**PGEG S2 03**

# KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

## SEMESTER 2

## ENGLISH

## BLOCK 1: ROMANTIC POETRY I

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUE STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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# SEMESTER 2
# MA IN ENGLISH
# COURSE 1: ENGLISH POETRY: ROMANTIC TO VICTORIAN
# BLOCK 1: ROMANTIC POETRY I

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## COURSE INTRODUCTION:

This course entitled English Poetry: Romantic to Victorian is a companion course to Course 2—"English Poetry: Chaucer to the Neoclassical", of Semester 1 of the MA English Programme. This course introduces 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 1: INTRODUCTION

There are total six units in this Block. In these units, the learners will get some ideas on the first phase of Romantic poetry.

**Unit 1** 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.

**Unit 2** deals 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** introduce you 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 18$^{th}$ 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.

**Units 5 & 6** shall help you 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 you finish reading this unit, you will understand that this poem is an excellent example of Coleridge’s poetry.

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 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 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.

**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.



## 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 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 which 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)



**Radical:** non-conforming or diverting from traditional practices

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

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 *Adonaïs* (1821) written in the memory of John Keats. Among his revolutionary works are his poems such as *Queen Mab* (1813), *Alastor* (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

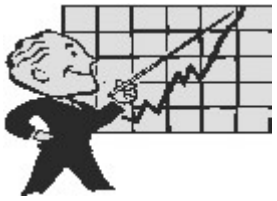
assistant at Guy's Hospital. However, he always desired and felt that he was destined to be a poet in life and so it was.

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 19$^{th}$ 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 Litereria* (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

Bowra, Maurice. (2009). *The Romantic Imagination* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Roe, Nicholas. (ed.) (2007). *Romanticism: An Oxford Guide*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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.

* * *

# 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

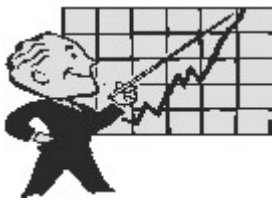
William Blake (28 November 1757–12 August 1827) was born to Catherine Hermitage and James Blake to be raised among six siblings in a devout and religious household in London. He was mostly tutored at home by his mother. As a school-going boy, he was hardly inclined towards studies owing to which he had 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 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.



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

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.



## 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?



**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

**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.

Sweet sleep, with soft down
Weave thy brows an infant crown.
Sweet sleep, Angel mild,
Hover o'er my happy child."

Sweet smiles, in the night
Hover over my delight;
Sweet smiles, mother's smiles,
All the livelong night beguiles.

Sweet moans, dovelike sighs,
Chase not slumber from thy eyes.
Sweet moans, sweeter smiles,
All the dovelike moans beguiles.

Sleep, sleep, happy child,
All creation slept and smil'd;
Sleep, sleep, happy sleep
While o'er thee thy mother weep.

Sweet babe, in thy face
Holy image I can trace.
Sweet babe, once like thee,
Thy Maker lay and wept for me,

Wept for me, for thee, for all,
When He was an infant small.
Thou His image ever see,
Heavenly face that smiles on thee,

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 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



**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

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,
Dreaming in the joys of night;
Sleep, sleep; in thy sleep
Little sorrows sit and weep.

As thy softest limbs I feel,
Smiles as of the morning steal
O'er thy cheek, and o'er thy breast
Where thy little heart doth rest

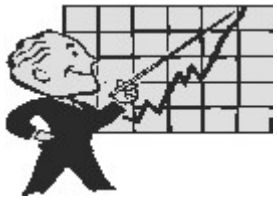
Sweet babe, in thy face
Soft desires I can trace,
Secret joys and secret smiles,
Little pretty infant wiles

O' the cunning wiles that creep
In thy little heart asleep!
When thy little heart doth wake,
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 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 rhymes. 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

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Johnson, Mary Lynn. (eds.) *Blake's Poetry and Designs*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

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

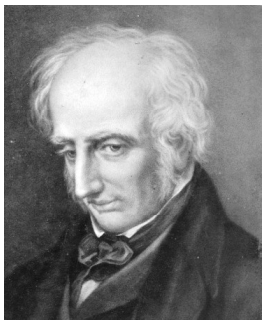
unit, an attempt has been made to discuss the life and works of the poet Wordsworth, which shall help you to read his poems in detail. Declaring in the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads* that poetry should be written in a "language really used by men," Wordsworth challenged the prevailing 18th century 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



**Source:** https://commons.wikimedia.org

death. William lost his mother at the age of eight. Five years later, when his father died, the family was left with 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.

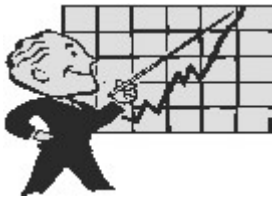
In the year of 1795, Wordsworth settled with his sister at Racedown, near Crewkerne, in Dorsetshire. Here he finished *Guilt and Sorrow*, a poem sombre in tone and *The Borderers*, a tragedy.

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 poem 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 18$^{th}$ 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.



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## 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 ascendance 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 view
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,
Or of some Hermit’s cave, where by his fire
The Hermit sits alone.
These beauteous form
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,
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
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.
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,
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
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,
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
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,
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,
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
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
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,
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
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,
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me
More dear, both for themselves and for thy sake!

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 rush 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

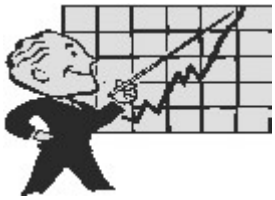
To look on Nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
… … … … … … … … … … …
… … And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with joy
Of elevated thoughts, a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
… … … … … … … … … … …
… … … … … … … … … … …
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-learn{e}d 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 18$^{th}$ 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 “tranquile 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

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Purkins, John. (2003). *A Preface to Wordsworth*. Delhi: Pearson Education.

Sanders, Andrew. (2000). *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press.

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.

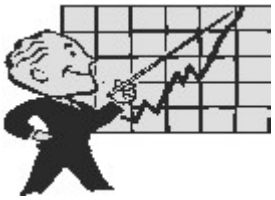
Coleridge at the time of his marriage was only twenty-three years old. For a number of years, Coleridge and his wife, and the children born to them, led a shifting life; sometimes they were together, sometimes they were separated. Now, Coleridge would make a stay in Germany, now they would be all together with the Wordsworths (William and his sister Dorothy) and Southeys 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.

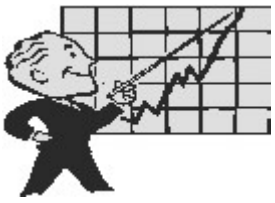
***Genesis of the poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner":***

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

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## 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,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'sthear the merry din.'
He holds him with his skinny hand,

‘There was a ship,’ quoth he.
‘Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!’
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.
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;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.
‘The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.
The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.
Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon—’
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.
The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.
The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.
And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o’ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.
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.
And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.
And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.
The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!
At length did cross an Albatross,
Thorough the fog it came;
As if it had been a Christian soul,
We hailed it in God’s name.
It ate the food it ne’er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steered us through!
And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow,
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the Mariner’s hollo!
In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
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!—
Why look'st thou so?'—With my cross-bow
I shot the ALBATROSS.

**PART II**

The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
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!
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!
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.
The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free;
We were the first that ever burst
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!
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,
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;
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
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.
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,
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!
Instead of the cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

**PART III**

There passed a weary time. Each throat
Was parched, and glazed each eye.
A weary time! a weary time!
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;
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,
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,
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.
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!
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
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.
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
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,
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,
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;
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!
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
The hornèd Moon, with one bright star
Within the nether tip.
One after one, by the star-dogged Moon,
Too quick for groan or sigh,
Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.
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!

**PART IV**

'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.
Alone, alone, all, all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.
The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

I looked upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I looked upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.
I looked to heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.
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.
The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they:
The look with which they looked on me
Had never passed away.
An orphan's curse would drag to hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.
The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—
Her beams bemocked the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmèd water burnt always
A still and awful red.
Beyond the shadow of the ship,

I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.
Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coiled and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.
O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessèd them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.
The self-same moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

**PART V**

Oh sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.
The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remained,
I dreamt that they were filled with dew;
And when I awoke, it rained.
My lips were wet, my throat was cold,
My garments all were dank;
Sure I had drunken in my dreams,
And still my body drank.
I moved, and could not feel my limbs:
I was so light—almost
I thought that I had died in sleep,
And was a blessed ghost.
And soon I heard a roaring wind:
It did not come anear;
But with its sound it shook the sails,
That were so thin and sere.
The upper air burst into life!
And a hundred fire-flags sheen,
To and fro they were hurried about!
And to and fro, and in and out,
The wan stars danced between.
And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge,
And the rain poured down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge.
The thick black cloud was cleft, and still
The Moon was at its side:
Like waters shot from some high crag,
The lightning fell with never a jag,
A river steep and wide.
The loud wind never reached the ship,
Yet now the ship moved on!
Beneath the lightning and the Moon
The dead men gave a groan.
They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise.
The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;
Yet never a breeze up-blew;
The Mariners all ‘gan work the ropes,

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

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

And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the Moon.
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,
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:
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,
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;
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,
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:
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
That he makes in the wood.
He'll shrieve my soul, he'll wash away
The Albatross's blood.

**PART VII**

This Hermit good lives in that wood
Which slopes down to the sea.
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:
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,
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!
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,
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,
That eats the she-wolf's young.'
'Dear Lord! it hath a fiendish look—

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

While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends
And youths and maidens gay!
Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
To thee, thou Wedding-Guest!
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.
The Mariner, whose eye is bright,
Whose beard with age is hoar,
Is gone: and now the Wedding-Guest
Turned from the bridegroom's door.
He went like one that hath been stunned,
And is of sense forlorn:
A sadder and a wiser man,
He rose the morrow morn.

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.

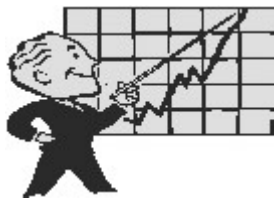
"Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? is this the kirk?

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 Marnier 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 18$^{th}$ 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 lovethus,
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 the1797 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 thinks, 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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**Web Resource:**

http://www.bloomsburyacademic.com/

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