PGEG S3 03

Modern Poetry

SEMESTER III

ENGLISH

BLOCK 2

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SEMESTER 3
MA IN ENGLISH
COURSE 3: MODERN POETRY
BLOCK 2: TILL WORLD WAR II

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BLOCK 2: INTRODUCTION

This Block contains total six units on five different modern poets who roughly belonged to the years beginning with the 20th century till the World War II. The details of the units are as the following.

Unit 5: This deals with G. M. Hopkins's poems "The Windhover" & "Pied Beauty". Hopkins is a major poet with his poetical and technical brilliance. He is also considered a religious poet and one of the precursors of modern English poetry. He made a radical attempt to alter the nature of poetic expression from that of his contemporaries in late Victorian times. He wanted to integrate the spiritual and the sensuous experiences, and then adopt certain reformist techniques which would give fresh vitality to the language and meter in English poetry.

Unit 6: This unit deals with the poem "The Second Coming" composed by W. B. Yeats. Yeats was an Irish poet, dramatist, and prose writer. However, he is more famous as one of the greatest English language poets of the 20th century. The title of the prescribed poem is derived from the Christian belief in the Second Coming of Christ, but the god to be born, is a monster. This idea is significant in the sense that it was written shortly after the Russian Revolution and World War I, and just before the rise of Fascism under Mussolini in Italy. Thus, in this unit, you will get to read how Yeats, in order to showcase the disintegration of the modern society, uses the Christian background in this poem.

Unit 7: This unit shall introduce you to T. S. Eliot and one of his poems "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". T. S. Eliot is one of the most eminent poet-critics of the 20th century. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" explores the abjection, the personal dilemma and self-disgust in a way that a whole generation, devastated by a horrific war, could truly identify with. These poems lay bare the complex and even shocking aspects of post-war life with the help of techniques immensely suited for the purpose.

Unit 8: This unit is based on yet another poem by T. S. Eliot –"Journey of the Magie". In this poem, Eliot recreates the Biblical account of the three wise men, also referred to as the 'magi' who take up a long journey towards Bethlehem in search of the Holy Infant, Jesus Christ so as to bless Him and complete the purpose of their divinely ordained journey. You will find that the Eliot's critical formulations and his sharp intellectual acumen made him a highly regarded critic as well as a visible figure in the 20th century literary circles.

Unit 9: This unit shall provide a reading of Rupert Brook's poem "The Soldier". As you know, when the First World War broke out in 1914, additional concerns relating to civilization and dystopia grappled the

minds of these poets. Indeed, many of those poets who were actively involved in the war were soldiers. Poets like Brooke exemplified ideas that were dominated by elements of mysticism, idealism and patriotism aiming to glorify self-sacrifice for the cause of the country. In the poem “The Soldier”, Brooke tells his short-term experiences as a soldier in the war to illuminate the society of his time on the idea of war and more particularly to instil in the people a vision of idealism as well as patriotism.

Unit 10: This unit, unlike the previous one which discusses War poetry with reference to the themes of idealising the concept of war, shall help you to discuss the shifting trend in war poetry with regard to the themes, the transition from an idealistic or patriotic representation to the anguish and reality, that have become the dominant traits of the War. Along with Siegfried Sassoon, it was Wilfred Owen, who contributed towards bringing into poetry the realities of War that were harsh and poignant to the civilians. As you read the unit, you will learn that, Owen strived to state through his poems his close association with the war experiences at the trench as well as with a soldier who fought at the frontline.

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 READING” 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 5: G. M. HOPKINS: "THE WINDHOVER" & "PIED BEAUTY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 G. M. Hopkins: The Poet

5.4 Reading the Poems prescribed

5.5 Major Themes

5.6 Hopkins' Poetic Style

5.7 Reception of Hopkins

5.8 Let us Sum up

5.9 Further Reading

5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.11 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain ideas on the life and works of the poet G.M. Hopkins
- explain G.M. Hopkins's "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty" as poems, providing insight into God the Creator and the divine manifestation of nature
- trace the 'crisis of faith' that characterised the Victorian era
- relate the text of the poems to the images used
- identify the literary devices of the curtal sonnet, sprung rhythm, inscape and instress
- appreciate the poems that admire God's creation, the aspects of the sensuous and sacramental beauty of nature and ultimate reverence to God

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of Block 2 of the course on Modern Poetry. This unit will introduce you to G. M. Hopkins and his poems "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty" both of which were written in 1877. The poems have in common, the religious fervor with which the poet admires God as the Divine Creator, which is evoked through the rich imagery woven in both the poems. "The Windhover" is written in the form of a sonnet (14 lined poem) and "Pied Beauty" in the form of a curtal sonnet (10 and ½ lined poem) respectively. Hopkins is remembered as a major poet in the history of English poetry, with his poetical and technical brilliance. He is also considered a religious poet and one of the precursors of modern English poetry. Hopkins made a radical attempt to alter the nature of poetic expression from that of his contemporaries in late Victorian times. He lived the austere life of a Jesuit priest and had converted to Roman Catholicism by choice, while at Oxford. The smart 18 year old Hopkins had entered Oxford University and his residential college of Balliol in April 1863. He was also reputed as the "Star of Balliol" for his academic excellence and it was his posthumous fame that established him, among the leading Victorian poets of his time. His poetry had a significant influence on the poetic revolution of the British and American poetry of the 1920s and 1930s. Hopkins was one of the first **religious poets** in English since Milton and also the creator of an original poetic medium. But his importance also lies as one of the pioneers of modern poetry. He well-understood the nature of the crisis in English poetry of his time, and also the means by which this crisis could be overcome. The first means was the integration of spiritual and sensuous experiences, and the second was the adoption of certain reformist techniques which would give fresh vitality to the language and meter in English poetry.

5.3 HOPKINS: THE POET

G. M. Hopkins (28 July 1844—8 June 1889) was born to Catherine (Smith) Hopkins and Manley Hopkins in Stratford, Essex as the oldest of the eight children from an upper middle class family. His father Manley

Hopkins owned a form of marine insurance firm and for a time was the British Consul General in Hawaii. Also, he was a Church Warden and a published, self-taught writer who also reviewed poetry for *The Times* and wrote practical manuals and a novel. Manley Hopkins's works include *A Philosopher's Stone and other Poems* (1843) and *Pietas Metrica* (1849) and *A Gathering of Verses by Manley Hopkins* (1892). Catherine Hopkins had a taste for music and reading particularly German philosophy, Literature and the works of Charles Dickens. Both the parents were High Church Anglicans and deeply religious.

Manley Hopkins shifted his home to Hampstead along with his family in 1852 which was near to the place where John Keats had lived 35 years ago. Gerard Manley Hopkins was sent to a boarding school called High gate School, at the age of ten from 1854 to 1863. Here, he made early attempts at asceticism, and also composed his earliest poem titled "**The Escorial**" in 1860. Hopkins's early ambition in life was to be painter and continued to sketch throughout his adult life, inspired by the works of **John Ruskin** and the **Pre-Raphaelites**. He was also a skilled draughtsman and his early training in visual art went hand in hand with his work as a poet. He was an innovator in the time of traditional verse with his experimental forms of the **sprung rhythm**, ideas of **inscape** and **instress**, the **curtal sonnet,** and his striking use of imagery.

Hopkins studied Classics at Balliol College, Oxford from 1863-67. It was here that he built a lifelong friendship with Robert Bridges. He began his student life at Oxford as a socialite and a prolific poet, but later there were changes in his behaviour, which led him to be more studious. He was unusually sensitive as a student and poet, as reflected in his class notes and his early poetic pieces. During his life time, he published few poems and it was through the efforts of his friend, the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges that his works were destined to reach out to the outside world. Hopkins had burnt all his poems on entering the Jesuit novitiate. But, the ones he had sent to Bridges survived as the only copies to be published as *Poems* in 1918 as a slim collected edition by him.

Hopkins was deeply impressed by the works of Christina Rossetti whom he had met in 1864. He also studied with the prestigious writer and critic Walter Pater who tutored him in 1866. Hopkins composed his most ascetic poem "The Habit of Perfection" in 1866. In the same year he had decided to become a Catholic. John Henry Newman had received him into the Catholic Church on 21 October, 1866 after Hopkins had travelled to Birmingham in September, to consult the leaders of the Oxford converts. His decision *estranged* him from both his family and friends. Newman provided him with a teaching post at the Oratory in Birmingham after his graduation in 1867. It was here that he inspired himself to learn the violin.

He felt the call to join the Ministry as a Jesuit priest and began his Novitiate at the **Society of Jesus** at Manresa House, Roehampton in 1868, and moved to St. Mary's Hall, Stonyhurst in 1870 for his philosophical studies. This was followed by his vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. His decision to convert to Roman Catholicism at Oxford and his later decision to enter the Society of Jesus in 1868, isolated him from the mainstream English life. Between 1868 and 1875, he wrote a detailed prose journal and also composed songs. Also, he sketched and wrote sermons and verses and other religious pieces for the Church. During this period, he had a twin conflict in terms of writing poetry which prevented him from devoting himself completely to religion. It was only after reading the 13th century philosopher Duns Scotus in 1872 that he came to realize that the two did not necessarily conflict with each other.

He taught Classics at Manresa House in 1874 and chose the vocation to the Jesuit priesthood. Having failed to clear the theology exam meant that although he was ordained as a priest in 1877, he would never be promoted in the order. The Jesuit life was hard and rigorous but provided him some stability. Hopkins took up the duties as Sub minister and teacher at Mount St. Mary's College where he taught Greek and Latin. He served as a Curate at a Jesuit Church in London and then at Oxford, Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow. While he was ministering in Oxford he became a founding member of Oxford University. Hopkins was temperamentally and physically not suited for the order with its exhausting schedule of study,

teaching, preaching, grading papers, carrying parish work and visiting the sick.

Hopkins became a Professor of Greek and Latin at University College, Dublin in1884. Here, he was much depressed due to isolation and his general health had also deteriorated as his eyesight began to fail. After being in ill health for several years and suffering bouts of diarrhoea, Hopkins passed away due to Typhoid fever in 1889. His funeral took place in Saint Francis Xavier Church located in Dublin and was finally laid to rest in Glasnevin Cemetery. On his death bed his last words were **"I am so happy, I am so happy. I loved my life."**



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the varied innovative literary forms that Hopkins had experimented with for his poetry?

Q 2: Describe his student life at Oxford from 1863-1867.

Hopkins began writing poetry in his school years expressing his appreciation of natural beauty in a sensuous **Keatsian** manner. But, while at Oxford he found himself into the religious conflicts of the 1860s and this created in his Oxford verses, an ascetic streak. It was as if, it reflected a considerable chastening of his enthusiasm for nature. The decision of 1868 is the most vital point for understanding his artistic life, and the intense religious life that he entered is essential to comprehend his poetry. But, this was also the year when he burnt all his poems, before joining the Jesuits, feeling that the sensuous writing was improper for the new order that he had chosen. The early poems available today are only those that survived accidentally in diaries and manuscripts. Like Keats, the development of Hopkins' mind can be traced through ***The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*** and his correspondences with Dixon, Patmore and others.

Although, Hopkins was not a professional poet, his letters to Bridges reflect his dedication to both theory and the practice of poetry in equal

measure. Hopkins was fortunate to have had poet-friends such as Richard Watson Dixon and Robert Bridges. It was the efforts of the Poet Laureate Robert Bridges who became Hopkins' literary executor and editor, after his demise and his efforts introduced Hopkins' poetry to a wide readership bringing the poet posthumous acclaim that he much deserved. Bridges had published a collected edition and introduced 750 copies of Hopkins's poems in a 1918 Oxford University Publication. Following then, an expanded edition, prepared by Charles Williams appeared in 1948.

Hopkins continued to write poetry until the end of his life. From 1875 onward his writing was completely religious. He moved to various places like Manchester and Liverpool among others and saw the evils of the industrial revolution which became the cause for the widening gap between man and nature. His poem "*Felix Randal*" is an example of his sympathy with man's soul. His most personal and intense poems belong to the period when he was in Dublin (1884-89). The passionate sonnets of 1884-89 stand out as his greatest poems, revealing an intense period of depression that he had lived through. An example of such a sonnet is "Carrion Comfort" which describes his defiant refusal to give in to this despair.

The Jesuit superiors failed to understand his poetic talent and cast him away from prospective readers. It was since 1875, that he started writing poetry again, beginning with the radical poem "The Wreck of Deutschland", which the editor of the Jesuit periodical *The Month* had stated he "dared not print." During his lifetime, Hopkins published only a few poems. No representative edition of his work appeared until 1918. Even though, he had made a bon-fire of all his poetry, before his entry to the Jesus novitiate, some of the poems that he had sent to Bridges and other friends had survived.

In 1884, he was the professor of Greek and Latin at the University College of Dublin, where his English origins, his disagreement with Irish politics, his isolation in Ireland and his personal oddities made him an ineffective teacher. The gloom and loneliness reflected in what came to be known as the "**Terrible sonnets**" such as "I Wake and Feel the Fell of Dark." According to Canon Dixon, they were not terrible because of the

quality but rather they reached the "terrible crystal" in which all the melancholy of the later part of his life had crystallised.

Most of his surviving works are centered on the presence of God and his evidence in the creation of his works and they also explore the presence of violence and mystery in the sufferings of human. Hopkins' achievement lies in his breaking out of the tradition of the contemporary Victorian poetry and also of the Romantic mode of poetry with his original treatment of personal sorrow and his deep love for nature. Notable collections of Hopkins manuscripts and publications are kept in Campion Hall, Oxford; the Bodleian Library, Oxford; and the Foley Library at Gonzaga University in Washington.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Which year is considered the most vital point of Hopkin's writing career?

Q 4: How did Hopkins receive posthumous acclaim for his great works after his demise?

Q 5: During which period of his writing career did Hopkins write his "Terrible sonnets"?

Q 6: Why did Hopkins burn his early poems?

5.4 READING THE POEMS PRESCRIBED

"The Windhover" To Christ our Lord.

I caught this morning morning's *minion*, king-
dom of daylight's *dauphin*, *dapple*-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and *striding*
High there, how he rung upon the vein of wimpling wing
In his *ecstasy*! Then off, off forth on swing,
As a *skate*'s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of the mastery of the tiny!
Brute beauty and *valour* and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my *chevalier*!
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down *sillion*
Shine, and blue bleak embers, ah my dear
Fall, *gall* themselves, and gush gold-*vermillion.* (14)

"Pied Beauty"

Glory be to God for dappled things- (1)
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in *stipple* upon *trout* that swim;
Fresh-fire coal *chestnut*-falls; *finches*' wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced- fold, *fallow*, and plough;
And all the trades, their gear and tackle and trim (6)
All things counter, original, spare, strange
Whatever is *fickle*, *freckled* (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet; sour; *adazzle*; dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him

"The Windhover"

"I caught this morning morning's minion, king- (1)
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding
High there, how he rung upon the vein of wimpling wing
In his ecstasy! Then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, - the achieve of the mastery of the tiny!" (8)

"The Windhover" is one of the finest poems by Hopkins. He himself opined that it was "the best thing" he ever wrote. Perhaps, this was the reason behind his decision to dedicate such an achievement to Christ. The windhover, also known as the kestrel, is the commonest bird of prey in Britain. It has a unique ability unlike any other bird in the sky, to remain stationary in the air at the relatively low altitude of 30-40 feet while scanning

for mice and other small prey on the ground below. In order to maintain itself in the air without forward motion, it constantly makes quick adjustments to various wind speed and currents of air. For the same reason the bird moves in place up and down, instead of moving forward.

The poem is a distinctive expression of the mystery of Christ the Redeemer, the lesson of Christ's life, and His victory after Death. Like all his nature poems "The Windhover" too has a deep spiritual significance. From Hopkins' letter to Bridges, it was evident that he wanted his poetry to be understood, even if they did not yield their meaning easily, and wished this poem to be 'rightly' understood. It was only after six years of having written the poem, that he inserted the dedication "To Christ our Lord". Perhaps, this was to emphasise the truth about the meaning of the poem. A serious student of Hopkins, Donoghue is of the opinion that only the dedication and not the composition of the poem was a religious act. However, one cannot overlook the religious or spiritual impulse in the poem.

The first octet (first eight lines) of the poem opens with the poet's catching sight of the bird as the minion of the morning, the crown-prince of the Kingdom of Daylight. It was riding the steady air, striding high above the sky. In its ecstasy, the windhover halted with the wings as if it were pulling back on a horse's rein and then again launching itself like a child on the swing. Like a skater sweeping gently around a bend, it hurled itself against the wind, gliding and mastering the morning air. The observing poet's heart stirred in excitement on seeing the mastery of the tiny bird. The vitality of the bird excites in the reader a desire for his own mastery and achievement. If the bird could show such beauty and power drawing so much of admiration and excitement, then one could expect the unimaginable from Christ, from whom are all things.

"Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here (9)
Buckle! And the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!
No wonder of it: sheer plod makes plough down sillion
Shine, and blue bleak embers, ah my dear
Fall, gall themselves, and gush gold-vermillion." (14)

In the content of the sestet (last six lines) of the poem is the meaning of the poem. The keywords in these lines are the sudden realisation of the poet in the "Here" (line 9) and "Then" (line 10). The beauty and power of the bird is something that is a physical reality, at once evident and visible. But, the true beauty and power of Christ lies in His ***transcendental*** reality or a higher principle, in His Passion and greatness, through which the beauty of virtue, love and sacrifice glow like fire. The admiration which the bird stirs in him at the beginning is "then" stirred by Christ and this realisation makes the narrator cry: "O my Chevalier!"

In the last three lines, the poet finds in nature the same paradox of mystery and meaning of Christ, that from destruction a new life will spring out. This he evokes through two examples, the first of which is the ploughshare for the simple plodding work of a ploughman. It should be rather, soiled and blackened in the mud due to being dragged through the clay. But, at the end, it emerges from the ground with an increased shine and brightness from its polish against the cut earth. And, the second example is of the coal in the grate that seems to lose all its heat and yet, reveals a gold-vermillion fire. Similarly, Christ's Passion and greatness rises from eternal sacrifice.

In the poem, from the freedom of the skies in which the windhover is ecstatic, the reader descends to the sheer plod, plough, sillion and dying embers. The mortal birds when they fall on the ground reveal the beauty of their red and gold crests even in death. But, in essence the poem glorifies the significance of the life, death and Resurrection (life after death) of Christ, the Lord. Everything in the Universe bears the stamp of the divine in it. The idea is also employed by J.R. Tolkien who compares the Creator to a perfect prism and creation to the refraction of perfect light.

"Pied Beauty"

"Glory be to God for dappled things- (1)
For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-fire coal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced- fold, fallow, and plough;"
And all the trades, their gear and tackle and trim (6)

The poem "Pied Beauty" is full of wonder at the world and also the awe at man's relation to this beautiful universe. Hopkins' desire for both rule and freedom finds him partly following and partly breaking the rule of the sonnet form. It is written in the experimental form of a ***curtal sonnet***. It opens with the declaration "Glory be to God" that suggest the poet's reverence for God the Creator. This phrase stems from the motto "Ad marjoram Dei gloriam" (to the greater glory of God) of Hopkins's Jesuit Society. The same phrase is found throughout the Bible like the well known passage of Luke 2: 12-14, which details the birth of Christ, following the glorification of God.

In the opening ***strophe***¸ the Creator appears indirectly in his works, through the visible created world, the phenomenal world of motion. The variety of the "dappled things" in nature, the artistic placement of one shade or colour against another is defined through the words "pied", "dappled", "couple-colour" and "brinded." The poet describes how falling chestnuts resemble coals bursting in fire due to the reddish brown edible insides that are exposed when the shell break against the ground, he also wonders at the "couple-colour" in the cattle, the swimming trout and the outstretched wings of the finches.

The ancient four elements are evoked in the poem through the reference of the "skies" (air), "swims" (water), "fire coal chestnut falls" (fire) and "landscape" (earth). The poet observes the landscape that is "plotted and pieced" in to fields by agriculture.

"All things counter, original, spare, strange (6)
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet; sour; adazzle; dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him." (11)

The second stanza turns from the corporeal to the spiritual. The poet lists several contrasting traits that can be grouped as swift-slow, sweet-

sour, adazzle-dim. Man's fickle will make him freckled with sin which lacks a common ground with God. The unchangeable Divine beauty of God in the concluding ***antistrophe*** is contrasted to the variable earthly beauty described in the opening strophe. The reader notes a spiritual conflict in the last lines because the poet draws another paradox in his puzzled idea of beauty.

The title "pied" itself implies two meanings, the first of which means spotted, mottled or freckled and the second which means confusion; such is the nature of beauty which is appealing to all. Even though, God is the Creator of all beautiful things, his own beauty is not "pied" (perfect beyond change). His beauty may appeal much less than the beauty of the world. God "fathers-forth" and is the ultimate Creator of all things diverse and variable, all the physical, material, spiritual and beyond. God is seen as the ideal artist, the Impressionist in the eyes of the poet emphasizes that God's beauty is "past change", for which one is to "praise him." The poem is not without its paradoxes and irony but Hopkins unites these opposites excellently with his call to join in such praise and reverence. To the poet, nature is a manifestation of God's beauty alone.



LET US KNOW

This was a century in which most writers and intellectuals of the time abandoned Christianity and faith in God which was also termed as the "Victorian doubt." During, this time, Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and David Hulme's 18th century studies created a major rupture between science and religion. Several other thinkers like John Stuart Mill, Georg Wilhelm, Friedrich Hegel, Thomas Carlyle and Karl Marx among others created a cultural shift from organized religion. But, with Hopkins religion was still central and important. The above poems "The Windhover", "Pied Beauty", and "God's Grandeur" carry the same religious and spiritual impulse.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: To whom is the poem "The Windhover" dedicated and why?

Q 8: What are the images of the living world evoked in the opening strophe of "Pied Beauty"?

5.5 MAJOR THEMES

The following are the important themes in the poems about which you are reading in this unit.

Changing Patterns of an Industrialised World:

The rapid changes in the Victorian world, brought about by the advances in science and technology, the growth of democracy and the decline of Christian faith, had left the Victorian frame of mind in a mixed state of anxiety and optimism. 19th century England under the reign of Queen Victoria was ideal for imperial and industrial growth because it was aided by political stability and social reform. The urbanisation and industrialisation of England led to a rapid growth of the English towns, causing changes in the demographic pattern and the home-based industry. The industrial revolution turned cities like Manchester and Liverpool into bustling hubs of trade, commerce, industry and urban culture. The first modern railway line was constructed between the two cities. The movement of more than half of the population by mid-19th century, led to a drastic change in the demographic pattern in the English cities. The benefits of urban life with transportation along with the railways and the telegraph opened up communication from the earlier insularity of country life. But, the constant noise, poor work conditions, pollution, crime and other factors did crop up in the wake of the industrial revolution.

The Crisis of Christian faith:

A crisis connotes a turning point or re-analysis of what had been accepted as the earlier norm. Prior to this crisis, religion had dominated both the cultural and intellectual fabric of English life. From the 1830s, the

successive geological and biological discoveries of Charles Lyell, Robert Chambers and Charles Darwin generated a stir with the controversies of the theories of evolution which came as a blow to the prevalent religious orthodoxy. Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), *Vestiges of Creation* (1844) and then Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) challenged the origins of divine origin and intensified what came to be termed as the 'great Victorian doubt' or the crisis of religious faith, as a result of the conflict between science and religion, that characterised the Victorian era.

Darwinian ideas weren't easily accepted, as people couldn't shake off their age-old belief in the story of Genesis or the biblical idea of Adam's creation, and yet they couldn't deny attention to the scientific evolutionary theories on the origin of man. And it was only by the end of the century, that most of the ideas of Darwin came to be regarded with favour by the majority of the people and not just intellectuals of the time. The tension of doubt and faith, science and religion much affected the Victorian mind. The same crisis is reflected in literary works like Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Matthew Arnold's famous poem "Dover Beach". But, strikingly the tendencies of the Victorian age were not reflected in the poetry of G.M. Hopkins, who saw in nature the divine manifestation of God the creator.

Nature as the Embodiment of Divine Energy: (as in "Pied Beauty")

Hopkins' aestheticism or appreciation of beauty was influenced by the preceding Romantics and the aesthetics of the late 19th century. His aesthetics were grounded in his love of nature which found reflection in his poetry and remained deeply personal. Hopkins' ascetism as a Jesuit priest made him aware of the demands of his religion and yet, it was his sensuous expression in poetry that bridged his conflicting desire for both the spiritual and the sensuous life. Instead of chronicling nature, Hopkins tried to extract a deeper meaning from nature and it was his study of Dun Scotus that led him to anchor his personal aesthetic with religion. Hopkins found the means to convert his love of nature into an act of admiration and celebration of divinity through his verses. He appreciated Arnold's aesthetic which was based on the need of a higher meaning in art in order to be relevant. His close observation of nature and his religious conviction led to the use of the

ideas of **inscape** and **instress** in his poetry. The early journals of Hopkins were filled with detailed descriptions of flowers, clouds and various aspects of nature. The ***Journal*** of Hopkins that he kept during the "silent years" (1866-75) shows his remarkable painter's eye for details in nature.



LET US KNOW

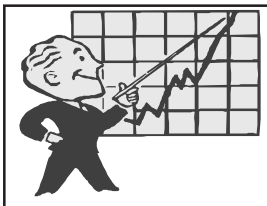
Inscape and Instress:

A very important element of Hopkins's poetry was his concept of "Inscape" and "Instress". Inscape has to with the individual essence and uniqueness of everything in the Universe. This concept was derived from the medieval Theologian Duns Scotus. The inscape of an object was communicated by its instress ensuring the transmission of its specific distinctiveness and importance in the wider creation. For an example, in his poems, God is the inscape or the essence of His created world. It is the '**instress of inscape**' that leads one to the realisation of Christ. Hopkins felt that it was the artist's job to express such uniqueness, through his works, to find 'images' that would nail the inscape down for the readers.

Emphasis on the Essence of Experience:

Hopkins' notebooks reveal how he details what appears unique to him, be it a particular sunset, cloud formation or the waves. Hopkins's devotion to the theologian Duns Scotus was in direct contrast to the preference of Thomas Aquinas by the Jesuit order of the time. This also raised a lot of suspicion among his superiors. They favoured Aquinas for his understanding of the unity of all things over the individual "thisness" or distinctiveness of Scotus. The "thisness" of Scotus was "that which makes this oak tree, this particular oak tree only, or this rose this particular rose only, or this person this person only and not another- something unique and separate, God's infinite and incredible freshness of Creation every nanosecond of everyday world without end." In "The Windhover", the poet experiences the essence of divine transcendental beauty through the visible and physical reality of the ecstatic bird in flight. It is the poet's admiration for

the majestic bird which dawns in him the realisation of God's omnipresence in nature as the poet exclaims "O, My Chevalier!" referring to Christ. Thus, the poem begins with an address to Christ and the figure of Christ is presented as the essence of His created world. His omnipotent presence is felt in His creation of nature at its best. And Hopkins directs the reader to the same realisation through the poem.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: To what extent, did Charles Darwin affect the Christian Faith?

Q 10: Comment on Hopkins' views on nature.

5.6 HOPKINS' POETIC STYLE

The poem "Windhover" is written in the form of Italian sonnet of fourteen lines divided into a octave and sestet. The rhyme scheme of the poem is "aaaaaaaa" in the octave which is quite different from conventional sonnets. Hopkins' other innovation is that each line of the octave ends with the 'ing' sound. While the poem "Pied Beauty" is written in the form of Curtal sonnet, another invention of Hopkins. In this form the main qualities of a sonnet are retained, but within a smaller compass. Instead of an octave (8 lines) and sestet (6 lines), this poem has 6 plus 4 and ½ lines. The metre used is described as 'sprung paeonic'.

Hopkins believed that poetry required a language that was rich to both the senses and the intellect. His vocabulary is drawn from many sources of ***archaic, colloquial*** and ***dialect*** words. He was always precise in his use of words and a supporter of **linguistic purism** in English which is reflected in an 1882 letter to Robert Bridges which states: "It makes one weep to think what English might have been; for in spite of all that Shakespeare and Milton have done…no beauty in language can make up for want of purity." The major influence in his writing was the **Old English**, which to him was "a vastly superior thing to what we have now" and he took a long time to learn it well. The Welsh language which he learnt while studying

Theology at St. Beuno's College influenced him a lot and the poetic forms of Welsh Literature became a prominent feature of his work.

This also added to his use of ***alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia*** and rhyme. The occurrence of multiple words with the same sounding prefix, is known as *alliteration* i.e., "daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn" ("The Windhover") or "swift, slow; sweet, sour" ("Pied Beauty"). *Assonance* is the repetition of vowel sounds in nearby words, which are used to reinforce the meanings of words or to set the mood (notice u: /o/ou/ue sounds repeated within a sentence) i.e. "Glory to be God/ then off, off forth on swing" ("The Windhover") or "My heart in hiding/ fold, fallow and plough" ("Pied Beauty"). *Onomatopoeia* suggests a word that imitates the source of the sound that it describes i.e. "riding" "rolling", "striding", "gliding" ("The Windhover") or "swift", "slow", "dim", "adazzle" ("Pied Beauty").

The imagery he used was remarkable for its richness. For example, in his poem "The Windhover", the poet catches the sight of a "morning's minion", which is the windhover. Here, the poet's use of the royal imagery is significant. For example, the bird is likened to a falcon in flight and is addressed as a prince of the kingdom of daylight and the imagery that is created through the words, describing the bird in motions of sweeping, striding, hurling and gliding, bring alive the mental image of a bird in an ecstatic flight. His appreciation and a **sensuous love of nature** based on detailed observation characterised much of his poetry before 1878. His early struggle to negotiate his sensuous love for nature and his ascetic life finally resulted in his ***sacramental*** view of natural beauty." The exactness of his detailed expression is similar to that of the Pre- Raphaelite painters.

Hopkins also used a lot of **religious imagery** in his works that stemmed from his interest in Theology and religion. For example, in the poem "Pied Beauty", the poet through the ending lines "He fathers —forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him" refers to God the creator, who is central to the poem, as intended by the poem. Similarly, the poem "The Windhover" begins with the address "To Christ, our Lord" and the poet in a sudden realisation in his admiration of the ecstatic bird, exclaims "O, my

Chevalier!" with a reference to Christ. Nearly, all of the poems written by Hopkins stems directly or indirectly from his personal association with the ministry.

One of the most important poetic techniques of Hopkins was the "**Sprung Rhythm**" which appeared in his poem "The Wreck of Deutschland". It is based on the irregular verses of *Samson Agonistes* and about the sinking of a German ship carrying exiles of five Franciscan nuns in 1875. **Sprung Rhythm** is a poetic rhythm, designed to imitate the rhythm of natural speech. The basic principle of this attempt is to break away from strictly conventional patterns in containing one stressed syllable, followed by any number of unstressed syllables in a foot of a poetic metre. Hopkins described it as a system of prosody in which the only stressed syllables are counted and the unstressed ones are ignored. He claimed to have discovered this unnamed poetic rhythm in the folk songs, spoken poetry, in the works of Shakespeare and Milton. He also employed the "**curtal sonnet**" in his works, which was an eleven-line (or more accurately, ten and a half line) sonnet.

As a Jesuit, Hopkins was to devote his intellect to the service of Christ which meant giving up writing poetry. But, through his own reading and understanding of his twin conflicts of the religious and the secular, of the priest and the poet in him, he himself said in one of his own sermons, that the poet and his works are creatures of God. Even Dixon was of the opinion that "**surely one vocation cannot destroy another**" and encouraged Hopkins saying "and such a Society as yours will not remain ignorant that you have such gifts as have been given by God to man."In his distinctiveness of poetic forms, he recognised the risk of being criticised as "queer" but to write real poetry it was a risk worth taking. A full appreciation of his excellent technical abilities requires careful analysis of his individual poems.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Which are the major characteristics of Hopkins' writing style?

Q 12: What is the 'curtal sonnet' form that Hopkins employed in his poetry?

Q 13: What is 'Sprung Rhythm' as one can find in a poem like "The Wreck of Deutschland?"

5.7 RECEPTION OF HOPKINS

Hopkins had decided never to publish his poems but he also realized that any true poet required an audience for criticism as well as encouragement. In an exchange of correspondence with his friend, fellow poet and Anglican cleric Richard Watson Dixon, Hopkins wrote: "the only just judge, the only literary critic is Christ, who prizes, is proud of and admires, more than any man, more than the receiver himself can, the gifts of his own making." John Berryman in *Eleven Addresses to the Lord* quoted: "Father Hopkins said the only true literary critic is Christ." The English humanist critic F. R. Leavis proclaimed the greatness of Hopkins in his critical essay on the writer which was included in the *New Bearings in English Poetry: A Study of Contemporary Situation* and it also remains one of the best account. Paul Mariani published Hopkins' full length biography *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Life* where he writes of the poet's creativity in the months before his ordination and following his writing of "The Wreck of Deutschland" which is an extraordinary contribution to modern poetry.

Hopkins' work inspired poets such as Elizabeth Bishop and John Berryman and continues to influence young poets and the criticism of academicians. **W. H Auden** pronounced himself "uneasy" at the intensity of Hopkins's confessional mode but others like **Robert Lowell** celebrated the poet's "inebriating exuberance." Some contemporary critics believed that the poet suppressed elegiac longing and erotic impulses in his poetry like the poems "The Bugler's Fist Communion" and "Epithalamion". Much of this has been discussed by critics such as Robert Martin's controversial biography *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (1991) and Julia Saville's book *A Queer Chivalry* among others. But, in no way the poet's distinctive brilliance can be tarnished for the same. One contemporary critic M. M. Taylor, has argued for the inclusion of Hopkins with the **Uranian Poets**,

a group whose writings derived in many ways from the prose works of Hopkins' academic tutor Walter Pater. His work did share the subjective love of nature the Pre-Raphaelite or Neo-romanticism schools and yet, was distinctively original in its own way. For the same reason, he is seen as the **precursor to modernist poetry** or as the bridge between the two poetic eras.



5.8 LET US SUM UP

You have just finished reading about Hopkins and two of his poems "The Windhover" and "Pied Beauty". The poems through its rich imagery find in all creation of nature, the mastery of God. And the poet expresses the awe and admiration, at the beauty of God which surpasses earthly beauty. Along with the prescribed poems, you have learnt about the poet's life and his works which earned him the delayed but much deserved posthumous acclaim. Although he was a Victorian poet, the crisis and the conflicts of his age, did not reflect in his work. Instead, in striking contrast to the Victorian crisis of faith, God was central to Hopkins's poetry. He presented in his work a rare combination of the intellect, of both a poet and a priest and harnessed his thoughts of both the secular and the religious. Hopkins employed and popularised the ideas of **Inscape** and **Instress** in his poetry, among other poetic forms like the **Curtal Sonnet** and the **Sprung Rhythm**, which have been discussed in this unit. These poetic techniques are very integral to Hopkins' writing. The themes in this unit, cover some of the important and associated aspects and ideas related to the poems, in order to enhance the learner's understanding and appreciation of Hopkins and his poetry.



5.9 FURTHER READING

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Websites and Electronic Resources:

Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/450198.

Available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/40001861.

5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Sprung rhythm… …Inscape and Instress… …Curtal sonnet… …use of imagery etc.

Ans to Q 2: Studied classics at Balliol College, Oxford… …met his lifelong friend Robert Bridges… …social life at Oxford university… …changes in behaviour.

Ans to Q 3: The year 1868 is important… …Hopkins' entry into religious life… …the tussle with artistic life… … burning of his poems in the same year… …feelings that sensuous writing is improper for new Jesuit order.

Ans to Q 4: The efforts of Bridges… …Hopkins' literary executor and editor… …Introducing his poetry to readers… …the posthumous acclaim… …Bridge's 750 copies of Hopkins' poems… …1918 collected edition.

Ans to Q 5: In around 1884… …he became Professor of Greek and Latin… …the gloom and loneliness reflected in poems that came to be known as "terrible sonnets"… …but according to Canon Dixon, they are not 'terrible' because of its quality… …the crystallised melancholy of the period.

Ans to Q 6: In1868, before joining the Jesuits, Hopkins' felt that the sensuous writing was improper for the new order he had chosen. The early poems available today are only those that survived accidentally in diaries and manuscripts.

Ans to Q 7: The poem is dedicated to Christ… …its an expression of mastery of Christ… …his life and death… …if a wind hover is so beautiful then Christ's beauty and power is unimaginable.

Ans to Q 8: The tension of doubt and faith, science and religion, caused by Darwin's theories much affected the Victorian mind… …examples are Tennyson's "In Memoriam" and Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach"… …But, strikingly the tendencies of the Victorian age were not reflected in the poetry of G.M. Hopkins, who saw in nature the divine manifestation of God the creator.

Ans to Q 9: Hopkins found the means to convert his love of nature into an act of admiration and celebration of divinity through his verses… …his close observation of nature and his religious conviction led to the use of the ideas of inscape and instress in his poetry.

Ans to Q 10: Chestnuts… … cattle… …trout… …finches… …landscape… …fields of agriculture… …four elements (air, water, fire, earth).

Ans to Q 11: Old English… …Welsh language… …poetic forms of Welsh Literature… …alliteration… …assonance… …onomatopoeia… …rhyme… …religious imagery.

Ans to Q 12: Eleven line sonnet.

Ans to Q 13: A poetic rhythm… …basic principle… …breaking away from conventional pattern… …one stressed syllable with a number of unstressed syllables… …discovered in folk songs, spoken poetry, works of Shakespeare and Milton.



5.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did Hopkins's student life at Oxford influence his early works? Would you like to discuss Hopkins as a religious poet?

Q 2: Describe the phase in Hopkins's writing career when he had a twin conflict in terms of his writing career. How did he resolve that crisis?

Q 3: Account for the struggle between poetic sensibility and religious commitment in Hopkins's poetry reflected through a poem like "The Windhover".

Q 4: How did Hopkins spend his final years in Dublin where he wrote his most passionate works from 1884-89?

Q 5: Explain briefly the content of the poem "The Windhover." Describe the significance of the imagery used in the poem "Pied Beauty."

Q 6: Do you think the line- "He fathers–forth where beauty is past change" sums up the content of the poem "Pied Beauty." If yes/no, why?

Q 7: What do you understand by the concepts of 'Inscape' and 'Instress'? Illustrate with actual examples from Hopkins' poetry.

Q 8: How were the works of Hopkins critically received after his death?

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UNIT 6: W. B. YEATS: "THE SECOND COMING"

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 W.B. Yeats: The Poet

6.4 Reading the Poems prescribed

6.5 Major Themes

6.6 Yeats' Poetic Style

6.7 Reception of Yeats

6.8 Let us Sum up

6.9 Further Reading

6.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

6.11 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read briefly about the life and works of the Irish poet W. B. Yeats
- discuss some basic features of modernism through W. B. Yeats' poetry
- interpret the poem prescribed in terms of its different aspects
- identify the themes, philosophy, and concerns of Yeats as a modern poet
- discuss the poem "The Second Coming" in its nuanced totality

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the second unit of the Block. In this unit, you will interpret a 'modern' poem "The Second Coming" composed by W. B. Yeats. You must have already read that Yeats was a great Irish poet, dramatist, and prose writer. However, he is more famous as one of the greatest English language poets of the 20th century. He also received the coveted Nobel Prize for literature in 1923. The poem "The Second Coming" was composed in 1919,

and first printed in *The Dial* in November 1920. Subsequently, this poem was included in his collection of verses titled *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921). You will find it interesting to read that the poem allegorically uses many Christian images regarding the **Apocalypse** and **Second Coming** to describe the atmosphere in post-war Europe of the early decades of the 20th century. The title of the poem is derived from the Christian belief in the Second Coming of Christ, but the god to be born, supposedly in the second Bethlehem, is a beast. There is a succession of "uncontrollable mysteries" which is antithetical to the Christian nativity. The new age to be born will be a reversal of the last. This idea is significant in the sense that it was written shortly after the Russian Revolution and World War I, between the Black and Tan War in Ireland, and just before the rise of Fascism under Mussolini in Italy. Thus, in this unit, you will get to read how Yeats, in order to showcase the disintegration of the modern society, uses the Christian background in this poem. Yeats as a modern poet was troubled by a sense of life's complexity. Very often, he sought to juxtapose the messiness of life with the neatness of art (through his creation of the ideal and mythical world of Byzantium) as a move towards writing poetry in the modern times. This was however not a poetry of 'escape' but rather an acknowledgement of the gap between reality and the artist's dream of an order in a society in turmoil.

6.3 W.B. YEATS: THE POET

His life :

William Butler Yeats was born in Sandymount, Dublin on June 28th 1865. His father was John Butler Yeats, a barrister but became a portrait painter later. His mother Susan Pooexfen belonged to a rich merchant family of Sligo, Ireland. After two years of his birth in 1867, Yeats' family went to London although young William spent much of his childhood days with his grandparents in the countrysides of Sligo. It is to be noted that the natural beauty, folklore and the supernatural legends of the country shaped many of Yeats' later works and would form the setting of many of his poems.

However, he received his school education in Dublin where his family moved in 1800. In 1883, in the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin he received the most important education through his meeting with many poets and artists.

Because of his parents, Yeats could claim lineages with various Anglo Arish Protestant families, which are present in many of his works. However, it is important to note that Yeats never identified himself with his own Protestant tradition, which represented a powerful minority against Ireland's Roman Catholic majority. However, he was also away from the Roman Catholic tradition because he could not share their faith, he felt annoyed by their concerns for material success. Instead, he was in favour of cultivating a tradition more profound than both these two historical traditions. Subsequently, he took side with the tradition in Ireland lying hidden and existing largely in the old customs, beliefs, and holy places more Pagan than the Christian.

Yeats' first publication was in the form of two lyrics published in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885. However, it was in 1887 that he adopted the career of a writer when his family again went back to London. There he joined the Theosophical Society, whose mysticism attracted him a lot mainly because it was a form of imaginative world far removed from the common humdrum day-to-day life. Gradually, his disavowal of the advances of science and his visionary ideals enveloped him with various types of poetic images. Along with it, he began to study the prophetic books of William Blake, which showed him ways into other traditions like the Platonic, the Neo-Platonism, the Swedenborgian, and the alchemical.

Soon Yeats became an active member of the London literary circle. He befriended William Morris and W. E. Henley, and along with his friends Lionel Johnson and Arthur Symons he co-founded the famous Rhymer's Club. In 1889, he met Maud Gonne, an Irish girl, and as Yeats himself writes, from then on "the troubling of my life began." Maud was very beautiful, brilliant and ardent. He hopelessly fell in love with her. Although Maud admired him, she was never in love with him. Instead, she was an Irish patriot, a rebel always trying to assert her commanding personality. In fact, when Yeats joined in the Irish nationalist cause, he did so mostly for the love of Maud.

When Yeats staged his play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, Maud played the lead role.



LET US KNOW

Rhymer's Club:

The Rhymers' Club, founded in 1890, was a group of London-based poets. Originally, not much more than a dining club, it produced several anthologies of poetry during 1892 to 1894. The members of the group usually met in a London pub in Fleet Street. The poets who were frequent visitors to the club were Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Francis Thompson, John Gray, John Davidson, Alfred Douglas, Arthur Symons, and so on. The group as a whole matched quite closely Yeats' retrospective idea of 'the tragic generation', destined for failure and in many cases early death. The members also published two volumes of verse. The first, entitled *The Book of the Rhymer's Club* was published in 1892. *The Second Book of the Rhymer's Club* appeared two years later in 1894.

By this time, Irish politics was undergoing rapid changes. After the death of the controversial leader Charles Parnell in 1891, Yeats thought that the Irish political life had lost its early significance. Yeats thought that the vacuum could be filled only by literature, art, poetry, drama, and legends. You perhaps know that Yeats' famous *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) was a move toward this end. In 1898, he met Lady Gregory who became a playwright and a close ally of Yeats. She was already busy in collecting old stories of Western Ireland. Yeats felt that if this lore could be treated in a strict or high style he would be able to create a realm of poetry unique to his own identity. Subsequently, he spent much time with lady Gregory at her home and purchased a ruined Norman castle called Thoor Ballylee in the neibourhood. This structure, under the name of the "Tower" would become a symbol of his best poems in later times.

In 1899, Yeats asked Maud Gonne if she would marry him but she refused his proposal. After that, Yeats devoted most of his time to literature

and drama as he had great faith in poetry and plays that would help transfigure an Irish nation. Soon he became one of the most prominent originators of **Irish Literary Theatre** performing its first show in Dublin in 1899 with Yeats' play *The Countess Cathleen.* Till the end of his life Yeats remained the director of this theatre, which reappeared as the **Abbey Theatre** in 1904. Some of his plays that became a part of the Abbey repertoire are—*The Land of Heart's Desire* (1894), *The Hour Glass* (1903), *The King's Threshold* (1904), *Deirdre* (1907) and so on. It was during the same time that Yeats published volumes of poetry like *Poems* (1895) and *The Wind Among the Reeds* (1899) typical of his early verse based on Irish folklore and legends. However, in collections like *In The Seven Woods* (1903) *and The Green Helmet* (1910), Yeats gradually shifted to Celtic influences. However, the changes in his poetry in between 1909 to 1914 can be perceived through the collection of poetry *Responsibilities: Poems and a Play* (1914) where Yeats hardens his verse lines with more resonant imagery and directness. In 1917, he published "The Wild Swans at Coole" which show perfections of his own poetic techniques. In 1918, he published *The Tower,* named after the castle Yeats owned. Some of his other great poems were published in *The Winding Star* (1929).



LET US KNOW

The most interesting development in dramatic literature of the early 20th century can be traced through the revival of poetic drama in the plays of W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot. Yeats started by writing dreamy plays on Irish mythologies but often presented a symbolic power in both action and imagery suggesting different labels of meaning English drama had not experienced for a long time. For example, the play *The Countess Cathleen* is the story of the Irish countess who sold her soul to save her people but finally she reached heaven. This play caused riots among the Dublin audience. Yeats' treatment of the **Deirdre story** in the play *Deidre* concentrates on the final moments with a heroic dignity, which was part of his notion of tragedy.

However, his later plays are based on neo-Platonic and other mystic notions and symbols, and are highly stylized in the manner of the Japanese **Noh drama** by which the writer was considerably influenced. *Cavalry* (1920), *The Resurrection* (1931), *Purgatory* (1939), *The Death of Cuchulain* (1939) are some of his important symbolic plays which threw light on the ironic contemplation of human psychology and history. However, to understand such plays we need to be ware of Yeats' 'symbolic system'.

Yeats' hostility towards the modern city life and his return to the ideals of the Renaissance or of Byzantium, of courtly Japan, or of Ireland's heroic age, might suggest that his works were out of touch with his time. His preoccupation with the ancient, the traditional, the mystical and the mythical may also seem to point to that direction. Yeats has been one of the first modern writers to be conscious of the need for the mythical in literature. Because, he believed that this method was 'simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and significance to the immense range of futility and anarchy which is apparent in contemporary history. This method was an alternative to the lives in cities, which killed the meditative passive life. However, the esoteric, archaic cultivation of tradition might also invite considerable political risks. Yet Yeats' works represent a cumulative and coherent response to the spirit of the modern age.

Yeats was much influenced by the fact that in certain parts of Ireland the oral tradition was still visibly alive. Gaelic poems and stories were still part of a world in which the common men had some share in imaginative literature. In contrast to this modern English literature was almost entirely the product of the printing press influencing its character and even determining its nature, and was directed primarily towards a small group of literate readers. With the passage of time however, the central distinctions between oral and written, between English and Irish continued to influence his own poetic and imaginative enterprises. An interest in folklore, ballads and other literary traditions of the countrysides characterise most of his poetry in general where the language and rhythms of speech are markedly very prominent. He was aware of his responsibility towards the claims of

the oral threatened by the prominent tendencies of contemporary English culture. His own poetry is the product of what he calls 'conscious, deliberate craft'. In a letter to his father in 1913, he writes: "I have tried to make my works convincing with a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling." Later Yeats also insisted that he must 'write for the ear', so that he might be 'instantly understood as when an actor or folksinger stands before an audience."

The interesting life history of Yeats personal life does not end here. In 1917, Yeats asked Iseult Gonne, Maud Gonne's daughter to marry him. Sometime later, he proposed another girl George Hyde Lees and they were happily married in 1917. In 1922, Yeats accepted an invitation to become a member of the new Irish Senate. In 1923, when he received the coveted Nobel Prize for literature, Yeats had already become one of the most significant modern poets. In 1926 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935*—a collection of poems he loved most was published. His last two collections of poems *New Poems* and *Last Poems and Two Plays* were published in 1938 and 1939 respectively.

Yeats died in January 1939 when he was abroad. The intention was to bury him in Sligo but the decision was thwarted because of the outbreak of World War II. In 1948, his dead body was finally shifted to Sligo and was buried in a little Protestant churchyard. Yeats has to his credit the rare expertise of producing his greatest works between the ages of 50 and 75. The poems written during this period, show clear instances of his experiments in a range of forms of poetry, drama and prose, and his own spiritual growth and gradual acquisition of personal wisdom which he incorporates into his own idea of mythology.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How did Yeats perceive the use of myths in his poetry?

Q 2: What is the significance of Rhymer's Club?

Q 3: From where is the poem "The Second Coming" taken? How does Yeats' use of Christian imagery reflect the contemporary age?

His Works :

For reasons of space, it is difficult to provide a detail discussion on the range of poetic works that Yeats had written. However, I do insist that you read more and more about Yeats' works from books like *WB Yeats: Selected Poems* for having a better grasp of the concerns and philosophy of Yeats as a modern poet. For your convenience, a short discussion of his poetry is provided period wise. Another fact is that his poetry is so full of references to people and events and reflects so much of his own spiritual and intellectual developments that it is really difficult to single out one particular poem as his best.

1885 –1889

You are already told in the previous section that Yeats' first publication was in the form of two lyrics published in the *Dublin University Review* in 1885. Since then he began to associate himself with other writers and intellectuals who recognised his talent for a would-be writer. In the next few years, his association with the Theosophical Society produced a number of poems like "The Indian upon God", "The Indian to his Love", "The Sad Shepherd" etc. again published in the *Dublin University Review*. At the same time, he also wrote an article on Samuel Ferguson whose poetry had attempted to interpret Celtic Ireland. Yeats' intention was to criticise the Englishness of the Trinity College Intelligentsia and to proclaim his belief in the National Celtic literature. His connection with the Irish patriot John O'Leary inspired his vision of a nationalist Ireland and this new attitude inculcated in him an idea that "all poetry should have a local habitation when at all possible." However, the purpose of nationality was to transcend that very nationality and to resort to universalism which according to Yeats could be attained "through what is near you, your nation, or, if you be no traveller, your village and the cobwebs of your walls." By this time Yeats was becoming recognised as a writer, and a Dublin publisher commissioned the publication of a selection of the works of some contemporary Irish poets, which was subsequently, issued as *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*. Meanwhile, he was also working on a long narrative poem –"The Wanderings of Oisin" which was published as Crossways in the *Collected Works* published in 1889.

1889-1892

This period remains important for the ups and downs in young Yeats' personal life. You have read that Yeats was deeply in love with Maud Gonne who had told Yeats that some passages in "The Wanderings of Oisin" had moved her to tears. This was a fair enough cause for Yeats to fall in love with her. Sometime in 1891, he proposed to her only to be repelled. Throughout the rest of his life, Yeats wrote several poems on her beauty, his hopelessness in love, and the bitterness of experience, which were transformed into poetry of passionate intensity. Yeats' Irish nationalism was differently inspired and with the help of poetry, he wanted to inspire in other writers an idea of the Celtic nation that would lead all men to a heroic conception of human life. However, after the death of the leader Charles Parnell in 1891, Yeats thought that the Irish political life had lost its early significance. Pernell's death prompted Yeats to write the poem "Mourn—and then Onwards", published in United Ireland.



LET US KNOW

Yeats' interest in the symbolism of the Theosophists and the Golden Dawn was that of a young man who habitually thought in images. **He was absorbed in trying to understand the world, created by imagination. He believed that mind and nature are unified.** This was also the time (**1889-1892)** to be inspired by the symbolism of William Blake, which further influenced Yeats' own use of symbols. Blake's vision of the world in four parts, which relate to the four aspects of the human mind, the four elements or the four points of the compass meant that there is an essential unity in the universe for those who can apprehend it with imagination. This understanding helped Yeats to develop the idea of **Phantasmagoria**—a structure of related images which would express the essence of all things. In his first such structures the emblems of the **Rose** and **Cross** predominate.

1892-1910

Yeats was becoming popular through for his writings in English periodicals, and reviews of Irish writers. In 1893, he published *The Celtic*

Twilight, a collection of stories and legends collected from the peasants of Connaught. In 1894, his play *The land of Heart's Desire* was produced at Avenue Theatre. In the same year was published another collection of stories *The Secret Rose* in which again he wrote deeply about the peasant lives. For the next two years, he lived with Mrs. Olivia Shakespeare. However, Olivia soon discovered his passion for Maud and left him. This situation is explicitly presented in the poem "The Lover Mourns the loss of Love." During 1896, he befriended Lady Gregory, George Moore, Edward Mertyn and John Middleton Synge who together as a group founded the **Irish Theatre**. The next few years he lived in Coole and when he suffered from nervous breakdown, Lady Gregory nursed him back to health. During this time, he continued to write short stories and poems in which he sought to combine the two traditions— "noble and beggar man". In 1899, he published his third volume of poems *The Wind Among the Reeds* roughly owing to Irish mythology but also echoing P. B. Shelly's "Ode to The West Wind". Other concerns of the poems are about unrequited love, yearning for the beloved, yearning for actual beauty possible only through death. At the same time, he was also helping his friend Arthur Symons on *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*. After this, Yeats tuned his interests towards theatre and the Irish literary movements. In 1910, he published *The Green Helmet and Other Poems* of which the majority of the poems are tinged with bitterness and disillusion.

LET US KNOW



Abbey Theatre:

The Abbey Theatre also known as the National Theatre of Ireland is located in Dublin, Ireland. The Abbey first opened its doors to the public on 27th December 1904. Despite losing its original building to a fire in 1951, it has remained active till today. The Abbey was the first state-subsidised theatre in the English-speaking world. In its early years, the theatre was closely associated with the writers of the Irish Literary Revival, many of whom were involved in its founding and most of whom had plays staged there. The Abbey served

as a nursery for many of the leading Irish playwrights and actors of the 20th century, including William Butler Yeats, Augusta, Lady Gregory, Sean O'Casey and John Millington Synge. In addition, through its extensive programme of touring abroad and its high visibility to foreign, particularly American, audiences, it has become an important part of the Irish tourist industry.

1910-1921

Yeats' next volume of work appeared in 1914 under the title *Responsibilities.* However, before its publication he visited America twice. In between the two visits, Yeats travelled widely. He stayed at Maud Gonne's Normandy house at Coole Park and occasionally at English country houses in the weekends. His interest in India had also led him to work with the poet Rabindranath Tagore on his translation of *Gitanjali* from Bengali to English. Ezra Pound praised both *The Green Helmet* and *Responsibilities* for their 'new robustness'. Between 1914 to 1019, Yeats produced a number of important poems. During the World War I, Yeats refused to write any **war poem** as his political interests were confined only to Ireland. He wrote in "On Being Asked for a War Poem": "A think it better that in times like these/ A poet's mouth be silent, for in truth/we have no gift to set a statesman right." Yeats might have been influenced by Maud Gonne who was nursing the wounded in France as well as Lady Gregory who supported the British War preparations. Yeats believed that Irish nationalism should co-operate with England and the last two years of the War. Two events inspired him to write poems about them – **Easter Rising of 1916**, and the death and active services of Major Robert Gregory in 1918 which was made to be the subject of his poems like "In Memory of Major Robert Gregory" and "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death." While the poem "The Double Vision of Michael Robertes" is another very important poem, which helps in understanding Yeats' philosophy better. Michael Roberts is a fictitious character with something of the visionary about him and represented what Yeats believed to be part of his own divided nature. He is contrasted with another character Owen Aherne having affinities with Yeats' 'public self'. Thus, the poem

expresses a conflict of which Yeats was always conscious – between a dreamer and an active Irish Nationalist.

During 1919-1921, Yeats wrote "The Wild Swans at Coole", and the next volume of poems *Michael Roberts and the Dancer* published in February 1921. Most of the poems were based on the thoughts of *A Vision* a unique example of which can be traced through his poem "The Second Coming." In the lengthy explanatory notes for "An Image From a Past Life" and "The Second Coming" are both attributed to Roberts and the 'Preface' expresses a hope that 'my selection from the great mass of his letters and table talk' my soon be published. Yeats' happy married life is clear from several poems including "A Prayer for My Daughter."

1922-1939

In 1923, Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. During the next few years, he was working hard to complete his philosophical 'system' to finish his *A Vision.* His holiday tour to Sicily and Italy during 1924 enabled him to have interest for the first time in the Byzantine Mosaics of Pelermo and Monreale, and in Michelangelo's paintings in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. In 1928, "The Tower" was published. This period is famous also for the excellent poems like "Sailing to Byzantium", "Leda and the Swan", "Among School Children" etc. During 1929-1930, he reached the end of his *A Vision*, which he had been revising and rewriting in recent times. Yeats spent some time in between 1935-36 translating the Hindu Upanishads—the Hindu treatises on the nature of man and the universe. Subsequently, he also edited *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. His last volume of poems called *Last Poems* contains all the poems published in 1938 as *New Poems.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Why are the years 1889-1892 important for Yeats?

Q 5: How is William Blake connected to Yeats?

Q 6: Mention some of the achievements of W. B. Yeats as a poet.

6.4 READING THE POEMS PRESCRIBED

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

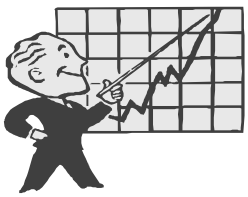
Yeats spent several years on his mystical theory of the universe that he described in *A Vision*. This theory issued in part from Yeats' lifelong fascination with the occult and mystical, and in part from the sense of responsibility, Yeats felt to order his experience within a structured belief system. The theory of history Yeats articulated in *A Vision* centers on a diagram made of two conical spirals, one inside the other, so that the widest part of one of the spirals rings around the narrowest part of the other spiral, and vice versa. He believed that this image (he called the spirals "gyres") captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process, and

he divided each gyre into specific regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods (and could also represent the psychological phases of an individual's development). "The Second Coming" was intended by Yeats to describe the current historical moment (the poem appeared in 1921) in terms of these gyres. Yeats believed that the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic revelation, as history reached the end of the outer gyre (to speak roughly) and began moving along the inner gyre.

The first 8 lines of the poem are concerned with the disintegration of the modern society with the spread of anarchy and the consequent violence and bloodshed. Under such conditions "Things Fall Apart; the center cannot hold" and there is a negation of the ceremoniousness which Yeats believed essential to the life of true dignity. However, for the soul to be 'innocent' it must be protected from vulgarity by rituals, or ceremony, and by custom hallowed by traditions. The poet calls it 'ceremony of innocence' which he wishes for his daughter in the final stanza of his other poem "A Prayer for my Daughter." The ruling classes, the would-be leaders, all fail to uphold such traditions as they lack "all convictions" and thus the mob violence of the 'worst' members of the community is unbridled. The opening 8 lines of the poem prepare the readers to understand the implications of the title of the poem about to be disclosed in the next stanza. Theosophical belief would help us to believe that every cycle of history has its own special deity and a new god comes regularly to replace the old. A turbulent time, as has been depicted in the poem would seem to denote the end of one cycle and imply the coming of some new deity.

The second stanza starts with a proclamation: "Surely some revelation is at hand". But, the readers wonder whether the expected revelation is of some glorious deity that would usher in a new era of peace. But ironically, the 'vast image' is presented as troubling the poet's sights. His vision connects to the **Spiritus Mundi**—an image revealed as a terrifying beast that helps in recalling St. John's vision of **Antichrist**, the beast of Apocalypse, and is at the same time an image of the **Egyptian Phoenix**. The sense of dread increases as more details follow like the blank and pitiless gaze and the desert birds. With this, the poet's vision ends but he

also proclaims about the knowledge he has gained. His knowledge seems to be that of a beast, having spent two thousand years of the Christian era in 'stony sleep' has been roused by a nightmare. The image of the 'rocking cradle' urges the monster to be born, and the fact that it 'slouches towards Bathlehem' together with the cradle image. Despite the poet's seeming assurance 'now I know', his uncertainty seems to be expressed by the fact that the poem ends not with an assertion but with a supposed question: "What is the nature of the brute to be born?" Thus, the title of the poem becomes ironic. In fact, there is no second coming of Christ, and the poem is about the birth of the beast/monster not the second coming of a god.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: State the meaning of 'Gyre' as propounded by Yeats.

Q 8: What is the revelation all about?

6.5 MAJOR THEMES

The following are the important themes in the poem under consideration.

The Poetic Self :

Very few poets are so attentive to the deliberate creation of a poetic self. In "A General Introduction for my work" written towards the end of his life, Yeats stated:

"A poet writes always of personal life; in his finest work out of its tragedy, whatever it be, remorse, lost love, or mere loneliness; he never speaks directly as to someone at the breakfast table, there is always a **phantasmagoria**…Even when the poet seems most himself, when he is Raleigh, and gives potentates the lie, or Shelly 'a nerve o'er which do creep the else unfelt oppressions of this earth,' or Byron 'and the soul wears out the breast' as 'the sword outwears its sheath' he is never the bundle of accident' and incoherence that sits down to breakfast; he has been reborn as an idea, something intended, complete.

"Here Yeats is perhaps claiming that the poet is never isolated by the individuality of his existence since he is part of an imaginative and psychological history or **phantasmagoria** informing his own life and which can be drawn on as a poetic resource. In the poem "Second Coming", this dimension can be experienced in the legendary, the mythological, the occult, the supernatural and in the mysterious energy, which gathers round images and symbols such as the **Beast** of the poem, which is both personal and part of an ancient tradition.

The Idea of Gyre :

The growth, maturity and the decline of Civilization are divided by Yeats (as found in *A Vision*) into the 28 phases of the lunar month. History as a process therefore is conceived of as turning on a Great Wheel, which is a three dimensional figure, or sphere to which Yeats refers as gyres. Moving in this sphere are two interlocking cones formed by the motions of the gyrating points. From a place, one point moves spirally in ever widening gyrations until it reaches the circumference of the sphere and thus its movement is in the shape of a cone. From the plane, which forms the base of the cone, another point moves in the same way in the opposite direction. These whirling, interpenetrating cones are the image of the principle of conflict: one expands and the other contracts, opposition based on the natural and the supernatural, love and hate, war and peace, subjective and objective and so on. The word *gyre* in the poem's first line may be used in a sense drawn from Yeats' book *A Vision*, which sets out a theory of history and metaphysics Yeats claimed to have received from spirits. Yeats claimed that this image captured contrary motions inherent within the process of history, and he divided each gyre into different regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods (and could also represent the psychological phases of an individual's development). Yeats believed that in 1921, the world was on the threshold of an apocalyptic moment, as history reached the end of the outer gyre and began moving along the inner gyre.

Spiritus Mundi (or Animus Mundi) :

Yeats firmly believed that dead souls could communicate with writers and artists and in so doing they were drawing on a general storehouse of

images, or **Spiritus Mundi**, and the man whose imagination can fuse with it can thus draw on all images ever conceived by men. However, he can also create new ones. In the poem "The Second Coming", The speaker describes a nightmarish scene: the falcon, turning in a widening "gyre" (spiral), cannot hear the falconer; "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold; anarchy is loosed upon the world"; "The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned." The best people, the narrator of the poem says, lack all conviction, but the worst "are full of passionate intensity." However, the narrator asserts that the world is near a revelation: "Surely the Second Coming is at hand." But, he is also troubled by "a vast image of the **Spiritus Mundi** or the collective spirit of mankind: somewhere in the desert, a giant sphinx ("A shape with lion body and the head of a man, / A gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun") is moving, while the shadows of desert birds reel about it.

Yeats' Prophesies :

"The Second Coming" is viewed as a prophetic poem that envisions the close of the Christian epoch and the violent birth of a new age. The poem's title refers to the Biblical reappearance of Christ, prophesied in Matthew 24 and the Revelations of St. John, which according to Christianity, will accompany the Apocalypse and the Last Judgment. The principal figure in Yeats' *A Vision* is a sphinx-like creature with a lion's body and man's head, a "rough beast" awakened in the desert that makes its way to Christ's birthplace, Bethlehem. According to Yeats, as one gyre widens over a period of two thousand years, the other narrows, producing a gradual change in the age. The process then reverses after another twenty centuries have passed, and so on, producing a cyclic pattern throughout time. In the early 20th century, Yeats envisioned the primary gyre, the age of Christianity, to be at its fullest expansion and approaching a turning point when the primary would begin to contract *and* the antithetical enlarge. Yeats wrote: "All our scientific, democratic, fact-accumulating, heterogeneous civilization belongs to the outward gyre and prepares not the continuance of itself but the revelation as in a lightning flash…of the civilization that must slowly take its place." Thus, in the poem "The Second Coming" scholars view the

uncontrolled flight of the falcon as representative of the primary expansion of chaos while the coming of an antithetical "rough beast" in the desert becomes a harbinger of the new epoch.



LET US KNOW

Yeats' Symbolism:

Edmund Wilson in his book *Axel's Castle* writes that Yeats came to know about symbolism from his friend Arthur Symons as "the only movement that is saying new things". However, Yeats cannot be seen primarily as a symbolist poet mainly because in taking symbolism to Ireland he fed it with new resources and gave it a special accent. This led to the perception of his poetry from the point of view of its national qualities rather than its relation to the rest of the European literature. His symbolism develops from the use of mythology, which is not so easy to understand. Perhaps, Yeats himself never wanted the full meaning of his thought and tradition to be immediately comprehended. His own cyclic vision of history, a recurrence and convergence of images so that they became multiplied and enriched, may be traced in his works.

Yeats was one of the most self-conscious practitioners of the adoption of myth not only to poetry but also to his personal psychology and to his unique view of philosophy and history. For much of his life, Yeats used myth as a defence against the power of his own insight and a means of releasing unconscious knowledge of poetry. Yeats' adaptation of myths indicates a need to impose order and unity on an apparent anarchy in his own mind and in the universe. His purpose is to use myths as a guide to reality both unconscious or personal, and historical or general. Subsequently, traditional mythological figures Leda, Helen, Sphinx, Achillis, Aeneas, Heracles— are adapted to the grand pattern of antithesis, regeneration and transcendence. These traditional figures are analogous to Yeats' own personal experience and this is what assigns a unique quality to Yeats' poetry.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: How does Yeats consider the poetic self?

Q 10: Comment on Yeats' use of symbolism.

6.6 YEATS' POETIC STYLE

Because of its stunning, violent imagery and ritualistic language, "The Second Coming" is one of Yeats' most famous and most anthologized poems. It is also one of the most thematically obscure and difficult poems. Structurally, the poem is quite simple—the first stanza describes the conditions present in the world (things falling apart, anarchy, etc.), and the second surmises from those conditions that a monstrous Second Coming is about to take place, not of the Jesus we first assumed, but of a new messiah, a "rough beast," the slouching sphinx rousing itself in the desert and lumbering toward Bethlehem. This brief exposition, though intriguingly blasphemous, is not complicated; but the question of what it should signify to a reader is another story entirely.

About the common quality of Yeats' poetry, Joseph Maunsel Hone the biographer of Yeats in his book *William Butler Yeats: The Poet in Contemporary Ireland* writes:

"His voice was musical, touched with melancholy, the tones rising and falling in a continuous flow of sound. He lingered on certain words to avoid as it were a hiatus, but the pauses when they occurred were timed and still full of sound, like the musical pauses in the execution of a master. This cadenced utterance was most characteristic. When emphasis was needed he would introduce a hard metallic note, and this when passion intruded was like the clash of sword blades. His myopic gaze as he spoke was turned within, looking into the darkness, where, as he himself said, 'there is always something'. He seemed indeed to be discoursing with himself rather than to be persuading others…"

In his "A General Introduction for my Work" Yeats explained the importance of form. However, unlike most of the modernist poets who experimented with verse libre, Yeats gained mastery over the traditional

poetic forms. Defending the use of traditional verse forms, Yeats tended to speak for his discovery of 'a powerful and passionate syntax, and a complete coincidence between period and stanza' and states the following: "If I wrote on personal love or sorrow in free verse, or in any rhythm that left it unchanged, amid all its accidence, I would be full of self contempt because of my egotism and indiscretion, and foresee the boredom of my reader. I must chose the traditional stanza, even what I alter must seem traditional…Ancient salt is best packing." This quotation can be usefully compared with T. S. Eliot's "Reflections on Verse Libre". Yeats perhaps wanted to revive the ancient potencies of symbols and the formal control provided by strictly regulated and received verse forms, which are often stanzaic.

However, "The Second Coming" is not stanzaic although it begins in rhyme. Yet the images of a disintegrating world are traced through brilliantly used blank verse. Yeats' understanding of politics and his own poetic activities needed for his vision of a world in which "the center cannot hold" would be written in a verse form, which embodied the gravitational pull of the center. What is important is the fact that Yeats approaches the subject of impending anarchy with a formal control, which might be described as classical. "The Second Coming" is written in a very rough iambic pentameter, but the meter is so loose, and seems closer to free verse with frequent heavy stresses. The rhymes are likewise haphazard; apart from the two couplets with which the poem opens, there are only coincidental rhymes in the poem, such as "man" and "sun."

6.7 RECEPTION OF YEATS

W. B. Yeats when alive had written several critical essays, stories, autobiographical works, both verse plays and prosaic plays, a considerable body of poems—narratives, dramatic and lyrical, which form the basis of his reputation as one of the greatest writers of the 20th century. He was also a playwright, literary journalist, critic, editor, public speaker, student and recorder of oral tradition, mythologist, theatre director and promoter of national literature. The range and diversity of Yeats' works may be surprising to a new reader.

The general relationship of *A Vision* to "The Second Coming" has been accepted by most critics, yet the elusive nature of Yeats' imagery has prompted varying interpretations of the poem. Many scholars have focused on its political character and especially on the sphinx-like beast of the poem's second half, seeing it as representative of the general forces of violence and anarchy, or more specifically of the Russian Revolution, World War I, the Irish Civil War of 1916, Fascism, or Communism. Such views typically emphasize the horrific and ominous nature of the beast, and associate its appearance with the decline of western civilization. Critics who have used *A Vision* extensively in their interpretations of the poem, however, have occasionally noted that the sphinx is not necessarily intended as a negative image—and that Yeats himself was not displeased to witness what he viewed as the close of the Christian era. Commentators have also seen "The Second Coming" in the context of other poems by Yeats that elicit similar or parallel themes, such as "Leda and the Swan" and "A Prayer for My Daughter." Additional areas of critical interest concerning the work include study of the symbolic nature of the falcon, exploration of the lengthy process of revision undertaken by Yeats, and consideration of the poet's ironic use of religious allusion in the poem. Others critics have also observed significant influences on the work, which contains echoes of Percy Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound,* and have examined its philosophical underpinnings, particularly in relation to the conception of alternating cycles of human history proposed by Friedrich Nietzsche. Overall, "The Second Coming" has been well received as one of the most evocative visionary lyric poems of the 20th century and widely praised for its technical excellence and extensive symbolic resonance.



6.8 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading the unit, you find that the poem "The Second Coming" is an important statement about the contrary forces at work in history, and about the conflict between the modern and ancient world. The

poem may not have the thematic relevance of Yeats' best work, and may not be a poem with which many people can personally identify; but the aesthetic experience of its passionate language is powerful enough to ensure its value and its importance in Yeats' work as a whole. You have learnt that Yeats spent several years on his mystical theory of the universe. Besides, this poem beautifully reflects Yeats' theory of history based on a diagram made of two conical spirals called 'gyres' which, according to the poet captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process. Yeats divided each gyre into specific regions that represented particular kinds of historical periods. The poem is also considered to be a major work of Modernist poetry as a statement of the war ridden contemporary age of the early part of the 20th century.



6.9 FURTHER READING

Daiches, David. (2007). *A Critical History of English Literature. Vol: II.* New Delhi: Random House.

Entry on Yeats in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Mathuen Notes. (1980). *W. B. Yeats' Poetry*. London: Mathuen paperback Ltd.

Webb, Timothy. (Ed). (1991). *W B Yeats: Selected Poems*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd.

Wilson, Edmund. (2008). *Axel's Castle: A Study in Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930*. Read Books.

6.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Concern over modern city life… … his return to the ideals of the Renaissance or of Byzantium… …use of myths as a way of controlling, ordering, and shaping a disorderly world… …mythical life as an alternative to the lives in cities which killed the meditative passive life.

Ans to Q 2: Rhymers' Club was founded by a group of London-based poets… …produced several anthologies of poetry during 1892 to 1894… ...poets like Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, John Davidson, Alfred Douglas, Arthur Symons, were frequent visitors… … Yeats' retrospective idea of 'the tragic generation'… …published two volumes of verse *The Book of the Rhymer's Club* (1892) and *The Second Book of the Rhymer's Club* (1894).

Ans to Q 3: The poem is taken from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer* (1921)… …Yeats uses many Christian images like the **Apocalypse** and **Second Coming** to describe the atmosphere in post-war Europe… …but the god to be born is a monster… …Yeats showcases the disintegration of the modern society.

Ans to Q 4: Because of the ups and downs in young Yeats' personal life… … Yeats was deeply in love with Maud Gonne who repelled him… …Yeats wrote many poems on her beauty, his hopelessness in love and bitterness of experience… …Yeats' attempt to inspire in other writers an idea of the Celtic nation… …death of the leader Charles Parnell in 1891… …Yeats thought that Irish political life had lost its early significance.

Ans to Q 5: William Blake influenced Yeats' symbolism… …His vision of the world in four parts… …an essential unity in the universe to be comprehended with imagination…. … Yeats developed the idea of Phantasmagoria.

Ans to Q 6: Yeats' developing the idea of Phantasmagoria… …he was one of the founders of Irish Theatre… …he translated Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* from Bengali to English… …In 1923, Yeats was awarded the Nobel prize for literature… ...he complete his philosophical 'system' called *A Vision.*

Ans to Q 7: Yeats spent several years on his mystical theory of the universe… …it is centered on a diagram made of two conical spirals… …one inside the other, so that the widest part of one of the spirals rings around the narrowest part of the other spiral, and vice versa…

…this image was called spiral "gyres"… …it captured the contrary motions inherent within the historical process.

Ans to Q 8: the revelation is of an ambiguous deity… …revelation about **Spiritus Mundi… …**a terrifying beast that recalls St. John's vision of **Antichrist**… …or the **Egyptian Phoenix**. But the poet's vision is that of a beastlike figure that has spent two thousand years of the Christian era in 'stony sleep'.

Ans to Q 9: Yeats believed that the poet is never isolated by the individuality of his existence since he is part of an imaginative and psychological history or **phantasmagoria** informing his own life and which can be drawn on as a poetic resource. In the poem "Second Coming" this dimension can be experienced in the mysterious energy of the **Beast** of the poem, which is both personal and part of an ancient tradition.

Ans to Q 10: Edmund Wilson states that for Yeats' symbolism was "the only movement that is saying new things"… …but he was not primarily a symbolist poet… …he only fed Irish poetry with the new resources of symbolism… …Yeats' symbolism develops from mythology which is not so easy to understand.



6.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does the poem "The Second Coming" reflect the age in turmoil? Do you find any hope in the poem?

Q 2: How would you describe the tone of "The Second Coming"? How does W. B. Yeats describe the state of things?

Q 3: Explain the meaning of the lines: "Turning and turning in the widening gyre / The falcon cannot hear the falconer." What does W. B. Yeats suggest about the contemporary world in terms of these lines?

Q 4: What is the "second coming?" What is it about the second coming that the poet seems to beseech? How does the second coming become darkly ironic by the end of the poem?

Q 5: What is the poet's vision? What do you think is the poet's attitude toward Christianity?

Q 6: Discuss W.B. Yeats as a modern poet with particular reference to his poetic response to the modern world.

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UNIT 7: T. S. ELIOT: "THE LOVE SONG OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK"

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Learning Objectives

7.2 Introduction

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- read briefly about the life and works of the Irish poet T. S. Eliot
- discuss the poem "Love Song" from different perspectives
- identify the different themes and assess Eliot's poetic style
- appreciate the poem as the product of an age which in itself constitutes a particular literary movement.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", by T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), one of the most eminent poet-critics of the 20th century. An American by birth and an Englishman by choice, Eliot made England his home from the time he became a doctoral scholar. This decision proved fateful as his creative output flourished in England and he established himself as a great literary figure of the modern age. His poetry was greatly influenced by the European literary luminaries like Dante and

Dostoevsky, and the impact of French Nineteenth Century Symbolist poets is evident in his early work. Eliot depicted himself as a "Classicist in Literature". By this, he meant that he preferred an anti-romantic attitude, which he adopted consciously. You will see this stance reflected in his major poems, which avoid, by his own admission, an "excess of emotion". Eliot's poetry has been hailed by critics like F. R. Leavis for what we now call the 'modernist' qualities. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" was completed in 1911 and published six years later in his first collection *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Observations*. Like his other early poems and his famed "The Wasteland" (1922), it explores the abjection, the personal dilemma and self-disgust in a way that a whole generation devastated by a horrific war could truly identify with. These poems lay bare the complex and even shocking aspects of post-war life with the help of techniques immensely suited for the purpose. You will note that in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", Eliot adopted the dramatic monologue and it helped him involve the reader in the agonies of Prufrock who is endowed with every quality of the anti-hero. The poem is fragmentary in plot but shows continuity in rhythm and tone. Although called a love song, it is actually an elegy where Prufrock pines for the impossible. The theme, treatment and technique combine to invest it with what has been termed the 'modern' element.

7.3 T. S. ELIOT: THE POET

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born on September 26, 1888 in St. Louis on the banks of the Mississippi river. His family had roots in Boston and the New England. His ancestors had left England in the 1650's and made their way across the Atlantic to Massachusetts on the east coast of America. Over time, they gained prominence in social and cultural circles. Later they migrated towards the South and settled in the state of Missouri. Eliot was raised to see destiny in terms of a life dedicated to the highest cultural ideas, and throughout his life never lost this sense of purpose. His staunch defence of tradition and the institutions that sustain it like the church, aristocracy, and education is the outcome of his inherited family values.

Eliot began his education in the best academies of St. Louis, read widely and became a model student. He was admitted in Harvard in 1906 and remained there till 1914 pursuing a Master's degree and a doctoral programme. He had an affinity for the humanities and studied literature, languages, history, and philosophy. As part of his education, in 1910, he took a tour of Europe confined mainly to Paris with excursions to London and Munich. It was a year of serious study and his stint in the Sorbonne resulted in concentrated reading of the works of French greats like Charles Baudelaire, Jules Laforgue and Tresten Corbiere. In 1911, he graduated from Harvard and enrolled in the Master's programme there. In 1914, he met Bertrand Russell who had come to Harvard as Visiting Professor. Russell was impressed by Eliot's intellectual prowess and thought that a stint at Oxford University would suit him well. Consequently, in 1914, Eliot took up a Fellowship for a year's study at Merton College, Oxford, as part of his doctoral work. His rented accommodation in Bloomsberg gave him access to other writers and poets. The most notable among his acquaintances was the American expatriate Ezra Pound. The literary and personal relationship between the two lasted till Eliot's death in 1965. The poet had conceived of and written some of his early work including "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" while still a student at Harvard and in 1917, his first collection *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Observations* was published.

In 1914, Eliot met Vivian Haigh-Wood and married her after a three-month courtship. The marriage displeased his family and turned out to be an unhappy one. His wife suffered from ill health both physically and mentally and Eliot sacrificed a great deal of his time to take care of her. Moreover, as times were difficult during the First World War in London, he took up lecturing and teaching to make ends meet. He was not particularly suited for this but was more successful in book reviewing which he did principally for the *Times Literary Supplement*. This occupation benefitted his literary career greatly. Some of these reviews were later developed into his important critical essays. Moreover, he had the opportunity to read widely and kept himself abreast of the developments in philosophy and other related disciplines.

Reviewing also clarified his writing style. As for teaching, it had a major influence on his prose style, so far as he developed a schoolmasterly fastidiousness in definition of terms. At a much later stage, the schoolmasterly manner evolved into a persona of a cultural sage. The end of the World War did not put an end to Eliot's domestic and financial worries. His wife's ailments and his own nervous exhaustion led to a feeling of despair. Added to this was the post-war scenario in England and Europe, which engendered a sense of collapse and chaos. He was not yet fully integrated into English life and was in a way a figure in exile or to use his own term 'metoikos'.

In March 1917, he joined Lloyds Bank and began an eight-year career in banking. Within a few months of his joining the new job, Egoist Press published the first book of his poems *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Observations*. During the depressing conditions in the aftermath of the war, Eliot began to put together fragments of a long poem, which he provisionally called "He Do the Police in Different Voices". He kept working on it for years through disruptions brought on by family problems. Finally, in 1921, after a sojourn in Switzerland and Paris and with the help of his friend Ezra Pound, a whole poem now called "The Waste Land" emerged. The same year began his association with Lady Rothermere, the wife of a proprietor of a major London newspaper. She saw in Eliot a potential editor and he wanted an access to a periodical where he could propagate not only his ideas about literary criticism but also about social and cultural life. The new review named the *Criterion* was finally launched in October 1922, and Eliot published "The Wasteland" in the very first number. It was published in America a month later in the literary magazine, the *Dial*. Eliot's position as editor of the *Criterion* enlarged his profile and also gave him a financial stability leading him to give up his bank job. However, Lady Rothermere's commitment to the periodical ended in 1925. Eliot then found a patron in Geoffrey Faber who had recently invested in a publishing firm operated by Richard Gwyer. He became the literature editor of the new company Faber and Gwyer (Faber and Faber from 1929) and the *Criterion* got a new lease of life.

His friendship with Faber would last for the next forty years and the *Criterion* flourished for twenty years. Faber and Faber attracted new writing of the highest quality and became the benchmark of literary excellence in England (and so it remains till date). In the 1950's, through Faber, he brought into prominence a new generation of post-war poets like Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Thom Gunn. Success in his literary career was not reflected in Eliot's personal life. Vivian's physical and psychological conditions declined and though Eliot remained a loyal caregiver, the marriage was dead by 1927. Amidst these unhappy circumstances, he moved closer to the Church of England, giving up his Unitarian faith. In a way, this allegiance to the Established church meant submitting to the English way of life. Within a few months of being confirmed to the Church of England, he also took up British nationality.

In 1932, Eliot went to America for a year as a visiting professor at his Alma Mater. 'The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism' was the outcome of these lectures at Harvard. On his return to Britain in June 1933, he took legal separation from his wife and the two never saw each other again. Now at the age of forty-five, he was in complete control of his destiny and able to devote undivided attention to his work and interests. At this point of his life, Eliot made a creative shift from poetry to drama, and published his first important play *Murder in the Cathedral*. While at Harvard in 1932, he renewed his acquaintance with an old Boston friend Emily Hale who was a teacher of drama at Smith College in Amherst. As Eliot's married life fell apart, he and Emily became close though he could not marry her because the Church of England discouraged divorce. Emily accepted his decision and made a series of visits to England to be with him. When Vivian died in 1947, she rushed to the country hoping to be married after a wait of fourteen years. Eliot was horrified at the prospect of marriage. While Emily worshipped him as he was, he worshipped the idea of her as an ethereal, unsullied figure, synonymous with the idea of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Emily of flesh and blood frightened him and he cited a vow of celibacy that he could not break. However, in 1957, at the age of sixty-eight, Eliot married Valerie Fletcher, his young assistant at Faber and Faber. This made a

remarkable change in his life and he was, according to a biographer, "happy at last". Although Eliot was an eminent public personality and a successful publisher, his was not of a particularly happy or sanguine disposition. He battled depression all his life and was often misunderstood. His humility was sometimes seen as arrogance because of his reserved nature. In his last years, he became infirm and was devotedly cared for by his wife. He died on January 4, 1965 and was honoured with a memorial service at Westminster Abbey with his friends, admirers and eminent public figures in attendance. His ashes were interred in the St. Michael's Parish Church at East Coker, Somerset.

In 1919, when Eliot was helping to bring about the modernist revolution in English literature, he wrote of "the existing monuments" of literature and how they have to be rearranged when a new "work of art" appeared among them. Over the next twenty-five years, it was his own poetry and criticism from "Gerontion" and "The Sacred Wood" to "Little Gidding" which came to dominate the museum of literature in English. It was declared the "Age of Eliot", thus conferring on him the status of a Classic in his own lifetime. Though that age and the taste for it had passed, Eliot still remains the poet for our time. Although he was a poet first, Eliot's role as a critic was of no less importance. The germinal ideas which he gleaned from his nineteenth century predecessors and various contemporaries inspired the major critical theories and practices in the 20th century. "Practical criticism" in England and "New Criticism" in America were shaped to a great extent by his critical thinking and seminal works like *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism*. In the area of popular discourse, Eliot is probably the most quoted poet of the 20th century. Quotes from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "The Waste Land" and *Four Quarters* have been immortalised in names of books and films, in songs and as common sayings. His role as a literary giant is endorsed by the fact that his poetry continues to be included in numerous school and university curricula across the English-speaking world. It is imperative for every student of English to take up a course of Eliot-studies in order to understand the progression of modern literature.

While enumerating his works, it must be acknowledged that Eliot was a poet first and a critic second. Having said that it must also be remembered that in addition to being the most celebrated among the modern poets, his role in creating the contemporary critical milieu was a crucial one. His critical writings were not confined to literature alone, but were extended to social subjects, politics and religion. Moreover, his poetry and prose do not constitute separate watertight compartments. You cannot think of one without the other and the principal themes of his work conjoin the two. The difference lie in the fact that Eliot's personal interest was in poetry and his academic interest in criticism. His penchant for poetry began early and "A Fable for Feasters" written when he was sixteen reveals certain panache and skill. While in college between 1906 and 1910, he edited the *Harvard Advocate* and contributed to it. His poem called "Spleen" published here contains many elements of Prufrock. In another early poem "The Death of Narcissus" has the sensibilities manifest in "The Wasteland". He wrote "Portrait of a Lady", "Preludes I and II" and began "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock" while in his graduate years. In 1914, when he joined Oxford University and befriended Ezra Pound in London, his literary career took a new turn. Pound gave an excellent review of 'Prufrock' and was later responsible for giving the final shape to "The Waste Land". Eliot's first book of poems *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock and Other Observations,* considered a key book of early modernist literature, was published by the Egotist Press in 1917. In 1920, he published a small volume of verse, *Poems* the first and most important poems in which was "Gerontion". Amidst the depressing scenario of post-war Europe and his conjugal worries, he began to put together the fragments of this long poem that he tentatively named "He Do the Police in Different Voices". The title was borrowed from a phrase in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*. After two years of working on it through increasing tensions in his personal life and with active intervention of Pound, "The Waste Land" emerged. The most famous poem of the 20th century was first published in the *Criterion* edited by Eliot himself in 1922.

The impact of 19th century French Symbolist poets is clearly seen in his works up to around 1920. While Gautier's influence is in Eliot's quatrains, that of Jules Laforgue is in the movement and structure of his *vers libre*. His diction and phrasing bear the stamps of Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Malarme and Tristan Corbiere. Some of his lines were adapted or paraphrased from the French models. Dostoevsky was another major influence. While in Paris, he read the French translations of *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov* and this went on to impact his poetry greatly. Eliot's affinity to Dante is perhaps the most notable feature in many of his poems including *The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock and Other Observations* and the *Four Quartrets*. The references and allusions from *The Divine Comedy* are galore but Dante's thoughts, the simplicity and beauty of his language, the clarity and force of his images and the pattern of his verse are all revived in Eliot's poetry.

From his Harvard days, Eliot displayed a curiosity and wariness about language and culture. This is evident in his 1916 thesis *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*. The focus on language took its most important form in his poetry and criticism. The German philosopher Heidegger says that in modernity, "language in general is worn out and used up" and that only "a very few" are able to revive it from its death throes. Eliot had mastered this difficult enterprise and even made it his special task. Reading of Baudelaire and Laforgue had opened up to him the possibility of making poetry out of language devitalised by "pedestrian chatter and triteness". The satiric use to which he put his early poetry may be seen in this context and understood vis-a-vis the smug upper-middle class milieu he grew up in. Stephen Spender in his *The Struggle of the Modern* states, "Modern art is that in which the artist reflects awareness of an unprecedented modern situation in form and idiom." If you accept this contention, Eliot's major poems would certainly fall into the category of modern art.

After the "Waste Land" period, Eliot had composed a verse drama *Sweeny Agonistes* in the 1920's but it was in 1935 that his first play *Murder in the Cathedral* was written and produced. The period saw a shift of his

creative interest from poetry to drama. *The Family Reunion* was staged in 1939. After the War, Eliot again turned to playwriting producing three plays – *The Cocktail Party* (1948), *The Confidential Clerk* (1954) and *The Elder Statesman* (1959) – in eleven years.

The final poem in his *Collected Poems* (1910-1935) "Burnt Norton" was written after a visit to the house of the same name in Gloucestershire. It defined a moment of visionary innocence, and would open ten years later his second long poetic sequence *Four Quarters*. The geographical locations inspiring these segments represented the significant points of an entire life. "East Coker" (1940) was his family's original English location and "The Dry Salvages" (1941) remembered his American homes of New England and Missouri. Here, the use of the *Gita* and the *Upanishads* as sources emphasised the idea of detachment. The last poem "Little Gidding" (1942), named after the small chapel at Little Gidding, had both historical and religious significance in the English context. It was the pilgrim's final destination.

Eliot's stature as a critic is no less formidable than his position as the most notable among the modern poets. His lectures in Harvard during his tenure of 1930-1933 were published as *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism.* This seminal work gave a new dimension to English literary criticism. His view of poetry here shows a shift away from the French Symbolists to a concept of 'Purity' both in the aesthetic and social senses. Earlier, in the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", he challenged the dominant Romantic concept of art in the 19th century. As a counter to the idea that art is primarily an expression of the self, he adhered to the theories inherited from the great Classicists. Thus, according to Eliot, poetry was not merely an egocentric exercise but something more objective, something "impersonal". In *Sacred Wood* (1920), we find a very important critical concept, the "Objective Correlative" about which he writes in an essay on Shakespeare. Here he advances the theory that a work of art delineates not only a theme but also a whole gamut of experiences. His criticism breaks away from the past as "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" breaks away from the nineteenth century tradition of poetry. He insisted that a poem

must be dealt with as a poem and not as "another thing". He also maintained that the meaning of a work could be ascertained only by a comparative analysis of specific passages. His methods of close reading were in harmony with other modernist methods like 'Practical Criticism' of England and 'New Criticism' of America.

By the end of the Second World War, Eliot had attained the stature of a literary sage. He stood at the end of a line of Victorian stalwarts Carlyle, Ruskin, George Eliot, Dickens and Matthew Arnold. He carried on a dialogue with Arnold on the nature of poetry and culture for over a decade and this resulted in many of his important critical commentaries. His "Notes towards the Definition of Culture" continued this dialogue and found him dealing with the difficult issue of culture in a secular and materialistic environment. This work constitutes his most forceful statement on culture and society, putting forth in a comprehensive manner the views already revealed in his poetry and prose. For him, mixing of races was never ideal. "Gerontion", "The Waste Land", "Sweeney Agonistes" and other works, show that ethnic heterogeneity causes disharmony in society. Rather than the multicultural England of his times, he celebrates the Elizabethan era as the acme of British civilisation in "For Lancelot Andrewes" (1925). Earlier in his editorial in the *Criterion* and in "After Strange Gods", he maintained that industrialisation and urbanisation polluted ancient communities and alienated people from their roots. Hence, an agrarian way of life was the best to preserve the purity of society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What were the important influences on T. S. Eliot?

Q 2: Comment on T. S. Eliot as a poet critic.

7.4 READING THE POEM PRESCRIBED

S'iocredessechemiarisposta fosse
A persona chemaitornasse al mondo,
Questa fiammastariasenzapiuscosse.
Ma perciocchegiammai di questofondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odoilvero,
Senzatemad'infamiatirispondo.

LET us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question….
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.
The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—
(They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!")
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—
(They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!")
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all—
Arms that arebraceleted and white and bare
(But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?
.....

Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows?…

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.
.....

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep … tired … or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head (grown slightly bald) brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet—and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.
And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,

Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"—
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all;
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worthwhile,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor—
And this, and so much more?—
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."
.....

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,

Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old … I grow old …
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.
I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

"The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" refuses at every point to reproduce the emotional satisfaction of the love song. What the poem brings vividly to our ears is the stammering into which a privileged humanist discourse had degenerated by Eliot's time. The poet is playing off the slightly absurd ring of J. Alfred Prufrock against the romantic expectation aroused by the words "The Love Song of". The poem also displaces the lover's lyricism. Donne's "Catch a falling star", referred to in it, has the capacity for achieving the effect of a song. Prufrock can only caricature this kind of lyricism. Even in his time, Eliot anticipated a postmodern construction of identity. The use of the dramatic monologue brings to light the gap between who you think you are and what others think of you. On one side of this gap lies abjection and humiliation, on the other side lies damnation. Eliot gave the name of J. Alfred Prufrock to this condition. Hence, Prufrock's problem is not a bad case of self-consciousness but a deeper philosophical dilemma.

The poem not only makes us look at the inherited conventions of being but also at certain forms of poetry, and questions language itself. The form of dramatic monologue is used not to reveal an interesting personality but to make the reader dismantle a personality. The monologue invites not only to observe but participate actively in the poet's creation. As for language, Eliot interferes with the conventional process of making poetry. Direct

statements lose their straightforward character and the writing does not have a sense of direction.

As has been mentioned earlier, Dante's influence on Eliot has been the most comprehensive. In *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Poems,* he relates the experience of modern life to a Dantesque scene that is medieval inferno. The opening words of Prufrock take their point from the Dante epigraph. Prufrock is conducting us through the realm of a 20th century inferno and purgatory. The epigraph in Italian quotes words spoken by Count Guido in the Dante's "Inferno" (XXVII, 61-66). On his visit to the underworld, Dante finds Guido imprisoned in flame for his treacherous advice to Pope Boniface. Guido speaks freely to Dante because he believes that Dante is also one of the dead who will never return to earth to report what he says.

Translation of the Epigraph:

"If I thought that my reply would be to someone who would ever return to earth, this flame would remain without further movement; but as no one has ever returned alive from this gulf, if what I hear is true, I can answer you with no fear of infamy."

Explanations:

Lines: 23-48

The repetition of 'there will be time' is an echo and variant of a passage in the Bible. We may also compare the thought to that expressed by Marvel in "To His Coy Mistress" where the poet argues to his mistress that there would be time for delay only if their opportunities for lovemaking were endless.

Line: 52

An echo of the lovesick Orsino in 'Twelfth Night' _ 'That strain again! It had a dying fall'.

Line: 73-74

The reference to a crab is suggested by Hamlet's words in Act II, Scene. 2 when he is pretending madness 'you…should be as old as I am, if like a crab you could go backwards'. There are other 'Hamlet' references in ll.111, 117-118 and 119.

Lines: 82-83

A Biblical reference. The head of the prophet John the Baptist was brought to Herod on a dish.

Lines: 92

Another image from Marvell's 'Coy Mistress_ 'All/Our sweetness, up into one ball'.

Lines: 94-95

A reference to Lazarus whom Christ brought back from death and to the other Lazarus in the parable of Luke c.16 whom Dives in hell wanted to send back to earth to warn men of the danger of punishment.

Lines: 119

Full of high sentence: Given to learned conversation like the Clerk of Oxford in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Prufrock suggests that he is much more like Polonius than Hamlet. And sometimes he is like Yorick, the Fool in the play.

Lines: 123

Trousers with turn-up bottoms were becoming fashionable; Prufrock means that to counteract his increasing age he will dress and behave like a fashionable young man at a seaside resort.

Line: 126

Suggested by the line from Donne's 'Song' - 'Teach me to Hear Mermaids Singing'—a poetically unattainable thing, but Prufrock attains it in his dreams.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How should one consider Prufrock's dilemma?

Q 4: What is Dante's influence on "The Love Song"?

7.5 MAJOR THEMES

The themes of the poem are remarkably diverse and can be read in terms of binaries like youth and old age, work and idleness, spiritual life and

death, commitment and indecision, dreams and actuality, action and analysis, courage and fear, interest and boredom, and so on.

Life in the Modern Age:

All the poems in *Prufrock and Other Observations* not only expose but also subvert the upper-middle class stability and smugness in which Eliot was born and bred. As an adolescent and as a young man he was the beneficiary of an elitist social milieu and his life of an emigre in England was an extension of his American origins. The poet's attitude towards this environment was ambivalent; he both enjoyed the benefits and loathed them. The satirical tone of his early poetry is the result of this ambivalence. His methods serve to unsettle the smoothness of an unsettled life. The poems can also be seen as fragments of spiritual autobiography. They record a struggle within the psyche as to whether apprehension or mockery is the best way to survive middle class anxieties. Anxiety and self-doubt in a modern context are well-marked themes in "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". The constant pressure of the unpredictable and the limits to one's knowledge had become evident by the beginning of the 20th century. This brought about a crisis in the meaningfulness that the established order deemed to prevail in life. The presence of others out there threatens our sense of personal control over our lives. Others see us in ways we can never fully understand or know about. There is always a gap between who you think you are and what others think of you. The need to invent a mask for yourself is enforced as well as undermined by the dread of how others might see you or see through your mask. On one side of this divide lie wretchedness and humiliation, on the other damnation. To this condition, Eliot gave the name of **J. Alfred Prufrock.** Though psychology was a new discipline at that time, the poet had already given a post-modern construction of personal identity in Prufrock. The poem engages the reader's inner life by involving us in Prufrock's miseries, so that they become our own in the course of reading the poem. It also makes us look past some established conventions like the existence of a well-defined identity and will power, of clearly defined gender differences, of male authority and so on. The poem does this by the

system of displacement; by disparaging an individual character. The very epithet 'Love Song' is a disparagement because at every point the text refuses to produce the satisfaction of a love song. Instead, it downplays the notion that pleasure and excitement are inherent in love life. Profrock's failure to seize the moment, his choice to remain repressed, to avoid the element of risk that gives a spice to life is a central theme of the poem. In fact, the failure to live fully is a recurring idea in Eliot's poetry.

Character of Prufrock:

Prufrock's character reminds us of the unheroic and timid nature of modern men. His spiritual distress, helplessness and despair are characteristics of modern life. Prufrock's tragedy is a recurrent phase in modern human civilisation. Prufrock represents a diseased civilisation where human life is trivialised. Prufrock is a tragic character whose tragedy is that of a man for whom love is beyond capacity but still within his desire. He should ask the 'overwhelming question' and seek love. However, he is timid and his inability to satisfy his love relation torments him a lot.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Mention some of the important themes in this poem "Love Song".

Q 6: What are the elements used by Eliot to represent modern life in his poem?

7.6 ELIOT'S POETIC STYLE

In his preface to "For Lancelot Andrewes" (1928), Eliot defined himself as a "classicist in literature". By "classicist" he meant a deliberate anti-romantic tone, an avoidance of theatrical, exaggerated emotion. By 1923, he identified "classicist" with "realist" and adopted classicism in principle. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" adheres to this principle both in theme and in technique. Emotions are kept in a tight rein by the use of a disparaging tone. This control is reinforced by the use of images that highlight the dreary landscape and the sordid experiences of Prufrock:

"When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;"
.....
"Streets that follow like a tedious argument....."
.....
"The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the windowpanes"
.....
"Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains"
.....
("They will say: 'But how his hair is growing thin!')

"When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?"
.....
"No I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;"
.....
"I grow old.....I grow old.....
I shall wear my trousers rolled."

There is a complete absence of lyricism and "flights of fancy" in the poem. The emotions of Prufrock are also far removed from the uplifting sentiments, a hallmark of the popular nineteenth century Romantic poetry. Instead, you find self-deprecation, abasement and despair being expressed through his emotions. The squalid surroundings combined with an abject dilemma and the failure to live life fully confer upon him the qualities of an anti-hero.

The poem is fragmentary in plot but shows continuity in rhythm and tone. Although it is called a love song, it is actually an elegy where Prufrock pines for the impossible. The recurrent images of his unattractive middle-aged figure and the allusion to mermaid singing heighten the tone of yearning. The *vers-libre* is an important stylistic device perfected by Eliot. Its judicious use juxtaposed with a prosaic narrative style introduces a sense of drama to the poem. Another notable element is the adoption of the dramatic

monologue, which helps the poet, involves the reader in the agonies of Prufrock.

New rhythms, absence of rhyme, sudden and unexpected twists and allusions are used to fit the mood of the poem to the complexities and shocking aspects of post-war life. In the tradition of the Decadents, Eliot, along with Hopkins, Auden, Spender, Blunden and others broke with Victorian tradition by dwelling on sensual aspects and used symbolism and allusion in place of direct statements. These elements are evident in Prufrock too. Eliot's early poems show a profound impact of the nineteenth century French Symbolist poets. Influence of Gautier is seen in his quatrains, of Laforgue in the movement and structure of his *vers-libre*, of Rimband, Baudelaire, Malarme and Corbiere in diction and phrasing. Through the poetry of Baudelaire, he discovered the "poetic possibilities" of "the more sordid aspects of the modern metropolis" which he used in many of his memorable creations like "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", "The Hollow Men" and "The Waste Land". Although he writes in (1927) 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca': "What every poet starts from his own emotions", as a poet, he is famous for his impersonality.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: What are the poetic techniques used by Eliot in this poem?

7.7 RECEPTION OF ELIOT

Eliot was already known to and read by the bohemian circle of writers and artists in London especially after the publication of *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock and Other Observations.* In 1922, "The Waste Land" opened the doors to a much wider readership, and overnight he became a public figure, This poem with 'modernist' qualities shocked mainstream society, and popular media attacked the 'radical' work. The notoriety he gained was in part due to his *avant garde* leanings. Among the intellectuals, however, the pessimistic view of the modern world in "The Waste Land" struck an emotional chord. The meaning of the poem, which was difficult to decipher,

gave it a visionary dimension. Moreover, it seemed to apprehend the problems confronting society of that time. In an age plagued by doubts and despair, the poem was a bold statement, even an enactment of despair. These and Eliot's ability to correlate modern dilemmas to ancient paradigms impressed this group.



LET US KNOW

The mood of the times was such that people could relate to the breakdown, failure and obscurity delineated in the poem. "The Waste Land", thus became a resounding success and a new generation of literary critics and scholars took note of it. I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and Helen Gardner in Britain, F. O. Mathiesson, Cleanth Brooks and others in America hailed Eliot as the poetic voice of a new age. This interest in Eliot continued unabated for several decades and soon extended beyond his poetry to his literary and cultural criticism, his career as editor and to his personal and public life. His association with the *Criterion* and Faber and Faber had turned him into one of the most influential editorial figures in the English-speaking world.

In 1927, Eliot declared his faith in the Church of England. This was a step, which brought him close to the Establishment and delighted church leaders. This movement towards mainstream society dismayed his *avant-garde* comrades who regarded this step as a betrayal of their aesthetic and cultural affiliations. Eliot's literal belief in the concepts of Christianity like original sin, hell, damnation and effectiveness of prayer went against the sceptical temper and intellectual sophistication of his age. His religious conversion brought about a sharp division among his readers and critics alike. Some regarded him as a courageous soul to have gone against the current scientific temper. Others regarded his act as a sell-out to the Establishment. This division continued throughout Eliot's career and persisted even after his death. On one side were those who saw him along with Ezra Pound, James Joyce *et al*, as modernising English literature and criticism. They looked upon him as the pioneers in liberating prose and

poetry from the shackles of Victorian tradition, and infusing new experiences of urban existence, instability and change into the body of their work. Their innovative use of language and their flexible approach towards the relationship between words and the mind were seen both as an experiment and as a revival. On the other side were those who believed that Eliot and his ilk were indulging in destructive literary practice. They decried the modernist strategy of demolishing the nineteenth century Romantic tradition in literature. These critics believed Romanticism to be the benchmark of literary values and vehemently attacked Eliot for subverting those standards. Eliot faced criticism from a section of American intellectuals for his Europhilia. They saw in this a betrayal of American modernism, which was an attempt to break away from the cultural bondage of Europe. Eliot, they felt, was trying to reverse this liberating process. With the growth of left-wing ideology among the intelligentsia of the North Atlantic world in the 1930's, he was perceived as a confirmed rightist. This view of Eliot was not confined to his poetry but was extended to his cultural and political beliefs. For many, his conservatism, especially after his religious conversion, constituted a force of regression.

Another point of debate was Eliot's alleged anti-Semitism. The controversy started with the publication of his "After Strange Gods" (1934) and continues in seminars and journals to this day. While his admirers tend to put his opinion about the Jews in historical perspective and minimise any personal animosity, his detractors find it aggravating Eliot's religious, social and cultural conservatism. His 'Four Quarters' was an important step in this direction drawing on the traditional wisdom and the enduring values of European culture. It gave succour to a people damaged physically and emotionally by an onslaught on their land, on their very civilisation. The poem is considered by many as the greatest to be composed in English in the 20th century. 'Four Quarters' became immensely popular and gave Eliot a new position of authority. He became a voice for the cultural unity of Europe and, after the war, kept speaking on this topic on different forums.

By the late 1940's and 1950's, he attained the stature of a literary sage in league with Victorian stalwarts like Carlyle, Ruskin, Dickens and

Matthew Arnold. His renown was at such a height that his critics were silenced for a time. A section of scholars and critics of 20th century literature feel the need to reassess Eliot's significance in the literary culture of his time. With the passage of time, the old debate has diminished as the cultural and political climate has undergone a change. Critics today examine Eliot's work from a very different perspective in tune with the critical movements and theories that have evolved in recent times. These include Feminism, Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, new forms of materialistic inquiry, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic techniques and deconstructive methodologies. That the critical interest in Eliot remains unabated in the radically different socio-cultural and literary ambience of the twenty first century underscores his importance in the evolution of North Atlantic culture.



7.8 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you must have realised that as a poet Eliot had a profound and acute apprehension of the difficulties of his age. He was a modern poet who not only gave expression to modern sensibility in English poetry but also set up new trends and traditions which were adopted and developed by the other contemporary poets of Eliot. In this poem, Eliot expresses the problems and disillusionment of modern life through a unique poetic technique and the images of the metropolitan life. Prufrock is in love but his love song is never sung. He meditates too much and is often haunted by the problem if he should reveal his love to the lady. But besides being a modern poet, Eliot is also a traditionalist and depicted himself as a "Classicist in Literature". The best example of his being a classicist is perhaps the reference made to Dante's *Inferno* at the very beginning of the poem. Eliot in this poem finally presents a realistic picture of the neurosis and dampness generated by the modern industrial age. The depiction of the barrenness of man's contemporary spiritual state and sordid paraphernalia of the city life makes the "Love Song" one of the most important modern poems.



7.9 FURTHER READING

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Jain, Manju. (2001). *A Critical reading of the selected poems of T. S. Eliot*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Menand, L. (1987). *Discovering Modernism: T.S. Eliot and His Context.* (2nd ed). Oxford University Press.

Moody, A.D. (1984). *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot*. Cambridge University Press.

Rain, C. (2006). *T. S. Eliot*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The impact of nineteenth century French Symbolist poets like Jules Laforgue, Rimbaud, Charles Baudelaire, Malarme and Tristan Corbiere… …Russian novelist Dostoevsky impacted his poetry greatly… …Dante's influence is clearly visible in the *The Love Song* etc.

Ans to Q 2: Eliot's *The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism* gave a new dimension to English literary criticism… …his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" challenged the dominant Romantic concept of art in the 19th century… …Eliot viewed poetry not merely as an egocentric exercise but something "impersonal"… … as a critic he insisted that a poem must be dealt with as a poem and not as "another thing".

Ans to Q 3: Not as a bad case of self-consciousness but a deeper philosophical dilemma… …postmodern construction of identity… …the gap between who you think you are and what others think of you.

Ans to Q 4: "The Love Song" relates the experience of modern life to a Dantesque scene in 'Inferno'… …opening words of the poem start with Dante's epigraph… …Prufrock's world is a 20th century inferno and purgatory.

Ans to Q 5: The themes of the poem are remarkably diverse and can be read in terms of binaries like youth and old age, work and idleness, spiritual life and death, commitment and indecision, dreams and actuality, action and analysis, courage and fear, interest and boredom, and so on.

Ans to Q 6: Instability and smugness of middle class life… …fragments of spiritual autobiography… …struggle within the psyche… …anxiety and self-doubt and so on.

Ans to Q 7: Use of *vers-libre… …*dramatic monologue… …judicious use of poetry juxtaposed with a prosaic narrative style… …use of sudden and unexpected twists and allusions to expose the complexities and shocking aspects of post-war life.



7.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How does T.S. Eliot reflect the reality and ugliness of the modern world through his poetry? Assess Eliot's reception as a modern poet.

Q 2: What are the images and symbols used by Eliot to depict the realities of life through his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"?

Q 3: How does Eliot leave the world of traditional poetry behind and bring in new ideas and a new poetic style?

Q 4: 'Prufrock' is a poem about the loneliness and fantasies of a sad 'gentleman dandy'. Discuss.

Q 5: Discuss T.S. Eliot's contribution to modernist poetry with reference to his poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"?

Q 6: In what ways does the "love Song" represent modern human life with all its sordidness and smugness? Discuss.

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UNIT 8: T.S. ELIOT: "JOURNEY OF THE MAGI"

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Learning Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 T.S. Eliot: The Poet

8.4 Reading the Poem "Journey of the Magi"

8.5 Major Themes

8.6 Eliot's Poetic Style

8.7 Reception of Eliot

8.8 Let us Sum up

8.9 Further Reading

8.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

8.11 Possible Questions

8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain some ideas on the life and works of the modern poet T.S. Eliot
- make a summary of the poem "Journey of the Magi"
- discuss the emergent themes from the text of the poem
- analyse the style and language employed by the poet
- provide a critical reception of the poet and explore
- the poetry of T.S. Eliot at length and at your own leisure

8.2 INTRODUCTION

As the fascinating title of the prescribed poem "Journey of the Magi" suggests, T. S. Eliot recreates in his own remarkable poetic brilliance–the Biblical account of the three wise men, also referred to as the 'magi' who take up a long journey towards Bethlehem in search of the Holy Infant, Jesus Christ so as to bless Him and complete the purpose of their divinely ordained journey. From your reading of the previous unit, you should be familiar to the poetry of T.S. Eliot who is known as one of the most prominent

modern poets of the 20th century, a widely read essayist, playwright, as well as, a literary and cultural critic who has received wide critical acclaim through several decades. In fact, David Perkins in *A History of Modern Poetry* (2006) significantly, notes that it was Eliot's literary criticism that had set him apart from equally promising modern poets like Ezra Pound or W. B. Yeats and had "enormously enhanced his prestige" (5) ushering in new literary perspectives and practices that in turn brought about refined literary tastes in modern English Literature. Moreover, even the major literary critics like I.A. Richards, William Empson or F. R. Leavis among others saw enough reason and validity in Eliot's critical perspectives. The clarity in his critical thoughts or formulations and his sharp intellectual acumen made him a highly regarded critic and also made him a visible figure in the literary circles thereby also accounting for his reputation as a poet and writer. In this unit, we shall first briefly read about T. S. Eliot as a poet and then we shall explore the prescribed poem in a detailed manner.

8.3 T.S. ELIOT: THE POET

In the previous unit, you have read about the life and works of Thomas Stearns Eliot in some length. This section shall just help you to recollect some of the things that you have already read.

Thomas Stearns Eliot who had a happy childhood in St. Louis, Missouri was brought up as the youngest of six siblings by Henry Ware Eliot, Eliot's father who was a successful businessman and his mother Charlotte Champe Stearns, a social worker who also had a gift for poetry and a love for literature. The Eliots were a prosperous and a prominent family who were devout Unitarian Christians. Eliot's grandfather William Greenleaf Eliot was also a well-known Unitarian Minister who established a Unitarian church in Missouri and had a shaping influence on their perspectives, as well as, their way of life, given the moral propriety and decorum, sense of righteousness and duty that the old man had inspired in them.

Eliot who nurtured a love for literature from an early age had considered his childhood as the best years of his life and in the enriching

environment of St. Louis, he was raised in relative comfort with the best of education and opportunities like most of the extended Eliot family. From his days at the Smith Academy which he had attended from 1898 to 1905, Eliot developed an interest in studying languages like Greek, Latin, French and German and even in his later years under the tutorship of Irving Babbitt, he began to explore Pali and Sanskrit languages. He studied at the Milton Academy, Massachusetts and at the Harvard College where he studied philosophy from 1906-1909. Following his graduation, he studied at Sorbonne, Paris from 1910-1911 and yet again returned to Harvard to pursue Indian philosophy and then moved to Merton College, Oxford on a scholarship for a year in 1914. Eliot's first attempt at writing poetry began at the age of fourteen and his first poem titled "A Fable for Feasters" was published in the year 1905 and during his second tenure at Harvard, he had published his poems, "Portrait of a Lady" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in the year 1915 which are widely anthologized poems today.

John Cooper in considering the literary output of Eliot writes thus, "T.S. Eliot was a poet first and second a critic. We remember Eliot the poet more often in our time because of his steady interest in poetry. With the evolution of his critical thinking, his criticism is studied for its historical importance rather than for its own sake. But we cannot conceive of the contemporary critical milieu without acknowledging his important early role in creating it" (37). Some of the widely read works of Eliot are his first volume of poems titled *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), a few of his poems published in the volume *Ara Vos Prec* (1920), *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* (1939), *Poems Written in Early Youth* (posthumously in 1967) followed by an anthology titled *The Sacred Wood* (1920) comprising a score of his seminal essays. The anthology of *Four Quartets* (1943) which contained four poems written over a course of seven years i.e., from 1936-1942 namely, "Burnt Norton", "East Coker", "The Dry Salvages" and "Little Gidding" had eventually earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1948. The learner may note that Eliot's fame as a poet rests on some of his literary masterpieces such as his poems also published independently as *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915), *The*

Hollow Men (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1927) and *Little Gidding* (1942). In addition, Eliot was known for his talent as a playwright with works such as *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), *The Family Reunion* (1939), *The Cocktail Party* (1949), *The Confidential Clerk* (1953) and *The Elder Statesman* (1958) all of which were staged for audiences and enjoyed great success.

From an early age, Eliot had developed a sense of keen observation and independent thinking which, as he grew older and interacted with the best of teachers and fellow poets and writers had grown even sharper. Some of these positive influences on his intellectual development were his teachers the American critic, Irving Babbit and English philosopher George Santayana both of whom inspired in him a love for traditional classicism, as well as, the American novelist Conrad Aiken and English writer Percy Wyndham Lewis who were his closest friends. Through the course of his professional career Eliot lectured at Birbeck College University of London, taught at Highgate School in London, worked as a publisher for Faber and Faber, took charge as the church-warden of St. Stephen's Church in London following his conversion to Anglican faith in 1927 and briefly taught at Harvard University where he was offered the Charles Eliot Norton Professorship.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Write a few words on the origins and early years of T. S. Eliot.

Q 2: Name the languages for which T. S. Eliot developed an interest from his early years as a student.

Q 3: Which are some of the widely read literary works of T. S. Eliot? Which major work had earned T.S. Eliot the Nobel Prize in Literature?

Q 4: Who were some of the positive influences in the life of T. S. Eliot?

8.4 READING THE POEM "JOURNEY OF THE MAGI"

The prescribed poem "Journey of the Magi" was first published in August 1927 and was considered a part of Eliot's 'Ariel Poems' comprising

poems such as: "A Song of Simeon" (1928) which was a recreation of the Biblical account of Simeon who had blessed the infant Christ before his death according to prophecy; "Animula" (1929) much inspired by Dante's philosophical reflections on the human soul; and "Marina" (1930) which derived its title from William Shakespeare's play with the same name that delves on the way Life takes unexpected turns and at times unravels amazing surprises. The "Journey of the Magi" which was the eighth poem to be published in the series of 'Ariel Poems' was illustrated by the artist Edward McKnight Kauffer.

The present poem strings together the Biblical account of the three wise men from the east, who had followed the star in the eastern sky in order to find their way to Jerusalem, where Jesus Christ was born. The Gospel, according to Matthew in the New Testament thus, describes how the magi from faraway lands in the east had undertaken a long and arduous journey to worship the Holy Infant in person and offer Him their presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh as they rejoiced in the birth of Jesus Christ. The jealous king, known as King Herod who had found out about the birth of Holy Infant who would be more powerful than him by virtue of his goodness, had requested the wise men to inform him about their meeting, so that he may worship the Holy Infant as well (although, in reality he had meant to harm him). The three wise men thus were led to the birthplace of the Holy Infant by the star in the east and that is how they had arrived at their destiny. Let us then take up the poem in small fragments and discuss these one at a time to grasp the experiences that the three wise men had in the course of their journey.

Journey of the Magi

'A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.'

The opening lines of the poem "Journey of the Magi" instantly captures the gloom of winter season together with the harsh and

unpredictable weather in which it is almost impossible to travel or undertake any kind of journey. It almost sets the tone of the poem, which is shrouded in mystery, and the unknown possibilities that lie ahead in the journey. Thus, in scanning the road ahead, the lifeless environment around and the biting cold, the narrator begins to describe the difficulties that they (i.e., the Magi) face as they embark on their journey.

Significantly, Eliot had also quoted these lines from a Christmas nativity sermon of Lancelot Andrewes, which was delivered in the presence of King James I in the year 1622 describing how the three wise men sacrificed their comforts for a larger significant cause given the fact that three wise men were also kings, namely Balthazar-King of Chaldea, Gasper-King of Garshish and Melchoir-King of Nubia with kingdoms to look after. However, as the Gospel of Matthew records, the prophets had long declared that there would be a Ruler among all the rulers who would be lead the people of Israel as the shepherd leads his herd. Thus, one of the magi narrates the experiences of the entire journey that is beset with many discomforts and difficulties.

> And the camels galled, sore-footed,
> refractory,
> Lying down in the melting snow.
> There were times we regretted
> The summer palaces on slopes, the terraces,
> And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
> Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
> And running away, and wanting their liquor
> and women,



Refractory: Stubborn or difficult to control
Sherbet: A drink of sweet diluted fruit juice
Cursing: An appeal to a supernatural power to harm someone or something
Grumbling: Complain in a bad-tempered way
Liquor: Alcoholic drink

Even the camels were galled or rather seemed annoyed, suffering sore-foot from miles of walking, turning restless when the camel men tried to control them, only wanting to rest for short periods on the melting snow out of complete exhaustion, refusing to budge or move ahead until they regained their strength. At such times, when all of them lost their enthusiasm and energy, when they felt that God was testing their endurance, they all

experienced a sense of regret of having left the comforts that they enjoyed in life to undertake such risks. The wise men who enjoyed their life of ease in their summer palaces set atop lush green hills with sunny climates; where they had sufficient attendants to ensure the best of services, recalling the maidens who brought them refreshing sherbet while they now went thirsty for water. Thus, in sharp contrast to the life that they led, they found themselves weary of such a tiresome journey with their camel men growing impatient and frustrated with the stubborn and exhausted camels and experiencing a similar longing for the life that they had left behind, longing for their leisurely hours with wine and women.



Snatches: Fragments or parts of something

Folly: Foolishness or foolish act

And the night fires going out, and the lack of
Shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns
unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high
Prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred to travel all night,
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices in our ears, saying
That this was all folly.

It was a strange feeling to find themselves in strange towns surrounded by crowds of unknown people, who were indifferent towards them and completely unwelcoming unlike people in their own homeland. Moreover, the villages were unkempt and dirty where there was no one to receive them with kindness and hospitality, no one to provide them with food and shelter for the night. Also, they were unable to make reasonable bargains for their goods owing to the high prices that were quoted in these strange market places. Perhaps, this could be explained by the fact that as travelers they were often easy targets of greedy sellers who took advantage of the urgency of their basic requirements such as food and necessary amenities, which the travelers required to sustain themselves through their journeys.

Perhaps, the rushing winds at night had prevented their fires from remaining lit, thereby, leaving them in complete darkness, with feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and desolation. They were mostly disheartened to find themselves being completely avoided and unwelcomed by the people in these little hamlets, towns and cities that they came across in the course of their journey. In fact, nothing seemed to have stood in their favour, which possibly made it the most difficult journey of their lives. Not only were the natural elements and their circumstances unfavourable towards the traveling group but also their own fellow beings proved themselves hostile, indifferent and unapproachable towards them, which made them feel all the more alienated. It was at such moments that they felt that they had committed the biggest mistake of their lives of having decided to travel outside their own land, leaving behind their own people. Their conscience and their inner voices whispered o them that it was all a mistake, a blunder that they had committed. However, they had continued their journey without the slightest thought of return and travelled by night, following the star ahead while stopping every now and then to rest and catch up with a little sleep in all their tiredness.

Then at dawn we came down to a temperate
Valley,
Wet, below the snow line, smelling of
Vegetation;
With a running stream and a water-mill
Beating the darkness,
And three trees on the low sky,
And an old white horse galloped away in the
meadow.



Temperate: Having mild temperature
Meadow: An area of grassland

Finally, they were at the tail end of their journey and like a new morning to their countless nights of travel, a new feeling of having arrived at their destined place had dawned on them. They had reached a temperate valley with a mild climate surrounded by fresh air, with a flowing stream and a water mill that harnessed the natural energies and with fertile soil that held

lush green vegetation. They had survived their darkest hours to experience this new dawn. Here, they had observed an old white horse that galloped towards the green valley and particularly three tall trees against the sky, which hinted at the events that were to follow in the near future.



Tavern: An inn or public house

Lintel: a Horizontal support across the top of a door or window

Dicing: Taking risks in a game

Wine-skins: Bags made of animal leather which stores water

Then we came to a tavern with vine-leaves
Over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door dicing for pieces
Of silver,
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information, and so we
continued
And arrived at evening, not a moment too
soon
Finding the place, it was (you may say)
satisfactory.

In their search of a place to rest in and to ask about the whereabouts of Mary and Joseph- the parents of Holy Infant, they had come across an inn, which had vine leaves hung on the doorframe, indicating that it was not the kind of place that they had expected, a place for drinking and gambling. As they were about to enter the inn, they found to their surprise six people by the open door playing dice in order to win pieces of silver coins, stamping and kicking empty wine-skins which they had already emptied. However, they could not delay any longer as they could not find any relevant information and had to reach in time in order to see the Holy Infant, they continued their search. That same evening they had finally arrived at the birthplace of the Jesus Christ at just the right time, not a minute early, not a minute late when the Holy Infant was born. When they arrived at their destination, they found a sense of satisfaction of having completed their mission successfully.

All this was a long time ago, I remember,
And I would do it again, but set down
This set down



Dispensation: Referring to the old ways or a religious or political system prevalent at a particular time

Alien: Unfamiliar or no longer acceptable

This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen
Birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth
Was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our
death.
We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here, in the old
dispensation,
With an alien people clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

Thus, the three wise men, their camel men, as well as, their camels had survived the challenges and hardships of their journey in terms of their physical, emotional and mental endurance without which it would not have been possible. The magi who narrates the entire journey in retrospect even expresses the confidence to be able to take up such a journey yet again. However, he also reflects the hardships hidden in the divine revelation that they had experienced together in their past when having worshipped the Holy Infant, they were already converted to a new faith, being reborn into Christianity in place of the religious faith that they had been born into. It was almost as if they were pre-destined to eventually turn into the followers of Christ and take this new religion to their own lands.

Their sudden Rebirth also had its share of difficulties as the change of one's old faith and complete change in one's belief systems is naturally accompanied with various emotional responses. Perhaps, Eliot had himself experienced such a sense of mixed feelings following his conversion from the Unitarian faith, which believed in oneness of God to the Anglican faith which glorified Christ and emphasized on the liturgical texts such as *The Book of Common Prayer*. With regard to the magi, they were divided between their old and their new faith, the feelings of death of the old life that

they had lived and the new life that embraced them before they could even realise that their entire lives had undergone a transformation. Therefore, they returned to their respective kingdoms where they had found that they were no more comfortable with the old religious and pagan practices. They felt disoriented or in other words all the more out of place among their own people, when they saw them worshipping idols and gods to whom the magi could no longer relate to. In fact, this had made them feel like they would willingly accept a second death if they were given a choice as they gradually became certain of their desires to follow Christ and his teachings leaving aside their old practices.

John Cooper in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* opines that "Journey of the Magi" is the best among his 'Ariel Poems', where as he notes, "[t]he greatness of the poem lies in is capturing something of the alienated state in which the Magus now finds himself as a result of significant transformation" (82). Also, Cleo McNelly Kearns in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* discusses the religious inclinations and reflections of Eliot which had a major influence on his literary output in the late 1920s that saw religious poems such as "Ash Wednesday", "Songs of Simeon" and "Journey of the Magi" to mention a few. Significantly, in one of Eliot's major literary essays titled "Tradition and the Individual Talent" which was first published in *The Egoist* (1919) and then in his anthology *The Sacred Wood* (1920), he himself had noted the importance of criticism thus, "but we might remind ourselves that criticism is as inevitable as breathing" (36). In this seminal essay, he had highlighted the significant role of the literary master, the transformative process of writing, the necessity of constructive literary criticism and the emphasis on literary tradition, which in his opinion was to be acquired by the dint of hard work rather than inheritance. According to Eliot, the 'literary master' or the 'poet' was endowed with great responsibilities whereby he or she extracted constructive criticism not on the basis of being judged as good and bad by critics or in comparison to others but by his or her unique transformative role through the creative process of writing.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is the source of the opening lines of the poem "The Journey of the Magi"?

Q 6: Who were the three wise men and what were their names?

Q 7: What did they feel in moments of crisis and when they faced difficulties in the course of their journey?

Q 8: What were some of the challenges that made it the most difficult journey of their lives?

Q 9: Briefly describe the mixed feelings of the three Magi after they had witnessed and worshipped the Holy Infant.

Q 10: What are some of the striking aspects of the poem "The Journey of the Magi"?

8.5 MAJOR THEMES

Some of the significant themes that emerge from the text of the poem are—journey and quest, as well as, the story of Jesus Christ portrayed through symbolical representation. However, the thematic concerns are not necessarily limited to the following discussion, and learners like you may identify more such thematic ideas through his your reading of the poem.

Journey and Quest:

The motif of journey and quest is clearly evident in the title, as well as, the substance of the poem itself where the magi undertake what proves to be a long and arduous journey in their search of the Holy Infant Christ so as to worship Him and offer their greetings of joy. The Magi were determined to make it to their destined place even as they were compelled into moments of crises and difficulties or as they were surrounded by uncertainty and several doubts regarding the completion of their journey, they reassured themselves of the greater purpose of their journey and that there was a divine hand that would ultimately ensure their safe travels. The Gospel of St. Matthew too describes the divinely ordained journey of the magi thus, "behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem", saying, "Where is He

who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2: 1-2). Through the course of their journey, the wise men had endured a range of difficult experiences and had even risen above their initial despair to practically overcome their hardships without surrendering to their circumstances. In fact, they had pushed themselves beyond their limits to complete their journey and fulfill the divine purpose that had also culminated in their spiritual conversion.

Also, change and conversion are very much a part of any form of journey as travelling considerably layers ones experiences and enriches a traveler in many ways which explains why a person emerges all the wiser and experienced through the process of his or her journey or travels. Moreover, the journey described in the poem is also symbolic in many ways it is not an everyday journey but rather a spiritual quest in search of the Holy Infant Jesus Christ whom the wise men had visited at the cost of risking their own lives and leaving everything else behind them. Thus, the journey was significant owing to the spiritual transformation that had dissolved away their old faith, filled the magi with a sense of newness, and renewed vigour. Most importantly, the inner quest or soul-searching that they had experienced following their arrival at the birthplace of Christ, as well as, their return to their old kingdoms, the magi had come to realize that both their journeys, as well as, the subject of their quest had transformed their lives forever bringing them closer to Christ. This theme has been in tune with the modernist idea of the 'quest' to decipher the existential meaninglessness of life.

The Story of Jesus Christ and its Symbolical Representation:

The poem "Journey of the Magi" which alludes to the Biblical account of the life of Jesus Christ who had founded the Christian faith through his teachings also symbolically represents several scenes from the Bible. Jesus of Nazareth was born to Mary and Joseph through the divine blessing of God in Heaven who had pre-determined the events of His life, as well as, His death. Thus, Jesus Christ spent a good part of his life sharing his parables and moral teachings, creating miracles and prophecies, touching and transforming the lives of many people who had turned into his disciples and ardent believers. When Christ was born, many infants across Bethlehem

suffered deaths in the hands of the soldiers sent by the insecure ruler of Judea known as King Herod, after he had learnt of the Holy Infant destined to be the most powerful, from the unassuming and well-meaning magi who had approached Herod before undertaking their journey. However, Jesus' parents moved towards Egypt in time to secure their Infant, as well as, their own lives, as an angel had warned Joseph in his dreams regarding Herod's cruel intentions.

Significantly, the poem refers to the betrayal of Christ by his own disciple Judas Iscariot who in his desire for a bag of silver pieces had given away the identity of Christ to approaching soldiers who were on the lookout for Christ in order to arrest him and take him to be tried by the Chief priests. The poem also encompasses other symbolical representations such as that of the three distinct trees, which also symbolised the three crosses to which Jesus along with two other thieves were to be nailed mercilessly. Ultimately, the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate had a hand in the trial and eventual death of Christ as he had denied justice to Him despite knowing that Jesus was innocent of all the charges of blasphemy that were brought against Him by the Jewish Elders because Jesus indeed was the Son of God which they refused to believe and for which He was crucified to death. Thus, the spiritual truth that was to be revealed following this crucifixion is symbolically represented by the lowered skies that indicate how even the heavens had clearly made it apparent that Jesus Christ was indeed the Son and Messenger of God.

Thus, in the poem the reference to spiritual transformation and the renewal or rebirth (being reborn) in Christ – refers to the death of old physical desires and the dawn of the new spiritual self. The symbolical representation of the magi travelling through darkness to arrive at their destination in the light of a new dawn; the unpredictability of the natural forces that acted as hindrances in their journey; the experiences of alienation from their own fellow beings in times of need; the promises of new life writ all over the lush meadows of the temperate valley; the singing stream and its pleasant music like a new source of life in a welcoming reception, symbolic of new hope; the white horse perhaps symbolising loyalty to its rightful Master Jesus

Christ; the tavern in sharp contrast to the natural world symbolically reflecting the ignorance and indulgent vices together with Judas' betrayal and the three standing trees symbolic of the impending death of Jesus Christ. All in all, the poem represents the tug and pull of both the sensual and the spiritual with regard to the transforming experiences of the magi and symbolically portrays the Birth of Christ which had heralded a new beginning, marking an end to old beliefs and practices, superstitions and blind faith while also upholding the importance of moral righteousness and exemplary goodness at all times.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: Which Gospel in the New Testament describes the divinely ordained journey of the magi?

Q 12: Mention some of the symbolical representations of the poem "Journey of the Magi".

8.6 ELIOT'S POETIC STYLE

In his 1927 preface to the anthology of essays *For Lancelot Andrewes,* Eliot considered himself "a classicist in literature, a royalist in politics, and a Anglo-Catholic in religion" (223) as he converted into the Anglican faith on 29 June 1927 at Oxfordshire which also had a profound influence on the poetry of this phase in his literary career. David Perkins notes that Eliot's baptism had considerably altered his perspectives as he writes that, "[v]irtually all his poetry from this time forth presents the struggle for belief and faith in one who has already made a religious commitment…Once he [Eliot] had joined he Church, he was punctilious in attendance and duties" and further that his later poetical output was "saturated with the rhythm and diction of the Anglican liturgy, which he heard daily" (14).

Some of the striking aspects in the text of the poem "The Journey of the Magi" can be found in the elements of symbolic significance conveyed

through the spiritual and religious allusions; the presence of an underlying allegorical meaning; the vivid imagery that the poet conjures with its comparing and contrasting images; crisp and concise language with a sense of poetical restraint; the employment of understatement, as well as, narration through the dramatic monologue. Eliot takes up the Biblical account of the three wise men journeying in search of the Holy Infant Jesus being led by the eastern star to Bethlehem to which he adds imaginary details through his allusions of Biblical events, narration of subjective feelings of the magi, as well as, imagined experiences of the journey that the wise men had undertaken. In its presentation, the poem has a somewhat melancholic rather than a joyous overtone that is otherwise found in the description of the Gospel. It also portrays the magi in a pensive or rather a reflective mood which 'understates' the emotional joy that the magi had possibly experienced at the end of their long arduous journey. Thus, while Eliot maintains the central image of the Holy Infant as the subject of the quest, he also underplays the ecstatic joy that the magi had experienced by instantly clipping the details of when and how they had witnessed the Newborn Infant or how they had worshipped Him.

Eliot deftly employs the dramatic monologue infusing his characteristic note of irony in the poem where he remarkably captures the practicalities of a journey and the natural human responses to challenges, moments of despair, feelings of alienation and experiences of spiritual conversion. Although, the poem appears simplistic in terms of the language employed, yet it is layered with symbolical meanings, as well as, vivid imageries, which almost brings alive the changing landscapes, the transforming experiences and the significant events of the entire journey. Moreover, Eliot cleverly creates a tug and pull of the contrasting experiences, mixed feelings and changing circumstances described by his narrator- one of the three wise men. Here, the learner may note that Eliot considered it important to take into account the text of the poem in itself and avoid associating the poet with the poem in any manner thereby citing the importance of 'depersonalisation' which was a necessary literary practice or convention that in his opinion defined the literary tradition itself.

Eliot in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" had also noted that "novelty is better than repetition" (37) which also explained his new take even on old subjects or events, as well as, his constant emphasis on new critical approaches towards literary practices whereby he replaced earlier romantic literary conventions with modern literary sensibilities. Thus, Eliot significantly wrote, "[t]here is a great deal, in the writing of poetry which must be conscious and deliberate. In fact, the bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious. Both errors tend to make him 'personal'. Poetry is not a turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" (42).

However, as Perkins notes even as Eliot's criticism had stepped ahead of the earlier romantic tradition, some elements of the romantic tradition were still evident in the writings of the modern poets like Auden, Yeats, Stevens and Eliot himself as therefore he writes**%** "[a]nd though most poets after Eliot would have become irritable at any suggestion that they themselves were not modern, their hearts still melted when they read Romantic lyrics. They hungered for the melody and cadence, imagery of nature, strong personal emotion, idealism, and mysticism of poetry in the Romantic tradition. Cummings, MacLeish, Crane, Spender, Day-Lewis, Thomas and Roethke, among many others, were modern poets of Romantic sensibility. Thus in practice the Modernist movement in poetry was much less anti-Romantic than is usually supposed" (9).

8.7 RECEPTION OF ELIOT

David Perkins in *A History of Modern Poetry* significantly notes thus, "[f]or twenty-five years T.S. Eliot exercised an authority in the literary world not possessed by any writer before him for more than a century" (3). Indeed, Eliot's poetry is imbued with an intellectual appeal of its own; with an impersonal voice taking up the concerns of the modern man; revealing spiritual and mystical elements of life; being cast in the form of symbolical meaning that capture his poetical essence; and unraveling the stark truths

of modern life. While noting that the critical reception of Eliot's literary contributions had "never slackened" down the decades, John Cooper in *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot* (2006) notes that Eliot's finest composition *The Wasteland* was such an extraordinary composition that in its time, had captured wide attention of the new literary critics and scholars such as I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Helen Gardner in Britain, F. O. Mathiesson, Cleanth Brooks and others in America all of whom, as he opines had considered Eliot as "the exemplary modern poet, the poet for a new age of doubt, skepticism, and irony" (111). Cooper mentions that it was largely in the 1950s that Eliot's literary works had received a great impetus and was readily examined by the literary and cultural critics, as well as, taken up in the academic circles.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 13: Name some of the modern critics whose attention was captured by T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*.

Q 14: Briefly mention some of the important highlights of the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Q 15: What were the two distinct aspects regarding the creative process of an ideal modern poet as noted by T. S. Eliot in his seminal essay?



8.8 LET US SUM UP

After having gone through the unit, you should be able to appreciate the literary contributions of the American poet T.S. Eliot to the treasures of modern English poetry. Besides presenting a very brief overview of the life and works of the poet, this unit has also taken up the poem "Journey of the Magi" in a detailed manner, and has presented a discussion on some of the emergent themes together with a reference to the poetic style and language. By this time, you must be having a better idea of the critical reception, as

well as, the critical literary perspectives of Eliot himself thereby gaining further interest in exploring Eliot's poetic works.



8.9 FURTHER READING

Andrewes, Lancelot. "Sermons of the Nativity." Project Canterbury, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.

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Jain, Manju. (2007). *A Critical Reading of the Selected Poems of T.S. Eliot*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Moody, A. David. (1994). *The Cambridge Companion to T.S. Eliot.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Perkins, David. (1987). *A History of Modern Poetry: Modernism and After*. New Delhi: ABS Publishers.

Sen. S. (2009). *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. New Delhi: Unique Publishers.

8.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Thomas Stearns Eliot who had a happy childhood in St. Louis, Missouri was brought up as the youngest of six siblings by Henry Ware Eliot, Eliot's father who was a successful businessman and his mother Charlotte Champe Stearns, a social worker who also had a gift for poetry and a love for literature.

Ans to Q 2: Eliot developed an interest in studying languages like Greek, Latin, French and German and even in his later years under the

tutorship of Irving Babbitt, he began to explore Pali and Sanskrit languages.

Ans to Q 3: Some of the widely read works of Eliot are his first volume of poems titled *Prufrock and Other Observations* (1917), *Poems* (1919), *Poems Written in Early Youth* (posthumously in 1967), *The Sacred Wood* (1920) comprising a score of his seminal essays… …*Four Quartets* (1943) which contained four poems written over a course of seven years i.e., from 1936-1942 namely "Burnt Norton", "East Coker", "The Dry Salvages" and "Little Gidding" eventually earned him the Nobel Prize in Literature in the year 1948.

Ans to Q 4: Some of these positive influences on his intellectual development were his teachers the American critic, Irving Babbit and English philosopher George Santayana both of whom inspired in him a love for traditional classicism, as well as, the American novelist Conrad Aiken and English writer Percy Wyndham Lewis who were his closest friends.

Ans to Q 5: Eliot had also quoted the opening lines from a Christmas nativity sermon of Lancelot Andrewes, which was delivered in the presence of King James I in the year 1622 describing how the three wise men sacrificed their comforts for a larger significant cause.

Ans to Q 6: The three wise men were also kings namely Balthazar- King of Chaldea, Gasper- King of Garshish and Melchoir- King of Nubia.

Ans to Q 7: At such times, when all of them lost their enthusiasm and energy, when they felt that their endurance was being tested by God, they all experienced a sense of regret of having left the comforts that they enjoyed in life to undertake such risks.

Ans to Q 8: The rushing winds at night had prevented their fires from remaining lit, thereby, leaving them in complete darkness, with feelings of insecurity, uncertainty and desolation. They were mostly disheartened to find themselves being completely avoided and unwelcomed by the people in these little hamlets, towns and cities that they came across in the course of their journey. In fact, nothing seemed to have stood in their favour which possibly made it the most difficult journey of their lives.

Ans to Q 9: With regard to the magi, they were divided between their old and their new faith, the feelings of death of the old life that they had lived and the new life that embraced them before they could even realize that their entire lives had undergone a transformation.

Ans to Q 10: Some of the striking aspects in the text of the poem "The Journey of the Magi" can be found in the elements of symbolic importance conveyed through the spiritual and religious allusions; the presence of an underlying allegorical meaning; the vivid imagery that the poet conjures with its comparing and contrasting images; crisp and concise language with a sense of poetical restraint; the employment of understatement, as well as, narration through the dramatic monologue.

Ans to Q 11: The Gospel of St. Matthew

Ans to Q 12: Refer to the subsection 8.5

Ans to Q 14: *The Wasteland* had captured wide attention of the new literary critics and scholars such as I.A. Richards, F.R. Leavis, Helen Gardner in Britain, F.O. Mathiesson, Cleanth Brooks and others in America

Ans to Q 15: In this seminal essay, he had highlighted the significant role of the literary master, the transformative process of writing, the necessity of constructive literary criticism and the emphasis on literary tradition, which in his opinion was to be acquired by the dint of hard work rather than inheritance.

Ans to Q 16: While he had mentioned the importance of depersonalising poetry, Eliot also held that the eclectic fusion of thoughts and ideas defined the entire creative process of an ideal modern poet.



8.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the life and literary contributions of T.S. Eliot with reference to his most important poems.

Q 2: Give a detailed explanation of the poem "Journey of the Magi" from your own reading of the poem. In what way, can this poem be considered a 'modern' poem?

Q 3: What are the major themes that are evident in the text of the poem "Journey of the Magi"?

Q 4: Analyse the style and language of the poem "Journey of the Magi".

Q 5: Give a detailed critical reception of the poetry of T.S. Eliot as well as his critical perspectives on modern literary practices, with particular emphasis on the poems that you have read.

Q 6: Explain the following lines with reference to context:

a) "And the night fires going out, and the lack of
Shelters,
And the cities hostile and the towns
unfriendly
And the villages dirty and charging high
Prices:
A hard time we had of it."

b) "This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death? There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt. I had seen
Birth and death,
But had thought they were different; this Birth
Was
Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our
death."

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UNIT 9: RUPERT BROOKE: "THE SOLDIER"

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Rupert Brooke: The Poet

9.4 Reading the Poem "The Soldier"

9.5 Major Themes

9.6 Brooke's Poetic Style

9.7 Reception of Brooke

9.8 Let us Sum up

9.9 Further Reading

9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.11 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- gain some ideas on the life of the poet Rupert Brooke
- discuss the poem "The Soldier" and extract the major themes in it
- explain Brooke's poetic style in terms of the poem prescribed
- critically examine the reception of the poet Rupert Brooke and his works
- gain an idea on war poetry in general through your reading of Rupert Brooke

9.2 INTRODUCTION

The poetic trend during the early decades of the 20th century witnessed the Georgian poets who explicitly followed the Romantics in their love for Nature and countryside. The term "Georgian" first came into use by Edward Marsh whose five edited volume of anthologies was titled *Georgian Poetry.* However, the term is loosely or rather pejoratively used to include poets who made their influence felt in between the years 1900 to 1922,

more particularly representing those poets who contributed "before, during, and after the First World War". (Perkins). However, when the First World War broke out in 1914, additional concerns relating to civilization and dystopia grappled the minds of these poets. Indeed, many of those poets who were actively involved in the war were soldiers. The First World War (1914-1918) that originated in Europe was one of the deadliest wars that had changed the course of history. Approximately forty million people including military and civilians perished during the war. For convenience of reading, we can roughly divide war poetry into two levels—one during the outbreak of war to 1914, followed by the period till 1918. The first phase of war poetry will be crucial to our understanding of the war poet like Rupert Chawner Brooke, Charles Hamilton Sorley, Julian Grenfell, Robert Nichols, etc. These poets exemplified ideas that were dominated by elements of mysticism, idealism and patriotism aiming to glorify self-sacrifice for the cause of the country. This unit shall deal at length with the war poet Rupert Brooke, one of the most sensational poets of his time. Here, we shall read about his life and contribution to English literature. More particularly, this unit shall attempt at exploring the poetic techniques of Brooke by referring to one of his well-known poems, "The Soldier". Brooke drew into his poetry his short-term experiences as a soldier to illuminate the society of his time on the idea of war and more particularly to instil in the people a vision of idealism as well as patriotism. As a genre, poetry was the best medium for him to reach out to the people of his time. In the following sections, we shall consider the factors that shaped him into a war poet, his personal life and his volume of works.

9.3 RUPERT BROOKE: THE POET

When we refer to the war poets, Rupert Brooke's name is likely to come first in the league. One of the finest looking men, Brooke has been admired as a poet for bringing into poetry the direct experiences of war. His image as the epitome of youth reverberates among his contemporaries. Brooke attempted through his poetry to provide a new vision of reality that was stark. In the initial years of the war, numerous poems that were patriotic in spirit and non-aesthetic in form came out of the pen of many amateur

poets, mostly those who were, directly or indirectly, participants in the war. Standing apart among these poets was Rupert Brooke whose craftsmanship, together with a strong patriotic fervour, captured instant popularity and success among the literary circles. In fact, Brooke was one of the main figures behind the anthology of 'Georgian Poetry' that landed a voice to the soldier poets in the coming years.

Brooke was born in the year 1887 on 3rd of August at Rugby, Warwickshire. His father William Parker Brooke served as a teacher at Rugby school, which was one of the best schools in England credited with shaping numerous poets before Brooke like Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough and Lewis Carroll. Regarding his mother Ruth Mary Brooke, née Cotterill, it is known that she had been very dominant. Brooke had two brothers; his elder brother Richard died when Brooke was in College, while his younger brother Alfred succumbed to the war a couple of months after Brooke's demise. They also had a sister who survived till infancy only. Brooke had received his early schooling at Hillbrow before joining Rugby. While at Hillbrow, he made friendship with James Strachey and Geoffrey Keynes (both these young men were younger brothers of more popular writers namely, Lytton Strachey and John Maynard Keynes).

As already mentioned, Brooke was an extremely handsome man and his admirers included both men and women. W. B. Yeats, a fellow poet goes on to call him the "the handsomest young man in England" and Leonard Woolf appreciated him when he noted: "That is exactly what Adonis must have looked like in the eyes of Aphrodite". Brooke was not only good in academics but also was a good athlete; these qualities, added with his physical charm, were enough for him to gain popularity among his contemporaries. He studied Literature at King's College, Cambridge where his literary circle comprised James Strachey, Lytton Strachey, Geoffrey Keynes, John Maynard Keynes and Virginia Woolf– many of them belonged to the group popularly known as the '**Bloomsbury group**'. Notably, it was his work on "John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama" that enabled him to win a scholarship to this College. While at Cambridge, Brooke was a member of the "Apostles" and pertaining to his interest in socialism, he was elected as the President of the **Fabian Society**.



Bloomsbury Group: A group of English writers and intellectuals whose works reflect their interest in literature and arts and had their informal discussions in Bloomsbury.

Fabian Society: A British organisation, which aims to establish democratic socialism through reformist way that does not involve revolution.

Much of the complexity regarding Brooke's relationships owed to his deep and hesitant belief regarding his own sexuality. His mother who always searched for a girl in him, given the kind of beauty he had, probably affected him psychologically. His relationships did not survive as they were characterised by his troubled emotional turmoil and many sexual encounters, with both men and women. The year 1912 was one of Brooke's difficult periods in life for he struggled terribly to balance his emotional and mental breakdown after his relationship with Katherine Laird Coxhad failed. Disconnecting with the Bloomsbury group, during this period, he travelled to Germany to seek rehabilitation. He also travelled to North America and the Pacific and was there in Tahiti for some time. He was said to have a lover in Tahiti whose name was 'Mamua' and with whom he had a daughter.

Edward Marsh, secretary to Winston Churchill, was an influential figure at that time and was Brooke's patron. They were both involved in the idea of publishing an anthology on **Georgian poetry** and the first volume, as such, included poems by Brooke, Sassoon, Graves and Nichols. When the war broke out in August 1914, Brooke actively took part in it as a volunteer and eventually, with the help of Churchill and Marsh, he got a commission in the Royal Naval Division. He went to the devastating Antwerp voyage with the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 to check the progress of the Germans. He did not see much of the hostilities of the war as he succumbed to death due to an infection from a mosquito bite. He was sailing to Dardanelles and while on board, he breathed his last due to this septicaemia on April 23, 1915.



LET US KNOW

Georgian Poets: Apart from Rupert Brooke, the other Georgian poets were Wilfred Gibson, W. H. Davies, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, W. J. Turner, John Freeman, Wilfred Owen, etc. among others.

Rupert Brooke's published works includes *Poems* (1911), *1914 and Other Poems* (1915) and *Collected Poems* (1918). His work on John

Webster that won him a scholarship to King's College titled *John Webster and Elizabethan Drama* (1916) is the only critical writing of Brooke. Apart from poetry, Brooke also wrote prose titled *Letters from America* (1916). The first of the five sonnets of his *1914* collection is titled "Peace". It deals with the poet's delight at the approaching War, which he sees as an escape from the evils that existed in his time. In a way, War which is attached with loss and suffering of human lives, will challenge the morality of the people and provide them peace and spiritual bliss as well. The sonnet deals with Brooke's search for meaning in life as a whole. The second sonnet "Safety" also deals with the moral renewal that participation in War brings about in a person. The sonnet chiefly embraces the effects of war on the poet. "The Dead" is the common title shared by his third and fourth sonnet of this collection. Pointing to the selfless sacrifice of youth, Brooke's third sonnet also deals with the idea of death. Here he explores the theme of death in an idealistic way. The sonnet glorifies the young men's willingness to die for his country staking all the hopes of youth. The fourth sonnet bearing the same title deals with the impressions of death that transfers the soul's desire to attain eternal peace. The fifth sonnet, "The Soldier" also deals with a soldier's sacrifice for the sake of the much-loved country that abounds in natural beauty. Here, Brooke dramatically represents the approaching bleakness of his own probable death in the War. As this unit is on this sonnet, we shall look critically at Brooke's notions about death in the War from the sonnet's perspective. The following section shall deal solely with this poem and will provide you with a detailed explanation of the poem. You are however, required to read the poem along with the other four sonnets of the collection titled *1914* so that it becomes easier to relate the thoughts of the poet.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who were the major poets associated with war poetry?

Q 2: Where did Brooke pursue his higher studies? How did he get into there?

Q 3: What role did Brooke play when the war broke out?

Q 4: State the cause of Brooke's death.

Q 5: Write about Georgian poetry in about 50 words.

Q 6: List the works penned down by Brooke.

9.4 READING THE POEM "THE SOLDIER"

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam;
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

Let us discuss now the poem in details taking together the idea behind its composition. The poem depicts Brooke's impression of the First World War. It was written in 1914 and was the last of the five sonnets of the collection entitled *1914*. The witness to the initial action of the war while he was in Belgium triggered Brooke in writing the sonnets. This was the time when he was serving actively as a volunteer for the war. The poem saw its first publication in 1915 in the magazine *New Members*. It was after the recitation of the poem at St. Paul's Cathedral in 1915 at Easter Sunday that his sonnets brought him immediate success by getting published in the *Times*.

In the poem, an anonymous soldier is the speaker whose heart is filled with deep reverence for his country, that is, England. The opening lines depict the speaker's sentiments attached to his country and the act of

dying in the battlefield. In "some corner of a foreign field" which implies the battlefield, the speaker tends to die holding up his love and respect for a greater cause, that is, love for his motherland– "forever England." Rather than regretting about his own death or his sacrifice, he claims that the corner where he dies will have a piece and the scent of England, more particularly, his love for the country, in it. This, in effect, points how through death there will be some kind of victory of England. The phrase "some corner" is reflective of the uncertainties associated with war. After his death, the soldier will be buried in an unnamed "corner" reflecting the obscurity of death in war. Through this poem, Brooke portrays the idealistic image of a soldier whose valour is foregrounded pushing the anguish he goes through. What makes the opening of the poem remarkable is the soldier's bravery and the eloquent revelation that his country will be able to conquer some part of an unknown, foreign land by his death.

The soldier is wholeheartedly an embodiment of England, which has nourished and shaped him, giving him the opportunity to breathe and grow up. The reference to 'richer dust' denotes the vivacity and strength that as an Englishman the soldier feels. Brooke uses the metaphor of 'dust' to convey the idea in a broader sense; any English soldier who dies in war accomplishes the same aspect, that is, they are so much shaped by England that wherever they die, that part of the land will bore their English roots, spreading the dust of the country. Thus, the first stanza establishes the patriotic flavour of the poem and ends by creating a picture of England as a blissful place on earth. The speaker evokes the power of nature that he finds in England and which somehow, he finds embraces the soldier till he is turned into 'dust'.

The second stanza develops a heightened state of the speaker's mind. England is personified; Brooke does this intentionally to capture the sense of unity and solidarity among the people. Bringing together the qualities that moulded England, the speaker highlights that England's sovereignty will continue to exist. It is by means of attributing human qualities that the speaker binds together all the people of the country for the cause of England. The speaker, thereby, pointing to all the positive reasons, lays emphasis on

the worthiness of the sacrifice the soldier makes. When a soldier dies while fighting, he will find peace as England is closer to heavenly bliss: "In hearts at peace, under an English heaven". Thus, the speaker, through this sonnet succeeds to make England emerge as a country that provides the soldiers enough strength and courage to fight against any enemy so that England becomes victorious. It is the soldier's love for his country that conquers his heart at the battlefield when death itself seems too trivial.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Write down the summary of the poem "The Soldier".

Q 8: What are the four other sonnets of the collection *1914 and Other Poems* apart from "The Soldier"?

9.5 MAJOR THEMES

In this section, we shall delve deeper into the issues that the poem is concerned with.

The title of the poem points out that it is about a soldier or soldiers in general who sacrifice their lives selflessly for the good of their country. Here, it is England that is given due importance throughout the poem. However, Brooke has touched upon other issues through the poem like death and war, patriotism/nationalism, idealism and optimism, etc. In the sonnet "The Soldier", Brooke's engagement with the idea of death is very important because it represents valour on the part of the soldier to sacrifice his life altruistically. The poem begins thus: "If I should die" and it was as if Brooke had preconceived his own end through the poem. Notably, Brooke's life ended after a few months, and this was publicly mourned so as to give him the status of a hero– an epitome of sacrifice and youthful energy. Indeed, death is a part of war and as such, the lurking danger that comes with the war is partially implied in the poem. The reference to War or warfare is narrowed down because the poem highlights more on positive issues like love for motherland. The feeling of patriotism is so strong in the poem that it is the prime factor or the triggering force for the soldier to stand against

any odds challenging/threatening his country. It must be noted that the poem also gave consolation to the ones who were out there in the battlefield by glorifying the sacrifice of their lives. Brooke was to a great extent touched by the marvels of nature and countryside. The sonnet exposes his love for Mother Nature as well as implies his mystic vision. It is his 'love' for England with all the bounties of natural sights that are worthy enough to be defended from external threats implied by War. The poet gives more importance to the Nation and its well-being, more than any kind of individual sacrifice. The sentimental touch of this poem is what made it a mouthpiece for conveying the nationalistic spirit that was the need of the hour. The poet is in full praise of the life rewarded to him by the English soil, which he must selflessly offer for the good of the nation. The "richer dust" of the soldier is situated only in its connection with England that "bore, shaped, made aware" and hence, is a part of England. Over and above, through the poem Brooke strikes an idealistic and optimistic note by eulogising a concept such as 'death', which comes with patriotic fervour. Death is not only the apt way for the soldier, it is also through this way that he can attain peace; it also points to the insignificance of human body.

9.6 BROOKE'S POETIC STYLE

Rupert Brooke's sonnets are graceful and lyrical in nature. All the five sonnets of his *1914* collection represent his highly intellectual and refined response to the Great War. An air of moral crisis together with the society's concerns also gets reflected through his sonnets. In the poem "The Soldier", Brooke has used the Petrarchan or the Italian sonnet form comprising an octave and a sestet. However, the rhyme scheme of the octave follows the Shakespearean pattern (ababcdcd) whereas the sestet follows the Italian rhyme scheme. The use of "I" in the poem is technically employed by Brooke for it stood for all those soldiers who are fighting for their country leaving behind their loved ones. It binds together all those who are directly or indirectly involved with the War. In the first line of the poem, "If I should die, think only this of me" the use of caesura is indicative of the stress that Brooke put on the patriotic spirit of the soldier who willingly gives away his life and hence deserves admiration from the society as well as family.

Brooke uses metaphors/imagery, personification, etc. in the poem to highlight the meaning and importance of death set against the social and moral obligation of the soldier. He uses repetition as a tool to emphasise the patriotic spirit of the poem. Certain words in the poem like 'some corner' represents uncertainty bringing out the extent to which the soldiers risk their lives in places unknown. The graveness of the octave is shifted to a merrier note in the sestet (second stanza). Images used in the last three lines of the poem denotes Brooke's optimistic attitude to the sacrifices of the soldiers:

> Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
> And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
> In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

By using personification in this line: "A pulse in the eternal mind, no less", Brooke aims to hint that the country will forever remember the soldier who died fighting for it. The dead soldier will receive his reward in the sense that England's memory or in a sense, history will forever commemorate those soldiers who have devoted their lives for the good of the nation. And, perhaps Brooke means 'peace' under an 'English heaven' in this context. It can be seen that Brooke uses "I" in connection to its collective use for it relates the soldier with the nation at large. About Brooke's poetic techniques and language, it can be concluded by mentioning his elegant use of symbolism added with the lyrical tunes, to be of mature kind and an indication of his technical accomplishment.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 9: Analyse Brooke's idea of death as reflected in the poem.

Q 10: Write briefly on the poetic style of Brooke in "The Soldier".

9.7 RECEPTION OF BROOKE

Considering the immense influence of Rupert Brooke, it has been found that there were mixed reactions regarding his works. Undoubtedly,

when he presented himself to the readers during the initial period of the WW I, he was almost a public figure who was able to conquer the hearts of his readers. In fact, Brooke did not aim to write propaganda through his works; particularly "The Soldier" was open to the public for enlightening them on the various discourses—social as well as political. This was possible for the kind of popularity Brooke enjoyed partly due to his image as an 'ideal' young man of his generation and partly through the theme of patriotism that was highly echoed in his poems. His immense popularity that he shared during his lifetime achieved the status of a national craze with his death during the war. Politically, his sonnets were used to instil the ideals of nationalism in the masses. Awareness of the war and mass participation was sought for by intensifying Brooke's individual experiences of war as he came to be regarded as an icon.

It must be noted that rather than personal experiences of war, which Brooke did not acquire much due to his early death; his poetry is chiefly a response to channelize the patriotic spirit prevalent in the society. Therefore, very clearly, his poetry was a premeditated expression to guide the society's discernment regarding the war. As his poetry is premeditated, there is hardly any spontaneity in his verses. His poetry rather creates an ambience wherein 'death' not as has been experienced personally but death, as an idea, has been situated. However, his influence and success as a poet, during the time in which he composed poems was great. The following quoted lines reflect the popularity of Brooke's poetry:

"Brooke's first volume, *Poems* (1911), was reprinted in 1913 and then six times in 1915 and four more by August 1916. By 1932, it had sold 100,000 copies. A second selection, titled *1914 and Other Poems* went through fourteen impressions between May 1915 and September 1916. A collected edition, with Edward Marsh's memoir, appeared in 1918 and went through sixteen impressions in the next ten years." (Brooker and Widdowson 121)

It is mention-worthy that the early reception of Brooke's poetry was relatively related to his early demise and his popularity as a public figure. It is also greatly linked to the war. Prior to the war, he was not regarded as a voice that could capture the collective imagination of the people. However,

the War brought an impact upon the poet's reputation whose war poetry was deeply rooted in patriotism. Immediately, after his death, "The Soldier" acted as a medium to convey the dignity of sacrifice as well as the selfless participation in war and heroism of the poet amidst life-threatening dangers.

However, there was a major shift in the poetic sensibility, which gradually turned to the stories of the poets who were brutally facing the War and wrote about their first hand experiences. This shift was a radical one as it affected Brooke's reputation to a great extent. His romantic and mystic war poems no longer were received with the vivacity they enjoyed once because they were viewed as idealistic contemplations mainly related to martyrdom and exaltation of the idea of War. The reality that prevailed was stark and after Brooke a new generation of trench poets emerged who highly dominated the poetic scene expressing pity, anguish, bleak situation, resentment and so on.

Interestingly, we must note that Brooke was included in the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935*, an anthology of poetry compiled by W. B. Yeats, one of the greatest poets of 20th century. This is an indication of how modern critics have been favourably indicating to the techniques of Brooke as well as his lyrical excellence. As a whole, Brooke's poetry has generated much idea about the society and the nation during the outbreak of the Great War.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 11: How was Rupert Brooke received as a poet?



9.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have read about the war poets like Rupert Brooke who actively used poetry as a medium to raise their various concerns regarding the war and its disastrous effects. This unit familiarised you with the war poet Rupert Brooke who is one of the major figures associated with literature of the First World War. As we have discussed, even though Brooke

did not witness the major devastations caused by the war, through his sonnets, he tried to project a sense of brotherhood and unity. After going through one of his famous sonnets, "The Soldier" you have come to know the themes of the poem such as patriotism, death and war, optimistic viewpoint and so on. You are now familiar also with the techniques of Brooke as well as his use of the sonnet form.



9.9 FURTHER READING

Brooke, Rupert. (1942). *1914 and Other Poems*. Third Impression. London: Faber & Faber.

Brooker, Peter. & Widdowson, Peter. (1986). "A Literature for England", *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880-1920*. ed. Robert Collsand Philip Dodd. London: Croom Helm.

Ervine, St. John G. (1915). "The Poetry of Rupert Brooke" in *The North American Review*, Vol. 202, No. 718, pp. 432-440.

Jones, Nigel. *Rupert Brooke: Life, Death and Myth*. E book.

Perkins, David. (1987). *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode*. New Delhi: ABS Publishers & Distributors.

Websites and Electronic Resources:

https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-true-story-of-rupert-brooke

http://www.warpoets.org/conflicts/great-war/rupert-brooke-1887-1915/

9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Wilfred Gibson, W. H. Davies, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, W. J. Turner, John Freeman, Wilfred Owen, etc.

Ans to Q 2: Rupert Brooke pursued Literature at King's College, Cambridge… …his literary circle comprised many of them from the 'Bloomsbury group'. Notably, it was his work on "John Webster and

the Elizabethan Drama" that enabled him to win a scholarship to this College.

Ans to Q 3: When the war broke out in August 1914, Brooke actively took part in it as a volunteer and eventually, with the help of Churchill and Marsh, he got a commission in the Royal Naval Division. He went to the devastating Antwerp voyage with the British Expeditionary Force in 1914 to check the progress of the Germans.

Ans to Q 4: Brooke succumbed to death due to an infection from a mosquito bite while sailing to Dardanelles; he breathed his last due to this septicaemia on April 23, 1915.

Ans to Q 5: Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Gibson, W. H. Davies, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, W. J. Turner, John Freeman, Wilfred Owen, etc… …the term "Georgian" first came into use by Edward Marsh… …the term is used to include poets who made their influence felt in between the years 1900 to 1922, more particularly representing those poets who contributed "before, during, and after the First World War".

Ans to Q 6: *Poems* (1911), *1914 and Other poems* (1915), *Collected Poems* (1918), *John Webster and Elizabethan Drama* (1916) and, the prose titled *Letters from America* (1916).

Ans to Q 7: Read section 9.4 and attempt on your own.

Ans to Q 8: "Peace", "Safety", "The Dead" and "The Dead".

Ans to Q 9: In the sonnet "The Soldier", Brooke's engagement with the idea of death… …represents valour on the part of the soldier to sacrifice his life altruistically… …Death is not only the apt way for the soldier… …he can attain peace.

Ans to Q 10: Brooke used the Petrarchan or the Italian sonnet form… …the rhyme scheme of the octave follows the Shakespearean pattern (ababcdcd) whereas the sestet follows the Italian rhyme scheme… …the use of caesura is indicative of the stress that Brooke put on the patriotic spirit of the soldier who willingly gives away his life and hence deserves admiration from the society as well as family… …uses metaphors/imagery, personification, etc… …repetition as a tool to

emphasise the patriotic spirit of the poem… … images used in the last three lines of the poem denotes Brooke's optimistic attitude to the sacrifices of the soldiers… …about Brooke's poetic techniques and language, it can be concluded by mentioning his elegant use of symbolism added with the lyrical tunes, to be of mature kind and an indication of his technical accomplishment.

Ans to Q 11: See section 9.7



9.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write briefly on the thematic concerns of First World War poetry. Point out the major poets and highlight their contribution to war literature.

Q 2: Do you agree that it is with Rupert Brooke that war poetry gained popularity? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 3: Discuss the life and works of Rupert Brooke.

Q 4: Give a critical summary of the poem "The Soldier".

Q 5: What are the thematic concerns reflected through the poem "The Soldier"? Discuss in details.

Q 6: Analyse the diverse responses to Rupert Brooke's poetic output.

Q 7: Examine the style and techniques employed by Rupert Brooke.

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UNIT 10: WILFRED OWEN: "FUTILITY" AND "ARMS AND THE BOY"

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 Wilfred Owen: The Poet

10.4 Reading the Poems "Futility" and "Arms and The Boy"

10.5 Major Themes

10.6 Poetic Style

10.7 Reception of Owen

10.8 Let us Sum up

10.9 Further Reading

10.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.11 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- describe the life of the poet Wilfred Owen
- interpret the poems "Futility" and "Arms and the Boy" by Owen
- point out the underlying themes in these two poems
- discuss the style employed by Owen in his poetry
- discuss the reception of Owen and his works

10.2 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have already discussed war poetry with reference to the themes of idealising the concept of war. In this unit, we shall discuss the shifting trend in war poetry with regard to the themes, the transition from an idealistic or patriotic representation to the anguish and reality that have become the dominant traits of the War. Along with Siegfried Sassoon, it was Wilfred Owen, who contributed towards bringing into poetry the realities of War that were harsh and poignant to the civilians. In fact,

Owen strived to state through his poems his close association with war experiences at the trench as well as a soldier who fought at the frontline. He tried to address the ground realities as against the propagandistic views and concept of the war. In him, we can find an imagist as well as a decadent, romantic as well as a realistic poet. His vibrant and eloquent language added by his command over the use of several technical details like personification and para-rhyme made his mark as a modern poet who has changed the course of English poetry. The horrifying and the ugly depiction of war and bloodshed is all that can be seen in his poetry, as mentioned by W. B. Yeats who did not include Owen in his anthology. However, it does not in any way minimise Owen's contribution because he is regarded as one trend setter in the world of English poetry for rejecting and challenging the old style, characterised by romantic notion of the country, and representing the stark realities in his poems wherein it surpassed issues like death, life, religion, nature, and so on. The present unit aims to introduce you to this great war poet whose contribution in the development of English poetry cannot be overlooked. Before we deal with two of his poems, "Futility" and "Arms and the Boy", as prescribed in your syllabus, it is essential to know the background of the poet for analysing his poems. Let us begin by getting to know the important facets of his life.

10.3 WILFRED OWEN: THE POET

Wilfred Owen was one of the prominent poets of the 20th century well known for his vibrant war poetry. The portrayal of the crudity of war in his poems was a stark contrast to earlier war poets including Rupert Brooke. Born in 1893 on March 18, Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was a mixture of English and Welsh origin. He was born near Oswestry, Shropshire to Tom Owen, who worked in the railways, and Harriet Susan and was the eldest of their four children. At the time of Wilfred's birth, the family lived a comfortable life in his (Wilfred Owen) grandfather's house. However, after his grandfather's death, the house was sold and they moved to Birkenhead. After changing many dwelling places, the family moved to Shrewsbury in 1906.

Owen received his education at the Birkenhead Institute and Shrewsbury Technical School. He came to realise his interest in poetry at a very early age of 10 or 11 during a vacation to Cheshire in the year 1903 or 1904. Undoubtedly, his interest in Literature grew and one poet who influenced him deeply was the romantic poet John Keats. He also began to develop an interest in religion. In 1911, when Owen could not secure first class in matriculation, he lost the chance to win a scholarship to London University. As such, with the hope of getting tuition and partly for the free lodging, Owen served as an assistant to the Vicar of Dunsden near Reading. He, however, could not succeed to win a scholarship to University College at Reading.

Pertaining to this failure and his disappointment with the functioning of the Church, Owen left for France where he taught English and French at Berlitz School of Languages in Bordeaux. Though initially Owen was ambiguous about the War, in 1915, he was ultimately enlisted in the Artists Rifles Officers' Training Corps. He underwent training for seven months in Essex before being commissioned as a second lieutenant on the 4th of June 1915 in the Manchester Regiment. Owen's perspective about the War changed completely after he fell into a shell hole and was there for three days, while leading his platoon in the famous and bloodiest Battle of Somme. It became obvious that he suffered from shell shock and had to be sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh. Owen met Sigfried Sassoon at the hospital who was by then an established poet and eventually had a great amount of influence on Owen. Sassoon's poetry was based on starkly realistic themes of War in contrast to Owen's inclination to romantic poetry; their association influenced Owen's poetic concerns to blend both the aspects.

In 1917, after being deemed fit to do lighter duties, Owen was discharged from the hospital. Through Sassoon's association, he was introduced to other literary figures of the time including Robert Graves, Robert Ross, Arnold Bennett and H. G. Wells. Regarding Owen's sexual inclination, he was considered homosexual, which is again debatable. Owen returned to France in 1918 and actively engaged himself once again in the War. By August of that year, he led the soldiers near to the village of Joncourt and

fell heavy on his enemies. In recognition to his valour, he was awarded the Military Cross. However, unfortunately one week before the Armistice was signed that ended the War, Wilfred Owen was shot dead while leading the unit of the second Manchesters towards Ors. He was buried in the cemetery, situated in the north west of the village in France.

Owen saw the publication of only four of his poems, the rest were published posthumously. Within a short life span of only twenty-five years, Owen made much significance in the poetry of WW I. He experimented with various forms and the traits echoes influence of Romantic, Decadent, Georgian and Modernist trends. Some of his poems are "Spring Offensive", "The Sentry", "Dulce Et Decorum Est", "Greater Love", "Disabled", "Strange Meeting", etc. "Dulce Et Decorum Est" is one of the best remembered poems by Owen. It was composed in 1917 at Craiglockhart Hospital when he was fighting against shell shock. "Strange Meeting" is perhaps the most popular poem by Owen where he handles the concept of war in a more matured and philosophical way. The meeting is strange because the dead soldiers from opposite groups meet in Hell. "Maundy Thursday", "Insensibility", etc. are equally significant poems by Owen. One important poem where Owen's realism can be seen is "The Sentry" as well as "Dulce Et Decorum Est".



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Can you relate one incident that changed Owen's views on war?

Q 2: Why is the title of his poem call "Strange Meeting"?

10.4 READING THE POEMS "FUTILITY AND "ARMS AND THE BOY"

"Futility"

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.



Fatuous: Showing lack of thought or intelligence

Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made **fatuous** sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Explanation:

"Futility" is one among the published poems during Owen's life time. The poem is written in the form of an elegiac lyric and it first appeared in 1918 in the *Nation.* Owen talks about the 'futility' of war that has crippled the lives of young soldiers who are succumbed by the War's force. The poem is about the fading hopes of soldiers who struggle to live.

The first stanza very poignantly describes how a deceased soldier is moved to the sun with the hope that the gentle rays of the sun will revive his consciousness. The speaker by the line "whispering of fields half-sown" suggests that the soldier whose life is curtailed by the War is young and it is eagerly wished that the sun, which is a life-giver, will once again bring the dead soldier to life because half of his life experiences are yet to be received. It was always the sun that somehow wakes him up while he was at home or in France. However, the speaker mentioned that even the sun could not bring life into him on this snowy morning. Even though the speaker tried to bring in the image of light through the sun, yet the first stanza ends in a state of despair for the soldier is dead. The soldier who has fought in the war and died there was not prepared to die; he joined the war with the hope of securing his home, his nation.

The second stanza depicts a change in tone of the speaker who takes on a questioning attitude regarding life. The sun and the soil that lead to the growth of seeds is suggestive of how despite the soldier's death, life has to go on. It signifies the paradox of life and death; while the sun and the soil gives light and life on the one hand, it is disturbing for the speaker to acknowledge that: "what made fatuous sunbeams toil/To break earth's sleep at all?" The speaker again refers to hope that is futile; even when the soldier is buried, as the seeds in the soil, he cannot be brought back to life.

The sun is personified when it is referred to as 'kind' and 'old' signifying the age old belief on the sun as a protector of life. Owen's reference to light can be understood in terms of his religious inclination also. By light, he projects God, the life giver. Even the warmth of the sun lay futile when it falls on the dead. Thus, the title can also be seen in the light of the inability to comprehend the mysteries of life and death and how Nature is a witness to both. This poem, in a way, projects the growing religious crisis in Owen. If the sun, symbolising God has created man then why is He silently witnessing the end of mankind. Indeed, the seriousness of the poem is reflected in the last two lines in which the speaker is clueless as to the notion of life and death. Therefore, it is only silence that pervades in the ending of the poem.

"Arms and the Boy"

Let the boy try along this **bayonet**-blade
How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood;
Blue with all malice, like a madman's flash;
And thinly drawn with **famishing** for flesh.

Lend him to stroke these blind, blunt bullet-leads,
Which long to **nuzzle** in the hearts of lads,
Or give him cartridges of fine zinc teeth
Sharp with the sharpness of grief and death.

For his teeth seem for laughing round an apple.
There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple;



Bayonet: A knife that can be fixed to the end of a rifle and used as a weapon.
Famishing: Hungry.
Nuzzle: Push against gently with the nose and mouth.



Talons: A sharp hooked claw

Antlers: Deciduous horn of a member of the deer family

And God will grow no **talons** at his heels,

Nor **antlers** through the thickness of his curls.

Explanation:

As a poet, Owen was always keen to represent the pity of the destruction caused by war to his fellow men. Through this poem, Owen takes his readers to witness the horrifying situation in which war destructs youths. The poem was written in 1918, few months prior to the end of the War. The poem is written in the form of three quatrains wherein the poet speaks of arms and its effects on the innocence of humanity. The poem depicts a young soldier undergoing training for the Great War the speaker in this poem asks a young boy to handle a bayonet-blade personified as a 'madman' hungry for blood and flesh having an evil and cold temper. The speaker urges the boy to stroke the bullets and hand over the cartridges that are made of fine zinc. Again, we see that the bullets are also personified as ones that long to tear apart those young hearts that will be fighting in the war. Even the cartridges symbolise "sharpness of grief and death." The first two stanzas concentrated on the 'arms' where the speaker is either arousing interest in the young mind or else training and making the young boy aware of the dangers in the War where only violence reigns. In a way, the two stanzas reveal the potential harm that weapons can cause.

The third stanza, however, reveals a contrasting figure, that is the boy is set against the deadly weapon. In comparison to the weapons that are as sharp as grief and death, the boy is fit for laughing and his teeth are not as wild as the weapons: "his teeth seem for laughing round an apple/ There lurk no claws behind his fingers supple". The last two lines: "And God will grow no talons at his heels/Nor antlers through the thickness of his curls" is suggestive of the fact that the boy is not a devil. Through this poem, Owen brings to light how men are their own enemies. It is by encouraging the young and innocent to use weapons that a section of war loving people corrupts mankind.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Give in your own words the summary of the poem "Futility".

Q 4: What is the irony that is reflected through the poem "Arms and the Boy"?

10.5 MAJOR THEMES

This section shall bring out some of the points in terms of which Owen's poems are to be read. Owen's portrayal of the war is of prime importance in the light of its representation of crude realities that he himself experienced as a soldier. His poems give us insightful exposure to the ground realities of War. You must have observed that his poems are a striking contrast to that of the poems of Rupert Brooke whom we have discussed in the previous unit. Let us explore some of the significant themes explicit in his poetry.

Owen's representation of Soldiers:

Both the prescribed poems deal with soldiers whom Owen has represented realistically in terms of the complex mental set up that has been instilled in them because of the continuous fights at the War. Both the poems depict the miserable condition of soldiers. In "Futility", we came across the horrifying effects of war on the psyche of the soldiers who struggle with every moment in their lives. Humanity is no more honoured as seen from deaths caused by War. The soldiers' attempt becomes futile while they hopefully tried to bring back their dead friend to live believing in God. However, as it seems, no positive force can bring about a change unless men themselves understand the value of humanity.

In "Arms and the Boy" Owen triggers the readers' sympathy for the young soldier who is turned into nothing but a killing machine devoid of emotions and common sense. Here again, by representing the innocent soldier who is young enough to laugh and enjoy his life is trapped in a brutal and cruel game of life and death. There are many other poems where Wilfred

Owen depicts the pathetic situation of soldiers and exemplifies the horrors and devastation that are caused by the war. Owen's description of the war results from his first hand experiences at wartime when he was in the frontline. His close observation of the wartime situations and of the soldiers in particular, is coloured with the hue of pity. Owen was very shattered to realise that the soldiers were turned into mere guns and that the romantic ideal associated with soldiers is no more a reality. He is critical of the whole war and he deals more maturely with the psyche of the soldiers in poems like "Insensibility" or "Strange Meeting."

Owen's reaction to War:

It has been noticed that Owen was extremely saddened to see that the War and its destruction on humanity. Unlike Rupert Brooke who idealised the war, Owen saw the war in a different light. He was more realistic in his representation because of his own experiences of fighting at the frontline and leading his platoons towards the destruction. Most of Owen's poetic output depicts his pity for the War. His reaction to war, as reflected in his poems, was heavily influence by his friend Siegfried Sassoon who showed him to dwell upon the realities of the war, as well as his mother who inspired him to develop a philosophy regarding the war. Representing combatant poetry, Owen was led to a moral dilemma as evident in his poems. It was a challenge for him, being the leader of his platoon, to carry out the orders and lead his 'boys' knowingly to the devious trap of the War which only provides suffering, fear, hopelessness and death. The only way that Owen can compensate was through poetry: "the anxiety, guilt or self-reproach consequent upon it was the spur to the writing of poems engaging with it". (Corcoran, 89) He felt the need to acquaint the British people of the horrible conditions faced by the soldiers by means of his poems. After all, his theme or the subject of his poetry was the 'pity of war' and as a result, he wrote in a voice that was "in no sense consolatory". (Corcoran, 92)

Nature vs Warfare:

Owen's poetry shows a strong implication of the cruelty that war laid upon the creation of Nature. One instance that can be cited is from the

poem "Futility" where warfare overpowers Nature. In fact, critics have considered the philosophical significance brought out through the nature-war or life-death conflict in the poem. Beneath the surface of the elegiac tone of the poem lies Owen's deeply existential crisis wherein he strives to find the meaning of life. Nature has always been the light giver and the source of life yet in the face of cruelty triggered by the war; it can just be a witness to its own creation. It is a very poignant description of human crisis. Another poem of Own, namely, "Spring Offensive" also deals with this theme. Nature also reacts to the devastation of the War as the sky is filled with the smoke emitted by the machines and ammunitions. Nature in its crudest sense is synonymous to humanity and welfare of the people rather than the promoter of inhumane war.

Innocence vs War:

Owen's "Arms and the Boy" is a striking example of the contrast of innocence and war. The young soldier or the soldiers in general, are not evil by nature. They are the victims of the brutal war and are shaped accordingly. Owen speaks in an ironic tone when he throws light on the fact that the war is human invoked. While it is man who teaches to be cruel and unkind in the war, it is man himself who is innocent and caring. It also speaks of a strong contrast in terms of youthful innocence when one normally is happy and playful but the occurrence of war turns the youthful vigour into a deadly weapon to be used insanely to kill enemies at the battlefield. As usual, Owen represents his public-private clash as a poet. Being the leader, it is man like him who leads the young soldiers towards the battlefield to kill and get killed, on the other hand, his individual or private experience exposes his deep crisis in humanity and the overwhelming influence of the war that encourages number of killing machines in the form of young boys.

These are some of the points under which we can classify the subject matter of Owen's poetry. However, you are suggested to explore other pertinent themes such as death, relationships, disillusionment with religion, friendship, etc. explicit in Owen's poetry and develop your own understanding of his war poetry. The philosophical overtones in his poetry exemplify his crisis as a modern poet, who was anti-war by heart and who

based his poems on the realities of the war. In fact, he was a conscious poet because he developed his poetic style to convey the deadening effects of the World War I to his readers.



LET US KNOW

The petrified ambience and the disillusionment surrounding Britain in the War years gets a reflection in memoirs and autobiographies of writers like Vera Britain's memoir *Testament of Youth* (1933), Robert Graves' autobiography which mainly has its base in his experiences as a soldier, namely, *Goodbye to All That* (1929). Another notable figure was Siegfried Sassoon who contributed in the exposure of the various mechanisms of the War expressing strong resentment towards it. Reflecting a soldier's point of view, his trilogy namely, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928), *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930) and *Sherston's Progress* (1936) have been projected through a fictional character 'George Sherston'.

10.6 POETIC STYLE

As a poet, Wilfred Owen was instrumental in depicting the realistic effects of War. As such, his poetic style appeared to be a combination of satire and anguish, but he depicted "an ampler gift in traditional and Romantic qualities of style and imagination, which unite with the realism and qualify it." (Perkins, 280) However, concentrating mainly on War, Owen did not only confine it to its realistic representation but also laid equal emphasis on the techniques of his poetry. About his style, it can be said that his association with Sassoon and his experiences during the War was instrumental in changing the course of his poetic technicalities. As one who was greatly influenced by the Romantic poets like Shelley and Keats, Owen's poetry carried in them a "great variety of treatment– parable and vision, narrative, subjective lyric, dramatic monologue, case history" (Perkins 280)

One significant aspect of Owen's style is his rhyming pattern that is exceptional in the sense that it is 'consonant rhyme'. For instance, in the poem "Arms and the Boy", the following is to be noted: 'blade-blood', 'flash-

flesh' and 'leads-lads', etc. are all examples of his use of consonant rhyme where the consonant remains fixed and only the vowel is changed. Use of images has always been a dominant feature in Owen's poems that contributed in his development as a modern poet. Owen's war poems are written in a very simple, eloquent and straightforward manner in a language that is common among the soldiers. However, his use of metaphor and personification adds to the new style he has developed for treating his subject matter. Deviating from the style of his early poems highly influenced by Romantic poets, in his war poems Owen chose a directness of style with regard to the treatment of his subject and the coarseness of its impact. Undoubtedly, Owen's poetry owes its splendour in his treatment of the grim reality of War accompanied by a sense of compassion and excellence of poetic techniques. As evident from our reading of both the poems, Owen personified the "sun" and the "weapons" respectively to emphasise on the life-emanating source of Nature while at the same time to impart the message of cruelty and violence being depicted through the outbreak of war. His use of para rhymes also serves to his purpose of creating an ambience of nastiness created by the war. For instance, sun-sown, star-stir, tall-toil–all these contribute to the disturbing effect of the poem "Futility".

With regard to the ironic allusion in Owen's poetry, Timothy O'keeffe noted that he "criticises the religious establishment through references to the Bible which project the disparity between the gentle teachings and example of Christ and the English Church's support of the war." (O' keeffe 72-73) As an instance, the poem "Arms and the Boy" can be cited for alluding to the classical poem of Virgil, that is, "Aeneid". By referring to this allusion, Owen parodies the opening remark of the classical epic, when translated into English, maintains that "Of arms and the man I sing…" (Virgil) Both these poems deals with war, but Owen is very critical about war in the sense that "innocence of the boy is caustically contrasted with the Classical allusions to harpies and (possibly) to Actaeon, who had violated with his eyes the chastity of Diana." (O'keeffe, 73) As evident, Owen used allusions in order to portray the violence of the war and bring out the deficiency of morality that his age was prone to.

In stark contrast to the war poets before him, Owen found a strong poetic voice by use of images. Rejecting the style of poetry that was practised by Brooke and others, Owen wrote about the terror and shock of war from a very close point. His poems are harsh as the war, by the use of sounds as well as visually. Owen's merit as a poet to this day lies in the terseness of his diction that represented realistically the horrors of a bygone era. Indeed, his stay at France introduced him to the Decadents, which has inculcated into his poetry a gloomy image.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Point out the major themes in Owen's poetry and describe any one in details.

Q 6: What is significant about the rhyming patter adopted by Owen?

10.7 RECEPTION OF OWEN

Regarding the poetry of Wilfred Owen, Dylan Thomas noted that his poetry has universal tone because Owen is "a poet of all times, all places, and all wars. There is only one War: that of men against men." (Bloom 26) This universal appeal in Owen inspired many later poets including Auden and his group that consisted of Spender, MacNeice, Cecil Day Lewis apart from W.H. Auden. Interestingly, it was only in 1931 that Owen came to be noticed. Earlier during his lifetime, only four poems were published. However, in 1919, Edith Sitwell posthumously published a few poems by Owen in *Wheels.* The following year Sitwell and Sassoon published a volume on Owen basing on his manuscripts, which was further revised by Blunden's edition. His poems greatly influenced Auden and his circle who were influenced by Owen's poetic style, especially his rhyming pattern. It must be noted that Owen's poetry was well received by later poets: "Leftist or Communist in sympathy at that time, they were attracted to his use of poetry for a political purpose, his idealization and celebration of common men, and his wrathful indignation against those who were exploiting them". (Perkins, 285)

With the formation of Wilfred Owen Association in 1989, public memorials were established in Shrewsbury and Oswestry, which stimulated discussions as well as presentation of any significant issue, related to the poet Wilfred Owen. His importance as a poet is also recorded in Benjamin Britten's 1961 *War Requiem.* Apart from being the subject matter of many novels as well as drama adaptations, Owen was chosen as for the BBC docudrama, namely *Wilfred Owen: A Remembrance Tale* (2007).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How well has Owen's poetry been received?



10.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed Wilfred Owen and his two poems namely "Futility" and "Arms and the Boy". As you have read that Wilfred Owen was one of the trendsetters when it comes to English poetry for he changed the whole discourse in which the war was viewed. He brought into poetry a directness of style, which was used to exemplify the horrors and the miserable condition of the war. He used poetry as a medium to convey to the common masses the realities that the war has brought upon. Apart from these two poems, some of his well-known poem that you are familiar with are "Spring Offensive", "The Sentry", "Dulce Et Decorum Est", "Greater Love", "Disabled", "Strange Meeting", etc. You have also been able to get a glimpse of Owen as a war poet in this unit. Further, we have dealt with the important themes that are very common in Owen's poetry. Owen's poetic technicalities, including his use of imagery and personification, have contributed to his reference as a modern poet. Not only Owen's poetry, in fact his life also became the source of many later novels as well as musical compositions. It is recommended that at least you read another five of his poems to have a better grasp on the poetry of Owen. A reading of this unit shall help you in relating to the other works by Owen and enable you to analyse and develop your understanding of war poetry in general.



10.9 FURTHER READING

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Websites and Electronic Resources:

http://users.clas.ufl.edu/snod/OwenIntroductionNB.110215.pdf

10.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Owen's perspective about the War changed completely after he fell into a shell hole and was there for three days, while leading his platoon in the famous and bloodiest Battle of Somme.

Ans to Q 2: "Strange Meeting" is perhaps the most popular poem by Owen where he handles the concept of war in a more matured and philosophical way. The meeting is strange because the dead soldiers from opposite groups meet in Hell.

Ans to Q 3: Refer to 10.4

Ans to Q 4: The boy is set against the deadly weapon. In comparison to the weapons that are as sharp as grief and death, the boy is fit for laughing and his teeth are not as wild as the weapons… …the boy is not a devil… …men are their own enemies… …encouraging the young and innocent to use weapons that a section of war loving people corrupts mankind.

Ans to Q 5: Refer to 10.5

Ans to Q 6: One significant aspect of Owen's rhyming pattern is 'consonant rhyme'. For instance, in the poem "Arms and the Boy", the following is to be noted: 'blade-blood', 'flash-flesh' and 'leads-lads', etc. are all examples of his use of consonant rhyme where the consonant remains fixed and only the vowel is changed.

Ans to Q 7: Refer to 10.7



10.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Comment on War poetry with special reference to Wilfred Owen.

Q 2: Examine the themes that are commonly found in Wilfred Owen's poetry.

Q 3: Discuss in details the life and works of Wilfred Owen. What is your view on the effect of Owen's personal experiences in his poetry?

Q 4: Critically analyse the poems:

a) "Futility"

b) "Arms and the Boy"

Q 5. Consider the style and technique prevalent in Owen's poetry. In what way does it differ from the earlier war poets?

*** ***** ***



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