge, on the other hand, tried to proclaim that each poem is like a growing plant evolving according to its internal principles into its final organic form.

Ans to Q 4: Autobiographical Interest... ..Nature and Man... ..Use of Memory... .. Wordsworth and Imagination

Ans to Q 5: Memory helps the poet to explore his self... ..the mind of the poet, lost in the worldly affairs, goes back through memory to

a time when Nature provided direct pleasure... ..so it is only through memory that the mind revives that reality and revisits that faith that once gave courage and inspiration.

Ans to Q 6: In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth calls himself the "worshipper of Nature"... ..Nature has remained a decisive influence in all the three stages of his life... ..Wordsworth correlates the tragedy of humanity with his vision of Nature... ..he arrives at a vision in which Nature's presence and human misery are brought to a concord so that to bring together the outer world and the inner world of mind.

Ans to Q 7: Wordsworth agrees with Coleridge on the creative faculty of imagination... ..but also differs from Coleridge in his conception of the relation between imagination and the external world... .. For Wordsworth, the external world has an independent-existence and Imagination must be subservient to the external world.

Ans to Q 8: The first is the boyhood days of pure physical sensations... ..the second stage is the adolescence or early youth when Nature was "all in all"... ..the third and last stage is the stage of maturity as it is a stage of thought and meditation and of mystic realization of 'a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused'.

Ans to Q 9: Wordsworth in the "Immortality Ode" consciously makes the speaker compromise with the joyous atmosphere of nature around him... ..to express his grief, the speaker attempts to enter wilfully into a state of cheerfulness... ..but, he is able to find real happiness only after realising the fact that "the philosophic mind" has given him the ability to understand nature in deeper and more human terms which will guide him for the rest of his life.

Ans to Q 10: The poem is written in tightly-structured blank verse... .. use of iambic pentameter... ..but it is also difficult to categorise the poem, as it contains elements of the ode, the dramatic monologue and the conversation poem... ..but the poet also employs an elevated diction far removed from his own propositions

to use a language of everyday use... ...this style can help us to penetrate into that domain of the poet's artistry where he was the most spontaneous and comfortable but never formally admitted it.

Ans to Q 11: Because, "Tintern Abbey" does not maintain the selection of diction that he expressed in "Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*"... ...the day to day language of the farmers and shepherds in Cumberland did not include words like 'sublime', 'ecstasy', 'interfused', 'genial'... ...going against his own propositions, Wordsworth employs an elevated diction far removed from his ideal adobe.



4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Comment on Wordsworth's philosophy of Nature. How is Nature connected to the development of the human mind and spirituality? Attempt an analysis from your reading of "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode"
- Q 2:** Write a note on the autobiographical elements in Wordsworth's nature poems such as "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode".
- Q 3:** How for Wordsworth are memory and imagination connected to one's intellectual and spiritual development? Attempt a discussion with reference to "Tintern Abbey".
- Q 4:** How do you evaluate poems like "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode" in the context of English Romanticism? Where do you locate its position among the cultural environment of this particular period? Discuss in terms of the major Romantic themes of the period.
- Q 5:** Write a critical appreciation of "Tintern Abbey" and "Immortality Ode" with particular emphasis on the three stages of the poet's life.
- Q 6:** In "Tintern Abbey" Wordsworth made himself joyful as a 'worshipper of nature' and referred to the "music of humanity", but in the

"Immortality Ode" he explicitly proposes that this music is the remedy for his mature grief. Discuss.

- Q 7:** Do you find in the Wordsworth's nature poems any reference to the socio-political upheaval of Wordsworth's Europe? Try to situate the poems in its socio-political and cultural background and discuss Wordsworth's possible reaction to it.

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UNIT 5: SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE:

- 5.1 Learning Objectives
- 5.2 Introduction
- 5.3 Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Poet
 - 5.3.1 His Life
 - 5.3.2 His Works
- 5.4 Critical Reception of Coleridge as a Romantic Poet
- 5.5 Let us Sum up
- 5.6 Further Reading
- 5.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 5.8 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- read briefly about the life and works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge
- discuss certain basic features of English Romanticism through Coleridge's poetry
- identify the themes that consist in the philosophy of Coleridge as a poet
- make an assessment of Coleridge as a poet of his time.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to Samuel Taylor Coleridge another of the important English poet, literary critic, philosopher and theologian of the Romantic era. With his friend Wordsworth, about whom you have read in the previous units, was the founder of the Romantic Movement in England. Coleridge was also a member of the group of poets known as the Lake Poets. He is well known for his poems like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan", as well as for his major critical work *Biographia*

Literaria. Coleridge coined many familiar words and phrases, including the very famous 'Willing Suspension of Disbelieve'. In this unit, an attempt has been made to discuss the life and works of S. T. Coleridge in some detail.

5.3 SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: THE POET

5.3.1 His Life

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born at the vicarage of Ottery St. Mary, in Devonshire, England, October 21, 1772. His father was a clergyman of the Church of England, and a schoolmaster, good-hearted but absent-minded and impractical. Coleridge's childhood was that of a talented and imaginative boy. He read a lot about fairy tales and acted out the scenes in them, living much by himself in the world, which he created out of his Imagination. When he was nine years old his father died, and the next year Coleridge entered the great public school of Christ's Hospital, where he became a schoolfellow of Charles Lamb. Then he went up to Cambridge, met Wordsworth, but failed to lead a comfortable college life.



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

While still a student, he made an excursion to Oxford, and met Robert Southey. It was the restless time of the French Revolution, and these young students and enthusiasts were eager to try some new order of life. With the help of a few other friend she developed a scheme which they named "Pantisocracy," or the equal rule of all, and proposed to form a community on the banks of the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania, where two or three hours' labour a day, on the part of each, would suffice for the community, and then the remaining time could be given to the pursuit of philosophy, poetry and all the arts. Southey was married, and Coleridge was thrown much with Mrs. Southey's sister, Sara Fricker, because of which he had to marry her hastily. Among his friends at this time

in Bristol, where the Frickers lived, was the bookseller Joseph Cottle, who had great faith in Coleridge's literary potentials. He undertook the publication of a volume of poems, and lent him money to run his family.

Coleridge at the time of his marriage was only twenty-three years old. For a number of years, Coleridge and his wife, and the children born to them, led a shifting life; sometimes they were together, sometimes they were separated. Now, Coleridge would make a stay in Germany, now they would be all together with the Wordsworths (William and his sister Dorothy) and Southey in the Lake Country. However, by 1813, the union of an irresponsible, dreamy husband with a wife of limited intellectual sympathy ended. For three years, Coleridge led a dreary life, lecturing, arguing with friends, and struggling against the habit of opium, which had finally taken his life. In 1816, he put himself under the care of Dr. Gillman, living at Highgate, on the outskirts of London. There he spent the last sixteen years of his life, cared for by a kind physician, making occasional journeys into other parts of England, receiving many visitors and continuing to write. His most notable poems were written towards the end of the 18th century. Coleridge died on 25th July 1834.



LET US KNOW

Wordsworth and Coleridge:

You should find it interesting to note the differences between Wordsworth and Coleridge as poets.

Wordsworth was severe, cold, much given to calm judgment; Coleridge was impulsive, erring, and warm-hearted. Wordsworth led a correct, diligent life; he was prudent and thrifty, a good housekeeper, a proper husband and father; while Coleridge had magnificent plans and dreams; he was indolent, and, fell into the terrible habit of opium, he left great works incomplete, he married in haste and repented at leisure; he led his life at the mercy of his friends.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** How did Coleridge's childhood influence his poetic mind in later times?
- Q 2:** What, according to you, is the meaning of 'Pantisocracy'?
- Q 3:** Identify the basic differences between Wordsworth and Coleridge as Romantic poets.

5.3.2 His Works

Most of the early works of Coleridge are tinged by a sense of radicalism and political reform. For example, one of his early works "Sonnets on Eminent Characters" written in 1794 is clearly partisan defining enemies and friends to the political cause. Another poem "France: An Ode" published in 1798, tends to distinguish the 'spirit of divinest Liberty' which, according to Coleridge, was to be found in the midst of nature. The context of such poems can also be traced in Coleridge's political commitment and his denunciation of monarchy and aristocracy at its worst.

Around 1795, he met William Wordsworth and both worked together with a revolutionary enthusiasm for change in society and literature. Their close association bore fruits in the form of conversation poems like "The Lime-tree bower my Prison", "Frost at Midnight", "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" which were written in between 1797-1798. Poems like "The Lime-tree bower my Prison" and "Frost at Midnight" suggest a Wordsworthian sense of transcendental reality of natural phenomena: the first one being an address to his school friend Charles Lamb, interlinks human affection, a sense of joy and unity in the midst of natural world. The second, on the other hand, is a school day memory of displacement and loneliness. The contrast between town and country, rural companionship and urban isolation are also the important themes in the poem. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is one of his most memorable contributions to **Lyrical Ballads**. The

poem takes the form of a voyage discovery, but it also beautifully describes the psychodrama concerning the guilt of the Mariner who killed an albatross. "Kubla Khan", on the other hand, is derived from Coleridge's wide reading of mythology, history and comparative religion. Another important poem "Christabel", intended originally for the publication in the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* but refused by Wordsworth for its strangeness, is in many ways a complement to "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". It too echoes the style of old ballads and links Christabel's experience of life and death to that of the Mariner.

In 1802, Coleridge composed "Dejection: An Ode", often considered his last important poem. It opens with an epigraph and is marked by an acknowledgement of the failure to respond to natural phenomena and of the decay of an imaginative joy. However, during the early 1800, Coleridge became increasingly aware of his poetic inspiration, and became interested in the processes and implications of 'critical theory'. Despite a visible decline in his Pantisocratic ventures and his revolutionary vows, he continued to delve deeper into the central principle of his philosophy: the ultimate unity and invisibility in the process of creation. The result was his thought provoking *Biographia Literaria* (1817) where he proclaimed his 'esemplastic' or unifying power of Imagination. This book is a meditation on poetry, poets and above all the nature of the poetic imagination. However, his later writings are preoccupied with religious issues, with the problem of belief and joy of believing, with a moral concern with the inward impulses, and with a criticism of the Scriptures. His subsequent publication of *The Constitution of the Church and State* (1829) brings to a climax his concern with dynamic unity, and constitutes a part of the national debate on reform.

Coleridge's prose works displayed a more openly social and religious inclination. His two *Lay Sermons* (1816, 1817) were addressed to the 'Higher' and 'Middle' classes on questions of reform and moral responsibility. His three-volume edition of *The*

Friend makes a Baconian attempt to explain the growth of knowledge; *Aids to Reflection* (1825) had a profound influence on Sterling, Kingsley, and the young Christian Socialists; and his short monograph entitled *Church and State* (1830), is based on the concept of national 'Culture' which was further taken up by Matthew Arnold and Cardinal Newman in the succeeding age. Coleridge's lectures on general literature and philosophy have survived in the form of notes and shorthand reports. All these later works develop Coleridge's leading critical ideas, concerning Imagination and Fancy; Reason and Understanding; Symbolism and Allegory; Organic and Mechanical Form; Culture and Civilization. The dialectical way he expresses them is one of his clearest debts to German Romantic philosophy, and represents a decisive counter-attack against British utilitarianism. His final position is that of a Romantic conservative and Christian radical, who strangely foreshadows much of the spiritual 'anxiety' of European existentialism. [Adapted from Margaret Drabble]

Some Important Contexts of Coleridge's Works: [Adapted from Gale Encyclopaedia]

Coleridge's career as an intellectual figure spans several decades and encompasses major works in several different fields, including poetry, criticism, philosophy, and theology. Because of the richness and subtlety of his prose style, his startling and often profound insights, and his active, inquiring mind, Coleridge is now generally regarded as the most profound and significant prose writer of the English Romantic period.

Spiritual Symbolism: The poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" perhaps best incorporates both Coleridge's imaginative use of verse and the intertwining of reality and fantasy. The Mariner kills the Albatross in bad faith, subjecting himself to the hostility of the forces that govern the universe. However, it is unclear how these forces are meant to relate to one another—whether the Life-in-Death is in league with the submerged spirit, or whether their

simultaneous appearance is simply a coincidence. After earning the curse for killing the bird, the Mariner is able to gain access to the favour of God—being able to regain his ability to pray—only by realizing that the monsters around him are beautiful in God's eyes and that he should love them as he should have loved the Albatross. In the final part, the Mariner's encounter with a Hermit will spell out this message explicitly, and you have learnt why the Mariner stopped the Wedding-Guest to tell him this story. The tale of a seaman who kills an albatross, the poem presents a variety of religious and supernatural images to depict a moving spiritual journey of doubt, renewal, and eventual redemption. We can consider the poem to be an allegorical record of Coleridge's own spiritual pilgrimage.

Influence of German Romantic Philosophy: The *Biographia Literaria*, was inspired by his disdain for the 18th century empiricists who relied on observation and experimentation to formulate their aesthetic theories. In this work, he turned to the German philosophers like Kant and Schelling for a more universal interpretation of art. From Schelling, Coleridge drew his "exaltation of art to a metaphysical role", and his contention that art is analogous to nature is borrowed from Kant.

Definition of Imagination: Of the different sections in the *Biographia Literaria*, perhaps the most often studied is Coleridge's definition of the imagination. He describes two kinds of imagination, the primary and the secondary. According to Coleridge, the purpose of poetry was to provide pleasure "through the medium of beauty."

Shakespeare Criticism: Coleridge's other great critical achievement is his work on Shakespeare. His Shakespearean criticism is among the most important in the English language, although it was never published in formal essays. His emphasis on individual psychology and characterization marked the inception of a new critical approach to Shakespeare, rendering a profound influence on later studies.

Genesis of the poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”:

The first suggestion to Coleridge appears to have come from a strange dream related to him by a friend, in which appeared a skeleton ship with figures in it. Wordsworth said: “Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge’s invention, but certain parts I suggested; for example, some crime was to be committed which should bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards wanted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime, and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke’s Voyages a day or two before that, while doubling Cape Horn, they frequently saw albatrosses in that latitude, the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings twelve or thirteen feet. “Suppose,” said Wordsworth, “you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.” The incident was thought fit for the purpose and adopted accordingly. Wordsworth also said: “I suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem. The gloss with which it was subsequently accompanied, was not thought of by either of us at the time, at least not a hint of it was given to me, and I have no doubt it was a gratuitous afterthought. We began the composition together on that, to me, memorable evening. I furnished two or three lines at the beginning of the poem, in particular, “And listen’d like a three years’ child:/ The Mariner had his will.” These trifling contributions, all but one, which Mr. Coleridge has with unnecessary scrupulosity recorded, slipped out of his mind, as they well might. As we endeavoured to proceed conjointly (I speak of the same evening), our respective manners proved so widely different, that it would have been quite presumptuous in me to do anything but separate from an undertaking upon which I could only have been a clog.”

LET US KNOW

In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge refers to his discussion with Wordsworth regarding two contrasting kinds of poetry—one dealing with common humdrum everyday events presented in a furnished manner with the help of the poet’s imagination; the other dealing with supernatural elements underlying which there is a concern with real human actions and situations. In Chapter 16 of his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge writes: “In this idea originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads*, in which it was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to produce for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for a moment, which constitutes poetic faith.” You will soon understand that the poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” was written to illustrate this faith of the poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention the most notable poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

5.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF COLERIDGE AS A ROMANTIC POET

By now, you must have realised that Coleridge was a major figure in the English Romantic movement. He is best known for three poems, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”, “Kubla Khan”, and “Christabel”. Although the three poems were poorly received during Coleridge’s lifetime, they are now praised as classic examples of imaginative verses. The influence of the Ancient Mariner rings clear in Shelley and Keats in the next generation. Whereas, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, and Swinburne are among their Victorian inheritors. In the title of W. H. Auden’s “Look, Stranger!” (1936), the echo of the Mariner’s exhortation, “Listen, Stranger!” from the text of

1798, shows how far Coleridge's voice would carry. Coleridge was also influential as a critic, especially with *Biographia Literaria*. His criticism, which examines the nature of poetic creation and stresses the relationship between emotion and intellect, helped free literary thoughts from the neoclassical strictures of 18th century scholars.

In his lifetime, Coleridge was renowned throughout Britain and Europe as one of the Lake Poets, a close-knit group of writers including William Wordsworth and Robert Southey. Today, Coleridge is considered the premier poet-critic of modern English tradition, distinguished for the scope and influence of his thinking about literature as much as for his innovative verse. However, Coleridge has been variously criticised as a political turncoat, a drug addict, a plagiarist, and a mystic humbug, whose wrecked career left nothing but a handful of magical early poems. However, it has almost been established that he rendered a shaping influence on English Romanticism with his criticism along with his friend Wordsworth. Critical estimation of Coleridge, the poet and his works increased significantly from the time of his death to the twentieth century.



5.5 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Samuel Taylor Coleridge is one of the important English poet-critics, philosophers and theologians of the Romantic era. With his friend Wordsworth, he became the founder of the Romantic Movement in England. Coleridge was also a member of the group of poets known as the "Lake Poets". He is well known for his poems like "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan". He is well known for the major critical work *Biographia Literaria*. His works may be seen in terms of Spiritual Symbolism, Definition of Imagination, Influence of German Romantic Philosophy, Shakespeare Criticism and so on.



5.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Albert, Edward. (1975). *History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- 2) Appelbaum, Stanley. (ed.) (1992). *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner and Other Poems*. New York: Dover Publications.
- 3) Bowra, C. M. (1999). *The Romantic Imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press
- 4) Carter, Ronald & John McRae. (1997). *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. London: Routledge.
- 5) Chatwin, D. (1980). *Notes on Coleridge's Poetry*. London: Mathuen Paperback Ltd.
- 6) Daiches, David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature. Vol II*. New Delhi: Random House.
- 7) Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). Oxford University Press.
- 8) Entry on Coleridge in Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). OUP.
- 9) Entry on Coleridge in *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature*.
- 10) Fry, Paul H. (ed.) (1999). *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner: Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*. Bedford: St. Martin's.
- 11) Milne, Ira Mark. *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature. Vol 1*.
- 12) Sanders, Andrew. (1999). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.



5.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Coleridge was a talented and imaginative boy... ..he was a voracious reader of fairy tales and acted out the scenes in them...

...the dream world of his own creation influenced his future upbringing as a poet of fantastic and supernatural stories.

Ans to Q 2: "Pantisocracy," generally means the equal rule of all...
...originally it was a part of a proposition to form a 'Pantisocratic' community on the banks of the Susquehanna in Pennsylvania...
...along with doing other works the members decided to devote equal time to philosophy, poetry and all the arts.

Ans to Q 3: Wordsworth was severe, cold, much given to calm judgment; Coleridge was impulsive, erring, warm-hearted... Wordsworth led a correct, diligent life; while Coleridge had magnificent plans and dreams; he was indolent, and, fell into the terrible habit of opium eating.

Ans to Q 4: "Dejection: An Ode"... "...Christabel"... "...The Lime-tree bower my Prison"... "...Frost at Midnight"... "...The Ancient Mariner"... "...Kubla Khan" and so on.



5.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Provide a detailed sketch of Coleridge's poetry with reference to some of his great poetic works.
- Q 2:** Discuss some of the important contexts of the poetic works of S. T. Coleridge.
- Q 3:** "The poems of Coleridge are remarkable for its precise observation". Discuss with references to the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".
- Q 4:** Discuss Coleridge's importance as a major poet of the Romantic period with particular contribution to English Romanticism.

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UNIT 6: SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE: “THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 6.1 Learning Objectives
- 6.2 Introduction
- 6.3 Reading the Poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
 - 6.3.1 The Texts of the Poems
 - 6.3.2 Reading the Poem
 - 6.3.3 Major Themes
 - 6.3.4 Coleridge’s Poetic Style
- 6.4 Let us Sum up
- 6.6 Further Reading
- 6.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 6.8 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- explain the poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and justify its importance as a ‘nature poem’
- identify the major themes prevalent in the poem and assess their implications
- discuss the relationship between Coleridge the critic and “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”
- read the poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” as an important contribution to English Romanticism.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will get an opportunity to read about the poem “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this poem, an old sailor or Mariner narrates the horrible sequence of events, which followed after he had shot an albatross during his trip through the sea. His ship was becalmed; he became subjected to

nightmarish visions and to an extended period of suffering. Even his water supply ran out in punishment for his deed. However, when the Mariner blesses some sea-creatures, his offence against the power of nature, supposedly caused by the killing of the bird, was forgiven, and he is able to return home becoming a wiser man through his suffering. You should notice that the whole poem is written in the form of a medieval ballad. After you finish reading this unit, you will understand that this poem is an excellent example of Coleridge's nature poetry.

6.3 READING THE POEM "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER"

6.3.1 The Texts of the Poems

It is assumed that Wordsworth and Coleridge jointly discussed the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" during its initial stage and Wordsworth might have suggested one or two ideas or even wrote one or two phrases for the poem. However, in no way the poem can be seen as a joint venture of the two poets. It is also because the kind of nightmarish world that Coleridge portrayed in the poem was foreign to Wordsworth who instead recorded in some early criticism of Coleridge that he could not understand the poem at all. However, the poem continued to remain in the successive editions of *Lyrical Ballads* although his *Christabel* was eventually dropped. Perhaps Wordsworth could not really understand the role of the conscious mind while upholding the world of nightmare, horror. This poem invites many discussions and it is almost not possible to discuss all the aspects of this poem in this unit. So, you are advised to read some of the books mentioned in the recommended reading list.

PART I

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

The Bridegroom's doors are opened wide, 5
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'
He holds him with his skinny hand,

'There was a ship,' quoth he.	10	And chased us south along.	
'Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!'		With sloping masts and dipping prow,	45
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.		As who pursued with yell and blow	
He holds him with his glittering eye—		Still treads the shadow of his foe,	
The Wedding-Guest stood still,		And forward bends his head,	
And listens like a three years' child:	15	The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,	
The Mariner hath his will.		And southward aye we fled.	50
The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:		And now there came both mist and snow,	
He cannot choose but hear;		And it grew wondrous cold:	
And thus spake on that ancient man,		And ice, mast-high, came floating by,	
The bright-eyed Mariner.	20	As green as emerald.	
'The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,		And through the drifts the snowy clifts	55
Merrily did we drop		Did send a dismal sheen:	
Below the kirk, below the hill,		Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—	
Below the lighthouse top.		The ice was all between.	
The Sun came up upon the left,	25	The ice was here, the ice was there,	
Out of the sea came he!		The ice was all around:	60
And he shone bright, and on the right		It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,	
Went down into the sea.		Like noises in a swound!	
Higher and higher every day,		At length did cross an Albatross,	
Till over the mast at noon—'	30	Thorough the fog it came;	
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,		As if it had been a Christian soul,	65
For he heard the loud bassoon.		We hailed it in God's name.	
The bride hath paced into the hall,		It ate the food it ne'er had eat,	
Red as a rose is she;		And round and round it flew.	
Nodding their heads before her goes	35	The ice did split with a thunder-fit;	
The merry minstrelsy.		The helmsman steered us through!	70
The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,		And a good south wind sprung up behind;	
Yet he cannot choose but hear;		The Albatross did follow,	
And thus spake on that ancient man,		And every day, for food or play,	
The bright-eyed Mariner.	40	Came to the Mariner's hollo!	
And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he		In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,	75
Was tyrannous and strong:		It perched for vespers nine;	
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,		Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,	

Glimmered the white Moon-shine.'
 'God save thee, ancient Mariner!
 From the fiends, that plague thee thus!— 80
 Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
 I shot the ALBATROSS. 82

PART II

The Sun now rose upon the right:
 Out of the sea came he,
 Still hid in mist, and on the left 85
 Went down into the sea.
 And the good south wind still blew behind,
 But no sweet bird did follow,
 Nor any day for food or play
 Came to the Mariner's hollo! 90
 And I had done a hellish thing,
 And it would work 'em woe:
 For all averred, I had killed the bird
 That made the breeze to blow.
 Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay, 95
 That made the breeze to blow!
 Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
 The glorious Sun uprist:
 Then all averred, I had killed the bird
 That brought the fog and mist. 100
 'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
 That bring the fog and mist.
 The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
 The furrow followed free;
 We were the first that ever burst 105
 Into that silent sea.
 Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
 'Twas sad as sad could be;

And we did speak only to break
 The silence of the sea! 110
 All in a hot and copper sky,
 The bloody Sun, at noon,
 Right up above the mast did stand,
 No bigger than the Moon.
 Day after day, day after day, 115
 We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
 As idle as a painted ship
 Upon a painted ocean.
 Water, water, every where,
 And all the boards did shrink; 120
 Water, water, every where,
 Nor any drop to drink.
 The very deep did rot: O Christ!
 That ever this should be!
 Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs 125
 Upon the slimy sea.
 About, about, in reel and rout
 The death-fires danced at night;
 The water, like a witch's oils,
 Burnt green, and blue and white. 130
 And some in dreams assurèd were
 Of the Spirit that plagued us so;
 Nine fathom deep he had followed us
 From the land of mist and snow.
 And every tongue, through utter drought, 135
 Was withered at the root;
 We could not speak, no more than if
 We had been choked with soot.
 Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
 Had I from old and young! 140
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross
 About my neck was hung. 142

PART III

There passed a weary time. Each throat
 Was parched, and glazed each eye.
 A weary time! a weary time! 145
 How glazed each weary eye,
 When looking westward, I beheld
 A something in the sky.
 At first it seemed a little speck,
 And then it seemed a mist; 150
 It moved and moved, and took at last
 A certain shape, I wist.
 A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!
 And still it neared and neared:
 As if it dodged a water-sprite, 155
 It plunged and tacked and veered.
 With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
 We could nor laugh nor wail;
 Through utter drought all dumb we stood!
 I bit my arm, I sucked the blood, 160
 And cried, A sail! a sail!
 With throats unslaked, with black lips baked,
 Agape they heard me call:
 Gramercy! they for joy did grin,
 And all at once their breath drew in. 165
 As they were drinking all.
 See! see! (I cried) she tacks no more!
 Hither to work us weal;
 Without a breeze, without a tide,
 She steadies with upright keel! 170
 The western wave was all a-flame.
 The day was well nigh done!
 Almost upon the western wave
 Rested the broad bright Sun;

When that strange shape drove suddenly 175
 Betwixt us and the Sun.
 And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,
 (Heaven's Mother send us grace!)
 As if through a dungeon-grate he peered
 With broad and burning face. 180
 Alas! (thought I, and my heart beat loud)
 How fast she nears and nears!
 Are those *her* sails that glance in the Sun,
 Like restless gossameres?
 Are those *her ribs* through which the Sun 185
 Did peer, as through a grate?
 And is that Woman all her crew?
 Is that a DEATH? and are there two?
 Is DEATH that woman's mate?
Her lips were red, *her* looks were free, 190
 Her locks were yellow as gold:
 Her skin was as white as leprosy,
 The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
 Who thicks man's blood with cold.
 The naked hulk alongside came, 195
 And the twain were casting dice;
 'The game is done! I've won! I've won!'
 Quoth she, and whistles thrice.
 The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out;
 At one stride comes the dark; 200
 With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
 Off shot the spectre-bark.
 We listened and looked sideways up!
 Fear at my heart, as at a cup,
 My life-blood seemed to sip! 205
 The stars were dim, and thick the night,
 The steersman's face by his lamp gleamed white;
 From the sails the dew did drip—

Till clomb above the eastern bar		I looked upon the rotting sea,	240
The hornèd Moon, with one bright star	210	And drew my eyes away;	
Within the nether tip.		I looked upon the rotting deck,	
One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,		And there the dead men lay.	
Too quick for groan or sigh,		I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;	
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,		But or ever a prayer had gusht,	245
And cursed me with his eye.	215	A wicked whisper came, and made	
Four times fifty living men,		My heart as dry as dust.	
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)		I closed my lids, and kept them close,	
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,		And the balls like pulses beat;	
They dropped down one by one.		For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the	
The souls did from their bodies fly,—	220	sky	250
They fled to bliss or woe!		Lay dead like a load on my weary eye,	
And every soul, it passed me by,		And the dead were at my feet.	
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!	223	The cold sweat melted from their limbs,	
		Nor rot nor reek did they:	
<u>PART IV</u>		The look with which they looked on me	255
		Had never passed away.	
'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!		An orphan's curse would drag to hell	
I fear thy skinny hand!	225	A spirit from on high;	
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,		But oh! more horrible than that	
As is the ribbed sea-sand.		Is the curse in a dead man's eye!	260
I fear thee and thy glittering eye,		Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,	
And thy skinny hand, so brown.'—		And yet I could not die.	
Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!	230	The moving Moon went up the sky,	
This body dropt not down.		And no where did abide:	
Alone, alone, all, all alone,		Softly she was going up,	265
Alone on a wide wide sea!		And a star or two beside—	
And never a saint took pity on		Her beams bemoaned the sultry main,	
My soul in agony.	235	Like April hoar-frost spread;	
The many men, so beautiful!		But where the ship's huge shadow lay,	
And they all dead did lie:		The charmèd water burnt always	270
And a thousand thousand slimy things		A still and awful red.	
Lived on; and so did I.		Beyond the shadow of the ship,	

I watched the water-snakes:		And still my body drank.	
They moved in tracks of shining white,		I moved, and could not feel my limbs:	305
And when they reared, the elfish light	275	I was so light—almost	
Fell off in hoary flakes.		I thought that I had died in sleep,	
Within the shadow of the ship		And was a blessed ghost.	
I watched their rich attire:		And soon I heard a roaring wind:	
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,		It did not come anear;	310
They coiled and swam; and every track	280	But with its sound it shook the sails,	
Was a flash of golden fire.		That were so thin and sere.	
O happy living things! no tongue		The upper air burst into life!	
Their beauty might declare:		And a hundred fire-flags sheen,	
A spring of love gushed from my heart,		To and fro they were hurried about!	315
And I blessèd them unaware:	285	And to and fro, and in and out,	
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,		The wan stars danced between.	
And I blessed them unaware.		And the coming wind did roar more loud,	
The self-same moment I could pray;		And the sails did sigh like sedge,	
And from my neck so free		And the rain poured down from one black cloud;	320
The Albatross fell off, and sank	290	The Moon was at its edge.	
Like lead into the sea.		The thick black cloud was cleft, and still	

PART V

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,		Like waters shot from some high crag,	
Beloved from pole to pole!		The lightning fell with never a jag,	325
To Mary Queen the praise be given!		A river steep and wide.	
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,	295	The loud wind never reached the ship,	
That slid into my soul.		Yet now the ship moved on!	
The silly buckets on the deck,		Beneath the lightning and the Moon	
That had so long remained,		The dead men gave a groan.	330
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;		They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,	
And when I awoke, it rained.	300	Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;	
My lips were wet, my throat was cold,		It had been strange, even in a dream,	
My garments all were dank;		To have seen those dead men rise.	
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,		The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;	335
		Yet never a breeze up-blew;	
		The Mariners all 'gan work the ropes,	

Where they were wont to do;		Singeth a quiet tune.	
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—		Till noon we quietly sailed on,	
We were a ghastly crew.	340	Yet never a breeze did breathe:	
The body of my brother's son		Slowly and smoothly went the ship,	375
Stood by me, knee to knee:		Moved onward from beneath.	
The body and I pulled at one rope,		Under the keel nine fathom deep,	
But he said nought to me.		From the land of mist and snow,	
'I fear thee, ancient Mariner!'	345	The spirit slid: and it was he	
Be calm, thou Wedding-Guest!		That made the ship to go.	380
'Twas not those souls that fled in pain,		The sails at noon left off their tune,	
Which to their corpses came again,		And the ship stood still also.	
But a troop of spirits blest:		The Sun, right up above the mast,	
For when it dawned—they dropped their arms,350		Had fixed her to the ocean:	
And clustered round the mast;		But in a minute she 'gan stir,	385
Sweet sounds rose slowly through their mouths,		With a short uneasy motion—	
And from their bodies passed.		Backwards and forwards half her length	
Around, around, flew each sweet sound,		With a short uneasy motion.	
Then darted to the Sun;	355	Then like a pawing horse let go,	
Slowly the sounds came back again,		She made a sudden bound:	390
Now mixed, now one by one.		It flung the blood into my head,	
Sometimes a-dropping from the sky		And I fell down in a swoond.	
I heard the sky-lark sing;		How long in that same fit I lay,	
Sometimes all little birds that are,	360	I have not to declare;	
How they seemed to fill the sea and air		But ere my living life returned,	395
With their sweet jargoning!		I heard and in my soul discerned	
And now 'twas like all instruments,		Two voices in the air.	
Now like a lonely flute;		'Is it he?' quoth one, 'Is this the man?	
And now it is an angel's song,	365	By him who died on cross,	
That makes the heavens be mute.		With his cruel bow he laid full low	400
It ceased; yet still the sails made on		The harmless Albatross.	
A pleasant noise till noon,		The spirit who bideth by himself	
A noise like of a hidden brook		In the land of mist and snow,	
In the leafy month of June,	370	He loved the bird that loved the man	
That to the sleeping woods all night		Who shot him with his bow.'	405

The other was a softer voice,		I could not draw my eyes from theirs,	440
As soft as honey-dew:		Nor turn them up to pray.	
Quoth he, 'The man hath penance done,		And now this spell was snapt: once more	
And penance more will do.'		I viewed the ocean green,	
'But tell me, tell me! speak again,	410	And looked far forth, yet little saw	
Thy soft response renewing—		Of what had else been seen—	445
What makes that ship drive on so fast?		Like one, that on a lonesome road	
What is the ocean doing?'		Doth walk in fear and dread,	
'Still as a slave before his lord,		And having once turned round walks on,	
The ocean hath no blast;	415	And turns no more his head;	
His great bright eye most silently		Because he knows, a frightful fiend	450
Up to the Moon is cast—		Doth close behind him tread.	
If he may know which way to go;		But soon there breathed a wind on me,	
For she guides him smooth or grim.		Nor sound nor motion made:	
See, brother, see! how graciously	420	Its path was not upon the sea,	
She looketh down on him.'		In ripple or in shade.	455
'But why drives on that ship so fast,		It raised my hair, it fanned my cheek	
Without or wave or wind?'		Like a meadow-gale of spring—	
'The air is cut away before,		It mingled strangely with my fears,	
And closes from behind.	425	Yet it felt like a welcoming.	
Fly, brother, fly! more high, more high!		Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,	460
Or we shall be belated:		Yet she sailed softly too:	
For slow and slow that ship will go,		Sweetly, sweetly blew the breeze—	
When the Mariner's trance is abated.'		On me alone it blew.	
I woke, and we were sailing on	430	Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed	
As in a gentle weather:		The light-house top I see?	465
'Twas night, calm night, the moon was high;		Is this the hill? is this the kirk?	
The dead men stood together.		Is this mine own countree?	
All stood together on the deck,		We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,	
For a charnel-dungeon fitter:	435	And I with sobs did pray—	
All fixed on me their stony eyes,		O let me be awake, my God!	470
That in the Moon did glitter.		Or let me sleep alway.	
The pang, the curse, with which they died,		The harbour-bay was clear as glass,	
Had never passed away:		So smoothly it was strewn!	

And on the bay the moonlight lay,
 And the shadow of the Moon. 475
 The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
 That stands above the rock:
 The moonlight steeped in silentness
 The steady weathercock.
 And the bay was white with silent light, 480
 Till rising from the same,
 Full many shapes, that shadows were,
 In crimson colours came.
 A little distance from the prow
 Those crimson shadows were: 485
 I turned my eyes upon the deck—
 Oh, Christ! what saw I there!
 Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat,
 And, by the holy rood!
 A man all light, a seraph-man, 490
 On every corse there stood.
 This seraph-band, each waved his hand:
 It was a heavenly sight!
 They stood as signals to the land,
 Each one a lovely light; 495
 This seraph-band, each waved his hand,
 No voice did they impart—
 No voice; but oh! the silence sank
 Like music on my heart.
 But soon I heard the dash of oars, 500
 I heard the Pilot's cheer;
 My head was turned perforce away
 And I saw a boat appear.
 The Pilot and the Pilot's boy,
 I heard them coming fast: 505
 Dear Lord in Heaven! it was a joy
 The dead men could not blast.

I saw a third—I heard his voice:
 It is the Hermit good!
 He singeth loud his godly hymns 510
 That he makes in the wood.
 He'll shrive my soul, he'll wash away
 The Albatross's blood. 513

PART VII

This Hermit good lives in that wood
 Which slopes down to the sea. 515
 How loudly his sweet voice he rears!
 He loves to talk with Marineres
 That come from a far countree.
 He kneels at morn, and noon, and eve—
 He hath a cushion plump: 520
 It is the moss that wholly hides
 The rotted old oak-stump.
 The skiff-boat neared: I heard them talk,
 'Why, this is strange, I trow!
 Where are those lights so many and fair, 525
 That signal made but now?'
 'Strange, by my faith!' the Hermit said—
 'And they answered not our cheer!
 The planks looked warped! and see those sails,
 How thin they are and sere! 530
 I never saw aught like to them,
 Unless perchance it were
 Brown skeletons of leaves that lag
 My forest-brook along;
 When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow, 535
 And the owllet whoops to the wolf below,
 That eats the she-wolf's young.'
 'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—

(The Pilot made reply)		And scarcely he could stand.	
I am a-feared'—'Push on, push on!'	540	'O shrieve me, shrieve me, holy man!'	
Said the Hermit cheerily.		The Hermit crossed his brow.	575
The boat came closer to the ship,		'Say quick,' quoth he, 'I bid thee say—	
But I nor spake nor stirred;		What manner of man art thou?'	
The boat came close beneath the ship,		Forthwith this frame of mine was wrenched	
And straight a sound was heard.	545	With a woful agony,	
Under the water it rumbled on,		Which forced me to begin my tale;	580
Still louder and more dread:		And then it left me free.	
It reached the ship, it split the bay;		Since then, at an uncertain hour,	
The ship went down like lead.		That agony returns:	
Stunned by that loud and dreadful sound, 550		And till my ghastly tale is told,	
Which sky and ocean smote,		This heart within me burns.	585
Like one that hath been seven days drowned		I pass, like night, from land to land;	
My body lay afloat;		I have strange power of speech;	
But swift as dreams, myself I found		That moment that his face I see,	
Within the Pilot's boat.	555	I know the man that must hear me:	
Upon the whirl, where sank the ship,		To him my tale I teach.	590
The boat spun round and round;		What loud uproar bursts from that door!	
And all was still, save that the hill		The wedding-guests are there:	
Was telling of the sound.		But in the garden-bower the bride	
I moved my lips—the Pilot shrieked	560	And bride-maids singing are:	
And fell down in a fit;		And hark the little vesper bell,	595
The holy Hermit raised his eyes,		Which biddeth me to prayer!	
And prayed where he did sit.		O Wedding-Guest! this soul hath been	
I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,		Alone on a wide wide sea:	
Who now doth crazy go,	565	So lonely 'twas, that God himself	
Laughed loud and long, and all the while		Scarce seemed there to be.	600
His eyes went to and fro.		O sweeter than the marriage-feast,	
'Ha! ha!' quoth he, 'full plain I see,		'Tis sweeter far to me,	
The Devil knows how to row.'		To walk together to the kirk	
And now, all in my own countree,	570	With a goodly company!—	
I stood on the firm land!		To walk together to the kirk,	605
The Hermit stepped forth from the boat,		And all together pray,	

While each to his great Father bends,		For the dear God who loveth us,	
Old men, and babes, and loving friends		He made and loveth all.	
And youths and maidens gay!		The Mariner, whose eye is bright,	
Farewell, farewell! but this I tell	610	Whose beard with age is hoar,	
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!		Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest	620
He prayeth well, who loveth well		Turned from the bridegroom's door.	
Both man and bird and beast.		He went like one that hath been stunned,	
He prayeth best, who loveth best		And is of sense forlorn:	
All things both great and small;	615	A sadder and a wiser man,	
		He rose the morrow morn.	625

In the winter of 1797-1798, Coleridge was living at a little village called Nether Stowey, at the foot of the Quantock Hills, about forty miles from Bristol. In the same neighbourhood at Alfoxden were also living Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy. Very often Wordsworth and Coleridge took long country walks, and they were under the strong, sweet influence of Dorothy Wordsworth. In November 1797, the three set off on a late hour, intending to meet the expenses of their journey by a poem to be composed jointly by the two poets. However, unfortunately, the scheme broke down, and Wordsworth's contribution was confined to half a dozen lines, and one or two suggestions. When first printed, this poem was introduced by the following ARGUMENT.

"How a ship having passed the Line, was driven by storms to the cold Country towards the South Pole ; and how from thence she made her course to the tropical latitude of the great Pacific Ocean; and of the strange things that befell; and in what manner the Ancient Mariner came back to his own Country."

Therefore, the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (originally *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*) comprises seven parts and is often considered to be a signal shift in British Romantic literature. The following is an attempt at reading the poem in some detail.

Part I of the poem begins with an intense drama and mystery when the Mariner, a weird and almost a supernatural

figure, intrudes upon the everyday world of celebration and catches the hand of the wedding guest with his 'glittering eye' and 'skinny hand'. He is obsessively determined to tell 'his' story—"There was a ship", quoth he' and although the wedding guest protests, he finally conforms to the hypnotic power of the eyes of the Mariner. As the following lines, suggest:

"He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.
The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;" (**Lines** 13-18)

However, the Mariner begins his tale in a carefree manner, which suggests the everyday, carefree world of the time in which the Mariner started his journey.

"The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top." (**Lines** 21-24)

Although for a time, the ordinary world can still be heard as we find in lines 31-40, once the ship moves South to the equator, the story of the Mariner receives new momentum. Storms blow the ship to the Antarctic, which has been evoked by Coleridge with extraordinary vividness. The beauty and terror of the polar region, the sight and sound of the ice are described in telling details causing surprise in our minds as to how Coleridge could conjure up such vivid description of places in this poem. Now the albatross, a large arctic bird prone to follow ships, seems like a common companion to the crewmembers of the ship. There is a sense of relief with the ice splitting and the unnatural atmosphere being broken by the friendliness of the albatross. However, a sudden dramatic change in the final verse of the first part of the

poem comes through the fateful act of killing the albatross by the Mariner.

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?'—with my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS." (**Lines** 79-82)

Part II begins with the sudden change of direction in the story, which the act of killing of the bird provides. Soon we realise that the ship is sailing North before a South wind towards the Pacific Ocean. In two long stanzas, the poet tells us the vacillating opinions of the crew on the Mariner's act of killing the albatross, judging it purely based on external circumstances without any serious consideration of rightness or wrongness.

"And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow! (**Lines** 91-96)
Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird
That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist." (**Lines** 97-102)

Coleridge's beautiful use of language is explicit in the next verses that follow. From lines 103 to 110, we see how the ship suddenly comes to a standstill like the breeze itself.

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea." (**Lines** 103-106)

The verses that follow emphasise the conditions of lifeless stillness, the pitiless paradox of undrinkable waters and moisture drawn even out of the ship's timber. There is an atmospheric change with the sky being 'hot and copper', the sun being no longer glorious but bloody, and the sea being rotten and slimy. There is indeed something intensely nightmarish about the fire dancing on the oily surface of the sea, which helps in pervading the sense of horror intended by the poet.

"About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green, and blue and white." (Lines 127-130)

Then, for the first time, we hear of the polar spirit who will reappear in part five of the poem. Many of the sailors deem it to be responsible for their horrifying plight.

Part III carries over the horror of stillness followed by the abrupt and supernatural halt of the ship in the midst of seawater. A fear is born in the minds of the sailors out of the realisation that the ship has been unaided by sea wind and that the tide is reinforced by a nightmarish image of a skeleton ship through which the sun glares as though through prison bars. As the ship draws nears them, the Mariner undergoes a sense of confusion and uncertainty. He perceives the figure of DEATH and with him a woman whose colour and beauty becoming chillingly lurid.

"Her lips were red, *her* looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was as white as leprosy,
The Night-mare LIFE-IN-DEATH was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold." (Lines 190-194)

The scene is followed by a dice game between "Death" and "Life in Death" for the possession of the Mariner. However, the suddenness and swiftness with which the sun gives way to

darkness helps the skeleton ship to disappear. The fear of the supernatural is once again reinforced by the dimness of the stars, the thick darkness, the eerie lamp on the steer man's face and the appearance of the moon. Coleridge knew that there are spots of light on the darkened surface of the crescent moon, but for the sailors there was an old superstition that a 'star gogged moon' boded ill. The death of the crew provides the horrible experience to the Mariner as every single death reminds him of his first impious act. For this, read the following stanzas:

"Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.
The souls did from their bodies fly,—
They fled to bliss or woe!
And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!" (Lines 216-223)

Part IV begins with the voice of the wedding guest who suddenly breaks the spell by voicing the following lines:

"I fear thee, ancient Mariner!
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribbed sea-sand.
I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown.—
Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!
This body dropt not down." (Lines 224-231)

However, the Mariner assures him that he will not cause him any harm as he is not a Ghost, and since Death did not possess him it is only "Life in Death" which has made him what he is. The Mariner starts feeling guilty for the death of 'many men so beautiful and identifies himself with slime and rottenness. In a number of beautifully written stanzas, the poet conjures up the hell-like suffering that the Mariner undergoes.

Whereas in **Part IV** there was an intimate psychological relationship between the Mariner and his surroundings, in this **Part V** the Mariner just remains a detached onlooker of nature's fury. The sudden storm that is blowing is exciting and invigorating, full of precise details. This exemplifies Coleridge's careful handling of the senses of sight and hearing. Although the sound of the storm itself is enough to make the ship tremble, it is quite away from the Mariner and his ship. Yet, the storm, much supernaturally, triggers off the rising up of the dead men. Thus, also begins the homeward journey of the ship. The Mariner raises the dead men, which symbolically suggests the lifting of the curse and the beginning of the restoration of the Mariner to some sort of society, as the following lines suggest:

"The body of my brother's son
Stood by me, knee to knee:
The body and I pulled at one rope,
But he said nought to me." (**Lines** 341-344)

Therefore, we find in this section, after the tropical hell, the prevailing temperate climate of spiritual refreshment. However, the elements of the Supernatural remain to be complicated. The Polar spirit apparently directs the ship's movement but the Mariner faints and hears spirit voices stating that his penance for the act of killing the albatross is not yet over.

In **Part VI**, the spirit voices seem to have continued its supernatural influence over the ship's journey. But the breaking of the curse is finely documented by the poet as the Mariner is first held by the gaze of the dead man who "neither spake nor moved their eyes", then his release and fear to look back at his erstwhile companions, finally the receiving of spiritual regeneration from the fresh breeze blowing. The entire part of the poem culminates in the emotion of the return.

"Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?"

Is this mine own countree?"
 "We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
 And I with sobs did pray—
 O let me be awake, my God!
 Or let me sleep always." (Lines 464-471)

Part VII The portrayal of the character of the hermit along with the Pilot and the Pilot's boy by the poet is a very effective device for bringing us back to the world we are used to inhabit. His conversations in the boat relate the Mariner's ship to images of menace in the natural world. To the 'superstitious' Pilot, the ship 'hath a fiendish look' and when the ship sinks and the Mariner is rescued, the Pilot's boy goes insane. Even the hermit finds it difficult to resist the ghastly power of the Mariner. Although the Mariner's desperate request for absolution (forgiveness for a person's sin) is not met with, the hermit does release him from his agony by urging him to tell the story. In addition, subsequently, the Mariner must at intervals keep retelling his story:

"Since then, at an uncertain hour,
 That agony returns:
 And till my ghastly tale is told,
 This heart within me burns.
 I pass, like night, from land to land;
 I have strange power of speech;
 That moment that his face I see,
 I know the man that must hear me:
 To him my tale I teach." (Lines 582-590)

Thus, the poem ends with a return to the wedding guest.
 But the Mariner's tale will live on.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How did Coleridge and Wordsworth conceive the idea of the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"?

Q 5: What is the significance of Part V of the poem?

6.3.3 Major Themes

The following are some of the important thematic aspects of the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

Autobiographical Impulse:

It is quite possible to argue that the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is in some sense an autobiographical poem. Though there is no hint of the purpose of the voyage, it does bear many resemblances with the voyages undertaken in the 16th century as the line suggests: "We were the first that ever burst/ Into that silent sea". So, the voyage undertaken by the Mariner may be seen as an intellectual discovery as experienced by Coleridge himself. It is also suggested that Coleridge, through his essential passivity, aggravated by his indolence and opium eating, 'shot the Albatross' of his creative imagination and so brought upon himself the hell of 'Life and Death'. Moreover, much of the emotional and spiritual experience of the Mariner was written out of Coleridge's own experience and some of the nightmarish effects may have had their origin in his opium-addicted dreams.

Nature Poetry and Coleridge:

The poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" can be read in the context of 18th century development of the arts of landscape painting and gardening following which natural description began to be written for its own sake. It is to be mentioned that both Wordsworth and Coleridge brought a new and generally more lasting perspective to nature poetry as they viewed nature with intensity and sensitivity. Coleridge is, in fact, an innovator in the field of poetry as he used a richly sensuous language and a form of poetry that allowed easy movement between the outer landscape of nature and the inner landscape of the mind. Such poems are often called conversational poems in that they refer to a specific time and place; often there is a specific person to whom the poet is speaking. They are written in relatively straightforward language as exemplified by the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner".

Moral Implications of the Poem:

The moral implications of the poem are related to the killing of the albatross. Although in the killing of the albatross the motive of the Mariner is not raised at all, it is implied that the bird was a friend to the sailors and that its killing was in some way a violation of what was due to a creature of nature. Perhaps it is not an exaggeration to say that the killing of the albatross was not in essence different from the killing of a fellow human being. Yet, for all that, the poem actually says, the Mariner's act could have been an accidental one. Hence, we should not expect a straightforward case of crime, punishment and redemption. Secondly, there is a problem with the punishment also. We the readers are told that the punishment is brought by the Polar Spirit in vengeance for the killing of its favourite. That the Mariner should be punished is fine, but the sailors too suffer horribly and die and we cannot help feeling that the sailors are really no more than pawns in the game of vengeance against the Mariner. Thus, we are presented with a universe in which suffering is visited upon the simple and trivial acts under which human beings have almost no control. Whatever it may be, to the Mariner, love and respect for all God's creatures is a condition of spiritual well-being and kinship with his fellow humans.

Christian Elements:

The albatross which has been killed by the Mariner appears through the fog 'as if it had been a Christian soul'. Interesting to note that the Mariner's experience is tangled and bewildering. He is an outcast who witnesses an action penetrating into the physical world. Therefore, despite the framework of a Catholic Christian faith and ritual, the Mariner appears to discover a series of meanings concerning the interdependency of life. Thus, his 'discovery' is both literal and spiritual. His coming back to the place from where he started his journey requires the

mechanisms of sufferings, but it is important to note that his pain is to be explored in the context of benevolence. Subsequently, the truth he realises stretch beyond more religious formulae to the consideration and affirmation of a universal harmony.

Coleridge the Critic and "The Rime of The Ancient Mariner":

The concept of Fancy and Imagination as propounded by Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter 13) forms the core of Coleridge's critical ideas. Fancy merely assembles and juxtaposes images and impressions without fusing them. However, Imagination actively moulds, transforms and tried to bring into unity what it perceives. Primary Imagination is nothing less than a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite I am. Through the Secondary Imagination, the mind "dissolves, diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate". The reading of the poem can be co-related to these basic critical ideas of Coleridge. Imagination need not relate to everyday world but can create its own make believe world. The world depicted in the "Ancient Mariner" is far removed from our familiar everyday world, which also brings the poem closer to another concept of Coleridge—the "willing suspension of disbelief". The reader must voluntarily suspend disbelief in order to appreciate the fantastic happenings in the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 7:** What, according to you, are some of the major themes in the poem?
- Q 8:** Briefly state the role played by Coleridge in the context of the 18th century nature poetry.
- Q 9:** In what ways can you trace the moral implication underlying the poem?
- Q 10:** State the basic contributions of Coleridge as a Romantic critic.

6.3.4 Coleridge's Poetic Style

It is important to note that while writing the poem, Coleridge adopted the form of a ballad, a popular Medieval verse form usually consisting of four line stanzas in simple rhythm. Unlike the stories in traditional ballads involving ordinary people through tales orally transmitted, Coleridge's poem incorporates suspense and horror. At the same time, Coleridge seems to have imagined the action of the story roughly in the 16th century. Although the rhyme scheme of a traditional ballad is abcb, in this poem Coleridge introduces variations by lengthening the stanzas into five or six lines. This is important because it adds to the poem's variety and helps us understand how Coleridge sought to use ideas or images beyond the restrictions of the four-line stanza form. Look at the following stanza from Part I that goes beyond four lines:

"With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward aye we fled." (**Lines** 45-50)

However, Coleridge does justice to the form of traditional ballads by keeping the feature of internal rhyme with a telling effect on the ear of the readers as we find in the following examples:

"It cracked and growled, and roared and howled"
(**Line** 61)

"With throats unslaked, with black lips baked"
(**Line** 157)

"With heavy thump a lifeless lump
They dropped down one by one"
(**Lines** 218-219)

Another important point to be noted is Coleridge's use of simple words and phrases. Very often, he uses a vocabulary that

might have been used by the ordinary people of his day and avoids complex phrases and complicated syntax. This is aligned with the form of the ballad— a kind of poetry meant only for the ordinary people and you should note that the Mariner himself is also an ordinary man caught up in extraordinary events. The effect of his heightened awareness on particular ideas and images is sought to be increased by repetition, which is a figure of speech used very freely and beautifully in the poem. Look at the following lines. Underlying such simple words is an intense expression about the sense of desolation experienced by the mariner.

“Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.” (**Lines** 232-35)

Another stylistic features of Coleridge in this poem relates to his exploitation of the appeal to the senses. In a varied way, this poem provides colour, sound and sensation of touch to a significant extent. You can easily read the poet’s descriptions of Polar ice in Part I, Sea creatures in Part IV, Storms and angelic sounds in Part V— all of which exemplify Coleridge’s power of imagination. Other subtle effects of the poem include *the agony of the beating pulse through a parched body* (**Lines** 248-252), *the blessed relief of wetness on the skin* (**Lines** 301-4), *shuddering in fear* (**Lines** 436-7, 446-451), *the feel of breeze* (**Lines** 456-9) and so on.

Finally, you are supposed to look at the variety in mood shifting throughout the poem—the moods of companionship and desolation, agony and relief, fear and joy, calmness and horror, malignity and beneficence, loathing and love etc. Look at the following stanzas that combine horror and serenity in its most rhythmic and musical effect.

“I closed my lids, and kept them close,
And the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky

Lay dead like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet." (**Lines** 247-252)

As we have already read, the whole poem is written in the form of a Mediaeval ballad. It is possible to see something of the allegorical and symbolic power of the poem. The lack of water represents the dryness of spirit, the becalmed ship symbolises the aimless soul of a man who has sinned and who awaits eventual redemption. The explicit moral is essentially Christian as we find in the following lines:

"Water, water, every where
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink." (**Lines** 119-122)
"He prayeth well who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.
He prayeth best who loveth best,
All things both great and small.
For the dear God, who loveth us,
He made and loveth all." (**Lines** 612-617)

Thus, we find Coleridge using a variety of stylistic devices, which add to his perfection as a great poet of the Romantic age.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: What are the important aspects of Coleridge's poetic style?

Q 12: What rhyme scheme did Coleridge use for this poem?



6.5 LET US SUM UP

As you come to the end of the unit, you have found that the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is unique among Coleridge's important works in different ways. From your reading of the various sections of this unit, you must have realised that it has little in common with the poetry of other Romantic poets like Wordsworth and

Keats. Rather, the scholarly notes, the epigraph, and the archaic language used in the poem combine to produce the impression that the "Rime" is a ballad of ancient times. This poem was first published in the 1797 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, and since then it came to be considered a great poem of Christian symbolism in terms of its moral lesson that "all creatures great and small" are created by God and should be loved. Critics have found in the "Rime" a number of interesting readings, ranging from Christian parable to political allegory.



6.6 FURTHER READING

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6.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 5: The first suggestion came from a strange dream related to him by a friend, in which appeared a skeleton ship with figures in

it ... much the greatest part of the story was invented by Coleridge ... Wordsworth also suggested some parts like crime committed which should bring 'life in death' upon the Old Mariner etc.

Ans to Q 6: In this part the Mariner remains a detached onlooker of nature's fury... this part exemplifies Coleridge's careful handling of the senses of sight and hearing... the terrible storm triggers off the rising up of the dead men supernaturally... in this part the Mariner also begins the homeward journey.

Ans to Q 7: Autobiographical Impulse... Nature Poetry and Coleridge... Moral Implications of the Poem... Christian Elements.

Ans to Q 8: The poem can be read in the context of 18th century development of the arts of landscape painting and gardening... both Wordsworth and Coleridge brought a new and generally more lasting perspective to nature poetry as they viewed nature with intensity and sensitivity.

Ans to Q 9: The killing of the albatross was in some way a violation of what was due to a creature of nature..... it is the violation of a trust..... there is a problem with the punishment also... that the Mariner is to be punished is fine, but the sailors too suffer horribly and die... to the Mariner, love and respect for all God's creatures becomes a condition of spiritual well being and kinship with his fellow humans.

Ans to Q 10: Coleridge's mediations on poetry, poets and poetic imagination can be derived from his *Biographia Literaria*... his theory of Fancy and Imagination and the distinctions between the two... Coleridge wished to revive the use of fantastic elements in poetry and the concept of "Willing Suspension of Disbelief" explained how a modern, enlightened audience might continue to enjoy such types of story.

Ans to Q 11: Coleridge adopted the form of Medieval ballad usually consisting of four line stanzas in simple rhythm... Coleridge does justice to the form by keeping the feature of internal rhyme...

...another important point to be noted is Coleridge's use of simple words and phrases... ...another stylistic feature of Coleridge in this poem relates to his exploitation of the appeal to the senses.

Ans to Q 12: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is written in loose, short ballad stanzas The meter is also somewhat loose, but odd lines are generally tetrameter... ...The rhymes generally alternate in an ABAB or ABABAB scheme... ...Many stanzas include couplets in this way—five-line stanzas, for example, are rhymed ABCCB, often with an internal rhyme in the first line, or ABAAB, without the internal rhyme.



6.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** In what ways, do you think, does Coleridge show his concern for the moral and the spiritual values in the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner"?
- Q 3:** How does Coleridge portray the natural world before and after the Ancient Mariner shoots the Albatross?
- Q 5:** In your opinion, is the Ancient Mariner's punishment for killing the Albatross fair? Whose fate is worse, the Ancient Mariner's or the sailors'? Why?
- Q 6:** Discuss Coleridge's use of imagery throughout "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". How does he use sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to inform the reader's experience of the story?
- Q 7:** Why do you think the Ancient Mariner kills the Albatross? Do his actions make him unusually cruel, or do they connect him to the whole of humanity?
- Q 8:** "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is a poem steeped in symbolism. Choose an aspect or character of the poem (such as the Albatross) and discuss its symbolic meanings.

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UNIT 7: JOHN KEATS: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 7.1 Learning Objectives
- 7.2 Introduction
- 7.3 John Keats: The Poet
 - 7.3.1 His Life
 - 7.3.2 His Works
- 7.4 Keats and the Tradition of English Odes
- 7.5 Reception of Keats as a Romantic Poet
- 7.6 Let us Sum up
- 7.7 Further Reading
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- obtain a general idea of the works of John Keats, the English Romantic poet
- situate Keats in the context of the British Romantic Movement and assess his contributions
- identify John Keats as an important poet critic of the Romantic Age.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 2 of the Course on English Poetry: Romantic to Victorian. In this unit, we shall discuss the life and works of yet another accomplished Romantic poet John Keats (1795–1821). Although, he died at the age of 25, he became one of the main figures of the Second Generation of Romantic poets, along with Byron and Shelly. His poems were not well received by critics during his lifetime. However, after his death, his reputation grew. By the end of the 19th century, he becomes one of the most beloved of the English poets. You will note that, Keats rendered a

significant influence on a diverse range of poets and writers. The Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, in his book *The Craft of Verse*, stated that his first encounter with Keats' work was the most significant literary experience of his life. His poetry, especially his odes, is characterised by sensual imagery. Some of the greatest poetic works of Keats include "I Stood Tip-toe Upon a Little Hill", "Sleep and Poetry", and the famous sonnet "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer". This unit shall help you to discuss the different aspects of John Keats as a Romantic poet.

7.3 JOHN KEATS: THE POET

In the following subsections, we shall look at the life and works of John Keats.

7.3.1 His Life

John Keats was the last born of the British Romantic poets who had a very brief poetic career but proved himself worthy of continuing popularity down the ages. What is astonishing is the fact that within a brief time span (comprising twenty-five years) he was able to add a rare perfection to his works, ensuring a permanent place in the English poetic tradition. Though open to the influence of other poets and sensitive to criticism, throughout his career, he turned out to be a most original and individual English poet. His development as a poet went in parallel with his continuous self-critical thinking and analysis, articulated in his famous letters. Because of his lower-middle class family background, he was denied of classical education but he was nevertheless extraordinarily well-read; he had recourse to John Lemprière's classical dictionary and read Chaucer, Spenser, Dante, Dryden, Boccaccio, Ariosto and Shakespeare. Traditionally seen as a poet of the senses, Keats was soon able to adopt the raw sensations and impulses into aesthetically heightened poetic articulation.



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

John Keats was born in London in 1795 to Thomas Keats and Frances Jennings. There are many myths woven around this poet, one of which is about his humble origin. There was, for instance, a belief that Keats was born in a coaching inn “The Swan and Hoop” and that his father was an ‘ostler’ in that inn. There was, however, little evidence to prove them. Yet, it is true that Keats faced financial troubles throughout his life. He did not have the privilege enjoyed by other Romantics like Byron and Shelley who were born into landed aristocratic families. Moreover, unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, Keats did not secure literary patronage either. Little is known of his father Thomas Keats; his mother was the daughter of John Jennings— a man of property who purchased the leasehold of ‘The Swan and Hoop’ in 1774. Keats had three brothers, George, Thomas and Edward, and a sister Fanny. It is to be acknowledged that it was George and Tom who played a significant role in the poet’s life.

Keats went to Clarke’s School in Enfield in 1803. Next year his father died by falling off a horse. Frances Jennings arranged a hasty marriage with William Rawlings and the couple took up a residence in The Swan and Hoop. In 1805, John Jennings died leaving a substantial estate to members of his family, but Frances challenged some of its terms, ultimately leaving the action incomplete. Soon, the Keats children left their mother and stepfather and went to live with their maternal grandmother. However, there is evidence to support that Keats’s mother was finally reconciled to her family. In the mean time, he was at Clarke’s school, where he learnt scientific and practical subjects, Latin and French. He developed an enthusiasm for Leigh Hunt at this stage, when his literary taste began to be strongly influenced by Cowden Clarke with whom he had friendship.

In 1819, Keats’s mother died and subsequently, he left school to be apprenticed to the surgeon and the apothecary Thomas Hammond. After apprenticeship, he registered as a medical student at a hospital in 1815. Contrary to the expectation of his family, his

long and expensive medical training did not give him financial security. He grew increasingly ambivalent about his medical career because it absorbs much of his writing time. Given his continuing financial trouble, it was a tough choice, which even pushed him to periods of depression. After securing the apothecary's license, however, he resolved to be a poet, not a surgeon.

Keats saw ravages of death in his family. In fact, the whole family suffered from Tuberculosis which had no medical treatment and cure until 1921. His brother had been suffering from the disease for a long time before he died. The same disease took the life of his mother. Another of his brothers George and his wife immigrated to America and died penniless racked by tuberculosis. In case of Keats after he left medical training he began to suffer from continuous cold; and in the beginning of the year 1821, he too reached the final stage of tuberculosis. Keats died on 23 February 1821 in a Protestant Cemetery in Rome. In accordance with his last wishes, he was buried under an unnamed tombstone containing only the words: 'Here lies one whose name was writ in water'. Although his literary career spanned only four years and consisted of just fifty-four poems, Keats demonstrated remarkable intellectual and artistic development.

7.3.2 His Works

Keats's poetic career was linked to his closeness to the radical journalist and poet Leigh Hunt whose rift with the government caused great disturbances. Keats was known to Shelly and others through his association with the radical brotherhood of Leigh Hunt. His first volume was published in 1817 and it almost went unnoticed in the critical circles. The Second volume of verse was published in 1818, and probably because of his link with Leigh Hunt. However, the Tory journals 'The Quarterly Review' and 'Blackwoods Magazine' made a savage attack on his poetry. We can understand how ruthless was the attack on Keats if we go by a comment on *Endymion* made by J. G. Lockhart in "Blackwood's Magazine": "it is a better and

wiser thing to be a starved apothecary than a starved poet; so back to the shop, Mr. John, back to plasters, pills and ointment boxes.”

Spenser was an early influence on Keats and the first volume of verse, *Poems* (1817) contained explicit imitation of the Elizabethan poet. That he was captivated by some poetic mannerisms of Spenser can also be gauged in poems like “Sleep and Beauty” and “I Stood Tip-toe upon a little Hill”. The second volume called *Endymion* is a long poem of over four thousand lines. It professes to tell the story of a lovely youth who was kissed by the moon-goddess on the summit of Mount Latmos. *Endymion* has its flaws and weaknesses; it cannot be called a mature work of Keats. Yet, it marks the budding of a style, which is distinctively Keatsian. *Endymion* was the attempt to move beyond the lyric to epic and narrative. Admittedly, the poem is over-exuberant and entangled and Keats himself recognised its shortcomings. However, Keats’ improvement was rapid; his mastery of dramatic and verbal effect and of narrative shape and tension was reflected in “The Eve of St. Agnes”.

As for the famous ‘Odes’, all nearly written in 1819, they have been regarded by many in subsequent times as the poet’s best known poems. There might be contrast and variations of mood among the poems (for instance, longing for escape from the clutch of reality in “Ode to a Nightingale” to calm of fruition in “To Autumn”), but all of them reflect a quest for true beauty. Douglas Bush opines that the odes are about the belief that whereas the momentary experience of beauty is fleeting, its embodiment in art form is an imperishable source of joy. As for the form and style, “To Autumn” has an eleven-line stanza and the rest are in stanzas of ten lines made up of the Shakespearean quatrains and the Petrarchan sestet.

You should remember that like the other Romantic poets, Keats also laid great importance on the faculty of imagination. Keats, in most of his poems, expresses a passionate love for the visible and the sensible world. In one of his letters, as elsewhere, he reveals this passion for sensation: “O for a life of sensation rather than of

thought!” and it moulds his poetic style in a big way. If you look at the sensuous nature of the poetic images available in this poem, it becomes clear that everywhere there is a relish in the concrete particularities of the visible world. The air of abundance created in the beginning, as we have suggested earlier, is not an abstraction; it is built through concrete image of the fruits: ‘load and bless with fruit the vines’, ‘bend with apples’, ‘swell the gourd’ and so on. Sometimes, the image also carries **tactile feel** as in ‘clammy cells’ whereas some are associated with the **sense of taste** ‘sweet kernel’, or even ‘clammy cells’. “To Autumn” is written in iambic pentameter (but with variations) with five stressed syllables in a line, each usually preceded by an unstressed syllable. Keats varies this form by the employment of Augustan inversion, sometimes using a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable at the beginning of a line.

Contrary to the **first stanza’s** exclusive focus on the visual, the **third stanza** beautifully combines the visual with the auditory. You can make a brief comparison with a poem by Wordsworth titled “Lines Written in Early Spring” which starts like this:

“I heard a thousand blended notes
While in a grove I sat reclined
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.”

The sound the poet hears is vague, indistinguishable as suggested in ‘blended notes’. Contrastingly, as is characteristic of Keats, autumnal music is not vague or indistinct; it is made up of diverse sounds of birds, animals and insects. Therefore, the humming of criteria generally set by reason and common sense. It is pertinent to mention in this context that the concept of ‘negative capability’ is more modernist than romantic, and it bears some resemblance with T.S. Eliot’s doctrine of poetic ‘impersonality’.



LET US KNOW

Negative Capability:

The poet John Keats introduced this term in a letter written in December 1817, to define a literary quality “which Shakespeare possessed so enormously— I mean *Negative Capability*, that is, when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason.” Keats contrasted to this quality the writing of Coleridge, who “would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude ... from being incapable of remaining content with half knowledge,” and went on to express the general principle “that with a great poet the sense of beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration.”

Impersonality Theory:

With the help of this theory, Eliot tried to profess that the poet engages in a “continual surrender of himself” to the vast order of tradition, and the artistic creation thus becomes the process of depersonalization. The mature poet is viewed as a medium, through which tradition is channelled and elaborated, and discussed.

Another important concept expounded by Keats in his letters is the concept of ‘Negative Capability’. A poet, Keats holds, has no identifiable self; he is always assuming other objects and selves. This notion of self-effacement goes contrary to an important doctrine of romanticism that accords supremacy to the perceiver, or to the poetic self. The rationalist view of the self is grounded on an unquestionable certitude, something that Keats dismantled. Through imagination, the poet has the ability to transform himself/herself and attain a mental state where reason cannot reach. When experiences are embodied in artistic form, they transcend normal habitual taste and the result is one of the most striking of all English poetic style.”

You will note that Keats has always been regarded as one of

the principal figures in the Romantic Movement. Tennyson considered him the greatest poet of the 19th century. Matthew Arnold commended his 'intellectual and spiritual passion' for beauty. In the 20th century, he has been discussed and reconsidered by critics from T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis to Trilling (*The Opposing Self*, 1955) and Christopher Ricks (*Keats and Embarrassment*, 1974). His famous "Letters", published in 1848 and 1878, today act as a valuable commentary on Romantic poetry. He wrote revealingly to Fanny Brawne, to his brothers and sister, to Shelley, Leigh Hunt, Haydon, Severn, and many others, mixing the everyday events of his own life with a lively and delicate interest in that of his correspondents, and displaying wit and high spirits as well as his profoundest thoughts on love, poetry, and the nature of man. T. S. Eliot in the 20th century described the letters as 'certainly the most notable and most important ever written by any English poet' (*The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, 1933). Important biographies on Keats are written by W. J. Bate (1963), R. Gittings (1968), and Andrew Motion (1997).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** As we have already found, Keats finally decided to become a poet rather than a medical surgeon. How do you see its ramifications throughout his works?
- Q 2:** How do you place the Odes in the entire oeuvre of Keats?
- Q 3:** Define 'Negative Capability' and compare it with Eliot's theory of impersonality.
- Q 4:** What makes John Keats distinguished as a Romantic poet?
- Q 5:** How does Keats view 'imagination'?

7.4 KEATS AND THE TRADITION OF ENGLISH ODES

An ode is an elaborate and elevated lyric poem addressed to a person, a thing or an abstract idea. It is a serious and dignified composition, always

with rhyme. It has three identifiable characteristics—(a) it is exalted in subject matter, (b) it is longer than a lyric proper, and (c) it is often addressed directly to a person or a thing. The ode generally has three parts: a strophe, an antistrophe and an epode. Odes are often intended to be recited or sung by two choruses (or individuals), with the first reciting the strophe, the second the antistrophe, and both together the epode. Over time, however, different forms of odes have developed with considerable variations in form and structure, but generally showing the original influence of the Greek Pindar or Roman Horace. Forms of odes appear in many of the cultures that were influenced by the Greek and Latin.

In the English poetic tradition, odes developed mainly in the Romantic period when the Romantic poets experimented on a variety of themes, and John Keats is generally regarded as one of the masters of the form. At the same time, he develops a poetic language appropriate to both the form of the ode and the nature of his themes. Keats' language experience precisely; it captures the rhythm and movement of thoughts and feelings; it registers a full range of sense impressions. Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" (1820) are important examples, which focus on the images of imperfection although the real emphasis is on the fact that we live in an imperfect world. For example, in the following lines from "Ode to a Nightingale", the poet asks for a drink of cool wine:

"O, for a draught of vintage!
that hath been Cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth,
Tasting of Flora and the country green,
Dance, and Provencal song, and sunburnt mirth!"

This stanza is characterised by an example of synaesthesia—a feature that recurs frequently in Keats' poetry. Synaesthesia is the use of imagery and language choices, which describe sensory impressions in terms of other senses. In the lines above, Keats manages to appeal to sight, colour, movement, sound, and heat almost simultaneously. For example, the movement of dancing and the sound of song are described as a taste. 'Sunburnt mirth' describes the sight of sunburnt faces at the same time as

we hear the same people laughing. Keats also created a rich poetic music. An example of his control of the rhythmic movement and syntax is clearly available in the poem "To Autumn".

His continuing influence in literary domains in subsequent times is a testimony of his true poetic genius. Anyway, the importance of sensation and sensuous experience is remarkable in John Keats. Because of the overwhelming aspiration of the sensuous, Keats was an important influence on Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites. To Keats, as to Wordsworth, sensation is cognitive; sensuous experience leads to knowledge of reality. In Keats, we get the impression of tasting things by the palate and to feel their texture. To Keats, however, unlike Wordsworth, the poet's mind is not just a passive receptacle of sensation. The duty of the poet, as Keats believes, is to render it persuasively in words. As the poet grew into maturity, he could discipline the sensation into symbolic meaning, as exemplified by poems like "The Eve of St Agnes" the odes and some of the sonnets.

As for Keats's reputation as a literary figure as well as his influence in subsequent times, his speculations on poetry, art, and the role of the poet has as much a stake as his poetry. A central tenet of the romantics was the primacy of imagination in the creative process. Antithesis of imagination is reason; the regime of reason was still pervasive; the concept that imagination leads to a kind of falsity was already an established view, as Tom Paine writes in *The Age of Reason*: "I had some turn and I believe some talent for poetry. But this I rather repressed than encouraged as leading too much into the field of imagination." In stark opposition to this established view of imagination, the romantics upheld a sort of ethic of imagination and showed it link to truth. In this context, C. M. Bowra writes in *The Romantic Imagination*: "to Keats, imagination provides a clue to absolute reality but this pursuit of absolute must go through appreciation of beauty of the sensuous world." Keats himself writes in a letter: "what the imagination seizes as beauty must be truth...they are all creative of essential beauty". In the next few lines of the same letter, he compares imagination to Adam's dream: "the imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found its truth."

In 1819, Keats had attempted to write sonnets, but found that the form did not satisfy his purpose because the pattern of rhyme worked against the tone that he wished to achieve. When he turned to writing poetry in the form of the ode, he found that the standard Pindaric ode form used by poets like Dryden was inadequate for properly discussing philosophy. Therefore, Keats developed his own type of ode as reflected in poems like “Ode to Psyche”, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and other odes that he wrote in 1819. Keats established a new poetic tone that accorded with his aesthetic ideas about poetry. He further altered this new form in “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by adding a secondary voice within the ode, creating a dialogue between two subjects. The technique of the poem is ekphrasis—the poetic representation of a work of art such as painting or sculpture. Keats further deviated from the traditional use of ekphrasis that describes a design on the sides of a cup as one can find in found in Theocritus’s *Idyll*. While Theocritus describes both motion found in a stationary artwork and underlying motives of characters, “Ode on a Grecian Urn” replaces actions with a series of questions and focuses only on external attributes of the characters



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What significance do Keats’ “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale” usually convey?

Q 7: What is meant by the term ‘synaesthesia’?

7.5 RECEPTION OF KEATS AS A ROMANTIC POET

[adapted from *Gale Encyclopaedia*]

You have learnt that John Keats was a major figure of the British Romantic Movement. The immediate critical response to Keats was largely negative, as we have already mentioned, owing to his ‘low’ social standing. Without the privilege enjoyed by the other Romantic poets, Keats was self-trained in poetic craftsmanship. Keats’ early reputation was dominated by two hostile, unsigned reviews of “Endymion”—one credited to John Gibson

Lockhart in Blackwood's *Edinburgh Magazine*, and the other, to John Wilson Croker in the *Quarterly Review*. Lockhart, a vociferous critic of what he termed "The Cockney School," named for its members' ties to London and their alleged lack of refinement, attacked not only Keats' poems, which he denigrated on artistic and moral grounds, but on what he perceived as the poet's lack of taste, education, and upbringing. Wilson Croker was neither so vitriolic nor personally degrading as Lockhart. In fact, Wilson's essay was singled out as damaging and unjust by Keats' supporters, who tried to defend the poet.

Keats was apparently disturbed temporarily by these attacks, as these reviews made him famous. A chief perpetrator was Percy Bysshe Shelley, who composed and published his famous "Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of the Poet John Keats" shortly after Keats' death. The preface to this work implicated Croker as Keats' murderer. Shelley's poem effectively created an image of Keats as a sickly and unnaturally delicate man, so fragile that a magazine article was capable of killing him (as you know Keats died very early). Lord Byron commented wryly on this idea in a famous couplet in his poem *Don Juan*: "Tis strange the mind, that very fiery particle/Should let itself be snuffed out by an article."

Keats remained famous even after his death. As early as 1820, people were beginning to write of Keats' legacy. Francis Jeffrey wrote an essay in *The Edinburgh Review*, and the obituary in *The London Magazine* (April 1921), noted, "There is but a small portion of the public acquainted with the writings of this young man, yet they were full of high imagination and delicate fancy." By 1853, Matthew Arnold could speak of Keats as "in the school of Shakespeare," and, despite his weak sense of dramatic action and his overly lush imagery was "one whose exquisite genius and pathetic death render him forever interesting." Yet, it was just this quality of lush, "pictorial" imagery that the Victorians admired in Keats, as reflected in popular paintings related to his works by Pre-Raphaelites such as Dante Gabriel Rossetti and poets such as Alfred Tennyson and Algernon Charles Swinburne, who wrote of "mastery of visual detail, his instinct for the absolute expression of absolute natural beauty."



LET US KNOW

“Ode on a Grecian Urn” was not well received by contemporary critics. It was only by the mid-19th century that it began to be praised, although it is now considered one of the greatest odes in the English language. A long debate over the poem’s final statement divided 20th century critics, but most agreed on the beauty of the work, despite various perceived inadequacies. The final lines of the poem declare that “beauty is truth, truth beauty—that is all/Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”, and literary critics have debated whether they increase or diminish the overall beauty of the poem. Critics have focused on other aspects of the poem, including the role of the narrator, the inspirational qualities of real-world objects, and the paradoxical relationship between the poem’s world and reality.



7.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that Keats is an important poet among the second generation of Romantic poets with a brief but brilliant poetic career. Within this brief period, he was able to display an extraordinary development in his poetic talent, and to evolve a distinctive poetic style, influencing some of the Victorian poets and the Pre-Raphaelites. His personal life was troubled by family tragedy and financial hardship; his medical profession, as he felt, was a wrong choice, hindering his poetic engagements. Leigh Hunt, Charles Clarke and some others were inspirations to him. His study of classical mythology had some bearing on some of his works. As for his works, the Odes are generally regarded as the best. And the poem “To Autumn” is structurally and stylistically one of the finest of Keats’ poems. It is not just a celebration of the physical beauty and grace of a season it deals with the issues of time and permanence, and by extension, reflects on certain inevitable conditionalities of life despite all its attractions.

Keats' reputation rests as much on his fragmented yet profound speculations on issues of art, and the creative process, as on his poetic works. You have learnt that his influence on modern critical sensibility was remarkable, and his concept of negative capability has some affinity with T. S. Eliot's theory of 'impersonality'.



7.7 FURTHER READING

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- 5) Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). Oxford University Press.
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- 8) Everest, Kelvin. (2002). *John Keats*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers.
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7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The outcome of such a choice was brilliant... ..Keats became a major poetic voice of British romanticism... ..his passion for poetry was also rooted in a deep understanding of the possibilities of imagination... ..the same passion also pervade his letters.

Ans to Q 2: The Odes are the works of the mature poet... ..transcending the limitations of *Endymion* and other earlier works the odes were experiments in versification... ..they exemplified Keats's attainment of formal and artistic perfection.

Ans to Q 3: Self-effacement in the creative process... ..self is in a perpetual state of 'becoming'... ..Eliot's theory of 'impersonality' expounds how the poet should rise above personality... ..what happens to the poetic emotion?... ..is it the poet's personal emotion or a complex of emotions generated by the poem itself.

Ans to Q 4: John Keats, within a brief time span, was able to add a rare perfection to his works, ensuring a permanent place in the English poetic tradition... ..his development as a Romantic poet went in parallel with his continuous self-critical thinking and analysis, articulated in his famous letters... ..he adopted the raw sensations and impulses into aesthetically heightened poetic articulation in the Romantic age.

Ans to Q 5: "Through imagination, the poet has the ability to transform himself/herself and attain a mental state where reason cannot reach. When experiences are embodied in artistic form, they transcend normal habitual taste and the result is one of the most striking of all English poetic style."

Ans to Q 6: Keats developed a poetic language appropriate to his odes... ..his language is precise and it captures the rhythm and movement

of thoughts and feelings... ..it registers a full range of sense impressions... ..in odes like “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and “Ode to a Nightingale”, Keats focus on the images of imperfection although the real emphasis is on the fact that we live in an imperfect world.

Ans to Q 7: Synaesthesia is the use of imagery and language choices, which describe sensory impressions in terms of other senses, as is explicit in his odes.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Discuss the life and works of John Keats with particular reference to his odes.
- Q 2:** “Keats and many other Romantics were preoccupied with perception and how an individual’s view of the world alters what is seen and experienced.” Elaborate.
- Q 3:** Trace the characteristics of Romanticism as reflected in Keats’ poetry, especially in some of his odes?
- Q 4:** Write a note on the critical reception of John Keats as a Romantic poet.

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UNIT 8: JOHN KEATS: “TO AUTUMN” & “ON A GRECIAN URN”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 8.1 Learning Objectives
- 8.2 Introduction
- 8.3 Reading the Poem: “To Autumn”
- 8.4 Reading the Poem: “On a Grecian Urn”
- 8.5 Keats’ Poetic Style
- 8.6 Let us Sum up
- 8.7 Further Reading
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 8.9 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read the poems “To Autumn” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn” and relate them to Keats’ artistic inclinations
- interpret the poems critically in terms of the various themes
- discuss the major themes of the poems prescribed
- explain Keats’ poetic style as reflected in the poems prescribed.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, we shall embark on a discussion of Keats’ poem “To Autumn” and “Ode on a Grecian Urn.” The first poem was occasioned by an experience gained by Keats after walking through the water meadows of Winchester, England, in an early autumn evening of 1819. The poem has three stanzas of eleven lines that beautifully describe the taste, sights and sounds of autumn. It was composed on 19th September 1819, and published in 1820, in a volume of Keats’ poetry that included *Lamia* and *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. “To Autumn” is the final work in a group of poems known as Keats’s “1819 Odes.” The poem “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, was

written by Keats in May 1819 and published anonymously in the January 1820 in the magazine *Annals of the Fine Arts*. This poem is one of his great odes of 1819 which include “Ode on Indolence”, “Ode on Melancholy”, “Ode to a Nightingale” and “Ode to Psyche”. Keats was inspired to write the poem after reading two articles by English artist and writer Benjamin Haydon. Besides, it can be assumed that Keats was aware of other works on classical Greek art, which reinforced his belief that classical Greek art was idealistic and captured Greek virtues, which forms the basis of the poem. Divided into five stanzas of ten lines each, the ode contains a narrator’s discourse on a series of designs on a Grecian urn. The poem focuses on two scenes: one in which a lover eternally pursues a beloved without fulfilment and another of villagers about to perform a sacrifice.

8.3 READING THE POEM: “TO AUTUMN”

8.3.1 The Text of the Poems

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees 5
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;
To swell the gourd and plump the hazel shells
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,
And still more, later flowers for the bees,
Until they think warm days will never cease; 10
For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen the oft amid thy store?
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind; 15
Or in a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep
Drowsed with the fume of poppies while thy hook

Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers;
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
 Steady thy laden head across a brook; 20
 Or by a cyder-press, with patient look
 Thou watchest the last oozing, hours by hours
 Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?
 Think not of them,—thou hast thy music too,
 While barred clouds bloom the soft dying day 25
 And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue;
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn
 Among the river-sallows, borne aloft
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn; 30
 Hedge-cricket sing; and now with treble soft
 The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies. 33

Reading the Poem:

"To Autumn" has a close-knit structure, divided into three stanzas, each consisting of eleven lines and describing a distinctive phase or aspect of autumn. The poem begins with a direct address to autumn season with an air of adoration and reverence: "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!"

Thus, the very beginning suggests the on setting of a day through the image of mist and, by extension, connotes the advent of the season itself. However, what you should look for, while reading the poem, is not the images themselves, but the dynamic relationship among them. The 'mists' conjoined with the ripe fruits create a somewhat hazy spectacle of the usual landscape of an autumnal dawn. With the advent of the maturing sun, the haze disappears, thus enabling a clear vision of a variety of fruits. Though autumn is the obvious object of poetic imagination, it is not just an inert 'object'. The first stanza, at a most obvious level, describes the 'actions' performed by autumn, a positively ironic result of its conspiracy with the 'maturing sun'. The heightened eulogy of autumn, thus, resides

in those positive actions; it has to do with the metrical pattern, with accent falling on the verbs 'load', 'bless', 'fill', 'swell', 'plump' etc. through its capacity for active agency. Autumn also acquires a deity-like stature, suggested by the word 'bless' which carries a religious connotation.

Basically, **the first stanza** suggests a state of plenty and abundance when autumn sets in, beautifully suggested by the image of swarms of bees gathering honey while the hives are already full, and in images like 'to bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees'. The poet beautifully suggests developments in the natural order. Sometimes, these developments are suggested through clipped but resonantly poised images (to bend with apples etc.) whereas poetic imagination also pursues the dynamics of vegetative maturation through a succession of images ordered like quickly passing cinematic shots, involving passage of time:

"To set budding more,
And still more; later flowers for the bees"

This strain of dynamic imagination culminates in the unwitting loss of subject/object division in the imagined delusion of the bees:

"...until they think warm days will never cease
For summer has o'er-brimmed their clammy cells."

Further, such a delusion suggests a sort of vexed wonder at the state of plenitude that autumn has to offer.

Thematically, the **second stanza** has a different focus; it describes the activities on the field related to harvesting, thus implicitly bringing the human into the scene. It starts with a rhetorical question: "Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?"

Here Keats employs a new rhetorical strategy: the whole idea of autumn is concretised and transposed into a human figure. Autumn is personified as a **winnow, reaper, gleaner** and **cyder-presser** in the first place, the 'winnow' is 'sitting careless on a granary floor'. The word 'careless' connotes an assured and self-absorbed mental state. With no concern for the past or anticipation of the future, autumn is, as it were, driven by its own state of abundance

achieved through harvest. This sense of serene and unthinking fulfilment is carried to a new height in the image of the reaper:

"Or in a half-reaped furrow sound asleep
Drowsed with the fume of poppies..."

Drowsiness leads to forgetting; one forgets his/her present self and reality and moves to a kind of ecstasy. The same drowsiness is invoked at the beginning of the poem "Ode to a Nightingale" when the poet writes:

"My heart aches and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I have drunk."

However, in the Nightingale poem, the poet-persona forgets himself only to be transported to the place of the 'other' (i.e. the nightingale), whereas in "To Autumn", we have autumn's narcissistic relation with itself.

The image of the gleaner presents an apparent contrast in that it suggests cautious balancing of the load over the head while wading through a brook. Nevertheless, it does not suggest pang of labour; contrary to it, the movement of the gleaner is rhythmic, as indicated by the poetic rhythm achieved through alliteration and assonance:

"And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep
Steady thy laden head across a brook."

In the fourth image there is a shift in focus from the near-panoramic to the microscopic, from the harvesting of corns to the making of apple juice. The cider-presser is watching the last drop of juice, unmindful of the passage of time. The cider-presser is watching without being watchful overseer, but optimistic and expectant, oblivious to the rest of the world.

The **third stanza's** explicit focus on sound comes through sudden evocation of a 'lack' and through a comparison established between it and the Spring season: "Where are the songs of spring? Ay, where are they?" It carries an elegiac note, and bemoans, as it does, the lack of the kind of sound audible during spring. However,

this depressing tone is promptly overpowered by a sort of vehement urge to 'restore' the glory of the Autumn season:

"Think not of them; thou hast thy music too."

In addition, what follows till the end is, technically, a demonstration of how autumn has its own music. Sights and sounds described in the third stanza are of an evening landscape, a stark contrast to the scenery dominated by the 'maturing sun'. Thus, it also describes the final phase of the season, its 'evening', the stage of its proximity with winter. Sometimes, the tragic awareness of how the beautiful autumn must give way to winter adds to the landscape a rare beauty:

"While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day
And touch the stubble plains with rosy hue."

In John Keats, as we shall discuss in relevant context, imagination, beauty and truth have a close connection. In fact, the pursuit of truth and beauty and the working of imagination are the grounds from where his poetry emerges. In poetry, truth lies in beauty that imagination can grasp. In the above-mentioned image, the implicit comparison of the evening sky with the blooming of a flower indicates how the beauty of autumn reaches a new height at its time of departure, betraying a desire to retain the season in a state of permanence.

The intermittently heard 'wailful choir' of the gnats carries an elegiac tone, and it eclipses the vehement and forceful self-satisfaction evoked in the second line of the final stanza. The glory of abundance characteristic of the first phase and the aesthetic of self-absorbed autumnal labour in the second phase become in the final phase of autumn a tragic spectacle of withdrawal: "And gathering swallows twitter in the skies."

So, you should note that the poem contains three eleven-line stanzas to describe a progression through the autumn season, from the late maturation of the crops to the harvest and to the last days of autumn when winter is nearing. The imagery is richly achieved

through the personification of Autumn, and the description of its bounty, its sights and sounds. However, the underlying meaning of the poem bears tremendous significance. Of all of Keats's poems, "To Autumn", most closely describes a paradise as realised on earth while also focusing on archetypal symbols connected with the season. Within the poem, autumn represents growth, maturation, and finally an approaching death. Thus, one can find a fulfilling union between the ideal and the real.



LET US KNOW

How different critics have viewed the poem "To Autumn" [adapted from Wikipedia]

- Walter Jackson Bate pointed out that 'death' in this poem implies the renewal of life and that the structure of the verse reinforces the sense of something to come.
- Harold Bloom emphasised the "exhausted landscape", the completion, the finality of death.
- Helen Vendler sought to discuss "To Autumn" as an allegory of artistic creation. As the farmer processes the fruits of the soil into what sustains the human body, so the artist processes the experience of life into a symbolic structure that may sustain the human spirit.
- Jerome McGann argued that while the poem was indirectly influenced by historical events, Keats had deliberately ignored the political landscape of 1819. Countering this view, Andrew Bennett, Nicholas Roe and others focused on what they believed were political allusions actually present in the poem, Roe arguing for a direct connection to the Peterloo Massacre of 1819.
- In his 1999 study of the effect on British literature of the diseases and climates of the colonies, Alan Bewell read the landscape of "To Autumn" as "a kind of biomedical allegory of the coming into being of English climatic space out of its dangerous geographical alternatives."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What do you think of the 'conspiracy' of autumn? How do the various sensory images reveal the state of abundant fruition?

Q 2: How do the various sensory images reveal the state of abundant fruition?

8.3.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the important themes in the poem "Ode to the West Wind".

The Seasons:

However, a poem about autumn, "To Autumn" also invokes other seasons and sees autumn in its circular link with them. What is established in the beginning of the poem is both its rupture and continuity with summer. Whereas the appearance of 'mists' heralds the advent of autumn, this season is no different from summer with respect to vegetative developments in nature. Abundance of fruits is distinctively autumnal through the imagined speculation of the bees:

"Until they think warm days will never cease

For summer has o'erbrimmed their clammy cells."

A distinctive change in tone and colour of landscape in the third stanza reveals the approaching of evening darkness and, by extension, of winter. The faint sound of swarms of gnats or the loud bleating of the lambs carry a suggestion of withdrawal and death. The advent of winter and the end of autumn is more distinctively indicated by the image of the swallows, which hover in the evening sky, ready to desert the place. Spring is not immediately linked to autumn in the circular chain of the seasons. However, the musical aspect of Spring prompts the poet to explore autumn's own music. When comparison is made of the music of both the seasons, what is implicitly established is their tonal variation, as autumn is seen to

have risen from its state of self-centered narcissism and become tragically self-conscious.

Time and Permanence:

Autumn is a permanently recurring phenomenon. In our conception of seasonal round, it exists as a determinate sequence. Yet, it is not an abstraction or a definite set of fixed qualities. The poem explores the three different stages of autumn comparing it to three stages of a day from sunrise till sunset. Hence, the passage of time is an important aspect in the experience of the season. When there is appreciation of plenitude what is withheld is the awareness of the passage of time; and when this awareness enters the text, what follows is the opposite side of plenitude: a spectacle of emptiness and a hopeless plea for longer stay (look, for instance, at the image of 'stubble-plains' and 'the wailful choir of the gnats'). Oblivion to the passage of time also betrays an inward plea for permanence. In the second stanza, the still, lingering images of the reaper falling asleep and the winnower sitting carelessly on a granary floor, or the cyder presser looking at the last drops of juice suggest such a plea for permanence.

**LET US KNOW**

You will do well to know that Keats wrote this poem about a month after the Peterloo Massacre (1819).

Peterloo Massacre occurred at St Peter's Field, Manchester, England, on 16 August 1819, when cavalry opened fire on a crowd of 60,000–80,000 people who had gathered to demand the reform of parliamentary representation. Critic Nicholas Roe finds an obvious connection between the poem and the massacre. The atmosphere of tensed expectant brooding that prevails in this poem carries a new resonance, given the historical context of the massacre.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Make a comparison between "To Autumn" and "Ode to a Nightingale" to see how the poet creates varied moods and tone in different stanzas.

Q 4: Discuss how Keats establishes a close link between the structure and the themes within an integrated whole in this poem.

8.4 READING THE POEM: "ODE ON A GRECIAN URN"

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
 Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
 Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
 A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
 What leaf-fring'd legend haunts about thy shape
 Of deities or mortals, or of both,
 In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
 What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
 What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
 What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?
 Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
 Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
 Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
 Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
 Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
 Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
 Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
 Though winning near the goal yet, do not grieve;
 She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
 For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!
 Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
 Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
 And, happy melodist, unwearied,
 For ever piping songs for ever new;

More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of this folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.
O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

Reading the Poem:

The poem begins with the speaker standing in front of an ancient Grecian urn by describing it as the "bride of quietness". The narrator addresses the urn by saying:

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness!

Thou foster-child of silence and slow time (lines 1–2)

He also describes the urn as a "historian" that can tell a story. He

wonders about the figures on the side of the urn and asks what legend they depict and from where they come. He looks at a picture that seems to depict a group of men pursuing a group of women and wonders what their story could be:

“What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?”

The speaker describes the urn as a “foster-child of silence and slow time” because it was created from stone and made by the hand of an artist who did not communicate through words. Time has little effect on it and ageing is such a slow process that it can be seen as an eternal piece of artwork. The urn is an external object capable of producing a story outside the time of its creation, and because of this ability the poet labels it a “sylvan historian” that tells its story through its beauty:

Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flow’ry tale more sweetly than our rhyme:
What leaf-fring’d legend haunts about thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?

In the second stanza, the speaker looks at another picture on the urn, this time of a young man playing a pipe, lying with his lover beneath a glade of trees. The speaker says that the piper’s “unheard” melodies are sweeter than mortal melodies because they are unaffected by time.

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear’d,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone: (lines 11–14)

He tells the youth that, though he can never kiss his lover because he is frozen in time, he should not grieve, because her beauty will never fade.

Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal – yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair! (lines 17–20)

In the third stanza, he looks at the trees surrounding the lovers and feels happy that they will never shed their leaves. He is happy for the piper because his songs will be "for ever new," and happy that the love of the boy and the girl will last forever, unlike mortal love, which lapses into "breathing human passion" and eventually vanishes, leaving behind only a "burning forehead, and a parching tongue."

For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloyed,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue. (lines 27–30)

In the fourth stanza, the speaker examines another picture on the urn, this one of a group of villagers leading a heifer to be sacrificed. He wonders where they are going:

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

The final stanza begins with a reminder that the urn is a piece of eternal artwork.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold pastoral! (lines 41–45)

The audience is limited in its ability to comprehend the eternal scene, but the silent urn is still able to speak to them. The story it tells is both cold and passionate, and it is able to help mankind. The poem concludes with the urn's message:

When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou sayst,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," – that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know. (lines 46–50)

8.4.2 Major Themes

[Adapted from <http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/keats/section4.rhtml>]

John Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" beautifully showcase his attempt to engage with a sculpture—the Grecian urn, passed down through countless centuries to the time of the speaker's viewing. The urn, according to the speaker, exists outside of time in the human sense—it does not age, it does not die, and indeed, it is alien to all such concepts. In the speaker's meditation, this creates an intriguing paradox for the human figures carved into the side of the urn. They are free from time, but they are also frozen in time. They do not have to confront aging and death (their love is "forever young"), but neither can they have experience (the youth can never kiss the maiden; the figures in the procession can never return to their homes). You should note that the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" discusses art and its representation. While a poem like "Ode to a Nightingale" appeal to auditory sensations while ignoring the visual, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" focuses on the visual aspect of art.

The speaker attempts three times to engage with scenes carved into the urn; each time he asks different questions of it. In the first stanza, he examines the picture of the "mad pursuit" and wonders what actual story lies behind the picture: "What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?" But, the speaker is forced to abandon this line of questioning as the figures on the urn lack identities. In the second and third stanzas, he examines the picture of the piper playing to his lover beneath the trees. Here, he tries to imagine what the experience of the figures on the urn must be like and tries to identify with them. He is mesmerised by their escape from temporality and attracted to the eternal newness of the piper's unheard song and the eternally unchanging beauty of his lover. He thinks that their love is "far above" all transient human passion, which, in its sexual expression, inevitably leads to an abatement of

intensity—when passion is satisfied, all that remains is a wearied physicality: a sorrowful heart, a "burning forehead," and a "parching tongue." Thus, the second section of the poem, describing the piper and the lovers, meditates on the possibility that the role of art is not to describe specifics but universal characters, which falls under the term "Truth".

The final two lines, in which the speaker imagines the urn speaking its message to mankind—"Beauty is truth, truth beauty," have proved among the most difficult to interpret in the Keats canon. After the urn utters the enigmatic phrase "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," no one can say for sure who "speaks" the conclusion, "that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know." It could be the speaker addressing the urn, and it could be the urn addressing mankind. If it is the speaker addressing the urn, then it would seem to indicate his awareness of its limitations: The urn may not need to know anything beyond the equation of beauty and truth, but the complications of human life make it impossible for such a simple and self-contained phrase to express sufficiently anything about necessary human knowledge. If it is the urn addressing humankind, then the phrase has rather the weight of an important lesson, as though *beyond* all the complications of human life, all human beings need to know on earth is that beauty and truth are the same. It is largely a matter of personal interpretation which reading to accept.

Keats believed that art should not provide history or ideals. Instead, both are to be replaced with a philosophical tone that dominates the meditation on art. The sensual aspects are replaced with an emphasis on the spiritual aspects, and the last scene describes a world contained unto itself. In this scene, the speaker contemplates where the boundaries of art lie and how much an artist can represent on an urn.



LET US KNOW

Critical Reception of the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" [adapted from Wikipedia]

- In an anonymous review in the July 1820 *Monthly Review*, it was stated that "Mr Keats displays no great nicety in his selection of images. According to the tenets of that school of poetry to which he belongs, he thinks that anything or object in nature is a fit material on which the poet may work ... Can there be a more pointed *conchetto* than this address to the Piping Shepherds on a Grecian Urn?"
- Another anonymous review followed in the 29 July 1820 *Literary Chronicle and Weekly Review* that quoted the poem with a note that said: "Among the minor poems, many of which possess considerable merit, the following appears to be the best."
- Josiah Conder, in a September 1820 *Eclectic Review*, argues: "Mr Keats, seemingly, can think or write of scarcely anything else than the 'happy pieties' of Paganism. A Grecian Urn throws him into an ecstasy: its 'silent form', he says, 'doth tease us out of thought as doth Eternity.'"
- George Gilfillan, in an 1845 essay on Keats, placed the poem among "The finest of Keats' smaller pieces."
- Alexander Smith in an article on Keats in *Encyclopædia Britannica* (1857) stated: "Perhaps the most exquisite specimen of Keats' poetry is the 'Ode to the Grecian Urn'; it breathes the very spirit of antiquity,—eternal beauty and eternal repose."
- Matthew Arnold claimed that the passage describing the little town "is Greek, as Greek as a thing from Homer or Theocritus; it is composed with the eye on the object, a radiancy and light clearness being added."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: State the central message of the poem "Ode on Grecian Urn."

Q 6: Why does Keats proclaim that "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"?

8.5 KEATS' POETIC STYLE

Critics have argued that the odes best reveal Keats' poetic genius, and "Ode to a Nightingale" in particular transcends his earlier limitations. The literary historian Edward Elbert writes of Keats' poetic style like the following:

"his (Keats's) early verse was rich in melodic beauty and decorative effect full of colour and the images of the senses... ..but often the result was an over-luxuriance and a lack of restraint which betray his, as yet, uncertain taste and the weakness of his artistic economy... ..in the new Keats all the qualities of the old are restrained by a restraint and poise, a delicacy of touch and a purer taste and the result is one of the most striking of all English poetic style."

You should remember that like the other Romantic poets, Keats also laid great importance on the faculty of imagination. Keats, in most of his poems, expresses a passionate love for the visible and the sensible world. In one of his letters, he reveals this passion for sensation: "O for a life of sensation rather than of thought!" and it moulds his poetic style in a big way. If you look at the sensuous nature of the poetic images available in this poem, it becomes clear that everywhere there is a relish in the concrete particularities of the visible world. The air of abundance created in the beginning, as we have suggested earlier, is not an abstraction; it is built through concrete image of the fruits: 'load and bless with fruit the vines', 'bend with apples', 'swell the gourd' and so on. Sometimes the image also carries **tactile feel** as in 'clammy cells' whereas some are associated with the **sense of taste** 'sweet kernel', or even 'clammy cells'. "To Autumn" is written in iambic pentameter (but with variations) with five stressed syllables in a line, each usually preceded by an unstressed syllable. Keats varies this

form by the employment of Augustan inversion, sometimes using a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable at the beginning of a line.

Contrary to the **first stanza's** exclusive focus on the visual, the **third stanza** beautifully combines the visual with the auditory. You can make a brief comparison with a poem by Wordsworth titled "Lines Written in Early Spring" which starts like this:

"I heard a thousand blended notes
While in a grove I sat reclined
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind."

The sound the poet hears is vague, indistinguishable as suggested in 'blended notes'. Contrastingly, as is characteristic of Keats, autumnal music is not vague or indistinct; it is made up of diverse sounds of birds, animals and insects. Therefore, the humming of the gnats, bleating of the lambs, cry of the grasshoppers, whistle of the red-breast-all constitute the music of autumn.

The **second stanza** employs the device of **personification** when autumn is visualised as a human engaged in various autumnal activities. First, it is seen as a winnower sitting beside a granary floor in a carefree state of self-contentment, then as a reaper who falls asleep in a field leaving the work incomplete, then as a gleaner wading through a brook cautiously carrying the load over head, and finally as a cyder-presser.

Another important aspect of Keats's poetic style is its musicality. You will notice that the rhyme scheme of "To Autumn" is complicated. The poem is divided into three stanzas, each having eleven lines, with distinctive combinations of rhyming sound, yet showing a basic rhyme-pattern: a b a b c d e c d d e. However, there is a variation in the first stanza the fifth line rhymes with the ninth and tenth, while the sixth line rhymes with the eighth. In effect, such a rhyming structure restraints the poetic exuberance, thus making the poem one of the formally and stylistically flawless poems by the poet.

The poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn", on the other hand, follows the same structure of an ode as one can find in his "Ode on Melancholy," though it varies more in the rhyme scheme of the last three lines of each stanza.

Each of the five stanzas in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is ten lines long, metered in precise iambic pentameter, and divided into a two part rhyme scheme, the last three lines of which are variable. The first seven lines of each stanza of the poem follow an ababcde rhyme scheme, but the second occurrences of the cde sounds do not follow the same order. In stanza one, lines seven through ten are rhymed dce; in stanza two, ced; in stanzas three and four, cde; and in stanza five, dce, just as in stanza one. As in other odes (especially "Autumn" and "Melancholy"), the two-part rhyme scheme (the first part made of ab rhymes, the second of cde rhymes) creates the sense of a two-part thematic structure as well. The first four lines of each stanza roughly define the subject of the stanza, and the last six roughly explicate or develop it.



8.4 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading this unit, you have learnt that the poem "To Autumn" has been interpreted variously as a meditation on death, as an allegory of artistic creation, as Keats' response to the Peterloo Massacre, which took place in the year of its publication; and as an expression of nationalist sentiment. One of the most anthologised of English lyric poems, "To Autumn" has been regarded by critics as one of the perfect short poems in the English language. "On a Grecian Urn", on the other hand has been seen as Keats' belief that art should not provide history or ideals. Instead, both are to be replaced with a philosophical tone that dominates the meditation on art. The sensual aspects in his other odes get replaced with an emphasis on the spiritual aspects in "Ode on a Grecian Urn."



8.6 FURTHER READING

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- Sanders, Andrew. (1994). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Web Resources:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/keats/section4.rhtml>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ode_on_a_Grecian_Urn



8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Apparently, it carries a negative tone... ..however, the consequences of the conspiracy are positive... ..the sensory images brings the state of abundance... ..the use of criminal metaphor connotes productive energy.

Ans to Q 2: Images of different fruits and their implicit taste... ..because of the maturing sun, the fruits also implicitly carry a warm colour... ..sense of touch evident in clammy cells... ..image of overflow suggests saturation.

Ans to Q 3: Different moods evoked in three stanzas in "To Autumn"... ..in "Ode to a Nightingale" this tonal variation is more stark, abrupt and dramatic... ..in "To Autumn", moods correspond less to the vagaries of mind but to different stages of the season... ..in the Nightingale poem, shifting has to do with the poet's mind.

Ans to Q 4: Three stanzas of equal number of lines... ..they correspond to three distinctive stages of a day as well as the three phases of

autumn... ..structural divisions are in sync with the greater temporal divisions of the season.

Ans to Q 5: John Keats' poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn" beautifully showcase his attempt to engage with the idea of art... ..the urn exists outside of time in the human sense... ..it does not age, it does not die... ..this creates an intriguing paradox for the human figures carved into the side of the urn... ..they are free from time, but they are also frozen in time.

Ans to Q 6: In the final two lines, the speaker imagines the urn speaking its message to mankind—"Beauty is truth, truth beauty"... ..the urn may not need to know anything beyond the equation of beauty and truth, but the complications of human life make it impossible for such a simple and self-contained phrase to express sufficiently anything about necessary human knowledge... ..all human beings need to know that beauty and truth are the same.



8.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Write a critical appreciation of the poem 'To Autumn'. How does the poet deal with the theme of time and permanence in the poem?
- Q 2:** How do you relate "To Autumn" to the Keatsian notions of truth, imagination and beauty? Comment on the imagery of "To Autumn"?
- Q 3:** Do you think that behind the apparently exclusive focus on the sensuous, there is, in the poem, a brooding speculations on the contending claims of beauty and time? Elaborate.
- Q 5:** What are the different ways in which critics have received the poems "To Autumn" and "Ode on Grecian art"?
- Q 6:** Provide a critical appreciation of the poem "Ode on a Grecian Urn." How does Keats deal with the ideo of Art in this poem?
- Q 7:** What is an Ode? Write a note on Keats' Ode with particular reference to the poems prescribed.

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UNIT 9: P. B. SHELLEY: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 9.1 Learning Objectives
- 9.2 Introduction
- 9.3 P. B. Shelly: The Poet
 - 9.3.1 His Life
 - 9.3.2 His Poetic Works
- 9.4 Reception of Shelly as a Romantic Poet
- 9.5 Let us Sum up
- 9.6 Further Reading
- 9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 9.8 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify Percy Bysshe Shelley as one of the prominent English Romantic poets
- identify Shelly's revolutionary spirit and assess its implications in the context of English Romanticism
- assess the importance of Shelly's literary aesthetics.

9.2 INTRODUCTION

Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the most radical and also the most romantic of the English Romantic poets. Born to an upper class family, he was expelled from Oxford University for publishing a tract *The Necessity of Atheism*. The conservative English society, unable to tolerate his radicalism, forced him to leave England permanently in 1818. His poetic genius is clearly explicit in his lyrics like "Alaster", "To a Skylark", "Adonais", "The Cloud", "Dejection near Naples" and in verse dramas like *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*. As a critic, Shelley, in his *A Defence of Poetry*, claimed for poets the status of 'the unacknowledged legislators' of mankind.

9.3 P. B. SHELLEY: THE POET

From an early age, Shelley showed an inclination towards radicalism and unconventionality and this one characteristic of Shelly as a poet gets reflected in almost all his poems. Like his own life, Shelley's poetry can be divided into two distinct moods. While in the longer poems, he gives vent to his passion for reform, in the shorter ones, he laments the hardships into which he is forced into. In his longer poems like *Queen Mab*, *Revolt of Islam*, *Hellas* and *Witch of Atlas*, he presents himself as the violent reformer. A dreamer of unrealisable dreams, Shelley, in his life as well as in poetry, always protests against religion, kingship, marriage and other conventional institutions.

9.3.1 His Life

Shelley was born in Field Place, near Horsham, Sussex, in 1792. He descended from noble and old families of influence. From childhood, he lived in a world of fancy, so real that certain imaginary dragons and headless creatures of the neighbouring wood kept him and his sisters in a state of fearful expectancy. From an early age, he developed a liking for the classics and did not accept the ordinary processes of learning. Shelley's first public school, kept by a hard-headed Scotch master with its floggings and its general brutality, seemed to him like a combination of hell and prison. When he entered the famous preparatory school at Eton, he was by then fed up with the existing institution and he promptly organised a rebellion against the brutal fagging system. All his friends called him as "mad Shelley". After his Eton experiences, Shelley found causes for rebellion in all existing forms of human society and he finally left school "to war among mankind," as he tells of himself in the *Revolt of Islam*.



Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

The next phase of Shelly's academic life begins with the

University of Oxford. The subsequent influence of Hume's philosophy prompted him to publish a pamphlet called "The Necessity of Atheism". It was such a controversial piece that it led to his expulsion from the University in 1811. Soon thereafter, his involvement and his elopement with Harriet Westbrook, a school girl who was attracted by his revolutionary doctrines, caused a permanent break with his family. Subsequently, the duo started wandering about England, Ireland and Wales, and Shelley's father disinherited him because of this ill-considered marriage. But, unfortunately, the pair soon got separated. By the beginning of 1812, Shelly met William Godwin, and this was followed by Shelley's marriage Mary Godwin, the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. In 1816, Shelley travelled to Europe with his wife and thereupon developed an association with Lord Byron. "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" dates from this period as does Mary's novel *Frankenstein*. His return to England was marked by the association with the group surrounding Leigh Hunt, who then was the editor of the radical newspaper *The Examiner*. That group consisted of John Keats and William Hazlitt. Shelley's long poem, *The Revolt of Islam* dates from this period. In 1818, Shelley left England and went to Italy. After wandering over Italy for some time, he finally settled in Pisa where his best poetry was written along with the company of Byron, Hunt and Trelawney. *Prometheus Unbound* was written in Rome in 1819. Between 1819 and 1820, Shelley went to Florence, and it is there that he completed both *Prometheus Unbound* and "Ode to the West Wind."

Throughout his life, Shelley was hostile to English Social institutions. But subsequently, in his later life, he came to realise the error of his rebellion. In 1822, when he was only thirty years of age, he was drowned while sailing in a small boat off the Italian coast. One finds that in all Shelly's works— epic, narrative and lyric alike— his devotion to liberty and his whole-hearted belief in love are the primary themes.

The poem "Ode to the West Wind" is one of the greatest and

most powerful odes with remarkable structural excellence in English literature. This unit has helped you to discuss how Shelley's exquisite and beautiful thoughts are expressed through effective images. Through this ode, the poet expects a bright future to follow the bleak present. It is his earnest desire to see humankind liberated from the deadening effect of authority. This notion distinguishes Shelly from the other Romantic poets. This poem reveals Shelley's own ideas about the changes which he wanted to make upon the world and humanity. Shelley's style abounds in personification and metaphors. The West Wind marks the end of summer and the beginning of the rainy season. In the wind, Shelly comes to discover a symbol for his own emotional pattern and his revolutionary zeal filled him with a passion for reforming the world.

9.3.2 His Works

Shelley was a reformer as well as a poet. Arthur Crompton Rickett has said the following words in favour of P. B. Shelly: "Little interested in the past, mindful only of the present, when it jarred on his social idealism his eyes are fixed intensely on the future. To renovate the world, to bring about Utopia, that is his constant aim, and for this reason we may regard Shelley as emphatically the poet of eager, sensitive youth of the visionary and reformer. In his earlier years, Godwin was the figure who most readily impressed his mobile imagination... In later life Wordsworth's influence is more clearly discernible. But most potent influence came from Greek literature." Such an analysis of Shelly's role as a poet helps us to understand the different aspects of Shelly's poetry.



LET US KNOW

A revolution to Shelley was much more than a political upheaval; it was a spiritual awakening, the beginning of a new life. On the other hand, Love, for Shelley, was a transcendental force kindling all things into beauty and no

poet felt more deeply the dynamic influence of love in moulding human destiny. But critics are of the view that the dreamlike quality of Shelley's verse is a defect rather than a merit. The beauty of the visible world strikes his prismatic imagination and is dissolved into rainbow colours. Arnold called Shelley an 'ineffectual angel beating in void his luminous wings in vain.'

Besides lyrical dramas, Shelley became famous as someone who wrote longer poems, lyrics, odes, and sonnets. The poems like *Queen Mab*, *Alaster*, (or *The Spirit of Solitude*), *The Revolt of Islam*", *Epipsychidion* and *The Triumph of Life* constitute the bulk of his longer poems. "Adonais", written on the death of Keats, is perhaps his only elegy. Written in 1821, "Adonais" is a noble and eloquent elegy, the finest of his non-lyrical pieces. As in "Adonais", he celebrates his love and admiration of a brother poet, so in *Epipsychidion* he voices his affection for certain feminine influences that have entered his life. *Hellas* (1822) is inspired by the Greek Revolution, to which Byron gave his life. While his *Prometheus Unbound* reflects the superb lyrical invention of the poet as well as his intense humanitarianism.

His lyrics and odes include the names of some of his famous poems like: "Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples", "Ode to the West Wind", "The Cloud", "Ode to a Skylark" and so on. The more popular sonnets of Shelly are "Ozymandias of Egypt" and "England in 1819". In his lyrics like "The Cloud" and "The Ode to the West Wind", we confront a logical development of ideas that blends perfectly with the exquisite music, making it a thing of thought and beauty all compact. The cloud becomes the part of a nature myth of flawless beauty. The complete identification of the poet with his subject, the superb rush of music, the crystalline clearness of the picture, not for a moment marred by over-profusion of metaphor, as we can find in the poem, "The Skylark", are some of the distinctive qualities of Shelly's poetry.



LET US KNOW

The poem “Ode to the West Wind” is one of the greatest and most powerful odes with remarkable structural excellence in English literature. This unit has helped you to discuss how Shelley’s exquisite and beautiful thoughts are expressed through effective images. Through this ode, the poet expects a bright future to follow the bleak present. It is his earnest desire to see mankind liberated from the deadening effect of authority. This notion distinguishes Shelly from the other Romantic poets. This poem reveals Shelley’s own ideas about the changes which he wanted to make upon the world and humanity. Shelley’s style abounds in personification and metaphors. The West Wind marks the end of summer and the beginning of the rainy season. In the wind, Shelly comes to discover a symbol for his own emotional pattern and his revolutionary zeal filled him with a passion for reforming the world.

Critics would also like to argue that one of Shelley’s earliest works *Queen Mab* (1813) is individual enough in its outcry against the unspiritual forces that weigh down in expression and, but it is crude in expression and is obviously written under the influence of Robert Southey’s oriental outlooks. In the next poem “Alaster” (1816), Shelley found his true greatness as a poet. Written under the inspiration of congenial companionship and of the glories of Alpine scenes, we find ourselves bathed in that atmosphere of luminous beauty and ethereal music which is so peculiarly Shelleyan. The aspiring youth in the poem is the poet himself on his quest for life. It is the revolt of the imagination against the limitations of human life. Following this poem, and spiritually akin to it, is the fine “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” (1816) and the glowing tribute to “Mont Blanc” (1816).

However, many would like to argue that Shelley is a lyricist rather than a narrative artist. According to Swinburne, “his thoughts,

words, deeds all sang together.” Shelley, as J. A. Symonds pointed out, is “the loftiest and the most spontaneous singer of our language.” Detested by men, Shelley often sought the company of nature. In the first place, he loves to transform aspects of nature into dream shapes of his own, as the skylark into ‘a cloud of fire’, ‘a high-born maiden in a palace tower’, ‘a glow-worm golden’. Shelley prays to nature for help when he falls ‘upon the thorns of life.’ Finally, nature for him, as it is to Wordsworth, interfused with a universal spirit, which bursts into beauty.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why was Shelly expelled from Oxford University?

Q 2: What is Shelly's idea of a Revolution?

Q 3: How does Shelly conceive the idea of nature in his poetry?

Q 4: What, according to you, is the idea of imagination and creativity in the context of the poem “Ode to the West Wind”?

Shelley's essay “A Defence of Poetry” is a reply to the charges made against poetry by Thomas Love Peacock in “The Four Ages of poetry”. Here, Shelley espouses his views about poetry. The Defence shows very clearly and most distinctly the influence of Plato, Sidney's *Apology*, and Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* on him. Shelley conceived imagination to be the most essential part of the creative process. He believed that Reason and Imagination are the two mental processes— Reason being the power of external analysis, and Imagination being the power of insight. Shelley believed that Imagination in itself is an instrument of moral good. Like Plato, Shelley believed that poetry is the creative principle in man. Poets, according to Shelley, are not only authors of language and of music, but they are also the institutions of laws and the founder of civil society. He further argues “Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.” Poetry, according to Shelley, is the expression of the universal spirit through words.

As a poet of Nature, Shelley is a Pantheist, because he finds a universal spirit or power working through Nature, controlling this universe. Pantheism is the belief that God is in everything and everything is God. Thus, Shelley is very fond of using the images borrowed from the natural world. He describes the objects of Nature with precision and scientific accuracy. Shelley pictures and presents Nature in its different moods— sometimes, Nature is presented in close association with human affections and sometimes she represents an absolutely detached and unconcerned way. Whereas Wordsworth spiritualises Nature, Shelley intellectualises it and uses it as a symbol of his thoughts and emotions. So, naturally, the West Wind becomes the symbol of Shelleyan revolution, a destroyer and preserver. Similarly, the skylark becomes the symbol of that ideal happiness. In “Adonais”, pansies are the symbols of his sad thoughts and violets symbolise his modesty and innocence. Shelley’s treatment of Nature is scientific as well as philosophical, mythical as well as human. This is what is called Pantheism, based on the theory that all Nature is the expression of one Universal Spirit. The poet identifies the spirit of Nature and the spirit of love. He, thus brings about the Platonic philosophy of love with the age-old doctrine of Pantheism. Under the influence of this spirit of love, Shelley sees in every object of Nature a subtle beauty of the spirit, capable of thinking, feeling and expressing in quite the same way as man. Like Plato, Shelley conceived of a supreme power, which is at once immanent and transcendent and which moves through all objects of Nature and human life. This spirit, according to Plato, is the governing spirit of the universe. Like Plato, Shelly believed that this spirit moves through the universe giving things form and shape according to its power.

9.4 RECEPTION OF SHELLEY AS A ROMANTIC POET

Shelley’s lyric powers and romantic biography have until recently obscured Shelley’s most enduring qualities as a writer: his intellectual

courage and originality; his hatred of oppression and injustice; and his mischievous, sometimes macabre, sense of humour (especially evident in his light verse and letters). He was widely read in the classics, philosophy, and contemporary science; he translated from Greek (Plato and Homer), Latin (Spinoza), Spanish (Calderón), German (Goethe), Italian (Dante), and some Arabic fragments. His essays, though very few in number, are highly intelligent. His political pamphlets are both angry and idealistic. His weaknesses as a writer have always been evident: rhetorical abstraction; intellectual arrogance; and moments of intense self-pity. However, in poems like the “West Wind,” or in great prose work like *Defence*, he shows the volcanic hope for a better world, of fiery aspirations shot upwards through bitter gloom.

Shelley’s *Letters* have been edited by F. L. Jones in 1964. The major political reinterpretation of his career has been done by K. N. Cameron in *Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical* (1951) and *Shelley: The Golden Years* (1974). Important modern criticism has also been produced by Harold Bloom (1959), Neville Rogers (1967), Judith Chernaik (1972), Timothy Webb (1976), and P. M. Dawson (1980).



9.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through this unit, you must have come to discover the unique qualities of P. B. Shelley as a Romantic poet. For Shelley, Poetry is a source of pleasure that combines delight as well as wisdom. At the same time, his poetry is also the clarion call for liberty and equality. Finally, from your reading this unit, you must have understood why Shelley is called more a lyricist than a narrative artist.



9.6 FURTHER READING

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- 5) Rosenthal, M. L. (1874). *Poetry and the Common Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
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9.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Shelly was fed up with the existing institutions both religious and political... ..while in Oxford he was influenced by Hume's philosophy that led to the publication of "The Necessity of Atheism".... ..this led to his expulsion from the University in 1811.

Ans to Q 2: A Revolution to Shelley was much more than a political upheaval... ..it was a spiritual awakening, the beginning of a new life... ..the poem "Ode to the West Wind" represents his ideas in a remarkable way as he addresses the West Wind as both destroyer and preserver.

Ans to Q 3: Detested by men, Shelley often sought the company of nature... ..he transformed aspects of nature into his own dream shapes... ..for example, the skylark is viewed as 'a cloud of fire', 'a high-born maiden in a palace tower', 'a glow-worm golden'... ..or he urges nature to help him when he falls 'upon the thorns of life'... ..Nature for Shelly is interfused with a universal spirit.

Ans to Q 4: The West Wind is the symbol of both creation and destruction... ..the use of different Nature images exemplifies his imaginative

power... ...Shelley's immortal message about creation through the regenerative role played by Nature.



9.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q1:** Discuss Shelley's conception of man's relation to Nature, and how does he explore that relationship in his poems?
- Q 2:** How does his treatment of Nature differ from that of the other Romantic poets?
- Q 3:** Why does Shelly believe in poetry to be an instrument of moral good? Discuss.
- Q 4:** What makes "Ode to the West Wind" one of the greatest and most powerful odes with remarkable structural excellence in English literature?
- Q 5:** State the important works of Shelley as a Romantic poet, and discuss how these poems contributed to English Romanticism.

*** **

UNIT 10: P. B. SHELLEY: “ODE TO THE WEST WIND”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 10.1 Learning Objectives
- 10.2 Introduction
- 10.3 Reading the Poems
 - 10.3.1 The Texts of the Poems
 - 10.3.2 Major Themes
 - 10.3.3 Shelly’s Poetic Style
- 10.4 Let us Sum up
- 10.6 Further Reading
- 10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 10.8 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- analyse the poem “Ode to the West Wind” in terms of different aspects
- trace the different themes available in the poem
- explain Shelly’s poetic style.

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block entitled “Romantic Poetry II”. In this unit, you will be introduced to one of the most anthologised poems of P. B. Shelly—“Ode to the West Wind”. In this poem, the poet invokes the ‘wild’ West Wind, which scatters the dead leaves and spreads seeds so that they can sprout with the advent of the Spring season, and urges that the West Wind should hear him. Shelley wrote the poem in a forest on the bank of the river Arno near Florence. The notes on the poem tell us that he received the inspiration to write the poem from his experience of a strong West Wind that swept down from the Atlantic and through the Tuscan landscape of

West-central Italy. From the different sections of this unit, you will be able to discuss the poem in question, in terms of its various aspects.

10.3 READING THE POEMS

10.3.1 The Texts of the Poem

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's beauty,		Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams	
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead		Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay,	
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,		And saw in sleep old palaces and towers	
Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,		Quivering within the wave's intenser day,	
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,	5	All overgrown with azure moss and flowers	35
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed		So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou	
The Winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,		For whose path the Atlantic's level powers	
Each like a corpse within its grave, until		Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below	
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow		The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear	
Her Clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill	10	The spaleless foliage of the ocean, know	40
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)		Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,	
With living hues and odours plain and hill:		And tremble and despoil themselves oh, hear!	
Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;		If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;	
Destroyer and preserver, hear, oh, hear!		If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;	
Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's	15	A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share	45
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,		The impulse of thy strength, only less free	
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,		Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even	
Angels of rain and lightening: there are spread		I were as in my boyhood, and could be	
On the blue surface of thine aery surge,		The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,	
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head	20	As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed	50
Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge		Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'ver have striven	
Of the horizon to the Zenith's height,		As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.	
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge		Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!	
Of the dying year, to which this closing night		I fall upon the throns of life! I bleed!	
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,	25	A heavy weight of hours has chained, and bowed	55
Vaulted with all thy congregated might		One too like thee: tameless, and swift and proud.	
Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere		Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:	

Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!		What if my leaves are falling like its own!	
Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams		The tumult of thy mighty harmonies	
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,	30	Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,	60
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,		Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth	
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!		Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!	
Drive my dead thoughts over the universe		Be through my lips to unawakened earth	
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!		The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,	
And, by the incantation of this verse,	65	If winter comes, can Spring be far behind?	70

Reading the Poem:

P. B. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" was composed in 1819. The poem was conceived in a wood that skirts Arno, near Florence, on a day when the West Wind was blowing strongly, heralding a storm at the beginning of the autumn rains. Shelly himself tells us about the genesis of the poem in the following words:

"This poem was conceived and chiefly written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence, on a day when that tempestuous wind, whose temperature is at once mild and animating, was collecting the vapors which pour down the autumnal rains. They begin, as I foresaw, at sunset, with a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions."

This means that the poem came out of a specific experience. The imagery of the poem clearly suggests an actual natural phenomenon that Shelly had observed.

The poem is divided into five stanzas which are as follows. In the **first** stanza, Shelley describes how the West Wind works over the Earth. All the seeds wake up when the azure sister of the West Wind's gives a rousing call to duty. The West Wind acts as shepherd driving the flocks of sheep to grazing ground. In the **second** stanza, Shelley explains how the West Wind blows so violently in the sky above as over the earth below. It causes a great upsurge in the sky and gives the signal of the approaching storm which is foreshadowed

by the clouds scattered all over the sky. The West Wind spreads the dark clouds from one end of horizon to another. In the **third** stanza, Shelley addresses the West Wind as the spirit that affects the sea with its mighty power. The West Wind stirs the tranquil surface of the Mediterranean when it seems to be sleeping peacefully in summer. The Mediterranean is so quiet in summer that the mansions and towers which once stood on its shores are reflected clearly on its surface. But when the West Wind starts blowing, the clear reflection vanishes. Such is the power of West Wind that it causes a great whirlpool in the Atlantic Ocean. In the **fourth** stanza, the poet stands badly in need of energy and strength. He is fully conscious of his limitations. Hence, he appeals to the West Wind to animate him with its power. He would like to be the dead leaf, a cloud or a wave to be swept along by its power. The poet is weak. He has been worn out with the trails and sufferings of life. He himself wants to be the West Wind so that he can drive his dead thoughts over the universe. In the **final** stanza, he passionately appeals to the West Wind to identify its spirits with his own. He feels that by coming in contact with his mind, the West Wind will be softened with the sadly sweet music autumn. Yet, he appeals to the wind to stimulate him in order that through the magic spell of his poetry, he may sing to the world the inspiring note of the coming millennium.

A special attraction of Shelley's poetry is his use of images which makes him one of the most typical and most admired of the later Romantic poets. His imagery tends to be abstract though highly passionate. F. R. Leavis remarks, perhaps justly, that Shelley at his best and worst offers the emotion in itself, unattached, in the void. Sometimes, he invests nature with human or divine attributes, such as we find in classical mythology. This myth making power is explicit in the poem "Ode to the West Wind", where the blue Mediterranean is no more a sea but a giant in deep slumber. Sometimes, Nature in Shelley, far from being dead matter in motion, lives a life of her own as human beings do. That is why Shelley prays to nature for help

when he falls 'upon the thorns of life.'

"Ode to the West Wind" is often considered one of the most impassioned of Shelley's shorter poems. Structurally, the poem consists of three parallel invocations of the West Wind in its three fields of operation—on the land, in the sky and on the sea. The invocations are followed by a prayer to the wind:

"If I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power." (Lines: 43-45)

All seeds remain in embryo, until West Wind's sister, mild breeze of spring, comes and helps them sprout. It is important to note that the West Wind has been perceived in different ways. With the rousing call to action, the West Wind urges the seeds to wake up. Another connotation is that the West Wind acts as a shepherd driving the flocks of sheep to grazing ground. As the wind purifies the woods, so does the wind sweeten the sky, clear the ocean, and make stronger and sounder the heart of man. With each fresh variation of the original thought, the poet uses superb imagery, strengthening the main theme: "O lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud." He further writes:

"Make me as thy lyre even as the forest is....
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!" (Lines 57-64)

This poem thus reflects Shelley's own rebellious spirit, as available in most of his poems. The very spirit of Nature overpowers his poetic sensibilities which results in his superb and heart touching poems. Then from the general, the poem passes to the universal. The old world must go, and a new world must come with the Spring, laden with fresh sweet promises for suffering humanity. So, the poet utters:

"O, wind,
If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" (Lines 69-70)

The lyric ends with a significant rhetorical question and this expression continues to inspire people through its universal significance.



LET US KNOW

The fact that the poem "Ode to the West Wind" was written near Florence, Dante's city, may explain why Shelley used Terza Rima, the stanza form that Dante used in his *Divine Comedy*, but very rare in English odes. Terza Rima is a series of triplets with interlocking rhymes, aba, bcb, cdc, etc. Shelley modified the pattern by ending each of the five sections of the poem with a climactic couplet. In keeping with his Terza Rima stanza, he concentrates on the effects of the West Wind on three classes of objects: Leaves, Clouds, and Water. The combination of *Terza Rima* and the threefold effect of the West Wind provide the poem with a pleasing structural symmetry.

You should note that at around 1819, democracy was not making much progress in Europe. Readers and critics alike both seek to locate in Shelly's "West Wind" a liberating energy that would 'free' the common people from all sorts of bondages. Shelly expounds that if he had the power of the West Wind's mythical divinity, readers would read his poem and liberty will automatically prosper. As he writes:

"Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!...
Scatter...my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy!" (Lines 61-69)

Although there remains a political undertone in this poem, you have seen that Shelley invokes the spirit of the West Wind in the true classical manner. The poet describes the activities of the West Wind in its two-fold capacities as destroyer and preserver. It

blows so violently in the sky above as over the earth below. It causes a great upsurge in the sky and gives the signal of the approaching storm which is foreshadowed by the clouds scattered over all the sky. The West Wind spreads the dark clouds from one end of the horizon to another and the sky resembles a tomb which is a sign of the advent of winter and the death of the year. The poet has compared withered leaves scattered by the West Wind to 'ghost from an enchanter fleeting.' And thus, Shelley also compares the West Wind as a magician who is unseen. "Ode to the West Wind" thus becomes one of the best examples of Shelley's poetic mind at work.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** Tell briefly about the context in which the poem "Ode to the West Wind" was composed.
- Q 2:** What are the three fields of operation for the West Wind?
- Q 3:** Provide a very brief stanza wise summary of the poem.
- Q 4:** What is the significance of Shelly's use of Terza Rima in the poem "Ode to the West Wind"?

10.3.2 Major Themes

The following are some of the major themes of the poem "Ode to the West Wind."

The Poet as a Visionary:

In Shelley's poetry, the figure of the poet is not simply an entertainer or a moralist but a prophetic hero. The intimate connection with the natural world provides the poet with an access to profound cosmic truths. Thus, his poetry almost becomes a kind of prophecy, and through his words, he will try to change the world for a better future based on political, social, and spiritual change. Shelley's poet is a near-divine saviour, comparable to Prometheus and Christ often doomed to suffer as their visionary power isolated them from other

common people. Finally, however, the poet triumphs because his art is immortal, outlasting the tyranny of government, religion, and society and living on to inspire new generations of people.

The Power of Nature:

Like many of the romantic poets Shelley demonstrates a great reverence for the beauty of nature, and feels closely connected to nature's hidden power. In his early poetry, Shelley shares the romantic interest in Pantheism—the belief that God, or a divine, unifying spirit, runs through everything in the universe. He refers to this unifying natural force in many poems, describing it as the “spirit of beauty” in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and identifying it with Mont Blanc and the Arve River in “Mont Blanc.” This force is the cause of all human joy, faith, goodness, and pleasure, and it is also the source of poetic inspiration and divine truth. Shelley asserts several times that this force can influence people to change the world for the better. Nature destroys as often as it inspires or creates, and when it destroys, it does it cruelly and indiscriminately. For this reason, Shelley's delight in nature is mitigated by an awareness of its dark side. Sometimes, Nature in Shelley, far from being dead matter in motion, lives a life of her own. The cloud, thus, is not a mere mass of vapour hanging over the earth, but an active agent, bringing ‘fresh showers for the thirsting flowers’, bearing ‘light shade for the leaves’ and so on. That is why, Shelley prays to nature for help when he falls “upon the thorns of life”. Finally, Nature to him is interfused with a Universal spirit which bursts in its beauty and its might from trees and beasts and men. It is therefore one of the many forms in which that spirit manifests itself. Of course, Shelley did not merely remain a worshipper of Nature in her simple and homely aspects, but turns to her awe-inspiring objects. In this poem, Shelley has presented the violence of the West Wind and the changeful glory of atmospheric effects, the terror of storms—those rare and awful manifestations of Nature when she puts on a supernatural grandeur.



Shelly follows Dante's Terza Rima, in which the middle line of each tercet rhymes with the first and third line of the next tercet, with the modification that there are five numbered sections, and each section consists of four triplets followed by a couplet.

Contemporary English Politics:

The poet desires the irresistible power of the wind to scatter the words he has written about his ideals and causes, one of which was opposition to Britain's monarchical government as a form of tyranny. Believing firmly in democracy and individual rights, he supported movements to reform government. In 1819, England's nobility feared that working-class citizens—besieged by economic problems, including high food prices—would imitate the rebels of the French Revolution and attempt to overthrow the established order. On August 16, agitators attracted tens of thousands of people to a rally in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, to urge parliamentary reform and to protest laws designed to inflate the cost of corn and wheat. Nervous public officials mismanaged the unarmed crowd and ended up killing 11 protesters and injuring more than 500 others. In reaction to this incident, Shelley wrote *The Masque of Anarchy* in the fall of 1819 to urge further nonviolent action against the government. This work was not published during his lifetime. However, "Ode to the West Wind", also written in the fall of 1819, was published a year later. The poem obliquely refers to his desire to spread his reformist ideas when it says, "Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!" Shelley believed that the poetry he wrote had the power to bring about political reform: "Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World", he wrote in another work, *A Defence of Poetry*.

Shelly's Prophetic View of History:

The lines "If winter comes can spring be far behind" can be read as a manifestations of Shelly's prophetic views of history, Shelly viewed Europe as pummeled into lethargy, as the poet himself is in the poem. Shelly saw that the French Revolution which promised real liberation had failed; the holy alliance suppressed freedom everywhere. Tuscany (Italy) the birth place of the poem was suffering foreign rule, and in England, revolutionary laws and actions by a

conservative Government were opposed by Shelly. He believed that tyranny ensures its own demise. The inevitability of self-destruction of the evils of tyranny is the pacifist poet's ultimate self-inflicted retribution of tyranny. His is a prophecy of optimism but we all know that history is full of examples that Spring does not end in the cycles of Winter.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: State the important themes that are available in this poem?

Q 6: What is Pantheism? Do you think that Shelly successfully blends his pantheistic ideas in the poem "Ode to the West Wind"?

Q 7: How does the contemporary English politics inform the poem?

10.3.3 Shelly's Poetic Style

You must have already read that Shelly adopts the Terza Rima form in this poem which has helped the poet deal with the structure of the poem in a remarkable way. Shelley unifies the content of the poem by focusing the first three stanzas on the powers of the West Wind and the last two stanzas on the poet's wish to use these powers to spread his words throughout the world. If you notice the style of Shelly, you at once find an interesting rhyme scheme in this poem. Each stanza has three Tercets and a closing couplet. In poetry, a Tercet is a unit of three lines that usually contain end rhyme; a couplet is a two-line unit that usually contains end rhyme. In the following examples drawn from the second stanza of the poem however, line 2 of first Tercet rhymes with lines 1 and 3 of the next Tercet. Consider the first three Tercets of the second stanza. Notice that *shed* rhymes with *spread* and *head* and that *surge* rhymes with *verge* and *dirge*

"Thou on whose stream, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,

Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are **shed**,
Shook from the tangled boughs of heaven and ocean,"

(Lines 15-17)

"Angels of rain and lightning! there are **spread**
On the blue surface of thine airy **surge**,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the **head**" (Lines 18-20)

"Of some fierce Mænad, even from the dim **verge**
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou **dirge**"

(Lines 21-23)

Another point to be noted is that all of the couplets in the poem rhyme, but the last couplet (lines 69-70) is an imperfect rhyme called Eye Rhyme.

"The trumpet of a prophecy! O **Wind**,
If winter comes, can Spring be far **behind**?" (Lines 69-70)

It occurs when the pronunciation of the last syllable of one line is different from the pronunciation of the last syllable of another line even though both syllables are identical in spelling except for a preceding consonant. For example, the following end-of-line word pairs would constitute eye rhyme: **wind** and **behind**.

You are already informed that Shelley's poetry offers a large variety of **images** in this poem. Cecil Day Lewis, in his *The Poetic Image* discussed Imagery in the following way: "The idea that imagery is at the core of the poem, that a poem may itself be an image composed from multiplicity of images, did not begin to have any wide official currency till the Romantic Movement. What do we understand by the poetic image? In its simplest terms, it is a picture made out of words. An epithet, a metaphor, a simile may create an image; or an image may be presented to us in a phrase or passage on the face of it purely descriptive, but conveying to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality. Every poetic image, therefore, is to some degree metaphorical. So,

imagery, that is images taken collectively, is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature. Even at the cost of repetition and monotony, Shelley uses piles of images. **Mist, cloud, water, wind, air and fire** are the elements out of which most of his images are drawn. But the elements which are most dominant are **darkness, light, water and fire**. He has rightly been described as the poet of light par excellence and for him earthly light is only a part or faint copy of "the light whose smile kindles the universe." His other images are '**wing**', '**quiver**', '**soar**', '**fly**', '**panting**', '**fainting**' and '**singing**'. But, the major source of his imagery is Nature or its four elements.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: What is an image, according to Cecil Day Lewis?

Q 9: How does Shelly integrate the images of nature in this poem?



10.4 LET US SUM UP

From the different sections of this unit, you have learnt that "Ode to the West Wind", by P. B. Shelley, was written in a wood that skirts the Arno, near Florence in October 1819, and published in 1820. The ode is a passionate invocation to the spirit of the West Wind, both "Destroyer and Preserver." It is composed in five sweeping stanzaic movements, each taking the form of a sonnet, but with complex musical patterns of internal rhyme and run-on lines, culminating in a breathless series of cries or questions. The symbolism used in the poem is rich. Shelley intends to state that the Wind is the seasonal force of renewal in Nature; it is also the power that produces self-sacrifice (or self-destruction) in personal life. Besides, in this poem Shelly expressed his 'unextinguished' political hopes as well as the very passion of his aspiration and creativity as a poet. Shelley's minute observations of wind, water, wood, cloud, and sky combine imagery which

is simultaneously scientific, mythical, and even biblical. The total effect of the poem finally can be seen in terms of the poet's transcendent hope and energy, achieved through suffering and despair.



10.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Compton Rickett, Arthur. (1983). *A History of English Literature*. New Delhi: Universal Book Stall.
- 2) Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). Oxford University Press.
- 3) J. Long William. (1977). *English Literature*. Boston: Ginn and Company.
- 4) Rogers, Neville. (1967). *Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry*. Clarendon Press.
- 5) Rosenthal, M. L. (1874). *Poetry and the Common Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- 6) Shelly, P. B. (1993). *Ode to the West Wind and Other Poems*. Dover Thrift Editions.
- 7) Shelly, P. B. (2003). *Major Works*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Web Resources:

<http://www.cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides2/Ode.html>



10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The poem was conceived in a wood that skirts Arno, near Florence... ..on a particular day a tempestuous wind was blowing followed by a violent tempest of hail and rain, attended by that magnificent thunder and lightning peculiar to the Cisalpine regions... ..so the poem came out of a specific experience.

Ans to Q 2: The three parallel invocations of the West Wind are on the land, in the sky and on the sea... ..the exact lines in the poem are "If

I were a dead leaf thou mightiest bear; / If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;/A wave to pant beneath thy power."

Ans to Q 3: The **first** stanza describes how on earth the West Wind helps the seeds to sprout... .. the **second** stanza explains how the violent West Wind in the sky gives the signal of the approaching storm... ..The **third** stanza addresses the West Wind as the spirit that affects the sea by stirring the tranquil surface of the Mediterranean... ..in the **fourth** stanza, the poet appeals to the West Wind to animate him with its power... ..in the **final** stanza the poet urges the wind to stimulate in him the power to sing the inspiring note of the coming millennium.

Ans to Q 4: Terza Rima is the stanza form that Dante used in his *Divine Comedy*... ..it is a series of triplets with interlocking rhymes, aba, bcb, cdc, etc. Shelley modified the pattern by ending each of the five sections of the poem with a climactic couplet.... the combination of Terza Rima and the threefold effect of the West Wind provides the poem with a pleasing structural symmetry.

Ans to Q 5: The visionary role of the poet... ..the power of nature... ..Shelly's concern over contemporary politics.

Ans to Q 6: Pantheism is the belief that God, or a divine, unifying spirit, runs through everything in the universe... .. "Ode to the West Wind best represents Shelly's pantheistic thinking... ..the West Wind destroys as often as it inspires or creates, and when it destroys, it does it cruelly and indiscriminately... ..Shelley's assertion is that this force can influence people to change the world for the better.

Ans to Q 7: Britain's monarchical government was seen as form of tyranny... ..Believing firmly in democracy and individual rights, he supported movements to reform government... ..Shelley believed that the poetry he wrote had the power bring about political reform... ..the poem obliquely refers to his desire to spread his reformist ideas when it says, "Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth / Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind.

Ans to Q 8: An image is a picture made out of words... ..figures of speech like epithet, metaphor and simile may create an image... ..an image may convey to our imagination something more than the accurate reflection of an external reality.

Ans to Q 9: His images are 'wing', 'quiver', 'soar', 'fly', 'panting', 'fainting' and 'singing'... ..but the major source of his imagery is Nature or its elements like air, water, earth etc... ..integration of all his images to signify his universal message... ..through the images of Nature Shelley announces the theme of birth and rebirth.



10.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** In what ways does P.B. Shelly make connections between Nature and Art, and how does he illustrate such connections in "Ode to the West Wind"?
- Q 2:** Discuss Shelley's use of Nature imagery in "Ode to the West Wind". Why does the poet call the West Wind, both a destroyer and a preserver?
- Q 3:** Comment on Shelly's use of the poetic persona as a reformer. What are the images he has used to signify that role?
- Q 4:** Do you think that Shelley uses too much figurative language in the "Ode to the West Wind"? What makes this ode different from any other type of Shelleyan lyric?
- Q 5:** How would you like to interpret the ideas of imagination and creativity in the context of this poem "Ode to the West Wind"?
- Q 6:** Comment on Shelley's integration of natural images into a vision of humanity and the Universe.

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UNIT 11: INTRODUCTION TO VICTORIAN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 11.1 Learning Objectives
- 11.2 Introduction
- 11.3 Different Forms of Victorian Poetry
- 11.4 Important Victorian Poets and their Works
- 11.5 Reception of Victorian Poetry
- 11.6 Let us Sum up
- 11.7 Further Reading
- 11.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 11.9 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- gain an idea of Victorian poetry
- describe the various kinds of poetry that were produced the Victorian period
- discuss the major concerns of the poets
- relate your understanding of Victorian poetry to the temperament of the age
- discuss the major Victorian poets and their works
- critically analyse Victorian poetry with reference to its reception.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 3 of the Course on English Poetry: Romantic to Victorian. Block 3 of this course shall specifically deal with Victorian poetry, and the present unit shall deal with Victorian poetry in general providing you an outline of the period in which poetry became a significant branch of literature. In order to understand Victorian poetry, it is important that you must have an idea of the preoccupations of the poets who were immensely affected by the various factors that shaped their works.

One significant aspect of the period was the growing scientific developments. People in general were affected by the new scientific discoveries, which shook their belief in religion creating a crisis of 'faith versus doubt.' Moreover, with industrialization, the middle class rose to acquire power and position in the society, whereas the worst sufferers were the working class people who were exploited largely. In connection with the skeptical attitude of the people in the Victorian age, the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859 was a major event. This book challenged the age—old religious beliefs of the people and triggered a sense of rationalism never before felt. Towards this ever-increasing crisis of the age, many writers turned towards the Church, while few others displayed an agnostic attitude in their writings; there were also writers who hold on to morality and some others turned towards nature. Hence, you must be able to realise that poetry was greatly affected by the drastic socio-economic, political and religious changes. Let us now move forward to read Victorian poetry, and see if the poets were directly influenced by the changing condition of the society or not, and if so, to what extent they are.

11.3 DIFFERENT FORMS OF VICTORIAN POETRY

Victorian poetry can be said to have retained some of the tendencies of its preceding age like individualism, relation with Nature, etc. However, the Victorian poets looked into these aspects with a different perspective. One of the significant aspects of Victorian poetry is that many poets turned to become prophets or guides. This group of poets tried to assure the people that the growing uncertainty was very common to all. Morality, if not didacticism, preoccupied these poets like Arnold, Tennyson, etc. We can also see a group of poets in the Victorian age who were obsessed with the pictorial description of nature. This group of poets led by D.G. Rossetti was called Pre-Raphaelites. There were also some writers who moved closer to the Church seeking to restore their lost religious beliefs and skepticism. The Oxford Movement, which was led by John Henry Newman, strived to put forward a belief system in the people amidst the rising crisis and increasing doubts of the age. However, it must be noted that all these varied

reactions of the poets were rooted in the context of the age. The Victorian poets displayed a close connection to the social condition of their age.

Poetry in the Victorian times was considered an affair of 'high seriousness.' To the Victorians, poetry not only became an expression of the poet but also a medium to address the concerns of the age. Poetry's close relation to human life was a significant characteristic of Victorian poetry. Another chief feature of poetry during the Victorian times was it addressed and raised issues that had public appeal. The earlier approach to the role of a poet was taken over by poetry's social responsibility. The Victorian poet had to be thoughtful about the people and not himself. You must be aware that for the Romantic poets, "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions" (Wordsworth, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*) but except a few group of poets, the majority of the Victorian poets believed poetry to be a substitute for morality in a so called 'mechanical age' that was declining in moral values. Hence, for the Victorian poets, poetry was aimed for 'higher' ends. In "The Study of Poetry", Matthew Arnold, one of the leading poet and critic stated, "the strongest part of our religion to-day was its unconscious poetry". Victorian poetry led much emphasis to 'poetic truth' and 'poetic beauty' as stated by Arnold. The subject matter as well as the style was of primary concern for the Victorian poets.

Another common feature of Victorian poetry was, therefore, the importance laid on style. Succumbing to the invasion of science, the style of poetry became distinctively precise and specific. For example, accuracy of details while representing Nature, chiefly by the Pre-Raphaelites was of utmost importance. It can, therefore, be seen that akin to the Romantics. In Victorian poetry also, nature was given priority. However, it has to be remembered that the emphasis on nature in Victorian times was given in reference to its relation with man. Moreover, the Victorian poets laid down a scientific basis to the understanding of Nature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** Mention any one of the significant features of Victorian poetry.
- Q 2:** What was the status of poetry in general during the Victorian period?
- Q 3:** Why did the style of poetry in the Victorian times become distinctively precise and specific?

It is no wonder that Victorian poetry portrayed a skeptical attitude. As you have already noted that poetry was a 'criticism of life', hence such an attitude on the part of the poets is justified. The evolutionary theory of Darwin created havoc in the Victorian age and shook the belief of the people. Being divided between a fading hope in religion and an increasing skepticism, Victorian poetry too displayed such tension. There were poets who were unabashedly skeptic like Fitzgerald, Clough, Matthew Arnold and James Thompson. In addition, there were also poets who laid emphasis on Nature and aesthetic qualities. However, of Tennyson and Browning, it can be said that their poetry portrayed an optimistic attitude towards the prevailing condition of the age.

As you have seen in the above discussion the mixed reaction of the various poets towards the complex situation of the age, it is obvious that Victorian poetry found its outlet in diverse ways, be it in thematic concerns or in style. Let us now consider the major poetic trends that dominated the Victorian period:

- a) The poetic output of Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning** is worth mentioning in the context of Victorian poetry. Amidst the tensions of doubt and progress, Browning's poetry is marked for his optimism. Unaffected by the changes that were sweeping the minds of majority of the Victorians, Robert Browning's optimism was commendable for placing its central emphasis on the 'realities of life'. His firm belief in God is evident in his poems. Poems like "The Last Ride Together", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "Evelyn Hope", "Pippa Passes", etc. are all instances of Browning's optimistic attitude towards love,

life and God. However, Alfred Lord Tennyson too was a representative of his age in the way he expressed doubt or faith. However, it must be noted that he was composed compared to many writers/poets of his time. Even though the advent of science affected the religious belief of man during the Victorian age, Tennyson's poetry, though at times have a pessimist tone, depicted his acceptance of scientific interventions but not at the cost of religious disbelief. Some of his best-known poems are "In Memoriam", "Ulysses", "The Lotus-Eaters", etc.

- b) **The Skeptics:** As the name suggests, those poets were called the skeptics who were affected by the confusion and uncertainty that befell the Victorian society. Poets like Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur Hugh Clough and James Thomson were prone to the bitterness of the age and hence through their poetry they expressed doubts and questioned their beliefs. Among them, Arnold was quite an influential figure of his age not only as a poet but also as a critic. As a poet, Arnold favoured the classicist's insistence on form and style. However, he was very critical about religion, scientific progress and politics in his poetry. We must also note his inclination towards Nature in his poems like "Thyrsis", "Sohrab and Rustum", "Lines Written in Kensington Garden", etc. We shall get an elaborate idea of the poetry of Arnold in the following section.

Out of the many translations of FitzGerald, the best remembered is *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1859). This poem has tones of both optimism and pessimism and represents the tension surrounding the poet in relation to life as well as death. Arthur Hugh Clough's poems also reflect his religious doubts; dissatisfied with the prevailing Victorian crisis Clough has always been critical about the developments or the changes that took place then. Some of the poems by Clough are "Songs of Absence", "The Last Decalogue", "Say Not The Struggle Naught Availeth", "Through a Glass Darkly", etc. His long poems include *The Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, *Amours de Voyage* and *Dipsychus*. While the former two poems represent his doubts regarding

love and the conflicts of the society, the latter one deals with his doubts on the changing attitude of the society towards spirituality. The last of the skeptics, that is, James Thomson is remembered as a pessimist poet for the poem titled "The City of Dreadful Night". This poem represents his despair and atheism. The two volumes written by him were *The City of Dreadful Night and Other Poems* and *Vane's Story and Other Poems*.

- c) **Spasmodic poets:** William Edmonstoune Aytoun first coined the term 'spasmodic' in his book titled *Firmilian: a Spasmodic Tragedy* to refer to a group of Victorian poets whose poetry was pompous in style and subject matter. The poets who are referred to by the term are P.J. Bailey, Sydney Dobell, J. Marston and Alexander Smith. These poets tried to express their scepticism regarding the age in view of their emphasis on poetry as an expression of one's inner state. Primarily, their works reflected the inner turmoil of the protagonists who were depicted as lonesome individuals or poets many a times. However, the depiction of the protagonists as lonely and depressed souls was very much in resonance with the age. However, excessive use of imagery and farfetched metaphors, use of bombastic words have resulted in the declining popularity of the spasmodic poets.
- d) **Pre-Raphaelites:** The group of poets influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite movement were Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Algernon Swinburne and Christina Rossetti. The movement was originally called the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood "of young, anti-Establishment painters (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, William Holman Hunt, F. G. Stephens, and James Collinson) and one sculptor (Thomas Woolner). This movement had drawn up a scheme for revolutionising the pictorial arts in 1848...what they insisted was the superior directness of expression of those artists who worked before the time of Raphael". (Sanders, 435) The poets like Chaucer, Shakespeare and Keats inspired the Pre-Raphaelites. Through the journal titled *Germ*, the Pre-Raphaelites shared their interests, be it painting, prose, essay or prose. However, among the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the only one to have literary inclination was D.G. Rossetti. Some of the poems by

Rossetti are “Autumn Idleness”, “The House of Life”, “A Half-Way Pause”, “The Woodspurge”, etc. However, Rossetti’s well-known poem was “The Blessed Damsel”. Rossetti was much enchanted by the female body and spirit as was evident from his poems as well as paintings. One of the chief characteristics of his poetry was his emphasis on ornamentation and minute description. Influenced by the aestheticism of the Pre-Raphaelite, Charles Algernon Swinburne and William Morris were also associated with this group. His two works that showed utmost influence of the Pre-Raphaelites were *Atlanta in Calydon* and *Poems and Ballads* (First Series). However, Swinburne was closely associated with the Italian cause, that is, its freedom from external domination. In addition, it is evident from his works that “there runs a defined paganism and an instinctive libertarianism, shaped both by his profound understanding of the forms and styles of classical culture and by his distaste for Christian narrowness.” (Sanders, 436) Some of his works include *Songs Before Sunrise*, *Songs of the Springtides* and poems like “The Garden of Prosperine”, “A Forsaken Garden”, etc.

Another poet belonging to this group was William Morris, who was also a painter and an architect. A lover of beauty, Morris was influenced by Chaucer in particular and by ancient Greek poets as well as poets of the Middle age in general. For him, poetry was “an extension of craft and a natural enhancement of the quality of life” (Sanders, 437). The important works by Morris are *A Dream of John Ball* (1886-87), *News From Nowhere* (1890), *The Defence of Guenevere and Other Poems*, *The Haystack in the Floods*, *The Life and Death of Jason*, etc. However, based on Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Morris’ *The Earthly Paradise* lacked the mastery of Chaucer and appeared “lifeless”. One of the most notable poets associated with the Pre-Raphaelite movement was D. G. Rossetti’s sister, Christina Rossetti. Her well known poems are “When I am Dead my Dearest”, “Sleep at Sea”, “Promises like Pie-Crust”, “Winter My Secret”, “Remember”, “Uphill”, “My Heart is Like a Singing Bird”, “The Convent

Threshold", etc. Her major works include *Goblin Market and Other Poems* (1862), *A Pageant and Other Poems* (1881), *The Prince's Progress and Other Poems*, etc. In her children book titled *Sing Song: A Nursery Rhyme Book*, her writing is plain and direct. It must also be noted that she was much influenced by George Herbert and was equally a devotional poet.

As a whole, it can be seen that the Pre-Raphaelites were all inclined to the Middle Ages, in painting as well as in poetry and were much influenced by the ballads and metrical romances. Most importantly, these poets were far removed from the social problems of their day, and laid emphasis on pictorial description as well as a sense of beauty to please their readers. The escapist tendency or the love of beauty that the Pre-Raphaelites shared was very much common to the Romantic poets. In fact, of the romantics, John Keats' poetry had a great influence on them.

- e) **The Decadents:** The term 'decadence' referred to the French literary ideals of placing importance on the uglier and sad aspects and wore a markedly unconventional badge of immorality. The chief figures of this movement that originated in France were Charles Baudelaire and Gautier. The decadent poets were symbolists as they extensively used symbols to express their inner quests. Poets who were influenced by this literary movement were Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson. These poets came into action towards the end of Queen Victoria's regime and were referred to as poets of "naughty nineties" or *fin de siècle*, a term that was used to separate them from the rest of the century. Some of the well-known poems of Wilde are "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", "A Vision", "Apologia", "Her Voice", "Flower of Love", etc. Poems by Symons' include "Rain on the Down, Emmy", "The Shadow Credo", "The Street Singer", "Javanese Dancers", "The Ecstasy", etc. Among Dowson's poem, "I have been faithful to thee, Cynara! In my fashion" and "Villanelle of Marguerites" may be cited as examples. Johnson's poems include "By the Statue of King Charles at Charing Cross", "The Dark Angel", etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Mention any two poems by Robert Browning.

Q 5: Who were called the 'skeptical' poets?

Q 6: Write a short note on the spasmodic poets.

Q 7: Point out a few features of Pre-Raphaelite poetry? Name the poets who were called by the name 'Pre-Raphaelite'.

Q 8: By the end of the century, a group of poets emerged in England who were influenced by French symbolism. Who were these poets?

11.4 IMPORTANT VICTORIAN POETS AND THEIR WORKS

The following are the important poets of the Victorian age.

Alfred Lord Tennyson:

Tennyson (1809-92) was one of the greatest poets of the Victorian age. He was a man of his age who had shown interest and was concerned with the material developments as well as the various scientific discoveries of his age. His poems represented themes commonly faced by the age such as doubt, faith, immortality, etc. The most famous poem for which he was best remembered was the commemorative poem he wrote for Arthur Hallam, a close friend and a poet titled "In Memoriam" in 1849. Tennyson owed much of his artistic brilliance to Hallam's critical perspectives that helped him mould his ideas both intellectually and emotionally in a world, which was rapidly witnessing a change in every aspect like religion, faith, etc. This poem particularly reflected Tennyson's awareness of the various scientific discoveries as well as his hopes. However, at the same time the poem also asserted the doubts related to the advancement of science. As the literary historian, Andrew Sanders had put it: "Most powerfully, it recognises two conflicting validities, those of the reasoning mind, which comes to perceive ultimate purpose and the agnosticism of the feelings, which continue to crave for present comfort". (434) The poems like "The Ballad of Oriana", "The Lotos-Eaters", "Mariana", "The Kraken", etc. dealt

with themes of death. Tennyson also published the volume titled *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* in 1830, *Poems* in 1841, *The Princess: A Medley* in 1847. The latter volume exposed Tennyson's "commitment to a poetry of social purpose and communal concern". (Sanders, 433)

After Wordsworth, Tennyson became the Poet Laureate immediately one year after the publication of "In Memoriam". In accordance with his role as a laureate, Tennyson wrote *Maud and Idylls*. His "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" was perhaps regarded by critics as one of the best commemorative poems. "The Charge of the Light Brigade" was also a universally acclaimed poem that earned him much fame and praise. Tennyson's *The Idylls of the King* was a retelling of the legend of King Arthur spinning across twelve narrative poems. You must also take note of a few other poems of Tennyson like "Break, Break, Break" which was an "evocation of a desperate sense of exclusion, by private grieving, from a working, rejoicing human community" (Sanders, 432); "Crossing the Bar", a poem representing the theme of death, etc. The poem "The Lady of Shalott" by Tennyson had a considerable influence on the Pre-Raphaelite painters as well. As a poet, Tennyson's mastery over language and metre was evident in his works. The influence of the Romantics was also obvious in the way he described Nature with rich imagery. His popularity also rested on his political concerns of the age. Dealing with a vast range of subject matter such as death, melancholy, immortality, etc., Tennyson's poetry reflected his pessimism at times as well as his greatness as an experimental poet who could raise the issues of his age and provide a comfortable perspective to his readers so as to adjust with the uncertainties that marked the age. A few lines from "In Memoriam" may be quoted:

"And love will last as pure and whole
As when he loved me here in Time,
And at the spiritual prime
Rewaken with the dawning soul."

Robert Browning:

The four major volumes that established Robert Browning's reputation as a poet were *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*

(1845), *Men and Women* (1885) and *Dramatis Personae* (1864). Poems that encompassed his poetic career were “Fra Lippo Lippi”, “My Last Duchess”, “Porphyria’s Lover”, “Evelyn Hope”, “The Last Ride Together”, “The Bishop Orders his Tomb”, “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, “The Lost Leader”, “One Word More”, “Home Thoughts From Abroad”, “The Pied Piper of Hamelin”, “Two in the Campagna”, etc. Browning was much concerned with the Victorian individual or the human psyche. By using ‘dramatic monologue’, the poet dwelt with the inner motives of his protagonists. Although his poetry lacked the dynamism of Tennyson, yet it has become popular for the use of dramatic monologues. Browning’s poems showed his interest on the human character. Through his poetry, he sought to drive away the Victorian crisis of faith and doubt. He was an optimist at heart, moralist in tone and an admirer of the realities of life. In his philosophy, “God” held the central place. His optimism is quite evident through the crisis he developed in his poems and settled them at the end of the poems. He was a religious poet and hence the religious disbelief that was paralysing the society could not affect him. His faith was closely associated with his belief on the immortality of human soul. Battling pessimism, Browning’s poetry provided hope and a belief on human self and individualism. Out of the many themes like religion or art, Browning’s poetic output constituted many poems on ‘love’ like “A Woman’s Last Words”, “Meeting at Night”, etc. *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) is a good example of Browning’s use of dramatic monologue. Depicting a disturbed dramatic monologue of Browning, lines from the poem “Porphyria’s Lover” have been cited below:

“That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her.”

Matthew Arnold:

Matthew Arnold is known as both a poet and a critic. He was very much inclined towards the classic poets like Dante, Shakespeare, Milton,

etc. and adopted the classical qualities of 'restraint' and 'precision'. His poetic output had shown evidence of his belief in "poetry as a criticism of life". As such, throughout his works, Arnold revealed his scepticism regarding the Victorian problems. Unlike Browning, Arnold was much shattered due to his loss of faith in religion. Therefore, it found an echo in his works too. Some of the poems by Arnold were "The Forsaken Merman", "The Scholar Gypsy", "Thyrsis", "Dover Beach", "Sohrab and Rustum", "Shakespeare", "Empedocles on Etna", "Lines Written in Kensington Garden", etc. You must note *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems*. By A. published in 1849 as his first volume of poems. Other poetry volumes include *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems* (1852) and *New Poems* (1867). However, it was seen that contradictory to his own criteria of poetry, his own works showed a Romantic spirit of nostalgia and sadness. The quote from his poem "Dover Beach" reflected his despair:

"The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

One of the prominent woman poets of the era was Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wife of Robert Browning. She mostly dealt with contemporary issues of her time. Her reputation as a poet lies in works such as *Seraphim and Other Poems* (1838), *Poems* (1844), *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, *Poems before Congress* (1860), the verse novel *Aurora Leigh* published in 1857, etc. Among her numerous poems, "The Cry of the Children" is notable for her empathy towards the children belonging to the working class and is evident of her political standpoint. The poem echoed Browning's enragement and her outlook towards the exploitation of the weaker section of the society—the children workers. Let us look at a few lines from the poem:

“For oh,” say the children, “we are weary,
And we cannot run or leap —
If we cared for any meadows, it were merely
To drop down in them and sleep.
Our knees tremble sorely in the stooping —
We fall upon our faces, trying to go;
And, underneath our heavy eyelids drooping,
The reddest flower would look as pale as snow.
For, all day, we drag our burden tiring,
Through the coal-dark, underground —
Or, all day, we drive the wheels of iron
In the factories, round and round.(Stanza VI)

11.5 RECEPTION OF VICTORIAN POETRY

Victorian poetry seen through the lens of contemporary critics deserves the mention of such literary theories like ‘deconstruction’, ‘feminism’ and ‘Marxism’. In the book titled *Alfred Tennyson: Rereading Literature* published in 1986, Alan Sinfield gives a Marxist interpretation of Tennyson and perceives him as a ‘cultural materialist’ and a ‘conservative poet’ and argues, “Tennyson’s aesthetic solutions to political problems were either timid or straightforwardly reactionary”. Sinfield’s analysis brought about a renewed interest in Victorian poetry with a materialist angle. Similarly, another critic Herbert Tucker tried to shed light upon the complex linguistic dimensions of Browning’s poetry through deconstruction. (Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poets and Politics* (e book)) E.D.H. Johnson’s book *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* was an attempt to study Victorian poetry “in relation to an increasingly severe lesion between the poet and the society”. (Armstrong) One of the modern poets, T. S Eliot was very critical of Tennyson and Browning. In his essay titled “The Metaphysical Poets”, Eliot talked about ‘dissociation of sensibility’ and expressed his contemplation regarding the Victorian poets: “Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.” He further stated: “Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a

rose.” (Eliot, “The Metaphysical Poets”) Eliot did not have high regard for the Victorian poets as such. You are suggested to read up more on other critical writings of the Victorian poets by writers such as Harold Bloom, etc. in order to get a broader view of the reception of Victorian poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Write briefly on Elizabeth Barrett Browning's works.

Q 10: What did Eliot opine about the Victorian poets, Tennyson and Browning?



11.6 LET US SUM UP

After you have finished reading the unit, you have become fully aware of the importance attached to poetry in the Victorian age. The role of a poet was much more than mere personal experience. Since poetry was a medium to address or express the social problems, it was basically called the ‘criticism of life’. Through poetry as a medium, the poets took recourse to morality or Church or Nature based on one’s own personal expression towards the rising crisis of faith and doubt as well as industrialisation. You have observed that many poets turned to become moral preachers. They intended to console their generation that the crisis or the uncertainty that was overshadowing every mind was a common sensation among the Victorians. In their poems, they raised issues to address such common problems and provided comfort and hope to their readers. You must have also read about the various kinds of attitudes that the poets had to such complexities. While there were poets who turned to Nature, few others moved closer to the Church in order to restore their lost beliefs. One thing common in all the poets was their style that was marked by precision and accuracy. By now, you have become familiar with the different forms of poetry that were popular during the Victorian times such as the Skeptics including poets like Fitzgerald, Arnold, etc.; the optimistic philosophy in Browning’s poetry; the Spasmodics

including Bailey, Dobell, etc.; the Pre-Raphaelites like D.G. Rossetti and the Decadents represented by poets as Oscar Wilde. You have gained a fair idea of some of the significant Victorian poets like Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, etc. In addition, you have been familiarised with the critical reception of Victorian poetry. It can very well be summed that Victorian poetry “is seen in terms of transition . . . It is either on the way from Romantic poetry, or on the way to modernism. It is situated between two kinds of excitement, in which it appears not to participate.” (Armstrong)



11.7 FURTHER READING

- 1) Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, poetics and politics*. London: Routledge. (e-book)
- 2) Collins, Thomas J. et al. (eds.) (2005 rpt.). *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory, Concise Edition*. Broadview Press. (e-book)
- 3) Matheikal, Tomichan. (2001). *English Poetry: From John Donne to Ted Hughes*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.
- 4) Sanders, Andrew. (2004 rpt.). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. Third Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Web Resources:

http://www.uwyo.edu/numimage/eliot_metaphysical_poets.htm



11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: One of the significant aspects . . . poets turned to become prophets or guides . . . tried to assure the people that the growing uncertainty was very common to all.

Ans to Q 2: Poetry in the Victorian times was considered an affair of ‘high seriousness’... ...a medium to address the concerns of the age...

...close relation to human life... ...poetry during the Victorian times addressed and raised issues that had public appeal... ...poetry's social responsibility... ...majority of the Victorian poets believed poetry to be a substitute for morality in a so called 'mechanical age' that was declining in moral values... ...poetry was aimed for 'higher' ends... ..."the strongest part of our religion to-day was its unconscious poetry"... ...Victorian poetry led much emphasis to 'poetic truth' and 'poetic beauty'.

Ans to Q 3: Owing to the invasion of science, the style of poetry became distinctively precise and specific. For example, accuracy of details while representing Nature, chiefly by the Pre-Raphaelites was an important feature of their style.

Ans to Q 4: "The Last Ride Together", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "Evelyn Hope", "Pippa Passes", etc.

Ans to Q 5: Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur Hugh Clough and James Thomson.

Ans to Q 6: The term 'spasmodic'... ...coined by William Edmonstoune Aytoun... ... refer to a group of Victorian poets whose poetry was pompous in style and subject-matter . . . P.J. Bailey, Sydney Dobell, J. Marston and Alexander Smith . . . express their scepticism regarding the age in view of their emphasis on poetry as an expression of one's inner state . . . reflected the inner turmoil of the protagonists . . . the depiction of the protagonists as lonely and depressed souls was very much in resonance with the age . . . excessive use of imagery and farfetched metaphors, use of bombastic, etc.

Ans to Q 7: The Pre-Raphaelites were all inclined to the Middle Ages . . . were far removed from the social problems of their day and laid emphasis on pictorial description as well as a sense of beauty to please their readers . . . the escapist tendency or the love of beauty . . . was very much common to the Romantic poets. The Pre-Raphaelite poets were D. G. Rossetti, Charles Algernon Swinburne, William Morris and Christina Rossetti.

Ans to Q 8: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symonds, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson.

Ans to Q 9: *Seraphim and Other Poems* (1838), *Poems* (1844), *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, *Poems before Congress* (1860), the verse novel *Aurora Leigh*, the poem “The Cry of the Children”, etc.

Ans to Q 10: T. S. Eliot...talked about ‘dissociation of sensibility’ and expressed his contemplation regarding the Victorian poets: “Keats and Shelley died, and Tennyson and Browning ruminated.” He further stated: “Tennyson and Browning are poets, and they think; but they do not feel their thought as immediately as the odour of a rose.”



11.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Discuss the major Victorian poets with reference to their major works.
- Q 2:** What are major trends in Victorian poetry? Describe each of them in details.
- Q 3:** Analyse the characteristics of Victorian poetry. Do you agree that Victorian poetry was mechanical? Illustrate your answer.
- Q 4:** Discuss Tennyson as a representative poet of the Victorian age.
- Q 5:** Write a note on the women poets belonging to the Victorian period.
- Q 6:** Give a detailed explanation of Pre-Raphaelite poetry with special reference to Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

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UNIT 12 : ALFRED LORD TENNYSON: “ULYSSES”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Learning Objectives
- 12.2 Introduction
- 12.3 Tennyson: The Poet
 - 12.3.1 His Life
 - 12.3.2 His Poetic Works
- 12.4 Reading the Poem
 - 12.4.1 The Text of the Poem
 - 12.4.2 Major Themes
 - 12.4.3 Tennyson's Poetic Style
- 12.5 Critical Reception of Tennyson as a Victorian Poet
- 12.6 Let Us Sum up
- 12.7 Further Reading
- 12.8 Answer to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 12.9 Possible Questions

12.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to

- describe the life and career of Alfred Tennyson
- discuss the poem “Ulysses” in terms of its different important aspects
- explain the underlying mythical pattern of the poem
- critically appreciate the significance of the poem “Ulysses” by Tennyson.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the poem “Ulysses” written by the Victorian poet Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) who is generally hailed as the most representative poet of the Victorian period. Tennyson, as you will get to read, perfectly voiced relentless spirit of the age for gaining more and more

knowledge of the unknown frontiers of the physical world of the time. While the other leading luminaries of Victorian poetry—Robert Browning (1812-1887) and Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) remained preoccupied with their professed line of interests—Browning with dramatic monologue, and Arnold with moral deprivations often snubbed as 'philistinism', Tennyson focused on the different polarities of his time. Robert Browning has been much acclaimed for his innovative dramatic monologues like "My Last Duchess" and "The Last Ride Together" in which he tried to probe the inner minds of his characters, while at the same time advocating on their behalf. Matthew Arnold, who defined poetry as "criticism of life", embodied the role of a moral critic of the time. As exemplified in his poems like "The Scholar Gypsy" and "Dover Beach", Arnold felt disgust at the Victorian way of life particularly the corrupt and selfish pursuits of the age, and yearned for a peaceful, optimistic and spiritually tranquil society free from the 'philistines'. In contrast to these two great poets, Tennyson displayed a sweeping range of interests right from the imbroglio involving the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Human Species* (1859) resulting in the famous Victorian Compromise, the scientific innovations and inventions of the time, to the expansion of the British empire within the ambit of his poetic designs. By the time you finish reading this unit, you will be able to learn why he is often considered one of the most accomplished lyric poets in the history of English verse.

12.3 TENNYSON: THE POET

Alfred Tennyson remains the most representative poet of the Victorian era. Being the mouthpiece of the age, he expressed both the hopes and the doubts of his time. Like the great Romantics of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Tennyson too was a keen observer of nature. However, his specialty in this respect remains the fact that he was not biased in favour of only one particular dimension of nature; rather, he threw light on both the



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alfred,_Lord_Tennyson

benevolent and malevolent aspects of it. Tennyson, to some extent, can be termed as a true descendent of Romantics like Shelly and Keats so far as the emotional thread of their poetic pieces is concerned. His bosom friend and one of his earliest critics Arthur Henry Hallam first pointed out this aspect of Tennyson's poetry.

12.3.1 His Life

Alfred Tennyson, born on August 6, 1809 at Somersby Rectory in Lincolnshire, was the son of the rector of Somersby, Reverend George Clayton Tennyson. Tennyson had eleven siblings and his father was an alcoholic— factor that took a toll on their middle class existence in Tennyson's childhood. After his early education, mainly at home and at Louth Grammar School for a brief period, Tennyson went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1827. He displayed his poetic competence at Trinity in 1829 by winning the Chancellor's Medal for his poem "Timbuctoo". In fact, admission into Trinity was sort of an escape for him from disturbed domestic environment marked by his father's bitter temperament resulting from his disinheritance. However, the chaotic atmosphere at home during his formative years had already left its mixed impetus on Tennyson's personality. The outcome of it was a dual personality displayed by the poet throughout his life—a personality prone to compromise that wavered between faith and doubt. However, his later life, particularly post the publication in 1842 of his *Poems*, a two-volume collection of poetry, was blissful.

In November 1850, Tennyson was appointed the Poet Laureate of England consequent to the death of William Wordsworth in April the same year and the refusal of the offer by Wordsworth and Coleridge's friend Samuel Rogers (1763-1855) on the ground of his senility. The year was also remarkable for the publication of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, an elegy triggered by the unfortunate and untimely death of Arthur Henry Hallam whom Tennyson had befriended at Trinity in 1828, and the beginning of his conjugal life

with Emily Sellwood. The poet's personal fortunes saw a steep rise after 1850 and he was honoured with the title of Baron in 1884, which he had declined earlier on three occasions in 1865, 1874 and 1880. Tennyson suffered from serious illness in 1888 that posed a threat to his life, which according to his doctor's version was as near death as a man could get.

He died at "Aldworth", his second country home, on 6th October 1892.

12.3.2 His Poetic Works [adapted from *Gale Encyclopaedia*]

In 1827, when Tennyson was almost eighteen years old, his first volume of poetry, *Poems by Two Brothers* was published. *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*, published in 1830, was well received and marked the beginning of Tennyson's literary career. Another collection, *Poems* appeared in 1832. Many critics praised Tennyson's artistry but objected to what they considered an absence of intellectual substance. The latter volume was published following a request of Arthur Hallam, a brilliant Cambridge undergraduate who had become Tennyson's closest friend and who was an ardent admirer of his poetry. However, Hallam's premature death in 1833, which prompted the series of elegies later comprising "In Memoriam", contributed greatly to Tennyson's despair. For nearly a decade after Hallam's death, Tennyson published no further poetry.

As Tennyson was maturing, the political situation in England was also changing as Queen Victoria took the throne in 1837, beginning a long reign (which ended in 1901) and setting the tone for an important era in British history. During the Victorian age, the Industrial Revolution reached its peak, providing a boost to British colonial and military expansion during the 19th century. On the one hand, there was a vast increase in the factory system, industrialization, and urbanization, changing the fabric of British society. On the other hand, reform and social justice were also emphasised. In such an environment, yielding to a friend's insistence,

Tennyson published his two-volume collection *Poems* in 1842.

Following an unsuccessful financial venture for some time, in 1845, Tennyson was granted a Government pension in recognition of both his poetic achievements and his apparent need. Contributing to his financial stability, the first edition of his narrative poem "The Princess: A Medley", published in 1847, sold out within two months. Moreover, the timely success of "In Memoriam", published in 1850, ensured Tennyson's appointment as poet laureate, succeeding William Wordsworth. This assured Tennyson the opportunity to become the poetic voice of his generation, and in his ceremonial position he composed such poems as "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington" and "The Charge of the Light Brigade", each of which is a celebration of heroism and public duty. *Idylls of the King* (1859), considered by Tennyson's contemporaries to be his masterpiece, and *Enoch Arden* (1864), which sold more than forty thousand copies upon publication, increased both his popularity and his wealth and earned him the designation "the people's poet."

Although the dramatic works written later in his career like *Queen Mary* (1875) and *The Foresters* (1892) were largely unsuccessful, Tennyson completed several additional collections of poems in the last decade of his life, all of which were well received. They included: *Ballads and Other Poems* (1880), *Tiresias, and Other Poems* (1885), and *Demeter, and Other Poems* (1889). In 1883, he accepted a peerage, the first poet to be so honoured strictly based on literary achievement.



LET US KNOW

A quick look at the list of Tennyson's works

- *Poems by Two Brothers* (1827): It also contained poems written by his brothers Frederick and Charles.
- *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830)
- *Poems* (1832)

- *Poems* (1842), in two volumes. One of these volumes contained previously published poems in revised form and the other one presented fresh poems.
- *The Princess* (1847)
- *In Memoriam* (1850)
- *Maud and Other Poems* (1855)
- *Idylls of the King* (1859)
- *Enoch Arden* (1864). The publication of this volume brought to him the title "Poet of the People".
- *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* (1869)
- *Ballads, and Other Poems* (1880)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What was Arthur Henry Hallam's role in Tennyson's early career besides being a friend?

Q 2: Which aspects of the Victorian society did Tennyson express in his poetry?

Q 3: What were the factors that affected Tennyson's early life at home?

12.4 READING THE POEM

"Ulysses" was published in *Poems*, the two-volume collection of poetry in 1842 that marked the beginning of Tennyson's rapid stride towards great success and fame. "Ulysses", in the words of Andrew Sanders, "emphatically embraces the idea of progressive development" (426) which was one of the important agenda of Victorian policymaking. Written after Arthur Hallam's death in 1833, the poem was of much significance. Speaking of it, Tennyson himself had said: "There is more about myself in 'Ulysses', which was written under the sense of loss..." and that the poem provided him with the "feeling about the need of going forward, and braving the struggle of life..." (as qtd. in Hill, 82).

The poem is based on two mythical sources—Homer's the *Odyssey* XI and Dante's *Inferno* (Canto 26). However, Tennyson's "Ulysses" is not a mere reproduction from his mythical sources but a re-appropriation of these to give vent to a typical Victorian attitude to life and work.

12.4.1 The Text of the Poem

It little profits that an idle king,
 By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
 Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
 Unequal laws unto a savage race,
 That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
 I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
 Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
 Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
 That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
 Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
 Vext the dim sea. I am become a name;
 For always roaming with a hungry heart
 Much have I seen and known, % cities of men
 And manners, climates, councils, governments,
 Myself not least, but honour'd of them all,%
 And drunk delight 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 arch wherethro'
 Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
 For ever and for ever when I move.
 How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use.
 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains; but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were

For some three suns to store and hoard 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 labour, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail
 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 vessel puffs her sail;
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me,—
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads,— you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honour and his toil.
 Death closes all; but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods
 The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
 The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep

Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends.	And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.	Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
Push off, and sitting well in order smite	We are not now that strength which in old days
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds	Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are,—
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths	One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Of all the western stars, until I die.	Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;	To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,	(Source: <i>Tennyson's Poetry</i> , edited by Robert W. Hill Jr.)

Ulysses, the speaker of the poem, dismisses the idea of leading a peaceful and idle life accompanied by his wife in his hilly kingdom of Ithaca. He is also not interested in ruling his subjects—a “savage race” in his view—who are ignorant of their king. He has been through many difficulties in life and have tremendously enjoyed and equally suffered while earning a reputation in the process. He has seen many a people in different countries and came to know their customs and manners. He acknowledges that wherever he has travelled to quench his thirst for knowledge, the people have honoured him. He has fought with valour along with his fellow warriors in the battle of Troy. He possesses much knowledge but the scope of knowledge knows no bound. One's experiences and knowledge appear just like an arch through which one can see the vast expanse of knowledge that remains unexplored.

Ulysses deems it foolish not to recognise the call of an active life preferring to lead a dull life of rest and comfort that resembles to him something made of iron that has lost the shine and rusted due to little use. According to him, lives piled on lives are inadequate to master knowledge of all the things available in the world. Since he has only one life at his disposal of which too only a few years are left, he cannot shy away from constant activity. He believes that an hour spent in meaningful and worthy pursuits of knowledge of new things equals to saving that time from death, which brings eternal silence to everyone. It will be mean on his part to waste another

three years doing nothing and so he renews in old days his resolution to dedicate the rest of his life in the noble pursuit of knowledge.

Ulysses projects his son Telemachus as the future ruler. He possesses all the requisite qualities to govern the country during the absence of Ulysses. Telemachus is free from corruption and dutiful. He is expected to subdue the resilient people of his kingdom into efficient and law abiding citizens while at the same time he would offer prayers to the household gods when Ulysses is out on his mission.

In the last part of the poem, Ulysses addresses his mariners. He is well aware of his old age as well as that of the fellow-sailors. However, it is his conviction that even old age has its honour to be won and work to be performed. Though death is inevitable, before it knocks them down, they can do some noble works that befit them who had fought with Gods in the Trojan War. As the daylight wanes and the moonrises, the roar of sea waves is heard. At such a juncture, Ulysses addresses his mariners to embark upon new voyages stressing that they are not too late to explore new things and newer opportunities. Ulysses is resolute to travel beyond the point in the horizon where the sun and all the western stars set. He wants to travel like that until his death. It may be that during the course of their journey they will get drowned in the sea or that they will be able to reach Elysium and meet the great hero Achilles whom they had known in Troy. Though they are now bereft of their youthful energy due to age, there remains with them the indomitable courage and the strong will "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield".

Ulysses postulates about the untraveled world, which holds a great store of knowledge unexplored. He is tempted to set out again and master this hidden knowledge. His urge to go for it is propelled by his realisation that he has already become old and he will not live long. He decides to put his son Telemachus at the helm of power to carry forward his legacy of kingship while he will be away. In the final section of the poem, he addresses his fellow

mariners and gives them a wake-up call. He impresses upon them the fact that they have become senile but still possess the unconquerable will to achieve something great before they are silenced by death. He reiterates to them his resolution to sail beyond the utmost frontiers to attain his goal and ready to face his end if necessary.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why is Ulysses not interested in ruling his subjects?

Q 5: How does Ulysses project his son Telemachus?

12.4.2 Major Themes

The Ulysses Myth:

"Ulysses" is a reworking of the traditional myth in the backdrop of Tennyson's sense of personal loss. The myth is Homeric, but Homer's Ulysses (called Odysseus) is a whimsical military general of the battle of Troy. He is also the adventurer who takes, after the ten-year war of Troy is over, another ten years to reach back his home. Towards the end of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus reaches his land Ithaca, killed many suitors of his wife Penelope and sits at the helm of power in his country. The only hint of a last adventure, which is the theme of the Tennyson's "Ulysses", can be traced in Book IX of Homer's *Odyssey*. Odysseus goes to the underworld, meets Tiresias, the blind prophet, who reveals to him that he would reach Ithaca and that his end will come from the sea. Dante, in Canto 26 of his *Inferno*, picks up this last sea voyage as his subject and not only extends the Homeric myth but also brings the story of Ulysses to an end. In the process, the character of Ulysses undergoes certain changes—from a clever general and avenger he has become a symbol of intelligence, hungry for more and more knowledge. Therefore, it is more on Dante's work than on the Homeric myth that Tennyson's poem "Ulysses" is based on. No doubt, the character of

Ulysses is Homeric but the theme of the poem is modelled after Dante's extension of Homeric myth.

Social Consciousness:

Contemporary social consciousness is a major theme of "Ulysses". It has been represented through the character of Ulysses. Tennyson's hero is different from the Ulysses of any myth or legend. He is a purely intellectual character imbibed with the 19th century scientific zeal. He yearns for more and more knowledge and is ready even to meet his death to fulfil his avowed objective. He can hardly rest from travel and proposes to "drink/ Life to the lees". He has travelled to different lands with a hungry heart and acquired knowledge of the places he has been to. Still, his thirst for knowledge remains insatiable and he wants to explore more and more in the unknown zones of knowledge. The imagination of the people of England during the reign of Queen Victoria was fired by the new discoveries and inventions of science. In these developments, they got the much-needed boost to discover new lands and thereby add to the expansion of the British Empire, which was perhaps sailing at its best pace at that point of time. Tennyson's Ulysses embodies in himself this quest of Victorians for knowledge.

Ulysses as an Egoist:

Another theme of the poem is the presence of an egoist in Ulysses. An accommodative outlook does not match his noble intentions and never-ending hunger for knowledge so far household relation is concerned. He is disrespectful of his wife and his subordinate citizens. The very first lines of the poem present him as an egoist who feels it unprofitable to remain "an idle king" who wastes his time by the side of the "still hearth" accompanied with "an aged wife". He even calls his people "a savage race" who only "hoard, and sleep". Such views and words to describe his wife and citizens sufficiently hint that he is biased against them and holds them in little respect. Ulysses even does not appreciate much his own son

Telemachus beyond his traditional and homely responsibilities.

Conflict between Science and Tradition:

The conflict or compromise between science and tradition remains a remarkable theme of the poem "Ulysses". The Victorian era was an age of the problem of choice between the traditional Christian way of life and the scientific discourse that was bolstered by new discoveries and inventions. Industrialisation and the advancement of science necessitated ever-going activity whereas the foundation of life of a large number of people in the society remained their religious faith. Tennyson, being one of the greatest poets of the age attempted to strike a balance between these two opposite poles of his time. "Ulysses" reveals this effort of the poet through the characters of Ulysses and his son Telemachus. The poem remains a celebration of the energy and resolution of the period to run after the ever-increasing horizon of the world of knowledge. In a sense, Ulysses is the cross-continental hero of the Victorian England, an adventurer, an explorer of the unknown realms of knowledge and culture. Contrary to his father, Telemachus' life is a life of contentment and he is expected to play to perfection the conventional duties Ulysses is about to assign to him. Unlike his father, he does not feel the stir to go exploring new places and would prefer to "subdue" his subjects and worship the "household gods". However, in the fields of their individual preferences, both Ulysses and Telemachus are in mutual collaboration. They are helping one another in their respective spheres of activities, which is in a way indicative of the post-1859 Victorian Compromise between the subscribers of the conflicting ideologies of the time. Without Ulysses willing to bequeath his kingdom to his son Telemachus to rule when he is gone or Telemachus' supposed acceptance to perform the responsibilities of the king assigned to him by his father, they would not have been able to do what Ulysses puts as "He works his work,

I mine". Thus, the compromising or collaborating relationship between the scientific and the traditional domains of activity can be termed as another theme of the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 6:** What are the mythical bases of Tennyson's "Ulysses"?
- Q 7:** How has Ulysses become a name?
- Q 8:** Why does Ulysses want to undertake a new voyage?
- Q 9:** How does the poem Ulysses display the Victorian conflict between science and tradition?

12.4.3 Tennyson's Poetic Style

"Ulysses", according to David Daiches, is "one of Tennyson's most controlled and perfectly wrought dramatic monologues ..." (998). This opinion by Daiches is quite apt considering the fact that the poet presents Ulysses at a very crucial moment of his life. He has come back after a long period of absence spent in pursuit of hazardous adventures on sea and plays with the opposite ideas of whether to idle away the rest of his life at home or embark upon yet another journey. In deciding what he intends to do, his inner mind is revealed to the readers.

Tennyson beautifully delineates through the inner play of conflicting emotions the entire personality of his hero. To heighten the effect of the dramatic monologue the poet gives the poem an abrupt beginning that captures our attention—"It little profits that an idle king, / By this still hearth ..." After such a dramatic abruptness, the poet takes his protagonist to the middle of the crisis where he has to decide again about his future course of action. The epic background is one of the subtle techniques of the poem that has sustained the readers' admiration for it even today. Using mythical allusions to the character of Ulysses, Tennyson contextualises the ceaseless zeal and hunger of his contemporary Victorians for more

and more knowledge of the unknown that would in turn add to the glory of their nation. It is Tennyson's sheer craftsmanship that blends so well the legendary elements from Homer and Dante with the Victorian thirst for ever-expanding knowledge.

Another technical aspect of the poem is the autobiographical element in it. "Ulysses" is actually an outlet of the poet's feelings regarding the need to face life and continue one's march ahead, undaunted by personal tragedies besetting life, towards fulfilment of men's set objectives. Tennyson himself has acknowledged this autobiographical aspect of the poem while speaking of *In Memoriam* to James Knowles, the architect of Tennyson's second country home "Aldworth", in this manner: "There is more about myself in 'Ulysses', which was written under the sense of loss and that all had gone by, but that still life must be fought out to the end" (as qtd. in Hill 82). Ulysses, the persona of the poem, reflects the spirit and personality of the poet himself. By infusing personal touches to the near objective speaker of the poem, Tennyson perhaps wanted to instil in the minds of his contemporaries the need for a sincere pursuance of the national interests of his times.

The poem "Ulysses" is written in blank verse and there is a pictorial quality in its language. In the poem, Tennyson uses the words in a very evocative way. As evident in "By this still hearth, among these barren crags", or "There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail; / There gloom the dark, broad seas", or even the lines "The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks; / The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep/ Moans round with many voices", the poem is a good example of how language can conjure up images that are like the real ones witnessed by the eyes. Such pictorial use of language appears intentional on the part of Tennyson with a view to appealing more and more to his contemporary citizens of England.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Comment on Tennyson's poetic style as reflected in the poem "Ulysses"?

12.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF TENNYSON AS A VICTORIAN POET

While discussing the critical reception of Tennyson as a Victorian poet, one should be reminded of W.J. Long's comment on Tennyson as: "For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet; he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their grief and triumphs. In the wonderful variety of his verse he suggests all the qualities of England's greatest poets" (586). This comment is quite befitting to the merits that Tennyson had as a poet.

There is hardly any doubt that Tennyson has been the best among the Victorian poets in terms of addressing the different moods and issues of his time. However, his reputation has not always enjoyed an easy ride. His critics dismissed his early poems. However, from the 1840s, he gradually established himself as a major voice of the Victorian poetry and after the publication of *In Memoriam*, his reputation became firmly cemented. The Poet Laureateship conferred upon him testifies to his status as a poet during his lifetime. However, in the early years of the 20th century, he received a mixed reception at the hands of the modernists. In their rejection of the entire Victorian ideology, the early modernists dismissed Tennyson too in that; he had betrayed a typical Victorian attitude through most of his poetic career. The damage to his reputation in the early 20th century was caused particularly by the didactic tone of his later poems for which he came to be looked at as a moral teacher besides being a great poet by his contemporaries.

It is not always so bleak for Tennyson so far the reaction of the 20th century critics is concerned. Some critics have praised him highly taking cognizance of his contribution towards art and craft he had practised with so much of mastery particularly from the 1830s. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

by situating Tennyson in the context of his time and subject matters, lauds him that "it was the peculiar genius of Tennyson to light on the tired, moderate, unconscious ideologies of his time and class" (613). Appreciating his lyric as "gorgeous", Sedgwick further opines that Tennyson had applied his lyric genius "with a regal impartiality that makes him seem like a Christmas present to the 20th century student of ideology" (613). Such accolades from Sedgwick highlight the importance of Tennyson for both the Victorian period and the 20th century.

Tennyson has been able to find appreciation even in the hands of T.S. Eliot. Being one of the greatest of the high modernist writers and a significant critic, Eliot's appreciation speaks volumes about Tennyson's position as a master poet of the Victorian era. Comparing between Tennyson's long poems and that of his contemporaries, Eliot writes, "Tennyson's long poems are not the long poems in quite the same sense as those of his contemporaries" (623). Pointing to his *Maud* and *In Memoriam*, Eliot also praises Tennyson's lyrical capacity as "*Maud* and *In Memoriam* are each a series of poems, given form by the greatest lyrical resourcefulness that a poet has ever shown" (623). Such appreciation by modern critics proves Tennyson's importance as a Victorian poet who still continues to delight his readers. Though at times scoffed at for expressing the Victorian morality, one cannot deny Tennyson the status of a great poet of his times, which is again seconded by Eliot in the following way:

Tennyson is a great poet, for reasons that are perfectly clear. He has three qualities, which are seldom found together except in the greatest poets: abundance, variety, and complete competence. We therefore cannot appreciate his work unless we read a good deal of it. We may not admire his aims: but whatever he sets out to do, he succeeds in doing, with a mastery, which gives us the sense of confidence that is one of the major pleasures of poetry. His variety of metrical accomplishment is astonishing. (621)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: How was Tennyson received as a poet in the 19th century?

Q 12: What type of critical reception did Tennyson enjoy in the 20th century?



12.6 LET US SUM UP

Alfred Tennyson is one of the greatest poets of the Victorian period. Coming from a family of humble origins Tennyson had to face domestic troubles in his childhood. However, he comes over those early unpleasant patches of life after taking admission in Trinity College, and thereafter, he made his mark as a poet. He was way ahead of his contemporary poets like Robert Browning and Matthew Arnold in theme, technique and vision. Tennyson's "Ulysses" remains a representative poem of the Victorian spirit and social consciousness for a ceaseless campaign for more and more knowledge and might. Taking his cues from Homer and Dante's treatment of the story of Ulysses, Tennyson re-appropriates it to suit the Victorian socio-cultural ideal. Written on the wake of a great personal loss, which Tennyson frankly confesses, the poem also offers him a way to express his resolution to carry forward his journey as a poet. The poem "Ulysses" begins with a dramatic abruptness that captures the readers' attention. Ulysses has returned home after a prolonged, tumultuous military engagement and equally eventful voyage. He expresses his unhappiness at the prospect of leading an idle life ruling over his people, which does not charm him at all. He recounts the wide range of experiences gathered during his adventurous journey and tells about his earning a name for himself.

You have read that critics have not always been unanimous in their support for Tennyson. In his initial career, he had to face adverse criticism. However, after the 1840s and 1850s, he was able to silence his critics through the merits of his poetic pieces. In the early years of the 20th century,

he was criticised again for being a votary of Victorian orthodoxy. However, his reputation was redeemed after some of the greatest critics like Eliot offered a fair assessment of his poetic oeuvre.



12.7 FURTHER READING

- 1) Daiches, David. *A Critical History of English Literature*. 4 vols. New Delhi: Allied, 1998.
- 2) Eliot, T.S. "In Memoriam." "Tennyson's *Princess*: One Bride for Seven Brothers." *Tennyson's Poetry*. Ed. Robert W. Hill Jr. New York: Norton, 2010. 621-27. Print.
- 3) Entry on Tennyson in *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature*. Vol 3.
- 4) Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. New York: Back Bay, 2013. Print.
- 5) Hill Jr., Robert W. Ed. *Tennyson's Poetry*. New York: Norton, 2010. Print.
- 6) Ricks, Christopher. (ed). (1987). *The Poems of Tennyson*. 3 Vols. Berkley: U of California.
- 7) Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*. New York: OUP, 2000. Print.
- 8) Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. "Tennyson's *Princess*: One Bride for Seven Brothers." *Tennyson's Poetry*. Ed. Robert W. Hill Jr. New York: Norton, 2010. 613-21. Print.
- 9) Turner, Paul. (1976). *Tennyson*. London: Routledge.



12.8 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Arthur Henry Hallam was an early critic of Tennyson.

Ans to Q 2: Tennyson expressed both hopes and doubts of the Victorian age.

Ans to Q 3: A large family of twelve children and an alcoholic father were

the factors that affected Tennyson's early life.

Ans to Q 4: He is not interested in ruling his subjects who in his view are a "savage race" and who are ignorant of their king.

Ans to Q 5: Ulysses projects his son Telemachus as the future ruler...
...he possesses all the requisite qualities to govern the country during the absence of his father Ulysses... ... Telemachus is free from corruption and is dutiful... ...he would subdue the resilient people of his kingdom into efficient and law abiding citizens... ...at the same time, he would offer prayers to the household gods when Ulysses is out on his mission.

Ans to Q 6: Homer's Odysseus and Dante's Ulysses are the mythical bases for Tennyson's "Ulysses".

Ans to Q 7: Ulysses has travelled to many countries where he has met many people and learnt their cultures and habits. As an outcome of his encounter with these different people across countries, he has been able to become a name among them.

Ans to Q 8: Ulysses wants to undertake a new voyage in order to know the previously unexplored world of knowledge.

Ans to Q 9: The Victorian era was an age of the problem of choice between the traditional Christian way of life and the scientific discourse...
...Industrialisation and the advancement of science necessitated ever-going activity whereas the foundation of life of a large number of people remained their religious faith.... ...Tennyson, attempted to strike a balance between these two opposite poles of his time.

Ans to Q No 10: This poem is one of Tennyson's most controlled and perfectly wrought dramatic monologues... ...with a dramatic abruptness, the poet takes his protagonist to the middle of the crisis where he has to decide again about his future course of action...
...using mythical allusions to the character of Ulysses, Tennyson contextualises the ceaseless zeal and hunger of his contemporary Victorians for more and more knowledge... ..."Ulysses" is actually an outlet of the poet's feelings regarding the need to face life and continue one's march ahead... ...the poem is written in blank verse and there is a pictorial quality in its language

Ans to Q 11: His critics dismissed his early poems... ..from the 1840s, he gradually established himself as a major voice of the Victorian poetry... ..he also became the Poet Laureate which testifies to his status as a poet during his lifetime... ..W J Long comments: "For nearly half a century Tennyson was not only a man and a poet; he was a voice, the voice of a whole people, expressing in exquisite melody their doubts and their faith, their grief and triumphs."

Ans to Q 12: In the 20th century, critics have praised Tennyson highly taking cognizance of his contribution towards art and craft he had practised... ..Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick lauded him that "it was the peculiar genius of Tennyson to light on the tired, moderate, unconscious ideologies of his time and class."... ..another poet T.S. Eliot speaks volumes about Tennyson's position as a master poet of the Victorian era.



12.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Discuss "Ulysses" as a typical Victorian poem with particular emphasis on the dichotomy between science and tradition.
- Q 2:** Can you state that Tennyson's "Ulysses" is an expression of his personality or of an ideology? Give reasons in support of your argument.
- Q 3:** It will not be an exaggeration to say that in "Ulysses" Tennyson celebrates the energy and resolution of the Victorian age. Discuss.
- Q 4:** Critically appreciate "Ulysses" as a poem on the basis of its various thematic elements.
- Q 5:** Discuss Tennyson's "Ulysses" in the context of its underlying mythical structure.
- Q 6:** Comment on Tennyson's poetic style and technique as found in the poem Ulysses.
- Q 7:** In what ways, does a poem like "Ulysses" reflect on the Victorian compromise between scientific progress and religious faith? Discuss.

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UNIT 13: ROBERT BROWNING: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 13.1 Learning Objectives
- 13.2 Introduction
- 13.3 Robert Browning: The Poet
 - 13.3.1 His Life
 - 13.3.2 His Poetic Works
- 13.4 Critical Reception of Browning as a Victorian Poet
- 13.5 Let us Sum up
- 13.6 Further Reading
- 13.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 13.8 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- identify Robert Browning as a significant Victorian poet along with Tennyson
- discuss the life and works of Robert Browning
- assess how Browning had been received as a Victorian poet.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the life and works of Robert Browning who is considered one of the greatest Victorian poets. Popular for his poetry collection *Men and Women* (1855), Browning's poems show his interest in a wide range of themes and subjects. His philosophy of life and art is loosely interwoven in his extremely condensed and rugged expression, which often make his poetry difficult for the readers. However, his poetry is marked by his acute sense of lyric intensity and the subtle grasp of the human character. However, he is chiefly remembered for his mastery of the dramatic monologue and the range of his works. The dramatic monologues show his

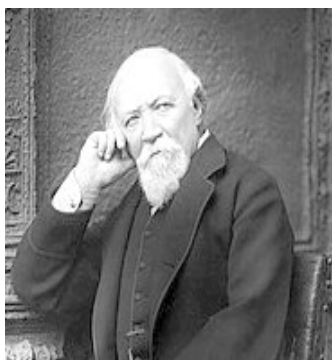
capacity to represent the meanderings of the individual mind through soliloquies. This unit shall help you to place Browning in the history of Victorian literature.

13.3 ROBERT BROWNING: THE POET

Robert Browning is considered one of the greatest poets of the Victorian England. His fame is spread as an erudite scholar and as one of the most prolific writers of his time. As a man of unchallengeable genius, he had tremendous hope and faith in the ability of man. His works are reflective of his philosophy of optimism, which marks the poet's worldview and aesthetics. In the following two sub sections, you will get to learn about the poet's life and his works.

13.3.1 His Life

Robert Browning was born on 7 May 1812 at the suburb of Camberwell, a district in South London, in a cultured middle class family. During his formative years of childhood, Browning received certain major influences from his parents. His father, who worked as a bank clerk, was highly interested in art. He was also an erudite reader and possessed a huge collection of rare books of varied interests. Both Browning and his father had a passion for tales of intrigues, crimes and violence, old and new, and they used to read a lot about them in the newspapers. This interest later influenced some of his famous poetic characters. Browning did not go to a formal school after the age of fourteen and it was his father's library that helped him develop himself with the required knowledge and intellect to get a seat in the University College of London. Before going to the University, he studied



Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Browning

European history, the Classics and painting at home apart from books on various other disciplines. His mother had an important role in developing his taste in music, love for the natural world, and the deep sense of religiosity.

While he was a teenager, he dreamt of writing poetry, plays and novels. By the age of twelve, Browning had written a book of poetry. He later destroyed this collection when he found no publisher eager to publish it. By the age of 14, he had acquired a formidable knowledge of French, Greek, Italian and Latin. He developed a deep interest in Romantic poetry and P. B. Shelley had been one of his early inspirations to start his poetic ventures. Influenced by Shelley, he became an atheist and vegetarian, but could not stick to this resolution for a long time. When he was sixteen, he joined University College of London to study Greek, but did not continue his studies after the first year.

In the year of 1844, Elizabeth Barret, an emerging poet, six years his elder, published her poetry collection *Poems*. In one of the poems of this collection, Browning found an appraisal of him. This appraisal acted as a catalyst in the development of romance between the two poets. Browning eloped with Elizabeth Barrett in September 1846, and started their conjugal life in Italy. From the time of their marriage and until Elizabeth's death, they lived in Italy, residing a few months in Pisa, and then, within a year, shifting to Florence. Elizabeth Barrett was interested in writing poetry and with her *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850); she acclaimed some fame for herself. After her death in 1861, Browning found it difficult to live in Italy. He left the city for good and came back to London to live with his son.

The death of his wife affected his creative mind; but he continued writing poetry until his death in 1889. In London, he spent the rest of his life, besides extensively travelling to France, Scotland, Italy and Switzerland. During this period, he wrote a number of dramatic poems, two series of Dramatic Idylls and a few poems like

“Balaustion’s Adventure” (1871) and “Aristophanes’ Apology” (1875) primarily on classical subjects.

He died at his son’s home in Venice on 12 December 1889. He was buried in Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, immediately next to the grave of Alfred Tennyson. In his lifetime, Browning received many honoured distinctions. He was made L.L.D. of Edinburgh as well as a life Governor of London University.

13.3.2 His Poetic Works

Robert Browning engaged his creative ventures as both a poet and a playwright. As a poet, he started his career at a very early age. His first book of verse *Incondita* was published in 1824. The influence of Lord Byron is clearly visible in this work. Besides *Incondita*, Byron’s influence can also be traced in his other early works like the autobiographical poem *Pauline* (1833) and *Paracelsus* (1834). After Byron, it was the poems and aesthetics of Shelley that continued to rule Browning’s poetic worlds for several years.

The publication of “Pippa Passes” in 1841 and *Dramatic Lyrics* in 1842, were two important events in his poetic career. These two works were part of his eight pamphlets published under the general title *Bells and Pomegranates*. The other pamphlets in this series include *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1843), *Colombe’s Birthday* (1844), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845), *Luria* and *A Soul’s Tragedy* (1846). Poems like “My Last Duchess”, “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”, and “Incident of the French Camp”; “Porphyria’s Lover” in *Dramatic Lyrics* established his mastery over this newly developing technique of dramatic monologue. His *Sordello* (1840), based on the historical setting of the conflict between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines in the 13th century Italy, had to receive severe criticism on account of the charges of obscurity of allusion and style. Arthur Symonds has marked the poem as a ‘psychological epic’ where the chief focus lies on the developing of conflicts between art and society, egoism and

sympathy, action and contemplation.

Browning was a great admirer of the then popular actor Edmund Kean, whose compelling influence encouraged the poet to try his hands with plays. He composed a few plays like *Colombe's Birthday*, *Strafford*, *A Blot in the Scutcheon* etc. It would be wrong to say that he was utterly unsuccessful as a playwright; in fact, most of these plays did a moderate business. However, Browning soon understood that playwriting was not the best option for him to cultivate his creative possibilities. His creative genius was much interested in exploring the struggles, tensions and conflicts within the individual's mind; and he could not appropriate the form of a theatrical production to do justice to what he wanted to express. His gradual departure from the stage was followed by a few new experimentations with the form of poetic expression. It was his inclination towards the theatre that led him to juxtapose the dramatic with the lyric. These experimentations resulted in the development of a new mode of poetic expression, popularly known as the 'dramatic monologue', which has given Browning an identity of his own in the field of English literature.



LET US KNOW

Dramatic Monologue:

It is important for you to note that though the words in the phrase 'dramatic monologue' may refer to some forms of expression related to theatre, actually it is not so. 'Dramatic monologue' is a particular type of lyric poem. A monologue is a long speech by a single speaker or character through which an expression of the private thoughts is given. Perhaps you know that in plays, such monologues are called soliloquies. While discussing Browning's construction of dramatic monologues, M. H. Abrams observes that a dramatic monologue is basically characterised by three main features.

- a. The entire poem is made up of the speech, made in a specific situation at a critical moment, by a person or a character who is not the poet.
- b. The speech of the speaker is made to one or more persons who converse with the speaker. The readers know about the presence of the author of the poem and other characters and their discussions only through the hints provided by the single speaker through his/her speech.
- c. The motif behind the poet's formulation of the single speaker's speech is to reveal to the readers the temperament and character of the speaker. Rather than thinking aloud, the speaker composes a self-defence, which the reader is challenged to see through.

Browning came to his eminence as a great master of dramatic monologue through the publication of *Men and Women* (1855). This collection showed Browning dealing with a wide range of themes and subjects with subtle and intense presentation of the individual's mind through soliloquies weaved in beautiful lyrics. This collection contained some of Browning's highly rated poems like "Love among the Ruins", "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came", "A Toccata of Galuppi's". Besides these poems, the dramatic monologues like "Fra Lippo Lippi", "Andrea Del Sarto" and "Bishop Blougram's Apology" are also published in this collection. It is to be noted that for his dramatic monologues, Browning chose some of the most debased, extreme and even criminally infamous characters, where the challenge for him was that of building a sympathetic case for a character that does not deserve one. This technique of poetic expression allowed the poet to raise serious questions over the intellectual and social atmosphere of the Victorian world without getting involved with them directly. The apparent dialogues in his monologues are reflective of the conflicts, tensions and contradictions of his age. Many of his poems were set against the backdrop of Italian Renaissance and depicted some of its major personalities.

The context of Renaissance helped him to raise questions about his own times. This practice allowed the readers to posit themselves at a moral and historical position different from their times and look into the issues with the freedom to enter into the psychological realm of the characters. It also helped him to maintain an objective distance from the characters he created. Browning draws on different traditions, which includes the soliloquies of Shakespeare, the poetry of John Donne, and, later in the Victorian period, the sonnets of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Such poets used language that is more colloquial, drew on the more discordant sounds of spoken language, and employed contrasting stylistic tones, which are often shocking and unpredictable, but served to shock the readers with an awareness of a world of everyday realities.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** Why did Browning shift his interests from drama to dramatic lyrics?
- Q 2:** What do you think about the characteristics of a dramatic monologue, which make it 'dramatic'?
- Q 3:** What purpose do the dramatic monologues serve for Browning?
- Q 4:** In what way, did the contexts of the Renaissance help Browning to write his monologues?

Browning published his *Dramatis Personae* in the year of 1864. This volume included some of his most celebrated poems like "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "Caliban upon Setebos", "A Death in the Desert", Mr. Sludge, "The Medium", "Prospice", "Abt Vogler", etc. "Caliban upon Setebos", which can be demanded as the most discussed poem in this collection, makes some important comments on the debates surrounding the relationship between God and man. Several critics have opined that Browning tries to satirise orthodox **Calvinism**, which holds man basically as corrupt, and God as the unquestionable and supreme power. Browning takes up man's

attempt to construct God in his own image as the central theme of the poem. His other well-acclaimed poem "Rabbi Ben Ezra" is an imaginative exercise to express the ideal through the dramatic representation of a man. This poem repeatedly tries to assert the superiority and nobility of man. His *The Ring and the Book*, the poem of epic length in twelve books, was published in 1868-69 in four instalments. Based on an infamous triple murder that took place in Rome in the year of 1698, the poem takes up a long forgotten moment in Roman history and enlivens it through the portrayal of different characters. The poem marks Browning's ability to look at the same incident through different distinct points of view, as we find his characters elaborating, emphasizing, and suppressing various elements of the same incident in accordance with their interests.

The achievement of Robert Browning lies in his breaking away from the post-Keatsian influence of handling sensory images and bringing back colloquial vigour to English poetry. He is renowned for his ability to build and explore complex character argumentatively that gave his verse robust individuality. Here, it has to be accepted that the personalities and attitudes that Browning projects in his dramatic monologues are not necessarily always accurate. Browning constructs the historical characters in order to present an area of his own thought and feeling, and as such, it does not make much difference for him in constructing the characters as imaginatively as he could. However, it does not mean that Browning never tried to realistically construct a historical moment; he is often seen at pains to capture the essence of a historical period in a particular character.

Throughout his poetic career, Browning appears before his readers in various avatars. Sometimes, he is a passionate singer of love, youth and the world of senses, sometimes a serious and curious investigator of human experiences and sometimes a valiant believer in the imperishable greatness of the soul of man. Moreover, he was one of the greatest humanists of his times. Out of all these avatars,

Browning as a singer of love, youth and sensuousness is often seen as superior in his artistic and humanistic appeal. Browning's indulgence with his psychological power leads his poems into subtleties and complexities that strip them off from their poetic sensibility. The same is true when we find him dealing with religious and philosophical issues; in such cases he behaves like a theologian and a philosopher without any displaying of his poetic imagination. However, all his great poems show an acute juxtaposition of the poet in all his poetic characteristics as a singer, lover, thinker, fighter etc.

The poetic value of Browning's monologues lies in the violence and vividness with which the poet renders his characters and their personality. Browning tries to construct a confessional moment and crisis for the characters, which forces them to give vent to the truth of life and the world as they observe. It is often seen that, as in his collection *Men and Women*, Browning intertwines his personal experiences and intuitions with historical facts and moments. The dramatic mode was, for Browning, a way of qualifying his own emotional experiences and imaginative endeavours to poetic temperament. Browning's dramatic monologues enable him to explore extreme and usually extremely morbid states of mind. However, his use of different characters and a range of different voices does not allow the reader to identify the speaker with Browning the author. The dramatic monologues, which Browning developed after his experience of writing for the London theatre, act as a kind of mask. They anticipate the monologues of Modernist poets such as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (for example, *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*). The 'mask' allows the writer to explore the human soul without the soul-searching being too directly personal.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Name some of the important poetry collections of Robert Browning.

Q 6: Explain the causes of Browning's great poetic achievements.

Q 7: What usually contribute to the poetic value of Browning's monologues?

13.4 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BROWNING AS A VICTORIAN POET

Although Robert Browning's work consistently attracted critical attention, it was not always positive. The critical history of Browning's works initially shows a pattern of slow recognition followed by enormous popularity and even adulation in the two decades prior to his death. His reputation subsequently declined, but gradually recovered with the appearance of important biographical and critical studies by William C. DeVane and other scholars in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Browning's early reviewers often complained about the obscurity, incomprehensibility, and awkward language of his works, an impression largely arising from *Sordello*. When Browning did achieve fame with *Dramatis Personae* and *The Ring and the Book*, the Victorian audience considered him a profound philosophical thinker and teacher who had chosen poetry as his medium of instruction. Critics often cite the influence of Browning's diction on the poetic language of modern poets like Ezra Pound, and the effect of his dramatic monologues on the pivotal works of T. S. Eliot. In addition to its considerable influence, the value of his works continue to be reassessed, with commentators focusing less on the philosophical aspects of his writings and more on his strengths as a genuinely original artist. Although his early poems were not successes, they are important for understanding his poetic aspirations and for the opportunity; they provide the reader to trace his developing philosophy and developing poetic techniques.

Browning's combination of dramatic and lyric expression gradually took the form of dramatic monologue. The scholars who have carried out

extensive studies on Dramatic Monologue agree that Browning's place in English literature is based largely on his contribution to the poetic genre of the dramatic monologue, the form he adopted for a large number of his works. His diverse topics, striking use of language, and stylistic creativity, his accomplishments in this genre etc. constitute the basis of his reputation. Literary historians define the dramatic monologue as a poem in which the speaker's character is gradually disclosed in a dramatic situation through his or her own words. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," for example, the hypocritical nature of the narrator becomes increasingly apparent to the reader as the poem progresses. As the monk speaks, he reveals aspects of his personality of which even he is unaware; the voice of the poet is absent from the poem altogether. Whether Browning chose a historical or an imaginary figure, a reliable or an unreliable narrator, Browning evolved the techniques of exposing a character's personality to an unprecedented degree of subtlety and psychological depth. As a few previous poets had done, he explored the makeup of the mind, scrutinizing the interior lives of his characters. His protagonists vary from sophisticated theologians and artists to simple peasant children, spanning a range of personalities from the pure and innocent to the borderline psychotic. A considerable number of Browning's men and women, however, exemplify his overriding interest in thwarted or twisted personalities whose lives are scarred by jealousy, lust, or avarice.

In addition to its psychological depth, critics agree that one of the main strengths of Browning's work is its sheer abundance and variety in terms of subject matter, time, place, and character. His difficult subjects demand serious intellectual efforts from the reader, and they reflect the enormous breadth of his interests in science, history, art, and music. His primary source of inspiration was Renaissance Italy; its unsurpassed artistic accomplishments and rich religious and political history provided him with many of his themes and characters. Nevertheless, his settings range from the Middle Ages to his own era, reflecting a diverse assortment of cultures.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: How is Browning different from the previous English poets?

Q 9: Which are the main strengths of Robert Browning as a poet?



13.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about the Victorian poet Robert Browning who is chiefly remembered for his mastery of the dramatic monologue and for the remarkable diversity and range of his works. By vividly portraying a central character against a social background, his poems probe complex human motives in a variety of historical periods. As a highly individual force in the history of English poetry, Browning made significant innovations in language and versification and had a profound influence on numerous 20th century poets, including such key figures as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot.



13.6 FURTHER READING

- 1) Abrams, M. H. (2000). *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 7th Edition. New Delhi: Harcourt India Private Limited.
- 2) Brooke, Stopford A. (2007). *The Poetry of Robert Browning*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.
- 3) Browning, Robert. (1956). *Poems of Robert Browning*. Boston: The Riverside Press.
- 4) Carter, Ronald. (2001). *Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland*. London: Routledge.
- 5) Drabble, Margaret. (ed.) (2000). *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. (6th edition). Oxford University Press.
- 6) Entry on Browning in *Gale Contextual Encyclopaedia of World Literature*. Vol 1.

- 7) Loucks, James F. (ed.) (1979). *Robert Browning's Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*. London & New York. WW Norton & Company.
- 8) Symons, Arthur. (2006). *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*. New Delhi: A.B.S. Publishers and Distributors.

Web Resources:

www.wikipedia.org

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/lippi/text.html>



13.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Browning understood that playwriting could not cultivate his creative possibilities... ..he was much interested in exploring the struggles, tensions and conflicts within the individual's mind... ..his gradual departure from the stage was followed by a few new experimentations with the form of poetic expression... ..it was his inclination towards the theatre that led him to juxtapose the dramatic with the lyric.

Ans to Q 2: Similarity with soliloquy... ..single character and assumed audience... ..narrative in the form of speech... .. self expression of character... ..apparent dialogue.

Ans to Q 3: Through his monologues, Browning chose some of the most debased, extreme and even criminally infamous characters... ..his tried to build a sympathetic case for a character that does not deserve one... ..this technique helped him to raise serious questions over the intellectual and social atmosphere of the Victorian world without getting involved with them directly... ..the dialogues in his monologues are reflective of the conflicts, tensions and contradictions of his age.

Ans to Q 4: The context of Renaissance helped him to raise questions about his own times. This practice allowed the readers to posit themselves at a moral and historical position different from their times and look into the issues with the freedom to enter into the psychological

realm of the characters. It also helped him to maintain an objective distance from the characters he created.

Ans to Q 5: *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) that includes poems like “My Last Duchess”, “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”, “Incident of the French Camp”; “Porphyria’s Lover”... ..*Men and Women* (1855) that includes poems like “Love among the Ruins”, “Child Roland to the Dark Tower Came”, “A Toccata of Galuppi’s”, “Fra Lippo Lippi”, “Andrea Del Sarto” etc.... ..*Dramatis Personae* in the year of 1864 which includes poems like poems like “Rabbi Ben Ezra”, “Caliban upon Setebos”, “A Death in the Desert”, “Mr. Sludge”, “Prospice”, “Abt Vogler”, “The Medium”, “Caliban upon Setebos” etc.... .. *The Ring and the Book* in 1868-69 that includes poems like

Ans to Q 6: Browning broke away from the post-Keatsian influence of handling sensory images and brought back colloquial vigour to English poetry... ..his ability to build and explore complex characters argumentatively gave his verse robust individuality... ..he constructed historical characters in order to present an area of his own thought and feeling.

Ans to Q 7: The poetic value of Browning’s monologues lies in the violence and vividness with which the poet renders his characters and their personality. Browning tries to construct a confessional moment and crisis for the characters, which forces them to give vent to the truth of life and the world as they observe.

Ans to Q 8: Browning explored the makeup of the mind, scrutinizing the interior lives of his characters... ..his protagonists vary from sophisticated theologians and artists to simple peasant children, spanning a range of personalities from the pure and innocent to the borderline psychotic... ..Browning’s men and women, exemplify his overriding interest in thwarted or twisted personalities whose lives are scarred by jealousy, lust, or avarice.

Ans to Q 9: Besides the psychological depths, critics agree that one of the main strengths of Browning’s work is its sheer abundance and variety in terms of subject matter, time, place, and character... ..his difficult

subjects demand serious intellectual efforts from the reader and they reflect the enormous breadth of his interests in science, history, art, and music... .. his unsurpassed artistic accomplishments and rich religious and political history provided him with many of his themes and characters... ..his settings range from the Middle Ages to his own era, reflecting a diverse assortment of cultures.



13.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** How could dramatic monologue be a useful tool for Browning in depicting the different tensions within a character and within its historical period?
- Q 2:** Describe the importance of Robert Browning as a poet in the context of Victorian poetry.
- Q 3:** Discuss the main causes behind the great poetic achievements of Browning as a Victorian poet.
- Q 4:** Provide a critical appreciation of Robert Browning as a poet of the Victorian era with special reference to his unique characteristics as a poet.
- Q 5:** Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the form of the dramatic monologue. What kinds of subject matter does dramatic monologue best address in Browning's poetry?
- Q 6:** Why does Browning so often choose painters as the speakers for his monologues? Discuss with reference to his Fra Lippo Lippi.

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UNIT 14: ROBERT BROWNING: “FRA LIPPO LIPPI”

UNIT STRUCTURE:

- 14.1 Learning Objectives
- 14.2 Introduction
- 14.3 Reading the Poems
 - 14.3.1 The Texts of the Poems
 - 14.3.2 Major Themes
 - 14.3.3 Browning’s Poetic Style
- 14.4 Let us Sum up
- 14.5 Further Reading
- 14.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 14.7 Possible Questions

14.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read the poem “Fra Lippo Lippi” and explore the various themes and ideas working in it
- explore the various themes and ideas in the poem and open up newer avenues for looking at the poem.
- discuss the poem “Fra Lippo Lippi” in its nuanced totality.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit brings to you a reading of Robert Browning’s famous poem “Fra Lippo Lippi”. Based on the life of a 15th century Italian painter and a Carmelite friar named Fra Filippo di Tommaso Lippi, the poem raises various questions on the role of art and artist in the aesthetic and spiritual life of an individual as well as the society. The poem is a dramatic monologue where the poet tries to demarcate the differences in attitude and philosophy of the Medieval and Renaissance artists on art. This poem is a good example of Browning as a humourist in English poetry. This intellectually alluring poem, with references to a number of saints and many other contemporary

painters, makes a unique combination of caustic irony and cutting laughter with the sober discussions on the nature and role of art in the individual and social lives of Renaissance. As you read through this unit, you will understand how under the layer of the ludic (playful), Browning beautifully presents a discussion of some of the most serious debates on the idea of art in this poem.

14.3 READING THE POEM

In the following sections, we will find ourselves discussing, in some details, the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".

14.3.1 The Texts of the Poems [Taken from <http://www.victorianweb.org>]

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
 You need not clap your torches to my face.
 Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
 What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
 And here you catch me at an alley's end
 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
 The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
 Do — harry out, if you must show your zeal,
 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse, 10
 , , that's crept to keep him company!
 Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take
 Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
 And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
 Three streets off — he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
 Master — a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
 I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
 Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe! 20

But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
 Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
 Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
 And count fair prize what comes into their net?
 He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
 Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
 Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
 Of the munificent House that harbors me
 (And many more beside, lads! more beside!) 30
 And all's come square again. I'd like his face —
 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
 With the pike and lantern — for the slave that holds
 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
 With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
 A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down, 40

You know them and they take you? like enough!
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye —
 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
 And saints again. I could not paint all night —
 Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.⁵⁰
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song —
 Flower o' the broom,
 Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good is life since?
Flower o' the thyme — and so on. Round they went.
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight— three slim shapes
 And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood, 60
 That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
 All the bed-furniture — a dozen knots,
 There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
 And after them. I came up with the fun
 Flower o' the rose,
 If I've been merry, what matter who knows ?
 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met —
 And so as I was stealing back again⁷⁰
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,

You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head —
 Mine's shaved— a monk, you say — the sting's in that!
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now! 80
 I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there. God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
 My stomach being empty as your hat,
 The wind doubled me up and down I went.
 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
 And so along the wall, over the bridge, 90
 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
 While I stood munching my first bread that month:
 "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
 Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time —
 "T quit this very miserable world?
 Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought!
 By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
 Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici 100
 Have given their hearts to — all at eight years old.
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
 'T was not for nothing — the good bellyful,
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
 And day-long blessed idleness beside!
 "Let's see what the urchin's fit for" — that came next,
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
 Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:

Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove, 110
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again, 120
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whippe
 How say I? — nay, which dog bites?, which lets drop
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street —
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge, 130
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
 "Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d' ye say?
 In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
 What if at last we get our man of parts,
 We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
 And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine 140
 And put the front on it that ought to be!"
 And hereupon he bade me daub away.

Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
 I drew them, fat and lean : then, folk at church,
 From good old gossips waiting to confess
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends —
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there 150
 With the little children round him in a row
 Of admiration, half for his beard and half
 For that white anger of his victim's son
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
 After the passion of a thousand years)
 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf, 160
 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
 (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone,
 I painted all, then cried "T is ask and have;
 Choose, for more's ready!" — laid the ladder flat,
 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
 Being simple bodies — "That's the very man!
 Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
 That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes 170
 To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd;
 Their betters took their turn to see and say:
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face
 And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
 Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!

Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
 Your business is not to catch men with show,
 With homage to the perishable clay, 180
 But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 Your business is to paint the souls of men —
 Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
 It's vapor done up like a new-born babe —
 (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 Give us no more of body than shows soul!
 Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
 That sets us praising — why not stop with him? 190
 Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
 With wonder at lines, colors, and what not?
 Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 Rub all out, try at it a second time.
 Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
 She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say —
 Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
 Have it all out! "Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further 200
 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
 When what you put for yellow's simply black,
 And any sort of meaning looks intense
 When all beside itself means and looks naught.
 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint — is it so pretty
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear, 210

Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
 And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?
 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all —
 (I never saw it — put the case the same —)
 If you get simple beauty and naught else,
 You get about the best thing God invents:
 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks. 220
 "Rub all out! "Well, well, there's my life, in short,
 And so the thing has gone on ever since.
 I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
 You should not take a fellow eight years old
 And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
 I'm my own master, paint now as I please —
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
 Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front —
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse! 230
 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
 The heads shake still — "It's art's decline, my son!
 You're not of the true painters, great and old;
 Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;
 Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
 Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
 Flower o' the pine,
 You keep your mistr ... manners, and I'll stick to mine !
 I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know! 240
 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
 They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
 To please them — sometimes do and sometimes don't;

For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints —
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world —
Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all, and his own life for each!
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,²⁵⁰
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
 In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
 Although the miller does not preach to him
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.
 What would men have? Do they like grass or no —
 May they or may n't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled forever one way. As it is, ²⁶⁰
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
 I always see the garden and God there
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards,
 You understand me: I'm a beast, I know. ²⁷⁰
 But see, now — why, I see as certainly
 As that the morning-star's about to shine,
 What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
 Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
 Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
 His name is Guidi — he'll not mind the monks —
 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk —
 He picks my practice up — he'll paint apace,

I hope so — though I never live so long,
 I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!²⁸⁰
 You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
 However, you're my man, you've seen the world
 — The beauty and the wonder and the power,
 The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
 Changes, surprises, — and God made it all!
 — For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
 The mountain round it and the sky above,
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
 These are the frame to? What's it all about?²⁹⁰
 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
 Wondered at? oh, this last of course! — you say.
 But why not do as well as say — paint these
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
 God's works — paint any one, and count it crime
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
 Are here already; nature is complete:
 Suppose you reproduce her (which you can't)
 There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
 For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love ³⁰⁰
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
 And so they are better, painted — better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth!
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place, ³¹⁰
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do

And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
 It does not say to folk — remember matins,
 Or, mind you fast next Friday! "Why, for this
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones, 320
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
 "How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?"
 I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns —
 "Already not one phiz of your three slaves
 Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
 But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
 The pious people have so eased their own 330
 With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
 We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
 Expect another job this time next year,
 For pity and religion grow i' the crowd —
 Your painting serves its purpose! Hang the fools!
 — That is — you'll not mistake an idle word
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk. God wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now! 340
 It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
 . . . There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!

They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
 God in the midst. Madonna and her babe,
 Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood,
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet 350
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
 When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two —
 Saint John, because he saves the Florentines,
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come 360
 Out of a corner when you least expect,
 As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! !! —
 Mazed, motionless and moonstruck — I'm the man!
 Back I shrink — what is this I see and hear?
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
 I, in this presence, this pure company!
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing 370
 Forward, puts out a soft palm — "Not so fast!"
 — Addresses the celestial presence, "nay —
 He made you and devised you, after all,
 Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—
 His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
 We come to brother Lippo for all that,
 "*Iste perfecit opus.*" So, all smile —
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
 Under the cover of a hundred wings
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay 380

And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,	Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops	And so all's saved for me, and for the church
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off	A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
To some safe bench behind, not letting go	Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights! 390
The palm of her, the little lily thing	The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,	Don't fear me! There's the gray beginning. Zooks!

5.4.2 Reading the Poem

Before you start reading the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi", it is important for you to have some idea about the context of the poem. This poem is based on the life of Fra Filippo di Tommaso Lippi (1406-69), an eminent painter of the 15th century Italy, who had a major influence in the moulding of intellectual and aesthetic environment in the early Renaissance Italy. Fra Lippo Lippi was one of the early painters to break away from the conventional forms of ecclesiastical painting practiced by the masters like Lorenzo Monaco and Fra Angelico. You should note that the Italian Renaissance is a period of great cultural change and achievement that began in Italy around the end of the 13th century and lasted until the 16th century. It was the earliest manifestation of the general European Renaissance that marked a transition between Medieval and Early Modern Europe. Although the origins of the movement is confined largely to the literate culture of intellectual endeavour and patronage in the earlier part of the 14th century, many aspects of Italian culture and society remained largely Medieval at that time.

In "Fra Lippo Lippi", Browning uses the historical figure in order to compare the writers and artists of his time with the artist of the 15th century. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is one of the many poems where Browning seeks to examine the condition of contemporary poetry and art. The poem starts with Lippi addressing the civil guards who have arrested the painter-monk in a drunken state in the dead of night on his way home after visiting one of his mistresses. The poem constitutes of Lippi's monologue. Lippi, while justifying his unsaintly

behaviour, bursts out his discontentment against the prevalent conventions of arts and aesthetics and pours forth a spirited explanation of his views. The guards, who have found the monk loitering in his neighbourhood 'at an alley's end/Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar', are necessarily surprised at this unexpected disposition of a friar. Lippi introduces himself as the artist who is patronized by Cosimo de Medici, an influential political leader of Florence and a great patron of art in his time. As the guards recognise the artist, their attitude gradually changes and Lippi comes to ease and starts his conversation with the guards. However, by the very nature of a dramatic monologue, what you will get of the conversation is only the dialogues of Lippi. It is only from Lippi's dialogues that you will gather your ideas of the speeches made by the other characters.

Lippi asserts that, despite his social identity as a monk, he prefers to indulge in the life of sensuality: "...flesh and blood, That's all I'm made of!" He does not want to deprive his body of the pleasures it demands; so when he saw some people enjoying themselves in the carnival night, he stole himself from his work and participated in the merrymaking when the guards caught sight of him. Now Lippi opens up the story of his life—how he has become a monk not by his choice but by circumstances. Lippi lost his parents when he was a baby; he somehow survived on the streets for one or two years when somebody took him to the monastery. For the starving boy, the food and shelter that the church offered was the only source of life. Therefore, for the sake of his daily bread, he renounced the life of sensuality at the age of eight years.

"So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father

Wiping his own mouth, 't was refection-time —

"To quit this very miserable world?

Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;

By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;

I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop and banking-house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to — all at eight years old."

(Lines 93-101)

Lippi so emphatically tries to justify his transgressive sexuality:
"You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear never to kiss the girls"

(Lines 224-225)

At the monastery, the friars tried to teach him Latin, but it proved to be a useless project. He found no interest in the learning of Latin and the comprehending the abstract ideas that literature in Latin referred to. His life as a street urchin has sharpened his senses and his knowledge of life; as such, the physical world around him seemed more appealing for him. The faces of people on the streets, the animals, the shapes and colour of things have taught him to find meanings in the earthly objects and to think beyond what is visible.

Lippi gradually turns his discussions on to his experiences and reflections over his practice of painting. From his childhood, he developed the skills of drawing figures familiar to him and later started drawing the figures of people around him. The poem thematically centres round the discussion of art that Lippi starts here. The figures that he painted impress the people in his community. Everyone is pleasingly amazed at his talent; and this show of talent gains him a higher place at the monastery. However, his tendency to depict reality as it visibly is comes into conflict with the stated religious goals of the Church. The subjects of Lippi's paintings were drawn from the life he had seen and experienced. The friars fear that their parishioners may be distracted by witnessing people they know depicted within the painting. Therefore, the Prior reminds Lippi:

"Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!"

Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men." (Lines 175-183)

The conflict between Lippi and the Prior echoes a few primary debates about the nature and purpose of art: is the primary purpose art—and, here, Lippi's art—to instruct, or to delight. If it is to instruct, is it better to provide men with ordinary scenes to which they can relate, or to offer them celestial visions to which they can aspire? Lippi vigorously rejects what the Prior claims to be the desired nature of art. While the friars plead him to renounce sensuality in his arts, he indulges himself deeply in depicting sensuous bodies in his paintings. Lippi portrays Prior's niece, who is actually Lippi's mistress, as the seductive Salome. In fact, as Lippi tries to assert, the objections from the Church authorities come not from any real religious concern, but from a concern for their own reputation. Lippi has appeared too close to the truthful depiction of the actual characters of persons around him.

Browning, through this debate between the Prior and Lippi, tries to reinforce the irony implicated in the gap between appearance and reality. The recurrent reference to the niece of the Prior serves Browning as a key structural element on this purpose. The niece first appears in the poem when the monks, marvelling over Lippi's ability to draw lifelike figures, notice a figure like her, "That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes/To care about his asthma: the life!" (170-171) The Prior vigorously rejects his paintings and advises him to concentrate on the soul of men:

"Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say —
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!

Have it all out! "Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further." (**Lines** 193-198)

The diction and punctuation of this passage shows some amount of change of tone, as dramatised by Lippi, descriptive of the Prior's reaction to the discovery of his niece in the painting. He is annoyed at seeing his niece in such a sensuous disposition in the painting, whereas Lippi maintains that the beautiful creations of God, like the niece, should be given due respect in artistic creations, which will further open the doors for understanding the grandeur of soul. "If you get simple beauty and not else, / You get about the best thing that God invents:" (217-218)



LET US KNOW

The dramatic monologue that you are reading here tries to reconstruct the ethos of the Renaissance through the worldviews of a painter. Inspired by Vasari's *Lives*, Browning's Fra Lippo Lippi comes out as a complete embodiment of the Renaissance spirit. He is a bohemian artist who takes pleasure in depicting the sensuous and beautiful objects around him in his painting – an act that he perceives as the interpretations of the works of God for men. Contrasting sharply with the medieval outlook towards art, he holds that the portrayal of human forms and bodies is a superior path leading to God than the mere portrayal of the soul.

Every appearance of the Prior's niece heightens the implicit irony of the gap between appearance and reality to a newer level. The significance of the niece in the poem is not fully revealed until, in his final mention of her, Lippi hints at an illicit relationship where she is involved:

"The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go

The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say
And so all's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!"

(Lines 383-387)

This is an outrageous passage, which is one of the most Chaucerian things that Browning ever wrote. The prior's niece is representative of both sensual and earthly beauty which is intricately combined with illicit love. She exposes the blindness of the Prior in who fails to appreciate the place of beauty in art. Her portrayal by Lippo ridicules the Prior and the monastic order by hinting at their hypocrisy and pretensions in life.

Browning's Lippi comes out as a confusing, ambiguous and deceptive character. He is a heretic who blasphemes and visits brothels and a devout and serious artist who believes that all good art has a religious purpose. He believes that a painter should paint "God's works", and to overlook even the minutest truth of nature is a "crime" (295). Departing radically from many of his contemporary artists and teachers, Lippi refuses to follow the monastic ideal of painting. He does not think of ignoring the body, or what others think the "perishable clay", in order to get to the souls of his subjects (180). Radically enough, Lippi believes that a painter can best represent the soul by concentrating on the body in its utmost detail: "the value and significance of flesh I can't unlearn".

Lippi has no aspirations beyond simple mimesis of the world as he understands, while the Prior has no respect for the importance of the ordinary objects of life. Lippi believes that meaning is always private and it can be derived only from the mundane. With this argument, he can easily disarm the worldly-wise guards like the Prior by rationalizing away moral scruples and averting a sexual dilemma. With sexually suggestive archetypes and rhetorical ploys, Lippi manipulates the unreconciled sensual and ethical concerns.

While he "interprets God" (311), he creates Him in his own image, blurring distinctions between conscience and convenience. Radically enough, he reads Scriptural lessons to fit sexual inferences: The monk parodies the Prior's ridiculous hypocrisy in the very language of his opponent's windy and dogmatic manner:

"You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
 I always see the garden and God there
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards." (Lines 261-269)

This sharp satire immediately followed by the deeply felt solemn pronouncement "I always see the garden and God there / A-making man's wife." is the kind of truth that is perfectly accessible to and apprehended by the monk. His vision of God creating Eve rises instinctively, and releases that incorruptible and childlike impulse to glorify God and His creation. Lippi is presented as one of the most genuinely religious sensualists who ever found a place in English literature.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** State the context in which Browning has set his poem "Fra Lippo Lippi."
- Q 2:** What is the contradiction Lippi is facing because of his identity?
- Q 3:** In what ways, does Lippi's primary skill face with challenges after his becoming a monk?
- Q 4:** How does Browning expose and criticise the pseudo-sainthood of the Prior?

Q 5: What impact of Renaissance Humanism do you find on the character of Lippo?

Q 6: Write briefly about the distinguishing features between Medieval and Renaissance art.

14.3.2 Major Themes

Although the poem revolves around the single most dominant theme of an individual's reaction against certain set conventions of the society, we may also think of the following points as major themes in the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".

Renaissance Arts and Paintings:

"Fra Lippo Lippi" is one of the poems that display Browning's abiding interest in the Renaissance civilization. The speaker Filippo Lippi is a Florentine painter and monk. He is on the pavement outside the Medici-Riccardi palace. He is painting an altarpiece for Cosimo Medici and by referring to the characters of the Carmine and San Lorenzo, the poem shows its background of the Renaissance Italy. Most of the material for the poem comes from the account of Filippo Lippi in Giorgio Vasari's book *Live of the Painters*.

With the story of a painter's life, the poet tries to express his own philosophy of art and aesthetics. The poem chiefly demarcates the conflict between Medieval and Renaissance viewpoints on arts and the role of the artist. The early days of Renaissance art saw a gradual shift from the ecclesiastical order to a secular worldview. The first art of Renaissance retained a great deal of faith and superstition, the philosophy, theology of the middle ages. The Medieval painting gave themselves chiefly to the representation of the soul upon the face, and the inspired human body under the influence of religious passion. At this time, painting dedicated its works to the representation of the heavenly life, either on earth in the stories of the gospels and in the lives of the saints, or in the circles of heaven. The expression of secular passion on the face, figures engaged in their social life and war and trade, were never

regarded as worthy of representation. Gradually, in harmony with the changes in social and literary life, the art of Renaissance took a turn from the representation of the soul to the representation of the body, with all its beauty and vigour, engaged in its natural movements. This type of painting shows an acute blending of the reality and symbolism. The poem thus tries to reconstruct a particular historical ethos prevalent in the socio-cultural life of Renaissance Italy.

Art and Morality:

The poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" raises several important questions regarding the role of art in society and its connection with morality. As you look at the history of literature and art, you will find that the question of morality in connection with artistic representations has always been a site for never ending debates among thinkers. You will find reference to these debates in classical Greek texts like Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*. Through Lippi's life and paintings, Browning tries to raise the same question again. Fra Lippo Lippi's life as a painter and his painting would violate all the established norms of the relationship between art and morality. Making a sharp contrast to the medieval attitude of looking at art as a means to the realisation of God, Lippi paintings aim at gratifying the beauty of the mundane and phenomenal world with all its sensuousness. Instead of drawing 'inspired' faces, the characters in his paintings show secular expressions caught in their social lives. Instead of aiming at religious preaching and reflecting the soul, his paintings try to focus on gratifying the beauty of the naked human bodies. Browning shows Fra Lippo as a realist who deviated from the religious idealism of the earlier painters. The Church authorities criticized his paintings because they did not express religious feelings.

The Question of Realism:

Browning, through the characterisation of Lippi, tries to give vent to the concern for Realism. Throughout the poem, Browning is constantly making the monk, almost poignantly, attempting to

represent the everyday and mundane phenomena expressed in: "A laugh, a cry, the business of the world," "this fair town's face.../The mountain round it and the sky above". This tendency has indissolubly linked Victorian poetry with that conception of the world, which was called Realism in the Middle Ages. In this sense, Lippi is instinctively and essentially a "realist." He looks for a "meaning" behind the "world" ("To find its meaning is my meat and drink"). By defining everything as the creations of God ("God made it all!"), Lippi tries to attribute the highest value to the objects he perceives around him. Lippo defends his realism by declaring that one way of worshipping God is to take pleasure in the visible world, which God has created. Whereas, Lippo is orthodox in his theology, the austere Prior, with his pretensions to sainthood, stands convicted of a radical perversion of the realist philosophy. In order to discharge their pious 'rage' the Prior and his disciples have 'scratched and prodded' Lippi's painting of the human forms. Their holy concepts have hardened into mere externalisms and they fail to find out the hidden meanings of the world. Because their 'simplistic' theology is rooted in a defective formalism, it is not, ironically, the ascetic Prior or his followers but the high-spirited 'realist,' Lippi, who is able to discover the religious meanings.

Human Nature and Significance of the Flesh:

The transitional phase between Medieval and Renaissance painting, or in other words, the beginning of Renaissance influenced Browning. This attitude is characteristic of Browning's worldview and perception to life; his keenest sympathies always lie with the young rather than the old. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is representative of this attitude adopted by the poet. With the coming of the Renaissance, 'the value and significance of flesh' received greater appreciation and the depiction of human form was held no longer an impediment to spiritual progress. Through this poem, Browning expresses his sympathy with humanism and realism of Renaissance art, its protest against the asceticism of the Middle Ages, its conviction that 'the

world is too big to pass for a dream'. Through artistic recreation of the world of nature, Fra Lippo Lippi tries to pave a way to God. He is delighted to express the sensuous beauty of the world of which God is a part, the creator. This is in direct contrast to the medieval ascetic viewpoint, which holds that the artist should never try to recreate nature. To recreate nature is like trying to compete with God. However, Lippi holds that recreating is a means of interpretation; he believes that his task as a painter is to interpret the works of God for men: "This world is no blot for us, / Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good: / To find its meaning is my meat and drink."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does Lippi's painting mark a transition from Medieval to Renaissance painting?

Q 8: Can we consider Lippi to be a realist?

14.3.3 Borrowing's Poetic Style

Browning was never considered a great poet by his contemporaries because his subjects were often obscure and lay beyond the tastes and cognitions of the great bulk of his contemporary readers. His extremely condensed and rugged expression maintains subtle links between the ideas and the manner through which he expresses them in his poetry. His treatment of the themes is often difficult and obscure though the keynote of his teaching is a wise and noble optimism. Browning is one of the greatest humourists of English poetry. His peculiar style of humour gives him a unique space in English literature. His humour covers a wide range of subjects starting from plain and pure fun to laughter from extremely sarcastic and critical expressions. In "Fra Lippo Lippi", composed in blank verse, we find the simplest humour and pure laughter occasionally infused with biting wit and stinging irony. However, the very nature of the character of Lippo Lippi, as a bohemian sensualist caught, compressed but not contained in the

life of a monk, has conditioned such a restless and irrepressibly comic composition of the poem. Though the story of Fra Lippo Lippi has been taken from Vasari's *Lives*, Browning's portrayal of the painter can claim complete originality. What the historical fact has served Browning is to act merely as materials for his artistic creations. Browning, with the help of his jovial tone accompanied by its heart humour and high spirits and the breathless speed of the verse has rendered the painter to the life.

The style used by Browning in this poem is that of a dramatic monologue that Browning is famous for. You are already told that this style involves a speaker and an implied auditor, and the speaker subtly conveys meaning as well as directly revealing meaning. This poem, like many of his monologues, show an intricate mingling of the colloquial and the unusual that results in an effect of grotesqueness that adds life and a kind of humour to his characters. The cadences that he employs in the poem may not be as colloquial as they seem, but the artificial and archaic nature of the expressions distanced his character (Lippo Lippi) from Browning's own time. This distancing gives an effect of an age and of individuality suggesting that this particular accent authentically belongs to the man at a particular moment of history in this place. Browning's use of double rhymes, used almost in a comic way, helped him to avail such effect.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Comment very briefly on the poetic style of Browning from the reading of the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".



14.4 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading the unit, you must have developed a fair idea of the poetic world of Robert Browning and his poem "Fra Lippo

Lippi". You have learnt that Browning, because of his condensed expression, mastery over wit and humour, and the ability to create sharp irony, is regarded as one of the greatest Victorian poets. The poem "Fra Lippo Lippi" provides a beautiful example of the poet's mastery over engaging in deep philosophical debates through plain and humorous expression. The poem is a dramatic monologue where the poet dramatises the tension between Medieval asceticism and Renaissance aesthetics on the idea of art. Through the portrayal of Fra Lippo Lippi as a bohemian, unsaintly, sensuous monk, the poet creates cutting laughter in his attempt to expose and critique the hypocrisy, prejudices and pretensions of the medieval clergy. The poet celebrates Renaissance humanism and Renaissance art where, with stark contrast to the medieval attitude, importance is given on the portrayal of the body in all its beauty.



14.5 FURTHER READING

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- 4) Carter, Ronald. (2001). *Routledge History of Literature in English: Britain and Ireland*. London: Routledge.
- 5) Loucks, James F. (ed.) (1979). *Robert Browning's Poetry: A Norton Critical Edition*. London & New York. WW Norton & Company.
- 6) Symons, Arthur. (2006). *An Introduction to the Study of Browning*. New Delhi: A.B.S. Publishers and Distributors.

Web Resources:

www.wikipedia.org

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/lippi/text.html>



14.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: This poem is based on the life of Fra Filippo di Tommaso Lippi (1406-69), an eminent painter of the 15th century Italy, who had a major influence in the moulding of intellectual and aesthetic environment in the early Renaissance Italy... ...Lippi showed the courage to break away from the conventional forms of ecclesiastical painting practised by the masters like Lorenzo Monaco and Fra Angelico.

Ans to Q 2: Lippi's contradiction was that despite his social identity as a monk, he prefers to indulge in the life of sensuality: "...flesh and blood, That's all I'm made of!" He did not want to deprive his body of the pleasures it demands. So when he saw some people enjoying themselves in the carnival night, he stole himself from his work and participated in the merrymaking when the guards caught sight of him.

Ans to Q 3: From his childhood, he developed the skills of drawing human figures... ...Lippi's show of this talent gains him a higher place at the monastery... ...but his tendency to depict reality as it visibly is comes into conflict with the stated religious goals of the Church... ...the friars feared that their parishioners may be distracted by witnessing the people they know depicted within the painting.

Ans to Q 4: Lippi's paintings of human figures... ...the Prior's reactions... ...portrayal of the Prior's niece in all her sensuality... ...hint at a possible adultery... ...the Prior's reaction at the discovery of his niece on the painting... ...exposes the hypocrisy of the Prior.

Ans to Q 5: Lippi's emphasis on the body rather than on the soul... ...critique of medieval scholasticism... ...ridiculing the Prior, his niece and the life of a monk... ...depicting people and experience from his day to day life.

Ans to Q 6: Medieval asceticism vs. Renaissance humanism... ...the soul vs. the body... ...question of beauty, nature... ...role of art and

aesthetics.

Ans to Q 7: Depiction of men in their social life, war and trade... ..secular expression on faces... ..emphasis on the beauty and sensuality of the body... ..the Prior's niece.

Ans to Q 8: Representation of men in their social life... .. importance on everyday and mundane phenomena... ..looking for 'meaning' behind the 'world'... ..drawing of objects around him... ..rejection of overt spiritualism and asceticism... ..treatment of men as bodied beings with all desires of the flesh.

Ans to Q 9: Condensed and rugged expression... ..use of cutting humour and sharp irony... ..character portrayal conditioning his mode of expression... ..lyric sensibility.



14.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** Do you think that Browning is successful in reflecting the ironic contemplation and intensity of feeling through his dramatic monologues? Discuss with reference to the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".
- Q 2:** Discuss "Fra Lippo Lippi" as a treatise on the Renaissance art and worldview in contrast with the medieval attitude towards art.
- Q 3:** It is often said that Browning's dramatic monologues reflect the psychology of the characters he portrays. How are the inner-conflicts of characters reflected in his monologues?
- Q 4:** Discuss how Browning sympathises with the aesthetics and the philosophy of Renaissance art in the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".
- Q 5:** Write your views on Browning's handling of poetic style and characterisation as he dramatizes the conflict between medieval asceticism and Renaissance worldview in the poem "Fra Lippo Lippi".
- Q 6:** Write a note on the importance of the painting of Prior's niece in the thematic development of the poem.
- Q 7:** Attempt an analysis of the character of Friar Lippo in the light of the inner conflicts that he is undergoing.

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UNIT 15: MATTHEW ARNOLD: “DOVER BEACH”

UNIT STRUCTURE

- 15.1 Learning Objectives
- 15.2 Introduction
- 15.3 Matthew Arnold: The Poet
 - 15.3.1 His Life
 - 15.3.2 His Poetic Works
- 15.4 Reading the Poem
 - 15.4.1 The Text of the Sonnets
 - 15.4.2 Major Themes
 - 15.4.3 Arnold’s Poetic Style
- 15.5 Critical Reception of Arnold as a Victorian Poet
- 15.6 Let us Sum up
- 15.7 Further Reading
- 15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)
- 15.9 Possible Questions

15.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss Matthew Arnold as one of the important poet critics in the history of English literature
- identify Arnold’s “Dover Beach” as a representative poem of the late Victorian period
- explain the significance of the poem in the context of the Victorian loss of faith
- enlist the specific themes that assign the poem the status of a contextually very relevant poem
- assess the importance of Matthew Arnold as an important literary critic.

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this course. In this unit, you will read about the poem "Dover Beach" written by Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) and make a critical assessment of the poem highlighting the importance of Arnold as a poet critic. Perhaps, you already know that Matthew Arnold is one of the greatest poets of the late Victorian period. However, he was also one who represented his age in a most visible way by throwing his radical voice as a sensitive Victorian intellectual on a number of social and cultural issues of his times. The poem "Dover Beach" was written in the shore of the English ferry port of Dover, Kent, facing Calais, France, at the Strait of Dover, the narrowest part of the English Channel, where Arnold honeymooned in 1851. The poem, despite all its brevity, is perhaps one of the best known of all his poetic works. It was published in his anthology *New Poems* in 1867. In this poem, the poet contemplates the sea, finding in it the melancholy reminders of the confusions and uncertainties of belief brought about by modern life. After you finish reading this unit, you will find why the poet instead turns to faith in human relationship. You will finally find that in this poem the Victorian problem of loss of faith is given its most memorable utterance to describe the disappearance of public values, a context in which the only retreat for human beings remains to the world of private affection.

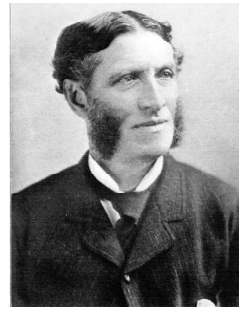
15.3 MATTHEW ARNOLD: THE POET

Matthew Arnold is considered one of the most significant writers of the late Victorian period. However, it was through his prose writing that Arnold asserted his greatest influence on literature. In the following subsections, you will get an opportunity to read about the life and works of this great writer.

15.3.1 His Life

Matthew Arnold was born near Staines on December 24, 1822. His father Dr. Thomas Arnold was the head master of the famous Rugby School. Arnold received his education at Winchester,

Rugby and then entered Balliol College, Oxford, where he won several prizes in poetry. Arnold reflects the spirit of his university in works like "The Scholar-Gipsy" and "Thyrsis". After leaving the University Arnold first taught the classics at Rugby, and then in 1847, he became the private secretary to Lord Lansdowne, who appointed the young poet to the position of Inspector of



Source: <https://www.mediawiki.org>

Schools under his Government. In this position, Arnold worked patiently for the next thirty-five years and travelling the country and examining the teachers. For ten years, he was professor of poetry at Oxford, where his famous lecture "On Translating Homer" was given. He made numerous reports on English and foreign schools, and was three times sent abroad to study educational methods. Thus, Arnold led a busy and active life.

Arnold's literary works are often divided into three periods, which are called as **the poetical**, **the critical** and **the practical**. He wrote poetry since his school days. In a letter to his sister he correctly assessed himself as a poet: "It might be fairly argued that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning: yet because I have perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them; I am likely to have my turn as they have theirs." In 1849, he published his first volume of poems, *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, and three years later, he published *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* in 1852. In 1853-1855, he published *Poems* and twelve years later, in 1867, he published his *New Poems*, which is also his last volume of poetry. Arnold then abandoned poetry in favour of literary criticism.

The important works of his critical period are the lectures "On Translating Homer" (1861) and the two volumes of *Essays in Criticism* (1865-1888), which made Arnold one of the best-known literary men in England. Then, he turned to practical questions and his *Friendship's Garland* (1871) was intended to satirise and reform

the great middle class of England, whom he called the '**Philistines**'. His critical prose was collected in 1865 and published under the title of *Essays in Criticism*. This was followed by *Lectures on the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), *Last Essays on Church and Religion* (1877), *Mixed Essays* (1879) and *Irish Essays* (1882). In 1857, he had been elected Professor of Poetry at Oxford. He received a pension a year in 1883, and then died suddenly at Liverpool in April 1888. Matthew Arnold was the greatest poet after Tennyson and Browning. He was famous also as critic, educationist and lecturer. Though he appeared to be a man of lively and enthusiastic temper, there was in him a deep strain of melancholy and pessimism.

Arnold's poetry is reflective of the major concerns of his age and he is to be judged not so much by his 'natural magic' as by his moral profundity, the two qualities he set up for evaluation of poetry. Though he appeared to be a man of lively and enthusiastic temper, there was in him a deep strain of melancholy and pessimism. His age was an age of democracy, science and industrialism, with none of which he had any sympathy. What was the remedy for all this, Arnold's poetry does not make clear. He only advises us not to be caught in its meshes. His incapability to find a solution for the ills of his age could be cited as the cause of his deep-seated melancholy, which is the prevailing note of his poetry.

The American Academy of Arts and Science in its proceedings in between May 1887 and May, 1888, describes the importance of Matthew Arnold like this: "Among the eminent men of letters whose names have been borne on the roll of Foreign Honorary Members of the Academy during the past generation, not one has done more to affect the course of the deeper currents of thought in his time than Matthew Arnold. The writings of some others have, indeed, been more popular than his, and more widely read. However, he has specially addressed the minds capable of receiving and of propagating the highest influences. No other English writer has

attained such distinction in prose and in poetry alike, or displayed such equality of power as poet and as critic. Alike in poetry and in prose his aim has been 'the moral interpretation, from an independent point of view, of man and of the world.' In fidelity to this aim is the unity of his work as poet and as critic; for such interpretation is the great business of both."



LET US KNOW

Matthew Arnold's poetry possesses three characteristics, which make it unique in 19th century poetry. These three are fused; they are recurrent; and, although not everywhere apparent, they are his predominant characteristics as a Victorian poet. These characteristics are:

- a) The mastery of mood-creating detail,
- b) The sacrifice of narrative to philosophical ideas, and
- c) A very special type of Hellenism.

For example, the poem "The Strayed Reveller", most illustrates Arnold's **Hellenism**. It indicates Arnold's independence of spirit in writing of a Greek theme in a Greek manner. That is to say, in this poem he wrote of a traditional Greek theme without a suspicion of what he himself called "Hebraism": the alteration of the story to achieve a moral lesson.

(Adapted from "Some Aspects of Matthew Arnold's Poetry"
by Stanley T. Williams.)



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 1:** State some of the important aspects of Arnold's life history.
- Q 2:** What are the three most obvious characteristics of Arnold as a poet?
- Q 3:** What does Arnold's poetry usually reflect?

15.3.2 His Poetic Works

Arnold's first volume of poetry *The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems* was written when Arnold was only 26. However, it was published anonymously and was withdrawn from circulation. In 1852, Arnold published his second volume of poems *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*. In 1853, he published *Poems: A New Edition*, a selection from the two earlier volumes famously excluding "Empedocles of Etna", but adding new poems like "Sohrab and Rustam" and "Scholar Gipsy". He explained in the Preface to *Poems* of 1853 that situations "in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done," cannot be fit subjects for poetry. In the same Preface, addressing the eternal objects of poetry, among all nations and at all times, Arnold holds them to be the "actions; human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the poet." You would notice in Arnold's works some conflict between his creative and critical faculties, along with the view that the main duty of a writer is to present as richly and broadly as possible, in whatever medium he can, his 'criticism of life'. In 1855, his *Poems, Second Series* appeared and in 1858, appeared *Merope*—an inferior attempt at a Greek tragedy. After these, in 1867, he published only one small volume of poetry *New Poems*. In between 1861 and 1888, he produced almost twenty volumes of prose.

"To Marguerite", "Grande Chartreuse", "Rugby Chapel", "Dover Beach" etc. are some of Arnold's most memorable poems as they reflect many of the concerns of Arnold both as a writer and as a critic. "To Marguerite" is a moving expression to a modern malaise like the isolation of the individual; "Grande Chartreuse" projects the fears, hopes and despairs of the thoughtful and sensitive man in a world of rapid change; "Rugby Chapel", based on Arnold's headmaster father Dr. Thomas Arnold, meditates on the sadness

that lies at the heart of man; and "Dover Beach" deals with the loss of faith followed by a disappearance of public values. Of Arnold's narrative poems, the two best known are "Balder Dead" (1855), an incursion into the field of Norse mythology which is suggestive of Gray; and "Sohrab and Rustum" (1853), which takes us into the field of legendary Persian history. Using some interesting materials, Arnold produced these poems, which have the rare combination of classic reserve and romantic feeling.

Two other best known poems of Matthew Arnold are "The Scholar Gypsy" and "Thyrsis". The first poem is the story of a 17th century Oxford scholar who disappeared among the gypsies. In one sense, it is an autobiographical poem as the poet describes his own position and his own state of problems. "Thyrsis", on the other hand, is written to commemorate Arnold's dead friend Arthur Hugh Clough. In both these poems, the influence of the Greek pastoral poets is clearly discernible. Arnold, who spent much of his time in train journey between one provincial town and the other as a School Inspector, saw in the English countryside a source of refreshment and regeneration. Perhaps, it was none other than Wordsworth who taught him the ways to get back to the countryside for relief and comfort. In one of his *Memorial Verses*, Arnold eloquently conveyed what Wordsworth meant to the Victorians. It is interesting to note that Arnold, who had been torn by the Victorian doubts and problems, was also illuminated by a vision of the ancient Athenian, and the Wordsworthian vision of the relation between men and nature.

The first place among Arnold's prose work must be given to the *Essays in Criticism* (1865). In this book, Arnold's views of criticism appeal to us strongly. In one of the essays, "Function of Criticism in Present Times" included in the volume, he views criticism as a disinterested and flexible mode of thought. Such a view also leads to the consideration of the dilemmas of the English society in his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) where culture is recommended as 'the great help out of our present difficulties' and defined as 'the pursuit

of total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world'. By 1870s, he joined hands with other Victorian thinkers who turned their attention to the theological controversies of the Victorian Age. *Literature and Dogma* (1873) is, in general, a plea for liberality in religion.



LET US KNOW

Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) contains most of the familiar terms such as culture, sweetness and light, Barbarism, Philistine, Hebraism and many others which are now associated with Arnold's work and influence. The term, "Barbarian" refers to the Aristocratic classes, whom Arnold thought to be essentially crude in soul, notwithstanding their good clothes and superficial graces. "Philistine" refers to the middle classes, narrow-minded and self-satisfied people. "Hebraism" is Arnold's term for moral education. Arnold undertook to preach the Hellenic or intellectual element, which welcomes new ideas, and delights in the arts that reflect the beauty of the world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Name some of the important poetry collections written by Arnold.

Q 5: How does Arnold view the idea of Culture?

15.4 READING THE POEM

15.4.1 The Text of the Sonnets

Dover Beach

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair.

Upon the straits; —on the French coast the light

Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand.

Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay. 5
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long of line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-balanced land,
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves drawback, and fling, 10
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin.
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.
Sophocles long ago 15
Heard it on the Aegaeon, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea. 20
The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar, 25
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.
Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems 30
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain 35
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night. 37

"Dover Beach" is often considered to be one of the best lyrics of Matthew Arnold. Written probably around June 1851, the poem deals with one of Arnold's most important themes—the loss of Christian faith. In a sense, this poem stands on the crossroad between an age of faith and the emptiness of the modern world. The advances of science created a kind of spiritual vacuum but the final affirmation was to be sought out in human love. Therefore, taking this theme as the starting point, "Dover Beach" best reflects Arnold's ideals and methods as a poet.

The **first** stanza opens with the description of a nightly scene at the seaside. The poet calls his beloved near the window to share the visual beauty of the seashore. Then he calls her attention to his own feelings of melancholy, which he relates to the seashore, which has caused an emotion of sadness inside him.

"Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves drawback, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin.
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in."

The **second** stanza introduces the Greek tragedian Sophocles' idea of "the ebb and flow of human misery." Sophocles also heard the similar sound at the 'Aegean' sea and thus developed his ideas on the miseries of humanity.

"Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Aegaeon, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery..."

Arnold then reconnects this idea to the present to show the universality of certain feelings that are not confined in time and space. You should note that the study of the classics has been constant throughout his life, as is clear from his Notebooks as well as from his own poems, essays, and letters. In "Dover Beach", which is one

of the most philosophical and personal of his poems, he gives direct expression to his feeling of kinship with the Greeks. But in the mood of his "Dover Beach", as the reviewer John Robert Moore opines, Arnold is much nearer to William Lisle Bowles, one of the lesser known poets of the English Romantic Movement, or to Coleridge of "Dejection: An Ode", than to his favourite Greek tragedian Sophocles.

In the **third** stanza, the sea turns into the sea of faith, which is a metaphor for a time in which religion could still be experienced without doubt in the modern days of change brought about through Darwinism, the Industrial revolution, Imperialism, and a crisis in religion. Arnold illustrates this issue by using an image of clothes, when religion was still intact, the world was dressed "like the folds of a bright girdled furl." Now that faith is gone, the world lies there stripped naked and bleak as the poet writes: "the vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world." in the following lines:

"The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world."

The **fourth** and final stanza begins with a dramatic statement. He asks his beloved to be true and faithful: "Ah, Love, let us be true/ To one another". However, the pleasant scenery turns into a "darkling plain, where only hostile, frightening sounds of fighting armies can be heard. The loss of religious faith made him aware of yet another and a vaster danger that the universe itself was without any direction. That prompts him to sing:

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Therefore, you find that the poem starts like a dramatic monologue in which the poet urges his companion to "Come to the window" when "the night-air is sweet". It is that time of the night in which the chalk-mountain becomes whiter and the seashore becomes mystically white because of the moonlight. The seawater is dashing against seashore; the pebbles are being thrown and drawn back by waves, thereby creating a sweet musical sound. However, these measured sounds, created by the movement of the pebbles, also bring a note of melancholy or sadness to the poet's mind. In this context, the poet refers to Sophocles, the Greek tragedian, who also heard this similar note of sadness long ago in Aegean, a sea between Mediterranean and Asia, and which brought into his mind the misery and unhappiness of human life. The poet then observes the sea forming a beautiful girdle around the land. However, you should note that through the sea of faith, Arnold expresses religious, metaphysical and romantic anguish, which he wanted to share with his preceding romantic poets. This also brings his mind back from the present stage to taking shelter in past. In the final lines of the poem, Arnold thinks that love between two persons is the only way to strengthen human existence. However, in the human world, there is no faith or conviction. Keeping these views, Arnold compares the world to a battlefield where it is tough to distinguish if one is a friend or a foe. This poem sincerely gives the memorable utterance of the Victorian problem of loss of faith. For a poet like Matthew Arnold, the search for some stability becomes a part of the agony he is undergoing. The agony is best reflected in the following lines of the poem:

"And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night"

The image of the ignorant armies significantly echoes Thucydides' descriptions of the last disastrous war between Athenians and Spartans in Sicily, fought at night between darkness

and confusion that virtually crushed the Athenians, in Book VII of his *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thus, this poem also echoes that Periclean Athens remained Arnold's ideal of civilisation.

Thus, "Dover Beach" is undoubtedly a love poem, but, instead of love being idealised, Arnold only sees the problems that stand on its way. The mood of Arnold's poetry tends to be of plaintive reflection, and he is restrained in expressing emotion. He felt that poetry should be the 'criticism of life' and express a philosophy. Arnold's philosophy is that true happiness comes from within, and that people should seek within themselves for good, while being resigned in acceptance of outward things and avoiding the pointless turmoil of the world. However, he argues that we should not live in the belief that we shall one day inherit eternal bliss. This philosophy is clearly expressed in such poems as "Dover Beach" and in these lines from "Stanzas from the 'Grande Chartreuse'":

"Wandering between two worlds, one dead
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Try to capture briefly the changing mood of the poet in the different stanzas of the poem "Dover Beach".

Q 7: What purpose does the allusion of Sophocles serve in the context of the poem?

Q 8: What, according to Arnold, is the role of poetry in his time?

15.4.2 Major Themes

The major themes of Arnold's poetry can be explained under the following headings.

The Issue involving loss of faith:

In the world of English poetry, Arnold occupies an important

position as a critic and a teacher. In his poetry, he reflects the doubt of an age, which witnessed the conflict between science and revealed religion. One important theme, which runs through the poetry of Matthew Arnold, is the issue of faith and the sense of loss that man can feel without faith. This theme is evident in poems such as "Dover Beach". Though he appeared to be a man of lively and enthusiastic temper, there was in him a deep strain of melancholy and pessimism. Though religious by nature, he was sceptical of dogma; he was dismayed by the Oxford movement, the theological and liturgical disputes which afflicted the Christian churches in mid century. So, meditative and rhetorical, Arnold's poetry often depicts the problems of religious faith and psychological isolation. For example, in "To Marguerite—continued", Arnold reiterates Donne's assertion that "No-man is an island", suggesting that we 'mortals' are indeed "in the sea of life enisled". In several essays, Arnold tries to project the essential truth of Christianity. He also argues for a renewed religious faith and an adoption of classical aesthetics and morals, which should represent Victorian intellectual concerns. Arnold's new approach had attracted almost every major English critic including T.S Eliot, Lionel Trilling and Harold Bloom. His poetry reflects the issue of faith and the sense of isolation that man can feel without faith.

The Theme of Love:

In "Dover Beach" the world invokes is that of the medieval Christendom when the sea of faith lay round 'earth's shore' like the folded garment of a mediaeval picture ("like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd). That was a secured world in contrast to the present world ("Where the ignorant armies clash by night"). Arnold wrote later on the possibility of a renewed Christianity in *St Paul and Protestantism* (1870) and *Literature and Dogma* (1873) and held that such a new world might be born. However, in "Dover Beach", his main alternative to loss of faith is 'love' at the personal level. In the beach at Dover the poet hears the noise of the waves that reminds him of Sophocles who wrote at the early days of Western civilisation

about human misery. In addition, the poet also thinks of misery. By why, on this lovely night with his 'love' by his side should he feel miserable? 'A thought' destroys his peace of mind. Therefore, the poet's problem is 'intellectual' not emotional. Too much thinking has destroyed his sense of serenity, which can be provided by only an authentic personal relationship. Therefore, love is also an important theme in the poem.



LET US KNOW

In his essay "The Study of Poetry", Arnold regarded poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." According to Arnold, each poem should be a unit, and he protested against the tendency of English poets to use brilliant phrases and figures of speech, which only detract attention from the poem as whole. Arnold is more indebted than he thinks to English masters, especially to Wordsworth and Milton, whose influence is noticeable in a large part of his poetry.

Portrayal of Nature:

Portrayal of landscape was a feature of much of the English Romantic poetry beginning with James Thomson and culminating with Wordsworth. With the latter, Nature took a distinct place of her own as a subject and a particular landscape used to lend a particular significance to his treatment of Nature. Arnold's treatment of a particular scene in Dover Beach, however, is not so much related to any larger philosophy of Nature as to creating a particular mood. As Ferris Lockwood observes Arnold seems to be very fond of furnishing a natural setting for the human element of his poem. His success here is largely due to what is known as pictorial art. The poem provides an imaginative insight to not only perceive clearly and feel intensely the beauty and the power of a scene, but also to discern upon what these qualities connote. This results from a process of

selecting and arranging, of subordinating or rejecting, of heightening or emphasising that, which, while preserving its unity, shall also give a sharp, clear impression of the characteristics of a scene. "Dover Beach" thus briefly but clearly suggests the beauty of a scene by means of a few vigorous, telling touches. Some even consider Arnold to be the bridge between Romanticism and Modernism. His use of the landscapes was typical of the Romantic era, and in "Dover Beach", the seascape portrayed in faithful detail corresponds to the mood of despair and pessimism and becomes a symbol of modern man's sense of alienation in the face of the Victorian ethos of progress. Therefore, depiction of Nature is one of the important aspects we find in the poem "Dover Beach".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: What does Arnold tell his readers about the loss of faith in the poem "Dover Beach"?

Q 10: Why, according to you, natural landscape is so central to the poem "Dover Beach"?

15.4.3 Arnold's Poetic Style

The poem "Dover Beach" consists of four stanzas, each containing a variable number of verses. The first stanza has 14 lines, the second 6, the third 8 and the fourth 9. As for the metrical scheme, there is no apparent rhyme scheme, but rather a free handling of the basic iambic pattern. In stanza 3, there is a series of open vowels "Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar". A generally falling syntactical rhythm can be detected and continues into stanza 4. In this last stanza, one can find seven lines of iambic pentameter with the rhyme scheme of abba cddcc. According to Ruth Pitman, this poem can be seen as "a series of incomplete sonnets". David G. Riede adds: The first two sections each consist of 14 lines that suggest but do not achieve strict sonnet form, and except for a short (three foot) opening line, the last section emulates the octave of a sonnet, but closes

with a single, climactic line instead of a sestet— as though the final five lines had been eroded. The thoughts of the poet do not appear as obviously structured and organised. They are accentuated by the fact that run-on lines are mixed with end-stopped lines. In the first stanza, the rhythm of the poem imitates the "movement of the tide."

Along with the use of alliteration, Arnold, in this poem, makes varied use of Figures of Speech. The very first few lines of the poem "Dover Beach" are alliterative to a great extent:

"The sea is calm tonight.
The tide is full, the moon lies fair.
Upon the straits; —on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand." (Lines, 1-4)

However, his use of other Figures of Speech can be seen in different expressions. For example, while comparing the human misery to ebb and flow of the sea, Arnold uses Metaphors *turbid ebb and flow of human misery*. Similarly, while comparing the sea to a griddle, he uses a Simile: *The Sea of Faith...lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled*. Other Figures of Speech includes the use of Anaphora and Hyperbole. He uses Hyperbole in *grating roar of pebbles* and Anaphora in *So various, so beautiful, so new* (repetition of *so*) and in *nor love, nor light, / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain* (repetition of *nor*).

15.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF ARNOLD AS A VICTORIAN POET

Arnold's work as a literary critic began with the 1853 "Preface to the Poems" in which Arnold put emphasis on the importance of the subject in poetry, on "clearness of arrangement, rigor of development, and simplicity of style", which he learned from the Greeks, Goethe and Wordsworth. However, criticism began to take first place in Arnold's writing with his appointment in 1857 as a Professor at Oxford. Arnold in his essay entitled

"The Study of Poetry", regarded poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty." He also said, "without poetry, our science will appear incomplete, and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry." He considered the most important criteria used to judge the value of a poem to be 'high truth' and 'high seriousness'. We can assess the significance of Arnoldian criticism in terms of three categories: Literary Criticism, Social Criticism and Religious Criticism.

Literary Criticism

With the emphasis on the subject in poetry as "clearness of arrangement, rigor of development, simplicity of style" which he learned from the Greeks, from Goethe and Wordsworth, Arnold embodies nearly all the essential elements in his critical theory. In 1861, his lectures *On Translating Homer* were published. This was followed by *Last Words on Translating Homer* in 1862. More than anything else Arnold is famous for introducing a methodology of literary criticism based on the historical and the personal approach. His *Essays in Criticism* (1865, 1888), remains a significant influence on critics till today. It is mentionable that in one of his most famous essays "The Study of Poetry", Arnold wrote that, "Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry". He considered the most important criteria used to judge the value of a poem were "high truth" and "high seriousness". By this standard, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* did not deserve Arnold's approval. He also sought for literary criticism to remain disinterested, and said that the appreciation should be of "the object as in itself it really is."

Social Criticism

Arnold is also famous for his Social criticism. In his book *Culture and Anarchy*, we find the word "Philistines", which he adapted and applied to denote anti-intellectualism. A philistine as conceived by Matthew Arnold is a person who is smugly narrow minded and of conventional morality, and whose materialistic views and tastes indicate a lack of and indifference to cultural and aesthetic values. In another way, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*

reflects his intelligent criticism of modern social life.

Religious Criticism

Critics and scholars of Arnold's works disagree on the nature of Arnold's personal and religious beliefs. Under the influence of Baruch Spinoza and his father, Dr. Thomas Arnold, he rejected the supernatural elements in religion, even while retaining a fascination for church rituals. Arnold seems to belong to a pragmatic middle ground that is more concerned with the poetry of religion and its virtues and values for society than with the existence of God. He wrote in the preface of *God and the Bible* in 1875—"The personages of the Christian heaven and their conversations are no more matter of fact than the personages of the Greek Olympus and their conversations." He also wrote in *Literature and Dogma*: "The word 'God' is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence." He defined religion as "morality touched with emotion."



LET US KNOW

You should note that Matthew Arnold is the first of English critics who seldom or never takes his eye off the object. He is the first, moreover, to make a systematic attempt to appeal from what he felt were merely personal or insular literary verdicts, to "the great Amphictyonic Court of European opinion." He kept himself "at the centre" as he phrases it; he knew what the brightest and wisest people in Germany, France, Italy, were thinking and saying, and by constantly quoting them, he set going "a current of true and fresh ideas." In this way, he contributed largely to the task of making English judgments, whether literary or moral, less rigid and liberal.

You must however note that Arnold's conception of culture, for which some critics also tend to call him a conservative, has recently been reevaluated as suggesting a model of contemporary critical and literary theory. In discussing Arnold's place in modern literature studies, Timothy Peltason

notes that although Arnold's name has long been considered "shorthand ... for ... cultural conservatism," there is a misunderstanding among many scholars and critics regarding what Arnold actually wrote and said. According to Peltason, Arnold did not endorse "received cultural values," nor did he passively accept the value of accredited masterpieces. Arnold instead focused his writing and scholarship on an examination of how things "work for us here and now." This interest in maintaining the value of culture and using criticism to stress that value to society was a central theme in Arnold's prose works. In an essay comparing Arnold's "The Function of Criticism" to T. S. Eliot's essay of the same name, critic Terence Hawkes notes that both writers considered criticism a seminal tool in helping society objectively examine its failures and successes. Hawkes related that the role of criticism, as described by Arnold and his contemporaries, is often haunted by the notion that it is secondary to the actual happening. Instead, says Hawkes, Arnold himself viewed criticism as a necessary and complementary act to the primary text or idea it was examining, often serving to illustrate uncanny and noteworthy aspects not inherent in the original text or incident. Recent scholarship on Arnold has acknowledged that Arnold's writing reflects the tensions of modern literature, particularly his remarks on aesthetic judgment, and his attempts to formulate a theory of the role of criticism in culture. His integration of social criticism and literary analysis, says Stefan Collini, is acknowledged as his most significant and lasting achievement. In Collini's words, Arnold "characterised in unforgettable ways the role that criticism—that kind of literary criticism that is also cultural criticism, and thus ... a sort of informal political theory—can and must play in modern societies."



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- Q 11:** What was Arnold's view on poetry as a literary critic?
- Q 12:** What are the three categories under which Arnold's criticism can be studied?
- Q 13:** How have the critics received Arnold's views on culture in subsequent times?



15.6 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading this unit, you have learnt that "Dover Beach" depicts an occasion of a brief trip across the channel. Love is described as an anchorage in a chaotic world. The poem was published in *New Poems* (1867). Arnold is sometimes called the third great Victorian poet, along with Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning. His early poetic works like *Empedocles on Etna* (1852) and *Poems* (1853). These established his reputation as a poet. In 1857, he was appointed professor of poetry at Oxford University, which he continued for ten years. During his time as Professor of poetry at Oxford, Matthew Arnold produced many essays of literary criticism such as "On translating Homer" (1861 and 1862), "On the study of Celtic Literature" (1867) and *Essays in Celtic Literature*. You have read that Arnold's poetic works are characterised by many of the Victorian beliefs with regard to religious faith and morality. However, one significant feature of the poem "Dover Beach" is that it is essentially a modern, or as one critic calls 'the first modern poem', not so much in diction and technique but in psychological orientation. The poem consists of four stanzas, each containing a variable number of verses. The first two sections each consist of 14 lines that also suggest the sonnet form.



15.7 FURTHER READING

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- 12) Williams, Stanley T. (1921). "Some Aspects of Matthew Arnold's Poetry". *The Sewanee Review*, Vol. 29, No. 3.

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15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: He was famous as critic, educationist and lecturer... ..his father Dr. Thomas Arnold was the Headmaster of the famous Public School of Rugby... ..his poems began to be published in 1849... ..his important poems were mostly written between 1843-53 and published between 1849-54... ..Arnold was an inspector of schools

and professor of poetry at Oxford for ten years(1857-1867)... ...his election as Professor of poetry at Oxford in May 1857 led to much of his well-known prose including *Culture and Anarchy* in 1869.

Ans to Q 2: The mastery of mood-creating detail... ...the sacrifice of narrative to philosophical ideas... ...a very special type of Hellenism.

Ans to Q 3: Arnold's poetry is reflective of the major concerns of his age... ...his moral profundity... ...a deep strain of melancholy and pessimism.

Ans to Q 4: *New Poems*... ...*Empedocles on Etna and Other poems*... ...*Poems: A New Edition*... ...*Poems*... ...*Poems, Second Series*... ...*The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*.

Ans to Q 5: In his book *Culture and Anarchy* Culture is 'the great help out of our present difficulties'... ...it is also 'the pursuit of total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world'.

Ans to Q 6: The **first** stanza opens with the description of the serene atmosphere of the night time sea shore... ...the **second** stanza introduces the Greek tragedian Sophocles' idea of "the ebb and flow of human misery" a feeling that the poet is undergoing at the present times... ...In the **third** stanza, the sea turns into the sea of faith, which is a metaphor for a time in which religion could still be experienced without doubt in the modern days of change... ...The **fourth** and final stanza the poet tends to think that the only consolation is human love.

Ans to Q 7: With the help of the allusion, the poet assigns universality to the note of melancholy or sadness in the mind of a poet... ...Sophocles, the Greek tragedian, too heard this similar note of sadness long ago in Aegean, a sea between Mediterranean and Asia, and which brought into his mind the misery and unhappiness of human life.

Ans to Q 8: Poetry is plaintive reflection of the tormented soul of the poet... ...poetry is also the 'criticism of life'... ...poetry expresses a philosophy that comes from within the poet.

Ans to Q 9: This poem reflects the doubt of an age which witnessed the

conflict between science and revealed religion... ..in this poem, Arnold beautifully expresses the problems of religious faith and psychological isolation... ..he also argues for a renewed religious faith and an adoption of classical aesthetics and morals which should represent Victorian intellectual concerns.

Ans to Q 10: Through the poetry of James Thompson and William Wordsworth Nature took a distinct place of her own as a subject of poetry... ..Arnold too portray nature... ..but he portrays particular scenes rather than projecting any larger philosophy of nature... ..Ferris Lockwood observes that Arnold is fond of furnishing a natural setting for the human element of his poem.

Ans to Q 11: For Arnold the main subject in poetry was "clearness of arrangement, rigor of development, and simplicity of style", which he observed among the Greeks, Goethe and Wordsworth... ..in his essay entitled "The Study of Poetry", he regarded poetry as "a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty."... ..he further considered 'high truth' and 'high seriousness' as the most important criteria to judge the value of a poem.

Ans to Q 12: Literary Criticism mainly cantered on the subject of poetry... ..Social Criticism based on his idea of philistinism... ..Religious Criticism based on Arnold's rejection of the supernatural elements in religion.

Ans to Q 13: Arnold's conception of culture has suggested a model for contemporary critical and literary theory... ..against the allegation of conservatism, Timothy Peltason noted that Arnold never endorsed "received cultural values,"... ..Terence Hawkes noted that Arnold considered criticism a seminal tool in helping society objectively examine its failures and successes... ..Recent scholarship on Arnold also discusses how Arnold's writing reflects the tensions of modern literature.



15.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

- Q 1:** What is the central message of the poem 'Dover Beach'? Illustrate with exact references taken from the poem.
- Q 2:** Do you think that Matthew Arnold is at his best in describing the Victorian Dilemma in the poem "Dover Beach"? How finally does the poet resolve issues of loss of faith?
- Q 3:** Trace the basic ideas underlying Arnold's criticism with special reference to the poem "Dover Beach".
- Q 4:** What, according to you, are the major allusions in the poem? How do they help in spreading certain universal human predicaments?
- Q 5:** Would you like to call "Dover Beach" a love poem? Elaborate.
- Q 6:** Landscape is an important element in the poem "Dover Beach". In what ways, does Matthew Arnold trace the melancholy underlying the serene atmosphere of the moonlit night?
- Q 7:** "Poetry is a criticism of life." Illustrate this point with specific references from the poem "Dover Beach".

*** **



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