UNIT 11: INTRODUCTION TO VICTORIAN POETRY

UNIT STRUCTURE:

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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 Milias, 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 Damozel". 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 'skeptic' 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 in1849 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 *Seraphin 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 tilted *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

Armstrong, Isobel. *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, poetics and politics*. London: Routledge. (e-book)

Collins, Thomas J. et al. (eds.) (2005 rpt.). *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory, Concise Edition*. Broadview Press. (e-book)

Matheikal, Tomichan. (2001). *English Poetry: From John Donne to Ted Hughes.* New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.

Sanders, Andrew. (2004 rtp.). *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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 4: "The Last Ride Together", "Rabbi Ben Ezra", "Evelyn Hope", "Pippa Passes", etc.

Ans to Q No 5: Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitzgerald, Arthur Hugh Clough and James Thomson.

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 8: Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons, Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson.

Ans to Q 9: *Seraphin 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 No 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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