

## UNIT – 1

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### WORDSWORTH : *THE DAFFODILS*

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#### Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Life of Wordsworth
- 1.3 Influence of the French Revolution and Rousseau on Wordsworth
- 1.4 Background of the Poem
- 1.5 Poem
- 1.6 Meanings
- 1.7 Stanza-wise Summary
- 1.8 Summary
- 1.9 Critical Appreciation
- 1.10 Self Assessment Questions
- 1.11 Answers to SAQs
- 1.12 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.13 Review Questions
- 1.14 Bibliography

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#### **1.0 Objectives**

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

- know about William Wordsworth
- understand the romantic period
- understand the ideas contained in the poem and
- appreciate and interpret the poem

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#### **1.1 Introduction**

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In this unit you are going to study the poem Daffodils written by Wordsworth. You will also learn about the life of Wordsworth, influence of the French Revolution and Rousseau on his life.

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## 1.2 Life of Wordsworth

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William Wordsworth was born on 7th of April, 1770 at Cockermouth. His father John Wordsworth was an attorney to Lord Lonsdale and was an influential man of his time. His mother Anne Cookson was the only daughter of William Cookson, a well to do mercer a dealer in milk products at Penrith and of Dorothy Crackanthrope, whose ancestors had been lords of the manor of Newbiggin near Penrith. He was second of the five children of his parents, the others being Richard, Dorothy, John and Christopher. He was educated at Hawkshead Grammar School and St. John College, Cambridge from where he did his B.A. in 1791. He went to France in 1791 and stayed there for a period of one year. During this time he was greatly influenced by the French Revolution which was at its peak at that time in France. He published his first volume of poems in 1793. In 1795 he got a chance to meet S.T. Coleridge and soon they became life time friends. Wordsworth along with his sister, Dorothy and S.T. Coleridge with his wife were neighbours to each other at Alfoxden and Stowey in Somerset for one year. In 1798, both the poets together published *Lyrical Ballads* which is considered to be an epoch-making collection of lyrical romantic poems whose preface along with the poems appearing in it attracted a lot of public attention. Together at the end of the same year they went to Germany where Wordsworth started writing *The Prelude* and completed *Ruth*, *Lucy Gray*, *The Lines on Lucy* and some other poems. In 1802, he married Mary Hutchinson of Penrith. After seven years i.e. in 1805 he completed *The Prelude* which was published after his death on 23rd April 1850. In 1807 he moved to Rydal Mount, Grasmere and lived there till his death. In 1843 he became the Poet Laureate after the death of Robert Southey.

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## 1.3 Influence of the French Revolution and Rousseau on Wordsworth

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Wordsworth after completing his B.A. in 1791 from St. John College, Cambridge went to France, in the same year. At that time in France, the French Revolution was at its peak. Wordsworth also felt attracted to it. The aim of the French Revolution was to abolish the kingship and aristocracy and to give full authority to the common man. Rousseau a well known French writer and who is also known as “the father of Romanticism” gave his complete support to this revolution. He also had a deep influence on Wordsworth. Rousseau once said in an argument favouring the French Revolution that man is born free but he is chained everywhere. Time has come now to do away with the kingship and aristocracy. It would be best for the man to give all the powers to the common man. Wordsworth shared the same point of view with Rousseau. He supported the purpose of the French Revolution whole-heartedly. He was deeply attached to the French Revolution. When England prepared herself to fight against Napoleon he went to Church and prayed there sincerely for the defeat of England, his own motherland. Though later in his life he changed his opinion about the French Revolution and became a

republican. He retired as the Poet Laureate of England. But throughout his life, he was unable to shed away the influence of the French Revolution and Rousseau on his poetry. From Rousseau and the French Revolution Wordsworth learnt to glorify the life of the common man. He also learnt to love and respect nature. The relation between nature and man became the main theme of his poetry. In being the poet of nature, he also became the poet of the common man.

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## 1.4 Background of the Poem

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On April 15, 1802 Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy went to their friends, the Clarksons, at Eusemere. When they were coming back to Grasmere, they saw a large number of golden daffodils growing on the bank of a lake Ullswater in the Lake district. They both were astonished by the mesmeric beauty of these daffodils which were fluttering and dancing with the light breeze. Inspired by this delightful spectacle Wordsworth composed this poem in 1804 and published it in 1807.

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## 1.5 Poem

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### THE DAFFODILS

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host, of golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine  
And twinkle on the milky way,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay :  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance

The waves beside them danced; but they  
out-did the sparkling waves in glee;

A poet could not but be gay,  
 In such a jocund company :  
 I gazed - and gazed - but little thought  
 What wealth the show to me had brought.

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
 In vacant or in pensive mood,  
 They flash upon that inward eye  
 Which is the bliss of solitude;  
 And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
 And dances with the daffodils.

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## 1.6 Meanings

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1. Wander (Verb) : To walk slowly around or to a place, often without any particular sense of purpose or direction.
2. Float (Verb) : To move slowly on water or in the air.
3. Vale (Noun) : Valley
4. Fluttering (Noun) : A quick, light movement.
5. Toss (Verb) : To move one's head this way or that.
6. Sprightly (Adjective) : Full of life and energy.
7. Outdo (Verb) : Surpass.
8. Glee (Noun) : A feeling of happiness.
9. Gay (Adjective) : Happy and full of fun.
10. Jocund (Adjective) : Cheerful
11. Gaze (Verb) : To look steadily at somebody /something for a long time.
12. Pensive (Adjective) : Thinking deeply about something, especially because you are sad or worried.
13. Bliss (Noun) : Extreme happiness.
14. Solitude (Noun) : The state of being alone, especially when you find this pleasant.

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## 1.7 Stanza -wise Summary

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1. I wandered lonely..... dancing in the breeze.

The poet is wandering alone from one place to another like a cloud, which flies over valleys and hills with the flow of wind. Suddenly the poet sees a large number of golden daffodils. These daffodils are growing close to the lake and under the trees. A light breeze is blowing making these daffodils dance and flutter with it.

2. Continuous as the star..... in sprightly dance.

To the poet these daffodils look like the stars that shine and twinkle in the milky-way. The daffodils are spreading over a very large area along the margin of a bay. They are in an excessively huge quantity. All these daffodils are dancing happily with the wind.

3. The waves beside ..... to me had brought.

The waves in the lake beside these daffodils are also dancing with the wind. But in comparison to the daffodils the waves are not as beautiful and attractive. Watching such a beautiful scene the poet feels very happy. The poet continues to look at the daffodils. The poet prizes the scene greatly for himself.

4. For oft..... with the daffodils

The poet says that whenever he lies down on his bed either thinking about anything or not thinking, the images of daffodils flash upon his imagination. It usually happens only when the poet is all alone. These images of daffodils have a magical effect on the poet. These images fill the heart of the poet with pleasure. The poet also feels like dancing with the daffodils.

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## 1.8 Summary

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The poet is alone and having nature in mind wandering from one place to another like a cloud which flies over vales and hills with the wind. All of a sudden he sees a large number of golden daffodils which are growing on the bank of the lake under the trees. A light breeze is blowing, making the daffodils flutter and dance with it.

For the poet, the view of these beautiful golden daffodils is similar to the stars shining and twinkling in the milky-way. As far as the poet can see, he finds only the daffodils growing along the margin of a bay and they seem to the poet to be in very large numbers. All of these flowers are tossing their heads in a sprightly dance.

In the nearby lake, the waves are dancing with the wind and sparkling because of the sun-rays falling on them. But the beauty of the golden daffodils is so attractive and charming that it easily surpasses the beauty of the dancing and sparkling waves. The poet feels happy and blessed in such an enchanting and cheerful company. The poet is completely absorbed in

the beauty of the daffodils and for the moment he has lost touch with his surroundings. He considers himself fortunate and very happy that he has been the witness to such a wonderful sight of the daffodils.

Later, whenever the poet is thinking of not being busy, lying on his couch the daffodils flash upon his imagination. The memory of the daffodils not only fills his heart with pleasure but also has a refreshing effect on him and he feels like dancing along with the daffodils.

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## **1.9 Critical Appreciation**

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Wordsworth is mainly a nature poet and for him, there is nothing which is superior to and better than Nature. He breathes through with nature and finds solace and spiritual peace in it. In his opinion, nature has the solution for all the problems of mankind. It is through nature that he seeks salvation. The theme of this poem i.e. “Daffodils” is based on the healing and refreshing power of nature. How easy it is for nature to lift the spirit and the morale of the man is also depicted in this poem. The poem is rich in imagery and the description of the daffodils is delightful. The poet starts the poem with the simile and compares himself with the cloud wandering lonely, free from duty and responsibility, here and there like the cloud. But as soon as he sees the beautiful golden daffodils growing along the margin of a bay beneath the trees, dancing and fluttering with the light breeze, he finds himself captivated by their magical beauty. The poet is so impressed by their beauty that the near-by lake whose waves are also dancing and sparkling, thus looking enchanting, also captivate his attention. The poet begins to admire the mesmeric beauty of the daffodils and is unable to think of anything else. Infact, at that time he could not think of the great importance of the scene for him but later while lying on his couch he realizes the very great importance the scene had on him.

The last stanza of the poem is the most important part of the poem and is the essence of the poem. In this stanza, the poet speaks about the healing and refreshing effect of nature and also praises solitude. According to him, when one is in the state of solitude, one becomes retrospective and meditates on all the good and pleasurable moments which one had or which had happened to him-in his life. These memories have a cheerful and lively effect on him. He greatly feels happy not only with himself but also with all that happened to him. The poet says that whenever he lies on his couch having nothing to do or in pensive mood, enjoying the solitude, the images of the daffodils flash upon his imagination. When this happens, the poet feels calm, refreshed, motivated and good about himself. This is how nature influences him. The memories of the daffodils fills his heart with pleasure and joy and he feels like dancing along with the daffodils. This shows the healing and refreshing effect of nature on the poet.

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## **1.10 Self Assessment Questions**

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1. What age is known as the “Age of Sensibility?”

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2. Which period is known as the Romantic Period ?
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3. Who are the main poets of the Romantic Period ?
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4. What was the purpose of the romantic poetry ?
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5. What are the main characteristics of the Romantic Period ?
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6. Who wrote the *Lyrical Ballads* and when was it published ?
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7. When was this poem written ?
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8. When was this poem first published ?
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9. What is the theme of this poem ?

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10. Where were the daffodils growing ?

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11. What are the objects the poet compares with the daffodils?

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12. What is the effect of daffodils on the poet ?

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13. What is the bliss of solitude according to the poet ?

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14. Why does the poet stop on seeing the daffodils ?

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### 1.11 Answers to SAQs

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1. The later half of the eighteenth century (1760-1796) is known as the Age of Sensibility. Dr.



Johnson called it as such.

2. The period between 1798 and 1832 is known as the Romantic Period.
3. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Keats and Byron are the major poets of the Romantic Period.
4. The main purpose of romantic poetry was to express the poet's personal feelings and emotions.
5. The main characteristics of the Romantic Period are :
  1. Love for humanity
  2. Love and regard for Nature
  3. Expression of emotions and imagination
  4. Love for the far off
  5. Revolt against the harsh complete Dryden hope.
6. Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge together wrote the *Lyrical Ballads*. It was published in 1798.
7. This poem was written in 1804.
8. This poem was first published in 1807
9. The healing and refreshing effect of Nature is the theme of this poem.
10. The Daffodils were growing beside the lake under the trees.
11. The poet compares the daffodils with the dancing waves and shining and twinkling stars.
12. The daffodils fill the poet's heart with pleasure and he feels happy with them.
13. When the person is in solitude and there is nobody around him. He is all alone. He has the opportunity to think of nature. In the poem the poet says that when he is either busy thinking or not thinking about anything he is reminded of the daffodils. He says that loneliness becomes lovely if he thinks about daffodils in his loneliness. When he remembers the daffodils he starts feeling happy, content and perfectly at peace with himself. This happens because of solitude.
14. The poet stops on seeing the daffodils because never before in his life had he seen such beautiful golden daffodils and that too in such a very large number. He is completely attracted towards them.

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### 1.12 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you were able to understand;

- Wordsworth love for nature,
- Nature's healing and soothing effect on man.

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### 1.13 Review Questions

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1. Elucidate the magical effect nature had on William Wordsworth.
2. Wordsworth was truly a romantic poet. Explain with suitable example.

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### 1.14 Bibliography

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1. Francis Austin, The Language of Wordsworth and Coleridge (1989)
2. Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (1940)
3. Jonathan Wordsworth, Michael C. Jaya, Robert Woof, William Wordsworth and the Age of English Romanticism, (New Brunswick and London, 1987)
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## UNIT – 2

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### WORDSWORTH :

#### (1) THE SOLITARY REAPER

#### (2) THE WORLD IS TOO MUCH WITH US

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##### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction to the Poems
- 2.2 The Poem: *The Solitary Reaper*
  - 2.2.1 Glossary
  - 2.2.2 Stanza-wise Summary
  - 2.2.3 Summary
  - 2.2.4 Critical Appreciation
  - 2.2.5 Self Assessment Questions
  - 2.2.6 Answers to SAQs
- 2.3 The Poem: *The World is Too Much With Us*
  - 2.3.1 Glossary
  - 2.3.2 Stanza-wise Summary
  - 2.3.3 Summary
  - 2.3.4 Critical Appreciation
  - 2.3.5 Self Assessment Questions
  - 2.3.6 Answers to SAQs
- 2.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.5 Review Questions
- 2.6 Bibliography

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### 2.0 Objectives

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After going through this unit you will be able to -

- \* understand the poems and
- \* appreciate and interpret the poems.

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## 2.1 Introduction

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In this unit you are going to study the poem “The Solitary Reaper” and ‘The World is too much with us’ written by Wordsworth.

‘The Solitary Reaper’ poem was written between 1803 and 1805 and first published in 1807. In 1815-1820 it was included among the “Poems of Imagination.” ‘The World is too much with us’ was also published in 1807.

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## 2.2 The Poem : *The Solitary Reaper*

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*Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland Lass !  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass !  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain;  
O listen ! for the vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.*

*No Nightingale did ever chaunt  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands;  
A voice so thrilling ne’er was heard  
In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides.*

*Will no one tell me what she sings ? –  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow*

*For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
 And battles long:  
 Or is it some more humble lay,  
 Familiar matter of to-day ?  
 Some natural sorrow, loss or pain,  
 That has been, and may be again ?  
 Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
 As if her song could have no ending.  
 I saw her singing at her work,  
 And o'er the sickle bending; –  
 And, as I mounted up the hill  
 The music in my heart I bore,  
 Long after it was heard no more.*

### **2.2.1 Glossary**

1. Behold (Verb) : To look at or see somebody/ something.
2. Solitary (Adjective) : Alone, with no other person or thing around.
3. Highland (Adjective) : Connected with an area of land that has hills or mountains.
4. Lass (Noun) : A girl, a sweet heart
5. Reap (Verb) : To cut and collect a crop.
6. Bind (Verb) : To tie somebody / something with a rope or string
7. Melancholy (Adjective) : Very sad or making you feel sadness.
8. Strain (Noun) : The sound of music being played or sung.
9. Vale (Noun) : Valley.
10. Profound (Adjective) : Very deep
11. Note (Noun) : A single sound of a particular length made by the voice or a musical instrument.
12. Weary (Adjective) : Very tired
13. Band (Noun) : A group of people

14. Haunt (Noun) : A place that somebody visits often or where they spend a lot of time.
15. Hebrides : A cluster of islands to the north-west of Scotland, known as the Northern limits of the world.
16. Plaintive (Adjective) : Sounding sad, especially in a weak complaining way.
17. Number (Noun) : A song.
18. Maiden (Noun) : A young girl or woman who is not married.
19. Sickle (Noun) : A tool with a curved blade and a short handle saythe
20. Mount (Verb) : To go up something.

### 2.2.2 Stanza-wise Summary

1. Behold her. .... with the sound.

The poet sees a Highland girl in the field. This girl is reaping the crop and singing to herself. The poet likes this scene. He says to the passers-by either to stop there quietly or to pass from there without making the least noise. The girl is cutting and binding the crop alone and also singing a song. This song is of sad nature. But the poet likes it very much and wants everybody to listen to it. The song is also echoing in the valley.

2. No Nightingale ..... farthest Hebrides.

The poet thinks that even the nightingale famous for its singing to the tired travellers in the Arabian desert when they take rest at an Oasis, cannot sing better than this girl. The singing of the girl is also better and more thrilling than the Cuckoo-bird which sings in the spring season and then breaks the silence of the seas among the faraway Hebrides.

3. Will no one tell ..... may be again ?

The poet is unable to understand the language in which the girl is singing. He does not know the theme of the song and wants somebody to tell him the theme. He thinks that the song is about old, unhappy incidents or of some battles in the past. The song can also be about some familiar matter related to the life of the girl. The song may also be about some natural sorrow, pain or loss which has happened to her.

4. Whate'er the theme ..... heard no more.

The poet does not think too much about the theme of the song. He is enjoying the song heartily. The poet thinks that there is no end to the girl's singing as if she will never stop singing. He watches her singing and using the sickle to do her work at the same time in the field. The poet says that he listened to her song without making any kind of movement and noise. When the poet went up the hill he says that, he still remembered the music of the song which that highland girl sang. The poet also says that he will always

remember her singing.

### **2.2.3 Summary**

The poet is wandering aimlessly on his way when suddenly sees a highland girl alone in the field. The girl is reaping the crop and singing a song to herself. The poet likes her singing very much. He tells the people passing from there not to disturb her in her singing. He wants the people to stop where they are or to pass from there very quietly. There is nobody with the girl and she is cutting and binding the grain all alone. The poet observes that the song which she is singing is full of sorrow and melancholy. The girl is standing in the valley and her song is resounding through the deep valley.

The poet feels that the girl's song is very sweet. He finds her song sweeter than the song of the nightingale. The poet says that the nightingale's song gives relief and happiness to the travellers in the Arabian deserts when they stayed on Oasis. The poet feels the girl's song is thrilling also. He says that he has never listened to a more thrilling song than this. He even finds the girl's song more thrilling than the song of the cuckoo bird. The cuckoo bird sings her songs in spring time over the silent seas of the faraway Hebrides.

The problem with the poet is that he is unable to understand the girl's song. He does not know the language in which she is singing. He wants somebody to tell him the meaning of the song. But there is nobody around to tell him. Therefore, the poet himself began to guess the meaning or theme of the song. According to him, the song may be about some old, unhappy incidents or of battles of the past. It may also be about a matter familiar to the girl. It can also be about some natural sorrow, loss or pain which has happened to her in the past.

The poet is unable to know the theme of the girl's song. But he is not worried about it. He is still enjoying the song. It seems to the poet that the girl will not stop singing. Her song will never end. She will continue to sing forever. The poet watches the girl singing and doing her work. He stands there without making any kind of movement. He also listens to her song without making any kind of noise. He does not want to disturb the girl. When the poet went up the hill, he could not hear the girl's song. But the poet says that he can still hear the sweetness and melody of the song in his memory. He is sure that he will never forget it.

### **2.2.4 Critical appreciation**

In this poem Wordsworth has beautifully described the life in a countryside, a girl cutting the crop while singing. He has used the language of the common man to describe the country life. The poet sees a highland girl working alone in the field, reaping the crop and singing a melancholy song to herself. The poet immediately feels attracted towards this beautiful song. Although he is unable to understand the language of the song but even then he is enjoying the music of the song. The poet loves the girl's singing so much that he compares it with that of a nightingale and a cuckoo bird. Both these birds are well known for their singing

abilities but the poet thinks that the girl was singing sweeter and better than these two birds. He does not want to disturb the girl in her singing. He says to the passers - by either to stop there or to pass away from there without making any kind of disturbance. He himself is listening to the song silently while standing still. As the poet is not sure of the theme of the song, he imagines that the song could be about some old, unhappy incidents or about the battles of the past. The song could also be about some familiar matter related to the girl's life, or it could also be related to some natural sorrow, loss or pain which must have happened to the girl before. This shows the love of past which is a characteristics feature of the romantic poetry. For the poet to enjoy the music of the song is more important than knowing the theme of the song. He is not concerned about the theme. It seems to him that there is no end of the girl's singing and she will continue to sing forever. At the end of the poem, the poet says that he knows he will not get a chance to listen to this song again. But even then he will remember her singing. It is impossible for him to forget that singing. He will always remember it.

### **2.2.5 Self Assessment Questions**

1. When was this poem first published ?  
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2. When was this poem written ?  
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3. What is the theme of this poem ?  
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4. What are the other things with which the poet compares the solitary girl's singing and why does he do so?  
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5. According to the poet what can be the theme of the girls singing ?



- .....
- .....
- .....
6. The poet says about the possible themes of the girl's song. Do these themes suggest the romantic nature of the girl's song.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- Q.7** Why does the poet think that the girl's song will have no ending?

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### 2.2.6 Answers to SAQs

1. This poem was first published in 1807.
2. This poem was written between 1803-1805
3. The theme of this poem is solitude and the bond between man and nature.
4. The singing of the girl is compared with a nightingale and a cuckoo bird which are well known for their extraordinary singing. He does so to suggest that the girl's singing was sweeter than that of the two birds.
5. According to the poet the song could be about some old, unhappy incidents or about some battles of the past. It could also be related to some familiar matter common to the girl's life. The song could also be about some natural sorrow, loss or pain which could have happened to the girl in the past.
6. Yes these themes suggest the romantic nature of the girl's song. These themes show the love of past which is a characteristic feature of the romantic poetry.
7. The poet thinks that the girl's song will have no ending because he says that he will never be able to forget this song. This song will always remain in his mind and heart. Thus he will enjoy it every time.

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## 2.3 The Poem: *The World is Too Much With Us*

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*The world is too much with us; late and soon,*

*Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;  
 Little we see in Nature that is ours;  
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !  
 This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;  
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,  
 And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;  
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;  
 It moves us not. – Great God ! I'd rather be  
 A Pagan suckled in a Creed out worn;  
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;  
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;  
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

### **2.3.1 Glossary**

1. Sordid (Adjective) : Immoral, Unpleasant.
2. Boon (Noun) : Something that is very helpful and make life blissful.
3. Bare (Verb) : To remove or uncover the cloths from something
4. Bosom (Noun) : Breast
5. Howling (Adjective) : Very violent, with strong winds.
6. Gather (Verb) : To bring things together
7. Out of tune (Idiom) : To have / not have the same interests, feelings etc.
8. Pagan (Noun) : A person whose religious beliefs are contrary to those of Christianity; an idol worshipper.
9. Creed (noun) : A set of principles or religious beliefs.
10. Outworn (Adjective) : Old fashioned and no longer useful.
11. Lea (Noun) : An open area of land covered in grass.
12. Glimpse (Noun) : A look of somebody / something for a very short time.
13. Proteus (Noun) : Sea god in Greek mythology.

14. Triton (Noun) : Son of Poseidon and Amphitrite in Greek mythology.
15. Wreathe (Adjective) : Having curves in it

### **2.3.2 Stanza-wise summary**

1. The world is too much ..... It moves us not.

In these lines the poet says that man is wasting his powers in earning and spending of money. He does not love and respect nature anymore. Now a days the only purpose of his life is to earn and spend money, as much as he can. Man has lost his ability to enjoy the beauty of nature. The beautiful scenes like moonlight falling on the sea and the blowing of the wind does not attract him. He has completely forgotten the pleasure and joy which he had when he used to respect and love nature.

2. Great God ..... his wreathed horn.

The poet is against this attitude of man. He is very unhappy. He prays to God and says to him that he would prefer to become Greek Pagan instead of remaining a Christian after looking at the money-minded attitude of the people of the earth. As a Pagan he would respect and love nature. He would enjoy the beauty of nature. He would watch the grass lands, Proteus, the sea god in Greek mythology rising from the sea and Triton, the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite blowing his horn to calm down the angry waves of sea. These scenes would immediately fill his heart with joy.

### **2.3.3 Summary**

The poet says that the people of this world have become money minded. Their only aim of life is to earn money and then to spend it. They care only to earn lots of money and then to spend it in whatever way they like. In this way they are wasting away there spiritual powers. They are getting away from nature and are now a days unable to enjoy the beauty of nature. According to the poet nature should be very important for their lives. The people have become too money-minded and they do not find beauty and peace in nature. They have given there hearts to the god of wealth which is not good. According to the poet, people have lost their capacity to enjoy the beauty of nature. The beautiful scene of moonlight falling on the surface of the sea does not attract their attention to it. The wind which blows very strongly in the day making lot of noise but when the night comes it becomes calm and blows lightly. But they do not find these beautiful scenes pleasurable. For us there is nothing special in these scenes. They have no interest left in those natural scenes. The beauty of nature does not fill their heart with pleasure and joy anymore.

The poet is not at all happy with this attitude of people towards nature. He does not like it. He is very sad. He wants people to respect and love nature. He prays to God that he would like to become a Greek Pagan. As a Pagan he would worship nature. He will live in

nature and will be happier than what he now is. He will also watch the Proteus, the sea god in Greek mythology, rising from the sea. He will also hear the Triton, the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite, blowing his horn to calm down the angry sea waves. In this respect the Greek paganism was better than Christianity that has made people money-minded.

### **2.3.4 Critical Appreciation**

The title of the sonnet “The Word is Too Much With Us” gives an idea about the theme of the sonnet. In this sonnet, Wordsworth tells us about man’s love for money which is hardly useful for his life. The poet says that now a days man gives all importance to money only. All the other things for him are less important. Even nature which used to be very beautiful for him does not attract him. But in the past it was not like this. In the past man used to enjoy the beauty of nature. He used to enjoy very much the scene of moonlight falling on the surface of the sea. But in the present time he does not enjoy this also. He also used to love the thrilling sound of the wind in the day time and the light wind blowing at night. But today he does not feel attracted towards these scenes. These beautiful scenes of nature have no importance left for man. Now he does not like the beauty of nature. The poet is not happy with this change in man. According to the poet, man has started worshipping money instead of nature. The poet does not like it. The poet wants man to love nature more. The poet also wants man to respect nature. According to the poet, if man loves nature he will become happier and will be closer to God. His life will also become better. He will feel happier more, peaceful and more satisfied. But now a days man has forgotten his love for nature. He does not remember the joy he used to have when he used to love and enjoy nature. But the poet still wants to love and enjoy nature. So he prays to God that he would prefer to be Pagan to his remaining a Christian. A Pagan is a person whose religion is not Christian. The poet also says that if he becomes a Pagan, he will enjoy freely the beauty of nature. This will make him feel happy. The poet also tells about his love for nature gods in Greek mythology. The poet says he will then be able to see Proteus who in Greek mythology is a sea god. He will watch him rising from the sea. The poet will also watch Triton who is the son of Poseidon and Amphitrite in Greek mythology. Triton had the ability to calm down the angry waves of the sea by blowing his horn. In this way, the poet will be able to live in nature and will be happier than what he is today in the company of the money minded people..

### **2.3.5 Self Assessment Questions**

Q.1. When was the poem first published ?

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Q.2 What is the theme of this poem ?

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Q.3. According to the poet, why can man not enjoy the beauty of nature anymore?

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Q.4 What is now the aim of man's life?

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Q.5 Why does the poet want to be a Pagan ?

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.....  
Q.6 What is that wealth that nature can give to man ?

### **2.3.6 Answers to SAQs**

1. This poem was first published in 1807.
2. The theme of this poem is man's love for money against his respect and love for nature.
3. According to the poet, man cannot enjoy the beauty of nature anymore because he gives more importance to money than anything else.
4. To earn and spend money as much as possible has become the aim of man's life.
5. The poet wants to be a pagan because then he can live in nature and enjoy its beauty freely.
6. Nature makes man content, peaceful. Through nature man learns to be happy.

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## 2.4 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you were able to understand Wordsworth's creative process. His belief 'Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' and how nature has always influenced and inspired him.

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## 2.5 Review Questions

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1. Write a critical note on 'The Solitary Reaper.'
2. Critically appreciate Wordsworth's love for nature in 'The World is too much with us.'

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## 2.6 Bibliography

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## UNIT - 3

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### COLERIDGE : *FROST AT MIDNIGHT*

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#### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 About the Poet
- 3.3 The Poem: *Frost at Midnight*
- 3.4 Paraphrase of the Poem.
- 3.5 Critical Appreciation
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 3.7 Answers to SAQs
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Review Questions
- 3.9 Bibliography

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#### 3.0 Objectives

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In this unit you will study:-

- About one of the famous romantic poets Coleridge
- The main characteristics of a romantic poem
- The famous poem *Frost At Midnight* and ,
- How to read a poem and appreciate it.

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#### 3.1 Introduction

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The poem was written in the year 1798 at Stowey and printed with other poem *Fear in Solitude* and *France: An Ode* .The poem is written in a contemplative mood. The writer's thoughts wander back to his own past or are projected forward 'to the future of his little son, Hartley Coleridge. The stillness of the night is maintained throughout the poem and nowhere does any violence of thought disturb the quiet of the night or the harmony of the poet's mind. The poem reflects Wordsworthian influence in the sense that it reveals his belief in Pantheism.

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## 3.2 About the Poet

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Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) was born in Ottery St Mary, Devonshire, as the youngest son of the Vicar of Ottery St Mary. After his father's death, Coleridge was sent away to Christ's Hospital School in London. He also studied at Jesus College. In Cambridge Coleridge met the radical, future poet laureate Robert Southey. He moved with Southey to Bristol to establish a community, but the plan failed. In 1795 he married the sister of Southey's fiancée Sara Fricker, whom he did not really love.

Coleridge's collection *Poems On Various Subjects* was published in 1796, and in 1797 appeared *Poems*. In the same year he began the publication of a short-lived liberal political periodical *The Watchman*. He started a close friendship with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, one of the most fruitful creative relationships in English literature. The outcome of this friendship was *Lyrical Ballads*, which began Romanticism in English Poetry. It opened with Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and ended with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". These poems set a new style by using everyday language and fresh ways of looking at Nature.

Disenchanted with political developments in France, Coleridge visited Germany in 1798-99 with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, and became interested in the works of Immanuel Kant. He studied philosophy at Göttingen University and mastered the German language. At the end of 1799 Coleridge fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's future wife, to whom he devoted his work "Dejection: An Ode" (1802). During these years Coleridge also began to compile his Notebooks, recording the daily meditations of his life. In 1809-10 he wrote and edited with Sara Hutchinson the literary and political magazine *The Friend*. From 1808 to 1818 he gave several lectures, chiefly in London, and was considered the greatest of Shakespearean critics. In 1810 Coleridge's friendship with Wordsworth came to a crisis, and the two poets never fully returned to the relationship they had earlier.

Suffering from neuralgic and rheumatic pains, Coleridge had become addicted to taking opium. During the following years he lived in London, on the verge of committing suicide. He found a permanent shelter in High Gate in the household of Dr. James Gillman, and enjoyed an almost legendary reputation among the younger Romantics. During this time he rarely left the house.

In 1816 the unfinished poems "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" were published, and next year appeared "Sibylline Leaves". According to the poet, "Kubla Khan" was inspired by a dream vision. His most important production during this period was the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). After 1817 Coleridge devoted himself to theological and politico-sociological works. Coleridge was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1824. He died Highgate, near London on July 25, 1834.



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### 3.3 The Poem : *Froast at Midnight*

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*The Frost performs its secret ministry,  
Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry  
Came loud, -and hark, again! loud as before.  
The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,  
Have left me to that solitude, which suits  
Abstruser musings: save that at my side  
My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.  
'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs  
And vexes meditation with its strange  
And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,  
With all the numberless goings-on of life,  
Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame  
Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;  
Only that film, which fluttered on the grate,  
Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.  
Methinks its motion in this hush of nature  
Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,  
Making it a companionable form,  
Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit  
By its own moods interprets, every where  
Echo or mirror seeking of itself,  
And makes a toy of Thought.*

*But O! how oft,  
How oft, at school, with most believing mind,  
Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,  
To watch that fluttering stranger! and as oft*

*With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt  
Of my sweet birthplace, and the old church-tower,  
Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang  
From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,  
So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me  
With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear  
Most like articulate sounds of things to come!  
So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,  
Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!  
And so I brooded all the following morn,  
Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye  
Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:  
Save if the door half opened, and I snatched  
A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,  
For still I hoped to see the stranger's face,  
Townsmen, or aunt, or sister more beloved,  
My playmate when we both were clothed alike!*

*Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,  
Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,  
Fill up the interspersed vacancies  
And momentary pauses of the thought!  
My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart  
With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,  
And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,  
And in far other scenes! For I was reared  
In the great city, pent mid cloisters dim,  
And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.*

*But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze  
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags  
Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds,  
Which image in their bulk both lakes and shores  
And mountain crags: so shalt thou see and hear  
The lovely shapes and sounds intelligible  
Of that eternal language, which thy God  
Utters, who from eternity doth teach  
Himself in all, and all things in himself.  
Great universal Teacher! he shall mould  
Thy spirit, and by giving make it ask.*

*Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,  
Whether the summer clothe the general earth  
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing  
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch  
Of mossy apple-tree, while the night thatch  
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall  
Heard only in the trances of the blast,  
Or if the secret ministry of frost  
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,  
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.*

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### **3.4 Explanation and Critical Notes**

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**Ministry-** function, to do or accomplish one's work

**Presageful-** Expectant or anticipation.

**Stranger-**The word is used for that film. There was a superstition that whoever saw this film at night would receive a visit from a friend or a relative in the course of the next day.

**Whose bells, the poor man's only music .....all the hot Fair day—**The bells

of the church used to ring throughout the day when there was a fair in the village. The sound of the bells was the only music which the poor villagers could enjoy.

**Haunted**-echoed in his ears.

**Articulate**-distinct; full of meaning.

**Vexes**- troubles, disturbs.

**Populous**- densely populated

**Clothe**-cover

**Tufts**- bunches; clusters of snowflakes

**In a great city**-London

**Cloister dim**-The dim and dark walks of school or college.

**Nought**- nothing; clothe-cover. Tufts-bunches; clusters of snowflakes

**Sun thaw**-snow melting in the sun; eves- drop-drop of rain water;

**Trance**- intervals. Blasts- storm. Icicles- frozen drops of water

Falling on mine ears most like articulate sounds of things to come—The music of the bells was not without meaning. As it fell in the poet's ears, it seemed to give him an intimation of future events. In other words, the music of church bells used to stir in him a vague sense of coming events.

**But ! how oft ..... most like articulate sounds of things to come!**  
(Lines 24-33)—When the poet was still a student at Christ's Hospital', he often used to look at the bars of the grate to catch sight-of that film. He had been given to understand that the sight of a fluttering film on the grate was an omen indicating the arrival of some friend or relative in the course of the following day. Therefore he used to be anxious to catch sight of the film because that would mean that some relative would come to see him at school on the following day. Whenever he gazed at the fire, he was reminded of his native place from where a relative could be expected to come. The thought of his native place brought to his mind the village church, which in its turn, reminded him of the church bells which used to ring all the day long on the occasion of a fair and the sounds of which were the only music which the poor villagers could afford to enjoy. The music of the church bells was, indeed, very sweet and thrilling to him in his childhood and it used to stir in him vague intimations of coming events.

**Christ's Hospital** was the name of a charity school in London. It was also known as the Bluecoat School because its pupils wore blue coats. This school was founded by Edward VI. In this school were educated Coleridge, Charles Lamb, and Leight Hunt.

(Lines 35-44)—**So gazed I, till the soothing things..... pro- longed my dreams !**—The poet used to keep gazing at the grate. He would, on these occasions,

think of sweet things connected with his native village. The pleasing memories of his village used to send him to sleep, and in his sleep he would see dreams of his native place. In other words, the memories of his native place continued to visit his mind during his sleep in the form of dreams.

**And so I brooded all the following morn .....swimming**

**Book**—throughout the next morning at school, he continued thinking of his native place and waited for the visitor and guests from there.

**Interspersed**- in between, intervals

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### 3.5 Complete Paraphrase

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**Lines 1-7.** The frost is performing its function invisibly. No wind is blowing to help the frost. The loud cry of the owlet is being heard at intervals. All the inmates of my cottage are asleep. I am quite awake except that my little child is sleeping peacefully in a cradle by my side. This solitude is favourable to philosophical thinking.

**Lines 8-15.** There is perfect silence all around. Indeed, this silence is so complete as to disturb one's thinking. 'Sea, hill, wood, this village with its all inhabitants and its numerous activities and occupations—these are all silent like dreams. The thin blue flame of the fire, which has burnt itself low, is quite motionless. The only active thing here is that film which has been quivering on the grate and which is still quivering there.

**Lines 16-23.** The movement of that film, in the midst of the complete silence all around, connects with me because I, too, am awake. There is a vague bond between me and the film because both of us are active or awake. 'Thus the film is a sort of companion for me. In this mood of idle thinking I interpret the irregular movements or fluttering of the film according to my own moods or whims. Thus my mind seeks everywhere a reflection of itself and. plays with ideas as one plays with a toy.

**Lines 24-35.** When I was a student I, often used to look at the bars of the grate because I believed that if I could see the fluttering film there, it would indicate the arrival of some friend or relative the next morning. Every time at the thought or sight of that film I used to see in my imagination my sweet native-place with its old church-tower whose bells rang from morning to evening on the hot fair-day. These church bells provided to the poor villagers the only music that they could ever hear. As for me, the sweet music of the church bells aroused a passionate joy in me and seemed to be a prophecy of future events. Thus, as a boy at school, used to look fixedly at the film and imagine sweet things till I fell asleep, and in my sleep I saw equally sweet dreams.

**Lines 36-43.** The next morning, on waking up, my mind would still be occupied with thoughts of home and some relative who might come to see me. Being afraid of the stern teacher, I used to keep looking at the book as I sat in the class-room, pretending to read; but

my 'mind used to be elsewhere. The words in the book used to be only dimly visible to me through my tears. Every time somebody half opened the door of the class-room, I looked hastily, and with a hopeful heart, for some visitor—a townsman, an aunt or a beloved sister, a play-mate of my younger days, when both she and I were clothed in similar garments. '

**Lines 44-53.** My dear child, sleeping in the cradle by my side! the sound of your gentle breathing is clearly audible to me in this deep silence, and it fills up the short intervals between the various thoughts that are coming into my mind. You are a lovely little child and as I look at you, my heart is filled with deep love and joy. Your education and your bringing will be of a different kind from mine. I was brought up in the great city of London in the midst of congested houses and buildings where I could see nothing beautiful except the sky and stars.

**Lines 54-64.** But you, my little son, will wander freely like the wind along lakes and sandy sea-shores, under the immemorial rocks and mountains, and below the clouds which in their immensity represent or symbolize the vast lakes, oceans and mountains. In this way you will see the beautiful objects of Nature and hear the meaningful sounds of the everlasting language of God who from the beginning of the universe has always revealed himself in all objects of Nature. Nature is the supreme teacher of mankind and will give the right shape to your character and personality, and you will be so influenced by Nature as to seek her company still more. -

**Lines 65-74.** (As a result of your constant contact with Nature) you will love all seasons. You will love the summer when the earth is all covered with green verdure. And you will love the winter when the red-breast sits and sings among the snow-flakes on the leafless branches of an apple-tree all overgrown with moss, while vapours are seen rising from the roof of a nearby cottage when the snow on it is melting in the heat of the sun; You all also love the time when rain-drops fall from the eaves and their sound is heard only in the silent intervals and pauses of the storm, and when, as a result of frost invisibly forming itself, the water-drops become frozen and are seen shining silently in the light of the silent moon.

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### 3.6 Critical Summary

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The poem is a picture of an evening spent by the poet by his fireside on a frosty night. The first stanza builds up the atmosphere of the night when complete silence prevails, broken only by the occasional cries of the owl. The frost is settling invisibly and there is no breeze. The poet sits alone by the side of his little son sleeping peacefully in a cradle. As he was sitting beside the fire, at the low-burnt fire, he sees a fluttering film on the 'grill'. He feels that there is a bond of sympathy between him and that film. He interprets the movements and fluttering of the film according to his own changing thoughts and fancies. The poet is here indirectly expressing the belief that outward objects merely reflect or mirror our own thoughts and moods.

The sight of the fluttering film reminds the poet of his school-days and he becomes reminiscent. He recalls that whenever at school he saw that film on the grate, he superstitiously believed that a friend or a relative would come to see him from his native place. The thought of his native village with the bells ringing all the hot fair-day was sweet to him. He also remembers that, when he sat in the class-room pretending to study his book, he was all the time expecting some dear relative or friend to arrive. There is an element of autobiographical sense which gives us a glimpse into the school-life of Coleridge at Christ's Hospital where he had been a student.

In the next passage the poet addresses his son, Hartley Coleridge. He makes a plan about his baby's future. While he was himself brought up in the suffocating atmosphere of London, he would put this baby into close contact with Nature. The baby will wander like a breeze in natural surroundings and will see the lovely objects, as well as hear the sweet sounds, of Nature. The boy will grow up under the benevolent and educative influence of Nature. He will learn a lot in the company of Nature. He believes that God reveals himself through Nature and thus God will mould the character of the baby through the medium of Nature. These lines contain the belief that is called pantheism, namely the belief that the Divine Spirit pervades all objects of Nature and that God reveals himself through Nature. These lines were written under the influence of Wordsworth.

The poem ends with striking pictures of summer and winter. The child will grow to love all seasons—whether summer covers the whole earth with green grass and green plants, or the redbreast sits on an apple-tree singing its wintry song in the midst of snow-flakes, or the drops of water falling from the roofs of cottages freeze into icicles shining quietly in the light of the quiet moon.

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### 3.7 Humphry House on *Frost at Midnight*

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The Unity and Design of the poem *Frost at Midnight* is one of the finest short poems in the language. I think it is much loved; it is certainly much praised: but even so I doubt whether it is adequately appreciated as the perfectly achieved work of art which it is. It has suffered even more than other poems from piecemeal handling; it is so exceedingly quotable for extraneous reasons. Either for biographical purposes- to illustrate Coleridge's boyhood at Christ's Hospital, where he "saw nought lovely but the sky and stars" ; or to illustrate his life in the little cottage on the street Nether Stowey, where it was written ; or to illustrate Hartley's life because of the prophecies about him contained in it : or else for expository purposes—to show the development of Coleridge's attitude to Nature or his skill in describing its details—the poem has been lovingly dissected, and for many readers lost.

What makes *Frost at Midnight* an achieved artistic whole is the design and the organization in the movement of the thought.

The centre is the Ego, the "I"—the seeing, remembering, projecting mind - man

sitting in a cottage-room at night. From the room the mind moves out, by stages, first to the physical context of weather and sound, then to the village, then to the world—"all the numberless goings-on of life". Next with a swift contracting transition, unexplained, in the middle of a line (1.13) it comes again to the fire. The movement of the film on the grate suggests the very kind of movement which the mind itself is here making—"the idling spirit by its own moods interprets".

But the film, the "fluttering stranger" sets the mind off again outside, now backwards in time, through memory. And in the schoolboy reminiscence the same process happens again that has already happened in the cottage. From Christ's Hospital the boy's mind goes back and outwards to Ottery; then forwards and outwards to.: the possible visitor who might come to take him out from school. Just as the poem as a whole is anchored to the original cottage room with the "low burnt" fire—a phrase which comes centrally in the first paragraph—so the Christ's Hospital paragraph is anchored in the central phrase which produces the image of the schoolboy

Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye

Fixed mock study on my swimming book.

From the memory of school the mind next comes back to the cottage room, by comparison between the two childhoods—the London schoolboy (Coleridge) seeing "nought lovely but the sky and stars" and Hartley (the poet's son) to see everything that Nature has to give.

This leads into the short passage of six lines on the Theistic Metaphysics (Pantheism) of Nature. More is not necessary for this includes and justifies the whole poem. God is

Himself in all, and all things in himself.

The quiet transition to the last passage is one of the most beautifully effective things in the whole poem. It returns to the opening context of seasons, and sounds through the imagining of Hartley's future, and comes round fully at the end to the "secret mimicry of frost" and the quietness of the winter night with which it began.

Not only do the movements of the mind give the poem its design and unity, but the poem as a whole leaves us with a quite extraordinary sense of mind's very being in suspense, above time and space; the mind with all its power of affection and memory, and its power of reading "Nature as the language of God."

The predominant emotion is the deep, tender affection for the child. . . .

Not only is the ending one of the finest pieces of short descriptive writing in the language, intricate yet at the same time sparsely clear, compressing so much of the moods of various weathers; but it is also perfectly rounds the movement of the mind which has been the poem's theme.



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### 3.8 Self Assessment Questions

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1. How did the poet Coleridge find the atmosphere of the poem *Frost at Midnight* in consonance to his mood?  
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2. What does the fluttering of the film on the grate remind the poet of?  
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3. Why does the poet want to up bring up his son in the company of nature? What is the name his son ?  
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4. Write a critical appreciation of the poem, “Frost at Midnight”.  
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5. Discuss *Frost at Midnight* as an autobiographical poem.  
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### 3.9 Answers to SAQs

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1. The contemplative mood of the poet throughout is in perfect harmony with the surroundings in which the poet is sitting. The complete silence of the atmosphere is in consonance to his contemplative mood. He interprets the movements and fluttering of

the film according to his own changing thoughts and fancies. The poet is here indirectly expressing the belief that outward objects merely reflect or mirror our own thoughts and moods.

2. The fluttering of the grate foretells the arrival of certain visitors.
3. The poet wants to bring up his son in the company of nature because of its educative and moral influence. He will learn a lot in the company of Nature. He believes that God reveals himself through Nature and thus God will mould the character of the baby through the medium of Nature. The boy will grow up under the benevolent and educative influence of Nature.
4. The poem Frost at Midnight was written in the year 1798 at Stowey and printed with other poem Fear in Solitude and France: An ode. The poem is written in a contemplative mood. The writer's thoughts wander back to his own past or are projected forward 'to the future of his little son, Hartley Coleridge. The stillness of the night is maintained throughout the poem and nowhere does any violence of thought disturb the quiet of the night or the harmony of the poet's mind.

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### 3.10 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have studied:

- about one of the pioneer poets of the Romantic Age;
- the main characteristics of a Romantic poem; and
- the critical appreciation of the prescribed poem.

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### 3.11 Review Questions

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1. Discuss Frost at Midnight as an autobiographical poem.
2. What qualities of Coleridge's poetry are to be found in Frost at Midnight?

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### 3.12 Bibliography

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## UNIT - 4

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### COLERIDGE: *DEJECTION: AN ODE*

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#### Structure

- 4.0. Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 About the Poet
- 4.3 The Poem: *Dejection: An Ode*
- 4.4 Paraphrase of the Poem.
- 4.5 Critical Summary
- 4.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 4.7 Answers to SAQs
- 4.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.9 Review Questions
- 4.10 Bibliography

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#### 4.0 Objectives

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In this Unit you will study:-

- about one of the famous romantic poets, Coleridge;
- the main characteristics of a romantic poem;
- the interpretation and appreciation of the poem; and
- various figures of speech used in the poem.

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#### 4.1 Introduction

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In the winter of 1801-02, the two causes of Coleridge's unhappiness, opium and domestic discord, worked havoc with him and brought him to despair. The wings of poesy were broken, as he realized. Meanwhile, Wordsworth was in high poetic activity, health forward-looking and happy. On April 4, 1802 when William and Dorothy were on a visit to Keswick, and could judge for themselves of Coleridge's misery, he composed, in part at least, the poem *Dejection*, which is a confession of his own failure, and one of the saddest of all human utterances. But it is a glorious thing, too ; its attitude is that of a stricken runner who sinks in the race but who lifts up his head and cheers the friend who strides onwards •and his generosity is

itself a triumph. On October 4, 1802, the poem was printed in the *Morning Post*. It is an ode in form only; in contents it is a conversation. It is not an address to Dejection, but to William Wordsworth. As printed in the newspaper, it purports to be directed to someone named Edmund in Coleridge's editions of his collected works this name is changed Lo Lady; but in the three extant early manuscripts the word is sometimes William and sometimes Wordsworth. In this sublime and heart-rending poem, Coleridge gives expression to an experience of double consciousness. His sense perceptions are vivid and in part agreeable; his inner state is faint, blurred, and unhappy. He sees, but cannot feel. The power of feeling has been paralyzed by chemically-induced excitement of his brain. The seeing power, less dependent upon bodily health, stands aloof, individual, critical and very mournful. By "seeing" he means perceiving and judging; by "feeling" he means that which impels action. He suffers, but the pain is dull, and he wishes it were keen, for so he should awake from lethargy and recover unity at least. But nothing from outside can restore him. The sources of soul's life are within. Even from the depth of his humiliation and self-loathing, he ventures to rebuke his friend for thinking it can be otherwise; William, with his belief in the divinity of Nature, his confidence that all knowledge comes from sensation, his semi-atheism, as Coleridge had called this philosophy

O William! we receive but what we give,

And in our life alone does Nature live.

In every other respect, Coleridge venerates him and humbles himself before him. Wordsworth, pure at heart, that is to say, still a child of Nature, and free, has not lost the birthright of joy, which is the life-breath of poetry. But oh! groans Coleridge, I have lost my gift of song, for each affliction:

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## 4.2 About the Poet

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**Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)**, English lyrical poet, critic, and philosopher, whose *Lyrical Ballads*, (1798) written with William - Wordsworth, started the English Romantic Movement.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born in Ottery St Mary, Devonshire, as the youngest son of the Vicar of Ottery St Mary. After his father's death Coleridge was sent away to Christ's Hospital School in London. He also studied at Jesus College. In Cambridge Coleridge met the radical, future poet laureate Robert Southey. He moved with Southey to Bristol to establish a community, but the plan failed. In 1795 he married the sister of Southey's fiancée Sara Fricker, whom he did not really love.

Coleridge's collection *Poems On Various Subjects* was published in 1796, and in 1797 appeared *Poems*. In the same year he began the publication of a short-lived liberal political periodical *The Watchman*. He started a close friendship with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, one of the most fruitful creative relationships in English literature. From it resulted *Lyrical Ballads*, which opened with Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and ended

with Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey". These poems set a new style by using everyday language and fresh ways of looking at nature.

The brothers Josiah and Thomas Wedgwood granted Coleridge an annuity of 150 pounds, thus enabling him to pursue his literary career. Disenchanted with political developments in France, Coleridge visited Germany in 1798-99 with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, and became interested in the works of Immanuel Kant. He studied philosophy at Göttingen University and mastered the German language. At the end of 1799 Coleridge fell in love with Sara Hutchinson, the sister of Wordsworth's future wife, to whom he devoted his work "Dejection: An Ode" (1802). During these years Coleridge also began to compile his *Notebooks*, recording the daily meditations of his life. In 1809-10 he wrote and edited with Sara Hutchinson the literary and political magazine *The Friend*. From 1808 to 1818 he gave several lectures, chiefly in London, and was considered the greatest of Shakespearean critics. In 1810 Coleridge's friendship with Wordsworth came to a crisis, and the two poets never fully returned to the relationship they had earlier.

Suffering from neuralgic and rheumatic pains, Coleridge had become addicted to taking opium. During the following years he lived in London, on the verge of committing suicide. He found a permanent shelter in Highgate in the household of Dr. James Gillman, and enjoyed an almost legendary reputation among the younger Romantics. During this time he rarely left the house.

In 1816 the unfinished poems "Christabel" and "Kubla Khan" were published, and next year appeared "Sibylline Leaves". According to the poet, "Kubla Khan" was inspired by a dream vision. His most important production during this period was the *Biographia Literaria* (1817). After 1817 Coleridge devoted himself to theological and politico-sociological works. Coleridge was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in 1824. He died in Highgate, near London on July 25, 1834.

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### 4.3 The Poem: *DEJECTION: AN ODE*

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#### I

*Well! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made  
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,  
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence  
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade  
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,  
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes  
Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,*

*Which better far were mute.  
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!  
And overspread with phantom light,  
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)  
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.  
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,  
And sent my soul abroad,  
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!*

## II

*A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,  
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,  
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,  
In word, or sigh, or tear -  
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,  
To other thoughts by yonder throstle wooed,  
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:  
And still I gaze -and with how blank an eye!  
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,  
That give away their motion to the stars;*

*Those stars, that glide behind them or between,  
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:  
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew  
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;  
I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!*

### III

*My genial spirits fail;  
And what can these avail  
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?  
It were a vain endeavour,  
Though I should gaze forever  
On that green light that lingers in the west:  
I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.*

### IV

*O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live:  
Ours is her wedding-garment, ours her shroud!  
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,  
Than that inanimate cold world allowed  
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,  
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth  
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud  
Enveloping the Earth -  
And from the soul itself must there be sent  
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,  
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!*

V

*O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me  
What this strong music in the soul may be!  
What, and wherein it doth exist,  
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,  
This beautiful and beauty-making power:  
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,  
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,  
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,  
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,  
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower,  
A new Earth and new Heaven,  
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud -  
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud -  
We in ourselves rejoice!  
And thence flows all that charms our ear or sight,  
All melodies the echoes of that voice,  
All colours a suffusion from that light.*

VI

*There was a time when, though my path was rough,  
This joy within me dallied with distress,  
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff  
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:  
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,  
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.  
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:  
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;  
But oh! each visitation*



*Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,  
My shaping spirit of Imagination.  
For not to think of what I needs must feel,  
But to be still and patient, all I can;  
And haply by abstruse research to steal  
From my own nature all the natural man -  
This was my sole resource, my only plan:  
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,  
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.*

*VII*

*Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,  
Reality's dark dream!  
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,  
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream  
Of agony by torture lengthened out  
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,  
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,  
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,  
Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,  
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,  
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,  
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,  
Mak'st Devils' yule, with worse than wintry song,  
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.  
Thou actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!  
Thou mighty poet, e'en to frenzy bold!  
What tell'st thou now about?  
'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,*

*With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds -  
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!  
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!  
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,  
With groans, and tremulous shudderings -all is over -  
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!  
A tale of less affright,  
And tempered with delight,  
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay -  
'Tis of a little child  
Upon a lonesome wild,  
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:  
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,  
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.*

#### *VIII*

*'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:  
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!  
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,  
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,  
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,  
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!  
With light heart may she rise,  
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,  
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;  
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,  
Their life the eddying of her living soul!  
O simple spirit, guided from above,  
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,*

*Thus mayst thou ever, evermore rejoice.*

*Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,  
My shaping spirit of Imagination.*

*His own race prematurely ended, he passes the torch to the survivor  
Dear William, friend devoutest of my choice,  
Thus may'st thou ever-more rejoice!*

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#### **4.4 Paraphrase of the Poem**

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##### **Stanza 1 (Lines 1-20)**

Well! If the poet, who wrote the grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, was correct in his forecast of weather, this night, which is so calm at this time, will not pass without being disturbed by winds which are more active than those which have broken up that cloud into slow-moving fragments or than the dull, melancholy breeze which is producing mournful sounds and which gently touches the strings of this lute on which the god of wind is playing and which should have been silent. For behold! the new moon is wintry bright. It is covered by a pale ghostly light which seems to be floating over it. But the moon has an edge of a silvery color all around it. I see the old moon in the lap of the new, and it foretells the coming of rain and a storm which will blow furiously. And, oh ! already is the wind developing into a storm and rain has started falling in a slanting direction. The rain drops are falling rapidly and are producing a loud sound. The sounds of the rain and the storm have often raised my spirits in the past, though at the same time they created a terrifying impression on me and sent my mind wandering out of doors.. It is possible that these sounds might produce in me their customary thrill. They might awaken this pain which benumbs me and might lend some movement to it.

##### **Stanza 2 (Lines 21-38)**

Mine is a grief which does not cause any piercing sensation. It is empty, thick, and dull. It is a suppressed, sleepy kind of grief that causes no excitement and that finds no natural outlet or relief in words, or sighs or tears. O Lady ! I have been gazing on the western sky and its peculiar hue of yellow green throughout this evening which was so peaceful and sweet, and I have been in a cheerless and spiritless mood. The song of the thrush singing over there has been inducing in me thoughts of other things. And I am still gazing (at the sky)', and I am doing so perfectly with vacant eyes. I am gazing at those thin clouds which appear in fragments and which, here and there, look like parallel lines. Although it is the clouds that are moving, it appears as stars behind them are in motion. The stars appear to be floating behind clouds and sometimes between the clouds. When stars are not screened by the clouds, they look bright;

when the clouds cover them, their light becomes dim, but they continue to be visible even then. The thin semi circular over there seems to be fixed, as if it has its roots in that portion of the blue sky where there are neither clouds nor stars. I see all these objects of Nature looking so beautiful and lovely.

### Stanza 3

The poet says that he has lost all happiness and joys of life and his spirits are now dropping. The beautiful objects of nature can not even make him forget the sorrows of his life. Even if the poet was to keep gazing for ever at the beautiful green light that seems to stay on in the western sky, it would be a futile effort because he would not draw any comfort from it. The heart itself is the real source of excitement and animation. When the inner source of excitement and animation has dried up, he cannot expect to experience these feelings by gazing at the beauty of the external objects.

### Stanza 4

O Lady! We get from Nature what we have transferred to it from our own hearts. Nature seems to be full of life, because our heart is full of joy and happiness. It is our own mood that is reflected in the nature. Nature cannot make us sad or happy. It is lifeless and cold. The human being themselves has to send whatever they want to receive from nature.

### Stanza 5

O pure hearted lady, you need not ask me what is the nature of this powerful and sweet voice in the soul is purest moments of life.. It is the essence of life and issues forth from the vitality of human being. Only the purest-hearted people are the recipients of this unique, gift of Nature, namely joy. This joy enables them to see a new earth and a new heaven which the vulgar and the proud persons cannot even dream. Of. Joy is .the source of that sweet Voice; joy is .the source of that bright light It is because of the joy in our own hearts that We feel happy. All the sweet sounds that delight the ear and all the beautiful sights which delight, the eyes flow from that joy in our hearts. All music is an echo of that sweet voice (the source of which is the joy in our hearts), and all beautiful paintings are a. reflection of that light (which flows from the joy in our own hearts).

### Stanza 6

There was a time when, though there were difficulties in my way, the joy in. my heart enabled me to make light of my suffering. In those days, even my misfortunes served merely as material, for my fancy to weave visions of delight. That was the time when hope grew around me like a climbing plant around a tree. The pleasure even of hopes which did not belong to me seemed in those days to be my own (just as the leaves, and fruits of a plant growing around a tree seem to belong to the tree itself). But now' the sorrows of life have crushed me and brought me from the upper regions down to the earth. Nor do I feel sorry that these misfortunes deprive me of my joy. But what grieves me is that each fit of depression renders my inborn 'gift

of the creative power of imagination inoperative. All that I can do now is to remain silent and patient 'under the stress of my incapacity to give poetic expression to my , deepest feelings. The gift of poetic imagination with which I was endowed by Nature is .being suppressed by my Philosophical and metaphysical tendencies. The gift of poetic 'imagination was my only treasure in life, the only quality on which my, life was based But 'my metaphysical tendencies' which' were only a part of my mental make-up have weakened and crushed my real nature which was poetically constituted. Now metaphysical thinking has taken almost complete possession of my soul and become 'a habit of the land.

Stanza 7 (Lines 94-125)

O poisonous thoughts which have enveloped my mind and 'which are like a fearful dream reality! I dismiss you. I turn my 'attention from you and listen to the wind which has been raging without my having taken any notice of it. The sound produced by the wind striking the strings of the lute is like the prolonged scream of a human being who is being tortured and who cries in. his agony. You wind, who are blowing furiously outside, it would be, much better if you, instead of playing upon the. lute, were to blow against bare rock, 'a' mountain lake, alighting-struck 'tree, 'a high .pine grove where no woodman has ever set foot, or a lonely house which' has long been believe&tc be haunted by evil spirits. You're a reckless musician playing upon the lute. The sounds that you are producing are worse than those which are heard during the bleak months 'of winter. It seems as if you are celebrating a devil's Christmas among the blossoms, buds, and tremulous leaves in this rainy season when the gardens look dark-brown and the flower peep from behind the leaves. You are an actor, able to reproduce fully all Sounds of pain and suffering. You are like a powerful poet. You can blow with great fury, thus emulating a frenzied poet. What sounds are you producing now? You are producing sounds similar to those produced by the panicky retreat of a defeated army, with cries of pain of trampled men with painful wounds, groaning in pain and at the same time shuddering with cold.

But now there is a pause. There is a brief interval of the deepest possible silence. All that noise, similar to the sounds of a retreating army, with the groans, trembling and shuddering of trampled soldiers, has ended: Now the wind produces different sounds, sounds which are less deep and less loud, and which express less of fear and something of delight. These sounds are like the pathetic poem written by Thomas Otway about a lost girl roaming about on a lonely stretch of territory, not far from home. The wind produces sometimes sounds of bitter grief and fear and sometimes it screams aloud like that lost girl who hoped that her mother would hear her cries and come to her rescue.

Stanza 8 (Lines 126-139)

It is mid-night, but I have almost no thought of sleeping. May my friend have such experiences of sleeplessness only rarely'! May soothing sleep descend upon her and make her forget her worries! May this storm be only a kind of mountain-birth!

May all the stars shine brightly above her house and continue shining in silence as if they were 'watching the sleeping earth! May she get up from bed with a care-free heart! May she feel happy and bright and may her eyes express a cheerful mood! May her spirits be raised by joy and may her voice be 'sweetened with happiness! May all living creatures from one end of the world to the other dedicate their existence to her! May their existence become a vital force to add to the energy of her spirit O dear and simple-hearted Lady! May you be guided by heaven! You are the most faithful friend of my choice. May you feel happy for ever and ever!

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## 4.5 Critical Summary

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The poet sees the old moon in the lap of the new and this, according to an old belief, foretells the coming, of rain and a furious storm. In a few moments the wind actually develop into a storm and rain starts falling with a loud sound, The sounds of rain and storm have often in the past raised the poet's spirits, though at the same time they filled him with awe. He welcomes the rain and the storm now because it is possible that their sounds might awaken his dull pain and make it move and live.

The poet then describes the kind of grief that has been weighing upon his heart. It is a dark, dear, drowsy and unimpassioned grief. Although the poet has been gazing at the western sky and 'its peculiar hue of yellow green throughout the peaceful and balmy evening, he has been in a cheerless and spiritless mood. He has watched the beauty of the clouds and the stars but he has not been able to feel that beauty because of the grief that has taken a firm hold on his mind. The poet laments of all happiness and joy in his life. His spirits are drooping. All the beautiful objects of Nature are unable to remove the weight of this grief from his heart. Indeed, it is not from external objects that happiness can flow to a man's heart. The heart itself is the real source of animation and excitement. When this inner source of animation and excitement, had dried up, a man cannot expect to experience these feelings by gazing at the' beauty of external objects.

Addressing his wife Sara', the poet says that we get from Nature what we give to Nature. Nature seems to be full of life because we ourselves endow it with life. In our life alone does Nature live? If we find Nature to be in a joyful or festive mood, it is because we are ourselves in that mood. If we find Nature in a mood of mourning, it is because we are ourselves in that mood. The objects of Nature themselves are cold and lifeless. If we want to see anything noble or sublime in Nature, our own souls must send forth a light, a lustre, or a radiance to envelop the objects of Nature. Our own souls must send forth a sweet and potent voice which will endow the sounds of Nature with sweetness and power. This light or this glory which our souls can send forth is not only beautiful in itself but it enables us to create beautiful things also. The Source of this light or glory is joy in the heart. This joy is given by Nature to pure-hearted persons only. All the sweet sounds that delight the ear, and all the beautiful sights that delight the eyes, flow from the joy in our hearts. All music is an echo of that sweet voice, the source of

which is the joy in our hearts, and all beautiful paintings are the reflection of the light which flows from the joy in our hearts.

The poet then recalls the time in his past life when, though there were difficulties in his way, the joy in his heart enabled him to make light of his distress. In those days even his misfortunes served as material for his fancy to weave Visions of delight. That was the time of hopefulness. But now the sorrows of life have crushed him. But it is not the loss of his joy that makes him sad. What grieves him is the decline and the weakening of his inborn gift of the creative power of imagination. His mind is now chiefly occupied with metaphysical speculation which tends to suppress his poetic imagination. Metaphysical thinking has taken almost complete possession of his soul and is crushing his poetical powers.

The poet then dismisses the depressing thoughts that have been haunting his mind, and turns his attention to the storm that has been raging outside. Hearing the sound produced by the wind blowing against the strings of the lute, he feels that it is like the prolonged scream of a human being who is being tortured and who cries in his agony. He thinks that it would have been much better if the wind, instead of playing upon the lute, were to blow against a bare rock, a mountain lake, a lightning-struck tree, a high Pine-grove, or a lonely house haunted by evil spirits. It seems - to him that the wind is celebrating a devils' Christmas. He addresses the wind as an actor and as a mighty poet who can reproduce kinds of tragic sounds. The sounds that the wind is producing are compared by the poet to those produced 'by the panicky retreat a defeated army and to the cries of pain uttered by trampled men groaning in their pain and shuddering with cold. Then there is a pause, a brief interval at deep silence. This pause is followed again by sounds which are this time less deep and less loud than before. These sounds are compared by the poet to the pathetic poem written by Thomas Otway about a lost child some-times crying in bitter grief and fear and sometimes screaming aloud in the hope that its mother would come to its rescue.

It is midnight, says the poet, but there seems to be little possibility of his falling asleep. He would not like his beloved wife to have such an experience of sleeplessness. He would like her to enjoy a sound sleep and to forget her worries. He ends the poem with a prayer for her happiness, and joy.

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#### 4.6 Self Assessment Questions

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1. What does the appearance of the new moon in the lap of old moon signify?

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#### 4.7 Answers to SAQs

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1. The appearances of the new moon in the lap of old moon signify the coming of rain and a furious storm. In a few moments the winds actually develop into a storm and rain starts falling with a loud sound.
2. The poet is in a dejected mood because he fears that he has lost his creative faculty.
3. The poet addresses his wife Sara in the second stanza of the poem.
4. The poet says that nature is inanimate and it reflects our mood only. If we are in a cheerful mood, we will find nature also in harmony with our mood. If we are sad and dejected then the whole nature also appears gloomy to us.
5. Critical Appreciation of the poem- The Poem *Ode to Dejection*, is a confession of the poet Coleridge's failure, and one of the saddest of all human utterances. The poem is written in the year 1802, in a way it is considered to be a swan song. In the poem Coleridge laments the loss of his creative imagination and also mourns his moral and spiritual loss. It is a deeply personal and autobiographical poem which depicts the poet's mental state at the time. It records a fundamental change in his life and is a lament on the decline of his creative imagination.

**The Quality of the Poet's Grief-** Coleridge at this time felt that his inborn gift of imagination was decaying and that his interest was shifting to philosophy. In other words, he found that he was becoming more and more of a philosopher or thinker and less and less of a poet. This change greatly distressed him. He was grief-stricken at the thought that his interest in abstruse research was crushing his poetic talent. The poem is an expression of that grief-

*A grief without a pang, void, dark, and*  
*A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,*  
*Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,*  
*In word, or sigh, or tear*

Seldom has grief found such tragic expression as in this poem which has been called "the poet's dirge of infinite pathos over the grave of creative imagination". The poem proceeds with an ever-deepening sadness, each stanza charged with heavy gloom.

“Sadder lines than these were never perhaps written by any poet in description of his own feelings.” It is much sadder and more tragic than Shelley’s *Stanzas Written in a Near Naples*.

**Attitude to Nature-** A very important point about this poem is that Coleridge here contradicts his own previous view of Nature, thus challenging Wordsworth’s Nature-creed also. In *The Eolian Harp* and *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge had expressed a belief in pantheism—the view that Nature is a living whole, that a Divine Spirit passes through all objects of Nature, that man can establish a spiritual intercourse with Nature, and that Nature exercises an ennobling and educative influence upon man. But in this poem, Coleridge completely denies this belief. Here he asserts that Nature has no life of her own—that it is we who attribute life to her

*O Lady! We receive but what we give*

*And in our life alone does Nature live*

*Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud.*

No longer can Coleridge gain from Nature the- joy used to give him because he has no joy in his heart to meet half-way. He has discovered that Nature can give no joy to these who have no joy already in their hearts.

*Joy, Lady ! is the spirit and the power*

*Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower*

**Imagery-** The ode contains some very vivid and concrete imagery. The poet sees the new-moon winter bright with the old moon in her lap ; the swelling storm with night-shower falling loud and fast ; the stars gliding behind or between the stars

*‘I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling*

*The coming-on of rain and squally blast.*

*And oh! that even now the gusts were swelling,*

*And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!*

More vigorous and forceful are the lines where the sounds of the storm are compared first to the rushing of a defeated army, with groans of trampled and wounded men and then to the alternate moaning and screaming of a frightened child who has lost its way home:

*What tell’st thou now about?*

*‘Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,*

*With groans of trampled men, with smarting*

*At once they groan with pain, and shudder cold*  
*Here in these lines also he has used beautiful imagery-*  
*Tis of a little child*  
*Upon a lonesome wild,*  
*Not far from home, but she hath lost her way;*  
*And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,*  
*And now screams loud, and hopes 'to make her mother hear.*

Nor are these the only pictures in the poem. We have also the images of the storm raging over a rock or a tree, a pine-grove or a haunted house, and of its celebrating the Devil's Christmas in the "month of showers, of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers."

**Note of Tenderness-** The poet ends on a note of tenderness for his wife. He prays to sleep to visit his beloved. May she rise with light heart, gay fancy, cheerful eyes! These are the only lines which to some extent lighten the heavy gloom of the whole poem.

Interesting points of comparison and contrast at once occur to us between this ode and Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*. As in Wordsworth's poem, we have here the poet's reference to his past joy and a description of his present mood of grief. There was a time when even misfortunes an aspect of happiness, but now had "afflictions bow me down 'to earth." These lines also remind us of similar lines in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*-

*If even I were as in my boyhood, and could be*  
*The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven*  
*I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed*

In Wordsworth's ode, grief finds relief and ends in joy; in Coleridge's poem grief finds no relief and ends in dejection. It is morning in Wordsworth's Ode, midnight in Coleridge's. In the former and it is May and the sun shines warm; in the latter it is the month of showers.

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## 4.8 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have studied

- about one of the pioneer poets of the Romantic Age
- the main characteristics of romantic poem, and

- the critical appreciation of the poem prescribed.

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#### 4.9 Review Questions

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1. Trace the autobiographical elements in '*Dejection : an Ode.*'
2. What attitude to Nature does Coleridge express in *The de to Dejection*. Give reasons for your answer.

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#### 4.10 Bibliography

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## UNIT-5

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**LORD BYRON: *ALL FOR LOVE*,**

***ON THE CASTLE OF CHILLON*,**

***THERE BE NONE OF BEAUTY'S DAUGHTERS***

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- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 About The Age
- 5.3 About The Author
- 5.4 The Poem: *All For Love*
  - 5.4.1 Glossary
  - 5.4.2 Explanation
  - 5.4.3 Self Assessment Questions
  - 5.4.4 Answers SAQs
- 5.5 The Poem: *On The Castle of Chillon*
  - 5.5.1 Glossary
  - 5.5.2 Explanation
  - 5.5.3 Self Assessment Questions
  - 5.5.4 Answers SAQs
- 5.6 The Poem: *There be None of Beauty's Daughters*
  - 5.6.1 Glossary
  - 5.6.2 Explanation
  - 5.6.3 Self Assessment Questions
  - 5.6.4 Answers SAQs
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Review Questions
- 5.9 Bibliography

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## 5.0 Objectives

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

- the Age of Byron
- aspects of Byron's Poetry
- and the meanings of Words used in the Poems.

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## 5.1 Introduction

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In this unit you are going to study three poems written by Byron. These are *All For Love*, *On The Castle of Chillon* and *There be None of Beauty's Daughter*. This will enable you understand the style of Byron. This unit will also make you familiar with the age of Byron. The poems will be explained to you; this will enable you to understand them fully. Questions will be given and we are sure you can find their answers in the text provided to you.

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## 5.2 About the Age

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George Gordon Byron (called Lord Byron), John Keats and Percy Bysshe Shelley belong to the second generation of Romantic Poets. Their works exhibit passion and revolutionary zeal. These three writers offer many points of close resemblance. Hence they are often studied together. Byron was born on the eve of the French Revolution and Shelley and Keats were born shortly after that. The situation in England was one of unrest. Agricultural England was giving way to Industrial England. Revolutionary ideas generated by the French Revolution were passionately accepted by some and denounced by others. Political unrest was prevalent in the whole of Europe. Despite that utilitarian philosophy progressed. This philosophy was popularized by Jeremy Bentham who believed in the concept of the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." Liberalism was advocated. The middle class began to have a realistic outlook. Literature reflected the intensity of the period and the works of these writers were in a sense representative of the times.

The Lake Poets (William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge and Robert Southey) were called the first generation of Romantic Poets. If they set the trend of poetry writing in England, the second generation of poets carried it further. Keats, Shelley and Byron freed poetry from all its restraints. They formed a group by themselves. The intensity of their art was understood by the elite. Byron crossed the boundaries of his country and conquered Europe with his fiery imagination. Keats and Shelley also won name and fame in the continent.

The period after the French Revolution is called the post Revolutionary era. Byron's was the most articulate voice of this era. He expressed the spirit of the age along with Keats and Shelley. The other well known writer was Sir Walter Scott. Scott was an immensely learned man: he had translated works of Goethe and some German ballads. Scottish history often finds place in his works. His characters are often shaped by the environment they are in.

Byron was very much influenced by Scott's works. Both Byron and Shelley (1792-1822) had a low view of public applause and they had a distaste for the British Establishment. John Keats (1795-1821) was much influenced by poets both living and dead.

This period also saw the birth of some famous essayists. One such essayist was William Hazlitt (1780-1830) who along with Coleridge is one of the famous literary critics of this age. Hazlitt won fame also as a critic of Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama. Hazlitt's friend 'Elia' Charles Lamb (1775-1834) was also an essayist of great repute. Lamb enjoyed Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. His essays (written under the name of Elia) reveal a Londoner's pleasure with the streets and institutions of London and the attachment to a countryside situated at a distance from the town. Another famous writer of this age was Thomas De Quincey (1785-1859) whose most celebrated work was *The Confessions of an English Opium Eater*.

The Romantics Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Keats, Shelley and Byron defy definition. Their poetry has imaginative spontaneity, and elements of wonder. They reacted against classical standards of balance, order, restraint, proportion and objectivity. The polished wit of the Augustans appeared to the Romantics as shallow and artificial. The Romantics heightened in their works the dignity and simplicity of rural life. Emotions like joy, dejection, rapture, horror were highlighted by the Romantics.

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### 5.3 About The Author

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George Gordon, Lord Byron was born in 1788 in London. He became the sixth Baron of Rochdale in 1798. He went to Trinity College, Cambridge in 1805 and left it in 1807. His first collection of poems *Hours of Idleness* was published in 1807. This work was bitterly criticized by Henry Potter, Baron Brougham (1778-1868) and this provoked Byron into writing *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* in 1809. In 1809 Byron took his seat in the House of Lords and between 1809 and 1811 he visited Portugal, Spain, Malta, Greece and the Levant, he wrote a number of poems and a couple of dramas.

Byron's first successful literary production was *Childe Harold* published in two cantos in 1812. In 1813 *The Bride of Abydos* and *The Giaour* were published. In 1814 he wrote two other literary pieces *The Corsair* and *Lara*. In 1815 *Hebrew Melodies* appeared. In 1816 Byron and his wife were separated and Byron went to Geneva where he stayed with Shelley.

Byron's works *Parisina*, *Childe Harold* Cantos III and IV and *The Prisoner of Chillon* were published in 1816. In 1817 he wrote *Manfred* and the *Lament of Tasso* after seeing Tasso's call in Rome. Between 1818 and 1819 Byron wrote *Don Juan* Cantos I, II and III. In 1820 *The Prophecy of Dante* was written and in 1821 *the Vision of Judgement* was published. It is interesting to note that Byron had a revolutionary zeal within him. He formed the 'Byron Brigade' at Missolonghi and gave large sums of money to the Greeks in their war for independence. In 1824 Byron died at Missolonghi.

Byron had a number of affairs with women. Therefore his poetry was condemned on moral grounds. “Byron was unique among Romantic poets in that he respected the neoclassical poets and sought to some degree, to emulate them. Most Romantic poets sought to overturn the old conventions and create new poetry based on creativity and individualism. Byron used diverse verse structures, but he, like Pope and Dryden, wrote satires about society and other poets.”

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## 5.4 The Poem : *All For Love*

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*O TALK not<sup>1</sup> to me a name great<sup>2</sup> in story;  
The days of our youth<sup>3</sup> are the days of our glory,  
And the myrtle<sup>4</sup> and ivy<sup>5</sup> of sweet two-and-twenty<sup>6</sup>  
Are worth all your laurels <sup>7</sup> though ever so plenty.  
What are garlands and crowns to the brow that is wrinkled ?<sup>8</sup>  
'Tis <sup>9</sup> but as a dead flower with May-dew <sup>10</sup> besprinkled.<sup>11</sup>  
Then away with all such from the head that is hoary <sup>12</sup>  
What care for the wreaths <sup>13</sup> that can only give glory ?  
O Fame<sup>14</sup> ! -if I e'er <sup>15</sup> took delight in thy <sup>16</sup> praises,  
'Twas less for the sake of they high-sounding phrases,  
Than to see the bright eyes of the dear one discover  
She thought that I was not unworthy <sup>17</sup> to love her,  
There chiefly <sup>18</sup> I sought <sup>19</sup> thee,<sup>20</sup> there only I found thee;  
Her glance was the best of the rays that surround <sup>21</sup> thee;  
When it sparkled <sup>22</sup> o'er <sup>23</sup> aught <sup>24</sup> that was bright in my story,  
I knew it was love, and I felt it was glory.<sup>25</sup>*

### 5.4.1 Glossary

1. Do not tell me
2. famous
3. being young early poet of life
4. kinds of plant
5. climbing evergreen plant with shining leaves



6. at the age of twentytwo
7. praises leaves as symbol of victory or poetic merit
8. a slight line or fold in something, especially fabric or the skin of the face
9. It is
10. dew drops in the month of May
11. sprinkle all over with small drops or amounts of a substance
12. having grey or white hair (an old person)
13. flowers, leaves woven together into ring for weaving or head
14. Personifies Fame (as if Fame is a living being)
15. ever
16. your
17. not worthy (but here the use of double negative means that he was fit to love her, worthy to love her)
18. mainly
19. looked for
20. you
21. all round or on all sides
22. glowed
23. over
24. anything
25. beauty

### **5.4.2 Explanation**

Lord Byron addresses this poem to beauty and love. The best days of a person's life are the days of his youth. A young man does not wish to hear of names famous in stories. The young man feels proud and happy to be young. He feels that laurels, garlands and crowns that are given to famous people are like dead flowers on which dew drops have fallen. He does not attach importance to these things, these crowns which can only give fame, but which fail to understand the joy and love that is there in the hearts of the youth.

The poet has personified fame and has directly addressed fame. Young men take delight in becoming famous not because of being praised in high sounding words. Young men

take delight in becoming famous so that they may see the glows in their beloveds's eyes. On becoming famous a young man gains credibility (be comes worthy) in the eyes of the beloved. That is the reason why a young man longs to gain fame(wants to become famous). The bright eyes of the beloved will discover that he is worthy to love her.

Fame is sought mainly in the eyes of the beloved. When her eyes sparkled with love, it was worth being famous. On seeing the joy and glow in her eyes, the young man realises that it was worth everything. He realises what is it to be in love and to be surrounded in the beauty of love.

### 5.4.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. Why does the poet not wish to hear the names of people famous in stories ?  
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.....  
.....
2. With what does he compare garlands and crowns ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
3. Why does he want to become famous ?  
.....  
.....  
.....
4. Why is the poet happy ?  
.....  
.....  
.....

### 5.4.4 Answers to SAQs

1. The poet does not wish to hear the names of people famous in stories because he thinks that the best part of a person's life is his youth. He wishes to hear about the activities of young people.
2. He compares garlands and crowns to dead flowers on which dew drops have settled.
3. He wants to become famous because then his beloved will think that he is worthy to be

loved.

4. The poet is happy when he sees the glow of love in the eyes of the beloved.

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## 5.5 The Poem : *On The Castle of Chillon*

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*Eternal spirit<sup>1</sup> of the chainless<sup>2</sup> mind !  
Brightest in dungeons,<sup>3</sup> Liberty, thou<sup>4</sup> art-  
For there thy<sup>5</sup> habitations<sup>6</sup> is the heart-  
The heart which love of Thee<sup>7</sup> alone can bind,*

*And when thy sons to fetters<sup>8</sup> are consign'd<sup>9</sup>  
To fetters, and the damp<sup>10</sup> vault's<sup>11</sup> dayless<sup>12</sup> gloom,<sup>13</sup>  
Their country conquers<sup>14</sup> with their martyrdom<sup>15</sup>,  
And Freedom's fame<sup>16</sup> finds wings on every wind.  
Chillon<sup>17</sup> ! thy prison is a holy place<sup>18</sup>  
And thy sad floor<sup>19</sup> an altar,<sup>20</sup> for 't<sup>21</sup> was trod<sup>22</sup>,  
Until his<sup>23</sup> very steps have left a trace<sup>24</sup>*

*Worn<sup>25</sup> as if thy cold pavement<sup>26</sup> were a sod,<sup>27</sup>  
By Bonnivard<sup>28</sup> ! May none those marks efface.<sup>29</sup>  
For they appeal from tyranny<sup>30</sup> to God.*

### 5.5.1 Glossary

1. Spirit that lives forever (here the reference is to liberty/freedom)
2. Mind that cannot be bound or chained
3. underground cell for prisoners.
4. You (old English: a form of addressing someone)
5. Your (old English)
6. dwelling, place where one stays
7. you (old english)
8. chains

9. hand over, commit
10. wet
11. cellar, a large room especially an underground one to keep prisoners in
12. where daylight does not enter
13. dark, not cheery
14. wins
15. death
16. name
17. Chillon-name of a castle (Chateau) in Switzerland. Prisoners who were supporters of Liberty were kept here in the damp vaults. These vaults or cellars or dungeons were at a semi-sub-lake level: that is why these cellars were always damp/wet.
18. a place of worship: prisoners fighting for liberty died here.
19. unhappy ground because freedom fighters died here.
20. a flat table like block to make offerings to god.
21. it was
22. past participle of tread; walked upon in a specified way.
23. Bonivard
24. mark
25. exhausted, damaged, weakened, wasted in strength due to being chained
26. wet ground
27. surface of the ground, with the grass growing on it.
28. A great man who fought for the freedom of his country. In the castle of Chillon, Bonivard was chained to a pillar for six years in the 1530s. The place he was chained was a semi-sub-lake level dungeon. In 1816 Lord Byron came to the Castle of Chillon and saw the place where Bonivard was imprisoned.
29. wipe out
30. Cruelty, unreasonable behaviour

### **5.5.2 Explanation**

In this poem Byron personifies Liberty. Liberty will live forever and people will die or

give up their lives fighting for liberty. Liberty cannot be chained; liberty resides in the hearts and minds of freedom fighters. Liberty shines brightly even in the dungeons, the dungeons where prisoners fighting for liberty were kept. No tyrannical chains can bind the hearts of prisoners; their heart can only be chained by liberty.

Oh liberty when your sons are bound by chains and locked in damp, dark, gloomy vaults, their country wins battles in their names and with their sacrifices. Lord Byron wishes to emphasize that the sacrifices of these martyrs are much appreciated by their countrymen. Even the wind helps to spread the names of the martyrs who gave up their lives fighting for freedom.

Byron personifies Chillon: the prison where prisoners were kept is indeed a holy place. People will come from far and near to worship the very floor on which prisoners ceaselessly walked. Bonivard, the great freedom fighter, walked on these floors for six years. He became feeble and weak because he was chained to a pillar for six years. He walked on these wet floors and his very steps seemed to have left a mark on the floors. The floors have become holy due to the sacrifices of prisoners like Bonivard. Lord Byron, the poet hopes that no one wipes out the marks of these prisoners. For these marks will remind the viewer (who goes to visit the castle) and the reader (one who will read this poem) of the cruel and unreasonable imprisonment of these men. God alone was a witness to their sufferings.

### 5.5.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. Where is Chillon situated ?

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.....

2. Name the Eternal Spirit.

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.....

.....

3. Who was Bonivard ?

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.....

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4. For how many years was Bonivard imprisoned ?

.....

- .....
- .....
5. Why is Chillon called a “holy place”?
- .....
- .....
- .....

#### 5.5.4 Answers to SAQs

1. Chillon is situated in Switzerland. Here there is a big castle and prisoners were kept in this castle.
2. Liberty.
3. Bonivard was a freedom fighter. He was chained and kept in the dungeon of the castle of Chillon for six years in the 1530s.
4. Bonivard was imprisoned for six years in the 1530s in the castle of Chillon.
5. Chillon is called a ‘holy place’ because a number of men died here fighting for the cause of liberty and freedom. Since these men became martyrs, this is a holy place.

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#### 5.6 The Poem : *There be None of Beauty’s Daughters*

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*There be none of Beauty’s<sup>1</sup> daughters*

*With a magic<sup>2</sup> like thee<sup>3</sup>;*

*And like music on the waters*

*Is thy<sup>4</sup> sweet voice to me:*

*When as if its sound were causing*

*The charmed ocean’s<sup>5</sup> pausing,<sup>6</sup>*

*The waves lie still and gleaming,*

*And the lull’d winds<sup>7</sup> seem dreaming.<sup>8</sup>*

*And the midnight moon is weaving*

*Her bright chain o’er the deep,<sup>9</sup>*

*Whose breast is gently heaving<sup>10</sup>*

*As an infant’s asleep:*

*So that spirit bows before thee  
 To listen and adore thee;  
 With a full but soft emotion,  
 Like the swell of Summer's ocean<sup>11</sup>*

### 5.6.1 Glossary

1. Beauty, an abstract noun, has been personified. Beauty is supposed to be a mother who has a number of daughters.
2. Magic- Charm
3. Thee-You(None of beauty's daughters have the charm that you have. Here 'you' refers to Augusta Leigh, Byron's step-sister)
4. Thy- Your
5. Charmed Ocean-As if the ocean has been bewitched, hypnotised
6. gleaming-shining
7. lull'd winds- as if the winds have been put to sleep by the music of your voice
8. weaving-make fabric out of inter lacing threads also, to move from side to side
9. deep-ocean
10. heaving-rising gently
11. Summer's Ocean-ice melts during summer and the beauty of the ocean is normally noticed.

### 5.6.2 Explanation

Lord George Gordon Byron came from a noble family, but his childhood days were not happy. He went to Trinity College Cambridge. He published his first collection of poems in 1808. Byron's relationship with his half-sister (step sister) Augusta Leigh, gave rise to scandal and gossip. It is said that this poem was written by Byron in honour of Augusta's beauty.

Byron feels that Beauty's daughters do not have the charm of Augusta. Augusta is very beautiful and Beauty's daughters do not have the charm that Augusta has. Augusta's beauty has powers of attracting people to her. Her voice is extremely musical. When water flows, one notices that water creates its own music. Augusta's voice is as soothing as the music of the waters. The very oceans seem bewitched by the sound of music. (Here there is a double meaning. Augusta's voice is extremely musical and one is taken in or hypnotised by her voice. The music of the waters has its own charm, and one can get carried away by it. But in any case the music of Augusta's voice and the sound of music of the waters both are very enticing) The

very waves of the ocean are calmed down by the musical quality of Augusta's voice. Even the minds are lulled to sleep on hearing this music. The winds are put to sleep, and in their sleep, the winds seem to be dreaming.

Since the waves of the ocean are gently moving, it seems that the moonlight falling on the waves is also moving. The light of the moon seems to be weaving a bright chain round the ocean. The moon light seems to have encircled the ocean. As the waves keep rising and falling, it appears that the ocean is breathing. The ocean's gentle breathing can be compared with the breathing of an infant (a baby) who is fast asleep.

The spirit of the poet and also the spirit of the world bows before the beauty of Augusta. The spirit adores you, worships you and loves to listen to the music of your voice. The heart (of the poet / admirer) is full of emotions which are extremely tender and soft. Just as the oceans during the summer months swell due to ice melting, similarly does the heart of the poet swell with soft emotions for his beloved. These emotions are extremely soft and tender. (Note: the poet thinks that his beloved is the most beautiful lady in the world and no one can be compared to her beauty.)

### 5.6.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. Is the ocean bewitched ? (under some magical spell ?)

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2. What is the wind doing ?

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3. What is the moon doing ?

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4. With whom has the poet compared the ocean's sleep ?

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### 5.6.4 Answers to SAQs

1. The ocean appears to be under some magical spell (bewitched) on hearing the musical voice of the poet's beloved. The musical sound seems to make the ocean pause. The beloved's voice has this hypnotic effect.
2. Even the wind, on hearing the musical voice of the beloved, is lulled sleep. The wind then begins to dream.
3. The moon seems to be weaving a chain round the ocean. The moon's light seems to fall in such a way that one gets the impression that the moon is making or forming a chain round the ocean.
4. The ocean's sleep has been compared with that of a baby. Just as a baby breathes gently when it is fast asleep, similarly, is the ocean breathing gently while sleeping. (The ocean has been personified, as if it is a living being.

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### 5.7 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you have read three poems written by Lord Byron. One poem is about love, about the joy in a young man's heart when he sees the glow of love in his beloved's eyes. The second poem is about the love for liberty and freedom. Men will willingly die for liberty. They will give up their lives so that their country may gain freedom. In the third poem he eulogizes the beauty of his half sister Augusta Leigh. These poems give you an idea of Byron's style. Byron was a great supporter of liberty. The poems have been explained for you. Word meaning have also been given. After going through this unit, you have become familiar with the age of Byron and finer aspects of Byron's poetry.

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### 5.8 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the Poem '*On the Castle of Chillon*' as representative of Byron's genius.
2. Give an account of Byron's view of liberty and freedom as revealed in his poems.
3. Write a short appreciative note on '*There be none of Beauty's Daughters.*'

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### 5.9 Bibliography

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## UNIT – 6

### P.B. SHELLEY : (I) *OZYMANDIAS*

### (II) *TO A SKYLARK*

#### Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 About the Poet
  - 6.2.1 Shelley : His Life and Personality
  - 6.2.2 Literary Background
  - 6.2.3 The Principal Poetic Works of Shelley
- 6.3. Reading the Poems (Texts)
  - 6.3.1 *Ozymandias*
  - 6.3.2 *To A Skylark*
  - 6.3.3 Notes and Explanations
    - 6.3.3 (a) *Ozymandias*
    - 6.3.3 (b) *To A Skylark*
  - 6.3.4 Critical Appreciation
    - 6.3.4 (a) *Ozymandias*
    - 6.3.4 (b) *To A Skylark*
- 6.4 Self Assessment Questions
- 6.5 Answers to SAQs
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Review Questions
- 6.8 Bibliography

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#### 6.0 Objectives

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In this unit we intend to acquaint you with the Romantic traits of English poetry associated with Shelley by presenting to you a detailed analysis of the poems – *Ozymandias* and

*To a Skylark*. Our purpose is also to give you clues so that you may be able to distinguish between the earlier (adopted by Wordsworth and Coleridge) and the later (adopted by Shelley and Keats) romantic traits.

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## 6.1 Introduction

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a *Ozymandias* illustrates the vanity of human greatness and the failure of all attempts to immortalize human grandeur. Ozymandias was a great Egyptian king, a life-statue of whom was made to immortalize him. But now the statue lies broken and disfigured, and all around it is a barren desert.

The Ode to a *Skylark* is one of the most famous poems in the English language. Shelley in this ode idealises the singing of the skylark. In the singing of the skylark, Shelley finds an ecstasy and rapture which are unattainable by human beings. The poet contrasts the sorrow of human life with the joy of the skylark. The skylark, among other things, serves as a symbol of the poetic spirit, which sings songs unbidden and with an unpremeditated art. The poem shows the superb lyrical genius of Shelley at its best. It is remarkable for its exquisite music, its wonderful similes, its sensuous beauty, its spontaneity and melody.

Written in early 1820 and published in the same year with *Prometheus Unbound*, it is the most anthologized of all Shelley's poems. Although a lovely poem, it has had its detractors who have regarded it "as the typically slight work of a typically slight poet."

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## 6.2 About the Poet

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### 6.2.1 Shelley : Life and Personality

Percy Bysshe Shelley, a son of a baronet of Sussex, was educated at Eton and Oxford. After a year at the University he was expelled (1811) for having published a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*. Soon afterwards he eloped with Harriet Westbrook, a daughter of a coffee-house owner whom he married at Edinburgh, English law not permitting the marriage of minors. Expulsion from the University and marrying much below his rank alienated his family. For three years (1811-14) he led with Harriet a wandering life, engaging in reformist propaganda in Ireland and Wales. In 1813 he privately printed for circulation among his friends *Queen Mab* his first notable work. After a love affair with a school mistress, he left Harriet (1814) and eloped with Mary Godwin, daughter of the anarchical philosopher, to Switzerland. He married her after Harriet's suicide (1816). On his return he published his first great poem *Alastor* (1816) and *The Revolt of Islam* (1817). At the suit of Harriet's father he was deprived of the custody of his children by his first wife. This as well as the public hostility aroused by his conduct and opinions drove him abroad to Italy in 1818. Here he spent the remaining four years of his life, living at Venice, Rome, Naples and Pisa. As in the case of Byron, Shelley's greatest works were produced during these years of exile in Italy; lyrical dramas *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*, a tragedy, *The Cenci*, a love poem, *Epipsychidion*, an elegy on the

death of Keats *Adonais*, and the great Nature lyrics, *Ode to the West Wind*, *The Cloud*, *To a Skylark*, etc. by which he is best known today. He left besides numerous poems published during his life time or after his death including the satires *Swellfoot the Tyrant*, *The Masque of Anarchy*, *Peter Bell the Third*; and lyrical pieces : *The Sensitive Plant*, *The Witch of Atlas*, etc. Of his prose writings the best known is his *Defence of Poetry*.

He was drowned in the gulf of Spezzia in July 1822 and cremated in the presence of Byron with whom he had been living. His ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome. Of his three children by Mary two died in childhood while the third, a son, lived and succeeded to the title. Of his two children by Harriet, Only one, a daughter, lived to a good age. They had of course no part in Shelley's life.

### 6.2.2 Literary Background

The Romantic Movement at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century was a deliberate and sweeping revolt against the literary principles of the Age of Reason. Just as Dryden and Pope had rejected the romantic tradition of the Elizabethans as crude and irregular and had adopted neoclassical principles of French literature in their writings, so now Wordsworth and Coleridge, in their turn rejected the neo-classical principles in favour of the romantic. To the First generation of the Romantics belonged Wordsworth and Coleridge.

After Scott we come to the younger generation of the Romantics : Byron, Shelley and Keats. They came to maturity when the older generation of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey and Scott had already produced their best work. All the three died young : Byron at the age of 36, Shelley at 29 and Keats at 26. The poetic flame in them, however, burnt intensely and during their short lives each produced work, which except perhaps Byron's is destined for immortality. Byron who cannot be classed with the immortals of English poetry had, however, the satisfaction of achieving great fame in his life time. He became a legend not only in England but also on the continent.

### 6.2.3 The Principal Poetic Works of Shelley

A. Early Poems : (i) *Queen Mab* (1813) - This poem attacks Christianity for professing love while inciting its followers to religious intolerance. The corrupting influences of kings and priests are also exposed in the poem, and the Golden Age is prophesied. It is a crude poem attacking dogmatic religion, government, industrial tyranny and war. It was written under the influence of William Godwin, the revolutionary philosopher.

(ii) *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* (1816) – It contains his devotion and worship of the principle of Beauty who is looked upon as a deity.

(iii) *Alastor* (1816) – It is an allegory condemning self-centred idealism and pleading on behalf of human love. It is a vaguely autobiographical account of a young poet's unsuccessful

ful attempt to recapture his envisioned ideal.

(iv) *The Revolt of Islam* (1817-18) – It is a symbolic epic in Spenserian stanzas containing violent attacks on Theism and Christianity, and proclaiming a bloodless revolution and the regeneration of man by love. It is valuable for the story of man's revolt against tyranny and for the glimpse of a Golden Age. *The Revolt of Islam* was Shelley's first long poem of mature splendour and power.

B. Poetic dramas : (i) *Prometheus Unbound* (1818-20) – It is a poetic drama containing a series of lyrics and choruses. It is based on an ancient Greek myth. Prometheus is an ideal and allegorical figure of progressive man's desire for intellectual light and spiritual liberty. This drama is Shelley's most characteristic work, in both thought and style. Its subject was suggested by Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, in which Prometheus, heroic friend and lover of mankind, was released from a rock where the tyrant Zeus had chained him. In Shelley's treatment, Prometheus represents, not a super-human helper of mankind, but mankind itself, heroic, just, gentle, sacredly thirsting after liberty and spiritual gladness, but chained and tortured by Jupiter.

(ii) *The Cenci* (1819) – It is a realistic tragedy based upon a morbid and sordid Italian story which gives a detailed account of the horrors which ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of Rome in the year 1599. In brief, the story was the murder of an incestuous and inhuman father by the daughter, Beatrice, with the law's savage revenges. When Shelley saw the artist Guido's portrait of Beatrice at the Colonna Palace, he was profoundly touched, and thought her to be one of the loveliest specimens of the workmanship of Nature. The Cenci Palace, vast and gloomy spoke also to his imagination. Shelley's drama is a poetical and moral commemoration of what may be called the martyrdom of Beatrice. This drama is something of an elegy in honour of the heroism of Beatrice Cenci.

(iii) *Hellas* (1821-22) – It is a lyrical drama inspired by the Greek declaration of independence from the Turkish yoke. In its way *Hellas* is magnificent, though it was written from the fragmentary information Shelley got from continental newspapers. For some the emotional final chorus is the one thing that matters in this drama : "The world's great age beings anew ....", It is the last of Shelley's major political poems. Its aims are three. The first is fundamentally political : to celebrate the Greek war against the Turks "as a portion of the cause of civilization and moral improvement". The second is ethical : to hold up as example for the modern world the wonderful achievement of Athens in the fifth century B.C., and to describe a new Athens symbolizing liberty and dedicated to the spread of brotherly love. The third is metaphysical : to assert that thought is the sole reality and that all else in the world is a shadow and a dream.

C. Short Humanitarian Poems : (i) *The Masque of Anarchy* (1819) – It is one of the world's great revolutionary songs, which Shelley was moved to write by the news of the "massacre of Peterloo". With the drum-beat of its solemn march, it is a call to the workers of

England to “rise like lion after slumber in un-vanquishable number”, and its true Shelleyan quality lies in the fact that though it calls for rebellion it does not call for blood. The same belief, the same ultimate trust that the only way to conquer evil is by good, runs through *The Revolt of Islam*.

(ii) *Song to the Men of England* (1819) – Based on the notion that Liberty, England’s erstwhile queen, had been done to death in the course of recent months, and could be revived only through the concerted efforts of her bereaved subjects, this poem was written to be sung to the tune of England’s national anthem : “God Save the King”.

(iii) *Ode to Liberty* (1820) – It is among the best of Shelley’s political poems in the grand style. The voice of liberty, coming out of the depth of thought, charges with mighty the wings of his song, says Shelley, and he provides an idealized history, first of the rise of Athenian liberty out of chaos, and then of liberty’s long decline under the Roman empire and the oppressive forces of institutional Christianity. This poem was inspired by the Spanish Revolution.

(iv) *Ode to Naples* (1820) – This poem was written by Shelley to greet the proclamation of a constitutional government at Naples in 1820. The poem is a tribute to the Neapolitans as the latest enemies of the league of tyrants.

D. Occasional Poems : (i) *Julian and Maddalo* – It is a conversation between Julian (Shelley) and Maddalo (Byron). The poem contains an important portrait of Byron’s puzzling personality. This poem gave to Shelley’s friends a taste of verse which was, for once, both earthly and human, those parts of it, that is, which do not concern the story of the madman. (The story of the madman is a dreadful one which reads like veiled and nightmare autobiography, of frightful projection of some inward canker of the mind). The tone of the verse in those parts is that of man talking amongst friends. The poem shows that Shelley could talk as well as sing.

(ii) *Epipsychidion* – It is an idealized history of Shelley’s life and feelings. It is addressed to Emilia Viviani, an Italian girl, whose wronged life produced a rapturous outburst in favour of free love. It is a strange poem. The movement of Shelley’s verse is habitually swift, but the couplets of *Epipsychidion* seem to flow with an almost breathless speed. The pulse of the poem beats at fever pitch, between waking and sleeping. After the veiled autobiography of the opening passages, in which he describes the failure of a search to find a living embodiment of that “Being whom my spirit oft met on its visioned wandering”, he declares that he has found it at last; and the rest of the poem, beautiful as only Shelley’s poetry can be, described as the island “beautiful as a wreck of Paradise” whither he wishes to take his beloved.

(iii) *Adonais* – It is an elegy on the death of John Keats, and one of the greatest elegies in the English language. It is a most noble tribute not only to the dead poet but to poetry itself, and the life beyond life of which poets are assured : “He is a portion of the loveliness which once he made more lovely..” That life beyond life was becoming more and more the subject of Shelley’s brooding. Keats had spoken of death as “life’s high mead”, and had found it “rich to

die”, when the nightingale was singing ; for him death had appeared as fulfilment, but for Shelley it appeared as an escape and a liberation, more and more desired. The concluding lines of *Adonais*, with their exultant sense of the melting away of the mortal body under the fire of Love which created and sustains the universe and is itself the only reality, are at once an inspiration and a prophecy.

E. *Poems chiefly Lyrical* – These include the following : *Mutability*; *Ozymandias*; *The Cloud*; *To a Skylark*; *The Indian Serenade*; *Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples*; *Ode to the West Wind*; *The Sensitive Plant*; *To Night*; *O World ! O Life ! O Time ! The Witch of Atlas* ; *The Triumph of Life*. Some of these lyrics are among the most glorious and the most celebrated ones in the English language.

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### **6.3 Reading the Poems (Text)**

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*Now read the poems carefully.*

#### **6.3.1 Ozymandia**

*I met a traveler from an antique land  
Who said : Two vast and trunkless legs of stone  
Stand in the desert .... Near them, on the sand,  
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,  
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,  
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read  
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,  
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed :  
And on the pedestal these words appear :  
‘My name is Ozymandias, king of kings :  
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair !’  
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay  
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare  
The lone and level sands stretch far away.*

#### **6.3.2 To a Skylark**

*Hail to thee, blithe Spirit !  
Bird thou never wert,*

*That from Heaven or near it,  
Pourest thy full heart  
In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.  
Higher still and higher  
From the earth thou springest  
Like a cloud of fire;  
The blue deep thou wingest,  
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.  
In the golden lighting  
Of the sunken sun,  
O'er which clouds are bright'ning,  
Thou dost float and run;  
Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.  
The pale purple even  
Melts around thy flight;  
Like a star of Heaven,  
In the broad daylight  
Thou art unseen, but yet I hear thy shrill delight,  
Keen as are the arrows  
Of that silver sphere,  
Whose intense lamp narrows  
In the white dawn clear  
Until we hardly see – we feel that it is there.  
All the earth and air,  
With thy voice is loud,  
As, when night is bare,  
From one lonely cloud  
The moon rains out her beams, and Heaven is overflowed.*



*What thou art we know not;  
What is most like thee ?  
From rainbow clouds there flow not  
Drops so bright to see  
As from thy presence showers a rain of melody.  
Like a Poet hidden  
In the light of thought,  
Singing hymns unbidden,  
Till the world is wrought  
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not :  
Like a high-born maiden  
In a palace-tower,  
Soothing her love - laden  
Soul in secret hour  
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower :  
Like a glow-worm golden  
In a dell of dew,  
Scattering unbeholden  
Its aerial hue  
Among the flowers and grass, which screen it from the view  
Lie a rose embowered  
In its own green leaves,  
By warm winds deflowered,  
Till the scent it gives  
Makes faint with too much sweet those heavy-winged thieves :  
Sound of vernal showers  
On the twinkling grass;  
Rain- awakened flowers,*

*All that ever was  
Joyous, and clear, and fresh, thy music doth surpass :  
Teach us, Sprite or Bird,  
What sweet thoughts are thine :  
I have never heard  
Praise of love or wine  
That panted forth a flood of rapture so divine.  
Chorus Hymeneal  
Or triumphal chant,  
Matched with thine would be all  
But an empty vaunt,  
A thing wherein we feel there is some hidden want  
What objects are the fountains  
Of thy happy strain ?  
What fields, or waves, or mountains ?  
What shapes of sky or plain ?  
What love of thine own kind ? what ignorance of pain ?  
With the clear keen joyance  
Languor cannot be :  
Shadow of annoyance  
Never came near thee :  
Thou lovest – but ne'er knew love's sad satiety.  
Waking or asleep,  
Thou of death must deem  
Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream,  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal stream ?  
We look before and after,*

*And pine for what is not :  
 Our sincerest laughter  
 With some pain is fraught :  
 Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.  
 Yes if we could scorn  
 Hate, and pride, and fear;  
 If we were things born  
 Not to shed a tear,  
 I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.  
 Better than all measures  
 Of delightful sound,  
 Better than all treasures  
 That in books are found,  
 Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground !  
 Teach me half the gladness  
 That thy brain must know.  
 Such harmonious madness  
 From my lips would flow  
 The world should listen then – as I am listening now.*

### 6.3.3 Notes and Explanations

#### 6.3.3 (a) *Ozymandias*

*An antique land* – ancient country; here, Egypt. The Egyptian civilization is one of the oldest in the history of the world. *Who said* – the traveler said. *Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / stand in the desert* – The two huge legs of a broken statue stand in the desert. The trunk or the upper portion of the statue is severed from the legs, and lies nearby. (This is a common sight in Egypt. Many broken and half buried statues of ancient kings of Egypt exist in various parts of the land and remind a traveller of the ancient glory of those kings).

*a shattered visage* – the broken face of the statue. *Whose frown – And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command* – On the face of the statue is an expression of anger, contempt, haughtiness, and sternness. The face shows a hardened sense of authority and power.

*Tell that its sculptor well those passions read* – It is clear that the sculptor who made the statue correctly understood the passions or feelings of the king and, therefore, successfully reproduced them on stone.

*Which yet survive.... That fed* (Lines 7-8) – The passions or feelings of the king still exist on the face of the statue, while the sculptor who carved those passions or feelings on stone, and the king who experienced those passions or feelings, are dead and gone. (*The hand that mocked them* – The sculptor's hand which reproduced or represented the king's feelings on stone. "Mocked" is here used in the sense of "imitated them without feeling any admiration for them". "Them" refers to those passions. *And the heart that fed* – and the king's heart which nourished or experienced those passions).

Note : To be able to get the meaning, you should read these lines thus : "whose frown and wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command, tell that its sculptor well read those passions which, stamped on these life-less things, yet survive the hand that mocked them and the heart that fed". The idea is that the king's passions still remain depicted on stone, while the sculptor's hand and the king's heart are no more, both the sculptor and the king having died long ago.

*Pedestal* – base ; foot, *these words appear* – there is an inscription on the pedestal. *My name is Ozymandias* – King Ozymandias flourished about 2100 B.C. He was the first soldier-king to invade Asia.

Note : The inscription on the foot of the pedestal reveals the name of the king, and gives us an idea of how great and powerful he was.

*Nothing beside remains ..... stretch far away* (Lines 12-14) – There is nothing else to be seen near the statue. A vast, desolate and barren desert surrounds the remains of that huge statue which lies broken. (colossal – huge. "Colossal" is from Colossus. "Colossus" was a huge statue bestriding the harbour of Rhodes so that ships could pass under its legs. "Colossal" therefore means huge).

Note : The last three lines describing the present ruined state of the statue present a vivid and pathetic contrast with the preceding two lines which convey the glory and greatness of Ozymandias.

### **6.3.3. (b) To a Skylark**

*Hail to thee, ..... unpremeditated are* (Lines 1-5) – The poet calls the skylark a cheerful and happy spirit. The skylark is not a bird but a spirit because, flying at a great height, it is not visible. The poet offers a warm welcome to the skylark. He joyfully greets the skylark. The skylark sings spontaneous songs from somewhere near the sky. It sings sweet melodies which express the feelings and emotions of its heart. A continuous stream of rich music flows naturally from the skylark. The skylark sings effortlessly and without any previous preparation.

*Higher still and higher..... ever singed* (Lines 6-10) – The sky-lark leaps upward from the earth and flies higher and higher into the blue sky. It flies up into the blue sky like a

cloud of fire rising upward. It keeps singing while flying, and it keeps flying while singing. It keeps flying and singing simultaneously.

*In the golden lightning ..... is just begun* (Lines 11-15) - The sun is just rising. It is still below the horizon, and it shoots its arrows as if they were flashes of lightning. The clouds in the eastern sky look bright and radiant because of the light of the rising sun. It is at this time that the skylark begins its upward flight. The skylark is a happy soul that has shaken off its earthly coil and has set out on a journey toward heaven. (The skylark leaving the earth and soaring upward is like a soul that has shed its mortal body and is on its way to heaven. The expression “unbodied joy” means a happy soul that has shaken off its mortal body).

*The pale purple even ... thy shrill delight* (Lines 16-20) – As the skylark flies upwards, the pale and purple twilight of the morning seems to melt away, giving place to the white light of the rising sun. The skylark becomes invisible as it flies higher and higher. For this reason it is like a star which shines in the sky invisibly during the day – time. The flight of the skylark becomes known to us by its loud and joyous singing. (even – actually the word “even” means evening. But here it has been used to mean twilight, the twilight of the morning. Shrill delight – happiness expressed in a loud voice).

*Keen as are the .... it is there* (Lines 21-25) – During the night, the moon sheds its white light upon the earth. But this bright light begins to fade with the coming of the morning. In the light of the morning, the moonlight fades away. Although the moon now becomes almost invisible, yet we are aware that the moon is still in the sky. In the same way, the skylark is invisible to our eyes, but listening to its music, we are aware of its presence in the sky.

*All the earth .... Is overflowed* (Lines 26-30) – The whole earth and the whole atmosphere above seem to be filled to overflowing with the song of the skylark. When the moon emerges from behind a single cloud in the sky, the moonlight fills the whole earth as well as the sky. The earth and the sky are flooded with the music of the skylark in the same way as they are flooded with the bright light of the moon.

*What thou ..... A rain of melody* (Lines 31-35) – The real nature of the skylark is not known to us. It is not even possible for us to think of anything that closely resembles the skylark. As it flies up and up, it sends a shower of rich music to us on the earth. The music flowing from the skylark is much more pleasant and delightful even than the bright and lustrous rain-drops falling from the clouds.

*Like a Poet .... it heeded on* (Lines 36-40) – The invisible skylark may be compared to a poet who is hidden from the public gaze by the originality and obscurity of his ideas. The poet’s message to mankind is so original and new that people cannot understand it. But the poet is not discouraged. He goes on singing his songs and expressing his ideas through those songs. Ultimately his songs do begin to produce an effect upon the people. The poet, by his perseverance and persistence, compels people to listen to him and to try to understand him. At last, the world is moved to sympathy with the poet’s hopes and fears which were previously

not understood by the people.

The idea is that the skylark keeps singing till we are moved to admiration for its songs, even though the skylark is invisible.

*Like a high-brown .... her bower* (Lines 41-45) – The skylark is here compared to a young damsel of high birth. This girl is supposed to be residing in a palace tower where she sings songs of love. She is singing these songs to attain some relief by giving an outlet to the intensity of her passion of love. Her songs are as sweet as her passion of love. The girl herself is not visible to outsiders because she is confined in the tower. But the songs of the girl overflow her apartment, and are heard by people outside. The skylark too is invisible to our eyes, but the sweet music of the skylark is audible to us. (The simile in these lines is highly suggestive and romantic).

*Like a glow-worm ..... from the view* (Lines 46-50) – The skylark is like a beautiful, shining glow-worm flying about among the dew-covered grass and flowers. The glow worm itself is invisible because it is hidden by the grass and leaves of plants. But we can recognize the glow – worm by the light that it scatters around itself. In the same way we cannot see the skylark in the aerial regions above, but we are conscious of the presence of the skylark on account of the sweet music which comes from it.

*Like a rose – heavy-winged thieves* (Lines 51-55) – We may not be able to see a rose which is wrapped up in its green leaves, but we shall certainly become conscious of it because of its sweet scent. When the warm wind blows, it seems to rob the rose of the rose's sweet fragrance. Indeed, the wind which steals the rose's sweetness becomes so heavy with that fragrance that its movement becomes slow. The physical presence of the skylark is not visible to our eyes, but we become aware of the presence of the skylark because of its sweet songs which are loud enough to reach our ears.

(*deflowered* – robbed of its sweet fragrance. *those heavy-winged thieves* – the warm winds which steal the fragrance of the rose and, becoming heavy with that fragrance, become slow in their movement).

*Sound of vernal ..... doth surpass* (Lines 56-60) - The music of the skylark surpasses in beauty, joy, and freshness everything that could ever claim these qualities. The music of the skylark is more fresh and joyful than the sound of rain falling on the bright grass in spring. It is more joyful and fresh than flowers which have been awakened from their torpor by rain.

*Teach us .... so divine* (Lines 61-65) – The poet would like to learn from the skylark which is perhaps a bird, perhaps a spirit, what sweet thoughts give rise to its joyful songs. The music of the skylark is full of a rapturous joy which seems to have a divine quality. No praise of love or wine has ever been so rapturous or joyful as the songs of the skylark.

*Chorus Hymeneal .... some hidden want* (Lines 66-70) – As compared with the

skylark's singing, a wedding song or a song of victory would seem to be meaningless. The note of joy in the songs of the skylark is much greater than in those other songs. By comparison with the skylark's song, other songs seem to suffer from some deficiency which we cannot define. (*chorus* – a song sung by several persons together. *Hymeneal* – relating to marriage. Hymen is the god of marriage. *Triumphal chant* – song of victory. *Vaunt* – an empty boast; something meaningless. *Hidden want* – deficiency that cannot be defined).

*What objects .... ignorance of pain ?* (Lines 71-75) – The poet wants to know what the source of the skylark's happiness is. What it is that makes this bird so happy? Does the skylark derive its happiness from the sight of some wonderful objects of Nature like fields, waves, mountains, the changing shape of the sky, and plains? If so, where are those objects of Nature which make the skylark so happy, because ordinary fields or waves or mountains cannot be a source of such extraordinary joy. Is the skylark so happy because of its great love for its fellow-creatures? Is the skylark so happy because it has never known any sorrow or grief?

*With thy clear keen ..... Lov'e sad satiety* (Lines 76-80) – The skylark feels so exquisitely happy that there can be no question of its ever feeling lazy or indolent. Nor does the skylark ever experience a feeling of the faintest irritation. This happiness of the skylark is absolutely unadulterated. The skylark does not experience the disillusionment or disgust which human beings invariably experience after an excessive enjoyment of the pleasures of love. The skylark does enjoy the pleasure of love, but in its case the feeling of disillusionment or disgust does not occur. (*joyance* – joy; happiness.) *languor* – laziness; indolence, *love's sad satiety* – the feeling or disgust which a human being experiences as a result of an excessive enjoyment of the pleasure of love).

*Waking or asleep .... A crystal stream ?* (Lines 81-85) – Both in its waking and sleeping hours, the skylark must be seeing truer visions of the nature and significance of death than human beings can. For human beings, death is an impenetrable mystery. The thought of death, therefore, not only puzzles and baffles human beings, but also depresses and saddens them. But the skylark has perhaps a truer and deeper knowledge of the mystery of death. And that is why the skylark is so happy and can produce such continuous and rapturous music. (*crystal stream* – continuous, joy full of music from the skylark).

*We look before and ..... saddest thought* (Lines 86-90) – The life of human beings is full of disappointments and frustrations. Human beings have desires and longings which remain unfulfilled. Whether they look back to their past or they look forward to their future, they feel an intense desire for what they have not been able to achieve and for what they will not be able to attain. There is an element of pain mingled even with their most genuine laughter. They can never enjoy unadulterated happiness. The sweetest songs of human beings are those that are full of sorrow and grief. The songs of the skylark, on the contrary, are an expression of pure joy.

*Yet if we could scorn ..... come never* (Lines 91-95) – Human happiness is marred

by feeling of hatred, pride, fear, etc. Human beings are born to suffer sorrows and griefs and to shed tears over their misery. Suppose that it were possible for human beings to cast off hatred, pride and fear from their hearts, and suppose that there were no sorrows in the life of human beings to make them weep. Even then they would not be able to enjoy that supreme happiness which the skylark enjoys.

*Better than all measures.... Of the ground* (Lines 96-100) – The skylark is scornful of the earth. That is why it flies in the higher regions above. If a poet could acquire the skylark's musical skill he would be able to produce rapturous songs like the skylark. All joyful songs known to mankind and all the available musical knowledge and instructions contained in books would be inadequate for a poet to produce songs of pure and perfect joy. Only by acquiring the skylark's musical skill can any poet equal the joyful singing of the skylark.

*Teach me half of ..... as I am listening now* (Lines 101-15) – If the skylark could communicate to Shelley even half of its joy, Shelley would feel inspired to write poems that would compete with the songs of the skylark. The world would then listen attentively to Shelley's poems just as Shelley is now listening to the songs of the skylark. All that Shelley needs is the feeling of ecstasy which the skylark experiences. (What he means to say is that his awareness of the tragedy of human life makes it impossible for him to write poems expressive of a rapturous joy).

### **6.3.4 Critical Appreciation**

#### **6.3.4 (a) *Ozymandias***

This poem relates an experience of a traveller from Egypt. This traveller saw two huge and trunkless legs of a statue in the desert. Near them lay, half-buried, the broken face of the statue. On this face can still be seen the expression of haughtiness and a sense of authority which had skillfully been depicted by the sculptor, and which survives the sculptor. On the pedestal the following words were inscribed : "My name is Ozymandias and I am a great king. Look at the great deeds which I have accomplished and which nobody can equal." Round the broken statue stretched a vast desert.

In form this poem is a sonnet. The sonnet-form was not really suited to Shelley's genius because the sonnet imposes restraints and restrictions under which Shelley must have felt impatient. For this reason, Shelley wrote very few sonnets, and failed to achieve distinction in them. This poem, for instance, does not rigidly obey the accepted conventions of the form of the sonnet. The rhyme-scheme does not follow any of the recognized patterns, and some of the rhymes are faulty (for instance, stone and frown; appear and despair).

But though not flawless, it is the best of the few sonnets that Shelley wrote. It has earned high praise from critics and is considered a most powerful, imaginative and suggestive poem. Its moral goes home to our hearts with force and vigour. Human glory and pomp are not everlasting. Hammers of decay quickly follow the hammers of construction. Time works



havoc with buildings and monument. But the moral is not directly stated. The poet only presents a picture to our minds and we have ourselves to draw the moral. It is a didactic poem, but its moral is not thrust upon us directly. Shelley said that didacticism was his abhorrence and he did not, therefore, directly preach moral lessons.

There is a touch of melancholy about the poem because it makes us reflect over the vanity of human wishes and the failure of all our efforts to keep our memory alive for ever. The contrast between the past glory of the king and the present condition of the statue is very striking to the mind and emphasizes the moral of the poem. The concluding lines of the poem are particularly remarkable for their suggestiveness. The sonnet contains two note-worthy pictures. One is the picture of the broken statue, a huge wreck, the face of which still wears the picture of the lone and level desert, boundless and bare, stretching far away (Lines 12-14).

#### **6.3.4 (b) *To a Skylark***

In this poem, Shelley dwells upon the sweet and rapturous singing of the skylark. The music of the skylark has been idealized by Shelley. The poet wants to know what it is that inspires the skylark to sing such melodious and ecstatic strains. He contrasts the sorrows and sufferings of mankind with the unspeakable joy of the bird. If it were possible for the poet to experience the gladness of the skylark, he would be able to sing songs as sweet and delightful as those of the bird itself.

The poem is remarkable for its abundance of similes, each of which is a picture in itself. The skylark climbs higher and higher in the sky “like a cloud of fire” (Line 8). The skylark floats and runs “like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun” (Line 15).

The skylark is unseen “like a star of heaven/In the broad daylight” (Lines 18-19). The skylark is like a poet hidden in the light of thought, like a high-born maiden singing love-songs in a palace tower, like a golden glow-worm invisibly scattering its light among the flowers and grass, like a rose hidden by its own green leaves and filling the air with its scent. The similes in this poem are unsurpassed for their romantic charm and beauty. Each simile brings a separate picture before the mind. These similes constitute a rich feast for the senses. We gloat over each simile with an epicurean delight.

This poem is a marvel of music and melody. The sweetness of the poem, combined with its other qualities makes it a lyrical masterpiece. The music of the poem is simply irresistible. The following stanza may be quoted not only for its musical quality but for the truth that it contains :

We look before and after

And pine for what is not :

Our sincerest laughter

With some pain is fraught;

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

There is an intensity of feeling throughout the poem. It is a passionate utterance. The poet's heart is overflowing with the flood of emotion. The note of longing and yearning, so characteristic of many of Shelley's poems, is to be found in this poem also. The following stanza in which the poet makes an appeal to the skylark, is an illustration :

Teach me half the gladness  
That thy brain must know,  
Such harmonious madness  
From my lips would flow  
The world should listen then as I am listening now.

All Shelley's lyrics possess a spontaneous quality. This poem is no exception. It seems to have come directly from the writer's heart. It appears to have been written naturally and effortlessly. It is a pure effusion. It is a superb example of Shelley's lyrical gift.

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#### 6.4 Self Assessment Questions

---

(a) The answer to the following questions should not exceed 20 words each :

(i) Who are known as younger Romantics ?

.....  
.....

(ii) Why was Shelley expelled from the University ?

.....  
.....

(iii) What was the first notable work of Shelley ?

.....  
.....

(iv) Name the two lyrical dramas written by Shelley.

.....  
.....

(v) Name the Elegy on the death of Keats, written by P.B . Shelley.

.....  
.....

- (vi) What is the best-known prose work of Shelley ?  
.....  
.....
- (vii) Who was Ozymandias ?  
.....  
.....
- (viii) What was written on the pedestal of the statue of Ozymandias ?  
.....  
.....
- (ix) What is the theme of the poem ‘Ozymandias’?  
.....  
.....
- (x) Why does the poet call the skylark a spirit ?  
.....  
.....
- (xi) Mention two beautiful similes employed by Shelley to suggest the sweetness of the skylark’s music.  
.....  
.....
- (b) The answer to the following questions should not exceed 500 words each :
- (i) Critically examine the poem ‘Ozymandias’ .  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

- .....
- (ii) Critically appreciate ‘To a Skylark’.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

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## 6.5 Answers to SAQs

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- (A) (i) Byron, Shelley and Keats.
- (ii) For having published a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*.
- (iii) *Queen Mab*
- (iv) *Prometheus Unbound* and *Hellas*
- (v) *Adonais*
- (vi) *Defence of Poetry*
- (vii) A great Egyptian king
- (viii) My name is Ozymandias and I am a great king.
- (ix) Vanity of human greatness and the non-yielding attempts to immortalize human grandeur.
- (x) Because it pours forth rich melodies of spontaneous music from the sky.
- (xi) The skylark is like a high-born maiden pouring forth her love into sweet songs; it is like a golden glow-worm.
- (B) (i) See Section 6.3.5 (a)
- (ii) See Section 6.3.5 (b)

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## 6.6 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have thrown light on the two representative poems of Shelley

*Ozymandias* and *To A Skylark*. The unit also presents a brief description of Shelley's life and literary career. To enable you understand the poems critically, you have also been given detailed explanatory notes followed by a critical appreciation on both the poems.

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### **6.7 Review Questions**

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1. Give an account of Shelley's views of nature as revealed in his poems.
2. Justify with examples that Shelley is the greatest lyric poet that England has produced.

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### **6.8 Bibliography**

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1. Desmond King – Hele : Shelley, His Thought and Works (OUP).
  2. J.A. Symonds : Shelley.
  3. R.D. Trivedi : A Compendious History of English Literature, Vikas.
  4. Stopford A. Brooke : Studies in Poetry, (OUP).
-

## UNIT – 7

---

### P.B. SHELLEY : (I) *TO The NIGHT*

### (II) *HYMN TO THE SPIRIT OF NATURE*

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#### Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Reading the Poems (Texts)
  - 7.2.1 *To The Night*
  - 7.2.2 *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*
  - 7.2.3 Explanatory Notes
    - 7.2.3. (a) *To The Night*
    - 7.2.3 (b) *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*
  - 7.2.4 Critical Appreciation
    - 7.2.4 (a) *To The Night*
    - 7.2.4 (b) *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*
- 7.3 Self Assessment Questions
- 7.4 Answers to SAQs
- 7.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.6 Review Questions
- 7.7 Bibliography

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#### 7.0 Objectives

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In continuation with the previous unit we intend to discuss in detail the two poems *To Night* and *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature* (an extract from *Prometheus Unbound*) composed by P.B. Shelley. We shall also familiarize you with Shelley's myth making power, of which the poem *To The Night* is a good example. Through the poem *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature* we intend to tell you that the story of Prometheus offered to Shelley an opening for his doctrine of love as the central principle of things and the key to the ideal future of humanity.

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## 7.1 Introduction

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*To The Night* is a remarkable lyric by Shelley. It is full of the passion and the yearning so typical of much of Shelley's poetry. The poem expresses Shelley's intense desire for Night, which he has personified. The poem is a wonderful illustration of Shelley's power of making his own myths. Not only has night been personified and made to live before us, but Day, Sleep, and Death are also treated in the same manner. Furthermore, relationships have been established between Night, Sleep and Death.

This poem expresses the writer's intense love of Night and contains an invitation to her to come soon. The poem is a sort of address of welcome to Night. The poet asks Night to spread herself rapidly over the sky. The whole day, Night has been weaving dreams of joy and fear in her cave. These dreams are to be seen by human beings in their sleep. Those who see joyous dreams love Night, while those who see fearful dreams regard Night as terrible. The poet wants Night to come without delay. Let Night establish her supremacy over the world. Let her wrap herself in a gray cloak decorated with stars, and let her wipe out the light of the day with her darkness. Let her sleepy influence be felt over city, sea, and land. The poet then gives expression to his passionate delight in Night. When he awoke and saw the dawn, he felt unhappy at the departure of Night. At all hours of the day he felt miserable because of the absence for Night and sighed for her coming. Death and Sleep offered to come to the poet but he rejected their offers because he did not feel attracted by them. Let Sleep and Death come to him when there is no more Night for him. But at present he is fascinated only by Night and appeals to her to come soon :

Swift be thine approaching flight,

Come soon, soon !

'Hymn to the Spirit of Nature's is a delightful lyric taken from Shelley's poetic drama *Prometheus Unbound* (Act II, scene v). It is a song sung by a voice in the air and addressed to Asia who, in the play, represents Intellectual Beauty, or the Soul of the world, or as the title above indicates, the Spirit of Nature. Prometheus is the spirit of love in mankind, while Asia is the spirit of love in Nature. The union of Prometheus and Asia in Shelley's play is the union of the spirit of love in man with the spirit of love in Nature. Their union marks the regeneration or redemption of the world of man and the world of Nature, and signifies the end of evil in the universe.

This song in praise of Asia is sung by an unknown voice in the air. Perhaps it is the voice of Prometheus who loves Asia. In any case, it is a glowing tribute to Asia. Asia is the Life (that is, the essence of life, or the source of life in Nature). Her lips brighten with their love, the breath passing between them. Her smiles, before they disappear, warm up the cold air. She ought to hide her smiles in her eyes which are so deep and so labyrinthine (that is, bewildering) that whoever looks into them will faint with intoxication. Asia is the child of light (that is, made of light or brightness). Her body seems to burn through her clothes in the same way as the

brightness of the morning appears through the clouds. Wherever she may be, she is surrounded by a heavenly atmosphere. It is not possible to look at Asia because her beauty is dazzling and unbearable. Her voice is sweet and soft. It is like liquid splendour, and it screens her from view so that everybody can feel her presence but none can actually see her. Asia is the Lamp of Earth (because of her brightness). Wherever she goes, she sheds light and illumines the dark shapes of earth. The souls of those whom Asia loves can walk upon the winds till they fail as Prometheus is now failing and although he is feeling confused by Asia's overwhelming beauty and although he seems lost because of his love for her, yet he does not complain or feel any regret.

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## 7.2 Reading the Poems (Texts)

---

Now read the poems carefully.

### 7.2.1 *To The Night* :

#### I

*Swiftly walk o'er the western wave,  
Spirit of Night !  
Out of the misty eastern cave.  
Where, all the long and lone daylight,  
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,  
Which make thee terrible and dear, -  
Swift be thy flight !*

#### II

*Wrap thy form in a mantle gray,  
Star inwrought !  
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day ;  
Kiss her until she be wearied out,  
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land  
Touching all with thine opiate wand –  
Come, long sought !*

#### III

*When I arose and saw the dawn.*



*I sighed for thee;  
When light rode high, and dew was gone,  
And noon lay heavy on flower and tree,  
And the weary Day turned to his rest,  
Lingering like an unloved guest,  
I sighed for thee.*

*IV*

*Thy brother Death came, and cried,  
Wouldst thou me ?  
Thy sweet child Sleep, the filmy-eyed,  
Murmured like a noontide bee,  
Shall I nestle near thy side ?  
Wouldst thou me ? – And I replied,  
No, not thee !*

*V*

*Death will come when thou art dead,  
Soon, too soon –  
Sleep will come when thou art fled;  
Of neither would I ask the boon  
I ask of thee, beloved Night –  
Swift be thine approaching flight,  
Come soon, soon !*

**7.2.2 Hymn of the Spirit Nature**

*Life of Life ! thy lips enkindle  
With their love the breath between them;  
And thy smiles before they dwindle  
Make the cold air fire ; then screen them  
In those looks where whoso gazes*

*Faints, entangled in their mazes.*  
*Child of Light ! thy limbs are burning*  
*Through the vest which seems to hide them,*  
*As the radiant lines of morning*  
*Through the clouds, ere they divide them :*  
*And this atmosphere divinest*  
*Shrouds thee wheresoe'er thou shinest.*  
*Fair are others; none beholds thee;*  
*But thy voice sounds low and tender*  
*Like the fairest, for it folds thee*  
*From the sight, that liquid splendour;*  
*And all feel, yet see thee never; —*  
*As I feel now, lost for ever !*  
*Lamp of Earth ! where'er thou movest*  
*Its dim shapes are clad with brightness.*  
*And the souls of whom thou lovest*  
*Walk upon the winds with lightness*  
*Till they fail, as I am failing,*  
*Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing !*

### **7.2.3 Explanatory Notes**

#### **7.2.3 (a) To The Night**

*Swiftly walk over the western wave.. thy flight !* (Stanza I). The poet here makes an appeal to Night which has been personified. Night seems to the poet to be a living being, capable of acting in accordance with its own will and capable of listening to the poet. Shelley has, therefore, created a myth here. He appeals to Night to spread itself over the western sky where the sun sets. He imagines that Night spends the hours of daylight in some misty eastern cave, all alone, and that it keeps busy during that time, manufacturing or weaving dreams of joys and fear for human beings. These dreams are seen by human beings during their sleep. Sweet dreams, which human beings see, make Night dear to them; but the frightening dreams, which they see, make Night terrible to them. Thus human beings are in love with Night and yet, at the same time, they are afraid of Night. The poet is in love with Night without being afraid of

it. He wants Night to come swiftly and without delay.

*Wrap thy form in a mantle gray, star-inwrought.* The poet calls upon Night to wrap itself in a gray coloured cloak which has stars woven in its texture. The dark sky is regarded here as the mantle of Night, and the stars that shine in the sky are supposed to be woven in the texture of that mantle.

*Blind with thine hair ... wearied out.* (Lines 10-11). Here Day is also personified. The poet asks Night to come and spread its black hair over the eyes of Day, so that Day may no longer be able to see. Then the poet asks Night to overwhelm Day with kisses. Let Day be kissed so vehemently and repeatedly that Day feels tired of these kisses and flees from the world. This is poetic fancy. What the poet means is that, with the coming of Night, Day withdraws from this world.

*Touching all with thine opiate wand.* We are to imagine that Night carries in its hand a magic staff which has the power of sending everyone, who is touched with it, to sleep. When Night comes, all creatures fall asleep.

*And the wearied Day..... an unloved quest* (Lines 19-20). When Day was tired of its stay on the earth, it felt like resting. And yet Day stayed on for some time more, just as a guest might prolong his stay in a house where he is no longer welcome. (The simile is very appropriate).

*Thy brother Death came..... No, not thee !* (Lines 22-28). The poet is interested neither in Death nor in Sleep. He looks upon Death as the brother of Night, and he calls Sleep a child of Night. Death is the brother of Night because Night stands for darkness, and Death takes human beings into the unknown dark regions. Sleep is the child of Night because it is during night that human beings are overcome by Sleep. Both Death and Sleep offer to come to him. Death is prepared to take him away from this world in case he is sick of life. Sleep, which makes the eyelids close, speaks to the poet very sweetly and softly like the murmuring of a bee at noon-time. Sleep offers to creep close to the poet and to send him into a state of temporary forgetfulness. But the poet rejects both these offers, because he is attracted only by Night.

(Sleep, the filmy – eyed – Sleep is called filmy-eyed because the eyes of person who feels sleepy look dim or filmy).

*Death will come when thou art dead* – Death would come to the poet in its own time.

*Soon, to soon* – Death would not take long in coming to the poet. (Here is an unconscious prophecy of Shelley's premature death. It was at the age of thirty that he was drowned in the sea).

*Sleep will come when thou art fled* – The poet does not accept the offer of Sleep, because Sleep can come to him when Night is gone. He would not like to waste his time in

sleeping. He can sleep permanently after death.

### 7.2.3 (b) *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*

*Life of Life* – essence of life. they *thy lips enkindle ... between them*—There is such love in Asia's lips that it lights up the breath which passes through her lips. (This is poetical language, and the words here are not to be taken literally). *And thy smiles....cold are fire*—There is such heat in her smiles that, before, fading away, they warm the cold air. The cold air becomes warm in the fire of Asia's smiles. *Then screen them...in their mazes* — Asia's smiles are so bright and lovely that nobody can endure their brightness and loveliness. Therefore, she is asked to screen or conceal her smiles in her eyes. Her eyes are like intricate and bewildering paths. By looking into her eyes, a man would get lost and feel dazed. (*maze - labyrinth*).

*Child of Light* – Asia is now called the Child of Light because she is so bright and shining. *Thy limbs are burning ... thou shinest* (Lines 7-12) – Asia is so bright that rays of light seem to be emanating from her body. Her body seems to be burning. Even her clothes cannot hide the radiance of her body which appears to be on fire. The brightness of her body is visible through her clothes just as the brightness of dawn becomes visible through clouds before the clouds are parted by the sun. Wherever bright Asia may go, she is surrounded by this heavenly atmosphere. In other words, she is a divine Spirit enveloped in heavenly light.

*Fair are other..... lost for ever* (Lines 13-18) – There are other fair spirits in the universe, but Asia surpasses them all in beauty. Nobody can see Asia, because her splendour is dazzling to the eyes. Her voice is sweet, soft and gentle like the voice of the fairest of spirits. The glorious melody of her voice seems to be screening her from the sight of others. Everybody becomes dimly aware of her presence but nobody can actually see her, just as the speaker (Prometheus) feels aware of her presence and is forever completely lost in her glory, splendour and divine beauty.

*Lamp of Earth ..... Unbewailing* (Lines 19-24) – Asia is now regarded as the lamp that sheds its light on the earth. Wherever she goes, her beauty and brightness illumine the dark objects on the earth. Those whom Asia loves are very fortunate. Because of the power of her love, their souls are enabled to walk lightly upon the breezes. Those souls can walk upon the breezes till in the end they collapse just as the speaker (Prometheus) is about to collapse. The speaker is feeling giddy or confused because of the dazzling beauty of Aisa and because of the intoxication of his love for her. In spite of that, to be in love with Asia is in itself a matter of pride, and that, though the lover is lost owing to his profound love for her, he does not complain or grumble.

You will be disappointed if you look minutely for the meaning of words and lines in this poem. It is the music of the poem that you must be able to feel. Therefore, the poem should be read for its sound, not for its sense; for its melody and sweetness, not for its meaning.

## 7.2.4 Critical Appreciation

### 7.2.4 (a) *To The Night*

In this poem Shelley expresses his deep love of Night. Night is personified here and regarded as a living entity, conscious of its own existence and of the existence of others. Night has a strange fascination for the poet who is attracted neither by dawn nor by day. Neither sleep nor death has any charm for the poet. He wants his beloved Night. He expresses his love for Night in such lines as the following : Swift be thy flight !” “Come, long-sought!” “Come soon, soon”.

There are a number of exquisite nature-pictures in the poem. Night is imagined as living in some lonely and misty eastern cave where, throughout the day, she weaves as wearing a gray cloak studded with stars. When Night appears, she blinds with her dark hair the eyes of Day and kisses Day till Day is exhausted and retires from the scene. The idea of Day giving place to Night has been conveyed to us through a beautiful picture :

Wrap the form in a mantle gray,  
Star – inwrought !  
Blind with thine hair the eyes of Day;  
Kiss her until she be wearied out, .....

Night is then depicted as wandering over city, sea and land, and producing a sleepy effect upon all living beings. More pictures follow in the poem. There is the picture of the sun riding high and the dew vanishing, and there is the picture of flowers and trees oppressed by the heavy weight of noon. The weary Day is depicted as lingering like an unloved guest, a most appropriate simile.

There is an atmosphere of melancholy in the poem which is also characterized by a note of longing. The poet yearns for Night. Several times in the course of the poem he says that he is sighing for Night, and several times he appeals to her to come soon. The music and melody of the poem lend a great charm to it. Here is a specimen of the poem’s music :

Death will come when thou art dead,  
Soon, too soon –  
Sleep will come when thou art fled ;  
Of neither would I ask the boon  
I ask of thee, beloved Night –  
Swift be thine approaching flight,  
Come soon, soon !

In short, this poem has all the qualities of Shelley's lyricism. The poem is remarkable also for the simplicity of its language and ideas. There is nothing abstract or obscure, either, about language or about the theme. Most of us do not have Shelley's love for Night, and yet somehow we are made to share the writer's sentiments in this poem, which only means that, as we read through the poem, we fall under its spell. The music of the poem has certainly something to do with this spell.

#### 7.2.4 (b) *Hymn to the Spirit of Nature*

Much of Shelley's poetry is divorced from real human life. It lacks substance. It is airy or ethereal. It is vain to look for definite meaning in much of his poetry. The song here is an example of the abstract or ethereal or insubstantial quality of Shelley's poetry. The four stanzas before us have no logical or clear-cut thought. The meaning is vague and hazy, not clear and definite. These stanzas have a dream like quality about them. But this song is regarded as one of Shelley's supreme efforts. J.A. Symonds for instance, says about it : "If a critic is so dull as to ask what 'Life of Life ! thy lips enkindle' means, or to whom it is addressed, none can help him any more than one can help a man whose sense of hearing is too gross for the tenuity of a bats' cry". That is all very well, but it ought to be admitted that this lyric, for all its impassioned imagery, is lacking in clear cut thought. It stirs a vague, transcendent emotion, but the last line ("Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing!") aptly describes 'the feelings of the reader when he has finished the poem. So far as the sense or meaning is concerned, it is a confusing poem, and our feelings are best described in the last line.

Apart from the meaning, however this is one of the finest lyrics of Shelley. Its melody and music are enchanting. The sweetness of its verse is delicious. As we read through the poem, we feel delighted by its singing quality. Especially note-worthy is the abundance of the liquid consonants (l, m and n) which always enrich and sweeten verse. For instance :

Life of Life ! thy lips enkindle

With their love the breath between them;

---

Till they fail, as I am failing,

Dizzy, lost, yet unbewailing

The poem is also remarkable for the richness of its imagery, and its similes and metaphors. The pictures of the breath of Asia being lighted up, her smiles warming the cold air, her body seeming to burn through her garments, her brightness illuminating the dim shapes of the earth – these are all wonderful. The beauty of Asia's eyes is most fancifully depicted by saying that whoever looks into them faints, "entangled in their mazes". Asia's eyes are compared to labyrinthine, bewildering paths in which a man would lose his way, while the intoxication of her eyes would completely overpower and overwhelm him. We have a beautiful simile when Asia's body seeming to burn through her garments is compared to the brightness of the morning

which appears through the clouds in the east. A wonderful metaphor is employed when the voice of Asia is called a “liquid splendour”. Another metaphor is used when Asia is addressed as the “Lamp of Earth”.

This song or hymn has all the spontaneity for which Shelley’s lyrics are known. As we read it, we feel that it must have come from the poet’s imagination naturally and effortlessly, just as a nightingale’s song comes naturally from her throat. The mood of the poem is rapturous because of the fascinating and dazzling beauty, charm and radiance of Asia. The two closing lines, however are tinged with sadness because there the speaker describes himself as “failing dizzy, lost”.

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### 7.3 Self Assessment Questions

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(a) The answer to the following questions should not exceed 20 words each :-

(i) What does Asia represent in ‘Hymn to the Spirit of Nature’?

.....

.....

(ii) Why is it not possible to look at Asia ?

.....

.....

(iii) What does the union of Prometheus and Asia symbolize ?

.....

.....

(iv) What is the voice of Asia called ?

.....

.....

(v) Where has the song ‘Hymn to the Spirit of Nature’ been extracted from ?

.....

.....

(vi) What is the main idea of the poem *To Night* ?

.....

.....

(vii) How is the Day depicted in *To Night* ?

.....  
.....  
(viii) What does the Night do to the Day ?

.....  
.....  
(b) Answer the following questions in 500 words each :-

(i) Critically analyse the Poem *To Night*.

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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
(ii) Critically appreciate the poem Hymn to the Spirit of Nature.

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#### 7.4 Answers to SAQs

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- (A) (i) Intellectual Beauty, Soul of the World or the Spirit of Nature.  
(ii) Because her beauty is dazzling and unbearable.  
(iii) The union of Prometheus and Asia symbolize the union of the spirit of love in



man with the spirit of love in Nature.

- (iv) Liquid splendour.
  - (v) From Shelley's poetic drama *Prometheus Unbound*.
  - (vi) It tells us about Shelley's intense love of Night and is an invitation to her to come soon.
  - (vii) The weary Day is depicted as lingering like an unloved guest.
  - (viii) The Night blinds with her dark hair the eyes of Day and kisses till day is exhausted and retires from the scene.
- (B) (i) See the Critical Appreciation.
- (ii) See the Critical Appreciation.

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## 7.5 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have presented a detailed analysis of Shelley's two poems – 'To The Night' and 'Hymn to the Spirit of Nature'. Both the poems are remarkable for their lyrical quality, spontaneity and richness of imagery.

The detailed explanatory notes have been given to enable you to comprehend and enjoy the poems. At the end are given the self-assessment questions to enable you check your understanding.

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## 7.6 Review Questions

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1. Discuss the use of images in 'To The Night'.
2. Elucidate the poem 'Hymn to The Spirit of Nature' as remarkable example of Shelley's lyrical richness.

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## 7.7 Bibliography

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1. Desmond King – Hele : Shelley, His Thought and Work (OUP).
2. J.A. Symonds : Shelley.
3. R.D. Trivedi : A Compendious History of English Literature, Vikas.
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## UNIT – 8

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### JOHN KEATS : *ODE ON MELANCHOLY*,

### *LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI*

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#### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 John Keats' Life and Personality
  - 8.2.1 John Keats' Works
  - 8.2.2 The Nature of an Ode and Keats' Odes
- 8.3 *Ode on Melancholy* : Text
  - 8.3.1 Glossary
  - 8.3.2 Detailed Explanation of Ode on Melancholy
  - 8.3.3 Self- Assessment Questions
  - 8.3.4 Answers to SAQs
- 8.4 La Belle Dame Sans Merci : Text
  - 8.4.1 Glossary
  - 8.4.2 Detailed Explanation of La Belle Dame Sans Merci
  - 8.4.3 Self- Assessment Questions
  - 8.4.4 Answers to SAQs
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Review Questions
- 8.7 Bibliography

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#### **8.0 Objectives**

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This unit will help you to understand

1. Keats' life and personality
2. his important works and his odes
3. the nature of an ode and Keat's odes

4. *Ode on Melancholy*
5. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*

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## 8.1 Introduction

---

In this unit we have given you an introduction to the early nineteenth century poets who belonged to the Romantic Revival and the chief elements of the Romantic poetry with special reference to John Keats. But you cannot understand Keats' *Ode on Melancholy* in isolation. In order to understand this ode you should study Keats' other odes. A brief review of his life and other poetic works is given so that you can understand *Ode On Melancholy* and *Ode on Indolence* in a better way. Keats' famous ballad *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is also explained in this unit. The text of the poems is included for your convenience. The glossary and literary terms are explained for your better understanding of the poems.

### Introduction to John Keats

The first thirty years of the nineteenth century are remarkable in the literary history of England for a number of poets of literary genius whose work has been as much discussed as that of any group of writers in English literature. The text books have attached the label 'Romantic Revival' to them to show how their work is different from that of their predecessors: John Milton, John Dryden and Alexander Pope.

'Romantic Revival' is a movement in England inaugurated by the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge in 1798. Wordsworth (1770-1850) is the oldest, the greatest and the most long lived of the Romantic poets. The other significant poets of this movement are S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), Lord Byron (1788-1824), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821).

The works of the romantic poets were significantly different from those of their predecessors because they all had a deep interest in and love for nature, not only as a centre of beautiful scenes but also as an informing and spiritual influence on life. They were turning to nature to escape the nightmarish influence of industrialism, may be for protection. They all valued their own experiences and there is a subjective element in their poetry as they looked into themselves, seeking in their own lives for strange sensations and subject for their poetry. In the poetry of all of them, there is a sense of wonder, a sense of mysterious, of life seen with a new vision and fresh sensibilities.

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## 8.2 John Keats' Life and Personality

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John Keats (1795-1821) was the last-born of the romantics and the first to die. Yet in this short span of twenty six years three volumes of his poetry were published : *Poems* (1817), *Endymion* (1818) and *Lamia and Other Poems* (1820). All the great odes (eight) of the 1820 volume contain his maturest works, Two others *Fragment of an Ode to Maia*, written

on Mayday (1818) and *Ode On Indolence* (1819) have been taken from the posthumous poems which were published after his death.

Keats was the son of a stable keeper. He was a West Countryman by descent, but a Londoner by birth. His father, Thomas Keats, was employed in livery stable in Finsbury and married his masters daughter Frances Jennings. He is described as a man of remarkably fine common sense and respectability. From their marriage were born John Keats, the poet, George, Tom, Edward, who died in infancy and one daughter called Fanny. Though Keats' birth was not aristocratic, his parents were well to do and ambitious. Soon after Keats had started going to school, his father died in 1804. His mother to whom Keats was deeply attached, died of consumption when he was only fifteen. He spent the best years of his youth in training to be a doctor though from the first a devotion to poetry occupied him intensely.

It was Charles Cowden Clarke who initiated Keats to Spenser and it was under the influence of *The Faerie Queene* that Keats thought of writing verses. The abundance of images in Spenser's poetry fascinated him most and it is reflected in his work at many places. From Spenser and Shakespeare he learned the magic power of words and from Elgin Marbles, Greek sculpture and paintings of Haydon he discovered what pictorial art could contribute to his poetry. He discovered the classical fables and legends from Dictionaries and reference books. When he decided to dedicate himself to poetry, he received positive encouragement from his brothers and friends who had great faith in him. His lovable nature won him many friends, most important among them were Leigh Hunt and Hayden. By 1817 Keats had given up his medical studies altogether and devoted himself to poetry as his life's work.

Keats' letters have played a significant role to sustain his popularity in the twentieth century. They reveal his critical opinions, his frustration in love for Fanny Brawne, his capacity for intimate friendship and his journey to Italy in an effort to recover his failing health.

The emigration of his brother George Keats and his wife to America, was the first blow that struck Keats. He writes : "My love for my brothers, from the early loss of our parents, and even from earlier misfortunes, has grown into an affection passing the love of woman." In the summer of 1818 Keats went on a walking tour through the English lakes and Scotland with his friend Charles Brown. Over exertion and exposure during this trip brought on fever and bad throat which soon developed into the fatal disease of consumption. His mother had died of it and his brother Tom was dying of it. He was already much depressed by George's departure to America, now Tom's illness broke him down. He nursed Tom till his death in December 1818. Then came the death of Tom as a last blow when Keats himself was far from well.

The first few months of 1819 were the most fruitful period of his life and one of the famous poems of this period is *Ode to A Nightingale*. Certain lines of this ode show how deeply he felt the loss of his younger brother and how he himself longed for death:

"Now more than ever seems it rich to die,

To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy! (II. 55-58)

A reference to the memory of Tom's closing days and his own failing health may be traced in the following lines:

Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies..." (II. 24-26)

Sickness was eating his life away and in 1820 he was torn between his disease and his passion for Fanny Browne. After the appearance of his last volume of *Poems* in 1820, he was at length ordered by the doctors to go to Italy to recover from his illness. He sank fast and died on February 23, 1821. Keats epitaph is of his own dictation:

"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

### 8.2.1 Keats' Works

Keats was not well known during his life time and as Shelley puts it, his work was doomed to "total neglect and obscurity". Many years later Matthew Arnold, one of the most famous Victorian poets and critics, said of Keats,

"He is with Shakespeare". This was complete reversal of judgement. If Keats' work is compared with the work of other English poets produced by the age of twenty five, he, undoubtedly stands supreme.

Keats published three volumes of poetry:

1. *Poems* in 1817
2. *Endymion* in 1818
3. *Lamia and Other Poems* in 1820

In the *Poems* of 1817, Keats expresses the youthful spirit of delight and of liberty of the new age. In this volume he seems to be influenced by Leigh Hunt in his idiomatic cast of language and versification. However, there are in this volume perfect sonnets: 'Much have I travelled in the Realms of gold', 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer'.

*Endymion* was published in 1818. It is a classical love story of a Shepherd prince and the goddess which depicts the passion of the human soul for nature and for absolute beauty.

The next important poem was *Isabella* which was finished in Summer 1818. In *Isabella*

Keats versifies a tale from Boccaccio of the love of Isabella and Lorenzo, and the murder of Lorenzo by Isabella's cruel brothers.

The Eve of St. Agnes is woven around an Italian legend which narrates the story of Porphyro who falls in love with the daughter of a hostile house, Modeline.

*Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* mark the opening and closing of the most creative year of Keats's poetry. He narrates in *Hyperion* the overthrow of the Titanic gods by the new Olympian gods.

*Lamia*, composed in 1819 has allegorical significance. The story seems to suggest that philosophy alone is cold and destructive while the pleasures of senses alone are unreal and unsatisfying.

*Odes*: In the spring of 1819, Keats was chiefly engaged in the composition of his unique odes which have no parallel and are a class by themselves. The spirit of sadness which predominates his thought in the last year of his life, strikes the Keynote of the odes. The most important Odes of Keats are: *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, *Ode to Autumn*, *Ode on Melancholy*, *Ode to Psyche* and *Ode on Indolence*.

### 8.2.2 The Nature of an Ode and Keats' Odes

The Ode is defined in *the Oxford New English Dictionary* as a 'rimed' lyric often in the form of an address, generally dignified or exalted in subject, feeling and style.'

The Greeks defined the word 'Ode' simply as a "song" and applied it to any kind of poetic composition that was composed to be sung to music. The Greek odes were of two kinds:

1. The first category of odes were composed for a single voice, such as lyrics of Sappho. They were regular and simple in metre.
2. The second type of odes were written for a choir. The best examples are the odes of Pindar. They were highly elaborate.

Amongst the famous writers of odes before Keats were Milton, Spenser, Dryden, Gray, Collins and Wordsworth. A reading of their poems shows that the Greek definition of ode must be changed for English poets. As a matter of fact, opinions may differ about the exact features of an ode. Now the name of ode is applied to one type of lyric poem only. Dignity of theme and style, elaborate metrical structure, solemnity in tone usually taking the form of an address are the essential features of an ode.

The odes written by English poets can be roughly classified into three categories: regular and Pindaric, regular and simple and irregular.

1. In the first group Thomas Gray's *Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* can be included.

They are composed of a group of stanzas; each group consists of three stanzas.

2. To the second group belong Spenser's *Four Hymns of Love and Beauty*, Milton's *Nativity Hymn*, Gray's *Eton College*, Collins' *Ode to Evening* and others.
3. To the third group belong Spenser's *Epithalmion* and Dryden's *Song for Saint Cecilia's Day*, Collins' *The Passion* and Wordsworth's *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*.

Among the most distinguished writers of odes who belonged to the early nineteenth century are Shelley Coleridge and Keats. Shelley's *to a Skylark* and *Ode to the West Wind* are written in regular stanzas, while Coleridge's *Dejection* is written in irregular stanzas.

Keats does not follow the strict Pindaric pattern. His structure of ode is sometimes regular and simple as in *To Fancy*. The most characteristic form of his odes consists of a group of stanzas complex in structure but regular or nearly regular.

We are brought into personal contact with the mind of Keats when we study his great odes. He expresses his own feelings and shows how they are coloured by the events of his life. Robert Bridges comments:

"Had Keats left us only his odes, his rank among the poets would not be lower than it is, for they have stood apart in literature".

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### 8.3 Ode on Melancholy : Text

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No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist

Wolf's-bane, tight-rooted, for its poisonous wine;

Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kiss'd

By nightshade, ruby grapes of Proserpine;

Make not your rosary of yew-berries,

5

Nor let the beetle nor the death-moth be

Your mournful psyche, nor the downy owl

A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;

For shade to shade will come too drowsily,

And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul.

10

And when the melancholy fit shall fall

Sudden from heaven like a weeping cloud,

*That fosters the droop-headed flowers all,*  
*And hides the green hill in an April shroud;*  
*Then glut thy sorrow on a morning rose,* 15  
*Or on the rainbow of the salt sand-wave,*  
*Or on the wealth of globed peonies;*  
*Or, if thy mistress some rich anger shows,*  
*Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,*  
*And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes.* 20  
*She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die;*  
*And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips*  
*Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,*  
*Turning to poison while the bee-mouth sips:*  
*Ay, in the very temple of Delight* 25  
*Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,*  
*Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue*  
*Can burst Joys grape against his palate fine;*  
*His soul shall taste the sadness of her might,*  
*And be among her cloudy trophies hung.* 30

### 8.3.1 Glossary

#### Stanza 1

Melancholy – a deep feeling of sadness that lasts for a long time.

- Line 1 Lethe – A river in the lower world, by drinking from which the spirits of the dead obtained forgetfulness.
- Line 2 Wolf's bane – The poisonous plant called aconite or monk's hood. Bane = harm. The plant was anciently used as a bait for wolf traps.
- Line 3 Twist – The action of turning or bending with your hand twisting is required for tearing up its root and for extracting its poisonous juice.
- Line 4 Tight – rooted – Rooted firmly in the ground.
- Line 5 Pale – A person having face or skin that is almost white.



- Line 6 Nightshade – Yields red bright berries which is the most dangerous of British poisonous plants.
- Line 7 Ruby grape – The “ruby grape” refers to the vivid red berries of the woody night shade.
- Line 8 Proserpine – Ceres’ daughter Proserpina was carried off by Pluto, King of the World of the dead. Ceres, who was the goddess of the fruits of earth, mourned for Proserpina so much that all the harvests were spoiled and Jupiter sent Mercury to fetch Proserpina back. But proserpina had eaten part of a pomegranate among the shades. As a result even Mercury could not wholly free her and she spends four months of every year in the nether world and the rest with her mother.
- Line 9 Rosary – The string of beads by which Roman Catholics count their prayers.
- Line 10 Yew berries – Yew tree is a small tree with dark green leaves and small red berries, associated with graveyards.
- Line 11 Beetle – Beetle lives in walls and woodwork generally, and by drumming with its head produces a melancholy sound of rapid tapping, believed by many to be a presage of the death of some person in the house.
- Line 12 Death-moth – The death’s head hawk-moth. As it flies it produces a low, melancholy sound.
- Line 13 Psyche – Psyche typifies the soul of man. It is generally represented as having the wings of a butterfly.
- Line 14 Owl – a bird of ill omen.
- Line 15 Downy – covered in soft hair or feathers.
- Line 16 Drowsily – In a tired or almost sleepy manner. The feeling caused by death or calamities is of deadening grief, not melancholy. Keats here probably means conscious enjoyment of sorrowful feeling which is associated with everything that is beautiful and joyful.
- Line 17 Anguish – Severe pain, mental suffering or unhappiness.

#### Stanza 2

- Line 18 Fit shall fall – the visitation of melancholy mood is sudden.
- Line 19 a weeping cloud – pouring rain
- Line 20 Foster – to encourage to develop.
- Line 21 The droop-headed flowers all – All those flowers which hang down their heads.
- Line 22 April Shroud – a shroud of April rain The word ‘shroud’ which means cover, lends a touch of mystery and sadness.

Line 23 Glut – indulge to the full

Line 24 Morning rose – A rose that blooms in the morning. The morning rose in spring season, after a shower looks beautiful but its beauty will fade away.

Line 25 Rainbow of the salt sand-wave – The colours of the rainbow sometimes produced by the play of sunlight on wet sand left by a retreating wave. The rainbow occasionally appears after a shower and its charming reflection will remain for a short while.

Line 26 Wealth – wealth or abundance of flowers

Line 27 Globed – globe shaped

Line 28 Globed peonies – plants with large globular red or white flowers.

Line 29 Rich – precious, pleasant In *Ode to a Nightingale* Keats longs for death and says: “Now more than ever seems it rich to die. To cease upon the midnight with no pain” (55-56) This use of rich is characteristic of Keats.

Line 30 Rich anger – a fervent emotion or passion of anger Keats is no doubt thinking of Fanny Brawne, whom he seems to have regarded as an incarnation of his ideal of beauty.

Line 31 Emprison – imprison, to hold her soft hand so that she cannot escape.

Line 32 Rave – Under the influence of some intense passion.

Line 33 Peerless eyes – eyes better than all others. The eyes acquire a lustre under the influence of a strong feeling.

### Stanza 3

Line 34 She – Melancholy is personified here

Line 35 Dwells – lives

Line 36 Beauty, Joy – are personified

Line 37 Bidding adieu – saying good bye

Line 38 Aching – feeling a continuous dull pain.

Line 39 Aching pleasure nigh – Melancholy dwells close to pleasure whose intensity merges into pain. The heart aches when the pleasure is excessive. Satiety in pleasure causes a sad feeling. Pleasure thus turns almost to pain and a feeling of disillusionment.

Line 40 Nigh – nearly

Line 41 The bee – mouth sips – The bee is the emblem of the pleasure seeker. Man is compared to the bee which sucks honey with great avidity. So man also indulges in pleasure with zeal and gusto but the sweetness of joy turns to poison as soon as it is tasted.

Line 42 Temple of Delight – Delight is personified

Line 43 Veil'd Melancholy – The face of the goddess Melancholy is covered or hidden from dull, insensitive souls.

Line 44 Sovran – The older form of “sovereign”

Line 45 Sovran Shrine – The dominating shrine. Melancholy dominates delight. Her face is veiled and she reveals her face only to those who are capable of experiencing intense pleasure.

Line 46 Save – except

Line 47 Strenuous tongue – a vigorous or strenuous pursuit of pleasure will lead to the realization of melancholy.

Line 48 Palate – The top part of the inside of the mouth palate fine is the soft part at the front or back of the palate.

Line 49 Save him ... palate fine – Only those who can appreciate the ecstasies of joy, can appreciate the finest shades of melancholy. The sense of taste and touch contributes to the perception of knowledge.

Line 50 The sadness of her might – the power of her sadness.

Line 51 Cloudy trophies – Sensitive souls of men are compared to clouds which are hung as trophies in the shrine of Melancholy. The clouds suggest the gloom and a feeling of dejection, melancholy.

### 8.3.2 Detailed Explanation of *Ode on Melancholy*

*Ode on Melancholy* is one of the most important odes of Keats. This is the last of the Odes in the 1820 volume. It reveals that melancholy and truest sadness dwell with beauty and joy, for the pain of suffering is less keen than the pain of knowing that beauty and joy will fade:

“She dwells with Beauty – Beauty that must die

And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips

Bidding adieu; and aching pleasure nigh, ....”

A note of solemnity, deepening now and then to poignant sadness and suffering can be heard through this ode as well as his other great odes.

Keats was reading Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* about this time when he composed *Ode on Melancholy*. He admired Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* for its fantastic and forcible images. Burton's influence on Keat's style and tone can be noticed in the following lines which were first written as the opening stanza:

*Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,*

*And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast  
 Stitch shrouds together for a sail, with groans  
 To fill it out, blood-stained and aghast;  
 Although your rudder be a dragon's tail,  
 Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony,  
 Your cordage large uprootings from the skull  
 Of bald Medusa, certes you would fall  
 To find the Melancholy – Whether she  
 Dreameth in any isle of Lethe dull,*

This stanza was omitted by Keats from the printed version this explains the seeming abruptness of the opening line:

“No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist...”

The main thought of the poem is that only those who are capable of experiencing the extremest joy will know what real melancholy is. The poet suggests that true melancholy does not lie in the sad and ugly things of life, not even in death and the accompaniments of death but in all things that are beautiful and joyful:

“Ay, in the very temple of Delight  
 Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine...”

Thus the profound perception of the poet is reflected in this central idea that the source of the deepest melancholy lies in Joy, Delight and in eternal Beauty.

That is why the poet suggests:

“No, no! go not to Lethe, neither twist  
 Wolf's-bane, tight rooted, for its poisonous wine...  
 Nor suffer thy pale forehead to be kissed  
 By night shade, ruby grape of Proserpine ...

These lines follow naturally from the omitted stanza.

Keats suggests in the opening lines that Melancholy is a delicate feeling and not deadening grief. Those who seek to find melancholy, should not look for her in the places which are commonly supposed to be her dwelling such as Lethe in the lower world, Wolf's-bane, ruby grape of Proserpine, the beetle, the death-moth, your mournful Psyche or the downy owl. The objects, places and creatures named in this stanza are associated with gloom

and mourning. The sufferer from melancholy, “A partner is your Sorrow’s mysteries”, will be lulled into drowsiness to forget the pain and suffering of the soul.

In the second stanza the poet describes how the fit of melancholy will fall suddenly like a weeping cloud. He uses a simile to describe the pouring rain which will encourage the flowers in the mouth of April to grow. There will be an abundance of flowers with their heads hung down covering the green hill. The tender melancholic feeling lies deep in your heart when you look at April showers, the beauty of the morning rose and the “peerless eyes” of your beloved.

The concluding stanza strongly suggests that a deep feeling of sadness, the “sense of tears in mortal things” is always presently in everything that is beautiful and joyful. Melancholy is personified, so are Joy, Pleasure and Delight. She lives close to the pleasure whose keenness merges into pain. A wealth of meaning is compressed in the graphic description of Melancholy as a veiled woman living in the very “temple of Delight”. The poet communicates with his characteristic magnificence of style and imagery that only those can appreciate the finest shades of melancholy who can equally appreciate the ecstasies of joy.

In Ode on Melancholy each stanza consists of ten iambic pentameter lines, a quatrain of alternate rhymes and a sestet rhyming cde cde. It’s structure is most nearly regular.

1. Iambic: The iambic in which the unaccented syllable precedes the accented ( ) eg. today

Example:

The night / is dark / and i / am far / from home.

2. Pentameter : line of verse with five metrical feet.

### 8.3.3 Self-assessment Questions

1. What are the places which are commonly supposed to be melancholy’s dwelling?  
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.....  
.....
2. From where shall the melancholy fit fall and what shall it be like?  
.....  
.....  
.....
3. When melancholy fit falls, what does the poet ask you to do ?

.....  
.....  
.....  
4. Where does Melancholy dwell?

.....  
.....  
.....  
5. Who can see the veil'd face of Melancholy?

.....  
.....  
.....  
6. What is the central idea of the poem?

#### **8.3.4 Answers to SAQs**

1. The places which are commonly supposed to be melancholy's dwelling are Lethe in the lower world, Wolf's-bane, ruby grape of Proserpine, rosary of yew-berries, the beetle, the death-moth mournful Psyche and the dawning owl.
2. The melancholy fit shall fall from heaven and it will be like a weeping cloud.
3. The poet suggests that when the melancholy fit falls suddenly from heaven, indulge your sorrow in April showers, a morning rose and the matchless eyes of your beloved.
4. She dwells with Beauty and Joy in the very temple of Delight.
5. The veiled face of Melancholy can be seen only by those who can appreciate the finest shades of melancholy and can equally appreciate the ecstasies of joy.
6. The central idea of the poem is that melancholy does not dwell in the sad and ugly things of life, not in death and the accompaniments of death, but in everything that is beautiful and joyful.

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#### 8.4 *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* : Text

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*'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely, loitering?  
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing.'*

*'O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
So haggard and so woe-begone?  
The squirrels' granary is full,  
And the harvest is done.'*

*'I see a lily on thy brow  
With anguish moist and fever dew;  
And on thy cheek a fading rose  
Fast withereth too'.*

*'I met a lady in the meads,  
Full beautiful – a faery's child;  
Her hair was long, her foot was light,  
And her eyes were wild.'*

*'I made a garland for her head,  
And bracelets too, and fragrant zone;  
She look'd at me as she did love,  
And made sweet moan.'*

*'I set her on my packing steed,  
And nothing else saw all day long,*

*For sidelong would she bend and sing  
A faery's song.'*

*'She found me roots of relish sweet.  
And honey wild and manna dew;  
And sure in language strange she said,  
"I love thee true!"*

*'She took me to her elfin grot,  
And there she wept and sigh'd full sore;  
And there I shut her wild, wild eyes  
With kisses four.'*

*'And there she lulled me asleep,  
and there I dream'd – Ah! woe betide!  
The latest dream I ever dream'd  
On the cold hill side.'*

*'I saw pale kings and princes to,  
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all;  
Who cried- "La Belle Dame Sans Merci  
Hath thee in Thrall!"*

*'I saw their starv'd lips in the gloam  
With horrid warning gaped wide,  
And I awoke, and found we here  
On the cold hill side.'*

*'And this is why I sojourn here*



*Alone and palely loitering,  
Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing.'*

### 8.4.1 Glossary

Title	Belle	-	a beautiful woman
	Dame	-	woman
	Sans	-	without
	Merci	-	mercy

Line 1 Ail – cause problem and make sick Thee – You Knight – in-arms – a man who saves a woman from a dangerous situation.

Line 2 Palely loitering – lingering with a pale face

Line 3 Sedge – a plant like grass that grows in wet ground or near water. Withered – dried up

Line 6 Haggard – looking very tired because of illness Woe – begone – looking very sad

Line 7 The squirrel's granary is full – The squirrel has gathered his food for the winter.

Line 8 Harvest is done – the cutting and gathering of crops on a farm is done.

Line 9 Lily – a large white or brightly coloured flower

Line 10 Anguish – pain and unhappiness

Line 11 Thy cheek a fading rose – your cheeks have become paler as if all colour has faded from them.

Line 12 Fast – moving or happening quickly Withereth – Witness

Line 13 Meads – Meadows

Line 14 Full – Very

Line 18 Fragrant Zone – a girdle of sweet-scented flowers.

Line 20 Moan – make a long deep sound

Line 21 Packing – walking up and down Steed – (literary) horse to ride on

Line 25 Relish sweet – Sweet taste

Line 26 manna dew – enchanted food

Line 29 elfin grot – fairy cave

Line 30 Sigh'd – took a long deep breath expressing sadness Sore – painfully

Line 33 lulled – Soothed my nerves by singing

Line 34 Woe betide – there will be trouble for.....

Line 37 I saw pale kings... These men with pale faces had died for love of the Beautiful Lady without pity.

Line 38 death – pale – as pale as death.

Line 40 Hath – has in thrall – enslaved

Line 41 Starv'd lips – Lips showed that they were feeling very hungry. gloam – evening twilight

Line 42 horrid – terrible, horrible gaped wide – staring with open mouth in surprise

Line 45 Sajourn – Stay here for a time

### 8.4.2 Detailed Explanation

*La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is a wonderful romantic ballad which some have considered one of the best of Keats' poems. It was composed probably in the spring or summer of 1819.

The title of the poem means 'The Beautiful Lady without Pity'. The title is taken from a poem of Alain Chartier, a French poet of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century of the Court of Charles VI. Keats is indebted to Alain Chartier only for the title which had a kind of fascination for him. In the *Eve of St. Agnes*, the title is mentioned in the following lines:

“He played an ancient ditty, long since mute,

In Provence called, “La belle dame sans merci.”

(11, 291-92)

Chartier's poem narrates “a prolix conversation” between an obdurate lady and her lover. At the end the lady goes away indifferent to dance and play while the lover is desperate to tear his hair and die.

Among books which Keats read with devotion and which influenced his poetry considerably should be mentioned Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. The Knight-at-arms of Keats' *La Belle* is the same one who is Burton:

“wandered in the woods sad all alone,

Forsaking men's society, making great moan.’

These lines can be compared with the opening lines of Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

“O what can ail thee, Knight-at-arms,

Alone and palely loitering?"

The central idea of the poem is unrequited love, and the pain and suffering of one who loves but is not loved in return. It is said that in writing this ballad, Keats was perhaps expressing his own feelings; for he also loved but his love was not returned.

The poem starts with a question: What can trouble the Knight at arms and make his look pale and sick? To describe the Knight's condition, epithets like 'Alone', 'palely loitering' 'haggard' and so 'woe-begone' are used. His brow is compared with white lily and his pale cheeks with 'a fading rose'.

In the following stanzas the knight-at-arms narrates his sad story how he was enchanted by a very beautiful lady in the meadows who appeared to be as beautiful as a fairy and whose wild eyes seemed to be inviting. He expressed his love for her by making a garland for her head and a girdle of sweet scented flowers. She gave him a loving glance, so he made her sit on his horse.

The beautiful lady reciprocated the knights' love and sang a fairy song while riding on the horse with him. She brought sweet tasting roots, honey and enchanted food and in an unfamiliar language said, "I love thee true!" She took the knight to her fairy cave and sang a lullaby to make the knight go to sleep.

The knight dreamed that there would be trouble in his life. He saw pale kings and warriors who had died for the love of this beautiful lady without mercy. They told him that she had enslaved the knight as she had enslaved them. Their pitiable condition in the evening twilight woke him up from his dream. After giving this simple explanation the knight says:

'And that is why I sojourn here

Alone and palely loitering,

Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,

And no birds sing?

The knight at-arms represents that chivalrous and romantic hero who has aspirations of each one of us. It is not only the soul of the poet "in thrall" in love but the soul of every lover and idealist. The knight expresses the infinite agony of frustrated love which is doomed to "loiter padely and alone."

The ballad is medieval in subject matter and the medieval element is highlighted by Keats' power of recapturing the mystical as exemplified in this poem and his other poems *Lamia* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*. Herford has rightly commented that Keats' *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* is "a master-piece of horror-stricken reticence and magical suggestion". The poet intentionally left the story slightly mysterious, that the reader may be left asking questions.

It is a ballad of forty lines arranged in twelve stanzas of four lines each. The diction is very simple, selective and dignified, old spellings of the words such as ‘thee’ ‘hath’ ‘thy’ don’t pose any difficulty in understanding. It may be concluded that the composition of this ballad is full of artistic skills and the epithets and images convey the poets’ ideas successfully.

### 8.4.3 Self Assessment Questions

1. Is the title of the Poem a good one? Why?

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2. Who is alone and palely loitering?

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3. What ails the knight?

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4. Why did the lady charm the knight?

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5. What happened to the knight in the end?

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6. What is the theme of the poem?

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#### 8.4.4 Answers to SAQs

1. Yes, the title is a good one. It is appropriate because the knight-at-arms is enchanted by the beautiful lady and expresses his love for her but she instead of returning his love enslaves him and has no mercy for him.
2. The Knight-at-arms is alone and lingering with a pale face on the cold hill side.
3. The knight looks pale, sad and worried because the beautiful lady without pity has enslaved him and his fate will be like that of other pale kings and warriors.
4. The enchantingly beautiful lady charmed the knight because she wanted to enslave him though she had no mercy for him.
5. The knight saw the pitiable condition of pale kings and warriors in the dream with their starved lips in the evening twilight. They cried that the beautiful lady “Hath thee in thrall!” He woke up as they warned him about his tragic fate. That is why the Knight is staying on the cold hill side alone looking pale and sad. Keats intentionally leaves the story at slightly mysterious note so that we may be left asking questions.
6. The theme of the poem is unrequited love, and the pain and suffering of one who loves but is not loved in return. It is said that in writing this poem Keats was expressing his own feelings. He too loved, but was not loved by Fanny Brawne.

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#### 8.5 Let Us Sum Up

In this unit we have tried to briefly sum up John Keats’s life and his works. You will be able to understand *Ode on Melancholy* with the help of glossary, detailed explanations and notes. The nature of an ode and the structure of Keats’s odes will be helpful in writing a critical appreciation of this ode. After going through the text of Keats’ *Ode On Melancholy* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* you will be able to study them with the help of glossary and detailed explanation. You must have noticed Keats’ use of epithets and figures of speech, his sensuousness, his use of various images his love of nature, his mood and the treatment of his themes.

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#### 8.6 Review Questions

1. Write a critical appreciation of Keats ‘*Ode on Melancholy*.’
2. Bring out the narrative acumen of Keats by citing examples from the prescribed poems.

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#### 8.7 Bibliography

1. The Penguin Book of English : Edited by John Hayward verse

2.     Selected Poems of John Keats :        Edited by George H. Ford
  3.     A short History of English        :        Sir Ifor Evans; ELBS Addition
  4.     Studies in Keats                   :        J.M. Murry
  5.     Keats                                :        Robert Bridges
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## UNIT – 9

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### JOHN KEATS : *ODE ON INDOLENCE*

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#### Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Keats Works
- 9.3 *Ode on Indolence* : Text
  - 9.3.1 Glossary
  - 9.3.2 Detailed Explanation of Ode on Indolence
- 9.4 Self- Assessment Questions
- 9.5 Answers to SAQs
- 9.6 Let us Sum Up
- 9.7 Review Questions
- 9.8 Bibliography

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#### 9.0 Objectives

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This unit will help you understand

1. Keats' life and personality
2. Keats' important works and his odes
3. *Ode on Indolence*

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#### 9.1 Introduction

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In this unit we have given you an introduction to the early nineteenth century poets who belonged to the Romantic Revival and the chief elements of the Romantic poetry with special reference to John Keats. But you cannot understand Keats' *Ode on Indolence* in isolation. In order to understand this ode you should study Keats' other odes. A brief review of his life and personality and his other poetic works is given so that you may understand *Ode on Indolence* in a better way. The text of the poem is included for your convenience. The glossary and detailed explanation of the poem are given to help you understand the poem.

#### Introduction to John Keats

The first thirty years of the nineteenth century are remarkable in the literary history of

England for a number of poets of literary genius whose work has been as much discussed as that of any group of writers in English literature. The text books have attached the label 'Romantic Revival' to them to show how their work is different from that of their predecessors: John Milton, John Dryden, and Alexander Pope.

'Romantic Revival' is a movement in England inaugurated by the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and S.T. Coleridge in 1798. Wordsworth (1770-1850) is the oldest, the greatest and the most long lived of the Romantic poets. The other significant poets of this movement are S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834), Lord Byron (1788-1824), P.B. Shelley (1792-1822) and John Keats (1795-1821).

The works of the romantic poets were significantly different from those of their predecessors because they all had a deep interest in nature, not only as a centre of beautiful scenes but also as an informing and spiritual influence on life. They were turning to nature to escape the nightmarish influence of industrialism, may be for protection. They all valued their own experiences and there is a subjective element in their poetry as they looked into themselves, seeking in their own lives for strange sensations and subject for their poetry. In the poetry of all of them, there is a sense of wonder, a sense of mysterious, of life seen with a new vision and fresh sensibilities.

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## 9.2 Keats' Works

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### Poems

Keats first volume of Poems appeared in 1817. This early volume contains one of the most splendid sonnets of English poetry, *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*. By his sheer genius Keats has transformed the experiences and reminiscences of his school boy reading into wonderful poetry. *Sleep and Poetry* was perhaps the last written among the poems included in this volume. This volume of poems well illustrates the youthful spirit of delight and of liberty of the new age. It shows that he loved Spenser for his imagery but had not yet mastered the secrets of Spenser's art.

### Endymion

Endymion, published in 1818 is perhaps his longest poem. Keats was indebted to Drayton and Fletcher for certain hints especially to *Man in the Moon* for the wanderings of his hero Endymion. It is a classical love story of a Shepherd Prince and the goddess. He depicts the passion of the human soul for nature, for absolute beauty and its manifestation in the moonlight, sunlight, earth, sea, love, heroic adventure and death.

### Isabella

Keats next important poem was *Isabella* which was begun in February 1818 and was finished during the next two months. The story of Isabella was taken from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. Lisabetta is the heroine of *Decameron* and the heroine of the story of *Isabella*



is Isbella. In Keats' story the passion of *Isbella* and Lorenzo is depicted on the superior level of art and ethics in comparison to the vulgar intrigue of Lisabetta's brothers' vengeance in *Decameron*.

### **Hyperion and The Fall of Hyperion**

*Hyperion* and *The Fall of Hyperion* mark the opening and closing of the most creative year of Keats' poetry. He wrote every poem that places him among the major poets of the world between September 1818 and September 1819. The subject of *Hyperion* had been long in his mind when he composed *Endymion*. Keats narrates in *Hyperion* the overthrow of the Titanic gods by the new Olympian gods. The supernatural character of the conflict is presented and his love of nature is also fully depicted when *Hyperion* is brought down to the earth. Although *Hyperion* is a fragment, it is the only poem of Keats which has epic dimensions and its grandeur is mainly due to its style.

### **The Eve of St. Agnes**

*The Eve of St. Agnes*: In January 1819, Keats composed *The Eve of St. Agnes* which is not a tragedy like *Isbella*. It is the story of Porphyro who falls in love with the daughter of a hostile house, Madeline. The beauty of the poem consists in how Keats brings it into association with the popular belief as to the way a love-lorn maiden may be granted a vision of her lover in a dream. In the last stanza he says:

“And they are gone: ay, ages long ago

These loves fled away into the storm,”

A marvellous effect is achieved by Keats by the use of contrasts. The fierce sleeping warriors tormented by nightmare are contrasted with the wakeful lovers. The happy Madeline is contrasted with joyless Angela and the youthful Porphyro with the aged beadsmen. The skilful use of contrast between the cruel cold outside and the warm love within the heart of the lovers is notable.

### **Lamia**

The source of Keats' *Lamia* is Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. He felt that there was that sort of fire in the story of Lamia which must hold of people in some way. The poem was composed in the summer of 1819. *Lamia* depicts the conflict of sensuous love and philosophy. The story highlights the fact that philosophy alone is cold while the sensuous pleasures are unsatisfying and not real. While reading the poem sometimes we feel that the love of Lycius is a passing illusion and at other times that the mutual love and passion of Lycius and Lamia is a beautiful thing. The rich imagery and pictorial quality of Keats' poetry is reflected in this poem.

### **Keats' Odes**

Keats was engaged in the composition of his famous odes in the spring of 1819.

Keats' odes occupy a unique place and have no parallel because they are a class by themselves. They are: Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on Melancholy, Ode on a Grecian Urn, Ode to Psyche, and Ode on Indolence, Ode to Autumn was composed in September 1819.

### **Ode to a Nightingale**

*Ode to a Nightingale* is one of the finest Odes. Listening to the nightingale's song, the poet is oppressed by its beauty and joy. He wishes to escape to the world of the forest so that he may be free from the worries and sorrows of daily human life. The sensuous quality of Keats' poetry is highlighted when he describes the natural beauty of early summer in St. 4. In this moment of ecstasy, when the nightingale is singing he longs for "easeful death". In the concluding stanzas as the song of the nightingale fades away, the poet returns to the real world with a jolt.

### **Ode on a Grecian Urn**

*Ode on a Grecian Urn* is important for the expression of the Hellenic Spirit in Keats. Keats is thinking of Greek sculpture in general and of figures and the scene of a sacrifice carved on a Grecian Urn. The central idea is the contrast between art and life. The carved life of imagery is more real than the human life of "Heard melodies". The love depicted on the urn is more permanent than the human love which never brings real happiness. In the concluding stanza he suggests that amidst the changes of this mortal life Beauty and Truth are permanent and everlasting.

### **To Autumn:**

*To Autumn*: In September 1819 Keats wrote to John Hamilton Reynolds from Winchester:

"How beautiful the season is now-how fine the air-a temperate sharpness about it!" Keats was struck by the beauty of the season so much that he composed upon it. The ode is composed of three stanzas which show a gradual rise of thought. In the opening stanza Autumn is seen as the season itself bringing all the fruits to ripeness. In the second, Autumn is personified as a woman who is present at the various activities of the harvest. In the last stanza, Autumn is associated with the sunset. *The songs of spring are over but Autumn has its music too.*

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## **9.3 Ode On Indolence : Text**

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*"They toil not, neither do they spin"*

*I*

*One morn before me were three figures seen,*

*With bowed necks, and joined hands, side-faced;*

*And one behind the other stepp'd serene,*

*In placid sandals, and in white robes graced;*  
*They pass'd, like figures on a marble urn,* 5  
*When shifted round, to see the other side;*  
*They came again; as, when the urn once more*  
*Is shifted round, the first seen shades return;*  
*And they were strange to me, as may betide*  
*With vases, to one deep in Phidian lore.* 10

## II

*How is it, Shadows! that I knew ye not?*  
*How came ye muffled in so hush a mask?*  
*Was it a silent deep-disguised plot*  
*To steal away, and leave without a task*  
*My idle days? Ripe was the drowsy hour;* 15  
*The blissful cloud of summer-indolence*  
*Benumb'd my eyes; my pulse grew less and less;*  
*Pain had no sting, and pleasure's wreath no flower;*  
*O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense*  
*Unhaunted quite of all but – nothingness?* 20

## III

*A third time pass'd they by, and, passing, turn'd*  
*Each one the face a moment whiles to me;*  
*Then faded, and to follow them I burn'd*  
*And ached for wings, because I knew the three;*  
*The first was a fair Maid, and Love her name;* 25  
*The second was Ambition, pale of cheek,*  
*And ever watchful with fatigued eye;*  
*The last, when I love more, the more of blame*  
*Is heap'd upon her; maiden most unmeek,*

*I knew to be my demon Poesy.* 30

IV

*They faded, and forsooth! I wanted wings;  
O folly! What is love? and where is it?  
And for that poor Ambition! it springs  
From a man's little heart's short fever-fit;  
For Poesy! –no, - she was not a joy, - 35  
At least for me, - so sweet as drowsy noons,  
And evenings steep'd in honied indolence;  
O, for an age so shelter'd from annoy,  
That I may never know how change the moons,  
Or hear the voice of busy common-sense! 40*

V

*And once more came they by; - alas! wherefore?  
My sleep had been embroider'd with dim dreams;  
My soul had been a lawn besprinkled o'er  
With flowers, and stirring shodes, and baffled beams:  
The morn was clouded, but no shower fell, 45  
Tho' in her lids hung the sweet tears of May;  
The open casement press'd a new-leaved vine,  
Let in the budding warmth and throstle's lay;  
O shadows! 't was a time to bid farewell !  
Upon your skirts had fallen no tears of mine. 50*

VI

*So, ye three Ghosts, adieu! Ye cannot raise  
My head cool-bedded in the flowery grass;  
For I would not be dieted with praise,  
A pet-lamb in a sentimental farce!*

55

*Fade softly from my eyes, and be once more*  
*In mosque-like figures on the dreamy urn;*  
*Farewell! I yet have visions for the night,*  
*And for the day faint visions there is store;*  
*Vanish, Ye Phantoms! from my idle spright,*  
*Into the clouds, and never more return!*

60

### 9.3.1 Glossary

“They toil not, neither do they spin” – (Matthew, VI, 28)

‘And why take ye thought for raimen?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;

they toil not, neither do they spin’,

These lines can be compared with Spenser’s *Faerie*

*Queene*, li, vi, 17:

‘Why then dost thou, O man, that of them all

Art Lord, and eke of nature Soveraine,

Willfully make thy selfe a wretched thrall,

And waste thy joyous houres in needlesse paine,

Seeking for daunger and adventures vaine?”

#### Stanza 1

1. morn – morning
2. bowed necks – their heads bent, so that it is difficult to recognize them. Side-faced – their profile only could be seen.
3. Serene – calm and peaceful
4. Placid – calm, peaceful and undisturbed. robes graced – dressed in white garments.
5. Urn – tall vase, usually with a stem and base specially one used for holding the ashes of a cremated person.

- 6. to see – so that one may see
- 8. Shades – Shadowy figures
- 10. Phidian lore – Phidias was a famous Athenian sculptor of the fifth century B.C. ‘Phydian lore’ refers to “the sculptor’s art”. Keats means that the figures depicted on a marble urn are various, and even a skilled artist of Greek sculpture can not easily recognize them.

## **Stanza 2**

- 11. Shadows – Shadowy figures Ye – You
- 12. muffled – disguised So hush a mask – so quiet a disguise
- 13. Was it ... my’ idle days – The poet imagines that the Shadowy figures had intentionally disguised themselves so as to join in a secret plot to shatter the vision of the poet in his mood of indolence.
- 15. Ripe... It was noon when one feels most drowsy in summer season.
- 16. Blissful – joyful Blissful ... summer indolence – the mood and state of indolence in summer is compared with a joyful cloud
- 17. Benumb’d – deadened the sensibility of eyes
- 18. Sting– unbearable pain Pain... Flower – There was no sharpness in pain and suffering no delight and attraction in the pursuit of pleasure.
- 19. melt – dissolve
- 20. my sense ... nothingness – The poet feels that his mind is blank and it is not conscious of anything but its own vacuity. Unhaunted – not visited repeatedly

## **Stanza 3**

- 22. A moment whiles – for the space of a moment.
- 24. ached for wings – The poet is filled with a keen desire to chase the three figures whom he recognizes. In a mood of dreamful indolence the poet feels a strong desire to have wings so that he can fly and follow them.
- 25. fair maid – the epithet ‘fair’ which means beautiful is used to indicate the infinite charms of Love.
- 26. Ambition, pale of cheek – Ambition has pale cheeks because to realize ambition one has to give up delights and live laborious days, vigilance and hard work are the befitting attributes of Ambition. Note: A connection can be noted between these lines and the closing lines of Keats’ The Terror of Death: “never have relish in the faery power of unreflecting love ... Till love and Fame to nothingness do sink.”

- 27.     fatigued – tiredness usu resulting from hard work.
- 28.     the more of blame – A reference is to unreasoned, bitter reviews of Endymion which had appeared in Blackwood's Magazine or The Quarterly Review.
- 29.     most unmeek – The poets' creative energy is irrepressible, that is why 'unmeek'.
- 30.     demon – the word is used in the Greek sense of familiar or guardian spirit. Whom I love more ... Poesy – The poet loves Poesy more than Love and Ambition, because Poesy fills him with demoniacal energy. He loves her hostile and unsympathetic critics.

#### **Stanza 4**

- 31.     forsooth – an archaism (old-fashioned use) for indeed. I wanted wings – It refers to the poets momentary craving for pursuing them.
- 32.     Where is it? – Compare with the following lines from Ode to a Nightingale: "Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow." (29-30)
- 34.     Short fever-fit – Ambition springs from a strong desire to achieve something in life, from a brief turmoil caused by the petty passions. Compare with Ode to a Nightingale: "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" (l. 23)
- 36.     drowsy noons – noon time which induces sleep.
- 38.     Sheltered from annoy – free from the annoyances and worries of life.
- 39.     how change the moons - how the seasonal changes take place and how the time passes.
- 40.     busy common – sense – the wisdom of the world.

#### **Stanza 5**

- 42.     Sleep... embroider'd with dim dreams – Sleep has been imagined as a dress and beautiful delicate embroidery is the dreams.
- 43.     Soul ... lawn besprinkled o'er with flowers – Soul has been compared with a lawn. Flowers are scattered over it.
- 44.     Stirring shades... beams – flickering of light and shade in a garden of flowers is baffling.
- 45.     morn – morning
- 46.     in her lids ... tears of May – The poet depicts a lovely metaphorical painting of soft cloudy days of spring and early summer (May). The air smells of coming rain. Vernal shower has not yet burst forth from the clouds floating above. The sweet tears of May are the raindrops.

- 47. Casement – Window that opens on hinges like a door.
- 49. O Shadows ... bid farewell! – It was a time when the ghostly figures of love, ambition and poesy should leave him alone and say good bye.
- 50. Upon your skirts... tears of mine – He wishes that these figures should leave him while he was still plunged in indolence without rousing him to activities of life which were sure to bring suffering and tears. He would have no regrets for their disappearance.

#### **Stanza-6**

- 51. adieu – (archaic) good bye
- 52. head cool-bedded – compare with Tennyson's *The Lotus Eaters*; "Resting weary limbs at last on beds of asphodel"
- 53. dieted with praise – This expression suggests that the food offered is not natural. The poet refuses to be fed by praise which is either undeserved or insincere.
- 54. A pet-lamb ... farce! – Keats does not wish to be petted like a lamb (by the public) and fed with flattery. In summer 1819, he wrote to a friend; "I have been very idle lately, very averse to writing, both from the overpowering idea of dead poets and from abatement of my love of fame. I hope I am a little more of a philosopher and I was, consequently a little less of a versifying pet-lamb."
- 54. Farce – funny play for the theatre based on unlikely situations and events.
- 56. masque – like figures – character is masque were often disguised, refers to the Elizabethan masques or pageants. dreamy urn – urn with shadowy figures sculptured on it.
- 58. faint visions – the visions that will come during day will come with lessened force than the vision of night.
- 59. Vanish – disappear completely Phantoms – ghostly figures Spright – Spenserian spelling for spirit.

### **9.3.2 Detailed explanation of Ode on Indolence**

*Ode on Indolence* is one of the important odes of John Keats. This ode is the depiction of a transient mood and may be the description of a half-wakeful vision.

#### **The Theme:**

The theme of the poem is that in this transient mood of indolence the poet imagines himself lying on a lawn. Three figures appear before his eyes which pass and repass and it seems as if they are carved on the sides of an urn which is slowly moving. Twice they move by him but he is sunk in a quiet indolent mood and fails to recognise them. The third time when they appear, he recognises them to be Love, Ambition and Poesy. Their sight wakes him up



from a dreamy state and he wants to pursue them but checks himself. When they return the fourth time, he bids them farewell because in this mood of lethargy he loves indolence better than Love, Ambition and Poesy. The poet is reluctant to face the hard labour and strife to which they call him.

In the summer of 1819 Keats wrote to his friend:

“You will judge of my 1819 temper when I tell you that the thing I have most enjoyed this year has been writing an Ode on Indolence.” In the same letter he says:

“I have been very idle lately, very averse to writing; both from the overpowering idea of our dead poets and from abatement of my love of fame. I hope I am a little more of a philosopher than I was, consequently a little less of a versifying pet-lamb”.

In the same year Keats wrote in another letter to a friend about his temper and his indolent careless mood:

“This morning I am in a sort of temper, indolent and supremely careless... in this state of effeminacy the fibres of the brain are relaxed in common with the rest of the body, and to such a happy degree that pleasure has no show of enticement and pain no unbearable power. Neither poetry, nor Ambition, nor Love have any alertness of countenance as they pass by me; they seem rather like figures on a Greek vase – a man and two women whom no one but myself could distinguish in their disguise. This is the only happiness, and is a rare instance of the advantage of the body overpowering the mind.”

These passages are very significant in explaining the mood of the poet and the ode. In the opening lines the poet imagines himself lying on a lawn half asleep. Three figures appear before his dreamy eyes, they pass and repass like figures on an urn which is slowly turned round. The figures depicted on vases move by him twice with their heads bent making it difficult for him to recognise them. Even a skilled artist of Greek sculpture cannot recognise them at one sight.

In the next stanza the poet is sunk deep in a mood of quiet indolence and the figures appear to be ‘Shadows’ who come quietly disguised in a mask. The poet suspects that the shadowy figures had deliberately disguised themselves so as to join in a secret plot to shatter the visions so dear to him in his mood of indolence. It is noon, the poet feels drowsy in summer, the sensibility of his eyes is deadened, the pulse rate is slow and he is in a state when he feels no sharpness in suffering and no real delight in the pursuit of pleasure. His mind is blank and he is conscious of nothing but its own vacuity and asks the figures:

“O, why did ye not melt, and leave my sense

Unhaunted quiet of all but – nothingness?” (19-20)

When the figures pass the third time he knows them to be Love, Ambition and Poesy. Since he recognises them, he is filled with a burning desire to have wings and to chase them.

The first figure is that of a beautiful lady called Love, the second is Ambition with pale cheeks because in order to realise ambition, one has to scorn delights and work hard. The poet says that the third figure, “whom I love more” is Poesy. The creative energy of Poesy is irrepressible that is why she is “maiden most unmeek.” In this stanza a reference is also made to bitter reviews of Keats’ *Endymion* in these lines;

“The last, whom I love more, the more of blame  
Is heap’d upon her, maiden most unmeek, -”

(II. 28-29)

He loves Poesy all the more for the unreasoned attacks as he writes in one of his letters:

“Praise or blame has but a momentary effect on the man whose love of beauty in the abstract makes him a severe critic of his own works ... and also when I feel I am right, no external praise can give me such a glow as my own solitary repurcussion and ratification of what is fine.” The poet is a drowsy watcher and the sight of these figures wake him up. Soon they fade and he is filled with a momentary desire to pursue them:

“They faded, and forsooth! I wanted wings:

O folly! What is love? and where is it?” (31-32)

In a moment he realises the foolishness and the futility of it all. The poet is haunted by such questions as: “What is love?” “Where is it?” He knows it well that ambition which springs from the desires of the heart, can be fulfilled by “short fever-fit.” In *Ode to a Nightingale* it is described as:

“The weariness, the fever and the fret” (I. 23)

These questions make him restless momentarily. He realises that neither Poesy, nor Ambition nor Love seem to bring him any joy because his mind and body are under the influence of indolence. He is no more willing to face the labour and strife to which these figures call him. He wants to sink deep into an indolent mood and forget how time passes.

In the fifth stanza the figures appear again for the fourth time but he loves indolence better and is not moved by them. He imagines his sleep as a dress which is embroidered by soft beautiful dreams and his soul as a lawn over which sweet scented flowers are scattered. “Stirring Shades” of light and shade add to the sensuous dreamy atmosphere of the garden. A lovely metaphorical painting of soft cloudy days of spring and early summer is drawn in these lines:

“The morn was clouded, but no shower fell,  
Tho’ in her lids hung the sweet tears of May;”

(45-46)

The poet wishes that the shadowy figures of Love, Ambition and Poesy should leave him while he was still indulged in dreamy indolence. It is time to say goodbye to them without any feeling of regret.

In the concluding stanza he bids them farewell and relapses into dreams as he has ample store of them. He asks these “masque – like” figures to vanish into the clouds and never return again. He knows very well that he does not wish to be petted by the public praise and fed with flattery:

“For I would not be dieted with praise,  
A pet-lamb in a sentimenta! farce!” (53-54)

An important aspect of Keats’ genius his sensuous, dreamy, pleasure element is reflected in this ode especially in the description of spring and early summer. The metaphorical description of the morning with clouds hanging on her lids and the air smelling of the approaching vernal shower which has not yet burst forth from the clouds as “Tears of May” – stands out as a painting.

The poem has some forceful images and felicitous phrases such as “ye muffled in hush a mask”, “the blissful cloud of summer indolence,” “drowsy noons”, sleep “embroider’d with dim dreams”, soul imagined as a lawn “be sprinkled ov’r with flowers” and “the sweet ters of May” hanging in the lids of the morn.

Love, Ambition and Poesy are personified and human characteristics are attributed to them.

This ode is composed of six stanzas of ten lines each. The iambic pentameter lines are divisible into a quatrain of alternate rhymes and a sestet introducing two more rhymes.

Iambic : The iambic (from Iambus) in which the unaccented syllable precedes the accented ( ) eg. today.

- unaccented symbol
- accented symbol

Example:

The night / is dark / and I / am far / from home

Quatrain : poem or verse of a poem consisting of four lines.

Sestet : Six line stanza esp. the last 6 lines of an Italian Sonnet.

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## 9.4 Self-Assessment Questions

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1. In what mood did the poet write this poem?

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2. Whom did he see one morning?

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3. How did these figures appear before him?

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4. Why did these appear figures strange to him?

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5. What is 'Phidian lore'? Why does the poet refer to it?

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6. How did the 'Shadows' come?

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7. What does the poet suspect about ?

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8. Why was the drowsy hour 'ripe' ?

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9. What is the physical state of the poet?

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10. What happened when the figures appeared a third time?

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11. Why did the poet want to have wings?

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12. Who were the three figures?

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13. Who was the first figure?

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14. Who was the second figure and why was she was pale of cheek?

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15. Why does the poet love poesy more?

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16. What does this line “the last ... the more of blame” refer to?

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17. From where does Ambition spring up?

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18. Why does the poet want to remain in the mood of indolence?

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19. Why does the poet want to bid farewell to the Shadows?

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20. Explain ‘dietet with praise’.

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## 9.5 Answers to SAQs

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1. The poem was written in a pleasant mood of dreamful indolence.

2. One morning he saw three figures with bent heads, joined hands and side faced, one

following the other calmly.

3. These figures appeared before him dressed up in white robes and appeared to be carved on the sides of an urn.
4. The figures passed and repassed and twice they moved by him when the urn was shifted round but the poet did not recognise them that is why they appeared strange to him.
5. 'Phidian lore' is the sculptor's art. Phidias was a famous Athenian sculptor of the fifth century B.C. Keats refers to it because the figures depicted on the urn are so various that even a skilled artist cannot recognise them at one sight.
6. The shadows came disguised in a quiet mask.
7. The poet suspects a silent secret plot and imagines that the shadowy figures had deliberately disguised themselves to join in a secret plot to disturb his vision and his mood of indolence.
8. The drowsy hour was ripe because it was noon when one feels most drowsy in summer.
9. The poet is in a mood of indolence in summer, the sensibility of his eyes is deadened and his pulse is slow. The poet feels that there is no sting in pain and pleasure has no attraction for him.
10. When the figures passed by him a third time, each of them turned their face to him for a moment, then they disappeared.
11. The poet had recognised the three figures so he had a burning desire to have wings to pursue them.
12. When the figures pass the third time, he recognises them to be Love, Ambition and Poesy.
13. The name of the first figure is Love. She is described as a beautiful woman.
14. The second figure was Ambition. She was pale of cheek because to realise ambition one has to scorn delight and be perpetually vigilant. Continuous hard work and fatigued eyes are other attributes of Ambition which make her cheek look pale.
15. The poet loves Poesy more because she is "maiden most unmeek". Keats means that the creative poetic energy of a poet is irrepressible.
16. In this line there is an allusion to the bitter, unreasoned reviews of Keats' *Endymion* which had appeared in *Black Wood's Magazine* or *The Quarterly*.
17. Ambition springs up from a brief turmoil caused by the passions and desires of the heart to achieve something in life.

18. The poet wants to remain in the mood of indolence in drowsy summer because he wants to be free from the petty annoyances of life so that he does not even know how time passes.
19. The poet wants to bid farewell to the shadows as he is still plunged in an indolent mood and wants that shadows should leave without pushing him to the activities of mundane life.
20. This phrase suggests that the food offered is not natural. He does not want to be fed and baited by praise which is not sincere.

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## 9.6 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have tried to briefly sum up John Keats life, personality and his important poems to give you an overall perspective of Keats' works. After going through the text, glossary and detailed explanation of *Ode on Indolence* you will be able to understand the poem well. A brief review of his other odes will help you understand the chief characteristics of his poetry – his love of beauty and nature, his sensitivity, his ear for music and his felicity for phrasing.

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## 9.7 Review Questions

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1. Write a critical appreciation of Keats' '*Ode on Indolence*'.
2. '*Ode on Indolence*' is a remarkable example of Keats' word painting, well-chiselled language, music with under current of melancholy. Explain.

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## 9.8 Bibliography

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## UNIT – 10

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### HOPKINS : (I) *PIED BEAUTY* (II) *GOD’S GRANDEUR*

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Structure :

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 About the Poet
  - 10.2.1 Hopkins and His Age
  - 10.2.2 Life, Career and Contribution
- 10.3 Reading the Poems (Texts)
  - 10.3.1 *Pied Beauty*
  - 10.3.2 *God’s Grandeur*
  - 10.3.3 Annotations
    - 10.3.3 (a) *Pied Beauty*
    - 10.3.3 (b) *God’s Grandeur*
  - 10.3.4 Model Explanations
  - 10.3.5 Critical Appreciation
    - 10.3.5 (a) *Pied Beauty*
    - 10.3.5 (b) *God’s Grandeur*
- 10.4 Self Assessment Questions
- 10.5 Answers to SAQs
- 10.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.7 Review Questions
- 10.8 Bibliography

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#### 10.0 Objectives

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The purpose of this unit is to enable you to comprehend Hopkins’ poetry. Our aim is also to familiarize you with the two opposite characteristics of his temperament – the aesthetic and the ascetic. For the aforesaid purpose we have selected two representative poems – *Pied Beauty* and *God’s Grandeur*. We intend to present an elaborate discussion on these poems by presenting to you

- (i) the glossary of difficult words and phrases,
- (ii) a detailed thematic analysis of the poems.
- (iii) a discussion on the literary devices such as sonnet (particularly curtal sonnet) instress, inscape and sprung rhythm employed by Hopkins.
- (iv) Some model explanations from the text.
- (v) Self assessment questions to assess your achievement level.

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## 10.1 Introduction

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**Pied Beauty** is a ‘catalogue’ poem. The poet catalogues the things which change from moment to moment, from season to season; things whose function, appearance, characteristics mark them out separately and individually – the changing patterns of the sky, like the ‘brinded’ (dappled) hide of a cow; the small pink or red moles which lie like stippled (dotted) paint on a trout’s back : the contrast between the red-brown nut of the fallen chestnut and the green husk which encloses it, a contrast which he likens to the glowing flame which is revealed by breaking open a lit coal, the varied browns and yellows of finches’ wings; the patchwork of landscapes, changing according to time and space from the green of the fold where animals are pastured, to dull fawn-brown of land left fallow, and the rich deep brown of fields newly ploughed; all the ‘gear, tackle and trim’ of man’s different jobs-the fisherman’s nets, floats and lines, the mechanic’s spanner, wrench and grease-gun and so on.

Then, moving from particulars, the poet lists the contrasts and antitheses of life which create instress and inscape- all things set in opposition, all things which strike one with a shock of newness, all things whose function is individual and economical. All these things whose nature is ‘freckled’ with opposites in union are products of God. Yet God himself is ‘past’ (or ‘above’) change; He who creates is not the same as His creations; they are the ‘signs’ of his powers of invention, of individuation. These things ‘praise him’, but the final words are really an imperative, addressed to man – ‘Praise Him; it is your duty and should be your delight to do so’. The poem is denotative in its method, indicating specific examples of God’s variousness.

As is evidenced in ‘Pied Beauty’, Hopkins’s nature poetry is descriptive but one finds no long passages of pure descriptions. His effort is to inscape objects with the art of concentration, activity and individuating. Needless to say, the result is ‘instress’ both by the poet and the reader. In his painting of nature, there is the Keatsian sensuousness evident everywhere. He prefers the concentrated thrust of compounds like ‘fresh-firecoal-chestnut-falls’ and dispenses with prepositions and articles which as elsewhere, show his violence to syntax. Excessive use of alliteration coupled with this concentration, results in verbal inscape. On the whole, the poem itself becomes an ‘inscape’ of delicate variety and pattern.

The deep sympathy of Hopkins with the thirteenth century Franciscan philosopher Duns Scotus was responsible for the lovely, carefree poems of praise such as ‘Pied Beauty’,

‘God’s Grandeur’, ‘The Windhover’ and ‘Hurrahing in Harvest’. The influence of the teachings of Ignatius Loyola and the two phases – his Keatsian sensuousness and Hellenic intellectualism – before he became a Jesuit priest, resulting in his sacramental view of nature, all go to make the poem characteristically Hopkinsian in form, theme and poetic art. The priest who was a poet demonstrated through the poem that as a poet he was deeply convinced of God’s presence and being in everything, while the poet, as man was also aware of sensuous beauty in everything.

The sonnet **God’s Grandeur** was written by Hopkins in February 1877. This sonnet is a protest against the crass materialism of the age. Yet the poet says that everything is not lost. Till the time God continues to brood over it there is hope for the world. God’s glory is going to burst out like the shine of the gold tinsel.

The world is full of the glory of God. This glory will burst out like the foil of gold. It gathers greatness like the oil crushed from olives. It achieves magnificent proportions after the human ego has been crushed under religious discipline. Just as oil becomes useful only when crushed out of seeds, likewise man partakes of God’s glory only after religious devotion. Then, why do people not pay attention to God’s glory? Generations of men have trodden the same path without recognizing God’s power to punish them. Everything in this world has been made ugly by crass materialism, by commercial activity, and by human toil for monetary ends. The world bears man’s smudge and smells of man’s ugliness. The fragrance of nature has been drowned in the foul smell of machinery.

Despite man’s activities leading to the destruction of the beauties of nature, it remains fresh and undestroyed. Although the sun moves to the western horizon and the earth is plunged into darkness, yet the sun will be rising again the next day. Likewise there will be a renewal of nature. From darkness would come light; from winter, spring. In nature there is a never drying source of freshness, which envelopes the world in spring. The Holy Ghost broods over the “bent” world and this brings forth renewed life. The Holy Ghost looks after mankind with the same protective care as a dove looks after its little ones.

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## 10.2 About the Poet

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### 10.2.1 Hopkins and His Age

Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889) was a nineteenth century poet whose place and influence it have been left for the twentieth century to assess and determine. Except for a few intimate friends, including Coventry Patmore and Robert Bridges, his work was hardly known to anybody. His poetry remained hidden away in manuscript form until Bridges launched his major works as *Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. It happened in 1918 although he had died in 1899. The second edition of his poems was issued in 1930. While the first edition had an introduction from Robert Bridges, the second edition was introduced by a great but discriminating admirer of Hopkins, Charles Williams.

Hopkins lived in the second half of the nineteenth century; so his one face looked at his own, the Victorian age; his poetry having been brought to light only in 1918, his other face looked towards the modern age. Again, as an artist, his one face looked at beauty with a deeply sensuous appreciation; as an ascetic, his other face looked at ascetic denial with all the intensity of a devout man of religion. As a boy, he had a passion for drawing and he wrote poetry under the influence of Keats and the Pre-Raphaelites. As a youth he came under the influence of Cardinal Newman and the Oxford Movement; became a Roman Catholic in 1866, and a Jesuit priest in 1877. England was non-Catholic but 'rare-dear' England for Hopkins, the patriot.

From his youth, his life was one of inner strife, very keenly felt. At first, he gave up poetry: "what I had written, I burnt before I became a Jesuit and resolved to write no more, as not, belonging to my profession, unless it were the wish of my superiors." But after seven years of poetic silence, he resumed poetry in 1875 with 'The Wreck of Deutschland', taking as permission, the remark of his rector that he wished someone would write a poem dealing with that disaster in which five nuns, banished from Germany, were drowned at the mouth of the Thames. Even so, there were times when he felt that to write poetry was to misuse time for which God's service had other demands, though his letters prove how continuously he was preoccupied with an insatiable interest in the technique of poetry. He feared beauty almost as much as he loved it and he would punish himself by sometimes refusing to let himself look upon the beauty of nature when he was walking. Indeed, in 1866, in a poem, 'The Habit of Perfection', when he was contemplating the taking up of religious life, he bade all his senses renounce the world:

Elected-silence, sing to me  
And beat upon my whorled ear,  
Pipe me to pastures still and be  
The music that I care to hear.

Hopkins was typical mid-Victorian. He was born in 1844; he died in 1889. In the words of Martin Gilkes, "These are unexpected dates. They suggest *Sesame and Lilies* and *Idylls of the King*; beards, ottomans and four-wheel cabs: the palmy days, in fact, of the nineteenth century, the period in which everything that we mean by Victorian came to full flower. The decadence of the '90's had not yet set in, and as for the modern revolt against nineteenth century standards and 'poetical' poetry-the mere idea would have seemed fantastic and incredible. Yet today the greatest single influence upon the development of modern poetry, with the solitary exception of T.S. Eliot, has been this stray mid-Victorian-who is anything but mid-Victorian when you come to read him."

So, Hopkins, the Janus-faced, is the only nineteenth century poet who is included in the anthologies of both the Victorians and the Moderns, for now, both are equally eager to

claim him. In this matter of being published out of times, he resembles Emily Dickinson. Although he died at the age of 45, in 1889, his poetry was not published until 1918. Prophetically during his lifetime, Hopkins had written to his lifelong friend and correspondent, Robert Bridges, about his poetry : ‘If you do not like it, is because there is something you have not seen and I see . . . . . , and if the whole world agreed to condemn it or see nothing in it, I should only tell them to take a generation and come to me again.’

When the history of the 1920s comes to be written by a dispassionate critic, no influence will rank in importance with that of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Most critics saw Hopkins as a Maverick, born out of his due time, an idiosyncratic poet without affinities. Only recently have critics seen his poetry as a synthesis of the new and the old, the revolutionary and the traditional. It has at last been recognized that his poetry was either the result of the organic and integral collaboration of the priest and the poet, of his sensibility and belief, or on the other hand, that it was an inscape of the tension between the two, a triumphant and victorious expression of his inner drama, “the war within”, as he refers to it in one of his sonnets. It is true that the poet’s religious dedication restricted the quantity of his poems, but they correspondingly gained an intensity and in those very qualities which every critic now considers as constituting the greatness of Hopkins.

Hopkins was a major influence on modern poets. When the second edition of the poems of Hopkins was published in 1930, the appreciative reviewer of the *Times Literary Supplement* made the following bold statement on 25 December 1930 : “It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that Hopkins was the most original of the poets of the nineteenth century.” There is no denying the fact that Tennyson, Browning and Arnold were original in their own peculiar ways, though none of them broke new grounds like Hopkins. The technical innovations brought about by Hopkins were so perfect that Edith Sitwell was forced to remark that he should not be regarded as a model, “since he worked his own discoveries to the uttermost point; there is no room for advancement, for development, along his lines.”

In the thirties, Hopkins became a major influence upon new poets. But for the undeniable traces of his influence we must go back to the “Georgians”, to Robert Bridges, in whom we find unconscious echoes of the diction of the younger friend. About his influence on the poets of the thirties Ifor Evans wrote : “In the thirties Hopkins became a major influence on new poets. They were not interested in his religious themes, for many of them, at that time at least, were agnostics, but they were fascinated by the originality of his rhythms and his vocabulary and, above all, in the contrast of his genius against the whole nineteenth century romantic tradition.

### **10.2.2 Life, Career and Contribution**

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born on 28 July 1844, in an Anglican family in Stratford, Essex. He was brought up in a family where simple piety and practical endeavour mixed with varied artistic culture. His father was the Consul-General of the Hawaiian Islands to Great

Britain. He combined this office with that of an average adjuster in the city. His father mixed practical efficiency with something of a poet's vision. His mother, who was a religious woman, gave her son her simple nature and love for metaphysical speculation. The literary bent of the mind of his father, gave Gerard a poetical turn. Through his father he also came in contact with problems of nautical law and he wrote learnedly on the subject of nautical law. There are many people who believe that his love of the sea was responsible for the writing of the great odes of the sea such as 'The wreck of the Deutschland' and 'The Loss of Eurydice' Although his parents were devout, they were far from narrow out-look, and painting and music, both of which influenced Hopkins, were cultivated and loved in the family. Most of the children in the family were interested in painting and music. Arthur, a younger brother, ultimately became a professional painter. The poet himself, received, after his sixth year, lesson in music and drawing from an aunt who was both a musician of sorts, and an accomplished portrait-painter.

Soon Gerard's interest in drawing increased and he made great progress, and by the time he was twenty he had developed strength and delicacy of line, together with a feeling for internal patterns. These are difficult things for an amateur to achieve. But Gerard was able to achieve these delicacies of taste. He was a great admirer of Ruskin. His affinity with Ruskin is revealed in his love and knowledge of architecture and in the nature descriptions and word paintings of his journal.

With age his interest in music also matured. But the difficulty with him was that he was neither able to devote himself exclusively to music nor to poetry, though he knew well that the production of a large body of work of the highest excellence in any of the disciplines demanded devotion. Still his musical studies were not wasted, for they influenced his poetry by giving it typical rhythmic patterns.

He was born at Stratford, Essex, but soon his family moved to Hampstead. In 1854 he was sent to the Cholmondley Grammar School. Hopkins showed an unusual interest in study and excelled in English. The devoutness of his parents was of moderate character, but Hopkins soon became less moderate under the influence of Canon Dixon, who was at that time the curate of the parish of Lambeth. He also worked as a teacher in the Highgate School where Gerard was a student. Hopkins had already been attracted by poetry. At this stage the influence of poets like Spenser and Keats was predominant. At the school he twice won the Poetry Prize. When he was sixteen he won the Poetry Prize for his poem 'The Escorial.' The second poetry prize was won by him two years later, when he was eighteen.

In 1862 Hopkins won a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford. In the same year he wrote a poem 'A Vision of the Mermaids'. He entered Oxford in October 1863 and for the next four years he remained an avid reader of the classics. Here he came under the influence of Jowett, The Regius Professor at Oxford. The friendship he made at Oxford lasted all through his life and the reference must especially be made to Robert Bridges, who was later to become the literary executor of Hopkins. Among his more intimate friends, besides Bridges, were A.W.M. Baillie, and D.M. Dolben.

Hopkins himself had started to take life seriously. As a student he was very punctual. Bridges writes : “Hopkins was so punctilious about the text, and so enjoyed loitering over the difficulties, that I foresaw we should never get through”. This fascination for the difficult remained a life-long infatuation with Hopkins. His diaries provide a fairly accurate and very scrupulous account of his youthful misdemeanours. In 1866, during Lent, he wrote : “No puddings on Sunday. No tea except to keep one awake, and then without sugar . . . Not to sit in armchairs except I can work in no other way. Ash Wednesday and Good Friday bread and water”.

Hopkins entered the Oxford University at a time when it was vibrant with many religious controversies. Eighteen years earlier, Cardinal Newman had entered the Roman Catholic Church and the repercussions of his conversion to Catholicism were still felt at Oxford. Edward B. Pusey, who after Newman became the leader of the Oxford Movement was still at the University. And so was Benjamin Jowett, who represented the more rational and intellectual conceptions of Christianity. Hopkins was influenced by all these three church leaders. Largely under the influence of Cardinal Newman he embraced Roman Catholicism in 1867. Then he wanted to leave the University. But Cardinal advised him to complete his degree. He graduated the same year with a First class in the Classics. This conversion to Roman Catholicism had far reaching effects. His letters record how deeply his conversion affected his whole being; he offended his family by this conversion. This also caused complication in his relations with Robert Bridges. As a result of this conversion he was isolated from many Oxford personalities with whom he was on the best of terms. His anguish and depth of distress can be gauged from a letter he wrote to Newman : “I have been up at Oxford long enough to have heard from my father and mother in return for my letter announcing my conversion. Their replies are terrible. I can not read them twice. If you will pray for them and me just now I shall be deeply grateful.”

This conversion caused a tragic isolation for Hopkins from the world that he had known for so long. And his only possibility of consolation lay in a strenuous, fervid and consuming loyalty to the new-found faith. The experience of a person who has become a convert is always different from that of a person who has been born into a faith. Such a person has to work in isolation. This isolation must be compensated by the intensity of the faith. This also explains why Hopkins attached so much importance to his relations with friends like Robert Bridges.

After graduation Hopkins left Oxford. From now onward the religious experience is the one great reality for the poet. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1868 and subordinated himself passionately to its discipline. Now he left poetry considering it to be something which could not continue with his life as a priest. He burned much of his earlier work. On leaving Oxford, Hopkins first went to Birmingham where he served at the Oratory school. Here Cardinal Newman initiated the new convert to the Catholic ways. Now, the main field of his study remained philosophy. About the hardness of this life he wrote to A.W.M. Baillie : “The life

here though it is hard is God's will for me as I most intimately know, which is more than violets kneedeep." In 1877 he was ordained as a priest. When he entered the Society of Jesus he left poetry, but now he was encouraged to recommence his work as a poet. This was the happiest advice which could have been given to any man. His highly individual poetry, which arose from his faith and his deep and mystical attachment to it belongs to the later years (1875-1899).

As a member of the Society of Jesus he was asked to fill many positions. He served both as a teacher and a preacher. His health was seldom very good, and he was moved from one office to another with great regularity, for reasons which have never been fully explained. After 1877 he served at Jesuit College at Manresa House and Stonyhurst. In 1884 he became Professor of Greek in the Catholic University of Ireland. Sometimes before his death Hopkins wrote : "Unhappily I cannot produce anything at all; not only the luxuries like poetry, but the duties almost of my position. I am a eunuch-but it is for the kingdom of Heaven's sake".

At the age of forty-four Hopkins died of typhoid fever. He lived a life of hard work, deprivation and suffering. He was a puritanical person who enjoyed self-abnegation and self-suffering. Once he wrote in his Diary : "Consider your own misery and try as best as you can to rise above it, by punctuality, and the particular examine; by favour at office, mass and litanies; by good scholastic work; by charity if you get opportunities."

Hopkins never aimed at achieving worldly success. The deep, religious strain in his character prevented him from seizing worldly success which appeared to be almost in his grasp.

The influences which shaped him should be clearly understood. Reference has already been made to the influence of Newman and the Oxford Movement. That his early model was D.G. Rossetti shows that he was influenced by the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. From sixteen to twenty-two, he essayed with skill, the styles of many poets from Milton to Byron and Keats, Tennyson, Arnold and Rossetti. The Keatsian sensuousness in his approach to poetry is clearly marked; in fact his poetry is the battle-ground between the Keatsian sensuousness and the sacramental view of Nature-that Nature abides as a handiwork of God. Hellenic intellectualism also had its hold on him in the early stages. The influence of the Welsh language with its beauty of 'consonant chime' and internal rhyme (called *Cynghanedd* : pronounced *Kunghanneth*) is also evident in his poetry. But much more than all these were the influence of the Franciscan philosopher Duns Scotus (in the matter of idiosyncrasy and individuation) and of St. Ignatius Loyola (on Hopkins' theme and metaphor).

Among his early poems written between 1860 and 1868, 'Heaven-Haven' and 'The Habit of Perfection' indicate the turn of the poet's mind and heart towards priesthood. Then followed 'the ten years' itch' when he assiduously cultivated silence. Out of the pent-up energy and tension were born the 'Wreck' poems – 'The Loss of Eurdice' and 'The Wreck of Deutschland' – and some ten other religious poems of 1876-1879. 'The Poems of Priesthood', fifteen in number, dealing with the everyday experiences of a priest, belong to the years



between 1879 and 1883. 'The Windhover' (falling paeonic rhythm, sprung and outriding) and 'Pied Beauty' (a Curtal Sonnet), 'Duns Scotus's Oxford' (Sprung, outriding rhythm), 'Felix Randal' (Sonnet, sixfoot lines), 'As Kingfishers (Scotist' Sonnet) are all sonnets of 1876-1883. From 1883-1889 came what are now called 'The Terrible Sonnets', dealing with the wreck of his own life. Unfinished poems, fragments, light verse, translations, Latin and Welsh poems, many in number, are not accounted for, here.

In spite of the 'terrible pathos', Hopkins poetry as a whole gives the impression of strength – a strength which is often refined to delicacy. Even in the poems of desolation the note of heroic resistance, or stoic acceptance, or willing surrender to the higher necessity, is more marked than the tone of self pity. He is the poet with 'plumage of far wonder and heavenward flight'. He wanted a stronger rhetoric of English language, tried to capture 'the naked sinew of the English language'. You will find him strange if not obscure at first; he is the poet of many 'faults' as Bridges called him, because of his syntactical inversions, ellipses, parentheses, and violent packing of words into unexpected places. You will have to familiarize yourself with 'Sprung Rhythm', 'Inscap' and 'Instress' to understand him. But he is also the greatest master of the poetic compound word in English. His style is, by turns, dramatic and contemplative, strenuous and graceful. There is variety, originality and organic function in his imagery. He has a unique command of rhythm. He was a master of the sonnet form though both an innovator and preserver. He gave depth and spiritual power to everything he wrote. His poetry was the outcome of a tension between the creativity of the artist and the dedication of the priest. He wrote to serve and praise God. And as Browning's poetry is described, his poetry is not a substitute for a game of cards.

Misunderstanding about his life, and accomplishment and ill-health marred the last years of Hopkins. Mental depression coupled with drudgery made him say : 'Life here is as dank as ditch water'. Yet, his death bed words were : 'I am so happy, I am so happy, I am so happy'.

The question often asked is : 'Did his becoming a Jesuit priest affect his poetry ? Quantitatively, there was restriction. But qualitatively, it added to his absolute honesty, directness, passionate personal utterances and concentrated intensity. Renunciation made him independent and unconventional.

His last poems are deeply expressive of his religious belief. The Seven Sonnets of 1884-85 are possibly the greatest of all his poems. These sonnets, all highly autobiographical, are written in blood'. They show the final struggle of the poet to adapt himself both to the ways of Christ and the ways of society. 'Carrion Comfort', 'To R.B.' and other sonnets of this period illustrate the religious despair, and the lament for the waste and loss of his poetic gift.

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### **10.3 Reading the Poems**

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Now you read the poems :

(i) *Pied Beauty* and (ii) *God's Grandeur*

### 10.3.1 *Pied Beauty*

(Text)

*Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For skies of couple – colour as a brinded cow ;  
For rose-moles in all stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh – firecoal chestnut – falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotterd and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;  
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.  
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.*

### 10.3.2 *God's Grandeur*

(Text)

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God;  
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;  
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil  
Crushed. Why do men then not reckon his rod ?  
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod ;  
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;  
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell : the soil  
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.  
And for all this, nature is never spent ;  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;  
And though the last lights off the black West went*

*Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs -  
 Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
 World broods with warm breast and with ah ! bright wings.*

### 10.3.3 Annotations

Section 4.3.3 (a) includes annotations of the poem ‘Pied Beauty’ and 4.3.3 (b) annotations of the poem ‘God’s Grandeur’.

#### 10.3.3 (a) Pied Beauty

*Pied* : parti-coloured or multi-coloured.

*Lines 1-2.* Both the cow and the sky, one animate and the other inanimate, bear witness to God’s artistic power.

**Dappled** – brindled – marked with spots or streaks, **Couple-col-our-** two colour combination. **Brinded** – early form of ‘brindled’; streaked.

*Line 3.* **Stipple** – dots of paint. The poet touches upon God’s handiwork in sky, land and in the water. **Trout** – a kind of fish.

*Line 4.* **Fresh-fire coal etc** – coloured husks that fall from the chestnut tree. **Finch** – a kind of bird – multi – coloured wings of these birds.

*Line 5.* **Fold** – sheepfold. **Fallow** – uncultivated land. **Plough** – ploughed land.

*Line 6.* **Trades** – occupations. **Gear tackle and trim** – occupational implements which reveal the glory of God.

*Line 7.* **Counter** – opposite.

*Line 8.* **Freckled** – coloured with.

*Line 9.* Things counter to each other.

*Line 10.* **Fathers-forth** – Hopkinsian word. God creates and puts it forth. God is a repository of beauty which does not change. **Whose beauty is past change** – God’s beauty is not subject to change; it has neither past, nor future; it does not pass or **change** ; it is eternal in comparison to the transient beauty of nature.

#### 10.3.3 (b) God’s Grandeur

*Line 1.* The world is full of the grandeur of God. **Charged** – filled with energy.

*Line 2.* This grandeur of God will shine forth like the foil made of gold. **Shook foil** – metal foil which is beaten to make thin foil.

*Lines 3-4.* **the ooze of oil crushed** – When olives are crushed they give oil. Likewise the

poet suggests that human ego improves under religious crushing (discipline).

*Line 4.* **reck his rod** – pay attention to the punishing power of God.

*Line 5.* The repetitions are effective. The poet says that unmindful of divinity, people have followed the same way.

*Line 6.* **seared with trade** – withered because of the application of the heat of trade. **bleared** – blinded. **Smeared** – covered with dust etc.

*Line 7.* **And wears man's smudge** – The nature wears the marks of man's corruption and pollution. **shares man's smell** – Man-made machinery and its foul smell have corrupted nature.

*Line 8.* **The soil is bare now** – The growth of nature has been arrested. **Nor can foot feel, being shod** – Because man is wearing shoes he is unable to feel the softness of the soil.

*Line 9.* Despite everything nature can never be exhausted. Nature will reassert itself.

*Line 10.* Deep down the earth the same freshness still persists.

*Lines 11-12.* The poet says that the sun goes down through the western horizon and the world is plunged into darkness, yet the next day also dawns. Likewise nature also refreshes itself.

*Line 13-14.* The nature is renewed because of the presence of the Holy Ghost. Here Hopkins compares the Holy Ghost to a dove. Just as the dove broods over her young ones, in the like manner the Holy Ghost gives a protective covering to the earth. So the world is full of the grandeur of God.

### 10.3.4 Model Explanations

(i) Glory be to God.... Tackle and trim.

These lines have been taken from the poem 'Pied Beauty' written by Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins was a Victorian poet but his fame was posthumous. He was almost unknown to all except a few friends, especially Robert Bridges. It was Bridges who put him before the reading public. Today he is considered to be the greatest influence on modern poetry. 'Pied Beauty' is a curtal sonnet, that is, a sonnet which has less than fourteen lines. It has ten and a half lines in all. Hopkins wrote only two curtal sonnets, the other being 'Peace'. Here the main qualities of a sonnet are retained, but in a circumscribed manner.

The theme of the poem is the praise and glorification of God for creating various multi-coloured, multi-shaped and multi-natured things in this world. He begins the poem by this praise. He says "Glory be to God for dappled things". The poet catalogues the various things which change from moment to moment, from season to season. He praises the sky which is many-coloured and compares it with a "brinded" cow. He also praises God for creating the

fish with black-spots on their rose-coloured skin. And he also praises God for the fallen chestnuts and the green core which encloses it. Hopkins is all praise for God for the patchwork of landscapes, changing according to time and space.

The poet praises God for creating all fish and fowl, men and animals. It is from God that all animate and inanimate objects take life. Hopkins gives a catalogue of all the things created by God for which praise be His. Beginning with praise, the poem builds up through a description of a variety of beautiful things which either are pined or contain opposites of various kinds – colour, taste, speed, brightness- to an assertion of the Creator of them, whose ability to comprehend the paradoxes within his unity aptly demand praise.

(ii) The world is charged .... Feel, being shod.

These lines have been taken from Hopkins' immortal poem, 'God's Grandeur'. This poem was composed by Hopkins in February 1877. This poem is a protest against the crass materialism of the age; yet despite man's wantonness and greed and wastefulness, there is hope for the world, as God continues to brood over it. The poems of Hopkins written in 1877 breathe with a simple rapture at the loveliness of the world as a manifestation of God, and by a confident, even triumphant mastery of rhythm, diction and imagery.

In these lines the poet says that the world is full of the glory and grandeur of God. And this grandeur of God bursts out like shining from a hammered foil- "like shining from shook foil". This gathers greatness just as the oil gathers after it has been crushed out from olives. So the poet suggests that God's grandeur gets its totality after a fruitful but painful crushing of human ego under religious discipline. Just as oil becomes useful only after it has been taken out of olives, in the like manner human ego partakes of God's glory and grandeur only after a great deal of religious perspiration and devotion. This leads the poet to lament the fact that still people do not pay attention to God's power and glory. Generation after generation of men has followed the same path without minding the power of God to punish them. In this world everything has been seared and corrupted by the dirty materialism in which man has taken part. Everything has been smeared and corrupted by commercial activity and the toil which brings worldly success or monetary gains. The nature around bears the marks of this smearing – man's foul odour can be seen in the midst of nature. In other words, we can say that all the beauty and graces of Nature have been blurred by man's worldly activities. The sweet fragrance of nature has been drowned in the foul smell of machinery. These ideas are reminiscent of Wordsworth who also spoke against the crass materialism of his age. In a word, Hopkins suggests that the beauty of nature has been spoiled and marred by man's industrial activities. Because of man's activities nature is becoming shorn of vegetation.

Hopkins says that man has been despoiling nature unmindful of the punishments which God can inflict on humankind. Man's toiling feet have worn away vegetation from the surface of the earth. In term of imagery also these lines deserve special mention. The similes introduced by the poet in the beginning are unique. He mentions "shook foil" and "ooze of oil

crushed.” These similes, to say the least, are highly suggestive. The repetition of the phrase “have trod” is very effective. It brings to our mind the poet’s opposition to the industrial civilization which is taking root everywhere.

### **10.3.5 Critical Appreciation**

It consists of two sections. The first section presents a critical analysis of the poem ‘Pied Beauty’ and the second section presents a critical analysis of the poem ‘God’s Grandeur’

#### **10.3.5 (a) Pied Beauty**

‘Pied Beauty’ is a dazzling creation of Hopkins. It is a ‘curtal sonnet’ a sonnet curtailed in length. Instead of having the traditional fourteen lines, it consists of ten and a half lines. Hopkins used this curtal form only in two of his poems, in the present poem and in ‘Peace’. The curtal form was an original invention of Hopkins. Still the poet is able to retain all the essential characteristics of a sonnet- it has an octave and a sestet. The Octave consists of the first six lines while the last four and a half lines form the sestet. The metre of this poem is ‘sprung paeonic.’ A paeonic foot has one stressed and three unstressed syllables.

The religious fervour of the poems is extremely remarkable. According to Norman H. Mackenzie, “Hopkins praises God for brindled cows and the blacksmith’s anvil as well as for the so-called poetic objects around him. He whose beauty is past change is recognized as fathering forth the slow and the sour, the shade as well as the light, pleasant little echoes ripple and lap through the poem - dappled, couple, stipple, tackle, fickle, freckled, adazzle.

Even though it is unwise and hard to categorize a poet’s works, the poems of Hopkins can be divided into two categories: the poems written between 1876 and 1879 as nature poems expressing joy, positive faith and mystical perception and those written between 1879 and 1885 as poems on man trying to adjust himself to a difficult world. But whether a poet of nature or of man God was always supreme in the mind of Hopkins.

Hopkins had great admiration for Wordsworth. But Wordsworth was a pantheist; Hopkins, a true Catholic. So God is apart from Nature, to Hopkins God is an artist, the Master-creator of beauty, for Hopkins. And the beauty of created things is a message from God, that behind ‘Pied Beauty’, varied and shifting, is the creator, changeless, eternal, One. The poem expresses the poets’ joyous wonder at the beauty of the work, of a joy enhanced because creation is seen sacramentally and because he himself is using beauty to praise his Maker. The beauty of created things, including the beauty of Nature is not permanent, but only by knowing transient beauty in the many, can the heart grasp the ‘Immutable Beauty’ of God. God is Beauty is itself. So praise Him; let it be your duty and your delight.

Hopkins uses the technique of enumeration in the poem. He is a poet of particulars, here. He catalogues things which change form moment to moment, from season to season :

the changing patterns of the sky, the contrast between the rich, red-brown nut of the fallen chestnut and the green husk or case which encloses it ; the patchwork of landscape changing according to time and place; the green pasture-land, the dull fawn-brown fallow lands, the deep brown ploughed lands ; the different implements of artisans and workmen; he catalogues them all. Then he generalizes, contrasting the anthesis of life, things set in opposition. All these things are products of God. Yet God Himself is 'past' or above change. He creates, but He is not the same as His creations. These things praise Him; are meant to praise Him.

In his Nature poetry, Hopkins betrayed as complete and unashamed a sensuousness as Keates himself . He fuses a Keatsian immediacy of sense perception with the spiritual tranquility of Wordsworth and his sublime healing power. 'Pied beauty' shows how alert and alive, his sensuous faculties were. The poet is 'adazzled ' by different colours in Nature; his physical feelings are stirred by thought of earthly occupation: he is aware of the sweet-sour tastes of life . As for the power of concentration shown by the poet the original poem has to be placed by the side of a paraphrase to understand the poet's 'nutty' style. The compound-words, like 'Fresh firecoal, Chestnut-falls, are full of force and meaning. At the same time, the poem is a good example of the violence to syntax and grammar.

To understand what 'Inscape' was to Hopkins, one need read only 'Pied Beauty'. The poem is full of image to give an idea of the variety and 'dapple' of the world, giving experiences of inscape in nature. For 'Cynghanedd', the Welsh art of making intricate and beautiful patterns of speech sound which Hopkins turned to good use in his poems, lines like with swift, slow , sweet sour addazle, dim are good examples. This is the art of alliteration by which language in inscaped.

Like Milton who rose to greatness by writing poetry to vindicate the ways of God to men', Hopkins, by nature a dreamer and a sensualist, only raises himself to greatness by writing poetry for 'great causes as liberty and religion'. In doing this , he had to sublimate his petice power. In a poem like 'Pied Beauty' we see how he did it . There is sensualism in the poem; there is no asceticism. It is a tribute to God's glory, as all poetry must be ; but they are tributes of the senses.

### **10.3.5 (b) God's Grandeur**

'God's Grandeur' was written by Hopkins in February 1877. The poem is permeated with the glory and grandeur of God. The poet begins by saying that nature has been made ugly by the industrialization of the age. Everything has become seared and corrupted :

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod ;  
 And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil ;  
 And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell : the soil  
 Is bare now, nor can foot fell, being shod.

Here the protest of the poet against crass materialism of the age can well be compared with the complaint of Wordsworth, who was also dissatisfied with industrialization. In the poem 'The World is Too Much With Us' he says :

The world is too much with us; late and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers :  
Little we see in nature that is ours ;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon !

Both the poets lament the indifference of people to the beauties of nature that lies round. But while Wordsworth satisfies himself with lament only, being a Jesuit, Hopkins goes further and having full faith in the greatness and goodness of God feels certain that the grandeur of God will still shine forth, Man has tried to kill nature but it will rejuvenate itself because the spirit of the Holy Ghost lies over it :

And for all this nature is never spent :  
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things :  
And though the last lights off the black West went  
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –  
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent  
World broods with warm breast and with ah ! bright wings.

The poem states its meaning with severe precision and hence the development of the thought becomes slightly difficult. There is great compression in the thought elements, perhaps because the sonnet form demanded great economy. The sentence-structure demands close attention to be understood properly. For ceaseless, untiring efforts the poet uses the structure "have trod" and repeats it thrice in the same line. The Holy Ghost bending over the world and thus proving God's grandeur connects it with the opening statement – "The world is charged with the grandeur of God".

In many poems of Hopkins, we find a streak of pessimism lurking through the texture. But in this case there is no pessimism. The pessimism is short-lived. The poet, being confident of the grandeur of God, is sure that "nature is never spent". He sees natural beauty being seared, blurred and smudged by the footfall of man, but the poet never becomes despondent. He is aware of the wings of the Holy Spirit spreading over the earth so that the "dearest freshness" of nature will be revived.

The theological element of the poem is insignificant. The conviction of the poem transcends any particular doctrinal belief. And everything is bound in typical Hopkinsian language. It is very sinewy, strong, personal, and inventive. The internal rhymes in "seared" and "bleared"



and “smeared” are very happy indeed. The rhymes suggest richness and plentitude. The poem comprises some very individual and very personal poetry.

This poem belongs to Hopkins’ year of renewed inspiration when he wrote copiously. After the composition of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ there was an inordinate silence. But in 1877 there was a spurt of renewed inspiration and he wrote some wonderful poems expressing ecstatic wonder at the beauty of nature. And among these poems about nature, ‘God’s Grandeur’ stands supreme.

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## 10.4 Self Assessment Questions

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(a) Answer the following questions in about 20 words each :-

1. What is a curtal sonnet ?

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2. Who is the English poet associated with the curtal sonnet ?

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3. What, according to Hopkins, is our duty ?

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4. Name the ‘catalogue’ poem prescribed for your study ?

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.....

5. Why is the poem ‘Pied Beauty’ called a catalogue poem ?

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.....

6. Name the Fransican philosopher who had a great influence on Hopkins?

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.....

7. When was the poem ‘God’s Grandeur’ written ?

8. What kind of protest does the sonnet 'God's Grandeur' express?

9. Which poem of Wordsworth can be compared with Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur'?

10. Why does Hopkins compare the Holy Ghost to a dove ?

11. How, according to Hopkins, does human ego improve ?

(b) Answer the following questions in about 500 words each.

1. Critically appreciate Hopkins' curtal sonnet 'Pied Beauty'.

2. Critically analyse Hopkins' poem 'God's Grandeur'?

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## 10.5 Answers to SAQs

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- (a)
1. A curtal sonnet is a sonnet curtailed in length. It contains ten and a half lines.
  2. Hopkins
  3. Our duty is to praise the Master – the creator who created the things of variegated beauty for us.
  4. ‘Pied Beauty’
  5. Hopkins uses the technique of enumeration in ‘Pied Beauty’ and catalogues things which change from moment to moment, from season to season.
  6. Duns Scotus.
  7. February 1877
  8. The poem is the protest of the poet against crass materialism.
  9. ‘The World is Too Much With Us’.
  10. The Holy Ghost looks after mankind with the same protective care as a dove looks after its little one.
  11. Through religious discipline.
- (b)
1. See the critical appreciation of the poem.
  2. See the critical appreciation of the poem.

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## 10.6 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have presented an elaborate discussion on Hopkins’ two representative poems – ‘Pied Beauty’ and ‘God’s Grandeur’. ‘Pied Beauty’ is a poem of praise to God for the variousness of his creation, whereas ‘God’s Grandeur’ is an expression of protest against the crass materialism of the age.

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## 10.7 Review Questions

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1. 'Pied Beauty' is Hopkins tribute to God as he believes "Glory to God for dappled things." Explain.
2. Compare and contrast Hopkins 'God's Grandeur' with Wordsworth's 'The World is Too Much With Us.'

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## 10.8 Bibliography

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1. John Pick : Gerard Manley Hopkins : Priest and Poet (OUP).
  2. W.A.M. Peters : G.M. Hopkins : A Critical Essay Towards the Understanding of His Poetry (OUP).
  3. W.H. Gardner : G.M. Hopkins : A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Traditions, Vols I and II.
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## UNIT – 11

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### HOPKINS : (I) *FELIX RANDAL* (II) *SPRING AND FALL*

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#### Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Felix Randal
  - 11.2.1 Text
  - 11.2.2 Annotations
  - 11.2.3 Model Explanations
  - 11.2.4 Critical Appreciation
- 11.3 Spring and Fall
  - 11.3.1 Text
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  - 11.3.4 Critical Appreciation
- 11.4 Terms used for Understanding Hopkins' Poetry
- 11.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 11.6 Answers to SAQs
- 11.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.8 Review Questions
- 11.9 Bibliography

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#### 11.0 Objective

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In this unit we intend to acquaint you with Hopkins' intense love for common humanity by presenting to you a detailed analysis of his two most representative poems on man. 'Felix Randal' and 'Spring and Fall'. Such other poems are "The Bugler's First Communion", 'The Candle Indoors', 'The Handsome Heart' and 'Brothers.' These poems reveal Hopkins' Wordsworthian sympathy towards Nature and all living creatures, old and young, proud and wretched alike. They recall to our minds Wordsworth's *Leech-gatherer*, *Old Cumberland Beggar* and *Michael*. *Felix Randal* was only a farrier, but his death is of great significance to

Hopkins. 'Harry the Ploughman' is another mute *Karmayogin* whose work, being the body's offering to God, is akin to the prayer. The Bugler also, humble for all his red-coated glory, kneels at the altar rail. 'Brothers', based on a real incident, deals with Harry, a reserved, sensitive boy and his impulsive younger brother John. In 'Spring and Fall : to a young child', Hopkins delicately unfolds a child's growing sensibility. In 'The Candle Indoors', the salt of Henry's tears is the very salt of Christ, whereby men become 'the salt of the earth'.

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## 11.1 Introduction

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'Felix Randal' is a sonnet with sprung and outriding rhythm, of six-foot lines, written at Liverpool in 1880. You should note the appropriateness of the name, 'Felix', which is a Latin word meaning 'happy'.

Felix Randal, the blacksmith is the subject of the poem; he used to make horse-shoes. Although he was robust and healthy, still he was overcome by diseases and died after receiving the Holy Communion. He was attended and looked after by the poet during his illness, and at the time of death, as a priest. The poem is a priestly meditation on his death.

In 'Spring and Fall', written at Lancashire, in 1880, Hopkins tells us that youth has an intuitive, almost innate knowledge of the sad transiency of all things due to the curse of Adam's original sin. Remarkably compressed and condensed, the poem opens with a tender and gentle address by a father-confessor to an imaginary child.

In the Title 'Spring and Fall' – *Spring* suggests the Garden of Eden in the Bible. (Margaret, the young child, also represents Spring). *Fall* suggests Adam's fall, the penalty of Adam, for eating the forbidden fruit. *Fall* also suggests the season of Autumn, when leaves ripen, become pale and ultimately fall. This is one of the few poems of Hopkins which is free from doctrinal elements explicitly stated. 'Spring' in the title suggests both the season of growth and the Garden of Eden (of Adam and Eve in *The Bible*); 'Fall' similarly suggests Autumn, when the leaves fall, as well as the Fall of Adam, the penalty of Adam. Remarkably compressed and condensed, the poem opens with a tender address to a child by a kindly father-confessor. The child Margaret is imaginary only; 'Goldengrove' may also refer to an actual village ; it means the golden trees in a grove or garden, which in the Autumn season, stand bare, leafless. Are you, Margaret, my young child, sorry for it?" Leaves like the things of man' suggests the Biblical assertion in Isaiah, 'And we all do fade as the leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.'

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## 11.2 *Felix Randal*

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### 11.2.1 Text

*Felix Randal the farrier, O he is dead then ? my duty all ended,*

*Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome.*

*Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some  
 Fatal four disorders fleshed there, all contended?  
 Sickness broke, hi,. Impatient, he cursed at first, but mended  
 Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some  
 Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom  
 Tenders to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended !  
 This seeing the sick endears them to us, us too it endears,  
 My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,  
 Thy tears that touched my heart, child. Felix, poor Felix Randal;  
 How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,  
 When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,  
 Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and bettering sandal!*

### 11.2.2 Annotations

- Line 1.* **The farrier** – one who shoes horses or cures horses' disease. **My duty all ended** – the spiritual duties of Hopkins, the priest, ended now that Randal is dead.
- Lines 2-5.* **Randal** – who was once big-boned, hardy and handsome, was later afflicted by diseases, and he began to wish for death, illness broke his body and spirit.
- Line 6.* **Anointed** – consecrated with holy oil; like baptism at childhood, a religious ceremony before death.
- Line 7.* **Reprieve** – Holy Communion : religious ceremony. Randal, in preparation for death and salvation.
- Line 8.* **God rest him** – May his soul rest in peace! **All road ever he offended** – ‘any road’, anyway, anyhow; hence, in whatever manner he may ever have sinned.
- Lines 10-11.* The solace and comfort, as the priest sat by the side of the innocent, childlike, sick man, was mutual. The priest contrasted his boisterous past with his helpless present and was moved; the patient derived comfort from the touch and words of the priest.
- Line 12.* **Did anyone then** – in those good old days, foresee that Randal would come to such a situation ?
- Line 13.* **Random** – built with rough, irregular stone. **Forge** – a smithy ; the workshop of a workman in iron. **Peers** – equals ; other farriers.
- Line 14.* **Fettle** – make ready; repair or set right. **Drayhorse** – horse which pulls low, strong

cart for heavy goods. **Sandal** – Randal used to shoe horses ; but now the horse which carries him aloft to the Heavens, wears sandals; it is light-footed.

### 11.2.3 Model Explanations

#### (i) This seeing the sick ..... Battering sandal !

These lines have been taken from Hopkins' poem 'Felix Randal'. This sonnet was written by Hopkins when he was in Liverpool in 1880. In this poem the happy ("Felix" is a Latin word which means "happy") Randal is the chief character. By profession he is a blacksmith who makes horse shoes. He was healthy and gay but after receiving Holy Communion he fell sick and died soon after. The poet attended him during his last illness. He also attended his last hours as a priest. So this poem represents the poet's priestly meditations on death.

In these lines the poet says that the visits of the priests to the sick persons make them mutually dear to one another. The priests become fond of the patients and the latter also begin to love their priests. When Hopkins, as the poet-priest visited Felix Randal, and spoke dear words in his ear, the words gave solace to him. Hopkins also tried to give relief to Randal by his caresses. The loving touch of the poet's hands stopped the flow of the tears of Felix Randal. Once Felix was strong man but now he had grown helpless like a child.

This makes the poet to think about the days of Randal when he was young. At that time he was full of vigour and vitality. In his youth Randal was big-boned, hardy and handsome. At that time Felix Randal never imagined that he could fall a prey to such a sickness that will eat into his vitality and youth. He continued to work at his shop where his skill was acknowledged by one and all. Then with marvelous artistry of equivocation – double meaning – Hopkins uses the word 'sandal' at the end of the poem; Bright and battering sandal? Not shoes ? That one word 'sandal' brings in pictures of hooves of horses, not iron-shod, but sandaled, battering, beating not the ground below, but flying with lightning in the skies, towards Heaven, in the company of, escorted by , angels who are riding the horses, lightning-shod. Look at the different picture now ! Randal, for who salvation is assured, is pictured as preparing for this last journey, on horses not shod, but sandaled. Now, his name Felix which means 'happy' becomes appropriate. He is happy on his way to Heaven.

The sheer force and beauty of these closing lines should be noted. There is the clumping assonance as also thumping alliteration in these lines. The diction should also be noted. 'Peers' and 'sandals' are evocative mytho-poetic words. Horse-shoes are heavy; sandals are light. We batter the ground with shoes; we fly in the air like birds with their light wings. Hence the suggestion of heavenward flight. Modern readers, mainly skeptical of metaphysics and religion, should give more importance to the theme of dissolution of material things than to the theme of humility, repentance and the Sacraments, in the poem 'Felix Randal'



### 11.2.4 Critical Appreciation

The poem 'Felix Randal' was composed by Hopkins in April 1880 when he was staying in Leigh, Lancashire. Hopkins stayed in Leigh from September to December 1879 serving the parishioners there. This poem was written by Hopkins when he was in a happier frame of mind. What is so surprising about this poem is that its subject is death, but it does not have the melancholy and sadness which usually accompany his poems concerning death.

Felix Randal, a farrier, is the subject of this wonderful poem. Felix Randal, the blacksmith, was a robust and healthy man who had not known sickness. But after receiving the Holy Communion he was overtaken by sickness and died soon after. During his last days, this maker of horse shoes, was attended by Hopkins. The description of Randal's occupation is made in the following words :

When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amid peers,

Didst fettle for the great grey dray horse his bright and

Battering sandal!

This "big-boned and hardy-handsome" young man falls sick and his mind wanders :

Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some

Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended ?

The poem tells us about the physical as well as the spiritual state of Felix Randal. Though his physical condition deteriorates, his spiritual condition becomes stronger.

The poem is also rich in the use of the linguistic devices. This is the first of Hopkins' Liverpool poems, and introduces Lancashire dialect, expression – "and all" (line 6), "all road over" (line 8) and "fettle" in line fourteen. Commenting upon the imagery and vocabulary of "Felix Randal" Norman H. Mackenzie has observed : "Felix Randal is noteworthy for the richness of its imagery and vocabulary. There is a word 'mould' for example, which was, both in dialect and in poetry, used for the grave; here this word has only a submerged meaning, 'His mould of man' is a metaphor from casting of metal particularly appropriate to a blacksmith's forge. Hopkins with his own frail physique, always admired strong-bodied persons. The last three lines of the sonnet are magnificently evocative of the blacksmith in his prime, physical strength. The word 'random' evokes the unplanned casualness of the smithy, typical of smith's life itself. The word 'grim' combines reminiscences of the powerful and forbidding Satanic rebels in the smoke of Pandemonium, with its homely, widespread dialect use, 'dirty, grim covered with soot or filth'. The word 'fettle', which every customer would use to the farrier, means 'to make' or 'to mend'. Furthermore, the last few lines are so arranged as to impart to Felix Randal the stature and splendour of the magnificent horse he is shoeing. How the rhythm beats out at time the sledge-hammer blows; 'random grim forge, great grey drayhorse' (where

the repeated vowels underscore the heavy strokes); we may catch too, the ringing of the horseshoe on the paving. The final phase of the poem is inspired; it transforms the drayhorse from drabness to radiance as the sonnet reaches an impressive and exultant close : ‘his bright and battering sandal!’”

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### 11.3 *Spring and Fall*

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#### 11.3.1 Text

*Margaret, are you grieving  
Over Goldengrove unleaving ?  
Leaves, like the things of man, you  
With your fresh thoughts care for, can you ?  
Ah ! as the heart grows older  
It will come to such sights colder  
By and by, nor spare a sigh  
Though worlds of wanwood leafmeal lie ;  
And yet you will weep and know why.  
Now no matter, child, the name :  
Sorrow's springs are the same.  
Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed  
What heart heard of, ghost guessed :  
It is the blight man was born for.  
It is Margaret you mourn for.*

#### 11.3.2 Annotations

*Line 1. Margaret* – no real Margaret is intended; any child.

*Line 2. Goldengrove* – the golden trees in a grove. There is ‘Goldengrove Farm’ in North Wales. **Unleaving** – leaves falling away getting leafless.

*Line 3. Leaves* – refer to The Bible (Isiah) : and we all do fade as the leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away’. **Like the things of man** – mortality is a part of all created things.

*Line 4. Fresh thoughts* – the poet points out a child’s growing sensibility. Young Margaret

grieves because the trees in the grove are getting leafless and beauty is fading away.

*Line 5 -6. **The heart grows older .... Colder*** – one day, later, when you lose your sensibility.

*Line 7. **Nor spare a sigh*** – Margaret, you will be unmoved.

*Line 8. **Wanwood*** – a very effective coinage; the bitterness of wormwood is suggested. ‘Wan’ gives the combined meaning of dark, gloomy, deficient, pale, bloodless (note it, as an example for ‘inscape’). **Leafmeal** piecemeal; leaf by leaf; like ‘inchmeal’, ‘limbmeal’, in Shakespeare. **Wanwood leafmeal lie** – one by one, the leaves fall, and then rot into mealy fragments.

*Line 9. **You will weep*** – note this as an example for the ambiguities in Hopkins. This can mean : (1) insist upon weeping, now or later, (2) shall weep in the future. **And know** – another ambiguity : (1) you insist upon knowing, (2) you shall know. **You will weep and know** – a third variation, ‘listen, and I shall tell you why you weep’. **Know** – a third variation ‘listen, and I shall tell you why you weep’.

**Why** – because of the blight of the original sin of Adam.

*Line 10. **The name*** – of Adam, his sin and fall and the curse source.

*Line 11. **Sorrow’s..... the same*** – all sorrows have virtually one source.

*Line 12. **Mouth... mind*** – of Margaret or somebody else’s.

*Line 12-13. **Nor mouth ..... guessed*** – neither your mouth nor even your mind has expressed what your heart must have known and your spirit must have guessed.

*Line 13. **What heart heard of*** – mortality. **Ghost** – archaic usage : spirit (of the living). It stands for both mortality and grave.

*Line 14. **The blight*** – the curse of decay and death.

*Line 15. **You mourn for*** – the inevitability of decay and death of all created things, the result of the original sin, the disobedience of Adam and the resultant punishment.

### 11.3.3 Model Explanations

#### (i) Margaret, are you grieving..... care for, can you?

These lines have been taken from the poem *Spring and Fall* written by Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Victorian poet, who remained almost unknown to the poetry reading public during his life time. He was first published by Robert Bridges, and since then he has been the most potent influence on modern poetry. This poem was written by Hopkins in 1880. This poem is remarkably condensed and compressed. The poem opens with a tender and gentle address by a father-confessor to an imaginary child.

This is one of the few poems of Hopkins in which the doctrinal viewpoint does not

dominate. 'Spring' in the title of the poem suggests, both the season of spring during which nature takes on a new look, and the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve lived so blissfully before their transgression. 'Fall' in the title similarly suggests two things : the autumn season, when the leaves fall, and the Fall of Adam, the penalty which he got for his transgression.

The child Margaret of the opening statement of the poem is an imaginary child. Likewise, 'Goldengrove' is no actual place, although the reference to Byzantium where there were golden trees may be made. The poet begins by giving a picture of autumn season when leaves begin to fall from trees. The poet asks Margaret if she is full of sorrow because leaves in the Goldengrove are falling. The poet asks her the reason of weeping. Then he asks her whether she is so upset because the leaves in the grove are falling or whether she is weeping for a similar mortality in human world. Here leaves like the things/humans suggest the Biblical assertion in Issiah, 'And we all do fade as the leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away'. The poet asks the child whether she, in all her simplicity, is grieving over the trees in the grove getting leafless and their beauty fading away. The father asks the child not to be so sensitive because as she matures she will know the facts of life and hence of decay and drabness of things in the autumn season.

#### **(ii) Nor mouth had..... you mourn for**

These lines have been taken from the poem 'Spring and Fall' written by Gerard Manley Hopkins. In this poem the title suggests the coming and going of seasons. The poet emphasises the sad transiency of all things due to the curse of Adam's original sin. This poem is free from any doctrinal content. It has been a favourite with anthology collectors. This poem expresses the idea of 'sad mortality' of man as well as nature. The child Margaret (who weeps because she finds leaves falling in the Goldengrove) does not know that she too is mortal and subject to decay like the autumnal leaves.

In these concluding lines of the poem the poet speaks about the little girl Margaret who has no suitable words, nor real understanding of her own grief. She does not know that like the leaves she is also liable to decay. Her heart half knows and her heart has half guessed the cause of her grief. But she has no definite words through which she could express the thoughts that come to her mind. Still her heart has sensed the truth almost intuitively.

But it must be remembered that the poem does not end on a note of admonition to Margaret. It is on a note of sympathy, Wordsworthian sympathy, that the poem ends. In this poem Hopkins expresses with poignant regret the fact of decay and mortality with great tenderness and pathos. In the words of Thornton, "The series of balances and comparisons in the poem give it a calm persuasive articulation, and the consciousness of all that is involved in 'knowledge' and 'fall' gives this apparently slight poem a great deal of weight".

### **11.3.4 Critical Appreciation**

'Spring and Fall' is one of Hopkins' most popular poems. It is also one of his sad

poems. This poem was written by Hopkins in the spring of 1880. It was written by Hopkins when he was struggling with great personal depression. Here we find him overworked and worried. Then he was living in Liverpool which for him was “the most museless, a most unhappy and miserable spot”. About this poem he wrote to his friend Robert Bridges, “(it is) a little piece composed since I began this letter, not founded on any real incident. I am not well satisfied with it”. Still, it remains a poem of great lyrical intensity and passion in which technical innovations also abound. The poem expresses the idea of sad mortality of man and nature alike. The child Margaret who weeps because of the golden leaves falling in autumn really mourns, though she does not yet know it, her own mortality.

The poem concerns human mortality. It is a kind of lamentation which the poet makes because of the Fall of man. In the beginning man lived in perfect innocence and bliss in the Garden of Paradise, but now after the disobedience of God, he has been made to decay and death. In this connection the use of the coined word “Goldengrove” in the second line of the poem is greatly suggestive. To some it is a simple and rather gratuitous invention; they consider it to be merely a description of trees, the leaves of which have turned red and yellow, or “gold”. The unleaving of the Goldengrove, however, gains wider implication when we consider it with reference to the Garden of Paradise. The leaves that are falling, we are told are “like the things of man” (line 3). So Goldengrove may also stand for “golden days of youth”, the spring time of life. Thus the two aspects – the seasons of the year and chronological stages of man’s life, get united in this one word. Then, the capitalization of the word “Goldengrove” alerts us to other suggestions in the poem “worlds of wanwood”, “ghost guessed”, and “the blight man was born for”. The words – “world”, “ghost” and “blight” – give us an invitation to read the poem in the context of the Garden of Eden for which “Goldengrove” is a happy coinage.

From the ninth line onwards we find a change in the thought of the poem. Here he tells us about the cause of Margaret’s grieving ;

Nor mouth had, no nor mind, expressed.

What heart heard of, ghost guessed :

It is Margaret you mourn for.

Now we are told about the cause why death and decay have come into the world. Thus we come across a double symbolism in the poem. Fall refers to autumn as well as man’s fall from grace. And Spring stands for the fountain head of sorrow (the Original Sin) and the spring of tears. Thus, this poem expresses Hopkins’ conviction that all sorrow springs from one cause - mortality, deriving from sin, and this is so, whether we are conscious of it or not. Margaret, now a mere child, will grow soon, and like Hopkins come to know of this great truth.

The poem is a direct address to the girl, Margaret, and there is no scene-setting worth

the name. The poem is written objectively. But we can feel that this is rather away from the truth. The poem is a projection of the poet's self in the form of Margaret. And the generalization of the human condition may also be read as the consciousness of the poet's own position. In Margaret he recognizes his own youth, and the distance he has traveled from it. Natural beauty, instead of being a revelation of God, is increasingly seen as a reminder of the shortness of his own life and his own mortal nature.

Hopkins has garnered the common resources of language and invented new words by extending the common process of its development and growth (shifting parts of speech, compounding new words from old elements). In the coinage of new words Hopkins has used old elements into new entities. In this poem he has twice coined two new words in a single line. In the second line he has coined "Goldengrove" and "unleaving", and in the line eight "wanwood" and "leafmeal". The happy choice of the coinage of Goldengrove has already been explained. As regards "unleaving" - it is composed of a noun "leaf" used as a verb with a negative prefix "un" to mean "leaving leaves". The cause of misunderstanding is that many people consider it a compound of "leave" used as verb with the compound "un".

The other line that contains two coined words is line eight. "Wanwood" is a compound of two words – "wood" and "wan". And the woods are pale because the trees have shed their leaves and so they have become "wan", that is pale. "Leafmeal" seems ambiguous but this ambiguity is soon removed. Here we have to remember that there is a word in English, "piece-meal" which means "piece by piece". Likewise leafmeal means "leaf by leaf". This line, thus may be read : "though huge areas of dark, colourless groves have dropped their leaves on the ground, one by one to decay, becoming a mass of mealy matter".

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## 11.4 Terms used for Understanding Hopkins' Poetry

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The section discusses the terms Inscape, Instress and Sprung Rhythm, central to the poetry of Hopkins :-

- (a) Inscape :** We talk of olive trees. We generalize. But Hopkins treated each olive tree as an individual item. When you read his 'The Windhover', you find the flight of the Windhover expressing the whole personality of the bird. That is 'inscape' for Hopkins (and should be, for you). Hopkins wrote "I have no other word for that which takes the mind or eye in a bold hand". So he coined a new word 'Inscape'. He used it to designate the beauty of Things. 'Inscape' is applied to some particular thing of beauty which is distinctive and patterned. It is the individual quality of an object as revealed in its characteristic action which reveals the inner form of it. Inscape is an effect to translate this into words. Verse is inscape of the spoken sound. Poetry is only speech employed to carry the 'inscape' of speech. Hopkins adds : "It is the virtue of Inscape to be distinctive and it is the virtue of distinctiveness to be queer. 'Inscape' is the very soul of art".

Verbal inscape is a pattern of design in words. When words are used to suggest the inscape by means of a sound pattern we get verbal inscape. For example, (1) ‘earliest stars, earl stars’, (2) ‘dapple – drawn dawn’.

(b) **Instress** : Inscape is the individuating quality. The reader’s response to the inscape may be called ‘instress’. It is the observer’s response to the object of observation. It is ‘stress’ emphasized, ‘stress’ felt inside, seen through the inner self. It is in order to produce this effect that the poet creates the inscape of the object. The poet finds adequate words to project the inscape which the object has, in such a way that the desired instress is produced. Hopkins tries to capture the flight of the Windhover in words and his apprehension of the characteristic activity of the bird, passed on to the readers, is called instress. It is the sensation of the ‘inscape’ – (W.H. Gardner). Hopkins has nowhere specifically defined ‘instress’.

(c) **Sprung Rhythm** : A term used by Hopkins to denote the method by which his verse is to be scanned. In his time, most English verse was written in Running Rhythm, that is, metres with regular stresses in the line. Hopkins wished to free English verse from this rhythm, so as to bring verse into closer accord with common speech, to emancipate rhythm from linear unit, and to achieve a freer range of emphasis. It is a rhythm not counted by syllables and regular feet but by stresses (stress being the emphasis of the voice upon a word or syllable). If you imagine a line divided into feet, then one syllable would be stressed in each foot, but that syllable can either stand alone or be accompanied by a number of unstressed syllables (usually not more than four). As stresses, not syllables, make up the line, it may vary considerably in length. To put in differently, in Sprung Rhythm, the number of stresses in each line is regular, but they do not occur at regular intervals, nor do the lines have a uniform number of syllables. The rhythm also drives through the stanza, and is not basically linear. Consider these lines from ‘The Wreck’.

‘Thou hast bound bones and veins in me fastened me flesh,  
And after it almost unmade, what with dread’.

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## 11.5 Self Assessment Questions

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(a) Answer to the following questions should not exceed 20 words each.

1. What does the word ‘Felix’ mean ?

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2. Who was Felix Randal ?

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- .....
3. Who are the patient and the priest in the poem 'Felix Randal'?
- .....
- .....
4. When was the poem 'Felix Randal' written ?
- .....
- .....
5. Name the poem of Wordsworth which can be compared to Hopkins' 'Felix Randal' and 'Spring and Fall'
- .....
- .....
6. What do the words 'Spring' and 'Fall' suggest in the title of the poem 'Spring and Fall'?
- .....
- .....
7. What does the word 'goldengrove' mean in 'Spring and Fall' ?
- .....
- .....
8. Who is Margaret ?
- .....
- .....
9. By whom were Hopkins' poems first published ?
- .....
- .....
10. What does the poem 'Spring and Fall' express ?
- .....
- .....
- (b) Answer the following question in 500 words each :
1. Critically appreciate the poem 'Felix Randal'.



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2. Critically appreciate the poem ‘Spring and Fall’.

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## 11.6 Answers to SAQs

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- (a)
1. ‘Felix’ is a Latin word which means ‘happy’.
  2. Felix Randal, the blacksmith, or ironsmith is the subject of the poem ‘Felix Randal’. He used to make horse shoes.
  3. The patient is Felix Randal, the ferrier and the priest is Hopkins, the poet.
  4. ‘Felix Randal’ was written in April 1880 when Hopkins was staying in Leigh, Lancashire.
  5. Wordsworth’s poems ‘Leech-gatherer’, ‘Old Cumberland Beggar’ and ‘Michael’ can be compared to Hopkins’ ‘Felix Randal’ and ‘Spring and Fall’.
  6. ‘Spring’ in the title suggests both the season of growth and the Garden of Eden; Fall similarly suggests Autumn and the Fall of Adam.
  7. ‘Goldengrove’ means the golden trees in a grove or garden. It may also refer

to an actual village.

8. Margaret refers to an imaginary child to whom the poem 'Spring and Fall' is addressed.
  9. Robert Bridges was the first to publish Hopkins' poems.
  10. The poem expresses the sad mortality of Man as well as nature.
- (B)
1. See the Critical Appreciation of the poem.
  2. See the Critical Appreciation of the poem.

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## 11.7 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit we have discussed in detail Hopkins' two representative poems – 'Felix Randal' and 'Spring and Fall'. These poems express Hopkins' intense love for common humanity. The unit also contains a brief discussion on the terms Inscap, Instress and Sprung Rhythm, vital to the understanding of Hopkins' poetry.

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## 11.8 Review Questions

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1. Comment on the confessional aspect in Hopkins poems.
2. Comment on the uniqueness of Hopkins poetry.

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## 11.9 Bibliography

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1. John Pick : Gerard Manley Hopkins : Priest and Poet (OUP).
2. W.A.M. Peters : G.M. Hopkins : A Critical Essay Towards the Understanding of His Poetry (OUP).
3. W.H. Gardner : G.M. Hopkins : A Study of Poetic Idiosyncrasy in Relation to Poetic Traditions, Vols I and II.

## UNIT – 12

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### ROBERT BROWNING : *MY LAST DUCHESS*

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#### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Age and Author
  - 12.2.1 About the Age
  - 12.2.2 About the Author
  - 12.2.3 Self Assessment Questions
  - 12.2.4 Answers to SAQs
- 12.3 Reading Text
  - 12.3.1 Text
  - 12.3.2 Glossary
  - 12.3.3 Summary
  - 12.3.4 Self Assessment Questions
  - 12.3.5 Answers to SAQs
- 12.4 Analysis
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  - 12.4.2 Dramatic Monologue
  - 12.4.3 Form and Style
  - 12.4.4 Self Assessment Questions
  - 12.4.5 Answers to SAQs
- 12.5 Let us Sum Up
- 12.6 Review Questions
- 12.7 Bibliography

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#### **12.0 Objectives**

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In this unit we wish to acquaint you with the Victorian Age. We will give you practice

to understand and appreciate poetry through Robert Browning's masterpiece dramatic monologue "My Last Duchess". We will give you practice by:

- (a) giving you the theme, story and detailed summary of *My Last Duchess*, one of the best dramatic monologues;
- (b) giving you meanings and explanations in a very simple language; and
- (c) critically analysing the text and explaining the literary devices used by the poet,

We will let you know about the social conditions and literary trends of The Victorian Age. We will also discuss Robert Browning's life, his literary genius and contribution to society and literature at large. After reading and understanding *My Last Duchess*. You will surely be able to :

- (i) appreciate and evaluate a dramatic monologue; and
- (ii) develop insight into understanding the hidden meanings and literary devices used by the poet.

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## 12.1 Introduction

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The poetry of the Victorian age – that of the middle part of the nineteenth century, between the first Romanticism which fills its beginning, and the second which precedes its end – is woven of the two main strands of thought and feeling which run through the central period; that poetry finds its proper perspective on the intricate, shifting background of their interplay. The inspiration of each individual poet can be described more precisely in relation to those broad lines of development.

Viewed as a whole, the display of poetic talent during these years is as prolific as it is subtly varied in the wide range of its colouring. One can, however, distinguish in it two groups of poets; they are not divided because of any well-defined antagonism-indeed, they are united by many intermediary shades; but one group rather seeks to identify itself with the contemporary movement in intellectual and critical thought, stressing the need for objectivity, and aiming at a standard of balance, based upon the quality of precision in each idea; while the other group seems to favour the idealistic reaction with its desire for emotion, its cult of beauty, and its dreamy tendency, weaving the main themes of vision round the subtle blending of imagination and sensibility. From the point of view of general literary history, the first group logically precedes the second, explaining, so to speak, and determining its existence, just as action naturally precedes reaction. The Victorian age is above all characterized by an intellectual and positive movement. But poetry is not always the surest, nor the most minutely accurate, symptom of the evolution of mind. Compared with other forms of art, it may show an appreciable backwardness; it is the privileged domain of conservative tendencies. In fact, the poets of the second group occupy a position of slight priority with relation to those of the first. A student who keeps chronology in mind will begin his examination with them.

The reason is that the idealistic reaction does not constitute an absolute beginning; in many respects it represents the natural, direct continuation of Romanticism. Neither in literature nor in the inner life of the soul can it be said that the properly Romantic inspiration is exhausted after 1830. It is seen in mixed forms, and combines with the other psychological elements which characterize the new period. There is scarcely a poet from now onwards who does not reveal, in some degree, the reciprocal penetration and fusion of the influences in conflict.

There is an element of Romanticism in all the Victorian poets. With many, this remains their strongest and most obvious characteristic. But the spiritual change that has taken place and the atmosphere of a different age give their art another aspect. The new features are either a more strongly disciplined manner, a more elaborate perfection of the form; or a more spontaneous sympathy with emotions which seem to exclude the Romantic obsession of self; or again, a stringent intellectualism which colours the highest flights of the imagination. In the same way, the poets who show most clearly in their work the decline of purely Romantic themes no doubt derive their inspiration from the restless activity of the mind; they are occupied with mere truth; philosophy and psychology appeal to them; their poems are analyses, demonstrations, into which one feels that science has instilled something of its method; their ideal lies, or seems to lie, in objectivity. But all their poetry is impregnated with a diffused Romanticism, which at times crystallizes in words that seem to be but the echo of those of yesterday. In view, therefore, of the very varied and mixed tendencies of work, strict classification would be arbitrary. Writers and groups can be studied according to a certain order; but this order must remain pliant, avoid all system, and leave full scope to the study of individual temperaments.

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## **12.2 The Age And The Author**

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In this section we will discuss the position, gravity and importance of The Victorian Age. The life and poetic genius of Robert Browning will also be given in this section. Browning is one of the major poets of this age.

### **12.2.1 About the Age**

The period from 1830 onwards witnessed a development in literary tradition. And 1832 is the year of a great reform which lays the solid foundation of political democracy. The third decade of nineteenth century traced the beginning of a new age in English society and literature.

This period derives its title from the reign of Queen Victoria lasting 1837-1901. As the literary trends, most marked in this age, had begun some years earlier, it is often dated from 1832, the year of Scott's death. Its notable events were the Oxford Movement, the rise of democracy, the expansion of the British empire, and the progress of science and industry. The Oxford Movement, so called from its origin at Oxford, was a movement for reviving the same faith in the Church that it commanded in the Middle Ages. In this way it sought to combat the

sceptical tendencies of the age. It was initiated by John Keble with a sermon on 'national apostasy' at Oxford University in 1833.

The democratic process, which began with the Reform Act of 1832, was carried yet further in this age by a series of progressive legislations that included the extension of the franchise to the labouring classes, removal of many of the remaining disabilities of the Roman Catholics, the admission of the Jews to membership in the Parliament, universal adult male suffrage, voting by secret ballot, and increased opportunities for education. Side by side, the British empire steadily expanded so as to include India, Egypt and the Sudan, South Africa and the self-governing colonies of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. Britain also acquired control of the Suez Canal. In the field of science a number of inventions and discoveries took place : those of Pasteur in medicine and Darwin in biology, the railway, the automobile, and the aeroplane; the telephone, the telegraph, and the wireless; and the application of machinery to industry.

In spite of the changes – political, economic, scientific, religious – noticed above, the poetic temper of the Victorian age is not materially different from that of the early nineteenth century. In its individualism, play of imagination, love of the picturesque, and interest in Nature and the past, it continues the romantic tradition. But in its response to the changed conditions it acquired a distinctive character of its own.

Democracy had introduced a new force to reckon with – the people conscious of their rights ; the new industry had made the rich richer and the poor poorer ; science, which had done all this, had by another stroke – the evolutionary theory – banished God from the universe; and religion therefore had little useful role to play. What would happen to England now that her elaborate religious system, which used to solve all such problems, had failed her? The poets – Tennyson, Browning, Arnold-filled in the breach. Each came out with a message of his own to reassure his readers that their doubts, distractions, and fears notwithstanding, all was right with the world. The poet turned a prophet too. There were two exceptions to this preoccupation with the present : the Pre-Raphaelites and those who came under the influence of the Oxford Movement. The former sought refuge in the pleasures of art and the latter in the pleasures of piety.

Under the impact of science, again, the poetic style underwent a change. While it continued to be ornate, most notably in Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites, it became more to the point than before. It is more rational and less extravagant. It is neo-classical in its plainness and romantic in its picturesqueness. One more factor contributed to this change : the stress the age laid on order and discipline in every walk of life. Poetry therefore shed the mere flowers of speech. It strove for beauty within the limits of reason.

### **12.2.2 About the Author**

Robert Browning was born in Camberwell on May 7, 1812. His father, an unusual

man was a clerk in the Bank of England. He was a man of more than ordinary culture and originality of mind, who was devoted to the study of various subjects of human interest. He possessed a library of six thousand volumes. The poet's mother belonged to Scotland. She was a devoted lady who took proper care of her children. Young Robert was encouraged to read a large number of subjects and side by side along with reading. He was encouraged for a careful training in music : and the Dulwich Gallery, not far away from his home, became a place which he visited regularly from his childhood.

Till the age of fourteen years he remained at a School for young gentlemen, run by a Mr. Ready at Peckham. After that he was not sent to any school by his father. He was placed under the care of a private tutor. When he was seventeen, he was admitted for a term to a Greek class at The University College, Gower Street. The systematic use of his father's library was probably the most important factor in the poet's early education while still a boy. He read the great Elizabethan writers and Byron with special interest. The first book he bought with his own money in his childhood was *Ossian*. His mother bought works of Shelley and Keats from London on his request. If we do not clearly understand that Browning was an ardent and almost the first disciple of Shelley, we shall miss the secret of his first inspiration.

When he was twelve years of age, a collection, under the title *Incondita*, was published by him. It contained his Byronic poems. This was studied by W.H. Fox, editor of *The Monthly Repository*, who did not forget the boy poet. The wholesome confusion of poet's youth is visible in his first long poem entitled *Pauline*. It was published in 1833. He was only twelve years old at that time. It is probably the most consummate poem of its length ever written by a youth. In 1833 Browning visited Russia and applied for a diplomatic post in Persia. He was not then interested in diplomatic work and did not join. During the next year he contributed poems to *The Monthly Repository*. In 1835 his *Paracelsus* was published. In vision and in apprehension it was the most profound of his youthful poems. This gained him the attention and appreciation of great poets and men of letters like Wordsworth, Dickens, Carlyle and Landor. After this he tried his hand in writing a play and his first play *Strafford* was successfully produced at Covent Garden on 1<sup>st</sup> May, 1837.

His third successful poem *Sordello* came in 1840. From 1841 to 1845 he wrote a series of astonishing poetical pamphlets to which the simple hearted Browning gave the title *Bells and Pomegranates*. Browning could not take an objective view of any character.

He married Elizabeth Barnett Moulton Barrett in 1846. She was six years older than him. After marriage Brownings made their home at Florence in Italy. Elizabeth was not very fit physically and did not do much physical exertion and labour. Their only child Robert Barrett Browning was born 1849. Brownings continued their literary endeavours in Italy. Mrs. Browning died in 1861. This made Robert Browning leave Italy and settle down in London for the rest of his life. His literary career rose to new heights with *Dramatic Personae* (1864), *The Ring and the Book* (1868-69), *Asolando* (1870), *Balaustion's Adventure and Prince Hohenstiel*

*Schwangam* (1871), *Refine at the Fair* (1872), *Red Cotton Night Cap Country* (1873) and *La Saisiaz* (1878)

He mostly lived in London and visited France and Italy at least once in a year. He was the centre of an admiring group of friends and an adoring crowd of disciples and enjoyed self respect and dignity. The brave and noble old man fell into his last sleep on the night of December 12, 1889. He was buried at Westminster Abbey.

### 12.2.3 Self Assessment Questions

Choose the correct answer from the three alternatives given below each question :

1. Victorian Age is characterized by :
  - (a) Intellectual and Positive Movement
  - (b) Poetic Honesty
  - (c) Idealistic Reason
2. The element of Romanticism is found in :
  - (a) Victorian Poets
  - (b) Elizabethan Poets
  - (c) Augustan Poets
3. The Victorian poets can be :
  - (a) taken as one group
  - (b) divided into two groups
  - (c) divided into many groups
4. Queen Victoria reigned over England from:
  - (a) 1830-1900
  - (b) 1837-1901
  - (c) 1832-1901
5. The Reform Act was begging of :
  - (a) The Queen's Reign
  - (b) Democratic Process
  - (c) The Tractarian Movement
6. The self governing colonies were :



- (a) Canada, Newzealand and Australia
  - (b) Australia and Canada
  - (c) Australia and India
7. Darwin's theory of the origin actually challenged :
- (a) The Throne of England
  - (b) The biblical version of the creation
  - (c) The growth of machinery
8. Robert Browning's son was born in :
- (a) 1845
  - (b) 1846
  - (c) 1849
9. Browning went to University College to study :
- (a) Literature
  - (b) Greek
  - (c) Classical Literature
10. The first collection of Brownings' poems was published :
- (a) when he was twelve years
  - (b) when he was fourteen years
  - (c) when he was sixteen years

#### **12.2.4 Answers to SAQs**

- 1. (a) Intellectual and Positive Movement
- 2. (a) The Victorian poets
- 3. (b) divided into two groups
- 4. (b) 1837-1901
- 5. (b) democratic process
- 6. (a) democratic process
- 7. (b) the Biblical version of creation

8. (c) 1849
9. (b) Greek
10. (a) when he was twelve years

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## 12.3 Reading The Text

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The dramatic monologue ‘My Last Duchess’ is regarded as the best dramatic monologue in the whole range of English Literature. The speaker is the Duke of Ferrara, an important city and cultural center of Italy. The spirit of Renaissance, its intrigues, its sensuality, its greed and cultural qualities are presented in it.

You are advised to read, understand and paraphrase the text of the poem with the help of the glossary. A summary and a detailed critical analysis are also given in this section to help you understand this dramatic monologue in a better way.

### 12.3.1 The Text of *My Last Duchess*

That’s my last Duchess painted on the wall.

Looking as if she were alive; I call

That piece a wonder, now : Fra Pandolf’s hands

Worked busily a day and there she stands.

Will’t please you sit and look at her? I said

‘Fra Pandolf by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

10

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, ’twas not

Her husband’s presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess’ cheek : perhaps

Fra Pandolf chanced to say ‘Her mantle laps

Over my Lady’s wrist too much.’ or Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
 Half-flush that dies along her throat' ; such stuff  
 Was courtesy she thought, and cause enough 20  
 For calling up that spot of joy. She had  
 A heart ... how shall I say ? .... too soon made glad  
 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er  
 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.  
 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,  
 The dropping of the daylight in the West,  
 The bough of cherries some officious fool  
 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule  
 She rode with round the terrace-all and each  
 Would draw from her alike the approving speech. 30  
 Or blush, at least, She thanked men – good but thanked somehow ... I know not  
 how ... as if she ranked  
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name  
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame  
 This sort of trifling ? Even had you skill  
 In speech – (which I have not) to make your will  
 Quite clear to such an one, and say Just this  
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,  
 Or there exceed the mark – and if she let  
 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set 40  
 Her wits to yours. forsooth and made excuse,  
 - E'en then would be some stooping, and I chose  
 Never to stoop. Oh, Sir, she smiled no doubt,  
 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without  
 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands  
 As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet  
 The company below, then. I repeat,  
 The Count your Master's known munificence  
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence 50  
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;  
 Thought his fair daughter's self as I avowed  
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go  
 Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, though,  
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,  
 which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me! 56

### 12.3.2 Glossary

1-10	looking	:	appearance of the pointing
	a wonder	:	a wonderful work of art
	worked busily a day	:	the portrait was painted in one day
	look at her	:	to admire the pointing of Duchess
	piece	:	portrait
	Fra Pandolf	:	the name of the painter who painted the portrait
	Fra	:	from, friar, a monk
	earnest	:	in good sense
	By design	:	intentionally
	read	:	examined carefully
	pictured countenance	:	the face of the last duchess as shown in portrait
	puts by	:	removes
	I	:	the Duke
	You	:	the messenger
11-20	seemed	:	appeared, as if
	they durst	:	if they had the courage to do so

	such a glance	:	you are not the first person to ask
	spot of joy	:	a faint blush caused by pleasure
	mantle	:	cloak
	laps	:	covers
	faint half blush	:	the reddish glow
	such stuff	:	such remarks
	were courtesy	:	they were merely courtesy
21-30	calling up	:	taking meaningless remarks seriously
	it was all one	:	she has no sense of discrimination
	too soon made glad	:	easily pleased
	my favour	:	ornaments given by me
	dropping of day light	:	hour of sunset
	officious fool	:	some foolish admirer of hers
	terrace	:	a raised walk or drive
	the approving speech	:	a few words of appreciation
31-40	ranked	:	considered of the same value
	stoop to blame	:	loss of dignity by criticism foolish conduct
	trifling	:	foolish, childish conduct
	your will	:	your desires
	to such an one	:	to a frivolous childish person like the Duchess
	set her wits to yours	:	at once began discussing
	forsooth	:	at once
41-50	made excuses	:	try to justify her conduct
	chuse	:	choose
	passed her	:	came across her
	commands	:	ordered the duchess not to smile an everyone
	than all smiles stopped together	:	this indicates the tragedy
	please you rise	:	will you please get up

the company	:	meeting
munificence	:	generosity, liberality
ample warrant	:	sufficient guarantee
just pretence	:	reasonable expectation or claim
disallowed	:	rejected
avowed	:	said, declared
51-56 fair	:	beautiful
starting	:	in the beginning
object	:	purpose, desire
Neptune	:	the sea-god in classical mythology
a rairly	:	a rare statue
claus of innsbruck	:	an imaginary sculptor
cast	:	produced
bronze	:	a metal compounded out of copper and brass

### 12.3.3 Summary

In the palace of an Italian Duke, who is the speaker in this short but vivid piece, had come the envoy of a count whose daughter he was negotiating to marry. The Duke was a widower, and taking his guest round the family portrait gallery, he paused before the portrait of his last Duchess and drew aside the curtain. He began to comment on the picture.

It was a fine portrait, so beautifully executed, that the form of his wife came to life in it. Friar Pandolf who painted it, had spent a lot of time and labour over that masterpiece.

At once, the Duke turned to inform his guest that he had deliberately named a Friar as the artist. This was because the look of deep and intense passion on the Duchess's face always intrigued onlookers. It was clear that they sensed something behind that look other than love for her husband; they would have asked questions about it if only they had the courage. The mention of a Friar's name helped to check fancies about an affair between the Duchess and the painter.

It was obvious to anyone that the look on her countenance was caused by something more than the mere presence of her husband in the studio. Its joy was so clear and bright. But it might have been caused by a casual remark from the painter; either a suggestion that her mantle should not cover her wrist so much or that it was impossible to reproduce on canvas the faint, evanescent flush that suffused her face. In her case even such a formal, courteous

remark was sufficient to call forth a bush of happiness.

She had an innocent, happy nature that could be pleased easily. Her earnest, impassioned, and yet smiling glance went alike to everyone. She who sent it knew no distinction of things or persons. Everything pleased her; everyone could arouse her gratitude. The same smile lighted her face again when he, her husband, showed her a special favour as when some over-zealous fool plucked a branch of the cherry-tree rich with leaves and fruits and presented it to her. The bright sky at sunset or the white mule she rode seemed to arouse the same smile of pleasure too. It seemed to him from her manner of showing her gratitude for such simple things that she ranked his gift the “gift of a nine hundred years’ old name”, with that of every one else.

Naturally, this outlook filled him with anger that turned soon to disgust. It was beneath his dignity to complain about such things. He could have admonished her and corrected her, and perhaps she would have submitted willingly to his wishes. But this would have meant lowering himself from his wonted dignity. All the time her attitude grew increasingly disgusting. So he decided to act. He gave the necessary orders, and she never smiled again. He put her in a state where she could worry or insult him no more. In plain words he got her killed.

Thus, having told the story of his last Duchess, the Duke turned to more immediate things. First, there was the dowry that his prospective bride was to fetch him : he knew that it would be adequate, coming as it did from such a munificent man as the count. Anyway, his main attraction was the beautiful lady and not the fortune she would bring.

With that, he turned to more down his guest. As a gesture of carelessness, intended to suggest his indifference to such things, he pointed in passing to a rare statute in bronze, the figure of Neptune taming his sea-horse.

### **12.3.4 Self Assessment Questions**

Choose the correct answer from the three alternatives given below each question :

1. ‘My Last Duchess’ is:
  - (a) a dramatic monologue
  - (b) an autobiographical poem
  - (c) a dramatic lyric
2. ‘My Last Duchess’ was published in :
  - (a) 1863
  - (b) 1860
  - (c) 1842

3. The Speaker in the poem is
  - (a) Duke of Ferrara
  - (b) Claus of Innsbruck
  - (c) Duchess
4. The story of the poem belongs to :
  - (a) Nineteenth Century
  - (b) Sixteenth Century
  - (c) Twentieth Century
5. The Duke, in the poem, is talking to :
  - (a) the Count
  - (b) a court official
  - (c) a messenger
6. The portrait has :
  - (a) smile on the lips
  - (b) deep passionate look in the eyes
  - (c) glow on her face
7. The Duke :
  - (a) discards the portrait
  - (b) hates the portrait
  - (c) is justly proud of it
8. The Duke had :
  - (a) graceful nature
  - (b) royal nature
  - (c) childish and foolish nature
9. The Duchess was :
  - (a) unfaithful to her husband
  - (b) overpowered by her husband
  - (c) free to enjoy her life



10. The portrait was painted by :
- (a) Fra Pandolf
  - (b) Claus of lunsbruck
  - (c) Neptune

### 12.3.5 Answers SAQs

- 1. (a) dramatic monologue
- 2. (c) 1842
- 3. (a) Duke of Ferrara
- 4. (b) sixteenth century
- 5. (c) a messenger
- 6. (b) deep passionate look in the eyes
- 7. (c) is justly proud of it
- 8. (c) childish and foolish nature
- 9. (b) overpowered by her husband
- 10. (a) Fra Pandolf

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## 12.4 Analysis

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In this section we will let you practice to analyse and appreciate a given text and also to understand poetic devices

### 12.4.1 Critical Analysis

*My Last Duchess* was published in *Dramatic Lyrics* in late November, 1842. In the collection of 1849, it was made one of the Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, and in the rearrangement of the poems in 1863 it was put under *Dramatic Romances*. In the first publications it was entitled Italy, and it was in the 1849 edition that the present title *My Last Duchess* was given.

Browning has represented the Duchess as a pathetic, stifled figure, rendered incapable by circumstances of giving expression to her talents and feelings. It has been suggested that it is based somewhat on the life that Elizabeth Barrett, later Mrs. Browning, lived in Wimpole Street. Her talents and passions were stifled by the tyranny of her father.

The Duke is addressing the envoy of a Count whose daughter he is going to marry. He draws his attention to the portrait of his last Duchess, now dead. He calls it a portrait done by

Friar Pandolf, and then qualifies his statement with the remarks that he did so by design, because he had noticed that visitors were intrigued by the expression on the Duchess's face, and almost wanted to ask what caused it. Most of them restrained that curiosity because they dared not wound his feelings.

The Duke means that often people, observing the expressions of passion on the Duchess's face, were suspicious of an affair between her and the painter. He generally, therefore, attributed the painting to one Friar Pandolf, since a clergyman's name would remove all suspicion. He was also particular that no one but he drew the curtain to display the portrait.

He remarks on her nature. Instead of understanding her amiable nature, he says that she was a silly childish woman who was readily impressed and pleased. She treated all favours alike with a smile ready for everyone. The Duke tells the envoy that the sweet smiles on the lady's face were not for her husband alone. The bright redness visible on the lady's cheeks was very unique. The Duke explains why the portrait of the Duchess has a blush on her cheeks. Many people think that the blush appeared on her cheeks because her husband the Duke was present there when the portrait was being made. The Duke tells the envoy that the blush on her face was not because he was present there. There was some other reason of it, perhaps some compliment by the artist occasioned that happy spot on her face. The artist might have complimented her on her dress. He might have said that her loose cloak covered her wrist too much.

The poem shows us the inside of a typical Renaissance character typified by an unscrupulous and proud Duke. Talking to the envoy of a Count whose daughter he wishes to marry, the Duke shows him the portrait of his previous wife who is dead. He remarks on her nature. Instead of understanding her amiable nature, he says that she was a silly childish woman who was readily impressed and pleased, who treated all favours alike with a smile ready for everyone.

The Duke was annoyed with the Duchess because she did not feel thankful to him for the honour he bestowed on her by marrying her. Even the gifts to her by other people and those given by him made her equally happy. She thanked both with equal warmth. The Duke failed to understand how she could equate his gifts with everybody's gifts. The Duchess was graceful for the least kindness done to her and when she thanked the people, the Duke, though he did not get angry at that, did not however feel happy. Being absolutely unaffected by such feelings of gratitude towards others, the Duke naturally could not understand or appreciate her attitude.

The Duke did not mind that she thanked people for their good acts. But she did not give him a special treatment while thanking others. He was her husband and belonged to a family of 900 years standing and reputation. He was shocked that she treated him at par with other people. Thus she disgraced his royal name and lineage. It was a mean act by the Duchess. He could have pointed it to the Duchess who might have corrected if she thought it fit. But

then he did not like to do that. It would have been his insult had he done so.

The Duke tells the Count's envoy that the reputation which the Count has for splendid generosity is enough guarantee that all his claims regarding dowry will be granted. The Duke further clarifies his remarks lest he should be misunderstood. He tells the envoy that even though his first and foremost attraction is the charming daughter of the Count, still he has mentioned about the dowry because he has great faith in the generosity of the Count. While going down he draws the envoy's attention to a bronze-statue of Neptune-the sea-god. He tells the envoy that this pose of Neptune taming a sea-horse is a rare one. He also informs the envoy that the bronze-statue was made for the Duke by Claus of Innsbruck. The Duke wants the dowry to be worthy of his status, or at least what he considers it to be. It is significant that Browning makes him speak first of the dowry and then of the lady. That shows which is more important to him. Obviously, love has no place in such contracts entered into by him. We expect that in a sort while he would treat his second wife in the way he treated the first. The same fate awaits her.

### **12.4.2 Dramatic Monologue**

The Dramatic Monologue was used by Browning with amazing skill and success. Browning did not invent the dramatic monologue, but he made it specially his own, and no one else has ever put such rich and varied material into it.

In other words, he could dispense with all, 'external machinery' of action and plot, and concentrate his attention on, "the incidents in the development of a soul". Unhampered by the limitations of the stage, he could now depict, "the phenomena of the mind". Browning made this form entirely his own, because it suited his genius, and also because it had a number of other advantages. It is an oblique or indirect mode of expression, and so the poet could freely express his views without fear of hostile criticism. The views were expressed by other characters, and so they could not be imputed to him. Moreover, he knew that advice given directly, "glances off athwart the mind," while truths expressed indirectly set men thinking and so have their due effect. The form enabled him to exercise his dramatic bent freely, as well as to play effectively his role as a teacher.

The Dramatic Monologue is, 'dramatic', because it is the utterance of imaginary characters and not of the poet himself, and because in it character is developed not through any description on the part of the poet, but through a conflict between the opposite thoughts and emotions of the character himself. It is a 'monologue', because it is a conversation of a single individual with himself (Mono' means 'one', and 'logue' means 'conversation'). The form is also referred to as monodrama.

The salient features of the dramatic monologue are best brought out through a comparison and contrast both with the drama proper and the soliloquy. The dramatic monologue differs widely from the drama in its purpose and its method. In the drama the action is external;

in the monologue the action is entirely internal. The thoughts and emotions of the individual character are the actors, and his soul is the stage. The monologue develops character not through outward action and conflict as in the drama, but through the clash of motives in the soul of the speaker, and with this end in view a moment of crisis is chosen, a movement when his personality is most active.

In each monologue, the speaker is placed in the most momentous or critical situation of his life, and the monologue embodies his reactions to this situation. Unlike a dramatist, Browning does not begin slowly with an action leading to the crisis, rather he plunges headlong into the crisis. For this reason, his monologues have an abrupt, but very arresting opening, and at the same time, what has gone before is suggested clearly or brought out through retrospective meditation and reflection. Thus *My Last Duchess* opens with a reference to a picture of the dead Duchess, with clear indications that it is being shown to some one. Similarly, *Fra Lippo Lippi* has a very dramatic beginning. This abrupt beginning is followed by self-inspection on the part of the speaker, and the whole gamut of his moods, emotions, reflections and meditations is given. The speaker's thoughts range freely over the past and the future and so there is no logical and chronological development. The past and the future are fused and focused in the present, and the unity is emotional rather than logical.

### 12.4.3 Form and Style

Browning was always weaving and modelling and inventing new forms. Among all his two hundred to three hundred poems, it would scarcely be an exaggeration to say that there are half as many different verse forms as there are different poems. As soon as a new idea entered his head, he tried to invent a new form to express it, and in this way he created a large number of quite novel and quite admirable artistic forms. His business was, soul-dissection, and for this purpose he developed and perfected the dramatic monologue, and used it most effectively.

The poet who invents such forms is a, 'maker', in the true sense ; he makes other poets. Browning was not indifferent to technical beauty, or beauty of form ; he invented new forms, lovely in their own way, and it is an entirely different matter that others did not like the kind of beauty he created.

He always has a noble end in view, and attains it completely. There is no characteristic of his work more admirable or more rare than the unity, the compactness and completeness, the skill and care in construction and definiteness in the impression of each poem. For example, almost all the poems in the volume *Men and Women* are designed, constructed and finished with the skill of an architect. There is no doubt, as that often his composition is broken up and over-crowded. Too many side-issues are introduced, everything that he imagines is cast upon the canvas, there is too little of artistic selecting and ordering of material. But all this seeming lack of selection and restraint is not the result of carelessness, rather such details and digressions are perfectly appropriate in their place and contribute to the perfection of the

whole. More often than not, they are integral to the purpose of Browning. They result from the richness of his thought, and not from faulty craftsmanship. There is a marvellous sense of proportion in the importance assigned to various features in his dramatic monologues; every element plays a significant but not over-emphasised part : hence the unity of atmosphere and effect.

Beauty of form in poetry also depends on the style and diction of a poet. Browning was a highly original genius, his style is entirely individual, and so for want of a better name it is called Browning-esque.

He uses the smallest number of words that his meaning allows. In the very beginning of his career, he was once charged with verbosity, and since then, he contended himself with the use of two words where he would rather have used ten. This dread of being diffuse resulted in compression and condensation.

#### **12.4.4 Self Assessment Questions**

Answer the following questions in 6 to 10 sentences :

1. 'Browning did not invent the Monologue, but he perfected it? Elucidate.
2. Write a note on Browning's art of characterisation.
3. Comment on Browning's style.
4. Discuss Browning's diction and versification.
5. Comment on the distinctive features of Browning's poetry.

#### **12.4.5 Answers to SAQs**

1. Dramatic Monologue was not very popular and known to everyone before. Browning used it with intricate skill and perfection. He used this poetic form in critical situations in the life of a character. The reactions of the character are analysed and modified so as to reveal the real worth of the character.
2. Browning is basically a poet of situations. His poetic characters are varied and wide. His characters are as humane as that of Shakespeare. They belong not only to England but Italy, France, Germany and Spain. The men and women who live and move in the new world of his creation are life like.
3. The poems of Browning show sparing use of adjectives. He uses mono-syllabic words wherever possible. His style is condense with the use of abbreviations and omissions. For example, 'in', 'on' and 'of' become 'i', 'o' in his poetry. His style can be termed as telegraphic style. He uses Latin expressions and allusions to little known sources.
4. Browning always seems rugged and fantastic. His ruggedness is justified sometimes by

the subject, whereas sometimes the use of a broken, varying, irregular verse is essential to convey the particular emotion or the impression which the poet wants to convey. Browning had a very keen ear for a particular kind of staccate music, for a kind of galloping rhythm. Often his verse sprawls like the trees, dances like the dust, it is top heavy like the toad-stool. He uses double rhymes to create grotesque effects.

5. Browning is a very original and skilful poet. He treats consonants as the backbone of his language, and hence, as the essential feature of his rhymes. He uses double and often triple rhymes to create humorous and satirical effects. He uses the measures most appropriate to his subject, whether it be blank verse, or the heroic rhyme verse.

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## 12.5 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you have acquired practice in

- understanding the trends and movements of literature in the Victorian Age.
- analysing and appreciating a poetic text; and
- understanding literary devices used by Robert Browning

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## 12.6 Review Questions

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1. *The Last Duchess* is a perfect example of Browning's poetic acumen of writing a dramatic monologue.
2. Comment on the style and form of *The Last Duchess*

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## 12.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT – 13

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### **ROBERT BROWNING : *THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER*, *PROSPICE***

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#### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Age and Author
  - 13.2.1 About the Age
  - 13.2.2 About the Author
  - 13.2.3 Self Assessment Questions
  - 13.2.4 Answers to SAQs
- 13.3 Reading Text (Browning : *The Last Ride Together*)
  - 13.3.1 Text
  - 13.3.2 Glossary
  - 13.3.3 Summary
  - 13.3.4 Critical Analysis
  - 13.3.5 Style and Versification
  - 13.3.6 Optimism
  - 13.3.7 Self Assessment Questions
  - 13.3.8 Answers to SAQs
- 13.4 Reading Text (Browning : *Prospice*)
  - 13.4.1 Text
  - 13.4.2 Glossary
  - 13.4.3 Summary
  - 13.4.4. Critical Analysis
  - 13.4.5 Theme
  - 13.4.6 Love Poetry

13.4.7 Self Assessment Questions

13.4.8 Answers to SAQs

13.5 Let Us Sum Up

13.6 Review Questions

13.7 Bibliography

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## **13.0 Objectives**

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In this unit we will make you familiar with the poetry of Robert Browning. He is a poet with rare qualities and very humane in his attitude. We will let you study the two poems of Browning in this unit. We will give you practice by :

- giving texts of two poems of Robert Browning,
- giving you the meanings of difficult words and phrases,
- giving you the summary of both the poems,
- critically analysing the poems and explaining the literary devices used in the poems;
- comparing both the poems, and
- giving you practice to answer the questions.

We will describe the literary scenario of the Victorian Age and see into the life and works of Robert Browning, after giving an introduction about the age and the author. We will then discuss both the texts in detail and critically appreciate them. The unit will have exercises to help you evaluate your understanding of the poems. You can check your answer with the answers of the exercises given by us. Try to read and consult other related books as suggested by us here.

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## **13.1 Introduction**

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It happens very rarely in the history of literature that a craftsman who has acquired perfect control of the medium and masterly ease in handling the techniques and conventions of his day is also a universal genius of the highest order, combining with his technical proficiency a unique ability to render experience in poetic language and an uncanny intuitive understanding of human psychology.

Robert Browning (1812-1889) has a remarkable combination of all qualities and has been praised for his deep insight of human psyche. There is no nineteenth century poet of the first rank whose ultimate position in the hierarchy is so doubtful as Browning's. He is at once astonishingly great and astonishingly faulty; and only time can determine how far the faults will blur and obscure the greatness. The chief difficulty in reading Browning is the obscurity of his



style. A few colonial wars that broke out during the reign of Queen Victoria, didn't seriously disturb the life of England. There was one continental war that directly affected Britain, and one that affected her indirectly though strongly, yet neither of these caused any profound alteration in social life.

Poetry at the beginning of this period had been refreshed as well as sometimes muddled by two generations of Romantic innovation. The legacy which Romantics handed over to the Victorians did not prove to be Wordsworth's simplicity or his autobiographical self-examination in quietly probing blank-verse. Like so many nineteenth-century initiations of the Elizabethans and Jacobean, it indicates an era habituated of following the seventeenth-century cadences.

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## **13.2 The Age And The Author**

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In this section we will discuss the most prominent age of literature in English, i.e. the Victorian Age and the life, ideals and works of Robert Browning, prominent figure in Victorian poetry.

### **13.2.1 About the Age**

The whole age may be described as one of the peaceful ages. In the earlier stages the lessening surges of the French Revolution were still felt; but by the middle of the century they had almost completely died down, and other hopes and ideals, largely pacific, were gradually taking their place.

It was an age alive with new activities. There was a revolution in commercial enterprise, due to the great increase of available markets, and, as a result of this, an immense advance in the use of mechanical devices. The new commercial energy was reflected in the Great Exhibition of 1851, which was greeted as the inauguration of a new era of progress and prosperity. On the other side of this picture of commercial expansion we see the appalling social conditions of the new industrial cities, the squalid slums, and the exploitation of cheap labour (often of children), the painful fight by the enlightened few to introduce social legislation and the slow extension of the franchise. The evils of the Industrial Revolution were vividly painted by such writers as Dickens and Mrs Gaskell and they called forth the missionary efforts of men like Kingsley.

There can be little doubt that in many cases material wealth produced a hardness of temper and an impatience of projects and ideas that brought no return in hard cash; yet it is to the credit of this age that intellectual activities were so numerous. There was quite a revolution in scientific thought following upon the works of Darwin and his school, and an immense outburst of social and political theorizing which was represented in this country by the writings of men like Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill. In addition, popular education became a

practical thing. This in its turn produced a new hunger for intellectual food, and resulted in a great increase in the productions of the Press and of other more durable species of literature.

The sixty years (1830-90) commonly included under the name of the Victorian age present many dissimilar features; yet in several respects we can safely generalize then.

1. **Its Morlaity.** Nearly all observers of the Victorian age are struck by its extreme deference to the conventions. To a later age these seem ludicrous. It was thought indecorous for a man to smoke in the public and (much later in the century) for a lady to ride a bicycle. To a great extent the new morality was a natural revolt against the grossness of the earlier Regency, and the influence of the Victorian Court was all in its favour. In literature it is amply reflected. Tennyson is the most conspicuous example in poetry, creating the priggishly complacent Sir Galahad and King Arthur, Dickens, perhaps the most representative of the Victorian novelists, took for his model the old picaresque novel; but it is almost laughable to observe his anxiety to be a moralist.

The literary product was inevitably affected by the new ideas in science, religion, and politics. *The Origin of Species* (1859) of Darwin shook the foundations of scientific thought. We can perceive the influence of such a work in Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, in Matthew Arnold's meditative poetry, and in the works of Carlyle. In religious and ethical thought the *Oxford Movement*, as it was called, was the most noteworthy advance. This movement had its source among the young and eager thinkers of the old university, and was headed by the great Newman, who ultimately (1845) joined the Church of Rome. As a religious portent it marked the widespread discontent with the existing beliefs of the Church of England; as a literary influence it affected many writers of note, including Newman himself, Freud, Maurice, Kingsley, and Gladstone.

The Education Acts, making a certain measure of education compulsory, rapidly produced the enormous reading public. The cheapening of printing and paper increased the demand for books, so that the production was multiplied. The most popular form of literature was the novel, and the novelists responded with a will. Much of their work was of a high standard, so much so that it had been asserted by competent critics that the middle years of the nineteenth century were the richest in the whole history of the novel.

During the nineteenth century the interaction among American and European writers was remarkably fresh and strong. In Britain the influence of the great German writers was continuous, and it was championed by Carlyle and Matthew Arnold. Subject nations, in particular the Italians, were a sympathetic theme for prose and verse. The Brownings, Swinburne, Morris and Meredith were deeply absorbed in the long struggle of the followers of Garibaldi and Cavour; and when the Italian freedom was gained the rejoicings were genuine.

With all its immense production, the age produced no supreme writer. It revealed no Shakespeare, no Shelley, nor (in the international sense) a Byron or a Scott. The general

literary level was, however, very high ; and it was an age, moreover, of spacious intellectual horizons, noble endeavour and bright aspirations.

### 13.2.2 About the Author

Robert Browning was born at Camberwell, his father being connected with the Bank of England. The future poet was educated semi-privately, and from an early age he was free to follow his inclination toward studying unusual subjects. As a child he was precocious, and began to write poetry at the age of twelve. Of his predecessors Shelley in particular influenced his mind, which was unformed and turbulent at this time with the growing power within. After a brief course at the University College Browning for a short period travelled to Russia (1833) ; then he lived in London, where he became acquainted with some of the leaders of the literary and theatrical worlds. In 1834 he paid his first visit to Italy, a country which was for him a fitful kind of home. In 1845 he visited Elizabeth Barrett, the poetess, whose works had strongly attracted him. A mutual liking ensured, and then, after a private marriage, a sort of elopement followed, to escape the anger of the wife's stern parent. The remainder of Browning's life was occupied with journeys between England and France and Italy, and with much poetical activity. His wife died at Florence in 1861, leaving one son. Browning thereupon left the city for good and returned to England, though in 1878 he went back once more to Italy. His works, after suffering much neglect, were now being appreciated, and in 1882 Oxford conferred upon him the degree of D.C.L. He died in Italy, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

His first work of any importance is *Pauline* (1833), an introspective poem, which shows very strongly the influence of Shelley, whom, at this period, Browning held in great reverence. *Paracelsus* (1835), the story of the hero's unquenchable thirst for that breadth of knowledge which is beyond the grasp of one man, brings to the fore Browning's predominant ideas – that a life without love must be a failure, and that God is working all things to an end beyond human living.

His next work was the play *Strafford* (1837), which was produced by the actor Macready, and which achieved real pathos toward the close. *Sordello* (1840), an attempt to decide the relationship between art and life, is Browning's most obscure work. The story of the hero, a Mantuan troubadour, is cumbered with a mass of detailed historical allusions, and the style, in spite of occasional passages of descriptive beauty, is too compressed and too ornate.

It is convenient next to deal with the entire group of eight volumes, which, published separately from 1841 onward, were collected in one volume as *Bells and Pomegranates* in 1846. In addition to two collections of lyrical and narrative poems, this series included six plays, *Pippa Passes* (1841), *King Victor and King Charles* (1842), *The Return of the Druses* (1842). *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* (1843), *Colombe's Birthday* (1844), *Luria; and a Soul's Tragedy* (1846). None of these is without its moments of drama, and they all show considerable spirit in their style. **Pippa Passes**, which was not intended for the stage, has an

idyllic charm, and it contains fine songs. But Browning lacks the fundamental qualities of the dramatist. His amazingly subtle analysis of character and motive is not adequate for true drama because he cannot reveal character in action. His method is to take a character at a moment of crisis and, by allowing him to talk to reveal not only his present thoughts and feelings but his past history. *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842) and *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845) show this faculty being directed into the channel in which it was to achieve perfection – that of the dramatic monologue.

Now at the height of his powers, Browning produced some of his best work in *Men and Women* (1855), which, with the exception of the dedicatory *One Word More*, addressed to his wife, consists entirely of dramatic monologues. Here are to be found the famous *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *An Epistle* containing the strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician, *Andrea del Sarto*, *Cleon*. Most of them are written in blank verse. The year 1864 saw the publication of his last really great volume, *Dramatis Personae*, again a collection of dramatic monologues. To illustrate their quality mention be made of only such works as *Caliban upon Setebos*, *A Death in the Desert*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and *Abt Vogler*. In style the poems have much of the rugged, elliptical quality which was an occasion of the poet's downfall, but here it is used with a skill and a power which show him at the very pinnacle of his achievement.

*The Ring and the Book* (1868-69) is the story of the murder of a young wife, Pompilia, by her worthless husband, in the year 1698, and the same story is told by nine different people, and continues for twelve books. The result is a monument of masterly discursiveness.

The remaining years of Browning's long life saw the production of numerous further volumes of verse, a few of which add greatly to his fame. To-day they are read by none but his most confirmed admirers. *Balaustion's Adventure* (1871), *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country* (1873), *The Inn Album* (1875), *La Saisiaz*, *The Two Poets of Croisic* (1878), *Jocoseria* (1883), *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884), and *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* (1887), all suffer from the writer's obsession with thought content, and the psychologizing of his characters at the expense of poetry. In too many of them the style betrays a wilful exaggeration of the eccentricities which he had once turned to such great account, but always the reader is liable to stumble across the passages which, in striking landscape or lovely lyric, show that the true poetic gift is not completely absent.

His long life's work has a powerful close in *Asolando* (1889), which, along with much of the tired disillusion of the old man, has, in places, the firmness and enthusiasm of his prime.

### 13.2.3 Self Assessment Questions

We give you here some questions to evaluate your understanding of the Victorian age and the life of Robert Browning.

Choose the correct answer from amongst the three alternatives given below each question.

1. The Victorian age can be termed as an age :  
alive with new activities  
full of surges of revolution  
of stagnation
2. Material wealth produced :  
inflation  
The Industrial Revolution  
hardness of temper
3. The evils of the Industrial Revolution are presented by ::  
Browning  
Arnold  
Dickens
4. Smoking in the public was thought as :  
respectful  
fashionable  
ludicrous
5. Interaction amongst American and European writers was :  
fresh and strong  
antagonistic  
cordial
6. Robert Browning was born in:  
Italy  
Camberwell  
Ireland
7. The first poem of Browning is :  
*Pauline* (1833)

*Paracelsus* (1835)

*Strafford* (1837)

8. Browning lacks the fundamental qualities of the :  
dramatist  
poet  
educator
9. Browning says that :  
life without love is a failure  
one must do one's duty  
honesty is the best policy
10. Browning's view of human life is full of :  
dullness  
cheerfulness  
optimism

#### **13.2.4 Answers to SAQs**

- (a) alive with new activities
- (c) hardness of temper
- (c) Dickens
- (c) ludicrous
- (a) fresh and strong
- (b) Camberwell
- (a) Pauline (1833)
- (a) dramatist
- (a) life without love is a failure
- (c) optimism

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### 13.3 Reading Text (Browning : *The Last Ride Together*)

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#### 13.3.1 Text

##### I

*I said – Then, dearest, since ‘its so,  
Since now at length my fate I know,  
Since nothing all my love avails,  
Since all, my life seemed meant for, fails,  
Since this was written and needs must be  
My whole heart rises up to bless  
Your name in pride and thankfulness!  
Take back the hope you gave, - I claim  
Only a memory of the same,  
- And this beside, if you will not blame,  
Your leave for one more last ride with me.*

##### II

*My mistress bent that brow of hers;  
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs  
When pity would be softening through,  
Fixed me a breathing-while or two  
With life or death in the balance : right!  
The blood preplenished me again;  
My last thought was at least not vain:  
I and my mistress, said by side  
Shall be together, breathe and ride,  
So, one day more am I deified,  
Who knows but the world may end to-night?*

### **III**

*Hush! if you saw some western cloud  
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed  
By many benedictions-sun's  
And moon's and evening-star's at once –  
And so, you, looking and loving best,  
Conscious grew, your passion drew  
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,  
Down on you, near and yet more near,  
Till flesh must face for heaven was here! –  
Thus leant she and lingered-joy and fear!  
Thus lay she a moment on my breast.*

### **IV**

*Then we began to ride. By soul  
Smoothed itself out – a long-cramped scroll  
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.  
Past hopes already lay behind.  
What need to strive with a life awry?  
Had I said that, had I done this,  
So might I gain, so might I miss.  
Might she have loved me? Just as well  
She might have hated, who can tell!  
Where had I been now if the worst befell?  
And here we are riding, she and I*

### **V**

*Fail I alone, in words and deeds?  
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?  
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,*



*Saw other regions, cities new,  
As the world rushed by on either side,  
I thought, - All labour, yet no less  
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.  
Look at the end of work, contrast  
The petty done, the undone vast,  
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!  
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.*

## **VI**

*What hand and brain went ever paired?  
What heart alike conceived and dared?  
What act proved all its thought had been?  
What will but felt the fleshly screen?  
We ride and I see her bosom heaven.  
There's many a crown for who can reach!  
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!  
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,  
A soldier's doing! what atones?  
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.  
My riding is better, by their leave.*

## **VII**

*What does it all mean, poet? well,  
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell  
What we felt only; you expressed  
You hold things beautiful the best,  
and pace them in rhyme so, said by side.  
'Tis something, nay 'tis' much : but then,  
Have you yourself what's best for men?*

*are you-poor; sick, old ere your time –  
Nearer one whit your own sublime  
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?  
Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride.*

### **VIII**

*And you, great sculptor – so, you gave  
A score of years to Art, her slave,  
And that's your Venus, whence we turn  
To yonder girl that fords the burn!  
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?  
What, man of music, you, grown grey  
With notes and nothing else to say,  
Is this your sole praise from a friend,  
'Greatly his opera's strains intend,  
But in music we know how fashions end!'  
I gave my youth-but we ride, in fine.*

### **IX**

*Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate  
Proposed bliss here should sublimate  
My being – had I signed the bond –  
Still one must lead some life beyond,  
- Have a bliss to die with dim-described,  
This foot once planted on the goal,  
This glory-garland round my soul,  
Boule I descry such? Try and test!  
I sink back shuddering from the quest.  
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?  
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.*

## X

*And yet-she has not spoke so long!*  
*What if heaven be that, fair and strong*  
*At life's best, with our eyes upturned*  
*Whither life's flower is first discerned,*  
*We, fixed so, ever should so abide?*  
*What if we still ride on, we two,*  
*With life for ever old yet new,*  
*Changed not in kind but in degree,*  
*The instant made eternity, -*  
*And heaven just prove that I and she*  
*Ride, ride together, for ever ride?*

### 13.3.2 Glossary

I	I	:	the speaker of the monologue
	since it is so	:	since you cannot love me
	dearest	:	the lady love
	at length	:	at last
	avails	:	accepts
	life seemed	:	the only desire of life
	failed	:	to be unsuccessful
	pride	:	privilege
	thankfulness	:	to be thankful to his lover for her company
	hope	:	promise to love
	blame	:	to consider improper
	leave	:	permission
II	bent	:	looked down
	that brow	:	the beautiful brow on her face
	demurs	:	lingers

	pity would be	:	the lady pitied her lover
	softening through:		wished to grant his request
	fixed me	:	to be notionless in anxiety
	for a breathing	:	for a moment
	balance	:	to be dependent on her reply
	right	:	the lady granted his request
	replenished	:	re-filled, got new lease of life
	not in vain	:	did not go waste
	side by side	:	with one another
	deified	:	enjoy the great happiness
	may end	:	it may be the dooms day
III	hush	:	to be silent
	western cloud	:	a cloud in the western sky
	billowy bosomed:		well developed bosom
	over bowed	:	enjoying in abundance
	benediction	:	blessings
	best	:	more than anything else
	conscious grew	:	felt, experienced
	passion drew	:	intensity of your love attracted
	down on you	:	to feel heaven coming to you
	lingered	:	remained near
IV	soul	:	heart
	smoothed out	:	expanded with joy
	long cramped scroll:		a sheet of paper which has been kept rolled up for a long time
	freshing	:	to be happy
	fluttering	:	to flutter in wind with joy
	past hope	:	desires which could not be fulfilled

	strife	:	to be worried, to regret
	a life away	:	a life that has been a failure
	had I said that	:	had he expressed his love differently
	had I done this	:	had he acted differently
	I gain	:	to get her love
	who can tell	:	nobody can be sure
	befell	:	happened
V	fail I alone	:	the lover is not the only person in the world who has been unsuccessful
	strive	:	to struggle to achieve success
	seemed	:	felt experienced as though
	spirit flew	:	soul was soaring high to heaven
	saw other regions, cities new:		the entire landscape appeared to him entirely new and joyous
	rushed by	:	passed by
	either side	:	both the sides
	vast	:	big, enormous
VI	hand	:	action, achievement
	brain	:	ideas
	ever	:	all the time
	paired	:	matched together
	alike	:	in the same way
	conceived	:	thought, formed plans
	dared	:	had the courage to act upon his plans
	will	:	determination
	fleshy screen	:	limitations of the human body
	leave	:	to swell
	crown	:	success
	heap of bones	:	the grave

	what atones	:	
	scratch	:	engrave on stone
	Abbey stones	:	raised engraved tone on the tomb
	leave	:	permission
VII	brains	:	thought
	beat into rhythm	:	express in rhythmical language
	felt	:	to feel in heart
	expressed	:	to put feelings in writing
	pace them rhyme	:	put them in poetical form
	have you	:	did you achieve the best goals
	ere	:	prematurely
	one whit	:	even a little
	sublime	:	lofty ideals
	turned a rhyme	:	composed even a line of poetry
	joy	:	source of pleasure
VIII	score of years	:	a number of years
	your Venus	:	the statue of Venus sculptured by him
	whence	:	from where
	yonder	:	that
	fords	:	wades through
	Burn	:	stream of water
	acquiesce	:	accept
	repine	:	to feel sorry
	grown gray	:	to become old
	sole	:	only
	opera	:	musical drama
	strains	:	songs
	gave my youth	:	devoted his youth in courting his beloved

	in fine	:	in short
IX	fit	:	desirable
	bliss	:	happiness
	sublimate	:	reach its perfection
	sign the bond	:	enter into an agreement
	bliss to die with	:	to die with some of his desires unfulfilled
	dim descried	:	faintly visioned
	planted	:	achieved
	glory garland	:	having won success
	could I decry such	:	had I achieved such success
	try and test	:	views to be tested by actual experience
	quest	:	search
	Heaven	:	the life after death in Heaven
X	at life's best	:	the successful life
	eyes upturned	:	looking up towards sky
	life's hower	:	the best the life can offer
	discerned	:	seen
	abide	:	to be able to see
	made eternity	:	to become everlasting

### 13.3.3 Summary

The 'Last Ride Together' is a poem of unrequited love. The lover is rejected. But he does not blame his mistress. He is magnanimous and accepts the position in a brave and noble way. In order to show that he can control himself and make the situation easier for her he requests her for a last ride together. After a little hesitation the lady grants his request. The lover is happy that he is not banished from her sight. He imagines that the world may perhaps end to-night and the happy moment may turn into eternity. This is a remarkable reaction.

The two ride together. The lady lays her head on the lover's breast. He feels that he has gained all the wealth of the world. Once he was sad but now he is full of joy. He wants to forget the past. He is not sorry for his failures. All make attempts but very few succeed. Success and failures are not important. Our achievements never match our expectations. He

has been successful as his beloved is with him. There is always a difference between planning and achievements. Man fails to do according to his planning. Great men earn name and fame but in the end they all meet death. After they are dead they are remembered only in a few lines.

The poet describes the achievements of brave soldiers, a poet, a sculptor and a musician in the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth stanzas and shows that the achievements of all these are not everlasting. In the final tenth stanza Browning's protagonist concludes that the life of the lover is the best. He is absorbed in the present life in love and joy with his beloved. The poem ends with optimism that this happiness of the lover with his beloved would be everlasting in his life after death in Heaven.

### 13.3.4 Critical Analysis

*Last Ride Together* is a dramatic monologue and it shows Browning at his best in the handling of this poetic form. It has also been called a dramatic lyric because it is not an expression of his own personal emotions, but that of an imagined character. It is spoken by a lover who loved his lady over a long period of time, and who, after making her wait for so long, finally rejected her, and turned to another lover. The lover then prayed to her to grant two requests of his. First, that she should remember his love for her, and secondly, that she should come with him for a last ride together. To his great joy the lady consented.

Such is the love situation out of which the monologue grows. It is spoken by the lover as he rides by the side of his beloved for the last time. As they commence their ride, the beloved for a moment bends over him and places her head over his shoulders. It seems to him as if heaven itself had descended over him, so great is the bliss he experiences at the moment.

As they ride along, the lover experiences a heavenly bliss. His soul which had lost its happiness and on which grief had left its ugly marks and wrinkles, now smoothens itself out like a crumpled sheet of paper, which opens out and flutters in the wind. All his hopes of success in love, all hopes of a happy life with his beloved, were now dead and gone. His love was now a matter of the past. But the lover does not despair. He shares Browning's optimism and says that it is no use to regret or to feel sorry for life which has been ruined. What is ended cannot be mended. It is no use speculating over his possible success, if he had acted and spoken differently. It is just possible that had he acted differently, instead of loving her, she might have hated him. Now she is only indifferent to him. Now at least she rides by his side. He derives consolation from this fact, instead of brooding sadly over the dead past.

The lover then reflects over the lot of humanity in general and derives further consolation from the fact that he is not the only one who has failed in life. Such is the lot of man that all try, but none succeeds. All labour, but all fail ultimately to achieve their ends. How little of success and achievement, and how much of failure does the whole world show! He is lucky in the sense that at least he rides by the side of his beloved. Others do not get even that much of success. There is always a wide disparity between conception and execution, between ambi-



tion and achievement.

The only reward, even of the most successful statesman, is a short obituary notice and that of a heroic warrior only an epitaph over his grave in the Westminster Abbey. The poet, no doubt, achieves much. He expresses human thoughts and emotions in a sweet, melodious language, but he does not neglect any of the good things of life. He lives and dies in poverty. The great sculptor and musician, too, are failures. From even the most beautiful piece of sculpture, says a statue of the goddess, *Venus*, one turns to an ordinary, but a living, breathing, girl; and fashions in music are quick to change. Comparatively, he is more successful, for he has, at least, been rewarded with the company of his beloved. At least, he has the pleasure of riding with her by his side.

It is difficult to say what is good and what is not good for man in this world. Achievement of perfect happiness in this world means that one would have no hopes left for life in the other world. Failure in this world is essential for success and achievement in the life to come. He has failed in this life, but this is a blessing in disguise. It means that he would be successful in the life to come. He can now hope for happiness in the other world. Because he did not get his beloved here, he is sure to enjoy the bliss of her love in the life after death. Now for him, "both Heaven and she are beyond this ride." Failure in this world is best. Further, so hopes the lover, "the instant may become eternity" and they may ride together for ever and ever. Who knows that the world may end that very moment? In that case, they will be together in the other world, and will be together for ever.

### **13.3.5 Style and Versification**

Browning's style is a pictorial style; it is also rich in the use of imagery, similes, metaphors, etc. His images are usually striking in their originality and daring. Often they are drawn from the grotesque in nature. Nature is constantly used to illustrate the facts of human life. Often the concrete is used to clarify and bring home to the readers the spiritual and the abstract.

Beauty of form in poetry also depends on the style and diction of a poet. Browning was a highly original genius, his style is entirely individual, and so far from wanting a better name it is called Browningesque.

He uses the smallest number of words that his meaning allows. In the very beginning of his career, he was once charged with verbosity, and since then, "he contended himself with the use of two words where he would rather have used ten." This dread of being diffuse resulted in compression and condensation which made him often, if not actually, obscure, at least difficult to understand.

Just as in his style, so also in his versification, Browning is often rugged and fantastic. Sometimes, this ruggedness is justified by the subject; sometimes the use of a broken, varying, irregular verse is essential to convey the particular emotion or the impression which the poet

wants to convey. Browning had a peculiarly keen ear for a particular kind of staccato music, for a kind of galloping rhythm.

Often he uses double or even triple rhymes to create grotesque effects. The real fault does not lie with such artistic use of the rugged and the fantastic ; the real fault arises when such a use is not necessary, when it is not artistically justified. And Browning's search for novelty frequently betrays him into using such clumsy and irritating metres, and this clouds his intrinsic merits as a metrical artist.

“He is the greatest master in our language, in the use of rhyme, in the amazing variety of his versification and stanza forms, and in the vitality both of his blank verse and rhymed verse. Browning is far indeed from paying no attention, or little, to metre and versification. Except in some of his late blank verse, and in a few other cases, his very errors are just as often the result of hazardous experiments as of carelessness and inattention. In one very important matter, that of rhyme, he is perhaps the greatest master in our language ; in single and double, in simple and grotesque alike, he succeeds in fitting rhyme to rhyme with a perfection which I have never found in any other poet of any age. His lyrical poems contain more structural varieties of form than those of any other preceding English poet.”

### **13.3.6 Optimism**

Browning's philosophy of life is characterised by robust optimism. The universe and the beauty of Nature, is an expression of the creative joy of God and so he finds the principal of Joy at the very Centre of Creation. This does not mean that he is blind to human imperfections ; rather he builds hope for the future on these very imperfections. His is a philosophy of strenuous endeavour ; true joy lies in effort, and not in success or achievement. Rather failure here means success in the life to come. Faith in God, faith in the immortality of the soul, faith in earnest endeavour are the cardinal points of Browning's philosophy of human life.

The monologue lays bare before us the soul of the lovers he muses over his past failure in love, his bliss in the present, and his hopes for the future, we get a peep into his soul. He is a heroic soul who is not discouraged by his failure in love. He derives consolation from failure itself. He shares the poet's cheerful optimism, his faith in the immortality of the soul, and believes, like him, that, “God creates the love to grant the love.” It is better to die, “without a glory garland round one's neck,” for there is a life beyond and one should have some hope left for it, “dim-described”.

### **13.3.7 Self Assessment Questions**

Choose the correct answer from amongst the three alternatives given below each question :

The poem has :

- (a) Eleven Stanzas
- (b) Six Stanzas
- (c) Ten Stanzas

The poem ends with :

- (a) frustration
- (b) love
- (c) optimism

The speaker in the poem is :

- (a) the lover
- (b) the poet
- (c) the listener

The lover rides with his beloved for :

- (a) the first time
- (b) the last time
- (c) the eternity

The lover prays to his beloved to grant him :

- (a) one request
- (b) two requests
- (c) nothing

The lover says that there is no need to:

- (a) repent for a life that has been ruined
- (b) wait for his beloved
- (c) request his beloved

It is a poem of :

- (a) frustration in love
- (b) happy ending
- (c) unrequited love

The lover in the poem is :

- (a) not discouraged by failure in love
- (b) encouraged by success
- (c) discouraged by failure in love

The best reward according to the lover is :

- (a) riding with his beloved
- (b) an inscription on the tomb
- (c) an award given by the King

The lover concludes that he is :

- (a) unfortunate
- (b) a hero
- (c) fortunate

### **13.3.8 Answers to SAQs**

- (c) ten stanzas
- (c) optimism
- (a) the lover
- (b) the last time
- (b) two requests
- (a) to repent for a life that has been ruined
- (c) unrequited love
- (a) not discouraged by failure in love
- (a) riding with his beloved
- (c) fortunate

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## **13.4 Reading Text (Browning : *Prospice*)**

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### **13.4.1 The Text : *Prospice***

*Fear death? – to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote,*

5

*I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe,  
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go,  
For the journey is done and the summit attained,  
And the barriers fall;  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all,  
I was ever a fighter, so-one fight more.  
The best and the last!  
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forbore,  
And bade me creep past,  
No! let me taste the whole of it, if, fare like my peers,  
The heroes of old  
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears,  
Of pain, darkness and cold.  
For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,  
The black minute's at end.  
And the element's rage, the fiend-voices that rave,  
Shell dwindle, shall blend.  
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,  
Then a light, then thy breast,  
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again  
And with God be the rest!*

10  
15  
20  
25  
28

### 13.4.2 Glossary

1-5    Fear death                                :            the poet asks this question which implies a negative answer

	Feel the fog in my throat:	feeling of suffocation in throat at the time of death
	mist in my face	: the blurred vision at the time of death
	snows begin	: when winter season begins; when body begins to become cold as death approaches
	blasts	: stormy weather; to face difficulty in breathing at the time of death
	denotes	: informs
	hearing	: approaching
	the place	: refers to death
	power of the night	: increase of invisibility
	press of the storm	: increase of difficulty in breathing
6-10	the post	: the place where death is waiting
	foe	: the death, the enemy of life
	he	: the death
	Arch fear	: the fear of death
	visible form	: death becomes visible in the shape of the dying man
	strong man	: a healthy man
	must go	: must die
	journey	: the life span
	done	: completed
	summit attained	: the final point of life is reached
	barriers	: difficulties of life
	fall	: come to an end
11-15	battle	: struggle of life
	ere	: before
	guerdon	: reward, place in the kingdom of God
	ever a fighter	: a brave person in life
	one fight more	: the final fight with death

	hate	:	dislike
	bandaged my eyes	:	closed his eyes
	forbore	:	prevented from moving about
16-20	bade	:	ordered
	creep past	:	go away
	taste	:	to bear sufferings
	heroes	:	great men
	bear	:	to sustain
	brunt	:	fury of death
	in a minute pay	:	life ends suddenly
	arrears	:	miseries of life
21-25	element's rage	:	difficulties faced by a person
	worst turns the best	:	a strong person dies
	friend voices	:	voices of devils of death
	rare	:	cry
	dwindle	:	disappear
	blend	:	loose intensity of life
26-28	light	:	light of Heaven
	breast	:	wife
	soul of my soul	:	refers to his wife, E.B. Browning
	clasp	:	embrace
	thee	:	you, refers to his wife

### 13.4.3 Summary

The poet is not at all afraid of the physical troubles that come at the time of death. Though he may feel suffocation (fog) in his throat, a heaviness in his vision and a cold numbness creeping over his body, all showing that death is very near, yet he is not at all afraid of death. These symptoms of death cannot unnerve him. He may find it difficult to breathe and hard to see because of his blurred vision, yet it is his duty as a strong man to go forward and face with fortitude and courage the severities and pains at the time of death.

During the course of our lives, we engaged in various kinds of activities and have achieved various kinds of honours and distinctions. We choose difficult adventures and take pleasure in overcoming them. There we prove the unconquerable nature of our spirit. But all the honours and glories which we acquire in life are only an introduction to our last fight with death. Like competitors in a race who are awarded prizes at the end of the struggle, the rewards that await, come to us only after death has been overcome.

The poet says that death cannot treat him as a coward. He does not want any mercy at the hands of death. He will face death like a bold man and not like a coward.

The poet says that throughout his life he has struggled with the numerous odds and difficulties of life. He has been a fighter in his life. He will gladly fight the last battle of his life with death. This battle against death would be the final battle of his life. It will also be the best battle because soon after death he will reach the kingdom of God and meet his beloved wife.

Earthly life is completed by our going to Heaven where all the “broken arcs” are made into ‘perfect rounds’ The same idea is conveyed here in these lines in a somewhat different way. Browning says that even the heroes of antiquity had to face death and fight it bravely. We ordinary people should derive inspiration from them and be prepared to meet death bravely and cheerfully like them. If we do so, we can overcome it in one minute. It is like our first plunge into the cold of death water which is painful. Thereafter it is pleasant to be in the water. Also, death squares up all human accounts.

Death appears to be frightening only when we are afraid of it. As a matter of fact, even the worst moment of death becomes enjoyable and appears to be the best to those who have got courage in them. After all through death we pass into another life and pass into Heaven if we are brave. Shortly before death one feels as if a storm were blowing, it were raining and in the mind of the man about to die it appears as if demons were standing ready to take him to hell. But all this disturbance of the mind and heart gradually decreases. One feels a peace pervading through his entire personality. This peace then gives place to the feelings of joy. Then the dying man sees a light, the light of God and ultimately with the help of this light he is united with the one he loves.

#### **13.4.4 Critical Analysis**

The poem ‘Prospice’ first appeared in *Dramatist Personae* in 1864. His wife had died in 1861. The poem is a tribute to her memory. It has been regarded as one of the most inspiring and original poems on the subject of death.

‘Prospice’, is a Latin word. It means ‘to look forward’. It is an apt title for the poem. In this poem it is confident that he will conquer death. He ‘looks forward’ joyfully to his reunion with his wife.

The poet compares the experience of climbing up a lofty mountain. A mountain climber



has to face fog, mist snow storms etc. during his ascent. Like the climber, a man in this world has also to face physical and spiritual sufferings when he approaches death. To face death is the final battle of a man's life in this world. And the man who puts up a heroic fight is fully rewarded for his bravery.

Throughout his life, the poet has been a fighter. Therefore he is determined to fight Death also bravely. He does not want any mercy or leniency from Death. He does not want to die in a state of unconsciousness like some persons who die in a state of coma during their illness. These people fear Death. In a state of coma they are sweetly unaware of what is happening to them. The poet would like to be in a state of perfect awareness when death comes to him. He wants to taste all the pain and suffering which Death brings with it. He is ready to meet in Death all the pain and suffering which he has escaped in life through some happy chance. In other words, he is ready to face any amount of suffering at the time of his death. He thinks that in this way he will be able to pay off all his arrears of life.

The poet is a brave man. He is an optimist. He knows that the worst will soon be over. All the pain, all the agony, all the torture will come to an end in no time. Within very short time, he will find all his suffering vanished. He will be reunited with his beloved wife who is waiting for him in heaven.

#### **13.4.5 Theme**

The poet looks forward to a battle with death. He expresses a heroic attitude towards death which is man's arch-enemy, and he flings a challenge at it. This is justly regarded as one of the most original poems in English on the subject of death. The poem is perfectly characteristic of Browning's philosophy. He is not in the least afraid of death. He would like to experience all the pain and suffering of death. He does not wish to die in a state of coma or unconsciousness because that would mean creeping past death in a cowardly manner.

On the contrary, he wants to taste all the grim horror of death. He would hear the raving of the fiend-voices and be in the very thick of fight. In all references to death in his poetry, Browning shows the same confident faith in the future. Death does not mean for him the close of life ; it means the beginning of a new life. He believes in God and in heaven. He has a Christian philosophy of life which finds a brief but unambiguous expression in the lines in which he says that he will be re-united with his wife who is waiting for him in heaven. According to Robert Browning death is only one stage in the unbroken, immortal life of the soul. Browning was a firm believer in God, in the immortality of the soul and in heaven.

#### **13.4.6 Love Poetry**

In this poem we find Browning's philosophy that love endures even after death and that we must be hopeful to meet our loved ones after death in the Kingdom of God. Browning's poems on death possess the same note of confidence and love for the person concerned and

the creator of this world. It is the love and faith in immortality of love, which enable the poet to believe in life after death and reunion with his dead wife in the Kingdom of god.

In Browning's other poems related to God and death even his knaves and rogues have faith in God and rely upon His perfection and mercy. They are in direct contact and are sure of the ultimate union with the Absolute. Sympathetic communion between Man and God is possible because in addition to His attributes of power and knowledge he has the highest attribute of love. It is love which kindles and exacts both knowledge and power and as love is common both to God and man. It is love which harmonises and unites all living beings.

The language of the poem is very simple, while the sentiments contained are universal and appeal to all. He reasserts his faith in God and not only forgets his sorrows, but looks forward to meet his wife in Heaven.

### 13.4.7 Self Assessment Questions

Answer the following questions in your own words. (Word limit 200-250 words)

- (i) Comment on imagery in Browning's poetry.
- (ii) Write a note on pictorial quality of Browning.
- (iii) Write about poet's faith in God's love and mercy.
- (iv) Describe Browning's optimism.
- (v) Write a note on Browning's style.

### 13.4.8 Answers to SAQs

- (i) The poem titled *Prospice* is organised round the image of a journey undertaken by a knight in search of a guerdon-a reward-who has met many opponents on the way and is now about to meet the last one the Arch Enemy. But this enemy may choose not to fight. The end may be painless. He may be allowed to pass without a battle. That would be a disappointment. Therefore the next line begins with 'No, let me.'
- (ii) Browning's pictorial quality is clearly indicated in *Prospice*. He compares the experience of meeting death with the experience of climbing up a high mountain with all the dangers and hazards of the upward journey. The hardships of the ascent are vividly pictured in the following lines :
  - "to feel the fog in my throat,"
  - "The mist in my face,"
  - "When the snows begin and the blasts denote"
  - "I am nearing the place,"

“The power of the night, the press of the storm”

- (iii) Robert Browning was the poet of soul and in his poems he has attempted to see the soul of man as created by God. He has firm faith in God, and immortality of the soul. The body may die but the soul lives on in the infinite. It has an after life or lives. It has experiences not only in the world and this life, but also in countless lives to come. The world is beautiful for God created it out of the fullness of His Love. Life in this world is worth living. For both life and the world are the expressions of Divine Love.
- (iv) Browning is a cheerful optimist. Optimism is at the very core of his teaching and his view of human life. Contrary to the views of some critics, his optimism is not blind. He does not shut his eyes to the suffering and evil that is prevalent in life. His optimism is founded on the Mercy of God and the realities of life.
- (v) In form, the poem is a monologue in which the poet is speaking in his own person. The style of the poem is simple. It does not suffer from Browning’s usual defects of style. There is no obscurity about it and it is easily comprehensible. It also shows Browning’s genius for consideration. He says, many of the words in the first few lines have an explosive or a near-explosive sound (technically beginning with letters classified as Plosives, Fricatives and Affricates) : power, press, place, post, death, blast, fear, fog etc. The effect is a noticeable difficulty in reading corresponding to the sense which too speaks of the difficulty of breathing experienced by a man climbing a mountain or by a man gasping for breath in the last hours. It also expresses the determination to face the difficulty with courage. The last lines are similarly noticeable for the frequency of the liquid l, m, n and the soft ‘s’ sounds : ‘dwindle’, ‘blend’, ‘elements’, ‘minutes’, ‘end’, ‘breast’, ‘soul’, ‘clasp’, ‘rest’, ‘peace’, the repeated ‘shall’ etc. and as a result the lines flow smoothly to the ecstasy. ‘Thou soul of my soul I shall clasp thee again whispered with the repeated ‘s’ sound.

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### 13.5 Let Us Sum Up

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In this unit you have acquired knowledge about the poet and his poetry. Now you practice to:

- understand trends and main features of the Victorian Age,
- know about life and works of Robert Browning,
- understand the poetry of Browning,
- know and understand various literary techniques used by Browning,
- critically analyse the poems of Browning, and
- answer the questions based on your text.

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### 13.6 Review Questions

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1. Comment on the style and Optimism of Browning's poetry with suitable examples.
2. What philosophy of Browning is expressed in the poem '*Prospice*'. Explain in detail.

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### 13.7 Bibliography

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## UNIT-14

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### ALFRED LORD TENNYSON : 1. TEARS IDLE TEARS

### 2. THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE

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#### Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Alfred Lord Tennyson's Life and Personality
- 14.3 *Tears Idle Tears*: Text
  - 14.3.1 Glossary
  - 14.3.2. Figures of speech and used in the poem
  - 14.3.3 Summary
  - 14.3.4 Detailed Explanation
  - 14.3.5 Self Assessment Questions
  - 14.3.6 Answers to SAQs
- 14.4 *The Charge of the Light Brigade*: Text
  - 14.4.1 Glossary
  - 14.4.2 Summary
  - 14.4.3 Form
  - 14.4.4 Background
  - 14.4.5 Critical Notes/Analysis
  - 14.4.6 Self- Assessment Questions
  - 14.4.7 Answers to SAQs
- 14.5 Let us sum up
- 14.6 Review Questions
- 14.7 Bibliography

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#### 14.0 Objectives

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This Unit will help you understand and appreciate:

- The Major Characteristics of the Victorian Age
- Life and Personality of Tennyson and his Important Works
- The Theme and Content of Tennyson's well known Creations, 'Tears Idle Tears' and 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'
- Figures of speech / literary devices like simile, lyric, personification, allusion, oxymoron, refrain, repetition, onomatopoeia, paradox, etc

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## 14.1 Introduction

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It is generally believed that literature reflects the life of the times in which it is created. Following this premise it is essential to have a basic understanding of the era in which Tennyson wrote. The Age of Tennyson coincides closely with the literary period generally known as the Victorian Age.

**The Victorian Age-** The literature written during Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901) has been given the name Victorian. Often considered a bridge between the romantic-era works of the previous century and the literature of the newly industrialized world of the twentieth century, Victorian literature is characterized by a strong sense of morality and is also known for its attempts to combine imagination and emotion with the neoclassical ideal of art for the common person.

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## 14.2 Alfred Lord Tennyson's Life and Personality

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The reign of Queen Victoria (1819-1901) is the longest individual reign in British history. The political, economic, cultural, industrial and scientific changes that occurred during her rule were remarkable. When Victoria ascended the throne, Britain was mainly rural and agriculturally oriented but by the time of her death, the country became highly industrialized and well-connected by railway network. In fact, the Victorian Age was characterized by rapid changes and developments in nearly every sphere - from advances in medical, scientific and technological knowledge to changes in population growth and location. Over time, this rapid transformation deeply affected the country's mood: an age that began with confidence and optimism leading to economic boom and prosperity eventually gave way to uncertainty and doubts regarding Britain's place in the world. Today we associate the nineteenth century with the Protestant work ethics, family values, religious observation and institutional faith. The two dominant movements of the times are the progress of democracy in political life and the progress of Science in the intellectual sphere. The progress of Science kept pace with the progress of democracy and in the sixty years with which we are here concerned ; men added far more to their knowledge of themselves and the universe than their forefathers had done in all the preceding centuries.

The spread of popular education, newspapers, magazines and cheap books, the facts

and speculations of the experts were no longer kept to the specialists only. Instead they were passed on rapidly to the reading public at large. The doctrine of evolution which we generally associate with the names of Darwin, Wallace and Herbert Spencer-completely revolutionized all current ideas about nature, man and society. Rapid progress and popularization of knowledge resulted in vast changes in thought, new theories came into conflict with old faiths and the ancient intellectual order was shaken at its foundations. The Victorian Age was marked throughout by the importance of the spirit of inquiry and criticism, by skepticism and religious uncertainty and by spiritual struggle and unrest and these are among the most characteristic notes of its higher literature. At the same time, the critical bent of mind which was fostered by science profoundly affected literature in other ways and a marked development of realism was one major result.

Finally, we must recognize the far reaching changes which were brought about by the practical application of Science to life in the railway, the steamship, and the telegraph. By breaking down the barriers which had till then separated town and country and nation by facilitating travel and intercourse of different peoples, and by making the transmission of thought easy and rapid, these mechanical agencies did much to destroy the old narrow view of life and helped the progress of democracy, thereby fundamentally altering the spirit of the world. They have therefore to be included among the chief social forces in the literature of Victorian England.

Science affected literature as much by the opposition it created as by its direct influence. Scientific discoveries that seemed to refute certain religious beliefs inspired many writers to conquer the topics of faith and truth in their works. This era saw significant advances in nonfiction works and the invention of the modern novel. The poetry of this period was a direct reflection of the popular attitudes of the time. Lord Alfred Tennyson wrote poetry that dealt with the burning topics of the era. His poems were both lyrical and mechanical in their structure. Conversely, Robert Browning was noted for his harsh style and intellectual subject matter. Matthew Arnold composed deeply emotional poetry. He focused on his pessimistic outlook on the fate of humanity. These three represent the major trends in Victorian poetry. For the first time in the history of English Literature, poetry was not the most popular form of writing. The novel had developed and become more popular than verse. At the forefront of this literary revolution were Charles Dickens and William Thackeray. This format enabled authors to create characters in much greater detail and allowed them to concentrate more on content and less on form. Other authors who wrote in this tradition were George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, Emily Bronte and Charlotte Bronte.

Another group of novelists concentrated their efforts on creating romantic and exotic stories to excite their readers. Most notable in this field are Rudyard Kipling, Joseph Conrad and Robert Louis Stevenson. Several authors used these fantasy situations to provide an indirect social commentary. The most famous of these is H. G. Wells. George Bernard Shaw was the driving force behind radically new dramatic works. He displayed a powerful capacity for

satire in his plays. He expressed his dislike for the existing social order in his entertaining plays. It was also his strong belief that the use of language was critical in establishing one's position in society.

'Victorian England' was, in Tennyson's phrase, "an awful moment of transition." A society based largely on agriculture, traditional values, and social hierarchies was transformed into one that was both stimulated and unsettled by unprecedented growth in science, technology, industry, urbanization and population, and profound questioning of politics, morality, and religion."

#### Biography of Tennyson / Life and Personality of Tennyson

Alfred Tennyson (1809-1892) was born in Somersby, Lincolnshire. Often regarded as the chief representative of Victorian poetry, Tennyson succeeded William Wordsworth as Poet Laureate in 1850. Tennyson's works were melancholic, and reflected the moral and intellectual values of his time.

His father, George Clayton Tennyson, a clergyman and rector, suffered from depression and was highly absentminded. Tennyson began to write poetry at an early age in the style of Lord Byron. After spending four unhappy years in school he was tutored at home. Tennyson then studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he joined the literary club 'The Apostles' and met Arthur Hallam, who became his closest friend. The undergraduate society discussed contemporary social, religious, scientific, and literary issues. Encouraged by 'The Apostles', Tennyson published poems, chiefly lyrical in 1830, which included the popular 'Mariana'. He travelled with Hallam on the Continent. By 1830, Hallam had become engaged to Tennyson's sister Emily. After his father's death in 1831 Tennyson returned to Somersby without a degree.

His next book, *Poems* (1833) received harsh reviews and Tennyson ceased to publish for nearly ten years. In the same year, Hallam died suddenly in Vienna. It was a huge blow to Tennyson who began writing *In Memoriam* for his lost friend - the work which took seventeen years. *In Memoriam* (1850), the elegy mourning Hallam's death is his major poetic achievement. The personal sorrow led the poet to explore his thoughts on faith, immortality, and the meaning of loss:

*O life as futile, then, as frail!*  
*O for thy voice to soothe and bless!*  
*What hope of answer, or redress?*  
*Behind the veil, behind the veil.*

A revised volume of poems, which included the 'The Lady of Shalott', 'The Lotus-Eaters', 'Morte d'Arthur' and 'Ulysses' established his reputation as a poet. In 'Ulysses' Tennyson portrayed the Greek after his travels, longing past days: "How dull it is to pause, to make an end, / To rust unburnished, not to shine in use!" After marrying Emily Sellwood, whom he met in 1836, the couple settled in Farringford, a house in Freshwater on the Isle of



Wight in 1853. From there the family moved in 1869 to Aldworth, Surrey. During these later years he produced some of his best poems. In the 1870s Tennyson wrote several plays, among them poetic dramas *Queen Mary* (1875) and *Harold* (1876). In 1884 he was created a baron. Tennyson died at Aldworth on October 6, 1892 and was buried in the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey. Soon he became the favorite target of attacks of many English and American poets who saw him as a representative of narrow patriotism and sentimentality. Later critics have again praised Tennyson. TS Eliot has called him 'the great master of metric as well as of melancholia' and has claimed that Tennyson possessed the finest ear of any English poet since Milton. Since his death his critical reputation has had its ups and downs: W. H. Auden described his genius as essentially lyrical and the general consensus has been that the longer narrative poems he spent so much time on are less successful, though this view has begun to be challenged.

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### 14.3 Tears, Idle Tears

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*Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy autumn-fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.  
Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,  
That brings our friends up from the underworld,  
Sad as the last which reddens over one  
That sinks with all we love below the verge;  
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.  
Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns  
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds  
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes  
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;  
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.  
Dear as remembered kisses after death,  
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd  
On lips that are for others; deep as love,*

*Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;*

*O Death in Life, the days that are no more!*

### 14.3.1 Glossary

1. idle- useless, purposeless, baseless; the word 'idle' can have many different meanings (Tennyson revised it from Tears, Foolish Tears, for this reason). The word 'idle' is associated with laziness, but it can also mean empty, worthless or dead.
2. divine- of, from or like God
3. despair-the state of having lost all hope
4. gather-to come together or bring something together
5. happy autumn fields- autumn fields are personified here and suggest that they bear the happy memories of spring and summer that have vanished, leaving the poet with nothing to look forward to except the dark and cold of winter
6. the days that are no more-the bygone days
7. glittering-shining brightly
8. the underworld- The 'underworld' is a term that could mean a criminal world, but in this context (and due to the period in which the poem was written) it is obvious that he is talking about the abode of the dead
9. reddens over one- the poet describing the last beam of the sun at the end of the day that is cast over a boat's sail; the use of 'reddens' suggests this because sunset reflects and endows the landscape with red colour
10. verge-edge, border, margin, threshold
11. Ah- The third stanza begins: "Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns" The use of 'Ah' to begin the stanza emphasises the fact that the speaker is thinking and the whole poem is a 'train of thought'.
12. dawns- daybreak, sunrise
13. earliest pipe-early morning sounds
14. half-awaken'd birds-birds that have not fully awaken
15. casement-part of a window hinged to open like a door
16. glimmering- shine faintly or intermittently faint or wavering light
17. fancy- imagination
18. feigned- simulate, pretend

19. regret- to feel sad, sorry or disappointed about something
20. Death in Life- The image of “Death in Life” recalls the dead friends of the second stanza who are like submerged memories that rise to the surface only to sink down once again. This “Death in Life” also recalls the experience of dying in the midst of the rebirth of life in the morning, described in the third stanza. The poet’s climactic exclamation in the final line thus represents a culmination of the images developed in the previous stanzas.

### 14.3.2 Figures of speech and used in the poem

**Simile-** a comparison between two distinctly different things by the words ‘like’ or ‘as’. In the second stanza, Tennyson says: “Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,” The freshness of memories is what is being described here and Tennyson uses an image of the sun shining on a boat’s sail to emphasize it.

**Lyric poetry** refers to either poetry that has the form and musical quality of a song, or a usually short poem that expresses personal feelings, which may or may not be set to music. Greek writers identified the lyric as a song rendered to the accompaniment of a lyre. The term basically refers to any fairly short, non narrative poem presenting a single speaker who expresses a state of mind or a process of thought and feeling.

**Alliteration** is the repetition of speech sounds in a sequence of nearby words; the term is usually applied only to consonants, and only when the recurrent sound occurs in a conspicuous position at the beginning of a word or of a stressed syllable within a word. The alliteration of the consonant ‘d’ in the phrase divine despair creates a very sombre and melancholic tone, whilst also creating a sense of rhythm. The word ‘divine’ has religious connotations as it means heavenly or sacred, but ‘despair’ seems opposite as it means to lose all hope; the poet is describing very powerful emotions.

**Personification-** is a literary device in which either an inanimate object or an abstract concept is spoken of as though it were endowed with life or with human attributes or feelings. In the ‘happy autumn fields’ the autumn fields is modified by the adjective happy which is a human trait so autumn fields have been given the attributes of humans. By the use of personification, the poet makes it seem as if the fields themselves are happy, although it is just the feeling they evoke in the speaker. Tennyson here also uses a paradox because he is describing emotions that contradict each other, despair and happiness.

**Paradox:** A Paradox is a statement which seems on its face to be self-contradictory or absurd, yet turns out to have a valid meaning. The contrasting descriptions of the tears which are “idle” and which yet come from deep within the narrator and the “happy autumn-fields” inspiring sadness are examples of paradox. The paradox points towards the disparity and contrast between the past and the present and add to the poignancy and immediacy of appeal.

**Oxymoron-** If the paradoxical utterance combines two terms that in ordinary usage

are contraries , it is called an oxymoron. ‘O Death in life, the days that are no more, is an example of oxymoron.

**Refrain** is a line, or part of a line, or a group of lines which is repeatedly used in the course of the poem. In this poem we find the phrase ‘the days that are no more’ being used repetitively. All the four stanzas of the poem end with ‘the days that are no more’.

### 14.3.3 Summary

The speaker sings of the baseless and inexplicable tears that rise in his heart and pour forth from his eyes when he looks out on the fields in autumn and thinks of the past. This past, (“the days that are no more”) is described as fresh and strange. It is as fresh as the first beam of sunlight that sparkles on the sail of a boat bringing the dead back from the underworld, and it is sad as the last red beam of sunlight that shines on a boat that carries the dead down to this underworld.

The speaker then refers to the past as not “fresh,” but “sad” and strange. As such, it resembles the song of the birds on early summer mornings as it sounds to a dead person, who lies watching the “glimmering square” of sunlight as it appears through a square window.

In the final stanza, the speaker declares the past to be dear, sweet, deep, and wild. It is as dear as the memory of the kisses of one who is now dead, and it is as sweet as those kisses that we imagine ourselves bestowing on lovers who actually have loyalties to others. So, too, is the past as deep as “first love” and as wild as the regret that usually follows this experience. The speaker concludes that the past is a “Death in Life.”

### 14.3.4 Detailed Explanation

One of his most famous lyrics, “Tears, Idle Tears” was published as one of the three “songs” in Tennyson’s ‘*The Princess*’ in 1847. Although the poem is written in blank verse , one does not really notices the absence of rhyme. Readers tend not to feel the lack of rhyme probably because of the richness and variety of the vowel sounds Tennyson employs.

Tennyson was inspired to write “Tears, Idle Tears” upon a visit to Tintern Abbey in Monmouthshire, Wales, an abbey that was abandoned in 1536. Tennyson explained that the idea for this poem came to him when he was at Tintern Abbey, not far from Hallam’s burial place. “Tintern Abbey” is also the title and subject of a famous poem by William Wordsworth. Wordsworth’s poem, too, reflects on the passage of time and the loss of the joys of youth. However, whereas Tennyson laments “the days that are no more” and describes the past as a “Death in Life,” Wordsworth explicitly states that although the past is no more, he has been compensated for its loss with “other gifts”:

That time is past,

And all its aching joys are now no more

And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts  
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompense.

The present poem like many of the other Tennyson's poems, evokes complex emotions and moods through a mastery of language. In the opening stanza, the poet describes his tears as "idle," suggesting that they are caused by no immediate, identifiable grief. However, his tears are simultaneously the product of a "divine despair," suggesting that they do indeed have a source: they "rise in the heart" and stem from a profoundly deep and universal cause.

Tennyson is obviously very passionate about what he is writing about. He has himself said of the poem: "This song came to me on the yellowing autumn-tide at Tintern Abbey, full for me of its bygone memories ... It is what I have always felt even from a boy, and what as a boy I called the 'passion of the past.' And it is so always with me now; it is the distance that charms me in the landscape, the picture and the past, and not the immediate today in which I move." (A. Tennyson, taken from <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/9712/poetry.htm>)

Tears, Idle Tears is very effective in the way in which it describes emotions. The fact that it is written in blank verse helps because it is the only verse form that is able to convey the natural rhythm of spoken English, therefore making the poem more realistic. The images are described very vividly and are used to represent the feelings of the speaker. The following lines aptly describe the significant characteristics of the poem: "the melody, the vision and the passionate wail of 'Tears, idle Tears' the most moving and finely wrought lyric Tennyson ever wrote." (*The Cambridge History of English and American Literature*). The speaker is saying that as well as he being sad, he finds it strange not to be able to go back to the "days that are no more". He says that the days that are now gone are as dear to him as the kisses of loved ones that are now dead. There is a sense of deep regret about the past in the last two lines: "deep as love, Deep as first love, and wild with all regret; O Death in Life, the days that are no more." Tennyson is talking about the emotion of love here, and firstly says "deep as love" but then extends it to "deep as first love" to suggest that first love is even deeper. The word 'wild' is a very powerful one that Tennyson uses to describe the regret that the speaker feels. The last line is powerful because he compares life and death and says that his memories of the past feel like a death to him. There is a sense of mystery in the poem as it seems that the speaker knows more than what he is telling us. It seems as if he has deep regrets about the past that are haunting him. Also, Tennyson does not make it clear who the speaker is as regards the gender. The speaker is sentimentalising about the past, and Tennyson sentimentalises in the way that he writes the poem. He deals with many different emotions such as despair, sadness, happiness, love and regret, which he qualifies with images to help the reader understand them. It is the last stanza of the poem where there is most emotion and sentimentality; a great yearning for something that will never happen again and about lost time. "Dear as remembered kisses after

death”, the speaker is saying that the memories of dead loved ones are both sad, and fresh in his memory, and remind him of the days that are gone.

### 14.3.5 Self Assessment Questions

1. Where did Tennyson get the idea for “Tears, Idle Tears”?  
(A) Somersby  
(B) Cambridge  
(C) Tintern Abbey  
(D) Westminster Bridge
2. ‘Tears Idle Tears’ is the part of a larger poem. What is the name of that poem and also state its basic theme.  
.....  
.....
3. Why does the sight of ‘happy autumn fields’ evoke sadness in the poet’s heart?  
.....  
.....
4. Describe the mood of the poem.  
.....  
.....
5. Why does the poet refer to the tears as idle?  
.....  
.....
6. Comment on the form of the poem.  
.....  
.....
7. Point out the significance of refrain in this poem by giving a suitable example?  
.....  
.....

8. What do you understand by ‘divine despair’?  
.....  
.....
9. Which other poet has written a poem on the same location and how is his treatment of the subject different?  
.....  
.....
10. Point out the portion of the poem where the poet seems to be a little hopeful/ Is there any part of the poem which suggests that the poet believes in re-incarnation.  
.....  
.....

### 14.3.6 Answers to SAQs

1. (C) Tintern Abbey
2. *Tears Idle Tears* is the part of larger poem called *The Princess*. Tennyson wrote *The Princess* to discuss the relationship between the sexes and to provide an argument for women’s rights in higher education.
3. The speaker states that he cries while “looking on the happy autumn-fields.” At first, it seems strange that looking at something happy would elicit tears, but the fact that these very fields would have to face harsh severe winters is in itself very depressing and hence make the poet sad and gloomy.
4. Tennyson’s, “Tears, Idle Tears”, has many references to symbols and images that reflect the mood of the poem. Gloom controls the atmosphere the author is describing to the audience. These images better the understanding of this poem and give the reader a vivid sense of what the author is trying to portray. Images of sadness are throughout the poem and they contrast with early memories of happiness the author once had. Idle tears caused the author’s world to stop as he thinks about how the world was still moving at the time of the tragedy.
5. The poet describes the tears as ‘idle’ – suggesting that they are caused by no immediate identifiable grief.
6. This poem is written in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter. It consists of four five-line stanzas, each of which closes with the refrain “the days that are no more.” The poem is set out into four stanzas of equal length, and is written in blank verse, meaning that it has no rhyme scheme.

7. Since all the four stanzas culminate with the phrase 'the days that are no more' - this phrase can be referred to as a refrain. The repetition of this phrase emphasizes the contrast between the past and the present. This creates a pattern in the poem and also acts as a summary to each stanza, and to the poem as a whole, because the speaker discovers that the reasons for his tears are his thoughts about "the days that are no more". This could mean death, or just simply moments in the past that you can't get back again
8. The phrase is a paradox. This paradox is complicated by the difficulty of interpretation of the phrase "divine despair" in two different ways: Is it God who is despairing, or is the despair itself divine?
9. William Wordsworth also wrote a poem Tintern Abbey inspired by this location in 1798, which developed a similar theme although both Wordsworth and Tennyson write poems set at Tintern Abbey about the passage of time, Wordsworth's poem takes on a tone of contentment, whereas Tennyson's languishes in a tone of lament.
10. The poet says that the beam on the sail will "bring our friends up from the underworld", which suggests that he believes in spirits, or re-incarnation. The beam is like a symbol of hope, as the first two lines of this stanza are hopeful. "

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#### 14.4 Charge of the Light Brigade

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*Half a league, half a league,  
 Half a league onward,  
 All in the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred.  
 "Forward, the Light Brigade!  
 "Charge for the guns!" he said:  
 Into the valley of Death  
 Rode the six hundred.  
 "Forward, the Light Brigade!"  
 Was there a man dismay'd?  
 Not tho' the soldier knew  
 Someone had blunder'd:  
 Their's not to make reply,  
 Their's not to reason why,*



*Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.  
Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon in front of them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell,  
Boldly they rode and well,  
Into the jaws of Death,  
Into the mouth of Hell  
Rode the six hundred.  
Flash'd all their sabres bare,  
Flash'd as they turn'd in air,  
Sabring the gunners there,  
Charging an army, while  
All the world wonder'd:  
Plunged in the battery-smoke  
Right thro' the line they broke;  
Cossack and Russian  
Reel'd from the sabre stroke  
Shatter'd and sunder'd.  
Then they rode back, but not  
Not the six hundred.  
Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;*

*Storm 'd at with shot and shell,  
 While horse and hero fell,  
 They that had fought so well  
 Came thro' the jaws of Death  
 Back from the mouth of Hell,  
 All that was left of them,  
 Left of six hundred.  
 When can their glory fade?  
 O the wild charge they made!  
 All the world wondered.  
 Honor the charge they made,  
 Honor the Light Brigade,  
 Noble six hundred.*

#### **14.4.1 Glossary & Notes**

1. Charge- sudden rush or violent attack by soldiers, a task, duty ,power to excite feelings
2. the light Brigade-cavalry carrying light arms
3. Half a league-one and a half miles
4. onward-directed or moving forward
5. valley of Death-
6. Rode the six hundred
7. the commander
8. valley of death-
9. none of the soldiers were discouraged
10. they knew that someone had committed a serious mistake
11. the soldiers duty is to simply follow the commands of the General and not question even
12. Cannon-an old type of large heavy gun that fired solid metal balls

13. volley'd-a number of bullets etc. fired at the same time
14. thunder'd-a loud deep noise
15. shot-firing of bullet from a gun
16. shell-metal case filled with explosives to be fired from a large gun
17. Boldly-without any fear of death
18. Death and Hell are being personified possessing jaws and mouth
19. Flash'd-a sudden brief bright light or flame
20. sabres bare-uncovered swords
21. sabring the gunners there-
22. Plunged-to move suddenly and violently forwards
23. Cossack-People dwelling in the northern hinterlands of the Black and Caspian seas
24. Reel'd-move in an unsteady way
25. sabre stroke-movement of the sword
26. shattered –to break or make something break into small pieces
27. sunder'd-to separate something by force
28. Not the six hundred- they were no more six hundred as many of them had lost their lives

#### **14.4.2 Summary**

The poem tells the story of a brigade consisting of 600 soldiers who rode on horseback into the “valley of death” for about one and a half miles. The soldiers were obeying a command to charge the enemy forces that had been seizing their guns.

Not a single soldier was discouraged or distressed by the command to charge forward, even though all the soldiers realized that their commander had made a terrible mistake: “Someone had blundered.” The role of the soldier is to obey and “not to make reply...not to reason why,” so they followed orders and rode into the “valley of death.”

The 600 soldiers were attacked violently by the shots of shells of canons in front and on both sides of them. Still, they rode courageously forward toward their own deaths: “Into the jaws of Death / Into the mouth of hell / Rode the six hundred.”

The soldiers struck the enemy gunners with their bare swords and charged at the enemy army while the rest of the world looked on in wonder. They rode into the artillery smoke and broke through the enemy line, destroying their Cossack and Russian opponents.

Then they rode back from the offensive, but they had lost many men so they were “not the six hundred” any more.

Canons behind and on both sides of the soldiers now attacked them with shots and shells. As the brigade rode “back from the mouth of hell,” soldiers and horses collapsed; few remained to make the backward journey.

The world marvelled at the courage of the soldiers; indeed, their glory is undying: the poem states these noble 600 men remain worthy of honour and tribute today.

### **14.4.3 Form**

This poem comprises six stanzas varying in length from six to twelve lines. Each line has two stressed syllables; moreover, each stressed syllable is followed by two unstressed syllables, making the rhythm dactylic. The use of “falling” rhythm, in which the stress is on the first beat of each metrical unit, and then “falls off” for the rest of the length of the meter, is appropriate in a poem describing the fall of the British brigade.

The rhyme scheme varies with each stanza. Often, Tennyson uses the same rhyme (and occasionally even the same final word) for several consecutive lines: “Flashed all their sabres bare / Flashed as they turned in air / Sab’ring the gunners there.” The poem also makes use of anaphora, in which the same word is repeated at the beginning of several consecutive lines: “Cannon to right of them / Cannon to left of them / Cannon in front of them.” Here the method creates a sense of harsh and intense attack; at each line our eyes meet the word “cannon,” just as the soldiers meet their flying shells at each turn.

This poem is effective largely because of the way it conveys the movement and sound of the charge via a strong, repetitive falling meter: “Half a league, half a league / Half a league onward.” The plodding pace of the repetitions seems to subsume all individual impulsiveness in ponderous collective action. The poem does not speak of individual troops but rather of “the six hundred” and then “all that was left of them.” Even Lord Raglan, who played such an important role in the battle, is only vaguely referred to in the line “someone had blundered.” Interestingly, Tennyson omitted this critical and somewhat subversive line in the 1855 version of this poem, but the writer John Ruskin later convinced him to restore it for the sake of the poem’s artistry. Although it underwent several revisions following its initial publication in 1854, the poem as it stands today is a moving tribute to courage and heroism in the face of devastating defeat.

### **14.4.4 Background**

“The Charge of the Light Brigade” recalls a disastrous historical military engagement that took place during the initial phase of the Crimean War fought between Turkey and Russia (1854-56). Under the command of Lord Raglan, British forces entered the war in September 1854 to prevent the Russians from obtaining control of the important sea routes through the

Dardanelles. From the beginning, the war was plagued by a series of misunderstandings and tactical blunders, one of which serves as the subject of this poem: on October 25, 1854, as the Russians were seizing guns from British soldiers, Lord Raglan sent desperate orders to his Light Cavalry Brigade to fend off the Russians. Finally, one of his orders was acted upon, and the brigade began charging—but in the wrong direction! Over 650 men rushed forward, and well over 100 died within the next few minutes. As a result of the battle, Britain lost possession of the majority of its forward defenses and the only metalled road in the area.

#### 14.4.5 Critical Notes/Analysis

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the British involvement in the Crimean War is dismissed as an instance of military incompetence; we remember it only for the heroism displayed in it by Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse. However, for Tennyson and most of his contemporaries, the war seemed necessary and just. He wrote this poem as a celebration of the heroic soldiers in the Light Brigade who fell in service to their commander and their cause. The poem glorifies war and courage, even in cases of complete inefficiency and waste.

Unlike the deeply personal grief of ‘Tears Idle Tears’ this poem deals with an important political development in Tennyson’s day. As such, it is the part of a sequence of political and military poems that Tennyson wrote after he became the Poet Laureate of England in 1850, including “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” (1852) and “Riflemen, Form” (1859). These poems reflect Tennyson’s emerging national consciousness and his sense of compulsion to express his political views.

In his poem “Charge of the Light Brigade” Tennyson describes the valiant charge of the light brigade into the “jaws of death.” He makes use of repetition, allusion, and personification to paint a vivid picture of the charge, and, at the same time, he gives the reader a glimpse into the psyche of the valiant soldiers.

The literary device Tennyson most commonly employs in this poem is repetition, but he also makes use of allusion and personification. In the first stanza he repeats the phrase “half a league” three times in order to convey the arduousness of the charge. It relates the fact that each league gained was a separate feat for the brigade. In the first stanza he also begins the repetition of “rode the six hundred,” a phrase which emphasizes the small number of valiant soldiers riding against the “mouth of hell” itself. Tennyson also includes the first reference to the “valley of Death” in the first stanza. This reference is continued throughout the poem. It functions as an allusion to the “valley of the shadow of death” in the twenty-third Psalm of the Bible and describes the charge. The allusion to the twenty-third Psalm serves to instill in the reader the sense of fearlessness that the brigade has because the psalm speaks of how evil in not to be feared, not even in the shadow of death itself. The reference to the valley also paints in the reader’s mind an image of being enclosed by greater things on all sides, a feeling no doubt shared by the soldiers. “Canon to the right of them,/ Cannon to the left of them,/ Cannon in front of them” is another repeated phrase in the poem that is found in the third and fifth stanzas

of the poem. The repetition of the phrase serves to add to the claustrophobic feeling in the reader that began with the mention of the charge into the valley. It also reminds the reader that the cannon of the enemy are all that can be seen no matter where the valiant soldiers look. Death also becomes personified in the third stanza when Tennyson gives it jaws. The personification of death is meant to shift the poem's tone to a more carnal tone. The brigade is now pitted against the ultimate beast that threatens devour them. They must now kill or be killed. The "jaws of death" and "mouth of hell" are also repeated images in the poem. They paint a picture of soldiers staring into a black abyss that is about to consume them.

In his poem Tennyson also provides the reader with some insight into the psyche of the men of the brigade. The first glimpse of the soldiers' state of mind given in the poem comes in the form of the valley of death. The reader is told that the soldiers face certain death, but the phrase, through its biblical allusion, demonstrates to the reader that the evil is face without fear. Tennyson also gives a more direct insight into the psyche of the brigade when he writes that the soldiers knew "Some one had blunder'd," and that they knew their place was not to question orders but "to do and die." The reader then knows that these men are blindly motivated by loyalty and a sense of duty. "Cannon to the right of them,/ Cannon to the left of them,/ Cannon in front of them" is another description Tennyson uses to take the reader in to minds of soldiers. This description allows the reader to see the battle as the soldier saw it. No matter where you looked, all that could be seen was certain death. No safety could be found. After being taken into the psyche of the brigade and seeing a vivid picture of the valiant charge the reader cannot hope to do anything but admire the valour of the soldiers and "Honour the Light Brigade."

Tennyson's use of literary devices to paint a mental picture of a heroic charge and the insight he gives the reader into the minds of the valiant men who made it make his "Charge of the Light Brigade" a powerful poem. It is a fitting tribute to the soldiers who fought the war that elicited the world's highest military honour: the Victoria Cross.

It has already been mentioned in the previous section that Tennyson is a defining poet of the Victorian era, nowhere more so than in his famous Archive-featured poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' (1864) which commemorates an infamous incident from the Crimean War. In the course of this action, undertaken in error due to misinterpreted orders, the Light Brigade attempted to capture the Russian gun redoubts at Balaclava with disastrous results. Of the six hundred and seventy three men who charged down "The Valley of Death" only a hundred and ninety five survived unwounded. News of the charge and its bloody consequences reached London three weeks later and there was an immediate public outcry. The news affected Tennyson who wrote his poem in commemoration of their courage only a few minutes after reading an account in *The Times*. It was immediately popular, even reaching the troops back in the Crimea where it was distributed in pamphlet form.

Less well-known is Tennyson's celebration of a more successful action during the same battle, 'The Charge of the Heavy Brigade'. This was written much later in 1882 at the

prompting of a friend which is perhaps why it fails to capture the creative burst of the first poem. The “three hundred” mentioned are the men of the Heavy Brigade and their commander, Sir James Yorke Scarlett, but the poem never caught the public’s imagination. Nevertheless, it is of historical interest to hear the two poems side by side which we’re able to do thanks to a remarkable recording made in 1890. These poems and eight others were recorded on a set of twenty three soft wax cylinders. Although their age and the primitive technology sometimes renders a word inaudible, Tennyson’s voice comes through clearly, intoning the pounding dactylic rhythms of the verse which gives it a breathless momentum. The patriotic poem ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ published in MAUD (1855), is one of Tennyson’s best known works, although first Maud was found obscure or morbid by critics ranging from George Eliot to Gladstone. Later the poem about the Light Brigade inspired Michael Curtiz’s film from 1936, starring Errol Flynn. Historically the fight during the Crimean war brought to light the incompetent organization of the English army. However, the stupid mistake described in the poem honored the soldier’s courage and heroic action.

#### 14.4.6 Self Assessment Questions

1. Which of the following historical events does “The Charge of the Light Brigade” describe?
  - (i) D- Day
  - (ii) The Battle of Waterloo
  - (iii) The Battle of Bull Run
  - (iv) The Crimean War
2. Why is the cavalry referred to as ‘light brigade’?
 

.....

.....
3. What is onomatopoeia? Can you find an example of onomatopoeia in the fourth stanza?
 

.....

.....
4. What is an alliteration? Point out the use of alliteration in the fourth stanza?
 

.....

.....
5. How does Tennyson make use of repetition in this poem?

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### 14.4.7 Answers to SAQs

1. (iv) The Crimean War
2. The cavalry is referred to as 'light brigade' because the cavalry was bearing only light arms- swords and sabres.
3. Onomatopoeia is a device applied to a word, or a combination of words, whose sound seems to resemble the sound it denotes; 'hiss', 'thud', 'buzz' are some common examples. The seeming similarity of the verbal sounds to the nonverbal ones is due to the meaning and to the feel of uttering the words. In the fourth stanza, the word "flash'd" imitates the sound of a sabre, or sword, being pulled from its scabbard, or whistling through the air.
4. Alliteration is the repetition of the first consonant sound in a phrase or a sentence. The matching or repetition of these sounds create a special effect. ....from the sabre stroke/  
Shatter'd and sunder'd is an example of alliteration.
5. Tennyson uses the same lines to open both stanzas three and stanza five:

*Cannon to right of them,  
Cannon to left of them,  
Cannon behind them  
Volley'd and thunder'd;  
Storm'd at with shot and shell*

He repeats these lines, particularly the word "cannon" to create a special effect of the warfare being conducted by the light cavalry. The rhythmic use of these words successfully capture the action of the war.

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### 14.5 Let Us Sum Up

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This unit has given you a glimpse of literary trends of the Victorian Age as Tennyson is a representative poet of that age and you have also got a basic idea of Tennyson's poetry, its content and style. Hopefully, this section has also helped you grasp the thematic intricacies of his poetry and enabled you to appreciate Tennyson's contribution in the field of poetry. The section also gives you an exposure to some of the figures of speech and literary devices giving you a broad understanding of them.



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## 14.6 Review Questions

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1. What an essay on Tennyson's usage of literary devices with suitable example.
2. Discuss Tennyson's poem '*Tear Idle Tears*' as a realistic and emotional poem.

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## UNIT-15

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### MATTHEW ARNOLD: *DOVER BEACH*

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#### Structure

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Text : *Dover Beach*
- 15.3 About The Poet
- 15.4 Summary of Dover Beach
- 15.5 Critical Appreciation
- 15.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 15.7 Answers to SAQs
- 15.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.9 Review Questions
- 15.10 Bibliography

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#### 15.0 Objectives

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After going through this unit you will be able to:

- understand the Age of the poet and his idea about the poem and its creativity,
- know about a literary metrical piece of study,
- develop a critical analysis about the theory and the poetic ideology, and
- use the word as referred to in the context of the study.

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#### 15.1 Introduction

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In this unit, you are going to study about the poem and the poet along with the age that he belongs to. In a way, you will reinforce your study of poetic evaluation various theories and concepts of the poet have been made simple to enhance your knowledge and understanding. Also remember to make use of dictionary so as to understand the words and their meanings according to the context.

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#### 15.2 Text : *Dover Beach*

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*The sea is calm to-night*

*The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
Upon the straits; - on the French coast the light  
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand.  
Glimmering and vast; out in the tranquil bay.  
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!  
Only, from the long line of spray  
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land  
Listen ! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand.  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous candence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.  
Sophocles long ago  
Heard it on the Aegean, and it brought  
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow  
Of human misery; we  
Find also in the sound a thought,  
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.  
The sea of faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled:  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating, to the breath  
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world  
Ah, love, let us be true*

*To one another ! for the world, which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Hath really neither joy, nor love nor light,  
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;  
And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.*

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### 15.3 About the Poet

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**Life of the Poet** – Matthew Arnold was born at Laleham near Staines on 24, December, 1822. His father Thomas Arnold was the famous headmaster of Rugby School. He was himself educated at Rugby. In 1840 he won the school prize in English verse. In 1843 he won the Newdingate Proze for writing a poem on Cromwell at Balliol College, Oxford. In 1845 he was elected Fellow of Oriel College.

He worked as a master at Rugby for some years. In 1851 he was made Inspector of Schools. That year he married the daughter of Justice Wightman. From 1857 to 1867 he was professor of poetry at Oxford. He died at Liverpool 10, May, 1888.

**His Works** – His first volume of poems, *The Strayed, Reveller and other poems* appeared in 1849. In 1852 was published. *Empedocles on Etna and other Poems* in 1853 appeared a volume of *Poems* are in 1855 “Poems, School Series” was published. In 1858 “*Merope, a Tragedy*” was published and *New Poem* in 1868.

**As a Poet** – We find clarity of expression, gravity and dignity of thought in his poems. He has classical sense of proportion and harmony. “He cannot tolerate exaggeration of sentiment or passion, or emphasis either in description or in epithets and imagery”. He writes with a purpose and a definite aim in his mind, and his writings are free from the clouds of passion and imagination, that hang upon and obscure the expression in Keats and other romantic poets.

**As a Poet of Nature.** Arnold bears some resemblance to Wordsworth. He also possesses penetrating and sympathetic insight in nature and believes in its ‘healing power’, but is not a nature worshipper like Wordsworth. Neither does he find perpetual joy in it nor does he recognise any mystic union with it, but takes only a detached view of it.

Comparing Arnold with Tennyson, Lord-de-Tabley says that the latter occasionally goes wrong but Arnold is always accurate.

**Introduction to the Poem** – The poem was published in 1867. The poet has expressed

pessimism in this poem. The world is full of misery. Even the Greek poet Sophocles sang it. But in olden times men had faith and love for each other, but that they have now lost and instead fight with each other. The poet is reminded of it by ebb and flow of the sea at the Dover beach

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## 15.4 Summary of *Dover Beach*

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In the first stanza the poet sees the calm sea in full tide at the Dover beach.

In the second stanza the roar of the ebbing sea strikes a note of sadness in his mind.

In the third stanza, he says that Sophocles was reminded of human misery as he heard the roar of the sea-waves at the Greek coast.

In the fourth stanza, the poet talks, that once the sea of faith girdled this earth, but it is now retreating.

In the last stanza, he asks us to love each other as this world is really a joyless place.

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## 15.5 Critical Appreciation

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### 1. Theme :

Matthew Arnold's 'Dover Beach' captures beautifully the poet's deep dissatisfaction with his age and its loss of faith. He puts forward the idea that the root cause of the miseries of men in the modern world is lack of faith. This is an idea prevalent in both the prose and verse of Arnold.

### 2. Expression :

The idea is expressed in the form of a beautiful metaphor. Humanity is presented as a sea-shore, faith as the sea. In the past ages, the heart of man was full of faith like a beach covered with sea-water at the time of the flow of the tide. Today the human heart is dry, like a beach at ebb-tide. Only the dry and soulless religious formulas, ceremonies and practices remain in it like pebbles on sea beach.

### 3. Naturalness :

This metaphor is sustained throughout the later part of the poem, except in the last three lines, where modern life is presented as a dark plain where a mad battle is on. The metaphor of the sea emerges naturally out of the poem in gradual degrees. Nothing is forced. The poem has all the suggestiveness associated with great poetry.

### 4. Pictorial Power:

Apart from the idea that this poem puts forth, it is remarkable for the beautiful and effective picture of Dover Beach presented in it. With a few touches the poet succeeds in

presenting a picture of great beauty vivid and clear. The sound of the waves beating against the shore is also beautifully captured.

### **5. A Note of Sadness:**

The poem has sad music about it sad like the slow, mournful beat of the waves described in it. It has that note of sadness and dissatisfaction that is so common in Arnold's writings. All things considered, it is one of the most beautiful poems in the language – simple and suggestive weighed with a heavy sweetness, yet restrained in expression as well as sentiment.

D.S. Tatke makes the following comment on this poem- then heightens the meaning in the next eight lines by using the images to express the last journey which every one must make, so does Arnold in this poem build a beautiful picture of the calm sea and the moon-blanching shore and makes us aware of the fact that though from the distance the picture is so calm and peaceful yet those who live near enough always hear the grating roar of pebbles and the eternal note of sadness and then deepens the meaning by giving it a philosophic content.

### **6. Transition to Philosophic Meditation:**

The transition to philosophic meditation comes in the second stanza. The third uses the image of the first stanza to express the present predicament – the loss of faith and the consequent gloom which is the most prominent note of Arnold's poems. The fourth stanza is an appeal to a beloved woman to be true to each other for that alone can sustain them in this land of dreams whose reality is very different from its appearance.

**7. Need for a Positive Faith:** The poem successfully expresses the fascination and the need Arnold felt for a positive faith and the reluctance with which he must accept the painful, unavoidable reality.

Note the perfect picture of the age with all its complexity in the last three lines of the poem –

“And we are here as on a darkling plain  
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight  
Where ignorant armies clash by night.”

His poems are marked by a restraint and, a conscious control. Neither excessively musical nor deliberately rugged the expression diction, imagery, rhythm – is marked by a perfect clearness, competence and precision. He is far too meditative a poet to be lyrical. His best poetry is reflective, always burdened by thoughts of the predicament of his generation. In a letter written in 1869 Arnold claimed that his poems ‘represent the main movement of the mind of the last quarter of a century’.

‘Dover Beach’ is one of Arnold's most famous poems. It is one of his most characteristic poems too. It has a sad tone and it expresses Arnold's sorrow at the loss of faith in the modern

world.

When we analyse the epithets used in the poem, we find that Arnold does not use colour epithets anywhere in this poem. Even in the first stanza where he describes the landscape, no colour epithet is used. But this deficiency does not in any way mar the literary merit of the poem. Arnold describes the landscape in a way that the reader is easily able to visualize the landscape, and its varied colour. “On the French coast, the light / Gleams, and is gone.” We can very easily visualize the colour here. Where he speaks of the “moon-blanch’d sand” he makes us see the sandy place shining white in the moon-lit night without using the colour epithet.

Another way in which he makes up the deficiency of colour epithets is by making us hear the sound of the waves striking the shore and then returning. He says:

“Listen ! you hear the granting roar  
Of pebbles which the waves such back, and fling  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cese, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in.”

He again says :-

“But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
Retreating to the beath  
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear  
And naked shingles of the world.

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## 15.6 Self Assessment Questions

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### (A) Short Questions

1. What do you appreciate in this poem?

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2. When was the poem published ?

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3. What does the poet express in the poem ?

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4. What classic reference does the poem display ?

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.....  
5. What great lectures did the people of old age have ?



.....

6. What is the poet reminded of in the poem *Dover Beach* ?

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7. What kind of faith does Arnold refer to?

.....

8. Is Arnold a poet of Nature?

.....

9. What does 'Nature' mean to Arnold?

- .....
10. Arnold has a sad note in his writings. Why ?
- .....
- .....
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- .....
- .....
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### 15.7 Answers to SAQs

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1. Clarity of expression gravity, dignity of thought, proportion and harmony.
2. 1867.
3. The poet has expressed pessimism in the poem.
4. Even the Greek poet Sophocles (classic) sang it.
5. They had faith and love for each other.
6. The poet recalls the old age of faith and leave by the ebb and flow of the sea which the modern man does not have.
7. Religious faith.
8. No, he is not a worshipper of nature like words worth.
9. To Arnold nature is quite indifferent to man. It is man's love for each other that helps

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### 15.8 Let Us Sum Up

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1. By now you must have understood the poem and the poet's intention of his creative impulse
2. Written in 1867.
3. A classical poem with a pessimistic or tragic appeal.
4. Compares the olden times the modern times etc.

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### 15.9 Review Questions

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1. Write a critical appreciation of the poem *Dover Beach*.
2. Who was Sophocles ? How could he have heard in ancient Greece the same note of

sadness in the sea as Arnold observed in the Victorian England ?

3. How are the ignorant armies, according to Arnold, clashing by night ?
4. Where is the battle being fought ?
5. Arnold employs no epithet of colour in *Dover Beach*. How does he make up for his deficiency ?
6. What are the main characteristics of the Victorian Age to Which Matthew Arnold belonged?
7. What does the concluding stanza portray in the poem *Dover Beach*?
8. What kind of mental frame did Matthew Arnold have ? Why ?.
9. Can you identify some chief pessimistic poets of the Victorian Age ?
10. Write down the summary of the poem *Dover Beach*.
11. What were the circumstances that forced Arnold to criticize the modern man?

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### **15.10 Bibliography**

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## UNIT - 16

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### OLIVER GOLDSMITH: A VERSATILE GENIUS

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#### Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
  - 16.1.1 Introduction to the life of Oliver Goldsmith
  - 16.1.2 Goldsmith and his Age: His Career and Character
- 16.2 Socio-political Ethos of Goldsmith's Time
  - 16.2.1 Socio-political Ethos of Goldsmith's Time
  - 16.2.2 Literary Trends in the Eighteenth Century England
  - 16.2.3 Goldsmith and the Contemporary Drama and Fiction
  - 16.2.4 The Sentimental Comedy and Goldsmith's Reaction Against it
- 16.3 A Pointwise Summary of the Contents of this unit
- 16.4 Glossary
- 16.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 16.6 Answers SAQs
- 16.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.8 Review Questions
- 16.9 Bibliography

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#### 16.0 Objectives

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The very objective of this study is to place Oliver Goldsmith in the proper perspective as a writer in the eighteenth century- the age of enlightenment and reason. He was a great genius and tried his hand at fiction, prose, drama and poetry. His contribution to the English comedy is not negligible. He reacted sharply to the Sentimental comedy which was under the spell of French playwrights of the period. The objective is to highlight how dexterously he revived the spirit of Shakespearean comedy and recreated the atmosphere of Farquhar's *Beaus Stratagem* on the English stage. He brought the genre of comedy on the right track because it had deviated from the norms of depicting genuine humanity and humour, and had degraded itself into maudlin and lachrymose sentimentality.

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## 16.1 Introduction

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### 16.1.1 Introduction to the Life of Oliver Goldsmith

Oliver Goldsmith had very humble origins. He spent his childhood in the little village Lissoy in the rural surroundings of Longford, Ireland. His father was a poor Protestant curate. He went to the village school. He also studied at Trinity college, Dublin. He became the postmaster of the arts of dissipation and practical joking. After his father's death, his mother lived in object penury. Goldsmith's relatives helped him thrice to emigrate to find work for a living. He was sent to Edinburgh to study medicine. He spent two years there, ostensibly engaged in study, but his heart was in tramping about the countryside and the streets with his flute to support him. He travelled various countries on the continent of Europe depending for food and lodging on humble cottagers. He had nothing to pay except to play upon his flute. For sometime he worked as a bookseller's hack. He took to teaching and acting but he didn't succeed in either of them.

He was in such straits that he ran errands and slept with professional beggars. He failed in the examination for surgeon's mate at a hospital and reverted to hack-writing. He was not an expert of any specific discipline but he did try his hands on natural history, English history, and Roman history for writing. During this period, he developed a graceful picturesque style of writing. Surely a great writer was in the making. His work *Letters of a Citizen of the World* appeared anonymously in *The Public Ledger* in 1762. These letters were professed to be from the hand of a Chinese philosophers visiting England. The contents consisted of a critique of contemporary genteel English manners.

Goldsmith made acquaintance with Dr. Samuel Johnson and was admitted to his literary circle which included Blake, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Garrick etc. The publication of *The Traveller* established his reputation as a man of letters. It was a reflective poem which narrated his early experience. He came out with a short novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*: regarded as a classic of the period. He wrote a lengthy poem *The Deserted Village* (1770). It was haphazardly planned but it was full of exquisite passages. Credit goes to him for having written such comedies as- *The Good Natur'd Man* (1768) and *She Stoops to Conquer* (1774). In spite of his recurring income obtained from various book sellers for hack compilations, his debts amounted to 2000 pounds. He died of nervous fever in 1774 and was buried at the Temple. Dr. Samuel Johnson's epitaph on Goldsmith reads- "He touched nothing that he did not adorn"- was the most correct and concise estimate of Goldsmith's genius. Grace was a salient feature of his style. Goldsmith was duly admired as a poet by his contemporaries. Unfortunately *The Traveller* is hardly read today but his poem *The Deserted Village* is more widely known. Both of these poems are products of his genuinely poetical and imaginative genius. These poems anticipate the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)

*The Vicar of Wakefield*, a novel by Goldsmith was a landmark in the history of the England novel. Its characterization is very skilful. There was nearly always an undercurrent of

decent humour. His play *The Good Natur'd Man* was like a gust of fresh air in a sickroom. Critics regarded it a dramatic failure on the ground that the people were not ready to abandon lachrymosity for laughter. His play, *She Stoops to Conquer* was a grand success. It had all the elements which constituted the perfect farce and sentimental comedy. This was the kind of comedy that Goldsmith desired on the stage.

### 16.1.2 Goldsmith and his Age: His Career and Character

It was the fag end of the reign of George II. Thanks to Dr. Samuel Johnson, the pursuit of literature was becoming an independent profession. A man of letters was getting free from the patronage of the aristocracy. Whitehead was the Poet Laureate of England. Griffiths- a bookseller of Paternoster Row- engaged Goldsmith as a hack upon his *Monthly Review*. For board, lodging and a little sum of pocket money, he wrote stray articles and reviews. When his landlord was carried off to prison for debt, Goldsmith, being very compassionate by nature, could not endure the distress of the man's wife. He pawned his new clothes and handed her the money. Hearing this, Griffiths- thought of Goldsmith as a villain and threatened him with extreme measures. Goldsmith began to write articles for the *Bee*, *The Busybody* and *The Lady's Magazine* and made literary reputation for himself. His book *An Inquiry into The State of Polite Learning in Europe* appeared in Europe. In course of time Bishop Percy, Garrick, Smollett, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dr. Samuel Johnson became his acquaintances. He was given a guinea an article in the *Public Ledger*. His *Chinese Essays* were first published in it. He would have prospered if his extravagance had not kept him nearly always in debt. He was fond of hosting suppers and had developed a taste for fine clothes. He liked colored events. He was sponged upon for guineas and half-guineas by some rascals who knew that he was a man of kind disposition. A guinea could never remain for a single day in his pocket. He was in the employment of Newbery (a bookseller). He worked very hard throughout the day and spent his evening in the company of Dr. Samuel Johnson at Sir Joshua's, or at the Literary Club. When he left Newbery, he landed in trouble. James Boswell record in his *Life of Dr. Johnson*: "I received one morning" said Dr. Johnson "a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress and as it was not in his power to come to me- begging that I could come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed and found that his landlady had him arrested for his rent at which he was in a great passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extorted. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked into it, and saw its merits; told the landlady I would soon return; and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for £60. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a hightone for having used him so ill."

This novel was *The Vicar of Wakefield* and its publisher was the younger Newbery. The novel proved to be the turning point in Goldsmith's literary career. He presented the

credentials of his creative genius in the form of this novel. Oliver Goldsmith was a man of infinite good humour: "Where he had aroused the scorn of the Club by foolish attempts at wise discourse, his simplicity would in a moment transform contempt into friendship." Though he was guilty of vanity, recklessness, and obstinacy, he was entirely free from the "sins of the spirit." He was essentially as lovable a person as his own Vicar of Wakefield. In his physical appearance, he was a shrewd-looking, low-statured man with five feet five inches, with a big round head, a pale scarred face with a bulging forehead and large pouting lips. His friend Dr. Samuel Johnson was a giant figure over six feet. Let me imagine when the two writers met in Fleet Street London, Goldsmith in his gaudy-coloured velvet and gold lace must have looked a curious personality. He was known as "Nall" or "Nolly" or "Goldy" or Poor Little Goldsmith" Beauclerk writes about him: "We were entertained as usual by Goldsmith's absurdities." Masson remarks, "He is a positive idiot except when he has pen in his hand." His friend Garrick commented upon Goldsmith's grave: "Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll, Who wrote like an angel but talked like poor Poll."

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## 16.2 Socio-political Ethos of Goldsmith's Time

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### 16.2.1 Socio-Political Ethos of Goldsmith's Time

As has been referred to earlier, literary patronage of the artist by aristocrats was coming to an end. Writers began to depend now more on their own resources and on the reading public, and no less on the booksellers as we have seen in the case of Goldsmith. He was aware of all the hard grind and drudgery of literary activities. The social content, therefore dominated literary themes. Goldsmith was highly conscious of his audience and reading public. In the last decades of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth century the writers did thrive under certain patronage. Some one supported the writers directly and even appointed them to some civil or ecclesiastical office. The writer did not make a living professionally by writing books. Goldsmith was one of those eminent writers who challenged and revolted against such patronage. Dr. Samuel Johnson famous letter to Lord Chesterfield in February 1755 was a declaration of the writer's independence. Goldsmith had no patron and therefore, he had to face abject penury though the popular market was expanding. Alexander Pope in *The Dunciad* speaks of "caves of poverty and poetry." Henry Fielding records the hand-to-mouth existence of a hack writer in *Author's Farce*. Thomas Amory in his novel *John Bunce* tells us how Edmond Curil- the bookseller and his hacks sleep in relays- three in a bed. Dr. Samuel Johnson in his *Life of Savage* paints the sordid poverty and relentless struggle of writers. But soon the profession was on the way to independence. The writer could earn his bread and butter by writing in prestigious journals, newspapers and magazines. *The Spectator* extended the circle of readers. Addison took upon himself the task of educating the public morality and healthy criticism and amused his readers by satire and curious chapter-sketches. A. Pope's translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were sold like hot cakes. They were not dedicated to any aristocrat or a prime but to Congreve. *The Gentleman's Maga-*

*zine* was founded in 1731 and several other periodicals reviewing and popularizing contemporary literature were started. The eighteenth century fiction had large number of readers. Richardson's success with *Pamela and Clarissa*, Sterne's with *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* < Macpherson's *Ossian* were portents of an epoch of popular literary taste and sentiment.

The political and economic conditions of England fostered the growth of social consciousness along with literary proliferation. This was the trend of practical humanism. This period was known as the age of prose and reason. A general desire for social harmony prevailed as a sequel to the Civil War and the persecution of dissenters after Lord Monmouth's rise in 1685. The remarkable feature of the period was the evolving social order with reason being the key attribute. Economic progress was certainly responsible for the growth of social consciousness. Daniel Defoe speaks admiringly of the adundance of things, rising buildings, and new discoveries during this period. The organic conception of society linking together the high and the low, the illustrious and the obscure, emerged though the class distinctions had not entirely disappeared. More and more attention was given to the management of public affairs. John Locke desired that men should seek knowledge of material causes and effects of things and that they should develop such arts, engines and inventions which could contribute to a happier state of society. The Bank of England was well established now. Traders, merchants, bankers, industrialists, etc preoccupied themselves with a new sophisticated economic order. They were as respectable in society as in the domain of literature. Sir Andrew Freeport in *The Spectator* is a remarkable character in the context. He is admired for indefatigable industry, strong reason, and great experience." James Boswell writes: "In this great commercial country, it is natural that a situation which produces much wealth should be considered very respectable."

This was "The strongest assertion of the Middle class" which has emerged very strongly. The men of all sects and creeds were infact, now willing to take up business as the very philosophy of life. England was heading for industrial property. The commercial prosperity got centred in London. It became an unfailing object of literary reflection. We find it in Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*, Belinda's dressing table, loaded with "All Arabia" breathing from perfume boxes; tortoise-shell and ivory stuck in combs, the various offerings of the world have been assembled for her make-up. Commercial prosperity in the Royal Exchange is well reflected in Addison's *Spectator* (Paper No. 9). Ken interest began to be evinced in foreign lands as one notices in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Throughout the eighteenth century, interest in the East was mounting: The South Sea Company was launched in 1711 and The South Sea Bubble burst in 1720. Commodore Anson Circumnavigated the globe during (1740-44), Byron's grandfather commodore John Byron did it in (1764-66) Captain Wallis did it in 1775-78. Captain Cook made his several expeditions in 1768-71, 1772-75 and 1776-79. Eastern trade constituted a small part of British economy. Burke's brilliant speeches refer admiringly to England's Eastern trade and its brighter prospects. This trade was the



channel for a wave of Oriental interest which spread in entire Europe. The European came to know of oriental wisdom and virtue and enlightened moral values.

### 16.2.2 Literary Trends in the Eighteenth Century England

From the imaginative and literary writings of the period we get a glowing perspective of the countryside. Daniel Defoe painted it rosy in his *Tour*; Thomson's *Seasons*, Gay's *Rural Sports*, Dyer's *Fleece*,.....all breathe an atmosphere of growing prosperity. We may contrast it with Oliver Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* mourning the lost happy peasantry of his youthful days: Under the enclosure system, the private estates replaced the old communally formed open fields and a large number of the laborious were dispossessed.

It would be a blunder to forget that the evolving social order in the eighteenth century was accompanied by violence. It is worthwhile to refer to Anti-Roman Catholic Popish Plot, and attempts to block James II's succession and also Lord Shaftsbury's plot against James II in favour of Lord Monmouth. Dryden has dexterously exposed it in his satires- *The Medal* and *Absalom and Achitophel*. Then came Lord Monmouth's revolt, the anti-Dissenter riots, provoked by the Tory Occasional Conformity Bill, of which the literary offshoot was Daniel Defoe's parody- *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* and the bitter Tory campaign against Marlborough in which Jonathan Swift's *Conduct of The Allies* accelerated his fall. Intrigues of parties, on the verge of Civil War in the Whig Replacement of the Stuart line by the Hanoverian one in 1714, personal animosities during the Prime Ministership of Walpole, John Wilkes's disputed election to the Parliament and lastly the American War of Independence followed. The French Revolution in 1789 was a great event in France: The fort of Bastille was stormed by the masses. Queen Antoniette was guillotined. The age of Oliver Goldsmith was ripe for socio-political upheavals and drastic changes.

The literature of the period, therefore, reflects the irresistible desire of the people to maintain law and order. Reason was the very basis of desirable social order. Saint Evremond tells us: "We love plain truth; good sense has gained ground upon the illusions of fancy and nothing satisfies us now-a-days but solid reason." Dryden thought of "wit" as "propriety of words and thoughts adapted to the subjects". Pope defined it as "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed." Hume, harping upon the Aristotelian idea of the constant universals of human nature, sought to explore it further. Therefore, wit in the eighteenth century meant not only stating and formulating the familiar truths but it was also impressing upon mankind with fresh ways of thinking and discovering new truths. We can understand why propriety, perspicuity, elegance, and cadence came to be highly valued both in poetry and prose: The discourse or content was to be happily-worded. Horace's *Art Poetica* and Boileau's *L'Art Poetique* ruled the day. Jonathan Swift in his *Treatise on Good Manners and Good Breeding* emphasized the value of good conversation and etiquette. Oliver Goldsmith in his *Account of the Augustan Age* bears witness to the accomplishment of these values: A happy union of literature and polite society marked the salient feature of the age.

These Augustans debt to the past cannot be underestimated. Though they lived their own lives, had their moral ideas, and developed their life style. They showed deep respect for the way the things had been done in the glorious classical past. They regard their lives collective as an integral part of a majestic ideal of humanity. They tried their best to emulate the great masters. Dryden quotes Longinus in his Preface to *Troilus and Cressida* (1669): "Those great men whom we propose to ourselves as patterns of our limitation serve us as a torch which if lifted up before us, to enlighten our passage and often elevate our thoughts as high as the conception we have of our author's genius." It is stated in the 86<sup>th</sup> *Guardian*: "The ancient were fountains of good sense and eloquence." Burke's letter to a member of National Assembly (1791) speaks volumes of England's disdain of Rousseauesque anarchy.

### 16.2.3 Goldsmith and his Contemporarily Drama and Fiction

Oliver Goldsmith was a playwright of no little importance. In his play *She Stoops to Conquer*, there is an under current of humour and satire. It marks a sort of relief from the turgidity of the heroic drama to lighter stuff.

The gaiety, cynicism and the strain of immorality of the Restoration period are fully reflected in this witty play. It satirizes the social behaviour of a certain class of English society. It is a sentimental comedy which reacts against Restoration wit and licence. Goldsmith's play *She Stoops to Conquer* incorporates a genuine spirit of comedy.

Satire came very handy to the Restoration playwrights and which was the legitimate element of drama had degenerated into farce. A new impulse now came to sustain the drama: it was sentimentalism. Sentimentality and bourgeois respectability went hand in hand. The desire to attack licentious morality of the period, the finer intelligence of Henry Fielding got deviated from the stage to the novel. He came out with *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. Tom, the bastard, he sats the natural impules of genuine humanity against hypocritical and calculating 'vartue.' While determining the grow of the sentimental movement we should take into account the bourgeois concept respectability and a stiff calculating commercialism. It is to be noted that a counter movement began at the same time. It is crystal clear in Richardson's *Pamela* and Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Sentimentalism which encroached upon the drama and the fiction of the day expressed decadent morals. A weaker form of sentimentality implies unmanly pity, lack of moral strength, and puritanical hypocrisy. Jean Jaqucs Rousseau is sentimental but his sentimentalism is saturated with humanitiansm. Sentimentalism, which penetrated the comedy of the period, banished murth and laughter from the stage. Etherege, Wycherley, Farquhar, Congreve might be rather lax in their moral tone but they did catch the genuine spirit of comedy. They not only provoked mirth and laughter but they also recognised the social problems of the days.

It was hyporisy masquerading as sentimentalism. The sentimental movement may be traced back to the early eighties of the seventeenth century. The political interest of the public during the last phase of Charles II, the reign of James II and the Rebellion contributed to the

dramatic literature as the people had become highly aware of religious, political and moral forces interacting in society. The Puritan ascendancy and commercialism went side by side and the net outcome was hypocritical and calculating virtue. Henry Fielding with his unclouded reason was the first writer to react against it.

### **16.2.4 The Sentimental Comedy and Goldsmith's Reaction**

#### **Against it**

The recurring theme of the sentimental comedy is that their licentious characters get reformed in course of time. Sir Richard Steele started the vogue of the Sentimental comedy. He threw all his weight on the side of morality as he believed in domestic happiness, in faithful love and in the goodness of the human heart. His play *The Tender Husband* emphasizes honorable love as the very basis of domestic happiness. The Sentimental comedy as a brand of drama was saturated with emotional sense and sentimental platitudes: it was divorced from realism. It was centred primarily on the middle class of society. It depicted the world of fops and dandies and fashionable ladies and exposed all follies and vices of society. Sentimental comedy was, thus, a degenerated mode of drama. In it, we had tears in place of laughter, melodramatic situations instead of intrigue, heart-breaking heroines and passionate lovers, and honest servants instead of rogues, gallants and witty damsels. The role purpose of the sentimental comedy, it seemed, was to make men and women charitably honourable. Sheridan and Oliver Goldsmith were the pioneers of anti-sentimental movement and reached sharply against the sentimental comedy. As early as 1759, Goldsmith condemned it in *The Present State of Polite Learning She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) stormed the sentimental comedy more successfully than *The Good Natured Man* (1768) did. Sheridan's play *The School for Scandal* is it equally brilliantly. Oliver Goldsmith rightly conceived amusement to be the primary objective of comedy. Sheridan comments the humour- 'guaint and sly' gay invention and satire should be the proper stuff comedy. The Sentimental comedy which substituted emotional tension and tears for mirth and laughter, and trotted forth mawkish sentiments was called into being by bourgeois pseudo-morality, humbug, and horror of vulgarity. It was called genteel comedy as it rejected the absurdities of the vulgar, the follies and vices as 'low'. Goldsmith reacted against this mode of spurious comedy in which the virtues of private life are exhibited rather than vices exposed, and the distresses rather than faults of mankind make our interest. In these plays the characters were good and exceedingly generous and extravagant.

If they happened to have faults or foibles, they were applauded. Thus follies instead of being ridiculed, were commended. Goldsmith reacted against this genteel comedy. He proposed to restore humour and nature to comedy. He regarded humour and comic situations as the very *sine qua non* of comedy. Lachrymose and Maudlin sentimentality was no substitute for humour and character. *She Stoops to Conquer* by Goldsmith revived the spirit of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with Sheridan's play *The School for Scandal* the English drama reached the culmination of anti-sentimental movement.

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### 16.3 A Pointwise Summary of the Contents of this unit

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1. Oliver Goldsmith was an eighteenth century writer. He had a versatile literary genius.
2. He was an Irish by birth. He started from scratch, as he had very humble origins.
3. He worked as a bookseller's hack as a young man.
4. He contributed his articles to the newspapers and journals.
5. He tried his hand at writing poems, plays, fiction, essays etc.
6. He came in close contact with Dr. Johnson and his circle of scholars.
7. Goldsmith had an extraordinary sense of humour.
8. He was a man of sweet disposition and remained in debt in spite of lucrative income. He hosted suppers to his friends and spent rather extravagantly.
9. He was called 'Nolly' or 'Goldy' among his chums.
10. Dr. Johnson admired his literary genius and sense of humour.
11. Goldsmith was not patronised by any prince or nobleman.
12. The eighteenth century was a period of developing trade and commerce. It was also a period of political and religious upheavals.
13. The Sentimental comedy, which excluded mirth and laughter, depended largely on lachrymose and maudlin emotion. It did not depict genuine humanity and nature. The French influence was rather morbid on the English drama.
14. Goldsmith and Sheridan reacted sharply against the Sentimental Comedy.
15. Goldsmith revived the spirit of Elizabethan/Shakespearean comedy with humour and depicted genuine human reality.
16. His play *She Stoops to Conquer* was a brilliant success.
17. Goldsmith had wonderful potentialities as a novelist. His novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* speaks volumes of his mind.

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### 16.4 Glossary

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**Penury:** Abject poverty. For example, Goldsmith lived in penury in his early days.

**Lsd:** Pound shilling and penny. (Please note that LSD is a drug)

**genteel:** Polite in an exaggerated manner.

**hack:** A hack was the helper who performed odd jobs in offices. Goldsmith was himself a bookseller's hack.

**lachrymosity:** A tendency or instinct to be moved to tears. For example, women become lachrymose in emotional moments.

**disposition:** nature or temperament. For example, Goldsmith was a man of kindly disposition.

**Guinea:** a gold coin.

**sentimental:** emotional.

**licentious:** sexually immoral.

**Curate:** An assistant to a Vicar.

**Vicar:** A church priest.

**Protestantism:** A Christian sect which came into existence in protest of the corrupt practices of Roman Catholic church in the sixteenth century.

**Guillotin:** A French device of execution: The person to be executed was made to stand on a platform and a sharp blade operated with a lever and chopped off his head like a fruit.

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## 16.5 Self Assessment Questions

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1. Who was the bookseller's hack? What was his work?

.....

.....

.....

2. Tell us the titles of at least two plays by Goldsmith.

.....

.....

.....

3. Why was Goldsmith in debt?

.....

.....

.....

4. Name a few renowned friends of Goldsmith in London.

.....

.....

.....

5. Who was called ‘Noll’ or ‘Nolly’ or ‘Goldy’
- .....
- .....
- .....
6. Who wrote the famous biography of Dr. Samuel Johnson ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
7. Who was Dr. Samuel Johnson ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
8. Refer to a few socio-political events of the eighteenth century in England.
- .....
- .....
- .....
9. What is Goldsmith’s grievance in *The Deserted Village* ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
10. What do you mean by genteel comedy ?
- .....
- .....
- .....
11. Why is Sheridan associated with Goldsmith ?
- .....
- .....
- .....

12. Was his acquaintance and a great admirer of his genius.

---

## 16.6 Answers SAQs

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1. Oliver Goldsmith.
2. The Good Natur'd Man and She stoops to conquer.
3. He was a man of sweet disposition and remained in debt in spite of lucrative income. He hosted suppers to his friends and spent rather extravagantly.
4. Bishop Percy, Garrick, Smollett, Sir Joshua Reynolds and Dr. Samuel Johnson.
5. Oliver Goldsmith.
6. James Boswell.
- 7.
- 8.
9. Growth of social consciousness along with literary proliferation well establishment of Bank and trade propered.
10. *The Deserted Village* mourning the lost happy peasantry of his youthful days: Under the enclosure system, the private estates replaced the old communally formed open fields and a large number of the laborious were dispossessed.
11. The Sentimental comedy which substituted emotional tension and tears for mirth and laughter, and trotted forth mawkish sentiments was called into being by bourgeois pseudo-morality, humbug, and horror of vulgarity. It was called genteel comedy as it rejected the absurdities of the vulgar, the follies and vices as 'low'
12. She *Stoops to Conquer* by Goldsmith revived the spirit of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* with Sheridan's play *The School for Scandal* the English drama reached the culmination of anti-sentimental movement.

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## 16.7 Let Us Sum Up

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Goldsmith recorded his ideals against the Sentimental comedy in his *Essay on the Theatre: or A Comparison Between Laughing and Sentimental Comedy* 1772. He attacked the Sentimental comedy in his preface to *The Good Natur'd Man* and placed his cards plainly upon the table.

He was a versatile genius: He tried his hand poetry. He wrote *The Deserted Village* and *The Traveller*. He wrote a novel *The Vicar of Wakefield* and a number of essays; and plays- *The Good Nautr'd Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. He would have achieved greater success if he had devoted himself entirely to drama. However his achievement as

writer of comedies is remarkable. In the play *She Stoops to Conquer* he recreates the atmosphere of Farquhar's *Beaux Strategem* and revitalises a breath of genuine humanity to drama stifled with excessive emotions.

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## 16.8 Review Questions

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1. Describe the life of Oliver Goldsmith as a Bookseller's hack.
2. Write a note on Goldsmith's friendship with Dr. Samuel Johnson.
3. What were the personal qualities of Goldsmith?
4. Comment upon the socio-political conditions in the eighteenth century England
5. Write an essay on the eighteenth century Drama with reference to comedy.
6. Why did Goldsmith react to the Sentimental Comedy.
7. Make an assessment of Goldsmith as a writer.

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## UNIT-17

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### OLIVER GOLDSMITH: *THE DESERTED VILLAGE*

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#### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Substance of *The Deserted Village*
  - 17.2.1 The Scenery of Auburn Prior to Modernization
  - 17.2.2 The Pen-Portrait of The Village
  - 17.2.3 The Portrayal of the Village Master
- 17.3 The Tyrant's Hand
- 17.4 References and Explanatory Annotations
- 17.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 17.6 Answers to SAQs
- 17.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.8 Review Questions
- 17.9 Bibliography

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#### 17.0 Objectives

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The study of Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* has its extraordinary significance with reference to the current phase of burgeoning and urbanizing villages and small towns in India, though it is written in the specific context of the latter half of the eighteenth century in England. In common parlance, India is a 'developing' country. It simply means that rural scenario is being replaced by urban scenario. Deforestation, mining, exhausting natural resources, conversion of agricultural land into residential blocks, etc. mark the pace of burgeoning development. A hamlet is becoming an overgrown village, and village, in turn, is becoming an ugly town with industrialization. There is water pollution due to chemical waste; sound pollution due to honking horns; and air pollution due to smoking factory chemicals and vehicles running upon the roads. There is a hiatus between the affluent class and the paupers- The Haves and Have-nots. The economic disparity and inequality cannot be bridged by the welfare state policies and the acts of Parliament.

The very purpose of the in-depth study *The Deserted Village* is to expose the indifference of the capitalist class to the working classes. "Where wealth accumulates, men decay"

is the moral message of Goldsmith to be grasped by the modern man, particularly the Indians. The so called development is taking place at the cost of finer values, healthy environment and natural sources and resources. Oliver Goldsmith advocates serene, calm, beautiful and happy living environment as in rural areas where Nature is benign. The concrete jungles- the residential colonies built on the land meant for agricultural produce are destroying something infinitely fine in human existence. Deforestation is very much like massacre and genocide as it amounts to destroying the ecological environmental conditions of healthy and happy living. It is like expelling Adam and Eve from Paradise once again. Goldsmith lamented as peasantry was dispossessed of the land and the villages were depopulated. The hamlets stood desolate and delapidated in the vogue of urbanization. The purpose of this study is to underline how Goldsmith cautioned his contemporaries against the systematic destruction of the land and the depopulation of the peasantry without thinking of their rehabilitation and healthy living. He regarded the heartless capitalists- tyrants and usurpers and noted 'the rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay.'

The theme of the *The Deserted Village* inevitably relevant to current Indian phase of development which means the requisition of agricultural land by the affluent at throw away prices. They erect the 'jungles of concrete' for residential and commercial purposes. They are quite indifferent to the small farmers and their existence. It is high time *The Deserted Village* was prescribed in all the Indian Universities at the under-graduate or post graduate level to impress upon the students that haphazard aggressive and inordinate destruction of the rural area in the vogue of sophisticated modernization and urbanization was a bane rather than a blessing. It meant starvation, penury and misery for the millions of native peasants who are being dispossessed of their lands under the strategy of the heartless commercial and market policies. Even felling a green tree is a greater crime than murdering an individual.

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## 17.1 Introduction

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In the famous poem, *The Deserted Village*, which was published in 1770, Oliver Goldsmith revisits Auburn <sup>1</sup> a village of which he had fond memories. It marks the depopulation brought about through the emigration of its peasant community and the influx of monopolising capitalists. Goldsmith mourns over the unfortunate and morbid state of society in which "wealth accumulates and men decay." Using images of the land in the poem, he conveyed the sense of what it was like to live in the country during the phase of burgeoning and modernization and how it had systematically grabbed the land of the native inhabitants. Their industrious efforts to maintain it had gone waste.

During the period when *The Deserted Village* was written, the labouring classes were in a very unfortunate situation: Changes in land ownership had led to shortages in labour and abject poverty had become the inevitable destiny of the working class. Small farmers were forced out of their possessions in the countryside. The big landowners rolled in riches and lived ostensibly in luxury. They caused bitter heart burning, moral indignation and poverty to

the working class. The poet and social reformers were not unaware of this stark reality and thus a larger fraction of poetry made a choice of the suffering labouring class and the excessive growth of luxuries and wealth of the bourgeois as its major themes. Therefore Oliver Goldsmith's poem *The Deserted Village* is a critique of luxury, or alternatively an engagement with the reality of miserable life of the labouring class. Oliver Goldsmith dedicated this poem to Sir Joshua Reynolds<sup>2</sup> and conveyed to him his personal reasons for writing it about the depopulation of the English countryside. He was sure that the poetic fraternity would disagree with his depiction of the countryside as a God-forsaken place of misfortune, desolation and adversity: He justified his motive in the following lines:

"I know you all will object (and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion) that the depopulation it deplors is no where to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarcely make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege, and that all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I here attempt to display." This asseration underlines Oliver Goldsmith's attachment and an unfailing sense of belonging to the natives of the countryside. He believes that it is vital that their lives were portrayed truthfully and lucidly, perhaps without the characteristic frills of pastoral poetry. However, in the same letter, he goes on to write, "In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries..... For twenty or thirty years past, it has been the fashion to consider luxury as one of the greatest national advantages..... Still, however, I..... continue to think those luxuries- prejudicial to states- by which so many vices are introduced and so many kingdoms have been undone." This second and the more strongly worded argument indicates that Oliver Goldsmith was morally indignant by the sinister spell of the luxury in England. Surprisingly enough James Boswell- the biographer of Dr. Johnson- records in his *Life of Samuel Johnson* that it was Dr. Johnson himself who wrote the last four lines of *The Deserted Village*. "Dr. Johnson..... favoured me by marking the lines which he furnished to Oliver Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, which are only the last four." These lines are the following:

*That Trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay*

*As ocean sweeps the labour'd mole away,.*

*While self-development power can time defy*

*As rocks resist the billows and the sky. 3*

(ll. 427-430)

Goldsmith had his grand-nephew who also had his Christian name "Oliver". He wrote a poem by way of response to his grand-uncle- Oliver Goldsmith. The title of his poem reads *The Rising Village* in which younger 'Oliver' elaborates the rise of communities in *Acadia*

(the area covers *Nova Scotia* and New Brunswick in Canada <sup>4</sup>now) His response is suggestive of newer opportunities in the world. *The Rising Village* was published in 1825.

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## 17.2 The Substance of *The Deserted Village*

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### 17.2.1 The Scenerio of Auburn Prior to Modernization

The poet feels rather nostalgic as he falls into reminiscences of early years. He had preoccupied himself with boyish sports in those days and loitered in the verdurous and charming countryside. He had noticed ‘the shelter’d cot’, ‘the cultivated farm’, and ‘the hawthorn bush’ He relished being under the shadowy sprawling trees and idled away his time. There was a church on the top of the “neighbouring” hill overlooking the village. The countryside was a familiar resort for old and young alike. It was a veritable ‘arcadia’ for young lovers’ clandestine rendezvous.

*“The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,*

*For talking age and whispering lovers made !*

.....

*And all the village train, from labour free*

*Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree!*

.....

*And still, as each repeated pleasure tired*

*Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired*

.....

*The swain mistrustless\* of his smutted face,*

*While secret laughter litter’d round the place,*

*The bashful virgin’s side-long looks of love,*

*The matron’s glance that would looks reprove.<sup>5</sup>*

*These were thy charms, sweet village/ sports like these.”<sup>5</sup>*

ll (13-31)

Goldsmith recreates the atmosphere of the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. The poet seems to record the bucolic paradisaical scenario of the charming countryside before the process of urbanization/ modernization would destroy it. But the “charms” as depicted (in the lines quoted above) fled away:

*"These were the charms- but all these charms are fled.*

*Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,*

*Thy sports are fled, and thy charms wuithdrawn;*<sup>6</sup>

But the charms of the rural scenario were evenescent. 'The tyrant's hand' ransacks everything-

*Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand\* is seen,*

*And Desolation saddens the green:*

*One only master grasps the whole domain,*

*And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain."*<sup>7</sup>

L 8(37-40)

A change for the worse takes place. Small peasants are the losers of their farms as one big landlord usurps them all. "The tyrant's hand" is "The spoiler's hand"

*"Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all*

*And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall*

*And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand*

*Far, far away thy children leave the land"*<sup>8</sup>

( ll 47-50)

The veritable paradise that countryside was, was ruined. The 'sweet' village became desolate as the natives left it for good. Depopulation of peasants, thus led to the desolation of the village. It surely doesn't augur well:

*Ill fares the land, to hasting ill's a prey,*

*Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.*

*Princes and Lords may flourish, or may fade;*<sup>9</sup>

*A breath can make them, as a breath has made:*

*But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,*

*When once destroyed, can never be supplied.*<sup>10</sup>

Goldsmith believes that tampering with tillage and peasantry will incur permanent national loss. Peasantry, therefore, should not be destroyed or displaced at any cost. The poet regrets that capitalists/ haves who have come into money by trade, buy the land for purpose of pleasure and display by dispossession peasantry.

*“But times are altered; trade’s unfeeling train  
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain;  
Along the lawn, where scatter’d hamlets rose,  
unweildy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose;”*<sup>11</sup>

The bucolic scenario has undergone a drastic change! The *rural* spectacle has turned *rururban* and would be *urban* very soon. The peasants before the process burgeoning began, were very complacent and innocent people. They were ignorant of mercenary motives. They lived apparently calm and quiet lives like the village as described in Gray’s *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*:

*“Far from the madding crowd’s ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learn’d to stray;  
Along the cool sequester’d vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.”*<sup>12</sup>

Goldsmith describes the peasants of Auburn-

*“A time there was,.....  
When every rood of ground maintain’d its man,  
For him light Labour spread her wholesome store,  
Just gave what life required, but gave no more;  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.”*<sup>13</sup>

The villagers of Auburn and those of the countryside as described in Gray’s *Elegy* are more or less the same. It is not unusual that Gray and Goldsmith as brilliant contemporaries strike similar notes. The English peasantry, apparently, with its ‘calm desires’ and ‘peaceful’ life-style was not ‘demanding’ by nature. It was self-satisfied by ‘rural mirth and manners’. But the change has destroyed all that was happy, innocent and healthy.

*“These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,  
and rural mirth and manners are no more,  
Sweet Auburn ! parent of the blissful hour  
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant’s power, .....”*<sup>14</sup>

When the poet revisited the village, he remembered the place where ‘Once the col-lage stood, the hawthorn grew-’ and his nostalgic memories “turned the past to pain.”

The earlier rural perspectives of greenery, cottages, hawthorn bushes, humble bow-

ers, were inspiring enough 'to husband out' 'life's taper' and 'keep the flame from wasting, by repose.' <sup>15</sup> The poet 'felt like a hare' whom 'hounds and horns' pursued. The very environment seem rather hostile and the poet as visitor experienced a sense of "resignation."

Sweet sounds 'at evening's close,' "the village murmur," "The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung," 'the noisy geese that gobbled o'er the pool,' 'the playful children just let loose from school'; 'the watch-dog's voice that bay'd the whispering wind' ..... all this 'sweet confusion' has disappeared for ever and for ever. What remains is **desolation** and ruined hamlet.

*"But now the sounds of population fail.  
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,  
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread  
But all the bloomy flush of life is fled-  
All but yon widow'd, solitary thing,  
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring,  
She, wretched matron, - forced, in age, for bread,  
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,  
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,  
To seek her nightly shed, weep till morn, -  
She only left of all the harmless train,  
The sad historian of the pensive plain." <sup>16</sup>*

ll. 125-136

It is a pathetic scene of desolation, ruin and depopulation. It is no exaggeration to state that it is in such lines that Goldsmith's pen acquires the quality of the brush. The poet becomes the painter of human suffering caused by penury. Picturesqueness is an inevitable characteristic of Goldsmith's poetry. It has been amply illustrated in *The Deserted Village*.

### 17.2.2 The Pen-Portrait of The Village

The poet introduces the village preacher. Geoffrey Chaucer introduced the Parson in his *Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. He follows Chaucer's method of character portraiture in the following lines:

*Near Yonder copse, where once the garden smiled,  
And still where many garden-flower grows wild,*



*There, where a few torn shrubs **the place** disclose,  
 The village preacher's modest mansion rose  
 A man he was to all the country dear,  
 And passing rich with forty pounds a year.  
 Remote from towns he ran his goldy race,  
 Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change, his place;  
 Unskilful he to fawn, or seek for power  
 By doctrines fashion'd to the varying hour,  
 For other aims his heart had learn'd to Prize.  
 More bent to raise the wretched than to rise,  
 His house was known to all the vagrant train;  
 He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain;  
 The long-remember'd beggar was his guest,  
 Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;  
 The ruin'd spendthrift, now no longer proud  
 Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allow'd.*<sup>17</sup>

II. (137-154)

This passage is reminiscent of Chaucer's pen-portrait of the Parson in *The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*. Let me quote the relevant lines of Parson's description from Chaucer's *Prologue*.

*A good man was ther of religioun,  
 And was poure Persoun of a toun;  
**But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk;**  
**He was also a learned man, a clerk,**  
**That Cristes gopel trewely wolde preche;**  
**His parishens devoutly wolde he teche;**  
**Benygne he was, and wonder dilight.**  
**And in adversitee ful pacient;***

.....

***He coude in litel thyng have suffiaunce:***

.....

*This noble ensample to his sheepe he yaf.  
That firste he wroghte and afterward he taughte,  
Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte.  
And this figure he added eek therto,  
That if gold ruste what shal iren doo ?*

.....

***But dwelte at hoom and kepte wel his folde  
So that the wolf ne made it not myscarie,  
He was a shepherde, and nought a mercenarie,  
And though he hooly were and virteous\_***

.....

*But in his techyng discreet and benygne.*

.....

*A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys:  
He waited after no pomp and reverence,  
Ne maked him a spiced conscience,  
But Cristes loore, and his Apostles twelve,  
He taughte, but first he folwed it hym-selve. <sup>18</sup>*

II. (478-529)

The village preacher in *The Deserted Village* is portrayed in the manner of Chaucer's art of characterization and personal portraiture. It is really very surprising how perfectly Goldsmith imitates Chaucer. The village preacher not only had 'the milk of human kindness'<sup>19</sup> but he was the very cow. He shared the qualities of Chaucer's Parson:

*The broken soldier <sup>20</sup>, kindly bid to stay,  
Sat by his fire, and talk'd the nightaway;  
Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,  
Shoulder'd his crutch, and show'd how fields were won.*

*Pleased with his guests, the good man learn'd to glow,  
 And quite forgot their vices in their woe;  
 Careless their merits or their faults to scan,  
 His pity gave ere charity began,  
 Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,  
 And even his failings lean'd to virtue's side;  
 But is his duty prompt at every call,  
 .....as a bird each fond endearment tries  
 To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,.....<sup>21</sup>*

ll.(155-168)

The village preacher of *The Deserted Village* is a true Christian. He has compassion, mercy, the sentiment of self-less service. His heart goes out for the wretched, invalid and unfortunate people. What Jesus Christ was to lepers, the village preacher was to the suffering natives of the place. He went out the way to console and comfort them and enlightened them as a paragon of virtues- his personality was ideally compatible with his religious and spiritual preoccupations. The welfare of the suffering wretches pleased him beyond measure. The poet, in his mind's eye, saw an aura of divinity about the preacher though he was nearly always surrounded by suffering and unfortunate villagers.

*“But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.  
 As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form.  
 Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,  
 The eternal sunshine settles on its head.”<sup>22</sup>*

ll 182-192

### **17.2.3 The Portrayal of the Village Master**

The portrayal of the village master follows immediately after that of the village preacher. This teacher looked apparently very strict. Every truant knew his tough exterior and could trace the day's disasters in his morning face. Even if the students did not understand his jokes, they giggled with artificial joy. At times he frowned but he was kind at heart.

*A man severe he was, and stern to view;  
 I knew him well, and every truant knew:  
 Well had the boding tremblers learn'd to trace*

*The days disasters in his morning face;  
 Full well they laugh'd with counterfieted glee,  
 At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;  
 Full well the busy whisper, circling round,  
 Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frown'd.  
 Yet he was kind,.....<sup>23</sup>*

II. (196-205)

The natives of the village wondered at his seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge and skill. He could make predictions about “terms and tides,”<sup>24</sup> he could measure ‘lands’, he could even ‘gauge’<sup>25</sup> and he could argue very well. The rustics were amazed with his thundering elocution and learned words. They wondered how his small head had such a vast fund of knowledge:

*“.....For even though vanquish'd he could argue still,  
 While words of learned length and thundering sound  
 Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around;  
 And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,  
 That one small head could carry all he knew.”<sup>26</sup>*

II.212-216

The poet further describes that ‘past is all fame’ The very spot where he ‘triumphed’ is forgotten. The poet describes nostalgically how the place gives a desolate and deserted look. The ‘parlour splendors’ of the ‘festive place’ are gone for good. Goldsmith with his camera-eye narrates the ‘transitory splendors’ of Auburn:

*Near yonder thorn, that lifts its head on high.  
 Where once the sign-post caught the passing eye.  
 Now lies that house where nut-brown draughts inspired,  
 Where gray-beard mirth and smiling toil retired,  
 Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,  
 And news much older than their ale went around.  
 .....  
 The white wash'd wall, the nicely sanded floor;*

*The varnish'd clock that click'd behind the door,*  
*The chest,.....*  
*A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day,*  
*The pictures placed for ornament and use,*  
*The twelve good rules,<sup>27</sup> royal game of goose,<sup>28</sup>*  
*The hearth, except when winter chill'd the day,*  
*With aspens boughs, and flowers, and fennels gay;<sup>29</sup>*

II. (219-234)

The poet regards that the tottering mansion of the master might crumble down to debris any time. This was the place when the villagers flocked to ease their tensions and dissensions of their humdrum existence. They felt relieved of their 'daily care'. This was the place where 'the farmer's news', 'the barber's tale,' 'the woodman's ballad' refreshed them. The coy maid passed on to them a cup of foaming ale. This rural environment was very congenial, salutary, charming, artless, and spontaneous. There was no affectation or undue sophistication. There was mirthful and frolicsome life style- unenvied, unmolested, and unconfined.

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### 17.3 The Tyrant's Hand

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*.....Could not all*  
*Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall ?*  
*Obscure it sinks,.....*  
*Thither no more the peasant shall repair,*  
*To sweet oblivion of his daily care,*  
*No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale,*  
*No more the woodman's balled shall prevail;*  
*No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear,*  
*Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear,*  
*The host himself no longer shall, be found,*  
*Careful to see the mantling bliss<sup>30</sup> go round:*  
*Nor the coy maid,.....,*  
*Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest,*

*.....let the rich deride, the proud disdain,  
 These simple blessings of the lowly train;  
 To me more dear, congenial to my heart,  
 One native charm, than all the glass of art.  
 Spontaneous joys, and owns their first born sway.  
 Lightly they frolic over.....  
 Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined. <sup>31</sup>*

The poet writes feelingly that the so called development or sophistication or burgeoning or urbanization or modernization does no good. The toiling pleasure has sickened into pain: "The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay." 'A splended and happy land' has been usurped by 'wanton wealth': capitalists and industrialist have begun to flock from all over the world. The affluent one usurps the space for 'lake' to extend his lawn, for his stable, equipage and his pack of hounds-

*"But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade  
 With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed.  
 And even while Fashion's brightest arts decoy.  
 The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy ?  
 Ye friends to truth, Ye statesmen, who survey  
 The richman's joys increase, the poor's decay.  
 .....  
 Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore,  
 And shouting Folly hails them from her shore:  
 Hoards,.....,abound  
 And richman flock form all the world around.  
 .....The man of wealth and pride  
 Takes up a space that many poor supplied:  
 Space for lake, his park's extended bounds,  
 Space for horses, equipage, and hounds:  
 .....*

*Indignant spurns the cottage from the green:*

*Around the world eavh neeful product flies.”<sup>32</sup>*

ll.259-283

The poet’s grievance is that mounting import and export has changed the rural scenario. In the vogue of industrialization and commercialization, the wealthy are taking possession of the sprawling land and in its barren state, it like a maiden fleeced of all her charm, and from the smiling land, the mournful peasant leads his humble band: The very garden has been reduced to a vertitable graveyard.

*“.....For all the luxuries the world supplies:*

*While thus the land, adorn’d for pleasure all,*

*In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.*

*As some fair female, unadorned and plain.*

*Secure to please while youth confirms her reign.*

*Slights every borrowed charm that dress suplies,*

*Nor shares the with art the triumph of eyes:*

*.....In all the glaring impotence of dress*

*Thus fares the land by luxury betray’d*

*In nature’s simplest charm at first array’d*

*.....*

*While, scourged by famine, from the smiling land*

*The mournful peasant leads the humble band.”<sup>33</sup>*

ll.286-296

Common land was undivided and unenclosed (fenceless) land upon which all the members of a community had certain well-defined rights, as of cultivation, pasture, cutting-wood etc. By Enclosure Acts (which were numerous after 1760 ),this land was often converted into private property. The small farmers were getting dispossessed of their agricultural fields. Luxury was pampered and mankind (peasantry) was thinned. The pleasures of the rich were **extorted** from poor peasants grievance. The aristocrats, courtiers are dressed in rich imported brocade while the artisans such as tailors are on the verge of starvation. The affluent ones display their wealth with great pomp and show in mid night masquerades with glaring torches, rattling chariots, gorgeous costumes. On the other hand, poor houseless women shivering with cold or shrinking from the shower deplore the ‘luckless hour’

*“Where, then, Ah! where shall poverty reside,  
 To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride.  
 If to some common fenceless limits <sup>34</sup>stray'd,  
 He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,  
 Those fenceless fields **the sons of wealth** divide,  
 And even the bare-worn common is denied.  
 .....ten thousand baneful arts combined  
 To pamper luxury and thin mankind:  
 To see each joy the sons of pleasure know  
 Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe:  
 Here while the courtier glitters in brocade,  
 There the pale artist plies the sickly trade;  
 Here while the proud their long-drawn pomp display,  
 There the black gibbet<sup>36</sup> glooms beside the way:  
 The dome <sup>37</sup>where pleasure holds her midnight reign,  
 Here, richly decked, admits the gorgeous train:  
 Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,  
 The rattling chariots <sup>38</sup>clash, **the torches glare**  
 .....Ah, turn thine eyes  
 Where the poor houseless shivering female lies:  
 She once,.....,in village plenty bless'd.  
 .....  
 Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,  
 And pinched with cold, and, shivering from the shower,  
 With heavy heart deplores the luckless hour.<sup>40</sup>*

II.(304-334)

The small peasants of 'sweet Auburn' are reduced to unendurable penury-suffering from hunger and shivering with cold-are constrained to go abegging. Things produced in factories are exported to various European countries by Cargo ships. The age of trade and



commerce is in full swing.

“E’en now,.....,by cold and hunger led,  
At proud men’s doors they ask a little bread!  
Ah,no. To distant climes, a dreary scene,  
Where half the convex world intrudes between,  
Through torrid with fainting steps they go.  
Where wild *Altama* <sup>41</sup> murmurs to their woe.  
The various terrors of the horrid shore,.....  
Where crouching tigers <sup>42</sup> wait their hapless prey. <sup>43</sup>

ll339-355

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## 17.4 References and Explanatory Annotations

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1. ‘Auburn’-It is a figment of Goldsmith’s imagination only. *The Deserted Village*. Has idealized reminiscences of Lissoy- the Irish village where Goldsmith spent a few years of his boyhood. The perspective of the poem is undoubtedly more English than Irish.
2. Sir Joshua Reynolds was a distinguished member of Dr. Samuel Johnson’s literary circle. Garrick, Burke, Goldsmith, and many other scholars from various walks of life assembled from time to time and discussed literary, socio-political, theological and historical topics with great enthusiasm.
3. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) ll 427-430
4. See Canadian Poetry:From The Beginnings Through The First World War.
5. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) ll13-31  
  
\*Also, ‘mistrustless’ (l-27) means ‘unconscious’ here
6. Ibid,ll.34-36
7. Ibid, ll.37-40  
  
\*’The tyrant’s hand’ (l.37) refers to the capitalist who requisitioned the agricultural land at throw away prices.
8. Ibid, ll. 47-50
9. Ibid, ll. 53-54 Burns wrote in “A Cotter’s Saturday Night: Princes and lords are but

the breath of kings” l.165

10. Ibid, ll. 51-56
11. Ibid, ll. 63-66
12. Thomas Gray: The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard. (stanza 19, ll. 73-76
13. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) l 1 .57-62
14. Ibid, ll. 73-76
15. Ibid, ll. 87-88
16. Ibid, ll. 125-136
17. Ibid, ll. 137-154. Oliver Goldsmith dedicated The Traveller to his brother Henry- a clergyman. He was “a man who, despising fame and fortune, had retired to happiness and obscurity with an income of £40 a year. The preacher in The Deserted Village is however, a composite portrait of Oliver Goldsmith’s father, his brother Henry and others.
18. Geoffrey Chaucer: A Prologue to The Canterbury Tales. ll .478-529
19. This phrase occurs in Shakespeare’s Macbeth (Act I, Sc. V. l.15)
20. “The broken soldier” is a demobilized veteran of the Seven Years War.
21. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) ll.155-168
22. Ibid, ll.188-192
23. Ibid, ll. 196-205
24. The phrase ‘Terms and tides’ means “times”. ‘Term’ is the word in connection with law courts and universities (as in “Michaelmas term”); and ‘tide’ is used for church festivals (as in “Easter tide.”)
25. ‘Gauge’ means ‘to measure the capacity of a barrel’
26. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) ll. 212-216
27. The Twelve Good Rules of conduct ascribed to King Charles I, were printed on a broadside with a rude woodcut of the king’s execution. The rules are the following:
  - “1. Urge no healths.
  2. Profane no divine ordinances.

3. Touch no state matters.
4. Reveal no secrets.
5. Pick no quarrels.
6. Make no comparisons.
7. Maintain no ill opinions.
8. Keep no bad company.
9. Encourage no vice.
10. Make no long meals.
11. Repeat no grievances.
12. Lay no wagers.”

Queen Victoria kept a copy of these rules in the servants hall, Windsor Castle.

28. ‘Royal Game of Goose’ means a game of ‘Parchesi’ (pronounced-pa’sheeze) or ‘Ludo’ which is played by two persons with dice on a board divided into compartments on some of which a goose was painted. “Royal” is a complimentary epithet often prefixed to the name of certain games, without any apparent significance.
29. Oliver Goldsmith; The Deserted Village. (The Fountain Press Chicago.1965) ll.219-234
30. Ibid (l-248) ‘The mantling bliss’ means ‘a cup of foaming ale.’
31. Ibid ll.237-256
32. Ibid ll. 259-283. The natural beauty of the countryside which has been forcibly fleeced and pulled out. Metaphorically, it is ‘Dropadi’s *Cheerharan* by Dushasan as in *The Mahabharata* (by Vyas)
33. Ibid, ll.286-296
34. Ibid, ll. 305 Common land was the undivided and unenclosed land upon which all the members of a community had certain rights, as of cultivation, pasture-wood cutting, etc. This land was often converted into private property as per Enclosure Acts which were numerous in the 1970s.
35. Ibid, l.316. In the vogue of industrialization and factory production and imported goods, the indigenous artisans- such as weavers, tailors, shoe-makers, etc. suffered. It became practically difficult for them to subsist. It would be quite relevant to make a pointed reference to John Goldsmith’s short story ‘*Quality*’. The story traces the decline of a shoemaker’s occupation. In a commercial environment of booming indus-

try, mechanized production and shrewd market strategies, the craftman finds his survival threatened. The forces out to abolish his work are too overwhelming to resist. In the story, Gessler is ruined. Galsworthy gives us a dignified and tender portrayal of an artisan and his downfall. The story, like Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*, raises larger issues. It refers to the decadence and decline of human manual skill and worth, and a way of life which has succumbed to the irresistible forces of burgeoning and urbanization along with the dictates of the capitalist class.

36. Ibid, l.318. "Black gibbet" means 'gallows'. In Goldsmith's time, the crimes (such as horse-stealing, forgery, shop-lifting, etc.) were numerous, and gallows were erected in every important quarter of the city.
37. Ibid, l. 319. The word 'dome' refers to such popular places of entertainment and amusement as Ranelagh and Vauxhall.
38. Ibid, l.322. 'Chariots' are carriages/coaches.
39. Ibid, l.322. In those days of dark streets, the fashionable midnight masquerades went about accompanied by link-boys bearing torches.
40. Ibid, l.(304-334)
41. Ibid, l. 344. 'Altama' refers to the Altamaha river in Georgia.
42. Ibid, l.355. Talking about tigers is an example of poetic licence since there are no tigers in the locale named in the poem. Goldsmith, however, has noted in his *Animated Nature* [1774(iii0244)] "There is an animal of America which is usually called the Red Tiger, but Mr Buffon calls it the cougar, which, no doubt, is very different from the tiger of the east. Some, however, have thought proper to rank both together, and I will take leave to follow their example.
43. Ibid, ll.339-355
44. Ibid, l.418. Torno's cliff's are near Como on the shore of Lake Como in Italy.
45. Ibid, l.418. Pambamarca is mountain Quito, Ecuador.
46. Ibid, ll.421-426

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## 17.5 Self Assessment Questions

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1. What does Goldsmith records in the *Deserted Village*?

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2. What is a locate in poem called.

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3. To whom is the poem dedicated.

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4. Who was Sir Joshua Reynold ?

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.....

5. What does Goldsmith regrets ?

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.....

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6. Who wrote the last four lines of The *Deserted Village* ?

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.....

.....

7. Why is countryside depicted as Paradise ?

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.....

.....

8. What are capitalists visualised as ?

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.....

.....

9. Which characters are realistically drawn and can be compared to whom ?

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10. Explain how the poet was in his true self?

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11. What does the poet disapproves ?

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12. What is the usefulness of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* in present India ?

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13. Who appreciated Oliver Goldsmith as a genius ?

.....

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## 17.6 Answers to SAQs

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1. *The Deserted Village* records Oliver Goldsmith's deep grievance against aggressive burgeoning and undesirable urbanization. He regards how the capitalists have requisitioned and usurped the land of small peasants.
2. The locale is a village called 'Auburn'.
3. The poet was dedicated the poem to Sir Joshua Reynolds,
4. Sir Joshua Reynolds was a distinguished member of Dr. Samuel Johnson's circle of learned friends and associates.

5. Goldsmith regrets the phase of depopulation of the peasants and dispossession of their lands. It caused object misery and poverty.
6. The last four lines of The Deserted Village were written by Dr. Samuel Johnson. There is Boswell's evidences available about it.
7. The countryside as depicted by the poet is very much like Paradise as it was a tranquil happy, beautiful, unpolluted place before modernization took place.
8. The capitalists are visualised as tyrants ransacking the charming countryside for commercial gain.
9. The character sketches of the village preacher and the village master are realistically worked out. The method, as resorted to by Goldsmith, reminds us of Chaucer's style of characterization in The Prologue to Canterbury Tales.
10. The feelings of the poet are genuine. His heart goes out for the peasantry of the countryside.
11. The poet disapproves of luxury and pomp and show of the capitalist class.
12. Thematically, *The Deserted Village* has relevance in the present phase of development in India. In the private sector, the capitalists are requisitioning rather usurping the agricultural lands of small peasants to build industrial or residential complexes in the rural pockets.
13. Dr. Samuel Johnson appreciated Oliver Goldsmith as a genius.

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## 17.7 Let Us Sum Up

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Goldsmith winds up *The Deserted Village* with sadness. He feels a sense of loss. He calls his period "these degenerate times of shame". Goldsmith says that 'half the business of destruction has been done' and 'rural virtues' have left "the land". According to him "sweet poetry" is "first to fly where sensual joys invade." He makes an impassioned appeal to Poetry- the loveliest maid and the 'nurse of every virtue' to redress the miseries and adversities of the inclement times. The poet has a sneaking notion that Poetry- source of all his bliss- might depart and climb upon Torno's cliffs<sup>44</sup> or Pambramarca's<sup>45</sup> side, 'where equinoctial fervours glow or winter wraps the polar world in snow. The poet's idea is that where commercialization or mercenary greed gains momentum, the nobler and finer arts dwindle, decline and perish away. The poet hoping against hope invokes the Spirit of Poetry:

*"Still let thy voice prevailing over time,  
Redress the rigours of th' inclement clime;  
Aid slighted Truth with thy persuasive strain;  
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;*

*Teach him that state of native strength possess,  
Though very poor, may still be very blest;’’<sup>46</sup>*

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## 17.8 Review Questions

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1. What were the causes which motivated Oliver Goldsmith to write The Deserted Village?
2. Present a full-length portraiture of the village preacher making pointed references to his virtues.
3. Make an attempt to recreate the rural scenario before depopulation and modernization took place in Auburn.
4. What does the poet mean by “the tyrant’s hand.”? Elaborate.
5. Write an introductory note on the village Master.
6. What is the relevance of Goldsmith’s Deserted Village to India today?

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## 17.9 Bibliography

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## UNIT - 18

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### OSCAR WILDE: THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

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#### Structure

- 18.0 Objectives
- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 About The Age
- 18.3 About The Author
- 18.4 The gist of the play the importance of Being Earnest
- 18.5 Extracts from the play
- 18.6 Self Assessment Questions
- 18.7 Answers to SAQs
- 18.8 Let us Sum up
- 18.9 Review Questions
- 18.10 Bibliography

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#### 18.0 Objectives

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After going through this unit you will be able to understand the age :

- The age of Oscar Wilde.
- The story of the play the importance of Being Earnest.
- Meaning of important words.
- The style of Oscar Wilde.

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#### 18.1 Introduction

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In this unit you are going to study the play ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ written by Oscar Wilde. This unit will also make you familiar with the age of Oscar Wilde. The gist of the play will enable you to understand the story/plot of the play. The extracts will make you familiar with the style and wit of Oscar Wilde.

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#### 18.2 About the Age

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Nineteenth century England was an age that saw a number of changes taking place in society. Agriculture was giving way to industry in many cities of England. Industries were set up

in cities and these industries began employing men, women and children. In order to improve the condition of the workers, a number of laws were passed.

Nineteenth century England also saw the rise of the Romantic poets. The first generation romantic poets were William Wordsworth, S.T. Coleridge and Robert Southey. The second generation poets were John Keats, P.B. Shelley and George Byron. These writers stressed on values like friendship and freedom. They also praised nature and the magical effect of nature on man.

In the first half of Nineteenth century the influence of the Romantic poets was remarkable. This period also saw the arrival of humanist like Thomas Carlyle who felt that man should not worship the machine. Important thinkers like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and James Mill stressed on education of the masses. The utilitarian theory was formulated by Bentham and James Mill supported it. They praised the industrial policy of England.

In 1850, England held the Grand Exhibition. England displayed her wealth before the world. She was now a great and powerful country. Queen Victoria was ruling on the throne and except for the Crimean war, no other war was fought during her time. A number of soldiers died in the Crimean war (1856 - 58). The government decided to improve the medical and health services offered to the people, Florence Nightingale was a young nurse who went to Crimea to treat the patients. The nursing profession gained popularity after this war.

During the time of Queen Victoria, there were two other well known people. These were Lord Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning. Tennyson's poems were full of energy and enthusiasm. Browning's poems recalled past splendor and dealt with death.

The important novelist of this age were: Jane Austin, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Thomas Hardy, Mrs. Gaskell and George Gissing. These writers, through their stories, wished to improve society. The common people or the working class was focussed upon in the works of these writers. Two other important writers were Harriet and Matthew Arnold and they also stressed on the importance of education. Arnold was an Inspector of schools and he was keen to promote the learning of the masses.

The influence of Karl Marx and Frederik Engels was felt in this age. These two communist thinkers called for an overall unity amongst the working class. "The communist manifesto" was written by Karl Marx in 1848.

The best known plays of nineteenth century were all written towards the end of the century. Dramatic activities gained importance after years of neglect. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the rise of poetry, fiction and non-fiction prose. The reason why there was a neglect of drama was because public taste seemed inclined towards novels rather than various plays. Moreover, the great popularity of Shakespeare prevented many aspiring playwrights from experimenting with anything new. Even eminent writers like Wordsworth, Shelley, Browning failed to write plays.

In mid-nineteenth century France “well-made” plays and “realistic” dramas were very popular. The influence of the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen was evident in the French plays that were being written. The nineteenth century England drama was developed by T.W. Robertson who wrote the play “Caste” in 1867. Two other dramatists were Henry the play “*The Silver Key*”. Pinero wrote the play. “*The second Mrs Tanqueray*” in 1893. Both James and Pinero contributed to make use of well dramatic or sentimental effects but with an undercurrent of social significance.

Henrik Ibsen also influenced nineteenth century British drama. Ibsen’s plays dealt with social problems. He focussed on the moral role in society in the play *Pillars of Society* (1877) in Ibsen’s play *A Doll’s House* (1879). Ibsen created the “new Woman” who had a mind and intelligence of her own. In England, Ibsen’s most ardent admirer was George Bernard Shaw. Shaw added his own rich wit and humour to the ideas derived from Ibsen.

Oscar Wilde’s plays were extremely well constructed (well - made plays). The plots had elements of suspense and surprise. Wilde also focussed in his plays on the double standards of morality in society. The speech, manners and attitudes of the upper class are all very well presented in Wilde’s plays. In Wilde’s plays there are influences of the comedy of manners. The comedy of manners first became popular during the Restoration period in seventeenth century England. King Charles II had enjoyed these types of plays during his years of exile in France. On his return to England he wanted these types of plays to be written. As its name suggests, this form of comedy delights in holding up a mirror to society and laughing at the follies of humanity especially of the aristocracy. These plays revolve around certain basic themes like sex (friendship, marriage, divorce, jealousy), money and the conflict between generations. Wilde presented before the viewers a tiny cross - section of society and the viewers could recognize their manners and customs. There is satire in these plays. Values and social norms like propriety and respectability are upheld. Wilde’s plays are simple and easy to understand.

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### 18.3 About the Author

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Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin in 1854. His father Sir William Wilde was a reputed eye and ear specialist. He was said to have invented the operation for Cataract. Dr. William Wilde was awarded the title of Knighthood for his services to medicine. (The King or Queen of England gives this honour of Knighthood. After receiving that honour “Sir” is added before the name of the person.)

Sir William Wilde’s wife Lady Jane Francisca Wilde was a very educated lady. She wrote articles and poems for the Irish nationalist newspaper The Nation.

Until the age of nine, Oscar Wilde studied at home. Thereafter he went to school. Later he studied at Trinity College of Dublin where he won the Berkeley gold medal. He was awarded a scholarship to Magdalen college, Oxford. He studied here from 1874 to 1878

and came under the influence of the Aesthetic movement. ( a movement that popularized the theory art for art's sake. The movement was a reaction to John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham's policy of utilitarianism. Bentham and Mill attached importance to things that were useful and material.)

After graduate from Oxford. Here he fall in love with Florence Balicombe, but she did not marry him. She got engaged to another person. On hearing of her engage, Wilde decided to leave Ireland permanently. The next six years were spent in London, Paris and United States where he travelled to deliver lectures.

In between Wilde's lecture tours, Wilde found time to meet poets like Henry Long fellow and Walt Whitman. In Wilde's lectures the influence of John Ruskin (The British writer) and Walter Pater (The British poet) was much noted. While lecturing at London, Wilde met constancy Llyed, daughter of Horace Llyed, Queen Victoria's council. In 1884, constancy was visiting Dublin, when Oscar Wilde was in the city to give lectures, he proposed to her and they got married on May 29, 1884. Constancy was an educated person. She spoke several European language and was out spoken in her views. The couple had two sons, Cyril (born in 1885) and Vyuyan (born in 1886).

Oscar Wilde's reputation as a writer made him aware of the importance of the year. He used words with great care and his writings were full of wit. From 1887 to 1889 he served as editor of *The Woman's world* and became interested in the concept of the 'new woman' popularized by Hebrik Ibsen (Norwegian dramatist) and G.B. Dhaw (British dramatist).

In 1894, Oscar Wilde brought out Lord Arthur Samile's crime and other stories. A house of Pomeranians as well as a collection of short stories.

In 1892, Oscar Wilde made an importance entry into London's theatrical world with the production of "Lady windermere's fan", which he described as 'one of those modern drawing room plays with pink lamp school.

Oscar Wilde's next English play was titled *A Woman of no importance*. It was stayed in London in 1893. In 1895 Oscar Wilde's third major play. *An Ideal Husband* was produced. *The Importance of Being Ernest*, the most famous of Wilde's plays, was stayed on 14 February 1895 in London.

At Oxford Wilde came into contact with Alfred Douglas. History records that Oscar Wilde and Alfred Douglas had a very close friendship and close physical relationship. Alfred's fallow John Sholto Douglas, 9<sup>th</sup> morgues of Queensberry did not approve of this friendship. He tried to break up Wilde's and Alfred's friendship. History records that Wilde forced a trial for his relationship with Alfred. Wilde was sent to prison in 1895. He was sentenced to two years hard labour. Prison was unkind to Wilde's health. He was released on may 19, 1897. He spent his last three years penniless, in self imposed exile from society and artiste cereals. On his death bed in Paris, he was Baptised and made a member of the Roman Catholic Church. He died of cerebral meningitis on 30 November, 1900.

Oscar Wilde was much influenced by John Ruskin and William Morris. The aesthetic movement represented by William Morris and the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti was much popularised by Wilde.

Wilde was a supporter of socialism. He and George Bernard Shaw both advocated for socialism. Like Shaw, Wilde also was extremely witty. His quick repartees won him a lot of admirers. Oscar Wilde's rich and dramatic Portrayal of human condition during the reckon with. Wilde wrote many short stories, plays and poems that continue to inspire millions around the world.

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#### **18.4 The Gist of the Play the Importance of Being Ernest**

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The Importance of being Ernest is a play by Oscar Wilde. It was staged on February 14, 1895 at the St. James's Theatre in London. It was Wilde's most popular play.

Algernon, an aristocratic <sup>1</sup> young Londoner, pretends <sup>2</sup> to have a friend named Bunbury. Bunbury lives in the country and is frequently <sup>3</sup> in ill health: Whenever Algernon wants to avoid an unwelcome social obligation, <sup>4</sup> he makes an ostensible <sup>5</sup> visit to his "sick friend". He calls this practice 'Bunburying'.

Algernon's best friend Ernest Worthing lives in the country but makes frequent visits to London. When his friend leaves his silver cigarette case in Algernon's morning room, Algernon finds and inscribes on it: "From little Cecily, with her fondest love to her dear uncle Jack."

Algernon's friend goes by the name of Jack while he lives in the country. Jack pretends to have a brother by the name of Ernest. Ernest is supposed to reside <sup>6</sup> in London. Jack gives the impression <sup>7</sup> that Ernest requires frequent attention. When Jack is in London, he assumes <sup>8</sup> the name of Ernest. Jack is also a 'Bunburyist'.

Jack wants to marry Algernon's cousin Gwendolen, but he cannot do so for two reasons. First, Gwendolen seems to love him merely for his name, Ernest, which she thinks to be the most beautiful name in the world. Second, Gwendolen's mother, the terrifying <sup>9</sup> Lady Bracknell, does not approve <sup>10</sup> of Mr. Worthing. She is horrified <sup>11</sup> to learn that he Jack was adopted <sup>12</sup> as a baby after being discovered in a handbag at a railway station.

Jack's description of Cecily appeals to Algernon and Algernon is keen to meet her. Jack opposes <sup>13</sup> this. One day Algernon comes to Jack's house. Algernon pretends to be Ernest because Cecily has imagined herself to be in love with Ernest. Cecily falls for Algernon who is disguised <sup>14</sup> as Ernest.

Jack meanwhile, decides to do away with Bunburying, and returns to his country estate with the news that his brother Ernest has reportedly <sup>15</sup> died in Paris. He (Jack) is forced to abandon this claim by the presence of "Ernest". Algernon who threatens <sup>16</sup> to expose Jack's double life <sup>17</sup> if the latter does not play along. <sup>18</sup>

Gwendolen runs away from London and her mother to be with her lover. When

Gwendolen and Cecily meet for the first time each insists that she is the one engaged to Ernest. Lady Bracknell arrives in pursuit of her daughter Gwendolen. She refuses to allow Jack's marriage with Gwendolen (remember Jack pretends that his name is Ernest): Jack does not agree to grant permission to Cecily to marry Algernon who also pretends that his name is Ernest.

The situation is saved by the appearance of Cecily's governess, Miss Prism. As she and Lady Bracknell recognise each other with horror it is revealed that, when working many years previously<sup>22</sup> as a nursemaid for Lady Bracknell's sister, Prism had inadvertently<sup>23</sup> lost a baby boy in a handbag. When Jack produces the identical handbag, it becomes clear that he is Lady Bracknell's nephew and Algernon's older brother.

With Jack's identity proven, only one thing now stood in the way of the young couple's happiness: Gwendolen's insistence that she could only love a man named Ernest. The question is what is Jack's real first name? Lady Bracknell informs him that he was named after his father, a general, but cannot remember the general's name.

Jack looks eagerly in a military reference book and declares that the name is in fact Ernest after all. He has all along been telling the truth inadvertently.

"The happy couple namely Gwendolen and Jack, Cecily and Algernon, Miss Prism and the Reverend Canon Chasuble embrace one another. Lady Bracknell complains to Ernest, "My nephew, you seem to be displaying signs of triviality."<sup>24</sup> Ernest replies to Aunt Augusta, "I've now realized for the first time in my life the vital<sup>25</sup> importance of being Ernest."<sup>26</sup>

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## 18.5 Extracts from the play

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The sub title of the play is "A Trivial Comedy for serious people". There are eleven characters in this play: These are-

- (i) John Worthing, J.P. (J.P. means Justice of Peace)
- (ii) Algernon Moncrieff
- (iii) Reverend Canon Chasuble, D.D. (Reverend is a title for a member of the clergy.) (D.D. means doctor of Divinity theology)
- (iv) Mr. Gribbsby, solicitor (Solicitor is a lawyer who does not actually appear in court, except in the lower court, but acts as an agent in legal matters and prepares case for trial)
- (v) Merrimon, Butler (A male headservant whose duties include general supervision of the household, especially the serving of food and drinks)
- (vi) Lane, Manservant
- (vii) Moulton, gardener

(viii) Lady Bracknell

(ix) Honorable Gwendolen Fairfax

(x) Cecily Cardew

(xi) Miss Prism governess (governess is a lady who takes care of small children and teaches them. In upper class private households it was a common practice to employ governesses to teach children. Nineteenth century upper class Englishmen followed this practice.)

## **Act I**

The play opens in Algernon's flat in Piccadilly, London the room is very well furnished. A piano is being played in the adjoining room. Lane is arranging afternoon tea on the table and after the music has ceased, Algernon enters.

Algernon: Did you hear what I was playing Lane?

Lane: I didn't think it polite to listen, Sir.

Algernon: I am sorry for that, for your sake. I don't play accurately anyone can play accurately but I play with wonderful expression. As far as the piano is concerned, sentiment is my forte. I keep science for life.

Lane: Yes, sir.

Algernon: And speaking of the science of life, have you got the cucumber sandwiches cut for Lady Brackwell?

Lane: Yes, sir.

(Algernon takes two sandwiches and begins to eat them. He then picks up the house keeping record book and notes that eight bottles of champagne had been consumed on Thursday night when Lord Shorenian and Mr. Worthing had come for dinner. Algernon is a bachelor and serve superior quality of wine. The servant Lane remarks that in married households the champagne is rarely of a superior quality)

(A little later Algernon receives Mr Ernest Worthing. Ernest Worthing is also called Jack. Both Jack and Algernon talk about neighbor who can be very boring and in whose company there is no amusement. Jack notices the cucumber sandwiches.)

Jack: .....why cucumber sandwiches?..... who is coming to tea?

Algernon: Oh! Nearly Aunt Augusta and Gwendolen.

Jack: How perfectly delightful!

Algernon: Yes, that is all very well well. But I am afraid Aunt Augusta won't quite approve of your being here.

Jack: May I ask why?

Algernon: My dear fellow, the way you flirt with Gwendolen is perfectly disgraceful. It is almost as bad as the way Gwendolen flirt with you.

Jack: I am in love with Gwendolen. I have come up to town expressly to propose to her.

Algernon: I thought you had come up for pleasure?.....I call that business.

Jack: How utterly unromantic you are!

Algernon: I really don't see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I'll certainly try to forget the fact.

Jack: I have no doubt about the, dear Algy. The Divorce Court was specially invented for people whose memories are so seriously constituted.

Algernon: You behave as if you were married to her already. You are not married to her already and I don't think you ever will be.

Jack: Why on earth do you say that?

Algernon: Well, in the first place girls never marry the men they flirt with. Girls don't think it right.

Jack: Oh, that is nonsense!

Algernon: It isn't. It is a great truth. It accounts for the extraordinary number of bachelors that one sees all over the place. In the second place, I don't give my consent.

Jack: Your consent!

Algernon: My dear fellow, Gwendolen is my first cousin. And before I allow you to marry her, you will have to clear up the whole question of Cecily. (Rings bell.)

Jack: Cecily! What in earth do you mean? What do you mean, Algy, by Cecily? I don't know anyone of the name of Cecily.

(Enter Lane)

Algernon: Bring me that cigarette case Mr Worthing left in the smoking-room the last time he dined here.

Lane: Yes, sir. (Lane goes out.)

Jack: Do you mean to say you have had my cigarette case all this time? I wish to goodness you had let me know. I have been writing frantic letters to Scotland Yard about it. I was very nearly offering a large reward.



Algernon: Well, I wish you would offer one. I happen to be more than usually hard up.

Jack: There is no good offering a large reward now that the thing is found.

(Enter Lane with the cigarette case on a salver. Algernon takes it at once. Lane goes out.)

Jack: I simply want my cigarette case back.

Algernon: Yes; but this isn't your cigarette case. This cigarette case is a present from someone of the name of Cecily, and you said didn't know anyone of that name.

Jack: Well if you want to know, Cecily happens to be my aunt.

Algernon: Your aunt !

Jack: Yes. Charming old lady she is too. Lives at Tunbridge Wells. Just give it back to me, Algy.

Algernon: (retreating to back of sofa). But why does she call herself little Cecily if she is your aunt and lives at Tunbridge Well ? (Reading.) "From little Cecily with her fondest love."

Jack: (moving to sofa and kneeling upon it). My dear fellow, what on earth is there in that ? Some aunts are tall, some aunts are not tall. That is a matter that surely an aunt may be allowed to decide for herself. You seem to think that every aunt should be exactly like your aunt ! That is absurd ! For Heaven's sake give me back my cigarette case. (Follows Algernon round the room.)

Jack then tells Algernon that he Jack was adopted by Thomas Cardew, when Thomas Cardew was on his deathbed he made Jack guardian of Cecily Cardew, the granddaughter of Thomas Cardew. Cecily lived in the country under the charge of her admirable governess Miss Prism. Since Jack was Cecily's guardian he had to always maintain a high moral standard. He found it difficult to maintain a high moral standard all the time, so he pretended to have a younger brother by the name of Ernest and this boy Ernest lived in the town called Albany. Ernest is supposed to get into the most bad situations, Algernon then tells Jack that Jack is a Bunburyist because Jack has invented a younger brother called Ernest. (Jack does not have any younger brother in reality) Algernon has invented a friend called Bunbury who is an invented and lives in the country Jack has invented a younger brother who lives in the town.)

Even though Algernon says that Jack is a bunburyist, Jack refreshes to accept the term.

Jack: I'm not a Bunburyist at all. If Gwendolen accepts me, I am going to kill my brother, indeed I think I'll kill him in any case. Cecily is a little too much interested in him. It is rather a bore. So I am going to get rid of Ernest. And I strongly advise you to do the

same with Mr..... with your invalid friend who has the absurd name.

Algernon: Nothing will induce me to part with Bunbury, and if you ever get married, which seems to be extremely problematic, you will be very glad to know Bunbury. A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.

Jack: That is nonsense. If I marry a charming girl like Gwendolen, and she is the only girl I ever saw in my life that I would marry, I certainly won't want to know Bunbury.

Algernon: Then your wife will. You don't seem to realize, that in married life three is company and two is none.

Jack (sententiously). That, my dear young friend, is the theory that the corrupt French Drama has been propounding for the last fifty years.

(Shortly afterwards Lady Augusta discusses with Algernon Mr Bunbury's health.)

Lady Bracknell: It is very strange. This Mr Bunbury seems to suffer from curiously bad health.

Algernon: Yes; poor Bunbury is a dreadful invalid.

Lady Bracknell: Well, I must say, Algernon, that I think it is high time that Mr Bunbury made up his mind whether he was going to live or to die. This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others. Health is the primary duty of life. I am always telling that to your poor uncle, but he never seems to take much notice..... as far as any improvement in his ailments goes. I should be much obliged if you would ask Mr Bunbury, from me, to be kind enough not to have a relapse on Saturday, for I rely on you to arrange my music for me. It is my last reception and one wants something that will encourage conversation, particularly at the end of the season when everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much.

Algernon: I'll speak to Bunbury, Aunt Augusta, if he is still conscious, and I think I can promise you he'll be all right by Saturday. You see, if one plays good music, people don't listen, and over the programme I've drawn out, if you will kindly come into the next room for a moment.

(It is interesting to note that Algernon has taken a promise from Jack that Jack would take him out for dinner in case Algernon arranges a meeting between Jack and Gwendolen.)

Algernon, therefore, as per his plans with Jack takes lady Bracknell to the music room and Jack is left alone with Gwendolen. This gives them the opportunity to be together and express their feelings for each other.)

Jack (nervously): Miss Fairfax, ever since I met you I have admired you more than any girl.....I

have ever met since.....I met you.

Gwendolen: Yes, I am quite aware of the fact. And I often wish that in public, at any rate, you had been more demonstrative. For me you have always had an irresistible fascination. Even before I met you I was far from indifferent to you. (Jack looks at her in amazement.) We live, as I hope you know Mr Worthing, in an age of ideals. The fact is constantly mentioned in the more expensive monthly magazines, and has reached the provincial pulpits I am told: and my ideal has always been the love some one of the name of Ernest. There is something in that name that inspires absolute confidence. The moment Algernon first mentioned to that he had a friend called Ernest, I knew I was destined to love you.

Jack: You really love, Gwendolen?

Gwendolen: Passionately !

Jack: Darling! You don't know how happy you've made me.

Gwendolen: It suits you perfectly. It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations.

Jack: Well, really, Gwendolen. I must say that I think there are lots of other much nicer names. I think, Jack, for instance, a charming name.

Gwendolen: Yes, Mr Worthing, what have you got to say to me?

Jack: You know what I have got to say to you.

Gwendolen: Yes, but you don't say it.

Jack: Gwendolen, will you marry me? (Goes on his knees.)

Gwendolen: Of course I will, darling. How long you have been about it! I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.

Jack: My own one, I have never loved anyone in the world but you.

Gwendolen: Yes, but men often propose for practice. I know my brother Gerald does. All my girl-friends tell me so. What wonderfully blue eyes you have, Ernest! They are quite, quite blue. I hope you will always look at me just like that, especially when there are other people present.

It is significant to note that Gwendolen loves the name "Ernest" and she finds names like "Jack" and "John" very dull and boring. Jack (Ernest) proposes to her. He goes down on his knees and requests her to marry him. Gwendolen is very happy and tells him that she is equally eager to marry him. At this moment aunt Augusta (Lady Bracknell) returns from the music room. She is surprised to see Jack kneeling and asks him to rise. Gwendolen tells her mother that she intends to marry Jack (Ernest) and she has

become engaged to him. Lady Bracknell then takes an interview of Jack. She also asks him about his income. She then asks him about his parents.

Jack: I have lost both my parents.

Lady Blacknell: Both? .....that seems like carelessness. Who was your father? He was evidently a man of some wealth. Was he born in what the Radical papers call the purple of commerce, or did he rise from the ranks of the aristocracy?

Jack: I am afraid I really don't know. The fact is, Lady Bracknell, I said I had lost my parents. It would be nearer the truth to say that my parents seem to have lost me .....I don't actually know who I am by birth. I was .....well, I was found.

Lady Bracknell: found!

Jack: The late Mr Thomas Cardew, an old gentleman of a very charitable and kindly disposition, found me, and gave me the name of Worthing, because he happened to have a first-class ticket for Worthing in his pocket at the time. Worthing is a place in Sussex. It is a seaside resort.

Lady Blacknell: Where is the charitable gentleman who had a first-class ticket for this seaside resort find you?

Jack (gravey): In a hand-bag.

Lady Bracknell: A hand bag?

Jack (very seriously): Yes. Lady Blacknell. I was in a hand-bag-a somewhat large, black leather hand-bag with handles to it- an ordinary hand-bag in fact.

Lady Blacknell: In what locality did Mr James, or Thomas, Cardew come across this ordinary hand-bag?

Jack: In the clack-room at Victoria Station. It was given to him in mistake for his own.

Lady Bracknell: The clack-room at Victoria Station?

Jack: Yes. The Brighton line.

Jack tells Lady Bracknell that he has no knowledge about his parents. He is an orphan. Lady Bracknell does not wish her daughter to marry an orphan. She and Gwendolen then leave Algernon's house. Algernon sympathises with Jack. He asks Jack whether he has told Gwendolen that he is called Ernest in the town and Jack in the country. Jack has a very simple solution to this problem. He tells Algernon that he, Jack, will tell Gwendolen that Ernest died in Paris due to 'a severe chill. Jack has also not told Gwendolen that he is the guardian of a pretty eighteen years old girl by the name of Cecily Cardew, Algernon is keen to meet Cecily, but Jack does not want that his friend should meet Cecily. Algernon does not discuss this topic any further.

Algernon and Jack have decided to go out for dinner. As they get ready to go, Gwendolen enters. She tells Jack that her mother may never agree to their marriage. They are very attracted to each other and she takes his postal address. Algernon also notes down Jack's address. Algernon tells his servant Lane that he will be out of town till Monday as he would be going to the country. Algernon is happy that he too has Jack's address in the country because Algernon is keen to meet Cecily.

## **Act II**

The scene opens in Jack's house in the country. Cecily is with her governess Miss Prism. Miss Prism tells Cecily to improve her German language. Cecily does not like studying German. Cecily and Miss Prism discuss Jack's brother Ernest. They do not know that in reality, Jack does not have any brother. Miss Prism also does not like Cecily's habit of keeping a diary. Miss Prism feels that everything should be stored in the mind. While they are talking, the Reverend Dr. Chasuble arrives, Cecily tells him that Miss Prism has a slight headache, but Miss Prism denies having any headache. The Reverend Rector Chasuble, Miss Prism and Cecily talk for a while and then Miss Prism goes for a walk with the Rector. She tells Cecily to read the book on political economy. As soon as they go, Cecily throws away her books. The butler Merriman enters with a card on a tray. The butler tells Cecily that Mr. Ernest Worthing has come from the station with his luggage. On learning that Jack was not home, he seemed disappointed, but he was anxious to speak to Cecily. Cecily tells the butler to ask the housekeeper about a room for Ernest Worthing. Cecily is both anxious and eager to meet Ernest. She has never met him before. Algernon is dressed very smartly. He tells Cecily, Algernon has started on his mission of winning over Cecily. He praises her beauty and feels that Miss Prism is not able to appreciate Cecily's beauty. He says that he is hungry and Cecily takes him into the house. As Cecily enters the house, Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble return from their walk. They are discussing the doctor's desire to remain single. The doctor is not keen to get married. They then notice that Cecily is not in the garden studying. As they prepare to enter the house, they meet Jack Worthing who is wearing black clothes and black gloves. The black dress is worn when there has been a death in the family and the family is in mourning. Both Dr. Chasuble and Miss Prism greet Mr. Jack Worthing and ask him as to why he was wearing black. He tells them that his brother Ernest died in Paris of a severe chill. He Jack had been informed about it by the manager of the grand hotel who had sent him a telegram to this effect. Jack then informs the Rector that he wishes to be christened since he does not remember being christened before. (Christening is a religious practice where by an infant is blessed and given a Christian name and admitted to the Christian Church.) The Rector expresses his willingness to christen Jack and he consoles Jack and tells him to bear his grief bravely. Just then Cecily comes from the house. She is pleased to see her uncle Jack and she tells him to change into better clothes. She does not like his

black dress. She then talk uncle Jack's brother Ernest is in the house. Jack is taken aback with this news. Cecily goes into the house and emerges with Algernon who is pretending to be Ernest Worthing. Jack is shaken to see Algernon. Algernon in the meantime has had an invalid friend by the name of Mr. Bunbury whom he goes so often to list. With great difficulty Cecily manages the reconciliation of Jack and Ernest (she thinks they are brothers) Dr. Chasuble feels that the two brothers should be left together for sometime. Cecily and miss Prism also return to the house. Cecily is feeling very happy at the meeting of the two brothers but Miss Prism says that one must not be premature in one's judgements.

Jack and Algernon are left alone for a very short time. The butler Marriman tells Jack that he has put Ernest's luggage in the room next to Jack. Jack is not happy to see his friend Algernon who has taken the name of Ernest and whop pretends to be Jack's brother. He (Jack) tells the butler to order for the dog-cart so that Algernon can go back to London. Algernon refuses to go until Jack changes into a better dress (Jack is dressed in black and he is supposed to be in mourning. Jack goes inside to change out and to water the flowers Algernon (Ernest) takes this opportunity to talk to Cecily.

Cecily: Oh, I merely came back to water the roses. I thought you were with Uncle Jack.

Algernon: He's gone to order the dog-cart for me.

Cecily: Oh, is he going to take you for a nice drive?

Algernon: He's going to send me away.

Cecily: Then have we got to part?

Algernon: I am afraid so. It's a vary painful parting.

Cecily: It is always painful to part from people whom one has known for a very brief space of time. The absence of old friends one can endure with equanimity. But even a momentary separation from anyone to whom one has just been introduced is almost unbearable.

(Enter Merriman)

Marriman: The dog-cart at the door, sir. (Algernon looking appealingly at Cecily)

Cecily: It can wait, Merriman ....for .....five minutes.

Marriman: Yes miss (Exit Merriman)

Algernon: I hope, Cecily. I shall not offend you if I state quite frankly and openly that you seem to me to be in every way the visible personification of absolute perfection.

Cecily: I think your frankness does you great credit, Ernest. If you will allow me I will copy your remarks into my diary. (Goes over to table and begin writing in diary.)

Cecily writes in her diary what ever Algernon tells her. The butler enter a second time to tell then that the cart is waiting. Algernon tells the butler that he does not need the dog-cart now. He plays to stay for a week.

Cecily: Uncle Jack would be very much annoyed if he knew you were staying on till next week, at the same hour.

Algernon: Oh, I don't care about Jack. I don't care for any body in the whole world but you. I love you, Cecily. You will marry me, won't you ?

Cecily: You silly you! Of course. Why. We have been engaged for the last three months.

Algernon: For the last three months?

Cecily: Yes, it will be exactly three months on Thursday.

Algernon: But how did we become engaged?

Cecily: Well, ever since dear Uncle Jack first confessed to us that he had a younger brother who was very wicked and bad, you of course have formed the chief topic of conversation between myself and Miss Prism. And of course a man who talked about is always very attractive. One feels there must be something in him after all. I dare say it was foolish of me, but I fell in love with you, Ernest.

Algernon: Darling! And when was the engagement actually settled?

Cecily: On the 14 of February last. Worn out by your entire ignorance of my existence, I determined to end the matter one way or the other, and after a long struggle with myself I accepted you under this dear old tree here. The next day I bought this little ring in your name, and this is the little bangle with the true lovers knot I promised you always to wear.

Algernon: Did I give you this? It's very pretty, isn't it?

Cecily: Yes, you've wonderfully good taste, Ernest. It's the excuse I've always given for your leading such a bad life. And this is the box in which I keep all your dear letters. (Kneels at table, opens box, and produces letters tied up with blue ribbon.)

Algernon: My letters! But my own sweet Cecily, I have never written you any letters.

Cecily: You need hardly remind me of that, Ernest. I remember only too well that I was forced to write your letters for you. I wrote always three times a week, and sometimes oftener.

Algernon: Oh, do let me read them, Cecily?

Cecily: Oh, I couldn't possibly. They would make you far too conceited. (Replaces box) The three you wrote me after I had broken off the engagement are so beautiful, and so badly spelled, that even now I can hardly read them without crying a little.

Algernon: But was engagement ever broken off?

Cecily: Of course it was. On the 22 March. You can see the entry if you like. (Shows diary)  
“Today I broke off my engagements with Ernest. I felt it is better to do so. The weather still continues charming.”

The reader gets an insight into the character of Cecily. Cecily has already decided to marry Algernon. On his behalf she writes letters to herself, and she has also bought a ring and put it on her finger. She appears to be a romantic person. One day in anger she breaks off her so called engagement. The reader must remember that Algernon. (Ernest) has so knowledge about these things. He learns about them from Cecily herself. She tells Algernon that she had forgiven him and she continues to be engaged to him. She likes the name Ernest. He tries to tell her that if he had any other name would she not love him. She says that she loves the name Ernest. It is interesting to note that both Cecily and Gwendolen are in love with the name Ernest. Whereas there is in really no person by the name of Ernest.

Just as Algernon goes out, Narriman, the butler, enters to inform Cecily that a lady by the name of Miss Fairfax has come. The lady wants to meet Mr. Worthing on a very important business. Cecily thinks that Miss Fairfax must be an elderly lady with Uncle Jack in some charitable work in London. Cecily tells the butler to bring her in.

Cecily and Gwendolen introduce themselves and Gwendolen learns that Cecily is Jack Worthing's ward. Since Jack has taken the name of Ernest and since Gwendolen knows Jack by the name of Ernest, Gwendolen is relieved to learn that Ernest is not Cecily's guardian. Till now both these ladies do not know that Jack calls himself Ernest. And to add confusion Algernon has also begun to call himself Ernest.

Cecily and Gwendolen learn that they are both engaged to Mr. Ernest Worthing. The butler and the servants enter to put the tea-tray on the table. The two ladies stop their argument. Cecily deliberately puts sugar in Gwendolen's tea and gives her cake to eat when Gwendolen has specifically asked for bread and butter. Both the ladies are nasty and unkind towards each other. At this moment Mr. Jack Worthing whom Gwendolen loves and who is Cecily's guardian enter the garden where these two ladies are having their tea.

(Entering Jack)

Gwendolen: (catching sight of him.) Ernest! My own Ernest!

Jack: Gwendolen! Darling! (Offers to kiss her.

Gwendolen: (drawing back) A moment! May I ask if you are engaged to be married to this young lady? (Points to Cecily.)

Jack: (laughing) To dear little Cecily Of course not! What could have put such an idea into



your pretty little head?

Gwendolen: Thanks you. You may. (Offers her cheek.)

Cecily (very sweetly) I knew there must be some misunderstanding. Miss Fairfax. The gentleman whose arm is at present round your waist is my dear guardian, Mr. John Worthing.

Gwendolen: I beg your pardon ?

Cecily: This is Uncle Jack.

Gwendolen: (receding.) Jack! Oh!

(Enter Algernon)

Cecily: Here is Ernest.

Algernon: (goes straight over to Cecily without noticing anyone else.) My own love! Offers to kiss her.)

Cecily: (drawing back). A moment, Ernest! May I ask you- are you engaged to be married to this young lady?

Algernon: (looking round). To what young lady? Good heavens! Gwendolen!

Cecily: Yes, to good heavens, Gwendolen, I mean to Gwendolen.

Algernon: (laughing). Of course not! What could have put such an idea into you pretty little head?

Cecily: Thank you. (Presenting her cheek to be kissed.) You may. (Algernon kisses her.)

Gwendolen: I felt there was some slight error, Miss Cardew. The gentleman who is now embracing you is my cousin Mr. Algernon Moncrieff.

Cecily: (breaking away from Algernon). Algernon Moncrieff! Oh! (The two girls move towards each other and put their arms round each other's waists as if for protection.)

Cecily: Are you called Algernon?

Algernon: I cannot deny it.

Cecily: Oh!

Gwendolen: Is your name really John?

Jack (standing rather proudly). I could deny it if I liked. I could deny anything if I liked. But my name certainly is John. It has been John for years.

Cecily (to Gwendolen). A gross deception has been practised on both of us.

Gwendolen: My poor wounded Cecily!

Cecily: My sweet, wronged Gwendolen!

Gwendolen:(slowing and seriously). You will call me sister, will you not? (They embrace. Jack and Algernon groan and walk up and down.)

Cecily(rather brightly). There is just one question I would like to be allowed to ask my guardian.

Gwendolen:An admirable idea! Mr. Worthing, there is just one question I would like to be permitted to put to you. Where is your brother Ernest? We are both engaged to be married to your brother Ernest, so it is a matter of some importance to us to know where your brother Ernest is at present.

Jack(slowly and hesitatingly). Gwendolen- Cecily- it is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. It is first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, and I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. However I will tell you quite frankly that I have no brother Ernest. I have no brother at all. I never had a brother in my life, and I certainly have not the smallest intention of ever having one in the future.

Cecily (surprised). No brother at all?

Jack (Cheerily). None!

Gwendolen: (severely). Had you never a brother of any kind?

Jack(pleasantly). Never. Not even of any kind.

Gwendolen:I am afraid it is quite clear, Cecily, that neither of us is engaged to be married to anyone.

Cecily: It is not a very pleasant position for a young girl suddenly to find herself in. Is it?

Gwendolen:Let us go into the house. They will hardly venture to come after us there.

Cecily: No, men are so cowardly, aren't they? (They retire into the house with scornful looks.)

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## 18.6 Self Assessment Questions

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1. What does Algernon mean by the term "bunburing" ?

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2. When and where was the play the importance of Being ernest stayed ?

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.....  
3. Who is Alegernon's best friend ?

.....  
.....  
4. Who is Gwendolen ? Whom does she love ?

.....  
.....  
5. Who is Cecily ? Whom does she love.

.....  
.....  
6. Where was Jack discovered (found) ?

.....  
.....  
7. Who is Miss Prism ?

.....  
.....  
8. How is Jack related to Lady Bracknell ?

.....  
9. What is Jack's father's name ?

- .....
- .....
10. What does the word “earnest” mean ?
- .....
- .....
- .....

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### 18.7 Answers SAQs

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1. Whenever Algernon wants to avoid an unwelcome social obligation, or whenever he wants to get away for the weak end, he says that he must visit his friend named ‘Bunbury’ who lives in the country and is frequently in ill health. He pretends he has a friend in the country (away from London). He calls this practice ‘Bunburying’.
2. The play was staged on February 14, 1895 at St, James theater in London.
3. Algernon’s best friend is Ernest Worthing who lives in the country. Ernest is also called Jack.
4. Gwendolen is Algernon’s cousin and Lady Bracknell’s daughter. She loves Ernest Worthing to Jack.
5. Cecily is Ernest Worthing or Jack’s niece. Cecily is in love with Algernon who pretends to be Ernest.
6. Ernest Worthing or Jack was discovered in a handbag at a railway station.
7. Miss Prism is Cecily’s governess.
8. Jack is actually Lady Bracknell’s nephew and Algernon’s older brother. Many years ago when Miss Prism had worked as a nurse maid for Lady Bracknell’s sister, Miss Prism had lost a baby boy in a handbag. That baby boy is Jack.
9. Jack’s father’s name is Ernest and Jack was named after his father.
10. In this play Ernest is a fictitious character at first. Later on when the play ends the reader that Jack was named after his father Ernest. The word “earnest” means someone who is sincere and eager about to learn something or know something.

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### 18.8 Let us Sum up

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In this unit you have learnt:

- About the age of Oscar Wilde. You have also become familiar with the main writers and poets of nineteenth century England.

- You have learnt about the life of Oscar Wilde. Remember that “Wilde” is spelt with an ‘e’ at the end.
- You have been made familiar with the summary of the play. Extracts from the play will be given to you in the next unit.
- Words used in the summary have been explained for your benefit. These words will help to increase your vocabulary.

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## 18.9 Review Questions

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1. ‘The Importance of Being Earnest’ is truly a very humourist play. Explain with examples from the play.
2. Oscar’s play is an exquisite work of wit and comic revelry. Elucidate.
3. The Victorian mannerisms and pompous life has been remarkably presented by Oscar’s flamboyant witty style and aphorisms. Explain with example.

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## 18.10 Bibliography

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Bulsary - Shah, Shefali ed. The Importance of Being Earnest. Delhi; Orient Longman, 1986.

Bird, Alan. The plays of Oscar Wilde: London: Vision Press, 1977.

Elofman, Richard ed. Oscar Wilde: A Collection of Critical Essays. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1969.

Website [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Importance\\_of\\_Being\\_Earnest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Importance_of_Being_Earnest).

Note- Some editions give the spelling as Earnest and in some editions the word (name) is an earnest.